

**Social Change in the Media: Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans and Queer (GLBTQ)  
Representation and Visibility in *The New York Times*.**

**A Critical, Qualitative Social-Historical Content Analysis  
of *The New York Times***

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**Abstract**

This research employs qualitative methodology to analyze social change in business news articles of *The New York Times*. A random sample of 127 articles published between 1970 and 2000, discussing advertising news and containing one or more of the terms “Gay”, “Lesbian”, “Bisexual”, “Transsexual”, “Transgendered” and “Queer” (GLBTQ), were selected. Feminist, Marxist, Postmodern, and critical theory is used to analyze social representation, cultural norms, stereotypes and levels of visibility. The “meta-theoretical” lens applied is a gendered postmodernism grounded in stratification theory that assuages the cultural-based critique of Marxism, overcomes the essentialist limitations of radical feminism, incorporates the pluralism of socialist feminism and delimits the relativist tendencies of a purer postmodernism.

Quantitatively, gay men were found to achieve twice as much business news coverage as lesbians. Bisexuals, transsexuals, transgenders and queers were highly invisible. Overall, a change in the representation and depiction of corporate interest in gays and lesbians was manifested. This socio-historical analysis revealed a shift from deviantization and stigmatization of homosexuality to the commodification, and spectacularization of GLBTQs. GLBTQ invisibility is documented and the misconception of gay and lesbian wealth, created by market research, is addressed. Invisibility of GLBTQs is posited to be both an intentional and actively managed form of politics. Furthermore, business news reporting is argued to be less “objective” and more a political, social cultural and political activity where the media itself is a stage for the cultural contestation of social norms.

This sociologically informed reading of business news articles details numerous case-specific instances where *The New York Times* contributed towards the proliferation of norms, values and beliefs characterizing GLBTQs. *The New York Times* is argued to be a contributor towards the creation of sexuality as a cultural product. Its representations of GLBTQs are seen as one manifestation of an institutionally created understanding of the “culture of homosexuality”.

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## Table of Contents

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Section	Page Number
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
<b>Chapter One.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Personal Biases and Interests.....	2
1.3 Research Purpose and Goals.....	5
1.4 Format.....	6
<b>Chapter Two : .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.0 Introduction.....	8
2.1 Social and Historical Contextualization of Sexuality.....	8
2.1.a. The Homosexual Sex Act in Historical Perspective.....	8
2.1.b. Sexuality, Class and Capitalism.....	9
2.1.c. The Deviant-ization of Homosexuality.....	11
2.1.d. Sexuality as a Social Category.....	14
2.2 Mapping Gender onto Sexuality: The Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality .....	16
2.3 Sexuality and Social Movement Theory.....	19
2.4. Sexuality and the Media.....	24
2.5. The Problem of “Identity” in GLBTQ Social Movements.....	26
2.5.a. Sexuality and Collective Consciousness.....	30
2.5.b. Social Change and the Gay Rights Movement.....	38
2.6 Contemporary Sexuality and Social Change.....	39
2.6.a. Sexuality, Culture and Social Perception .....	39
2.6.b. Sexuality, Social Institutions and Discrimination .....	41
2.6.c Gay and Lesbian Income and Affluence at the	

	End of the Twentieth Century.....	45
	2.6.d Sexuality, Visibility and Social Control.....	53
2.7	Theoretical Paradigms and Sexuality.....	55
	2.7.a. Multiple Feminisms.....	56
	2.7.b. Theories of Inequality and the Need for Interconnectivity.....	61
	2.7.c. Postmodern Feminism, Neo-Marxism and the Reintroduction of Culture.....	65
2.8	Sexuality, Subcultures, Media studies and Economics.....	70
	2.8.a. Sub-cultures, Consumption and Market Niches.....	70
	2.8.b. Culture, Post-Industrialism and Neo-Marxism.....	78
	2.8.c. Advertising and the GLBTQ Community.....	84
	2.8.d. GLBTQ Media Visibility and Social Change.....	87
	2.8.e. Social Change and Contemporary (Homo) Sexuality.....	88
	2.8.f. GLBTQ visibility and Equality.....	90
<b>Chapter Three.....</b>		<b>92</b>
3.1	Methodology.....	92
	3.1.a. Paradigmatic Perspective – Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions: Social Constructivism and Cultural Studies.....	92
	3.1.b. Qualitative Methods - Definitions and Elaborations.....	97
3.2	Research Purpose and Location within the Field.....	98
3.3	Strategy of Inquiry and Research Design - A Socio- Historical Content Analysis of Cultural Texts.....	100
3.4	Sample.....	101
	3.4.a. Selecting Institutions.....	101
	3.4.b. <i>The New York Times</i> as a Data Source.....	102
	3.4.c. Database Sample.....	103

3.4.d. Sampling Frame.....	106
2.4.e. Sample Categorization and Format.....	108
3.5 Terminology and Article Representation.....	112
3.6 Interpretation Strategies and Evaluation Criteria.....	114
3.7 Contextualization and Research Question.....	117
<b>Chapter Four.....</b>	<b>119</b>
4.1 Advertising.....	119
4.1.a. First Signs of GLBTQ Visibility in <i>The New York Times</i> .....	119
4.1.b. The Mid-Eighties.....	126
4.1.c. The Growth of “Gay Marketing”: Advertisers Take the Plunge and the Heat.....	140
4.2 Commodification Does Not Produce Equality.....	153
4.2.a Ads, Television and Politics.....	153
4.2.b The Corporate/Media Connection.....	167
4.2.c Marketing Gay Male “Lifestyles” in the Nineties Oops...Did They Forget the Lesbians, Bisexuals and Trans-Community on Purpose?.....	178
4.2.d Bisexuals, Transexuals and Transgenders – Unworthy Social Groups?.....	186
4.2.e A Queering of the Issues.....	192
4.3 Media Criticism and the Lingering Norm of Heterosexuality.....	204
4.4 The Social Construction of a Lifestyle and Alternative Marketing Projects.....	208
4.5 (Homo) Sexuality and the Institutionalization of Norms.....	208
4.6 An Insider’s Perspective on “Diversity” and <i>The New York Times</i> .....	211
<b>Chapter Five.....</b>	<b>217</b>
5.1 Summary.....	217
5.2 Conclusion.....	220
5.3 Insights for the Future.....	227

<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>Appendix A.....</b>	<b>240</b>

## Chapter One: Introduction

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### 1.1 Introduction

This dissertation is a sociological analysis of social change. More specifically, it is a study of how a particular social group - gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals<sup>1</sup>, transgenders<sup>2</sup> and queers (GLBTQs) - has experienced “change” in one facet of mainstream society: media representation. Through a systematic exploration of one type of media – *New York Times* newspaper articles – I explore how GLBTQs have historically been depicted in this influential sector of mainstream American society.

I begin this research with an articulation of why I view this project as a worthwhile endeavor, situate it within an interdisciplinary paradigm and clarify the epistemological and ontological assumptions I impose. In the methods chapter, I explain why I use qualitative methodology, where this study fits into the field of sociology, what the particulars of my research design entail, and how I chose and structured my sample. Next, in the third chapter, I describe how sexuality has historically been contextualized within social institutions, its role as a distinguishing factor in social identity, culture and social labeling, and its development as a social issue fueling social movements and social change. Drawing upon the insights of postmodern, Marxist, neo-Marxist, feminist, critical and cultural theory, I discuss the strengths and limitations these theories hold for this research. Ultimately, I make an argument for using deconstructed social categories to facilitate comprehension of such meaning-loaded terms as *diversity* and *oppression*. The last component of Chapter Three identifies contemporary American society’s focus on

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<sup>1</sup>“The official definition of transsexualism...includes the following: the essential features of this disorder as a persistent discomfort and sense of inappropriateness about one’s assigned sex in a person who has reached puberty. In addition, there is a persistent preoccupation, for at least two years, with getting rid of one’s primary and secondary sex characteristics and acquiring the sex characteristics of the other sex...Invariably there is the wish to live as a member of the other sex” (American Psychiatric Association, 1987).

<sup>2</sup>“Transgenderism designates at once all those subjects who cross gender boundaries (as in “the transgender community”) as well as (more specifically) those subjects who undergo partial sex change, usually hormonal (Hausman, 1995 p 220, footnote 85).

GLBTQs in advertising and briefly reviews some of the consequences and costs of queer commodification. This chapter closes with a discussion of how applying sociological insights to analyzing GLBTQ representation in the media alters the research questions one asks, such as those traditionally formulated within media studies. Thereby, this dissertation lays the foundation - by articulating the historical, media-driven realities that shaped and fostered GLBTQ social imagery for the time period analyzed - from which future explorations can proceed.

In Chapter Four, I establish an historical snapshot depicting *what is*: I explain how I came to focus on advertising and when GLBTQ visibility first appeared in *The New York Times*. I empirically document the surge in gay marketing, the media's depiction of how some sectors within corporate America reacted and the gender, race and class specific focus by corporations on this "niche market". Chapter Four continues with a critical analysis of the data and questions how the institutionalized norm of heterosexuality has shaped media representation of GLBTQs. Lastly, I end this chapter with a brief acknowledgment of and counter-argument to McGowan's (2001) "insider" testimony that the contemporary media overly focuses on "issues of diversity."

Chapter Five details and summarizes the main findings garnered from this research. Approaching social change from a decade-specific perspective, I identify the quantitative and qualitative changes I found in *The New York Times* regarding representation and visibility of GLBTQs. Next, these findings are discussed in context of their larger implications relating to issues of social change and equity. In the final pages, I make recommendations about what all these findings mean to developing a broader knowledge and historically-guided understanding of sexuality in contemporary America. I argue that, although the magnitude of the media's impact on the institutionalization of GLBTQ stereotypes cannot be discerned, exploring these images presented in business news articles is a first step in understanding how media representations of this social group have, or have not, changed in one area of contemporary American culture.

## 1.2 Personal Biases and Interests

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In identifying the personal biases I bring with me, as researcher, to this project, I draw upon the words of Howard Zinn, progressive historian, media critic and native New Yorker, to assist me with the task of commenting on “objectivity and scholarship”:

I've said two things about it. One, that it's not possible. Two, it's not desirable. It's not possible because all history is a selection out of an infinite number of facts. As soon as you begin to select, you select according to what you think is important. Therefore it is already not objective. It's already biased in the direction of whatever you, as the selector of this information, think people should know. So it's really not possible. Of course, some people claim to be objective. Of course you can't be. Historians should say what their values are, what they care about, what their background is, and let you know what is important to them so that...[you] are warned in advance... We should have history that does reflect points of view and values, in other words, history that is not objective. (Zinn and Barsamian, 1999 p.13).

Hence, I take the opportunity in this introduction to introduce you, my audience, to the background, values and cares I bring to this research which seeks not objectivity but, rather, reflection of values and points of view. Throughout my lifetime, I have casually noticed the rise and fall in popularity of various social groups within my limited New York and Southwest Virginia environments. During my pursuit of higher education, I learned more academically how some social groups are systematically disadvantaged within the United States by social institutions. Having lived and worked in a variety of such institutions - education, government, law and financial corporations, I witnessed, and experienced firsthand, the gross inequality that plagues much of American society. I also noted our hesitance, as a society, to admit to such shortcomings and social illnesses as discrimination and lack of equal value for all humans.

After having worked at the United Nations for two years and then on Wall Street for a similar length of time, I became increasingly intrigued with issues of inequality at both global and local levels. One institution that I became particularly interested in was “the market.” The more I discovered the “causes” of national and global stratification,

the less democratic the social order came to be in my mind. Suddenly, social truths that I took for granted - such as the “right” of Mr. X to own his conglomerate because of his “hard work” and “wisdom” - became entirely arbitrary and superficial. The deeper I dug to find and expose “why” things were, the clearer the world’s plasticity and artificiality became. In short, I realized that it is the moves of the rich and powerful players in the clique “game of life” that both create social reality and determine who becomes wealthy and what objects are coveted.

In this dissertation, I continue to wear my critical eyeglasses and begin by turning my gaze back to my roots. Experiencing the gentrification of my own neighborhood, Park Slope, Brooklyn, I have long had an interest in exploring why and how certain groups of people and places “suddenly” become of interest when previously they seemed of little use-value. To me, the social group most interesting, for a number of reasons, was gays and lesbians. During the 1990s, my neighborhood experienced a significant influx of upper middle-class gay and lesbian urban professionals. As gays and lesbians contributed towards the gentrification of Park Slope, and as I daily was confronted with an explosion of “pro” gay and lesbian advertisements and images while taking the subway and buses, I became increasingly intrigued. However, the ever mounting number of articles I encountered about this social group, staring back at me from the *New York Times*, contrasted with the synchronous poverty I saw facing the majority of other, less-than-fortunate lesbians and gay men suffering from AIDS in the surrounding city streets and community centers. I was affronted with incongruous contradictions and unanswered questions. How could a social group that, as a good Catholic school-girl I was taught was morally wrong, be at once “trendy” and popular yet to be feared and avoided? What was it about this group that made “them”, as my mother would say, so different from our new Jewish and African American neighbors buying up the brownstones adjacent to our dilapidated apartment complex? Why were Calvin Klein and Sky Vodka so interested in selling their products to gays when the local public school district and politicians were flexing their political muscles to exclude same-sex parents from having their families discussed in textbooks and classrooms?

These questions and life experiences, which are reflexive of larger issues of equity and social power, continued to trouble me as I pursued several years of post-graduate

study. It is not until after earning two masters degrees, and pursuing several other areas of social research, that I return to issues affecting GLBTQs as a topic of study. This project is one that I nearly rejected in favor of a less tedious, less controversial topic. However, my passion for social justice and my desire to give voice to those most marginalized convinced me that the insights such research may reveal would make my labor worthwhile.

After explaining how this project came to be, it must also be noted that I could have written this dissertation from any one of a hundred different perspectives. I have selected to study inequality and social change from the angle I detail below because of my passion for critical social theory, my areas of interest within the field of sociology and my personal life as a member of the GLBTQ community. As a social activist dedicated to humanitarian causes who possesses little patience for intolerance, I am committed to doing research that will enhance the understanding and treatment of GLBTQ persons yet which is at once self-reflexive and critical. In other words, although one of my greatest hopes is for equality of civil rights for all American citizens, I shall not hesitate to criticize GLBTQ persons contributing to social inequality where applicable.

As a sociologist, my areas of interest lie primarily within the areas of social and political struggles over gender, sexuality and class. My preference is for viewing the world through a macro, theoretical lens. I am fascinated by how social institutions, such as the media, create and shape our knowledge of events and people and by how power imbalances contribute towards such representations. I particularly enjoy uncovering and exposing hidden information, critically exploring why life events and circumstances unfold as they do, and challenging *prima facie* perceptions of reality. Given my background interests, I approach this research from training in social movements, inequality in matters pertaining to race, class, gender and sexuality, science and technology studies and environmentalism.

### **1.3 Research Purpose and Goals**

The purpose of this research is to examine how ideas, beliefs and treatment of GLBTQs have changed or remained the same over time. I have conducted this research

by analyzing *The New York Times*, for a 30-year period ranging from 1970-2000. I hope to accomplish many things with this dissertation. In particular, by assessing the framework in which GLBTQs are or are not discussed, it is my intent to give voice to a marginalized segment of the public. I seek to document how an institution in mainstream society has thought about and represented this group to itself and the world. It is my intention that through this analysis, I will be able to show how ideas, policies and behaviors have or have not changed historically over time, understanding that the social change I may find might be neither magnanimous nor obvious. Once again, taking the advice from a fellow social scientist whose experience and breadth of scope in studying the media and social change far outpaces my own, I shall try to remember that

We should be encouraged by historical examples of social change, by how surprising changes take place suddenly, when you least expect it, not because of a miracle from on high, but because people have labored patiently for a long time (Zinn and Barsamian, 1999, p.33).

Finally, in an abstract sense, this dissertation is important because it critically analyzes the media, which creates public perception.

#### **1.4 Format**

This dissertation follows a qualitative research design. I write it in the first person and to my “audience” - those reading this text. Hence, I use the plural “we” to connote what has been learned/understood or debated over time. Because I expect my audience to read this text as critically as I have written it, I include throughout rationales and explanations that explain why one idea or concept is being put forth and/or why one research plan was chosen over others.

In the qualitative tradition, I have kept arduous field notes during the entire research process. Although these notes are not attached as part of the dissertation directly, I use them for explanatory purposes to clarify the research decisions that I have made. The format of this dissertation will follow general qualitative guidelines even

though independent chapters cover theory, methodology, and literature review, I put forth all three components are embedded throughout the text in a flowing, content-specific manner.

As I uncovered general themes while gaining an understanding of and relationship to the data, I organized chapter headings and sub-sections appropriately. Consistent with the amorphous nature of qualitative methodology, I have approached this research without pretense of knowing what shape the final project would take. Through my submersion into the data, important categories and foci have become apparent. Hence, the topics *The New York Times* focused upon in the articles in my sample are responsible for my corresponding foci and analyses. In sum, while I take responsibility for the format, scope and ideological approach to this research, the content, which specifically focuses upon advertising, has been directed by the quantity of its coverage by *The New York Times* in its business news articles. Nevertheless, the reader ought to remain aware that the article selections included and quoted in this dissertation reflect my understanding and interpretation of how representations of GLBTQs in the media do or do not exhibit social change.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review, Theory Research

### Description and Socio-Historical Setting

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#### 2.0 Introduction

#### 2.1 Social and Historical Contextualization of Sexuality

Before approaching sexuality as a contemporary social and historical construct, it is first necessary to explore, albeit incompletely and at best discursively, the pathways to knowledge of human sexuality that precede our modern day sensitivities towards this feature in Western human society. In this section, I bring to the foreground a few of the more prominent, widely effective ways homosexuality has shaped social relations, induced social stigma and entered (or not) the domain of academic thought and research. Using historical accounts of sexuality, I demonstrate that the “sex act” was, in years gone by, an activity divorced from what we today understand as “sexual identity”. This shift in perception and association, about how sexuality is defined and understood, and moreover this shift in the *social meaning* of sexuality, was associated with changes in social acceptance, behavior and organization, at both an individual and institutional level.

##### 2.1.a The Homosexual Sex Act in Historical Perspective

Although a thorough historical overview of homosexuality in western thought lies beyond the scope of my research, I present here the arguments of two well-respected social historians: Greenberg (1988) and Connell (1987, 1995). Traditionally, in the history of Western thought up to the Nineteenth Century, the act of sex was seen primarily as a means of ensuring reproduction and social stability, and not as a measure of self-identity. For most of early civilization, homosexuality was not stigmatized or repressed as long as it conformed to gender, age and status norms (Greenberg, 1988). One wasn't labeled homosexual; one merely engaged in homosexual sex. For example,

Sir Francis Bacon was known for having homosexual relations with his young students. Yet, Bacon, like many others of his era, eventually married and did not consider himself to be homosexual. What this example shows is that during this period, personal identity, as being a homosexual, did not necessarily develop out of sexual activity. Nor, was the creation and existence of subcultures crucial to the preponderance of homosexual relations. “Special institutions to find partners weren’t needed as long as dependent servants...were available” (Greenberg, p.328). Stemming from these conditions, some histories of homosexuality, such as Greenberg’s, note that throughout significant portions of history, class was a better predictor of engagement in a homosexual act, as well as ensuring the availability of same-sex sexual partners, than was the self-identification and ascription of homosexual as characterizing one’s “sexual orientation”. Furthermore, although both men and women engaged in homosexual relations, the legitimacy of sexual relations between women, in Western societies, was largely non-existent, being dismissed as child-like, displaying a lack of maturity or feeble-mindedness by the medical community, socially understood as grounds for pity, or not seen at all by families – i.e. the “old spinsters”, or, for wealthier, independent Nineteenth Century Western women, described in some regions as “Boston marriages<sup>3</sup>”.

### **2.1.b. Sexuality, Class and Capitalism**

The linkage between class and sexual activity is one with long historical roots. In this section, I use historical examples to evidence that ideas governing expressions of sexuality have, in the past, been fueled and driven by economic structure. Ultimately, I argue that contemporary exhibitions and reactions to the various forms of sexuality derive a large portion of their shape from the interests and directives of capitalism.

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<sup>3</sup> “The term “Boston marriage” came to be used, apparently, after Henry James’ book, *The Bostonians*, detailed a marriage-like relationship between two women -- “New Women” in the language of the time, women who were independent, not married, self-supporting (which sometimes meant living off of inherited wealth or making a living as writers or other professional, educated careers).” It must be noted that not all Boston Marriages were of a lesbian nature – some were and some were not, with the details of particular relationships between women still being fleshed out by historians. (<http://womenshistory.about.com/msubbosmarr.htm>)

One era where historians have developed the link between homosexual activity and class is the feudal society. In feudal societies, sodomy was linked to wealth, self-indulgence, and a lack of desire for having and raising children (Greenberg, 1988). Early anti-sodomy campaigns were grounded in class conflict. In fact, some social historians have deduced that class hatred is what actually drove these early campaigns against sodomy (Greenberg, 1988). Aside from religious heretics, such as Joan of Arc, and “witches” of various strains, “great Italian bankers” were also believed to favor sodomy. Indeed, throughout history, we see an interconnection between ideas about class and enduring notions of morality and religion.

Structural features affecting sexuality, such as wars, imperialism and colonialism, disrupted the previous sex/gender order. The State, as head of military forces, actively shaped acceptable norms of behavior for men and women and ardently enforced heterosexuality. From the Eighteenth Century onward, femininity came to be defined in contrast to masculinity, and in contrast to all that institutions such as the economy and state represented. Because of this devaluation of all “female”, males displaying feminine characteristics were likewise held in disdain. Life experiences, such as duels, violence, authority over women, and brutal relationships with the agricultural workforce all helped to maintain the social boundary. During the Eighteenth Century, and continuing into the next, we witness the dichotomization of society - the strong separation of male/female, straight/gay, rich/poor, black/white. “Gentry masculinity was closely integrated with the state”, as was social control, which was exerted through “evictions, imprisonment, the lash, transportation and hangings” (Connell, 1995 p.191). Changing perceptions about homosexuality began during the Eighteenth Century as aristocracy were exposed to middle class values via business dealings and money transactions, and as the middle-class grew in numbers, its representation in government ranks swelled and became more influential on public policy (Greenberg, 1988). It is not until the onset of the Nineteenth Century, with the emergence of feminism as a form of mass politics, the mobilization of women, growth of industry, economy and bureaucratic states, both liberal and autocratic, that we see the decline of the gentry’s power.

Prior to and continuing into the nineteenth century, it was religious mores that dictated the laws governing sexual relations. Homosexuality was not, however, seen as

something deviant. Rather, homosexual desire was understood as being “felt by all” but a feeling that one ought not act upon because it was evil (Matthaei, 1995). In a puritanical sense, sexual relations were only for procreation and all else was socially disapproved and branded immoral.

Greenberg argues that the historical shift in ideas about sex, from an act of procreation to an act of pleasure, is directly tied to the growth of capitalism. As political centralization and a growing cash economy destroyed feudal social relations in Western Europe, growth in manufacturing and trade led to production for wages, commercialization of agriculture and science, significantly altering the shape and impact of all social institutions. Capitalism reorganized family relations, sharpened gender stereotypes and created rigid public/private spheres. Early seeds of social reform, governing ideas about the changing norms of sex, came from within the middle strata of society - from artisans and shopkeepers. This social group, known as the rising middle class, provided support for Gregorian reform by favoring impersonal law and bureaucracy over religious zealots (Greenberg, 1988).

### **2.1.c. The Deviant-ization of Homosexuality**

As useful an imperative as capitalism is for understanding the history of sexuality, studied alone it remains insufficient. Equally important in contributing to our modern-day norms and ideas of sexuality is the influence imparted from the institutions of science and religion. As grantors of knowledge, these two divergent paradigms of thought have generated a diverse range of ideas regarding the normalcy of non-heterosexuality. For understanding what I term “the medicalization of homosexuality”, the Enlightenment is a crucial era. The proliferation of “degeneracy theory” is responsible for sexuality being identified by medical authorities to be a disease. Consequently, this prognosis and proclamation of homosexuality being a “condition”, and “inversion”, a congenital physical and mental defect or illness requiring medical attention, delivered sex norms into the hands of “experts”.

The changes taking place during the Nineteenth Century were largely fueled by the eugenics movement which called for state-run programs to place members of the

professional middle-class in positions of power and responsibility to determine who could/couldn't have a child. Taking what they believed was a pro-active measure to prevent homosexuality, reformers attempted to prevent perversity, which they feared would spread like an epidemic. Reformers advocated castration, sterilization, and a return to the "traditional" sex division of labor. Some even believed homosexuals should not be given medical treatment at all so they could be "left alone to die out" (Greenberg, 1988 p.417-421). Beginning at least in 1852, when Swedish Dr. Magnus Huss coined the term and disease "alcoholism", medicine became a normative science not only reflecting the moral standards of physicians' class, but also granting doctors the power and status of "secular clergy" in enforcing a moral code of ethics. In 1876, Cesare Lombroso's infamous Evolutionary Theory propounded that criminals and homosexuals were biological throwbacks to an earlier stage of evolution. In this same period, "Degeneracy Theory" was created by French physicians and used as a form of social control. Doctors made appeals to this theoretical dogma to justify their expanding role in treating what came to be known called degenerative diseases. Along with homosexuality, crime, alcoholism and poverty constituted the bulk of degenerative disease (Greenberg, 1988).

As an institution, the field of medicine used its moral hegemony to enforce "normal" codes of sexuality and unjustified homosexuality by labeling it a mental illness. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) continued to classify homosexuality as a mental illness, as a form of psychopathology, until 1973 when it was removed from the APA's DSM (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, 302.60). However, although homosexuality is technically no longer classified as a mental illness, to this day it still remains stigmatized and deviant<sup>4</sup> (Sedgwick, 1993).

Ever plastic, ideas about sex and sexuality historically have accompanied changes in major institutions and life sectors. The decline of homosexual acceptance has been associated with many social factors, including but not limited to, the growth of large cities, the decline in polytheistic religions that previously connected agriculture and fertility, growth of long-distance trade and imperial expansion which brought together

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<sup>4</sup> Through an analysis of APA quotes distinguishing GID in boys and girls, Sedgwick (1993) reveals how this "new" disorder is gender biased, though it claims gender neutrality, further contributing towards the continued medicalization of both sexuality and gender norms. In place of its former DSM entry appeared the "gender identity disorder of childhood" (GID).

different religions, and a growing gap between the wealthy aristocratic class and serfs, slaves, artisans and small traders (Greenberg, 1988). As large-scale politics in kingdoms and empires reduced popular participation, feelings of helplessness and the disengagement from bodily pleasure ensued. Wars lead many to withdraw from worldly pleasures and encouraged individuals to live abstinent lives. War intervened upon the body, disciplining, regulating and supervising it (Foucault, 1978). Consequently, in conjunction with religious mores, society learned to repress corporal desires and mortal pleasure in exchange for the promise of salvation in the afterlife.

It was in the twentieth century that we find two very important social shifts in the collective understanding of sexuality. The first shift involved changing ideas about family structure. During the twentieth century, sex became viewed as part of a romantic/intimate experience used to gain personal happiness. “The view of sex as a pleasurable activity for both sexes accompanied the rise of consumerism and the decline of the work ethic that characterized advanced capitalism in the early-twentieth century United States” (Matthaei, 1995, p. 149).

The second shift was one of nomenclature. Sex became a social activity used to identify and label groups and individuals, often as either morally upstanding or deviant. It is in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century that we find the creation of “homosexuals” and “heterosexuals” (Matthaei, 1995). Along with the medical community’s creation of hetero/homosexuals, came the idea that self-identity is tied to sexuality. From this moment onward, the object of one’s sexual gratification became entangled with one’s intrinsic sense and self-definition of self as either a “deviant” homosexual or a “normal” heterosexual (Katz, 1983). As presented here, the creation of the “homosexual” is a purely social phenomenon. It was during this historical era that “certain kinds of behavior stopped being attributed to particular persons and came to define them” (Hubbard, 1998, p.54). Henceforth, this categorization created the stereotypes that were popularized by the sex reformers, such as Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, who biologized the “difference”. “The homosexual” became a person who is different by nature and therefore should not be made responsible for his or her so-called deviance. This definition served the purpose of the reformers and continued the medicalization of homosexuality, turning same-sex love into a medical problem to be

treated by doctors rather than a degenerative act to be punished by judges (Hubbard, p.54). Finally, as the Twentieth Century emerged and progressed, expert opinion reflecting upon the norms of sexuality, started to come less from the medical establishment and more from academic authorities as additions of public secondary and university systems unfolded, accompanied by the invention of research institutes and expansion of the research capabilities of corporation and government (Connell, 1995).

#### **2.1.d Sexuality as a Social Category**

Ideas governing what are socially acceptable expressions of human sexuality have varied widely in the United States, as well as throughout the rest of the world, and remain contingent upon social customs, cultures, institutions and belief systems. Because expressions of sexuality, ideas about it and reactions to it live in a constant state of change, impacting and being impacted by social, political and economic institutions, I argue that sexuality ought to be more routinely explored as a social variable in theory, as well as in other forms of analysis.

Changes in social institutions, such as the family, economy and religion might also lead to changes in ideas about human sexuality. However, determining causality and explaining specific instances of change are difficult, perhaps impossible pursuits. The sexual order is so deeply embedded in a range of social institutions that when one begins to explore these institutions from a homo/multi-sexually-informed vantage point, such as by using queer theory, alternative visions of association appear revealing different forms of power and collectivities in the process (Sedgwick, 1990). In other words, for example, it was only when feminists began treating gender as a primary category for understanding problems that did not initially appear to be gender-specific (Seidman, 1993) that previously unthinkable patterns emerged. It is my belief that an analogous effect may be found through similar institutional analyses using sexuality<sup>5</sup> as a social category.

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<sup>5</sup> However, for some feminists, the development of queer theory is a trend that ought not to be embraced. “Much of the negativity associated with queer theory for some feminists is that these new bourgeois assimilationist strategies of incorporating ‘gays into mainstream middle-class culture’ [is that it] does not disrupt postmodern patriarchy and its intersection with capitalism; indeed, it is in some ways quite integral to it” (Hennessy, 2000, p.137). As we shall learn though our exploration of postmodern, Marxist and cultural theories, academic approaches to analyzing sexuality, and the value-laden term “identity”, are far

Within the discipline of sociology, sexuality, as a social category, has been understudied. Although we currently are experiencing a period of great growth in the “correction of history”, through the work of academic fields such as “gay studies” and queer theory, it is far from universal that sexuality, as a social category/institution affecting social groups, is automatically considered an important inclusion when developing social theory. Several pertinent social theorists give barely more than precursory treatment toward sexuality as an institution effecting social change. For instance, the works of Habermas, Giddens, Luhmann, Laclau and Mouffe, Bourdieu, and Melucci all marginalize the treatment of “queer sexuality” and its effects on the social world (Warner, 1993). Furthermore, it is these same theorists who have been responsible for much contemporary thought on the topics of culture, consumption and social change. On the other hand, there exists a growing number of social theorists who have included sexuality as an important aspect of the social world, albeit, each approaches the study of sexuality from his/her own unique, diverse perspective. As Warner’s (1993) bibliographical description reveals, some of the most well known studies of social thought about sexuality include French social thought linking sexuality and politics, “from Bataille to Deleuze”; radical psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Freud; the Frankfurt School, which resulted in Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*; comparative anthropology beginning with Malinowski’s *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*; critical liberalism, such as Bentham and Sade; liberationist sexual movements reflecting on sexuality, democracy and socialism; gay social theory, such as that by Guy Hocquenghem, Jeffrey Weeks, Mario Mieli, Michel Foucault; and last but not least, multiple feminists including Gayle Rubin, Adrienne Rich, Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and Iris Marion Young.

Still, the problem with much historical treatment of sexuality lies in the dismissal of sexuality as an agent of social change. Political critics point to the inability of sexuality to determine political preference, with gays/lesbians existing on both the political left and right, using this as a partial rationale for why mobilization around sexuality is a fruitless task. However, such arguments not only dismiss sexuality as a

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from congruous. For now, however, I shall focus on the historical development of sexual subjects, leaving theoretical debates until the later half of this chapter.

political agenda, they furthermore dismiss the remaining question of “whether or in what context queers have political interests, *as queers*, that connect them to broader demands for justice and freedom” (Warner, 1993 p.xi). Although this question lies beyond the scope of the current research at hand, it is important to note because it is through the perpetual positing of the either psychoanalytic or historicist dichotomy of sexuality that one misses the inherently *social* nature of sexuality. The regulation and normalization of sexuality is inherently linked to social institutions and ideologies, as the work of some queer theorists reveals:

Because the logic of the sexual order is so deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and is embedded in the most standard accounts of the world, queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions and accounts. The dawning realization that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are (Warner, 1993 p.xiii).

Thus, sexuality is arguably an institutionalized category, as much as it is a political or psychological manifestation.

## **2.2 Mapping Gender onto Sexuality: The Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality**

Understanding sexuality as a social institution establishes the framework for researching the social norms guiding its development and transformation. In historical context, the reorganization of public and private spheres, from pre-capitalism to capitalism, brought with it an even more rigid establishment of gender norms. Capitalization required multiple social institutions to demand different performances based upon one’s gender. Masculinity and femininity were redefined to fit the needs of corporations and work environments under systems of capitalism. Men’s domination

over women, and the “modern gender order” changed from being within the family domain to being legitimated by the technical organization of production (Connell, 1995).

In the literature, discussions of gender norms inevitably digress, sooner or later, into a debate between biological-determinists and social constructivists. These determinist-constructivist<sup>6</sup> arguments swing like a pendulum. On one end we find the work of sociobiologists, whose arguments I shall not explore here, while at the other we find thinkers (Lorber, 1994; Butler, 1990) who argue sexuality and gender ought to be understood as performative, constituting the identity it is purported to be, in the same way that Nietzsche (1969) conceived the dialectic that “there is no ‘being’ behind doing...the deed is everything” (p.45). From a performative, Nietzschean perspective, difference stems from action. From a Lacanian linguistic perspective, being is always produced through the structures of signification. However, the problematic in Lacanian theory lies in the notion of a “divide,” an internally divided subject, which establishes the duality of the sexes. Self-identification, from this psychoanalytic perspective, renders woman, as subject, motionless, bared from the “Truth” of her origins because of the bars language, itself an institution, imposes. So, any inequality present is inherent to the system by which it was created. In sum, from this perspective, the inequality of gender, or any other divided subject, cannot be resolved via discussion, for communicative modes are infused with all the same unequal social trappings manifested in other institutions, in much of the same manner as Foucault has shown the law to be representative of a specific historic and power configuration.

Having momentarily explored the limitations I find would be inherent to a performative analysis of sexuality, nevertheless I believe the underlying logic of a socially constructed communicative act can inform studies of social change in sexuality norms. What is revealed is how the sexuality we reproduce is not one based upon free will. Rather, it is an outcome, a consequence of the system itself. Even homosexuality is at once a re-creation of the norms of heterosexuality and not a “free” expression of non-

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<sup>6</sup> When engaging in the contemporary feminist debate between essentialism and constructivism, I believe it is crucial to establish one’s epistemological standpoint. As Butler (1990) points out, even notions of “dialogue” are historically and culturally bound, and are subject to power relations that limit possibilities. So, even if such considerations do raise uncomfortable “postmodern” issues of identity and allegiance and pose threats to the speed of feminist “progress”, I believe that without serious reconsideration, the “feminist project” will neither bring about the social change it so desires nor truly be liberatory for all.

heterosexuality. In other words, it is impossible to create a “purely” homosexual identity within a heterosexist, homophobic society. As Butler articulates Foucault and Nietzsche’s position, our cultural values emerge as a result of “an inscription on the body” (Butler, 1990 p.109). Social institutions, whether they are penal or educational systems, inscribe norms, values, and beliefs on bodies. Doing gender becomes an expression of the hegemonic order, a manifestation of internalized norms and values, whether done consciously or not. It is precisely this normative, numbing process that thwarts change. The body is a cultural field and gender is “a construction that regularly conceals its genesis” (Butler, 1990 p.140).

Still, as history reveals, social change does occur. It occurs at the margins - at those points where the system is “most vulnerable”, to use Mary Douglas’ phrase. The cycle does break, although those with the least at stake are less likely to notice. For me, the cycle ends when people “question authority”, when individuals “break the rules”, such as the drag king that denaturalizes the categories of sex and gender. However, social change “cannot be addressed as a homogeneous social phenomenon, but only as a variation in social relations” (Melucci and Lyyra, 1998, p. 209). It is the disruption of normative, everyday practices of daily life that characterize modern forms of resistance to the status quo. Activities that work to reject and challenge dominant systems entail the protection of identities and the reinforcement of culture (Melucci and Lyyra, 1998).

Studies within the fields of anthropology, history and sociology repeatedly reveal that sex/gender systems are not only the result of genetics. Within the study of gender we find definitions of masculinity and femininity being entrenched in the history of institutions and economic structures. Contemporary sociology of gender now argues that gender, and to a large extent sexuality, is not fixed in advance of social interaction and looks at the making and remaking of conventions for explaining social behavior.

However, critiques of traditional sociology assert that much social theory: still operates in the universe created by Descartes, with a sharp split between the knowing, reasoning mind and the mechanical, unreasoning body. Theories of discourse have not overcome this split: they have made bodies the objects of symbolic practice and power but not participants” (Connell, 1995, p. 60).

What Connell and other contemporary thinkers wish to assert is how sex/gender systems reflect social practice. As a social practice, gender never just *is*. It is always changing, and is always a social pattern that is a product of the historical moment. Hence, “to understand gender [or sexuality], then, we must constantly go beyond gender [sexuality]...we cannot understand class, race or global inequality without constantly moving towards gender. Gender relations are a major component of social structure as a whole, and gender politics are among the main determinants of our collective fate” (Connell, 1995, p. 76).

The social-constructivist, feminist interpretation of history presented above differs largely from an historical account of this same topic presented by biologists. Researchers studying the biological etiology of homosexuality (LeVay, and Hamer 1994; Hamer and Copeland, 1995; Watson and Shapiro, 1995; Nimmons, 1994; Pool, 1993; Angier, 1993; Bailey and Pillard, 1991; Angier, 1991) have argued for varying degrees of difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals. From anatomical brain differences (Angier, 1991, 1992; Nimmons, 1994; Watson and Shapiro, 1995) to twin and sibling studies arguing for genetic determinants of homosexuality (Pool, 1993; Angier, 1993; Bailey and Pillard, 1991), to the 1990s which were filled with controversy over whether the “causes” of homosexuality were genetic or not. Interestingly, one might note the absence of corresponding studies searching for the causes of heterosexuality.

### **2.3 Sexuality and Social Movement Theory**

As social and natural scientists continue to debate amongst and between themselves whether the origins of sexuality lie within socialization, genetics or perhaps some combination, one notices that within the field of sociology, deviance textbooks still devote an entire chapter to homosexuality (Goode, 1997). It is this deviance perspective that defined much sociological thinking about sexuality, especially up until the late 1970s.

Not until the advent of the “Gay Rights Movement<sup>7</sup>” (GRM), which was largely fueled by the growth and work of the women’s movement, do we find books and articles that question heterosexuality as *the* dominant sexual paradigm (Lorber, 1999). From the 1970s to the present, alongside the development of the modern day gay rights movement, which is known as the "post-Stonewall" period, what it means to be “gay” and what ideas are put forth both academically and commonly about homosexuality and moreover sexuality have dramatically shifted. In short, during this time, what gay means has been reformulated. “Gay” took on a new identity as circumstances changed in America.

In complex, contemporary society, organizations maintain considerable power in constructing social codes and exerting pressure on individual and group behavior during everyday life. However, as Melucci (1989) argues, with increasing social complexity comes higher degrees of differentiation that results in “a need for greater systemic integration and intensified control, which shifts its focus from content to codes, from patterns of conduct to the pre-conditions of action” (Melucci, 1989 p.12). Hence, when one looks at the activities of contemporary social movements, whether be the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement, Animal Rights, or Women’s Rights, one notices that the result is moreover a symbolic challenge to dominant codes of behavior. Contemporary social movements disrupt that which is hegemonic and an actively produce alternative sources of knowledge and information.

Collective action affects the dominant institutions by modernizing their cultural outlook and procedures ... contemporary social movements stimulate radical questions about the ends of personal and social life and, in so doing, they warn of the crucial problems facing complex societies (Melucci, 1989, p.12).

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<sup>7</sup> Since its inception in 1951 with the foundation of the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles, the GRM, which was then called the "homophile movement" (Esterberg, 1994, p.429), has changed considerably. Initial homophile organizations were small, composed of a majority of men, provided social activities and worked with professionals "psychiatrists, medical doctors, clergy and academics to improve society's attitudes towards homosexuals" (Esterberg, 1994, p.429). Members were hard to recruit, and "because of the powerful sanctions against homosexuality in the 1950s, the issue of safety was an important theme" (Esterberg, 1994p.431). Early GRM publications, such as the first lesbian magazines, created by the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the *Ladder*, had articles that emphasized "good manners" and took an integrationist stance as a personal and political strategy. "The Daughters of Bilitis endorsed an attempt to change the individual to suit society" (Esterberg, 1994p.432). While ultimately the DOB merged with the women's movement, their approach accentuates the difference between the early and present strategies of gay organizations.

By carefully avoiding an *a priori* presupposition of social conflict, unlike most Marxist analyses, and by avoiding a simplistic, reductionist rational-choice or exchange-theory approach, Melucci's contribution of the term "New Social Movement"<sup>8</sup> provides us with the epistemological space to explore the very creation of social action. It is the theoretical acumen social movement theory that enables us to better understand how new cultural models of behavior and cultural symbols about GLBTQs are created. Hence, given the cultural complexity of present day US society, and the high density not only of social but also of information networks, we may see how "society's capacity to intervene in the production of meaning extends to those areas which previously escaped control and regulation: areas of self-definition, emotional relationships, sexuality and 'biological' needs" (Melucci, 1989, p. 45). In other words, institutional control over sexuality - in its definition, negotiation and expression, is contingent upon cultural complexity.

Social structure plays an important part in new social movement theory. A fundamental component of new social movements (NSMs), of which the GRM can be classified, is that structure exists on a micro as well as macro level. As Melucci writes;

The logic of a system is not necessarily to be looked for in large scale interests or in the more visible forms of power; it is also to be found at the more simple levels of social life, where actors interact to define the possibilities and constraints of their action (Melucci, 1989, p.108).

For instance, NSMs ask such questions as whether the dominant logic and conflicts that are apparent on a macro-level are reproduced on an ethnomethodological, or daily interaction, level. Drawing from the work of Habermas (1984) and Touraine (1971, 1978, 1984, 1995), Melucci asserts that "conflicts move from the economic-industrial system to the cultural sphere. They focus on personal identity, the time and space of life, and the motivation and codes of daily behavior" (p.109). Hence, the role, or function, of systems appears to be

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<sup>8</sup> "'New social movement' has been used to designate feminist movements, the gay movement, the environmental movement, (sometimes) movements among racial minorities, and anti-nuclear weapons efforts" (Plotke, 1995, p.115).

changing. In postmodern terms, highly differentiated systems interact with individuals. As a result, systems impart resources to individual actors whom become "autonomous loci of action". In return, individuals must self-regulate imposing outside forces and construct their own meaning.

It is this interactive component of NSM theory that I find of greatest utility for understanding GLBTQ representation. As a system, the media allocates its resource (power to make (in) visible) to various sexualities. This mass reflection of sexual selves grants or denies individual actors confirmation and authenticity. In turn, individuals must resolve these external representations (i.e. positive/negative/neutral reflections) with the internal belief system used to construct identity and social meaning. In short, using this theoretical framework, we may better understand the dialectical relationship involved with GLBTQ media representation and cultural (in) significance, meaning, and identity construction. This production of meaning and identity lies at the heart of contemporary conflicts and is crucial to the definition of a new social movement. NSM theory sees identities, and groups organized around them, not as hierarchical, but as multiple and overlapping. NSM groups do not claim to be overarching - able to take care of all the needs and issues of participants - but are, instead, "affinity groups knit together not by superordinate logic but by a web of overlapping memberships (Calhoun, 1993, 407-8; Esterberg, p.440).

Characteristic of NSMs is the dilemma of actors striving for equal access to economic and political benefits yet refusing in the process to change their own identities in order to gain such access. "Being recognized as different is perhaps one of the most crucial rights at stake in postindustrial systems...In societies that exert strong pressures toward conformity, the appeal to difference has an explosive impact on the dominant logic" (Melucci, 1989i, p.119). Thus, it is in this addressing of issues of difference, the connection between the societal and the personal is clearly evidenced.

Antagonism in NSMs lies in their ability to resist and change the dominant social order that organizes daily life. According to NSM theorists, this can be done in many ways, such as with the creation of new languages or terms<sup>9</sup> and the development of new symbols.

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<sup>9</sup> As Hennessy (2000) points out, the struggle over GLBTQ representation is apparent with the largely uncomfortable / cumbersome usage of different terminology (queer, bisexual, transsexual, pansexual, etc.)

This focus on symbiotics is simultaneously NSMs gift and curse. The insistence that new codes of meaning and new ways of seeing the world<sup>10</sup>, outside the lens of the dominant system, define members and non-members lends NSMs to charges of exclusivity and eccentricity whereby participants are characterized as no longer being able to distinguish between work and leisure time. In short, identification with the movement becomes an aspect and extension of the self. This dual focus on both the local and global consequences of action embodies the distinguishing feature of NSMs: the dual role of the individual - both at once independent and attached to the larger society, and embodies the frequently loathed issues of “identity politics” that plague the GRM. As Foucault (1983) best articulates, in contemporary movements, conflict lies in struggles that "question the status of the individual:

on the one hand, they assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way...they are struggles against the 'government of individualization.

Axiomatic to NSM proponents is the need to reflect upon how power relations shape the construction of knowledge and identity. In particular, NSMs are in opposition to the privileging of knowledge. "What is in question is the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relation to power" (Foucault, 1983, p.116). It is the confluence of struggles centering around the question "Who are we?" that unifies NSM thought and empowers its theorists to put forth mandates for self-governance. It is the refusal to let economics, science and authority dictate whom one is:

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to convey one's sexual identity. These terms may be called “cultural signifiers” because they reflect and shape the social meanings attached to sexual identity. However, terms and other manifestations of sexual identity must be interpreted as creations stemming from a social order where heterosexuality is naturalized. Again, it is in this fashion that Marxist feminists continuously view heterosexuality as part of social structure.

<sup>10</sup> For example, within the animal rights movement one may describe the perception of meat and food as shifting from means of sustenance to systems of domination and exploitation. The same paradigm shift is apparent in sectors of the women's movement on a host of issues and topics.

The main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much "such and such" an institution or power, or group or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power (Foucault, 1983 p.116).

This aberration from traditional social movement theory demarcates NSM's originality and its contribution to my project at hand. Media, understood as a *technique* or *form* of power, I will argue, exudes a better-equipped form of analysis than one unduly focused on the media as a specific class or institution of power. Focusing upon tangible instances where the media has expended its position of power to create a certain image, stereotype or normative opinion about GLBTQs focuses our attention on the actualized inequality resulting from this power-induced technique rather than getting sidetracked with the more intellectualized project of deconstructing "the media".

## 2.4 Sexuality and The Media

In the broadest sense, one purpose of this dissertation is to reveal the social nature of sexuality - to provide evidence for the creation of a social history of sexuality as a social category, as a system that grants or deprives persons of privileges. However, engaging in such a project is problematic because "atypical" sexualities often lack mainstream visibility, social cohesion, or visible representation within a wide range of social institutions. This invisibility is not unintentional. "...the management of visibility through the media is an unavoidable feature of modern politics"(Thompson, 1995b, p.138). Invisibility of GLBTQs is, of course, not limited to the practices of the media. For example, the military's<sup>11</sup> "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy makes highly invisible GLBTQ service people.

The media, as a social institution that greatly impacts GLBTQs, has long been classified an "agent of socialization" within sociology. Still, it remains the most

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<sup>11</sup> Nor does invisibility deter discrimination. Statistics reveal that prior to 1992, 15,000 homosexuals were dismissed from the US military while during the year of 1995, the same year that DADT mandates aimed to "improve" the condition of "gays in the military", 488 servicepersons were discharged because of their sexuality, representing a 17% increase in one year alone.

understudied of all "agents". I believe this is a trend that needs to be addressed - especially given the importance of technologies as transmitters of information throughout our post-modern society. The media is both a sponsor of meaning and a site where cultural norms are contested. Hence, the media is one actor among many - political parties, corporations, social movements, and other institutions - in a complex society that “attempt[s] to generate, aggregate, transform, and articulate the interests of some underlying constituency” (Gamson, 1998, p.60).

By extracting and delineating the messages revealed in and transmitted by *New York Times* articles, I endeavor to analyze the media as a cultural product. “The mass media system, like the state, can also be assumed to have autonomous interests of its own, beyond the varying organizational interests of the field of actors that comprise it” (Gamson, 1998, p. 62). In essence, the media is not merely a reflecting mirror but is a contributor to and site of meaning construction. How an issue or social group is depicted in media discourse largely affects public opinion. In focusing on the media as cultural agent, I believe this research will be a valuable contribution not only to the field of sociology, but also to communication studies and interdisciplinary programs focusing on issues of inequality. Learning how GLBTQs have historically been represented by the modern media will evidence levels of visibility/invisibility and contextualize representation within a larger social framework. Understanding why GLBTQ issues "all of a sudden" became newsworthy is an issue that will help GLBTQ social movements address issues of resource-mobilization, identity, and constituency. Furthermore, I believe this study will help empower an often invisible minority to notice the social changes that have taken place, to understand how and why such social change was made possible.

## **2.5 The Problem of “Identity” in GLBTQ Social Movements**

*Identity is formed at the unstable point where the “unspeakable” stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture ~ Stuart Hall*

Within the social movement literature, tension<sup>12</sup> exists between ideas about “old” verses “new” movements. Those critical of NSM theory (Plotke, 1983) have objected to a distinction between the two, taunting "What's so new about NSMs?". Although the controversies within this discipline-specific battle is worth noting, the distinction between old and new social movements is of some use to this dissertation. Most importantly, I believe the objections NSM theory raise provides a novel method for circumventing the conflict and postmodern theory debate over the primacy of class. For example, Offe (1987) asserts that issues of economic growth and distribution, military and social security and social control are what motivated old modes of political action associated with the old mode of action. In contrast, issues sparking mobilization for NSMs include "preservation of the environment, human rights, peace and unalienated forms of work" (Plotke, 1983 p.117, citing Offe, 1987).

Extrapolating the fundamental arguments beseeching social movement theory, and applying them to an analysis of homosexuality and capitalism, enables one to see how the breach in mobilization theory replicates the historical economic shift from big-business and corporate conglomerates to decentralization and fragmentation within the market. More specifically, applying historical insights gained from social movement literature facilitates understanding how US society changed its articulation of social problems, and reformulated its ways of addressing them. Social movement theory (applied to questions such as: How did “identity” issues come to assume their centrality of importance to GLBTQ persons in American society?) assists the conceptualization of social change as a process and action that is constantly in a state of flux – propelled by activities that both support and inhibit the movement. Hence, articulating the difference between “old” social-movement paradigms, which were content to privilege the values of “freedom and security of private consumption and material progress”, and NSMs, that favored “personal autonomy and identity, as opposed to centralized control” (Plotke, 1983 p.117), forces one to question what is driving action.

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<sup>12</sup> Much akin to postmodernism, NSM discourse is often set in opposition to Marxism. NSM theorists ardently assert that emergent social identities are irreducible to class (Plotke, 1983). However the desire of NSM participants to achieve autonomy, as voiced within NSM theory, causes a state of confusion to result. Identities are arguably not apolitical; they are both socially and politically influenced. In addition, concurring with the fluidity and multiplicity of identities that postmodernity and NSM theory beckons, leaves one questioning why and how this theoretical camp can so arduously argue for the “radical autonomy of identities”.

Centralizing issues of personal autonomy and identity can, I believe, facilitate our understanding of the GRM, and the media's preoccupation with GLBTQ consumption patterns in particular. As my previous digression into the nuances of old/new social movement theory detailed, the historical shift in how collective organization operates magnifies how the ontological shift in collective action has redirected our attention away from the group to the individual. In old social movements, participation (i.e. the force driving action) was primarily socioeconomic status. Groups acted in ways that fostered group interests. In NSMs on the other hand, actors act "on behalf of ascriptive collectivities" (Plotke, 1995, p.117). NSMs are conceptualized as "embodying resistance to power, motivated by cultural aims, fundamentally differing from the labor and socialist traditions [and being] uninterested in conventional forms of political participation" (Plotke, 1995, p.118). So, even though the gay community may arguably constitute a group, participation in efforts that assert group goals are often enacted on the individual<sup>13</sup>, rather than collective, level. This is why, in my opinion, techniques used by the media to debase GLBTQs can have such debilitating effects upon GLBTQs. Without more traditional structural mechanisms in place to foster collective identity, and given our cultural predisposition to devalue non-heterosexuality, individual actors may be more susceptible to internalizing the negative imagery or stereotypical depictions the media creates on its behalf. GLBTQs use prompts grounded in individualism to spur behavior.

Since its inception in the 1951, we can notice that the goals and ideologies of the GRM have changed. "The success of the more militant homophile groups in the late 1960s and the radical gay activist groups in the 1970s was partly the result of their willingness to emphasize the differences between lesbians and gay men and heterosexuals" (Esterberg, 1994 p.438). Whereas fifty years ago Kinsey's heterosexual-

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<sup>13</sup> Taylor and Raeburn's (1995) work on the consequences of activism for lesbian, gay and bisexual sociologists evidences the highly-individualist consequences and activism GLBTQs experience in working towards the aims of the GRM. In the field of sociology, there exists an organization called the Sociologists' Lesbian and Gay Caucus (SLGC). Formed in the early 1970s, the group "emphasized personal identity strategies to create a visible gay and lesbian presence in sociology, to challenge dominant conceptions of homosexuality as deviance, and to force public acceptance" (p.260). Thus, activism referred to the promotion of personal political acts, such as teaching gay-affirmative courses and publishing research that supports the non-deviant nature of homosexuality. However, even in this more "liberal" field, queer sociologists remained isolated on a daily basis, lacked a forum for collective activism and personally withstood the consequences of their activism, as it impacted their own professional careers.

homosexual continuum (Kinsey et al., 1953) served to locate sexuality on points in a fixed set of binary sexual identities, the women's and gay rights movements diverged from this origin to reveal a clearly gendered nature of sexuality (Lorber, 1994). Yet, although studies of sexuality continue to expand and reflect a more inclusive representation of sexuality, with more recent studies of transgenderism and bisexuality for instance, we find that definitions of self are still confined by the Western cultural construct of a dichotomous sexuality and consequently are not only marginalized but even excommunicated (Laquerur, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990; Rust, 1995; Lorber 1996). When some non-heterosexuals defy and reject compartmentalization by and/or within the GRM, and push for the "queering" of sexuality so that their identities may be "counted", they are frequently met by resistance both by the GRM and mainstream society. The present-day Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's<sup>14</sup> policy of "women born womyn" is a perfect example of how gender identity politics plays out in real world discrimination - in this case, by a faction of the lesbian community itself. By only allowing women with the "correct" genitalia to enter "the land", we can see how what qualifies as female is arbitrated not by the individual but rather by the power wielded by social institutions. Furthermore, as Lorber (1999) points out, Rust's work on bisexuality demonstrates that attempting to decode the science of desire - the problematic that bisexuals are attracted to both men and women - undermines the presupposition of innate homosexuality to some gays and lesbians.

