

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Coming Out of the Television

LGBT-themed Made-for-Television Movies as Critical Media Pedagogy

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

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2014

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2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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LGBT-themed Made-for Television Movies as Critical Media Pedagogy

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

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Since the early 1970s, an important but under-examined subgenre of Made-for-Television Movies have foregrounded critical LGBT concerns, including coming out, parental custody, HIV/AIDS, gays in the military, and hate crimes or featured affirmative LGBT representations. These programs, often highly-rated and critically-acclaimed, were nonetheless sites of political contestation from social conservatives and LGBT activists. Through the lenses of critical media pedagogy, critical cultural studies, and critical media industries studies, this dissertation conducts a critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies. This history includes critical case studies of twenty seminal LGBT programs featuring original interviews with the producers, executives, and writers responsible for their pedagogical design. The evidence reflects how these programs helped frame these concerns, educate audiences, and advocate on behalf of the LGBT community. This research further suggests how progressive pedagogues and media producers might collaborate to help address other social issues through the use of critical entertainment.

This dissertation of David Randolph Craig is approved.

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2014

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1972, ABC aired *That Certain Summer* (1972), an original, made-for-television movie that featured a gay man in a committed relationship who is rejected by his teenage son for being gay. The program appeared less than three years after the Stonewall Riots, a landmark event in LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) movement in the U.S., and a year before the American Psychological Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder. The program also featured no affection between the same-sex characters, and the protagonist struggled with being openly gay. The program was the target of a backlash from both religious groups and gay activists, and a number of ABC affiliates refused to air the program. Nonetheless, *That Certain Summer* was seen by more than a third of the television audience and garnered numerous Emmy Awards.

Since *That Certain Summer*, dozens of LGBT-themed TV movies have featured narratives that foregrounded critical concerns shared by the LGBT community, including parental custody (*Two Mothers for Zachary* [1996]), LGBT youth (*Consenting Adult* [1985]), AIDS (*An Early Frost* [1985]), gays in the military (*Serving in Silence* [1995]), transgenderism (*Normal* [2003]), and marriage equality (*Wedding Wars* [2006]). A few programs were more genre-driven fare and less issue-oriented but nonetheless featured affirmative LGBT narratives and characters. Some programs were docudramas based on real-life events, whereas others were adaptations of LGBT literature and theatre, including *Gods and Monsters* (1998), *As Is* (1985), *Tales of the City* (1993), and *Angels in America* (2003).

LGBT TV movies have often garnered extraordinary ratings, critical acclaim, and numerous awards. In 1985, *An Early Frost* attracted 34 million viewers, while also receiving 14 Emmy nominations. In 1995, *Serving in Silence* was seen by 20 million viewers and received Emmy and Golden Globe awards. In 2003, HBO's *Angels in America* was seen by eight million viewers, which was "enough to fill every seat in the original Broadway theatre every night for twenty-two years" (Edgerton, 2009, p. 144). The program was nominated for more Emmy Awards than any other program in television history at the time.

In addition, LGBT TV movies have often been the site of political contestations across the political and cultural spectrum. The New Right, comprised of a coalition of evangelicals, Catholics, and conservatives, has often fought against any LGBT visibility. Evangelical preachers, like Reverend Jerry Falwell and Reverend James Dobson, convinced their followers to engage in a backlash against networks, including advertiser boycotts, to protest these programs. These protests resulted in millions in lost revenue, the loss of subscribers, and, in the case of PBS, the elimination of funding for *American Playhouse* (Lowry, 1997).

In addition the Right, LGBT scholars and activists targeted these programs for a variety of reasons, including their normalizing influence, lack of diversity, and limited representation of same-sex affection. This backlash reflects the complex and conflicted nature of the LGBT community. Unlike other identity-based communities, the LGBT community comprises multiple identities, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, and represents tremendous diversity, including all races, classes, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds.

The unique nature and diversity of the LGBT community informs the structures and strategies engaged by the LGBT social movement to secure full citizenship for LGBT citizens.

While the movement predates the landmark Stonewall Riots, since the 1970s, two distinct currents have emerged, the Gay Rights Movement and the Gay Liberation Movement. The Rights-based Movement has proven more successful than the efforts at achieving gay liberation. According to Seidman (2011),

Aside from brief periods of social upheaval between 1969 and 1973, and the early years of the AIDS crisis, when ACT UP and Queer Nation seemed to promise a renewed political militancy, a liberationist politic has been the exception in postwar American gay and lesbian movements...And, from roughly the mid-1970s, when gay liberationism and lesbian-feminism were consigned to the social margins, gay and lesbian politics have been about identity normalization, rights, authenticity, and social integration. Today, nearly every influential US national lesbian and gay organization – the Human Rights Campaign, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, and even the left-leaning National Lesbian and Gay Task Force – has adopted the political vocabulary and agenda of normalization. (p. 520)

Nonetheless, despite its diversity and internal division, since Stonewall, the LGBT community has seen tremendous success, in spite of a potent backlash from social conservatives, including the political and religious Right, and the debilitating impact of the AIDS crisis. This success has taken the form of increased legal protections and rights, including the right to serve in the military. Most notably, marriage equality has rapidly become more widely accepted and legally approved. In addition to the federal government, seventeen states now recognize gay and lesbian marriages. Along with these rights, LGBT citizens have experienced profound shifts in the cultural acceptance and increased visibility of affirmative LGBT lives throughout media.

This dissertation considers where there is some correlation to be drawn between these LGBT TV movies and the success of the LGBT social movement. In addition to the proliferation of dozens of these programs on television over the past, by foregrounding the concerns of the community or featuring progressive representations, did these programs advocate on behalf of either the gay rights or gay liberation movements? In addition to other LGBT

political, cultural, and media efforts, can LGBT TV movies be credited with at least some of the success of the LGBT social movement?

To address these questions starts with consideration of prior research into TV movies and, more specifically, LGBT movies. Since the early 1970s, over 3500 TV movies have been produced; however, Rapping's *Movies of the Week* (1992) represents the only critical monograph on the subject along with a few articles and essays that have been written about the format or individual programs. What little scholarship exists reflects how these programs are "consistently the most misunderstood and maligned genre of television" (Edgerton, 1991, p. 114). Todd Gitlin (1982) claimed that, "these programs make less of an impression than series, for they don't stay long enough to inspire sustained identification" (p. 335). Gomery (1982) condemned broadcast TV movies but commended cable TV movies for featuring social issues. Rapping has described how some TV movies have operated progressively and critically in culture; nonetheless, she has confused these programs with "movies of the week" and disregarded cable TV movies since they "lacked the centrality" of broadcast television movies (p. 147).

In light of this confusion, I propose the following operational definition of *television movies*: self-contained narratives of varying lengths originally produced for television. As self-contained narratives, television movies are critically distinguished from television series that feature perpetual storylines; however, the movies may get sequels (e.g., *Tales of the City*, *More Tales of the City* [1998], and *Future Tales of the City* [2003]). These programs may appear in the course of a single night or multiple nights, which are referred to as "mini-series" or "limited series." In addition, these programs were originally designed and produced for television rather than film, which is a vital distinction greatly affecting the content, development, production, and marketing of these programs; however, some television movies have secured theatrical

distribution before their television premieres, including PBS' *Longtime Companion* and Showtime's *Gods and Monsters*. Furthermore, the title "Movie of the Week," or MOW, represented a broadcast television programming strategy that included both original, made-for-television movies as well as syndicated feature films.

In addition to the misunderstanding surrounding television movies, LGBT scholars, historians, and activists have typically considered LGBT TV movies in limited, conflicted ways that often failed to account for their ability to educate and entertain. A number of LGBT media scholars have conflated LGBT movies and LGBT-themed movies. The former primarily feature LGBT protagonists and were designed for gay audiences, whereas the latter may or may not feature LGBT protagonists but nonetheless feature LGBT subject matter and are typically designed for mass audiences that might also include LGBT viewers. As a result, LGBT scholars and activists have often criticized LGBT-themed programs for using gay subject matter to entertain straight audiences and for not featuring enough same-sex intimacy, affection, or sexual conduct. These critiques have been limited to only a few programs and rarely accounting for their production or popular or LGBT reception. While these programs may have been too gay for the New Right, for these gay scholars and activists, these programs were often deemed not gay or queer enough.

In contrast, LGBT media historians considered the production, text, and reception of a few of these programs. Although primarily focused on feature films, Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* (1985) included a few TV movies in his remarkable history of gays in Hollywood. LGBT TV historians Stephen Tropiano (2001) and Stephen Capsuto (2000) looked more broadly at LGBT television but included a number of LGBT TV movies, as well. In particular, Capsuto

conducted exhaustive archival research about these programs that revealed how these programs were often sites of contestation during production.

Existing scholarship has failed to account fully for the diverse history of LGBT TV movies. Nor has this scholarship considered how these programs may have operated as moral and political pedagogy education, whether for mainstream or LGBT audiences. Nor has this scholarship considered how these programs have helped advocate, reflect, or frame the concerns of the LGBT social movement.

To frame these concerns, the conceptual basis for this dissertation considers multi-disciplinary theories, starting with theories of critical media pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is a movement that combines education praxis and critical theory to engage issues involving power, hegemony, and representation (Giroux [1999], Kellner [1995], Sholle [1994]). While the field of cultural studies represents multiple traditions, a more critical cultural studies is inherently political and investigates how media and culture represent forms of domination and resistance. Consequently, critical media pedagogy considers how media educates audiences around concerns about ideology and identity.

In addition to critical media pedagogy, other complimentary theories are included that further explain how these programs may have operated as education and engaged in advocacy in support of the movement. Theories of new social movements based on identity have described the practice of framing to promote the movements' concerns for mainstream audiences. In addition, communication and education scholars Walter Fisher (1985), Jerome Bruner (1986), and Martha Nussbaum (1997) have theorized how narratives are vital to human communication, help us construct our reality, and are capable of transforming attitudes about lives lived at the margins.

Collectively, these theories suggest how these programs may have helped frame, educate, and /or advocate on behalf of the concerns of the LGBT social movement, whether gay rights or gay liberation. However, while these theories may speak to pedagogy and advocacy, these theories would not account for how this pedagogy was possible, especially in the television industry, which is beholden to conservative corporate and commercial interests. Nor would these theories identify who was most responsible for their pedagogical content as well as their production, promotion, and exhibition.

To address these concerns, this research engages with multiple methodological and perspectival approaches, including more rigorous critical cultural and production studies research strategies. As recommended by Kellner (2003), a more holistic and diagnostic critical cultural studies practice should include consideration of production, text, and reception. Production includes a political-economic analysis of the various networks, including their material interests and structures, as well as the financing and ownership of these programs. Production also investigates the conventions and formulas of these programs, which would include a mix of docudramas and literary adaptations as well as comedies and melodramas. Textual analysis includes deep readings of the narratives, ideologies, representations, and performances in these programs. Finally, reception includes their audience and industrial reception, namely ratings and awards, popular reception from mainstream and LGBT critics, and critical reception from critical or LGBT scholars and historians.

Still missing from this Kellnerian approach to critical cultural studies is critical consideration of the role, agency, and strategies conducted by media creators operating within media industries. In *Critical Media Industries Studies* (2009), authors Havens, Lotz, and Tinic

set forth a research agenda that compliments a Kellnerian critical cultural studies approach. In addition to original interviews and production ethnography, these research strategies include:

[g]rounded institutional case studies that examine the relationships between strategies (here read as the larger economic goals and logics of large-scale cultural industries) and tactics (the ways in which cultural workers seek to negotiate, and at times perhaps subvert, the constraints imposed by institutional interests to their own purposes). (p. 247)

These complimentary practices would account for the critical struggles by cultural workers over ideology, narrative, and representation at the level of everyday media production. These research strategies can help account for how media professionals inform the critical value of these programs throughout the entire cycle of producing, including development and promotion.

In light of these theories and methodologies, this dissertation conducts a critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies since the 1970s. This history considers how these programs reflected and framed the concerns and strategies of the LGBT social movement. In addition, this history includes a critical comparative analysis of these programs to other forms of LGBT media, namely feature films and television series. Also included are critical case studies that analyze the political economy, production, texts, and commercial, critical, and cultural reception of twenty seminal LGBT programs that appeared throughout this history. In addition to documentation, these case studies feature original interviews with twenty-six producers, programming executives, and screenwriters who contributed to the critical success of these programs. For some programs, multiple interviews were conducted to triangulate interviewees' accounts.

This research is informed by my life and career as a gay man, LGBT TV movie producer and executive, and LGBT media activist over the past four decades. LGBT TV movies have proven seminal to my development as an openly gay man. As a producer, I have insider knowledge about the critical media production of TV movies. In addition, through my network of professional relationships, I was afforded access to these respondents and able to secure

privileged information. However, my identity, career, experiences, and background also risk potential bias. In light of my heightened subjectivities, I have included exhaustive data to support my claims and conducted this expansive historical account and featured multiple case studies. The appendix features my autoethnography, which provides further details regarding my identity as a gay man as well as my professional experience as a TV movie producer, LGBT media activist, and clinical communications professor.

This dissertation includes five chapters plus a list of programs and references. Chapter Two begins with a literature review, including a survey of critical TV movie scholarship before looking more specifically at LGBT TV movie scholarship. After the literature review, the chapter describes the multidisciplinary theories that help frame this research, including critical media pedagogy, new social movements, framing practices, and multiple theories of narrative. These multiple theories, in turn, suggest a multiple methodological and multi-perspectival design. This design includes critical cultural analysis of the history of LGBT TV movies to account for their political, social, and cultural realities.

In addition, Chapter Two includes critical case studies of a twenty seminal LGBT TV movies, including: *Consenting Adult*, *An Early Frost*, *As Is*, *Longtime Companion*, *And the Band Played On* (1993), *Tales of the City*, *Serving in Silence*, *Any Mother's Son*, *Two Mothers for Zachary*, *Anatomy of a Hate Crime* (2001), *Wedding Wars* and *Angels in America*. These case studies analyze, with some variance in depth and scope, the production, content, and reception of these programs. This analysis features historical documentation and original interviews conducted with twenty-six producers, programming executives, and screenwriters who were critically involved in the production of these programs.

Chapter Three surveys the critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies, which has been divided into five eras: Liberation, Backlash, Counter-Backlash, Culture Wars, and Post Wars. These eras reflect significant turns in LGBT history in the wake of larger political currents in the culture, the AIDS crisis, and the emergence of new media technologies including cable television. Within each period, the concerns and strategies of the LGBT social movement are described along with a brief survey of other LGBT media from that era, primarily feature films and television series, followed by a survey of the LGBT TV movies in that period, including critical case studies.

Chapter Four includes a summary and discussion of the political economy, production, programming, production, producers, texts, and reception of LGBT TV movies. This discussion includes their complicated financing and ownership of TV movies and the diverse commercial logics of commercial, public television, broadcast, basic cable, and premium cable television that have distributed these programs. In turn, these material conditions informed the rhizomatic structures and management practices of networks and their commercial and critical programming strategies. The term “rhizomatic” refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980) conception of those cultural processes that feature non-linear and multiple points of entry, complicated networks of relationships, and complex, hierarchical structures. Caldwell (2013) borrows this term to describe the industry as “a series of dense rhizomatic networks of sub-companies held at a safe distance, loosely structured to flexibly adapt to new labor markets, new digital technologies, and consumer unruliness” (p. 161).

In addition, this chapter includes discussion of the critical *alliance* forged between the multiple types of producers and programming executives, amongst others, who operated with varying degrees of critical agency and who contributed to the critical success of these programs.

Finally, this chapter concludes with discussion of the expansive and rhizomatic nature of TV movie production, which includes the phases of development, production, and promotion. Within each phase, there are multiple creative practices that allow for these alliances to engage in commercial strategies and critical tactics, which may not always be mutually exclusive.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by providing an overview of the entire study, a summary of the results, and a discussion of how these addressed the research questions. Also included are the limitations of this research and recommendations for further research. Finally, this chapter concludes with discussion of the larger implications of this research for the theories and practices of social movements, critical cultural and media production studies, as well as critical media pedagogy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review, Theories, and Methods

Introduction

This chapter combines a literature review with a discussion of the theories, methods, and procedures used to address the following research questions: Did LGBT TV movies educate and/or advocate on behalf of the LGBT social movement? If so, how was this possible, and who was most responsible? The literature review surveys the critical scholarship about TV movies in general and LGBT TV movies in particular. The theory section explains my multi-disciplinary approach, which considers the theories of new social movements, framing, narratives, and critical media pedagogy that inform my research. These theories also inform the multiple methodologies, research strategies, and perspectives I engaged. These methodologies include a critical cultural analysis of the history of LGBT TV movies along with critical case studies of the production, content, and reception of twenty seminal programs. The methods described include historical research, critical content analysis, and original interviews with twenty-six of the producers, executives, and screenwriters who were most responsible for the critical value of these programs.

TV Movies

As neither feature film nor television series, made-for-television movies are critically, if not also ontologically, challenged. Film critics and scholars have often ignored these texts or treated them as failed films that were originally financed, designed, and produced as features but then premiered on television. When these programs are recognized, scholars have a tendency to “frame the made-for-TV movie within an agenda set by the movie business” and as “byproducts of the motion picture industry” (Edgerton, date, p. 124). Conversely, television scholars have traditionally privileged the series format from television, which represents the medium’s most

unique properties and most popular format. As a result, TV movies are often overlooked or treated as an after-thought in critical and media history scholarship. These problems are further exacerbated by the complex, rhizomatic, and little-studied material conditions, structures, and logics of television movie production, which will be considered in this study.

In light of these concerns, television movies are, according to media scholar Gary Edgerton (1991), “consistently the most misunderstood and maligned genre of television” (p. 114). Despite the 3500 original, made-for-television movies and mini-series that have aired since the early 1970s, scholar Elayne Rapping (1991) has produced the only single critical monograph about these programs. Otherwise, what little scholarship exists surrounding TV movies has often been limited to a small number of programs. These programs have often been misunderstood due to their unique combination of form, content, and medium, resulting in a conflation of these programs with docudramas and confusion of these with the network programming strategies known as “movies-of-the-week.” Furthermore, what these critiques typically lack is a more diagnostic, multi-perspectival approach, as advocated by Kellner (1995, 2001).

In *Inside Prime Time* (1983), media scholar Todd Gitlin conducts one of the most critical, if contradictory, assessments of television movies. In reference to the content and narratives of TV movies, Gitlin lauds these programs for taking chances with topics typically foreclosed to series. He further describes how these programs most often include docudramas, which he describes as “motion pictures based on fact” that often include social issues, e.g., race and environmentalism. Among the “rare historical docudramas,” Gitlin includes numerous highly-rated and critically-acclaimed programs, including *Roots* (1977), *Holocaust* (1978), and *The Missiles of October* (1974). Gitlin even commends the execution of *Bitter Harvest*, which was based on the true story of a farmer who discovers his cattle are being poisoned, as a successful

social issue film that “was moving, understated, sharply directed, and well photographed – in short, one of the best of the breed” (p. 354).

Nonetheless, Gitlin still considers these programs with disdain, critiquing their style and making unproven claims regarding their function and reception. In terms of aesthetics, Gitlin suggests that, “what stands out about most docudrama is how unexceptional they really are” and how they are “special events made routine.” Gitlin professes deeper artistic appreciation for, by contrast, television procedural cop and legal dramas, e.g., *Hill Street Blues*. Gitlin suggests that, for networks, these programs operate as “just another set of predictable interruptions in the series stream” that provide these networks with “relief from the steady stream of series” (pp. 335-336). Without any evidence, Gitlin claims that, “these pictures no doubt make less of an impression on society than series, for they don’t stay long enough to inspire sustained identification” (p. 335).

As one of the few production ethnographies of its kind, Gitlin offers a rare insight into the role of programmers; however, he holds these executives in as much contempt as their programs. Gitlin describes how TV movies include “prestigious exceptions” that have been championed by executives, which would suggest the critical agency of programming executives. Yet, in the same essay, Gitlin dismisses these same executives: “When less-passionate executives like Wilson [the programming executive on *Bitter Harvest*] feel twinges of social conscience, they can buy indulgences with heartwarming stories of non-Hispanic people struggling to overcome handicaps” (Gitlin, 1983, p. 159).

In her review of *Inside Prime Time*, Rapping (1985) charges Gitlin with elitism and failing to consider the value and function of the industry from multiple perspectives, including production, programming, content, and reception. Rapping notes that Gitlin “presents his entire study, not from the point of view of audience responses or network executives' political values,

but instead from the point of view of the writers and producers who create the stuff” (p. 17). These perspectives, according to Rapping, afford Gitlin only a limited understanding of how these programs and this industry operate within broader culture. As Rapping claims, “If you want to know how TV gets to be TV, you couldn't do better than Gitlin. But if you want to know what it really means socially and politically, you almost couldn't do worse” (p. 18).

More notably, Rapping accuses Gitlin of dismissing the complex and contradictory ideological content of television’s fictional entertainment -- in this instance, both series and TV movies. Rapping finds this all the more curious since Gitlin had previously identified the ideological framing conducted by television news. Rapping cites TV movies as an example, claiming that these are the most progressive formats on television, noting that “[t]hese movies may lack the stylistic innovation Gitlin so admires, but they do occasionally present images of oppressed people engaging in collective, successful struggles against corporate and state institutions” (p. 18). Rapping’s criticism of Gitlin reflects the backlash against cultural and media scholarship engaged in by numerous feminist and queer scholars since the 1970s.

Newcomb and Alley (1983) identify television as a *producer’s medium* and conduct an interview with multiple producers, including the producing team of Richard Levinson and William Link, who also wrote most of their projects. This team has been responsible for “highly acclaimed movie-length television dramas dealing with complex and often controversial social issues” (p. 129), including the gay-themed *That Certain Summer*. Levinson and Link refer to themselves as “self-conscious producers,” which suggests that these writer-producers may see their work through a more critical lens (p. 134). Nonetheless, despite producing a number of “serious telefilms,” like Gitlin, these producers “express personal doubts that single programs . . .

can change social attitudes” (p. 136). Unlike Gitlin, they qualify their opinion as “personal doubts.”

Film historian Douglas Gomery shares similar concerns with Gitlin regarding TV movies. In his essay about *Brian’s Song*, Gomery lamented that the film “boils down the complex issue of race relations to a competition between two individuals” (p. 91). He criticizes the film for reducing the female characters to non-liberated, “perky” housewives, even though they are relatively minor characters in the story. In addition, he objects to the way the NFL franchise is presented as a small group of humane owners and managers, rather than using this opportunity to conduct a larger, cultural critique of the corporate ownership of sports franchises. Gomery’s exhaustive critique of the programs’ critical failings, while limited to his own subjective textual analysis, fails to account for not only the program’s mass appeal but also its industrial acclaim, including a Peabody Award, eleven Emmy nominations, and four Emmy Awards.

Furthermore, Gomery uses this program to critique the entire format of TV movies. Gomery suggests that *Brian’s Song* “pioneered the ‘disease-of-the-week’ subgenre of the docudrama form; now regularly we expect disturbing stories of rape, stalking, kidnapping and drug addiction as routine narrative cores, providing ammunition for those who loathe TV to further denounce the medium.” While deriding these broadcast programs as purely for-profit, inexplicably, Gomery commends cable television movies for taking on more “serious social commentary” (p. 96).

As Edgerton (1991) suggests, it is fundamental to understand that these programs are “products of TV,” which would account for the economic and industrial conditions in which these programs are produced. Furthermore, in contrast to Gomery’s contempt for the medium and format, Edgerton claims that, “The best made-for-TV movies of any year . . . are as

meaningful to their viewers within the dictates of television as any theatrical motion picture is to its audience within the separate context of cinema” (p. 125). Similarly, former CBS and HBO programming executive John Matoian claimed that television movies function for people “looking for windows into behavior (Silverman, date, p. 169).” These comments suggest that television movies may operate more meaningfully in culture than either Gomery or Gitlin claim.

Other scholars have examined similar television movies with more consideration of how these may have operated pedagogically. In her essay on the mini-series *Roots*, Fishbein (1991) claims, “*Roots* seemed to have had a genuinely humanitarian influence on its audience” (p. 272). She refers to media effects research that showed how the program “either reinforced audience preconceptions or performed a pro-social, humanistic and informational role for viewers” (p. 274). As with Edgerton and Matoian, Fishbein further alludes to how audiences make meaning from these texts, claiming, “Haley and the makers of the miniseries use *Roots* to conjure with, to provide a viable mythology to enable a modern audience to find rootedness in a troubled world” (Fishbein, date, p. 282).

As previously mentioned, Rapping’s *The Movie of the Week: Private Stories, Public Events* (1991) is the only monograph to focus exclusively on television movies. Rapping considers the critical production, content, and reception of these entertainment texts, and concludes that these programs operate more critically and powerfully than suggested by these other critics. As Rapping notes, television movies

[o]perate in a unique way as discursive sites upon which representations and ideologies of “the family” are struggled over first in the text itself and then in the larger public sphere of social and political relations, by virtue of the form’s special position among popular narrative texts and its intertextual relations to other discursive structures – news broadcasts, media critique, formal and informal gatherings in which the movies and their topics are discuss. (p. xvii)

Like Gitlin and Newcomb, Rapping recognizes the critical agency of producers, programmers, writers, and other culture workers. She writes, “There are in fact, writers, producers, directors and performers who have their own agendas and varying levels of power to enforce them.” Like Newcomb and in contrast to Gitlin, she recognizes how the “left-liberal slant of creative people in television” has informed the more progressive, ideological content contained in television movies (p. 149).

Rapping’s analysis suggests that these programs also operate as critical pedagogy. According to Rapping, “It speaks to the power of this genre, to educate and to move viewers against the grain of what seems to be the dominant value system even in these most reactionary of times” (date, p. 44). Furthermore, Rapping reflects on how TV movies operate as discursive sites of political and cultural contestation. Rapping notes, “TV movies remain an intriguing communicative arena within which meanings and values that affect us as a nation are struggled over and defined” (p. 150). More broadly, she recognizes that entertainment can operate as both an escape “and as a form of understanding and coming to terms with harsh social reality” (p. 7).

Rapping’s contribution to this dissertation cannot be overstated. While Rapping focuses more on women’s and family movies, she does mention a few LGBT TV movies, including *An Early Frost*. Rapping further suggests that “it is possible to intervene in positive ways in the development of national consciousness while working in a commercially, politically conservative industry and using the dramatic techniques of Hollywood narrative” (p. 119). In consideration of how these programs operate critically and pedagogically in the culture, Rapping also considers these programs through multiple perspectives, including production, content, and reception.

Leading educational scholars Garcia and Yosso (2008) may be the only education scholars to have contrasted feature films with an original TV movie. The authors considered how two inner-city school dramas, *Half Nelson* (2006) and *Freedom Writers* (2007), portrayed minorities as poor, violent gang members. According to the authors, these films continued a long Hollywood tradition that had white teachers helping to lift inner-city, minority students out of poverty. In contrast, HBO's original movie *Walkout* (2006) featured a tale of self-determination by the Latino/a community and more realistic portrayals of minorities. The protagonist, student activist Paula Cristosomo, led the East L.A. High walkouts by thousands of Mexican-Americans in 1968 to protest educational conditions. According to Yosso and Garcia, "*Walkout* demonstrated how teaching history in all its complexities lead to empowerment" (p. 181). The movie's Executive Producer, Moctesuma Esparza, based the film on his own experiences as a student who participated in these protests. Along with his partner, Katz, Esparza has produced numerous TV movies featuring Latino/a and minority topics. Their work reflects a larger tradition of television movies that have included numerous critical and counter-narratives (Craig, 2014).

In the past decade, television movies have waned in popularity and cultural value. Within the turn towards media industries studies, contemporary scholars (Perren [2009], Smith [2009]) have focused on the industrial structures and commercial logics rather than content, reception, and effects. Nonetheless, Smith (2009) confirms that television movies help to produce large audiences and Emmy recognition that both raise awareness of the network and brands it for television viewers. From this observation, we understand that the commercial logics of these programs are not limited to their advertiser appeal but also popular and critical value.

Media scholarship about LGBT TV movies has also offered conflicted and contradictory consideration of LGBT TV movies, especially of their critical value. Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* (1985) represents a seminal history of gays in Hollywood, especially in feature films, although Russo includes a few television movies. Unfortunately, Russo's book only extends to 1985, just before he died of AIDS, which limited the scope of his project. Nonetheless, Russo's description of *That Certain Summer* includes a brief description of the content, the backlash from gay activists, and a few details about the critical production. The latter discussion of production was based on interviews from the screenwriters discussing their battles with the network over dialogue; however, no account was given from the network executives' perspective.

Based on the few TV movies featured in his account, Russo concludes that LGBT TV movies operate as problem films about gay people for straight audiences; this opinion is shared by other critical scholars, including Gross (2001) and Walters (2001). In his description of the feature film *Making Love*, Russo claimed that the film "focused on coming out as a family program, an approach it shares with made-for television movies . . . television films like *Consenting Adult* and *An Early Frost* subtly say that there are no homosexuals, only a homosexual problem" (pp. 276-277). Russo further concludes that, "most television movies are made by liberal heterosexuals who mean well but are limited in their efforts by the demands of the medium" (p. 277). As Edgerton confirms, Russo considers these programs through the structures and forms of feature films rather than taking into account their unique production and reception within the medium of television.

LGBT media historians Stephen Capsuto (2000) and Stephen Tropiano (2002) continued Russo's work but focused on television with an emphasis on television series. Their analyses sometimes include considerations of production and occasionally feature interviews with the

producers or screenwriters. Furthermore, while operating from a less critical, queer, and rigidly ideological lens, these scholars still consider describe how these programs have operated to raise visibility and inform audiences about the lives of LGBT people.

Both scholars include TV movies in their analysis, although not exclusively and with varying levels of inquiry. Their critical considerations of these texts are far more detailed and empirically-based than other critical scholars. Most notably, Capsuto's scholarship includes exhaustive archival research, including internal network notes and memos, about the production of a number of these programs. Capsuto features some of the only accounts of the critical production of these programs from the view of producers and network executives. Like Rapping, Capsuto's scholarship has proven invaluable to this dissertation.

In *Up from Invisibility* (2001), communications scholar Larry Gross provides an expansive understanding of how media has increased LGBT recognition in culture throughout the twentieth century. However, Gross considers most forms of LGBT representation to be limited, engaging in a form of "mainstreaming" that ignores difference to support the dominant ideological and stable positions of heterosexual society. Gross also advocates for more oppositional forms of representation, especially those counter-narratives produced by the LGBT community. According to Gross, "the most effective form of resistance to the hegemony of the mainstream is to speak for oneself, to create narratives and images that counter the accepted, oppressive, or inaccurate ones" (p. 19).

While Gross acknowledges that gays have been members of the Hollywood production community, Gross considers television to be "the most insular and undemocratic of the media, largely unavailable to most minority groups" (p. 20). He further claims that "television producers are not looking to please gay and lesbian people; they are merely trying to avoid

arguing with them afterwards” (p. 51). Unfortunately, Gross does not conduct any empirical research to support these claims, speaking neither to the openness and agency of LGBT television workers nor those who support the concerns of the LGBT community.

Gross views LGBT media through a more critical and queer lens. Operating from multiple fields, critical and queer scholars often privilege a more subversive and liberationist approach to sexuality and sexual identity. In contrast to most LGBT media historians, who engage with more empirical evidence, including archival research, to support their claims, critical and queer scholars engage in critiques of popular culture through a more ideological lens, often informed by Marxist literary criticism as well as feminist and gender studies. As Green (2002) points out, “while not all scholars of sexuality identify themselves as ‘queer theorists,’ queer theory exerts a formidable influence in the study of sexuality nonetheless powerfully reshaping the language, concepts and theoretical concerns of contemporary academic production” (p. 521).

In his estimation of gay representation on television, Gross states, “[A]lthough the right wing has attacked the networks for what it considers overly favorable attention to gay people, in fact, gay people are mostly portrayed and used in news and dramatic media in ways that reinforced rather than challenged the prevailing images” (p. 82). While Gross acknowledges that the Right would prefer less (and less favorable) LGBT visibility, Gross’ criticism suggests that these representations are simply not gay, or rather, queer enough.

Gross does mention a number of television movies, sometimes positively. For example, Gross acknowledges *That Certain Summer* as a “breakthrough,” one of the first LGBT television movies to feature a gay-affirmative coming out story (p. 81). However, like Russo, Gross claims that LGBT TV movies represent problem films about gay people for straight audiences. Gross

cites another critic, William Henry, who argues that in most television, “homosexuality thus becomes not a fact of life but a moral issue . . . defined almost entirely by their ‘problem’” (1987). Like Gomery, Gross claims that these programs belong to what Gross pejoratively refers to as the “problem-of-the-week” genre of TV movies (p. 83).

Similarly, with respect to HIV and AIDS, Gross claims that most gay characters are often reduced to victims, “objects of pity” in TV (p. 143). These programs feature almost exclusively on the individuals, rarely having the support of a larger community, “alone and abandoned, unless and until they are taken back into the bosom of their family” (p. 146). Gross concedes that these TV movies are preferable to the same depictions of those with AIDS in TV series where they were often portrayed as “villains – real or imagined,” including “those who carelessly, or worse, deliberately place others at risk by continuing to practice unsafe sex, or health professionals who, through negligence or malevolence, infect their patients” (2001, p. 141). With this comment, Gross suggests that TV movies about AIDS may feature at least more positive, if pitiable, gay characters.

In addition, Gross objects to the failure of the television movies to depict same-sex affection. In his critique of *Serving in Silence*, his one observation was that the program featured only a tepid kiss. Gross does not describe the program’s narrative about a highly-decorated officer who sues the Navy to keep from being discharged for being a lesbian. Nor does Gross account for the fact that the program aired shortly after the political debacle that led to the regressive “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” military policy denying LGBT soldiers the right to serve openly in the military.

Like Gross, Walters (2001) considers the rise in LGBT visibility, including media, although her focus is limited to what some scholars have coined *The Gay 90s*. Walters also

expresses concern that, even with greater visibility, these representations are limited by their homo-normativity and a kind of “thoughtless assimilationism” (p. 17). However, Walters does concede a point made by LGBT historian John D’Emilio -- namely, that any visibility of LGBT characters is valuable because it disrupts the usual pattern of heterosexuality on television. She further admits that a more queer or sexualized representation risks reducing “difference to another sexy commodity” (p. 18). As for television, Walters acknowledges that “there is no avoiding the reality that this contemporary story of gay visibility has been told more consistently on television than in popular film” (p. 27). Walters concedes that, in contrast to film, television’s ability to be seen in the privacy and convenience of the home can unintentionally and more likely result in straight people encountering LGBT representations.

Like Walters, Becker (2006) also considers the rise in LGBT visibility in the 1990s, more narrowly focusing on television series. Becker claims that “throughout its first four decades, television virtually denied the existence of homosexuality” (p. 3). In contrast, much like the myth that the LGBT social movement began with Stonewall, “relegating earlier periods to darkness and invisibility.” Walters at least concedes that important LGBT cultural work has occurred prior to this period in time (p. 23).

Walters does include a number of LGBT TV movies. Like Gross, she critiques the majority of these programs for failing to capture the LGBT community and for a lack of same-sex affection. Walters conducts a comparative analysis of two television movies that featured lesbian families engaged in and losing custody battles. In the case of *Two Mothers for Zachary* (1999) and *What Makes a Family* (2001), Walters critiques these programs for their depiction of a more fluid sexual orientation, where the protagonist’s lesbian identity is “an unfortunate occurrence resulting from the chance encounter with romance in the feminine form” (p. 222).

Nonetheless, she commends *What Makes a Family* for at least depicting a supportive gay community.

Like Gross, Walters' position towards LGBT media, including TV movies, reflects a more critical, queer, ideological, anti-assimilationist position; however, by the end, Walters claims her position has shifted. More specifically, she acknowledges that, while the LGBT representations on TV may have rendered "harmless, and innocuous, similar to straights and denuded of politics, sexuality, difference, something else often slips through or past the homogenizing gates of the culture factory" (p. 296). She concedes that greater visibility may translate into tolerance and then acceptance. She references another LGBT scholar, Bronski (1998), who makes the distinction between making LGBT lives visible versus making our lives public, "which entitles the individual to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (p. 299).

While Walters is concerned with the depictions of lesbianism in TV movies as perhaps too casual and fluid, LGBT scholar Christopher Pullen would arguably herald this development. In *Gay Identity, New Storytelling and the Media* (2011), Pullen considers how recent television and new media feature new storytelling with "narrative progression where gay men and lesbians reject imposed mythic identities of the past and create, new optimistic, and self-focused constructions" (p. 13). This includes more iterative constructions of sexual orientation and identity that are not limited to their dyadic formations as gay-straight. According to Pullen, this "opposition per se is problematic, as it reinforces power relationship, and queer identity remains peripheral" (p. 7).

Along with other forms of media, Pullen cites a number of television movies that have contributed to this new storytelling, including *Tales of the City* and *Angels in America*. Both programs featured more diverse and fluid representations of sexual orientation that include the

possibility of further transformation and mobility. In addition, Pullen considers the cultures of production and progressive agency of those who helped craft these new narratives. Although his research is limited given its focus on screenwriters, Pullen alludes to the collaborative nature of media as well as the “veiled support of homosexuals” from within media institutions like the BBC (p. 25).

For storytellers and media producers, these conflicting critiques can become untenable with regard to the creation and production of LGBT narratives. For example, LGBT critics and activists often complain that these programs feature LGBT characters as victims or villains. At the same time, the same critics, along with other activists, have complained that these programs featured hagiographic depictions of the perfect gay or lesbian. In addition to these contradictions, these critiques privilege the text of production, which limits our understanding of how these programs operated in culture. For example, as argued here, a number of these programs contain narratives deliberately designed and produced as gay problems for straight audiences, with both commercial and critical motives.

LGBT TV movie scholarship has been sparse and contradictory, featuring conflicting accounts of the critical value of these programs. In contrast to critical scholars, LGBT media historians have more frequently accounted for the full circuit of production of these programs, including production, content, and reception. Similarly, LGBT TV historians have also accounted for how TV operates differently from other media. Although these historians have often considered the critical cultural value of these programs, they have also operated from a more equivocal, less ideologically-rigid position than the critical and queer scholars cited here.

Theory

As demonstrated in this literature review, there is no historical account of LGBT TV movies that analyzes their multiple and diverse topics or how these operated in culture, whether as education, entertainment, or advocacy. To address these questions requires a multi-disciplinary approach that considers LGBT TV movies through the lens of social movements, narrative theories, and critical pedagogy. Collectively, these theories help frame this research and provide multiple methods and perspectives for studying these concerns.

Since the 1960s, theorists like Melucci (1980) have described the rise of new social movements (NSMs). NSMs are based on culture and identity rather than political or economic concerns around labor, politics, or economic grievances. These would include the Civil Rights and Women's Rights movements, as well as the LGBT social movement. Like these other movements, LGBT social movements are not limited to one nation or region's concerns but may be found operating around the globe. Their goals and grievances are not exclusively economic, legal, or political but also include the struggle over social and cultural recognition and acceptance.

LGBT sociologists, political scientists, and historians have considered the nature of the LGBT social movement, including Armstrong and Bernstein (1997), Seidman (1993), and D'Emilio (1983). These scholars have considered how the LGBT movement also represents their own unique set of concerns, including debate over the nature and definition of sexual orientation. More broadly, these debates have reflected the tension between essentialist, social constructivist, and post-structuralist constructions of identity. Most notably, queer theory has repudiated LGBT essentialism, operating from the poststructuralist position that LGBT identity is the product of discursive strategies. Furthermore, scientists and scholars have challenged the

belief that sexual orientation is a fixed identity; rather, this identity may be fluid, in a state of constant transformation rather than a dyadic construction limited to straight-gay.

Similarly, LGBT scholars (Rimmerman, Walters, Eaklor, D'Emilio) have noted how these complications of sexual identity design and formation have created tensions within the movement. These tensions have challenged the limited resources and affected the number and structure of LGBT organizations. In addition, they have generated multiple, conflicting and complimentary strategies, including liberationist and assimilationist approaches. An assimilationist strategy operates from the inside, featuring more rights-based approaches and a tolerance for more incremental institutional changes. Conversely, a liberationist approach deploys more radical, transformational, counter-hegemonic, and militant tactics like marches, sit-ins, and protests.

These divides have created a unique set of internal complications within the movement. Some queer members have charged more moderate members of the movement with embracing the status quo and maintaining the larger material, structural, and cultural formations crafted by mainstream, hetero-normative, and hegemonic society. While representing tremendous critical and cultural value, a queer position may also prove untenable as a political and movement strategy. As sociologist Green (2002) noted:

Despite its laudable ambition and broad academic appeal, queer theory tends to lapse into discursively burdened, textual idealism that glosses over the institutional character of sexual identity and the shared social roles that sexual actors occupy . . . as a consequence, queer theory constructs an under-socialized 'queer' subject with little connection to the empirical world and the socio-historical forces that shape sexual practice and identity. (p. 522)

Of late, LGBT scholars have started to abandon a queer perspective to consider more progressive positions. Green advocated for a "gay, but not queer" position (p. 521). Edwards (1998) has described "queer fear" and pushed back against this cultural turn (p.471). Seidman (2002) has

described a movement that has gone “beyond the closet,” including these ideological and instrumental divisions, particularly in the wake of increased visibility throughout culture (p. 6). Nonetheless, the movement continues to wrestle with the concerns and backlash from the Right as well as these internal battles and divisions within their own community.

In addition to these internal divides over the nature of sexual orientation, the LGBT movement depends upon a declaration of identity known as “coming out.” This process occurs at the micro-level of identity formation and development, including coming out within one’s own family. At the macro-level of society, the strength of the movement is predicated upon increased recognition throughout all sectors of culture, including politics, education, religion, and media. As a consequence, the efforts to raise LGBT visibility are critical to the success of the movement, including representation throughout all forms of culture and media.

Like other NSMs, the LGBT movement has engaged with media more critically and accurately to frame their concerns and more progressively feature their stories and lives. Framing “is a process in which social actors, media and members of a society jointly interpret, define and redefine states of affairs” (Klandermans, 1997, p. 44). These social actors would include media activists, publicists, and strategists operating within the movement, albeit typically outside the media industries. Consequently, as Benford and Snow have claimed, the practice of framing is limited since “social movement activists rarely exercise much control over the ‘stories’ media organizations choose to cover or how the media represent the activists’ claims” (2000, p. 626).

LGBT historians (Rimmerman [2002], D’Emilio [1983], Eaklor [2011]) have noted that LGBT activists have engaged in cultural and media activism at the national level, starting shortly after Stonewall. As early as 1973, LGBT activists were meeting with film executives to discuss

guidelines for the responsible depictions of gays and lesbians (Russo, 1987, p. 220). Similarly, as Montgomery (1985) has observed, “Like other advocacy groups, gay activists were beginning to see prime-time television as critical symbolic territory in their struggle to gain acceptance in the wider society” (p. 77).

Furthermore, as noted by a number of scholars (Gross [2001], Capsuto [2000], Montgomery [1989]), LGBT activists benefitted from the long history of gay people working within the industry. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, “unlike Latinos, Blacks and Asian Americans, gay people are fully integrated into the power structure . . . in much the way Jews have traditionally occupied a disproportionate number of positions in the entertainment business” (Brownfield, 1999, p. A1). Nonetheless, the presence of LGBT media professionals does not necessarily mean they are open and actively engaged in promoting the concerns of the LGBT community.

Furthermore, the declaration of coming out may also operate as a political strategy. As Bernstein (1997) has noted, this “celebration” of identity can, under certain political conditions, be instrumental in pushing forward the concerns of the LGBT community within structures of power. The opposite can also be true. Based on my own experience, for some media professionals, out workers may be perceived to have an “agenda” that inhibits their critical agency to champion these projects. Conversely, staying in the closet affords these workers the ability to operate more subversively, which allows them to champion and maintain the critical value of these programs. The same concerns would apply to the LGBT scholarship conducted by open and closeted academics, which suggests the concerns raised by Standpoint Theory (Harding, 2010) regarding the relations of experience to epistemologies and methodologies.