In the process of this transformation, not only of the GRM but also of the very definitions of gender and sexuality in contemporary US society, allegiances between gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgenders and others are becoming severed and politics becoming even fiercer. "The more outrageous the behavior [in self-presentation, non-conventional partners, political acts and other forms of gender performativity (Butler, 1990)], the more the boundaries get drawn between "them" and "us" (Gamson, 1998). So, as a social movement, the GRM currently not only lacks self-unification but also, and perhaps even more importantly, it lacks cohesive representation of itself to mainstream society. This knowledge is important to our study of the media because it is

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<sup>14</sup> As discussed this represents a greatly simplified version of the issues involved between the trans community, festival organizers and some traditional feminists.

the actions of collectivities and radicals that often garner the most media attention. When the media uses “fringe” actors’ behavior to generalize to all GLBTQs, everyone suffers. Furthermore, as mainstream commentators might readily question: If the queer community cannot “agree” on how its members are defined, perceived or recognized, who ought to “police” how the straight community interprets, assesses and judges the media’s representation of homosexuals?

Leaving the aforementioned question aside, we might briefly discuss the overall difficulty determining sexual identity entails. In contemporary societies, the mere presence of a homosexual sex act is often insufficient for the adoption of a homosexual identity. Surveys (Turner, 1989) reveal that many adults who have had sexual childhood experiences with both genders continue to consider themselves heterosexual and proceed with becoming heterosexual adults. Still, I would argue that identifying as a homosexual or bisexual adult today, even more so than in past generations, is an identifiably *social* process governed by the large-scale structure of gender and cultural norms. Studies exploring the seemingly recent surge in the number of “midlife lesbians” point to multiple social and cultural factors, such as the “sexual revolution”, the feminist movement and the growing presence and acceptance of lesbian visibility in mainstream and popular culture (Rosch, 1997). Estimates drawn by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force reveal that by the mid-1990s between one and five million women previously living as heterosexual wives and/or mothers have chosen to seek out same-sex partners. While such estimates are difficult to quantify, what is increasingly even more difficult to discern is how these women perceive their sexuality and their self-identification. Regardless of whether one chooses to take the postmodern feminist route and reject the cultural imperative to classify one’s sexual identity or, if one chooses to think in a more traditional sense: I was straight, but now I’m gay, to me the more important acknowledgment is noting the challenges non-heterosexuality poses. As one can see, once an individual steps outside the heterosexual box, sexuality becomes a complex phenomenon resistant to simplistic categorization.

For NSMs, culture is used as a means of identity definition and maintenance (Plotke, 1995 p.122). However, because culture is an unstable and disputable concept, it can cause conflict. "Cultural conflicts have intensified because of new links between cultural and

socioeconomic processes. The location of individuals and groups within socioeconomic hierarchies is increasingly dependent on access to education and skills...this access is shaped by conceptions of the merit and potential of different groups" (Plotke, 1995 p.122). Given that the US has a weakly defined labor movement and welfare state, social theorists have noted that focusing only on the cultural aspects of such NSMs as the feminist movement and black /civil rights movement misses "issues of legal equity and socioeconomic distribution" (Plotke, 1995 p.124).

To some degree, the same argument can be extended to the GRM. Assuming cultural and socioeconomic homogeneity among members of the GRM can lead to dangerous conclusions, especially since census data reveals that 10% of the population is gay (Dean, 1994). "Lesbians and gay men are distributed across ethnic, racial and class lines" (Esterberg, 1994). Furthermore, as an illustrative example, in a study of "coming out", often a critical event in a gay individual's life, Harry (1993) found that variation among who is or isn't "out" is largely due to differences in income, occupation, area of residence, sexual orientation of friends and individual nonconformity. As is evident, this variation is due to cultural and socioeconomic variation within the gay community.

### **2.5.a. Sexuality and Collective Consciousness**

Despite individual differences, integral to NSMs in general, and the GRM in particular, is the cultivation of a shared identity. In this section, I will elaborate upon the important role of "culture" to studies of GLBTQs.

The creation of a collective consciousness, regardless of whether it is as gay, women, black, etc., depends upon a complex relationship between individuals and social structure. "Social categories assume political and cultural identities prior to identification at the material level of social reproduction. 'Consciousness of kind' appears as a consequence of both the reproductive process and the forcible assertion of antistructure" (Foss and Larkin, 1986, p.134). By the "reproductive process" Foss and Larkin mean the act of continuously re-enacting the dominant social order, such as the role of women prior to the women's movement. A shared "mental life" therefore results from a common relation to material and political structures. Yet, although many people may be in the same situation,

they are often isolated due to their location in the social structure. As a result, "consciousness of kind is repressed or obliterated until events occur that raise common experiences within a significant sector of the social category to the level of consciousness" (Foss and Larkin, 1986 p.134).

At this point in time, several events are occurring that are raising "consciousness of kind" among gays and lesbians. Two examples entail the work of social movement organizations (SMOs) documenting hate crimes, including homophobic and domestic violence (Jeness, 1995) and the extensive amount of research currently being conducted about AIDS. This AIDS research not only includes contributions from the medical community, but also from social scientists. For instance, Krouse (1994) looked at the inception of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, which was begun by the gay community in San Francisco during 1987. Many of the messages extended in the quilt are a direct counteraction to the biomedical community's marginalization and stigmatization of gay men. What Krouse concludes from her research is that not only does the quilt make a tribute to those who have died from AIDS, but it also was a vehicle that mobilized gay men to participate in a collective activity that allowed for the formation of a positive reconstruction of gay identity.

Even the way in which gay is defined has proven to affect the nature of activism, as Schmidt's (1994) study of the effects of Jeffrey Dahmer's serial killings on the Milwaukee's gay and lesbian movement demonstrates. The development of a positive gay identity is also crucial to good mental health. As D'Augelli's and Hershberger (1993) study of gay, lesbian and bisexual college students indicates, if a positive gay self-identity does not develop, it can cause depression and may even lead to suicide.

Lastly, approaching the concept of sexual identity as a form of culture has been met with great resistance. For example, in New York City in 1992 an effort was made to incorporate a "Rainbow" curriculum into NYC public schools (Irvine, 1994). The rainbow program primarily consisted of a teacher's guide that presented homosexuality and same-sex parenting as an aspect of multiculturalism. Although the attempt failed, this also demonstrates the gay community's various ways of trying to incorporate homosexuality as a cultural and alternative lifestyle.

In my opinion, what the above issues demonstrate is that, as a community, gays and lesbians are recognizing and asserting that many gay issues warrant the label of a social problem. This is evidenced by their unprecedented pursuit of legal reform - to extend civil rights to their group in several areas and by their pursuit for publicity, visibility and acceptance within such institutions as the church, educational institutions (via AIDS education and the inclusion of gay studies as course offerings in college), the military, and even for legal representation itself (via their fight for child custody and same-sex marriages). To this degree, their existence as a collectivity is changing their relationship to several sectors in society.

It is through the framing of issues as social problems that the gay and lesbian movement has expanded its scope and increased its penetration into the larger society. Visibility and validity as an alternative lifestyle are underlying goals which are indirectly being achieved via the efforts of "issue work" (for example, street patrol, gay affirming education, SMOs), as well as through events such as Pride marches and gay week. And, since Jenness (1995) stresses that "visibility is a central resource for social movements and a central component for the successful construction of a social problem (citing Gamson et al, 1992; Collins, 1990 and Holstein and Miller, 1990 among others), the GRM appears to be, at least theoretically, framing their goals in a way that can lead to accomplishing their goals.

By establishing a collective identity under the framework of a civil rights movement, gays and lesbians have been successful in creating an identity that has its own social and political institutions. This collective identity, founded upon an ideology of minority rights and shared oppression (Gamson, 1997), has been crucial to political success. Hence, identity issues embody the role ideology plays in securing consolidation of action. "Ideology offers ways of knowing that profoundly shape identity through the organization of differences. Ideology naturalizes differences...and so legitimates human relations of exploitation and domination (Hennessy, 2000, pp.18-19). If identity is not fixed, if identity remains too fluid and boundary-less, then fighting politically for rights becomes an impossibility. Lesbian politics, and in particular the radical feminist assertion that "the personal is political", is one example where personal identity has been used as a political tactic. If identity was not fixed and the personal was ever changing, this proposition would have been useless to assert.

According to Melucci and Gamson, NSM theory recognizes collective identity as both necessary for successful collective action and as "an end in itself" which often emerges from the very process of organizing collectively. Implicit in this portrayal is the notion that collective identity is historical in nature and therefore constrained by external factors, such as the political climate, legal climate, institutions, etc. This is pertinent to GLBTQs because it directly ties into boundary (de)construction, a theme reverberated throughout queer theory. As boundaries are reconstructed, identities are re-negotiated. Through current debates over naming and membership privileges, this is a social process affecting not only GLBTQs from a personal identity standpoint, but also from outside gay culture as mainstream agents attempt to discern the "correct" social representation of alternative sexualities.

From within the GLBTQ community, efforts with collective organization, whether for political, economic, or social reasons, have resulted in a plethora of achievements and challenges. These issues ought to be of immediate interest to any sociologist studying social change and non-heterosexuality because they poignantly illustrate the unique complications involved in dealing with sexuality as a social category. As the following demonstrate, inequality and discrimination resulting from non-dominant sexualities cannot be "fixed" in isolation from class, race and gender inequalities.

Historically, one of the biggest problems the GRM faced was drawing women into the gay movement. In 1992, 62% of the SLGC activists were men. As research on participation during the 1970s and 1980s confirmed (Taylor and Rupp, 1993), women's participation in social movements has been "channeled through feminist and lesbian feminist organizations while men took center stage in the struggle for gay rights" (Talyor and Raeburn, 1995). The lack of female representation in the determination and framing of "gay issues" is problematic foremost because the image presented to mainstream society about what constitutes gay was inherently male and essentially white.

Second, leaving aside the host of race and gender issues that plagued the early organization of gays, and continue to be problems today, we can notice that there are many serious consequences for engaging in "gay" activism. Solely looking at gay rights activists who are sociologists, we learn that those who participate in activist activities, such as publishing on gay issues or being visibly gay, are more likely to be discriminated against in

the hiring process for academic positions, less likely to obtain tenure and/or promotions, experience isolation from social circles, have trouble locating faculty to serve on dissertation committees, not be able to receive grants/fellowships, not have their work fairly reviewed and not be published in top-rated journals (Taylor and Raeburn, 1995). Furthermore, the scientific validity of their work is more frequently questioned and they often have to deal with homophobic reactions from students (Taylor and Raeburn, 1995).

Even as a disfranchised unit of disparate organizations, the GRM has historically been lax to give attention to its members who varied from the White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) norm. For example, although the GRM witnessed the establishment of several SMO "watchdog organizations" during the 1990s, as of 1995 it still had not sponsored activities to combat racism and anti-Semitism experienced by gay persons (Jenness, 1995). Hence, the fact that for the majority of contemporary US history a Jewish lesbian sociologist would not have had a place within the GRM to turn to for help with discrimination not only raises the dilemmas posed by often incommensurable identities, but also shows the complexity of GLBTQ lives.

Until most recently, and arguably even today, identifying as a GLBTQ person has often resulted in negative career consequences. In keeping with the example of the field of sociology, researchers have found that if one assumes a gay identity, then the rest of one's work by default comes to be viewed as seen through the eyes of a gay sociologist. This is because "the process of negotiating what it means to be a gay sociologist makes individuals a site of political activity" (Taylor and Raeburn, 1995, p.269), just as identifying as a feminist or environmentalist does. In other words, one's identity becomes inseparable from one's work; one is no longer seen as capable of objectivity - even if one doubted claims of objectivity in the first place. So, forevermore, any research topics gay individuals pursue are perceived as almost tainted by that worldview or perspective. In other words, proclaiming a homosexual identity irrevocably subjects one to being labeled - the gay teacher, my gay neighbor, etc., much akin to the female police officer, female surgeon, etc. From a sociological view, sexuality acts as a master status shaping and altering future social interactions. In the eyes of the media, as my research shows, it is socially, perhaps politically, important to note that the killer was a lesbian - not just a 40-year-old white female.

This logic of how homosexuality functions as a master status can be understood using the example of politics. Even precursory exploration into the history of US politics reveals the great degree to which the political arena is intolerant of homosexuals. As a group, gays and lesbians are not extended the same political rights and protections that have been extended to other groups (Riggle and Ellis, 1994). Although many examples abound, one brief illustration is discrimination law. During the 1960s and 1970s, when Congress passed several contemporary anti-discrimination laws, such as Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Employment Act of 1967 and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibit employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, marital status, beliefs, age, national origin, or handicap, sexual orientation was excluded (Riggle and Ellis, 1994 p.144). To date, although legislation<sup>15</sup> protecting gays and lesbians is slowly being introduced, it is complicated by the lack of consistency between federal and state law and still overwhelmingly privileges heterosexuality.

Finally, other issues affecting the progress of GLBTQs that have been fleshed out in debates among various theoretical camps include the problem of bisexual “passing”, whereby gays and lesbians exclude bisexuals from “their” movement and causes because bisexuals living a “heterosexual” life experience the social privileges associated with heterosexuality, and, consequently, experience few of the disadvantages. While in social movement theory this may be theorized as a “free rider” problem of sorts, in conventional society bisexuals tend to receive the least amount of social acceptance from either heterosexual or homosexual communities. However, in the eyes of the law, as long as they are in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex they are considered heterosexual and do qualify for the over 100 automatic privileges, in addition to the rights granted under divorce law, that marriage automatically confers upon the unionship of two opposite-sex individuals. Which leads us to the last contentious debate within the GRM that I will mention: the assimilation versus separatism debate. Most briefly, this is an ideological debate over whether strategies for success should be aimed at either stressing the similarities

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<sup>15</sup> One major legal accomplishment for GLBTQs was the passage on 4/23/90 of the Hate Crime Statistics Act, signed by President Bush, that "requires the US Department of Justice to collect data on hate-motivated violence against select groups"... "the inclusion of a 'sexual orientation' provision in the Act constitutes the federal government's only official legislative response to anti-gay and lesbian violence" (Jeness, 1995, p.149).

among gay and non-gay populations or whether one should wave the queer flag and fight for the unconditional acceptance of differences.

Most of the difficulty that the GRM has had in establishing a collective identity stems from individual gender differences. By trying to "build a politics from the rubble of deconstructed collective categories", a debate over both the content of collective identity and the everyday and political usefulness of even establishing a sexual identity has developed (Gamson, 1998 p.390). This has had highly visible consequences, namely the differentiation in how lesbians and gay men organize (Gamson citing Adam, 1987 and D'Emilio, 1983).

Much criticism of the strategy of the gay rights movement has come from queer theory, which developed out of constructionist history and sociology, feminist theory and post-structuralist philosophy (Gamson, 1998a). Queer theory accuses gay rights' collective identity approach of upholding the tendency to validate socially imposed dichotomies (woman/man; gay/straight) that reinforce oppression (Gamson, 1998a). In this view, it is only through the deconstruction of socially constructed categories that true liberation can be achieved. Gamson (1997) parallels the "queer dilemma" to the difficulties faced by other identity movements<sup>16</sup> (racial, ethnic and gender movements). The dilemma is that "fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power" (Gamson, 1997 p.391).

From the queer/gay rights debate, an old struggle between those in favor of assimilating versus separating is re-enacted. This debate grew out of the 1950s "homophile movement" which originated as a Marxist sex-class struggle pursuit (Gamson, 1997) and ended in a movement towards conformity and assimilation into the larger society. The gay rights movement still advocates the latter, asserting "We are everywhere", while queer activists take an anti-conformist position, which is readily recognized by their slogan "We're here, we're queer, get used to it" (Gamson, 1995 p.395).

One of the fundamental components of NSM theory is that individuals have multiple and even overlapping identities. Queer theory's refusal to be marginalized into any single identity is merely another dynamic of the same issue - by embracing fluidity between sexual

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<sup>16</sup> The postmodern threat is not limited to the gay rights movement. Other civil rights movements, such as the African-American Movement, have also had to deal with the problem of politically enforcing a policy of "identity-building" versus "identity-blurring" (Gamson, 1995 p.401).

identities (gay, straight, bisexual, transsexual), they are simultaneously assuming various identities. Therefore, there is little difference between a queer's multiple identities and a lesbian's multiple identities as say, woman, lesbian and white. Although the identities may be qualitatively different, the individual must still deal with multiple, and often conflicting, roles.

One point of queer politics though, in my opinion, is very useful for conceptualizing and working towards real social change. This point is that by operationalizing lesbians and gays as a single, homogeneous community, the current gay rights movement ignores major differences in experience by gender that fragment its own movement. In Gamson's words, they "avoid challenging the system of meanings that underlies the political oppression: the division of the world into man/woman and gay/straight" (Gamson, 1998a p.400). Until the gay rights movement incorporates gender construction into its theoretical basis, it will be missing a key component of identity formation. The gay community is not immune to gender inequality, and in order to unite collectively, this issue must be addressed. Lesbian feminists are quite aware of gender disparity, and by incorporating this issue into the larger gay movement, it would facilitate the transition to self-identification as a member of both the feminist and gay movements. Because, while lesbianism and feminism have often been connected (Gamson citing Phelan, 1989; Taylor and Whittier, 1992), there appears to be a distinction between lesbianism and the gay movement as a whole.

### **2.5.b Social Change and The Gay Rights Movement**

Regardless if one believes identity politics is important in studying the social shift in representation and visibility of GLBTQs, I believe it is necessary to conceptualize at least the GRM as a collective body that has been an active agent in fostering social change. To the extent that this shall be agreed upon, I shall put forth the following definition of "social change" that can serve as a useful guideline in this dissertation. Social change can be articulated as "the quantitative and qualitative changes in the appearances of social relations which continue throughout periods of dissidence and quiescence alike" (Foss and Larkin, 1986, p.2).

Using the above definition of social change, I would argue that the gay rights activities that occurred during the 1990s more than sufficiently establish the “authenticity” of the GRM. Being that “hundreds of thousands of lesbians and gay men marched on Washington, DC to claim civil rights in 1987 and 1993” (Esterberg, 1994), and again in 2000, implies that, as a group, gays, lesbians and bisexuals are engaging in identity construction and are making appeals that challenge the dominant social order. This, by definition, reveals social change is taking place - and outside of consumptive practices.

Contrary to arguments put forth by *The New York Times* that the fashionability of gay and lesbian culture in the 1990s was largely a market invention, social science research argues that “the gay, lesbian, and bisexual movement flourish[ed] in the 1990s in part because of the formidable infrastructural base of cultural, political, social, educational and professional organizations built by activists in the preceding decade” (Taylor and Raeburn, p.252, citing Morris, 1984; Knopp, 1987; Adam, 1995). Unlike mainstream arguments about the corporate invention of lesbian and gay chic, Taylor and Raeburn (1995) note that it is mainly political activism by GLBTQ persons, especially in the workplace, that has been crucial to the movement's success and expansion.

As an increasingly organized and active group, gays and lesbians are challenging dominant society's exploitation, the imposition of heterosexual norms which explicitly and covertly harm them, and society's ideological censoring and marginalizing tendencies which stem from mass homophobic tendencies. Contrary to what Madison Avenue would like us to believe, GLBTQs are rebuking the current social structure in a definably social movement way. According to Foss and Larkin's four criteria<sup>17</sup> about what constitutes social movement behavior, GLBTQs are engaging in “subjective” development.

Through legal, political and social avenues, gays and lesbians are currently challenging the limitations placed upon them by the social structure and are questioning the justifications that have been used to impose inequalities. GLBTQs are “overtly challenging and interfering with the reproduction of relations of social privilege and participating in forms of mass collegialization themselves, dissident collectivities become agents of

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<sup>17</sup> 1. The social category becomes a social collectivity in that members begin acting in behalf of the collectivities. 2. The members of the social category experience new relations within their collectivity and between themselves and other collectivities. 3. Their social action alters their understanding of the nature of the social order. 4. They collectively experience altered states of consciousness.

antistructure (Foss and Larkin, 1986 p.8). "Statuses are [being] temporarily suspended", role structures do appear to be interfered with and people are refusing to accept their "place" in society (Foss and Larkin, 1986).

## **2.6 Contemporary Sexuality and Social Change**

### **2.6.a. Sexuality, Culture and Social Perception**

The history of social change is the history of changing ideas - and ideas about homosexuality, as I have argued, have significantly shifted over time. Yet, in embarking on a journey to document social change, one immediately faces the forbidding question: What “qualifies” as social change in cultural attitudes towards sexuality? Initially, posing this seemingly mundane question may appear incongruous. However, as an even limited exploration of the literature dealing with social change and sexuality quickly reveals, there is no definitive source, no particular field to which one can turn to for illumination. Thus, what I have chosen to do in this section is to compile a potpourri of ideas and findings from a variety of sources that describe how “society’s” understanding of and reaction to homosexuality has changed in a host of cultural venues.

One of the primary ways to explore cultural approval of any given topic is to address the idea as a “moral issue”. Couching homosexuality in the realm of morality is an age-old tradition stemming from the discipline of philosophy and ethics. Whereas morality in ancient times was largely regulated and sanctioned by clergy and religious dogma, in the modern era, and specifically from the Scientific Revolution on-ward, moral judgments have increasingly been declared from the secular community and intelligencia, albeit using similarly arbitrary diagnostics.

Deciding whether to pass anti-discrimination laws is one way modern-day American states express their moral, and inherently political, ideology regarding homosexuality. For example, during the 1970s, three fourths of Americans defined homosexuality as morally wrong (Haeberle, 1996). Consequently, anti-discrimination laws based on sexuality were non-existent. However, as time passed and ideas changed, we see both a shift in the social expression of immorality and in the extension of legal protection to homosexuals. By the

mid-1990s, just over half of the same population agreed with such statements (NORC, 1996) and over half of the largest sixty-one cities in the United States have adopted anti-discrimination policies and statutes (Haeberle, 1996). Social science research indicates that for large cities (population  $\geq$  250,000), neither changes in population size, income, or diversity account for this social change. Rather, what does account for the shift to the passage of anti-discrimination policy is the growth of college-educated residents and the large presence of gays and lesbians in densely populated cities (Haeberle, 1996). Yet, what remains unaccounted for is an explanation of why college-educated citizens would be more “tolerant” of non-heterosexuality. To understand this and other social changes in the perception of homosexuality, I appeal to the logic implored by Lorber to explain gender norms. Drawing upon the work of Foucault (1972) and Gramsci (1971), Lorber writes:

Gendered social arrangements are justified by religious and cultural productions and are backed by law, but the most powerful means of sustaining the moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideology is that the process is made invisible; any possible alternatives are virtually unthinkable (Lorber, 1994, p.26).

Hence, I argue it is a change in how we, as society, *think* about sexuality that is responsible for our acceptance, or at least admittance, of diversity. It is the work of GLBTQ activists, in conjunction with corporate America’s interest in GLBTQs as a new market sector that made visible that which previously was denied existence. Just as Engles attributed the subordination of women to the institutionalization of the family, private property and the state (Lorber, 1994 p.257), so too can modern-day subordination of homosexuality be attributed to these same institutions.

Dilemmas over the morality of homosexuality are, like most ethical debates, confounded by the notion of “rights”. In this case, ideas personified by social movement activists working for “gay rights” are to a great extent responsible for why the American majority thinks both gays and straights deserve equal workplace opportunities (NORC, 1996). However, residual fears about the perversity of homosexuals and their mythicized tendencies to convert youth persist as this same majority continues to assert disapproval of homosexual teachers, especially those teaching adolescents and children. Furthermore,

most Americans believe that gays and lesbians are more likely to have and raise gay and lesbian children while such ideas remain “scientifically” unsubstantiated.

The cultural, social and political consequence of ideas about homosexuality translates into institutional discrimination when state laws see gays and lesbians as unfit parents and consequently deny them adoption rights and/or parental custody. Henceforth, social perception in the United States about homosexuality largely remains one of moral disapproval albeit is beginning to exhibit a limited degree of increased social acceptance, or at least “tolerance”.

While considerable variation in the social perception of homosexuality remains constant throughout the United States, a giant rift exists among the various social domains affecting queer Americans. For instance, whilst recent surveys (Bowes, 1996) still show that a substantial number of gays and lesbians experience verbal and physical abuse<sup>18</sup>, laws protecting domestic partners from abuse are few and far between. On the other hand, the social climate for gay (specifically gay male) roles in Hollywood and the film industry has shifted so drastically it has lead the media to exclaim how actors taking gay roles<sup>19</sup> no longer means that their careers are “ruined” or in “jeopardy” (Weinraub, 1997). This change is said to have taken place over the last decade, i.e. from the late 1980s, and is attributed to “many factors”, including less stereotypical homosexual scripts and an overall shift in the social climate which has lead society to focus more upon the gay community as a consequence of the AIDS crisis.

### **2.6.b. Sexuality, Social Institutions and Discrimination**

Studying the impact diverse sexualities have upon institutions requires an exploration of the links between sexuality, discrimination and institutionalized forms of inequality. Yet, such analyses are problematic due to variation in how institutions both represent and understand sexuality. For instance, one problem commonly faced by those

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<sup>18</sup> Between 80-87% of gays and lesbians have experienced verbal abuse and between 6-35% have been physically abused because of their sexuality (Bowes, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> *The New York Times* cites the “successes” of such films as *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Philadelphia* and *The Birdcage* (9/10/97).

who have studied institutionalized discrimination against gays and lesbians is the problem of invisibility. For example, when studying experiences of discrimination in organized, non-professional sports, frequently very little discrimination against homosexuals is found (Hekma, 1998). However, this is not because discrimination does not exist. Rather, it is because both sports organizations and GLBTQs themselves who live in fear of being “outed” (Hekma, 1998) frequently silence homosexuals. So, it is because of invisibility that there simply *appears* to be no discrimination while, in reality, lack of visibility itself reveals how sports, as social institutions, remain highly discriminatory.

The military provides a second example of covert discrimination. Via a critical study of discrimination policies against homosexuals in the US military, Leggett (1994) shows that it is the beliefs and practices of multiple institutions that are responsible for discrimination against homosexuals in the military. For example, the field of psychiatry<sup>20</sup> used its anti-gay policies for its own benefit, the legitimization of its own growing profession, in exerting its anti-gay dogma while simultaneously the legal system worked to support both psychiatry’s claims and the military’s anti-gay policies, power and administrative proceedings (Leggett, 1994). According to US government statistics, before 1992, a total of 15,000 homosexuals were dismissed from the military. However, during the year of 1995, 488 were discharged, representing a 17% increase.

A number of studies, both within and outside of sociology, have focused on how changes in institutions either accommodate or disadvantage homosexuals. Much emphasis and attention has been devoted to studying how social change occurs within social movement organizations (SMOs) and social movements (SMs) given varying strategies and issues taken up by GLBTQs (Melucci, 1980; Esterberg, 1993; Jenness, 1995; Bernstein, 1997; Corzine et al., 1977; Smith, 1978; Mac Nair et al., 2000; Cohn and Gallagher, 1984; Blasius, 1990). Other research has examined how organized religious institutions have responded to gays and lesbians, noting particular forms of social change, or lack thereof (Glock, 1993; Roozen, et al., 1995) and to how educational

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the GRM, originally grounded in Marxist sex-class ideology (Gamson, 1995), saw psychiatry as a field to embrace and encouraged many gay rights activists to turn to in the hope that psychiatry could legitimate homosexuality (Stein, 1994, 1999). This period is referred to as the "pre-Stonewall" stage of the GRM and ranged from World War II to the late 1960s (Stein, 1994). "But as the gay movement grew, it came to reject psychiatry, ultimately protesting the American Psychiatric Association's classification of homosexuality as a psychological disorder" (Stein, 1994 p.292).

systems have altered their approach to GLBTQs as a means of combating AIDS (Booth and Ainscow, 1988). Several diverse studies have been conducted to measure social change and shifts in perception of homosexuality, these include “the sociology of story telling” which uses “sexual stories” on topics like rape and coming-out (Plummer, 1995) and a textual analysis of the 1999 SSSP (Society for the Study of Social Problems) presidential address as a means of discerning changes in the level of conservative/progressive discourse and beliefs about US culture and family (Ferree *et. al.*, 1999). However, despite the growing familiarity with GLBTQ issues, exploring institutionalized forms of social change surrounding homosexuality remains an arduous task due to issues of invisibility, political correctness, sensitivity and undisclosed feelings of shame, guilt or immorality.

The majority of works exploring homosexuality deal with issues such as AIDS, legal rights, ethics, the “science” of sexual preference, gender, psychiatry or politics. Within the field of sociology, little research has been devoted to establishing how major social institutions, including the media, which has been shown by fields such as psychology and cultural studies to effect social behavior, have or have not changed over time in response to diverse sexualities. Still, reviewing the limited sociological writings about homosexuality we can see that understandings of and ideas about homosexuality have concurrently shifted as the decades have rolled past. Perspectives about homosexuality in the late 1970s ranged from that expressed via the deviance paradigm<sup>21</sup> to a critical cultural stance, as expressed by those who advocated that the main “problem” with respect to the homosexual “lifestyle” was that society rejects it as a valid alternative (Smith, 1978). Yet, regardless of the changes in how sociologists classify or label homosexuality, it is clear that this has been and continues to be an under-studied topic. “Of all the major U.S. social movements...the gay and lesbian liberation movement has perhaps been least studied by sociologists” (Esterberg, 1994, p. 424). Within the United States, sexuality, as a topic of study, was not considered a valid area of research until the

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<sup>21</sup> As authors of deviance books attest, a sociological definition of deviant sexuality is not meant to imply pathology or value judgments, such as morality. “Homosexuality is a form of deviant behavior because most members of this society do not approve of it, and because this disapproval takes the form of condemnation and punishment of homosexuals and strained, difficult relations between straights and gays” (Goode, 1997, p.251).

1950s. And, as recently as 1994, critics have exclaimed the lack of sociologists examining the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality critically (Symposium: Queer Theory/Sociology, 1994).

While the majority of social institutions (the family, law, science, politics, economy and medicine) have received a severely limited degree of formal analysis as to how they have been impacted by the growing presence of GLBTQs, the media remains an exception. Surprisingly, the sociological literature is largely devoid of analyses about GLBTQs and the media. In general, studies of social institutions vary in how much attention they devote towards understanding how the treatment of gays and lesbians has historically changed in each institution. Rather than stemming from within the discipline of sociology, it is primarily the growth of gay and lesbian studies, as an academic field, that has fueled much of this research rather than changes within each social science discipline. For example, within the field of law, debates over the institutionalization of marriage rage in both academic and popular circles, spurring legal arguments of whether the institution of marriage should be extended to include same-sex couples and questions over what constitutes a family, spurring analysis of the social functions of laws and policies on both the pro (Dalton, 2000) and con (Gray, 1993) sides, as well as in the popular press.

Despite the popularity of articles and books written about homosexuality today, examples abound which attest to the continuance of disdain for homosexuality. One example that has wide-reaching ramifications is the legal reality that the act of sodomy still remains illegal in several states, for both heterosexuals and homosexuals. A recent court case on this topic, the Harwick Case, was heard in 1986 in the state of Georgia. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that Georgia's anti-sodomy laws are constitutional and that the State may legally prohibit sodomy even if it occurs in private house with two consenting adults. South Carolina went so far as to declare that as citizens, homosexuals do not have same "rights of privacy" during sexual acts as do heterosexuals practicing conventional "missionary" sex. So, although I have only presented two brief examples, we may see that legal cases continue to reveal that within the institution of law, although positive changes have been made regarding the extension of "rights" to GLBTQs, this change is far from universal or comprehensive. In short,

GLBTQ persons still do not receive equal rights and status as citizens of the United States.

### **2.6.c Gay and Lesbian Income and Affluence at the End of the Twentieth Century**

Sexual minorities are both socially and economically disadvantaged. They are stigmatized, verbally and physically abused and harassed<sup>22</sup>, denied adoption rights (Human Rights Campaign, 2001), subject to anti-sodomy laws in 21 US states, fired and/or denied employment (HRC), and have state and federal law unequally applied to them<sup>23</sup>. Lesbians in particular are twice as likely to earn lower incomes due to their doubled minority status as both homosexual and female and black lesbians are three times more disadvantaged than white, heterosexual men. Hence, homosexuality is not merely a social classification or a sexual preference; it is a classification device used by dominant groups to systematically disadvantage entire classes of people.

Despite the disadvantages associated with being gay in America at the end of the Twentieth Century, considerable manifestations of social change in the cultural status and acceptance of GLBTQs in America during the Eighties and early Nineties become apparent upon inspection. Stemming from debates over gays in the military, same-sex marriage rights and health care defeats influenced by the AIDS crisis, to name a few, census polls revealed that by the Nineties, Americans' tolerance of homosexuality in a number of areas increased significantly. Specific areas indicating this increased social tolerance of homosexuality include wider tolerance of gay neighbours and co-workers, voting behavior in urban cities, such as New York, where many Americans considered voting for a lesbian candidate, and the media's increase in giving gay issues more "positive attention" (Sack, 1994). In querying this "paradox", whereby nationally gays and lesbians experienced several political setbacks while locally they experienced greater

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<sup>22</sup> Social surveys reveal that 80-85% of gays and lesbians have been verbally abused and 6-35% have been physically abused because of their sexual orientation (Bowes, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> On 1/26/01, Diane Whipple was mauled and killed by neighbors Robert Nole and Marjorie Knoller's attack dogs. Her life partner of 7 years, Sharon Smith, cannot sue for wrongful death because they are not

tolerance, Sacks concludes that gay and lesbian progress was made possible by “corporate America”:

Despite the political depredations of the Religious Right, corporate muscle has been acting to bring lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans into the cultural mainstream (Sacks, 1994).

As the Nineties progressed, Americans witnessed a surge of interest, and ensuing debate, over the supposed newly-discovered wealth of gays and lesbians. With the help of politicians, corporate America and the media, conservative organizations, such as the Religious Right, stereotypical images emerged in the US and Europe equating homosexuality with affluence. “It’s a media-amplified notion that has been spread for about fifteen years,” remarked Grant Lukenbill in an on-line report for the Gay.com Network. Suzanne Goldberg, a Lambda Legal Defence and Educational Fund attorney commented to *The Wall Street Journal* that “Homophobic organizations frequently cite [high income] figures to argue that gay people do not experience discrimination” (12/30/99). Along with this quote, *The Wall Street Journal* comments how “the stereotype of a moneyed minority is hard to fight” (12/30/99). Urvashi Vaid, director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, argues that the myth of gay wealth is “so pervasive and accepted...that Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia injected it into the dissenting opinion in the Colorado Amendment Two case” (12/11/98). As Sack (1994) writes, “This assumption that all gay folk are wealthy is not only inaccurate, but unhealthy for the queer movement.”

Contributing to this image of queer affluence were at least three marketing surveys conducted during the early Nineties. One of the earliest surveys of gay and lesbian household income, conducted by Overlooked Opinions, a market-research firm

found that gay male households reported average incomes of more than \$50,000 in 1990, compared with the national average for all households of about \$37,000.

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legally married, confirming again that “domestic partners enjoy few of the civil rights taken for granted by married couples” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 2/21/01).

It reached survey respondents through bars, bookstores and pride festivals.  
(Alsop, 1999)

A second, done by the Simmons Market Bureau in 1992, claimed gay men earned an average of \$63,700 per year. While this data was used widely to promote advertising and marketing initiatives, critics discredited the survey, arguing

This figure was based on inserts filled out by readers of major gay newspapers, a group likely to be better educated and more affluent than the average (PFLAG, 1997).

Similar attempts to cite US Census Bureau data (*USA Today*, 1993) to determine average gay and lesbian household income, based upon 1990 figures, also suffered from non-representative sampling (PFLAG, 1997). Indeed,

Of all the studies on human sexuality and income demographics conducted in the past one hundred years, fewer than five are statistically relevant in terms of gays and lesbians. And most of that data is cited out of context (Lukenbill, 2002).

PFLAG studies of how discrimination affects gay and lesbian income reveal, “discrimination reduces gay and lesbian incomes below the average” (1997). International research conducted in Britain by the Glasgow Women’s Library (1999) and in Ireland by the Combat Poverty Agency (1995) confirm that gay’s and lesbian’s experience of prejudice and discrimination in and out of the workplace negatively impacted income figures:

Twenty eight percent of gay men and lesbians in the [Glasgow] survey were found to be living below the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) ‘poverty line’ of under seventy-one pounds per week...Forty percent of gay men and lesbians reported that they found it difficult to make ends meet, of these fifty-two

percent were lesbians and forty-eight percent were gay men. (John and Patrick, 1999)

Furthermore, as the authors warn, “it is important to acknowledge that lesbians face double disadvantage and discrimination, as women, and so are more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion” (John and Patrick, 1999 footnote 4).

A third survey conducted in the early Nineties assessing gay and lesbian income was the 1993 Yankelovitch survey. This statistically representative survey identified gay male average household income to be \$37,400, compared to \$34,800 for heterosexual men. Annual lesbian household income was found to be \$34,800 (PFLAG, 1997). Despite the methodologically sound foundation of this study, it is rarely cited in the marketing and advertising literature.

In 1995, an academic named Lee Badgett, then in the School of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland and later in the economic department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, became involved in the controversial debate over the affluence/non-affluence of gays and lesbians. Using 1989-1991 General Social Survey data, Badgett (1998) found gay men’s annual income to be between 11-27% below heterosexual men’s annual income and lesbian annual income to be 12-30% below heterosexual men’s income.

Still, by 1997, the Simmons Market Research, in a study funded by the National Gay Newspaper Guild formed with the aid of the Rivendell Marketing Company, a firm which buys advertising space in gay publications, we are told that:

Readers of gay newspapers in ten major markets have an average individual income of \$47,090 ... that figure is more than twice the US per capita income of \$18,135 based on Census Bureau figures. (Quinones, 1998).

Headlining the Gay and Lesbian 1996-98 Market Studies Report are the following demographics used to evidence how gays and lesbians are “the ultimate DINK (double income, no kids) market”:

1. The annual value of the gay and lesbian market is \$514 billion.
2. Average household income
  - i. Gay households \$52,624 (41% above national average)
  - ii. Lesbian households \$42,755 (26% above national average)
3. Households with income over \$100,000
  - i. Gay households 15%
  - ii. Lesbian households 3%

Accompanying the inflated income claims in the mid-Nineties was a surge in advertising spending on ads in the gay press. In a business wire written by *Advertising Age* we are told:

Advertisement spending in the gay press reached \$100.2 million this year, a 35% increase over 1996, according to the fifth Mulryan/Nash Gay Press Report, a national study of ad spending and editorial content in the 138 gay-targeted publications across the US. ‘According to our calculations, the gay press has once more emerged as the fastest growing print/ad market in the US,’ stated Dave Mulryan, partner of Mulryan/Nash.’ For the past three consecutive years, gay press ad revenues have grown faster than those in both the mainstream press and other niche markets (Gordon, 10/6/97).

In 1998 a research report titled “Income Inflation” published by the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, authored by Badgett, presented contrary gay and lesbian household income information based on a meta-analysis of seven gay and lesbian income studies:

The evidence from many different scientifically sound data sources points to the same clear conclusion: gay people do not earn more than heterosexual people, either as individuals or as couples. Some GLB people are poor, some are rich, and most are in the middle, just as heterosexual people are. Now that we have credible

data, we can stop relying on flawed studies that were designed to identify people in high income brackets. (12/11/98).

By 1999, in an article titled “Are Gay People More Affluent Than Others?”, *The Wall Street Journal* asks “Who’s right?” in the debate it labels as “increasingly contentious” and “has created rifts within the gay community” (12/30/99). Noting how “the lack of consensus among the surveys and among the parties involved perplexes concerned onlookers who have no axes to grind”, *The Wall Street Journal* reiterates the sampling problems plaguing the pursuit of “more and better data” on gay and lesbian income.

2001 statistics gathered by the Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International, reported by Liz Winfeld of Common Ground Consulting, reveal “that there are about four million gay men and lesbians raising eight to ten million children in the US” (Cultural Diversity at Work, 2001). These realities remain largely unnoticed by many advertisers and marketers. As Sack (1994) states:

Corporate America’s desire to target lesbian and gay people is based on the assumption that queer folks are wealthier, or at least have larger disposable income than our straight brethren and sistern – no children to raise.

Meanwhile, “US census data shows that, only slightly more than half of all heterosexuals have children, as well. Moreover, data consistently shows that 53% of all straight marriages end in divorce within the first two years. How come we never hear about these single, straight, childless consumers? Shouldn’t they have at least as much disposable income...? (Lukenbill, 2002). This falsification of a marketing-driven formula I write as “Gay or lesbian = DINK = wealthy” is supported by UK reports:

Although many reports from the US make great play of alleged above-average earnings of gay consumers, figures in the UK indicate that earnings of gay consumers, figures in the UK indicate that income levels might be closer to those of the general population. It is the disposable income of gay couples without the

expense of children that gives rise to the notion of the pink pound...However, lesbians tended to earn approximately 3,000 pounds more than heterosexual women, with the difference attributed to a higher incidence of full-time workers in the lesbian population. (Pinkpassport.com, 2002).

Finally, in critiquing the media, Lukenbill (2002) further demonstrates how gay and lesbian income figures continue to be distorted:

A common trick used by reporters at the *Associated Press*, as well as *The Wall Street Journal* is to compare gay households alongside straight households. The operative words of course being “gay” and “household”. When they say “gay”, they are usually citing gay male income figures – otherwise they would say “gay and lesbian” like they usually do in most other articles. But it is only by conveniently leaving out the word “lesbian” that their stories are able to support this bogus media logic...men in virtually any household will always have a higher combined income than a married straight man and woman because men earn more than women! If reporters looked at lesbian household incomes, they would find that it tends to skew below straight household incomes because women earn less than men.

As academic debates continue to rage over whether technocratization and mass media contribute towards producing a homogeneous mass consumer - i.e. “the average American”, or whether increased specialization has indeed lead to diversification. For instance, demographic studies show that urbanization leads to the containment of large numbers of people within a small geographical space who frequently have minimal contact and interaction with one another. Yet, this group of persons is not a collectivity. Although they may reside in the same city, they frequently are not of the same class, race or ethnicity. They most often do not share similar life goals, interests, religion or politics. Still, despite their unique differences, we, as social scientists, can distinguish patterns of behavior. Why is this so? Part of the answer lies within the development of sub-cultures. Earlier researchers (Wolfe, 1965; Lewis, 1978) argued that, particularly post-WWII, this

“new money” represented a built-in class-bias that was reflected in the creation and consumption of cultural artifacts due to increased disposable income. Such ideology flourished during the 1980s and continued into the “Gay Nineties”, with corporate America rationalizing that dual-income gay and lesbian households, which frequently have no-children coupled with above-average education levels, represented a new, even growing, market niche. The growth of gay owned and operated businesses certainly reveals the later to be true. But, additionally, it is the interest of the straight market sector and non-gay firms who have dedicated significant fiscal resources to attracting the “pink dollar” that has gained economists interests in gay and lesbian visibility. Figures show that in 1997 advertisers spent an estimated \$95 million to reach this sector, representing a 30% increase from the amount spent during 1996 (Wilke, 1997).

There are several positive outcomes of the recent and growing degree of interest in and cultural representation of GLBTQs within mainstream culture. “Cultural visibility can prepare the ground for gay civil rights protection, affirmative images of lesbians and gays in the mainstream media, [and] like the growing legitimacy of lesbian and gay studies in the academy, can be empowering for those of us who have lived most of our lives with no validation from the dominant culture” (Hennessy, 2000, p.111). Yet, irrespective of the affirmation GLBTQ visibility provides, Hennessy makes the same critical argument I made before reading her work: This recent surge of interest in gays, and the accompanying homosexual visibility, is first and foremost a marketing strategy where “money, not liberation, is the bottom line” (p. 112).

Despite growing interest in this niche market, gay marketing surveys reveal the stereotypical correlation between sexual orientation and high disposable income is simply untrue. According to a 1993 Yankelovich Monitor survey of 2,503 people, with gay/lesbians representing 5.7% of the sample, the mean household income for gay men was \$37,400 compared to \$39,300 for heterosexual men. For women, the difference was even less, with lesbians earning \$34,800 and heterosexual women \$34,400 (Elliot, 1994, p. C-1). Such data re-confirms that it is gender, not sexual orientation, that is the primary determinant of income, along with race that has been omitted from the source cited.

In short, what social scientists reveal is the degree to which homosexual households are more similar than different to heterosexual households. Households

raising children, irrespective of the sex of the caretakers, are more likely to be poorer than households not bearing the economic costs associated with child rearing. Men, regardless of their sexual identity, still earn more than women, although gay men tend to earn less than heterosexual men. For lesbians, the picture is less clear. Those with access to higher education and urban living seem to earn more than their heterosexual counterparts, at least until they have children. However, the “cause” of lesbians having higher income is due less to an intrinsic difference in occupation or income. Differences in female income appear to be due to more lesbians working full-time than heterosexual women working full-time. These unremarkable findings – that economic organization continues to be structured around gender norms – continue to be largely ignored by marketing and advertising firms who still claim to have discovered the “perfect” market niche<sup>24</sup>.

#### **2.6.d. Sexuality, Visibility and Social Control**

Over the last century, trends in social thinking and ways of conducting research in US society have impacted how homosexuality is understood, made more or less visible and represented institutionally and individually. It is by analyzing *who* deems *what* to be an issue worthy of social exploration that one can see patterns of thought about social groups emerge. Furthermore, the process by which topics surface and disappear as areas of research interest is, in the American capitalist system, an expression of social control. Social control is most clearly manifested in society by what gets counted as a “social problem”. Clearly, it is not drug dealers who get to cite drugs as a chief concern facing America. Often, it is without any direct correlation to reality that some problems get counted as “problems” while others get pushed aside and buried. Power and money are usually the chief determinants (Hartsock, 1983). Based upon the history of homosexuality (Greenberg, 1988), I argue that homosexuality is one dimension of social reality that illustrates how those who control the means and modes of production and knowledge facilitate the growth or decline in social visibility of homosexuals.

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<sup>24</sup> Gays and lesbians do exhibit different consumption patterns than heterosexuals. Rather than focusing on income as the reason for targeting this market, it would be more appropriate for advertisers to use arguments about market behavior, all well documented in the marketing literature, to explain their interest

Generally, the time period between 1900-1950 is characterized by the positivist paradigm, 1950-1970 connotes modernism, or, the “golden age”, 1970-1986 is referred to as the “blurred genres”, 1986-1990 the crisis of representation, and 1990-the present is labeled postmodern (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Each of these time periods has its own corresponding theories, each with greater or lesser impact upon how homosexuality is depicted, and its degree of popularity, or subsequent lack of popularity. Despite the multiple historical shifts, what I believe remains constant throughout is the existence and presence of “the system”. As Melucci contends, due to different circumstances and access to resources, such as cultural markets, social groups are more or less affected by “the contradictory requirements of the system” (Melucci, 1989 p.47).

In exploring how homosexuality is made visible or invisible, one must simultaneously explore the mechanisms of social control institutions exert on social groups. For instance, drawing upon Foucault, while faulting him for exhibiting Orwellian, totalizing images of social control, Melucci concurs that the “system” increasingly exerts control over codes of behavior and pre-defines standards and criteria of normality (i.e. healthcare systems definitions of health and illness). Yet, all the while, overall integration of systems becomes highly diffuse and less visible. The symbiotic relationship between control, power and ownership of institutions is consequently rendered less visible as society shifts from the modern to the postmodern era. Still, despite increased social complexity, extracting what Domhoff calls the “relations of the ruling” is crucial to disentangling the web of social control in which homosexuals have been caught for years.

In Foucaultian terms, social control may be translated into one's “gaze” that remains ultimately tied to one's institutionalized location. Like Descartes and Malebranche, Foucault agrees that seeing is perceiving and perceiving is institutionally bound. “The residence of truth in the dark centre of things is linked, paradoxically, to this sovereign power of the empirical gaze that turns their darkness into light (pp. xiii-xiv)”. “Rational” discourse is based on this gaze, which inevitably is linked with experience, and therefore always remain biased and socially bound. What once was light,

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in this sector – i.e. that homosexuals spend more time on the Internet, are more technologically adept, brand loyal, etc (Kates, 1998).

as in “truths” discovered by the Enlightenment, now becomes dense object; what once was a transparent nature, now becomes an opaque artifact.

Hence, although I shall proceed to apply various “ways of knowing”, or theories, to the topic of homosexuality as a mechanism for explaining social visibility and representation, it is imperative to remain cognizant that the positions I put forth are ultimately institutionally bound. In essence, the picture I create through analyzing *New York Times* articles is, by virtue of definition, an image, or “gaze”, articulated and mediated by my institutionalized location. Applying a gaze informed by the theoretical underpinnings elaborated in the forthcoming section, it is my goal to make explicit the positions, ideas and images put forth by multiple agents (who possess greater or lesser degrees of social control) about GLBTQ persons. From this process, this rendering visible normative belief systems and particular instances of thought, I aim to create a historically and culturally contingent document detailing the social, and economic, representations of GLBTQs *The New York Times* has, either implicitly or explicitly, put forth.

## **2.7 Theoretical Paradigms and Sexuality**

Foregrounding culture in analyses of social change is one way I believe we can bridge the gap between individual identities and structurally created environments. In this section I briefly explore the strengths and weaknesses of applying three major theoretical paradigms – Postmodernism, Neo-Marxism and Feminism – to my cultural analysis of GLBTQ media representation. I argue that by analyzing how culture is institutionally created, – i.e. the culture of homosexuality – and defined (however real or stereotypical this reflection of reality may be), we will be better positioned to examine the interplay between representation and subjectivism. In other words, by applying a theoretical framework informed by, yet sensitive to the limitations of, Marxism, Postmodernism and Feminism, a space for conceiving culture as a multi-dynamic, dialectic concept simultaneously embedded within while independent of specific social relations emerges. Articulating flexible definitions and constructions of culture will contribute to, rather than confine, explorations of how institutionalized heterosexuality is

manifested within the confines of a masculinized organization - i.e. the media. In brief, what I hope to achieve is expressed by Lorber's (1994) mandate stating that in order to dismantle "the institution", you must first render it visible. Thus, in accordance with the arguments of socialist feminists, I believe that it is by examining organizations as gendered and sexed institutions that will enable us to lend visibility to instances of the segregation of work and income, status inequality, cultural images of gender and sexuality and even individual gender/sex identity, which are all, in part, created (and, I would argue, maintained) through organizational practices (Acker, 1990).

### **2.7.a. Multiple Feminisms**

Feminism, as a theoretical paradigm, is most applicable to this research in deconstructed, localized states. Despite the congruence in primatizing women among all branches of feminist thought, ideological differences and internal dissension make a unified approach to feminism not only impractical but, moreover, insensitive to the historically-shifting efforts of the movement and disrespectful to the evolution of feminist philosophy. Therefore, I approach the utilization of feminism from a hyper-regional and localized perspective. Due to the dialectical relationship between Marxist and Radical Feminists, I accentuate the strengths of one to expose the limitations of the other. Furthermore, I elaborate upon the works of Radical Feminists precisely because of their prominence in cultural critique (and Marxist Feminism's noticeable lack of cultural analysis), even though I largely dismiss Radical Feminism's ontological assumptions. In the didactic process of fleshing out the Marxist/Radical tension, as it specifically relates to issues of GLBTQ visibility and representation, I draw upon Socialist and Liberal Feminism where applicable for purposes of clarification and/or contrast. At the end of this journey I introduce Postmodern Feminism, equipped with all its shortcomings, as the theory I perceive to be best situated for framing an analysis bereft with multiple identity-based, in addition to race, class and gender-based, concerns. However, as conceived, the meta-theory which informs my analysis is a bastardized, hybrid that straddles the fields of social and cultural production. My introduction of a gendered Postmodernism is grounded in stratification theory, assuages the culture-based critique of Marxism,

overcomes the essentialist limitations of Radical Feminism, incorporates the pluralism of Socialist Feminism and delimits the relativist tendencies of a purer Postmodernism.

Marxist Feminism<sup>25</sup> is a theoretical lens which I see as holding much promise for our understanding of GLBTQ representation and visibility in the media. However, in its current form, Marxist Feminism simultaneously suffers from rigid paradigmatic assumptions. Due to the integral role this theory plays in my understanding of socio-economic relations, I put considerable effort into articulating here what I understand as the benefits and limitations of using Marxism Feminism for my research.

One of the benefits of employing a Marxist-feminist framework to the study of sexual identity, and especially the study of how social institutions represent and give visibility or invisibility to sexual minorities, is that it underscores how resilient the norms of “heteronormativity” (Hennessy, 2000) are to alteration. Viewing heterosexuality as a systemic structure, radical and Marxist feminists argue that hegemonic heterosexuality transcends local situations and interactions and consequently exerts power over social relations that results in both exploitation and patriarchal domination (Mackinnon, 1987, 1989; Hartsock, 1983).

The superiority of applying a Marxist feminist theoretical paradigm over other forms of feminism can be explained with the following case study. Studying a lesbian-owned and operated auto repair shop, “Amazon”, Weston and Rofel (1984) show us how simply sharing the same social category (sexuality) is insufficient for guaranteeing freedom from oppression and conflict. In this case, although this particular group of women managed to free themselves from the dominant society’s heterosexual norm and heterosexist biases, from patriarchal oppression, and from class and race cleavages (all were white and employed in “blue-collar” jobs), as a collective, this group still was unable to avoid conflict. Though the “private” and “public” spheres of personal life and work had been bridged, the institutional structure of a capitalist enterprise organized with

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<sup>25</sup> The basic goal of Marxist feminism is the elimination of inequality via economic restructuring. According to Marx and Engels, women’s status is seen as deriving from the economic organization of society and male supremacy within the family is seen as originating with the accumulation of property. “Therefore, the liberation of women will follow with the revolution of workers and the abolition of private property” (Anderson, 1999, p.351). However, women’s liberation is only secondary in importance to the ending of class oppression.

its primary goal as profit created imbalances in power and authority. Despite open lines of communication and the desire for an egalitarian workplace, it was still the owners who had the final say in decision making. Lines were still drawn among labor between the capitalists and the workers. So, at the heart of the debate were “the deeper questions concerning ownership and the division of labor at Amazon, which were not mediated by notions of gender and sexual identity” (Tong, 1998, p.447).

The Amazon study reveals that class, conceived as a relational outcome of an individual’s relation to social structure, as well as something determined by socioeconomic status, occupation, education, etc., operates within the structures of ownership in society to produce power differentials in a way that is different from gender, race and sexuality. Oppression therefore, is not the result of individuals’ intentional actions, but is the product of political, social and economic structures associated with capitalism (Tong, 1998). On the other hand, this study shows that “while the bridging of the private/public split could not defuse class relations at Amazon, it generated the conditions for overcoming class divisions by fostering a lesbian workplace culture that promoted solidarity among the workers and motivated them to defend their needs in a situation where the owners held the balance of power” (p.453). It is this last insight that, for me, demonstrates the shortcoming of Marxist feminism. As I have, and will continue to argue, what is lacking within the field of gender studies is the integration of Marxism and postmodernism. In the Amazon case, it was culture, based upon shared personal identities that promoted collective solidarity sufficiently resilient to address class concerns.

Aside from the inclusion of culture, Marxist Feminism additionally suffers from the same type of limitation as Radical Feminism. In my opinion, Marxist and Radical feminists are both dis-served by an overly narrow conceptualization of causality<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Despite lesbian separatist tendencies to use radical feminism to explain social inequality, I find such ideas of little value, especially when “the oppressors” - the white, middle-class men - become the victims simply due to their preference of bed partners. Radical feminists’ call for androgyny and egalitarianism, and the insistence that the family unit is responsible for patriarchy, women’s oppression, and class and race inequality, make this theory ill equipped to account for modern day GLBTQ experience of inequality in other institutions, i.e. the media, that are not tied to either reproduction or clearly demarcated “women’s roles”. Additionally, the growing awareness of domestic violence in lesbian households severely undermines radical feminism’s assumption that women are biologically less abusive than men. Finally, as

Whereas Marxist Feminists situate the cause of inequality within patriarchal economic structures, radical feminism ties oppression to biological roots (Firestone) and seeks to eliminate the current family order by using technology to disconnect women's "obligation" to reproduce. Arguments for collective child rearing (Oakley), for women refusing to be "other"<sup>27</sup> and learning to say "no" to values that lead to victimization (Galey) and radically essentialist claims, such as feminine values being better than masculine ones and basically unproblematic (French) all contribute towards the dichotomization of male/female. Radical feminism's male/female ontological split that equates men with corruption and women with innocence is, according to Jean Elshtain, an essentialist trap to be avoided. Finally, as Joan Cocks notes, our dichotomized patterns of thought have nothing to do with any inherent, innate male/female difference but rather are an outcome of positivist science and capitalism. Ultimately, we can critique Radical Feminism for its apolitical analysis of oppression that relies on a personal, psychological and sexual explanations which need to be politicized (Tong, 1999). On the other hand, although Marxist Feminism is highly political, its preoccupation with class-based gender structures inhibits its ability to recognize other bases of social cohesion, or lack thereof, in traditional Weberian and Durkheimian fashion.

To further explain the limitations of applying Marxist feminism as a heuristic tool for analyzing GLBTQ visibility, I shall compare sexuality with the (of course non-analogous) example often used by Marxist feminists to expound on the concept of (in)visibility. Approaching inequality from a market-driven angle, some social thinkers have articulated the "problem" with housework as being not only that it is unpaid labor, but also that it is one of the many forms of "invisible work" (Kahn-Hut et al, 1982; DeVault, 1987; Glenn, 1992) which women perform. Housework's visibility surfaces only when it's not done. This trivialization of housework serves to devalue women's work

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historical materialist explanations (Jagger) counter, women's biology will not yield the same set of imperatives across space and time.

<sup>27</sup> Here and throughout this paper the term "other" is used to connote a power-dependent relationship contingent upon social categorical variables, such as race, class, gender and sexuality, whereby those with power create and define the social ideal. The powerful then use their might to impose their ideal norms upon the less powerful - hence making them "others" - within a stratified society. "The 'other', by definition, is the opposite of the 'self', and therefore comes to be regarded as intrinsically of lesser value" (Halpin, 1989, p.286).

and, especially for working-class women, creates contradictions between the mental shift required for at-home versus on-the-job paid labor, contributing to an excessive total work load, stress and difficulties experienced from the contradictory roles of caretaker and provider (Ferree, 1987, p.297 in Gerstel and Gross, 1984). And, because it takes place mostly outside of the market, it is not only invisible, but is unrecognized as "real work". Consequently, men simultaneously profit and benefit from this gendered arrangement, which is essential to the functioning of the industrial economy, and women remain not only unrecognized, are not paid for the labor provided (Glenn, 1992).

Sexuality, and especially female homosexuality, I argue, can be understood in much of the same way as housework. First, while much has been written in academic circles about the trials and tribulations of "doing gender", little to no critical assessment of the labor involved in "doing sexuality" has been put forth. Critical studies are, to me, of the utmost importance because "critique is a political practice and a mode of reading that establishes the intimate links between the visible and the historical by taking as its starting point a systemic understanding of the social" (Hennessy, 2000, p.141). We live in a society that remains largely homophobic and both overtly and subtly discriminates against GLBTQs. Indeed, it is predominately perceived as socially acceptable to even require GLBTQs to not "act so gay" during the course of their employment and day-to-day interactions. In order to articulate these and other social demands made of GLBTQs, we must make visible these behaviors and stereotypes put forth. Thus, what I shall term "sexuality performance" is, for most GLBTQs, an arduous, time-consuming aspect of GLBTQ reality while living as a minority within the heterosexual majority. The work involved with suppressing one's so-called gayness is not only unpaid but moreover largely unnoticed. And, akin to housework, sexuality performance is trivialized, if acknowledged at all, by most heterosexuals, yet remains crucial to the functioning of heterosexist institutions. Like housework, sexuality performance is also a gendered process, although who "profits" may be less unanimously clear.

My goal for digressing into the above "housework example" is to make tangible one of the limitations Marxist analysis imposes upon analyses of inequality and visibility. One cannot, I believe, reduce all complex systems to the inequity of capitalist exchange. In order to most fully disengage sexuality from systems of oppression one must broaden

the concept of class. In our trans-capitalist society we need to move beyond the now century-old conceptualization of class as solely confined to objective socio-historical relationships between capitalists, who own the means of production, and wage-laborers who only own their labor and work to produce the surplus which makes capital accumulation possible. Remaining fixated on what I see not as an outdated mode of thought but rather a rigid, self-limiting hegemonic fundamentalism, where to stray is to commit blasphemy, is futile and detrimental to the goal at hand: the exposition of inequality. In short, I see one of the greatest limitations of Marxism as the maintenance of a self-proscribed intellectual and moral high-ground whereby the astute are bequeathed the foresight and acumen to declare the rest as suffering from the malady of false-consciousness. This is no less than old-fashioned elitism. However, I do not declare Marxism obsolete. To the contrary, I believe that, as a theory aimed to explicate how society under capitalism works, it possesses several useful tenets. Now, what needs to be done, is a re-fashioning of its archaic principles into current-day applications.

### **2.7.b. Theories of Inequality and the Need for Interconnectivity**

Having identified what I construe to be some of the boundaries inflicting “single model” social conflict theories, I shall now identify some contemporary research that uses the foundations of Marxism and Feminism yet simultaneously transcends the boundaries constructed by the traditional theories. Next, I will articulate how some recent trends in stratification theory can be advantageous to multi-dynamic understandings of sexuality. Lastly, revisiting the theme of interconnectivity, which comes to us in opposition of single-mode inequality theories, I argue for the incorporation of agency and individualism – formerly taboo concepts in the world of macro-politics – from multiple, diverse selves to be complimentary or confounding variables sharing in the construction of belief systems and institutions. In sum, I make an appeal for the deconstruction of normative social categories as a means for exploring systems of privilege/inequality in conjunction with social change.

Traditional theories of inequality used so-called “additive models” to understand oppression. Classic Marxism is one such model. In order to understand inequality,

regardless of its type, within capitalist systems, all one needed to focus upon was class. Similarly, to understand gender oppression, “old-school” feminism simply looked at the conditions of white women. And, if one so desired to look at race, then one just “added in” race to gender. As the history of thought reveals, this facile logic proved to be greatly inadequate. Through the work of contemporary feminists, research showed that only class, or race or gender is but “one of a number of intersecting, interacting forces that stratify access to resources, autonomy, and power in society (Andersen and Collins, 1992; Rothenberg, 1992; West and Fenstermaker, 1995)” (Feree and Hall, 1996, p.936).

Weaving together Thompson (1995a) and Wood’s (1995) theories of class experience, which is understood more as a structured process than as a structural position, and as a relationship that in turn shapes social experience, Hennessy (2000) puts forth a revitalized expression of classic Marxist historical materialism<sup>28</sup>. This re-rendering, in my opinion, moves past the impasse stagnating queer theory and faces the challenges currently being experienced by the GRM, as I have previously outlined. A homosexually-informed awareness of the interconnections between sexuality, gender, class and race enables us to “think more creatively beyond the dilemmas of identity politics about the formation of collective consciousness and the process of social change” (Hennessy, 2000 p.18) when confronted with the reality of multiple identities.

Theorizing about sexuality, we may therefore use contemporary stratification theory, which sees stratification processes as “interactive<sup>29</sup>”, not additive (Feree and Hall, 1996), to understand how contests for visibility necessitate an approach that conceptualizes sexuality in conjunction with other social categories that contain the ability to stratify. Applying studies of race and gender, which divulge such details as

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<sup>28</sup> According to much liberal theory, it is rationality and the use of language, religion, art, science and attitudes/behaviors, such as competitiveness, that separates humans from animals. For Marxists, the distinguishing feature is the social fact that humans produce their means of subsistence. Thus, animals are governed by instinct and humans are governed by intentionality. Under the concept of “historical materialism”, the material forces of production and reproduction are prime movers in history. The mode and means of production create superstructure (legal, political and social ideas). So, Americans think in certain characteristic ways about liberty, equality and freedom *because* their mode of production is capitalist.

<sup>29</sup> Important to note is that using an integrated, as opposed to an additive model, “does not imply that race, class and gender are equal in their effects, but argues that they need to be analyzed as theoretically codeterminative” (Feree and Hall, 1996 p.936).

how “within the social framework constructed by race, gender is organized differently for Whites and Blacks [and] in turn, gender shapes race in different ways for women and men, as was graphically illustrated in the Hill-Thomas hearings (Morrison, 1992; Willie, 1993)” (Feree and Hall, 1996 p.935), we gain insight into the interconnectivity of social categories. Just as organizational research on gender inequality reveals gender to be integral to the operation of organizational processes which cannot be properly understood without addressing the dialectical relationship of class and gender (Acker, 1989, 1990; Connell, 1987; West and Zimmerman, 1987), so too must we understand sexuality as one of many elements within that same dialectical relationship.

It is my argument that, sexuality norms exist and function similar to gender norms which have been shown to act as ideological devices that create and limit choice (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Smith, 1990), whether one is evaluating face-to-face interactions or secondary creations of images, as via media representations. Ethnomethodological studies of non-heterosexuality, such as Garfinkel’s study of “Agnes” (Garfinkel, 1967), reveal that gender and sexuality are created through interaction and social structure. Although Agnes was a transsexual<sup>30</sup> raised as a boy (who at 17 assumed a female identity), displaying her gender was very complex. As transgendered<sup>31</sup> persons demonstrate, there is much more involved in the establishment of both gender and sexuality than mere possession of the “appropriate” genitals. “Doing gender consists of managing such occasions so that, whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender-appropriate or, as the case may be, gender-*in*appropriate” (West and Zimmerman, 1987 p.135).

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<sup>30</sup> In her analysis of medical texts and discourse, Bernice Hausman’s work *Changing Sex* argues that transexuality supercedes narratives about gender (Hausman, 1995). She makes the case for refocusing on the body as being the site for sexual signification. In contrast, Kate Bornstein, her self a transsexual, argues that gender ought to be a voluntary decision not explicitly tied to biology (Bornstein, 1994). However, as Hausman critiques trans movement relies on the binary gender system in order to construct notions of gender (Hausman, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> The transgender movement continues to be a contentious issue among scholars of gender. To some such as Kate Bornstein and Ann Borlin transgenderism possesses the potential to transform the gender system by disassociating sex bodies and performances of gender (Borlin, 1988). To others such as Janice Raymond (Raymond, 1979) and Bernice Hausman the transgender movement is a paradoxical one grounding its claims within the traditional gender paradigm and replacing “collective political challenges to power” with “expressive individualism” (Hausman, 1995).

The interconnectivity of social categories implicit within the concept of “doing gender” is useful in my application not only of how one “does sexuality” but moreover to how society demands and forcefully imposes arbitrary belief systems about normalcy. To “do gender” is to create differences and inequalities among genders. The same applies to sexuality. Whether discussing gender, or its counterpart, sexuality, it is through the construction of difference that society is able to reinforce normative perceptions and expectations. As these differences achieve the status of “objective facts”, they are used both by oneself and others to monitor sexuality/gender-appropriate behavior. So, for instance, to the extent that housework is associated with women, and is perceived to be a feminine task, it will continued to be seen as “women’s work”, regardless of the employment-status of wives (Berk, 1985). To the extent that butch or femme roles are associated with lesbianism, society will continue to try to figure out who in the lesbian couple “is the girl?”. It is through the repetition of tasks, whether mental or physical, that a sexualized, gendered division of labor becomes expected, routinized and finally demanded (Bourdieu, 1990). Normative beliefs are used as ideological weapons that define individuals’ place within the social order and which define, limit and reproduce access to such things as power and resources that are part of an institutionalized process. Ambiguity is not permissible.

In questioning normative systems of believe, cultural theorists reconceptualize what it means to *be*. The deconstruction of universal categories - whether they refer to sexuality, race, class or gender, is, in my opinion, *the* most important contribution work in cultural studies gives to other, non-postmodern/post-structuralist social theories. It is truly a gift that black studies has forced “us” to deconstructed what it means to be “woman”, “man”, “lesbian”, or any other previously conceived universalistic categorization. Black studies researchers (Moraga and Anzaluda, 1981; hooks, 1981; Cross et al., 1982; Smith, 1982; Dill, 1983; Andolsen, 1986; and Davis, 1989, as cited in Collins, 1990), in particular, are among those chiefly responsible for our new sensitivity in exploring “diversity” and have done much to reveal that oppression is not a universal, singular phenomenon (Butler, 1990). Writers like “bell hooks, Gloria Joseph, Audre Lord, Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman have unmasked the implicit reference to white Anglo women in many classic feminist texts” (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990, p.33).

To ignore these contributions and continue to assert one “ism” or social category at the expense of another when identifying the status quo, and explaining challenges to it or mechanisms sustaining it, is to ignore the insights approaching these issues from the perspective of “other” has brought forth. Hence, I argue that social analyses exploring non-heterosexuality must first identify *how* categorizations of (homo)sexuality are constructed, exploring the norms and systems of belief accompanying each construction, prior to yielding “answers” to questions asking *why*.

### **2.7.c Postmodern Feminism, Neo-Marxism and the Reintroduction of Culture**

Having argued for a multi-dynamic theory when addressing social change and sexuality, I shall now use postmodernism to exemplify how expanding class-based analyses to include non-economic criteria for explaining consumptive practices is a crucial turning point epistemologically. While simultaneously remaining critical of post-modernity’s feigned transcendence of a class-based society, I develop an argument for using Postmodern Feminism for exploring media based norms depicting expressions of sexuality.

Postmodernism (PoMo) has been described as both a metaphysics and a methodology. In its most cynical form, PoMo says that we cannot distinguish ourselves from meta-narratives - the set of symbols that define our identity. Hegemonic categories of reality are shown to be denaturalized (Gare, 1995). In its most progressive format, PoMo empowers Others to enter “the dialogue”. One of the consistencies I see PoMo as maintaining with Marxism is its perception of what Lyotard (1979) refers to as the “social bond”. Under this paradigm, access to data, much alike capital ownership, continues to be non-pluralistic. Within PoMo, access to data is the prerogative of experts: "The ruling class is and will continue to be the class of decision makers"(Lyotard, 1979, p.15). Knowledge is a saleable good. Disciplines and discourses of human sciences are power systems (Foucault, 1983; Lyotard, 1979). Yet, PoMo logic says that knowledge ceases to be an end in itself. In fact, knowledge actually loses its use-value because the role of the

State is diminished in modernity. We, as society, supposedly no longer want to support the State (i.e. Welfare State) because we're preoccupied with the market.

As an antithesis to Marxism, PoMo charges that the claims Marxism and other “grand narratives” make are too big and too theoretical, relying on a theory of social practice and social relations that claim to *explain* historical change. Epistemologically, it is a “social bond” that holds society together, not common consciousness or institutional substructure. “Social identities are complex and heterogeneous. They cannot be mapped onto one another nor onto the social totality” (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990 p. 24). General categories of race, class and gender are too reductive of the complexity of social identities in order to be useful. However, this ought not be construed to mean PoMo sees all of society as anti-structural. For instance, Lyotard “recognizes that PoMo society does contain at least one unfavorable structural tendency...to universalize instrumental reason, to subject all discursive practices indiscriminately to the single criterion of efficiency, or “performativity” (Lyotard et al, 1979 p.25). This threatens the autonomy and integrity of science and politics. Hence, a critically informed PoMo sensibility identifies knowledge to be a productive power. As its founders conceived, knowledge itself becomes the ultimate commodity<sup>32</sup>, to be bought and exchanged based on its use-value. In this hyper-capitalist society where even “knowledge is...produced in order to be sold” (Lyotard, 1979 p.4) ideas about “truth” and “justice” are destroyed and replaced by that which is marketable and in demand.

Postmodernism’s grand narrative critique can also be extended to feminism. PoMo teaches feminism that time, place and setting create boundaries for knowledge. As Baudrillard’s (1981) writings reveal, “others” disappear and are silenced due to lack of representation. Using the metaphor of a nomad, Baudrillard shows us how the subject is

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<sup>32</sup> Notions of sciences that can sell themselves replace the Enlightenment idea of science as emancipatory because scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge. In short, without histories like the Enlightenment story with its ideas of steady progress, reason and freedom we find that meta-discourses are no longer credible and moreover fall out of existence due to their delegitimation. Some proponents of PoMo take this opportunity to launch into analyses of language and its power games (Habermas; Lacanian criticism), while others have used such ideas as the denaturing of space and time (Harvey, 1989), the “personal is political” (Harding), the commodification of life and culture (Bourdieu 1984a, 1984b), and the (less useful in my opinion) “death of the subject” caused by depersonalization (Jameson, 1991). As argued from the PoMo platform, as societies become more democratic, the social order comes to be based less upon “force, fraud and manipulation”, verbal arguments assume greater importance and grand narratives assume a totalizing perspective (Gare, 1995, p.33).

removed from having serious impact. From a Foucaultian perspective of location, we may notice how power-relations denigrate locale knowledges and silence others, such as homosexuals and non-scientists. It is in choosing to write, or not write, about different sexualities that the media actively produces meanings and images of non-heterosexuals. Embarking upon this project of “historicizing” I, too, shall contribute to the cultural reproduction of modern-day sexualities. It is my hope that my rendition shall proffer how “prevailing truths” are indeed social products that could have been otherwise.

Despite its transcendental claims, PoMo falls short on several fronts. One of the largest bodies of PoMo criticism comes from feminists who fault PoMo on the grounds of androcentrism and political naivete, arguing that the leaders of the PoMo movement are men that have “had their Enlightenment” (Collins, 1990; DiStefano, 1987), do not make gender an explicit focus of study and underestimate the struggles historically faced by the women’s movement. Whereas PoMo theorists Rorty and Lyotard argue that philosophy is no longer a viable enterprise and say that criticism must float free of any universalistic theoretical grounds, feminists see themselves as still working towards creating philosophies and women-identified theories. This has lead some feminists to argue “there is no place in Lyotard’s universe for critique of pervasive axes of stratification, for ...relations of dominance and subordinate along lines like gender, race and class” (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990 p.23).

As PoMo’s most ardent critics claim, as a theory, PoMo is debilitating in its relentless focus on minutia and compulsion to “deconstruct”. Endless travels into regression are not tasks that I find useful for addressing “real world” social issues. However, I do believe that positioned within the rubric of critical study, PoMo can be of great use to studies of the construction of knowledge and social change. For instance, as Lyotard puts forth, and as Latour’s<sup>33</sup> arguments exemplify, “The games of scientific language become the games of the rich, in which whoever is wealthiest has the best

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<sup>33</sup> Among Latour’s insights is the observation that technical apparatus require investment. Within universities, and other knowledge-producing institutions, capitalism can be viewed as solving the scientific problem of funding via privatization and corporate grants to universities. However, as I later argue, just as relying on gay-friendly advertising to “solve” the “problem” of gay invisibility is a short-sighted solution, so too is relying on capitalism to solve other knowing-based questions. In particular, “scientists, technicians and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power” (Lyotard et al., 1979 p.46) and, in a power-elite sense, to believe otherwise is to one’s own detriment.

chance of being right" (Lyotard et al., 1979 p.45). In short, PoMo informed thought exemplifies the mechanisms by which power can be self-legitimizing.

Despite the tension between these two theoretical camps, a critically informed reconstruction of PoMo that has recently emerged is Postmodern Feminism. Postmodern feminists, like Nicholson (Nicholson, 1990) and Fraser (Fraser, 1997) reject universalizing and totalizing theories and principles that purport to organize social life. Issues involving sexuality can be seen as social justice issues stemming from "cultural misrecognition" (Fraser, 1997). As the socialist, pluralist Fraser (1997) argues, the economic/cultural rift facing our modern-day society is a great problem that can only be addressed with the "cultural deconstruction" of identities. Still, despite the many benefits to be gained from dismantling grand narratives, I also argue that merit exists in perceiving heterosexuality as a normative system used by dominant social institutions as a benchmark from which to compare all "others".

Adrienne Riche (1986) argues that it is by creating our own "locals" that we displace others into the periphery. If our local position is one of heterosexuality, then non-heterosexuals will be regulated to the periphery. However, we must approach arguments for localities with caution. As the mistakes of second-wave feminists divulge, there is a danger associated with placing one social category above others. These feminists' works have been faulted for placing "womanhood" "above the differences of class, race, age and sexual (Probyn, p.177, in Nicholson, ed.). In taking every precaution to not re-commit such oversights, concurrently I approach this research viewing media constructions and representations of sexualities as cultural narratives written under the "guidelines" of the heterosexual norm. This norm, in my opinion, does affect all race/class/genders, albeit the effect remains different. In order to assess this heteronormative impact, we must remain sensitive to the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality. As cultural products, newspaper articles are mediated not only by the "owners of production", but also by the creators and critics of cultural form. It is only by looking at what qualifies as knowledge, as epistemology, that we may remark upon what is knowable or excluded.

Postmodern Feminism's most generous contribution is a historically and culturally sensitive way of theorizing about issues in a fashion that simultaneously

notices social cleavages and collectivities. *Without a priori* seeing the world as either socially cohesive or socially antagonistic, PoMo gives us, as researchers, the intellectual freedom needed to create localized assessments, such as the one being pursued with this dissertation. Applying postmodern feminist theory, unlike either postmodernism or feminism alone, to the study of GLBTQs offers us an epistemology that uses large theoretical tools that are historically and culturally conscious, puts forth categories as genealogized, poses a cross-cultural, trans-epochal, comparative mode of theorizing that's non-universal and tolerates, indeed requires, a plurality of definitions for social beings (Fraser and Nicholson, pp. 34-35). Thus, I put forth the recommendation offered by Jane Flax (1993) as a workable guideline structuring my research: Although it may be appealing to "others" and "women" to "prove" that, in defiance of Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers, they are capable of executing rational arguments, it is not necessary for feminist theory to take the same route in "doing science". Therefore, in my research I seek not to replicate this impasse but rather to take the "best" of each theory applying it to my social analysis.

Overall, Postmodern (PoMo) ways of knowing are useful to this dissertation because although each method is equally suspect to its ability for producing final truth claims, PoMo challenges us to limit our findings and claims to local, partial and situated locations (Lyotard, 1979; Richardson, 1994; Harding, 1991). Postmodern Feminism, in particular, imposes realities of location and insists that all knowledge is local and situated (Harding, 1991). Applying a feminist PoMo perspective can, I believe, contribute towards the production of "less partial and perverse representations without having to assert the absolute, complete, universal or eternal adequacy of these representations" (Harding, 1991, p.100). In my assessment, such ideas as cyborgs (Haraway) articulate, rather than obscure "the located, limited, inescapable, partial and *always* personally invested nature of human 'story making'" (Bordo, p.144). PoMo forces us to forgo the temptation of building meta-narratives and eliminates the methodological trap of the "god-trick". In other words, claims of universal knowledge and theorems transcending situation are readily avoided. While the practicality and applicability of PoMo to "natural" science continues to be heavily debated within such academic disciplines as science and

technology studies, for studying the sociology of social change using the paradigm of social constructivism, I believe it is extremely well suited.

## **2.8 Sexuality, Subcultures, Media Studies and Economics**

### **2.8.a. Sub-cultures, Consumption and Market Niches**

“The view that things as they appear can be accounted for by ‘natural laws’ of society is, according to Marx, both the highpoint and the ‘insuperable barrier’ of bourgeois thought”  
(Lukas, p.174)

To develop the concept of the media, as an agent of socialization, I use this subsection to broadly define culture and identify the media as a social product. In the process of defining the media as a cultural product, I posit the media to simultaneously be a vehicle that produces and transmits ways of thinking about social groups, and, a vehicle that is itself impacted by and transformed by the very social groups it represents. Using the example of consumption, I show how external factors affected the media’s portrayal of GLBTQs as consumers, while the media’s representation of GLBTQs as consumers served to bolster public opinion of GLBTQs status, as consumers and otherwise. This exercise, this brief interlude encompasses and fleshes out most tangibly what I believe is a dynamic tension threaded throughout this dissertation. Namely, that one cannot derive processes of causality from this research project. Although, in the final instance, I can articulate social changes in GLBTQ visibility and representation, I cannot, and ought not, deliver the media as key agent responsible for these changes. In other words, it is not possible to distinguish where the media, as a cultural product *caused* changes in GLBTQ visibility and representation, and where factors beyond the media *caused* the media to change its tone, approach and scope. At the end of the day this analysis puts forth the image of the media as an institutionalized expression of one manifestation of knowledge. This manifestation, which is even problematically labeled “the media”, must itself be deconstructed and approached from a clearly articulated stance (i.e. a region, a period of time, a media form, a section of that form, etc.) with an appreciation for the degree of

power and authority it possesses within its particular social climate, knowing that situated in different contexts, its effect may dissipate.

As a newspaper, *The New York Times*, wields a considerable degree of power and authority to shape ideas, cultural beliefs and consumptive practices both in New York and the US more broadly. In general, one may say that *The New York Times* possesses a relatively strong degree of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1990). Cultural capital, from a cultural studies perspective, refers to the power of a thing/person to produce, shape and transmit knowledge. Thus, *The New York Times*’ cultural capital enables it to transmit ideas and knowledge about the persons and topics included within its pages. *The New York Times* arguably also possesses what Bourdieu calls “symbolic capital”. Symbolic capital, otherwise known as respect and prestige, enables this media form to affect how GLBTQs, events and issues pertaining to them are represented and presented. I believe it is important to conceptualize the media as possessing varying forms of capital because it reveals its capacity, as a cultural agent, to use its authority and power to shape public perception.

With the media, and particularly the “mass media”, being posited as a social and cultural agent, it is necessary to define what we mean by “mass”, as well as by “culture”. “Mass culture” theorists were popular during the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are most frequently known for attributing industrialization, the media and urbanization with the destruction of “cultural diversity” (Gasset, 1932; Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948; Rosenberg, 1957). To label something “mass” - as in “mass transit” or “mass media” was not a compliment. “Mass culture” has been frequently used in a derogatory fashion to connote the derision of culture. As Lewis (1978) infers, the proliferation of mass culture was seen as rendering citizens to tasteless, empty vessels susceptible to the techniques of mass persuasion (Lewis, 1978 p. 202).

“Culture”, in the broadest sense, “includes all of the meaning-making systems, practices, and forms in a social formation - the prevailing truths as well as the contesting knowledges, residual and emergent forms of intelligibility, both formalized and informal, codified beliefs as well as inchoate structures of feeling” (Hennessy, 2000, p.18).

Opposition to such theories arose during the 1960s with the rise of marketing and advertising research and culminated with what might be termed the “culture of individualism” whereby commodities, rather than reflecting alienated beings manipulated by powerful elites, now signaled the height of individuality. Consumption, as an activity, became equated with freedom of self-expression, choice and modernity. Compared to the 1950s, which maintained a single-market strategy, the 1970s ushered in a plethora of new products all aimed at diverse market sectors. Throughout the 1980s, the height of individualism and consumption, these trends continued, sparking a quasi-earnest trend towards sustainability and “simple living” in the 1990s. However, despite the touted popularity of minimalism, overall the Nineties remained as preoccupied with consumption as other decades, even as some of the products marketed dispensed a hefty dose of New Age simplicity.

Within the field of media/communication studies, codes of conduct for vehicles of mass media, such as television, radio and print, have been noted for their capacity to reflect the encompassing socioeconomic structure (Hartley, 1982). However, what is less frequently articulated is how the mass media, rather than simply *reflecting* social reality, actively *creates* social reality. “Today’s mass media play a pervasive role in shaping practically every aspect of our post-intellectual culture - our family, political, economic, educational, religious, and entertainment institutions” (Wood, 1996, p. 75). Criticizing institutions in general, Sedgwick argues:

the scope of institutions whose programmatic undertaking is to prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large. There is no major institutionalized discourse that offers a firm resistance to that undertaking: in the US...the state, the military, education, law, penal institutions, the church, medicine, and mass culture enforce it all but unquestionably (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 76).

To Sedgwick’s list of institutions we can add the mass media. While I do not wish to assert a priori that the media “prevents the development of gay people”, I do believe that mainstream media operates from within a social climate governed by the

norm of heterosexuality and that these norms, reflexive of the larger social system, carry with them the same predisposition to validate heterosexuality over non-heterosexuality. Hence, while it is not my intention to reduce gay and lesbian culture to media representation, I believe that applying a sociological analysis to the media, as a social institution, component of social structure, and an agent of socialization, can elucidate the dynamic relationship that exists between the media and cultural expression. In congruence with Wood (1996), I approach this work from the following perspective:

Although the media must be a major focus in any discussion of cultural shortcomings, we should look at them not solely as causative agents, but as mirrors and magnifying glasses that reflect and intensify other societal values (Wood, 1996 p. 175).

The media is part of our culture that creates and is created by a larger social context. Media both shapes and is simultaneously shaped by society's norms, values and belief systems. In other words, in order to understand how and why the media possesses its current guise, one must begin by exploring the dialectical relationship that exists between the history of specific social groups and the historical expression of those groups within the media itself, as a social institution.

The media is a cultural product. What classifies studies of media as “cultural” is concern for both the meaningful character of symbolic forms and concern for social contextualization . The symbolic dimension of communication media is “concerned with the production, storage and circulation of materials which are *meaningful for the individuals who produce and receive them*” (Thompson, 1995b, p.11). Thompson (1995b) makes an irreducibly social argument for our understanding of the media as a product from the culture within which it was produced. As important as technical components of media are,

they should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the development of communication media is, in a fundamental sense, a reworking of the symbolic character of social life, a reorganization of the ways in which information and

symbolic content are produced and exchanged in the social world and a restructuring of the ways in which individuals relate to one another and to themselves....Mediated communication is always a contextualized social phenomenon: it is always embedded in social contexts which are structured in various ways and which, in turn, have a structuring impact on the communication that occurs (Thompson, 1995b, p. 11).

Through the above citation, Thompson conveys to us the importance of social contextualization to the interpretation of the media. We may use his precaution for this study by noting how even those focusing on the media's symbolic content cannot understand it apart from the social conditions within which the media was created. Within political sociology, the mass media are attributed as being "the most important forum for understanding culture impact since they provide the major site in which contests over meaning must succeed politically" (Gamson, 1998, p.59). Mass media is where issues are politically contested and where meaning-makers exert their influence. Applying social movement theory, Gamson (1998) argues the media to be "the critical gallery for discourse carried on in other forums, with success measured by whether a speech in the legislative forum, for example is featured prominently in *The New York Times*" ( Gamson, 1998 pp.59-60). The media is not merely a reflection of reality or a marking post for cultural contests. Mass media, as I have been arguing, is an active agent shaping culture:

Mass media...is not merely an indicator of broader cultural changes in the civil society but influences them, spreading changes in language use and political consciousness to the workplace and other settings in which people go about the public part of their daily lives. When a cultural code is being challenged, a change in the media forum both signals and spreads the change. To have one's preferred framing of an issue increase significantly in the mass media forum is both an important outcome in itself and carries a strong promise of a ripple effect (Gamson, 1998, p.60).

I believe that changes in the cultural codes governing belief systems about non-heterosexuality are slowly changing over time. *The New York Times* is one media forum that is both shaping this change and spreading the “news” about the cultural shift I believe is occurring. Gamson’s notion that the proliferation of one’s “preferred framing” about issues in the media is in and of itself an accomplishment, and may lead to further consequences, is useful to my exploration of GLBTQ representation in *The New York Times*. Although we cannot declare any singular “preferred” perspective for GLBTQs in general, we may put forth a general notion of positive imagery, thereby suggesting that positive media representation of GLBTQs may indicate social change regarding this group in other arenas.

In analyzing the media for this dissertation, I have elected to follow the same approach as that used by Fox (2001) to rigorously examine and interpret media messages. Like Fox, I accede that focus on discrete parts of mass media is often pursued at the expense of contextualizing media as part of larger society. It is through studying the media as a consumable product, a form of culture, and a social agent vocalizing cultural voices that we may begin to discern the details of this dialectical relationship. As an agent of socialization, the media influences how we act, think and feel, and, in turn, the actions, thoughts and expressions of individual cultural representations of groups, such as GLBTQs, are simultaneously media mediated creations and cultural artifacts. It is impossible, in my opinion, to determine the extent in which GLBTQ actors determine media representations and how often GLBTQ representations in the media are shaped by journalists’ and other mass media actors’ own fabricated beliefs about this social group.

Using the metaphor of a pulley, I shall propose that the dialectical representation of social groups, in this instance GLBTQs, exists and is created by the back-and-forth tension between the media on one end and social groups on the other. The rope in between these two is culture. Therefore, culture is shaped and created by the interplay between these two ends, while all the while both are situated within the larger context of the complex social system we call society.

Throughout this analysis, I shall ask my audience to keep in mind that I do not propose the media to be “bad”. To the contrary, the media is, according to my thesis, a vehicle possessing the potential for greatness and less than greatness. The media, like

several other human creations, such as science, law, etc., because of its frequently unquestioned role in producing, a.k.a. reporting, information and “news”, has become uncritically accepted at face value.

Fortunately, the field of media studies defines for us some of the more insidious practices in news/information reporting that mask what “really”<sup>34</sup> happened. As we, American society, continue to be overwhelmed with pre-filtered information we face the danger of allowing other, more powerful and dominant “voices” to think and speak for us. In other words, we face the risk of mass media appropriating our ideas, beliefs and values. I believe this to be especially true for minority groups, such as GLBTQs. When we read a newspaper article about the benefits of drilling oil reserves in the Arctic or the crisis gays and lesbians are posing to the institution of the family and “family values”, what we forget is how “all media texts are mere abstractions from reality and bear the prints of the many people who decided what’s left in [the article], what’s left out, how it’s shaped, and how’s it’s presented” (Fox, 2001, p.27). By using a critical lens when digesting what the media feeds us, we can come to a more complete, well-rounded understanding of the topics presented. This is one main goal of this dissertation. The media’s frequent dichotomous portrayal of issues helps us to forget that in “real life”, there may be far more sides and complexities involved with the subject being reported than the article implies.

Overall, what we, as consumers of mass media, must remember is that those who stand to benefit and profit from its production purposively create every facet of news production. “News, by definition, is what happens that is out of the ordinary” (Wood, 1996 p.177). It is the “illusion of objectivity” (Fox, 2001 p.35) that news reporters trap us into believing that their classification systems, authoritative voice, and limited framing of cause

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<sup>34</sup> There are three common ways the media and other institutions distort the presentation of information. The first is called “doublespeak” and entails making something seem less heinous than it actually is. An example is the 1984 decision made by the US State Department to use the phrase ‘unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of life’ instead of ‘killing’ so that the agency would not be socially sanctioned for supporting countries that “routinely engage in government-sanctioned murder” (Fox, 2001, p.4; Lutz, 1989). The second practice, according to Fox (2001) is “salespeak”. This is largely an advertising mechanism that plays on consumer’s emotions and experiences - i.e. the ‘escapism’ experienced when looking through an L.L. Bean or J.Crew catalog - to promote consumption. The third practice, “sensationspeak” refers to the more technical practice of subliminal messages and speed at which information is presented, often via tv, that impedes rational thought processes. This is important to locate because, as Fox argues, “Yesterday’s Sensationspeak often turns into today’s mainstream journalism” (Fox, 2001 p.5).

and fault are all that is possible. As Fox's (2001) example of the Jon Benet Ramsey murder investigation reveals, the media's categorization of this case as a murder mystery limits our thinking from transcending their representation and inhibits our questions of larger social issues, such as our culture's obsession with appearance, our exploitation of children, and even our economic system, which reinforces values of materialism and appearance over everything else (Fox, 2001 p. 36).

Although the field of media studies provides us with many useful, eye-opening interpretations of the media, the content of focus differs considerably from a sociological analysis of the media as a social institution. Analyzing the use of metaphor (Fiske, 1993), background, camera angle, the role of narration, tone and the role judgment play in the presentation of images, and the use of symbolism (Fox, 2001), media studies identifies each as vehicles the media, and especially advertisers, can manipulate to shape the messages and ideas being communicated. With these and other tactics put forth, "invisible" messages are used to sell or promote ideas and values. Despite the fruitfulness of these analyses, the micro focus on detail and technologies is often pursued at the negligence of analyzing how disadvantaged social groups and issues at large are represented and portrayed in the media. In short, what media studies lacks, and what a sociologically informed media study can contribute, is an analysis that privileges and foregrounds the study of inequality. In order to achieve our desired goal - the articulation of visibility and representation from a standpoint that assumes social inequality as a given - we can execute the methodology used in media studies to achieve our task with greater facility. Hence:

if we go straight to the values we perceive in media messages - especially those related to conformity, materialism, instant gratification, spirituality, nature, violence, family, patriotism, work, technology, and gender - we can sometimes then work backward to determine the validity or appropriateness of the message" (Fox, 2001, p.41).

Yet, even using this media studies-informed methodology, we must be aware that, for media studies, the goal remains limited to establishing the "validity" or

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“appropriateness” of media messages (Parenti, 1998). What I, as a sociologist, aim to do is to use this approach as a guiding framework. By uncovering the media’s invisible messages we will be in a better position to describe and examine what the media is “really” communicating. With this knowledge we can then critically question the meaning of such messages and ask what social implications have or could result from this powerful institution’s work. To me, this is a task more worthwhile for exploring GLBTQ representation in the media than merely questioning if the messages presented are valid/appropriate. Furthermore, isn’t it revealing that even in one of the most recent (2001) critical media publications sexuality, as a social category<sup>35</sup>, is still excluded from the laundry list of stereotypes the media puts forth?

### **2.8.b. Culture, Post-Industrialism and Neo-Marxism**

As an academic concept, “culture” has long been the territory of anthropologists who have demonstrated that most of what exists, be it tools, technologies and machines, art, fashion or a particular mode of thought, all constitute a component of culture. Within the field of sociology, except for Talcott Parson’s social-functionalist adaptation of the concept between 1930’s - 1950’s, few theorists have rigorously pursued defining culture (Worsley, 1984, 1997; Alexander and Seidman, 1990; Archer, 1988). As Worsley (1997) points out, recent trends link industrialization not only with a new “information society” (Toffler, 1981), but even with the “end of ideology” (Bell, 1962) and with the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992), removing all human agency and rendering culture a by-product of technology and social structure (Archer, 1990). This, I believe, is a grave mistake. As research in the field of science and technology reveals (Bijker et al, 1994), history, industry and the creations of science never “just happen”. Culture, and cultural norms, actively shape and form the knowledges, technologies, sciences and theories that humans produce.

One contribution this dissertation makes is revealing how conceptualizing media representation of GLBTQs, as a cultural product, affects *what* histories about GLBTQs are produced. Worsley (1984) draws upon a Kantian definition of culture to identify three dimensions culture can possess. The first dimension is cognitive and thus is represented via

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<sup>35</sup> Gender, race, age and socio-economic status (Fox, 2001 p.41).

ideas. The second is normative, represented by values. The third is conative, and is manifested via behavior. These three components of culture have been used by anthropologists, and other social scientists, to define culture. However, as employed in anthropology, such definitions of culture lack a critical component. By focusing on customs and traditions, this “image of culture...tended to underplay innovation and, more widely, to abstract ideas and values from any context of use, treating them as if they were all-powerful determinants of behavior, rather than as resources *used* by people who commanded power to control behavior and to validate institutions” (Worsley, 1997, p. 345). Thus, the reformulation of culture being presented here stresses the need for a contextualized, critical focus on both individual and institutional action and motivation for engaging in the support or dismissal of various cultural values and ideas.

A chief point of demarcation between cultural and historical materialists is that the former understand culture as being political and historical but not particularly determined or shaped by capitalism’s division of labor (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Butler, 1990). Sometimes termed “post-Marxist”, or “post-structuralist”, cultural materialism was developed largely through the work of Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe. Yet, these and other works, continue to be criticized by Marxists for severing the historical relationship between culture and capital (Hennessy, 2000). Furthermore, some of cultural studies’ primary targeted areas, such as sexual identity, for demonstrating the limitations of class analysis are being re-addressed. Most basically, Marxists reject cultural materialism’s reduction of social relations to cultural and symbolic relations derived from the postmodern elimination of fixed identities and overwhelming focus on contextualism (Derrida, 1976, 1981).

Several social theorists have linked the emergence of modern day sexualities with the growth of a consumer society where one’s identity is thoroughly intertwined with consumption (Weeks, 1985 1991; Chauncy, 1994). Those analyzing the connection among “non-normative” sexual identity, capitalism and consumption cite the increasing trend of acceptance into the cultural and corporate mainstream as “proof” that not only does capitalism not need heterosexuality (Hennessy, 2000) but furthermore that we are witnessing a period of “global gay culture” where gay imagery is an increasingly international phenomenon spread via consumerism (Altman, 1982, 1996).

Contemporary society's fascination with GLBTQs as prospective target markets tangibly characterizes the nouveau desire to sell so much more than mere commodities. By postulating products as symbolic signs of success, corporations and other agents involved in the creation of consumer culture impart consumption the power to surpasses class representation. In addition to reflecting social status and wealth, consumption allows individuals to acquire social identities, perceived social mobility, and, in a vulgar sense, to buy a thinly veiled, uncritically false selfhood. As ideas expressed by John Stuart Mill convey, "the possession of such and such an object is in itself a social service: as a certificate of citizenship the TV is a token of recognition, of integration, of social legitimacy" (Baudrillard, 1981 p.54). Commodities are tokens, and are, in a Marxist sense, fetishized<sup>36</sup> objects that mask the exchange-value inherent within and the inequitable social relations that result in re-producing the stratified society that produced them.

Taken to the most critical extreme, consumption is one of the highest expressions of modern society's inertia, submersion into the social system and a reflection of the naïve complacency of consumers who believe that the process of consuming is a democratic, self-propelled expression of individualism and free will. In a sense, consumption has been embellished with existential ability to transport and transpose individuals to higher and better levels of existence. Yet, despite the far-reaching claims of advertisers and marketers, consumption, to the contrary, is a discriminatory process that reproduces the inequalities of the social system from which it was created. As Baudrillard argues, consumption and production are at once heterogeneous and homogeneous sectors. "Consumption is only possible in the abstraction of a system based on the "liberty" of the consumer" (pp.82-83). Ideas about need displace and dispel the realities of "need-productive force". To use Baudrillard's (1981) example:

The slave's only assurance that he would eat was that the system needed slaves to work. The only chance that the modern citizen may have to see his "cultural"

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<sup>36</sup> Fetishism of commodities refers to when "workers gradually convince themselves that even though their \$ is very hard earned, there is nothing inherently wrong w/the specific exchange relation....because life...is simply one colossal system of exch. relations" (Tong, 1998, p.42).

needs satisfied lies in the fact that the system needs his needs, and that the individual is no longer content just to eat (Baudrillard, 1981 p.84).

In short, when necessary, needs are cultivated “as a means of repression”(p.84). From this angle, consumer needs are created, mediated, and controlled by capital in a calculated, pre-meditated way to ensure profit and produce “competitive exploitation”. In what can be criticized as an overly deterministic model, the worldview put forth by Baudrillard is one where individuals are ultimately products of “the system”. Returning my discussion to consumption more broadly, I will now use neo-Marxist Jean Baudrillard’s application of sociological principles to the study of consumption which reveal considerable variation from the more traditional analyses of Marx, Weber and Veblen (Veblen, 1899). It is my contention that Baudrillard’s “political economy of the sign” eloquently expresses the dangers associated with GLBTQs reliance upon the so-called “merits” of capitalist interest and the media’s fascination with this “trendy” social group. Using Baudrillard’s sociologically sophisticated insights into the limitations of consumption as a vehicle of liberation can, in my opinion, provide a useful starting point from which to protest neo-liberal arguments put forth on the behalf of more conservative and uncritical members of the gay community. In short, what I hope to accomplish here is the articulation of a theoretically grounded refutation of why queer-theory’s disavowal of class-based arguments<sup>37</sup> is detrimental to the advancement of GLBTQ social, political and economic equality.

Marxists’ disdain for the concept of “culture”, for its perceived dilution of the purity of class analysis defies that, for quite some time, we have been living in what can be called a “post-industrial” (Bell, 1973) society. The demarcating feature of post-industrialism is that individuals communicate with other individuals at work more than solely interacting with machines (Bell, 1973). This, and other features, makes sexuality an even more predominant force in post-industrial social relations than in industrialized societies. The gendered experience of tokenism at work (Williams, 1992) shows the

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Warner is one such queer theorist who admits to the domination of queer culture by capitalists and that this domination results in power inequalities but then blatantly rejects the fruitfulness of class analysis to queer theory. In fact, he states “class is conspicuously useless” (p.xxiv).

importance of social and cultural sanctions involved in determining who does what job. That white men simply refuse to enter occupations traditionally held by “others” demonstrates the infiltration of meta-economic<sup>38</sup> forces in shaping contemporary post-industrial work relations. Post-industrial society is, in nearly all segments, characterized by far more than economic relations and yet simultaneously remains bound to consumptive practices.

Baudrillard’s (1981) “commodity of the sign” uses semiotics to explore consumption from a perspective where consumption is understood not only as any object per se but rather sees consumption as entailing an entire system of objects which is reproduced simultaneously as it is consumed. Like Habermas, Baudrillard critiques Marx’s theory for failing to comprehend and include the role culture and language play in the process of consumption (Levin, 1981). While many renditions and understandings of culture abound, in a Gramsci-an sense, culture may also be perceived as an “ideological struggle” for hegemonic control over not only the state and production but moreover the very control of knowledge forms. According to Gramsci (1957),

culture does not simply emerge or exist; it is produced, brought into being, by intellectuals, who formalize and codify religious and social ideas and make them into a hegemonic ideology which they communicate to society at large, elaborating and reinforcing it continuously, transmitting it from generation to generation (Worsley, 1997, p. 265).

The inclusion of culture into class-based theories thereby imparts that, via hegemonic ideology, the causes of inequality are masked. Scapegoats, whether GLBTQs or others, and forces beyond one’s control are blamed for society’s ills. It is because of hegemony that *mass culture* “is in fact not a culture of the masses but a culture manufactured for the masses” (Worsley, 1997, p.266). So, when we are reading

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<sup>38</sup> Structural obstacles, like underpayment, certainly do play a pivotal role in explaining why men refuse to enter non-masculine jobs. However, some researchers argue that wages are not the primary obstacle because studies, such as those of ATandT workers, find that men would rather accept unemployment than do “women’s work” (Epstein, 1987). The association of femininity with male homosexuality has been used to explain the existence of men within traditionally defined “female” occupations. And, as the experiences

newspapers, products that are produced for the masses, we must remain critical of the cultural images presented. Culture is not that which exists to be reported but, to the contrary, is that which is actively managed and created. Thus, Baudrillard's inclusion of culture enhances our understanding of materialism by expanding traditional Marxist concepts such as alienation and false-consciousness to include a host of non-economic activities that contribute towards the exploitation of labor by capital.

Cultural values and capitalism have been wedded for a great portion of American history. Classical sociological work by Weber (Weber, 1947) reveals that in order to understand capitalism, one must focus on motivation and cultural values, such as the Protestant work ethic. As Worsley (1997) notes, capitalism is not merely based upon economic realities but moreover upon law and cultural values such as “the sanctity of private property and the right to transmit accumulated wealth to one's kin or any other legatee” (p.347). “Thus, though the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] is a cultural institution, governments seek to influence or totally control the media (not just the news) because they recognize that the media influence people's behavior, not just their ideas”. Given most people's limited personal interaction with GLBTQs, the fact that the media impacts behavioral decisions makes media representation of minority groups of great importance.

Having argued for the importance of culture, understood as agency as well as values and beliefs, I shall propose consumption to be one expression and articulation of American culture. However, I do not see consumption as a manifestation of one's free expressionism. Like Marcuse and Baudrillard, I purport humanity, and particularly its consumptive practices, to be the embodiment of one-dimensionality. In other words, according to these theorists, via consumption, particularly conspicuous consumption, humanity deprives itself of its critical ability and, in reality, does little more than reproduce the system within which it resides. For example, Baudrillard writes “consumption...has nothing to do with personal enjoyment...rather it is a restrictive *social institution* that determines behavior before even being considered in the consciousness of the social actors” (Baudrillard, 1981 p.31). From this perspective,

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of male temporary workers reveals, social assumptions are often made that these un-traditional male workers are indeed gay, even when this is untrue.

consumption is far from an expression of individualism. Indeed, it is the opposite; consumption is the “social destiny” proscribed by social class with discrimination resulting from not merely the possession of artifacts but rather from the organization and social usage of commodities. So, the notion that GLBTQ persons can freely select and consume products to self-create an identity possesses an element of false consciousness. In our consumer society, it is “through objects a stratified society speaks and, if like the mass media, objects seem to speak to everyone, it is in order to keep everyone in a certain place” (Baudrillard, 1981 p.38). “Consumption...is our most powerful cultural force, helping to shape our attitudes, beliefs, values and lifestyles” (Fox, 2001, p.116).

Sexuality, in my opinion, does not have the power to transcend the inequalities and injustices of class, gender and race stratification. Thus, in order to address inequalities grounded in sexual inequality, we must concurrently speak of the interdependencies that exist with sexuality and other major categories that stratify. To speak of a universal sexual being, i.e. “lesbians” or “bisexuals” dismisses the complexity and inter-connectivity, and moreover everyday, real-life challenges, facing the GLBTQ movement.

### **2.8.c. Advertising and the GLBTQ Community**

Advertising specifically to homosexuals is a practice that typifies one of several changes in the general approach, and scope, of American marketing campaigns. Rather than detail, from a marketing perspective, the particularities of this change, in this section I ask what some of the implications for GLBTQs this newfound “fame” brings, and, very briefly, explore the queer backlash resulting from this commodification of the “gay lifestyle”.

Over \$150 billion is spent annually by American advertisers to sell their merchandise (Fox, 2001). This modern trend - of spending ever-increasing quantities of money to advertise products - is characteristic of an historical change advertising, as a field, has witnessed. Whereas, in the past<sup>39</sup>, the purpose of advertising entailed

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Fox uses the 150 year old example of how a sign hung in a trading post at the beginning of the Oregon Trail advertised sugar as “Sugar, 2 cents per lb.”, contained all the information needed for an audience with

communicating information about one's product, today, advertisements contain very little information about the product or service being promoted. This, coupled with the very few "true needs" American have, and the free rein advertising, as an industry, has to make its messages pervade every aspect of life and reach every social group, means that "it's become one of our most dominating voices, if not the most dominating voice" (Fox, 2001 p. 110) in society.

In studying the commodification of lesbians, Clark (1991) finds that the popularity of lesbian imagery in mainstream advertising is "less indicative of a growing acceptance of homosexuality than of capitalism's appropriation of 'styles' for mainstream audiences. Visibility in commodity culture is in this sense a limited victory for gays who are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but not as social subjects (Clark, 1991, p.192 as cited by Hennessy, 2000 p. 112). Hence, in congruence with the arguments I am putting forth, other researchers have also found mainstream interest in homosexuality to not only serve the interests of capitalists, but, moreover, that this representation of gay visibility is a fabrication of class contingent imagery reflexive of a commodified subject.

Despite the "reality" that the GLBTQ community does not offer corporate America any greater monetary reward for seeking its dollars, the "gay market" has been steadily attracting more and more attention since the mid-1990s, albeit not without risk. While minimal studies have been conducted regarding corporate America's pursuit of the "pink dollar", some research notes that companies who opted to advertise during the coming-out episode of *Ellen*, such as Volkswagen, did so precisely as a means of marketing their product as one that fits many different lifestyles (Canedy, 1997, p. D-8). In contrast, other companies, such as Chrysler, noted that it wasn't a "smart business decision to be advertising in an environment that is so polarized" (Canedy, 1997, D-8). The minimal degree of research available for this topic raises more questions than it answers. Specifically, what do such examples say about the images of homosexuality in this historical moment? Is it the media that is creating the stereotype that gays and lesbians are affluent and possessing a distinctive lifestyle? If independent marketing firms find divergent information, who, then, is controlling the creation of such images and

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special needs and goals to make the decision whether or not they would purchase the sugar (Fox, 2001 p. 110).

cultural expressions of gays and lesbians? What *is* the current image of this sub-culture that is being targeted...and does it consist of one or many categories?

One less than corporate-friendly consequence of mainstream capitalism's appropriation of gay culture has been the reactionary activist work organized by Queer Nation in response to this hyper-commodification. Seeing products as a forum where identity is constructed, queer activists in the 1990s used corporate logos to express queer visibility by converting company name into gay terms. For example, Nike became Dyke, positioned alongside the Nike "swoosh", Home Depot became "Homo Depot", and Gap became "Gay", using the same corporate lettering. Despite these subversive efforts, gay academics note the limitations this "strategy of resistance" (Hennessy, 2000 p. 128) affords because such tactics largely continue the spectacularization of commodities and ignores the social relations inherent to commodity fetishism. Yet, although queer activism may not expose the underlying relations of exploitation inherent to global capitalism, I would argue that it is still significant for the purposes of this dissertation. In a Debordian sense (Debord, 1995), the political economy of the sign does link the production of identities with the spectacularization of consumption, exposing the hybrid identity created by late-day capitalism's merging of self and object. As critics of modernity express, it is increasingly difficult to discern any identity of selfhood from the community and cultural artifacts used to construct that very sense of self.

As queer theorists and postmoderns extol the flexibility and boundaryless ability each individual purportedly possesses to configure one's sexual and other identities to transcend his/her previous heterosexist socialization (Butler, 1990), so that s/he may actively engage in the re-subjecting of their identity to resist the corporal limitations agents of social control have imposed (Foucault), they are, according to Marxists (Hennessy), using the concepts of "lifestyle" and "identity" in ways that disassociate the connection between cultural production and capitalism. The fact that the gay and lesbian "lifestyle" is propounded as fashionable by some advertisers and the growing notion that increased market representation, equipped with the newly-acclaimed ability to purchase an identity, masks the reality that in contemporary US society, homosexuals and heterosexuals do not have the same rights and benefits as citizens. Where Hennessy is preoccupied with the economic relations this "aestheticization of social life" conceals, the

larger issue that interests me is how the commodification of queer sexuality works to increase or detract from the extension of full civil liberties to all GLBTQs.

#### **2.8.d. GLBTQ Media Visibility and Social Change**

The decade of the 1990s has commonly been labeled “The Gay ‘90s” by much of the popular press. While it may certainly be true that GLBTQs have witnessed an unprecedented degree of publicity, I will continue to argue that it is misleading to equate heightened visibility with social acceptance. As numerous historical descriptions of “gay” arise, and researchers chronicle the events of first one period and then the next, it is important to note the limitations such endeavors possess for explaining social shifts in visibility. Although much needed and definitely worthwhile, regional and micro foci, such as on AIDS, individual celebrities’ coming-out experiences, specific court cases, family forms, psychological issues, etc. remain unable to present a coherent image of why social change for GLBTQs is occurring *now*.