LGBT scholars and media historians have accounted for the cooperation between outside LGBT activists and inside LGBT creative workers. As Montgomery has referred to them, these were “agents in place,” which is a term that implies subversion (p. 78). These insiders helped secretly inform activists of objectionable scripts and depictions, sometimes in advance, which gave the organizations the opportunity to address the concerns, which the networks sometimes heeded. Meanwhile, LGBT media activists also applied pressure from the outside, threatening protests, boycotts, and sit-ins. This insider/outsider strategy proved to be potent and complimentary. Not only do these strategies resemble the assimilation/liberationist strategies, but they confirm how these strategies were, according to Rimmerman (2009), “not mutually exclusive” (p. 5).

Nonetheless, little consideration has been given to activists operating within media industries or those critical alliances that may be forged between LGBT activists and sympathetic cultural workers, whether LGBT or not; however, as Lievrouw (2011) claimed, new social movements include participants “who are most involved in the production and circulation of culture, including media culture and information technology” (p. 43). As reflected in this research, LGBT media activists have not only worked from inside but have also forged critical alliances with other progressive, sympathetic, and marginalized cultural workers.

While focused on the framing of news and documentaries, little consideration has been given to the framing of entertainment, particularly fictional narratives. Nonetheless, as Mulligan and Habel (2011) have claimed, “one way that entertainment framing could influence opinion is through the framing of issues” (p. 80). These scholars also mentioned how popular audiences gravitate more to popular, scripted entertainment rather than to news, documentary, or more conventionally educational formats.

Outside the field of sociology and social movement literature, communications and media scholars have evaluated the potential of television entertainment to feature and frame social issues. Klein (2011) has proposed,

Entertainment television programming does not function as mere amusement for viewers, but a site through which contemporary social issues may be considered and negotiated. Entertainment programs that provide unconventional perspectives on social issues showcase the potential of popular television to complement more traditionally informational or educational television content, including news and current affairs output. (p. 905)

Klein has further suggested that the programs may have been deliberately designed to operate as education, even critically, noting that

[f]or writers, directors and producers of entertainment programming, education may be a secondary goal. At the same time, descriptions of what they are trying to achieve recall elements of a critical pedagogy that encourages critical thinking, recognizes the role of popular culture in learning, is aware of power dynamics embedded in social structures (where teacher is to student as media professional is to viewer), and views schooling as a foundation for democratic public life (Giroux & McLaren, 1989). (p. 917).

Similarly, communications scholar Jones (2010) has proposed a theory of *political entertainment* that is capable of cultivating greater political engagement, perhaps even more effectively than the news media. Jones has cited the success of political-satirical comedies, e.g., *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. These programs have been proven to attract and raise political awareness among younger viewers. U.K. media scholars Kay Richardson and John Corner have evaluated the role of political dramas on television, e.g., *The West Wing*, suggesting that “dramatic stories of this kind are important for the sake of their potential contribution to what citizens believe – and perhaps just as importantly, feel – about politics itself” (p. 923).

In addition, some scholars have considered film and television docudramas as a format for entertainment narratives that feature critical, political content capable of educating audiences and provoking critics and partisans. As journalist and critic Rosenthal (1999) has claimed,

“many critics attack docudrama as a form, when what really disturbs them are the opinions being expressed” (p. 9). Rosenthal has further suggested that this form offers the “possibility of making strong social and political statements about current affairs that could be made in no other way” (p. xii). While he has acknowledged the lack of audience research, Rosenthal nonetheless has suggested, “One can theorize away, but I suspect that the audiences will continue to accept the best of docudrama as being an important force for good” (p. 10). Similarly, Hoffer and Nelson (1999) have referred to the unique content, format, and appeal of the docudrama form, claiming,

The combination of dramatic and documentary forms offers a unique perspective on and analysis of both current and historical occurrences, attracting a much larger audience share when compared to the traditional documentary or newscast. And it should be emphasized that these are often “new” audiences who otherwise would not watch a documentary or theatrical presentation. (p. 73)

Moving beyond medium, genre, and format, a number of scholars from diverse fields have set forth narrative theories. These theories suggest how media narratives, even deployed for entertainment purposes and on television, can operate as critical, political, or moral texts.

Derived from theories of rhetoric and persuasion, including Aristotle’s *Poetics*, communication scholar Walter Fisher’s *The Narrative Paradigm* (1985) suggested that all humans are storytellers and all communication is a form of storytelling. Although Fisher did not consider all narratives to be critically and pedagogically equal, narratives may operate critically in multiple forms and genres: “Some discourse is more veracious, reliable, and trustworthy in respect to knowledge, truth and reality than some other discourse, but no *form* or *genre* has final claim to these virtues” (p. 19). Furthermore, Fisher did not privilege any narrative medium over another. As he stated, “The central point here is that there is no genre, including technical communication, that is not an episode in the story of life” (p. 347).

Fisher's theories reflected those claims about narrative and cognition proposed by Jerome Bruner. Bruner was a renowned educational and social psychologist whose work represented "broad philosophical themes, drawn not just from philosophy itself, but from linguistics, literary theory, anthropology, and other disciplines" (Bakhurst and Shanker, 2001, p. 1). Bruner's theories were inspired by Vygotsky, who proposed that we needed "a way of understanding man as a product of culture as well as a product of nature" (Bruner, 1986, p. 78). Bruner suggested that we have a narrative mode that informs cognition and "leads to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily 'true') historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course" (p. 13).

Within this narrative mode, Bruner considered how narratives are used to construct reality and how they operate with culture to make meaning for individuals and groups. Bruner's theories of narrative explained how cultural stories, including fables, myths, and folktales, help resolve the conflicts and inconsistencies that our mind has with the external world

: The life of the mind seems everywhere to be caught in a never ending dialectic between the ordinary and the unexpected, between the quotidian and the exceptional. Narratives seem to be our natural form for rendering the two into a culturally and cognitively manageable form. (2008, p. 9)

In his view, narratives serve as a cognitive, sense-making bridge between the fields of psychology and anthropology as well as between the individual and culture.

Bruner's theories correlated as well to theories of narrative espoused by philosopher and University of Chicago Law and Ethics Professor, Martha C. Nussbaum. Nussbaum has proposed the following concept of the narrative imagination:

This [narrative imagination] means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. The narrative imagination is not uncritical, for we always bring ourselves and our judgments to the encounter with another; and when we identify with a character in a

novel, or with a distant person whose life story we imagine, we inevitably will not merely identify; we will also judge that story in the light of our own goals and aspirations. (p. ix)

Nussbaum considered the narrative imagination one of the vital components demanded of education in helping to foster proper citizenship, if not the proper way to learn what it means to be “a human being capable of love and imagination” (p. 14).

In particular, Nussbaum explored how narratives are forms of moral pedagogy and therefore able to help us understand and express compassion for difference:

Narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist’s interest – with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society’s refusal of visibility. (p. 88)

Tied to the goals of education, narrative imagination is a vital political strategy. Hence,

Nussbaum claimed that

If the literary imagination develops compassion, and if compassion is essential for civic responsibility, then we have good reason to teach works that promote the types of compassionate understanding we want and need. This means including works that give voice to the experiences of a group in our society that we urgently need to understand, such as members of other cultures, ethnic and racial minorities, women and lesbians and gay men. (p. 100)

Similar to Nussbaum’s conception of the political capacities of the narrative imagination, education scholars Peters and Lankshear (1996) identified what they call “counter-narratives,” which “serve the strategic political function of splintering and disturbing grand stories which gain their legitimacy from foundational myths concerning the origins and development of an unbroken history of the West based on the evolutionary ideal of progress” (p. 2). Similarly, education scholars Solorzano and Yosso (2002) have identified “counter-storytelling,” which they describe as “both a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told (i.e., those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those

in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse – majoritarian story” (p. 124).

Both Bruner and Nussbaum considered the arts, particularly literature, to be sources of moral pedagogy helping to foster narrative imagination. Through the affective engagement of audiences with the more emotional rhetorical structure, narratives provide an artistic form that “makes its spectator perceive, for a time, the invisible people of the world – at least a beginning of social justice” (Nussbaum, date, p. 94). Bruner further suggested that these narratives apply “whatever the medium – whether words, cinema, abstract animation, theater” (1986, p. 19). Bruner’s ideas also suggested a complimentary perspective to the technological determinism of media, as proposed by media scholar Marshall McLuhan: “It is not just, in the shopworn phrase, that the medium is the message. The message itself may create the reality that the message embodies and predispose those who hear it to think about it in a particular mode” (Bruner, 1986, p. 121).

Reflecting the same concerns about morality and media, British sociologist Tim Dant (2012) has proposed that television is a medium capable of fostering the “moral imaginary,” particularly through its mimetic nature (2012). Like Newcomb and Hirsh’s account of television as a cultural forum, Dant claims that “television . . . is *the* medium par excellence for mimesis, because it merges the capacities of all other media and incorporates all arts” (p. 1). Dant further suggests that television has “become the prime medium for sharing morality” (p. 2), which leads to his proposition that the *moral imaginary* is “a repository of ideas about the possible ways of living in the world” (p. 2). According to Dant, television operates as “a way of sharing ideas across a society that can bring together groups of people, and it is a cultural space in which

changes in mores and moral ideas can be rapidly passed on without instruction or formal education” (p. 2).

Critical media pedagogy represents some of the same concerns that have been raised by these social movement and narrative theories, although through the lens of both educational and media theory. Critical media pedagogy reflects earlier theories of critical pedagogy that situated education as “part of a larger project for expanding the possibilities of a democratic politics, the dynamics of resistance, and the capacities for social change” (Giroux, date, p. 89).

Fundamentally political and ideological, critical pedagogy has been designed to address the “rising indifference towards those aspects of education to foster critical consciousness, engender a respect for public goods, and affirms the need to energize democratic public life and reinvigorate the imperatives of social citizenship” (p. 2).

Meanwhile, scholars within cultural, critical, and media studies have considered the pedagogical potential of culture and media. As Giroux (2009) notes:

Following the work of Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall, many cultural theorists acknowledge the primacy of culture’s role as an educational site where identities are being continually transformed, power is enacted, and learning assumes a political dynamic as it becomes not only the condition for the acquisition of agency but also the sphere for imagining oppositional social change. (p. 89)

However, Giroux also acknowledges that these theorists have often considered the value of a critical media literacy or pedagogy in limited ways. To address this concern, Giroux’s theory of public pedagogy accounts for how learning takes place in a variety of public spheres outside of the schools. Similarly, as educational theorists Burdick and Sandlin claim, “We are constantly being taught, and we constantly learn” (date, p. 349). Public pedagogy’s consideration of educations beyond the formal institution reflects Dewey’s philosophy of “informal education” (Dewey, year, p. #) as well as Williams’ (1967) notion of “permanent education” (p. #).

Over the past few decades, Giroux has developed his theory of public pedagogy in relation to public intellectuals (2000), the politics of resistance (2003), cultural politics (2010), and Hollywood film (2008). In addition, other theorists of public pedagogy have found a great deal of traction within the fields of education and cultural studies. For example, public pedagogy has been used to describe the educative potential of public spaces, e.g., museums and parks, graffiti and performance street art: “These public pedagogies – spaces, sites, and languages of education that exist outside schools – are just as crucial, if not more so, to our understanding of the formation of identities and social structures as the teaching that goes on within formal classrooms” (Burdick and Sandlin, date, p. 349).

Like Giroux, Kellner (1995, 2001) has combined these concerns with critical pedagogy with prior scholarship surrounding cultural and critical media studies. In *Media Culture* (1995), Kellner privileges media as the dominant source of culture and pedagogy. As Kellner states, “We are immersed from cradle to grave in a media and consumer society and thus it is important to learn how to understand, interpret, and criticize its meanings and messages” (2001, page). Although media reflects the commercial logics of capitalism, Kellner claims that media is a contested terrain, capable of delivering hegemonic and counter-hegemonic messages that may reinforce ideological domination as well as provide the potential for resistance. According to Kellner, in order to successfully sell media artifacts, “the products of the culture industries must resonate to social experience, must attract large audiences and must thus offer attractive products, which may shock, break with conventions, contain social critique, or articulate current ideas that may be the product of progressive social movements” (1995, p. 16).

Critical media pedagogy has often focused on feature films at the expense of television (Van Heertum, et al., 2010). However, more recent scholars have started to direct their attention

to the television as a site for critical, cultural, public and media pedagogy. For example, Wright and Sandlin (2009) analyze the British television series *The Avengers* to consider how this series operates as counter-hegemonic, proto-feminist media pedagogy (Wright, date). Sophia A. McClennon (2010) has considered *The Colbert Report* through the lens of critical media pedagogy, articulating how the series' use of political satire continues a long tradition of helping audiences engage around political issues, fostering citizenship and promoting the democratic project. McClennon's work is comparable to Jones' considerations of Colbert as political entertainment (date). These considerations of television as a site for political entertainment and critical media pedagogy suggest how LGBT TV movies may operate pedagogically.

Meanwhile, other communications scholars have started to consider the potential for commercial media and entertainment texts to operate critically or politically . In *Media Interventions* (2013), communications scholar Howley has set forth his concept of media interventions "as activities and projects that secure, exercise, challenge or acquire media power for tactical and strategic action" (p. 5). These interventions, according to Howley, "avoid a tendency to view social change communication, often associated with alternative and activist media practice, as a distinct and separate sphere of cultural activity from dominant media culture" (p. xiii). Rather, media interventions consider "how and why commercial and corporate interests exercise media power to affect change" (p. xiv). Furthermore, this definition "accommodates discursive, pedagogical and policy-oriented change initiatives." which compares to those strategies alluded to by the practice of media framing (p. 8).

Similarly, over the past few decades, communications scholars have forged alliances with media producers and programming executives to conduct Entertainment-Education (E-E). Inspired by numerous theories of persuasion and narrative, E-E is a set of strategies for

“purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior” (Singhal & Rogers, 1999, 2002; Wang & Singhal, 2008). In addition to crafting these messages, E-E work features measurements for gauging the efficacy of these pro-social and educational messages. Over the past few decades, this collaboration has been involved in crafting certain storylines in such hit shows as *Friends* and *Grey’s Anatomy* that focused upon various health and social issues. Curiously, this work has been conducted within the fields of communications and public policy studies, but E-E does not include scholars from education and media studies.

Methods and Procedures

Critical media pedagogy has engaged with the traditions, practices, methods, and research strategies advocated within critical cultural studies that allow readers to conduct critiques of culture and media. However, critical cultural studies have typically privileged the critical readings of text over reception and have privileged dominant readings of texts that do not account for the possibility of resistant or alternative readings. As Kellner (1995) claims, “certain cultural texts have an aesthetic excess, a polysemic, over-determination of meaning, contradictory moments and aspects that can be read against the ideological grain even of conservative texts and those that aestheticize violence” (page). While recent cultural critical scholars have focused more on the role of audiences in making meaning of media texts, Kellner (1995) suggests this has resulted in the “fetishism of audiences” (p. 37), often at the expense of dominant and ideologies readings of the text.

Furthermore, often missing from most critical cultural studies practice is consideration of the production of media. As Kellner (1995) notes, “This focus on text/audience, however, leaves

out many mediations that should be a part of cultural studies, including analyses of how texts are produced within the context of the political economy and system of production of culture” (p. 37). In other words, in addition to the prospect of active audiences, critical cultural studies ought to account for the probability of active producers.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I understand the production of these texts to be vital to our understanding of how these programs were able to frame the concerns of the LGBT community and critically educate audiences. While critical media pedagogy and media framing research has theorized how these programs operate critically, politically, and pedagogically, they have failed to explain how this was possible or who was responsible for making this happen. The lack of knowledge about media industries and production reflects the influence of earlier theories of cultural industries and critical scholars, which privileged texts and reception.

As Kellner (1995) says, “[O]ne could indeed argue that most recent cultural studies have tended to neglect analysis of the circuits of political economy in favor of text- and audience-based analyses” (p. 43). Hence, Kellner advocates for a multicultural, multi-perspectival approach to critical cultural studies, including analysis of reception studies, production and political economy. Reception studies include quantitative and qualitative methods, e.g., interviews and surveys, to account for both meanings and effects. Production studies include the political economy of media as well as the formulas and conventions of production.

Nonetheless, while Kellner’s approach is more expansive and holistic than most critical cultural studies, this production analysis is somewhat limited because it fails to account for the complicated, rhizomatic practices of everyday media production that often confound scholars and even practitioners. As media scholar Caldwell (2014) confirms, the media industry is a “mess,” and he advocates for “integrated cultural-industrial analysis” to “develop more holistic

systems approaches if we are to fully understand today's complex systems of film and television" (p. 163). As an example of practice, in *Not Hollywood* (2013), cultural anthropologist Ortner conducts ethnographic interviews with independent film producers to discuss how critical formations of identity may inform their filmmaking practices and outcomes.

Similarly, in *Critical Media Industries Studies: A Research Approach* (2009), Havens, Lotz, and Tinic (2009) set forward a set of research strategies to accommodate for the limitations of most critical cultural studies, including those analyses limited to political economy. As the authors claim:

If and when popular culture is considered within a political-economic analysis, there is a reductionist tendency to treat it as yet another form of commodified culture operating only according to the interests of capital. There is little room to consider the moments of creativity and struggles over representational practices from that vantage point. (p. 236)

In order to identify these practices and struggles, the authors recommend conducting "empirical (not empiricist) research into the media industries with an eye towards the *struggle* over ideological hegemony in the production of popular culture, in particular" (p. 249). In addition, the authors suggest that

the way in which institutional discourses are internalized and acted upon by cultural workers is an important missing link between political economy's concentration on larger economic structural forces and much of cultural studies' analyses of end products such as media texts and audience interpretations. (p. 247)

These authors base their claims on earlier theories of cultural labor and reception previously articulated by French sociologists, including Miege and De Certeau. Miege (1979) considered critical agency of cultural workers, whom he acknowledged intervenes and engages in the production of cultural work. Similarly, De Certeau (1984) considered the practices, strategies, and tactics engaged in by citizens in making meaning of everyday life, including mass culture. In consideration of this work, as Havens, Lotz, and Tinic authors have proposed,

Following the arguments of de Certeau (1984), we envision and propose critical media industries studies that examine the relationships between strategies (here read as the larger economic goals and logics of large-scale cultural industries) and tactics (the ways in which cultural workers seek to negotiate, and at times perhaps subvert, the constraints imposed by institutional interests to their own purposes). (2009, p. 247)

Like Kellner, critical media industries studies also take into account the possibility of pro-social work produced by commercial media industries. In order to explain these phenomena, this requires understanding that “the entire circuit of production is one of constant ideological and discursive struggle in the attempt to frame representations within a specific socio-historical context” (Havens et al., 2009, p. 243). This would allow us to consider how LGBT-themed television movies are capable of being produced within the logics of commercial television, even in the wake of viewer backlash and advertiser boycotts.

Through the lens of critical cultural and media industries studies, multiple disciplines and theories have begun to consider television as a site for political activism and critical media pedagogy. These theories further inform the research questions posed by this dissertation, namely:

1. Through the lens of critical media pedagogy, how could LGBT TV movies raise awareness, educate, and/or transform the attitudes of viewers towards LGBT citizens? Similarly, through the lens of social movement theory, how could LGBT TV movies frame, reflect, and/or advocate on behalf of the concerns of the LGBT social movement?
2. How was this critical media production possible? Answering this question will entail consideration of commercial strategies and critical tactics within the commercial modes and structures of television media production.
3. Who was responsible for this critical media production, and with what agency and intention?

These questions require a multi-methodological and multi-perspectival study design. These methods include a critical culture analysis of the history of LGBT TV that include critical case studies. This history has been divided into five eras that reflect the various turns within the LGBT movement in the wake of larger political currents (the New Right), disease (AIDS), and

technology (cable television and later new media). These eras are: Liberation, Backlash, Counter-Backlash, Culture Wars, and Post Wars. Within each era, the concerns and strategies of the LGBT social movement are considered along with a survey of other LGBT media, namely feature films and television series, before surveying the multiple genres, narratives, and concerns of LGBT TV movies within that period.

The critical case studies featured twenty seminal LGBT TV movies to account for their production, texts, and reception. These programs appear because they featured critical narratives that foreground the concerns of the LGBT social movement or featured affirmative LGBT narratives and representations. A review of documentation accounts for the production and reception of these programs. Critical textual analysis of the narratives include deep readings to consider the ideology, representations, and performances, especially expressions of same-sex affection or sexuality.

In addition, the data includes original interviews conducted with twenty-six executive producers, programming executives, and screenwriters of these programs. These media professionals operated with varying degrees of critical agency and function to ensure the critical value of these programs. When possible, at least two interviews were conducted per program that could be triangulated alongside the documentation and readings of the texts. The programs along with associated respondents included the following:

1. PBS/*American Playhouse's Fifth of July* (1982). This episode of Playhouse is based on the play Lanford Wilson and features an openly gay ex-Vietnam veteran played by Richard Thomas and his lover, played by Jeff Daniels. The opening of the program features a half-naked Daniels openly kissing Thomas on the lips both casually and sensually. An interview was conducted with Lindsay Law, who ran *American Playhouse* as the Executive Producer for 15 years and championed numerous gay and AIDS-themed productions. After leaving American Playhouse in the wake of the *Tales of the City* cutbacks, Law was hired to run the independent film studio, Fox Searchlight, but has since retired from the industry.

2. NBC's *An Early Frost* (1985). Considered to be the first TV movie about AIDS, this movie featured a gay man coming out to his family about his sexual orientation and illness. The program secured an audience of more than 50 million viewers, and was recognized with numerous awards, including Emmys, Peabodys, and Golden Globes. In addition, the program was the target of a backlash from the religious right that cost the network more than \$4 million due to advertiser fallout. Interviews were conducted with NBC's Steve White and writer-producers, Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman. White is no longer a network executive, and his last credit as an Executive Producer was in 2004. Cowen and Lipman adapted the British, LGBT-themed series *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005) for Showtime and have focused more recently on writing and producing stage musicals.
3. ABC's *Consenting Adult* (1985). This was the first TV movie to feature a young teenager coming to terms with his homosexuality. This program led to other TV movies and Afterschool Specials on the same topic and had featured the support of the LGBT community in the development and promotion of the program. Interviews were conducted with the ABC executives, Brandon Stoddard and Ilene Amy Berg. Stoddard has since retired from the industry and was inducted into the Television Academy's Hall of Fame in 2014. Berg left ABC to become an Executive Producer and but has not produced a project since 2001.
4. Showtime's *As Is* (1985). An adaptation of an off-Broadway play about two gay men who are former lovers coping with an AIDS diagnosis, the program is missing from most of these other histories and scholarship about TV movies. An interview was conducted with Showtime programming executive, Allen Sabinson, who was the executive who programmed five AIDS-themed TV movies in the course of his career. After a career at NBC, ABC, Showtime, TNT, A&E, and briefly at Miramax Films, Sabinson left to become the Dean of Westphal College of Media, Arts & Design at Drexel University in Philadelphia.
5. PBS/*American Playhouse's Longtime Companion* (1989). This movie was originally conceived, developed, financed and produced for television but later secured theatrical distribution before premiering on PBS. The story featured a fictional account of a group of urban, white, middle-class gay men in New York City coping with the ravages of the AIDS epidemic over the course of the 1980s. The program was the subject of a backlash from the gay community. An interview was conducted with PBS' *American Playhouse* executive and producer Lindsay Law.
6. PBS/*American Playhouse's Andre's Mother* (1989). *Andre's Mother* is a one-hour drama about a gay man who has just lost his lover and attempts to find solace in his lover's mother who callously refuses to acknowledge his grief. An interview was conducted with *Playhouse's* Lindsay Law.
7. HBO's *And the Band Played On* (1993). This movie was based on the book by Randy Shilts, which was an exhaustive account of the early years of the AIDS crisis. The program featured multiple storylines including a medical thriller about the discovery of the virus and the political infighting among politicians, doctors, researchers and the gay

community in response to the crisis. The program garnered tremendous critical acclaim but was also the subject of a backlash from the gay community. An interview was conducted with HBO's programming executive, Richard Waltzer. After working for 12 years at HBO, Waltzer left in 1997 to become a producer. His last credit was a TV movie in 2004.

8. PBS/*American Playhouse's Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City* (1993). This was the first of three mini-series that were adapted from Armistead Maupin's novels. These novels were inspired by real life and based on the experiences of a group of gay, straight, transgendered, lesbian, and bisexual friends living in the same boarding house in San Francisco in the 1970s. These programs were the targets of a tremendous backlash from the evangelicals and conservatives, who persuaded Congress to reduce funding for PBS, which led to the demise of *American Playhouse*. In addition, research was conducted regarding the subsequent two sequels, *Armistead Maupin's More Tales of the City* (1998) and *Armistead Maupin's Further Tales of the City* (2001), which were produced for Showtime. Interviews were conducted with producers Alan Poul and Anthony Root and Showtime's programming executive, Pancho Mansfield. Poul remains an active producer in television and film, currently Executive Producing Aaron Sorkin's *The Newsroom* (2012) for HBO. Mansfield remains a television executive, working for Fox Television Studios, where he develops and supervizes production of numerous broadcast and cable television series. Root has moved from producer to executive, producing numerous television movies and series, and is the Executive Vice President, Original Production and Programming at HBO Europe.
9. NBC's *Serving in Silence* (1995). Based on the true story of Margaret Cammermeyer, a highly-decorated colonel who was discharged for being an open lesbian, this program aired at the height of the debate over the military's anti-gay policy, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Interviews were conducted with the producers, Craig Zadan and Neil Meron, as well as the NBC head of TV movies, Lindy DeKoven. Zadan and Meron have since produced a number of highly-acclaimed television movies and series, including LGBT-themed programs. They have also produced numerous highly-acclaimed and commercially-successful feature films, including *Chicago* (2002) and *Hairspray* (2007). In addition, they have produced a few Broadway musicals and the *Academy Awards*. DeKoven left NBC to become an executive producer but has since become a published author and serves on the Board of numerous non-profit organizations, including the American Film Institute, Women in Film, and the Television Academy.
10. Showtime's *Twilight of the Golds* (1997). This program was based on a fictional play that imagined a pregnant mother considering whether or not to abort her unborn gay child. Interviews were conducted with the producer, Paul Colichan, Showtime executive, Sharon Byrens, and the screenwriter-playwright, Jonathan Tolins. Colichan continues to produce as well as run Here Media, which owns numerous gay media operations, including *The Advocate* and *Out Magazine* and numerous gay-themed websites. After working at Showtime, Byrens became Vice-President of Programming at TNT. Tolins continues to write for features and television and recently garnered the Lucille Lortel Award for Solo Show for writing the off-Broadway hit play *Buyer & Cellar*.

11. Lifetime's *Any Mother's Son* (1997). This movie was based on the true story of a mother who fought the Navy to secure justice for the murder of her son, a sailor who had been killed by his fellow sailors for being gay. Interviews were conducted with producer Jack Grossbart and Lifetime's head of movies, Sheri Singer. Grossbart and Singer continue to produce the occasional television movie.
12. ABC's *Two Mothers for Zachary* (1998). This movie was based on the true story of a lesbian mother who loses custody of her son to her grandmother because of her sexual orientation. An interview was conducted with producer Randy Robinson, who has since left the business.
13. Showtime's *Gods and Monsters* (1998). *Gods and Monsters* was based on the Christopher Bram novel, *The Father of Frankenstein*, loosely based on the last days of the 1930s gay film director, James Whale. Although originally produced and financed for television, the program secured feature film distribution and subsequently won the Academy Award for the screenwriter. Interviews were conducted with producer Paul Colichman and Showtime's Sharon Byrens.
14. MTV's *Anatomy of a Hate Crime* (2001). The first of three TV movies about the murder of Matthew Shepard and the trial that followed, the story has never been told as a feature film. In addition, the program aired just prior to the network blacking out all programming for 24 hours to run the names of victims of hate crimes, which included LGBT citizens. An interview was conducted with MTV's head of programming, Brian Graden. After 13 years at MTV, Graden left in 2009 to launch his own production company, Brian Graden Media, and has also been writing and composing the score for a new Broadway musical.
15. HBO's *Angels in America* (2001). An eight-hour adaptation of Tony and Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Tony Kushner and set in the mid-1980s, the story featured multiple stories about gay and straight characters dealing with sexuality, religion, and politics at the height of the Reagan era and the AIDS crisis. The program garnered over eight million viewers and is one most highly-acclaimed program in television history. Interviews were conducted with the producer, Cary Brokaw, and the screenwriter-playwright, Tony Kushner. Brokaw continues to champion film and television projects, while Kushner most recently was nominated for the Academy Award for writing the screenplay for *Lincoln* (2012).
16. A&E's *Wedding Wars* (2006). *Wedding Wars* is a political satire inspired by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* that imagined if gays went on strike in support of marriage equality. Interviews were conducted with the producer, Dave Mace, A&E's head of drama, Delia Fine, and the screenwriter, Steve Mazur. As indicated in my introduction, I was part of the programming team that conceived, developed, and produced this program for A&E. Mace is now an executive overseeing reality series at A&E Television. Delia Fine has retired from the business, and Mazur continue to write the occasional film and television project.

17. MTV's *Pedro* (2008). This movie is a biopic about the life and death of Pedro Zamora, an openly gay Latino who starred in an early season of MTV's *Real World* and brought attention to AIDS before he died from the disease at age 22. An interview was conducted with MTV's Brian Graden.
18. In addition, an interview was conducted with Barry Sandler, the screenwriter-producer of *Making Love* (1982), considered to be the first Hollywood studio feature films to positively feature gay men. The program also aired on CBS in 1983. Sandler continues to write and is an Associate Professor in the School of Visual Arts & Design at the University of Central Florida.

With respect to conducting interviews with media professionals, Caldwell (2009) offers a cautionary warning:

Contemporary film and television obsessively invest in, produce, and distribute self-analysis and critical knowledge about themselves to anyone looking in from the outside. In essence, the film and television industries already station a wealth of preemptive “self-ethnographic” accounts in the path of any ethnographer seeking to uncover “what is really going on” in the new media industries. (p. 69)

In other words, Hollywood producers, executives, and writers have a reputation for trying to “spin” their responses in a way that will serve their commercial interests for these projects and maintain their reputations in the industry or a company.

While this factors into any consideration of the responses made by media producers about their work, the nature and design of this dissertation research helps ameliorate this concern. Since the majority of these projects were produced well in the past, there would be less incentive for the respondents to try to position their comments to help promote and contribute to the commercial value of these programs. Furthermore, as noted above, the majority of the respondents interviewed for this research have since either left the company where they produced or programmed these projects, are operating as independent producers unaffiliated with any media corporation, or have retired from the business. As a result, they have less of a stake in maintaining a pre-emptive posture to circumvent critical interrogation of their work.

Furthermore, best efforts were made to seek out multiple interviews subject for every project to triangulate responses, which then factored alongside historical document analysis and critical content analysis.

As for procedures, the interviews occurred between June 2013 and March 2014, either at home, in the respondent's office, or in a public space. A few took place on the phone or over Skype. These interviews complement other interviews as well as data from historical documentation about the production and reception of these programs. These guided and recorded interviews were transcribed. The interview questions raised the following general topics, informed by research and viewing of the programs:

1. His or her childhood, education, and earlier career.
2. His or her philosophy of media, producing, programming, and education.
3. His or her title and responsibilities on these projects as well as the role of other critical partners in the production.
4. The various phases of producing, including inception, financing, development, casting, production, post-production, promotion, and programming.
5. The critical and commercial response to these programs, including any backlash from the gay community or religious and political conservatives.

This chapter surveyed the literature, described the conceptual frameworks, and explained the study design for this research. This design featured analysis of the critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies, which will be featured in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL CULTURAL HISTORY OF LGBT TV MOVIES

Introduction

Over the course of LGBT history and since TV movies first appeared, the LGBT social movement has experienced a number of turns. These turns resulted from larger cultural, social, medical, and technological forces, e.g., the rise of the New Right, the AIDS crisis, and multichannel television. These turns informed the critical strategies and tactics of the movements.

This chapter analyzes the critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies since they first appeared in the early 1970s. This history chapter has five eras: Liberation, Backlash, Counter-Backlash, Culture Wars and Post-Wars. Each era includes a brief description of the LGBT social movement, their primary organization, strategies, and concerns, including media activism. This description precedes a brief cross-media analysis of other LGBT media followed by a survey of the multiple and diverse LGBT TV movies from each era, identifying and distinguishing their topics, narratives, and concerns.

Within each section, there are a few critical-industrial case studies of the seminal programs from each period with varying degrees of scope and depth. These were programs that were either critically acclaimed, commercially successful, overlooked by other historians and scholars, or were the site of political contestations in production or reception. These case studies include a deeper analysis of the production, content, and reception of these programs, including data from the original interviews.

Liberation

Liberation refers to the period shortly after the Stonewall Riots. While the history of the LGBT movement preceded these events, this was a watershed moment for the movement.

Furthermore, just a few years later, TV movies would first appear within the “movie-of-the-week” programming strategy, including *That Certain Summer*.

During Liberation, the LGBT social movement featured many of the strategies developed by other civil rights movements, such as those on behalf of African-Americans, Latino-Americans, and feminists. Situated in both spaces, the LGBT movement initially benefitted both the civil rights movements as well as the sexual revolution that produced profound changes in sexual attitudes and behavior. As Eaklor (2011) notes, “gay liberation may not have been a brand new idea but it was able to blossom at this time in soil well prepared by both the social ferment of the sixties and the solid history of GLBT organizing and political action” (p. 132). As a result, the movement experienced tremendous success initially. Foreshadowing the later backlash to the movement, *Time Magazine* claimed that “the love that once dared not speak its name now can’t keep its mouth shut” (Cory, 1969, p. 61).

These tensions between the assimilationist and liberation ideologies within the movement would be reflected in the rise, division, and collapse of a number of LGBT organizations. The militant, idealistic Gay Liberation Front (GLF) that launched in 1969 after the riots had splintered into two groups. A group of activists formed the more moderate and pragmatic Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). According to Bronski (2011), “as GAA grew and some of its leaders began to have political ambitions, their agenda became more reformist and conservative” (p. 211). By 1972, GLF was gone, and, by 1974, activists from GAA split off to form the National Gay Task Force (NGTF). In addition, lesbian feminists sought alliances with the National Organization for Women (NOW), which began to divide the community across gender lines.

Within a few years, the movement had developed fissures along the lines of philosophy and strategy, gender, location, class, and forms of identity. Bronski (2011) suggests that there

were two movements, Gay Liberation and Gay Rights. In turn, these divisions informed included resources, organizations, and strategies devoted towards both political and cultural advancement. By the end of the decade, these groups would reunite in response to the backlash from the emerging New Right, comprised of both evangelicals and conservatives.

Despite these divides, the groups understood the critical value of culture and media in helping push forward their agenda. As early as 1973, LGBT activists were meeting with film executives to discuss guidelines for the responsible depiction of gays and lesbians (Russo, 1987). Whereas feature film studios were less receptive, television networks were more responsive to the concerns raised by the movement. Similar, LGBT activists saw television as a more vital medium for reflecting their concerns. As Montgomery (1989) notes, “Like other advocacy groups, gay activists were beginning to see prime-time television as critical symbolic territory in their struggle to gain acceptance in the wider society” (p. 77).

Unlike other minorities, the movement benefitted from the long history of gay people working within the industry. As Montgomery refers to them, these were “agents in place” (p. 78). These insiders helped tip off activists to objectionable scripts and depictions, sometimes in advance, which gave the organizations the opportunity to address the concerns, which the networks sometimes heeded. Meanwhile, LGBT media activists also applied pressure from the outside. As with the film industry, these LGBT activists presented to the networks their list of both good and bad stereotypes of LGBT lives (Montgomery, 1989). These lists were accompanied by threats of protests, boycotts, and sit-ins, including threatened boycotts of advertisers. The commercial logics of television coupled with the conservative nature of most advertisers made the networks less willing to take risks. This insider/outsider approach proved

to be potent and complimentary. As LGBT historian Craig Rimmerman (2009) notes, “these strategies are not mutually exclusive” (p. 5).

In addition to the insider/outside strategies, there were two LGBT media activist organizations that, as Russo (2000) notes, “worked in tandem” (p. 97). The Gay Media Task Force, based in Los Angeles operated more from the inside, meeting and collaborating with the networks to help shape and address negative representations within television. In contrast, the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) was more militant, conducting what they called “zaps,” which included sit-ins at network offices as well as threatened boycotts with network advertisers (Montgomery, 1989). Ironically, the Religious Right would embrace these same tactics in their backlash to LGBT media in the 1980s and 90s.

As mentioned, the film industry was fairly unresponsive to the concerns of the LGBT community during this period. *The Boys in the Band* (1970), according to LGBT media scholar Vito Russo, “became the most famous Hollywood film on the subject of male homosexuality” (1985, p. 174). Critics considered the film to be a breakthrough film for depictions of homosexuality. However, the film featured a host of stereotypically gay characters engaged in both deep-seated self-hatred and vitriol. As LGBT scholar Gross comments, “the real message of the film was that being out of the closet was dangerous to your health” (2001, p. 62). Nonetheless, *The Boys in the Band* at least signaled some visibility by Hollywood, albeit short-lived. As Russo points, “the 1970s would continue to reflect the freak show aspects of homosexual villains, fools and queens” (1985, p. 178).

Over the course of the decade, a few films have featured LGBT characters, including the transgendered cult film, e.g., *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), but not LGBT narratives or the concerns raised by the movement. On the contrary, *Cruising* (1980) further illustrated that

Hollywood filmmakers were tone deaf to the concerns and emerging power of the LGBT social movement. Based on a regressively homophobic novel, the film was a murder mystery about a NYPD cop (Al Pacino) tracking down a homicidal gay killer through a fetishized, sadomasochistic version of New York's gay subculture. The ambiguous ending even suggested that Pacino might have been turned gay by virtue of his experiences in this subculture and that this might result in Pacino murdering gays. Not surprisingly, as Russo points out, the film "brought a storm of protest and rioting by gays in New York" (1985, p. 91).

A year later, Hollywood offered up something of a reprieve in the form of the film *Making Love*. Featuring a cast of television actors, the film was the first studio feature to suggest that gay men were not deeply dysfunctional, bitter, and homicidal. The story involves a married man who comes out of the closet after falling in love with his doctor, an open, self-affirming gay man. Screenwriter-producer Barry Sandler and his partner at the time, author A. Scott Berg, had originally conceived the story together and convinced straight executives at 20th Century Fox to produce the film with straight producer Dan Melnick. In my interview, Sandler stated,

Scott had a very close friend, Claire Townsend, at Fox that we met with, and told her we wanted to write this movie. She jumped at it, was extremely supportive, and then went right to Sherry Lansing, the studio head, who also just jumped at it, but these are both straight women who were very progressive, enlightened women.

The critical role of the writer, producer, and studio in making this program was even recognized by the critics. Stanley Kaufman in *The New Republic* compared the film favorably to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and claimed that, "the most interesting people aren't on the screen, but the ones who decided to risk making the picture" (1982, p. 25).

While the studio and network was supportive, the film struggled to find leading men to play the gay characters. According to Gross, as confirmed by Sandler, the producer Melnick would ask actors, "Listen, if you played Hitler or the Boston strangler, do you think audiences

would confuse you with being Hitler or the Boston strangler?” (2001 p. 73). Nonetheless, the film ended up with television stars, including Kate Jackson, star of *Charlie’s Angels*; however, according to Sandler, Melnick championed Jackson “because he thought, everybody knows Kate Jackson, she’s been in everybody’s homes for the last three or four years.” In this account, a pattern emerges of actors being unwilling to play gay male roles, while producers sought out popular television stars, whose appeal from television would bring a comfort and familiarity to audiences. As discussed shortly, this pattern had already been developed in TV movies and reflected the critical concerns of the industry about gay content as well as the critical tactics engaged in by producers to help audiences embrace these critical narratives.

According to Gross, the film had a happy ending, which was “Hollywoodish and whitewashed” (2001, 74). However, in my reading of the film, the ending is bittersweet. By the end of the film, the husband has come out and even the ex-wife supports him; however, the gay men do not end up a couple. When I asked Sandler, he suggested that most romantic dramas do not end with the couple united, only romantic comedies. According to Sandler, “yes, there is a sadness, but you look at a lot of great love stories, you look at *The Way We Were*, *Splendor in the Grass*, or *Gone with the Wind* -- any of those -- the lovers rarely end up together.” I would argue that the examples he cited were romantic tragedies, whereas there have been plenty of romantic dramas where the couples are together in the end, including those featuring critical narratives, like *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967). Nonetheless, as the first affirmative Hollywood gay drama, a happier ending might have been symbolically more meaningful to the LGBT community, although even a bittersweet ending was seen as whitewashed by critical scholars, including Gross and Russo. However, as reflected throughout this history of LGBT TV movies, these stories almost always featured bittersweet, mixed, ironic, or tragic endings. The

characters are left unrequited in romantic or familial relationships, or reunited with family and partners but doomed to die from AIDS.

Commercially, depending on the source, the film was either a “critical or commercial flop” (Gross, 2001) or nominally successful commercially (Hadleigh, 1993). The critical response was equally divided. As Russo remarks, “by Hollywood standards, *Making Love* was daring”, which is a backhanded compliment (1985, p. 272). According to Gross, *Making Love* was “a boring film too straight for gay audiences and too gay for straight audiences” (2005, p. 74). Curiously, feminist scholar Camille Paglia considers the film to be her “favorite film to date about gay men” (Adnum, 2006, p. 54). Of the non-gay critics, *The Chicago Tribune’s* Gene Siskel noted, “*Making Love* is not a perfect film, but it is far above the usual treatment of gays as leather freaks and suicidal narcissists” (1982, p. C3). Both Russo and Roger Ebert would describe the film as a TV movie, “in which the subject is announced loud and clear at the outset and there are no surprises” (Ebert, 1982).

Amongst gay audiences, the response to *Making Love* was more supportive, albeit with a little instigation from the studio. A publicist from 20th Century Fox encouraged viewers to respond to critics who blasted the film, claiming that, “it’s an opportunity to open people’s eyes with letters to the editor, which have great educational value” (Hadleigh date, p. 196). In addition, while promoting the film, Sandler came out openly as a gay man, which was considered risky at the time. According to Gregg Kilday of *Film Comment*, “the most heroic aspect of the whole enterprise was that its screenwriter, Barry Sandler, frankly acknowledged being gay whenever discussing the film” (1986, p. 40).

A year later, *Making Love* aired on network television. According to Hadleigh, the program “penetrated the so-called heartland and reached many more millions than in theatrical

release” (1993, p. 198). As Sandler noted, “It’s free and you don’t have to go out of your house, you can watch in the privacy of your home, and you don’t have to pay for it. You don’t have to risk being seen in the theatre.” The program was promoted differently on television, as though the film was told through the experiences of the wife, played by Kate Jackson. While speculative, this decision was probably due to her continuing appeal in *Charlie’s Angels* but also because the program would likely appeal to women more than men. In addition, a couple of minor edits were made, including replacing a close-up of the kiss to a long shot. As reflected in the other LGBT TV movies surveyed in this history, depictions of same-sex affection would become prominent critical concerns in both production and reception.

In television, both scripted series and documentaries began to feature more and more diverse LGBT characters, although few programs featured LGBT narratives. For example, in 1973, the PBS-produced *An American Family* (1973) was a verite documentary series that had a camera crew follow all the members of a California a family over a series of months. The program is often considered the forerunner of reality television. The series featured Lance Loud, the oldest son, who was not only gay but demonstratively proud, if not transgressive, wearing his sister’s makeup and rebelling against his parents.