In order to understand how and why the media, as simply one of many institutions, has changed in its treatment of GLBTQs, we can look towards studies of how the media operates as a vehicle of social control. For example, in discussing issues of social control and the media, particularly by the medium of television, Murdock (1994) notes that debates over aspects of social life are fleshed out based upon the results of competition in three areas (Murdock, 1994 p.111). The first issue structuring debates over social life is “visibility”. In order to have your issue considered, you must be seen and heard. Applying this framework to GLBTQs, we can see that this hurdle is one that gays and lesbians are in the process of achieving. The second regulator of social debates is “legitimacy”, or, the power to have one’s claims treated as credible, authoritative and worthy of respect. Although Murdock’s research governs social debates on television, I believe the same argument about gays and lesbians’ authority as agents who can speak for themselves has not achieved any greater credibility within other mass media mediums. Hence, although not a goal of my current research project, later research efforts could explore what legitimacy claims GLBTQs can make, what their arguments are in comparison to others, if their positions are interpreted as credible sources and to

whom they are worthy of respect. Finally, according to Murdock, the third arbitrator of social debates is “precedence”, or, the ability to set the agenda and terms of the debate. Again, while this lies outside the focus of my research, we can speculate that, compared to corporate America and the media, gays and lesbians, lack the same social power needed to compete for the right to frame topics and set conditions for arbitrating “truths”. It is my intention to flesh out some of these power struggles during the process of my critical analysis of GLBTQ media representation in *The New York Times*. In sum, this dissertation continues the critical media project of seeking knowledge about the power struggles and relations involved in the media as an institution that both creates and shapes knowledge, adding a sociological awareness to the study. It is therefore not only my intent to explore how the media frames issues and distributes “column space” but moreover to assess how the media creates and defines the social and cultural realities of GLBTQ persons, noting all the while if there is an historical shift in this depiction.

#### **2.8.e Social Change and Contemporary (Homo) Sexuality**

Most fundamentally, social change, whether it is for sexual equality or otherwise, is multi-faceted and can come from several sources. The invention of new objects, ideas, technologies, discoveries (such as medical advances based upon better understanding of human anatomy and environment), diffusion of objects, people and information from one culture to another, conflict, social movements, demographic changes, modernization, etc. all cause social change. Although a growing number of research projects describe how various fields, such as law, medicine, science, politics, etc., independently have changed from vilifying “homosexuals” to negotiating new, more “tolerant” labels and definitions of such persons, few works take a macro perspective in describing this cultural shift. For instance, studies in the field of psychiatry have questioned what led up to the American Psychiatric Association’s removal of homosexuality from the DSM manual in 1973 of psychiatric disorders, and further, in 1986, from all referents to psychological malfunctioning, but psychiatry, as a field, continues to police what constitutes “normal” gender identities. In the field of law, the existence of legal standing, cases and case

content pertaining to gays and lesbians from the beginning of the US to present day continues to be traced and documented.

The existence of studies such as the ones just mentioned is useful in several ways. First, they chronicle social change. Second, they define who the principle actors are. Third, they present an institutional picture of social change and therefore reveal that change is structural and beyond the plight of any given individuals. However, at the same time, such works lack a critical perspective. By taking *prima facie* that change is positive, they fail to notice the compromises that mainstreaming entails. Historical accounts of social change lack theoretical guidance and, for the most part, take for granted the way chains of events unfold. In studying social change, what I believe is needed is a critical reading of GLBTQ social histories that can both inform and illustrate not only the paths taken by various actors but also can identify and assess the avenues of change rendered non-viable for one reason or another.

Murdock (1994), a sociologist studying social change, argues “publicity is the result of accidental, unplanned or uncontrolled visibility” (p.108). Social change catalysts shifting gays and lesbians from a state of invisibility to one of recognition during the 1980s and 1990s include the AIDS epidemic, disclosure of gay/lesbian sexual orientation of several famous gay and lesbian icons in sport, music, film, politics and other areas, the creation of “The Gay Games” and the rise of other positive social and civic outlets, including pride events and festivities, as well as the establishment and formalization of GLBT organizations and gay studies programs. But, aside from AIDS, the majority of other occurrences were far from “accidental, unplanned or uncontrolled”. Proposing, as several cultural studies do, that gay/lesbian visibility lead to increased gay/lesbian culture and that gay/lesbian culture increases gay/lesbian visibility is a tautological argument. *Something* larger than gays and lesbians must be accountable for *why* the 1990s has been labeled *the* “gay” decade. Although this question resides outside the scope of the current project at hand, it is the goal of my research to detail *how* social images and visibility of GLBTQs has shifted over time in the media. Future studies may want to explore what structural or non-structural agents are responsible. Moreover, throughout this process, one must remember that, as the social histories of gay and

lesbian culture display, increased publicity does not necessarily mean positive publicity or even positive change.

### **2.8.f GLBTQ Visibility and Equality**

Gaining visibility and publicity is without doubt an important first step in creating social change. However, visibility, while necessary, is alone insufficient as a catalyst for social change. In this dissertation, I demonstrate and argue that although gays and lesbians have achieved unprecedented levels of visibility, the ensuing social change has been neither universal nor equitable. The primary agents fostering visibility were largely, as Murdock argues, not self-organized and initiated plans-of-action stemming from within the GLBTQ movement and representatives, but instead were sensationalized, uncontrollable events and images created by mainstream and corporate America, distributed by mass media, and capitalized upon by segments of an increasingly technologically advanced, consumerist culture. In my most cynical mindset, I believe my analysis provides some support for the argument that two prominent US institutions - corporate America and the mass media - exploited this “new” emerging social group for their own advancements and interests, seeing homosexuality as yet another avenue for commodification. The mounting rhetoric and glamour, exhibited in newspaper articles, surrounding the Gay Nineties is far from indicative of any national effort to compensate a group wronged in decades gone by. Given that social surveys reveal the majority of Americans still consider non-heterosexual relations immoral (GSS, 1999), it remains untrue that in America homosexuality has become a non-issue. Rather, this decade’s business interest in gays and lesbians, as depicted by *The New York Times* is less concerned with issues of morality and social disapproval/approval and is more a reflection of technocratic America’s preoccupation with

- a) capitalization - by corporate America and advertisers upon the patriarchal fetishization of lesbianism and the class-based stereotyping and minority exclusion of gay men and

- b) competition - among major social institutions to control the production of knowledge of this “new” social group’s tastes, values, lifestyles and culture

In this power struggle to define, to speak, to be represented, social and economic inequality prevails between gay and heterosexual organizations in the fight to establish what is normative and desirable in an increasingly stratified, heterogeneous sub-culture. Conflict, tension and an imbalance of power exists between the mass media’s attempt to foster a few distinct images acclaimed as representative of the majority of gays/lesbians and the increasingly fragmented and internally divided GLBT organizations fighting for resources and some semblance of unity in order to retain the minimal social/political power and authority they have achieved.

With the purpose of this research being to elucidate and critically assess the dialectical, interdependent relationship that exists between GLBTQs and the mainstream US institution of the media, fueled and funded by corporate America, I analyze several years of mainstream newspaper representation of GLBTQs. During this process, I describe the image presented of 1990s gay culture and identify the structural inequalities that exist and historically persist in preventing gays and lesbians from achieving social equality. Within a sociological paradigm, I question issues of social control by exploring:

- a) what and how issues are framed
- b) what and how cultural images are established
- c) issues of assimilation vs. diversity (relating to sexuality, not race) within GLBTQ culture.

By identifying general trends and reoccurring themes, and applying insights gained from cultural analyses of Marxism, Feminism and Postmodernism, I construct a historical picture evidencing the growth of GLBTQ legitimation, the decline of socially accepted, overt social degradation of gays and lesbians, the increase in stereotyping and the continued bifurcation of homosexuals based upon gender norms in business news articles. Succinctly, I expose social change.

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## Chapter Three: Methodology

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### 3.1 Methodology

#### 3.1.a Paradigmatic Perspective - Ontological and Epistemological

##### Assumptions: Social Constructivism and Cultural Studies

In this section, I outline my ontological and epistemological perspectives on research. I then identify and explain two paradigmatic lenses that I have selected to apply to this research project and explain why I believe they are important and appropriate. Scientific investigations generally proceed under the heading of one research tradition or another. Within any given research tradition one will find a collection of assumptions, tools, methodologies and axioms that are used to guide the creation of facts and the finding/rationalization of evidence (Laudan, 1976). In this research project, the epistemological paradigm I adhere to is social constructivism. Compared with empiricism and positivism, social constructivism understands social facts as being greatly influenced by cultural attitudes, time and place.

Cultural studies is one approach that fits well under the heading “social constructivism”. Using a materialist-realist ontology, which means that “the real world makes a material difference in terms of race, class, and gender,” cultural studies relies upon Marxist, feminist and postmodern thought and sees methods “as resources for understanding and for producing resistances to local structures of domination” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994 p 14). Thus, even if reality has an existence independently of how it is known, what matters most is how reality differently impacts social groups *because of* their social characteristics. Therefore, although a constructivist paradigm insists multiple realities exist, assuming a relativist ontology, it need not deteriorate into a vulgar postmodern relativism whereby all realities are equal. To the contrary, social constructivism argues for a subjectivist epistemology, meaning that both that which is known and that which knows (the knower and the subject) create understandings in the

natural world. Social constructivism, while acknowledging reality as socially produced, does NOT see all realities as equal.

Cultural studies, as an embodiment of social constructivist methodology, is one research approach that I believe to be fruitful for the exploration of GLBTQ representation and visibility in the media. Multi-paradigmatic in focus, cultural studies uses a naturalist perspective, is interdisciplinary, and is informed by diverging politics and ethnicities (Nelson, et al, 1992). By viewing newspapers as cultural products embedded within specific socio-historical times and locations, I believe a cultural studies approach can augment and enhance the framing of this research. As a methodology, cultural studies is especially helpful in illuminating how the social category<sup>40</sup> of sexuality is produced by structural and material conditions, as well as by identifying how sexuality is historically manifested.

The social constructivist paradigm, as discussed, offers us new ontological and epistemological frameworks, while also providing a number of methodologies that considerably diverge from positivism. For example, such terms as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability come to replace more traditional, positivist principles as internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994 p.13-14). Within the constructivist paradigm, “particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and action” (Schwandt, 1994 p118). Social reality is seen as being comprised of a plurality of knowledge systems and as being shaped by human interaction. Therefore, in contradiction to the Enlightenment project, knowledge and truth result from human perception and social relations, not merely from reason and rationality (Gergen, 1991; Knorr-Cetina, 1981). The social construction of reality thus, I would argue, exposes not only the limits of rationalism but also poignantly illustrates the social dynamic of human nature:

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<sup>40</sup> While some may dispute that “sexuality” is “technically” not a social category, for the purposes of this research I am likening sexuality to the social categories race, class and gender. I put this forth from a real-world vantage point whereby sexuality, like race, class and gender, is used to discriminate, categorize and classify groups of persons for the intention of granting or denying social, political and economic privileges.

The basic innovation introduced by the philosophy of praxis... is the demonstration that there is no abstract 'human nature', fixed and immutable, but that human nature is the totality of historically determined social relations, hence an historical fact" (Gramsci, 1971 p.133)

As revealed by the above quote, Gramsci's discursive treatment, and even disdain, for the intellectual "polemic against the subjectivist conception of reality" calls the "question of the objective reality of the external world" not only "badly framed" but furthermore reveals how such preoccupations are "to a great degree futile and superfluous" (Gramsci, 1971 p.440-41). It is precisely this gestalt switch, this deconstruction and rejection of "truth" that provides the theoretical underpinnings for my research. More specifically, my hesitancy to accept reports of truth at face value as objective fact fuels my questioning of how history has been created, constructed and reported.

Beginning with the strong program's ontological assumption that nothing exists solely within the realm of the "real" world, proponents of the sociology of knowledge (SSK) assert that knowledge must be causal<sup>1</sup>, impartial, symmetrical and reflexive (Bloor, 1976 p 7). By appealing to norms and conventions as mechanisms by which knowledges are created, SSK sketches a picture of situated<sup>2</sup> knowledge. Hence, that which is taken for granted can be readily reified. In this dissertation, I argue that "knowledges" about GLBTQs has grown in congruence with societal and cultural norms consistent with the belief systems of the dominant social institutions. So, for example, consistent with natural science's appeal to nature (as opposed to nurture) as a causal agent governing sexual orientation, we witnessed the highly publicized search for the "gay gene" that subsumed some scientists during the early 1990s. As some social scientists have noted, during a post-Enlightenment historical moment "nature will take on a moral significance, endorsing and embodying truth and right" (Bloor, 1976, p.13). In

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<sup>1</sup> "Concerned with the conditions which bring about belief or states of knowledge" (Bloor, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Situatedness, otherness and positionality are all "crucial elements in defining how particular differentiated discourses arise and how such discourses are put to use as part of the play of power. There can be no universal conception of justice to which we can appeal as a normative concept to evaluate some event... There are only particular, competing, fragmented and heterogeneous conceptions of and discourses about justice which arise out of the particular situations of those involved" (Harvey, 1989).

this single example we find both pro and anti-gay groups appealing to scientific rationals about the credentialism of one's "gayness." Such behavior, I would argue, reflects how society envisions and demarcates given forms of knowledge that later may or may not become embodied as part of a collective vision of reality.

Akin to the strong program of the sociology of knowledge, I appeal to norms and conventions as mechanisms by which knowledges are created. Thus, in my own research project I attempt only to sketch for you a picture of situated<sup>41</sup> knowledge. I am not producing a definitive history of GLBTQ representation and shifting social imagery. Rather, with this dissertation, I create and define one small piece of a much larger quilt. Writing from a critical standpoint, I chronicle imbedded assumptions, question stereotypes, and challenge representations of GLBTQs to expose the mainstream role in replicating or confuting dominant norms and value systems.

I want to stress that unlike SSK, my goal is not to grant equal validity to all knowledge claims. As an ideology, SSK privileges functionality. While contextualized realities are superficially beckoned, ultimately dominant ideologies are established as normative. In other words, in my opinion, all knowledges cannot be or are equally validated. Applying a Latourian sensibility, we might say that GLBTQs, as verifiers of truth and historical witness, have been disqualified in earlier years as legitimate and credible sources. Through this disqualification by authoritative structures GLBTQ marginalization and structurally imposed invisibility has been achieved, perpetuated and consequently evaporated as components of the collective construct. Hence, because of *how* reality has been created, I reveal *why* the outcome - GLBTQ visibility, or lack thereof, is a consequence of particular power structures in this dissertation.

Another area where my application of SSK diverges with its founders' vision lies within my focus on construction vs. praxis. Whereas SSK seeks primarily to establish relative forms of truth, I find that the relentless pursuit to establish what *is* severely detracts from the at least equally important task of *praxis*. Thus, I find Bloor's call for a method of impartiality when pondering truths and falsehoods an impossibility because I do not believe that objectivity is either purely possible or practically, at least for this dissertation, even an ideal to which we should strive. Objectivity is a trait given much esteem and

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clout within and outside of the scientific community. However, as my research shows, once that which is put forth under the guise of objectivity is deconstructed, often the only remaining artifact of objectivity is the unpronounced bias of any given reporter and/or researcher. So, I advocate a rather moderate form of relativism, I neither advocate absolute relativism nor blatant objectivity. All that I can produce with my application of this methodology is a deconstructed representation of how GLBTQ social groups are inherently socially embedded constructs. In short, my contribution to this field is the production of knowledge about GLBTQs that is contingent, mediated and partial.

In conjunction with Latour's proposal of how one ought to proceed with scientific research, I examine the processes by which individual claims<sup>42</sup> are constructed, supported, or debated, as reflected within business news reporting. Keeping in mind the impact social networks have upon not only the creation of scientific knowledge but also broader understandings of reality, my goal is to actively note and document how larger social-structural conditions impact GLBTQ representation and visibility.

Latour's examination of debates within scientific literature reveals that rhetoric plays an important part in determining the outcome of natural scientific studies. As an aside, an element of my research endeavor is to determine whether applying a Latourian / SSK sensitive methodology to a social scientific topic will yield results similar to those found in science and technology studies and non-sociological pursuits. For example, within the scientific community, Latour argues that each side of any debate works to build networks and gain allies so that any effort at disputing the opponents' argument becomes impossible. Although I do not believe that notions about GLBTQs have reached the state of being a black box, I do anticipate counter-arguments against homosexuality to possess a degree of untouchability. The social significance of seemingly irrefutable GLBTQ stereotypes is akin to the problem of black boxes in science: once a theory has garnered enough support to become a black box, it literally becomes true regardless of the counter-evidence one produces. In short, Latour's theory is useful for my project precisely because it focuses on how people deal with competing fact claims.

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<sup>42</sup> By individual I do not mean psycho-sociological. Rather, individual here refers to each normative truth claim, stereotype, etc. that mainstream society reports, imposes or refashions for GLBTQ persons.

### 3.1.b Qualitative Methods - Definitions and Elaborations

Fundamentally, qualitative research uses multiple methods to gather empirical data to facilitate the understanding of its subjects and phenomena in their natural setting using their own interpretive framework. Research is conceived as “an interactive process shaped by...[the researcher’s] personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.3). Thus, I, as researcher, believe it to be important to identify and discuss throughout this dissertation my own interest in and understanding of this topic of study. Ethical concerns, as well as ontological, epistemological and ideological assumptions will continue to be put forth, as will the referencing of field notes that reflect my emotional and cognitive processes throughout this study. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is imperative that my audience understand that I define this scientific endeavor as a value-laden process that is set within a complex web of power relations that both reflect and shape the ideas and values produced herewith.

That some may object to the statements made in the above paragraph is characteristic of the great criticism qualitative researchers often receive about their work. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) note, criticism of and resistance to qualitative research is often because “the traditions of qualitative research commit the researcher to a critique of the positivist project” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994 p.4). This critique usually includes such offenses as identifying personal biases, acknowledging that science is not value-free and noting that science is a social and political process more than an unfolding of “truths”. Moreover, qualitative methodology is berated for the same faults heralded at social constructivism. Rebuked for its focus on the mundane, chastised for lapsing into a postmodernist state of relativism, and meta-theoretically faulted for claiming its own morally superior wisdom, qualitative research is frequently seen as a “softer” form of science. Additionally, qualitative methodology has been critiqued as a method that produces less rigorous results than positivism’s statistically sophisticated, emotionally detached reports.

Instead of engaging in a debate in quantitative versus qualitative methodology, as a social scientist trained in both positivist and non-positivist traditions, I have used this

dissertation to apply qualitative's theoretical and ethical sensibilities with quantitative's penchant for producing detailed visual images, specifically charts, to present this historical information. However, despite my usage of quantitative tools, this dissertation ought to be primarily classified as qualitative. As a methodology, quantitative research possesses a penchant for eschewing uncompromising fixidity in research design, and, although this dissertation *could* fit a quantitative framework, I believe that qualitative methodology is better suited for exploring the research questions I pose at the end of this section. Qualitative research, as understood, is a mindset, a framework of approach that guides how one "does" science rather than establishing concrete theories and methods to be followed. As a heuristic guideline, I believe it is qualitative methodology that provides the epistemological realism I need to academically approach this subject matter, given my personal relationship to this topic.

### **3.2 Research Purpose and Location within the Field**

The purpose of this research is two-fold. Primarily, this dissertation is an historical analysis of how social ideas, perceptions and values of GLBTQ persons have shifted over time, using *The New York Times* as an historical record of sorts. After considerable work and much deliberation, I chose to only use articles in the business section and explore / document the shift in market trends from GLBTQs being classified as persons to be avoided, sometimes at all costs, to a group to be sought out and targeted by corporate America and declared a hot, "niche" market. I will detail how I came to this decision shortly. The second goal of my research involves a critical analysis of *The New York Times* itself, as a creator and representation of social image. It is my argument that *The New York Times* itself has also changed over time in its attention to GLBTQ persons.

In this dissertation, I approach how the media, specifically *The New York Times*, has attended to issues surrounding homosexuality as it relates to business issues via deconstructing all articles in the sample dealing with the broad category "consumerism". While one may argue that the media merely reflects preexisting social change, or, that the media itself is partially responsible for social change that has initially taken place, it is not my endeavor to answer this chicken-or-the-egg question. Rather, I seek to evidence

and evaluate, from a sociological standpoint, how the media, as represented by one of the most “liberal” newspapers, has changed, if at all, in its coverage of GLBTQ business issues and news, over the past several years. I execute this analysis by noting emerging themes and trends in the media’s coverage of this social group with the purpose of exposing shifts over time. Using a critical lens, it is my goal to unveil *The New York Times*’ assumptions and stereotypes in representing and giving visibility to GLBTQs. Although an analysis of the inequalities existing in American society regarding GLBTQs lies beyond the scope of this project, I believe that my critical assessment of what *The New York Times* defines as “all the news that’s fit to print” will lend insight to the structural obstacles GLBTQs face in how they are understood by reporters of mainstream, American businesses and the media.

Within the current literature, and as I have argued, no clear-cut, definitive answer as to what qualitative research *is* prevails. However, lack of congruence over a definition ought not be construed as lack of vigor. A number of qualitative researchers have put forth guidelines declaring what constitutes high quality qualitative research, and these are the formalities by which I abide in conducting this research. In particular, as mentioned, my goal is not to produce “objective” facts, but rather to develop situated knowledges and socially and historically contingent accounts of GLBTQ representation and visibility in mainstream media. While thoroughly submerging myself into the data, I simultaneously endeavor to remain cognizant of my own particular standpoints, biases and interests in this research. It is precisely due to this duality, this vying between submersion into and externality from the data, that I identify and disclose, to the best of my capability, my relationship with this research topic. My approach to the data remains, from a critical perspective, to question authority, inequality and the underlying power relations that have not always been conspicuous. From this social-historical account of social change, I envision both mainstream and non-mainstream social groups deriving a contextualized, comparative historical understanding of GLBTQ media representation.

As stated, this dissertation is most generally an exploration of social change. Starting with the presupposition that change has occurred in the cultural visibility and social representation of GLBTQs, one of my research goals is to explore how this social shift has happened. Consistent with a qualitative ontology, I do not perceive social

change as following a linear route. Rather, I see a more nuanced, complex and dialectical relationship existing between social groups and institutions. It is this dialectic that I have put much energy into developing and fleshing out during the course of this project. Consequently, one outcome of this research has been the creation of a quasi-social history of GLBTQs as social groups situated and contextualized within a specific cultural and historical milieu. It is for this reason that I have simultaneously used *The New York Times* as both reference and point of deconstruction.

### **3.3 Strategy of Inquiry and Research Design - A Socio-Historical Content Analysis of Cultural Texts**

Qualitative research reflects the historical moment in which it is undertaken. Because of my intrigue and emphasis upon social history as an agent of influence shaping events, I employ historical-comparative methodology in this research. Historical-comparative analysis is a methodology that has been pursued by several classical social thinkers. Some notable research projects conducted in this tradition include the classic study of the Protestant work ethic by Max Weber and studies of democratic societies by Alex de Toqueville and Seymour Lipset (Lipset, 1960). Comparative-historical researchers ask questions about social structures and processes that are concretely situated in time and space. Temporal sequence is taken to be a crucial variable for understanding life events and outcomes, as is the interplay between action and structural context. In brief, comparative-historical sociology understands society and its forms as embodying a dialectical relationship between agency and structure. So, unlike modernization theory, which argues for a linear path from the past to the present, this research form sees history as un-standardized and with uncertain outcomes that result from intersections of class, race and gender, which socio-historical works (Quadagno, 1994) show reveal gross historical inequalities.

I believe employing a qualitative, quasi historical-comparative methodology, will enable me to identify a number of over-arching categories/themes that may signify difference/similarity of media approach in GLBTQ representation between 1970-2000. This differs, in my opinion, from imposing a rigidly fixed assessment design, whereby I

subject individual articles to a check-list template, because I am acknowledging *prima facie* the reality that my data may not “perform” as anticipated. I approach this research with the understanding that, after much engagement with the data, patterns and trends may become visible that were unthinkable or unknowable prior to rigorous analysis. Likewise, trends that, prior to embarking upon this research project, I may have anticipated finding may prove to be non-existing. Thus, I impose a degree of structure upon this project to make it both manageable and feasible, yet that structure possesses great plasticity enabling the data to have a life of its own. In the following section, I detail this research design further.

### **3.4 Sample**

#### **3.4.a Selecting Institutions**

My interest in the media as the sole institution of focus for this dissertation emerged out of my wide reading of books and articles discussing social change and GLBTQs. During my first library/ information- gathering excursion, exploring the literature about GLBTQs and social change, I carted home over seventy-five books written about nearly every topic imaginable. In my “grand plan”, I was going to do a comparative, historical, institutional study of social change. I read books about GLBTQs and law, medicine, politics, sociology as a field, media, religion, education, popular culture, family and other such categories. This informative introduction to my topic was time-consuming but not a waste of time. I am grateful to have approached my study of GLBTQs from this perspective because it revealed areas where there is a dearth of information, and other areas where considerable amounts of research have been conducted. Repeatedly, I found the least degree of sociological study done on the media as a social institution. Additionally, lesbians, bisexuals, and the trans-community in general were far less discussed and researched than were gay men. Given the lack of scholarly research, and particularly sociological studies, about GLBTQs and the media, I decided this would constitute my research area, simultaneously providing me with

multiple research options and providing a novel contribution to both my field of study and to interdisciplinary research about GLBTQs.

### **3.4.b.            *The New York Times* as a Data Source**

*The New York Times* constitutes the sole source of sample data for this dissertation. After much deliberation, research and discussion, I decided, for the purposes of this research, I would document and elucidate the historical treatment of GLBTQs by the media as a social institution. Analyzing *The New York Times* would provide more than ample information for an initial inquiry. This decision was made upon completion of the following steps.

During my initial conceptualization of this project, I planned to compare five newspapers' representations of GLBTQs over the same thirty-year time period. My rationale for using five newspapers was that I could establish a liberal/conservative continuum and assess a broad range of the United States. With this in mind, I set out on a journey to locate what resources "the professionals", a.k.a. the media, use to establish opinions of "the American public". Seeking a quasi-independent source, I contacted National Public Radio (NPR). I called NPR's office in Washington, DC and spoke to an employee who gathers data for NPR's show "All Things Considered". From this informant, I learned that the resources they use to establish what the "American public" thinks are *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Times*.

With my newfound knowledge about how NPR discerns what is the "American public's opinion", I set out to locate all of these newspapers. However, as I searched the established databases, it quickly became apparent that they are not all on-line for the same years, are categorized differently and some were only available on microfilm. Additionally, after speaking with a colleague in Seattle, we realized that all of these sources, except *USA Today*, are "east-coast" creations. Next, I considered looking into *The Chicago Tribune* or *The LA Times*, or even smaller, more local newspapers throughout mid-America. As it became more apparent that my search for an ideal expression of the American public was leading me towards another dissertation on a

completely different topic, I decided that, given that my immediate interest rested in looking specifically at *The New York Times*, I would pursue this partial, local study for my dissertation and leave my analysis of multiple-newspapers, and even multiple forms of mass media, for my five-year future research plan. This decision to use *The New York Times* as the sole basis for a historical-comparative research<sup>43</sup> project is one that other prominent sociologists, such as Myra Marx-Ferree and Bill Gamson, have also made. Thus, although *The New York Times* is, and cannot be, the “final word” in news-reporting, I, along with other sociologists, assert this newspaper to be a credible, albeit partial, commentary on social life that is simultaneously a cultural product and a text that can be analyzed to evidence a wide range of social change.

### 3.4.c. Database Sample

I developed the data sample for this research employing the following procedures. First, during several brainstorming exercises, I devised a list of possible keywords<sup>44</sup> to use for searching. Equipped with this list, I searched every keyword and “The New York Times” on Lexis/Nexus’ database.

In Lexis/Nexus’ database, *The New York Times* is categorized according to news section. Of all the news sections, “general news” is the largest category. Within the general news category, you can search via full text, headline or photo caption. Hence, I proceeded to search my keywords in all of three sub-categories, for full text see Charts 1a and 1b, for results of the headline and photo captions searches see Appendix A. This strategy produced copious quantities of articles. These articles I did not read, but rather used to gauge the scope of the data.

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<sup>43</sup> Ferree and Gamson have been analyzing abortion discourse to see if Tarrow and McAdams’ concept of “political opportunity structure” can be applied to the cultural realm of news media, framing and ideology work. Specifically, they have used quantitative methodology to explore how different groups framed abortion in *The New York Times* over the past thirty years, coding variables at the article level, “utterance” level and “idea element” level. I am indebted to Jack Huber these insights on Ferree’s work at the University of Connecticut.

<sup>44</sup> Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, same-sex, homosexual, sexual orientation, sexual preference, sexual identity, non-heterosexual.

Within *The New York Times*' general news, there exists four broad sub-sections. Hence, I continued to delimit the scope of my project by searching each sub-section of the general news: 1. medical and health news (see Appendix A) 2. entertainment news, which is further divided into books, movies, plays and music, arts and sports, (see Appendix A) 3. legal news, which contained no articles for any of my categories, and 4. business and finance news, which is further divided into industry news and mergers and acquisitions. Upon completion of this preliminary general sampling of all articles, and several meetings with my chair, I decided to only take my final sample from the "business and finance" section of *The New York Times*. Although this section is titled "business and finance news", I elected to focus only upon "industry news", which I henceforth term "business news" because the "mergers and acquisitions" section contained numerous letters-to-the-editor and an assorted compilation of other non-article information. I made this judgment based upon my focus on GLBTQs as a new consumer group and to narrow my research topic to one substantive area. In making this decision, I realize that there may be articles dealing with business issues in articles discussing crime, health, general announcements, film and book reviews, etc., that might be located within the broad "general news" categories. However, I decided if *The New York Times* chose to classify an article as "business news", then that is the framework for labeling an article "business" by which I, too, shall abide for the purpose of this research.

Next, I systematically searched all business and finance news for every year between 1970-2000 for all words on my key term list: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, same-sex, homosexual, sexual orientation, sexual preference, sexual identity and non-heterosexual. The purpose of this exercise was to find the total number of articles, organized by Lexis/Nexus, as associated with each key term in all business news articles between 1970-2000. I compiled the results of this search in another table. The figures presented from this third search constitute the population from which I drew my final sample of articles.

As an aside, I must note that while initially I searched every section<sup>45</sup> of *The New York Times*, and wanted to do an analysis of the entire newspaper, the sheer magnitude<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> General news, sports, photo captions, headlines and business and finance

of articles found required I make this rudimentary, although fundamental decision, about my sampling frame. Henceforth, I resolved that since one of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to provide insightful in-depth analyses, I would forgo any remaining propensity to conduct an across-category, numerical picture of GLBTQ media representation that surpassed the level of graphing and table-making.

Additionally, before I proceed to discuss my sampling frame, I must caution my reader that the numbers presented in Charts 2-4 differ from those initially found via Lexis/Nexus. The reasons for this are as follows. First, Lexis/Nexus includes articles containing a multitude of “gay” terms that do not refer to sexuality. For instance, products, such as BenGay, company names, such as Gay Real Estate, along with individual personal names, i.e. Mr. Gay, all were included at first and made the number of articles about “gays” appear far higher than they are upon closer inspection. Second, there is considerable overlap among categories. In other words, although there are frequently twice as many “gay” articles in comparison to “lesbian” ones, in reality there are very few “purely” lesbian articles. Greater discussion of the issue occurs later in this paper. Third, the database counts what it calls “business digests” as separate entries. These digests are mini summaries of the full-text article appearing inside the paper on the same day. Because this sample only includes full-articles, these digests have been eliminated from the total count where applicable. Finally, in a few instances, “letters to the editor” are found within the database. Again, since this dissertation is only evaluating actual articles written and printed by *The New York Times*, these letters have also been removed from the sample.

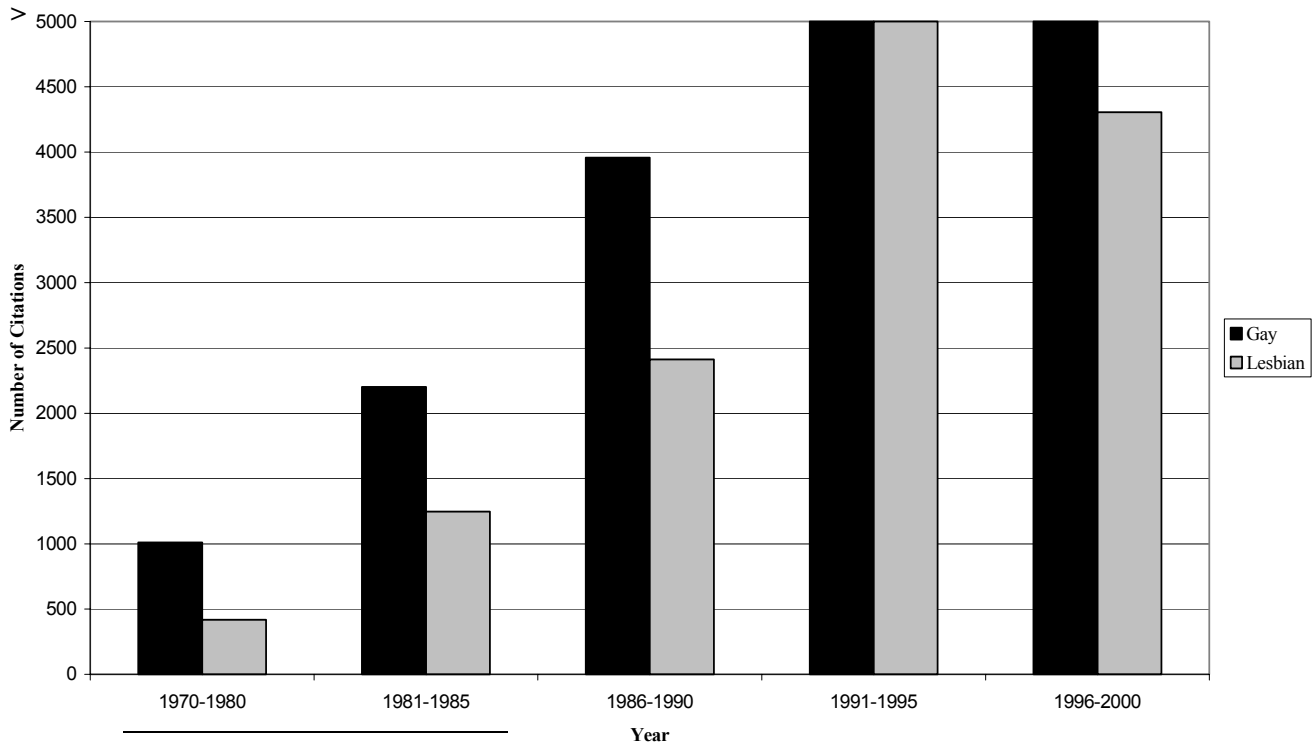
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<sup>46</sup> For example, just the category “gay” alone yielded well over 1,000 articles for every year between 1993-2000 within all *New York Times* full-text categories. While it would have been interesting to compare why the same was not true for any of the other GLTBQ categories, and this could make a significant contribution to the fields of gender and queer studies, these, as well as several other, research questions would require separate analysis. To me, the usefulness of quantitative data lies in the identification of anomalies, such as the dramatic increase in the year 2000 of transsexual issues, as a word appearing less than 22 times for every year between 1970-1995, and less than 10 times for several years and then jumping to over 35 in 1996, dropping to less than 5 in 1997-1999 and then surging to around 55 in 2000 (see Appendix B, Table 4). Thus, it is to illuminate the broader social picture that I have used some quantitative techniques in this dissertation. Yet, to continue perfecting a detailed quantitative picture of this data would detract from my ability to analyze the content of the articles in my sample. Therefore, I have again opted to leave this future project full of descriptive potential aside for now.

### 3.4.d. Sampling Frame

I arrived at the total number of articles included in my sample using the following procedure. First, I located the total number of articles found in Lexis/Nexus meeting the criteria defined above (N=1028<sup>47</sup>). However, it is crucial to note that between 1970-2000, *The New York Times* did not print this many separate articles relating to GLBTQ persons. This number reflects great overlap. In other words, for any given year, such as 1980, although it looks like there are three articles printed in the business and finance section about sexuality, in reality there is only one article that the search mechanism is locating separately under each of those key terms<sup>48</sup>.

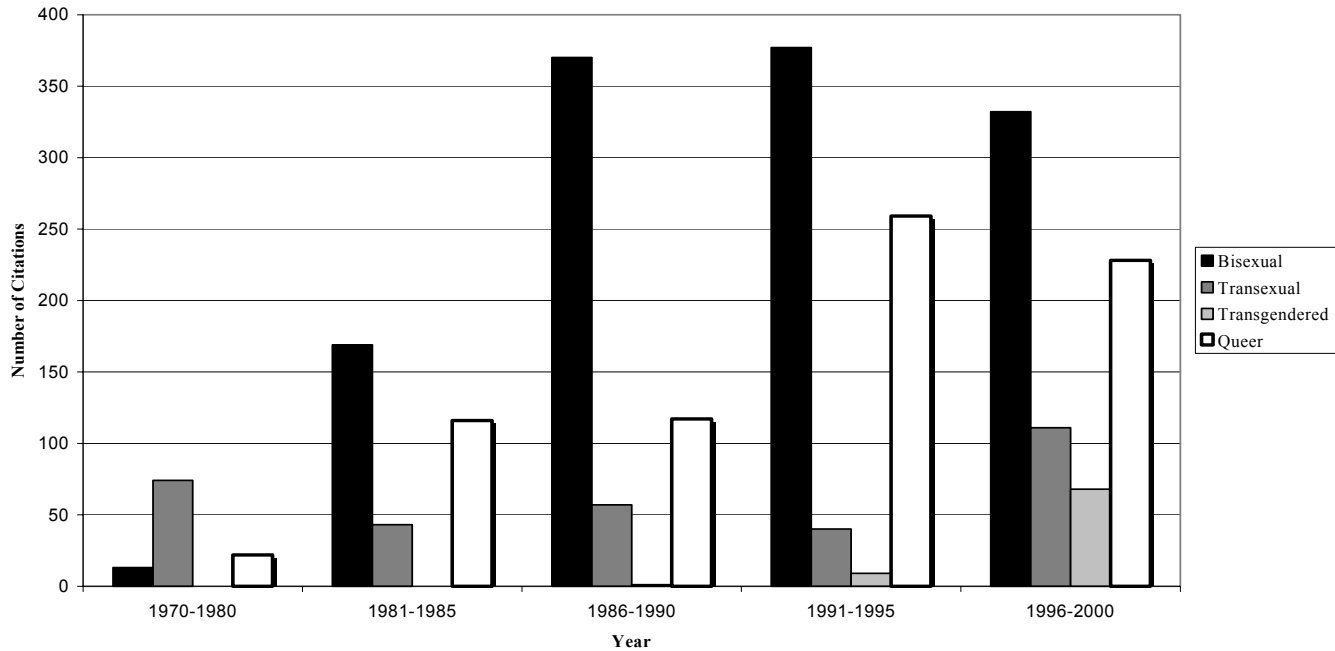
Chart 1a: Total Number of *New York Times*' Articles Containing the Terms Gay or Lesbian 1970-2000



<sup>47</sup> The breakdown by category is: Gay 515, Lesbian 346, Bisexual 11, Transsexual 3, Transgender 3, Queer 19, Same-Sex 53, Homosexual 165, Sexual Orientation 48, Sexual Preference 18, Sexual Identity 8, Non-Heterosexual 4.

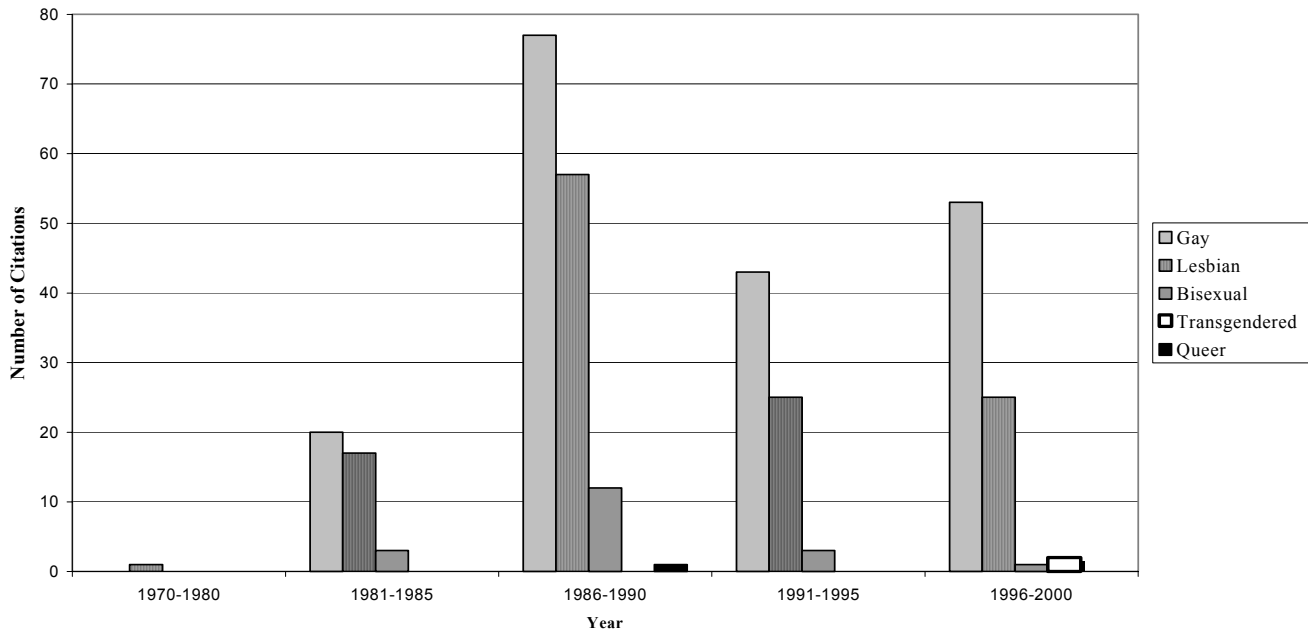
<sup>48</sup> In order to report exact numbers for total articles for every year, I would have had to read every single article (N=1028). Because this is a qualitative dissertation, my goal is not to provide a numerical count but rather to provide an in-depth analysis of article content. Hence, I devised the sampling scheme detailed above and included a standardized way to handle duplicate articles.

**Chart 1b: Total Number of *New York Times*' Articles Containing the Terms Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgendered or Queer 1970-2000**



Second, I refined my initial key term list, eliminating several categories. Specifically, I decided to exclude the categories same-sex, sexual orientation, sexual preference, sexual identity and non-heterosexual from my study because I wanted to focus only on GLBTQ persons and these categories are peripheral to those actual persons. Third, I devised a proportional sampling scheme for the remaining GLBTQ categories so that comparable numbers from each category would be included in the study. I sampled each group in the following manner. For articles mentioning “bisexual”, “transsexual”, “transgender” or “queer”, all were sampled due to their overall very small number. Because the category “homosexual” contained a total of 165 articles, relatively half of the next largest category, “lesbian” and less than a third of the largest category, “gay”, I read every article to determine the degree of overlap. Since “homosexual” is frequently equated with “gay” by *The New York Times*, only 42 of the 165 articles listed as “homosexual” were unique to that category. Hence, I sampled all 42 and rejected the rest, (see Chart 2).

**Chart 2: Appearance of GLBTQ Terms in the Business and Finance News Sections of *The New York Times* 1970-2000**



Finally, for categories “lesbian” and “gay”, the following sampling scheme was used. For the lesbian category, every year containing five articles or less resulted in all articles being sampled. For years containing six to fifteen articles, every third article was sampled. Lastly, for years containing more than fifteen articles, every fifth article was included in the sample. This format yielded a total of 111 articles. Analogously, for the category “gay”, again, any year containing fewer than five articles resulted in all articles being sampled while years possessing between six and fifteen articles also resulted in every third article being sampled. However, in those years where more than fifteen articles were printed, I decided to take only every seventh article so that there would be correspondingly similar numbers of gay and lesbian articles in the total sample. Using this format, a total of 95 gay articles have been included in the overall sample, making the grand total of articles used in this dissertation 284.

**3.4.e. Sample Categorization and Format**

I shall begin this section by drawing your attention to the fact that this dissertation could have been designed in an entirely different manner. Throughout this research process, I have judged and decided what is important to include (i.e. business articles instead of art reviews) and how this information should be organized. This section, which details how I elected to categorize my data, reveals the discretionary nature of research and my particular engagement with this research project.

After establishing my sampling frame, I printed every article. While this sounds simple, I might add a note of precaution: it is not. One can only gain access to Lexus/Nexus via an institution that subscribes, and pays, for its service and printing is costly. Future researchers may wish to consider saving the files to diskette<sup>49</sup>, or, and this might be the “best” option even though it is more time-consuming, e-mailing every article to oneself, thereby providing a more permanent and electronic copy. With the technological details resolved, I sorted through the deleted and missing files and assigned a reference number<sup>50</sup> to every hard copy article. Next, I highlighted and made notes on every article, reading each several times. From these multiple readings, I concluded that, despite differences and uniqueness, every article could be fit into a general classification scheme. The entire sample of *New York Times* articles, including all GLBTQ sub-samples, could be represented, in my evaluation, via seven topical, albeit not mutually exclusive, categories: 1) Advertising and Marketing, 2) Discrimination, 3) Publicity, 4) AIDS, 5) Gay Press, 6) Work, Business and Finance, 7) Descriptive Terms. After devising these seven topical categories, and sorting all sampled articles accordingly, I proceeded to make further sample-limiting decisions. For instance, at the onset, I thought the last category, “Descriptive Terms” could be useful for my research because of its tendency for revealing the extent to which *The New York Times* deemed it necessary and/or worthwhile to define people, books, and the like with an adjective or noun revealing sexual preference/lifestyle. However, while the articles in this category do reveal shifts in nomenclature, because the articles employ GLBTQ terms only for simple identification and descriptive purposes, I determined this category to be a weak

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<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, when I was gathering my data the PC library computers lacked disk-drives.

<sup>50</sup> For example, L100889 would be given to an article searched under the keyword lesbian that was printed on October 8, 1989.

mechanism for measuring representation. Upon further reflection, I came to view *The New York Times*' choice in describing individuals by printing their sexual orientation as a form of publicity. Thus, I resolved that a better way to incorporate these articles into my analysis, which would concurrently simplify and clarify my taxonomy, would be to include articles identifying persons as members of a social group based upon their sexual classification in the "Publicity" category, thereby reducing the number of categories from seven to six.

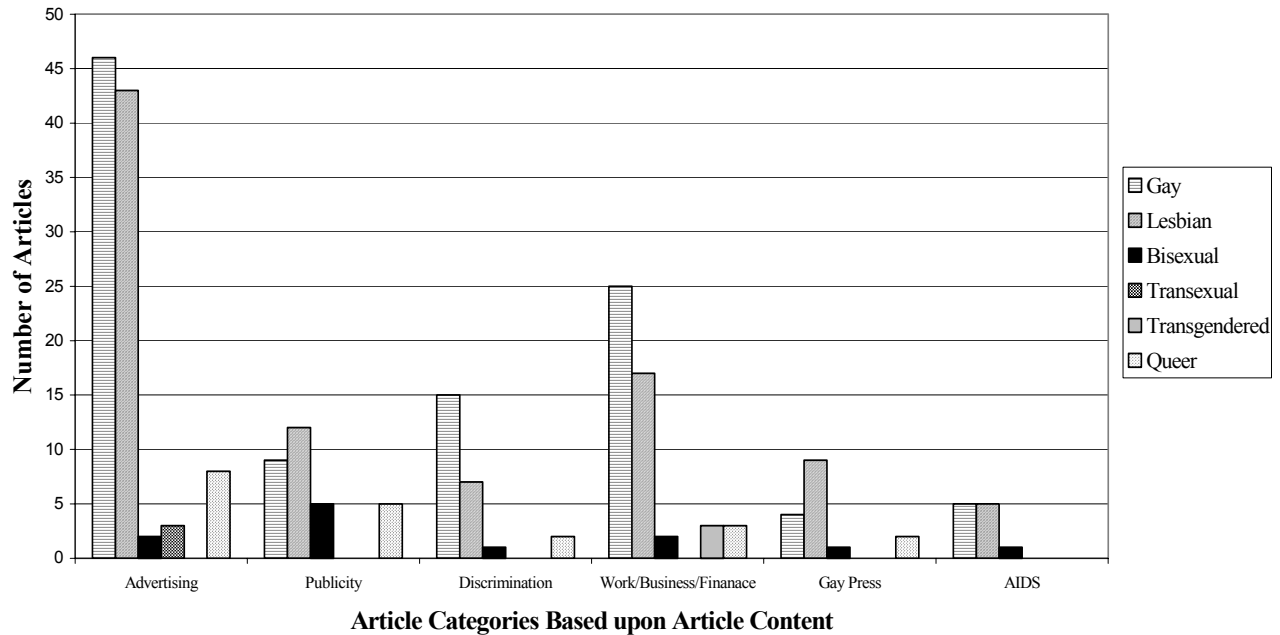
From the six remaining general categories, I developed two "primary" descriptive categories. Conceptually, I collapsed the gay press, advertising and work/business/finance articles into a broad theoretical framework I termed "consumerism" and combined discrimination and publicity under the broad heading "social climate and inequality", since many of the articles share similar content and commentary. Finally, because articles discussing AIDS frequently referred to issues relating to business, work, health benefits, and/or publicity, upon deeper inspection I opted to incorporate them into the existing categories rather than discuss them independently.

Sadly, my struggle to make my sample more manageable did nothing to lessen the critical mass of articles I had garnered from my sampling frame. Further categorizing all the articles into the five broad categories: 1. advertising 2. business, work and finance 3. gay press 4. discrimination and 5. publicity did simplify the presentation of my data, but it did not address the impossibility of analyzing, with great depth, this overwhelming number of articles. Again, I was faced with the task of narrowing my focus.

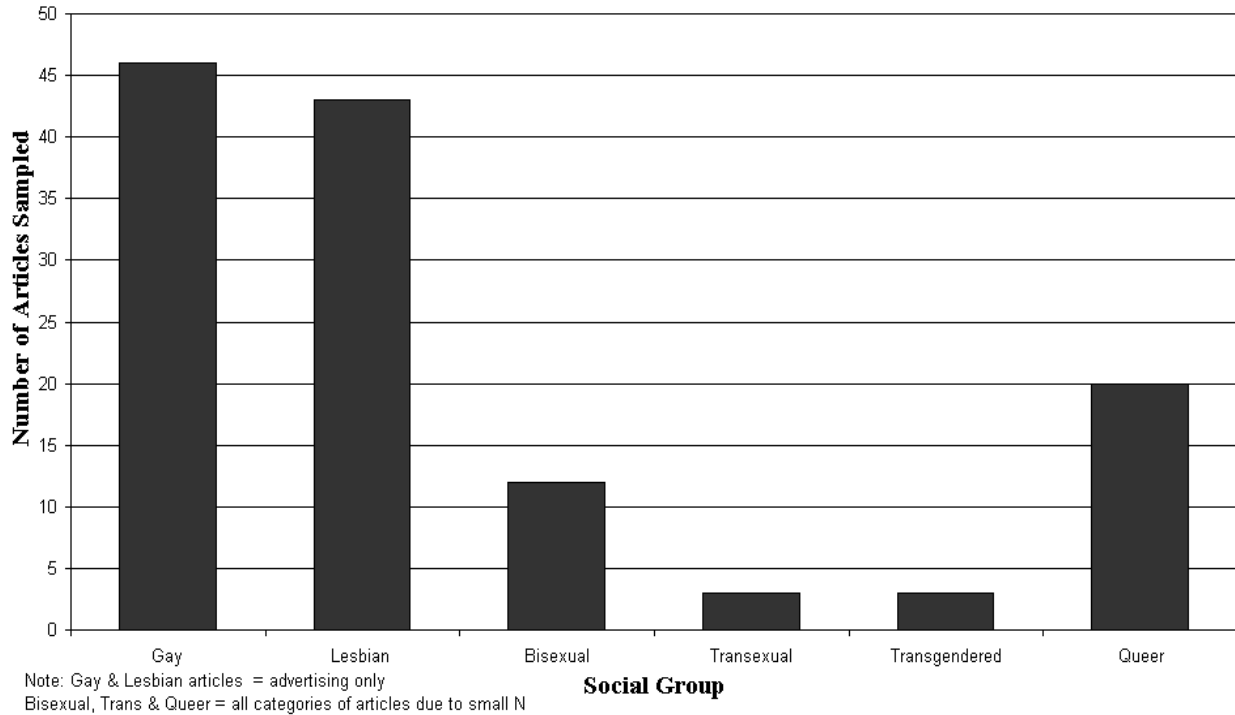
The final shape of this research project was achieved through many meetings, reformulations and re-assessments about what issues and areas I found most important to explore. The focus and content of the dissertation chapters that follow are born from multiple re-evaluations of the sample, research objectives and data content. Consequently, the resulting format of this "content analysis", which forms the bulk of this paper and may be construed as a "findings" section of sorts, continues the collaborative, reflexive and self-discursive process that characterizes the qualitative methodology employed up to this point.

During the final refinement round, the specific topic of “Advertising” emerged as the sole area of focus. I arrived at this decision because the largest number of articles from my random sample dealt with issues related to advertising (see Chart 3). Related to, but distinct from, advertising are GLBTQ issues and experiences found in the second largest category, “Work/Business/Finance”. Because this section includes such diverse issues as mergers and acquisitions, marketing and health insurance, I decided to only analyze articles specifically related to advertising in order to lend a sense of continuity to my analysis. Still, given the unique role the gay press plays, both as a separate entity yet also as a member of the business, and specifically advertising, community, I chose to include those “Gay Press” articles that specifically discuss advertising in my analysis. Lastly, although I originally sought to do a separate analysis of articles dealing with “social climate and inequality”, which would also address matters of publicity and discrimination, in the final run I opted to not incorporate any information contained in those articles in this dissertation, leaving it for future studies. Ultimately, my sample included 127 articles, whose categorization is illustrated in Chart 4.

**Chart 3: Why Advertising? Categorization of Business News Articles in Original Sample**



**Chart 4: Number of Articles Sampled and Analyzed**



### 3.5 Terminology and Article Representation

At the onset of this research project, I intended to do separate analyses of GLBTQ representation by and in *The New York Times*. In other words, for each topic, i.e. advertising, I planned to compare how the newspaper represented each GLBTQ group. To achieve this goal, I searched each term (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender and queer) independently, compiled quantitative data on levels of frequency for every year and coded every article in my sample based upon content. However, as I read each article I noticed a trend emerging: Although I specifically searched, for example, the term “lesbian” and “New York Times”, repeatedly the articles found in the database never actually contained the word “lesbian”, and in several instances the content of the articles was specifically about gay men. Thus, instead of achieving a “lesbian” sample, I culled a wide variety of articles. Consequently, the lesbian sample includes articles that:

- A. use the word “homosexual” as an umbrella term which, due to article content, could be perceived as applying to both gay men and women.
- B. only specifically deal with gay men
- C. have absolutely no relevance to anything pertaining to homosexuality.

Interestingly, the same was not found to be true for my other categories – specifically, bisexual, transsexual, transgender and queer.

My discovery of lesbian invisibility in Lexis/Nexus’ database, albeit consistent with other historical<sup>51</sup> accounts revealing invisibility not only of lesbians, but women in general and especially persons of color, complicated my methodology. I foremost wanted to conduct a gender analysis of the media’s coverage of non-heterosexuals. However, given the minimal, and often illusive, representation of lesbians in the articles in my sample, I decided a detailed analysis of gender would be better suited to an independent study undertaken after I set the framework with this research.

In addition to “the lesbian complication”, there also exists some overlap in all of the sub-samples due to the presence of organizational names (i.e. LEAGUE, the “Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay United Employees”). Where this occurs, I have found that Lexis/Nexus inconsistently listed the article under one or more of the categories, problematizing even simple “counting” of each article. Furthermore, qualitatively, I have

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<sup>51</sup> Traditionally, association with an “other” category has involved devaluation and discrediting. Lesbians, as part of this other group are no different. “Since the late nineteenth century, lesbians have been both public spectacles and invisible social subjects, represented in the discourse of science, romance and pornography as fascinating sexual agents and at the same time...we continually hover on the threshold of invisibility” (Hennessy, 2000, p.176). Work on “sexual inversions”, done by sexologists during the late nineteenth century, personifies the racist, classist historical practice of associating lesbianism with the socially defined undesirables. Sexologist Ellis (1975) explains, for example, “what a lesbian is and looks like through many references to studies of Native Americans, Balinese, Arab, Turkish, and Chinese women, as well as European and British prostitutes, prisoners, and working women while white middle-class (respectable) lesbians remain invisible (Ellis, 1975, pp.195-263; Hart, 1994)” (Hennessy, 2000 p. 200-1). Historical analyses of sexuality consistently declare the pertinent role class plays in the social demarcation of homosexuality as inversion, perversion and so forth. Correspondingly, when we take notice of the racial nature of class, a compounding effect is revealed. Poor lesbians of color in the United States continue to remain not only the least visible of all social groups but historically, women of color in general have been equated with both bestiality and hyper-sexuality (Adams, 1994; Hooks, 1981, 1984).

noticed that the content of the article may or may not have anything to do with any/all of the groups listed. For at least two categories – “gay” and “lesbian”, although via sheer number it appears that *The New York Times* has devoted an ever-increasing number of articles to each social group, closer inspection reveals that the majority of articles are dedicated to issues and topics pertaining primarily to gay men. It is due to this unforeseen complication that I elected to compartmentalize my dissertation topically rather than via social group. Hence, in some sections I simultaneously discuss gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgenders and queers, while in other areas I discuss each of these groups independently. Still, to bring order to this project, and to facilitate the establishment of an historical picture of social change, all topics and discussions are ultimately organized chronologically.

The last instance of complication associated with terminology relates to the usage of the word “gay”. Given that the term “gay” is most frequently used by *The New York Times* to describe homosexual men, yet, in some instances is also used as a general classification for referring to all non-heterosexual persons, for the purposes of this research, I use “gay” to encompass both men and women. In those instances where I wish to demarcate men from women, I simply write “gay men” and “lesbians”.

### **3.6 Interpretation Strategies and Evaluation Criteria**

In order to determine the degree and qualitative expression of GLBTQ visibility and representation by *The New York Times*, I imposed the following list of questions to each article sampled. These questions were used to guide my interpretation of each article, so, irrespective of article content, I would be able to apply the same criteria for discerning GLBTQ representation. Although systematic in application, I did not write out the “answers” to each of these questions for every article. Rather, I used these questions to guide my reading and written analysis.

1. How are GLBTQs labeled or discussed?
2. What adjectives are used to describe GLBTQs?
3. What stereotypes are applied?
4. What is the content of the article?

5. How are issues framed?
6. Is the article's tone positive, negative, "neutral"?
7. What cultural image of GLBTQs is expressed?
8. What dominant ideology is being represented?
9. Does the article contain false-balancing?
10. Whose interests does this article serve?

Stated again, the purpose of these questions remains to focus the analysis and facilitate description of how *The New York Times* has represented and publicized GLBTQs within my chosen time frame. It is only issues specifically addressing how GLBTQ persons are described, depicted and treated by *The New York Times*, in their everyday reporting of "news" that I analyze in this dissertation. Thus, I cannot be overstate that the goal of this research is to develop a socio-historical picture of how and if the cultural images of GLBTQs, as presented by this media source, have changed over the past decades in matters *The New York Times* classifies as relating to the world of business and finance news.

I created these ten questions under the guidance of Parenti's (1998) declaration of six common methods the media uses to manipulate information. As a critic of mainstream media, Parenti argues against the media industry's claims of neutrality, objectivity and impartiality in representing information to the public. Moreover, he asserts that media bias is anything but random error or the result of everyday production chaos. To the contrary, "the built-in biases of corporate mainstream media faithfully reflect the dominant ideology, seldom straying into territory that might cause discomfort to those who hold political and economic power, including those who own the media or advertise in it" (Parenti, 1998 p.150).

Given the pertinence of media bias to this dissertation, I shall briefly identify and explain each of the six methods Parenti identifies:

1. "Suppression by Omission" - omitting entire stories, such as the oppression and mass killings perpetrated by US-supported right-wing client states like Morocco, El Salvador and Guatemala, as well as downplaying, disowning or suppressing information on crimes committed by the State.

2. “Attack and Destroy the Target” - this strategy is often pursued when omission is ineffective. Basically, the media shifts from ignoring to attacking a story. For example, after the *San Jose Mercury News* published an in-depth series about CIA contra-crack shipments flooding East Los Angeles, the media suppressed the story. Publicity on the web forced other media to acknowledge the information, which they did:

“Articles in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* and reports on network television and PBS announced that there was ‘no evidence’ of CIA involvement, that the *Mercury News* series was ‘bad journalism’ and that the public’s interest in this subject was the real problem, a matter of gullibility, hysteria, and conspiracy mania (pp.152-53).

That the *Mercury News* investigated the issue for a year, had names of agents and dealers, copies of documents and depositions, did not matter. According to Parenti, the media simply lied and told the public such evidence did not exist, thereby exonerating the CIA from drug involvement.

3. “Labeling” - through the use of language, the media actively shape and create perceptions and labels, such as the notion of a stable economy, competent leader, Islamic terrorists and inner-city gangs. Such terms come to be accepted over time even though they are often not contextualized within a larger framework of social issues.

4. “Face-Value Transmission” - accepting lies uncritically and passing along information to the public without confirming it’s truth-value. Examples include the infamous black-listing which occurred during McCarthyism, giving birth to journalists derogative title, “stenographers of power”, whereby going-along with the orders of superiors in the name of objectivity masks the underlying relations of power created and transmitted by the media.

5. “False Balancing” - despite claims that both liberal and conservative sides are given equal weight, in reality, Parenti argues, “both sides are seldom accorded equal prominence” (Parenti, 1998 p.155) while radical and progressive sides are excluded altogether.

6. “Framing” - Framing<sup>52</sup> is a means of distorting the truth, rather than outright lying, to create the sought after impact. This is, in my opinion, one of the most effective mechanisms employed by the media to shape the transmission of facts because it allows the facade of objectivity to remain in tact. By altering how news is presented, how much exposure is given to one topic verses another, where the story is physically located on a page, the tone of the article, and the phraseology of headlines and images, coupled with the “neutral” third-party voice of the reporter, the media creates credibility in a manner that becomes almost unquestionable. This is how “news” is transposed into “fact” and how selectivity is representative of power, position and wealth.

Although each of these “methods” employed by the media contributes to a greater or lesser degree of “fact” distortion, for this project, I chose to only focus upon labeling, false balancing and framing<sup>53</sup> as a means of analyzing how the media has reported GLBTQ issues over time.

### **3.7 Contextualization and Research Questions**

Rather than create a linear diagram of how GLBTQs have shifted from non-visibility to visibility, this research paints a textured picture depicting the social-historical context shaping emerging trends. Throughout this research I ask whether it is possible to identify major social/thematic understandings of GLBTQ persons. Retaining an

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<sup>52</sup> One way framing can be used is to chart mass media coverage of an issue or group. In the example put forth by Gamson (1998), the cultural practice of using “he” as a generic term for men and women, we may assess the “success” of the women’s movement by comparing media samples of the early 1960s and today to see if there is a shift in the use of gender-exclusive language.

historical image, I explore if these representations change over time and in congruence with other factors, identified within the news articles.

Finally, using a socio-historical, qualitative methodological paradigm, I developed three broadly based research questions. It is my expectation that, at the end of this dissertation, I will have established the foundation upon which to provide local, partial, and specific explanations for each research question.

1. How have GLBTQs been discussed/presented as a social group between 1970-2000 by the mass media, using *The New York Times* as an indicator?
  
2. What cultural images / stereotypes are used to describe GLBTQs by *The New York Times* between 1970-2000 and how does *The New York Times*, as an exemplar of the media, represent GLBTQs in each time period?
  
3. What larger issues of social equality or inequality towards GLBTQs does this research manifest?

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## **Chapter Four: *New York Times* Article Analysis**

### **aka**

### **“Data Analysis and Findings”**

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In this chapter I analyze articles from *The New York Times* to analyze how one small segment of American society, an American newspaper, creates knowledge, images and definitions of GLBTQs. The focus of this section is regional and local but the findings and implications revealed have a much broader scope.

#### **4.1 Advertising**

I begin this analysis with an exploration of articles that deal with GLBTQs and advertising. While I did not set out to study advertising, initial sampling highlighted advertising as an area of interest to *The New York Times*' business section. Hence, we may infer that within American culture, and particularly within *The New York Times*' demarcation of what shall constitute business foci, advertising assumes great importance and dedication of time and resources.

##### **4.1.a First Signs of GLBTQ Visibility in *The New York Times***

In this section, I will concentrate on the trends arising in *The New York Times* business news articles which are associated with GLBTQs and advertising throughout the Eighties. The reader will see three themes resulting from my analyses of these early articles. First, I shall discuss how the business of advertising was careful to avoid controversial liaisons. Secondly I will explore how the emergence of AIDS affected the portrayal of GLBTQs in business and advertising, leading to notions of separate

businesses for homosexuals which could be “sympathetic” to the needs of the homosexual market. Finally, this section briefly covers the shift in nomenclature experienced during this historical moment, whereby terms used to describe homosexuals broadened and the word “gay” came to replace “homosexual” in popularity and conventionality.

The first article published in *The New York Times*’ business section where we find any GLBTQ term used appears on August 30, 1980. It is a financial article about “nonmarital agreements” written by Deborah Rankin (Sect.2, p.28, Col.1). In it, she writes:

For various reasons - relaxed social attitudes, reluctance to cement a permanent relationship, or a desire to experiment with trial marriage - more and more people are opting to live together without the benefit of matrimony...To minimize such battles [speaking of court cases], many lawyers suggest the use of ‘nonmarital agreements’ - contracts that detail the rights and obligations of both partners should one die or the relationship end for other reasons. The most obvious candidates are heterosexual couples, but homosexual couples would also benefit from such agreements.

Here we see that “homosexual” is used in a blunt, matter-of-fact tone to describe a group of persons, a reporting style that characterized the first-ever usage of the word by *The New York Times* on January 11, 1969<sup>54</sup>. While it is not clear to me why “the most obvious candidates are heterosexual couples”. The only article written about GLBTQs in 1980 in *The New York Times*’ business section and, in my opinion, sets a rather favorable tone for the inclusion of GLBTQs as a social group by recognizing homosexuals as an alternative family form.

Between 1980-1989, *The New York Times* remained remarkably mute on issues dealing with business and homosexuality. Over the next nine years (1981-1989) we find a very small, uneven increase in the number of articles including GLBTQs. The year immediately following the initial publication, 1981, witnessed a total of five articles

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<sup>54</sup> The first published article using the term “homosexual” is about Amsterdam, Holland, noting its tolerance of homosexuals and characterization as a “mecca for homosexuals”.

published on various gay/lesbian topics. However, this initial interest dropped in 1982, when only three articles were written, and then disappeared entirely in 1983, with no articles published. It is not until 1984, with the publication of four articles, that we begin a steady upward trend. Still, for every year between 1984-1989, the most articles any category (gay, lesbian or homosexual) of non-heterosexuals saw published referring to “them” was eleven, which occurred in 1989. In short, homosexuality remained an under-discussed reality of life represented in the business news of *The New York Times*.

Despite the tolerant image presented of homosexuals in the 1980 article, it was not about advertising, the focus of this analysis. The first article about advertising in *The New York Times* attempts to justify why GLBTQs are not of interest to advertisers. “The ad business is the straightest business there is”. Such were the words Lloyd Kolmer, ad agency celebrity coordinator, spoke to *The New York Times* in May, 1981 describing the world of marketing. In the article that ensues, *The New York Times* characterizes advertising as a conservative, even archaic, field that avoids any type of controversy like the plague. The incident used to present this image is the case of Billie Jean King, who is introduced in a listing along with “Flip Wilson, Roberto Duran, Marilyn Chambers and Anita Bryant” as a celebrity “thrust into controversy”. These celebrities, we are told, earned disapproval as a result of their lives becoming “blemished” (Sect. D, p.1, Col.1).

The “facts” of Mrs. King’s case are introduced by *The New York Times* under the sub-heading “When a Personality is Tainted”. Soon, we learn that Mrs. King is a tennis champion being sued by her former secretary for assets promised during their “homosexual relationship”. Estimating that \$150,000 in potential sponsorship was lost “since the disclosure”, we are again told by Mr. Kolmer that “the advertising business won’t give her a vote of confidence [because] it’s too straight” (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p.1, Col.1). Citing the Lillie Langtry<sup>55</sup> “problem”, *The New York Times* reporter, N.R. Kleinfeld, notes how “although moral attitudes have changed appreciably”, “in the world of soap and suds” the atmosphere remains intolerant.

The pertinence of the article for this dissertation lies not within the details of Billie Jean King’s misfortunes but rather in the representation of homosexuality as a

moral failing. King’s homosexual affair is listed along with Peter Lawford’s drinking problem, Marilyn Chamber’s porn film, Roberto Duran’s “quitting” a boxing championship and Flip Wilson’s arrest for possession of drugs. What *The New York Times* makes perfectly clear is that the climate of advertising and marketing was overwhelmingly adverse to all sorts of “controversial” topics in 1981.

In 1982, *The New York Times* published only two advertising articles dealing with homosexuality. The first, printed on July 1, merely uses the term “homosexual” as an adjective describing a community of people and magazines catering to this market. The second, more descriptive article, reports on the trend of advertising agencies to take insurance out on their commercials:

You’re increasingly seeing commercials tied to celebrities, where you can’t substitute,” said Mr. Grant, explaining the growth of insurance, “so production houses buy insurance to protect themselves against the celebrities becoming unavailable.” (Sect.D, p.6. Col.5, 8/20/82).

Included on the list of non-insurables are “neither temper tantrums nor sudden notoriety - as in the case of Billy Jean King, the tennis player, whose homosexual relationship became widely publicized” (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.6., Col.5, 8/20/82). Given that reporter Sandra Salmans chose the fifteen-month-old example of Ms. King’s to illustrate “sudden notoriety” further illustrates the negative impact homosexuality, at this time, had on the field of advertising.

When trying to analyze the “effect” presence of GLBTQs in the advertising section of *The New York Times*, had on the world of advertising, it is important to contextualize their position within the overall economic climate portrayed in the business section of *The New York Times* in the Eighties. During the mid-eighties, even with the rising awareness of the AIDS epidemic, we encounter very limited discussion of homosexuality relating to any topic in the business section of *The New York Times*. In fact, for the entire decade, 1980-1990, the total number of articles listed in the database

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<sup>55</sup> Lillie Langtry, we are told, did ads for Pears Soap in 1993 and was dropped because her tendency for “always [being] into one affair or another” made her reputation “a bit too flashy and dynamic” and so

for *all* categories of non-heterosexuals is approximately 85. The majority of commentary consisted of blame, condemnation, sympathy or fear for their “spreading” AIDS throughout American society.

In looking at article content, we find that economic discussions of AIDS focused on such topics as the dilemmas faced by insurance companies, such as the disease’s potential to “bankrupt insurance companies” from a flood of claims and monumental health bills (*New York Times*, 2/22/87), to the fear heterosexuals had of catching the disease. For instance, one article stated that because “straight people don’t want to try on clothes that gays have put on” (*New York Times*, 12/29/84, Sect.1, p.29, Col.1), stores are closing and businesses suffering, even in predominantly gay areas such as Castro Street, San Francisco. Although *The New York Times* generalizes to “businesses...run by homosexuals”, reporter Isadore Barmash quotes only gay male store owners and fails to mention if lesbian owned businesses experienced the same decline. And, rather than completing a comprehensive study, *The New York Times* finishes its article with the section “problems for homosexuals” where the “cause” of this decline in business is attributed to closeted gays - “too many gay-owned businesses hide the fact that they are” - and the expression by gay business owners that they are ignored and “look[ed] down upon” by “big corporations” (*New York Times*, 12/29/84, Sect.1, p.29, Col.1), as opposed to printing the main, underlying “cause” - homophobia.

Given the uncertainty surrounding homosexuality during the 1980s, one would not expect corporate America to take a marked interest in this social group at this point in time. However, it is exactly during this decade that *The New York Times* begins to take notice of, and comment upon, the foretold wealth of homosexuals as a market sector. The first co-appearance of the words “homosexual” and “affluence” are divulged in November, 1984 in an advertising report entitled “Company to Broaden Homosexual Campaign”. Here, in this brief article, we are told of the financial service firm Christopher Street Financial, founded in 1981 to serve “that segment of the population”. Not until November, 18, 1984, did the firm decide to advertise in a mainstream publication, *The New York Times*, because, according to its President, Robert Casaletto, “there are many affluent homosexuals who do not read homosexual media” (*New York*

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consequently she was dismissed (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p.1, Col.1).

*Times*, Sect. D, p. 12, Col. 4). Next, the reporter, Philip Dougherty questions: “Why is it necessary? Isn’t money sexless?”, to which Mr. Casaletto retorts “financial needs are closely tied to lifestyle and homosexuals need sympathetic advisers they can deal with and not be embarrassed” (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p. 12, Col. 4). With this, the article ends and we are left with the impression - oh, of course homosexuals need “sympathetic advisers”. While this is true, what remains intact is the fact that one’s homosexuality is something to be embarrassed about, and is an issue one should not have to discuss with non-homosexuals. In questioning “why is it necessary?” *The New York Times* discloses its own lack of sympathy regarding financial institutions’ conservative climate, an experience to which Mr. Casaletto’s statement noting the less-than-sympathetic climate and treatment sexually-diverse minorities experience from financial institutions alludes. Moreover, the overall implication gained from this article is that a satisfactory solution to homophobia is to simply create gay organizations to deal with gay clientele rather than revamp hetero-centric, ones.

Throughout the Eighties, “homosexuals”, as identified by *The New York Times* database, appear to be gender-less. Looking only at the sheer number of *total* articles written about gays and lesbians in the business section between 1980-1989, one is unable to detect any major gender difference. Numerically, there are thirty articles classified as “lesbian” and thirty-nine classified as “gay”. With even a precursory reading of these articles, however, the gender difference in article content often is quickly revealed. Frequently, the content refutes its gender label used for classification and/or declares the inability of discerning any specific gender label, usually due to the common usage of the gender-ambiguous term “homosexual”. For example, the article “When a Celebrity Becomes Notorious” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.1, Col.1, 5/18/81<sup>56</sup>) appears when one searches with the keyword “gay”. However, in print only the word “homosexual” is written and in content this article is actually about the lesbian tennis player “Mrs. King”. On the other hand, we find gender-ambiguity to be a frequent, although far from exclusive, characterization of the usage of “homosexual” in *The New York Times* during this decade. Most commonly the term is used to describe a group of persons for whom

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<sup>56</sup> Also see “Advertising: Mrs. King No Longer at Squibb, *The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.16, Col. 3, 5/6/81).

we never learn more detail about, other than their same-sex sexual preference: “a homosexual bookstore in Manhattan” (*The New York Times*, Sect.3, p.15, Col.1, 1/6/85). The problems the historical reporting about GLBTQs poses are more than lexiconic. GLBTQs lack of inclusion by the media in business issues translates into invisibility. Historically, had sexuality in America been a non-issue, this would not be worthy of notation. Yet, as the history of non-heterosexuality in the United States reveals, this is not the case. Sexuality in the 1980s did matter and heterosexuality was accompanied by a plethora of privileges and rights. As *The New York Times* began to write more business articles referring to GLBTQs, primarily during the 1990s, the media’s representation, and ultimately shifting socio-historical image, of GLBTQs takes shape. What lies ahead in this dissertation is articulating what images this American institution created.

Turning our focus to advertising in particular, we may note that for the entire decade of the Eighties, a total of approximately twenty-five articles appeared in *The New York Times* business section that made reference to homosexuality and advertising. Not one of these advertising articles mentions the terms “bisexual”, “transsexual”, “transgender” or “queer”, illustrating the contemporary nature of these terms as descriptors of sexuality. Other interesting trends in verbiage have also become apparent. At the onset of this research project, I anticipated finding a large number of “homosexual” articles during the earlier publication years, leading to a tapering off and replacement with the growing popularity of the term “gay”. Although I have found some evidence of this phenomenon, given the time span of articles analyzed, 1980-2000, this proved to be much less of a concern than originally expected. It is only during the years 1980-1984 that one finds the term “homosexual” used in print to the exclusion of all others. There exist a total of twelve articles written about any non-heterosexuals and advertising in *The New York Times*’ business section between 1980-1984, of which only four are not located when using the search terms “gay” and “lesbian”. By 1985, the terms “gay” and “homosexual” are used nearly interchangeably and by 1986, the reverse happens: it becomes impossible to locate all articles about gays and lesbians only using the search term “homosexual”. In 1986, searching the business section yields seven “homosexual” articles and 8 “gay” ones. Every year thereafter, the gap grows wider. For instance, in 1994 we find forty-nine “gay” articles but just ten “homosexual” ones. By

the year 2000, use of the term “homosexual” seems to have nearly completely fallen out of favor. Listed in the database are sixty articles about gays and a mere six about homosexuals.

#### **4.1.b. The Mid-Eighties**

The Mid-Eighties is a period where we see homosexuals no longer being identified as a group to avoid. To the contrary, this section describes how homosexuals became the newest “niche market”. Despite the few articles depicting homosexuals in a more positive light than would have been possible just a few years earlier, as a social group, we find they remain largely unpopular and unaccepted. Further, even those businesses that show some reception and interest in gays as consumers display a lack of sensitivity and social responsibility. Indeed, advertisers are still careful to avoid controversial liaisons in the field of corporate endorsements and those advertisers who do take the risk of advertising in television programs with a gay content risk organized backlash from conservative groups. Worthy of notice, however, is *The New York Times* emerging trivialization of homophobic issues raised by conservative groups, which is expressed via lack of column-space dedication. Finally, in this section I discuss the dearth of lesbian articles and the complete lack of articles containing references to other non-heterosexual groups represented in this dissertation – i.e. bisexuals, transsexuals, transgendereds and queers.

During the mid-1980s, representation of gays and lesbians in conjunction with advertising ranged from fear of stigmatization with being associated with a deviant lifestyle to a more positive formation of homosexuality as a “special niche” status. The latter is conveyed in an advertising article that details the results of Planned Communications Services’ third survey “to discover what the stations desire” for their public service announcements (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.25, Col.3, 5/1/85). According to the article, noticeable changes included the first-time appearance of “homosexuals, the college educated and yuppies” (ib) among their list of social groups and foci.

Said to be used for advertising targeting, the results of their survey are said to “indicate that public attitudes have a strong influence on their [the 665 television public service directors surveyed] thinking”. Having homosexuals listed documents, albeit in a very minor way, a change in public, and hence advertising, perception.

In 1985, a business news article discussing men’s fashion magazines (*GQ-Gentlemen’s Quarterly, M and MGF-Men’s Guide to Fashion*), discloses that some in this media form feel compelled to justify to non-apparel advertisers that their magazines discuss “more than just fashion”. Albeit subtly, this example evidences the pressure men’s fashion magazines feel to persuade mainstream advertisers that heterosexuals also read such publications. Moreover, the market for men’s fashion magazines appears to be one business arena where heterosexuality is not automatically presupposed. Reporting on the effort of advertisers to break the stereotype that for men to be fashion-consciousness means they must be gay, and to further develop the notion of niche marketing sectors, reporter Richard Stevenson writes:

Style-oriented publications, particularly *GQ*, have also had to deal with a perception that their primary readership was fashion-conscious homosexual men, say advertising executives. Steven T. Florio, publisher of *GQ*, said the magazine is trying to appeal to a broad range of male readers, without excluding anyone. “There are probably some guys who read the magazine who are married with six kids, and there are probably some who are gay,” Mr. Florio said (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.1, Col.3, 4/8/85).

Although the article does not disparage homosexuality, per se, and, for its era it does include gays as a legitimate sector of its audience, the message still conveyed is that *GQ*’s association with homosexuality was a negative attribute for advertisers. Clearly, to only be associated with gay men would be detrimental to *GQ*. From a broader perspective, since only three business news articles discussing advertising were published in 1985 in *The New York Times*, this review documents that in this media form, GLBTQs at this time were quite marginalized, minoritized and made invisible

However, even with this newfound representation within business news, homosexuals remain markedly invisible. According to *The New York Times*, homosexuality could be used as one of several “ploys that grab bookbuyers”, given that “frequent travelers and homosexual men and women now have about a dozen bookstores catering to their literary interests” (1/6/85, Sect. 3, p. 15, Col. 1). In this article, one of three that were published in 1985 discussing homosexuality and marketing/advertising, the concept of niche markets, in which homosexuals are classified, is developed. However, “interest” in gays and lesbians, even in articles where the “market” is homosexuals, is severely lacking. As some passages reveal, instances that provide opportunities to discuss a non-heterosexual market, during the mid-1980s, are routinely passed over and attention is diverted elsewhere. To me, a perfect example is an article written in January, 1986 discussing the growth of the condom market. The growth in sales for the condom market is specifically noted in Manhattan and the West Coast to be due to large “homosexual and single communities” in those areas. However, *The New York Times* fails to include any discussion of homosexuals in its article. Instead, it chooses to focus the article’s entire content on “American women”, noting how “the growing evidence that the AIDS virus can be transmitted during heterosexual sex is bringing even more women to the condom market” (Sect. 3, p. 10, Col. 3). Not until the end of a very long article do “homosexuals” appear again in a fleeting, passing statement - and even then, they are cited only as a reference group during a discussion of why heterosexual men feel it is unnecessary for them to use condoms.

*The New York Times’* lack of articles about GLBTQ advertising issues continued throughout the remaining years of the mid-Eighties. For the year 1987, not one GLBTQ advertising article was written, no GLBTQ terms were printed in advertising articles and no GLBTQ issues were reported. From January, 1986 to December, 1988 *The New York Times* printed just two articles it classifies as discussing lesbians and advertising. Unfortunately both of these articles fail to mention the term “lesbian” and do not discuss issues unique to women. Still, we must remember that “homosexuals” only appeared in print in 1980 and throughout the Eighties *The New York Times* reported on this group largely as a unified whole.

Continuing with our analysis of news articles, another article written in 1986 mentioning gays is about election software and discusses the ability of computers to target specific audiences:

Through computers a campaign can create a database of the electorate - a list of all registered voters, complete with voting habits, interests, contributions to the campaign or demographic characteristics. Using that database, campaigns can aim a political message at any group of voters, playing to that group's interests (*The New York Times*, Sect.3, p.19, Col.1).

Given this description, it is worthy of noting that the only “group of voters” reporter Kurt Eichenwald chooses to use as an example in his article is homosexuals. In reporting how consultants Below, Tobe and Associates who utilize this software, Eichenwald writes:

For between \$150 and \$225 per thousand, Tobe will take letters aimed at specific voter groups, pick out the corresponding names and addresses from its demographic lists, and mail the letters. For example, Tobe has a “gay algorithm,” which is used to locate people who are likely to be homosexual, and thus interested in a politician's stance on gay rights (*The New York Times*, Sect.3, p.19, Col.1).

In the past few pages I have tried to raise awareness about the lack of articles mentioning homosexuals as one social group among others in *New York Times* business news during the Eighties. To me, this is one indication of the unpopularity of homosexuality, as a topic of mainstream interest, during this time. Hence, upon encountering this software article, I was taken aback. To some readers, the “election software” article may not even warrant a second glance. However, to pass over this seemingly innocuous news article would be most unfortunate, for it possesses revolutionary potential. Read in the context of the general exclusion of homosexuals as anything other than a stigmatic label, this article establishes a precedent for the normative description of homosexuality in future business news articles. It is at this historical moment that *The New York Times* shifted to a

position whereby it portrays gays as being worthy of inclusion in its business section. In writing of a “gay algorithm”, the inclusion of gays transcended individual advertisement campaigns and, in my opinion, is one marker of the rise of gays as a social group worthy of political dollars and focus, as well as news media coverage. Between the introduction of “homosexuals” in business articles in 1981, and then the “official” policy adoption of allowing the use of the word “gay” in 1986, *The New York Times* actively helped contribute towards the emergence of gays as a social group worthy of news media coverage in advertising issues. This does not mean that *The New York Times*’ representation of GLBTQs is “accurate”, or even reflexive of reality. Nor, does it mean that the paper is necessarily stereotypical. Rather, what this content analysis does reveal is that for some unidentified reason, the perception and understanding of homosexuality by *The New York Times* about, gays, and particularly homosexual men, changed in such a way as to make business news issues about this group newsworthy.

No articles were published by *The New York Times* about lesbians and advertising for the year 1987. Between the years 1986-1988, the word “lesbian” is not used when discussing business news articles of any sort. The term “homosexual” is used to generalize to the gay population, and by reviewing the content of the articles, it is relatively clear that homosexual women are invisible to news reporters during this period.

Despite lesbian invisibility in news articles, Lexis/Nexus categorizes two articles as “lesbian” during 1986-1988. The second of these articles was printed on July 18, 1988 and is titled: “The Media Business: Advertising: AIDS Test Center Drive Set to Begin”. I shall now discuss this article in considerable detail.

In “The Media Business”, Philip Dougherty writes about Safecom, a private AIDS-detection center whose target audience and marketing plan “will include neither homosexuals nor intravenous drug users but heterosexuals about to begin a relationship and couples who have decided to have a baby<sup>57</sup>” (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.9, Col. 3).

Specifically, the article states:

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<sup>57</sup> As a lesbian, I view this company as a conservative backlash working to ensure that non-drug using heterosexuals can safely reproduce. However, because the focus of my research is on *The New York Times*, and not the actions other social actors, Safecom’s work remains a non-issue.

A former Long Island high school principal is prepared to spend \$600,000 in New York in the fourth quarter alone to promote a privately owned AIDS-detection center primarily for people outside the high-risk groups. The man is Joseph P. O’Connell, his company is the Safe Company Testing Service, or Safecom, and the agency is Sturtevant and Hildt. The target audience of the marketing push will include neither homosexuals nor intravenous drug users but heterosexuals about to begin a relationship and couples who have decided to have a baby (Sect. D, p.9, Col. 3).

My critique of *The New York Times*’ coverage of this story lies in their publishing an article about Safecom’s ad while simultaneously providing no critique of the advertising agency, Sturtevant and Hildt’s, or Safecom’s lack of sensitivity towards homosexuals. Given that the ad mentions nothing about infertile women or heterosexual couples (it’s true audience), homosexuals are likely to read the ad and, thinking it is targeting them, attempt to call. Despite this reality, *The New York Times* does not raise the issue of corporate liability to the high-risk groups who may respond to the ad. Furthermore, by making “homosexuals” a category exclusive from “couples who have decided to have a baby”, the paper is contributing towards the company’s exclusion<sup>58</sup> of gay parents and families.

One of the ads proposed to run “in newspapers, on radio and in transit” reads:

You don’t have AIDS. To prove it, call 1-800-SAFECOM. Confidentiality is total. You’ll get a number, and an appointment. Come in. Talk to a counselor. And find out for sure. It’s that simple (Sect. D, p.9, Col. 3).

When I read this article, I notice that *The New York Times* side steps the potentially politically charged nature of Safecom’s actions by strategically inserting

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<sup>58</sup> Although beyond the scope of this analysis, the strength of this article for illuminating GLBTQ representation and visibility also lies in its capacity to reveal declining corporate profit as a direct result of the fear of AIDS. This is not to say the fears are, or are not, justified. However, what it does indicate is how “homosexual” issues impacted business during the late Eighties and forced companies to make different kinds of “targeting” decisions than in previous years. It also reflects the lack of social responsibility and sensitivity enacted by business, towards homosexuals, at this time.

selective adjectives. For example, the business is introduced by the statement saying how the detection center is “primarily” for those outside the high-risk group. As one continues to read the business news article, one notices that Safecom never had any intention of dealing with “traditional” AIDS-infected populations. Mr. O’Connell’s corporate holdings include the Ovex Fertility Corporation, whose aim is to help infertile couples. AIDS, we may infer, ruined his business:

Mr. O’Connell, 53 years old, was a counselor and then principal of Bethpage High School until 1980. He got out of the education business and into health care when he established the Ovex Fertility Corporation, which later went public. The company has six physician-staffed offices that gives couples help, for a fee of \$2,000 to \$20,000, with infertility problems...900 couples a month visited the offices and many of the women were artificially inseminated with donors’ sperm. However, the AIDS crisis has drastically cut into the number of people willing to undergo insemination...Sturtevant and Hildt [the advertising company]...has added Safecom to the roster thanks to the good offices of a creative guy at another agency who plays tennis with Joe O’Connell and put in the good word (Sect. D, p.9, Col. 3).

Yet, with framing and word choice, *The New York Times* deflects criticism away from Safecom and inhibits the casual reader from labeling Safecom as anti-gay or anti-any group. Yet, as the article continues, we are clearly told that the “target audience” will be “neither homosexuals nor intravenous drug users but heterosexuals about to begin a relationship and couples who have decided to have a baby”. This is all fine – Safecom has every right to target whomever it chooses – it is a private company with private objectives. Yet, as I articulated above, it is not acceptable for the *Times* to propound the stereotypical belief that only heterosexual couples have babies. Clearly, I am inserting a value judgment here. On the other hand, one may distance oneself from the issue and draw a more general conclusion, such as: During the late Eighties, the media contributed towards the invisibility of gay parents by disassociating parenthood with homosexuality.

Finally, it is the media's, or more precisely Dougherty's, matter-of-fact reporting that contributes to the seemingly objectivity of business news. Yet, when deconstructing this article, we can find several instances where value judgments are reflected by the author's insider-knowledge and opinion. For instance, this article ends with the following commentary:

And it [Sturtevant and Hildt] has added Safecom to the roster thanks to the good offices of a creative guy at another agency who plays tennis with Joe O'Connell and put in the good word (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.9. Col.3).

To me, it is newsworthy that *The New York Times* does not devote a single line to investigating what Safecom tells those social groups who don't fit the company's target profile when they call, yet, deems it worthwhile to report that Safecom was added to Sturtevant and Hildt's roster "thanks to the good offices of a creative guy at another agency who plays tennis with Joe O'Connell and put in the good word". To me, Dougherty's personal approval of Safecom being added to Sturtevant and Hildt's campaign clearly illustrates non-objectivity in news reporting. Moreover, this article contributes to the list of articles that only use the term homosexual, discuss gay male-issues (especially, when this article could have framed this in part as a lesbian issue, had *The New York Times* considered that lesbians may be interested in seeking fertilization and wary of AIDS), and then generalize the term "homosexual" to include lesbians for purposes of search functions and identification.

Between 1986-1988 only five articles were written about gay men and advertising in *The New York Times'* business section. Furthermore, only three of the five articles are different from those already discussed. The business of book publishing, the Gay Olympics and athletic endorsements form the topics of interest about gay men and advertising to *The New York Times* during this timeframe.

In the earlier article from this group, we learn about the business dilemmas facing small book publishing companies, and the tenacity with which some small publishers cling to their books, including those that do not sell well. In this article, homosexuality is used to define a category of books, or, market segment. This article is a useful tool for evidencing social change. As it demonstrates, towards the end of the Eighties, a small

publisher was able to profit when it took a chance on books that were unpopular in the industry because of their gay content. Such a risk would not have been newsworthy or profitable just a few years earlier:

[after discussing the sales potential of reprinting books]... While such resales can bring much-needed capital to the publisher and a windfall to the author, Mr. Wood urges his colleagues to avoid them. “The mass marketers only want the very strong sellers from small publishers,” he said. “Once you get a very strong one you should hang on. Don’t sell any good books.” Small-press proprietors insist that only by staying small can they be on the cutting edge of issues. The Crossing Press, in Trumansburg, NY, for example, began with poetry but moved into vegetarian cookbooks, feminist fiction and books for the homosexual community. “We published ‘Male Muse,’ the first contemporary gay poetry anthology,” said John Gill, 61, co-founder and editor with his wife Elaine Goldman Gill. “Nobody would publish it, but it sold about 20,000 copies and is still in print” (*The New York Times*, 3/23/86, Sect.3, p.4, Col.3).

In grouping “vegetarian cookbooks, feminist fiction and books for the homosexual community” (*The New York Times*, Sect.3, p.4, Col.3), we may conclude, at least in this representation, that vegetarian cookbooks, feminist fiction and homosexual books qualified as “cutting-edge issues” during the mid-Eighties. However, if we take notice of the statement how “nobody else would publish” *Male Muse*, we see that this is yet another example of how homosexuality was not a topic openly welcomed and pursued during the Eighties. This, as the *Times* reports, was a chance the Gills took and happened to profit from. *The New York Times* does not comment on this statement, nor report anymore information. Furthermore, even with the success of this book being reported, the paper does not go on to publish any other articles about gay products or the gay market during this year. “Big Books from Small Houses”, along with “What’s New in Election Software”, a.k.a. the “gay algorithm” article, are the only two “advertising” topics *The New York Times* reports on for all GLBTQs in 1986. However important or useful, they are ill equipped to provide even superficial coverage of GLBTQs as a social

group with business needs or issues in comparison with the foci of the heterosexual advertising and marketing sectors.

Homosexuality as a concern for corporate endorsement is an issue that surfaces and is vocalized by *The New York Times* in 1988:

The advertising agency executive, Marty Blackman recalled, was frantic. He had just heard a rumor that a former football star serving as a spokesman for his client, a major soft drink company, was gay. He wanted Mr. Blackman to find out whether it was true...The executive called him because of his reputation as an impeccably accurate source. Mr. Blackman checked out the rumor and, within a few days, was able to tell the executive that it was untrue.

Interviewing Gina Gaylord, retired vice president of advertising agency McCann-Erickson, reporter David Tuller quotes, “He can tell you who will be terrific and who will be a problem” (*The New York Times*, Sect.3, p.4, Col. 1, 1/31/88). With no other information presented, the message transmitted is that if the football player had been gay, this would most definitely have been “a problem”.

Mr. Blackman is a native New Yorker, Columbia Law school graduate and former sports agent who specializes in organizing corporate sports’ promotions. Mr. Blackman is considered to be one of the best in his business and has worked with many of the top American corporations, including Exxon and Miller Lite and sporting associations including the Yankees, Mets and Oakland Raiders. Given his reputation and prominence, I find it disheartening to read that he considered the rumor of a football star being gay a valid reason for advertisers to be frantic. It is disappointing to see *The New York Times* disperse this line of thought and endorses Mr. Blackman by reporting how “corporate executives increasingly call on Mr. Blackman and others like him not only to suggest suitable athletes but to reassure themselves that those selected have no hidden bombshells” (Sect.3, p.4, Col. 1, 1/31/88), such as being “homosexual”. The only other “bombshells” described in this article are the death of basketball player Len Bias from a cocaine overdose and Mets’ pitcher, Dwight Gooden’s entrance into a drug rehabilitation center. Situating homosexuality as a social problem akin to substance abuse presents a

highly negative image of GLBTQs. Sadly, this is what this article repeatedly does. Homosexuality is equated with a “horror story” that is “terrific” for advertising business:

“The awful part is that because horror stories shock the business and advertising communities, they are terrific for my business”, Mr. Blackman said.

Ultimately, homosexuality is used as a criteria to justify termination of employment:

(Speaking to Mr. Blackman about his power to make or break athlete’s reputations, Mr. Blackman puts the ball in the company’s court:) “It’s up to the company to make the final judgment”. He cited the soft drink company that had heard a rumor about the sexual preference of its spokesman as an example. Executives “were going bananas because they were considering renewing his contract”, Mr. Blackman said. “With AIDS, corporations are even more paranoid about homosexuality than they used to be” (*The New York Times*, Sect.3, p.4, Col. 1, 1/31/88).

Once again, this highlights the impact of AIDS on business decisions and corporate perception of homosexuality. Furthermore, it demonstrates the willingness of the media to present corporate America’s homophobic opinion of homosexuality as a normative, justified response.

As the decade drew to a close in 1989, *The New York Times* published a total of eleven business news articles about “gays,” none of which discussed advertising issues. There are a total of three business articles discussing “homosexuals<sup>59</sup>” and no articles covering bisexual, transsexual or transgendered business news. Hence, I infer this paucity of news coverage to be indicative of a social climate whereby American GLBTQs were largely invisible and unrepresented at the close of the Eighties in *The New York Times*. Whether this reveals intolerance, disinterest or underreporting I am unable to

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<sup>59</sup> Although Lexis/Nexus lists five “homosexual” articles for 1989, only three of them differ from the articles already counted as gay/lesbian.

determine. But, what is clear is that, at the end of the decade, the world of advertising and business news reporting catered disproportionately to heterosexual issues.

The lack of attention to GLBTQ issues by *The New York Times* was particularly revealing given the events of 1989. However, with increased visibility, came strong waves of conservative backlash. I interpret *The New York Times* lack of news coverage about such issues as hesitance to become too involved in such debates. For example, although the year of 1989 witnessed boycotts and the withdrawal of advertising from several programs with “anti-Christian” content, including *Heartbeat* with its lesbian nurse character, and *Thirtysomething*, which was the first show to air a gay male lovemaking scene, these events garnered little business-related press coverage. *The New York Times* dedicated merely two articles detailing the advertising ramifications resulting from the entire brouhaha. Thus, I conclude that the paper deemed these issues to be rather unimportant, obviously unworthy of taking up much column space. Although knowing *why* the paper chose to take its silent approach is not possible in this analysis, applying the critical theory discussed earlier, I would posit power networks and fear of lost profit to be among some of the paper’s motivating factors.

In one of the two reports, titled “Ads Reportedly Lost Because of Gay Scene”, Geraldine Fabikant opens her article saying:

Several advertisers, apparently concerned about a scene depicting a homosexual couple on ABC’s prime time show “Thirtysomething,” pulled advertising from last Tuesday’s episode, costing the network about \$1.5 million in lost sales, a source familiar with ABC said yesterday. He declined to identify the advertisers.

Although the series’ main characters are two married upscale couples in their 30’s, along with their friends and relatives, there is also a minor character named Russell, an artist who has discussed his homosexuality. The prime drama in last week’s show involved Melissa, one of the main characters, who was going out with a younger man. In a subplot, Russell was introduced to another young homosexual. They become involved and were seen in bed together after lovemaking (*The New York Times*, Sect.D., p.21, Col.1, 11/14/89).

Neither the homosexual scene, which was the first homosexual bed scene on prime time television, nor advertisers' response to it, received moral judgment by the newspaper. From the quote above, we learn that Russell was a "minor" character and the scene was a "minor subplot". The executive producer, Marshall Herskovitz, is quoted saying, "We will certainly deal with Russell again...No one has indicated to me there would be a problem with such a scene in the future" (*The New York Times*, Sect.D., p.21, Col.1, 11/14/89).

From this statement, reporter Geraldine Fabrikant goes on to write:

Various groups and individuals have campaigned against what they view as objectionable sex and violence on television. The most visible was Tery Rakolta, a mother in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, who led a campaign against "Married...With Children," which is still doing well on Fox Television. The Rev. Donald Wildmon, who heads an organization called the American Family Association, based in Tupelo, Mississippi, has also attempted to lead a boycott against the Clorox Company and the Mennen Company, both of which advertise on "Miami Vice" and "Tour of Duty."

With last Tuesday's cancellations, the advertisers apparently made their own choices and did not respond to outside pressures. "This appears to be a case of companies reacting to protect their interest," said one agency executive who declined to be named. "They are fearful of losing their market" (*The New York Times*, Sect.D., p.21, Col.1, 11/14/89).

From the quote above, I understand the *Times* to be indicating that there was no prior "outside pressure" exerted on advertisers to cancel their advertisement. We are told that advertisers "made their own choices". Thus, I conclude that advertisers pulled their ads out of "fear(ful) of losing their market" without having any immediate evidence upon which to base their decision. In this case, *The New York Times* attributes advertisers'

negative response to business sensibility. “Fear of losing one’s market” is reported as ample justification for their action. As stated, advertisers reacted on the presupposition that viewers would be homophobic, thereby reinforcing the norm of heterosexuality and denying the American public agency to decide for themselves whether the episode was/was not appropriate, and whether they would hold advertisers accountable for the shows’ content.

As the article proceeds, we are told that:

It is understood that the network received about 400 phone calls after the show, of which about 90 percent were negative. A network spokesman said they were not calling in behalf of a particular organization. He added that the network also received 50 letters, all favorable.

Advertisers generally either prescreen shows or they or their agencies are informed of the subject matter by the networks so they can decide whether shows meet their criteria. Because the homosexual incident in “Thirtysomething” was not a main theme of the program, it may have escaped advance attention (*The New York Times*, Sect.D., p.21, Col.1, 11/14/89).

It remains unclear as to the precise nature of the phone calls, although given that Fabrikant inserted a discussion of “various groups and individuals” who “have campaigned against what they view as objectionable sex”, the reporter may have anticipated an organized phone-a-thon of some sort. Still, any such insight remains speculative. What is worthwhile to note is how this episode, once again, evidences the widespread disapproval of homosexuality in American culture as recently as 1989. The response of the public has been recorded by the media as fifty “favorable” letters and four hundred phone calls, “of which about 90 percent were negative” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D., p.21, Col.1, 11/14/89). As presented, this confirms a bias towards intolerance of homosexuality, via the actions of the public and the advertisers. Writing that “because the homosexual incident in “Thirtysomething” was not a main theme of the program, it may have escaped advance attention”, implies, to me, that had advertisers gained prior

knowledge of the homosexual<sup>60</sup> scene, they most surely would have pulled more ads. Finally, although *The New York Times* does not convey a homophobic stance for itself in this article, and does put forth a noticeable effort to be non-partisan, it does contribute towards the trend of lesbian invisibility.

Overall, in speaking broadly about the Eighties as a decade, we may conclude the following: Despite the period’s prevailing sentiment of ambiguity, marked with instances of both acceptance and homophobia, mainstream visibility for gays and lesbians reached unprecedented levels in the media.

#### **4.1.c The Growth of “Gay Marketing”: Advertisers Take the Plunge and the Heat**

By the Nineties, we begin to see *The New York Times* reporting on GLBTQs as a legitimate social group with substantial power to consume products and services. It is in this section where I will discuss how many of the larger corporations, with the means to mount expensive advertising campaigns, began to target the homosexual market, albeit, in an indirect fashion. I shall detail how even though GLBTQs received positive attention in *The New York Times*’ business news as potential consumers, the newspaper remained silent on issues were negative stereotypes and opinions pertaining to this group were reinforced. Next, I will take the opportunity to explore the way *The New York Times* reported problems encountered by gay organizations seeking support for obviously gay events, such as the Gay and Lesbian Business Expo and the Gay Games. In my analysis I shall argue that support has largely been driven by the need to find new consumers in a period of economic downturn rather than due to support for the “gay lifestyle”.

With the arrival of the new decade, we begin to see a shift in focus on homosexuality from a debased status to a characterization as a social group that has the potential for consuming selected products. However, in the beginning of the decade, there still remains a dearth of articles published by *The New York Times* on GLBTQs in

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<sup>60</sup> Despite that the article clearly discusses “a minor character named Russel, an artist who has discussed his homosexuality” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D., p.21, Col.1, 11/14/89), it is categorized under the search term “lesbian”.

its business section. Across all categories of persons and issues, there are fewer than fifteen articles in 1990.

Although media coverage remains slim - with just three articles in 1990 discussing gays and lesbians and advertising - it is in this year that we find the first “positive” framing of homosexuals as a social group. In contrast, although companies were reported to have first become aware of the “homosexual market” during the Eighties, much negativity remained associated with “that segment of the population” (*The New York Times*, 11/18/84, Sect.D, p.12, Col.4) whose members were routinely identified as a “problem” (*The New York Times*, 1/31/88, Sect.3, p.4, Col.1) and whose presence made companies fearful “of losing their market” (*The New York Times*, 11/14/89, Sect.D, p.21, Col.1).

Up until 1990, the image presented by *The New York Times* of mainstream American companies’ approach to the gay and lesbian audience is predominantly one of hesitancy, with marked instances of social disapproval and the rarer instance of intrigue. Although the overall mood tends to be somber and fearful, most notably in a reaction to the AIDS crisis, the new decade does usher in one positively framed business article about gays. Written on April 13, 1990, we are told in this article that some companies welcome “gay” publicity. However, the problem that remains, as I shall argue, is the means by which gay publicity is achieved.

Opening with a description of “controversial advertising campaigns”, the Johnnie Walker ads are quickly categorized as such by reporter Randall Rothenberg. In his own words:

Controversial advertising campaigns are typically the province of young, upstart agencies trying to distinguish themselves in the cluttered precincts of Madison Avenue. The brash “...and she drinks Johnnie Walker” campaign, whose slice-of-life dialogues have managed to outrage feminists and intrigue gay organizations, may be the older folks revenge (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.4, Col.3, 4/13/90).

As *The New York Times* reports, it was the young upstart advertising agency, Smith and Greenland, hired by Johnnie Walker, that capitalized on “controversial” advertising campaigns in an effort to “distinguish themselves” from the crowd. However, although

*The New York Times* frames this approach as a step forward, as “novel” and “unique”, Smith and Greenland’s advertising campaign opened the door to what I would call an insidious, albeit increasingly popular, approach to reaching the gay market. Such ads are crafted in the most nuanced manner possible in order to avoid controversy and disapproval from heterosexuals while simultaneously luring the gay dollar. Their now infamous Johnnie Walker ad, for instance, is a prime example. The ad shows “two sweaty young men staring at each other after a racquetball game. ‘He works as hard as he plays,’ reads the caption. ‘And he drinks Johnnie Walker’” (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p. 4, Col. 3, 4/13/90).

The success of this new breed of advertising lies in advertisements’ potential to reach the gay market without having to clearly display images of homosexual behavior. Such ads tend to focus on an unseen romantic encounter with an invisible third party. For example, in another advertisement, a “talking billboard” showed a telephone number and a male model dressed in a bathing suit. When the phone number is called, “‘Tom’ talked about going to the theater and to Fire Island, a Long Island beach that is popular among homosexuals” (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p. 4, Col. 3, 4/13/90). The problem with such ads is that their vagueness enables corporate America to woo the supposedly lucrative gay male market, and excites gay groups that their lives are receiving national validity and exposure while corporations simultaneously deny any such affiliation with homosexuality and/or contributing towards its social awareness. Such ads provide a convenient mechanism to escape possible homophobic disapproval. When the *New York Times* asked Mr. Greenland of Smith/Greenland if he was aiming at the gay market, he conveniently responded:

“We walk through life with a certain innocence. When that ad came through me, I loved it. It did not occur to me it would get the reaction it got. We did not target gay people, but we are delighted they could relate to it (Sect.D, p. 4, Col. 3, 4/13/90).

The reporter, Randall Rothenberg, perhaps questioning the naivety of Mr. Greenland’s response himself, describes Greenland’s intonation as “coy”. And, further questions Greenland’s proclaimed innocence when he writes:

Given that all the executions focused on romantic relationships with an unseen third party, gay groups and advertising executives naturally considered this reference to an absent “he” a bold example of aiming at the gay market (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p. 4, Col. 3, 4/13/90).

If Rothenberg’s deduction is accurate, that it was “natural” for gay groups and advertisers to consider this campaign a venture into gay targeting, then I feel justified in criticizing the company’s “coyness” about targeting the gay market and applaud *The New York Times* for directing readers’ attention to the highly debatable “intent” of the advertisement. Historically, this is the first *New York Times* article of its kind to call corporate America on its lack of accountability for introducing gay visibility in its business. This advertisement possessed the potential for illustrating social change in gay visibility, yet the lack of confirmation by Mr. Greenland negates this “progress”:

Trying something different was the agency’s charge from its client when it was asked to reformulate the campaign for Johnnie Walker. J. Penn Kavanagh, the chairman and president of the Schieffelin and Somerset Company, Johnnie Walker’s importer, told the agency he wanted a campaign that would be talked about.

It was. The first execution depicted two women in tight bikinis running along a beach. “He loves my mind,” one says, somewhat incongruously. “And he drinks Johnnie Walker.” It was assailed by *Adweek*’s critic, Barbara Lippert, who called the focus on the women’s backsides “most gratuitous” and a “perverse joke”.

Equally controversial was a subsequent ad showing two sweaty young men staring at each other after a racquetball game. “He works as hard as he plays.” Reads the caption. “And he drinks Johnnie Walker.”

Given that all the executions focused on romantic relationships with an unseen third party, gay groups and advertising executives naturally considered this reference to an absent “he” a bold example of aiming at the gay market. A later “talking billboard” also appeared to be aimed at homosexual men. It showed a male model, in a bathing suit, from behind. When called, “Tom” talked about going to the theater and to Fire Island, a Long Island beach that is popular among homosexuals. (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p. 4, Col. 3, 4/13/90)

Regardless of how this ad impacted GLBTQs, clearly, the Johnnie Walker campaign more than achieved its mainstream objective. While not one ad was ever purchased in gay journals<sup>61</sup>, “the ad received a great deal of free publicity in gay-oriented publications” (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p. 4, Col. 3, 4/13/90). Hence, a mainstream corporation was able to reach the gay market and potentially gain monetarily from this advertising campaign while simultaneously avoiding direct association of its products with homosexuality. This type of advertising, I argue, is precisely what renders GLBTQs invisible. Still, while the “progress” gays and lesbians made as a social group, in terms of visibility, is debatable, we may take note of the way *The New York Times* chose to describe this event. Although *The New York Times* seems convinced that the ads target the gay market, in spite of Greenland’s alleged surprise, reporter Rothenberg labels this advertising foray as “bold”. Labeling an ad that addresses the homosexual market “bold”, to me, implies that *The New York Times* is aware that a risk exists for advertisers and companies to receive homophobic responses. Furthermore, because the *Times* wrote that “gay groups and advertising executives” considered this ad to be “a bold example of aiming at the gay market”, I feel confident asserting that some degree of social change in visibility and representation occurred by 1990.

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<sup>61</sup> By 1996, *The New York Times* reports that Johnnie Walker placed an ad “featuring three attractive men” in *The Advocate* and *Out* with the headline: “For the last time, its not a lifestyle. It’s a life.” (Sect.D, p.4, Col.3, 7/26/96). Apparently, Johnnie Walker decided it would be beneficial to more specifically target “homosexuals”, perhaps because any group’s display of desire for scotch is good news for a company selling a product that appeals mainly to older people. Frank Walters, a research director surveying who drinks scotch noted that “Scotch has the worst demographics of any alcoholic beverage type”, that its lack of favor by younger people is “where the problem is, as the older people die off” (ib.).