In contrast to *Boys in the Band*, positive gay characters appeared on the occasional sitcom, including the top-rated *All in the Family* and *Barney Miller*. In contrast to *Cruising*, drama series sometimes featured heroic gay and lesbian figures as cops, lawyers, or doctors. By the end of the decade, the networks were more consciously avoiding series episodes that might be perceived as anti-gay. According to Capsuto, “almost the only gay plots on the networks were ones whose message was that sexual orientation - an innate and unchangeable trait – had no negative bearing on a person’s morality” (2000, p. 148). While LGBT media activists may

deserve some credit, these pro-gay representations may also reflect the more progressive views of network programming executives or producers.

The series *Soap* was the first to feature a central gay lead character, portrayed by Billy Crystal. According to Capsuto, the network had consulted with gay activists in the development of the program; however, the divides within the LGBT movement led to a backlash by more militant activists who felt the character was offensive. NGTF, amongst others, objected to the series and threatened boycotts. But the series was also the target of a backlash from the emerging New Right. While the show did well in the ratings, advertisers fled due to the backlash, and the show was cancelled after four years (Capsuto,2000).

Along with series, numerous LGBT-themed television movies appeared in the 1970s. In contrast to features and television series, these programs often represented the contemporary concerns of the LGBT community and featured positive, if not hagiographic, representations of LGBT lives. As previously described in the introduction, *That Certain Summer* was groundbreaking in its gay content and success. The program helping turn TV movies into a destination for social issue films and led networks to believe that pro-gay content could succeed.

Based on tremendous archival research by LGBT scholars Gross (2000) and Tropiano (2002), the details behind the making of the program reveal a complicated and conflict-ridden production process. Writer-producers William Levinson and Bill Link conceived the idea for the program about a gay father, played by Hal Holbrook, whose son rejects him because of his sexuality. Holbrook's character is portrayed as ambivalent about his sexuality, rejecting open displays of affection, despite the fact that he is in a committed relationship with his lover, played by Martin Sheen. According to Gross, Levinson stated in a 1980 essay that the writers knew an

openly gay TV executive who had sons from an earlier marriage, who became the inspiration for the program. Although originally rejected by NBC, ABC's Barry Diller bought the project.

Although the writer-producers had the support of the programming department, they would encounter problems with other departments. As Gross reports, according to Levinson and Link, "Diller 'told us there would be corporate problems because of the nature of the project but he assured us he was fully behind it'" (Gross, 2001, p. 83). These problems would include repeated notes from the network's Standards and Practices (S&P) department censoring any pro-gay language or displays of affection. Gross locates the memos from the S&P in which they openly state such objections as, "the line 'we love each other' will need to be said in some other way, less explicit" (2000, p. 83). Furthermore, the writers were asked to depict the program in a more balanced way. This included having the father admits to his son that some people think homosexuality "is a sickness" and that if he had a choice, "it isn't something I'd pick for myself" (2000, p. 81). According to Tropiano, the writers "strongly resisted, disagreeing with them totally, but finally we decided to have the homosexual himself, rather than some bigot imposed on the story, tell his son the harsh truth" (Tropiano, 2002, p. 111).

As reflected throughout this history, the S&P often operated as moral arbiters, provoking programming executives, producers, and writers. These executives would try to get the program cancelled or, at the very least, delete any semblance of pro-gay content and remove any depictions of same-sex affection. These departments served multiple purposes, including protecting the network from libel, but also mitigating concerns raised by ad sales who would find it difficult to get advertising for controversial topics. However, as a number of executives admit in my interviews, these executives were often puritannical, operating as moral arbiters and often representing the concerns of the religious Right.

Like *Making Love*, the casting was a challenge. According to Gross, after a number of top actors had passed on the project, Holbrook accepted the role despite his agent's objections. Martin Sheen played the gay lover and he would later claim that he received more hate mail for this role than any other (Russo, 1987). A decade later, Sheen would also play the role of the father of a gay man in the television movie, *Consenting Adult*. In addition, Sheen has exploited his star value to promote liberal causes and critical concerns. As seen throughout this history, the same actors have appeared in multiple LGBT TV movies, including numerous actors who have reputations as liberal activists, e.g., Marlo Thomas and Ian McKellen.

In promoting the film, the network screened the program in advance for a number of groups. This is both a commercial strategy and critical tactic used often by networks to both promote the program as well as thwart objections. According to Capsuto, the film was prescreened for "religious leaders, gay libbers, college students, the American Civil Liberties Union, disc jockeys and parents' media watch organizations" (2000, p. 85). Nonetheless, the program received a mixed review from the Gay Artists Alliance. The activists acknowledged the more positive gay characters but resented the ending featuring the son's rejection. Other gay critics were less favorable, which Levinson and Link attributed to a "militant activism among gays," claiming that the lead character was "a homosexual in transit, and therefore not as liberated as the militants may have wished. They wanted propaganda, not drama" (Levinson and Lin, 1982, 132-133). In addition, the program received angry mail from evangelicals, as they considered the program to be anti-Biblical propaganda. The backlash from both communities would become a regular feature in the reception of LGBT TV movies.

Despite the backlash, according to Capsuto, popular critics lauded the program as a *landmark* and *breakthrough* for its treatment of homosexuals. Similarly, Tropiano claims the

program “broke new ground by portraying homosexuals as real people rather than one-dimensional stereotypes” (2002, p. 112). Montgomery describes the program as a “breakthrough for prime-time television . . . the topic of homosexuality had hardly been dealt with at all in prime time” (1989, p. 75). The program was the highest rated program of the night and was nominated for eight Emmys. As mentioned, according to Montgomery, the success of the program “suggested that provocative social and political issues might be the ideal ingredient for network television’s newest genre – the made-for-TV movie” (1989, p. 75).

In this case and throughout this history, LGBT TV movies have been the site of tremendous political contestation, both in production and reception. These contestations feature interference from more conservative forces within the networks and from outside activist organizations from both sides of the political spectrum. These struggles affirm those claims by Havens, Lotz and Tinic (2009) that “the entire circuit of production is one of constant ideological negotiation and discursive struggle in the attempt to frame representations within a specific socio-historical context” (p. 243).

Throughout this period of LGBT history, numerous TV movies either featured LGBT narratives or positive LGBT characters. These narratives were often issue-based. In 1978, NBC aired *Sergeant. Matlovich vs. the U.S. Air Force*, based on the true story of a highly-decorated soldier who was dishonorably discharged for being gay. While his personal life is rarely shown, Matlovich is unquestionably portrayed heroically. As the lead character claims in the program, “they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one.” More impressively, this program appeared fifteen years before the concerns over allowing gays in the military became a year-long, highly public, political drama, which resulted in the regressive policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

Not all programs featured these issues at the center of the narrative. In 1981, Richard Thomas played an openly gay Vietnam Vet in the American Playhouse adaptation of *The Fifth of July* for PBS. Thomas was highly regarded for his role as “John Boy” in the popular series *The Waltons*, a series that represents the epitome of American hetero-normative values. In the opening scene of the program, Thomas’s character kisses his shirtless lover, played by the young Jeff Daniels. In my interview with Playhouse’s head of programming, Lindsay Law admitted that “the kissing part is a big deal, but it was the fact that it was sexual. [That’s] actually what you wanted to stay away from – anything sexual. Kissing doesn’t have to be sexual.”

In this account, we see how some network executives and producers exploited the star value of these programs for both commercial and critical purposes to help attract audiences while depicting positive gay images. Having the proverbial all-American boy play an open, affectionate, and sensual gay man was unquestionably radical. However, by appearing on PBS, *Playhouse* operated with a different mandate and set of critical concerns, informed by their different commercial logics of public television, which will be discussed later.

Lesbians were also featured prominently and positively in a number of LGBT-themed television movies. *A Question of Love* (1978), which is based on a true story, depicted a lesbian fighting and ultimately losing custody of her children to her ex-husband. Portrayed by Gina Rowlands, the lead character is the perfect mother, daughter, lover and is even a well-regarded nurse, while her ex-husband is a formerly abusive husband, cheat, and alcoholic. Rowland’s lover, portrayed by Jane Alexander, is the perfect partner, loving and patient towards her lover’s children and stalwartly supportive throughout the trial. In addition, Rowland’s mother is portrayed initially as a hateful woman who slaps her daughter for being a lesbian, but by the end

of the story she comes around to support her daughter. Nonetheless, the ending is clearly tragic, as the mother loses custody of her children.

The movie portrays the lovers dispassionately, as they never kiss or make love. Gross notes that “the women never kiss, but one is shown tenderly drying her lover’s hair” (2001, p. 83). As Capsuto discovered, the S&P executive had concerns about a scene where one lover kisses the hand of the other lover. The producers were instructed to shoot “both ways, with and without” (2000, p. 147). In the end, even the kiss is gone. In addition, S&P wanted to eliminate a scene where the youngest son expresses his desire to stay with the couple; however, according to Russo, the producers prevailed.

These tropes will be continually rediscovered throughout this history of LGBT TV movies. The narratives are often issue-based, which some critics referred to pejoratively as “problem movies.” The LGBT characters are almost always perfect, and their lives are ideal, except for the problems caused by their sexual orientation, which some critics complained made these characters one-dimensional hagiographies. Furthermore, same-sex affection was prohibited, often leading to struggles behind-the-scenes between S&P, programming executive, and producers.

In addition to adult-based narratives, gay teens were sometimes featured in a number of these programs, albeit with mixed representations that ranged from the exploitative to the heroic. In *Born Innocent* (1974), a teenage girl locked in a detention center is raped with a broom handle by a lesbian mob, which generated a backlash from the general public. A year later, in *A Cage without a Key* (1975), a lesbian sacrifices her life to save a straight girl who had been unfairly locked in the detention center.

In addition to detention centers, gay homeless teens were portrayed in a couple of TV movies as sex workers. *Dawn: Portrait of a Teenage Runaway* (1976) featured a bisexual, male hustler, Alexander, who serviced both men and women. A year later, *Alexander: The Other side of Dawn* (1977) centered on the boy's experience and his confusion over his sexuality. According to Montgomery, the program featured a sympathetic older gay therapist modeled after Dr. Newt Dieter, the GAA representative and consultant who was also a psychotherapist (Montgomery, 1989). Reportedly, Dieter had been consulted on the script and "succeeded in reversing the plot line so that it would reflect a pro-gay point of view" (Montgomery, 1989, p. 92).

As reflected in this era, the LGBT social movement was experiencing the early growing pains of a young social movement. These produced divisions over organization, resources, and strategies. Meanwhile, activism was a priority for the movement. While feature films rarely depicted the lives and concerns of LGBT citizens in a responsible manner, television series were more open and progressive, although rarely centered on LGBT characters or the concerns of the movement.

In contrast to films and series, LGBT TV movies featured more diverse and critical LGBT narratives. While appearing on commercial television, programming executives engaged in critical programming tactics that helped create opportunities for these programs to appear. These executives engaged in critical collaborations with producers and screenwriters to develop these scripts, often overcoming objections raised by S&P. These scripts featured LGBT concerns and positive, if sometimes conflicted or hagiographic, LGBT representations. These programs featured casts known for their popularity but also critically intended to help audiences feel comfortable with the topics. The endings of these programs often featured sad endings, e.g.,

the loss of lovers, legal battles, and parental custody issues; however, these programs always represented these concerns in a manner that would lead audiences to sympathize with the LGBT characters. This would include sometimes featuring callous or villainous straight characters in position of power. The patterns introduced by the making of these programs will be seen throughout the history of these programs in what follows.

As featured in the next section, the critical success of these programs was, according to Gross, “quickly seized upon by the right wing as a sign of media capitulation” (2001, p. 82). Along with the AIDS epidemic, the backlash from the New Right would seek to eliminate all LGBT representations, setting back the movement and sending LGBT lives back into the closet, if not also to their graves.

Backlash

In response to the Sixties, the sexual revolution, and the advances made by various social movements, a counter-movement emerged. This movement comprised both political conservatives and religious groups, including evangelicals and Catholics, whom I refer to as the New Right. Reverend Donald Wildmon had launched the American Family Association, and Jerry Falwell launched the Moral Majority, which featured both political and media activism. These organizations formed a coalition with Republicans and helped elect former California Governor and staunch right-winger Ronald Reagan President.

As a result, gay liberation was short-lived. By 1977, Anita Bryant, a former Miss America, helping to push back gay rights advances in Miami-Dade County, which made her a spokesperson for an emerging anti-gay movement nationwide. Bryant’s movement, “Save our Children,” succeeded by “perpetuating the stereotype that lesbians and gay men are especially dangerous to young children” (Eaklor, 2011, p. 170). In 1978, LGBT activist Harvey Milk

helped convince California voters to defeat the anti-gay Briggs Amendment, which would have blocked gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools. At the same time, Milk ran for a seat as San Francisco supervisor and became the first openly gay politician in the U.S. only to be assassinated a few days later. These events augured an ominous turn for the movement.

Initially, the LGBT social movement did not retreat. Rather, the various coalitions, organizations, and groups agreed to participate in the first national Gay and Lesbian March on Washington in 1979. Once again, the movement was borrowing a tactic from the Civil Rights movement, amongst others. In addition, in D.C., the movement launched the Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF). The mission of the organization was to build coalitions with other marginalized groups in order to pursue more federal protections for all minorities (Eaklor, 2011). However, within a few years, a mysterious disease, first called the “gay cancer” and later AIDS, began to infect gay men, as well as IV-drug users and Haitian immigrants. In response, the LGBT social movement had to develop alternative strategies and divert limited resources to cope with the AIDS crisis. Inspired by the earlier women’s health movement, gay men and lesbians launched health organizations for people with AIDS, including the Gay Men’s Health Center in New York City and AIDS Project Los Angeles.

The combination of the New Right and AIDS would severely cripple the LGBT social movement. Conservatives repealed pro-gay legislation at the federal, state, and local level and denied government funds towards prevention or treatment of the disease. President Reagan refused to acknowledge the disease for the first seven years of his administration, after more than 20,000 Americans had died and far more had been infected. Evangelicals used their pulpits and televised radio programs to frame AIDS as God’s punishment. As Russo states:

Images found on our television and motion picture screens cannot be viewed in isolation from the political climate of the nation that produces them. A vocal minority of right-

wing religious fanatics in America, similar in style and viewpoint to the Nazi youth groups found in Germany just before Hitler took power, have been permitted to set the terms of the political debate regarding the existence of gays in society and have used the AIDS health crisis to exploit anti-gay prejudices that already existed. Dangerous political extremists like Lyndon LaRouche, Jerry Falwell and New York's Archbishop John J. O'Connor have fostered the fiction that homosexuality is simply chosen behavior, an act, not an orientation. Such behavior is then termed sinful or illegal, creating a partisan moral issue where none should exist. (1987, 248)

The Religious Right co-opted the tactics used by LGBT media activists and began threatening the networks with a backlash and advertiser boycotts that would cost these networks millions of dollars. Reverends Wildmon and Falwell developed exhaustive networks that could generate a massive reaction to any appearance of LGBT people or themes in media, or any non-conservative media for that matter. Through their efforts, gay men and AIDS became virtually synonymous, and LGBT stories and characters began to disappear.

Meanwhile, the movement suspended its own LGBT media activism as resources went to deal with the AIDS crisis. As Capsuto notes, "Of necessity, many gay people spent the 1980s concentrating on survival, on promoting the development and availability of medical care, on encouraging safer-sex education, on supporting their friends, and on grieving" (2000, p. 249). GAA disbanded, and NGTF focused on legislation. In their place, two smaller organizations, the Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Activist (AGLA) and Media Access, emerged. These groups represented more of an advocacy approach, launching awards shows offering recognition for progressive images of LGBT lives and consulting with networks rather than conducting zaps and threatening boycotts (Montgomery, date).

Nonetheless, LGBT Hollywood came out of the closet. According to Capsuto, many series had openly gay and/or lesbian staff members. While actors still could not afford to be out of the closet, TV writers and technicians had more flexibility. Straight writers, producers and directors often used gay friends and colleagues as a sounding board to see if portrayals rang true or were potentially offensive. (2000, p. 171)

Unfortunately, the presence of LGBT media executives and producers were no guarantee that LGBT media would be produced.

After *Making Love*, Hollywood released a few LGBT-themed programs. The comedies *Victoria Victoria* (1983) and *Tootsie* (1983) featured cross-dressing and conveyed progressive messages about gender roles in society. *Personal Best* (1983) was a small romantic lesbian drama, while *Partners* (1983) was a gay-straight buddy cop comedy. These films briefly signaled what some consider a new gay movement; however, within a few years, LGBT narratives and characters disappeared, even from those studio features adapted from LGBT content. *The Color Purple* (1985) only briefly alluded to the lesbian romance featured more prominently in the novel, while *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) turned the lesbian romance at the core of the novel into a buddy picture about best friends.

The decline in LGBT characters cannot be attributed solely to the backlash from the New Right. Corporations had purchased studios previously run by movie moguls and had become even more focused on profits rather than storytelling. Meanwhile, the success of B-movie genre films with special effects, e.g., *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, produced a blockbuster mentality amongst studios and producers. The goal was to develop high-concept, B-movie franchises capable of securing massive audiences on the opening weekend. In response to these larger industrial changes, a parallel, independent film industry emerged, which found niche audiences interested in non-Hollywood, low budget, and character-driven content. In addition, the rise of the home video industry created a second revenue stream, which temporarily sustained this filmmaking model until recently, once online video distribution replaced this business.

In this space, gay, queer and AIDS cinema emerged. Russo refers to this as “taking the game away from Hollywood” (1987, p. 247). Throughout the decade, small, independent, often

British, LGBT-themed movies found distribution. In 1986, over one weekend, four LGBT-themed independent films premiered. *My Beautiful Launderette* is a small British film about two multicultural gay men in London. *Desert Hearts* is a period lesbian romantic love story set in the American west. *Dona Herlinda and Her Son* is a provocative Mexican romantic comedy about a mother taking in her son's gay lover while forcing him to marry a wife. In addition, *Parting Glances* is a micro-budget film set in New York City about a young group of gay men that reached small, niche audiences. The film, considered the first film to mention AIDS, included one character with the disease; however, as discussed here, the AIDS-themed TV movie *An Early Frost* had already reached massive audiences.

The feature documentaries of this era also captured the arc of the LGBT movement from crisis to queer. In 1984, *The Times of Harvey Milk* depicted the gay politician's rise to power, assassination, trial, and the light sentence for Milk's murderers, which sparked riots by gay people in San Francisco called the *White Nights*. Like TV movies, the documentary featured a hagiographic portrayal of Milk, leaving out more sullied details of his life that had been included in the book by Randy Shilts, which was the basis for the documentary. The film won the Academy Award for best documentary. Over the next decade, the filmmakers would produce a series of critically-acclaimed LGBT- and AIDS-themed documentaries, including *Common Threads*, *The Celluloid Closet*, and *Paragraph*

By contrast, on the broadcast networks, LGBT themes disappeared. The television sitcom *Love Sidney* was originally meant to star an openly gay man, played by Tony Randall; however, by the time the program appeared, the character was, at best, asexual. While the protests against *Soap* had led to advertiser flight, a threatened boycott from Donald Wildmon and his Coalition for Better Television against *Love, Sidney* fizzled; nonetheless, the network

cancelled the program after only two seasons. The hit series *Dynasty* introduced an openly gay character, but within two seasons, the character had become straight and subsequently died.

For the first few years of the AIDS crisis, neither the news nor the government paid much attention. However, once the world discovered that Rock Hudson had the virus, AIDS finally became a public concern, although news accounts often heightened fears and spread misinformation. In my interview with the writer-producers of *An Early Frost*, Daniel Cowen and Ron Lipman, Lipman said

Geraldo Rivera had a news show on ABC prime time that just salaciously put out there, “There’s this disease among gay men.” He showed the San Francisco gay pride parade with all the guys dancing without their clothes. Then he showed a patient with Kaposi’s sarcoma lesions and his face was puffed up and horrifying looking. It was terrifying.

As a result, gay men became taboo on television. According to Lipman, “When AIDS happened, the lid slammed shut. Nobody wanted to talk about gay people. Gay people were instantly evil.”

Like the independent film industry, a new television industry also emerged in the 1980s, which featured basic and premium cable networks distributed via cable and satellite affiliates. These networks sought more diverse and controversial programming worthy, which reflected the different commercial logics of cable television. In order to secure distribution on affiliates, basic and premium cable networks distinguish themselves from broadcast television with unique programming as reflected by HBO’s tagline, “it’s not TV, it’s HBO”, which the network introduced to audiences in 1996. In contrast, basic cable networks, once fully distributed on affiliates, pursued more advertising at higher rates.

By the early 1980s, HBO announced plans to launch a series based on a best-selling series of gay novels, *Tales of the City* by Armistead Maupin. However, by the time the series was written and about to be produced, AIDS was in the headlines and the network scuttled the series, which emerged a decade later as a mini-series that aired on PBS. In contrast, by 1984,

Showtime had launched *Brothers*, a sitcom featuring three brothers who ran an Italian restaurant. One brother was gay, albeit a particularly normalized gay, who had a close, more flamboyantly gay friend. This strategy of combining the “normal” gay and his “queer” friend was a critical programming strategy that would prove even more successful fifteen years later, when the series *Will & Grace* debuted.

Although LGBT stories and characters had disappeared from studio features and broadcast television series, and even as the LGBT movement was experiencing a backlash from the New Right, television featured a number of LGBT TV movies. These included a number of programs about gay teens. These were more progressive than their 1970s counterparts, featuring LGBT narratives that focused on gay teens coming out and affirming their sexuality to their parents. These were groundbreaking in that they dealt with underage youth coming out affirmatively. As portrayed in these programs, the gay sons created problems with the gay parents, but the problem was not the gay son but the the parents’ own homophobia. Over the course of the narrative, most parents would come around to accepting their gay children, which reflected a critical pedagogical journey in the form of classic Aristotelian catharsis.

In 1985, ABC aired *Consenting Adult*, which was based on a ten-year-old novel by Laura Hobson. Hobson had also written *Gentlemen’s Agreement*, a message movie from the 1940s about anti-Semitism that won the Academy Award for Best Picture. In her obituary, Hobson was remembered as someone who “always championed the socially-ostracized” and “jerked the reins of the American conscience as masterfully as anyone. She made us think and learn, and she made us like the lesson” (Middleton, 1986, p. 22). These comments suggest how some critical cultural workers who, regardless of medium, found ways to combine the popular with the political and the pedagogical.

Producer Ray Aghayan, the boyfriend of openly gay costume designer Bob Mackie and a designer in his own right, had optioned the book. For a decade, he had attempted to tell the story as a feature film. According to Russo, “Hobson could sell Hollywood Jews in 1947, . . . but she could not sell Hollywood gays in 1979” (1987, p. 226). However, in an interview with Aghayan, he claimed the reason that the reason he could not make the film as feature was because the story was too small, which is why he succeeded in producing this for television (Margulies, 1985, p. 1). In these remarks, we understand how these mediums attracted different content and also operating with a different set of commercial logics. We also see how some scholars may arguably make assumptions about the production of these programs that may not concur with the producer’s experience.

Aghayan eventually partnered with Martin Starger, a former ABC executive, who took the project to his former colleagues at ABC. At that time, Brandon Stoddard ran the department and Ilene Amy Berg was his executive on the project. In the process, a former network executive helped this project finally find a home. Starger’s former role as a network insider afforded him not only greater status but also critical agency, which would be a pattern reflected in other similar projects.

The program was produced under the aegis of *ABC Theater*, which represented a particular programming strategy. *ABC Theater* was a destination for movies that featured less genre-driven and commercial fare and more critical, historical or political content. Per Berg, these were

Movies that were a little bit more difficult, a little edgier; movies that were not programmers about hookers...they were movies that mattered. He [Stoddard] would protect them under the heading ABC Theater and it would have a special promotion and logo.

In our interview, Stoddard confirmed that *ABC Theater* was a programming strategy that signaled to audiences something different was about to air, claiming:

It was a tip-off to the audience that we thought it was good. What you're about to see is something that we are proud of and we built what we're referring to now as "the brand," which I hate, but we built ABC as a trusted television event for the audience. If you're going to see it tonight, I don't know if you'll enjoy it, but it's going to be good. It's going to be well-done: it's going to be well-acted, it's going to be well-written, it's going to be good. And that worked. I mean, it took five, six years, but it worked and we got very big audiences for the ABC Theater. I think it was the result of the fact that they saw the last one and they liked it.

As reflected in this account, these tactics offered programmers greater critical agency. Under these umbrellas, the executives could air controversial topics without censure from the network's Standards and Practices or Ad Sales divisions.

Loosely inspired by Hobson's own life, the story focused on a white, middle-class family coming to terms with their gay teenager and featured Marlo Thomas and Martin Sheen as the parents. As mentioned before, both actors were known for their social activism in addition to their acting careers, and Sheen had already appeared as a gay man in *That Certain Summer*. Once again, the gay son is portrayed as the perfect son, athlete, and student, while the parents struggle with his decision. The father (Sheen) rejects his son and later dies, although he leaves behind a letter asking for forgiveness, which leads to reconciliation between mother and son. During script development, according to Montgomery, the network and the producers consulted with gay activists. Once completed, the program was screened for another LGBT media activist organization, the Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Artists (AGLA).

The response from LGBT scholars and popular critics to *Consenting Adult* has been tepid, arguably confirming what Aghayan had described as the challenge with turning the book into a feature film. Tropiano describes the film as "earnest" (2002, p. 166), while Capsuto notes, "the film is a bit safe" and fits TV's "ideal" archetype: white, suburban and middle class" (2000,

p. 203). Nonetheless, the program scored highly in the ratings, which arguably opened the door for other projects. A year later, a similarly-themed movie aired on CBS called *Welcome Home, Bobby*. In addition, two afterschool specials, HBO's *The Truth About Alex* (1986) and CBS' *What If I'm Gay* (1987) also tackled teenagers coming out of the closet.

As the New Right became more emboldened and the AIDS crisis widened, LGBT TV movies would become the target of boycotts and backlashes from evangelicals. In my interview, Steve White, NBC's head of movies, claimed:

They had a biblically fundamentalist view that they didn't want television to deal with issues that they considered immoral. They considered homosexuality immoral, and de facto at that time doing a movie about homosexuality, whatever the issue was, the wedge was this horrible disease...they didn't want it on the air.

Nonetheless, throughout the decade, gay men with AIDS would feature in numerous episodes of medical, cop, and legal dramas.

In addition, a number of TV movies featured AIDS themes, although not limited to gay characters. These AIDS-themed movies almost always feature middle-class, white, gay men and their families. Like the rest of television entertainment, other minorities rarely appeared in these texts. The narratives often featured the dual concerns of the gay men and their straight families. The gay men were coping with the disease or their grief over losing a partner, while the parents had to overcome their homophobia in order to be supportive of their child's illness. Examples of these programs include *An Early Frost* (1986), *Andre's Mother* (1991), *Our Sons* (1991) and *In the Gloaming* (1997). This framing of the narratives would often generate a backlash from gay critics and scholars, although not necessarily gay audiences.

In addition, LGBT critic and scholars often overlooked these programs that centered upon the gay characters coping with the illness. These programs included *As Is*, *Longtime Companion* (1989), and *Roommates* (1994). Furthermore, AIDS was also featured in a number of

biopics, including *Rock Hudson* (1986), ABC's *Liberace* (1988) and CBS' *Liberace: Behind the Music* (1989). In addition, some programs focused on straight people with the disease, including *The Ryan White Story* (1990) and *Something to Live for: The Allison Gertz Story* (1992).

An Early Frost. In October 1985, Rock Hudson died of AIDS. The next month, television aired the first original movie about the subject, *An Early Frost*. The timing was coincidental. In fact, the network executives who initiated and commissioned the project had spent nearly three years trying to get the program on the air, only to encounter repeated interference from within the network itself.

According to Steve White, the project had been initiated in-house, although he could not recall who originated the idea. According to White, "I don't know if anybody else mentioned it to me. Certainly no outside producer brought it in. It was not a topic that producers said, 'Oh, this is hot, let's go pitch this at the networks.' That was definitely not the case." White's comments suggest that critical, albeit controversial, projects were less likely to be initiated by outside producers who lacked the critical agency to navigate the internal opposition at the network.

In his exhaustive research on the film, Capsuto (2000) confirmed that Lafferty initiated the project and conceived the idea:

Doctor friends of Lafferty's first called his attention to articles about AIDS before it was big news. Lafferty decided to drop AIDS into the lap of a 'straight-arrow family...and have them find out almost simultaneously that [their son] was gay and had this disease. (2000, p. 211)

Capsuto noted that Lafferty

spent several days meeting with other NBC brass, pitching the idea to one person at a time before the network approved it. The network worried that advertisers would stay away. Lafferty promised that the sales staff could have the film four weeks early to screen for sponsors. NBC senior managers and the Broadcast Standards department were also hesitant. 'Mostly,' Lafferty recalled, 'there were concerned that we would present a

fair picture of the homosexual community, that it wouldn't be loaded in their favor or against them; that we wouldn't have any technical inaccuracies about the disease, and that we wouldn't send the American public into a panic. (p. 211)

Capsuto's research parallels my own in revealing the multiple dilemmas and obstacles encountered by network programmers as they attempted to produce controversial and critical content. From inception, the network was aware that they risked losing ad revenue and were also concerned about spreading disinformation or creating hysteria around this illness.

Nonetheless, based on my interviews, the network executives and screenwriter-producers were determined to press forward for pedagogical reasons. In my interview with White, he claimed that the program "was the ideal way to get a lot of information about the disease out into the public, into a commercial environment, into a movie." When asked whether this was the obligation of the movie division, White responded,

We had three network newscasts with a half an hour each a day. That's it...there weren't news magazines, and really cable news was in its infancy, and they weren't considered a major source. The penetration wasn't what it is today. At the time...TV movies were the only place on network television to deal with this stuff. You couldn't deal with the issues of AIDS in a two-minute news piece.

White's comment suggests TV movies may sometimes function as journalism and education, while nonetheless supporting the material interests of the network. When I asked White to describe his role at the network, he used the term *broadcaster*. When asked to explain, he said:

There was also a belief I [had] that the airwaves are a public trust, and the license to be on the air is granted by the FCC as long as the broadcasters do a certain amount of programming that's in the public interest. As a broadcaster, which is a term you don't hear that much anymore, and that was sort of the highest compliment you could pay to somebody in the programming departments in the Eighties was to say they were a broadcaster. It meant that you honored that, that you felt, whether you thought you would get a great rating or not, there were certain things -- you couldn't just program crap all the time, even if it was successful. You had an obligation to come up with some things that were important.

According to White, most executives in that era held this philosophy. Although White was the only one of my 26 interview subjects to use the term “broadcaster” and discuss the notion of the “public trust,” nearly everyone I interviewed shared this philosophy regarding the critical role of television in culture . When asked whether these movies were meant to educate the public, White mentioned a network executive at ABC who used the following phrase: “We are the only book on the shelf.” When I asked White to clarify, his response was:

The three networks in those days had over ninety percent of the audience. They had research to show that there were many homes in which the only source of information about the world was one of the three networks, or all three of the networks. There were many homes where there was no book on the shelf. Therefore, they had a special obligation, in terms of what they depicted and presented, because of that. While we were in the entertainment division, “that only book on the shelf meant” more that you’re depicting in a dramatic form what is going on, and what is culturally acceptable and not acceptable. Every night they put on hours of police programming, in which policemen come up against the world outside, and what is unacceptable and what is acceptable is depicted. The way that police operate, what is acceptable for police and was unacceptable. Cultural arbiter. Gatekeeper’s for the culture is what we represented.

While White headed the department, NBC had two in-house producers, Perry Lafferty and Deborah Aal, who were the producers on the project. Lafferty had previously been an executive in the department. In my interview with writer-producers Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman, Lipman described Lafferty as someone who “believed that television could be more than what other people envisioned television to be.” Referring to both Aal and Lafferty, Cowen added, “They believed in social responsibility. Deborah came from a very intellectual background . . . These people were very smart, very well-educated, and very political people. This was not a world of greedy people doing crap to make a buck. That was not the television I grew up in.”

According to Capsuto (2000), the network originally hired another writer only to replace him with Cowen and Lipman, who had previously worked with Aal on another project. After meeting with the writers, White believed that having gay writers was a good idea. As White

recalled, “We were trying to do a story first and foremost about a gay relationship. I figured they’d have insight into that other than creative insight, and they had good credits.” White’s comment illustrates how both the creative and the critical can sometimes overlap. White’s concerns over their identity and responsible depictions of LGBT lives are essentialized. White’s belief that gay men are best able to write gay-themed TV movies, especially those targeting straight audiences, is not necessarily proven by this research. Gay men are better able to craft narratives about their own lives. As a commercial strategy, this practice of hiring gay men to write gay stories might be viewed as exploitation or co-optation; alternatively, this practice may also support the theories of Solorzano and Yosso (2002) about counter-narratives or Gross’ belief (2001) that the most effective forms of resistance are narratives self-told from the margins.

Cowen and Lipman were not necessarily convinced they should write the project. They explained that they had spent years writing a socially-conscious television movie that never got made, which left them disillusioned. In addition, according to Lipman:

We knew it was obviously a very scary subject matter, and we were scared of it. I don’t know. We didn’t just say, “Oh, yeah, let’s do this.” I think the first reaction was, like, “Oh, let’s not. This is going to be very upsetting, it’s terrifying.” Dan [Cowen] said, ‘I don’t know if I want to live with this subject matter and write about this for months or years.’

Regardless who initiated the concept for the project, both White and the writers confirmed that they had deliberately designed the concept to deal with both homophobia and AIDS. The basic premise was that a gay man discovers he has the disease and has to tell his family, who do not know he is gay. According to Cowen, NBC’s Lafferty referred to this as the “double whammy.” At first, the writers objected to this approach but, in their own research, confirmed that this phenomenon was not only likely but also commonplace. However, before they would commit to

this concept, the writers insisted that the gay man would not be seen dying at the end of the program. According to Cowen,

We insisted that he cannot die at the end. We said, “We will not have a funeral, we’re not going to have that, there’s got to be hope.” It was a hopeless time, and Ron and I felt very strongly that there had to be hope, and that’s why at the end of the movie you see him in the cab, going, and we don’t know what’s going to happen to him. But on the other hand, like so many people with AIDS, there was hope, ultimately, but we did not want to see his demise. We just wanted to see him go into the darkness.

These remarks suggest the critical agency of both programmers and producers and the irony that the straight executives understood more clearly than even the gay writers the relationship between homophobia and coping with the disease. In addition, we understand how these creative workers wanted both to inform critically and speak to our collective moral imagination and to the possibilities of a hopeful outcome.

The network agreed to the ending and the writers set out to do research on the disease; however, this was 1983 and the disease was still largely unknown outside the gay community. According to Lipman, “they didn’t know how it was even communicable. NBC sent us a book, one of the first books, which I still have somewhere. . . . There was a chapter about how it was spread by mosquitos from Long Island.” In the course of conducting research, they met with numerous AIDS patients and became privy to how the government parses out information to the public through carefully controlled media. According to Lipman,

We had to keep up with all this medical [information]...things [updates] were coming every day, and at the beginning of our writing this and our research, the medical advisors were saying to us, “Look, we have all this information now, but we’re afraid to just throw it out there. The virus is in the saliva, this can cause this, this can cause that. We’re afraid if we put too much information out there we’re going to panic everyone. So, every week or so, you’ll see in *The New York Times* a little bit of information.

As a result, the writers, producers and the network felt an obligation not to violate this arrangement or contribute to misinformation and hysteria surrounding the disease. This led them

to take extra precautions. During production, they were shooting a scene where the grandmother says goodbye and kisses her AIDS-infected grandson. The network was concerned that she risked exposure to the virus; however, the actress playing the grandmother, Sylvia Sidney, insisted that she be allowed to kiss her grandson. At an airport, the producers tracked down the head of the Centers for Disease Control who acknowledged that kissing had not been proven to be a form of transmission. In the scene, the grandson resists, but the grandmother insists, saying, “It’s a disease, not a disgrace,” and gives him a kiss. In this example, we see how actors can also play a critical role in these concerns.

The writers also included a scene in a doctor’s office where the doctor provides the gay couple with the latest information about the disease. The network had the production keep the set for this scene and the actor playing the doctor on standby up until the eve of the premiere. In the event any new information had been released regarding the disease, including the cause, treatment, or cure, the production was prepared to reshoot the scene and edit this information into the film at the eleventh hour. Ultimately, this reshoot was not required; nonetheless, this illustrates the critical pedagogical intentions by the network, even at added expense. Critics and historians mentioned this pedagogy: Tropiano refers to *An Early Frost* as combining a “coming out story with an AIDS 101 film that aimed to educate viewers about the disease and shatter some myths surrounding the transmission of the virus” (2002, p. 36).

In the course of writing the script, according to the writers, the network insisted that they mention AIDS and discussed the known science up until that point. The network felt this was an opportunity to inform audiences who may have known nothing about the disease. According to Lipman, “we were told that this was going to be written for people who knew nothing about

AIDS and didn't know anything about being gay or about people coming out or anything. A mass audience.” Cowen added:

They said, “This is the first time that an American audience is going to even hear this word, AIDS. They're not going to know what it is. We have to tell them what it is. Most of them probably know nothing about gay people. This may be the first time they really see gay people...and they would think, ‘Oh my God, it's the plague and those terrible gay people are spreading it.’” That's basically all they knew. They didn't know any medical facts. They never probably had seen a gay person, with maybe the exception of *That Certain Summer*, I suppose. As Dan said, you would see people on a float in a gay pride parade in San Francisco in jock straps and feathers, and you'd say, ‘Oh, my God, that's what gay people are.’ People in Middle America, and everywhere – nobody really much knew at that time what gay people were really like, who they really were.

In these comments, the writers confirm White's description of television and TV movies as sites for conducting critical pedagogy. In addition, these comments suggest how TV movies were sometimes designed to counteract the disinformation delivered from other sites on TV, including the networks' own news divisions.

As mentioned, Lafferty had already engaged in numerous interventions with other NBC departments just to get the project commissioned. According to Lipman:

Perry said to us, “It's going to be a difficult sell, so what I'd like to do, with each draft, I'd like to get somebody onboard one at a time.” He said, “If you wrote a script, and I threw it to everybody who has to give their approval, there would be chaos. This person wouldn't like it, this person wouldn't like it, and I'd never get it through.” He said, “What I want to do, before I take it to Brandon [Tartikoff, the head of programming], is I want to make sure everybody's onboard in all departments, and they'll have notes, we'll address them,” so that's why there were thirteen or fourteen drafts.

Lafferty's comments reflect the critical tactics employed by the network to overcome any obstruction, in light of the sensitive and controversial subject matter.

Despite Lafferty's knowledge of the internal working of the network, this strategy was not completely effective. According to White, the programming executives kept running into objections from their head of S&P regarding the script. As previously mentioned, S&P is a division of a network legal department whose primary responsibility is to protect the network

from any claims of libel due to their programming; however, over time, these departments also protected the concerns raised by their ad sales department to have programming avoid any controversial topics, which certainly included gay-themed, AIDS-related programming. These topics had already seen a backlash from the gay community and the religious right, which had led advertisers to flee even successful programming, like *Soap*.

These material concerns empowered S&P executives. They had critical agency, including the ability to prevent a program from getting on the air, which was nearly the case with *An Early Frost*. In my interview, White described his struggle with his S&P executive:

I kept getting bizarre notes. There was a guy named Maury Goodman who was the West Coast Broadcast Standards executive...the things he would say were so bizarre. He objected to the gay relationship. I said, "The two men are committed to a relationship. There's an infidelity that's caused this disease to come into their lives, but what's the problem?" He said, "Do you know that in the average gay male relationship one or both the partners have seventy outside partners." I said, "I didn't know that. I don't know where you're getting your numbers from, but that's not what we're talking about here." He said, "Maybe we should represent it that way, because that would be a more honest way of representing it." And I said, "Well, that's not what we're doing." Those were the kind of comments I would get from him.... Well, finally, Maury at one point just said to me, "Well, maybe the real problem is that, because we are the network, we are the gatekeeper for what is acceptable within the society, and if we show a normalized gay relationship in a drama on television, we are de facto endorsing a gay lifestyle, and that is a problem." That's the environment in which he was given a bad job to do. That's the environment in which he was living. He was clearly being told.

White would later refer to this process as "shadow boxing with people who weren't in the room." When I asked White to clarify, he said he was referring not only to Ad Sales but also to Reverends Falwell and Wildmon. However, White equivocated a little, stating, "I just think the sales department was pressuring the east coast. That's what it felt like, okay. Do I know that for a fact? No." In fairness, the concerns from sales did not lack foundation. Depending on the source, the network lost between one and three million dollars because sponsors objected to the controversial content of the program.

These concerns raised by S&P affected the writers and their attempts to craft the screenplay. According to Cowen:

I don't know what they're called now, but back then it was called "Standards and Practices," which was their euphemism for the censor. Our censor was a really lovely guy. We adored him. He was terrific. He was a former Jesuit priest. The tough part was that we really liked him, and we really hated his notes. We were respectful of him, and I think we learned a lot about how to deal with people in television. I think we learned, to some degree, diplomacy. Some of their notes were outrageous, and we got to be very clever in giving them what they wanted, but at the same time keeping what we wanted.

In these accounts, we understand the collaborative and rhizomatic nature of media production and the complicated critical struggles that can occur when producing critical narratives. Power is represented in multiple sites within the network as well as outside with the producers and writers.

The writers described one particular set of concerns raised by Goodman during one scene. The family is having dinner and meeting the son's gay lover at the same time. In an earlier draft, the grandmother turns to the grandson and says bluntly, "I like your friend." However, Goodman insisted that they replace this dialogue, since it gave the appearance that the grandmother, and therefore the network, condoned homosexuality. As a result, the writers found it necessary to use more covert, coded dialogue. The boyfriend ran an antique shop, and the grandmother offered to bring in her broken radio and have the boyfriend repair it. Although resulting in more oblique representation, the writers felt the note actually forced them to write more authentic dialogue.

For the writers, these concerns were annoying, although sometimes they forced them to be more artful. Nonetheless, the writers also felt that the networks were not necessarily trying to derail the project; rather, the network understood that these were strategies that would ensure not only commercial returns but also more critically desirable outcomes. According to Cowen:

I think the network back then was very astute in judging their audience and knowing how far they could go, and how they had to say it. If you went too far, you would lose your

audience, so then what was the point of even bothering to do it? If they were going to change the channel and shut you down because you were pushing too hard...And Perry would say that, "You're going to lose your audience, so why are you even bothering to do it? You want to turn off your audience?"... It made us more creative, and we knew how far we could go. No, we didn't want to turn off an audience and lose an audience. Why would we want to do that when we had the biggest audience in the world, which I have to go back and say was one of the main reasons I loved television.

In this account of the role of S&P and the concerns raised over the script, we understand the complicated processes and arguably counter-intuitive nature of crafting critical scripted narratives. Unlike news and documentaries, these are narratives meant to deliver information and meaning but in an affective, more artistic manner. This would confirm those theories of narratives by Fisher (1985), Nussbaum (1997), and Bruner (1986). In addition, these narratives operate subversively, being designed to reach audiences who may have no interest in this critical knowledge. Nonetheless, in success, these audiences will be critically informed and possibly enlightened in the end.

For the majority of the projects mentioned here, writers' only role was to draft the scripts. In some instances, however, they also received producer credit because they retained the underlying rights, e.g., Armistead Maupin (*Tales of the City*), Barry Sandler (*Making Love*), and Jonathan Tolins (*Twilight of the Golds*). Whether or not they also engaged in producing activities is difficult to determine, since the practices of producing are multiple and often indiscernible from the practices of other creative workers on a project. However, Cowen and Lipman were also made producers on the program, which meant they would continue to work throughout the production. According to Lipman, "On the set you can change dialogue, you can change a character's name, there's certain things writer-producers can do during production. That's how we became producers, which led us to producing other things after that, as well."