Unfortunately though, this newfound visibility did not translate into economic gain for GLBTQ publications. The Johnnie Walker campaign succeeded in luring the gay market to its products without purchasing so much as one ad in gay publications or journals<sup>62</sup>: “the ad received a great deal of free publicity in gay-oriented publications” (*New York Times*, Sect. D, p. 4, Col. 3, 4/13/90). Hence, a non-gay, mainstream company succeeded in persuading the gay market to buy its products, yet GLBTQs, as a social group, experienced no monetary gain as a result of this process. Certainly, one can argue that any change from invisibility to “visibility”, (though I would contest that this campaign poignantly demonstrates gay visibility) even if only to themselves (i.e. by seeing oneself represented in an advertisement in a positive manner), is progress. However, advertising campaigns, such as Johnnie Walker, continue to perpetuate the need for gays and lesbians to remain a hidden, insider-only section of the American public. Therefore, by gays and lesbians continuing to be portrayed as invisible to others – i.e. non-GLBTQs – I argue visibility remains unachieved. Still, it is meaningful to note that by the early Nineties, GLBTQs, and heterosexuals attune to this population, *interpret* mainstream advertisements as depicting a gay scene – whether or not this is “true”. That some segment of the population recognizes gays as an existing social group is in itself a major breakthrough, as limited as this “progress” remains in 1991.

Unwillingness to advertise in GLBTQ publications is an advertising issue repeatedly arising in *The New York Times*. For example, under the headline “Advertiser Resistance”, reporter Deirdre Carmody describes the magazine *Outweek*’s “radical” political stances as main reasons for their reluctance.

So far, *Outweek* has attracted only a few mainstream advertisers, like Absolut vodka and Remy Martin Cognac. Most of its advertising comes from local businesses - gay bars, restaurants, doctors and travel agents - and from sexually explicit telephone services (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.10, Col.1, 6/10/91)

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<sup>62</sup> By 1996, *The New York Times* reports that Johnnie Walker placed an ad “featuring three attractive men” in *The Advocate* and *Out* with the headline: “For the last time, its not a lifestyle. It’s a life.” (Sect.D, p.4, Col.3, 7/26/96). Apparently, Johnnie Walker decided it would be beneficial to more specifically target “homosexuals”, perhaps because any group’s display of desire for scotch is good news for a company selling a product that appeals mainly to older people. Frank Walters, a research director surveying who

Quoting *Outweek's* founder, Gabriel Rotello, we learn,

“There has been a certain amount of resistance by advertisers who do not want to be in a journal that reflects the political values that they do not subscribe to” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.10, Col.1, 6/10/91)

Interestingly, the Carmody article failed to refer to a *New York Times'* article written a month earlier. On 5/8/91, *The New York Times* reported that TBWA Advertising Inc. won the 1990 Stephen E. Kelly Award, from the Magazine Publishers of America, for its Absolut vodka ads even with their new endeavor of “buy[ing] space in publications directed at homosexuals” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.8, Col.3, 5/8/91). This shows that advertising in gay magazines was not at all detrimental to TBWA's success. However, by *The New York Times* including the qualifier that they won “even though they targeted homosexual magazines” implies that the homosexual market remains tainted. In covering this reward, *The New York Times* notes how the Absolute ads make “Carillon (the importer of Absolute) one of the few mainstream marketers addressing those consumers through their own media” (Sect.D, p.8, Col.3, 5/8/91) while concurrently describing how it was Absolut's unique advertising campaign that resulted in Absolute becoming the number one imported vodka.

On a different note, aside from mentioning advertising giant Young and Rubican's role in helping to position “a forthcoming detective satire starring the comedian Andrew Dice Clay, who in his stage act attacks women, members of minorities and homosexuals”, the only other issue covered by *The New York Times* pertaining to homosexuality and advertising in 1990 focused on AIDS. In the coverage of Burroughs Wellcome's controversial national public service campaign spurring people to get tested for AIDS, *The New York Times* refreshingly focuses rather proportionately and dispassionately on both the drug company and gay rights' positions on AZT (*New York Times*, 11/15/90). In another advertising and AIDS article, this time in 1991 about the advertising industry's “Ads Against AIDS”, the “first national educational campaign to

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drinks scotch noted that “Scotch has the worst demographics of any alcoholic beverage type”, that its lack of favor by younger people is “where the problem is, as the older people die off” (ib.).

fight the disease” (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.5, Col.1, 7/26/91), the article’s tone, and reported public response, are also positive. Exceptions, such as printed in an *Advertising Age* column by Crain Communications chairman Sid Bernstein, do continue to reveal animosity that *The New York Times* throws in without comment:

The column attacked Ads Against AIDS for, among other things, “its implication that AIDS is a major problem in the advertising business,” adding, “Despite its gradual increase, AIDS is still heavily concentrated among the homosexual population and certain entertainment and artistic circles in contrast to the general population (Sect. D, p.5, Col.1, 7/26/91).

While these two articles present a softer, more sympathetic approach to AIDS, sympathy, equality and/or “objectivity” have not been characteristic treatments of the newspaper for issues surrounding AIDS. For instance, just four years earlier, in a report about AIDS in the workplace, the newspaper published a lengthy article spewing opinion. For instance, in discussing criticisms of the Justice Department’s decision that Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act does not apply to persons transmitting/perceived to transmit AIDS, *The New York Times* wrote that

the criticisms are misplaced...strident critics are complaining that the opinion will foster discrimination against homosexuals or others perceived to be potential carriers of AIDS. These complaints are misdirected for several reasons (7/13/86, Sect. 3, p. 2, Col. 3).

The report even went so far as to tell gays and lesbians how they should feel about the Department of Justice’s ruling: “the gay community and other political minorities...should applaud, not condemn, the Department’s opinion” (7/13/86, Sect. 3, p. 2, Col. 3).

As a social group<sup>63</sup>, gays and lesbians continue to both entice and repel advertisers. On the one hand, corporate advertisers desire reaching the widest market potential with minimal cost. But on the other hand, the supposed newly discovered income of the gay market makes this group attractive to advertisers. In other words, while basic cost-benefit ratio analysis historically mandated advertisers steer clear of controversial, “fringe” populations, which described non-dominant sexualities in the United States, the perceived buying power potential of this new market simultaneously lured advertisers. Advertisers are constantly seeking new, innovative ways to sell their products. Given that same-sex behavior was beyond that which is normative, early ads displaying homosexuality - a market tactic previously unused - possessed a shock value some advertisers employed as a mechanism for getting their products noticed.

Benetton, an upscale Italian clothing company, is an example of one such company who has come to be known for specializing in running shocking advertisements. In 1991, Benetton ran an ad depicting “a man with AIDS at the moment of his death” with the Benetton logo superimposed over the picture in magazines such as *Life*, *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* (*New York Times*, 4/29/92). Such ads, termed “point-of-purchase politics<sup>64</sup>”, gained popularity during the 1990s in the marketing industry, and were touted by *The New York Times* as a mechanism that helps to link goods and services with specific consumers. In this particular case, AIDS organizations charged Benetton for “callously exploiting concerns over the disease” in their process of advertising clothes (*New York Times*, 4/29/92). In the proceedings that followed, *The New York Times* writes that Benetton made no apology, no effort at compensation and has continued to create shocking advertisements. However, in what was asserted by the company as a continuation of its controversial approach to marketing, Benetton issued a tear-out guide

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<sup>63</sup> As a reminder, prior to 1991, fewer than seven articles for any given year were written on any *New York Times* business news topic classified as “lesbian”. In 1991, this changes. A total of twelve articles are classified as “lesbian” in this year. The same trend is not true for articles labeled “gay”. More than seven “gay” articles are listed in *The New York Times* database as early as 1986. The point, however, is that from 1991 onward, in accordance with my sampling frame, every written article for both gay and lesbian groups is no longer analyzed.

<sup>64</sup> According to *The New York Times*, “Point-of-purchase politics, as it is called, aims to appeal to some consumers but definitely not to others, winnowing them through a striking strategy of speaking out. Companies are finding that their politics can be good for business”, with its leading adherents, Benetton and Ben and Jerry’s ice cream “enjoying record sales and profits” (Sect.1, p.33, Col.3, 4/18/92).

to safer sex that accompanied its advertisements. As *The New York Times* noted, Benetton made financial world history by becoming the first international apparel company to buy advertising space in a gay publication, *Out* (*New York Times*, 4/29/92).

For the purposes of my research, the fruitfulness of the case example of Benetton lies not within the debate of pros and cons surrounding Benetton's actions but rather in the poignancy of three main points that this case illustrates. First, in every discussion of non-traditional advertising schemes, *The New York Times* fails to report the large sums of resources, not merely creativity, that are needed to enable corporations to be unconventional. Second, Benetton succeeded in running "controversial" ads about AIDS because of the resource weakness of those with AIDS to object. Third, although *The New York Times* writes "AIDS organizations and some advocacy groups for homosexuals charged that Benetton was callously exploiting concerns over the disease", *The New York Times* does not condemn, or even object, to Benetton's socially unacceptable action of selling clothes using an image of a dying man. Instead, the paper uses this example to demonstrate "the growing interest in, and perplexing problems with, linking products to causes" (*The New York Times*, 4/29/92, Sect. D, p. 19, Col. 1). As this dissertation demonstrates, *The New York Times* frequently condones or objects to a wide variety of actions. To not object, to engage in no action, I argue, is in itself taking a stance. Hence, by frequently not objecting to the belittlement, stereotyping and exploitation of the pain homosexuals afflicted by AIDS experience, *The New York Times* actively manages and creates societal images about this group of persons.

However, as the renegade companies, such as Benetton and Johnnie Walker, raked in profits, "more traditionally minded marketing giants" dared to follow suit. The bottom line truth that companies are less than purely altruistic in choosing their "causes" is a notion *The New York Times* detects and reports. Citing Neil Kraft, former Esprit image director, we are told, "Some companies that are political in their advertising have absolutely no political involvement. It's already becoming a gimmick, and that worries me" (*The New York Times*, Sect.1, p.33, Col.3, 4/18/92).

Coverage of point-of-purchase marketing by *The New York Times* is surprisingly critical in nature. Perhaps this is due to *The New York Times* realizing that advertising does more than just sell products. *The New York Times* does not merely "report" the objective

“facts” about point-of-purchase advertising, it shapes and defines a perspective and opinion about this activity’s “real” purpose:

Many untraditional marketers were 1960’s activists, and most of their causes are left wing. Point-of-sale politics is the latest example of how liberals, exiled from the White House for more than a decade, now pursue their goals through commerce -- while conservatives, who have long dominated the world of business, have been achieving many of their goals through politics. You will probably not see pints of ice cream anytime soon tied to causes dear to Pat and Jesse (Buchanan and Helms) (Sect.1, p.33, Col.3, 4/18/92).

By relating product pitches to real-life issues more important than the choice of tissue brands, point-of-purchase politics also appeals to those who disdain the hype and hoopla of conventional advertising (Sect.1, p.33, Col.3, 4/18/92).

*The New York Times* continues this “reporting” by describing the “cynical opportunism” that some executives are accusing point-of-purchase advertisers with:

Critics have complained that a current Benetton magazine advertisement, featuring a photograph of an AIDS patient at the moment of his death, cruelly exploited the issue because there was no information about AIDS charities or prevention.

So, if “critics” believe it would have been okay to use a dying AIDS patient to sell clothes if they had included charity or prevention information?

Some companies, such as the magazine *Entertainment Weekly*, even “pegs all its promotional events to fighting AIDS” because, we are told, “considering the concerns of the entertainment industry and the magazine’s readers it’s the right thing for us to do” (*The New York Times*, Sect.1, p.33, Col.3, 4/18/92).

Although by 1992 some companies covered by *The New York Times* seem to be displaying an unparalleled interest and alleged receptiveness to homosexuality, it is

important to realize that this interest is far from universal. When the Gay and Lesbian Business Expo began seeking participants, there was considerable disinterest and downright disapproval expressed as well as intrigue. Steven Wesler, president of Robert Donnell Productions that produced the Expo, said “We have some companies that as soon as we said we were calling about the Gay and Lesbian Business Expo would say, ‘We’re not interested, goodbye’” (*New York Times*, 4/14/94, Sect. D, p.18, Col.1). And, in attempting to find advertisers to sponsor the 1994 Gay Games, we are told, “It’s an uphill battle all the way because it’s a gay event” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.3, Col.1, 7/31/92). *The New York Times*, in an article titled “Athletes at the Gay Games Face No Commercial Clutter”, documents the reluctance of corporations to have their products associated with anything gay:

How the Gay Games fares in its attempts to attract sponsors could be an acid test of a recent trend that has seen marketers and their agencies edging, however hesitantly, into advertising aimed at homosexuals (Sect.D, p.3, Col.1, 7/31/92).

Paralleling the Olympics, the Gay Games is first and foremost an athletic competition event. However, when organizers sought corporate endorsement, they were faced with deep-seated stereotypes advertisers held of the incompatibility between “the macho imagery of athletics and the stereotypes of homosexuality” (*New York Times*, 7/31/92). To overcome the hesitancy of potential advertisers the promoters of the games marketed the games as more of a gay and lesbian event rather than a sporting event; thereby encouraging those companies that were interested in niche marketing.

When asked why he chose to sponsor Gay Games IV, Stewart Levitan, vice president of Nora Beverages which markets Naya, a Canadian spring water, said that he believes in niche marketing (*New York Times*, 7/31/92). Given Molson beer’s success at Gay Games III as the only beer-selling sponsor on the site, who, for a mere \$5,000 fee sold more than \$200,000 worth of beer, it is apparent that business decisions are chiefly based upon money as the bottom line; in the words of Stewart Levitan “It’s a marketing decision, not a life-style choice” (*New York Times*, 7/31/92). Potential moral dilemmas are only given precursory treatment in so far as they inhibit the ability to sell products.

Hence, I would argue during the mid-1990s, in a period of economic downturn, the increase in homosexual marketing was due to “many advertisers [were] scrambling to reach whatever consumer groups were still spending money” (*New York Times*, 7/31/92), rather than a desire to privilege heterosexual or homosexual lifestyles.

By 1994 many companies were more open about their targeting of gays as part of a new market strategy. The Dial-a-Mattress Corporation in Long Island, Queens, shared the following comment about selling to homosexuals: “it’s taken us a long time, but we’ve recognized this as a niche market in the same way we have a Hispanic market campaign and a deaf market campaign” (Danny Flamberg, Marketing Director, as quoted in *The New York Times*, 9/29/94, Col.1, p.20. Once the monetary potential, of the gay market was realized, advertisers capitalized on every potential opportunity to make their products attractive to gay men. Even colors, for instance, have been fully appropriated and imbued with such symbolism that when the Seagram Company decided to tie red ribbons onto its G.H. Mumm’s Cordon Rouge Champagne bottles it simultaneously was seen by the media and industry as aligning itself with AIDS awareness. As noted in *The New York Times*, “the red ribbon obviously lends itself to efforts to benefit AIDS charities...[while] Donna Karen, Todd Oldham, Ralph Lauren and other designers are creating apparel items colored red” (12/8/95, Sect. D, p.6, Col.1). The “nontraditional marketing efforts” sparked by the red ribbon frenzy largely benefited and catered only to gay men. Some indication that advertisements employed AIDS symbolism not to reach out to all individuals suffering from the disease and to raise awareness but rather to entice homosexual men to purchase their products. For example, one of Mumm’s Cordon Rouge ads, created and printed in New York’s gay guide magazine *Metrosource*, “shows a drag performer named Brenda Starr wearing a red hair ribbon that complements an all-red ensemble. Tugging at a huge bottle of Mumm Cordon Rouge, Brenda declares: “Drag out your best for the holidays! Like I said, Santa, Rouge is really your color!” (*New York Times*, 12/8/95, Sect. D, p.6, Col.1). Even products, such as Rainbow Spirits, defined as “a new line of premium-priced alcoholic beverages aimed at gay men and lesbian consumers” gain advertising publicity by contributing 50% of their profits to AIDS organizations (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.4, Col.3, 8/23/95). If Marie Brizard Wines and Spirits was interested in donating to lesbian causes, as well as gay male ones, perhaps

it should have given 25% toward breast cancer research. *The New York Times* reports, “rainbow spirits are part of a fledgling market niche of products...that are created for and advertised to homosexuals” (Sect.D, p.4, Col.3, 8/23/95). If “homosexuals” is meant to equally mean men and women, why does neither *The New York Times* or Brizard Wines and Spirits not see a problem with this?

## 4.2 Commodification does not Produce Equality

### 4.2.a Ads, Television and Politics

Demographic surveys of gay press readers indicate that marketing to a gay male audience “enables advertisers to reach an audience with considerable disposable income” that is substantially higher than national averages (*New York Times*, 12/17/90). Early 1990 studies revealed gay customers to have higher levels of education and “relative affluence”, making this niche “demographically desirable to pursue even at a risk of offending consumers who disdain homosexuality” (*New York Times*, 2/23/94, Sect. D, p.1, Col.1). These and other characterizations of gays have turned a group of individuals into a risk-assessment scenario. Marketers and corporations bet against the odds of gaining money versus “offending” other consumers. Fear of a right-wing conservative backlash looms in the background as the social group that remains upheld as the dominant, even if not the norm, and possesses the most wealth and power in society to organize the ever-feared product boycott. Despite that conservative groups tend to have interests that differ considerably from a number of the products being marketed,

the vast majority of marketers have continued decades-old policies of shunning any involvement or association with homosexuals because of the pervasive societal stigma surrounding homosexuality and concerns that they might be subjected to consumer boycotts (*New York Times*, 2/23/94, Sect.D, p.1, Col.1).

So, what is an advertiser to do? In past years, the simple answer was to simply avoid any connection with homosexuality.

Early efforts by television networks to air shows containing homosexual characters were met with the fear advertisers most dreaded - homophobia coupled with

morality-driven public chastisement. Public, and consequently corporate, response to gay and lesbian publicity during the late 1980s and early 1990s was met with fear, stemming largely from the AIDS “crisis”, objection and in several cases, the retraction of support and sponsorship. Television programs, such as ABC’s *Heartbeat*, containing a lesbian nurse, received great opposition in the form of phone calls and letters from the AFA (American Family Association), a Christian fundamentalist group with a history of organizing massive boycotts and movements against “anti-Christian” programming content. As a result of AFA action, Ralston Purina, General Mills and the Mennen Company all pulled their advertisements during *Heartbeat*.

In reporting on this event, *The New York Times* appears to have remained relatively non-partisan. The paper elected to include a quote from an NBC spokesman stating how there are a mounting number of pressure groups in existence which exert control over advertising and programming content. While the paper dedicates more space to describing the particulars of the AFA and corporations’ side of the case than to GLAAD’s (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) objections, by noting that “Domino’s action [to withdraw ads from *Saturday Night Live*] was announced not by the company but by the American Family Association”, *The New York Times* acknowledges the coalescence of these two associations.

*The New York Times* appeared eager in December, 1992, to report that, in the world of television at least, “popular shows can easily replace any skittish advertiser with another willing to take the risk” to advertise during shows with “sexually oriented content” (Sect. D, p.1, Col.1). Quick to cite examples, reporter Bill Carter uses *Seinfeld*’s masturbation episode and *Roseanne*’s episode where a character comes out as a lesbian to reveal how “both networks were able to replace the advertisers immediately, losing no revenue”, even gaining revenue in some cases. Yet, despite *The New York Times*’ tone of accomplishment and conveyed sense of progress, we must notice that for 9 out of 10 scheduled advertisers to withdraw from the *Seinfeld* episode alone, is indicative of social disapproval - even though monetarily nothing was lost. Furthermore, in the very next paragraph of the article, Carter describes how just earlier in the 1992 season a network did lose money due to dropped advertisements. So, as Carter points out, it is due to the popularity and success of the specific programs *Roseanne* and *Seinfeld* that the threat of

advertisers pulling out was harmless. That a character was able to come out as a lesbian on prime time television and still retain advertisements and profit in this case is *not* indicative of unprecedented tolerance and comfort with homosexuality. Rather, as media buyer Paul Schulman declared perception of content is all about program ratings: “sex and violence become love and adventure if a show has a 25 share or higher” (*The New York Times*, 12/7/92, Sect.D, Col. 1, p.1).

By relying primarily on television ratings and advertiser commitment as a means of gauging social acceptance or rejection of programming content and social issues surrounding sexuality in general, *The New York Times* is missing the complex web of connections among social movement organizations that is largely responsible for aspects of social change. In short, the paper reduces the great effort and work of social movement organizations to mere fiscal operations.

The first awareness by *The New York Times*, in the articles reviewed, that NSMs matter occurred in 1991 when Americans for Responsible Television organized an annual one-day television boycott it termed “Turn Off TV Day”. As a counter-mobilization tactic, GLAAD organized a “Turn On TV Day” for that same time frame. In one of the first articles written about this event, we are told that the goal of “Turn on the TV Day” is:

that millions of Americans will alter their viewing habits and express their opinions by writing and phoning not only local stations and national networks, but also the advertisers whose commercials pay for the programming. Yet, even if the ratings do not change by a tenth of a point, the organizers say, Tuesday will serve to remind advertisers that they are under constant scrutiny (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.16, Col.3, 10/25/91).

The significance of this article, and the others that follow, I argue lies less in the outcome of the events’ particularities – i.e. whether Americans did or did not turn off their television sets - but rather in the observation that by the early 1990s, the media is being used as a tool for gauging public acceptance or disapproval of homosexuality and other social issues.

In reporting this news, *The New York Times* declares its awareness of special interest groups' attempts to influence the media:

Their diametrically opposed advice, though largely symbolic, underscores the continuing struggle by special-interest groups to redirect the content of television programming in ways more to their liking (Sect.D, p.16, Col.3, 10/25/91).

Such overt and publicly stated intentions to influence the media's representation of social activity are efforts previously not addressed in business news. In writing this, and forthcoming articles, *The New York Times* clearly evidences its interest in, and decision to report on, issues of (homo)sexuality and morality affecting business. *The New York Times* did not simply report the "business news" about this event but instead chose to delve deeper into the issues, such as alerting readers to the indecisiveness about what precisely was/was not being debated:

The gay-rights group decided to promote a counter effort, said Ellen Carton, its executive director, because it believes Concerned Viewers wants "to put fear into advertisers" on gay-themed programming. The president for Concerned Viewers, Vicki Riley, called that "the farthest thing from the truth." She added: "Just as I wouldn't want to see two men making love, or two women, I don't want to see a man and a woman." (Sect.D, p.16, Col.3, 10/25/91).

The response by businesses and advertisers – at least those *The New York Times* cites - clearly show social change in response to issues of sexuality and homosexuality:

"Two groups go at it like this, and the advertisers get caught in the middle," said Thomas DeCabia, senior vice president of the Paul Schulman Company in New York, a national media buying service.

Executives at buying services and advertising agencies said yesterday that so far, no clients had requested changes in their plans for Tuesday. Such changes are unnecessary, said Michael Drexler...because "advertisers are already sensitive to

program content.” Most provide agencies and buying services with detailed guidelines for purchasing air time.

Peter Chrisantopoulos, the president and chief executive of the Network Television Association in New York, which represents ABC, CBS, and NBC, predicted that viewership levels would be no different from any other fall Tuesday. Americans, he said, reject “coercive tactics” (Sect.D, p.16, Col.3, 10/25/91).

To me, what these comments reveal is media’s reluctance to get involved in censorship issues. Whereas in earlier years, such as the early Eighties, discussions of homosexuality were immediate cause for advertisers to run far, far away, we now see a shift where advertisers already have mechanisms for addressing controversy to program content built into their business routine. This is indicative of progress in visibility of homosexuality. However, care must be taken to not equate this progress with social advancement. As Peter Chrisantopoulos’ comment seems to imply, programming content has become, for television networks, a non-issue due to Americans’ overriding preference for freedom of choice. This does not mean that the media is anymore likely to portray one image versus another – media representation and content cannot be discerned from the information provided. Rather, it verifies that structural mechanisms for dealing with diversity of experiences and images have been incorporated into business practice.

From a social critique perspective, one may fault the newspaper for oversimplification in reporting social behavior. By focusing on non-action, *The New York Times* contributes to a distorted and elementary representation of social issues. The focus of *The New York Times* business news ought to remain business news. As my sample of articles reveals, social issues impact business and therefore become an important component in business news coverage for *The New York Times*. However, combining business news and social commentary is a dangerous union because it sets up the possibility for inadequate news coverage leading to faulty public deductions. By presenting the public with a rudimentary amount of information on topics, which is of course limited by the amount of column space and the time / ambition / knowledge of reporters, individuals learn surface details about what is often a deeper, historically

driven social issue. This creates the potential for the public claiming a “false expert” stance whereby one thinks one understands a social issue when, in reality, one only has a very narrow, limited understanding of its complexity. Although this is perhaps unimportant for “turning off/on” one’s television, this becomes an issue for concern with more serious matters such as AIDS, discrimination and homophobia.

For two consecutive years, 1991 and 1992, *The New York Times* focused reporting on the outcome of “Turn Off/On the TV Day”. Repeatedly, the paper draws our attention to the fact that networks could not discern any difference in television ratings on “Turn Off TV Day” than for any ordinary day. (Sect.D, p.7, Col.3, 11/1/91; Sect.D, p.9, Col.4, 11/02/92):

The battle of the television switchers has unofficially been declared a draw. Nielsen indicate that the percentage of households watching television on Tuesday was no different from the same day last year, despite the efforts by two groups to influence viewing levels. One, Concerned Viewers for Quality Television, urged people to turn off their sets to show disapproval of what it considers objectionable programming, while the other, the New York chapter of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, encouraged people to turn on their sets in a counter-protest. During prime time on Tuesday, 61.8 percent of households tuned in, compared with 61.5 percent that watched on the comparable Tuesday a year ago. (Sect.D, p.7, Col.3, 11/1/91).

Organizations representing opposite sides of social and political issues are again squaring off by making the media part of their message. Americans for Responsible Television, an organization allied with conservative groups like the American Family Association and Morality in the Media, is sponsoring its second annual “Turn Off TV Day.” The one-day boycott, scheduled for Nov. 13, is intended to protest what the organization considers sexually graphic, violent and vulgar programming. The first boycott by the group, when it was called Concerned viewers for Quality Television, was met with a “Turn On TV Day” for the same day, sponsored by the New York chapter of the Gay and Lesbian

Alliance Against Defamation. Network television executives said they found no discernible change in ratings that day. (Sect.D, p.9, Col.4, 11/02/92).

Although *The New York Times* presents an image of ineffectiveness with this event, from a social movement standpoint, these incidences are important and do represent social unrest and opposing interests regarding homosexuality among other things. In focusing on “bottom dollar” statistics - i.e. no change - *The New York Times*, I argue misses the larger picture. Consequently, readers are predisposed to drawing hasty conclusions - i.e. that the actions of social conservatives like the American Family Association and Morality in Media no longer is of much concern to businesses because they did not result in lost ratings. Even in its initial coverage, *The New York Times* dismissed the event’s outcome before it occurred, concluding their October 25, 1991 article with media director Michael Drexler’s comment that “Thanks to remote control, it’s easier than ever to avoid what you watch... You don’t even have to walk up to the set; hit the button” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.16, Col.3). While on one hand, we can applaud the media’s apparent disgust with all the “fuss”, for the lack of a better term. Still, on the other hand, such a comment bypasses the reasons why some images are seen as appropriate for airspace while others are not.

In another example, in a brief “Turn Off the TV” report, *The New York Times* includes a non-sequator paragraph describing how homosexual organizations created a “billboard campaign meant to increase the visibility of lesbians” that included a pregnant lesbian couple saying “Another Traditional Family” without any commentary, framing or elaboration. This is newsworthy because of its rarity and its difference from the normative understanding of “traditional family”. One message the paper is trying to convey is its support of gay rights activism and its disapproval of conservative measures (11/2/92, Sect.D, p.9, Col.4).

Routinely, *The New York Times*, in its reporting, paints an image that social change regarding gay/lesbian issues has occurred. This creates an impression that homosexual advertisements and visibility are now part of the everyday reality of at-large American culture and no longer cause much struggle or controversy on the part of American businesses to include as part of their normative marketing program. This

simply is untrue. For example, as recently as 1997 the magazine *Esquire* canceled a fictional story that had a homosexual sex scene when a four, full-page Chrysler ad was scheduled to run (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.8, Col.6, 10/17/97). Although Chrysler has since discontinued its policy of “requiring magazines in which it advertises to notify in advance about articles that may stir controversy” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.8, Col.6, 10/17/97), as a company they declare their guidelines unchanged. As *The New York Times* cites Chrysler spokesman Mike Aberlich saying, “We’ll just have to make a judgment as to which magazines are less likely to use this content” (ib.). However, more pertinent to my analysis is the fact that *The New York Times* chose to write “articles that may stir controversy” in conjunction with the only example, “homosexual sex”, in their article. Given that Chrysler deemed homosexual sex a controversial issue worthy of avoidance in 1997, we might deduce that homosexuality is not a “normal” part of American culture and is still stigmatized, although evidencing issues of normalcy remains beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Even light-hearted advertisements capitalizing on stereotypical images of homosexuality for the sake of humor have been met with less-than-successful results. Known as “entertainment marketing”, an article written in March, 1992, describes this growing field where products are sold “in fresh, untraditional fashion by exploiting consumer’s fascination with show business, celebrities and popular culture” (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.8, Col.3, 3/12/92). Among this sector *The New York Times* cites the Doritos/Frito-Lay skit that ran as a counter program to the Super Bowl. *The New York Times* speaks of this spectacle as “the project that has perhaps brought Mr. Coleman [described as a pioneer in entertainment marketing]...the most acclaim, not to mention a measure of noisy notoriety” (Sect. D, p.8, Col.3, 3/12/92). And what was the spectacle? It was “The Doritos Zaptime/’In Living Color’ Super Halftime Party”. Although Mr. Coleman, Frito-Lay and Fox are all reported to be happy with the special, *The New York Times* remarks how “Frito-Lay does not mask its disappointment with several aspects of the show”, noting how

perhaps most distressing was a skit called “Men of Football,” featuring two cast members of “In Living Color”, Damon Wayans and David Alan Grier, portraying

flamboyant homosexual characters who ad-libbed provocative statements of a personal nature about the actor Richard Gere and the athlete Carl Lewis (Sect. D, p.8, Col.3, 3/12/92).

*The New York Times* fails to further disclose why this skit was “most distressing” but does go on to note how this television advertisement

was particularly discomfoting for a company like Pepsico, anxious enough about its corporate image to cancel an elaborate, expensive Pepsi campaign starring Madonna when religious fundamentalists threatened a boycott over an unrelated Madonna video clip featuring Christian icons (Sect. D, p.8, Col.3, 3/12/92).

From the above statement we might conclude that Pepsico was not concerned the group they would be offending with this ad would be the homosexuals whom were caricatured and ridiculously impersonated. No, with this the marketers were perfectly comfortable. Rather, given the further tidbit of information from Mr. Coleman that “From our perspective, it would have been fine if Fox had ‘bleeped’ it” [the “provocative” personal statements towards Richard Gere and Carl Lewis], the audience whose discomfort caused concern were heterosexuals uncomfortable with hearing such male-to-male “cat-calls”. Again, such portrayals, however comical or “entertaining”, do not represent “progress” in popular culture’s representation of homosexuality. Would it have been equally funny to dress up and make fun of Native American Indians or African Americans? It is the lack, indeed absence, of realist, positive images of GLBTQs in *The New York Times* business news, as well as in advertisements in general, that makes such hyperbole, and its nonchalant coverage by the media, particularly discomfoting.

My dissatisfaction with *The New York Times*’ handling of many GLBTQ issues and articles is not to say that the newspaper is anti-gay. To the contrary, analyzing the articles in this sample leads me to assert just the opposite. When it comes to issues of gay rights, *The New York Times* repeatedly shows a bias in their favor over other, Conservative agendas. The following excerpt provides some minimal documentation:

After listening to Republican Party attacks on homosexuals as having made “a wrong choice,” many of America’s largest marketers are making a different choice. Rather than being daunted by the campaign rhetoric, they are instead accelerating efforts at aiming sales messages at gay and lesbian consumers (9/23/92, Sect. D, p.27, Col.3).

Yet, although *The New York Times* declares marketers as undaunted by campaign rhetoric, it still defines the strategy of pursuing the homosexual market as “unconventional”. What we learn again and again from critically re-reading articles is that the newfound “popularity” in acceptance for homosexuality has very little to do with either sexuality or civil rights.

The year of 1992 was an exceptional year for gay and lesbian visibility in *The New York Times*. Whereas the total number of business and finance articles the newspaper wrote pertaining to gay men in 1991 was 22 and to lesbians was 12, these numbers triple for the year of 1992 to 61 and 42 respectively. What accounts for this sudden shift in focus? In a word: recession. Interest in gays and lesbians by “liberals” was not, at least as *The New York Times* reports, due to humanitarianism or rejection of conservative principles. “For a lot of people, the main concern right now is surviving in a tough economic climate,” said Doug Alligood, vice president of ad agency BBDO New York. When that happens, people get liberal in a hurry” (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.27, Col.3).

This “conclusion” that *The New York Times* seems to have made, that the gay market’s wealth is *the* driving source of advertiser and corporate interest in this “niche<sup>65</sup>” market, is reiterated more than once. Body, for example, reports

The surge in gay publications comes as advertisers are showing increasing interest in the gay market. In a time of recession, many see it as a lucrative niche. And like so much in gay life, the growth of the gay press has been propelled by the AIDS crisis.

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<sup>65</sup> *The New York Times* reports that niche marketing, and specifically point-of-purchase advertising “has become popular, and possible, because of a sea change in marketing, primarily a shift from mass marketing, or being all things to all people, to market segmentation, or slicing the mass market into smaller pieces” (Sect.1, p.33, Col.3, 4/18/92).

Often unable to find enough information in mainstream publications, many homosexuals turned their own publications into journals about AIDS. But the AIDS crisis caused some advertisers to stand back from the gay market (*The New York Times*, Sect.A, p.1, Col.2, 3/2/92).

Here again the stigma of AIDS is cited as a direct cause of corporate disinterest in homosexuals. However, even in this very gay-positive article, whose title is “Gay, Lesbian Press is Starting to Emerge in the Mainstream”, we find homosexual equated with gay men. *The New York Times*’ statement “And like so much in gay life, the growth of the gay press has been propelled by the AIDS crisis” primarily speaks to gay men. AIDS has not propelled so much in lesbian life, and while it certainly is reflected in some of the content of lesbian publications, it is not a main focus or concern. *The New York Times*’ printing that “the AIDS crisis caused some advertisers to stand back from the gay market” serendipitously exposes advertisers disinterest in lesbians. If advertisers were truly interested in the “homosexual” market, why did they not focus attention on lesbians, given that lesbians have less than 1% chance of contracting AIDS and that lesbian publications did not turn their publications into AIDS journals? The most obvious reason seems to be that lesbians do not possess the same market potential as gay men, further supporting an economic-driven explanation for this sudden visibility. Also, the invisibility of lesbians is another manifestation of sexism, and the invisibility of women more generally. Even *The New York Times* contributes towards this continuous lesbian invisibility. For example, as the article “When Products are Tied to Causes” printed 4/18/92 demonstrates, *The New York Times* categorizes its articles as “lesbian” when the only “gay” issue being discussed is AIDS.

What has occurred in the marketing/advertising community is a surge in gay male visibility, which is reflected in *The New York Times* business section. This mirrors larger society’s preoccupation with locating any source of money in times of economic downturn. It was during 1992 that many companies, such as CBS and Carillon, first placed ads for their products in gay-targeted publications and that a noticeable number of companies created gay-specific advertising campaigns. But, for the most part, the newspaper uncritically reports how consumer product companies cared little about the

particulars of their new-interest market segment, so long as they're "educated and affluent". To corporate America, this new target market was defined by its annual earnings and not by its sexuality. This might explain the lack of lesbian visibility compared with gay men.

For some, the presence of *any* gay or lesbian recognition by mainstream companies and publications might be great news - an acknowledgement of sorts that, finally, gays and lesbians are being seen by some segments of the broader society as "normal". This is the perspective one finds upon reading corresponding gay press articles of this time. However, one ought not equate equal commodification with equal social acceptance. To find gays and lesbians excited at having finally achieved mainstream recognition and legitimacy is dangerous when, in reality, the only thing achieved has been further capitalization. As Stephanie Blackwood, president of a NY public relations firm that specializes in gay and lesbian marketing told *The New York Times*, "the affluence of homosexuals...is the reason why Hiram Walker is interested in that market" (Sect. D, p.27, Col.3).

In addition to shifting socioeconomic perceptions about gay men, the gay press itself is described in *The New York Times* as having changed in its approach to representing GLBTQs. For example, *The New York Times* quotes Alligood's interpretation about advertisers' shift to advertising in the gay press:

For a while, anything connected with the gay market had a stigma. But there's a change. They got away from offending mainstream sensibilities. That had to happen before the advertisers could take the medium seriously.

Clearly, as we have been so told, it was the gay press' fault for their lack of corporate interest. Gay publications changed to accommodate the tastes and preferences of mainstream advertisers, and not the other way around. As *The New York Times'* reporter writes, "Some advertisers were uneasy about the sexually oriented ads in many gay publications or were afraid they would lose customers who disliked homosexuals" (Sect.A, p.1, Col.5, 3/2/92). Hence, it was only when the gay press eliminated ads deemed undesirable by corporate America that mainstream advertisers displayed interest.

It was only when the gay press conformed to the standards and norms of heterosexual publications that “advertisers could take the medium seriously”. Moreover, it was the interests and preferences of “customers who disliked homosexuals” that was privileged. These nuances *The New York Times* does not pronounce.

In black and white figures, conformity proved profitable for the gay press. In just two years, advertisers doubled the amount of money spent in gay publications, from \$1 million to \$2 million (*The New York Times*, 3/2/92). So, should we conclude that social change has taken place? Certainly. Should we conclude that advertisers are more “gay-friendly” than previously? In my opinion, no.

For example, in 1992 Alligood states:

“Madison Avenue has gotten a lot more pragmatic about the marketplace. Basically, people are saying, ‘If this is a market in which people stand to make sales, then why not?’” (*The New York Times*, Sect.A, p.1, Col.1, 3/2/92).

Simultaneously, *The New York Times* reported interest in the gay/lesbian market, writing that “the gay market is an influential and trend-setting market” (Sect. D, p.27, Col.3), noting how “the gay market may be too big to ignore” (Sect.A, p.1, Col.1, 3/2/92). Thus, it seems incongruous that *The New York Times* should lose interest so quickly in reporting on this supposedly huge market, as the decline in business news articles clearly evidences. Between 1994-1999 there is a steady and consistent drop in business articles mentioning gays and lesbians. Should one interpret *The New York Times*’ dwindling coverage as an indication that Madison Avenue changed its mind about its “pragmatic” approach to GLBTQs? Or, did GLBTQs perhaps lose their “trend-setting” edge, given that they ever possessed it in the first place? Of course, such questions cannot be answered in this dissertation. Still, I find this sudden growth and decline in media, and moreover corporate, intrigue with gays and lesbians peculiar.

Although intriguing, such questions are not the subject of this dissertation. What this dissertation, and more specifically these articles, does reveal is the consummate commodification of yet another social group – GLBTQs in American society. Analyzing mass media articles about advertising enables us to explore if, over time, the self-

articulated corporate interest in the GLBTQs market actually materialized. In other words, without imposing a moral imperative that corporations ought to care about the consequences of their exploitation, we can, as subjective observers, engage in conversations about the nature of the social relationship between the representer and the representee. Acknowledging *prima facie* that social groups, in this case GLBTQs, are put on display by business, and are represented in business news, for the purposes of capital gain and news reporting, enables us to move beyond a critique of capitalism to an informed social history of social groups within a capitalistic economy. The difference, although nuanced, is one that I believe allows the social scientist to articulate normative perceptions and cultural characterizations otherwise hidden by the overriding economic focus.

As Wood (1996) describes, we are living in a society characterized by “post-intellectualism” where advertising routinely “dehumanizes” the media consumer:

Commercial media are in the business of delivering you, the consumer, to the advertisers. *You* are the commodity. *You*, your attention, your time, are being sold to the highest bidders - those who want to inundate you with their messages. You are nothing more than a consuming cog in the wheel of big business. You have no identity other than your Visa or Master Card number. You have no uniqueness; you have only your demographic profile. Advertising annuls the individual; materialism dulls the intellect. (Wood, 1996 p.149).

On one hand, one may simply deduce that the courting of GLBTQs by advertisers exposes only the irrevocable degree of commodification seizing modern society. Advertisers are not in the business of caring; they are in the business of selling. The fact that some companies have opened their portfolios to gays and lesbians does not translate into an “American society” that is more embracing or more equitable. The only revelation corporate “interest” in GLBTQ grants is visibility - and, as I shall continue to argue, this visibility is value-laden and governed only by the interests of capitalists. Yet, on the other hand, there is more to be understood than the commodification of humanity. Where Wood (1996) writes how “advertising annuls the individual”, I argue advertising

heightens the homogenation of multiple individuals. As the articles reviewed in this dissertation reveal, “You” *are* much more than a consuming cog in the wheel of big business. You *do* have uniqueness. If “you” are transgendered, then it is precisely your uniqueness that literally and figuratively renders you invisible in mainstream publications and social consciousness. If “you” do not have a clearly identifiable and marketable gender, then you do not exist because your uniqueness is problematic. If your sexuality and gender do not coincide with the aims of media and marketers, as these articles reveal, it really does not matter whether you have a Visa or Master Card because fear of a homophobic backlash from all the heterosexuals with Visas and Master Cards takes precedence. In sum, the “you” represented by multi-national corporations and the commercial media remains pre-selected and highly normative.

#### **4.2.b. The Corporate/Media Connection**

One tension that quickly surfaces when conducting media research, and a theme I will explore in this section, is the dialectical relationship that exists between various segments of the media<sup>66</sup> and corporations/conglomerates. The interconnections among corporate America, which commodifies and capitalizes on anything that will sell, mainstream media’s reporting of the changing role of corporate America’s interest in gays and lesbians and the gay media’s involvement in the representation of gays and lesbians, illustrate the complexity advertising, as necessary good and/or evil, possesses. It also exposes the degree to which the media is itself a commodity that is bought, owned and sold. In our analysis of the media, we must keep in mind that the media is not independent. The majority of the world’s media is owned and run by a handful of corporations (Miller, 1996). As FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) points out, there are “nine firms which dominate the world”:

Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, Sony, TCI, Universal (Seagram) and NBC. Most of these are US based, transnational media corporations, which form a system to ‘advance the

cause of the global market and promote commercial values while denigrating journalism and culture not conducive to the immediate bottom line or long-run corporate interests' (McChesney, 1997, p.11).

So, just because one segment of the media is “gay”, does not make it less subject to the pressures of corporate America.

The intersection between the gay press and corporate America has been fleshed out in *The New York Times* in a less-than-collegial debate. In what boils down to little more than a schoolyard brawl, the *The New York Times* reports, that “magazines and newspapers for gay men and lesbians have been assiduously courting Madison Avenue, offering demographic data indicating that their readers are affluent and well-educated consumers” (7/31/92, Sect. D, p.3, Col.1). Conversely, the gay press claims that it had little choice other than to seek corporate sponsorship in a media environment wrought with competition and high cost in order to stay in business. Regardless of why the gay press “wooed” mainstream advertisers, the critical question I pose to *The New York Times* is why it does not credit the work of gays and lesbians in the gay press with achieving this newly created interest in gays and lesbians? Why are reports written and framed in such a way that the reader is lead to believe it is the activities of specific corporations that are responsible for the pursuit of the gay/lesbian market niche? For example, as early as 1985 we find such statements as “A growing number of independent bookstores are seeking refuge in special niches” (*The New York Times*, 1/6/85, Sect.3, p.15, Col.1) and then again, in 1995, “The Hiram Walker and Sons unit...is introducing in this country an unconventional campaign for Tuaca” (*The New York Times*, 2/15/95, Sect.D, p.20, Col.3). Indeed, all gay/lesbian agency is removed from publication. This is notable because in battles over cultural contests, or, the right to speak, GLBTQs have little, indeed practically no social standing in *The New York Times*. Gamson (1998) describes standing in the following fashion:

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<sup>66</sup> Again, I am only analyzing printed media - and even from within this sub-category, only *The New York Times*. “Media” encompasses numerous forms - television, film, technological, etc., and thus, future studies may wish to explore these and other complexities.

“Standing<sup>67</sup> is not the same as being covered or mentioned in the news; a group may be in the news in the sense that it is described or criticized but has no opportunity to provide interpretation and meaning to the events in which it is involved. Standing refers to a group being treated as an agent, not merely as an object being discussed by others” (Gamson, 1998 p.68).

GLBTQs are rarely allowed to speak for themselves about issues pertaining to them. In a few instances, as I highlighted from selected articles throughout this chapter, representatives from gay and lesbian organizations are interviewed by *The New York Times* for commentary on specific issues. These representatives inadequately represent the diverse range of GLBTQ organizations that could be used to reflect a more accurate image of GLBTQs. Repeatedly, *The New York Times* uses the same handful of GLBTQ groups to represent the “gay” side of an issue. This reality of practice counters the ideal claim to objectivity. Although journalists repeatedly claim their choice of sources to quote is independent of their personal opinion about the source, research reveals that in the US media, source choice is driven by issues of power and the need for “spectacle and drama” (Gamson, 1998, pp.68-69). This is further problematic for GLBTQs because, if it is mainstream corporate America that has adopted, internalized and owns gay/lesbian marketing, how then do we know if it indeed represents gay/lesbian interests at all? As *The New York Times* itself has reported, it is only money that ever fuels corporate interest. This leads me to another point: Why does *The New York Times* equate gay/lesbian reality only from the characterizations the gay media puts forth? Is not the gay press also a sector of corporate America, possessing the same pursuit of maximizing profit? In sum, it is problematic that *The New York Times* relies only upon other media and marketing sources to explain why gays/lesbians position in business in US society maintains its current shape. GLBTQs are more than the sum of their media-mediated representations. Or, are they? Some academics devoted to the study of American culture

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<sup>67</sup> Gamson interjects that standing alone is an insufficient measure of cultural acceptance for any social group. In order to get a broader picture, one must include a variety of mass media representations, such as how a group is depicted on tv, in movies, entertainment, and advertising. “Standing, measured as who gets quoted in news accounts, does not capture this broader form of cultural acceptance. It does not deal, for example, with the portrayal of gay and lesbian characters in a sympathetic or matter-of-fact way in

argue that current events do not even exist until they are covered by the news media (Wood, 1996). If it is possible that events can be said to not be “real” until they receive attention by the news media, why should social groups be any different?

In order to understand the predicament of the gay and lesbian advertising market in the 1990s, and how *The New York Times* represents it, we must first realize that the various media forms involved are viewing this situation from only one vantage point. *The New York Times* sees the gay press as giving corporations a “pitch” that “received help from the souring economy, which sent many advertisers scrambling to reach whatever consumer groups were still spending money” (7/31/92, Sect.D, p.3, Col.1). However, this version of history is put forth arguably less because this is necessarily the way history happened but rather because this is the only representation we are viewing at this moment – the interaction of three actors - *The New York Times*’ news reporter, the selected voice for the gay press and the corporations cited in the newspaper’s articles – are all we have to draw upon when limiting our frame of reference to the news article. In other words, to only rely upon the media is to only walk away with a partial and biased story. This is not a bad recognition – indeed, it is all we can hope for. Peril lies in stopping exploration of topics here. It is with the addition of other references – i.e. academic works, other media forms, conversations, etc. – that one can address the deeper questions of *why* which may not surface upon initial interaction with topics.

During 1992, for instance, we are told that “hundreds of major marketers still omit homosexuals from their plans” (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.27, Col.3). Why does *The New York Times* not discuss this status quo? Listed in the article are categories of companies that omit homosexuals - automobiles, fast food and soft drinks - but company names and commentary are withheld. Again, the focus is not to expose the practices of the mainstream but to publicize the “unconventional” trends of a few - most likely because it is only that which exceptional that is newsworthy. And, when those, such as the Gap, “refuse to discuss” their venture into the gay/lesbian market, negative review is withheld.

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entertainment forums, which may say more about the acceptance of the homosexual constituency than quoting a person from ACT UP or the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force” (Gamson, 1998, p.69).

By 1993, *New York Times*' articles portray GLBTQs as a market sector that is all of a sudden too important, or rather economically lucrative, to overlook. This unprecedented expansion of GLBTQs into the limelight fully expresses the ideas articulated by the social theorists in my literature review section. Contemporary consumption is marketed and sold as the height of individualism. Like other researchers who found that mainstream interest in homosexuality serves capitalists first and foremost, my analysis of advertising articles written in *The New York Times* confirms this assertion. Statements such as “When it comes down to the dollar, a lot of homophobia disappears” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.17, Col.1, 9/10/93) confirm that interest in and representation of GLBTQ visibility is contingent on class, not the social subject. By 1993, GLBTQs have not achieved social legitimation in the eyes of the business world; they have achieved classification:

By coming out of the closet, gay men and lesbians identify themselves. That brings sales pitches aimed at homosexuals in the same way ads are aimed at bowlers, collectors of Coca-Cola memorabilia and dog breeders (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.17, Col.1, 9/10/93).

As publisher David Alport is quoted saying, “The availability of mailing lists is the number one most important thing to having a successful catalogue. And now there’s a growing resource of viable names for lists available in data bases” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.17, Col.1, 9/10/93). Hence, what GLBTQs have achieved is the unenviable status of being identified by their sexuality on junk mail lists.

In June, 1993, *The New York Times* opens an advertising article with the following question: “Can tolerance be sold like soap or soup? And if it can, can it be sold in -- of all places -- the subway?” (Sect.D, p.19, Col.1, 6/11/93). In an article about GLAAD’s marketing campaign, we are told GLAAD is betting the answer to both questions is “yes”. However, although the approach may be the same - to sell an idea, “tolerance”, like one sells commodities, the purpose of this campaign is different. In this article, *The New York Times* continues to advance the idea that the early Nineties

represents true social change in the visibility of GLBTQs. Quoting Ellen Carton, executive director of GLAAD, we are told:

Gays and lesbians have been exceedingly visible this year, visible on controversial issues. Americans don't see us yet as regular people who have a variety of jobs, a variety of life styles, different genders and colors and ages (Sect.D, p.19, Col.1, 6/11/93).

However, even after printing GLAAD's assertion that Americans do not see GLBTQs as "regular people" who come from diverse backgrounds, *The New York Times* does little to incorporate "diverse" images of GLBTQs within its own publication. And, by ending the article with Fred Hochberg's (finance director for the Campaign for Military Service in New York) quote: "People disapprove of the 'gay life style,' but they are opposed to discrimination" (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.19, Col.1, 6/11/93), we are reminded that the majority of Americans in 1993 disapprove of homosexuality.

The majority of advertising articles written by *The New York Times* confirm the consummate commodification of GLBTQs by 1993. By this year, *The New York Times* is reporting entire advertising agencies, such as Ron Owen and Partners, that specialize in campaigns for mainstream advertisers aiming their products at gays and lesbians (11/16/93). Through such articles, we are given an image of American society that focuses on consumption as a main expression of self-identity:

As more gay men and lesbians become open about their sexual identities, they are being asked to fill their recently vacated closets with merchandise from an increasing number of catalogue marketers addressing them as homosexuals...Sean Strub, president of the Strub Media Group of New York, which specializes in the gay and lesbian market, said: "Part of 'coming out' is self-expression. And part of self-expression in 1993 is wearing caps and T-shirts and jewelry that say who you are. Yet while you now can come out in North Liberty, Iowa, you can't go to the Younkers department store and find" gay- and lesbian-related products" (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.17, Col.1, 9/10/93).

This quote documents an historical shift experienced in America by the mid-Nineties. Like Baudrillard, whom in his writings was referring to televisions when he wrote “the possession of such and such an object is in itself a social service: as a certificate of citizenship the TV is a token of recognition, of integration, of social legitimacy” (1981, p.54), we may now quite easily insert pride items in place of televisions. Wearing a rainbow necklace in 1993, as *The New York Times* confirms, is a “certificate of citizenship” and proof of “recognition, of integration, of social legitimacy” in GLBTQ culture. Yet, this “celebration” of GLBTQ “culture” is little more than routine marketing, albeit to a new focus group. *The New York Times* uncritically reports that catalogue companies have sprung up in response to this “nascent niche”, noting the development of two trends:

One is the continuing segmentation of the once-mass consumer market as advertisers aim sales pitches at narrower groups for reasons of economy and efficiency. The other is the growing appeal of an affluent, educated gay and lesbian market to consumer-product companies (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.17, Col.1, 9/10/93).

Thus, the needs of GLBTQ consumers are, along with all of the other consumers, created, mediated, and controlled by capital in calculated, pre-meditated ways that ensure profit and produce “competitive exploitation”. As the shift in representation and visibility in business news shows, *The New York Times* is an actor who has actively participated in fostering this change in image. *The New York Times*, in its advertising reporting, has contributed to creating the image of GLBTQs as consumers. Simultaneously, *The New York Times* documents the continued lack of unanimous social support for this shift:

Mr. Strub estimated that about a million gay and lesbian households could be reached through various lists. For all that, the fledgling field has its problems. “There are people who totally freak out if they get something and they’re not

gay,” said Mr. Strub, who has compiled a sort of reverse mailing list of almost 100,000 complainers” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.17, Col.1, 9/10/93).

If, as *The New York Times* reports, nearly 100,000 people felt so strongly adverse to receiving a homosexual catalogue to take the time to lodge a complaint, then might we posit that, for many Americans, homosexuality in 1993 still is not seen as just another aspect of life. Furthermore, I would propose that few Americans would even think twice about the entitlement of those 100,000 Americans to file such a complaint. Would the American majority feel the same if *The New York Times* published an article noting that 100,000 GLBTQs filed complaints for receiving catalogues with images depicting heterosexual lifestyles? Such questions illustrate Lorber’s sociological conclusion about how one of the most forceful ways of sustaining dominant ideologies is to make other social arrangements, such as the equal co-existence of hetero- and homosexual cultural images, unthinkable:

Gendered social arrangements are justified by religious and cultural productions and are backed by law, but the most powerful means of sustaining the moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideology is that the process is made invisible; any possible alternatives are virtually unthinkable” (Lorber, 1994, p.26).

Where Lorber speaks of gender, I speak of sexuality. The outcome, regardless of whether one substitutes sexuality, race or gender, is the same. Any social arrangement that challenges social norms is “unthinkable” until proven otherwise. By 1994, *The New York Times* still notes that “most advertisers, to be sure, still shun even elemental efforts in this realm [gay and lesbian marketing] because of a stigma about homosexuality” (6/24/94, Section D, p. 18, Col. 3). In the mid-1990s, ways of dealing with homosexuality in the world of advertising and business not only differentiated marketing strategies but also came to distinguish corporate policy and its overarching moral climate. In what the *New York Times* defined by February, 1994 as “this contentious issue”, homosexuality, and advertiser’s reaction to it, sparked “a rambunctious debate roiling corporate America” (2/23/94, Sect. D, p.1, Col.1). On one

side, were companies such as Kraft General Foods<sup>68</sup>, which issued an internal memorandum, inadvertently sent to the media, stating “no KGF commercials can run in the episode” of the *Rosanne* show because it “deals with homosexuality”, containing a lesbian kiss scene (*New York Times*, 2/23/94, Sect.D, p.1, Col.1). In contrast, companies such as American Express chose not only to place their advertisements in gay magazines but went so far as creating “special versions of ads”, like their traveler’s checks “Cheques for Two” which featured the ability of being used individually or together as a couple, including same-sex couples. Other companies, such as North America Philips Consumer Electronics, Dewar’s White Label (9/13/93) received recognition by *The New York Times* (7/6/93) for being the first of their industry type to place advertisements in gay and lesbian-aimed publications.

The actions of American businesses and the reaction to and articulation of these events by the media reveal that hegemonic ideas govern what is and is not acceptable sexuality. If we pose the question Gramsci both asks and answers, Who creates hegemonic ideologies?, we see that the four decades-old answer is still the same. For Gramsci, there existed two types of intellectuals, organic and traditional, that create hegemonic ideologies. Organic intellectuals, such as economists and accountants, “reflect and express the ideas and values of the dominant social class...[and] some, like the editors of most tabloid newspapers, are little more than ‘hired pens’” (Worsley, 1997 p.266). Traditional intellectuals, on the other hand, are not “mere tools of the ruling class”, but are professionals, such as lawyers and university professors, which create their own social identity. In my opinion, it would seem that the reporters at *The New York Times* constitute organic intellectuals, reflecting and expressing the ideas and values of dominant social classes. The ideas of non-intellectuals, non-elites, the unknown and the non-credentialed are absent and excluded from business news articles. As *The New York Times* reports, it is corporations, paying for air and ad space that dictate what is and is not acceptable sexuality. It is *The New York Times* that defines, censors and prints what are and are not appropriate business responses to this alleged “contentious issue” and moral, political and economic dilemma. In short, it is by far *not* the “American public” that

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<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, Kraft, as a company, has taken a position of avoiding multiple social issues. It pulled its advertisements from another episode of *Roseanne* dealing with masturbation and also refused to advertise

decides what images and knowledges about sexuality are produced for us to consume. And certainly, it is not GLBTQs that have control over this knowledge production process either.

From a social movement perspective, however, we may notice an interesting particularity about the response of various “Americans” to this corporate control of reality. By examining who is included in *The New York Times*’ article on the “growing list” of organizations exerting pressure to “change advertisements”, we can see that even groups with diametrically opposed viewpoints are working against the omnipotent influence of advertising. In this particular case, fighting eating disorders, “advocates representing the mentally ill, stutterers, the religious right, homosexuals and highway safety adherents” have attacked “the undue influence of advertising images to convince consumers, particularly women, that there are certain ideals of appearance to which they must conform” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.18, Col.1, 4/26/94). So, although those organized to oppose the media’s ever expanding influence may largely differ otherwise, it is interesting to note that the intrusion and effect of advertising on various groups of people is a topic even homosexuals and the religious right have both worked on. To me, this denotes the sovereignty advertising possesses in modern society.

The growing importance of sexual identity as a tool for consumer research may be asserted by its inclusion in the annual Yankelovich Monitor survey. It was not until 1993 that this survey, which has tracked consumer values and attitudes every year since 1971, first decided to include a question about sexuality. Reporting the results of this survey, *The New York Times* writes,

Among the most interesting results of the survey are demographic data at odds with widely held assumptions about the affluence of gay households and answers to attitudinal questions that underscore perceptions of homosexuals as trend-setting consumers (Sect.D, p.1, Col.3, 6/9/94).

Interest in gays as a market sector of great interest in 1994 is confirmed with Yankelovich’s managing partner, Watts Wacker, stating, “this is a very viable market that

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while *Law and Order* dealt with issues of racism (*New York Times*, 2/23/94).

many clients have expressed an interest in knowing more about” (ib). *The New York Times* contributes to the idea of homosexuals being of heightened appeal to mainstream advertisers in 1994 by remarking how they

have sharply increased their activities aimed at this market, as evidenced by a flood of campaigns this month in connection with gay-themes events that include the Gay Games IV and Cultural Festival” (Sect.D, p.1, Col.3, 6/9/94).

It is curious that *The New York Times* should make such a statement being that this same reporter, Stuart Elliot, reported a number of times on the reluctance of mainstream advertisers to participate in such events. Perhaps this is why, even in this gay-positive article, Elliot writes,

Yet some companies, particularly those selling mass-market products, remain reluctant to enter the market, whether because of the stigma in some quarters about homosexuality or fears of a backlash among conservative customers (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.1, Col.3, 6/9/94).

So, in some respects, the situation remains unremarkably unchanged. Yet, one major impact *The New York Times* reports the Yankelovich survey has is debunking the myth of homosexual affluence.

It has become conventional wisdom to consider homosexuals far more affluent than the general population...but the Yankelovich data indicated little noticeable difference between the homosexual and heterosexual respondents. Among the gay men, the mean household income was \$37,400, compared with \$39,300 among the heterosexual men. Among the lesbians, it was \$34,800, compared with a national average of \$34,400 among the heterosexual women (Sect.D, p.1, Col.3, 6/9/94).

Instead of commenting on how it is heterosexual males that continue to make between \$2,000 - \$5,000 more than homosexuals, *The New York Times* continues to look for reasons for corporate America to continue courting this population:

Mr. Steward said the income data “would certainly be worrisome from a marketing perspective” if advertisers based their new-found interest in homosexuals solely on “superior buying power”. Rather, he added, marketers should focus on the other results that suggest gay men and lesbians are demographically desirable<sup>69</sup> (Sect.D, p.1, Col.3, 6/9/94).

#### **4.2.c Marketing Gay Male “Lifestyles” in the 1990s - Oops...Did they forget the lesbians, bisexuals, and trans-community on purpose?**

Gender issues complicate business concerns relating to homosexuality in several ways. The tendency of *The New York Times*, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, is to bypass gender issues to avoid complication by stating “gay and lesbian”, or just “gay”, and leaving it up to the reader to discern whether the topic discussed refers to men, women or both. In this section, I draw upon several *New York Times* examples to illustrate some the complications involved in representing the “gay” market during the mid-Nineties and to identify some advertising campaigns that have worked to reach – or ignore – lesbians.

Throughout the 1990’s, gay targeting grew to be an identifiable marketing strategy for a growing number of market sectors. The entertainment industry is my first

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<sup>69</sup> Homosexuals are twice as likely as heterosexuals to have attended graduate school. They are highly concentrated in the top 25 metropolitan markets. They are more concerned about physical fitness, well-being and self-enhancement, which manifests itself in everything from keen interest in new shopping outlets to greater use of cosmetics and fragrances. They report more stress in their lives than heterosexuals do, which could make them likely prospects for everything from escape-style vacations to home security systems. They are self-employed at a rate almost two-thirds higher than that of heterosexuals, which could make them likely prospects for technological products like cellular telephones and fax machines (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.1, Col.3, 6/9/94).

example of how gender complicates images of homosexuality and how gay male issues predominate in the media.

By 1993, the number of gay-themed plays and musicals reached an unprecedented high. Despite the surge in productions addressing homosexual issues in the entertainment industry, *The New York Times* avoids discussion about how “gays and lesbians have been increasingly visible in arts and entertainment, despite the industry’s still deeply entrenched investment in heteronormativity” (Hennessy, 2000, p.135). This is true for advertising articles – even when theater, an area with perhaps greater potential than others for homosexual sensitivity, is the article’s focus.

Speaking to *The New York Times* in June, 1993, Sean Strub, producer of *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* and president of Strub Media group, a NY direct marketing firm specializing in gay/lesbian consumers, stresses “The market for gay and AIDS-themed work is exploding, so people are experimenting with different ways to sell to that market. The environment has changed dramatically, even in the last year. There’s an openness that’s very unusual”(6/25/93, Sect. D, p.16, Col. 3). Despite the alleged new-found “openness” gays and lesbians enjoyed in 1993, it was only gay male theatrical events that received coverage in this *New York Times* review. Among the chosen are *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, *Angels in America*, *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, *Falsettos*, and *Jeffrey* - all which center on gay male experiences and/or AIDS. Hence, it is my contention that the early-1990s is a period that remained largely oblivious to the needs of lesbian consumers, in everything from household products to art and theater. The final touch promotions “complementing the ad campaign aimed at mainstream theatergoers are...” “Jeffrey’ Night” at the “gay nights” of clubs like the Roxy and Limelight, where patrons get free condoms in matchbook-like packages bearing the slogan “Spend the night with ‘Jeffrey’” (*New York Times*, 6/25/93, Sect. D, p.16, Col. 3) clearly demonstrate that lesbian’s needs and interests were not ever considered...which would have been fine if *The New York Times* and advertising executives simply limited their discussions and assertions to gay men.

In other market sectors, the problematic gender divide for the homosexual population also manifests itself in less than apparent ways and, once again, is rendered mute and unattended. April, 1994 ushered in the first National Gay and Lesbian Business

Exposition, held at the Meadowlands Convention Center in New Jersey. In this advertising news example, *The New York Times* cites this “landmark event” as

another indication of one of the least expected business trends of the 1990’s: the growing efforts by many mainstream marketers to reach consumers who are homosexuals. Scores of large consumer-product companies...are shedding a longterm reluctance to aim sales pitches at this market.” (*New York Times*, 4/14/94, Sect. D, p.18, Col. 1).

Yet, although “scores of large consumer-product companies<sup>70</sup>” are noted for “shedding a longtime reluctance to aim sales pitches at this market”, discussions of diversification continue the trend, which I identified in earlier sections, of centering around profit, making consumption the underlying goal. As Stuart Elliott writes,

They are concluding that the potential for generating additional sales among affluent, brand-loyal gay consumers outweighs the risk of alienating existing customers” (4/14/94, Sect. D, p.18, Col. 1).

In other words, while corporate desire to reach the gay market is depicted in *The New York Times* as increasing, the reporter stresses “still, the stigma surrounding homosexuality remains powerful” (4/14/94).

This article raises several issues for homosexuals. First, by associating homosexuality with affluence (i.e. “affluent, brand-loyal gay consumers”), the reader is left unsure whether by “gay” *The New York Times* means gay men or all homosexuals. If, as I interpret this quote, they mean men and women, then the claim remains more hopeful than quantitatively substantiated.

Second, stereotypical representations of homosexuals obliterate the reality of lesbians, especially those raising children. Median income for American women is consistently less than for men. With US Census data (1997) citing that, among the US

poor over eighteen, 62.7 percent are women, the “feminization of poverty” is a trend to which lesbians are not immune. Due to the US Government’s lack of collection of statistical data for homosexuals, median income and occupational data is non-existent. However, projecting the race and gender specific income trends to families formed by two women, we may postulate that two women are more likely to have fewer economic assets than either heterosexual families or gay men raising children due to the lack of an advantaged white male income.

Third, it is discouraging, albeit unsurprising, to witness the media and corporate America further contribute not only towards the age-old trend of lesbian invisibility but also to the false notion that “affluence” is a universally attributable characteristic of homosexuality – irrespective of race, gender and class. The degree to which the American public, and the mass media, transposes homosexual male characteristics and demographics of affluence onto female and other homosexual populations is highly problematic.

Differences in acceptance of homosexuality based upon gender are further illustrated in an article about the success, or lack thereof, of gay and lesbian magazines. In this rare focus on lesbian business news, the reporter highlights three general points to explain the apparent gender difference in homosexually-targeted magazines’ business success. First, *The New York Times* acknowledges how it is untrue that gay men and women are equally accepted by the American public. Lesbian magazines are described as facing a greater “uphill climb” than gay male magazines. More specifically, the paper writes “while mainstream culture may have come a long way in accepting gay men, it still does not quite know what to make of lesbians, much less their publications” (12/23/96, Sect.D, p.7, Col.5).

Second, lesbians’ works are seen as inferior, and hence rejected not only by heterosexual women, but also by gay men. Sarah Petit, editor-in-chief at *Out* states, “People won’t take them seriously as women’s books but won’t take them seriously as gay books either” (*New York Times*, 12/23/96, Sect.D, p.7, Col.5). This double divide – between heterosexual and homosexual women and between homosexual men and women

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<sup>70</sup> A non-exhaustive list including American Express, Philip Morris, Seagram, Time Warner, ATandT, Columbia Records, Continental Airlines, Waldenbooks and Xerox are listed (*New York Times*, 4/14/94,

– confounds the struggle of lesbians, and their publications, to achieve visibility and acceptance in both homosexual and mainstream culture. To read an article in *The New York Times* stating that “mainstream culture...still does not quite know what to make of lesbians” in 1996 is a good indication that lesbians have not yet achieved the same social position as gay men.

Thirdly, although the gay and lesbian press, as represented by *Out*, exclaims how “there is a whole market of women out there who have the same niche potential that these gay men do” (12/23/96, Sect.D, p.7, Col.5), the truth remains that advertisers still shy away from pursuing the lesbian market. Although Paula Brooks, media director at ad agency Margeotes/Fertitta and Partners is quoted by *The New York Times* saying, “more advertisers are recognizing this as a very potent audience,” simultaneously neither *The New York Times*, nor advertisers, evidence a marked change of interest in lesbians. As the article continues, *The New York Times* specifically states “gay and lesbian publications remain a tough sell” to advertisers (12/23/96, Sect. D, p.7, Col.5).

Lastly, as magazines struggle to gain corporate funding to cover costs, several magazines note how content is suffering. Still, lesbian magazines, such as *Curve*, struggle to defy stereotypical images. Editor in chief and publisher Frances Stevens expresses their focus in the following manner:

That’s always been our goal: to produce a magazine that’s about who we are as people rather than just who we’re sleeping with. We also want to put a variety of images out there, not say: ‘You’re a lesbian. That means you have to cut off all your hair, wear jeans and chain your wallet to your belt. (12/23/96, Sect. D, p.7, Col.5)

Given that this statement was printed by *The New York Times*, I find it perplexing why this knowledge – of lesbian image and reality, of lesbian non-acceptance in mainstream and gay male culture, and of the lack of advertising support, is not reproduced in its other articles.

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Sect. D, p.18, Col. 1).

In the mid-Nineties, as increasing numbers of blue chip companies<sup>71</sup> rushed in to attach their slogans and logos with the newest up-and-coming target group. The momentousness of gays and lesbians, as a social group gaining mainstream visibility, and dare-say legitimacy?, was further evidenced when Time Inc. Ventures, “a leading publishing company”, in January, 1994, considered creating a publication steered towards gays and lesbians. Although Stephanie Blackwood, associate publisher of *The Advocate* expressed excitement in “the power of Time Warner’s sales force to present the gay and lesbian market to advertisers who have been very receptive to the idea of gay and lesbian consumers but very fearful of backlash” (*New York Times*, 1/24/94, Sect.D, p. 8, Col.3), the lure of this group remains solely tied to its “financial strength”. This is less than good news for the majority of poorer gays and lesbians seeking lifestyle validation.

In the midst of all the hoopla and fervor in the fight for the gay dollar, a noticeable absence and void is still apparent: the automobile industry remained mute on “the gay issue”. Not until this same year, 1994, perhaps due to the “mainstreaming” of gay and lesbians as consumers, did any automobile manufacturer make an initiative to reach what was coming to be dubbed the hottest untapped market. In September, 1994, Saab Cars, USA became the first automobile industry to “aim its sales pitches at homosexuals” (*New York Times*, 9/29/94, Col.1, p.20). However, while *The New York Times* announced Saab as “tak[ing] its message to magazines for gay men and lesbians” (*New York Times*, 9/24/94, Col.1, p.20), in reality Saab only targeted white, middle-to-upper class, homosexual men. The two magazines Saab chose to run its advertisements in - *Out* and *Genre* - are historically gay male publications, not lesbian magazines, despite the newspaper’s assertion that these “two magazines read by gay men and lesbians” (*New York Times*, 9/29/94, Col.1, p.20). It is only within the past year or so that *Out*<sup>72</sup>, in particular, has made a committed effort to attract more lesbian subscribers. This

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<sup>71</sup> Examples include American Express, ATandT, Apple Computer, Grand Metropolitan, Levi Strauss, Philip Morris, Seagram and Unilever (*New York Times*, 9/29/94, Section D, Col. 1, p. 20). Others include Calvin Klein, Sony and Time Warner (*New York Times*, 2/23/94).

<sup>72</sup> One example of the gendered nature of *Out* can be seen via the advertisements contained within the publication. For instance, American Express’ Cheques for Two advertising campaign made the sample checks signed by “Robert Stevenson” and “Matt Howell” in *Out* and by “Amy Mulligan” and “Nancy Russo” in 10 Percent. As Cherie Winkler, advertising manager for American Express, comments, “It’s part of an effort to make sure we’re reaching all our potential users” (*New York Times*, 2/23/94, Sect. D, p.1, Col.1).

is a history of which *The New York Times* is aware, yet selectively continues to choose to ignore in future reports about Saab. For example, when Robin Pogrebin wrote an article entitled, “Lesbian publications struggle for survival in a market dominated by gay males” (*New York Times*, 12/23/96), she explicitly commented

“Although...gay publications like *Out* and *The Advocate* are aimed at both men and women, the readers of these magazines remain largely male. Indeed, most gay publications are still geared to a gay male audience” (Sect.D, p.7, Col.5).

Sarah Petit, chief editor of *Out* magazine, notes that “Because lesbians have been underserved in the national gay press, women have not known to even look for themselves in those magazines” (*New York Times*, 12/23/96, Sect.D, p.7, Col.5). Furthermore, aside from the differential serving of gay men verses women, homosexuals as a group have been subjected to “whitewashing” because of corporate America’s sudden interest in marketing to them in the gay press. According to Joe Landry, associate publisher, in 1992, *The Advocate* ridded its magazine of all “controversial” advertising, such as ads for phone sex, in an effort to attract mainstream corporate sponsors and to alter its image to “coffee table” magazine. Women-focused gay publications, such as *Curve* and *Girlfriends* are criticized by some lesbian editors as being “the Campbell’s soup of magazines”, avoiding political and “intellectually provocative” (*New York Times*, 12/23/96, Sect.D, p.7, Col.5) content in fear of scaring away mainstream marketers, whose financial contributions keep such publications functioning.

In the majority of *New York Times* articles dealing with homosexuality and advertising, where the newspaper mentions “gays and lesbians” the focus remains either gender neutral or on gay men’s issues. The same is true even for topics with the potential to be identified as “lesbian”. For example, in 1995, when Subaru became the first-ever Japanese automobile maker to reach out to lesbians, *The New York Times* framed the issue as “gay and lesbian”, rather than just reporting that Subaru was targeting lesbians. Even in this Subaru article’s title, “Martina Navratilova is in a Campaign Aimed at Gay Consumers”, lesbians are removed from visibility. Yet, reading the quote by Tim Mahoney, marketing strategy manager for Subaru of America, we are told,

In focus-group interviews with Subaru owners who happen to be gay we learned we had some equity there, particularly with lesbians. Since these people essentially found us, it made sense we'd reach back to them (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.6, Col.4, 10/6/95).

Whereas I might have approached reporting on Subaru's ground-breaking lesbian marketing tactics by noting that Subaru was one of the first large-scale companies to specifically target lesbians, *The New York Times* elected to discuss how Subaru is

only the third national auto marketer...to address gay men and lesbians through separate efforts that augment mainstream marketing [and is] the first auto maker to participate in a so-called cause-related marketing project aimed at homosexuals (Sect.D, p.6, Col.4, 10/6/95).

Perhaps *The New York Times*, like Subaru, decided to target gays and lesbians because, as the newspaper tells us, they were "motivated by money" and associated this social group with money. *The New York Times* does find it newsworthy to mention that Ms. Navratilova is the "nonpaid public spokesperson" for the Rainbow Card, sponsored by Subaru. Although chosen "because she has incredible credibility not only in the gay community but in the straight community" (ib), this credibility still does not warrant payment. As *The New York Times*' paraphrasing of Pam Derderian, chief executive of the marketing company that created the Rainbow Card program, notes, "Ms. Navratilova has often linked her paucity of lucrative national endorsement contracts to her openness about being a lesbian" (ib). Even in 1995, *The New York Times* continues to report that corporate executives continue to reject sponsorship due to homosexuality and that "most mainstream advertisers continue to shun the market because of stigma many attach to homosexuality" (Sect.D, p.6, Col.4, 10/6/95).

The close of the decade failed to yield any path breaking changes for gays and lesbians in the field of advertising as reported by *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*' interest in gays, as measured by the number of business articles written, continued

to decline after the late eighties (Chart 2). However, by the mid-to-late Nineties, there appears to be another surge of interest. Although, this renewal of interest seems to only apply to articles discussing advertising and gay men, and not to lesbian, which evidences a continued gender difference quantitatively, as well as qualitatively.

*New York Times* advertising news coverage of lesbians in the late Nineties continues to be limited. Of the articles sampled, those in 1999 only mention lesbians in conjunction with a name (Public Interest Productions for the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) (Sect.C, p.1, Col.2, 12/29/99) or again as part of the general term “homosexuals”/ “gays and lesbians”. However, corporate interest in gays and lesbians continued to grow. By 1999, an \$11 million marketing agreement between Next Card Internet Visa and Planet Out is defined by *The New York Times* as “one of the largest in the gay and lesbian market” (Sect.C, p.13, Col.5, 6/28/99).

#### **4.2.d. Bisexuals, Transsexuals and Transgenders - Unworthy social groups?**

Between 1970-2000, *The New York Times* business section, for all categories of articles, included a total of twelve articles containing the term “bisexual”. Out of these twelve articles, only two were printed in the 1980s, with the first appearing in 1986. The remaining ten were published in the 1990s and 2000. Compared with the plethora of articles published about gays and lesbians in this same time frame, merely noticing this low number is significant in and of itself. The lack of any discussion or mention of this social group, to me, conveys a message that *The New York Times* sees bisexuals as not significantly related to business matters. However, we might also deduce a more positive conclusion: While “bisexuals” were never mentioned in *The New York Times* during the 1970s, by the 1990s, this social group has at least earned a morsel of representation.

Coverage of bisexuals and business issues in *The New York Times* reveals a number of social norms. First, not one article addresses the needs or issues of bisexuals; bisexual in every case is merely a descriptive noun used to describe people (i.e. “Today, you can be fired in 41 states simply because you’re gay, lesbian or bisexual” *The New York Times*, 4/27/97, Sect. 3, p.11, Col. 1) or appears as part of an acronym (i.e.: GLOBAL (Gays, Lesbians or Bisexuals at Lockheed), *The New York Times*, 4/28/91. In

every case, bisexuals are mentioned as a group of persons but receive no independent discussion.

Second, the lack of “bisexuals”, as an *independent* social group, being mentioned in any articles dealing with marketing, business or advertising implies that they exist beyond the scope of business news according to *The New York Times*. Out of the twelve existing articles mentioning “bisexuals”, three discuss advertising. In each of these advertising articles, the needs of bisexuals - as consumers or as human beings, is not discussed. In the first article, about marketing Rogaine, Upjohn’s vice president Keith Barton mentions how marketing to women lead to Rogaine’s continued growth. This remains the focus of the entire article. The introduction of bisexuals has nothing at all to do with Rogaine; bisexuals are merely introduced by reporter, Stuart Elliott, in a stereotypical manner, as attestation to how availability to men and women “doubles” one’s chances of “success”:

After all, if, as Woody Allen once said, being bisexual doubles your chance of getting a date, then expanding a drug’s market to women and men, from only men, would seem to be a marvelous marketing opportunity (*The New York Times*, 1/3/92, Sect. D, p.4, Col. 3).

The second advertising article, “Advertising: For gay consumers, sales pitches are getting more personal”, also by Stuart Elliot, (*The New York Times*, 6/24/94) is about the multiplicity of gay communities and the differences each represent as consumers. Seemingly, this would have been a perfect place to at least mention the word bisexual, as well as transsexual, etc. Unfortunately, the only place we see “bisexual” appear is in the title of a United Employee organization - League (Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay United Employees). Again, by repeatedly ignoring non-gay and non-lesbian “homosexuals?”, the normative image created is one that is black or white. You either advertise to homosexuals or to heterosexuals. Where bisexuals fit into the framework is never discussed and remains unclear.

The only other business news article where *The New York Times* comes close to mentioning differing queers during the mid-Nineties is an article about “Planet Out: ‘Gay

Global Village’ of Cyberspace”. Unfortunately, a mention by name is all that appears and, non-heterosexuality is still framed as stigmatic:

Besides being a potentially powerful global marketing force, some gay groups see Planet Out as a gathering point for millions of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transvestites and others who may be reluctant to associate openly in public (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.3, Col. 1, 8/21/95).

Between the mid-Nineties and 2000, a shift in conception, as well as nomenclature, in how non-heterosexuals are represented, both within *The New York Times*, and society at large, appears to have occurred. By 2000, a shift in conceptualization of “homosexual”, at least within the advertising industry, becomes apparent and is manifested in at least one business news article. In a discussion about *Showtime’s* cable network series *Queer as Folk*, discussed in detail in the “queer” section of this dissertation, *The New York Times* makes a direct association between bisexuals and advertising. Although not a focus of the article, “bisexual” is mentioned in a side-comment put in brackets by reporter Stuart Elliot:

Coincidentally, a study issued last week by Better World Advertising in San Francisco showed that 66.8 percent of the gay, bisexual and transgendered respondents said they subscribed to cable TV, but Showtime was not listed among their twelve most watched networks, broadcast or cable (*The New York Times*, Sect.C, p.9, Col.1, 11/28/00).

I find it interesting that “gay” is listed independently of the other two categories. Clearly, “gay” here means “gay men and lesbians” while “bisexuals” and “trans” constitute separate categories. Unfortunately, lack of precision and consistency in definition translates, both within the media and broader segments of society, into confusion, exclusion and lack of clarity in discussion of these social groups.

Although bisexuals, as a social group, are practically invisible, transgenders and transsexuals represent no more than a speck of dust on my sampling graph. There are a

total of three *New York Times* business news articles categorized by Lexis/Nexus that use the term “transgender”. Interestingly, the *Queer as Folk* article cited above is not listed as one of them. Of the other three articles, the first appears in December 1994 and the other two occur in June and September 2000. The image for transsexuals is equally invisible. Again, there are a total of three articles mentioning transsexuals - two being written in 1997 and one in 1998. Trans-issues differ considerably in focus from bisexuals (the other “other”). Whereas bisexuals are mentioned across a number of business news categories not included in this dissertation, i.e. AIDS, the gay press, and discrimination issues, articles mentioning transgender focus exclusively on work, specifically labor benefits, and transsexual articles advertising. Because the focus of this analysis has come to be on advertising and marketing, I shall not discuss the transgender labor articles. However, given that every transsexual article is about advertising, I find this of particular interest and shall discuss each.

The first mention of the term “transsexual” appears in 1997 in a brief article titled “Holiday Inn Pulls TV Ad”. The entire article, cited below, reveals that avoiding discomfort and offense remains a hallmark of major advertisers:

Holiday Inn Worldwide said today that it was dropping a television commercial featuring a transsexual that appeared during the Super Bowl. The hotel chain, a unit of Bass P.L.C., said the ad, which was aimed at dramatizing the company’s \$1 billion renovation program, offended some people. The ad, first broadcast on Sunday, showed a woman drawing admiring glances at a class reunion. She turns out to be a male alumnus who had a sex-change operation. (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.7, Col. 3, 1/29/97).

The message this article conveys, especially to transsexuals, is that as individuals, they are not equal American citizens with rights of personhood and public representation. Rather, as late as 1997, they remain social aberrances - a status *The New York Times* does not challenge.

The second article, about the spread of homosexual imagery from magazines and newspapers to television, comments on the increasing visibility of non-heterosexuals in commercials:

The spots feature same-sex couples, celebrities known to be homosexuals, drag performers and even a transsexual or two (*The New York Times*, 6/30/97, Sect. D, p.12, Col. 1).

In this GLBTQ affirmative article, advertisers are quoted as being conservative yet conscious to represent consumer culture in its entirety:

Advertisers are a conservative bunch, but advertising likes to think of itself as a mirror reflecting the values out there,” said Michael Wilke, a reporter for the trade publication Advertising Age who has collected about 100 commercials from around the world that feature or evoke homosexual imagery. (*The New York Times*, 6/30/97, Sect. D, p.12, Col. 1)

*The New York Times* notes that gay images in television ads contain more stereotypical representations than those in print but the framing of the article is intrinsically positive - i.e. that such introductions are where society ought to be heading:

As more mainstream companies aim sales pitches at homosexuals as part of efforts to reach segments of the general consumer market, images associated with gay men and lesbians have become increasingly prevalent in print advertisements for products as disparate as Absolut Vodka, American Express travelers checks, Subaru automobiles and Garderburger vegetable patties. (*The New York Times*, 6/30/97, Sect. D, p.12, Col. 1)

Despite *The New York Times* depiction of “progress”, no negative commentary is made about the advertising industry’s continued disassociation with non-heterosexuality in “gay-vague advertising”:

The imagery that viewers watch may often be less overt than what magazine and newspaper readers see. For instance, what is the nature of the relationship between two 20-something men who drive around aimlessly in commercials for Volkswagen of America? And there may be more stereotyped characters like effeminate fashion designers in television spots than in print ads. (*The New York Times*, 6/30/97, Sect. D, p.12, Col. 1)

As in 1990, the ability of advertisers to both pursue and dodge “gay issues” surfaces again in 1997. Volkswagen Golf’s commercial featuring “two men randomly roaming the roads in a Volkswagen Golf” (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.8, Col.1, 4/21/98) drew audience applause and popularity. However, the response from the advertising and marketing director, Liz Van Zura, clearly foretells how the industry is oblivious to the notion that two same-sex adults could be perceived as homosexuals. Quoting the response of Ms. Zura about their ad, *The New York Times* article states:

“We’ve had such a response, we didn’t anticipate it...hundreds of inquiries on our Web site and our ‘800’ number...but it never crossed our minds that viewers would infer the two men are not just friends. There was never any intention other than to present them as two college guys on a Sunday afternoon with nothing going on. It’s interesting that people read more into it (Sect. D, p.8, Col.1, 4/21/98).

*The New York Times* notes that the reason for such audience “reading” may be due to the fact that the ad aired during *Ellen*’s coming out episode. Regardless of Volkswagen, Quaker Toasted Oatmeal, or the number of other advertiser’s true intentions, “gay-vague advertising” is reaping the profits from simultaneously reaching gay and non-gay audiences.

The third and last article mentioning transsexuals is written within the context of the Fallon McElligott advertising agency, “already known for risk-taking campaigns...with unconventional, much-discussed work for Holiday Inn, featuring a transsexual” (*The New York Times*, Sect. D, p.8, Col. 1, 4/21/98), whose chairman is quoted saying “We embrace controversy that’s relevant to the consumer target”. Once again, transsexuals are only spoken about in the context of the unconventional and controversial market. Consistent with the other two articles, transsexualism association with “controversy” and “unconventional[ity]” is confirmed. To put forth images of transsexual is risk-taking behavior. If one were to only read *The New York Times’* business news for an understanding of transsexuals, transgenders and bisexuals, one would not come away with a favorable image. To me, one of the most potent messages these articles convey is that these groups are inferior and exterior to society. To have a total of 18 articles citing these three social groups for over a thirty year period, compared to the thousands of articles written about gays and lesbians during this same period, in my mind, unquestionably reveals their lack of importance to American corporations. To the degree that *The New York Times* reports the undertakings of corporate America, I would argue that the pursuit of the “gay dollar” is one that follows a strictly narrow definition of “gay”.

#### 4.2.e. A Queering of the Issues

**Queer** (kwîr) *adj.* **queer·er, queer·est.** **1.** Deviating from the expected or normal; strange: *a queer situation.* **2.** Odd or unconventional, as in behavior; eccentric. See Synonyms at **strange.** **3.** Of a questionable nature or character; suspicious **4.** *Slang.* Fake; counterfeit. **5.** Feeling slightly ill; queasy. **6.** *Offensive Slang.* Gay; homosexual. **-queer** *n.* *Offensive Slang.* Used as a disparaging term for a gay or homosexual person. **-queer** *tr.v.* **queered, queer·ing, queers.** *Slang.* **1.** To ruin or thwart: “*might try to queer the Games with anything from troop movements...to a bomb attack*” (Newsweek). **2.** To put someone in a bad position.

~*The American Heritage Dictionary, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., 1996*

From the above definition we learn that “queer” constitutes, among other definitions, a contemporary derogatory slang term connoting homosexuality. Given that all other definitions of “queer” are negative - odd, strange, ill, fake, counterfeit, thwarting or ruining - it does not bode well for homosexuals that this term has come to be associated with them. Recently, there has been a trend within some branches of the “gay rights” movement to “reclaim” this derogatory word for empowerment, akin to the controversial step taken by some blacks to claim usage of the term “nigger”. Perhaps less so than “nigger”, the term “queer” remains derogatory if applied to a group of people by “outsiders” with malicious intent. Yet, unlike “nigger”, “queer” is embraced by some for its ability to unify and unite everyone within the non-heterosexual community that in some way identifies with homosexuality. It is part of an effort, often heralded by postmodern feminists, to include and incorporate what has historically been excluded or overlooked. Hence, it is for this reason I find it imperative to explore how one small actor in mainstream media has, or has not, incorporated the word in its own usage. Again, what I hope to achieve through this analysis is more than mere documentation of terminology. What I hope to uncover is how an institution of power, *The New York Times*, understands and represents this “new” classification system of persons.

During the Eighties, the word “queer” is used in *The New York Times*’ business section on three occasions to describe various events. Its first appearance, on February 25, 1986, use is in an article about how employee health benefits are a “last-minute item” in “megamergers”. “Queer” is used in the last sentence of the piece as a response to an inquiry about post-retirement medical benefits: “We don’t want to know about it,” the benefits manager said. They were not looking for anything to queer the deal.” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.2, Col.1, 2/25/86).

The term continues to be used in this fashion in its second printing whereby it is said that the publicity surrounding a \$350 million proposed settlement “clearly queers it” (*The New York Times*, Sect.1, p.28, Col.3, 3/29/86). The third and final usage of “queer” in *The New York Times*’ business section is in a 1989 article titled “Selling Yourself on Madison Avenue” by freelance writer Aimee L. Stern. Telling of two cases where advertising directors were unexpectedly laid off, “queer” is used to describe the way the

chief executive Barry Biederman looked before he fired art director Lisa Levy. As every *New York Times*' business article using the term "queer" for the 1980s shows, "queer" was not used in conjunction with homosexuality and mainstream business issues at this time.

The year of 1992, which has been noted for its exceptional increase in articles about gays and lesbians, is also pertinent to our analysis of how and when queers became subjects in mainstream business advertising news. For *The New York Times*, queers make their entrance in an article written by Deirdre Carmody Body about the mainstreaming of the gay and lesbian press. After describing the demise of the gay NY publication *Outweek*, we are told that some people formerly involved with *Outweek* "brought out another New York weekly, NYQ, with Q standing for queer, their preferred word for homosexual" (*The New York Times*, Sect.A, p.1, Col.2, 3/2/92). From this point, Body seems compelled to elaborate the meaning and application of this new term for the mainstream audience:

The very word is somewhat of a red flag among gay men and lesbians, with younger and more militant people embracing it and others wincing when they hear it. "The word queer started up as a way to say it's not derogatory to be a homosexual," said Troy Masters, co-publisher of NYQ. "It's also a way of defining yourself as a political person." (*The New York Times*, Sect.A, p.1, Col.2, 3/2/92).

However, the newspaper's presentation of queer in 1992 was not uniformly introduced in such a pedagogical fashion. In the second of two advertising articles incorporating this term we are told how a hot, gay editor at *The New Republic* gained popularity because he rejected "the idea of changing the word "queer" from an epithet into a label of proud self-identification" (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.19, Col.1, 3/26/92). As *The New York Times* quotes Paula Brooks, executive vice president and director of media services at Margeotes Fertitta and Weiss, NY, it was not a change in advertiser's tolerance that caused this new editor to be well received:

The fact they have a new editor, and he's 28, and his sexual preference is what it is, and he's much publicized as well, makes you want to pick it up and look at it," she said. And Mr. Sullivan's opinions are of "a more moderate slant," she added, "that make *The New Republic* more appropriate for a broader base of advertisers." Indeed, while another gay journalist might have put off advertisers by advocating radical opinions, Mr. Sullivan opposes "outing," the practice of disclosing the homosexuality of prominent individuals, and the idea of changing the word "queer" from an epithet into a label of proud self-identification, a move popular with some gay men and lesbians. (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.19, Col.1, 3/26/92)

Hence, as we are told, it was because "Mr. Sullivan's opinions are of 'a more moderate slant that make *The New Republic* more appropriate for a broader base of advertisers" (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.19, Col.1, 3/26/92).

With this example we see how the decade of the 1990s was a time period that witnessed several milestones for some gays and lesbians. For instance, it is worthy of note that it was not until October, 1991, when Andrew Sullivan became top editor of *The New Republic* that any national, mainstream magazine had a publicly visible homosexual in this position (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.19, Col.1, 3/26/92). However, this change was far from wholeheartedly welcomed:

There was widespread talk among advertising, marketing and media executives that some advertisers would prove leery of him, in much the same manner that sponsors withdraw from television programs with plots centering on homosexuality or other controversial issues" (*New York Times*, 3/26/92).

In an era marked by an overall inhospitable media climate, the fear surrounding how Mr. Sullivan's homosexuality would be received was reported by *The New York Times* as heightened by the numerous "traditionally minded" advertisers in *The New Republic*, including military contractors and corporate associations (Sect.D, p.19, Col.1, 3/26/92). Yet, despite the vocalized internal fear, *The New Republic* ended the year of

1991 with a 3.6% gain in advertisements during a year that the advertising industry as a whole experienced decline. When asked why he thought this was the case, the magazine's president, Jeffrey Dearth, attributed *The New Republic's* success to the "hot editor" phenomenon, which *The New York Times* describes as an ability to generate excitement "because of who they are, what they write, whom they hire, or all of the above" (ib). Such a consequence may be interpreted positively or negatively. First, one may comment how wonderful it is that we have entered a time when Mr. Sullivan's gay sexuality was seen by corporate America and the public not as a deterrent to success but rather as one of many interesting features of him as an editor - along with the *New York Times* description of his being British, young, moderate and a religious Catholic. On the other hand, we may notice how Mr. Dearth's comment how "'the thought is always in the back of your mind' that Mr. Sullivan's sexuality would discourage advertisers" (*New York Times*, 3/26/92) still frames Mr. Sullivan's work within the context of his stigmatized sexuality. Perhaps it is the editor's status as a young, white, religious male that enabled him to override his other identity as gay. From the information provided we could not tell. As the *New York Times* reporter notes, "while another gay journalist might have put off advertisers by advocating radical opinions" (3/26/92), Mr. Sullivan is approvingly conservative. *The New York Times* reports Mr. Sullivan's opinions are "of a more moderate slant", which does not "put off advertisers by advocating radical opinions" (3/26/92). He has appropriately conformed to, perhaps even blended into, the dominant belief system, opposing "outing" "and the idea of changing the word "queer" from an epithet into a label of proud self-identification" (ib.). In fact, *The New York Times*, remains so uncritical of this cow-towing as a means of gaining corporate approval that it describes these approaches as "inclusive" and concludes with mentioning how he "has participated in presentations made to advertisers, meeting executives from companies like General Motors and Lockheed" (ib). Now this is progress! Imagine, for merely disavowing radical ideas, conservative blue-chip companies even let a gay editor make a presentation to them. Such "progress" makes perfect sense. The good old boys club has not been radically altered; its agenda remains the same. The only difference is that the prodigal son has been admitted.

During the following year, 1993, *The New York Times* mentions “queer” in two advertising articles. The first occurs in the coverage of the increase in gay/lesbian theme theatrical productions. In discussing the increase in direct marketing to gay and lesbian consumers, *The New York Times* reports “That reflects a larger trend. Increasingly, marketers of mainstream products from books to beer are aiming ads specifically at gay men and lesbians” (Sect.D, p.16, Col.3, 6/25/93). In this article, which is essentially about advertising the gay and AIDS themed, off-Broadway comedy, *Jeffrey*, it is reporter Stuart Elliot who introduces the term queer to describe Grey Entertainment and Media’s advertising campaign: “However effective this “We’re here, we’re queer, come see our show” strategy can be, there can be pitfalls” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.16, Col.3, 6/25/93). “Queer” is used in conjunction with “pitfalls” and thus perpetuates the aura of negativity surrounding this term. In the remainder of this article, the “danger” of aiming ad campaigns towards “gay audiences” is discussed. The risk one faces in accentuating the “queerness” of a theatrical event is that the “broader audience” may fail to take interest and attend the production. However, by pre-determining that audiences will reject “queer” cinema, *The New York Times* operates from the normative assumption that audiences are first uninterested in “queer” issues and second unlikely to attend a production that openly embraces its non-heterosexuality and uses it as a descriptive selling point. Disengaging from the local topic, i.e. theater, and abstracting the underlying ideology, one might conclude covert “queerness” imparts “mainstream” alienation.

In this article, *The New York Times* proffers readers confirmation of the status quo. Rather than criticize marketers of “Falsettos” and “Kiss of the Spider Woman”, two other gay-themed musicals, for “confining their efforts to mainstream media”, *The New York Times* puts forth an assimilationist marketing strategy. Rather than draw attention to a product’s “queer-ness”, the newspaper advocates accentuating its other assets, whatever those may be.

From a social change framework, I see several implications emerging. On the hand, de-emphasizing products’ “queer-ness” remains the traditional way to sell items. As we see by analyzing advertising articles in *The New York Times*, using sexuality as a vehicle for marketing is a new and culturally specific phenomenon. The degree to which

queer realities are made explicit and visible in mainstream publications is the change that has occurred during these past few years. However, documenting and drawing attention to social change is an entirely different task than is an evaluative exercise in social critique. To ask whether the changes made are beneficial or detrimental to one social group or another is perhaps the next stage one may wish to undertake. To question if sexuality-driven marketing campaigns represent progress, to ask if there ought to be continued polarization of queer and mainstream, and to explore whether “queering” advertising campaigns ghettoizes non-heterosexuality or validates “alternative lifestyles” are concerns I see knowledge of change in GLBTQ media representation raises.

The queer advertising articles analyzed in this dissertation depict queer as a more-or-less inclusive category that validates normative and less offensive<sup>73</sup> (to mainstream Americans) forms of homosexuality. The second, and last, time *The New York Times* writes about queer advertising in 1993 is also covered by reporter Stuart Elliot. The article, again about the growth of gay and lesbian marketing, does not use the word queer to refer to homosexuals throughout. Queer is used twice. Once, when “‘queer pride’ refrigerator magnets” are listed among several “so-called visibility items” in a discussion of catalogues marketing to gays and lesbians, and then again in the article’s closing sentences:

After catalogues, what? Several gay and lesbian entrepreneurs are considering home-shopping programs on local cable television systems. That could bring a whole new meaning to the “Q” in QVC (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.17, Col.1, 9/10/93)

The remaining two articles mentioning “queer” are equally lax in quantity, and quality, of queer-content. In 1994, “homosexuals”, and specifically “Digital Queers”<sup>74</sup>,

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<sup>73</sup> By “less offensive” I mean stereotypically conservative. We do not see more “deviant” sub-sectors of homosexuals – i.e. SandM constituents, polysexuals, etc. included in marketing campaigns and advertising business news.

<sup>74</sup> Interesting, “Digital Queers” is defined by *The New York Times* as “a group dedicated to promoting gay and lesbian workplace concerns while using its members’ skills and connections to build a high-tech infrastructure for gay America” (Sect.3, p.21, Col.3, 6/26/94). As written, I cannot tell from this definition whether the group sees bisexuals and trans concerns as included in gay and lesbian concerns or not. Within

are listed as one on-line consumer market group to have services aimed towards their particular consumption habits. Here, homosexuals are listed with women the digitally hip, older hipsters, sports buffs, game players and computer buffs (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.1, Col.3, 7/12/94). The only *New York Times* article at all to mention “queer” in 1995 is again due to the title “Digital Queers”. “Planet Out” is the focus of the article and Peter Lewis reports how

Encouraged by a recent survey by *Out* magazine that indicates lesbians and gay men are far more likely than the general population to use personal computers, modems and on-line services at home, Planet Out also intends to extend its reach to America Online (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.3, Col.1, 8/21/95).

Tom Rielly, head marketing executive, president and financial backer of Planet Out, confirms heterosexual domination of mainstream media:

Gays and lesbians don’t have a high level of ownership of mainstream media properties. The Internet is the first medium where we can have equal footing with the big players (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.3, Col.1, 8/21/95).

However, along with this description of the gay and lesbian market, we first experience the association of Planet Out “as a gathering point for millions of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transvestites and others” (ib), making this the birth of “homosexual” entailing more than gays and lesbians according to *The New York Times*.

In sum, throughout the Nineties, *The New York Times* speaks very little about “queers” and advertising. In total, seven advertising articles mention the term, and all of these articles, except one, occur between 1992-1995. Even with the onset of the much-publicized Showtime series, “Queer as Folk”, the new decade does little to break the

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the Gay Rights social movement, gay and lesbian have specifically meant gay and lesbian – a belief that continues to be supported today, especially by segments of feminist lesbians. If “Digital Queers” does include a broader range of non-heterosexuals, then *The New York Times*’ publication of a definition that defies the very point of the word “queer” – which is to have a single term that includes bisexuals and trans-persons along with gays and lesbians – is problematic.

silence. As of December 31, 2000, *The New York Times* only published one article about advertising to “queers” since August, 1995. In this one article, by Stuart Elliot who apparently handles nearly all of “gay advertising” articles, we learn that Showtime created a \$10 million campaign for the “Queer as Folk” series. Despite Elliot’s exclamation that this campaign is

probably the most elaborate ever aimed by a mainstream marketer at gay audiences and probably the most elaborate ever with gay themes aimed at mainstream audiences (*The New York Times*, Sect.C, p.9, Col.1, 11/28/00)

the potential for this highly visible effort is minimalized by *The New York Times*’ decision to limit reporting about this advertising campaign to just one article. Still, in this single article Elliot asserts that this advertising campaign

is also emblematic of two trends that are helping to reshape the way advertisers reach potential customers. On one hand, the campaign is indicative of efforts to appeal to the general audience by first generating positive word of mouth among niche markets deemed to be trend setters, like gays, blacks and urban residents (*The New York Times*, Sect.C, p.9, Col.1, 11/28/00).

Prime Access, the New York advertising agency responsible for the campaign, is quoted saying:

[Queer as Folk] It’s relevant to a broader audience if you convince them the show is an authentic slice of gay and lesbian life and the elements of storytelling and character are compelling enough that everyone can enjoy and relate to them (*The New York Times*, Sect.C, p.9, Col.1, 11/28/00).

While Prime Access is portrayed as trying to convince audiences that *Queer as Folk* can appeal to “a broader audience” by revealing an “authentic slice of gay and lesbian life” (ib.), quotes from the program’s marketers by *The New York Times* present just the opposite:

“We wanted to cover all our bases,” said Len Fogge, executive vice president for creative and marketing at the Showtime parent in New York, the Showtime Networks division of Viacom Inc., which has long presented TV series for specialty audiences like gays (“Brothers”), blacks (“Soul Food”) and Hispanics (“Resurrection Boulevard”). “Queer as Folk” really speaks to our brand promise of ‘No Limits,’” he added, referring to the theme of Showtime named the Red Group...The campaign focusing on gay viewers started in April (*The New York Times*, Sect.C, p.9, Col.1, 11/28/00).

Thus, I would argue that providing mainstream America with an authentic depiction of gay and lesbian life is not the primary purpose of “Queer as Folk”. The purpose, as with the purpose of all corporate-funded programming, is to attract viewers, otherwise known as consumers. Showtime wanted to “cover all our bases”. It decided niche marketing would be its marketing strategy, to attract new cable subscribers and viewers, saw it already had specific niche groups covered, and sought to expand its gay market. This social change, from “general” to “niche” marketing is a change I have reiterated throughout this dissertation, and one that *The New York Times* acknowledges:

The promotions...reflect the growing realization among traditional marketers that they need to keep up with the segmentation of the general audience into niches, each with its own interests and appetites. That is particularly true amid mounting signs of a slowdown in growth in consumer spending in the general market; campaigns focused on gay men, for instance, thrived during the last recession because of perceptions they spend more freely than their heterosexual counterparts (Sect.C, p.9, Col.1, 11/28/00).

Thus, it is questionable why Prime Access should either portray *Queer as Folk* as “relevant to a broader audience” or desire to make the storyline and its characters “compelling enough that everyone can enjoy and relate to them” (ib) when all along the history of negative backlash and/or controversy accompanying niche marketing programs

has presented itself again and again in advertising business news articles and does not appear to be, at this point in time, an obstacle overcome. However, removing ourselves from the details of this Showtime example, we may notice that just to be considering whether marketing campaigns for gay and lesbian shows ought to be targeted at GLBTQs specifically, or, society more broadly, is a great example of overall social change. Still, one must remain cautious. In the marketing and advertising business, the focus remains, and perhaps rightly so, on whomever will consume products and services<sup>75</sup>. As I have discussed at length in earlier sections of this dissertation, part of the reason we see a social shift in ad campaigns focusing on gay men is because they have been perceived by mainstream American corporations as having and spending more money – the “ultimate DINK market”. While I cannot resolve the gay income debate, and shall not re-address it here, we might merely note that the purpose of advertising *Queer as Folk* was not to ensure GLBTQ television viewers became aware that a network was broadcasting a show that might reflect or provide validation for the reality of their lives. Rather, “ads [were] intended to stimulate *Showtime* subscription sales” (ib). However, analyzing the purpose and/or impact of queer television programs is an entirely other matter, and one that may hold considerably more hope for demonstrating more positive social change. While advertisements may forever remain about selling products, as the executive producer of *Queer as Folk*, Daniel Lipman, remarked that *Showtime*’s decision to “include as many different kinds of audiences as possible”, such as gays, Blacks and Hispanics, was done with the hope that “within the specific, there’s the universal” (*The New York Times*, Sect.C, p.9, Col.1, 11/28/00).

One question I see emerging at the end of this exploration is: If “gays, blacks and urban residents” are such “trend setters”, as *The New York Times* has reported, then why does *The New York Times* remain reluctant to give them greater business news coverage? Furthermore, if in the year 2000 we find business executives asserting how “within the specific, there’s the universal”, why, during the same year, does *The New York Times* continue to write so few business articles about these “niche” groups?

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<sup>75</sup> What I see as a lesson to GLBTQs as members of American society, in addition to being consumers, is to not juxtapose social change in civic rights with social change in media representation. Although how one is represented by various institutions may lead to changes in other arenas, the path is not linear.

The overall lack of advertising coverage of “others” is a phenomenon *The New York Times* acknowledged and reported on in 1996. With a tongue-in-cheek flare, Elliot writes:

Consumers could be excused for thinking the Madison Avenue calendar includes an annual winter festival of black advertising that begins in mid-January with earnest advertisements from mainstream marketers “saluting the legacy” of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. --timed for the holiday in his honor-- and continues through February with campaigns “celebrating Black History Month”. Then on March 1, the festival ends. And so, it seems, do many of the efforts to cultivate black consumers (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.2, Col.1, 2/9/96).

This tendency of Madison Avenue to give visibility to the designated minority group for their “history” month is a marketing approach that, although acknowledged by *The New York Times*, receives little critique. Rather than questioning why “blacks, homosexuals and people who speak Spanish” are routinely grouped together and labeled for their difference from “the mainstream”, focus is turned to “the significant long-term opportunity” that exists if one routinely advertises to these “overlooked” niches. What this and other such articles confirm is the social trend to divide and differentiate in order to target. “We” are not Americans. “We” are black or homosexual or Spanish-speaking - and rarely is thought given to the idea that we might be all three.

*The New York Times* lack of coverage for several “others” who do not fit their preconceived notion, and specifically those non-heterosexuals who don’t fit the gay/lesbian description may foretell that social discomfort and rejection of “others” still exists. Discomfort and unease may also explain the lack of *The New York Times*’ adoption of the term “queer”, and continued use of “gay and lesbian”. Or, perhaps this group of people remains too insignificant/marginal to “Madison Avenue” to matter, although the marketing literature appears to indicate otherwise. At the end of the day, we are left with more questions than answers. The ideas presented in this dissertation raise issues to which there may be several, often diverging, responses. However, overall, I believe I have clearly evidenced social change has occurred. *The New York Times* does

publish business articles, both positive and negative, referring to GLBTQs whereas in the past, it did not. Future studies may wish to continue the critical questioning of what incorporation in and representation by the media means for and to various social groups.

### 4.3 Media Criticism and the Lingering Norm of Heterosexuality

The media's attention to homosexuality often comes as a "double edged sword". On one hand, it enhances the visibility of this group within mainstream society, but, on the other hand it perpetuates the division of homosexual and heterosexual societies, thus maintaining the normative values of the heterosexual society while disregarding the diversity and needs of the homosexual society. Indeed, even the media's portrayal of events that seem to be more positive representation of homosexuality tend to employ techniques that remind us America does not embrace homosexuality as a valid, moral, homespun American lifestyle. Given that sixty percent of *Out* subscribers request their magazine be delivered in a dark wrapper, hiding its content, reflects the continued discomfort some persons experience with issues of homosexuality. This is not a pornography magazine - it is a general information/fashion focused magazine for homosexuals. However, the fear of being "outed" to the post-deliverer, or one's neighbors and the stigmatization of being homosexual remains so strong that some gays and lesbians feel the need to hide publications disclosing any information that is not heterosexual. In the articles sampled, *The New York Times* does not comment on this as being a social problem. Yet, my analysis concedes that frequently the paper is not short on opinion or critique. *The New York Times* remains mute only on printing non-heterosexual reproach, and thereby can be defined as an active agent in reproducing the heterosexual norm.

If one were to read *The New York Times* without a critical perspective, one might be tempted to note that the markedly increased level of discussion - from none to a very little bit - is indicative of widespread change in the social status of homosexuals. This, I shall argue, would be a mistake. While it is certainly true that coming across articles in a mainstream newspaper about GLBTQs does reveal change per se, we must question *how* images of GLBTQs are being presented and under what circumstances. So, for example,

it is noteworthy that Saab, representative of an historically conservative industrial sector, chose to market to “homosexuals” in 1994. However, the reasons I see framing this decision are different than those selected by *The New York Times*. Saab’s advertisements in *Out* and *Genre* are claimed by *The New York Times* to be “a breakthrough for efforts to persuade mainstream advertisers to set aside longstanding concerns that the societal stigma against homosexuality, still widespread, requires them to shun that market” (*New York Times*, 9/29/94, Col.1, p.20). However, simply acknowledging that gays and lesbians exist and that they possess money that might be used to buy a product your company is selling does not, in my mind, eliminate the “societal stigma against homosexuality”. Advertisements *may* lend visibility to homosexuals but by consistently categorizing products as “gay-friendly” does more to ghettoize homosexuality than to normalize it. Obviously, gays and lesbians have purchased cars before 1994. However, up until then, one’s sexuality was not used as a mechanism to sell cars. We would be appalled to see an advertisement using one’s race blatantly used as a selling point for a car, computer, credit card, alcoholic beverage, etc., so why should we be overjoyed at Madison Avenue’s “discovery” of gays and lesbians existence?

*The New York Time’s* reporter, Stuart Elliott’s, decision to draw an analogy between the automotive industry’s hesitancy to advertise in homosexual publications with “Detroit’s Big Three” auto makers’ refusal to advertise in *Playboy* due to fear of consumer complaints further works to solidify the association between homosexuality and immorality. Yet, such perceptions lie beyond the scope of the media. Rather, the newspaper proceeds with congratulatory prose, rewarding Saab for its assimilationist strategies which I believe are best represented through the words of Howard Sherman, a director at Saab Cars at Angotti: “This decision [to market to homosexuals] was about the appropriateness of the market for the brand”. Noting that homosexuals were “a group known to buy Saabs”, Sherman continues to comment on how it was a “good business decision to talk to people who have an interest in your product” (*New York Times*, 9/29/94, Col.1, p.20).

These and other examples reported upon in *The New York Times* lend support for Lasch’s (1991) description of how, in a highly consumerist society, the “health” of the economy is ultimately all that matters:

The rise of consumerism in this century - in which the individual's self-interest is the *only* good - created a society in which you don't need any public consensus as long as the economy can satisfy people's needs and expand them into ever increasing levels of desire and expectation (p.45).