Despite a finalized script, the project still languished within the network, in part, due to the continued objections from S&P. According to White,

It just wouldn't get through broadcast standards, and I remember going into Perry Lafferty's office, and I said, "You know, Perry, I feel like I'm about to give up, and I don't want to. It just doesn't seem like no matter what I do, I can't get this movie made." Perry must have said something like, "We're not going to give up. We're going to keep pushing until we get it made." I don't know if he did anything, or what happened, but suddenly everybody stop resisting. They just stopped saying, "You can't make the movie," and I said, "Okay, we're going to order the movie." And he said, "Yeah, well, okay, we don't think you should, but go ahead." Brandon [Tartikoff] was a supporter of the movie, and [Grant] Tinker [the head of NBC] was the one on the east coast, and Tinker later said, "And I don't care about the three million dollars, that was the movie we should have made." He was the guy that always said, "First, let's be best, then let's be first." That was really what he believed. He believed in the movie, but he was the furthest guy away from being a gay rights guy. He was one of those brown liquor guys...he was truly a quality guy.

White suspected that Lafferty, having been a veteran executive at NBC, had used his relationship with NBC's senior management to get them to make the movie. White recalls thinking that this was part of the process required of programming executives, a strategy that relied on "stubbornness, refusing to give up. . . . I just remember that feeling of, "Oh, I see, sometimes they just give you resistance to see how much you want it, and if you just keep leaning against the doors, they're not locked, they just open." These examples suggest how critical media producing can be complex and often irrational. The network's S&P project understood that the network risked losing advertising revenue and was trying to protect its commercial interests. The executives overlooked these material concerns in order to further their public service obligations.

Although the project received a greenlight, or was allowed to proceed to production, before the network would proceed, the director needed to be hired and the lead actors needed to be cast. This refers to a "cast-contingent" order. Directors and actors may also yield critical agency, which means the process may become open to new voices and concerns.

The network approved hiring openly gay director John Erman, who previously directed the mini-series *Roots*. Erman's critical and commercial success also yielded the director more critical agency than most television directors. According to Lipman, Erman "had a lot of power. He had a lot of clout." Erman read the last draft of the screenplay but felt the script had been, according to the writers, "diluted" by the notes from S&P. Instead, Erman insisted on going back to one of the earliest drafts, even though S&P had raised repeated concerns about the content of these drafts.

Although Erman disregarded some of the concerns raised by S&P, he refused to fight the network over their prohibition against showing same-sex affection. Instead, the writers and director were forced to engage in more coded performances that signaled the affection between the gay couple. For example, in a bathroom scene, the gay lover plucks a gray hair from his lover's brow. In another scene, the lover is in bed, and Quinn's character flicks his ear to wake him up. Although minimal, according to Capsuto, these expressions of affection were still considered "unusually up front" for network television; however, in comparison to independent cinema, their relationship lacked "naturalism" (2000, p. 213). Other scholars disagreed, suggesting that the program featured "ostentatious absences of physical affection" (Gross, 2001, p. 144). In these critiques, we understand how these critical concerns are subjective as well as how important it is to consider these concerns within the context of other forms of LGBT media.

As mentioned in my literature review, since the 1970s, networks had often collaborated with LGBT activists to design and produce LGBT-themed content. As the writers confirmed, prior to production, the network approached them about having a gay media activist organization read the script. According to Lipman, "We refused, and I told NBC, 'This is not the Soviet Union. We don't have a bureau of scripts. We don't need their approval, and I don't want their

approval.”” Lipman’s remarks reflect the tensions between these stakeholders over critical and political concerns and the artistic process.

With Erman hired, the next phase was casting. According to Capsuto, “by July, they had hired a name cast – the surest way to sell a film about an unpleasant subject” (2002, p. 212). Capsuto alludes to the need to hire popular actors to overcome the audience’s reluctance to watch controversial, critical fare. However, based on my research, this was not a typical television movie cast, as the result of a couple of factors. As with *That Certain Summer*, major actors turned down the gay lead roles, although their motives may never be fully known. According to *The Advocate* (2013), in an interview with Aidan Quinn, Quinn indicated that Jeff Daniels had turned down the part, even after playing a gay man in PBS’ *American Playhouse* production of *Fifth of July*. According to Cowen and Lipman, Stephen Collins had been offered the role only to be replaced by Quinn, although Quinn was a relative newcomer, unknown to TV audiences.

In addition, two veteran actors, Ben Gazzara and Gina Rowlands, were cast as the parents. Rowlands had previously played the lesbian mother who lost custody of her children in the television movie *A Question of Love*. While highly respected as actors, these were not actors known to attract audiences based on their popularity. According to White, the casting of the leads presented another “built-in problem” - the network understood that these actors would not perform publicity on their own projects. According to White,

The press didn’t know who Aidan Quinn was and Ben Gazzara and Gina Rowlands are famous for not promoting the things they’re in. We were going to have a problem, and in fact, Sylvia Sidney was the best person on the press tour on the movie. I don’t think Ben Gazzara did the press tour. I don’t remember if he did or not, but he was not a good interview, but Sylvia Sidney was great...remember, this was a hot button issue, and because she was a grandmotherly character, saying that this was alright... Somebody asked her a question about AIDS, and she said, “You know, we used to be afraid to talk about cancer.” She used that comparison, and that really cut through a lot of stuff.

As reflected in this example, actors contribute (or, in this instance, potentially handicap) the commercial and critical success of these programs, through both performance and promotion. More importantly, Sidney's comments helped frame the disease as a medical issue for the press and divert the conversation away from AIDS as a gay disease.

In addition to publicity, according to White, NBC's marketing executive, Mike O'Hara, was vital to the commercial and critical success of the program. O'Hara screened the program in advance for a number of constituencies, including AIDS organizations and station owners who would likely be threatened with boycotts by the religious right. According to White,

There was a lot of advanced negative reaction. The Wildman people were out there, and they tried to pressure various affiliates into not carrying [it], threatening at the local level. There were a number of brave guys, station managers, who said, "Fuck it, we're broadcasters, I'm not going to let these people, I don't care who they are, I'm not going to let them pre-censor what we put on the air. That's not my job. My job is put it on the air and let the public make their own judgment about it."

Despite the backlash, according to White, the program "went on with full carriage. There are, like, 204 affiliates, I don't think anyone backed out of carrying the movie." Once again, this example illustrates the multiple commercial and critical stakeholders involved in television.

In addition, according to Capsuto, "the network sent out 200,000 study guides to schools, social service agencies and community groups" (2000, p. 215). Tropiano (2002) noted that these "Viewers Guides" included such topics as "Fear of Contagion," "Responses to AIDS," and "Support Services." According to Tropiano, "the guide asks viewers to consider how they would react if someone they knew had AIDS and it includes guidelines on how to prevent the transmission of the HIV virus" (p. 36).

The week of the premiere, NBC aired a series of news and documentaries about AIDS. According to Montgomery (1989), these programs featured AIDS experts discussing the disease

and a panel discussion with doctors and journalists followed the movie's premiere. While designed to help promote the movie, these programs also helped raise awareness about the disease.

According to Capsuto (2000), some members of the gay community objected to the lack of affection, which they nonetheless understood had been prohibited by the network. In addition, activists disliked that the network's promotion of the *An Early Frost* mentioned that the film "was not 'about' homosexuals or AIDS, but rather about people in a family – as if these concepts were mutually exclusive" (p. 215). According to Ron Najman, media director of the National Gay Task Force in New York, "Although we agree that AIDS is not a gay disease and a gay issue, we are most clearly affected by it. We should have been consulted" (Haller, 1985, p. 137). These criticisms reflect how, even with the best of critical intentions, these programs often became sites of political contestation from all directions.

Most critics, who responded, liked the program. *The Washington Post's* Tom Shales referred to the program as the "most important television movie of the year" (1985). *People Magazine* described it as "not an ordinary movie meant only to entertain. It tells you more about the disease than any news story or hysterical gossip can" (Haller, 1985, p. 137). The program reached over 30 million viewers and received nominations for 14 Primetime Emmy Awards and three Golden Globes. Despite the backlash and loss of revenue, the network repeated the program in April 1986. The program secured high ratings. Less clear from the data is if the network ever recouped their investment.

According to Tropiano (2002) and Capsuto (2000), the commercial and critical success also convinced networks to feature more AIDS storylines in their episodic programs. According to Capsuto, "before the film could air, writers for several series were already outlining potential

‘AIDS episodes’ that would air starting in early 1986” (p. 215). Gross (2000) claimed that six years elapsed before networks would return to the subject of gay men with AIDS. His research disregards various episodes of series television and ignores the Rock Hudson and Liberace biopics, however. Gross also does not mention Showtime’s *As Is* (1986) or *Longtime Companion* (1989), which was funded and produced by PBS’ *American Playhouse* before securing a theatrical release.

The critical impact of this program on audiences is, admittedly, difficult to determine, even in retrospect. When asked if the program made a difference, in our interview, White simply stated, “That’s for other people to say. I don’t know. I think it was the right movie to make”. Cowen and Lipman offered a more provocative response, stating:

We really did our job... Privately, to each other, we can talk about it now, a quarter of a century later, but we said, “We are writing propaganda.” That’s the word we used, “This is propaganda. We want to put out a certain message. We’re doing it for two reasons. We want the straight world to have some understanding for gay people, and to have compassion. That was our goal, our intention, and we to ourselves called it propaganda, but that’s what we wanted to do: compassion and understanding. We wanted them to cry at the end, to have feelings for gay people, because it was at a time when people did not have very warm feelings for gay people, and they also understood nothing. We didn’t understand anything, how do you expect somebody in Kansas to know what the hell is going on?”

As suggested by these comments, the writers were keenly aware of their critical pedagogical mission. These comments suggest how critical television narratives can operate as subversive forms of persuasion at the cultural level. Though television, these programs can reach broader, less informed, more critically-desirable audiences. Through entertainment narratives, these programs can operate as affective pedagogy, helping to sway both hearts and minds.

In February 1987, just four months after NBC aired *An Early Frost*, the independent film *Parting Glances* appeared in theaters. Considered by some historians to be the first AIDS film, the film did not foreground gay or AIDS issues, although a gay man with AIDS (played by Steve

Buscemi) was a central character. This reflects how media critics, scholars, and historians have often overlooked prior TV movies to make certain claims about feature films. While a breakthrough for features, this program was not the first narrative to feature AIDS in media, nor was this film centered upon the concerns of people coping with the disease.

Later that summer, Showtime produced an adaptation of the award-winning, Broadway play *As Is* by William Hoffman. The program was produced as part of its series *Showtime on Broadway*. Like ABC Theater, this was a programming strategy that also became a critical tactic, allowing programming executives to sometimes feature controversial topics.

As Is was remarkable for its explicit depiction of the lives of two gay men, former lovers, as one of the partners discloses that he has the HIV virus. The narrative focuses exclusively and frankly on their coping with the threat of the disease, without any mention of how it might affect their family or the broader concerns of the medical or political establishment. Like *An Early Frost*, the film ends not with the death of a partner, but with the decision by the two former lovers to have sex in the hospital room. This ending symbolically represents an act of love between these partners and a show of defiance, both to the virus and the outside world.

A month before the program aired, the Supreme Court, in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, ruled that a Georgia anti-sodomy law was constitutional. In the *New York Times*, Showtime's head of programming, Allen Sabinson, stated that the Court's decision helped "make the program only more valuable. . . . A film that presents a gay couple in very human terms may lead people to engage in some very interesting dialogue with regard to the recent Supreme Court decision" (Farber, 1986). Depending on one's perspective, Sabinson's remarks are exploitative, co-opting the concerns of the LGBT community, or they reflect how Showtime and Sabinson were conducting a critical media intervention in the wake of the Court's decision.

Sabinson was quoted in the press as saying he had seen the original play Broadway and commissioned the adaptation for Showtime; however, in my interview with him, he would not take the credit. Rather, he suggests this was a “partnership” between himself and the Executive Producer of the program, Michael Brandman. Brandman had previously produced a number of programs, including theater adaptations, for the network.

Sabinson further mentioned that, at the time, he had considered adapting two AIDS-themed Broadway plays, *As Is* and *The Normal Heart*. However, Sabinson felt that latter was too political and incendiary, stating:

I decidedly, rightly or wrongly, greatly preferred *As Is* as a piece of art. Not that I didn't respect *Normal Heart*, [but] that [play] was agitprop to me. It was one man's pursuit, and his anger, and it painted the system and it's resistance in simplistic ways, whereas *As Is* was a very personal and powerful piece.

In this response, Sabinson illustrates the critical agency of television programming to choose their projects, which is further informed by their critical responses to the underlying texts.

The Normal Heart also came up in two other interviews. *An Early Frost* screenwriters, Lipman and Cowen, had seen the play when they were scripting their program. According to Lipman, the play was “written for a New York gay audience.” Cowen added, “a very specific audience, very knowledgeable audience.” Lindsay Law, who ran PBS' *American Playhouse*, mentioned that he had received the opportunity to adapt the play, but he turned it down.

According to Law, “I hated it initially; I just thought it was one big screaming, angry polemic. Only when it became a piece of history, meaning time went by, did I enjoy – enjoy! – did I actually admire that play.” In these comments, we understand how both writers and executives considered the critical value, commercial appeal, and pedagogical potential of these narratives. On a side note, HBO will air the first-ever adaptation of *The Normal Heart* in May of 2014.

Neither Sabinson nor Brandman had much to say about the adaptation by the screenwriter-playwright, William Hoffman; however, the *New York Times* described minor struggles over language:

The executive producer, Michael Brandman, argued vehemently that the amount of profanity should be reduced. "I felt it was a tough film," he explained, "and I didn't want to muddy the water with gratuitous profanity. We did keep some of the language, but I think it is highlighted more effectively because it's used more sparingly." Mr. Hoffman made the changes willingly. "Four-letter words offend some people tremendously," he said, "and we didn't want to risk losing those people who might benefit from what the piece was saying (Farber, 1986).

As previously described in the making of *An Early Frost*, this quote suggests how the producers were hoping reach a largest, more critically-desirable audience. Tempering the language was more of a critical tactic than a creative or artistic decision.

While the language was tempered, in opening the story up from the stage, the program did feature scenes within a gay bar. According to Sabinson, "images, the very shots, of leather bars, and S&M, and anonymous sex were mind-boggling." When I asked if Sabinson had any concerns with depicting these images just a few years after the backlash to *Cruising*, Sabinson responded:

We were not doing it as a Showtime original movie, and we were doing it as Showtime on Broadway. I rationalized that the tradition in the theatre is the playwright is king; you cannot force a playwright to do anything. Even in this day and age of big musicals, [if] the playwright doesn't want to do it, he doesn't do it. Very unlike any other thing. Part of, and I was pretty early to this, but I had grown up in the theatre, was this is a play. It's not for me. This is not a movie.

In this response, Sabinson suggests the privileged position of the screenwriter-playwright.

However, this comment also conflicts with the earlier account of the producers' asking the playwright to change the dialogue, which suggests that the development of the scripts is a more collaborative process.

Once again, casting proved difficult since no “name” actors were willing to play a gay actor. According to Sabinson, “I wanted it to reach a huge audience and my network background told me to push for big-name casting. We made initial overtures to a number of major stars, and we were turned down across the board” (Farber, 1986). In my interview, Sabinson affirmed that that casting was difficult and limited the potential success of the program. According to Sabinson, “a lot of my obsession was trying to get bigger casting. . . . We were lucky to get Bobby Carradine, he had some heat at the time . . . and we were lucky to get Jonathan Hadary, who had done the play, [although] nobody knew who he was.”

Meanwhile, Sabinson also had to resolve any internal concerns about the subject matter. According to Sabinson, “some of our executives were nervous about doing this play, but before the film airs, we will inform people that it is rough in subject matter and language. The whole philosophy behind pay cable is that subscribers make a choice” (Farber, 1986). When I asked Sabinson about these concerns, Sabinson could not recall any names. However, Sabinson pointed out that senior management and affiliates represented mostly “distribution and sales guys” and

This was not a piece that I would hope they would be watching on Showtime when it went on the air. The danger was twofold: that you were going to get cable systems down south saying, “We’re going to not carry Showtime if you carry this kind of trash” or viewers cancelling subscriptions. I wasn’t so much worried about viewers, because the reach for these Broadway on Showtime [programs] was so small.

Sabinson’s comments speak to the multiple stakeholders and complex management and structure of premium cable television.

Meanwhile, as with other programs in this research, Sabinson confirmed that the program was screened for the National AIDS Network and Gay Men’s Health Crisis. These screenings help promoted the program and raise money for these organizations.

The critics lauded the program for its critical content. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, this film “comes – as is – warts and all. . . . [I]t’s a tough, ironic, profoundly serious treatment of the subject.” The reviewer suggests that the director deserves the credit for the critical nature of the project rather than the playwright or the producers. This confirms Edgerton’s claims that these programs are often considered through the lens of feature film production. Another critic, Stephen Farber of the *New York Times* noted, “[T]elevision has already addressed the subject of AIDS, and several television dramas have focused on homosexuality, but perhaps none have done so as explicitly.” In Farber’s interview with Hoffman, Hoffman claimed that:

As Is will show things that haven't been seen in a lot of living rooms in this country. I thought NBC's film about AIDS, *An Early Frost*, was terrific. But they had to do a lot of tightrope walking. They couldn't really present AIDS from the protagonist's point of view. They had to present it from the family's point of view or society's point of view. They didn't really get into the full emotional life of two male lovers. My play is much more about the two guys.

In this account, the critic and Hoffman suggest how the program operated in contrast to other TV movies, as a counter-narrative that operated with greater authenticity. However, as discussed, Showtime was seeking a different, more niched, audience willing to pay for a subscription, which meant tailoring the text more for gay and gay-friendly audiences, including those already watching their series *Brothers*. In contrast, broadcast networks needed to appeal to broader audiences and, as discussed in this research, *An Early Frost* was clearly designed to reach non-gay, audiences who might otherwise have no interest in a gay-themed program.

A number of reviews curiously and pointedly used the term “art” to describe the film. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* stated that “here for 90 minutes, anxiety has been conquered by art” (Winfrey, 1986). Similarly, in reviewing the later video release in 1990, Jim Farber, critic for *Entertainment Weekly*, noted that the program refuses to “embalm its characters in nobility. . . .

[U]nlike the public service announcement that is *Longtime Companion, As Is* is art” (Farber, 1990). When I asked Sabinson to comment, his response was illuminating:

Under the banner of *Broadway on Showtime*, literary conventions of the screenplay were more artistic. I mean, art is not a word that was held in high regard. You might say, “artfulness,” the beauty of its production and craft and performance, but “art” is a whole other matter, and people would sort of escort you from your office for aspiring to art. PBS could do art, but I think it comes back to... that under *Broadway on Showtime* I could hide behind.

Sabinson’s response suggests the tensions represented by commercial television over art and entertainment. In addition, Sabinson’s remark further confirm how this programming strategy operated as a critical tactic. This tactic allowed Sabinson the opportunity to include a gay-themed, AIDS narrative, based on a relatively obscure, Broadway play, even when it risked provoking his management and affiliates.

When asked whether Sabinson regarding his role in raising awareness of AIDS to a larger audience, he responded that:

Nobody pays you, in these positions as a program executive, to be an advocate. All of the broadcasters, cable, do not see their entertainment divisions as wanting to take them into advocacy... You have more freedom at a pay cable network and cable network, because it doesn’t have a news division, but I remember having real nasty debates with the head of the news division when we made *The Final Days* [a television movie about President Nixon] going, “Where the hell do you get off making a movie about a President who’s still alive where you could endanger the reputation of an entire news division?”

Sabinson’s comments reflect how programming executives may operate critically, which can often go unrecognized. These comments also suggest how particularly broadcast networks are rhizomatic structures with multiple stakeholders and critical concerns about power. As mentioned in the making of *An Early Frost*, both the writers and the programming executives cited the failure of the network news divisions to adequately address social concerns. Whether as a public service or as gay propaganda, these creative workers shared a critical mission. Their goal was to address the failures by the news media to address these critical concerns within the

public sphere. This mission came, as Sabinson suggests, at some risk, since these critical interventions may have placed the programming division at odds with the news division. In these examples, we understand the critical agency of programming executives, producers, and writers who can operate within the more conservative political economy of television networks.

Sabinson's comments also allude to the different commercial logics of premium channels and broadcast. According to Sabinson:

We could do anything, and it was about providing value, noise, self-promotion, working with low budgets, getting your name in the paper, anyway to drive awareness, because you didn't have a lot of money to spend on programming...give them something you can't find anywhere else, take chances, experiment, be outrageous, distinguish yourself from the networks. That was a very different and wonderful environment to work in. It was sort of that happiest time in my life. You aren't going to get a ratings report in the morning saying, "You put *As Is* and now you better start looking for your next job."

These comments suggest how premium cable executives and producers were afforded greater critical license to produce these programs, which explains how Showtime and HBO have been able to produce so much LGBT- and AIDS-themed content.

As for the ratings for *As Is*, my research could not establish how many people watched these programs. But these ratings would not account for the knowledge or meaning derived by audiences from the program. Nonetheless, Jonathan Hadary, who played one of the leads on stage and in the program, claimed that

Seeing *As Is* at home might make its difficult subject matter less uncomfortable for many viewers. A lot of people do not want to leave their homes to see an AIDS play. Watching it at home is a little bit easier. And they should see it because AIDS is not going to go away. It's going to come close to the life of almost everyone who sees *As Is*.

From this comment, we understand how television operates differently from both the stage and feature films. The medium is better able to reach more critically-desirable audiences about critical topics and concerns. Meanwhile, neither Gross (2001) nor Capsuto (2000) included *As Is*

in their discussion of LGBT media and television, while Tropiano (2002) only provided a tiny blurb.

As an executive at NBC, Showtime, ABC, TNT, and A&E, Sabinson was the executive responsible for numerous AIDS-themed programs, although not all were about gay men with the disease. These included the biopics of Rock Hudson and Liberace, the *Ryan White Story* (1989), *Something to Live For: The Allison Gertz Story* (1991), and *Our Sons* (1991). When I asked Sabinson why he championed these programs, he responded that the disease had affected him quite personally. According to Sabinson,

It was cataclysmic. My best friend, who was my college roommate, who was a television director, passed away. Gary Keeper...who was my senior vice president at Showtime, which was the job after NBC, passed away. You just lose count of the actors, directors, writers, costumers. I mean, it was a tsunami.

From these comments, and as reflected in a number of interviews conducted for this dissertation, we can understand how the critical identity, interests and motives inform the agency and production of some programming executives, particularly those working in TV movies.

Throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s, a number of television series and movies featured AIDS. In 1990, *American Playhouse* aired *Andre's Mother*. Inspired by a short one-act play by a gay playwright, Terrence McNally, the one-hour production told the story of a New York community of mostly white gay men dealing with the disease. Richard Thomas portrays Cal, a gay man whose lover has died of AIDS. At the funeral, in his grief, Cal reaches out to Katherine, his late lover's mother. However, Katherine denies Cal any solace. Sylvia Sidney returns once again to play the unconditionally-loving, gay-supportive grandmother who condemns her daughter's rejection of her grandson's lover. While ratings were not available, McNally did receive the Emmy Award for writing this program.

In an interview, I critiqued the fact that this program, like so many others, featured white, handsome, successful, urban, upper class, waspy gay men. When asked, Law noted,

I don't know if that's how we want to see ourselves, or whether it's more complicated in terms of to make this somewhat acceptable. Let's not make it be some unattractive scruffy bearded – let's at least let the audience be able to like him. I don't know if it's that or because we all just see all young gay men as ridiculously handsome and pleasant and lovely (laughs). Or whether it's none of those things.

As a white, WASPy, urban, gay man, Law's response suggests how these concerns over identity are mitigated by the identity and phenomenology of those responsible for creating these programs. Law also mentioned that the program was directed by a woman and cast by a woman, suggesting that even with the critical and creative agency of these women, they came around to proposing the same "type" for the gay male lead. Furthermore, these concerns over multiculturalism are complicated by Law's desire that audiences best identify with the gay protagonists, as proposed within narrative theory, especially Nussbaum. As reflected here, critical media production engages in critical tactics that are instrumental in tapping into the audiences' narrative imagination.

In addition, critics heralded Thompson's performance as the mother, Katherine. In the *Los Angeles Times* a critic described how "Thompson's stony mother, her eyes frosted like glazed buttons, delivers a steely performance, her silence plumbing the depths of denial, confusion and pain" (Loynd, 1990) However, in my reading, the mother's behavior is callous, if not borderline sadistic. When I asked Law if he had any qualms about this representation, he responded, "No, because there's so many of them." In this comment, Law suggests Katherine is authentic; however, I would argue that straight audiences might consider her reaction to be defamatory. As part of a multicultural critique, all forms of identity and performance ought to be considered.

The critics lavished praise on this program, contrasting the program to other TV movies. According to John O'Connor of *The New York Times*, "The subject of this 'American Playhouse' drama is homosexuals and AIDS deaths as seen through the grief, denial and acceptance of those left behind. It is a subject on which prime-time commercial television, most notably all those made-for-TV movies, has been virtually, and shamefully, silent" (1990). Similarly, *Seattle Times*' critic Jason Voorhees suggested that the program "packs more of a wallop in one hour than *An Early Frost* did in two" (1990). As for critical scholars, neither Gross (2001) nor Capsuto (2000) mention the program. Tropiano wrote a brief blurb, he claimed that, "the program is one of the best original AIDS dramas made for television" (2002, p. 43). In these examples, we see how critics and scholars have sometimes overlooked these programs, even those considered more aesthetically or critically valuable.

While AIDS became synonymous with gay men, and the Right would threaten to boycott any program that affirmed the lives of gay men, these factors did not prevent more lesbian-themed TV movies from airing. As with ABC Theater, *Playhouse*'s mandate to adapt successful theater allowed them to produce a number of LGBT-themed projects, including the aforementioned *Fifth of July*. In addition, Playhouse aired original programs, including *Waiting for the Moon* (1986) based on the love story between Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein.

These lesbian-themed TV movies also became more racially diverse. ABC aired *The Women of Brewster Place* (1986), based on a novel by Gloria Naylor about a group of African-American women. Produced by and starring Oprah Winfrey and directed by an open lesbian, Donna Deitch, the program also featured a well-adjusted, African-American lesbian couple. As Capsuto wrote, "in a film where most heterosexual relationships are abusive, brief, and/or dysfunctional, longtime lovers Lorraine and Tee is the best-developed, most stable romantic

couple” (2000, p. 228). The program was also groundbreaking in depicting LGBT concerns within a minority community; nonetheless, once the program was adapted to a short-lived series, the lesbian couple had been removed.

In addition to lesbians, these TV movies featured bisexuality and transgenderism. ABC’s *My Two Loves* (1986) is the story of a woman who falls in love with both a man and a woman and was written by lesbian feminist author, Rita Mae Brown. In addition, the program broke a long-held taboo when the two female leads exchanged a kiss on the lips in the last scene (Capsuto,2000). In the end, however, the lead character elects not to pursue either relationship, again leaving the prospect of romantic homosexual love unfulfilled (Tropiano, 2002). In addition, CBS’ *Second Serve* (1986) was a CBS film about the true story of Dr. Renee Richards, a tennis pro who had a sex-change operation from male to female. While the subject of transsexuality has appeared within episodic series, based on my research, this was the first time a TV movie tackled the subject of transgenderism.

In addition to premium cable, by the late 1980s basic cable began airing TV movies, including The Arts and Entertainment Channel (now referred to as A&E). With a limited operating budget, A&E competed with PBS to acquire less expensive, albeit highly-acclaimed, U.K. content. According to Delia Fine, the network’s head of drama,

A&E began as an acquisition network, because that’s all it could afford to be at the time. It did not want to take on the overhead that becoming a production network would entail. It could co-produce at a high quality level much more cost effectively with UK co-productions or European co-productions But at that time, from an affiliate standpoint, it was still very important to have that patina of quality and high-brow and artiness, which the UK stuff automatically had. That was a very important thing, probably not as much to advertisers, but it was certainly important on the affiliate side where you were always jockeying for channel position and trying to keep your affiliate fees high.

Like Showtime, early A&E was more focused on distinguishing their programming rather than a concern solely with advertiser appeal. More critically-acclaimed or controversial programs

translated into commercial value but also gave these executives the opportunity to program more critical fare. Similarly, like PBS and other cable networks, A&E represented these programs as original productions, even if acquired. This moniker would enhance the network's appeal to affiliates, even if confusing audiences, critics, and scholars.

In light of these material conditions and unique commercial logics of cable, Fine was able to acquire the lesbian-themed mini-series, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1989). Based on an original novel by Jeanette Winterston, the story is a period drama about a lesbian coming out to her mother and her deeply religious community in the U.K. The book had been adapted to a mini-series by the BBC.

Despite greater critical agency, Fine still needed to secure approval from other departments in the network, including marketing, ad sales, and senior management. Fine recalled having concerns that the network might object to the program. As Fine stated:

I expected the management to be much more conservative in their reactions to material than they were... I was worried about the reaction both to negative portrayal of Christian fundamentalism -- I was as worried about that as I was about any of the lesbian issues that might have bothered people. I don't remember, really, the reaction from ad sales. I'm sure they weren't thrilled, but I think pretty much across the board everybody felt that the quality of the piece was so outstanding that we could take a hit in terms of ad sales.

In Fine's comments, we can understand how these critical struggles can occur within the network and amongst multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, Fine's comments reflect how programs may be perceived through multiple lenses of quality, content, and popular appeal.

At the time, A&E was only shown on a handful of affiliates, and its programming received limited recognition in the press. In addition, according to Fine, the network did not provide much marketing support. Nonetheless, the critical and controversial nature of the program did help A&E secure the cover of some television guides in newspapers. In addition,

the critics lauded the film for its content and execution. Ratings information could not be obtained. Nonetheless, Fine would receive the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Made for Television Movie. At the time, Fine admits, she had never heard of GLAAD.

Reflected in this period of the LGBT social movement, the backlash from the New Right coupled with the AIDS crisis severely crippled the movement. Resources and organizations shifted to the crisis and away from media activism; however, the crisis also compelled more creative workers to come out of the closet. While studio features produced fewer LGBT-themed movies, the emerging independent film industry released LGBT films targeted at niche LGBT audiences.

On broadcast television, series no longer featured LGBT characters as lead or supporting characters, for fear of a backlash from the New Right. However, like independent cinema, the emerging cable industry began to feature these topics to attract critical attention as well as niche audiences. Due to their complicated commercial logics, cable networks depended less upon advertiser revenue and used these controversial programs to help brand the network and secure affiliate distribution.

Despite these larger cultural, material, and technological concerns, a number of LGBT TV movies aired on broadcast television. These programs featured numerous AIDS narratives or less controversial, gay teen, or lesbian-themed subject matter, and started to feature more diverse representations. Programming executives often engaging in protracted struggles internally with other departments to get these programs on the air. In addition to programming executives, producers, writers, directors, actors, and marketing executives contributed to the critical and commercial success of these programs.

Counter-Backlash

In response to the larger cultural forces arrayed against them, by the late 1980s, the LGBT social movement had engaged in a counter-backlash. This backlash was instigated in response to a Supreme Court case *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which upheld anti-sodomy laws in Georgia. Various LGBT organizations partnered to produce another March on Washington in 1987, although according to Eaklor (2011), this event was virtually ignored by the media. A year later, National Coming Out Day was launched in order to promote greater LGBT visibility at home and in media. In addition, other LGBT support organizations, including Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) became more politically active, lobbying politicians for more resources to fight AIDS. In order to raise awareness about the disease, The Names Project created the AIDS Quilt, which displayed panels representing the tens of thousands of victims of AIDS, including numerous young, gay men who had died in the prime of their lives.

In addition, the movement reverted back to earlier, more militant, liberationist strategies, including the rise of ACT UP, an AIDS organization dedicated to direct action and civil disobedience. According to LGBT Historian Michael Bronski, “ACT UP was a return to the raucous streets actions of the Gay Liberation Front and the ‘zaps’ of the Gay Activist Alliance” (2011, p. 231). The organization crafted clever, provocative messages to frame its concerns, including the phrase “Silence equals Death.” They held rallies in front of and inside the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes for Health, the Centers for Disease Control, and, most notoriously, St. Patrick’s Cathedral. These protests attracted media attention to their cause, including the criminally-negligent actions of the government, the resistance by religious organizations to HIV prevention, and the staunch resistance by the medical establishment to expedite their drug-approval practices even as thousands were dying without any treatment.

According to Bronski (2013), ACT UP also branched out into media activism, confronted media organizations for their misinformation about and lack of coverage of AIDS.

Along with ACT UP, other LGBT activist organizations emerged, including Queer Nation, “who formed to protest increasing violence against GLBT people and advocate social freedom” (Eaklor, date, p. 176). As mentioned, the New Right has helped conflate the LGBT social movement, particularly white, gay men, with AIDS. Queer Nation directed their appeals to cultural, political, and religious organizations to raise awareness to the diverse array of concerns and identities in the movement. As a new strategy, closeted public figures were “outed,” which, according to Eaklor, threatened “the closets of power,” those operating from centers of government and media influence, particularly those pitted against LGBT rights (2011).

By the early 1990s, a new LGBT media activist organization would emerge, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLAAD). This organization picked up where the 1970s media activist groups left off, engaging in a mix of insider and outsider strategies. LGBT activists, including creative workers working within the industry, consulted with film studios and television networks to cultivate more frequent, diverse, and balanced representations of LGBT lives. In response to objectionable media, the same media activists would picket networks and theaters and threaten advertisers’ boycotts. Local chapters formed initially in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles; however, by the mid-1990s, these groups merged to form a national organization while launching local chapters across the nation.

In addition to these efforts by a new wave of LGBT media activism, LGBT media began to reflect more diverse representations of LGBT lives. In 1990, the feature documentary *Paris is Burning*, produced and directed by openly gay filmmaker Jennie Livingston, detailed the unique subculture of the drag ballroom scene in New York City comprised of gay and transgendered

Latino and African-Americans. There were no white gay men featured, and there was no mention of AIDS even though half of those featured in the film were HIV-infected and died within a few years.

Paris is Burning represented, according to Hildebrand (2013), a classic *queer* film, reveling in these depictions of a self-affirming, albeit secretive and deeply marginalized subculture. Nonetheless, the film came under attack from militant members of the gay community, many of whom felt that the white, lesbian, female filmmaker had exploited this subculture. Nonetheless, *Paris is Burning* garnered tremendous acclaim from outside the community and won numerous awards. When the film was excluded from the Academy Awards, which produced charges from gay activists of homophobia and racism by the Motion Picture Academy. Meanwhile, the pop singer Madonna quickly appropriated the style and dance moves of this subculture, which became the basis of her music video, *Vogue*. In these accounts, we understand how critical media, even produced with the best of intentions, can become sites of complicated, even contradictory, forms of political contestations.

Although independent LGBT cinema continued to thrive, these were films of, by, and for LGBT audiences, not programs designed to crossover and potentially inform mainstream audiences about LGBT concerns. Meanwhile, studio features continued to avoid most LGBT narratives and characters, but even when represented sympathetically, the gay community lashed out. *Philadelphia* (1993) appeared and was proclaimed to be the first studio feature film about the AIDS crisis; however, the film's narrative featured a straight man overcoming his homophobia rather than a gay man suffering from the disease. After a decade of the disease, the film proved to be too little too late for the gay community, especially at the height of the movement's militant moment. In addition, over a half-dozen LGBT TV movies and independent

films had already featured the subject in a more progressive and critical fashion. Larry Kramer, the playwright of *The Normal Heart* and a prominent LGBT activist, delivered a scathing critique of the film in *The New York Times* entitled “Why I hate Philadelphia.” Nonetheless, per Gross, “there is no question that it did bring the realities of AIDS home to many who had not gotten the message” (Gross, 2000, p. 147). In addition, the film did well at the box office and garnered numerous Academy Awards, including an award for Tom Hanks’s powerful and dignified performance as a gay man dying of AIDS.

In television series, if the networks dared feature a lead or even supporting LGBT character, the right-wing response was virulent. The hit series *thirtysomething* attempted to include a regular gay male character in the ensemble. The character appeared in a few episodes, and, in one scene, was seen in bed with another man discussing the impact of AIDS amongst their friends. The religious community was outraged, and the ensuing advertiser boycott cost the network over \$1.5 million. The episode was banned by some affiliates and aired after midnight on others. Unlike other episodes of the series, the network never reran the episode (Capsuto, 2000).

Unlike studio features and television series, numerous TV movies featuring LGBT narratives and characters continued to air across the dial. These include some of the lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered programs that were listed in the previous section. As for gay men, these characters were often limited to representations within the numerous AIDS-themed programs that appeared on broadcast, PBS, and premium cable television. However, when these narratives appeared, they became the target of a backlash from the more militant members of the LGBT community as well as the religious Right.

Most historians would consider *Longtime Companion* to be a feature film; however, the project was fully-financed, developed and produced by PBS' *American Playhouse*. According to Lindsay Law, the executive producer and head of programming for *Playhouse* from 1981-1995, *Playhouse*'s mission was to adapt theater, literary adaptations, and original screenplays that were designed for what Law referred to as "underserved communities." Like *ABC Theatre* and Showtime on Broadway, *Playhouse*'s mission was a programming strategy that created opportunities for programming executives sometimes to include critical or LGBT content. Over his tenure, the openly gay Law acquired, produced, or commissioned a number of LGBT programs, including *Fifth of July* (1982), *Waiting for the Moon* (1987), *Andre's Mother* (1990), *Longtime Companion* (1989) and *Tales of the City* (1993).

Law referred to *Playhouse*'s funding as a "three-dimensional chess puzzle." The funding for original, wholly-owned *Playhouse* productions came from PBS stations, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and corporate sponsors. In addition, *Playhouse* sometimes partnered with foreign broadcasters to co-produce new programming, which required that *Playhouse* provide only a portion of the production budget. Furthermore, they sometimes acquired fully-financed program that had been previously produced elsewhere.

In addition, according to Law, "the added element was that some of them would be made as movies to be released in theatres first and then come exclusively to our series for their television premiere, rather than going to video." This was a strategy that helped Law attract feature and theater talent who otherwise held television in contempt. Law's strategy coincided with the rise of the independent film industry. Consequently, Law had early success, taking his first two programs, *Testament* and *El Norte*, to the Telluride Film Festival where they both found distribution deals. Over the span of his career at *Playhouse*, Law produced over a hundred

programs, and more than forty secured feature film distribution, including *The Thin Blue Line*, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, *Stand and Deliver*, and *Angels and Insects*.

Like Sabinson, Law had been directly affected by the disease through the loss of a number of friends, particularly within the New York City theater world. Despite the numerous AIDS-themed television movies described in this research, Law felt that television was not doing enough to discuss the disease, particularly its effect on the gay community. According to Law,

Nothing was being done about it -- I think John J. O'Connor, who was the TV critic for the Times was writing articles saying that this was going on in the world and there's nothing on television about it. Then, through any number of friends, of course, of that time period, and people we'd worked with at *Playhouse*, etc. I mean, lots of them, succumbing to AIDS.

As a result, Law and his development executive, Lynn Holst, commissioned two AIDS-themed projects simultaneously, *Longtime Companion* and *Andre's Mother*. For *Longtime Companion*, Law hired openly gay screenwriter, Craig Lucas, and director, Norman Rene, who had previously worked with Law on an adaptation of their stage play, *Blue Window* (1987).

Like *As Is*, the story focuses almost exclusively on the lives of white, middle-class gay men in New York. Few straight characters existed except for the one main female character, portrayed by Mary Louise Parker, who is included amongst the tight-knit group of gay friends. Over the course of the 1980s, members of the group become infected, grow sick, and die, while the survivors struggle with their fear, anger, grief, and confusion. In the wake of all these deaths, the survivors are transformed into caretakers and activists, volunteering at AIDS health centers and protesting in the streets with ACT UP.

In an interview with Lucas, he openly admits to having used his own experiences as the inspiration for the film. According to Lucas,

I just decided to trace my experience during the last 10 years, which is why the movie is about the class it's about and the people I know. Usually as a writer I try to throw my

imagination away from myself and write about people who are not about me. But these are people who inhabit a world that I know (Schulman, 2001, p. 36)

In published accounts, Lucas described conducting research by volunteering for an AIDS organization that delivered food to AIDS victims. Lucas included a similar scene in the film where a main character had volunteered as an AIDS food bank. In the course of delivering the food, he encounters a particularly disagreeable Latino client, who regrettably was one of the only non-white characters in the entire film.

Although inspired by real-life experiences, the film concludes with a surreal dream sequence. The few remaining characters of the group are walking on the beach in Fire Island and imagine what life will be like when the AIDS crisis is over. Suddenly, the beach is flooded with gay people, including those who had passed away in the film, and the survivors and ghosts of the dead are reunited. Law acknowledges that was perhaps a “shameful” example of a happy ending. Nonetheless, he admits that “there’s the kind of wonderful cheesy element of let’s see all those faces again, because this will just kill them, which it does.” When asked to clarify, Law said, “if your aim was to create good drama or good comedy, for that matter, hopefully you engage your audience as strongly as possible.” From these comments, we can see how Law is seeking to create affective experiences for these audiences. Although manipulative, these creative practices represent both commercial strategies of engagement but also critical tactics designed for enlightenment and education.

Rather than find corporate sponsors, *Playhouse* put up all the money, which Law admits “was still a very big deal in those days.” According to an interview Law gave to *The New York Times*, this was the first time *Playhouse* had fully financed a production because Law did not want to take the time to find potential partners (Michaud, 1990). Law felt a sense of urgency in the wake of the crisis to tell these AIDS-themed projects quickly. As a result, Law felt

tremendous pressure to find a distributor for the project, which meant that Law needed to secure a feature cast. Once again, top-tier actors refused to take part, and Law was forced to proceed with only a few lesser-known names. These included Mary Louise Parker, Dermot Mulroney, and Bruce Davison. As reflected in the making of *An Early Frost*, Law and his partners on the project shared a commitment to delivering the most accurate medical information possible.

By the time Craig had written this, almost as much as was going to be known was known. ...we shot the movie in '89, and it came out in '90 -- I think. It was as up to date as the moment we made the movie, and because of Craig being literally partnered with a doctor, the medical information he took quite seriously because we had all been aware of mistruths we'd been told, so the last thing we wanted to do was promulgate any more untruth, to the point that the movie even covers that. "I hear you're not supposed to kiss," all that stuff, "it's passed on in saliva." The movie covers stuff like that to make sure to shoot down that notion.

Once the program had been produced, Law sought out a feature film distributor. This process proved all the more difficult because the response from the LGBT community was negative. In an attempt to generate word-of-mouth for the project, Law screened the program for a number of LGBT and AIDS organizations, whose members objected to the film's lack of diversity. As Law describes the situation:

We were always on different panels with different organizations hoping to spread word, get word out there. Anytime we screened a movie we said, "Listen, if you liked this movie, if you know anybody, pass the word along. We've got to convince the people that put movies in theatres that there's sufficient interest in this." At some of those panels we'd all be attacked, of course, in that of everything must be included whether it's historically accurate or not. "How come this is all white men? Why are there no black men? Black men are dying of AIDS? And what about there [being] no Hispanic there? Hispanic men are dying of AIDS." You'd say, "Well, yes, that's completely true, but in the early days of the people who started to do something about it and organize and to fight the government, I'm afraid to say it was all upper-middle class white men. Sorry, but that's what it was."

In addition to the backlash from the LGBT community, Law found little interest from distributors. He screened the movie at the Mill Valley Film Festival, where he had previously found a distributor for *Stand and Deliver* (1988). Despite a standing ovation, no distributor came

forward. Along with one of the producers on the project, Stan Wlodowski, Law pursued as many as 20 possible independent distributors, to no avail. Wlodowski claimed in the press that the film's struggles reflected Hollywood's anxieties about selling an AIDS-themed movie. As quoted in *The New York Times*, Wlodowski said:

One independent distributor said he thought the filmmakers had underestimated the amount of homophobia in the industry, and that with so many other worries during shooting, distribution had to take a back seat. Mr. Law conceded the possibility, although he felt the movie "so smartly deals with gay issues that it lets people laugh at their own discomfort. But in the end, these companies are simply businesses. (Michaud, 1980)

In my interview, Law offered a different explanation, suggesting that the problem was not homophobia but the fact that the film was Hollywood's first AIDS film. This meant the film, at least symbolically, had to represent more than just a compelling story about AIDS. As Law explained, "since it was going to be the first one, if that's the phrase, then it should be everything. You can't just do the landing at D-Day, we've got to do all of World War Two." In this account, we can understand how the critical, cultural, and symbolic value of the programs presented a unique set of challenges for these to succeed. In addition, the belief that this was the first AIDS film, even after all these other TV programs, reflects how films still retain greater cultural and symbolic value, even if TV can reach larger and more critically desirable audiences.