In short, as I have discussed elsewhere, here again we see that sexuality has been fully appropriated and used as a label to define a particular market segment and sell commodities. It truly matters little if the Jones next-door ultimately think you are immoral. What matters is that your parking your new Saab in front of your house, alongside their Mercedes, will not decrease the value of their real-estate. We can agree-to-disagree. They can still tune in to Rev. Phelps to learn how their righteousness will save their souls and we can still march in our pride parades, and America, the great, will continue to grow and prosper, maintaining its position as the number one exploiter on earth.

Today, homosexuals, as a group, remain specialized at best or problematic and often non-existent. Industry sectors, such as those selling "packaged foods, cosmetics, over-the-counter drugs and financial services" continued to avoid the gay niche as recently as 1994, largely due to homophobia both within the companies themselves and society at large. Additionally, as of 1994, homosexuality still remains normatively male. Even advertisements selling gender-neutral items, like mattresses, are continuously marketed to gay men. This is a phenomena that transcends American culture and has been criticized by women in other Westernized countries, such as Australia<sup>76</sup>l.

The ramifications of and approaches to pursuing the gay market are topics that continue to perplex a growing number of industries. Speaking about the homosexual market, John Kramer, vice president of sales and marketing for Saab in Norcross, Georgia told *The New York Times*, "Frankly, it's a market I think all of us have looked at. Some people have avoided it for obvious reasons, but as a demographic group, I don't think it's different from any other market out there". However, what is not spoken here is

what demographic “it” is. For the great majority of marketers, the homosexual market is young, careerist, affluent, and most frequently male. While this “demographic” is used to sell numerous objects, liquor companies, such as Dewar, have been noted for asserting their beverages’ alignment with young-age campaigns, especially when trying to capture a portion of the gay market (*New York Times*, 9/13/93).

In some instances, the progressive behavior of corporate America is directly thwarted by inconsiderate reporting habits of the media. Hiram Walker’s campaign marketing Tuca (orange-flavored liqueur from Italy) to early twenty year-olds exemplifies alcohol companies’ emblematic plan of couching their products as trendy and fashionable to consumers of various sexes and sexualities. By typecasting “Generation X” as a disparaging separation, of genders and sexualities, Hiram Walker’s campaign is by far one of the more revisionist of the years leading up to 1995. As Laurie Acosta, group manager at Hiram Walker, says, “This campaign was created with a particular consumer in mind, one who is hip, young and very sophisticated. My target goes out a lot, to gay and straight bars and discos, and they go out together” (*New York Times*, 2/15/95, Sect.D, p.30, Col.3). Gender equity in its advertising content makes Tuca’s campaign unique, and consequently worthy of recognition for giving equal weight to ads targeting gay men, lesbians and straights. *The New York Times* apparently recognizes this novelty, since it elected to devote an entire article to this theme, and headlined the article “...niche marketing shuns the standard niches”. Thus, it is surprising that, in discussing Tuca’s atypical “crisscross media plan”, which runs counterintuitive to the logic of niche marketing by placing straight ads and gay ads non-discriminatingly in both gay and “mainstream” publications, *The New York Times*’ sabotages its own intermittent representation of homosexuality as a viable alternative lifestyle. While reading the article, one encounters a commentary sentence written by newspaper reporter, Stuart Elliot, that states “A risk of the campaign, of course, is that heterosexuals might disdain the ads presenting the gay male and lesbian characters”. This commentary appears in the midst of an otherwise affirming article about diversity. The reporter’s comments are insulting as they typify heterosexuals as homophobic, further it is appalling that he

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<sup>76</sup> Toyota Australia, ahead of American auto manufacturers in marketing to homosexuals received criticism in December, 1991 for its pilot gay advertisements for only displaying gay men, and not lesbians in Sydney

considers the “disdain” of heterosexuals should be validated as of greater concern than the praise of homosexuals. It is in these precise moments that the hegemonic normativity of heterosexuality is re-created by the media itself. It is unfortunate that these tradition-affirming “of course” comments appear in articles possessing the greatest potential of refuting the “natural” heterosexual order - where, even *Spin*'s publisher, is declaring how the diversity of its readership contributes a level of comfort.

#### 4.4 The Social Construction of a Lifestyle and Alternative Marketing Projects

A fundamental flaw with mainstream advertisers' attention to the “gay” market lies in their reduction of all gay persons to “homosexuals”. Publishers, such as Liberation Publications, which produces the gay periodical, *The Advocate*, have long since recognized this flaw. As Sam Watters, president of Liberation Publications states, “there isn't one gay community; there are communities, and it takes a lot of work to reach them” (*New York Times*, 6/24/94, D, p. 18, Col. 3).

The larger social issue this research raises is the fundamental problem associated with GLBTQ relying on capitalist endeavors to extol their “lifestyle” and give validation and visibility to their selves as legitimate members of humanity. Societies organized around consuming media images ultimately produce a “homogenized culture”, not a diverse one. The focus of consumption is selling products - not legitimizing diverse sexualities. This project can and must come from collective organization that rejects corporate sponsorship and recognizes the power and authority the media retains to shape public opinion. As Wood (1996) critically asserts, “we are products of our media experiences” (Wood, 1996 p.149). This homogenization of culture does not mean that we will all make the same product or political choices, what it does mean is that “media viewers and readers can be induced to adopt a conforming pro-growth, big-business, exploit-and-consume mentality [that]...cancels one's ability to engage in meaningful social criticism” (Wood, 1996 p. 150).

#### 4.5. (Homo) Sexuality and the Institutionalization of Norms

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and Melbourne (*New York Times*, 12/24/91, D, 1, p.7).

Through a critical analysis of articles in the *New York Times* dealing with GLBTQ issues, in this case as they relate to advertising, we can take an historical snapshot of what is currently “acceptable”, “normal” in our society at this point in time. From my analysis, I would ascertain that the overwhelming climate with respect to GLBTQ persons is one of intrigue, disgust and monetary potential. The fact that the *New York Times* cites Deutsch Inc. as “gain[ing] a reputation for unconventional approaches to prosaic product categories” (10/24/00) by citing its commercial for Ikea with a gay male couple shopping for furniture at an IKEA store illustrates this point clearly. In order to make a mundane experience - i.e. furniture shopping - memorable and “creative”, Deutsch had to introduce something novel, extraordinary - i.e. a gay male couple. If homosexuality were normative in American society for the year 2000, it would hardly be noteworthy or “creative” to display a homosexual couple shopping at Ikea. The fact that this is not the case illustrates that homosexuality is still not accepted, stigmatized and controversial in American society today.

When IKEA’s “gay male couple” advertisement was initiated in 1994, *The New York Times* heralded IKEA’s portrayal of “nontraditional -- yet loving and caring -- families who typify the new consumers of the 1990’s” (12/30/94) as part of the “year’s best” in advertising. The reporter, Stuart Elliot, further noted that among the non-traditional vignettes, it was the gay couple that drew the most headlines (*New York Times*, 12/30/94). Likewise, although IKEA reports that the feedback it received for this ad was nearly entirely positive, it is not insignificant that both IKEA and its agency, Deutsch Inc. in New York received hate mail and that one store has to be intermittently closed due to a bomb scare (*New York Times*, 4/14/94, Sect. D, p.18, Col. 1).

When deconstructing the messages presented in the *New York Times* articles we notice several trends. First, if among all the vignettes produced it was the gay male couple that attracted the most discussion and attention, we may deduce that this was perceived by the public and corporate world as the most radical or striking. Others, such as “a dating divorced mother” get cited as being “smartly done” (*New York Times*, 12/30/94), but the sheer degree of commentary afforded them in the paper is little to none, which in itself reveals a molecule of importance. Second, and more transparent, is

the continuous use of the adjective “nontraditional” that accompanies most references to gays and lesbians. Regardless of the topic at hand, the point clearly reiterated is that this group is different from all the rest. Finally, in this particular case, that Mr. Elliot was compelled to describe these nontraditional families as “yet loving and caring” makes one wonder if he’s concerned the public will not attribute gay men and divorced mothers as such. It is in digressions and descriptions like this that normative values seep through that which is otherwise made to be objective. *The New York Times* is not merely reporting the news. Rather, as a social institution, it is actively engaging in the construction and perpetration of some norms and values and not others. To clarify my point, take the following example. To date, I have yet to come by any such analogous statement to describe heterosexuals as is commonly used in the newspaper to define homosexuals. Phrases such as “these traditional, highly religious yet loving and caring heterosexual families” remain absent in describing advertisements or any other subject matter dealing with heterosexuals. Yet, they are commonly used by “progressive” news-reporters to describe homosexuals. This is problematic because, even though such reporters are seemingly sympathetic towards gays and lesbians and in their own way are trying to emphasize acceptance, in reality they are perpetuating difference and conveying their personal ideas of acceptance or rejection. In short, this and other instances throughout this dissertation contribute, in my opinion, to the “fact” that, contrary to what their editors protest, newspapers are no less value-laden than any other written text. The only difference that does exist is one of nuance.

This critical analysis should not, however, be interpreted to mean that GLBTQ persons have not made headway in improving their social condition. What I am attempting to show during the course of this research is how social change is always a matter of degree. Degrees of social change have taken place in American society during the year 2000 that could not have happened earlier. For example, Dr. Laura Schlessinger’s well publicized daytime television show was attributed by the *New York Times* as being “as big a miss with viewers as it has been with advertisers” (9/18/00). The unpopularity of ‘Dr. Laura’ was written to be a direct result from gay and lesbian activists who urged and convinced big-name corporate sponsors, including Procter and

Gamble, to pull their advertisements from airing during her show, making her series “one of the biggest failures of the 2000-2001 season” (*New York Times*, 12/26/00).

There is a distinct difference between tolerance of homosexuality and acceptance of it as one faction of a truly diverse society. Despite the growing number of rainbow bumper stickers, buttons and the like, the multiplicity of American society does not “celebrate diversity”. Rather, it is the moral majority that uses its power to decide what degree of difference it shall deem acceptable or unacceptable for expressing “American values”. The media is one branch of this moral majority and in several cases has acted as gatekeeper controlling that which it decides to be “proper”. For example, in 1992, Act UP, an educational and activist organization working on issues dealing with AIDS, created a commercial aimed at the 1992 presidential candidates presenting information and messages about AIDS. Despite Act Up’s efforts, vice president Larry Gilpin of WMUR television station in Manchester, NH, turned down the paid commercial saying that the presentation of homosexual, lesbian and interracial heterosexual couples kissing was a “blatant portrayal of sexuality” that was “inappropriate” content matter (*The New York Times*, 1/13/92). Consequently, the commercial was rejected.

In another example, focusing on Times Square billboards, the Sony Corporation “rejected commercials with gay content meant to promote tolerance” because, as their spokesman declared, “they were deemed not appropriate within the context of our standards and practices” (*The New York Times*, Sect.D, p.15, Col.1, 9/9/94). In this case, *The New York Times* does point out the social consequences advertisers, in this case Sony, control of social issues:

That dispute also raises a question crucial to social-issue signs: the role of the gatekeeper, almost always a private, for-profit company, in deciding whether a paid point of view should be promulgated (Sect.D, p.15, Col.1, 9/9/94).

For this acknowledgement, *The New York Times* should be praised.

#### **4.6 An Insider’s Perspective on “Diversity” and *The New York Times***

The main image generated from *The New York Times*' articles sampled throughout this dissertation is one of social change regarding GLBTQ persons. However, as I have labored to detail, change in GLBTQ representation in and by this newspaper has been nearly invisible for some groups. For others, change has been marked by inequality, struggle and great imperfection. In brief, the slogan we may aptly apply is: One step forward, two steps back.

My analysis of how *The New York Times* represents GLBTQs remains, however, just one viewpoint and one analysis. What I find most interestingly though is how the other most-recent exploration of this topic (McGowan, 2001), presented as an “insider’s account”, develops nearly diametrical conclusions. Given the pertinence and applicability of McGowan’s research to this dissertation, I will devote this section to addressing his work.

William McGowan, a reporter for *Newsweek*, the *BBC* and writer for *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, and *Wall Street Journal*, as well as fellow at the Social, Philosophy and Policy Center and Manhattan Institute argues in his most recent book, *Coloring the News* (2001), that contemporary media’s pursuit of “diversity” has weakened American journalism. McGowan’s main argument is that the media’s effort to promote “minority viewpoints”, specifically the “diversity issues” of immigration, race, gay rights, feminism, and affirmative action (p.7), which he argues are the most important social issues facing the country today and comprise “the culture wars”, has resulted in great media bias. “Instead of fostering detached, neutral reporting and analysis, the diversity mandate has given us advocacy” (McGowan, 2001 p. 8).

Internal policy at the newspapers fostered such bias, according to McGowan. During the 1990s, *The New York Times*, among others, issued a “pluralism plan” where top editors have openly admitted to relying on quotas, favoring less qualified minority candidates in filling positions, and violating hiring freezes when minority journalists have been in short supply (McGowan, 2001, p.10).

Personally, I am in favor of affirmative action and see this as a, albeit imperfect, much needed historical compensation for members of American society grossly wronged by “the system”. At first, McGowan appears to agree by acknowledging that

historically, given the poor record of the press in covering marginalized communities, American journalism really might have an obligation to compensate for its historical mistreatment of people who are not white, male or heterosexual (McGowan, 2001 p.13-14).

However, as soon as he concedes to the above statement, McGowan proceeds to foretell how these new policies of diversity and change lead to a breakdown of communication among *New York Times* staff members. Quoting Arthur Sulzberger, junior publisher of *The New York Times* at the 1992 Diversity Summit Meeting, staff were described as being “at each other’s throats”.

Complaints about having to be “politically correct” plague contemporary news reporting:

With respect to gay and feminist issues, diversity’s enhanced sensitivity has purged news coverage of many of the pernicious stereotypes that governed reporting and commentary in the past. But it has also given the coverage a decidedly partisan edge. Whether the issue be the integration of gays and women into the military, AIDS, abortion, gay marriage or gay adoption, the press has tended to side with gay and feminist groups, trimming its news-gathering zeal to filter out realities that might undercut the cause. The script on gays and feminists also tends to depict any objections to their causes - however well grounded in constitutional, moral or institutional traditions - as outright bigotry, worthy of cartoonish portrayal (McGowan, 2001 p. 28-29).

Given this extraordinary liberal description of 1990’s media accounts of gays and feminists, one would expect to find anti-gay sentiment to be the extreme exception for the 1990s whereas, in the previous decades, it would be normative. As I have shown in this dissertation, understanding *The New York Times*’ representation of GLBTQs is a complex process. Both the 1980s and the 1990s are marked by reporting that is sympathetic and/or disparaging of GLBTQs. As the bulk of this dissertation shows, at least for advertising, GLBTQ stereotypes continue to seep into news reporting. Indeed, as

McCowan’s internalist description of the newsroom portrays, gay newsroom colleagues are the foremost critics of any anti-gay journalism at the major newspapers. This “invisible liberal consensus” McGowan claims makes the newsroom susceptible to an unconscious, deeply rooted bias. If the so-called pro-gay bias McGowan describes indeed is so prevalent, then the less than amicable treatment of GLBTQs in *New York Times’* articles is even more shocking and incredulous. Given the lack of normalcy the newspaper extends to the coverage of GLBTQ issues, and the hesitancy of *The New York Times’* to “side” with GLBTQ on several accounts I have discussed in this analysis, makes McGowan’s conclusion that diversity, as the race/orientation/gender of reporters and as article content, has tainted media coverage questionable. To the contrary, I would argue that diversity hiring has not “purged” the paper of stereotypes. “Political correctness” has merely made jabs and comments more subtle while “objections to their causes” still do exist, despite McGowan’s undocumented generalization. By citing a *New York Times* reporter who says that reporters live in fear of being labeled racist, sexist or homophobic and thus have become reluctant to present “conservative” perspectives (p.32) McGowan equates conservative with racist, sexist and homophobic - a quality I am sure conservatives themselves might not appreciate. Furthermore, if “conservative” perspectives do result in such labels, perhaps the titles are appropriate.

The belief that “diversity” hiring results in less-biased, or even “good” / “pro-gay” reporting of GLBTQ articles is not automatic. Given our knowledge of how social organizations operate, and the power structures that sustain them, it is unreasonable to expect a handful of “minority” employees to amass enough power to change the paper’s coverage of GLBTQs in any short amount of time. Indeed, there have probably always been GLBTQ employees at *The New York Times*, it’s just that their sexuality remained undisclosed. Yet, as I have repeatedly argued, and as much feminist writing supports, there is no typical “gay” person, trait or opinion. If, as I have shown, an historical shift in the quantity of news coverage and the images presented in *The New York Times* for GLBTQs has changed over time, it is most probably irreducible to any singular phenomenon. As “important” as this cultural icon may be, *The New York Times* is a social product living within and being shaped by a larger social climate. Despite our disagreements on a variety of issues, on this topic, McGowan and I seem to concur:

[At *The New York Times*] three of the paper's top political reporters, an advertising critic, theatre critic, film critic and classical music critic are all openly gay, along with the page-one picture editor and the top editor of its Sunday magazine. But the notion that the presence of more openly gay reporters in the newsroom has translated into both more and better coverage of issues is, I think without foundation (McGowan, 2001 p.98).

McGowan uses the following examples to evidence his further claim of media bias in gay news coverage:

By the end of 1999, *The New York Times* ran 195 stories about the Matthew Sheppard case but not one on the 1999 murder of a thirteen year old Arkansas boy named Jesse Dirkhising and the 2001 trial of the two gay neighbors who killed him (p.99).

McGowan cites *The New York Times* as failing to comment on this case. Clearly, this example supports McGowan's argument of "liberal bias". However, one could also use the lack of coverage by *The New York Times* of the John Byrd case, where an African-American man was dragged to death by two young white supremacist men, in comparison with Matthew Sheppard to show that equal treatment among "liberal" issues does not prevail either. In other words, it is unclear what criteria *The New York Times* uses to determine which stories get covered and which do not. McGowan's conclusion that *The New York Times* will not publish articles working against "the cause" cannot be asserted with his lack of solid research.

Using his insider status, McGowan is able to garner admissions of bias by reporters on a variety of topics. Speaking about the coverage of AIDS during the 1980s, McGowan documents how "because their editors were either homophobic or simply uncomfortable with the subject, these reporters say, they had no choice but to become advocates simply to get the issue of AIDS on the news agenda at all" (McGowan, 2001 p.101). He goes on further to reveal that the racial and ethnic imbalance of infection rates

and the underlying cultural issues were rarely addressed in mainstream media - not until mid-1998 did by *The New York Times* print any report about the black community's denial (McGowan, 2001 p.102). This type of information is unavailable through content analysis. However, with this external knowledge we may more justifiably assert *The New York Times*' "homophobia" and "discomfort" with such topics as sexual orientation and race lie behind the emotionally-charged writing that is conveyed in some of the articles analyzed in this dissertation.

## Conclusion

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### 5.1 Summary

In chapter three, I identified the following definition of social change:

the **quantitative** and **qualitative** changes in the appearances of social relations which continue throughout periods of dissidence and quiescence alike" (Foss and Larkin, 1986, p.2).

Drawing upon this definition, social change is argued to not be a homogenous social phenomenon but rather variation in social relations. In this dissertation, I have argued that knowledges of sexuality exhibit social patterns, which are products of sociohistorical moments. In this concluding section of my research, I put forth the simple answer "Yes" to my main research question:

Has the representation and visibility of GLBTQs in *The New York Times*' business news changed between 1970-2000?

Both the representation and visibility of GLBTQs have changed over time. Does this imply social change? To answer this, I shall deconstruct the definition of social change:

During the time period of this study, 1970-2000, the United States experienced periods of war and peace. This time frame witnessed both financial and political volatility, and experienced periods of heightened economic success and despair. The media, represented here by *The New York Times*, is a major component of social structure responsible for the creation and reporting of public perception. Public perception about any given social group, in this case non-heterosexuals, is the result of multiple social relations. Thus, alterations in representation of GLBTQs in *The New York Times* business

news reflects a wider shift in the status/societal acceptance or rejection of GLBTQs. As argued, changes in representation and visibility characterize “social change”.

a. Quantitative Change:

1970s *The New York Times* excludes all discussions of homosexuality and GLBTQs from its business news.

1980s The first business news article to mention homosexuals is published in 1980. In very small increments, the number of business news articles mentioning homosexuals, gays and lesbians increases up to 1989. Bisexuals are mentioned twice throughout the entire decade and there is a consistent bias in focusing on gay men more than lesbians. Transsexual and transgendered persons are non-existent in *New York Times* business news articles.

1990s Media coverage increases marginally during the first two years of the 1990s and then explodes in 1992 and 1993, tripling in size. However, by the middle of the decade, attention wanes once again, and during the last few years, interest rises and falls yearly, all the while gay men continue to receive twice as much news interest as lesbians. Bisexuals and transpersons warrant mention in, on average, one article per year.

2000 In the year 2000, there is once again an increase in gay male articles. Despite fights for equality, lesbians continue to receive only half as much attention in business news as gay men and the fate of bisexuals and transpersons is unchanged, receiving mention in one, if any, articles for the entire year. However, it is in 2000 that *The New York Times* first uses the word “transgender” in its business news articles, marking a shift in mainstream awareness of the complexity of non-heterosexuality.

b. Qualitative Change:

1970s Given that no business articles discussed GLBTQs, we have no reference point to analyze *The New York Times*' perception of GLBTQs. I would argue invisibility equals disapproval, or at least non-importance.

1980s This decade begins with hesitancy and marked instances of disapproval of homosexuality. Homosexuals are labeled a stigmatized "other" during the early Eighties and homosexuality is described as a moral failing. Some advertisers fear associating their products with this "immoral lifestyle", while a handful of pioneering capitalists find the labels of deviance and abnormality alluring and seize the opportunity to reach a new market sector and use controversy as a vehicle for distinguishing their products from the multitude. Thus, by the mid to late Eighties, we see a hyper-stereotypical representation of homosexuality where it is discussed at all.

1990s We may characterize the 1990s as a time period torn in diverging directions over how to handle what came to be called the "gay issue". The gay issue represents a social, political and economic dilemma, fueled by corporate America's simultaneous adverse reaction to and newly found interest in this previously untapped, moreover unknown, market. The early years of the 1990s are characterized by continued disapproval of homosexuality but by the middle of the decade, there is a slow, hard-earned shift in the perception of homosexuality. Despite turmoil and lack of consensus about homosexuality, *The New York Times* reports positively on the progress and changes that have occurred in relation to gay business and marketing. Although reporting is almost exclusively limited to issues that relate to gay men, self-reflexivity about this situation remains void. Whereas once being labeled homosexual was the kiss of death, by 1995, we witness the destigmatization of homosexuality. Ads with homosexual

innuendos are reported to be simply “unconventional” advertising campaigns in pursuit of the “gay dollar”. As the focus shifts away from the morality of homosexuality to the acclaimed lucrativity of this “new” market sector, *The New York Times* focuses on the profitability of targeting gays and makes a general plea for the de-stigmatization of homosexuality. However, because profit is the focus, business news articles continue to largely exclude lesbians and other non-heterosexuals, repeating their history of invisibility.

- 2000 Despite the new millenium, the image of GLBTQs in *The New York Times* continues to be articulated as “unconventional” (10/24/00). GLBTQs are still identified by their difference from homosexuals. Yet, no longer is it socially “acceptable”, or popular, to profess one’s dislike of homosexuality, as the articles about Dr. Laura’s unpopularity evidence.

## 5.2 Conclusion

When embarking on this research project, my primary [research] goal was to document and analyze the socio-historical portrayal of GLBTQ persons by *The New York Times* between 1970-2000. I chose this time frame not only because it represented my personal life-span, but moreover because of its historical significance. It is during this period, along with the introduction and fruition of second and third wave feminism, GLBTQs achieved unprecedented visibility and formalized social movement for equal rights in the United States. Hence, it is unsurprising that a sociological analysis of business articles in *The New York Times* during this timeframe reveals noticeable changes in the imagery, representation and normalization (or lack thereof) of GLBTQs.

Throughout this dissertation I have interwoven theory, analysis and a one-way discussion/critique of the media. I have used postmodern and cultural theory to define sexuality as fluid and plastic, contingent on social customs, cultures, institutions and beliefs systems. Like Foucaut and Nietzsche, I drew an image of social institutions as possessing the ability to inscribe norms, values and beliefs on bodies and applied social

theory to postulate how sex norms impact social change. By privileging GLBTQs, hence making a marginalized social group prime focus, I made an effort to commit to practice the establishment and routinization of including sexuality as a social category/variable within social science research. Employing a multi-dynamic understanding of “gay,” has resulted in having to take the harder, yet more inclusive, route in defining non-heterosexuality.

My choice of social theory was derived from its potential to surpass ideological impasses. I chose to use postmodern feminism because it does not *a priori* assume the world is divided between social cohesion and social antagonism. I employed social movement theory to address the conflict theory versus postmodern issue regarding the primacy of class. This helps provide guidance about how identity issues became important to GLBTQs and sees social change as processes and actions in flux. Furthermore it helps question what drives action, expressed as media interest/non-interest in GLBTQs. Still, at the end of the analysis, I argue contemporary manifestations of sexuality derive a large portion of their shape from the interests and directives of capitalism.

Chronologically<sup>77</sup> exploring how *The New York Times* historically addressed non-heterosexuality in its business news, through reading and analyzing business news articles, enabled me to identify a number of trends and conclusions. First, invisibility is intentional. As Thompson (1995b) articulates, the media actively manages that which is made visible. In sheer numbers, discounting article content, we can see a marked change in *The New York Times*’ allocation of space/coverage of GLBTQs in business articles. From non-existent in the Seventies, to marginal at best during the Eighties and then to unprecedented numbers in the Nineties, we can clearly see that *some* socio-historical shift in the relevance of the GLBTQs to *The New York Times*’ coverage of business endeavors has taken place. However, the move to “inclusion” has not been universal. Year after year, *The New York Times* continuously reduces non-heterosexuality to an all-encompassing group of others. While the naturalization of difference may be a positive outcome of

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<sup>77</sup> Although my initial intent was to do thirty years worth of analysis, in reality my research has been confined to a twenty year exploration because the first article discussing homosexuality in the business section was not published until 1980. Nevertheless, twenty years of articles has provided a plethora of information.

ideology for the construction of solidarity within a GLBTQ social movement (Hennessy, 2000), such positive attributes are not immediately transferable to public institutions. Representation of “homosexuality” in *New York Times*’ business articles is reflexive of larger US society’s association of homosexuality with wealthy, white gay men. The shift to “visibility” has also been a gendered one, with gay men receiving the most business news coverage while the “others” – bisexuals, trans and queer persons – received little to no column space. Lesbians are frequently grouped along with gay men, even in contexts where their inclusion is purely for political correctness. As an independent social group, lesbians receive little to no business news coverage, while, in contrast, much corporate focus is lavished on the gay male community. Over-representation of white males is a problem not only facing the media, it is also an historical characteristic of the Gay Right’s Movement.

This dissertation evidences that both the news media and the business community have been impacted by ideas governing homosexuality which stem from a variety of extra-business sectors: leaders in morality debates, celebrities and scandals, public health, politics, international customs. The misconception of gay and lesbian wealth created by market research is but one example that has been explored in considerable depth. Additionally, this research has shown that examining homosexuality alone is insufficient for documenting a social shift and change in norms. Social change in any single social institution can be chronicled, as I have done, and rudimentarily interpreted, but in order to make informative generalizations or deductions about society as a whole requires a dialectic analysis of the multiple institutions that have convened to create societal norms. This analysis cannot determine *why* social change in the acceptability of non-heterosexuality has occurred. However, it does illuminate the problematic of whether greater media publicity gave birth to heightened awareness of GLBTQs, or whether explicit social/political actions by GLBTQs in public arenas spurred increased business/media interest. This “chicken-or-egg” issue is a dilemma that future researchers may wish to systematically address. In sum, to determine “*Why* social change has occurred?” and to answer “*Who* is responsible?” are questions requiring analysis with a much broader scope and depth, ideally of multiple social institutions.

A second fundamental trend this research has uncovered is the pervasive belief that sexuality is an inevitably socio-cultural product that continues to metamorphose over time. The terms “homosexual”, “gay” and “queer”, for instance, cannot be fixed outside of their socio-cultural content. Meanings and understandings of sexuality continue to be fluid, shifting with varying audiences and scenarios. Business articles referring to homosexuals in the Eighties express very different connotations than articles in later decades. During the early Eighties, “gay” is used by *The New York Times* as a scandalous term, often signaling mainstream death of the person (both figuratively and in reality due to AIDS), company, advertising firm, whatever. One ought not infer that we have witnessed a shift from negative publicity to positive. Rather, one should walk away with the knowledge that what it meant to *be* homosexual in 1980 differs from what it meant to *be* “homosexual” in 2000. As most of the articles reviewed in this study reveal, when it comes to business deals, sexuality constitutes far more than the gender of one’s bedmate. Sexuality, according to American businesses, as reported by *The New York Times*, encompasses a host of non-sexual characteristics: your “lifestyle”, disposable income, product preferences, propensity for disease, taste in wine, shoes, cheese, etc. Being “gay in the Nineties” was a different social experience than being gay in the Eighties. Thus, in congruence with other studies (Melucci and Lyyra, 1998), I argue social change, here in the representations of sexuality, cannot be analyzed, studied or understood as singular, isolated news-worthy social occurrences. In order to explicate the genuine nature of “social change”, we must approach our topic systematically, entrusting the social category, i.e. sexuality, with the ability to altercate social relations. In other words, if one desires to understand how society’s or an institution’s perceptions of a social category/group changes, one must look beyond that social group. To understand shifting belief systems governing homosexuality, one needs to contextualize sexuality as one social factor among many, set in a sea of complex social relations.

Third, while as a society we seem to have “progressed” beyond the medicalization of homosexuality, we have not moved past the need for “experts” to advise us on such issues. Even in business news articles we find the association of homosexuality with deviance. Business experts advise on the pros and cons of pursuing the gay market. *New York Times* contributors repeatedly report about “homosexuals” in one quick breadth,

reducing a divergent group of races/classes/sexes/genders to one amorphous market. Throughout the decades, *The New York Times* continued to report news with an “us” versus “them” mental framework, most ardently imposed when it reported business decisions. Furthermore, media representations of sexuality reinforce arbitrarily created belief systems about the normalcy of difference between sexualities. It is through the construction of difference that sectors of society are able to reinforce normative perceptions and expectations as well as monitor sexuality/gender appropriate behavior.

At the point when some expressions of homosexuality became fashionable among capitalists, one witnesses the creation of gay/lesbian advertising campaigns, product lines and even entire market sectors. No longer is sexuality a component of one’s entire, larger self. In the new millennium, sexuality is isolated and targeted as a means of approach. Expressions of sexuality, and the efforts of business to target or avoid homosexuals as a market, confirm our postmodern society’s focus on the everyday. Contests over meaning and identity are fleshed out in hyper-mundane acts, such as which brand of sweater to put on one’s back and which type of vodka to order for the next social event.

This *New York Times*’ analysis finds that by the late Nineties, a majority of businesses exhibited the stereotypical belief that pursuing the gay dollar would be profitable. Compared with the Eighties, when businesses shunned gays in fear of product “contamination” and association with homosexuality, and hence undesirability, the Nineties look remarkably progressive. However, with a closer inspection, one finds the Nineties less globally embracing of non-heterosexuality than at first glance.

The 1990’s saw more and more business exploring, utilizing and exploiting the gay market. Advertisers transitioned from subtle ads, where homosexuality was inferred but not directly portrayed, to the use of homosexuality for its shock value. Like the fat woman at a carnival, advertisers created ads valuing gays for their divergence from the heterosexual norm rather than their due inclusion as legitimate, valuable members of society. During the height of corporate exploitation, AIDS red ribbons were even used as a marketing tool. Supposedly a signal of a company’s supportive stance in the “fight against AIDS”, in reality, such tactics amounted to little more than a marketing tactic to attract the gay male market. As commodification of everything “gay” continued, the “trendiness” of homosexuality was adopted by a select few businesses who pushed

forward, albeit frequently in the face of ardent opposition, supporting the gay and lesbian business exposition, sponsoring the gay games and, finally, creating direct target ad campaigns, i.e. American Express and Subaru. While *The New York Times* presents these changes in a positive light, it also makes clear that such “progress” is due more to the financial interests of the business sector in an otherwise weak economy rather than to a reflection of business sector acceptance or embracement of gay culture as a viable social norm.

Regardless of *The New York Times*’ personal opinion about homosexuality, this sociological reading of business news articles exhibits that the newspaper is an institution whose actions inscribe norms, values and beliefs extend to society at large. Business is not “just business” – it is a political, social and cultural activity, as well as an economic one. Through its choice of words, news coverage, and expression of approval/disapproval/neutrality, *The New York Times* is arguably a cog in the institutionalization of cultural norms and censorship. *The New York Times* is, in part, responsible for making sexuality the cultural product it is. Furthermore, *The New York Times* actively engages in social commentary and the reproduction of cultural biases in its business news reporting.

The historical analysis of business news, conducted via this research, enables us to pinpoint concrete instances of when and how this newspaper, this social organization, contributed to the establishment of social codes and facilitated exerting normative pressure on “undesirable” behaviors. Moreover, this research reveals that *The New York Times* is not an independent actor. The image of homosexuality presented in its articles is also subject to inspection by the advertisers that publish in this periodical. Thus, when attempting to draw conclusions, I must once again defer to the pronouncement of the extraordinarily dialectical relationships that partake in the construction of meaning systems. In brief, while several examples discussed in this dissertation exemplify the media’s role in constructing knowledge and information about non-heterosexuality for mass consumption, the media cannot be declared an isolated agent with sole responsibility. *The New York Times* itself is a cultural product whose understanding of and affinity for/disgust with GLBTQs appears to be influenced by its socio-cultural context.

The impact of external socio-cultural norms, and reproduction of the status quo, in *New York Times*' business articles, can be elaborated by re-stating the following trends exhibited in the newspaper. First, confirming the work of Taylor and Raeburn, 1995, Knopp, 1987, and Morris, 1984, widespread attribution of the trendiness of gay and lesbian culture in the 1990s has been accredited to business decisions. In article after article, *The New York Times* reports the growth in popularity of gays and lesbians as immediately due to companies "inventing" a "new" niche market. *New York Times*' business articles fault the gay press for misrepresentation and misleading economic claims, without conducting research to validate such claims, and deny and/or ignore GLBTQ involvement in the creation of non-heterosexuals as a legitimate minority group.

Applying a poignantly gay-friendly interpretation, one might posit that the decline in GLBTQ business articles towards the end of the Nineties might indicate that targeting this market niche is no longer news worthy. However, given this social group's historically short-lived reign of "popularity", or rather "tolerance", I find it far too optimistic to assert that inclusion of GLBTQs is so common place as to not warrant media attention. Perhaps advertisers have utilized this sector to the degree with which they are comfortable – having produced enough rainbow dog collars and gay pride t-shirts that they are now moving on to another niche? Perhaps this sector failed to produce sufficient returns on their investments? Or, maybe, their foray into gay/lesbian marketing was so successful that they are well-established and no longer need to advertise their "gay-friendly" image? Certainly, this is all pure speculation. The point, however, is that *The New York Times* has not cultivated the ever-expanding inclusion of all GLBTQs in its business coverage. Rather, true to form, news reporting has ebbed and waned as market interest, or, more accurately, the interests of capital, have become intrigued or repulsed by non-heterosexuals. Is this progress? To some. Is this social change? Most definitely.

In drawing my final conclusions from this research, it must be stated that this research in no way is meant to imply that the media is "bad". Rather, the media is ubiquitous. As an institution, it invades every aspect of life. The media is a tool to be used and manipulated, although not every social actor has equal access to employ the media for their own purposes. This dissertation has evidenced that GLBTQs have very little power and control over the images and degree of visibility attributed them in

business articles written by *The New York Times*. The media, as expressed by this newspaper, reveals itself to be a voice for corporate America, or rather, global capital. *The New York Times*' expression of homosexuality and alternative sexualities, as they relate to business decisions, is but an extension of a collectively capitalist voice. The media is an agent of socialization. As such, the normative definition of sexuality conveyed remains heterosexuality. To be queer is to be aberrant. However, as I have illustrated, mainstream social tolerance of this "unconventionality" has changed during the past thirty years.

### 5.3 Insights for the Future

Throughout this dissertation I developed the argument that the media can be understood as a "technique" or "form of power" – more than a specific class or institutionalization of power. Drawing upon the ideas put forth by Gamson, that the media is an active agent with autonomous interests, not just a mirror reflecting what is, I have argued the media actively contributes to meaning construction. In congruence with Wood's directive that the media must be a major focus in discussion of cultural shortcomings but ought not to be seen as causative agent, I have put forth an analysis that describes the media as a reflector and intensifier of societal values. Repeatedly, I have cautioned my readers to note that my research cannot and should not declare causality.

In this final section, I shall use C. Wright Mill's power-elite theory and G. William Domhoff's state-centered theory to lend a macro-lens to this societal situation. I end this dissertation questioning the fortuity that the images presented to us about non-heterosexuality in *The New York Times* are anything other than planned, conscious efforts on the part of a major institution to shape the public's perception of specific social groups.

When studying the media, we must not only take into consideration who is writing the script/articles/reports, we must also assess who is audience at which the message is foremost aimed. *The New York Times* business news is not merely for public consumption. Journalists are members of a wider network that possesses distinct tastes and preferences. Hence, during the Eighties, when homosexuality was unpopular, it is

not surprising that we do not find journalists writing about the wonders of homosexuality as an alternative to marriage. To do so would have meant rejection, since that image was not representative of the hegemonic norm expressed by *The New York Times*. Why did *The New York Times* express disdain about homosexuality during the Eighties? Most probably because this was the belief system expressed by the business community. Conversely, the shift to a more accepting position during the late Nineties is also reflexive of changing business community norms.

In brief, audience affects content. Using Lee and Solomon's (1991) case example of ABC's *Nightline*, which analyzed three years of news reporting in 865 programs, FAIR, the media watchdog group, found that of *Nightline*'s audience guest list,

over eighty percent were government officials, corporate representatives, or other professionals; five percent represented 'public interest' constituencies (peace, environmental, consumer organizations); and less than two percent were leaders of labor or racial/ethnic groups (Wood, 1996, p. 150).

As this example shows, audience affects content. As Wood deduces, "the media purveyors seldom present any content that is going to offend a large number of readers or viewers and listeners" (Wood, 1996 p. 150). I would argue the same to be similar for *The New York Times*. Even though it is billed as one of the more "liberal" newspapers, we simply do not find images presented that radically differ from mainstream of the period. Wood's example also demonstrates, although he does not so declare, how the overlapping of power-based representations manifest the networking which has become so emblematic of American society. The eighty percent majority, constituted of officials, corporatists and professionals represented in *Nightline* audiences, is symptomatic of other intersections of power and authority in America. As Domhoff's (1996; 1983) quantitative research, measuring the integration of the corporate community and government policy groups, found, "the most central people in the network were directors of large corporations" (Domhoff, 1996 p.36). Furthermore, of the "twenty-five most central organizations in the American corporate community", the nonprofit Conference Board ranks only second to IBM, followed by the Committee for Economic Development

(5<sup>th</sup>), Yale University (7<sup>th</sup>), the Council on Foreign Relations (19<sup>th</sup>), the Metropolitan Museum (21<sup>st</sup>), MIT (24<sup>th</sup>) and finally the American Assembly (25<sup>th</sup>). Overall, there are nine non-profit organizations along with sixteen corporations, all with over-lapping directors or trustees, that combine to form this interlocking network. What this overlap among the upper class, corporate community and policy-planning organizations form is “the power elite” (Domhoff, 1996).

The importance of such research to this dissertation is that it demonstrates how changing systems of thought is a complex task involving actors who are inherently not necessarily apparent. In order to alter the representation of a previously undesirable social group entails recognizing the degree of influence and power various elites exert in the control and production of knowledge. In trying to explain why *The New York Times* presents one image over another for any social group, we need to ask whose interests are being served and at what cost. Such questions lie beyond the ability of this dissertation to answer. However, in establishing and chronicling some of the stereotypes produced, the voices silenced or heard, and the images, values and belief systems put forth, I have attempted to build one small part of the foundation for future analyses. Maintaining a critical lens, “questioning authority”, and seeing the invisible are all important aspects for documenting and analyzing how and why GLBTQs, or any other social category, holds its current position in American society. Though the task remains great, so too are the invaluable insights that such research can yield.

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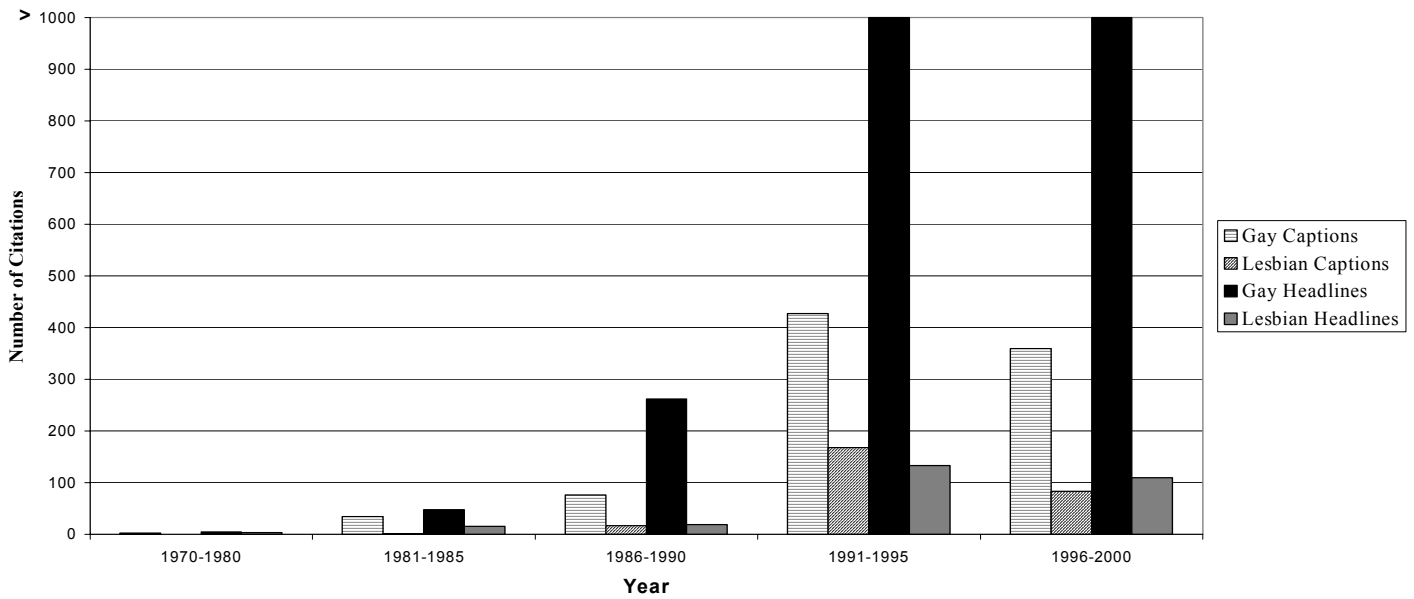
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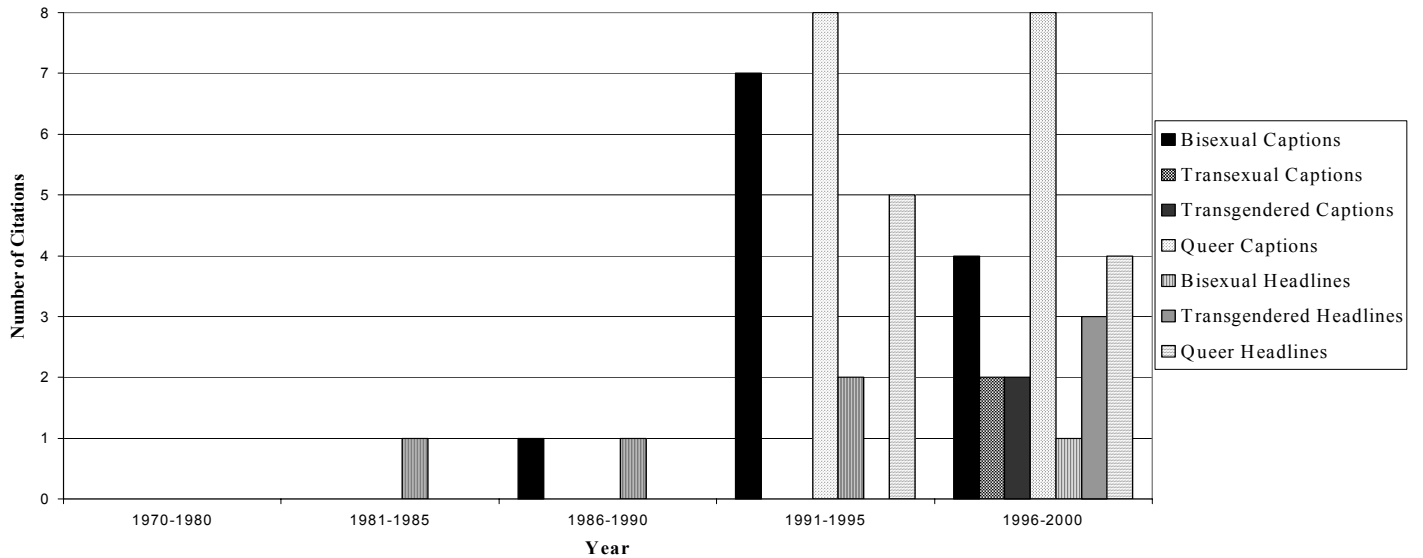
## Appendix A

Total GLBTQ visibility by newspaper sections in The New York Times from 1970 to 2000.

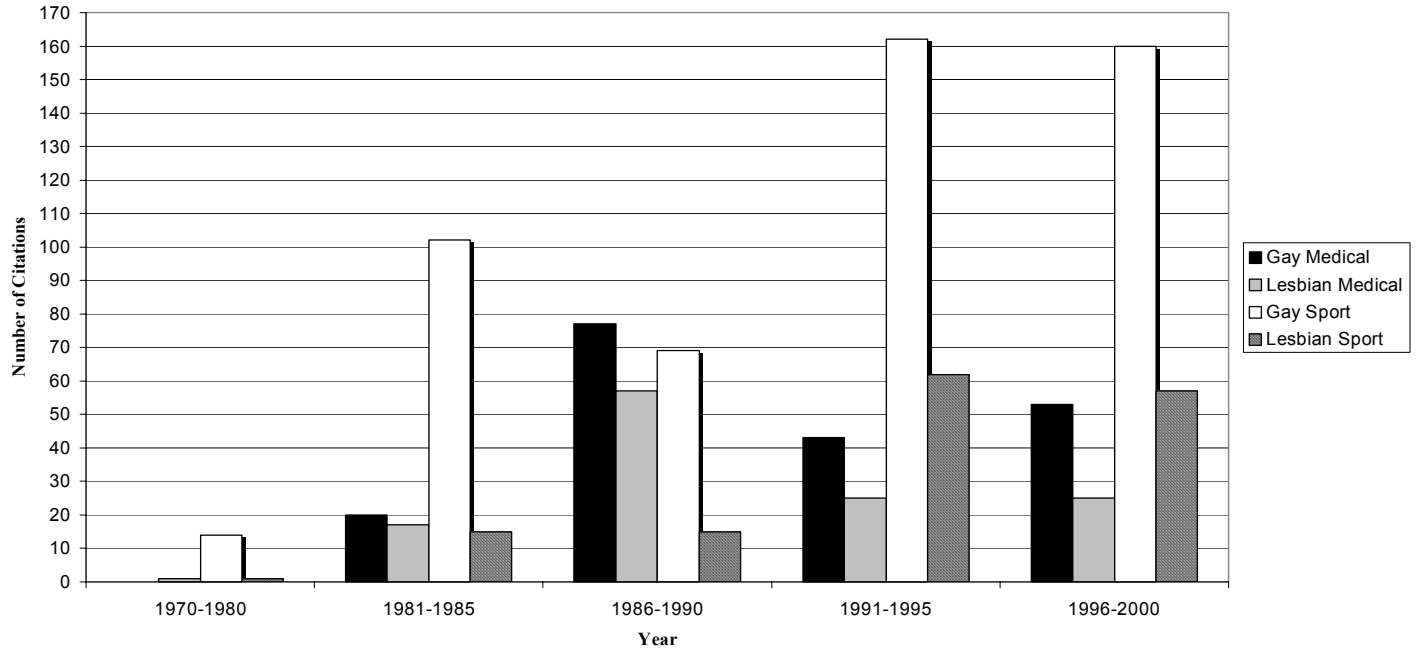
Appearance of the Terms Gay or Lesbian in *The New York Times*' Headlines and Captions Accompanying Photographs 1970-2000



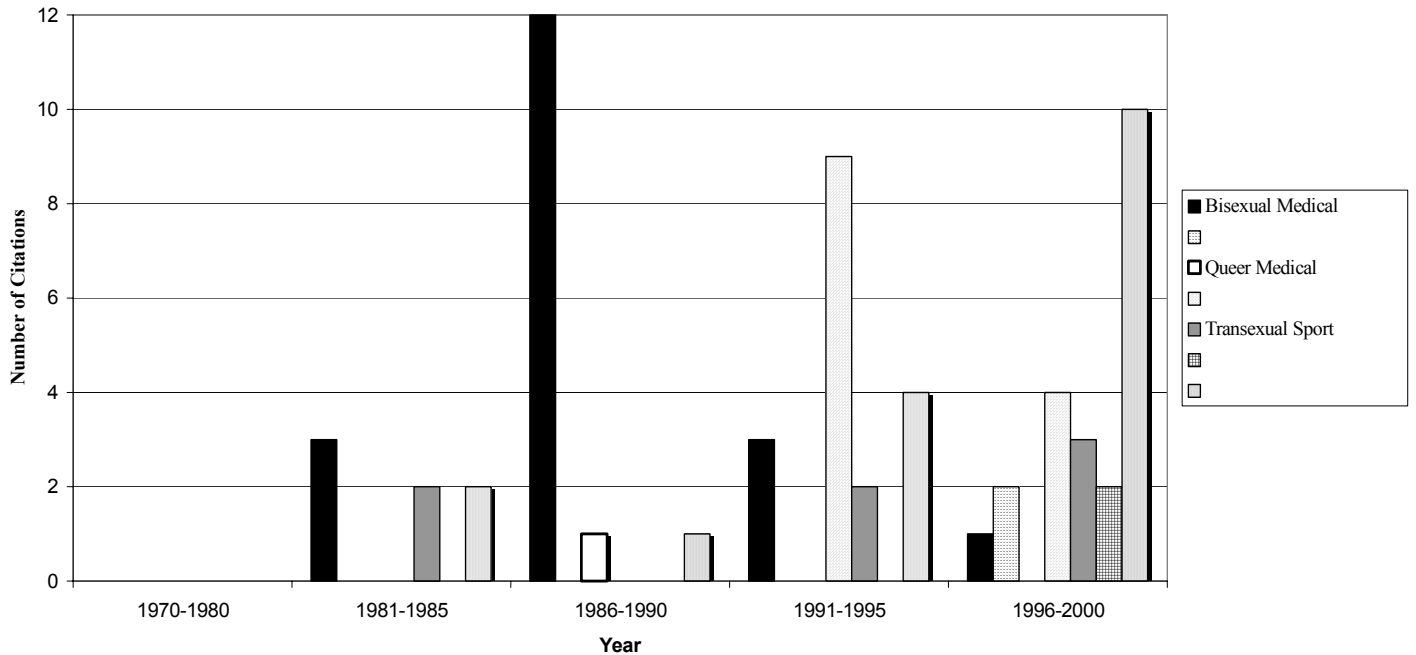
Appearance of the Terms Bisexual, Transexual, Transgendered or Queer in *The New York Times*' Headlines and Captions Accompanying Photographs 1970-2000



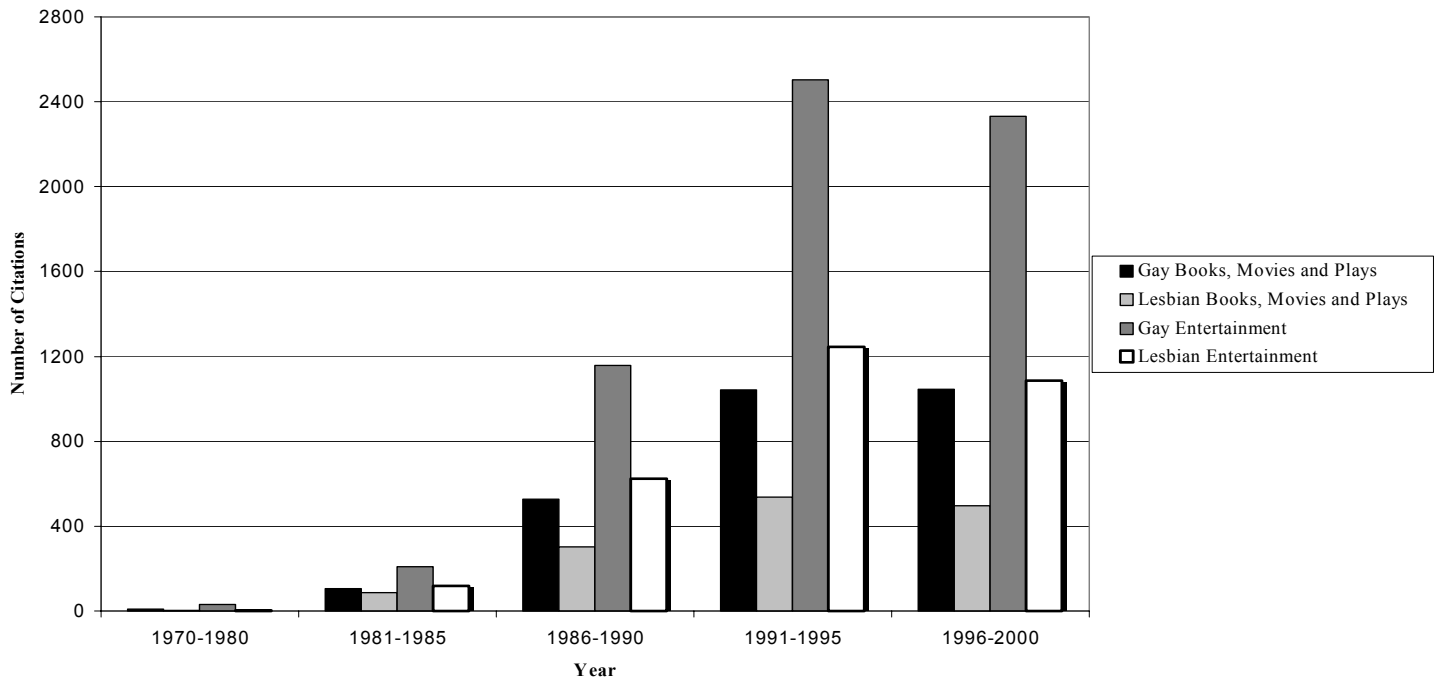
Appearance of the Terms Gay or Lesbian in Medical or Sports News Sections of *The New York Times* 1970-2000



Appearance of the Terms Bisexual, Transexual, Transgendered or Queer in Medical or Sports News Sections of *The New York Times* 1970-2000



**Appearance of the Terms Gay or Lesbian in Entertainment or Books, Movies and Plays News Sections of *The New York Times* 1970-2000**



**Appearance of the Terms Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgendered or Queer in Entertainment or Books, Movies and Plays News Sections of *The New York Times* 1970-2000**