In January, before taking the film to Sundance, Law and his colleagues held a screening in New York where they invited every powerful gay person they could. As Law claimed:

It wasn't an entertainment audience. There were no distributors there, but there were producers there. I mean, big producers. I shall leave them all nameless, but every famous, rich, gay person in the entertainment business who said they wanted to do a movie on AIDS and then couldn't help us. They were all invited.

At the end of the screening, Law stood up and made one last plea before the audience, saying,

This movie, we've screened it for everybody, and nobody wants to distribute this movie. It's not going to get out there unless you prove to them that it can. Tomorrow morning,

unless you hate this movie and you'd rather it just go away, I need everyone of you to get on a telephone and talk about this movie.

In the end, a straight producer, David Picker, championed the film and convinced Goldwyn Pictures to make a modest offer to distribute it. In this account, we not only understand the tremendous struggles that Law encountered, but how the LGBT community handicapped the process while non-LGBT creative workers proved vital to the film's success.

The program was screened at Sundance, where it won the coveted Audience Award. In addition, benefit screenings took place for numerous AIDS organizations, including the AIDS Hospice Foundation and the American Foundation for AIDS research. The film was not only a modest commercial success but also received numerous awards, including the GLAAD media award and an Oscar nomination for Bruce Davison. This recognition further bolstered the program's ratings when it aired on PBS eighteen months later.

The film received mixed reviews from both popular critics and the gay press. As described previously, some objected to the lack of diversity in the film. Others, particularly straight critics, took offense at the film's depiction of a separate, insular, gay community that had little use or need for the straight world. Others criticized the film's surreal ending that, for some, undercut the film's critical value by offering up the proverbial happy ending required by Hollywood movies. Others felt the program was too pedantic. Just as Tropiano has described *An Early Frost* as AIDS 101, *Entertainment Weekly* described *Longtime Companion* as a "public service announcement" (Gleiberman, 1990)

Some critics engaged in scathing critiques, both of the film's lack of diversity as well as the film's production by PBS. In the U.K.'s *Guardian*, journalist Nicholas de Jongh proposed that the all-white cast was by design, suggesting that,

It could be objected that this opulent, personable group were being used in a public relations exercise for homosexuals. After all, is it not the impoverished, the drug-addicted black people with AIDS who are liable to suffer the most harrowingly in America of AIDS? (1990, p. 26)

In an interview in the *Los Angeles Times* (Fox, 1990), the screenwriter, Craig Lucas, responded to all the criticism, claiming:

Longtime Companion bears a burden to be everything to all people, because this is the only movie. There's such an onus on it to speak for everyone. As if this movie must be *the* statement about people with AIDS. Some people have said, "Why aren't there women and children with AIDS or IV drug users with AIDS in the movie?" It's not about that. No work of art can bear the full political responsibility of any "issue." It has to be first and foremost aesthetically whole. I would hope that, if nothing else, this movie opens the door for many, many more projects, for all of the rest of the stories that need to be told. (Fox)

Lucas' comments reflect Law's own perception of why the film struggled to find distribution.

This multicultural critique ought to be considered within the history of the disease and its victims. In the early years of AIDS, AIDS in America was most prevalent amongst white, gay, urban, middle-class males. According to the Centers for Disease Control, even in 1989, after 100,000 people had been diagnosed with AIDS, 70% were white persons. As portrayed in the film, the majority of those infected were gay men living in gay communities, which is not only where they were most likely to be infected but also where they were most likely to receive treatment and support. In consideration of these facts, these critiques appear unfair.

Nonetheless, there remain very few films or television programs that have depicted other classes of AIDS victims. This arguably reflects that the structural conditions of the entertainment industry reinforce a hegemonic racism that is pervasive. In addition, those AIDS films that featured a straight protagonist have come under heightened scrutiny by AIDS critics. More recently, the feature film *Dallas Buyer's Club* (2014) featured the true story of a straight man with AIDS who also fought to secure and provide treatment for the disease in the 1980s.

Some critics (Wickman, 2014) have complained that the character was “straight-washed,” claiming that the real life character was bisexual or even gay.

In addition, de Jongh critiques the film for its restrained depictions of sexuality (1990), and Law points out that there is one moment of “post-coital sweatiness” (1990, p. 26) De Jongh cites an interview with the director, Norman Rene, who stated, “I was hesitant about being sexually graphic. If I had been it would have enabled the heterosexual audience to disassociate” (p. 26). On this point, de Jongh admits that the film was nonetheless a crossover hit that appealed to gay and straight audiences. Furthermore, Rene’s comment reflects how he was engaged in a critical tactic by not showing much same-sex effect in order to reach a more critically and pedagogically desirable audience.

De Jongh further lauds the film for featuring only the gay community and its response to the epidemic, rather than considering the response from a straight community that “abuses reviles despises and harasses you” (p.26). Other critics complained that the film was too contained within the world of gay subculture. Vincent Canby of *The New York Times* condemned the film for its “self-absorbed characters...[it’s] as if the rest of America doesn’t exist” (1990) As mentioned in my literature review, Gross and Walters complained that most LGBT TV movies failed to reflect the gay community. In these comments, we understand how these critical concerns can become contradictory and untenable.

In *The Advocate*, Russo ironically defended the film along the same lines as both the screenwriters and the producers, claiming that, “*Longtime Companion* will be criticized on many accounts by the same people who always want films like this to cover all bases and be all things to all people” (1990, p. 53). Russo further added that the film was “a courageous and powerful statement, and it's something of a miracle that it got financed and distributed at all” (p. 53). With

respect to the lack of diversity, Russo noted that “virtually all the characters are white, handsome, and upscale professionals--and rightly so, because this is exactly the population first identified with this disease” (p. 53). In these comments, we see a far more nuanced understanding by Russo of how some LGBT media can often be held up to unreasonable criticisms. Most notably, he suggests that the struggles encountered by producers ought to be considered by critics. I would argue the same about some of Russo’s critiques of TV movies.

In 2006, LGBT scholar David Romàn offered up a “reappraisal” of the film that compares to my own appraisal. The backlash from the gay community reflected a heightened militancy within the LGBT community. Romàn points out that:

These earlier films appeared before the emergence of ACT UP, and the mass politicization of urban gay men around HIV/AIDS issues. Of its many significant accomplishments, ACT UP, founded in 1987, should be remembered not only for critiquing but also for reshaping the representational politics of AIDS in the media and popular culture. As a result of these efforts, AIDS representations themselves became sites of political contestation. *Longtime Companion* was no exception. (p. 288)

In his analysis, Romàn conducted a meta-critique of the film, repeating some of the same concerns cited here regarding the lack of diversity, which he also suggests were misplaced.

Romàn writes:

This sense that white gay men had to be defended in the pages of the Advocate, no less, points to how critiques based on race and gender sometimes sound indifferent to the numbers of gay white men who have died. That these critiques were offered by white people also seems worth commenting on today; few activists of color took on the film in any significant way, but white activists and critics perhaps uncomfortable in their own viewing and anxious about appearing racially insensitive felt compelled to focus on the film's representational politics. I would also argue that the critical focus on the film's representational shortcomings in regard to race made it seem as if the entire film was about whiteness, a reading at the expense of the much more interesting political narratives that the implicit charge of racism obscures. (p. 293)

Unfortunately, like other critics and historians, Romàn claims that “Only a handful of films about AIDS had been made previously, including *Buddies* (1985) and *Parting Glances* (1986), neither

of which had the budget or production credentials of *Longtime Companion*” (p. 288). Once again, a critic ignores the numerous television movies that addressed these concerns.

Furthermore, Romàn does not account for the fact that *Longtime Companion* was financed, developed, and produced by TV, even if *Playhouse*'s business model relied on these programs' securing featuring feature distribution. Nonetheless, Romàn's criticism reflects how critics and scholars still privilege features films for the heightened cultural and symbolic value of feature films, while they often ignore TV movies.

And the Band Played On by acclaimed gay journalist Randy Shilts is an exhaustive piece of investigative journalism that explored the early years of the AIDS crisis. The 650-page book considered the efforts by epidemiologists to trace the origins of the first infections, the scientists who struggled to find the cause and then fought over credit for the discovery, and the internecine struggles within government and the gay community over how to respond to the epidemic. The book became a best-seller, crossing over to mainstream audiences as well as the LGBT community, and was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

According to Gross (2000), the book also succeeded because it read like a Hollywood thriller, featuring a gay villain, Patient Zero, a gay flight attendant who reportedly first spread the disease. According to Gross:

It was the Patient Zero angle that attracted the most media attention when St. Martin's Press was trying to publicize the book. Editor Michael Denny later took the credit – or blame – for pushing the most sensational part of the Shilts book, claiming “that book would have been stillborn without using the ‘Patient Zero’ ploy.” (2000, p. 143)

Gross' comment suggests how book editors may employ commercial strategies to sell books and yet, whether or not these commercial strategies diminish the critical value of the texts remains subject to debate. Nonetheless, the thrilling aspects of the book might suggest why the book was quickly optioned by Hollywood.

According to Tropiano (2002), the project started development at both ABC and NBC, where it languished. In Capsuto's account of the making of *And the Band Played On*, he suggested that, by the late 1980s, the broadcast networks were incapable of putting LGBT characters on the air. Capsuto writes:

Under pressure, major sponsors ordered their ad agencies to pre-screen shows on an episode-by-episode basis, and withdraw ads from inappropriate broadcast. Usually, anything remotely controversial was considered suspect. Gay-themed shows were hard hit. ABC's TV movie, *Rock Hudson*, had trouble finding sponsors to begin with...ABC's vice president for Movies and Miniseries, Allen Sabinson, acknowledged that in commercial TV, "the subject of homosexuality may be taboo at this time." (2000, p. 252)

In my interview with Sabinson, he acknowledged that the advertiser fallout was a "shock" considering that the subjects of both the Rock Hudson and ABC's *Liberace* were based on highly-publicized accounts already in the public sphere. According to Sabinson,

I mean, *Liberace*, Rock Hudson, both of these men were so clearly gay that nobody ever asked. Nobody ever spoke. This was fascinating.... How could you look at *Liberace*? How could you look at Rock Hudson and not know? How could they carry on these things? There was nothing terribly explicit in the film.

In addition to the backlash from the Right and advertiser-flight, according to Capsuto, the network began to waiver on the project in light of the book's politics. Capsuto claimed that, "Shilts had excoriated the Reagan administration for allowing thousands of deaths to occur amid the government's homophobic inaction to AIDS" (date, p. 252). As a result, the project fell out at NBC, and HBO secured the rights.

HBO had less to risk. The network did not rely on advertisers nor was its subscription model dependent upon reaching the broadest possible audiences. Rather, this controversy was a selling point, helping to attract greater press attention and, in turn, premium subscribers. In addition, Robert Cooper, a former investigative journalist, had been running HBO's movie division. He crafted a programming strategy that favored critical, often politically-themed,

docudramas like *Citizen Cohn* (1992) and *Barbarians at the Gate* (1993). In addition, HBO executive Richard Waltzer had come from a background in journalism and politics, which meant he was a good fit for Cooper's mandate. Not surprisingly, once HBO optioned *And the Band Played On*, Waltzer asked to be assigned to the project because

This wasn't just a great book. This was a great book on a story that was just unfolding. I just felt like we were at the precipice of a historical event, or in the middle of it, but at least of the precipice of it becoming so well known. I really wanted to be a part of it, partly as a career part, but I went to heat. This was, for me, the hottest project we had. I mean, we could make history by making this movie. That's what I felt. By exposing this story to a wider audience...people would understand what was going on. Look, I don't know how many copies of the book sold, but I'll bet the book basically sold to its constituency. If we made that movie, it would go beyond the constituency.

The project came with Aaron Spelling, a prolific TV series producer, attached as creative producer. However, based on my interview with Richard Waltzer, HBO's programming executive in charge of the project, Spelling was rarely involved. According to Waltzer,

He [Spelling] was hands-off, which is why, when you referred to that as "my movie," there is not another project that I wouldn't have corrected you and said, "Look, I was the executive on the movie. I didn't direct it. I didn't write it. I didn't produce it." But if anybody had ownership of that movie...I'm a candidate for that.

Unlike other networks that were dependent upon outside production companies to finance and produce their movies, HBO often produced its own TV movies in-house. This meant the network had greater creative and financial control over the production, while there were a few less critical stakeholders in the process. This also meant that, in the absence of a strong creative producer, HBO programming executives often operated as Executive Producers.

While the book offered multiple storylines, characters and approaches, according to Waltzer, "we're going to do this as a thriller. Patient zero is our audience's access to the story." In light of Gross's comment, this reflects the perpetuation of the same commercial strategy deployed by the book editor. The storyline featured the doctors, scientists, and activists trying to

solve the mystery of where the disease first began, while also trying to identify the underlying virus responsible for the disease. The protagonists were Dr. Don Francis, a straight epidemiologist, and a San Francisco gay activist, Bill Kraus. They partnered in efforts to push back against the epidemic, even in the wake of government indifference, scientific hubris, and resistance from the gay community.

HBO hired a feature film screenwriter, Arnold Schulman, to adapt the book. According to Waltzer, Schulman shared the network's vision for telling a medical mystery. Although taking longer than usual and far longer than most TV movies, the script appeared within a year and the network started to consider directors. Unlike network movies, where the director joined after the project was written and cast, HBO considered feature directors more commercially, if not critically vital to the projects. These directors could help attract feature talent as well as bring a more cinematic style to the production. The network spent months courting openly gay feature film director Joel Schumacher, who had directed the box office hits *Flatliners* and *Dying Young*; however, according to Waltzer, for Schumacher, "it was too close to him...He could not pull the trigger."

In the end, they hired Roger Spottiswoode, a straight director who had already made two prior films for HBO while also working features. While Spottiswoode was known for his more ascetic, less emotional style, Waltzer felt this style was more suited to this subject matter. As Waltzer states,

I suggested Spottiswoode, because we're doing a medical thriller. It doesn't have to be touchy feely. Obviously there were emotional things in the movie, Roger's not a philistine, but if we're doing a medical thriller, Roger's a pretty good candidate for it.

Even HBO struggled to find A-list actors to play parts in the movie. Waltzer claimed even gay lawyers were unwilling to approach their clients with the project, as he recalls:

I remember calling a very important – still very important – gay lawyer. And I cold called him. Again, maybe I wasn't sensitive to the question I was asking, but I was stunned by the reaction I got. I said, "You know, we're trying to cast the movie. Is there anybody you think might—" and he was offended. He said, "Oh, because I'm gay?" I said, "Well, I think because you would probably be a champion of this movie getting made." So, again, to this day I don't know whether I should never have asked that question or not. It seemed like I was doing something that wasn't just out of self-interest, but I was kind of surprised, that's when you're talking about [the] gay community, and not everyone was just sitting back hoping this story got told.

Similarly, according to Gross, the author, Randy Shilts, "blamed Hollywood's homophobia and closeted executives for the delays: 'Gays are so terrified of being exposed, they'll get in the way of the project'" (2001, p. 148). These examples confirm the heightened, politically contentious, and complicated stakes involved in the making of LGBT content in Hollywood.

According to Ian McKellan's blog, Richard Gere's willingness to play a gay choreographer in the project proved to be of "crucial encouragement" to the production (2000). Soon, others became involved including Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin. Matthew Modine, who had once been a feature film star, took the role of Dr. Don Francis. Nonetheless, Waltzer confirmed that Modine "wasn't the hottest guy in the world [but] the time had finally come. We had to make the movie." In this remark, Waltzer alludes to the urgency to tell the story while the AIDS crisis continued; while this may be perceived as exploitation, Waltzer also felt that the film contained vital information that the public needed to know.

In addition, Alan Alda signed on to play U.S. scientist Dr. Richard Gallo. Gallo had tried to take sole credit for discovering the HIV virus that causes AIDS, costing the medical establishment precious time when a test and treatment might have been pursued. According to Waltzer, Alda "was interested in playing against his public persona. He wanted to play a bad guy." Like Martin Sheen and Marlo Thomas, Alda is a liberal activist who uses his public

personae to promote progressive causes, including those concerns of the LGBT community. In this way, actors may also operate as critical agents in the making of these programs.

In addition, openly gay Ian McKellen was cast as gay activist Bill Kraus after other actors refused to play the role. According to McKellan, “Although I looked nothing like Kraus, was the wrong nationality and was 15 years older than he when he died of AIDS related illness,” according to McKellen, “I offered my services” (2000). Waltzer admits to objecting to casting McKellen, hoping for a younger and more virile actor, which would in turn make his death from AIDS all the more tragic. Like *Law*, Waltzer was invested in manipulating an emotional response out of the audience; however, I would submit that this strategy reflects both commercial and critical intent to engage, educate, and enlighten audiences. They reflect critical media producing practices that correspond to the narratives theories proposed by Bruner (1986) and Nussbaum (1997).

Although the production ran into a few problems, the larger critical concerns appeared during post-production. Waltzer showed an earlier cut to Randy Shilts, who was dying from AIDS at that point. According to Waltzer:

Randy was very concerned about the images of the more flamboyant gay characters, like from the parade. I said, “Randy, the parade is stock footage.” “I understood why,” he said, “that doesn’t matter. I’m not saying it didn’t happen, I’m just saying I’m worried that people are going to pull that out of the movie.”

In these remarks, Shilts confirms how the need to attract the most critically desirable audience informed the authenticity of representations featured in the program.

In light of these concerns by Shilts, along with other notes from various focus group screenings, Waltzer asked Spottiswoode to make subsequent changes to the film. Spottiswoode refused and took his concerns public. In a letter published in *Variety*, he claimed that the network had locked him out of the editing room in order to remove the gay content.

Spottiswoode wrote, “An enormously sensitive subject has become hopelessly politicized by a studio that appears to be terrified of its contents and now seeks to bowdlerize them. AIDS is too important a subject to be trashed in this cynical fashion” (Klady, 1993). In a subsequent interview with *Variety*, Spottiswoode further claimed that the network had removed scenes of gay people and Reagan from the documentary montage, which he subsequently restored prior to a focus group screening (Klady, 1993). Although the director had defied the network, he claimed the response to the film had been overwhelmingly positive; nonetheless, the network still fired him. Further fueling the dissent, lead actor, Matthew Modine, wrote a letter to HBO decrying the changes. According to HBO, Modine claimed HBO was “letting gays escape any blame for avoiding responsible behavior” (Brodie, 1993).

Spottiswoode and Modine’s actions hijacked the film and undercut its critical potential. Regardless of the veracity of their claims, their concerns would be featured in all the publicity about the film and contributed to a backlash from the gay community. According to Waltzer:

The irony is that the things that the gay community was troubled by, where Roger thought we were censoring him – the images of the clichéd version of gay people – that’s why it was such crazy making, because you’d say to yourself, “If they only understood what Roger was fighting for.”

Complicating matters further, HBO had concluded that the movie was missing scenes featuring the relationship between McKellan’s gay character and his lover, played by Asian-American B.D. Wong. They decided to do reshoots, recreating the set up in San Francisco, to capture more “domesticity.” According to Waltzer,

We did some reshoots, because of gay community concerns [which] probably came out of some of the focus group stuff, and we needed to shoot Ian [McKellen] in San Francisco, because one of the things we wanted to do is to show a stable, monogamous, gay relationship. That was an element that we came to feel was neglected in the movie... I think it’s a really innocuous scene. I think they’re maybe having breakfast – it’s a nothing scene – but it showed them just having a quote “normal” kind of relationship. A

more traditional, heterosexual style relationship, that it wasn't all bathhouses and the relationship just wasn't about sex. I don't think anything happened in the scene.

Waltzer's remarks suggest the challenges faced within these productions over representation.

The program did feature a number of scenes with the gay community fighting to keep their bathhouses open. There is a scene in a bathhouse with gay men cruising one another in towels.

These are the images of gay sexuality that LGBT critics have suggested were missing from LGBT TV movies. But these were not images that would necessarily help change attitudes by straight audiences towards gay men. As Waltzer further claimed:

I do think that part of it was to flesh out who that man was and that relationship a little bit more. I think that we wanted to rebalance, slightly, the personal with the political. By political, I mean the story we're telling in the movie. Again, in some ways -- I don't have to tell you this -- it was the dark ages for most straight people viewing a homosexual relationship. If people like me or people that I knew that really didn't have many gay friends, they saw that, "Oh, it's not some weird...it's not what everybody...it's just like you and me."

Waltzer acknowledged that these reshoots were expensive; however, this was not an uncommon practice on their projects. In addition, Spottiswoode came to the set unexpectedly and directed the shoot. Waltzer could not recall what motivated Spottiswoode to come. Nonetheless, this reflects further on the nature of media production in the industry, where even a public scandal of this magnitude was not enough to keep the director away.

In an interview for *The New York Times*, Armistead Maupin claimed that McKellen had been instructed not to kiss his partner in the scene. According to Maupin, McKellen said,

An [HBO] executive on the set said he personally had no problem with the kiss but it was his responsibility to see to it that his viewers – and this is a direct quote – “not be grossed out.” I reminded him that this film begins with a shot of dead and dying Ebola fever victims, one of who spews blood almost directly into the camera. If the audience isn't grossed out by that, it could surely handle a little peck on the lips.

If true, this second-hand account would reflect how even HBO continued the same concerns like other networks over same-sex affection. Both Gross (2001) and Capsuto (2000) repeat this

account in their work. However, none of these accounts mentioned these reshoots, which suggests the need for including deeper critical production analysis when conducting critical cultural studies. Otherwise, certain forms of knowledge about the making of these programs become the official record, while other struggles over representation that might present the network and its executive in a more balanced light are overlooked.

The project was eventually completed and, according to Waltzer, the film was screened for numerous communities and LGBT and AIDS organizations, including the Castro Theater in San Francisco. The program aired to high ratings for the network. The program received nominations for multiple Emmy, Golden Globe, and Cable Ace Awards, as well as the GLAAD Media Award and a Humanitas Prize. Awarded by a progressive Catholic organization, the Humanitas Prize is for media that “promote human dignity, meaning and freedom.”

Despite the backlash and concerns raised by the gay community, Tropiano (2002) claims that the program “is not a perfect film, but like Shilts’ book, it is a powerful indictment of the individuals and public and private institutions who failed to respond to the crisis during its infancy, out of apathy, greed, fear, and homophobia” (p. 143). As for other LGBT historians and critics, Capsuto (2000) barely mentions the program, only to discuss the lack of kissing. Walters’ book (2001), although primarily focused on LGBT visibility in the “Gay 1990s,” mentions the program once. Gross’ book only includes a few blurbs that portray the program in the worst possible light, with the description of the book’s editorial commercial strategy and these second-hand accounts about Ian McKellan and the kiss. These missing accounts may reflect the fact that the film did not prominently feature gay narratives; nonetheless, the program represents vital and important historical account of a disease that transformed and nearly decimated the LGBT community and social movement.

As reflected in this critical case study of *And the Band Played On*, yet another LGBT film became a site of political contestation in both the production and reception. These contestations left Waltzer weary but nonetheless proud of his critical contributions to the project.

As Waltzer remarked:

It was the most difficult movie I've ever been involved with in terms of the making of it, for reasons that we just talked about, more difficulties than anything I'd done as a producer. And, happily, it was, I felt, the most important movie that I'll ever have an involvement with, because it told an important story that had largely gone untold in mass media and it was made at a time where we could maybe make a little bit of a difference about the people, you know, who were out there.

In this period of the LGBT social movement, the LGBT community fought back against the backlash from the New Right and the lack of support from the government, medical establishment, and the general public to combat the AIDS epidemic. Resources and organizations emerged that engaged in more political strategies and more militant tactics, including direct action and protest. The emergence of GLAAD represented a renewed commitment to media activism on behalf of the multiple and diverse needs of the LGBT community.

Studio features continued to omit LGBT narratives, except for *Philadelphia*, which nonetheless experienced a backlash from the community for its retrogressive, straight-centered, narrative. LGBT characters in TV series were taboo, although LGBT narratives would appear in numerous TV movies. Those programs that featured women as lesbian, bisexuals, and transgendered people appeared with little response from the religious community; in the 1990s, lesbian same-sex affection would become even more prominent. In contrast, white, male, gay-themed, AIDS-based programs received scrutinization and criticism by the gay community. These were not concerns raised by the New Right but rather from the militant gay Left; however, with the election of Democratic President Bill Clinton, the "Culture Wars" would feature even

more heightened and dramatic contestations between the New Right and the Gay Left over LGBT TV movies, as reflected in the next section.

Culture Wars

“Culture Wars” describes the period from the mid-to-late 1990s after President Clinton’s election. The term describes the battles that ensued between the New Right and a reinvigorated progressive Left, including the LGBT community. These battles ensued at the local and national levels, over social, cultural, and educational policies and practices (Eaklor, 2011). This period overlaps with the appearance of a resurgent and more militant LGBT community; however, just as the 1970s saw the social movement evolve from liberationist and revolutionary tactics to more rights-based and assimilationist strategies, the new and emboldened LGBT social movement began to pursue more access to conventional cultural, social, and political power, both in D.C. and Hollywood.

The election of the first Democratic President in twelve years appeared, to most gay Americans, to be a sign of hope. LGBT organizations put their resources towards helping President Clinton get elected. However, Clinton and a resurgent progressive movement only exacerbated the fears and concerns of the New Right, for which gay lives were the straw men. According to Eaklor (2011), at the Republican National Convention of 1992, Patrick Buchanan declared “a militant leader of the homosexual rights movement could rise at the Democratic convention and exult: ‘Bill Clinton and Al Gore represent the most pro-lesbian and pro-gay ticket in history.’ And so they do” (p. 190).

Within the gay movement, the AIDS crisis continued to sap resources. According to the Centers for Disease Control, by 1992, there were a quarter of a million people diagnosed with AIDS, the majority of whom were gay men, and nearly 200,000 of this number were already

dead. Numerous gay men's health organizations, including GMHC and APLA, fought for limited resources from the government to treat their community and support campaigns for prevention. While ACT UP continued to wage war in the streets, Treatment Action Group (TAG), a splinter group within ACT UP, borrowed the earlier insider/outside strategy of LGBT media activists. The group was "comprised of AIDS activists who were committed to a pragmatic assimilationist political strategy emphasizing the treatment of HIV/AIDS" (Rimmerman, 2002, p. 59). Over the next few years, members of TAG worked inside medical organizations like the CDC and pharmaceutical companies, to expedite new treatments, lower prices and change policies. More importantly, by the mid-1990s, new medications had been discovered that, in combination, dramatically reduced the mortality rate of those living with AIDS. This would contribute to a diminished sense of urgency surrounding the disease, although the consequences of the virus and the devastating toll it had taken on the LGBT community were far from alleviated, especially among minorities.

Unfortunately, President Clinton's election did not produce the transformation hoped for by the LGBT community. Eaklor described this period as "new regime, old struggles" (date, p. 198). Clinton's efforts to honor his election promise to overturn the ban on gays in the military backfired; after he encountered a virulent backlash from the New Right and the military, Clinton signed the regressive "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. This policy led to even greater numbers of LGBT military being discharged from the military. Various national LGBT political organizations who had helped sway LGBT support for Clinton's election rightfully felt betrayed.

On the judicial level, the Supreme Court weighed in with two powerful decisions affecting the community. In 1995, they overturned Colorado's Amendment 2, which had banned all legal protections for gays and lesbians in the state. At the state level, some states passed

LGBT anti-discrimination laws, while in Hawaii, gay and lesbian litigants were pursuing the right to marry. Litigants in other states also started to pursue marriage equality. As a consequence, a Republican-led Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act, banning Federal recognition of same-sex marriage. On the eve of his re-election in 1996, President Clinton signed the bill into law, effectively codifying discrimination against the LGBT community.

As for media activism, by 1992, GLAAD earned recognition as one of Hollywood's most powerful entities, from *Entertainment Weekly* (Gross, 2001, p. 107). By the mid-1990s, the separate organizations merged into one national organization. In addition, "in 1995, producers Bruce Cohen and Nina Jacobson cofounded Out There, an organization of openly gay and lesbian entertainment personnel" (Eaklor, 2011, p. 222).

As described in the last chapter, *Philadelphia*, Hollywood's attempt to tell an AIDS-themed story, reached mass audiences and garnered critical acclaim, but it also provoked the ire of LGBT activists. Other Hollywood feature films continued either to ignore LGBT concerns or feature reprehensible LGBT characters, which GLAAD targeted with protests and direct action. *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) featured a transgendered serial killer, and *Basic Instinct* (1992) featured a homicidal lesbian, played by Sharon Stone. *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1992) turned the lesbian characters at the center of the story into platonic friends. In 1995, the feckless son of the King in *Braveheart* (1995) watched as his father threw his gay lover out the window of the castle turret, leading audiences to cheer. The film would receive the Academy Award for Best Picture.

The other arguably gay studio film from this era was *The Birdcage* (1996). Based on the French stage and film musical, *La Cage Aux Folles* (1978) featured gay lovers who run a club for drag queens and performance artists. Meanwhile, their straight son is marrying the daughter of a right-wing conservative. Arguably, the film maintained a Hollywood tradition of laughing at

flamboyant gay men, but the alternative family run by the two gay men was portrayed in a more favorable light, while the conservative family was made to look ridiculous.

Meanwhile, gay, queer, and AIDS-themed independent cinema continued to offer more diverse LGBT narratives and characters, often in more genre-driven form, like road movies and romantic comedies. *Jeffrey* (1995) became the first AIDS rom-com, while *Go Fish* (1994) and *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995) featured lesbians falling in love. Films broached controversial topics like gay priests, in *Priest* (1994), but also featured Australian drag performers on a cross-country trek, *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* (1994).

After nearly disappearing altogether, on the small screen, LGBT characters started to emerge across the dial, on broadcast, cable, and premium channels. A number of series featured recurring LGBT characters, including *L.A. Law*, *Roseanne* and *Northern Exposure* (Capsuto, 2000). In episodes of both *Golden Girls* and the Fox series, *Roc*, stories about gay men getting married figured prominently and affirmatively. In 1994, the appearance of a minority gay teen character in the series *My So-Called Life* represented a breakthrough, although depictions of LGBT minorities continued to be few and far between.

Perhaps the most galvanizing LGBT character on television was Pedro Zamora, the openly gay and Latino AIDS educator who appeared on the third season of MTV's *The Real World* in 1994. *The Real World* was a cultural phenomenon that helped launch the reality show format across the dial, and Zamora was a new symbol for young gay people and for the AIDS community. Over the course of the season, Zamora fell in love with an African-American gay man, and they held a commitment ceremony, which featured them exchanging rings and kisses.

Despite the increase in positive portrayals of LGBT lives and their concerns in the occasional episode of various television series, none featured a LGBT leading character or centered upon LGBT narratives. In contrast, a number of LGBT television movies not only featured LGBT protagonists but also directly addressed contemporary concerns faced by the community. For example, both *Serving in Silence* and *Any Mother's Son* were narratives about the treatment of gays and lesbians in the military. These programs appeared at the height of the debate over "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Twenty years after *A Question of Love* (1978), ABC's *Two Mothers for Zachary* also told the true story of a lesbian who loses custody of children.

Other networks also featured numerous LGBT narratives, some more critical than others. Fox Broadcasting Network briefly launched a television movie division with gay-themed programs, although somewhat regressive in theme and tone. *Doing Time on Maple Drive* (1992) featured a dysfunctional, middle-class family whose perfect son turns out to be a closeted gay man who attempts suicide in shame. *The Price of Love* (1997) was the story of a gay teen hustler, which was a throwback to *The Story of Alexander* (1977). USA aired the biopic *Breaking the Surface: The Greg Louganis Movie* (1997). In 1998, Lifetime aired three LGBT-themed movies, *Change of Heart* (1998), *Labor of Love* (1998) and *Final Justice* (1998).

AIDS-themed TV movies continued to air across the dial, including *Our Sons* (1991), *Something to Live For: The Allison Gertz Story* (1992), and *Roommates* (1994). In addition to HBO's *And the Band Played On*, the network aired *In the Gloaming* (1997), a family melodrama about a gay son coming home to die of AIDS, and *Gia* (1998), about the AIDS-related death of the bisexual supermodel, portrayed by Angelina Jolie.

Like HBO, Showtime became a regular destination for LGBT TV movies. These included more diverse topics, including a couple of black gay-themed movies, *Blind Faith*

(1998) and *Holiday Heart* (2000). In 1997, Showtime's *Twilight of the Gods* featured a controversial, if fictional, story of a mother discovering her unborn child may be gay and contemplating abortion. Like *Longtime Companion*, Showtime's *Gods and Monsters* secured a theatrical release before premiering on the network. After PBS declined to produce them, Showtime co-produced the sequels to *Tales of the City*, *More Tales of the City*, and *Further Tales of the City*.

Tales of the City. Under Lindsay Law's aegis, PBS *American Playhouse* continued to be a prolific supplier of LGBT programming, including a mix of original programs and British acquisitions. Some of the British acquisition included BBC's *A Question of Attribution* (1992) about the British gay spy, Anthony Burgess, and BBC's *Breaking the Code* (1997) about the British gay man who solved the Nazi war code. Although produced in the U.K., *The Lost Language of Cranes* (1992) derived from a highly-acclaimed American gay novel. *Tru* (1992), about the life of gay writer Truman Capote, was a televised taping of the award-winning Broadway production.

Perhaps no LGBT-themed television movie symbolized the culture wars more than PBS' *Tales of the City* (1993). As a journalist, Armistead Maupin wanted to describe the world around him in San Francisco, especially during the 1970s near the height and at the intersection of numerous social movements. But Maupin quickly discovered he could not get people to go on the record about their lives, behaviors and, in particularly, sexual identities. Instead he converted his non-fiction stories into an inspired-by version, with fictional names and stories, but nonetheless based on Maupin's experiences. Maupin's decision suggests how "inspired by" fiction and its various formats, e.g., docudrama, reality, historical novels, allow authors, artists and filmmakers to conduct critical interrogations about and interventions into the public sphere.

Maupin's literary approach suggests how entertainment may feature both commercial strategies to engage audiences and critical tactics that also enlighten. In an interview with *The Gay and Lesbian Review* (1998), Maupin claimed:

I do have an agenda, and it's one that has to do with my hopes for the collective human heart. But the fact that I want to entertain doesn't keep me from wanting to be an artist. I want to do both. My biggest literary influence was Alfred Hitchcock, who taught me very early that you can create something beautiful and lasting and also tell a hell of a good story. I've tried to merge both of those functions in everything I've written. (Ely, 1998, p. 7)

Maupin's comments suggest how art and entertainment are not mutually exclusive but rather both operate as communication strategies that may also educate and enlighten.

Tales of the City featured a group of friends who lived in a Victorian boarding house run by the mysterious Anna Madrigal, whom the audience eventually learns is a transgendered woman. The stories have the point of view of Mary Ann Singleton, a straight, single Midwestern girl who had just arrived in the city. Also featured prominently is an openly gay man, Michael "Mouse" Tolliver, a bisexual woman, Mona, and Brian, a straight, single man for whom no sexual concerns or boundaries seem to exist.

As reflected in this description, nearly every permutation of sexual identity resided in this house and in these stories, some more fluid than others. These characters reside in time and place where sexuality is embraced without shame or judgment. As confirmed by Tropiano,

In Maupin's world, characters that are traditionally marginalized on the basis of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation are at the center of the narratives. At the same time, they're not relegated to some 'sexual ghetto,' for the richness of Maupin's book derives from the way a variety of characters...occupy the same world. (2002, p. 137)

In addition to an embrace of all forms of sexuality and sexual orientations, the narratives are subversively apolitical, hidden within the narratives conventions of a period soap opera. The stories featured multiple narratives and genres, including failed romance, mistaken identity, and

the occasional murder mystery or thriller subplot, which also presented queer normativity. In my interview with *Tales* producer Alan Poul, he described the stories as “a picaresque tale about life in San Francisco during the ‘70s... which includes a deftly handled balance between social satire and a heartfelt message about the meanings of family and the level of social tolerance implicit in that.” As gay scholar Pullen (2009) similarly notes,

Tales of the City may be considered as a nostalgic yet evocative expose revealing the interconnectedness of sexual minorities within American (mainstream) culture. Maupin’s vision reflected not only his political ideology in expressing gay and lesbian rights, but also it employed an everyday popular tone in its contemporary audience connection within the newspaper, the book and the television event. (p. 89)

Poul’s use of the terms “social satire,” “message” and “meanings” and Mullen’s use of the terms “everyday” and “popular” affirm the series’ unique interplay between form, design, and medium.

Furthermore, the story contained thriller elements that involved a new tenant at Barbary Lane, a rather seedy, unlikable straight man who had discovered that Anna Madrigal had formerly been a man. His intentions were to use the information to blackmail Madrigal’s wealthy straight; however, Mary Ann uncovers his scheme and confronts the man, who accidentally stumbles off a cliff and dies. As a result, the straight menace fails, and the alternative “family” is returned to order and safety. Pullen notes that, “such display may be seen as a carnivalesque narrative device, which ignores the regular conventions of crime solving and locates the normally disenfranchised in sites of power... authority is challenged and dominant order is overturned” (2009, pp. 93-94). Again, this confirms my argument that Maupin’s use of genre conventions operates subversively to reaffirm the alternative, queer normativity of this world.

The series ran initially in a small San Francisco paper as early as 1974 but later found a venue in the much larger *San Francisco Chronicle*, before it was turned into a series of

bestselling books. Although popular in the U.S., they often appeared on in LGBT bookstores and bookshelves; however, outside the U.S., they were global bestsellers, especially in the U.K. and Germany. The first two books became the first miniseries, *Tales of the City* (1993), with two sequels, *More Tales of the City* (1998) and *Further Tales of the City* (2001), which totaled sixteen hours of television.

While writing the series for the papers, Maupin describes how the editors limited Maupin's covert activism:

When I gradually introduced gay characters into the columns, the newspaper's managing editor was so nervous that he began to keep a chart in his office. There were two columns, one said "Heterosexual," the other said "Homosexual," and as a new character was introduced, it was placed in the appropriate column. This annoyed the hell out of me because it basically consisted of a quota system. (Ely, 1998, p. 7)

From this comment, we understand how the structural forms of homophobia exist throughout media, even in newspapers and even within the conventions of historical fiction.

Having been influenced by film, Maupin wrote the series in a cinematic style, including copious dialogue between characters. When approached about selling the rights to feature film adaptations, Maupin insisted on creative approval. According to Capsuto (2000), Maupin insisted that the producers vow to feature gay men kissing and maintain fidelity to the transgressive elements in the book, which included not only sexual behavior but also drug use. A purported Warner Brothers feature in 1979 was put in turnaround when the producers tried to eliminate the gay characters and drug use. Networks considered the project for series, including both CBS and HBO, but, by then, the AIDS crisis had struck, and gay men having sex was taboo (Capsuto, 2000).

After the networks passed on the project, Maupin sold the rights to a U.K. production company, Working Title Films, best known for highly-acclaimed independent films including

the gay-themed *My Beautiful Launderette* (1984). In turn, Working Title partnered with Channel Four, a U.K. network, which agreed initially to develop and ultimately to finance, produce, and distribute the television program. Channel Four solicited a U.S. co-production partner, which would help underwrite what would become one of the network's most expensive projects; however, this effort would prove challenging.

According to *Tales*' U.K. producer Antony Root, Channel Four included not only a strong "public service remit" but a mandate to air programming unlikely ever to be seen on any other U.K. television channel. Root claims the network's mission statement was, "We will only do things that other broadcasters will not do." However, unlike PBS' *Playhouse*, this remit was not necessarily about content for underserved communities but more about content that was not designed for mainstream U.K. audiences. This distinction is critical. Channel Four's interest was not in making these books to appeal to a marginalized, LGBT community. In fact, from the point of view of Root and Channel Four's commissioning editor, and in stark contrast to Poul and Maupin's distinctions, the *Tales of the City* books were not gay-themed novels; rather these were populist tales set in San Francisco in the 1970s that happened to feature a number of LGBT characters and a world that U.K. audiences might otherwise never experience. According to Root,

Frankly I was never aware of *Tales* being a gay set of books per se. All I heard was people talking about these fantastic stories set in San Francisco and stuff. It's only when I read them I realized what people were doing in the books, but no, I think that the radiance of Armistead's writing and the humanity and the joy was something that people connected to whatever background.

Despite Channel Four's commitment, the development of the scripts would become mired in a series of complications; these complications were informed by differences between U.S. and U.K. culture and television production practices. While securing Channel Four's

interest, Working Title had been acquired by Polygram Filmed Entertainment, a U.K.-based record label. Polygram had also acquired a boutique production company in Los Angeles, Propaganda Films. Since the program was set in the U.S., Polygram agreed that Propaganda would take on the primary role of producing the project, although creative approvals would remain with Channel 4 and Working Title. Propaganda hired producer, Alan Poul, who had previously working on other projects for Propaganda.

Openly gay screenwriter Richard Kramer, who had previously been attached to the project years earlier at HBO, was hired to adapt the books as a U.S. series, meaning developing settings, characters, and narratives that could run indefinitely. As a result, according to Root, “Richard [Kramer] found it very difficult to contain his imagination and restrict it.” In contrast, Channel Four, who were paying for development, wanted the traditional British series format of four to six-hours with a closed-end narrative, which would be comparable to an American mini-series. The U.K. tradition also included more fidelity to the text. As Poul noted, “For Channel Four, fidelity is the ultimate goal. It’s a slightly different ethos from what you get in an American adaptation.” Even with Kramer’s pilot and storylines written, U.S. networks were not interested. The production went back to the original designs, which were for a six-hour, U.K. format with a closed-end narrative. Root worked closely with Kramer and Poul, and the scripts were eventually approved. According to Poul, “at least ninety percent of the dialogue in the first miniseries was dialogue from the book.”

In addition to the concerns over formatting and fidelity, Root observed that the U.S. political climate, manifest in the repeated contestations over LGBT media, created more complications in the critical producing of the programs. Whereas for the British, the show was a

simple adaptation of beloved novels, in the U.S. the show achieved greater and more contentious symbolic and political significance. As a result, according to Root,

The British participants, notably Channel 4, were keen that the project should not be hijacked by a political agenda that had nothing to do with what we all thought we'd started out on, just because it was so unusual for these people to feel as gay men that their world was being depicted on television in this way. It became a poster-child for a whole community of people working in Hollywood who wanted to be associated with it.... Obviously, that had a terrific upside, but from a kind of "Are we satisfying the British public point of view?", Channel 4 didn't want a flaming all gay super pink polemical show...here were two industries that didn't understand each other, two cultures and television production cultures that were not aligned because the societies were coming from a different place when they ran this material.

Root's comments reflect how critical media production can represent a unique set of creative struggles, including critical concerns over ideology and representation. Root admits that, some years later, he came to understand the nature of these cultures wars between the LGBT community and the New Right. According to Root, "I became aware, as a resident, of a lot of the things that you are describing, and aware of the polarities in the society, and of the argument about what the media should and shouldn't do."

These critical production battles continued into production. Channel Four insisted on hiring a British director, Alistair Reid. According to Root, "Alastair had done *Traffik* for television and much good work. He'd also worked in America. That was important for everybody. And Alastair came in at the end of the development process." Although hired after the scripts had been written, Reid yielded critical and cultural agency to keep the project from becoming too Americanized. In fact, as Poul would point out in our interview,

This is obviously Armistead's vision, but the thing that Alastair brought that was so extraordinary is the sense of the all-embracing humanism and tolerance. The sense of, "It's all okay. Everything's okay. Human emotion is okay. Human desire is okay. Human foibles are okay." That [philosophy] permeated the first miniseries. I can attribute that to Alastair and the way that he worked.

Casting introduced a set of new critical challenges, as they have for almost all the projects in this dissertation. The producers once again struggled to find an actor to play the openly gay character of Mouse. In addition, according to Poul, “Mouse was an incredible beloved character, someone that a lot of gay men attached to when they read the books, and the character who was closest to Armistead himself in terms of his experiences.” Because Maupin had maintained critical, creative oversight over the project, the casting of this role took on even greater importance for him.

Poul would eventually discover an actor, Marcus D’Amico, in a U.K. production of *Angels in America*, and convinced the production to hire him as “Mouse.” However, according to Root, Maupin became convinced that D’Amico was a closeted gay man, which became a point of contention. Although D’Amico’s sexual orientation cannot be verified, as Root pointed out,

That’s a very interesting anecdote, because it in a sense it points up the delicacy and sensitivity of things during the making of the program. It was really, really important to Armistead. I remember him saying to me things like, “The whole point of my books is that they’re honest and we’ve got an actor who’s being dishonest.”

D’Amico did not return for the two sequels. According to Showtime’s executive on the sequels, Pancho Mansfield, this decision was not based on D’Amico’s sexual orientation but upon other concerns expressed by the production. Furthermore, Maupin claimed that, “despite the rumors, it is not true that Marcus D’Amico wasn’t invited back because of issues surrounding his sexuality. The production team met with Marcus and he expressed ‘ambivalence’ about returning to the role of Mouse. The director felt it was important to find someone who would enthusiastically embrace the role” (Maupin). Nonetheless, these concerns over the sexual orientation of the cast suggest yet another set of complications in the producing for critical LGBT-themed media.

In addition, Root credits the gay casting director for the series with securing the remainder of the cast. Root claims that,

John [S. Lyons] should really get the medal of honor for this show. He brought an enormous amount of insight and inspiration to the casting. It was unbelievable. And, as a gay man, he brought a huge personal commitment in a very understated way to giving this show the best shot.

As reflected in these comments, critical media production is not only collaborative, but it may sometimes also include extra creative labor informed by critical identities and motivations.

Playhouse's Lindsay Law acquired the U.S. distribution rights, only after the production had already commenced and for a fraction of what it would have cost as a co-production.

According to Root,

It was a very expensive show for Channel Four. I think it was probably one of the most expensive dramas done at that time, and it was all their money. The deal was made between Channel Four distribution and Lindsay ... and that probably wasn't closed until the very end of the shoot, if I remember correctly. I forget what the exact economics were, but it certainly helped Channel Four lay off a bit of the money that they'd put into it. But it wasn't anything like coming in as an equal co-producer from the start.

Finally, the series finished production and post-production and aired in the U.K. According to Root, the notices were mixed to good. In addition, as Root mentions, "it was certainly noticed in the industry and in the talking classes," which suggests the heightened level of interest in producing successful and critical LGBT media at the time. Despite all the critical contestations during production, per Root, "we all know it was quite the happy history in the end."

For *American Playhouse* and Lindsay Law, the end was not so happy. For religious viewers and politicians on the New Right, the program clearly represented an attack on heteronormativity and violated puritanical conventions of sexuality. Furthermore, *Tales of the City* found partial financing through public funding. According to Poul,

What put us in the cross-hairs was that the Right was running with two things: the concept of there being a gay agenda and the idea that public money should not be spent

on material that was abhorrent to the public or parts of the public. Look at all the brouhaha over the NEA Four [Four performance artists whose controversial publicly-funded works lead to a backlash from the Right, a Supreme Court case, and deep cuts in the NEA's budget for individual artists]. This confirmed how much mileage social conservatives could get out of misuse of public funds, or public funds being directed to cultural activities that they considered objectionable.

As Capsuto further points out, "*Tales* was exactly the weapon that opponents of PBS had prayed for" (2000, p. 323).

Before the program even aired, Reverend Donald Wildmon somehow secured a copy and edited together the more provocative scenes, including male kisses, bathhouse images, and bare breasts. The video also included scenes from other PBS productions featuring LGBT themes, including *Tongues United*, a documentary about African-American gays, and *In the Life*, a news magazine program about LGBT subculture. Based on these images, Wildmon asserted that, "PBS can rightly be called the Homosexual Pride Taxpayer-Funded TV Network" (Capsuto, 2000, p. 323) and sent videocassettes to members of Congress just as PBS funding was up for renewal.

In advance of the premiere, Wildmon's campaign spread across the country. The program got banned on the floor of the state legislatures in Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Georgia. Georgia slashed their public television budget. Calls from outraged conservatives besieged local stations, and the PBS station in Chattanooga received death threats. As a result, some PBS stations chose not to air the program, while others aired a censored version. The program also included a warning stating that the program may not be suitable for all viewers. These events also, as Poul stated, helped "rouse the base" of the Far Right.

Despite or perhaps because of all the controversy, *Tales of the City* became the most watched program on PBS in five years. Poul claimed that, other than a couple of episodes of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, "the show had the highest ratings – was the highest rated premiere, ever,

on PBS.” In addition, the critics were mostly positive, although, according to Capsuto, the critics felt obliged to warn audiences about the program’s “strong language, its matter-of-fact approach to GLBT characters, its portrayal of casual drug use, and the use of brief nudity” (2000, p. 319). The program was nominated for multiple Emmy awards and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards. In addition, the program won the prestigious Peabody Award. Furthermore, GLAAD would recognize Poul with three media awards for all three *Tales* series.

LGBT critics were more effusive. Frank DeCaro, the openly gay critic for *Newsday*, referred to the program as the “*Roots* of gay-positive TV programs” (1994). However, Poul made a point of contextualizing the LGBT response, stating that

This is pre-*Will and Grace*. Today, when gay content is configured as entertainment and designed to appeal to a lot of people, you hear both sides in terms of “Does it go to far? Does it not go far enough?” At that time, there really was no other side. It was one hundred percent positive.

In response, I pointed out that other LGBT programs had experienced a backlash from gay critics and the community. Poul suggested that the difference lay in both the period content and the fact that the program was a literary adaptation, stating:

This show was a celebration of something that was already considerably in the past... a love letter to a time past. I was only aware of waves of good will and emotion and positive response. And it was a period piece that was also an absolutely authentic adaptation of an iconic and much-loved work of literature that was closely supervised and endorsed by the author. If you were going to attack the show, you had to be attacking the books, which was not a popular position at that time.

Poul’s comments suggest a commercial strategy and critical tactic, which informed the program’s development. As indicated, Channel 4’s development strategy required greater fidelity, which may have helped protect the program from a backlash from fans of the book, especially the LGBT community. However, this strategy would not prevent a backlash from the Right. In contrast, *Longtime Companion*, *An Early Frost*, and *Philadelphia* may have been the

greater target from the LGBT community because these were original concepts, for which fidelity could operate as a shield. Meanwhile, *And the Band Played On* experienced a backlash from the LGBT community for some of the same reasons why the Gay Left despised the underlying book by Shilts. These examples illustrate the complex and contested terrain of critical media production, especially during the culture wars.

Even after the program aired, *Tales of the City* remained a topic in the news, especially as Congress was considering PBS' budget. Meanwhile, PBS and Channel Four were in negotiations on a sequel, *More Tales of the City*, which featured even more controversial elements. These included characters confronting an "Anita-Bryant style antigay activist" (Capsuto, 2000, p. 324). PBS dropped out of the projects, claiming that Channel Four was demanding a higher fee as a co-production, rather than an acquisition. Capsuto's research confirmed that, whereas *Playhouse* had paid only \$1 million to acquire the first series, Channel Four was asking for between \$2.5 and \$4 million for the sequel. This amounted to between 25 and 50% of the \$8 million production budget and was a significant sum for PBS. Nonetheless, since *Playhouse* would be involved in the development and production of the sequels, Channel 4 had a legitimate right to request higher co-production funding rather than the significantly lower acquisitions fees that *Playhouse* paid for the first series. Furthermore, according to Root, while the program had rated highly in the U.S., the ratings were lower in the U.K., which diminished the value of the program for Channel 4.

Other critics suggested that PBS' decision was a political decision by the Chairman of PBS, who was conservative and evangelical Republican. In a scathing editorial in *The New York Times*, Frank Rich wrote, "PBS can hardly afford a president who recklessly tells both the gifted creators and discerning audience of the most successful prime-time drama in years to get lost."

As Poul claimed, “Frank Rich seized on the utter hypocrisy of what was going on with PBS in Washington. He was our hero and exposed just how cravenly PBS caved because they were terrified of losing their funding.” Even after the cancellation, Congress slashed PBS’ budget, particularly *Playhouse*. The series would soon be cancelled after fourteen years on the air and countless successful programs and numerous profitable independent feature film releases. These programs were often critical or counter-narratives of, by, and for “underserved communities,” including Latinos, Hispanics, African-Americans, and the gay community.

The subsequent two sequels were later picked up by Showtime. Ironically, according to Capsuto:

In an interview, actress Laura Linney pointed out that while PBS was not willing to coproduce *More Tales*...PBS stations were willing to use footage of the original *Tales of the City* during pledge drives to tout the network’s high artistic standards. “My favorite thing now,” she said, “is their ad campaign of ‘If PBS doesn’t do it, who will?’ Well, the answer is Showtime.” (2000, p. 325)

In this example, we see how media institutions operate as rhizomatic sites of cultural and media production. While PBS and *Playhouse* suffered the backlash from the gay community and the New Right, PBS affiliates were able to exploit the backlash to speak to their respective “bases.”

Law left *Playhouse* and became head of Fox Searchlight, an independent division of 20th Century Fox, where he helped get a number of critical, gay-themed movies distributed, including *Boys Don’t Cry* (1990). Law’s career move reflects the nomadic practices of critical media producers and executives, like Allen Sabinson. As one site of critical production closes, critical media workers must seek out new opportunities to engage in critical media production elsewhere.

Although he worked with the screenwriter, Nicholas Wright, on the sequels, Producer Root had moved on to a senior drama position at another TV network and was unavailable to

continue with the productions. Nonetheless, Root remembers the series nostalgically as reflecting that period of LGBT liberation before AIDS. Root states, “It was looking back to a time before terrible things had happened, that were now going on at the time in the ‘90s when we were doing it.” Similarly, Pullen similarly describes Maupin’s work as a “contemporary nostalgic serial.” In these comments, *Tales* can be seen as both a site of contemporary critical political contestation at the time and as a kind of historical palliative, in this case, reminding those affected by the AIDS crisis of a simpler, happier time. I would argue that this nostalgic effect is critical in its own right. These programs offered the beleaguered members of the gay community reason to hope and the prospect of progress, envisioning a time when AIDS would no longer overwhelm their lives.

Furthermore, Root claimed that one legacy of the series was opening the door for more LGBT-themed content. This included the highly-acclaimed and sexually-provocative Channel Four series, *Queer as Folk* (1999). I would argue similarly that the success of the program as well as the critical cultural backlash further motivated the LGBT community to fight for more representations. The legacy of *Tales* contributed to Ellen DeGeneres’ coming out on her sitcom, *Ellen*, as well as in her personal life. In addition, the series would motivate a new generation of LGBT media producers to champion LGBT content, e.g., *Will & Grace* and the U.S. version of *Queer as Folk*. In other words, these contestations contributed to the evolution of the LGBT social movement and enjoined media professionals in the struggle towards greater LGBT equality. As reflected in the next section, the critical alliance behind the making of *Tales of the City* may have lost the battle, but the LGBT movement would eventually win the war.

Channel Four and the premium cable channel, Showtime, co-produced the sequel, *More Tales of the City* (1998). The production featured a third partner, a Canadian production

company, which helped the program secure Canadian production subsidies, including provincial subsidies from Quebec. As a consequence of the tri-partite financing, the production moved to Canada, although a few exteriors shot in San Francisco. By the time the third series wrapped in 1991, Channel Four was no longer involved and Showtime was in business solely with their Canadian partners. This financing model is not uncommon and reflects the complicated nature of TV movie production, which contributes to multiple stakeholders who may also be creatively and critically involved in the production.

Showtime's Pancho Mansfield championed the projects at Showtime. According to Poul, "Pancho was our hero." In my interview with Mansfield, he credits both Jerry Offsay, the head of programming, who often championed LGBT-themed fare, and the fact that the production was able to secure Canadian co-production financing. As Mansfield stated, "I don't think it was difficult into getting Jerry into wanting to do it; the trick was to figure out how we could pay for it." Co-production financing is both a commercial strategy and a critical tactic. By lowering the risk to the network, the network was more inclined to take the risk to do critical content that might only appeal to niche audiences.

Financing required the production to re-cast some lead actors with Canadians. According to Poul,

there was a lot wrangling with the Canadians about how many of our original cast we were able to keep and what we had to sacrifice in order to keep more of the original cast. It was a big deal, and it took a long time to work out the kinks.

However, Mansfield offered a slightly different account, which had to do with behind-the-scenes concerns between the producers and the original cast. According to Mansfield,

The change of the cast had nothing to do with Showtime. Certainly in the central characters there it had nothing to do with it being a Quebec content issue, okay? It was an issue of the character and the friction between Armistead, Terry, I don't know if Alan,

but it was a volatile situation and they really didn't think it could work. I pushed it so that we could have our opportunity to see it and we realized that it couldn't work.

This account suggests how critical media production can introduce another set of concerns and tensions beyond the financial, creative, and commercial.

As mentioned, these sequels were slightly more explicit and political. Poul would confirm that the production did not have the "same restrictions" as PBS, especially with respect to language; nonetheless, Poul claimed that, "the books are not about pushing envelopes of sexuality, not in terms of graphicness." Nonetheless, Mansfield, who is straight, mentioned having a visceral reaction to the dailies depicting two men kissing in public. Mansfield noted,

I remember the first time going, "Oh, wow." I'm not gay, but from my late teens I had a couple of very good friends who were gay, I was in New York, I never thought about it twice, really, but it was interesting in watching this. I remember they're at the seashore, on a bench or something or other. We shot this about fifteen years ago. I went, "Oh, wow," and it was very loving, but it made an impression.

In these remarks, Mansfield reflects the critical potential of these programs to enlightened straight viewers, even those who may know gay people but have never fully grasped how gay lives reflect similar desires and needs with straight people. In one respect, this affirms those concerns by critical scholars over the lack of same-sex affection in these other texts. Conversely, I would argue that these less critical, more apolitical texts still retain their critical value. In their depictions of homo-normativity, these programs are subversive.

Mansfield further claimed that the programs had not been produced for a niche gay audience. According to Mansfield,

They were really meant for any audience. We hoped for the gay audience. We also knew that we were going to be pissing some of them off, but they were meant for the large audiences, and we also knew that we had to honor them and do them well and make them provocative enough and not shy enough away so that we wouldn't get in trouble with the gay audience, but I think that at their core, they were meant for as many people as possible.

The commercial logics of Showtime, based on premium subscribers, could still not afford to target such a small, niche audience as LGBT viewers. In addition, as Mansfield's comment suggests, the LGBT audience is not monolithic but rather represents diverse tastes, identities, and critical interests. Nonetheless, Showtime was an ideal home for this content since premium cable is not dependent on advertisers and is therefore less conservative. As Poul confirmed, "something that airs on pay cable cannot be controversial, really. I mean, pay cable, its bread and butter was being provocative, and there wasn't any public funding involved." Furthermore, PBS is subject to the FCC's restrictions over content whereas cable television is not.

Mansfield further described how, in the span of just a few years, LGBT media had changed dramatically. Mansfield was also supervising the production of the U.S. adaptation of the Channel Four, gay-themed series, *Queer as Folk* (1999), which had by Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman (*An Early Frost*) was sexually explicit. Like *Root*, Mansfield suggests how his participation in these projects may have contributed to this progression towards a more liberated LGBT media. As Mansfield noted,

I was drawn to the stories. It so happens that a couple of these things I was involved in moved the needle a bit. I believe that just because people saw these things. The fact that it moved from this...even though *Tales* didn't push the envelope sexually in the same way, even though it was just a few years earlier, it was a different time. It needed to come before the other one could come also. These are all part of the steps to something.

Mansfield's comments suggest how some critical programming executives, like other critical cultural worker, may also be advocates for progressive change. Their contribution to the critical success of these programs helped create opportunities for even more critical media. In addition, Mansfield ruminated on how critical, even normalizing, LGBT media may have contributed to the LGBT social movement, claiming that

Whether it was *Will & Grace* or it was *Tales of the City*...before you know it it's a few years later and you're in *Queer as Folk* and they're really pushing the envelope and you

can still love these people, [even if you] feel like they're in a different world than you are... along with everything else that was going on in culture, in society, thirteen years later the world is changing, dramatically. That doesn't mean it doesn't have a long way to go, but all these things and a number of shows, and these are two, as controversial as they may have been, were key to that change. But we weren't really thinking about it. At that point we were making television shows.

In these comments, Mansfield supports the argument posed in this dissertation. LGBT TV movies operated as agents of change, helping transform cultural attitudes towards LGBT people. At the same time, these programs may have also served the material interests of the networks.

Gays in the Military. In early 1994, President Clinton signed the regressive anti-gay military policy called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Rather than resolve the debate surrounding this issue, following the bill's passage, partisans from both sides continued to engage in debate throughout the public sphere. New LGBT organizations formed, including the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, to try to overturn the policy and defend those gays and lesbians who were being discharged in even greater numbers than before.

In addition, the discharge of these servicemembers would become public events, including the story of Margarethe Cammermeyer, a highly-decorated Colonel in the Washington State National Guard. After thirty years of service, she was honorably discharged in 1992 after revealing to the Guard that she is a lesbian. After two years of appeals, she filed suit in civil court and in 1994 the military's decision was deemed unconstitutional. Even with "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in effect, Cammermeyer was allowed to return to service. Cammermeyer's story became a chapter in the ongoing culture wars between the LGBT social movement and the New Right.

In the spring of 1993, producers Neil Meron and Craig Zadan became aware of her story. In my interview with the producers, Meron claimed that her story was better-suited to be a television movie because

at that time, issue-oriented movies were being done on TV, which set them apart from the regular disease of the week or women in jeopardy films. When you want to do an issue, to reach the greatest biggest and most available audience, you do it for TV to get your message across.

Meanwhile, Meron's friend and Barbra Streisand's producing partner, Cis Corman, read the story and decided to team up with Zadan and Meron to pursue the rights as a television movie. With Streisand and Corman on board, the producers approached Glenn Close, who expressed interest in playing the lead role, subject to the script. Zadan mentioned that attaching these partners was a critical as well as a commercial strategy, stating:

The reason why we kept attaching people is because the agencies would say no one will ever make this movie. They thought they would discourage us and get us to walk away. We were talking to agents about getting the rights to the story and they said don't bother. It's not worth getting the rights because no one is going to make it and no one is going to broadcast it. So we thought, "Let's say they are right?" The answer is not to abandon it. The answer is how do you get it made? The answer at that moment in time was attaching Barb [Barbra Streisand] and Glenn [Close].

In these comments, the producers describe a critical producing strategy referred to as *pre-packaging*, which describes securing A-list talent to the project in advance of a guaranteed production or distribution deal. This strategy would help overcome the concerns from potential buyers regarding the critical, controversial and political nature of the subject matter. As Meron described it, "we made it impossible to say 'no.'" That said, in exchange for the talent commitment, producers often have no choice but to split their fees and share credit with the talent.

After forging this alliance, coincidentally, Zadan and Meron had lunch with Lindy DeKoven, the newly-appointed head of movies at NBC. DeKoven had previously worked for Zadan in feature films and, upon getting the position at NBC, reached out to her former boss, unaware that the producers were in production on their first television movie, the musical *Gypsy*

starring Bette Midler. This example reflects the nature of networked cultures of media production in which relationships developed over years help facilitate the process.

Zadan and Meron mentioned the project and DeKoven was immediately interested. In my interview with DeKoven, she confirmed that the combination of Streisand and Close attracted her to the project, claiming:

I knew that was a home run and that I could get something like that on the air... Because Glenn Close had never been on television before - this would have been her first movie. [In fact, Close had appeared in numerous TV movies, including the highly-rated and critically-acclaimed *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (1991) for CBS.] And Barbra Streisand had never previously produced anything for television. That kind of subject matter without the two of them? No, I could never have gotten that done. The combination of it with Barbra being so outspoken about issues, Glenn Close being such a classy actress, it just was the perfect storm. It just worked perfectly on every level. We could sit here and talk about other actors and other producers and I could tell you, no, it wouldn't have worked. That was a perfect team.

Furthermore, DeKoven added that the feature cache of Zadan and Meron further contributed to the commercial appeal of the project. DeKoven remarked,

It was like the feature world was coming to television, and by the way, at that time, in March of 93, that was the first time. Feature people were not coming to television at that time. It was very clear they had a message they wanted to make.

DeKoven's comments affirm how the cultural value of feature films can translate into commercial value for the network. This value also afforded the producers the ability to sell the network a project with controversial subject matter.

Although they had preliminary conversations with Cammermeyer, they had not yet secured the rights from Cammermeyer. According to Zadan, "she was reluctant...she really didn't want to do a television movie." Then, according to Meron, Barbra said, "We're doing this for the greater good...and that was the key phrase that turned it around." In these remarks, we understand not only the complicated negotiations between the various stakeholders involved in television movie production but also the added concerns regarding criticality and intentions.

Because the producers shared an interest in telling this story for reasons beyond commercial gain, the rights holder, who understood that she had become symbolic of a much larger cause, agreed to participate.

DeKoven did not require the approval of senior management to develop the project, although she did seek out their support. According to DeKoven,

Don [Ohlmeyer, head of programming] had given me what everybody pretty much knows during that time was unusual – the authority to greenlight movies and miniseries – which is pretty rare for that position. But when I knew I had a movie like this, I worked with him and the marketing team and Standards and Practices all the way through, because it’s really important to get everybody onboard. You don’t want to get to the end of the process and marketing going, “Wait a second,” raising red flags. You’re selling internally and developing a team around it and a clear vision of how you want this positioned. What most people don’t know is that in the position that I was in at the network, ninety percent of the job is selling internally. It really is.... There was certain subject matter. I don’t remember all the details, but Ros Wyman was head of Standards & Practices. She worked out of New York, and she became a good friend of mine, but I ran everything by her. My department was a lightning rod for sales because it was issue-oriented subject matter, sometimes subjects that weren’t particularly appealing to advertisers... In fact, I remember the marketing guys would say, over time whenever I would bring a movie like this onboard, “This is one of Lindy’s movies.”

In these remarks, DeKoven illustrates the added complications that executives face when championing critical projects. As with NBC’s *White*, S&P would represent a potential obstacle in the process. As with *Fine*, DeKoven engaged in a strategy of courting other departments, including marketing, to ensure the commercial and critical success of these programs.

Furthermore, DeKoven predicted in advance that the project would produce advertiser flight. DeKoven claimed, “We knew we would have losses. We knew what was going to happen.” Nonetheless, DeKoven claimed this project would not only help NBC secure a large audience but would also attract other Hollywood talent who had similar projects with A-list talent attached. DeKoven’s comments suggest how the overwhelming flow of programming on

television can afford opportunities for projects that may lose money but operate on behalf of larger material and structural interests, e.g., building the reputation of the NBC movie division.

But DeKoven also described how her critical pedagogical motives informed these decisions to make “Lindy’s movies.” DeKoven stated,

I really believed that the audience wants to be enlightened as well as entertained. I really believe that on a certain level that people want to learn. If they can learn something as well as be entertained, it’s a home run.

Later in our interview, she expressed her belief that those TV movie creative workers are “socially repressed activists. All of us in another time may have been out there raising the flag, pounding the pavement.” In these comments, we see how critical intentions, coupled with agency, helped producers and programming executives find the space to produce these programs.

Furthermore, DeKoven had a personal interest in the subject matter of this program, by virtue of her gay brother, although this did not override her responsibilities to the network.

According to DeKoven,

to this day, he thinks that it was one of the most groundbreaking movies of all time. Of course, I had a personal interest in it, but you have to treat all your children the same. I knew this was a special movie, I knew that we had an Emmy opportunity here.

Although DeKoven is not gay, as reflected in her comments, she represents a critical ally in the social movement, namely a liberal, socially-conscious, gay-supportive cultural worker. To the extent that these programs reflect the ideology, intentions, and critical movies of their creators, within the structural limitations of the television industry and commercial constraints, the existence of a liberal, LGBT-affirmative culture helped these projects get produced and achieve their critical success.

DeKoven described securing a deal with the producers and Cammermeyer quickly in time to announce the project at the biannual Television Critics Association Press Tour. She put

together a panel with the producers to discuss the project, even though there was no writer, script, or director in place or a firm commitment from Close. The producers did not receive payment for their participation. The network made an “if/come” agreement with the producers, which DeKoven described as meaning that “if the project gets into production, this is the deal we’re going to have.” As with most television movies, producers do not get paid during development, even though these projects may take years to complete a script and secure directors and actors. In the interim, the producers provide intellectual labor, working on the scripts with the writers, giving notes on multiple drafts, and developing relationships with talent representatives who represent potential actors and directors on behalf of the project. In this regard, producers represent unpaid development labor for networks. Most networks develop more projects than they produce, which means this labor may never be compensated; for these critical projects, which represent higher risk to the networks, producers may more frequently go unpaid.

To complicate matters more, the producers had an “overall” deal at Sony Pictures Television, which meant that Sony paid for their overhead in exchange for the first right to finance and produce their projects. For most network television movies, the projects find financing and get produced by outside financiers, and they get licensed for a limited number of “runs” to the network, usually at a fraction of the total cost of the project. The studio or production company would then sell the project internationally, on home video, and on other platforms, e.g., airlines or online. One more challenge for deeply cultural or critical narratives like *Serving in Silence* is the limited appeal for international audiences, which lowers the potential returns for the financiers.

With the rights secured, the next phase was to secure a writer to craft the script. Zadan and Meron deliberately sought out the writer, Allison Cross, who had just written the critically-acclaimed and highly-rated mini-series, *Roe vs. Wade* (1989), for which Cross received the Emmy award. This program was about the legal case that eventually made abortion legal. Zadan said that their choice of writer was deliberate because

We didn't want anything mawkish. We wanted something really tough. Greta is not an emotional person, which reflects the Scandinavian part of her personality. She is very militaristic. She's a soldier. And Alison is tough and doesn't write maudlin. We knew this from *Roe v Wade* that she was going to tell the story and not every get soft.

Zadan's comments suggest how the development of these projects includes a mix of creative, commercial, and critical considerations.

In the development of the script, according to the producers, there was some dissension with the network. According to Meron, DeKoven "thought she was buying a courtroom drama, but what we were selling and our intention was to make a love story." Zadan added,

They thought this would be safe, to play down the lesbian stuff, foolproof. But when you research it, you find out the only reason Cammermeyer came out was because she fell in love with Diane (played by Judy Davis). Without falling in love, she never would have made the statement [that she was a lesbian], and there wouldn't have been an issue and she never would have been thrown out of the military. You can't take out the love story that's the only reason the story exists!

DeKoven confirmed these comments, claiming, "that's probably true. I mean, Craig was very passionate about the issue. I obviously knew him very well, and I knew this was a really important movie for them." However, DeKoven had also assigned an executive on the project to directly oversee development and production, who would have been more intimately aware of these critical matters. Nonetheless, this account reflects the struggles over criticality and representation that occur throughout the producing process.

Over the course of the development and production, the producers fought with the network to maintain the critical values in the project. This required a unique set of critical tactics, which involved their partners on the project. According to Zadan,

So the battle raged and we got to the point where we said to Barbara and Glenn they are trying to disassemble this and what we don't want to do is call you every 15 minutes so with your permission we're going to use your name a lot and we did. Every time they came to us and said we want this cut, we don't want this scene, or we want to cut the kiss, we would say we spoke to Barbara and she's furious. "Oh she is?" [the network responded, to which we added], "We also spoke to Glenn and she's going to pull out."

In the crafting of the narratives, the producers and the writer engaged in a set of critical tactics that were instrumental in helping audiences identify with the lesbian protagonist. These tactics further reflect Nussbaum's theory of narrative imagination. As Zadan explains:

It wasn't until well into the movie that you got into the love story and the gay issue. So we didn't hit anyone over the head. We wanted the audience to fall in love with this woman and to see that when she did lose her job, you would get angry and say how dare they! You would relate to this woman. She could be anybody who is doing a great job and who cares what their personal life is?

While queer media scholars might critique this tactic as assimilationist, I would argue that the approach reflects one of "radical normalization." Particularly at that time, the New Right was framing gays as sub-human violators of God's will. Meanwhile, AIDS was devastating the community with no treatments in sight, and the only image most Americans had of gay people were of white gay men whose bodies resembled corpses as they wasted away from AIDS in hospitals across the nation.

The producers also acknowledged that this program was not designed for gay people, although they assumed they would get the support of the community. According to Meron, "we wanted to get the message to the unconverted." Meron added:

We were telling a particular story and when you represent a marginalized people, everyone looks at that and wants it to answer for the entire group and not that particular story. You can't answer the needs of everybody. We chose this story for particular

reasons not to answer the global issues and what we wanted to accomplish we accomplished.

In Meron's response, I would argue, we see that these producers understood the symbolic nature and critical value of these programs clearly. But these programs spoke for the marginalized, not to them. These producers were engaging in critical pedagogy to reach more critically desirable audiences, not to preach to the proverbial choir.

A counter-argument could be made that these producers had no right to speak on behalf of the LGBT community. In response, I would argue that these were not producers looking solely for commercial gain. These producers were operating with the full support of Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer. These were gay producers speaking on behalf of gay concerns. They had the agency to craft these critical counter-narratives on behalf of those LGBT members of the military who continued to be threatened with discharge based solely on their identity.

During development, the producers worked with a number of LGBT organizations to ensure that the project accurately reflected the legal issues as well as the critical concerns of those, like Cammermeyer, trying to overturn the policy. This included collaborating with the Servicemen's Defense Fund as well as Cammermeyer's attorney, a member of the Lambda Legal Defense Fund, who was "able to authenticate exactly what we were doing," according to Zadan. This account describes how LGBT TV producers collaborated with LGBT activists to more accurately craft and frame the concerns featured in these projects.

With the script completed, the producers hired director Jeff Bleckner. According to Meron,

We looked at his credits and he came from theatre and that was a plus with us. He had directed two plays about the Vietnam War and he was directing a lot of high end TV. We also vetted him with Glenn [Close] because he came from Public Theatre [Close came out of theater] and he speaks the same language as us. He was strong and not sentimental and understood the tone we wanted to achieve.

Once again, the director came to the project well into its development, but still brought commercial and critical value.

The actress Judy Davis was hired to play Cammermeyer's lover, Diane. However, once production started, the network raised concerns with Davis' pale makeup, which the actress had insisted on wearing. The network considered the look too unfeminine or, as Zadan claimed, "Lindy called and said, 'what is this? Kabuki?'" However, Davis refused to change her make-up style, and, once again, the producers had to intervene, insisting that Close and Streisand were also supportive of Davis' choice.

During production, the network raised concerns over the lesbian couple kissing and asked the producers to shoot the scene two ways, with and without the kiss. However, on the day of the shoot, the production only shot one version: the kiss. When the network asked, the producers claimed that Close had refused to do the alternative take. DeKoven confirmed that, once the media heard about the kiss, advertisers pulled out of the program. However, for the producers, this controversy helped draw even more attention to the program. As Zadan confirmed,

there was an explosion of controversy which we didn't discourage ... someone broke the news that there was going to be this big onscreen kiss between Glenn and Judy. That was a big deal and became *the* topic that they were writing about.

Reflected in these remarks is the fact that Zadan and Meron courted controversy, believing this would draw more viewers to the program, even if it cost the network in advertising revenue. They were already assured their producer's fee, which did not depend on revenue or the ratings; nonetheless, they were determined to get a large audience to watch because of the critical message they were trying to deliver. Meron would add,

That's exactly why we did it, for the public conversation. The reason we thought network TV was because we, I hate to say it was a message movie, but it was a message movie and that's the way to get a message across.

Zadan added, "We saw it as a love story but the subversive attitude we had was that we were sending out a message."

In the promotion leading up to the premiere, Zadan and Meron voiced critical objections to the poster for the movie. Close as Cammermeyer appears in full uniform before an American flag, with the words "Don't Tell" on the poster. However, the marketing department insisted on taking out the words, claiming that these words implied the network was taking a political position on "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." The producers attempted to fight this decision, but eventually concluded the network would not back down. This account suggests how these producers continued to champion the critical potential of the program after production and throughout the promotion of the program, albeit with limited agency.

In addition, as seen with other programs presented here, NBC also screened *Serving in Silence* for LGBT groups, including fundraisers for Lambda, the Servicemen's Defense Fund, and GLAAD. These not only helped court the LGBT audience and build word-of-mouth, but they also helped these organizations in their fund-raising efforts. They also screened the program in Seattle for Cammermeyer, who hosted the event. In addition, the producers noted that Streisand and Close were on the cover of the gay magazine, *The Advocate*, which was the first time major Hollywood stars had ever appeared on the cover of a national LGBT magazine. These marketing strategies speak to the complex dynamics and complimentary interests between these producers, network, and the LGBT social movement.

As a result of the kiss controversy, some affiliates threatened to cancel the movie or censor the kiss. The producers indicated that NBC made it clear that censorship was not

possible. Nonetheless, as Zadan recalls, “I remember groups, church groups going nuts. The Arkansas or Alabama NBC affiliate, just before the kiss, flipped the switch and the screen went black during the kiss...pitch black no sound...then turned it back on.”

Despite the controversy, advertiser fallout and affiliate response, the movie secured an audience over more than 18.8 million viewers, coming in second for the evening; however, according to DeKoven, this was a modest success since the network strived to reach at least 30 million viewers for these event programs. Furthermore, although she could not recall the amount, DeKoven is certain the program lost money due to advertiser flight.

Serving in Silence also garnered numerous nominations and awards, including multiple Golden Globes and Emmy Awards as well as the Peabody and GLAAD Media award. In addition, DeKoven takes particular pride in receipt of the National Education Association Award for Advancement of Learning Through Broadcasting. She also acknowledged that a number of “Lindy’s movies” would be distributed through various educational channels to schools and non-profit organizations.

Twenty years earlier, the 1978 television movie *Sergeant Matlovich vs. the U.S. Air Force* featured almost the exact same narrative, only this time a highly decorated gay man was being discharged from the military. Whereas that program did not feature any aspect of the gay man’s personal life, *Serving in Silence* featured the romantic love story at the center of the narrative. In his critique of the program, Capsuto recognized how the program “blended a unique lesbian love story with elements of a traditional gay civil rights drama” (2000, p. 351).

As for the depiction of same-sex affection with the kiss, Capsuto (2000) suggested that kiss reflects “more of a cry for comfort than an expression of tenderness, but both it and the film in general were a huge leap forward in portraying lesbian lives with dignity and respect” (p.

351). Gross's only reference to the program is about the kiss, which he concludes was "probably a tribute to the clout of Barbra Streisand, who produced the TV movie."

LGBT scholar Michael Bronski offers a conflicted evaluation of the program, comprised of backhanded compliments that recognized the critical pedagogy conducted by the program. As Bronski writes:

There is nothing really terrible about *Serving in Silence*. It is what we have come to expect from made-for-television movies: mundane, unimaginative, and - with the exception of two competent performances by Glenn Close as Cammermeyer and Judy Davis as her partner Diane - completely unremarkable. What is notable about *Serving in Silence*, however, is that it is the most visible and popular manifestation of a new trend in the articulation of arguments for lesbian and gay rights. While *Serving in Silence* - with its star potential and headline immediacy is guaranteed to garner high television ratings, it is only one of several recent cultural manifestations that attempt to put a human (gay) face on the military issue. (1995, p. 307)

A year after *Serving in Silence* aired, another television movie attempted to put a human (and gay) face on the military issue. In August 1997, Lifetime aired *Any Mother's Son* (1997), which was based on the true story of Dorothy Hadjys, who fought the Navy to get justice for the murder of her son. Her son, Allen Schindler, had been an openly gay soldier on a Navy ship and had been beaten to death by his fellow soldiers in what the Hadjys and eventually the Navy conceded was a hate crime.

The story first appeared in the news in January 1993, shortly after Schindler's murder. At that time, Hadjys had gone public with the fact that she knew the Navy was trying to expedite the court-martial of the defendants, effectively giving them a dishonorable discharge. As detailed in my autoethnography in Appendix 1, I had met Hadjys and secured the rights to try to tell her story as a television movie. At the time, she requested that the project only be made for television because, according to Hadjys, "where I come from, people believe TV." Nonetheless, I was unable to find a network buyer and let the rights elapse.

In May 1996, producer Jack Grossbart contacted Lifetime about the project, having secured the rights to Hadjys story. As Grossbart stated in our interview,

That was my first thing with Lifetime. Lifetime at that point was doing little stuff through Hearst or whatever. They had just started doing outside projects. That was sort of the first, you know, attempt to sell something there, for me. It went through very, very quickly.

Grossbart's account reflects how cable television became a potential outlet for these programs.

As the executive on the project, my job was to convince Sheri Singer, the head of movies for Lifetime, to option the project for development. According to Singer, her strategy for Lifetime was to "champion projects that could not be made elsewhere." After pitching the project to her, Singer recalled thinking "about how a mother would feel. I had small kids at the time. And also, it was just such a travesty, and these things are still happening."

When asked why she felt this particular travesty needed to be told, Singer remarked, "Because I could." However, later in our interview, she described her philosophy towards making these types of programs, which she garnered from producing *The Phil Donahue Show*. Singer stated,

I felt that television had an obligation not just to entertain, but also to inform. You can entertain in a reality show, a sitcom, a light drama or a game show. But, because of my background and degree in broadcast journalism, the ability to inform and change opinions is what has always interested me about storytelling in a television movie format.

Singer's remarks compare to those of NBC's White, who described the role of the broadcaster who embraced the public service obligation of the network; perhaps not coincidentally, Singer and White are also spouses.

Singer, like NBC's DeKoven, Showtime's Sabinson, and ABC's Stoddard, could develop and greenlight her own projects, without consulting senior management, advertising, or marketing. Nonetheless, as Singer noted,

I'm sure I talked to senior management, because although I had the autonomy to make my own choices I did so on every movie I planned to green light. By the time I ordered *Any Mother's Son* to production, our department had been responsible for a number of successful movies. This helped underscore my strategy and belief that there are some projects you produce for ratings success, and some you do for their import and for generating off the entertainment page articles. That was what this project was going to be.

Singer optioned the project with Grossbart, insisting on quick development and production, which took a little more than a year. She wanted the film completed in time to air over Labor Day in 1997, which is when other Lifetime movies had aired and performed well.

During development, Bruce Harmon joined to write the screenplay. Singer recalled, "I knew Harmon was gay," which informed her decision to hire him. Although Lifetime did not have an S&P department, the script offered little reason to be concerned about the depiction of the gay character, particularly since he died in the first act. As Singer noted, "as I recall, depicting homosexuality not an issue, because we were telling the story of a hate crime as opposed to a story of sexuality or love.

In the casting, Grossbart recalled having a difficult time finding an actress to play the lead role. This had less to do with the subject matter than the fact that Lifetime was still relatively unknown to most audiences, which led actors to avoid the network and representatives to keep their clients away. They eventually hired Bonnie Bedelia to play Hadjys.

The network screen program for gay organizations, including the Servicemen's Defense Fund. According to Grossbart, the organizations received consultation requests during the scripting stage to ensure that the information presented was accurate. This account confirms that these programs deliberately attempted to frame and represent the concerns of the LGBT social movement.

The program became the second highest rated original movie ever for Lifetime. The *Los Angeles Times* review acknowledged that the film, "features homophobia at the heart of the

story.” The program also received the GLAAD Media Award. According to Grossbart, this award was particularly meaningful to him.

It just can't get more rewarding than that. My attachment to it is a personal attachment, because I'm a gay man and this was a story about a gay man who was dealt with in a horrific way, and a mother who was sort of pissed at the military that does that. It's just frightening. Everyone wanted to cover their asses. That was my personal connection to it. I would have been proud of it in any case...but this one was more of a connection because I am, you know, a gay man, and I was able to sort of give back to my own, to my community and do something positive for them.

Throughout this period of the LGBT social movement, battles over media representation ensued between the gay community and the New Right, as reflected in the backlash against *Tales of the City*. Furthermore, as demonstrated with other LGBT TV movies, *Serving in Silence* and *Any Mother's Son* deliberately operated as critical pedagogy. Producers and executives both collaborated and engaged in contentious battles over a host of critical concerns throughout the producing process. The next section describes how the coming out of Ellen DeGeneres would become a media spectacle, followed shortly by the breakout success of the gay-centered *Will & Grace*. These programs represented yet another turn in the LGBT movement, which I refer to as the *post-war* era.

Post Wars

Over the past fifteen years, the LGBT social movement has experienced tremendous success. Resources previously dedicated to the AIDS crisis have been diverted to address, other, diverse concerns by the movement. According *AIDS.gov*, advances in medical treatment have turned AIDS into a more manageable disease, at least for those who can afford it. Still, every year, tens of thousands of Americans, mostly young and minority gay men, continue to be infected, while outside the U.S., the disease has become a global pandemic. Nonetheless, for the

LGBT community, the overwhelming sense of crisis has abated, along with the more militant practices of groups like ACT UP.

The larger political currents and the deep partisanship in government have informed the successes and failures of the LGBT movement. While President Clinton was the most LGBT-inclusive and supportive of any modern President at the time, his efforts to extend LGBT rights encountered tremendous resistance from the New Right. In addition to signing the regressive “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, on the eve of his re-election, Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, enshrining discrimination against gay and lesbian couples into federal law.

President George W. Bush and his administration proved far less supportive of LGBT concerns, even though Vice President Cheney accepts his openly gay daughter. The administration used the threat of marriage equality as a wedge issue that helped Bush win re-election in 2004. Ken Mehlman, a closeted gay Republican strategist, designed and implemented this campaign strategy. Since then, Mehlman has come out of the closet and fights on behalf of marriage equality (Stolberg, 2013, p. A1). Meanwhile, the 9/11 attacks, subsequent two wars, and global economic class diverted attention from LGBT concerns.

President Obama and his administration have been far more successful at addressing LGBT concerns. The Affordable Care Act helped make AIDS and women’s health care more viable and accessible for more Americans, including LGBT citizens. In 2011, President Obama overturned the ban on gays serving in the military, which quickly led to the integration of the military. Still, much work remains at the federal level. LGBT citizens can be fired and denied housing in thirty states, which is why LGBT organizations are lobbying for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

At the state and federal level, LGBT marriage equality has seen tremendous success. Over the past fifteen years, through a mix of judicial and legislative strategies, eighteen states have allowed gays and lesbians to marry. In 2012, Obama came out in favor of marriage equality and instructed his Attorney General to suspend efforts to defend the Defense of Marriage Act. In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled the Defense of Marriage Act to be unconstitutional, providing federal marriage benefits to those gay and lesbian couples living in states that offer marriage equality. From 2003 to 2013, approval for marriage equality has gone from 30 to 50%; amongst young people below forty years old, approval is up to 70%.

One of the tipping points in the LGBT social movement occurred in 1998 in the wake of the brutal killing of Matthew Shepard. Shepard, a gay college student in Wyoming, was tortured and left to die on a fence, reportedly due to his sexual orientation. The events surrounding his death and the trial after became a media spectacle, which was a reflection of the demand by the numerous cable news networks. But openly gay LGBT journalists and media organizations like GLAAD helped frame these events as a hate crime throughout the press. A year later, Congress added crimes against LGBT citizens within federal hate crime law. This legislation also help frame the LGBT social movement as another civil rights movement alongside those of other minorities.

Over the past decade, the LGBT movement has evolved into a more rhizomatic and mature movement engaging in activism throughout all aspect of society, including politics, culture, religion, and education. Multiple organizations are operating at the international, federal, state and local level, which engage in diverse legislative and judicial strategies. This complex and rich history lies beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, vital to this

discussion are the advances made by LGBT media, often conducted by open LGBT cultural workers working within the material interests and structures of the entertainment industry.

In addition to the Matthew Shepard incident, a couple of media events in popular culture became cultural tipping points. In April 1997, comedian Ellen DeGeneres came out in real life and on her popular sitcom, *Ellen*. This event found coverage throughout the press, and the episode became the third most watched episode of television in history, behind the “Who Shot J.R.” episode of *Dallas* and the finale of *MASH*. In addition, according to Walters, GLAAD sponsored fifteen hundred “Come out with Ellen” home viewing parties (date, p. xv).

A year later, the sitcom *Will & Grace* debuted, featuring a leading, albeit normalized, gay character and his straight girlfriend. The series also featured Will’s friend, Jack, a flamboyantly gay character, who represented the type of stereotype that critics like Russo had complained about in the past. Nonetheless, the series featured numerous plotlines featuring LGBT concerns, including gay marriage, coming out, and critical media representations. More importantly, a white gay man was seen falling in love, kissing, and in bed with another man, rather than dying of AIDS or on a fence in the Midwest. The series became a popular phenomenon and catapulted these LGBT characters to the height of pop culture and inside living rooms across the country.

These were transformative moments, a critical cultural watershed for the LGBT movement. Conservative, evangelical, and LGBT critics, historians, bloggers and journalists (Lively [2013], Kirchick [2013], Teixeira [2009]) have suggested that these events have signal at least the beginning of the end of the culture wars. Furthermore, Vice President Joe Biden proposed that the success of the movement can be attributed to the success of LGBT media, especially television entertainment. On *Meet the Press* in 2013, Biden claimed that,

When things really began to change is when the social culture changes. I think *Will and Grace* probably did more to educate the American public than almost anybody's ever done so far. People fear that which is different, now they understand. (6 May 2012)

Since *Will & Grace*, coupled with the rise of multi-channel television with hundreds of networks available on any given cable or satellite system, LGBT images have proliferated. In any given year, the number LGBT characters in series varies widely, according to the annual reports of LGBT representation released by GLAAD. Nonetheless, some of the most popular programs on television have recurring or lead LGBT characters. For example, a gay male couple and their adopted Asian daughter figure prominently in *Modern Family*, one of the most popular and critically-acclaimed sitcoms currently on television.

Forty years have passed since the appearance of Lance Loud on PBS' *American Family* and twenty years since Pedro Zamora on MTV's *Real World*. Today's reality programs feature numerous LGBT participants and contestants. On *Survivor*, *American Race*, *The Biggest Loser* and *Big Brother*, LGBT contestants have often won the final prize, challenging prior stereotypes of LGBT people as non-athletic and weak. Most recently, an openly gay performer has sung on *American Idol*. Openly LGBT characters feature as homebuyers on *House Hunters* on HGTV, accomplished cooks on *Top Chef*, and designers on *Project Runway*.

Appealing to niche audiences, cable television has become a regular supplier of LGBT programming. Bravo re-launched its brand with the debut of the lifestyles program *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* in 2003. Andy Cohen, Bravo's openly gay head of programming, has helped launched numerous reality programs that cater to LGBT audiences, including gay minorities like Iranian-Americans as seen on *Shahs of Sunset*. MTV routinely features LGBT characters on their programs in reality and competition programming. In my interview with openly gay Brian Graden, MTV's former head of programming, he admitted that, "the most

subversive thing we did was fill the afternoons with gay kids dating. That was never going to win any award, but I knew that was doing the most work for us.” Graden also helped launch the Logo Television network, dedicated to LGBT programming, which has found limited success, namely with the transgendered reality competition series, *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

As for studio features films, LGBT characters remain fairly absent, particularly as Hollywood has consolidated into a handful of vertically-integrated media conglomerates focused on launching global entertainment brands. These are brands designed for mass appeal that can be exploited across multiple platforms in film, television, books, toys, video games, theme park attractions, and more. In addition, film studios are dependent upon the international box office, which provides 70% of their revenue. As a result, the studios avoid more culturally-specific content, while generating intellectual property that can appeal to global audiences. As a result, the majority of studio releases are fantasy-based franchises based on best-selling books (*Harry Potter*) and comic books (all the Marvel and DC comics characters), toys (*Transformers*, *Legos*) and animation films that can be easily dubbed for international audiences.

The independent film industry has collapsed due to competition from new digital media and distribution websites, platforms and technologies, like Netflix and iTunes. Revenue from home video has disappeared, and major video retailers like Blockbuster have gone bankrupt. Independent film studios and distributors have disappeared or continue to struggle to release a few films a year, including Miramax, Fine Line, Paramount Vantage, Focus Features; other distributors have consolidated into mini-majors and are trying to compete with other studios. For example, Lionsgate has acquired both Summit Entertainment and Roadside Attractions.

Nonetheless, the occasional low-budget studio or independent feature appears in time for awards consideration, which helps these films garner more press and therefore more commercial

success. These are more “execution-driven” vehicles, told from the point of view of film auteurs. Comparable to early television movies, these are often more character-driven stories, inspired by real-life events, featuring social issues or adaptations of literature. Among these, the occasional LGBT-themed movies has garnered multiple awards and nominally crossed over to mainstream audiences, including *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Milk* (2008). More importantly, these programs find further distribution on television, online, and internationally, where audiences can view these programs more readily in private as well as on computer and mobile devices.

In the wake of new media information and communication technologies, LGBT audiences can find a proliferation of LGBT images, stories, interests, and concerns online. For those with access to the Internet, LGBT citizens of any age, nationality, and identity can forge communities with other LGBT members from across the world on Facebook, YouTube, and countless other social networking sites. In addition to watching LGBT content, in the new participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), users can generate their own LGBT content. LGBT digital media activists have launched interactive, participatory campaigns in this space. Some examples include the online, viral video campaigns, “It’s Get Better” and “You Can Play,” which target LGBT teen and athletes respectively.

As described in the above literature review, over the last two decades, TV movies have struggled in the wake of these shifts in industry, technology, and audience behavior. As Perren noted, TV movies “became incompatible with the broadcast networks’ economic models and programming strategies in the new millennium for several reasons” (2009, p. 166). One reason includes the proliferation of TV news magazines and 24-hour cable news networks that frequently feature LGBT stories once limited to TV movies. As NBC’s Steve White mentioned,

“that broad spectrum of news magazines and news sources and news documentaries and magazine style pieces, is what helped kill TV movies, because TV movies were the only place on network television to deal with this stuff.” Similarly, DeKoven stated:

In terms of when... those issue-oriented movies started to decline. The reason why, essentially, was because of *Dateline*. That’s really why we started not doing them so much. The story would come out and *Dateline* would do the whole story. There were three or four nights of *Dateline* at that time; I think that started in ‘97, ‘98, somewhere around there. We couldn’t compete with that...it screwed us up.

Nonetheless, over the past fifteen years, a handful of LGBT-themed television movies have continued to foreground the concerns of the LGBT community. Notable lesbian-themed television movies include *If these Walls Could Talk 2* (2000), *The Truth About Jane* (2000), *A Girl Thing* (2001), and *What Makes a Family* (2001). A few minority-based LGBT programs have appeared, including MTV’s *Pedro* (2008), about the life of *Real World*’s Pedro Zamora. Still, minorities continue to be under-represented throughout the media as well as within the LGBT social movement.

Matthew Shepard. The brutal murder of Matthew Shepard was featured in three separate television movies, MTV’s *Anatomy of a Hate Crime* (2001), NBC’s *The Matthew Shepard Story* (2002), and HBO’s *The Laramie Project* (2002). To date, no feature film has broached the subject. In particular, MTV’s version of the story debuted first in January 2001. After the program aired, the network turned off all programming and, for 24 hours, scrolled the names of the victims of hate crimes, including LGBT citizens. MTV’s Graden had conceived of using the original movie as a strategy to raise awareness about the network campaign, stating:

We were looking to launch a year-long campaign around tolerance, and in the past on television that usually meant just a couple of boring documentary forms, or talking head forms, or documentaries that somebody funded and nobody watched...So one of the things we started to do was make a television movie part of this yearlong campaign, which I don’t think had ever been done. I’m sure there’d been overlap and coordination by other networks, the issues they care about, but we made it sort of a centerpiece of it.

Graden's programming strategy reflected his own experiences watching TV movies growing up, which he claimed were both issue-oriented and capable of becoming media events. As Graden added, "we wondered if we could use what I remembered as the currency of event movies on MTV to get people's attention and tell a story." Graden's comments reflect how TV movies have once held higher cultural and critical value for audiences, which he attempted to resurrect in this programming stunt.

Although produced as part of this larger programming stunt, Graden also felt the program could educate MTV's in ways no other medium or format had, particularly the news. Graden claimed:

It was a very commercial way to engage people in the conversation, as is all good storytelling. And he'd just been in a news story, and I think by that time it was a few years after it had happened. And so it's hard to believe, but somebody watching MTV at eighteen would have no memory of what happened when they were thirteen, or no understanding of it, so even to them it was a history story...and the other thing I remember thinking is the news reports that he was killed, and they can tell you the facts and it sounds horrible, but it's not nearly the same thing as seducing the audience into seeing this person as a human being the way a movie can do it. Falling in love with them, and then having to slowly live what it must have been like to be in those -- I thought it would be a different experience.

Graden's response reflects the same narrative theories proposed by Nussbaum (1997) and Bruner (1986) as well as Dant's (2012) conception of the moral imaginary of television.

Graden further elaborated on how he helped reframe the network's intolerance and hate crime campaign. Instead of warning oppressors not to commit hate crimes, Graden described his strategy as trying to make anti-bullying seem more heroic. As Graden stated, to "make it cool to put your arm around the kid that is not like you." This approach would parallel the larger efforts throughout the LGBT movement to reframe gay teen concerns through anti-bullying campaigns,

appealing to non-gay but gay-friendly teens to support and defend their friends. Graden's comments suggest the overlapping framing strategies of LGBT media producers and activists.

Graden claimed the network lost \$4 million between the cost of producing and marketing the program and shutting down programming for 24 hours. In light of these material concerns, Graden described the critical tactics he used to convince the MTV to proceed with this programming stunt, despite the huge expense. As Graden said,

there were a lot of meetings about closing it down, and I sort of played dumb. As opposed to going through all the steps to get proper sign-offs, knowing I would never get it, I just created a certain momentum as if it was going to happen and then let them come.

In addition, Graden acknowledged that his ability to advocate for these strategies was the result of his success as a programmer, claiming,

I always had awareness where my political capital was and how much I could spend, and it had been a very, very good year, and so I had a lot of conscientiousness about I'm going to spend it on things I care about. Whether that's right or wrong or political, it's just how the world works.

Graden's comment suggests how critical agency couple with deft critical tactics can help overcome internal opposition and resistance. These factors have allowed some LGBT media professionals and their supporters to operate subversively within commercial media, despite their material concerns and logics.

As for the reception to the program, Graden described how the network did not aspire to positive, critical reviews from television critics. According to Graden, "your political career internally could be driven by a good *New York Times* story, but a lot of times the stuff that critics hated made it ten times more likely the audience would want to watch." In this remark, we see the divide between cultural and critical elitism and the popular, everyday activities of audiences who were the targeted by these programming strategies, campaigns, and interventions.

The meaningful and critical impact of the program and the blackout stunt on audiences is impossible to measure; nonetheless, Graden did describe the online viewer response coupled with unexpected news coverage of these events, claiming:

This is hard to believe, but message boards were new-ish then. And so it was one of the first events I remember where we could watch the message boards all night and the outpouring of emotion. For all the programming we had, nothing had come close to generating that kind of conversation in the hours that followed that went on all the way through the night. There were all sorts of people being mesmerized just watching this scroll, which is not being good television, and parents and kids that watched it together. It was so early in the message boards that in a way it was the first time that you were getting that interactive feedback. Television had been such ...you make your show and you don't really know what people really think or feel until the ratings come out, but it's just a number, and this was one where you could feel it back and forth. And then also all the news organizations, like *Nightly News* and that sort of thing, picked this story up, and that had never even been part of the plan. We didn't do it for that reason, but I remember watching Brian Williams report on it the next day and thinking that was such a rewarding thing that it became known in the national consciousness. I think, had it just been the movie, I think it would have come, and the audience would have enjoyed it, and it would have gone. But it was the one - two [strategy] of the movie and then a stunt to make sure people understood the movie was an event.

Graden described virtually no backlash to the program or the campaign. In part, this may be a consequence of the fact that the event had played out in the public sphere and throughout the news. Furthermore, by including LGBT citizens along with other hate crime victims, Graden felt this protected the network from a backlash from the New Right. According to Graden:

It was not a gay marketing campaign...and the whole campaign was about tolerance for any diversity, not simply gay, and that was conscious, too. As a gay man, I wanted that to be lined right up there against racism and everything else that a great percentage of the population did think was bad.

Graden's comments reflect a framing strategy engaged by the LGBT community to treat homophobia just like other forms of minority-based hate crimes. Furthermore, by removing all advertising, Graden had limited the ability of the New Right to threaten the networks with a boycott. Meanwhile, the program did garner some critical acclaim, including a GLAAD Award. As Graden recalled, "thinking how lucky I was that I got to say yes to tell his story. That I just

found myself at this weird intersection in life, in a moment in time, that I can do that.” Graden’s comments affirm how, for LGBT programming executives, these programming opportunities reflect deeper, critical concerns related to identity.

Before leaving MTV, Graden programmed *Pedro* (2009), MTV’s biopic about the life of Pedro Zamora. Graden admitted that Zamora’s appearance on *Real World* “was a defining story in my life, because it was his story that really moved me to come out.” He claimed that the film was made mostly for personal motives, stating, “There was no particular reason it should have been done then or not done then.” As for the financial rewards, like *Anatomy of Hate Crime*, Graden knew this program would not be profitable, stating “you put a lot of money into something [TV movies] that comes and goes, it won’t pay you the dividends of a seven-year series. Even then I knew I was burning money.” Graden’s account confirms what these TV scholars have suggested about the changing commercial logics of television that contributed to the decline of these programs.

As mentioned, Matthew Shepard’s story appeared in two other TV movies. In 2000, NBC’s Steve White rejoined the network to run the movie division, and he greenlit a Matthew Shepard film. In our interview, he claimed this was because “it was such a horrible, brutal thing to happen to somebody. I just felt there was a story that needed to be told.” Since these Matthew Shepard TV movies appeared, other TV movies have featured hate crimes committed against transgendered citizens including *Soldier’s Girl* (2002) and *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story* (2006).

Marriage Equality. In addition to hate crimes, marriage equality became the focus of the LGBT social movement, which was also reflected, if not instigated by, representations in LGBT media. Gay men getting married figured prominently in the early 1990s on sitcoms, e.g., *The*

Golden Girls, *Roseanne*, *Friends*, and *Roc*. On reality television, Pedro and his boyfriend participated in a commitment ceremony on MTV's *Real World* in 1993. Recent polls have suggested that gay images on television have contributed to the rise in viewer approval for marriage equality (Appelo, 2012).

At the time, A&E's *Wedding Wars* was the only TV movie to feature a narrative about marriage equality. Inspired by the Greek satire *Lysistrata*, the program was a fictional comedy that imagined what would happen if LGBT people went on strike in support of marriage equality. The story involved two brothers, one straight, played by Eric Dane from *Grey's Anatomy*, and the other gay, played by TV veteran John Stamos. Dane's character is a speechwriter for the Governor of Maine and engaged to marry the Governor's daughter. At his fiancé's request, he agrees to hire his brother to be the wedding planner; however, after writing a speech for the Governor against gay marriage, the gay brother goes on strike, which spreads across the country. In the end, the straight brother comes around to believe in marriage equality, the strike ends, and the marriage resumes happily ever after.

The program was produced by Zadan and Meron, who also produced *Serving in Silence* (1995), *What Makes a Family* (2001), and *It's All Relative* (2003), a sitcom about a gay couple coping with families from different class backgrounds. In addition to winning numerous GLAAD Media Awards and the Vito Russo Visionary Award, the producers have produced the GLAAD Media Awards. Furthermore, in addition to producing the Academy Awards, they have produced a number of feature films, including *Chicago* (2002) and *Hairspray* (2007). While these features may have not featured LGBT narratives, they often include LGBT characters and same-sex affection. Their career suggests how openly gay producers in Hollywood can be both

successful and operate as activists within the commercial structures of the entertainment industry.

Like NBC's *An Early Frost* and Playhouse's *Longtime Companion*, A&E's programming executives conceived of the idea and underlying story. In my interview with Fine, she admitted this was the first time she had ever created a program based on her own idea. Fine felt this concept of a satirical romantic comedy could address marriage equality in a less polemical, more entertaining fashion. Fine noted:

I thought, first of all, that it needed to be a comedy. I thought that it needed to be accessible to a mainstream audience, and even though dealing with serious things, it needed to be lighthearted. I think the world has gotten so shrill and so polarized over so many things that I think it's really helpful if you can look at something from a different perspective. I think it's really helpful if you can tone the volume down a little bit and not have a shouting match over something, but just, what if? Think about something in a way that you haven't thought about it before. For example, and this is so hugely important I think for anyone, but certainly in my own evolution as a human being, to think about an issue in the abstract is so very different than thinking about how an issue really impacts people you personally know, and how very different that is if it's affecting someone that you know and love. You can find yourself thinking about things in a very different way if it is specific as opposed to abstract.

Like Jones and McClellan, Fine's comments suggest how political entertainment and critical pedagogy can be conducted through satirical comedy. Similarly, Fine's comments affirm those theories about narratives and television by Bruner (1985), Nussbaum (1997), and Dant (2012).

The next step in developing the project was hiring a screenwriter. Despite approaching numerous openly gay screenwriters, no one would agree to write the project. Any explanation for this would be speculative. Instead, through his openly gay agent, Stephen Mazur, a straight, screenwriter, lobbied for the job. As Mazur has confirmed, he holds a variety of political opinions across the spectrum but perceives himself as more conservative than most screenwriters. Nonetheless, in regards to gay marriage, he is an advocate. The network reluctantly approved him; however, his straight and more conservative identity may have been

provident. While crafting of the screenplay, Mazur helped resolve a flaw in the original concept for the narrative by shifting the focus to the straight character's transformation and subsequent enlightenment around gay marriage.

Fine's original concept was to feature a gay political speechwriter going on strike after his boss, the Governor, came out against marriage equality; however, Mazur proposed that the story primarily feature the straight brother who, over the course of these events, would come to understand these concerns and support marriage equality. According to Mazur:

If you're trying to appeal to the mass audience, then the notion is to have a lead who represents the mass audience – so he'd be a straight guy, and a generally good guy, though wrong on this issue, right? And he'd need to get his head together, need get to get his values straight. That would be a character that Middle America could relate to directly. "Yeah, he's like me, and like him, I know some people who are gay, and they're nice people, good people." And, "Yeah, why shouldn't gay people have the right to get married?"

Mazur's description of his choices reflects a critical practice for storytelling that can speak to the narrative and/or moral imagination of mainstream television audiences. This practice confirms those claims by Russo (1987), Gross (2001), and Walters (2001) that these were programs operated as gay problems for straight audiences. From the perspective of message movies engaging in critical pedagogy, this practice becomes instrumental to helping educate audiences and transform attitudes.

Nonetheless, Mazur acknowledges that this tactic has its detractors, noting that:

It's a very common technique, which is sometimes criticized. In *Mississippi Burning*, the lead characters are two FBI Agents sent from the North to investigate civil rights violations in the South. At the time of its release, the movie received a lot of criticism along the lines of, "Why aren't we telling this story from the point of view of the Southern victims of these civil rights crimes?" And there's some legitimacy to that argument, of course, but I think the reasoning is that, if you bring someone from outside who serves as an observer of what's going on, then that character becomes a substitute for the people in the audience. And it forces the audience members to ask themselves, "What would I do in these circumstances?"

Mazur further describes how this tactic operates phenomenologically, i.e., through the experience of visual narratives and identification with the actors, not just intellectually, to morally engage straight audiences. Mazur referred to these audiences as “folks who hadn’t given the issue much thought at all, or whose first thoughts were they were against it.” As Mazur stated:

The difference is, am I watching something or am I experiencing it viscerally? On the one hand, I’m watching something that’s educating me – oh, I didn’t know that, and I’m getting the details of what I’m watching – but I’m not experiencing it vis-à-vis the characters...these things are designed to draw you in, to identify you with a character and experience what they’re experiencing... if we start with a straight guy, people watching in St. Paul Minnesota are watching and they go, “Yeah, I know that guy. That’s kind of like me.” They’re drawn in, and that experience that he goes through is going to be cathartic for them. I agree completely, and I think that that’s a very good, strong way to tell the story. I remember in *The Advocate*, they were generally positive about the movie, but they did say, it’s not really very radical or they didn’t say dogmatic, but it was kind of playing in the middle. That was, at least from my point of view, an intentional thing because we were specifically trying to speak to people in the middle.

Mazur’s comments provide further insight into not only how these critical narratives are constructed but also how he believes they can operate as critical pedagogy.

Once a script was approved, the producers convinced John Stamos to play the lead with the network’s approval. In an interview in the press, Stamos also suggested how his commercial appeal also operated subversively and critically, claiming that,

middle America will start watching and, fingers crossed, won’t be able to stop. People that are not gay will want to follow my story. A safe way to get people to see this and hear a really important message. Hopefully they’ll take the trip and be able to look at both sides.

Stamos’s remarks suggest how actors may also contribute to the commercial and critical success of these programs. In addition, the producers persuaded Eric Dane to take the part. Dane’s first role had been the son of Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer in *Serving in Silence*.

The network approved an openly gay director, Jim Fall. In addition, screenwriters Chuck Ranberg and Anne Flett-Giordano, who had created *It's All Relative*, were hired to do a polish on the screenplay. A polish is usually a rewrite of the script limited mostly to dialogue, in this instance, to make the lines funnier. However, the writers delivered new pages nearly every day of production to try to improve the comedy. The writers received no credit for their work, which is mandated by the Writers' Guild and often the case even for writers only involved in a dialogue polish. This industrial practice further reflects the silent labor of creative workers that is often missed by viewers, critics, and scholars.

By the time the movie aired in December 2006, A&E's Fine had left the company. She was not there to champion marketing for the project. As Fine remarked, "I had to abandon my children and I let them go. I remember being disappointed that there wasn't more marketing for it." In addition, whereas Fine had received an Executive Producer credit on a number of her projects in the past, including those acquisitions and co-productions with U.K. partners, her name was taken off the program. Fine's comments reflects how some programming executives operate provide multiple functions within the structures and management of networks. In addition, like other creative and cultural workers, artists and storytellers, programming executives can also be emotionally invested in their work.

Critical LGBT History. Over the past decade, with the proliferation of news channels and magazines, the value of LGBT-themed television movies as contemporary cultural interventions has diminished. For contemporary LGBT crises and concerns, cable news networks and magazine can more readily cover these events far sooner than a TV movie, which would take longer to produce. As suggested by earlier comments, news coverage of LGBT concerns may be more exhaustive but not necessarily more critical or meaningful for audiences.

In addition, non-news audiences may be less fully aware of these concerns unless embedded within more popular forms of media, like television entertainment and narratives.

Nonetheless, a number of LGBT TV movies have featured LGBT history and narratives, often adapted from LGBT literature or theater. I would argue that these programs still operate as critical pedagogy in both content and reach. These programs typically feature critical narratives that can reach larger audiences than books or theater. Meanwhile, LGBT history, literature, and theater rarely figures into primary and secondary education; in 2012, California became the first state to mandate that LGBT history be included in public schools, although the state has yet to fully implement this mandate. This past week, according to CNN, Republican lawmakers in South Carolina have slashed budgets for public universities that assign LGBT topics (Brydum, 2014).

As mentioned previously, Showtime has produced numerous LGBT TV movies, including a few based on history, literature, or theater. Showtime's adaptation of the Broadway play *The Twilight of the Gods* (1996) was the fictional story of a pregnant mother who considers aborting her child upon discovering the fetus was gay, despite having a gay brother. Openly gay producer Paul Colichman brought the project to Showtime's Sharon Byrens, who championed the project and supervised its production. Openly gay Jonathan Tolins wrote the play and, along with his writing partner, Seth Bass, adapted the screenplay.

In my interviews with Colichman, Byrens, and Tolins, I was given slightly conflicting accounts of the adaption from stage to screen. Byrens claimed that the network had seen a draft with the original ending of the play in which the pregnant mother aborts the child. Both she and the network insisted on changing the ending. According to Byrens, one reason she cited was,

I was pregnant at the time that we did this, with my third child, so I was appalled at the ending, because the idea that anybody could make that a reason to abort a child was just...I just couldn't wrap my head around it.

Byrens's remarks suggest how executives' critical agency reflects their own personal values.

Byrens further claimed her motives were "not because this was a pro-life issue. It had to do with the message going across that this [aborting a gay fetus] was okay."

Colichman claimed the writer had previously changed the ending. According to Colichman,

Jonathan [Tolins] had evolved as an artist, and was not feeling as bitter and angry towards his family, and wanted to change the ending because it reflected his change, and his point of view towards his family and the world.

Although Tolins would not characterize his feelings as "bitter and angry," he did confirm that his relationship with his family had evolved. As Tolins states, "my family had accepted my partner and so the idea that the Gold family could change and come around did not feel false to me."

Furthermore, once the project had been in development at Hollywood Pictures as a feature film, the studio and the director, Garry Marshall, had also requested that the ending change. These conflicting accounts reflect the multiple creative, critical, and commercial stakeholders who may become involved in media production. In addition, these accounts suggest how creative practices can be informed by multiple commercial and personal motives that may not be mutually exclusive.

In 1998, Showtime financed the production of *Gods and Monsters* (1998), based on the historical fiction novel *The Father of Frankenstein* (1996), by Christopher Bram, which imagined the last days of gay Hollywood film director, James Whale, who had directed a number of classic horror films in the 1930s. Similar to the *Playhouse* model, Showtime allowed the producers to pursue theatrical distribution, which they secured through both Lionsgate and BBC

Films in the U.K. The film garnered a number of awards, including an Academy Award for the screenwriter-director, Bill Condon, and a modest return at the box office.

The making of *Gods and Monsters* for Showtime featured one of the more complicated financing and production arrangements. Writer-director Bill Condon had acquired the underlying rights to the book by gay author Christopher Bram and written a screenplay that had been rejected by independent film distributors for seven years. As a result, the project came to producer Paul Colichman, who financed his own productions. In my interview with openly gay Colichman, he claimed that,

what I was finding as an independent producer that couldn't afford to pay millions of dollars for a script, the better scripts that were coming to me were the gay scripts that the mainstream producers that could afford to pay the big dollars weren't willing to do.

While the material conditions of the entertainment industry may include structural forms of homophobia, these conditions may work to the advantage of producers who are operating on the margins of the industry or are able to find alternative means of financing and production.

In order to secure financing and distribution, Colichman attached actor Ian McKellan to the project. McKellan's appeal to U.K. audiences helped Colichman secure pre-financing from numerous sources, including the BBC. With partial financing in place, Colichman took the project to Showtime, where he had previously produced numerous programs, including the gay-themed *Twilight of the Golds*. In my interview with Sharon Byrens, the executive on the project at Showtime who found, developed, and supervised production of both *The Twilight of the Golds* and *Gods and Monsters*, she confided that Showtime was only responsible for a quarter of the budget. Like other buyers, the network had concerns about the commercial value of the program. Colichman's partial financing helped lowered the risk for the network, which reflects another critical media producing strategy.

Although minority investors, Showtime yielded more creative control, which reflects the complicated and irrational nature of television production. The network insisted that Colichman hire three more known actors, which included Brendan Fraser, Lynn Redgrave, and Lolita Davidovitch. Fraser has previously starred in *Twilight of the Gods* for Showtime and Colichman. As illustrated in other example, Fraser is among a handful of actors who have appeared in multiple LGBT TV movies. Colichman claims that Fraser had been their first choice although he was initially unavailable to take the part; by the time other actors had rejected the role, Fraser had become available.

Like Playhouse, Showtime sometimes allowed their producers to try and secure feature film distribution before these programs appeared on the network. In the example of *Gods and Monsters*, according to Byrens,

We did not want to have a Showtime premiere, because we knew it was going to get lost on Showtime, because the subject matter was so obscure and we had limited marketing dollars for everything that we were doing. We knew this one...was going to get lost in the shuffle, because it just was such a small, independent movie, so when it went theatrically, we were thrilled.

According to Colichman, securing theatrical distribution proved to be challenging, claiming that, “there was no one; there was absolutely no one banging on our door.” The producers screened the film at the Sundance Festival where the response was tepid, although the film won the Sundance Prize for “Best Adapted Screenplay.” Ultimately, Lions Gate offered a modest fee to distribute and promote the project. The film released to both critical acclaim and helped secure a crossover audience. In addition, the film received nominations and won multiple awards, including the Academy Award for Condon’s adaptation of the screenplay. As with the majority of the projects discussed here, the film also won a GLAAD Media Award.

Like Showtime, HBO continues to air the occasional LGBT-themed program, based on LGBT and AIDS history, literature, or theatre. *Normal* (2003) came from the Broadway play by Jane Anderson, which was a fictional account of a Midwestern, middle-aged farmer who pursued gender reassignment surgery to become a woman, with his wife's support. In 2013, HBO's Liberace movie, *Behind the Candelabra* (2013), featured two major feature film stars, Michael Douglas and Matt Damon, and the critically-acclaimed feature film director Steven Soderbergh. The program revealed little more about Liberace's life than had been portrayed in the earlier television movies from the late 1980s. Nonetheless, the cultural value of the feature talent involved in the production helped generate tremendous press for the program as well as numerous industry awards.

Angels in America. HBO's production of *Angels in America* is perhaps the most remarkable LGBT TV movie ever produced. Edgerton (2008) claimed that, "even before reaching the screen, *Angels in America* emerged as, 'the biggest event involving the gay movement in the history of American popular culture'" (p. 136). Based on the Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Tony Kushner, HBO's *Angels in America*, was subtitled *A Gay Fantasia with National Themes* and became an eight-hour mini-series. Set in 1985, the play features a series of overlapping narratives and characters set against the rise of the New Right and Reagan, the rise of the gay community and the AIDS Crisis, as well as organized religion, in this instance, Mormonism.

The themes feature the critical intersectionality between disease, sexuality, culture, politics and religion. In my interview with Tony Kushner, he claimed:

Angels is certainly not the first gay play, it certainly wasn't the first gay TV film, it wasn't the first thing about AIDS. It possibly...had the biggest numbers of lines assaulting the Reagan administration of anything that had been on television up to that point, which often get overlooked. When people talk about the play, they talk about

sexual politics and the politics of AIDS, but I think one of the most, maybe the only really original thing about *Angels* is that it's a serious play in which people talk about politics and name specific politicians and don't talk about them in generalities.

Kushner's comments reflect the multiple critical themes of the play, including those ignored, like politics, while others are privileged, like AIDS and gayness. In this regard, I agree with Minton and Schultz (date), who claimed that *Angels* is "so ambitious as to attempt to address the history of Western civilization in general and the United States' development as a nation in particular" (p. 19).

Any attempt to describe the plot of *Angels* is fraught with complication; as *New York Magazine's* critic John Leonard (2003) said of the program, "to be sure, you must bring to the occasion the same stamina and alert intelligence you'd bring to a serious novel". The narrative features an ensemble of multicultural, straight, and gay fictional characters, and a few real-life characters, convicted Communist spy Ethel Rosenberg and the closeted gay Republican lawyer, Roy Cohn. The program featured an A-list cast of feature stars, including Al Pacino, Meryl Streep, Mary Louise Parker, and Emmy Thompson, who all performed multiple parts in the drama.

In my interview with Cary Brokaw, the Executive Producer, he described how the project took thirteen years to make. Brokaw came from a background in both studio and independent features, as both an executive and a producer. He produced a number of independent films including Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992) and *Short Cuts* (1993), Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law* (1986), and Gus Van Sant's *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989). Brokaw further mentioned he was drawn to these projects out of personal interest, not necessarily commercial potential. As Brokaw states:

I learned a long time ago that I can't develop and produce a movie simply because I think it's going to make a lot of money; it's going to appeal to a vast audience. I have to have

some sort of personal stake and connection to the story. I have to believe, as corny as it sounds, that I'm bringing something to the world; bringing light, or knowledge, or awareness, or something of value. That's what motivates me to get up and work as hard as I do to develop and produce and oversee the movies I do. I'm not saying it's a more noble pursuit, but for me it works, it's what drives me. What interested me in movies, and applies to TV movies and series as well when I was a child was the power of the medium, and it could be so persuasive.

Brokaw's motives and philosophy suggest how critical media producers may sometimes operate beyond commercial motives and material concerns; rather, like other artists, their work sometimes reflects larger critical cultural motives.

Once Brokaw read the play, he began to "stalk" Kushner for the rights, pursuing him wherever the play was subsequently mounted, in Los Angeles, Seattle, New York, and London. Finally, Kushner agreed to enter into a deal with Brokaw. As Brokaw explained it,

There came a point where he began really trusting me; he understood that my intentions were good and that I was a man of my word, was reliable, [and] that I had the best interests of *Angels* and he by association at heart. We had a dinner, and I said, "I want to make two movies of your plays. Will you do this with me?" And he said, "Yes, I will."

Brokaw's efforts reflect the complicated, irrational nature of securing the rights to properties, including or perhaps especially critical narratives. However, Kushner admits that other producers had expressed interest only they never followed through with a commitment. This suggests how Brokaw's tenacity, like other critical media producers listed in this research, was a vital critical producing strategy.

Brokaw wanted to produce the project as two separate independent feature films. According to Brokaw, he secured interest from Pacino, Streep, and Thompson early on to play these roles. Kushner suggested that these actors were attached later, once the director, Mike Nichols was at the helm. Along the way, Brokaw also attached a series of well-regarded directors, including Robert Altman, who had done two projects with Brokaw. Altman eventually left the project, which Brokaw considered to have been fortuitous because

In hindsight, and I would say this if Bob Altman were alive and sitting there, he was absolutely the wrong director, because he does not respect ...the written word the way the director of *Angels* needs to... Bob would have fussed with it. The other thing about Bob is that he had a degree of cynicism that I don't think is best suited for *Angels*. I mean, there is heart. Earnestness is usually a term that I abhor, but there's a sincerity and a vulnerability, and a heart to *Angels* that I think is contrary to what Bob did best.

Brokaw's comments reflect how creative and critical concerns come into play and may not necessarily be complimentary. In addition, this account underscores the potential tensions within the creative and critical process of filmmaking between the filmmaker director and the storyteller screenwriter. As seen with *Tales of the City*, fidelity to the underlying text can represent both a creative choice and a critical tactic.

Altman would never commit to the project, and Brokaw struggled to find a studio to finance the play as two films for \$20 million. In the interim, other directors also expressed interest, including P.J. Hogan, who had some commercial success with *Muriel's Wedding* and *My Best Friend's Wedding*. Playwright and director Neil LaBute was also interested; however, the Mormon Church threatened LaBute with disfellowship if he directed the project. According to Brokaw, "he, his family, and his wife's family were going to be excommunicated if he undertook *Angels*, and he backed out." In these events, we see that the play had generated a potent backlash from the Mormon Church, which features prominently and negatively in the play. According to Edgerton, other directors who had expressed interest included Jonathan Demme (*Philadelphia* [1993]) and Gus Van Sant (*Milk* [2008]).

While waiting to find a way to finance the project, Brokaw started to produce television movies, including *Two Mothers for Zachary*). In addition, Brokaw started to make TV movies for HBO, where he had a longtime ally in Colin Calendar, who ran the movie department. According to Brokaw, HBO saw itself as "filling the role of supporting independent filmmaking in America" and offered "a safe haven, a protected environment, in which creative talent can

take risks and make movies that would otherwise not be made and released in theaters” (Gener, 2003).

For HBO, Brokaw adapted a number of successful Broadway plays. HBO’s programming strategy continues a tradition practiced by Showtime on Broadway and ABC Theater. These projects included the LGBT-themed *Normal*, which was produced concurrently with *Angels in America*. In addition, Brokaw produced the off-Broadway play *Wit* (2001), starring Emma Thompson and directed by Mike Nichols. Brokaw secured Nichols interest and finally convinced HBO to go forward with *Angels*. As Brokaw said, “the stars all aligned.”

Brokaw’s experiences reflect some of the struggles that producers sometimes encounter in trying to champion a dense, culturally-specific, and critical project. In discussing these challenges with Brokaw, he mentioned that another factor in HBO’s decision was that the AIDS crisis had started to wane. According to Brokaw, “There was just enough distance; there was enough calm, enough perspective about the epidemic and what it meant and what it portended going forward that suddenly there was a different kind of attitude towards making *Angels*.” In *The New York Times*, Frank Rich suggested that

if anything, Mr. Kushner's writing has gained in pathos with age. What he has to say about coping with unfathomable loss and the terror inflicted by covert, death-dealing cells at the end of the last millennium speaks to us more urgently than ever in the new one ushered in by 9/11. (2003)

Brokaw’s remarks suggest that the passage of time had made the project’s narratives, themes and representations less politically-charged and controversial. This account represents Brokaw’s perspective. Unfortunately, I was unable to secure an interview with HBO’s Calendar, who might have provided even further insight into the network’s decision. In addition, as mentioned previously, these programs are more viable due the commercial logics of premium cable that do not depend on advertiser funding and court controversial fare that will attract press

and subscribers. However, Rich's remarks also suggest that the passage of time contributed to the critical reception of the program, coming in the wake of 9/11.

In contrast to a feature adaptation, HBO allowed the production to maintain fidelity to the play. Kushner claimed in one interview that "television feels more like theater. The fact that it's on television preserves the kind of intimacy of the stage" (Owen, 2003). Kushner also remarked that the plays "may adapt better into television than in theatrical release" (Owen, 2003). In my interview, Kushner acknowledged, "As I remember, and I would have to go back to the original scripts for the film to figure this out, but as I remember, Mike didn't really ask me to make cuts, many cuts, in the screenplay."

Edgerton (2008) suggested that the transition of theater to television has been a rare occurrence on television, except for PBS' *American Playhouse*; however, in this research, I have listed a number of networks that engaged in this programming strategy, which afforded opportunities to include LGBT-themed critical content. In fairness, the adaptation from stage to television reflects the early programming strategies of broadcast radio and early television anthologies, which persisted in the development of the television movie format. Similarly, Ron Cowen, who co-wrote *An Early Frost* and previously wrote for the CBS Anthology series, *CBS Playhouse*, claimed that

There was socially responsible writing going on, on television. There was a history of that. And that is a precursor to a movie of the week. It [*CBS Playhouse*] was taped in a studio, but it was an original drama written for television. The next step was TV movies, film. It moved from tape to film.

My intention in describing this history is to account for the critical legacy of TV movies in earlier TV production, which media historians have described as the "Golden Age of Television." The format of TV movies, like anthology series, required multiple narratives,

which offered opportunities for critical producers, executives, and writers to produce the occasional critical narrative or conduct some form of critical media intervention.

Although HBO original committed to spending \$20 million, the budget would later grow to over \$67 million. According to Brokaw,

After we started, and Colin [Calendar, HBO's head of movies] in particular, fully grasped what we had, when we asked to be able to shoot heaven in Rome and Hadrian's Villa they agreed. When we asked to do a million dollar title sequence, they also agreed. When we needed to build in a hiatus [for Mike Nichols who could not complete the entire production at once] in the schedule they also agreed.

Brokaw's comments, while unconfirmed with HBO, reflect Waltzer's account of the reshoots for *And the Band Played On*. In these accounts, HBO's investment in these projects reflected a commitment to quality programming that does distinguish them from other television networks.

While the commercial logics of HBO may allow the network to invest more in its programming, as a premium network, HBO can only reach a smaller, self-selected audience than broadcasters or even basic cable networks. In this way, *Angels in America* was unable to reach larger, mainstream, and perhaps more critically desirable audiences. In response, Brokaw stated:

I never really looked at it that way, because HBO allowed things to be made well with great people, and they spend what needs to be spent on production, but they market the shit out of it. So I wasn't looking at the audience numbers, but I was looking at the profile, because even then the idea was it premieres on HBO, that means its going to play the majority of foreign markets, probably on television, you have your life on video and DVD, it's going to be picked up on a second round of syndication, and if it's good, if it is critically acknowledged, those larger numbers eventually are going to be found in aggregate through these different mediums.

Brokaw's remarks reflect on the circulation of these critical texts throughout culture. Since HBO owned this program, this meant the network could more readily repeat the program on the network far more frequently than broadcast or basic cable networks, who license movies for limited runs. In addition, a basic cable network, LOGO, aired the program in syndication, and the program has been released in home video.

Brokaw also indicated that, from the beginning, the program reached out to numerous LGBT organizations as collaborators, to communicate and raise awareness amongst their constituents about the making of the program. According to Brokaw,

We communicated with all those organizations from day one of pre-production to let them know this was coming, that we were doing it, and we engaged them as active partners in terms of awareness and what this miniseries and this movie represented in terms of public awareness about gay and lesbian issues. HBO was incredibly smart and adept the way they did that, to really lock arms with everyone, and not let it get to be, “Oh, I don’t like this scene, because...” They’d just say, “Look, we’re doing this, you can be a part of it or not,” and basically everybody did.

Brokaw’s comments confirm, as reflected in numerous accounts in this dissertation, that these networks, producers, programmers, and marketing executives collaborated with LGBT organizations in the production and promotion of these programs.

Furthermore, politicians in Washington, D.C. attended a screening of *Angels in America*. According to Brokaw,

I remember going to a dinner with Ben Bradlee and a bunch of senators. Richard Plepler, the actual President of HBO, was then the head of publicity and marketing, and Richard is very canny and well-connected politically. He’s done great things over the years by cultivating a relationship between HBO and Washington so that when there’s an HBO screening, people turn out, it’s an event. Because he has tied cultural perspective that HBO has brought to television and the American entertainment landscape to political awareness in a very effective way where the opinion makers, the policy makers, they want to know what HBO is showing. It’s pulling back the curtain on stuff they weren’t entirely aware of, so it’s been a really positive exchange that Richard deserves tremendous credit for, creating this, and building this, and expanding it.

Brokaw’s account suggests the ways in which HBO operates within the larger political economy of media. While these projects serve the commercial interests of the network, these also reflect how HBO deploys these projects strategically to promote HBO for D.C. policy makers and legislators.

These screenings may also continue the critical pedagogical mission of the programs, namely, to educate and raise awareness amongst the most powerful members of our society. In

this regard, media scholar Shayne Pepper (2013) argues that HBO's multiple AIDS programming efforts suggest their status as *public service entertainment*. According to Pepper,

In examining HBO's forty-year history, one notices an extensive list of socially conscious, politically engaged, and even outright public service programs. Over the years, HBO has brought a great deal of thoughtful (and sometimes controversial) cultural programming into American households. This group of films explores topics such as poverty, AIDS, women's rights, and global injustice, often fiercely critiquing systems of inequality and oppression. Sometimes these programs even provide potential solutions and avenues of hope.

As for the reception of this program, the critics were effusive and the program secured an audience of 7.8 million viewers. As Edgerton (2013) points out, this amounted to "the equivalent of filling the Walter Kerr Theatre to capacity day after day for 22 straight years" (p. 144). As Kushner remarked, "The play had already been seen by an enormous number of people. But television, the scope of it, is a whole lot bigger." As these comments suggest, even premium cable television operates as a mass medium, confirming the medium's critical potential but also its responsibility.

HBO's *Angels in America* (2003) would become the single most nominated and Emmy award-winning program in television history. The last record holder was the mini-series *Roots* (1977), twenty-five years earlier. This symmetry provides a symbolic and poetic coda for what, in my estimation, reflects the last days of the TV movie era.

In describing his motives for writing the play, Kushner offered up the following response:

I think it was inevitable, because it was going to be a play about being gay, it had to be political. Because identity is a politically formed, historically determined, historically formed thing, as all identities are. There was no way then, and there really isn't today, any way of talking about homosexuality or being gay or being part of the LGBT community without being political. There was no apolitical way to explore that identity. I guess, this has always been true of LGBT politics, their politics are inherently personal. You're talking about sex and the way you give and receive love in a physical sense. And the way in which you're allowed or not allowed to live openly and to express love, erotic love or romantic love, in an open way. Those are all political issues, as I said, but they're also obviously very deeply personal issues.

Kushner's account confirms how LGBT stories, whether overtly critical or not, operate at the intersection of the personal and the political. The programs, by making LGBT lives visible, breaking up the hetero-normativity represented throughout media and provide representations that are often absent from other forms of culture, including sports, politics, religion, and education.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Chapter 3 surveyed the critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies in the context of the concerns and strategies of the LGBT social movement. This history featured five eras and corresponding sections: Liberation, Backlash, Counter-Backlash, Culture Wars, and Post Wars. Within each section, the analysis compared these programs to other LGBT media, including feature films and television series. In addition, this history featured critical-industrial case studies of twenty seminal LGBT TV movies that analyzed their ownership, production, content, and reception.

This chapter discusses this research in consideration of the original research questions: Did these programs educate and advocate on behalf of the LGBT community? If so, how was this possible and who was most responsible for their critical production? To address these questions requires consideration of the following:

- The critical pedagogical narratives featured in these texts as well as the popular and critical reception by critics, scholars, and activists.
- The complicated ownership and financing of LGBT TV movies, diverse commercial logics and rhizomatic structures of television networks, and the critical media production practices that included both commercial strategies and critical tactics conducted throughout the entire producing process of development, production, and promotion; and,
- The critical *alliance* between producers, programmers, screenwriters, amongst others who were vital to the critical production of these programs;

Critical Narratives and Reception

In Chapter Three, the critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies featured dozens of programs with diverse narratives and representations. As described in this section, only a few of these programs were LGBT-centered, i.e., featured LGBT protagonists or co-protagonists that were produced for LGBT audiences. These included *As Is*, *Longtime Companion*, *Andre's Mother*, and arguably *Tales of the City*. Surprisingly, some respondents did not even consider

these programs to be LGBT texts. Nonetheless, in contrast to feature films and television, these programs offered more affirmative representations of LGBT characters.

“LGBT-themed” describes programs that foregrounded the critical concerns of the LGBT community, i.e., coming out, AIDS, custody, marriage, and serving in the military. These programs were, to quote Gross (2001), Walters (2001), and Russo (1987), “problem movies,” in which the concerns raised in the story featured problems, although I would argue that the very nature of Aristotelian drama is conflict, in which protagonists must always overcome “problems.” Furthermore, as Bruner and Nussbaum suggest, narratives allow audiences to identify with these characters, experience these concerns, and develop empathy and understanding. These programs can speak to the narrative imagination of audiences. Through the mimetic nature of visual narratives, and through the capacities of the medium of television that delivered these programs in the privacy of the home, these programs can also appeal to the moral imagination of audiences.

In addition, Gross, Walters, and Russo are correct to point out that these were gay problems designed for straight audiences; however, through the lens of critical pedagogy, these were social issue movies designed to educate straight audiences about these LGBT problems and offer possible resolutions. In every instance, the LGBT characters were seen as the moral center of the story most deserving of acceptance or justice. For example, *That Certain Summer*, the gay father is clearly deserving of his son’s support for his sexual orientation. In *A Question of Love*, the lesbian mother deserves to keep custody of her children. In *Serving in Silence*, Colonel Cammermeyer deserves to keep her job in the military.

In *Angels in America*, while Roy Cohn is clearly depicted as despicable, loathsome, self-hating, and manipulative characters, especially with regards to his sexuality, his death is still

treated with compassion by the gay characters whom he otherwise despised while alive. Two gay characters in his room at the time of his death even offer the Mourner's Kaddish for him. Meanwhile, in the coda, which takes place five years later, the survivors, gay or straight, positive or negative, present an alternative family structure surviving the crisis. Like so many AIDS-themed movies listed here featuring gay men, including *An Early Frost*, *As Is*, and *Longtime Companion*, this ending offers hope to audiences. In my interview with Kushner, he described his motive for this ending:

I was motivated in part, by, there were two men with AIDS that we meet in *Angels in America* and one of them dies, and it was important to me that the other one didn't. There were a number of things that were happening in AIDS-related dramatic fiction at the time. One was that everybody who was shown having AIDS had a kind of sad death at the end, and I thought it would be interesting that Prior would turn out to be one of those people who doesn't die ...and I felt given the way that the play is talking about the millennium approaching and so on and so forth, there's a part of the play that looks to the future.

The protagonists in these LGBT-themed movies were often LGBT characters, although other characters had their own story arcs. For example, in *An Early Frost*, the gay man with AIDS had to come to terms with being positive and the fact that his partner may have infected him. In the end, he and his partner reunite, and he allows his family to finally know about his relationship. At the same time, the drama focused on the parents, who first discover their son is gay and is HIV positive. In the course of the drama, they overcome their homophobia in order to support their son and his partner.

LGBT-centered programs featured LGBT characters at the center of narratives; however, these programs may or may not foreground the concerns of the community. Nonetheless, as I argue here, these programs still operated critically, raising visibility about LGBT lives, featuring positive and balanced representations of LGBT characters, and often becoming sites of political

contestation in both production and reception. These programs drew on seminal LGBT literature (*Tales of the City, Gods and Monsters*) or prominent LGBT history or biographies (*Pedro*).

These distinctions between LGBT-themed and LGBT-centered are also subjective and may overlap. For example, *As Is* may be seen as both LGBT-themed and LGBT-centered since it foregrounds the AIDS crisis and featured a gay couple coping with the disease. *Serving in Silence* is both a courtroom drama about gays in the military and a romantic drama about a decorated lesbian soldier willing to sacrifice her career for the woman she loves. *Any Mother's Son* does not foreground a gay soldier trying to serve in the military; nonetheless, the story clearly indicts the homophobic culture of the Navy that motivated the murder and the Navy's attempt to expedite the trial.

In my interviews, some respondents did not feel these programs qualified as LGBT narratives. These were, in every example, straight respondents; whereas other respondents, even on these same projects, understood these to be LGBT texts. For example, Antony Root, the U.K. producer of *Tales of the City*, stated:

I was never aware of it being a gay set of books. All I saw was people talking about these fantastic stories in San Francisco and stuff. It's only when I read them I realized what people were doing in the books, but no, I think that the radiance of Armistead's writing and the humanity and the joy was something that people connected to with of whatever background.

Similar to Root, Showtime's Mansfield, who championed the subsequent *Tales* sequels, did not consider them to be gay texts, stating "I don't remember looking at it as a gay show at all, because it was very mixed."

In contrast to Root and Mansfield, the gay author and U.S. producer and screenwriter understood that these were gay texts. Armistead Maupin insisted on retaining creative control over any film or television adaptations, demanding that they include same-sex characters and

affection. Alan Poul described these as gay texts that had been ghettoized in gay bookstores and on gay bookshelves in the U.S. Comparably, U.K. customs confiscated these books at the gay bookstore where they had first been imported before these books became bestsellers.

Similarly, Showtime's Sharon Byrens did not necessarily perceive *Gods and Monsters* to be gay texts, stating:

The project was never positioned as a gay project internally. It wasn't like we had to do this really great gay project, it was just we had to do this really cool, obscure story about a Hollywood character no one knows about with James Whale and these last days of him. It wasn't like, wow, this is a really cool gay project. It just happened to be that he was gay and it was this period of time that you celebrate his life.

Yet, as openly gay producer Colichman suggested, the reason the script spent years looking for financing was the result of both "homophobia and the lack of a high concept." In addition, A&E's Fine did not necessarily consider *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* to be lesbian story so much as she felt the program was a literary adaptation that happened to include a lesbian narrative.

These differences in perception sometimes informed the critical nature of the production. For *Tales of the City*, as Root described, "we didn't want a flaming all-gay super pink show. We were making the show that the secretaries were reading on the train in to London and very happy about every day." As a result, the U.K. producers were at odds with the U.S. producers and screenwriter over the critical development of the screenplay. For Mansfield, Byrens and Fine, however, these opinions did not seem to interfere or inhibit the critical production of these texts.

In addition, I would argue that having straight collaborators champion projects that happened to be gay could also be strategic. As discussed in my literature review, Bernstein described how coming out may operate as a strategic decision. Straight producers who did not

identify these programs as gay texts were better able to avoid internal contestation and any impression of having a pro-gay agenda. Regardless, gay and religious activists perceived these to be gay texts. For example, *Tales of the City* suffered a backlash from the New Right while all three programs garnered GLAAD awards for Outstanding TV Movie.

Compared to feature films, LGBT TV movies featured more critical narratives or operated as pedagogy intended for mainstream audiences. Most studio feature films either ignored gay people or cast them as pathological villains, suicidal depressants, or comic relief. The few studio films comparable films, e.g., *Making Love*, appeared years after these narratives had been featured in TV movies, although these movies were meaningful due to their cultural value as feature films. As reflected in the backlash to *Philadelphia*, by the time the film was released, a militant LGBT movement had emerged that did not care for how the film framed gay men in an AIDS movie as a supporting character. While an independent gay cinema emerged, these films operated as gay texts for gay audiences, not programs intended to help straight audiences identify, understand, and relate to LGBT concerns or characters. As mentioned previously, television networks financed and produced two highly-regarded LGBT independent films, *Longtime Companion* and *Gods and Monsters*, , although critical and historical accounts often overlook this fact.

As for the desired audiences for the narratives, based on my interviews, their creators meant these programs for broad, mainstream audiences. *American Playhouse* is the exception, which had a mandate to create programming for underserved audiences. In describing *Tales of the City*, Showtime's Mansfield stated:

We hoped for the gay audience. We also knew that we were going to be pissing some of them off, but they were meant for the large audiences, and we also knew that we had to honor them and do them well and make them provocative enough and not shy enough

away so that we wouldn't get in trouble with the gay audience, but I think that at their core, they were meant for as many people as possible.

The need for broad audiences reflects the commercial logics of television, whether seeking out the largest possible audiences for advertisers or trying to secure the most subscribers for a premium cable network. Furthermore, as Mansfield's quote suggests, gay audiences are not monolithic. Their reading of these texts may be just as diverse and divisive as any other group, straight or gay, as reflected in the backlash to a number of these texts by the gay community.

Their historicity informs the critical value of these narratives. Curiously, there were a number of programs that told nearly the same story twice, only two decades apart, which provided an opportunity to trace the evolution in narratives and representations. In 1978, *A Question of Love* told the true story of a lesbian mother losing custody. Gina Rowlands' lesbian mother appears as an ideal mom, nurse, daughter and partner. In the end, she loses custody of her children to her ex-husband, even though he is portrayed as a former alcoholic and abuser.

Twenty years later, *Two Mothers for Zachary* told the story of different legal case that featured the same outcome. However, as producer Robinson mentioned, he fought the network to air the movie after the Virginia Supreme Court ruled in favor of the grandmother. As he claims, networks want TV movies with happy endings; however, this was not the case with most of the LGBT TV movies included in this research. The network's motives remain unclear since I did not secure the interview; however, Robinson's determination to air the movie because of the tragic ending suggests his understanding of how these programs can operate pedagogically and cathartically.

Furthermore, *Two Mothers for Zachary* represents the characters with a great deal more nuance and sophistication than in its predecessor. The lesbian mother portrayed by Valerie Bertinelli is a promiscuous woman who bears her child out of wedlock and struggles with

keeping a job. Despite her heterosexual behavior in the past, she falls in love with a woman at work, which articulates a far more fluid depiction of sexual orientation than typically shown in these programs. Although the program still lacks prominent displays of same-sex affection, the lesbian couple affirms their love and commitment to each other, even at the risk that it may cost the mother custody of her son. In this way, she is privileging homosexual longing above her own maternal needs, which I would argue is transgressive and counter-hegemonic.

Reflecting similar tales told two decades apart, *Sergeant Matlovich vs the U.S. Air Force* (1978) and *Serving in Silence: The Margaret Cammermeyer Story* (1995) can be compared in terms of narrative progression. Both are based on true stories about accomplished LGBT soldiers who lost their appeals and their military jobs. However, there are stark differences in how these films portray these characters. *Matlovich* does not depict the gay soldier's personal life. In contrast, in *Serving in Silence*, the core of the story is the romantic love affair between Cammermeyer and her partner. As described in the case study, against the interests of the network, the producers insisted that the love story remained central to the narrative. As producer Meron noted, "she [Lindy DeKoven, the head of NBC movies] thought she was buying a courtroom drama, and what we were selling...our intention was to tell a love story."

While some projects did not foreground LGBT political concerns, these nonetheless shed critical light on the structural nature of homophobia within our culture, *Any Mother's Son* (1985) tells the true story of a mother who fought the Navy to ensure that justice comes to the two sailors who killed her son. The program clearly indicts the Navy for fostering a homophobic culture that would encourage these hate crimes and then attempt to cover them up. Furthermore, *Any Mother's Son* appeared at the height of the debate over "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." In airing

this program, Lifetime Television, executives, and producers could easily have been accused of engaging in partisanship.

In their critical reception, a number of these programs became sites of political contestation. Their narratives were subject to complex and heightened scrutiny, from LGBT critics, activists and scholars as well as religious and political conservatives. For example, in the case of HBO's *And the Band Played On*, the program came under criticism by gay critics for not foregrounding gay characters and for not depicting more same-sex affection. None of the critics would have been aware of the network's efforts to add more scenes between the gay couple, which involved expensive reshoots. Critics accused programs like *That Certain Summer*, *An Early Frost*, and *Consenting Adult* of representing hagiographic gay men, or rather, "super-fags." Similarly, LGBT critics objected to the lack of diversity of gay men reflects in *Longtime Companion*, even when the epidemiology struck mostly white gay men in the beginning.

In these examples, LGBT TV movies have been criticized for not being gay enough, for not being more authentic, or for not reflecting the diversity of the community. At some point, these criticisms make the creation of LGBT narratives almost untenable. Nonetheless, I would argue that these critiques confirm how these programs operated critically and symbolically for gay audiences, activists, scholars, and critics. At the very least, these criticisms repudiate Gitlin's (date) claim that "these pictures no doubt make less of an impression on society than series, for they don't stay long enough to inspire sustained identification" (p. 335).

One further concern cited by most LGBT critics is the lack of same-sex affection or sexuality in these programs. This criticism is warranted as most programs rarely showed same-sex affection, although other critics and audiences did not share these same concerns. For example, in *Serving in Silence*, while popular reviews alluded to the romance between the

lesbian couple, some LGBT scholars focused almost solely on the tepid nature of the kiss. Similarly, while some LGBT critics described *Making Love* as boring, other LGBT audiences were lauding the film in letters to the editor. As described in my own experience, the film was the first text that I had experienced that suggested that gay men could live openly, proudly, and romantically. In this way, the film informed my moral imagination, not necessarily my carnal imagination. In this response, I would argue that reducing the value of these programs solely to their depiction of same-sex affection fails to account for the critical, pedagogical, and moral value of their narratives, themes, and representations.

As reflected in the case studies, these depictions of same-sex affection often became sites of contestation in production. Because most critics rarely consider the struggles over representation that occur during production, they failed to understand how these decision to leave out these depictions was strategic and often contested by the producers. In *An Early Frost*, the openly gay director, John Erman, refused to fight the network, which had insisted on excising any depictions of gay love. Similarly, NBC tried to get the producers to shoot an alternative version of the kiss in *Serving in Silence*, but they refused. ABC required that the production of *Two Mothers for Zachary* shoot multiple versions and only depicted a slight side-ways kiss. Furthermore, these concerns were not unwarranted. When same-sex affection and sexuality has been portrayed, as seen in *Tales of the City*, the program has become a target for the Right. Wildmon compiled these scenes videotape, which convinced Congress to defund *Playhouse*, which had championed numerous LGBT programs for years.

Although missing from most scholarship, some programs did feature overt depictions of same-sex affection. In 1981, the *American Playhouse* production of *Fifth of July* (1980), prominently featured a disabled gay Vietnam Vet, played by Richard Thomas, star of *The*

Waltons. In the opening scene, Thomas' shirtless lover, played by Jeff Daniels, comes in the house and sensually kisses Thomas on the lips. As *Playhouse's* Law noted, while watching the scene as it was filmed:

I'm thinking, "Oh my God, they're going to just crucify us". I myself had never seen anything like that on television, and I'm thinking, I'm about to put this on television? I don't remember if anything happened, frankly, I just remember in terms of eras changing and what you can expect to find on television that for its day was beyond groundbreaking. Yeah, it was sexy. I mean, he didn't have his shirt on, he had a smelly, sweaty t-shirt [from] someone else and then enjoyed inhaling, and then they kiss. The kissing part is a big deal, but it was the fact that it was sexual. [That's] actually what you wanted to stay away from -- anything sexual.

Law affirms not only the transgressive nature of televised depictions of homosexuality on television but also how these depictions cannot be considered out of context for their meaning to audiences. A kiss may be more meaningful between committed lovers than strangers in a park.

Similarly, Showtime's *As Is* features an ending perhaps more sexually transgressive than any other text featured here. The former lovers pull the curtains closed as they are about to make love, in a hospital room, even though one of the lovers has been diagnosed with AIDS. This decision to engage in sex may, for some audiences, be viewed as reckless but, for others, heroically defiant. Unfortunately, for some LGBT critics and historians, these programs and the behaviors they depict were overlooked, as have so many other texts featured here.

Owners, Networks, and Programming

As reflected in previous chapter, LGBT-themed TV movies featured multiple, complicated ownership and financing arrangements. While some networks owned, financed, and produced these programs (e.g., *And the Band Played On*, *Consenting Adult*, *As Is*, *An Early Frost*), other programs were licensed by networks from studios or production companies for a limited number of runs (e.g., *Serving in Silence*, *Two Moms for Zachary*, *Any Mother's Son*, *Wedding Wars*). In addition, some programs were acquisitions that had been financed, produced,

or exhibited by other networks in the U.K. (e.g., *Tales of the City*, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*), although these were promoted as original programming in the U.S. Furthermore, certain networks allowed for producers to secure theatrical distribution, even after the network developed, financed, and produced the program (e.g., *Longtime Companion*, *Gods and Monsters*).

While there are multiple forms of financing and ownership for these programs, television networks are primarily responsible for their distribution and marketing. These programs aired across the dial, including broadcast, public, basic, and premium cable networks. All these networks feature complicated and iterative commercial logics, comprised of multiple stakeholders including viewers, advertisers, station managers, affiliates, subscribers, and regulators. In turn, these commercial logics inform their rhizomatic management structure and multiple programming strategies.

Some networks financed and produced their own programs, which meant greater creative control but also higher risks. In the 1970s and early 1980s, some broadcast networks contained their own in-house TV movie production units. ABC's in-house unit produced *Consenting Adult* with outside executive producer, Ray Aghayan who had partnered with Martin Starger, a former ABC executive. Similarly, NBC's in-house production unit owned, financed, and produced *An Early Frost*, which former NBC executive Perry Lafferty supervised. In both examples, the former insider status of the producers offered the kind of greater critical agency that contributes to the success of these programs.

Showtime sometimes not only financed and produced their own programs but also co-produced others, which lowered the financial risk but added more stakeholders involved in the creative and critical production. Showtime financed and produced *As Is* and *The Twilight of the*

Golds, but partially financed *Gods and Monsters*, which secured theatrical distribution with Lionsgate. Showtime co-produced the two sequels to *Tales of the City*. In making *More Tales of the City*, Showtime partnered with Channel Four and Canadian partners, whereas Channel Four dropped out of the partnership for *Further Tales of the City*. HBO sometimes owns, co-produces, and acquires their programming, although all the programs included in this research received financing and production from the network, including *Longtime Companion*, *Normal* and *Angels in America*.

The majority of the broadcast and basic cable TV movies highlighted in this research received licensing from outside studios and production companies. Networks paid for only a couple of runs and only provided a portion of the budget; the rest of the budget would come from international syndication and home video. Although multiple stakeholders were involved, the network yielded the most control, although producers often exhibited agency where possible. Sony Pictures Television financed and produced *Serving in Silence* and *Wedding Wars* with producers Zadan and Meron. ABC Pictures financed and produced Lifetime's *Any Mother's Son*. MTV licensed *Pedro* and *Anatomy of a Hate Crime* from outside suppliers.

These complex financing and production deals could make the creative and critical production of these programs challenging; however, these arrangements also created opportunities for these critical interventions to occur. For example, producer Randy Robinson had secured a deal with Hearst Pictures to finance, license, sell and distribute his projects. As a result, according to Robinson,

I was serving several masters. I was serving the network first and foremost, because they're the buyer. I was serving Glenda [Grant, head of production for Hearst], who had the purse strings and the financial controls on the movie, and creative involvement. Given my sort of philosophical differences and perhaps aesthetic differences with most other television movie executives or producers, I worked more independently with the network

than many or most of Glenda's other producers, and often we would butt heads, Glenda and I, on the development of a movie.

By the time Robinson had sold *Two Mothers for Zachary* to ABC, their deal with Hearst was over. Robinson and Brokaw secured a distribution deal with Hallmark Entertainment but they still needed to finance the production themselves. As a result, according to Robinson,

Avenue cash-flowed the movie, between the license fee that the network paid out and the money that Hallmark Entertainment cash-flowed during production, there were nanoseconds of true deficit where there had to be money put up by Avenue, but it was very limited in those days. You basically had between the cash flow and the payout of the network and the distribution advance; they usually were covering your cost of production pretty much at every step of the way.

Robinson's comments reflect the complicated nature of TV movie financing and production.

These conditions create a unique set of risks and opportunities for producers to engage in critical media production.

In addition to owned and licensed programming, some networks acquired programming from the U.K. Channel Four financed and produced *Tales of the City* after the efforts by Propaganda and the producers had failed to secure interest in a conventional U.S. series version. During production, PBS' *American Playhouse* acquired the program for a reduced fee but nonetheless became the target of a backlash and had their funding cut by Congress. A&E acquired *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* from the BBC in the U.K., although the network still promoted the program as original programming.

PBS' *American Playhouse* had a complex financing, production, and ownership model, which Lindsay Law referred to as a "three-dimensional chess puzzle." A consortium of PBS major stations from New York, Los Angeles, Boston, and South Carolina owned *American Playhouse*. Each project was financed separately with some financing from its owners and other financing from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. In addition, some programs were able

to secure feature film distribution, which provided additional revenue for future projects. In the early years, *Playhouse* would also secure corporate funding; however, *Playhouse* provided all the funding for *Longtime Companion*, which placed even greater pressure on Law to secure theatrical distribution.

The commercial logics of these networks are just as complicated and diverse as their financial and ownership arrangements. These logics represent multiple stakeholders, viewers, advertisers, station owners, cable affiliates, and regulators. These logics also contribute to complex management structures and programming practices, which included both commercial and critical strategies. Broadcast and basic cable networks rely on advertisers who are typically conservative and risk-averse. This meant that networks would avoid controversial programming, including critical narratives that might offend viewers and lead to backlash and advertiser boycott. As a result, network standards and practices departments developed into a proxy for ad sales and advertisers, trying to prevent or diminish any controversial topics that might lead to advertiser flight.

In the making of *An Early Frost*, NBC's programming executives encountered repeated objections from the S&P executive assigned to the program, which nearly kept the program from getting made. As NBC's White stated, "I was shadow-boxing with people who weren't in the room." His comment refers not only to the concerns of the ad sales and advertisers, but also Reverends Wildmon and Falwell, who would still conduct a boycott that cost the network millions.

Lindy DeKoven's projects at NBC were described as "Lindy's Films," which meant they were "a lightning rod for sales because it was issue-oriented subject matter, sometimes subjects that weren't particularly appealing to advertisers." While DeKoven was able to greenlight her own

projects, she still worked with these departments to avoid any “red flags.” Similarly, A&E’s Delia Fine would have to engage in internal lobbying of other departments, including ad sales and marketing, to overcome resistance and foster collaboration to promote the program. MTV’s Graden described how he “played dumb,” which allowed him to overcome potential resistance to his programming plans to produce *Anatomy of a Hate Crime* followed by a 24-hour blackout of all programming, which cost the network millions.

In addition to navigating the internal management structures and operations of television networks, programming executives also had to consider outside constituencies, including viewers, advocacy groups, station owners, and cable affiliates. Some of these groups yielded more agency than others. For example, Donald Wildmon threatened NBC stations to replace *An Early Frost*; however, according to NBC’s White, every station owner aired the program. A decade later, when NBC aired *Serving in Silence*, according to producer Meron, the network instructed these stations, “either you run the film as shot or not at all.” Nonetheless, one station went to black during the infamous “kiss” on the air.

American Playhouse yielded even less control over their affiliates. According to *Tales of the City* producer Poul, the first series did not air on a few PBS stations. In addition, in the case of PBS Chattanooga, the station received bomb threats. As *Playhouse*’s Law affirmed, some stations would either refuse to air these programs or edit out offensive scenes or dialogue, for which there were no repercussions. According to Law, “we felt we would only be able to exist if they were allowed to alter them if they felt it need be. When we were doing the features we did shoot alternatives, always to do with sex and nudity.”

In the early years of the cable networks, while still securing affiliate distribution across the country, basic cable networks like A&E were less concerned with advertisers than with

branding the network and garnering press and attention. This allowed Fine to air more controversial fare, like *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. As these networks secured more affiliate distribution, they become more reliant upon advertising, which may result in fewer risks in programming. Nonetheless, some programming executives, like A&E's Fine and MTV's Graden, found ways to get critical programming on the air through deft internal management strategies. Meanwhile, Lifetime's Sheri Singer joined the network in the first few years of their original programming. This afforded her more creative and critical agency to produce projects she wanted, including social justice programs which she'd previously produced while working at Norman Lear's production company. As Singer mentioned,

This is the best time for me to take the job, because I can come in and make something out of it. I can't really fail, because I'm not coming from anywhere, and I really, really liked who was then my boss, because she handed me the reigns to order the movies.

Although a premium network that did not rely on advertisers, Showtime produced distinctive programming designed to secure affiliate distribution, albeit on limited budgets that lowered risk. As Showtime's Sabinson said:

The beauty of Showtime was I think the budget was about sixty million dollars. The whole budget. You didn't have advertisers, the ratings were not material, you were trying to demonstrate that for whatever it was then, \$7.95 a month, that it was worth paying fifteen dollars to get twenty eight channels, and then \$7.95 a month more to get one, and the one should be Showtime, and not HBO. We're talking the very early, fledgling days. I was smart in thinking this is the next way of going. We could do anything, and it was about providing value, noise, self-promotion, low-budget, getting your name in the paper, anyway that you get your way out, because you didn't have a lot of money to spend on programming.

In these two examples, we understand how these networks translated the critical value of these programs into commercial value, helping them secure affiliate distribution and subscribers. In turn, these logics and strategies created the opportunities for programming executives to include LGBT programs featuring critical narratives.

Once HBO and Showtime had full distribution, their goal was still to make controversial fare that would attract subscribers without concern from advertisers. By virtue of avoiding FCC censure, HBO and Showtime's programming was afforded greater creative and critical agency over their projects, although still limited to the constraints of production budgets, financing, and ownership while also collaborating with outside producers who are also stakeholders in the process. While these programs contribute to the material conditions of these networks, producers and executives are able to exploit the network's resources to generate critical programming. As a result, HBO and Showtime have produced numerous LGBT and AIDS-themed programs, which Pepper has referred to as "public service entertainment."

HBO, Showtime, and ABC engaged in a programming strategy of adapting theater to television, which was both a commercial strategy and a critical tactic. Sabinson admitted that this strategy gave him something to "hide behind," so he could include programs like *As Is*, which had only been nominally successful off-Broadway. Airing under the aegis of *ABC Theater*, *Consenting Adult* was not even based on a play, but it shared similar critical themes that would better work within this strategy. This strategy was also commercial, while helping attract audiences interested in more critical fare. According to ABC's Stoddard,

It was a tip-off to the audience that we thought it was good. [That] what you're about to see is something that we are proud of and we built what we're referring to now as "the brand," which I hate, but we built ABC [Theater] as a trusted television event for the audience. If you're going to see it tonight, I don't know if you'll enjoy it, but it's going to be good. It's going to be well-done: it's going to be well-acted, it's going to be well-written, and it's going to be good. And that worked. I mean, it took five, six years, but it worked and we got very big audiences for the ABC Theater. I think it was the result of the fact that they saw the last one and they liked it.

In addition, a number of programming executives described their ability to air these programs as "counter-programming" to help reach a different audience than their competitors. DeKoven described airing more commercial topics on Sunday night but, to compete against ABC's

Monday Night Football, she featured more female-driven fare, including *Serving in Silence*. DeKoven further noted that “every single one of those movies on Monday night was an issue.” This programming strategy also lowered the risk for the network, since advertising rates were lower due to the smaller potential audiences. NBC’s White described a similar programming strategy from the 1980s, which meant airing “pro-social” movies against football as well CBS’ older skewing comedies, e.g., *M.A.S.H.*

These examples illustrate how the complex commercial logics, rhizomatic structures of network management, and programming strategies provided opportunities for these programs to be produced. While also satisfying their commercial imperatives, these material conditions provided agency and opportunity for programming executives to air the occasional critical program, including LGBT TV movies fare. Whether these strategies might be described as forms of exploitation or co-optation is a subject for debate; nonetheless, I would argue that these strategies were mutually beneficial for the networks and the LGBT social movement.

Critical Media Production

As reflected in the case studies, producing reflects multiple, rhizomatic, and often non-linear practices that start from inception to exhibition. These practices may continue even after exhibition, including awards campaigns and syndication internationally or on other platforms e.g., home video. In what follows, I have divided producing into three phases: development, production, and marketing. Within each phase, there are multiple creative practices, e.g., casting, financing, and scripting. For each practice, these may feature strategies that benefit the commercial value of the program, but these practices may also feature critical tactics that maintain the critical value of these texts. In addition, these commercial strategies and critical tactics are not mutually exclusive.

The initial phase of media development includes multiple creative practices starting with the conception of the idea and/or securing underlying rights. Inception can begin with the idea for a movie, reading a book, watching a play, or hearing about a true story in the media. As for the original ideas, these projects were all conceived in house. NBC network executives had conceived *An Early Frost*, A&E executives conceived of *Wedding Wars*, and *Playhouse* executives commissioned the original screenplay for *Longtime Companion*. In addition, for a few projects, the producers had been former programming executives, including Martin Starger (*Consenting Adult*) and Perry Lafferty (*An Early Frost*). These examples suggest how these network executives, by virtue of their privilege insider status, yielded greater critical agency to champion these projects that might otherwise have proven too difficult for outside producers. As NBC's White claimed, "certainly no outside producer brought it [*An Early Frost*] in. It was not a topic that producers said, 'Oh, this is hot, let's go pitch this at the networks.' That was definitely not the case."

Other projects were based on underlying properties, life rights, or public domain. These underlying properties included *Tales of the City*, *Angels in America*, *As Is*, *And the Band Played On*, *Consenting Adult*, *Gods and Monsters*, amongst others. Projects based on acquired life rights included *Two Mothers for Zachary*, *Serving in Silence*, and *Any Mother's Son*. Projects based on public domain included MTV's *Pedro* and *Anatomy of a Hate Crime*. Most projects had been identified, acquired, or championed by producers first, although some programming executives had instigated these. For example, Showtime's Sabinson had seen *As Is* and then hired the producer to develop the project.

For producers, championing projects with critical narratives often required additional perseverance. Ray Aghayan owned the rights to adapt *Consenting Adult* for a decade before

ABC agreed to make the project. Producer Cary Brokaw pursued and optioned the rights to *Angels in America* over a span of thirteen years before he finally got HBO to produce the adaptation. *Twilight of the Gods* had been in development as a feature film before it final got produced at Showtime. Other networks had previously optioned *Tales of the City* and *And the Band Played On* before their producers found a network willing to proceed with production and distribution. *Gods and Monsters* had been a script written speculatively by the writer-director who had optioned the underlying book rights. After seven years, the script was sent to the producer, Colichman, who found the financing and set up the project at Showtime.

Producers can pursue projects, investing time, financial resources, and creative labor for years before these projects get made. In addition, producers receive compensation only once the project reaches the production stage, which means they are not compensated for their collaboration in the development of these projects. If the project does not proceed to production, as seen in a number of these examples, the producers receive no compensation. Even if the project goes forward, producers are often the last to be compensated. As Randy Robinson noted regarding the production of *Two Mothers for Zachary*, “I didn’t get paid anything until usually long after the movie was at least wrapped for principal photography. I think I got one payment after principal photography wrapped and another one on delivery, if I remember correctly.” These examples reflect the precarity of producer work, which can be heightened by more critical projects.

The sourcing of underlying critical properties reflects the occasional tension between commercial strategies and critical tactics. As mentioned, Showtime’s Sabinson and *Playhouse*’s Law felt that the Broadway play, *The Normal Heart*, was too polemical for their audiences. In crafting *An Early Frost*, Cowen and Lipman mentioned that *The Normal Heart* served as an

example of a play crafted for New York audiences, not television audiences. These accounts suggest how critical media pedagogy must account for the rhetoric nature of the text as well as the appeal for the audiences.

The remaining projects were based on non-fiction stories, either secured through the life rights from the individual or based on accounts told in the public domain, e.g., the press or court transcripts. In the making of *Serving in Silence*, Producers Zadan and Meron partnered with Barbra Streisand and Glenn Close and had NBC interested before approaching Cammermeyer about her rights. The producers admitted to their critical intentions, the “greater good,” which convinced Cammermeyer to let them proceed with her rights. The producers of *Any Mother’s Son* had secured the underlying rights to Dorothy Hadjys story and brought the story to me at Lifetime, unaware that I had previously owned the rights. Although my prior interest in the story perhaps helped sell the project internally, according to Lifetime’s Sheri Singer,

I felt like it was totally our mandate. It was a woman’s story because it was the mother’s story, it had a lot of social importance and impact, it was very controversial, and it was incredibly emotional. Those were the things I wanted.

Even with the rights, producers were pre-packaged talent to mitigate network concerns over controversial, critical fare. As Zadan and Meron mentioned, they had good reason to attach Streisand and Close to *Serving in Silence*:

The reason why we kept attaching people is because the agencies would say no one will ever make this movie...they thought they would discourage us and get us to walk away...because we were talking to agents about getting the rights to the story and they said don’t bother...it’s not worth getting the rights ...because no one is going to make it and no one is going to broadcast it. So we thought, let’s say they are right? The answer is not to abandon it...the answer is how do you get it made? The answer at that moment in time was attaching Barb and Glenn.

DeKoven admitted that without this package, she never would have made the project.

Although Randy Robinson had interest from ABC in *Two Mothers for Zachary*, the network would not buy the project until he secured interest from Valerie Bertinelli to play the lead role. Furthermore, attachment of talent is contingent upon an acceptable script; had these scripts not been well-executed, the talent may have passed, the project may have been put in turnaround by the network, and the efforts by producers would have been for naught. For *Angels in America*, even though producer Brokaw had interest from Pacino, Watson, and Streep as well as a number of highly-regarded directors, he could not get the project made as a feature film.

In addition to pre-packaging talent, some producers also secured partial funding from other sources, which lowered the budget and risk for these networks. Paul Colichman brought in partial financing on *Gods and Monsters* which convinced Showtime to partner with him on the project. Working Title Films partnered with Channel Four to finance and produce *Tales of the City* outright before *Playhouse* acquired the project in production.

With financing and distribution in place, development would commence on the script. As mentioned, for a number of these projects, scripting became a site of contestation between the programming executives, the writers, and the S&P executive assigned to the project. The internal battle over *An Early Frost* almost prevented the project from going forward until the alliances lobbying senior management to override S&P concerns. These contestations represent the multiple stakeholders in the production of these texts and confirm what Havens, Lotz, and Tinic (2009) call “moments of creativity and struggles over representational practices” (p. 236).

As also reflected in these case studies, producers, writers, and executives sometimes collaborated with LGBT organization in crafting these scripts, e.g., *Consenting Adult*, *Serving in Silence*, *Any Mother’s Son*, and *Angels in America*. This collaboration helped contribute to the authenticity and veracity of these projects, but also ensured that these narratives properly framed

these concerns on behalf of the LGBT social movement. However, this is a practice that some screenwriters, e.g., Cowen and Lipman of *An Early Frost*, felt like a form of censorship.

Once the script was completed, depending on the network, directors or lead actors would be hired next. As reflected in numerous accounts included here, directors were hired for a mix of commercial and/or critical motives. Spottiswoode was thought to provide the right execution of the thriller storyline of *And the Band Played On*, although his critical concerns that were made public, according to HBO's Waltzer, sabotaged the project. For Byrens, the first-time director of *Twilight of the Gods* was someone who came attached to the project with Garry Marshall, who became a producer on the project when the project was still in feature development at Hollywood Studios.

Similarly, critical or commercial appeal led to the hiring of actors, although these were not always mutually exclusive. In *An Early Frost*, critical casting undercut the commercial prospects for the program. Aidan Quinn was not a household name. While Gina Rowlands and Ben Gazzara were well-respected actors, the network understood that these actors would not promote the program to the press. Martin Sheen and Marlo Thomas provided both commercial and critical appeal to *Consenting Adult*. Both performers had a public reputation for supporting progressive causes. Furthermore, Sheen had already starred as the gay lover in *That Certain Summer*.

Both homophobia and advocacy operate structurally within the entertainment industry. As indicated, a number of the same actors kept appearing in these programs, which included openly gay Ian McKellan as well as presumably straight actors Brendan Fraser, Sylvia Sydney, Gina Rowlands, Eric Dane, Bonnie Bedelia, and more. Conversely, numerous projects ran into difficulty casting name actors, especially for gay male roles, including *Longtime Companion*,

And the Band Played On, *An Early Frost* and *As Is*. Producers and programming executives claimed that actors either feared playing gay characters or their representatives advised against it. In contrast, major actors like Glenn Close and Valerie Bertinelli were willing to attach themselves in advance to play lesbian characters. These accounts further suggest the larger cultural inhibitions towards gay male sex versus lesbianism.

With the cast and the director, the project enters pre-pre-production, which describes multiple practices, e.g., finding locations, hiring craftspeople, selecting wardrobe, completing the casting, and more. In my research, I encountered few critical issues during this phase of production; however, once physical production commenced, a few projects ran into concerns over depictions of same-sex affection. In *An Early Frost*, affection was limited to a gay character pulling out a gray hair of his partner. In *Serving in Silence*, the producers refused to shoot another version of the kiss, which forced the network to air the scene, which was later blacked out by a local affiliate. Nonetheless, LGBT critics (Gross [2000] Capsuto [2001]) still complained that the kiss was too tepid. In describing the making of *Two Mothers for Zachary*, producer Robinson discussed the concerns over the kiss, stating:

I insisted that there be a kiss in the movie to be able to show that these two women as their friendship for one another was developing and their love for one another was developing. There had to be a display of affection, that big moment, where they would kiss one another. I probably have a lot more gray hair today than I would have if I hadn't insisted that we had a kiss in the movie. ABC allowed us to shoot a kiss, but we had to cover it, which means shoot forty different directions of it, including two heads coming together, but not showing any lips touching one another in order to be able to give the network infinite number of options of ways to be able to indicate that these two protagonists kiss one another without necessarily showing lips touching one another. It was a great challenge.

These examples reflect how same-sex affection represented critical value in performance. These moments of affection or lack thereof came up in the backlash from gay critics and the religious right. As cited in the example from *Serving in Silence*, the kiss was censored by some affiliates,

led to advertiser flight, but also helped generate controversy. Producer Zadan mentioned that this may have hurt the network but helped their cause, which was to reach a larger audience about these critical concerns. Also, during production, producers and programming executives went to great lengths to provide critical information, particularly about AIDS, as seen in the making of *An Early Frost* and *Longtime Companion*.

Although rare, some critical concerns arose during post-production. Most notably, HBO decided to recut *And the Band Played On*, as well as shoot additional scenes to better feature the gay couple in the story. The ensuing battle with the director that played out publicly contributed to the backlash from the gay community. In the last phase of producing, marketing and publicity executives employed a mix of commercial strategies and critical tactics to promote these programs. Although operating with limited agency, producer, programming executives, actors, and directors may be involved in these campaigns.

In rare instances, the writers and directors do press on these programs. Barry Sandler, the openly gay screenwriter of *Making Love*, went on television to promote the movie. As Sandler recounts:

I went on the *Today Show* and *20/20*, and every city I went on *Good Morning, Atlanta* or whatever. I thought it was important, it was incumbent on me to represent the film as the writer, and to show people that I was not the gay stereotype, or the effeminate queen, or whatever the negative images that people had of gay people at that time, I felt if I went out there and [was] just this kind of average guy who was very comfortable in my own skin and very happy to acknowledge that he was gay, that people would look at it and say, "Well, gosh, if he's willing to be so...maybe it's not so terrible. Maybe I shouldn't have this feeling about gay people." I was trying to, in some ways, maybe, reshape people's perceptions of gay people if I could go out there and come out publicly. It may have been a risk in terms of my career, but I felt it was necessary to do that to give the film credibility, and give gay people that perception.

Playhouse's Lindsay Law described watching the writer and director of *Longtime Companion* promote the film on a national talk show. According to Law, after the program, Director

Norman Rene admitted, “I guess we did something pretty good, didn’t we? Although I hadn’t planned on coming out to my entire family on national television!” These examples suggest how LGBT cultural workers were sometimes willing to risk their personal and professional lives to help promote these programs to further contribute to their critical success.

In addition to marketing and promotion, a number of the networks screened these programs for LGBT organizations, sometimes as fundraisers on behalf of these organizations. This practice represented a mix of commercial strategies and critical tactics. These organizations may help promote the program. ABC’s Ilene Amy Berg described how Brandon Stoddard often engaged in this practice because Stoddard “understood exactly how to mobilize forces that would increase the awareness of the film.” In addition, the network may have also approached these groups to mitigate any critical concerns that might lead to a backlash. As seen with both *An Early Frost* and *Longtime Companion*, this strategy backfired. In some instances, the networks screened these programs for policy makers (*Angels in America*) and religious organizations (*An Early Frost*, *Consenting Adult*). These examples suggest how networks navigate the contested terrain of critical media production with both commercial strategies and critical tactics.

Some networks, production companies, and producers continued the critical pedagogy mission of these programs. A number of my respondents mentioned that they knew their publicity departments provided these programs for schools and other organizations. While employed in network publicity earlier in her career, ABC’s Ilene Amy Berg described working with representatives from the National Education Association (NEA) to help promote these programs to schools. As Berg recounts, “they would do a study guide, and then the film would be shown in the classrooms.” According to Berg, even though this practice helped promote the program on air, this would not necessarily mean the network made more money since advertisers

had already paid for their commercials in advance. As mentioned, DeKoven took special pride in earning an NEA Award for *Serving in Silence* for Advancement of Learning through Broadcasting. (The NEA website does not keep a list of prior recipients and apparently the award is no longer offered. In addition, NEA awards are not listed on IMDB; however, they may be found on numerous media sites, including NBC.com and PBS.org.) In addition, other producers, including Jack Grossbart (*Any Mother's Son*) and Randy Robinson (*Two Mothers for Zachary*) described providing free copies of these programs for schools and non-profit organizations after these aired.

Geoff Alexander's *Academic Films for the Classroom* describes multiple organizations that have sold these programs to schools, including the Learning Corporation of America in the 1970s. More recently, through the cable industries' educational initiative Cable in the Classroom (ciconline.org), numerous cable programs have been provided to schools for free after they aired, often with curriculum discussion guides. Nonetheless, I was unable to determine if these organizations also distributed these LGBT TV movies. Furthermore, I was unable to find research that could fully account for how these programs were distributed to schools or non-profits. In addition, how these schools and teachers incorporated these programs into their curriculum is beyond the scope of this research. I reached out to GLSEN, the Gay and Lesbian Straight Educational Network, which is dedicated to getting LGBT curriculum to schools but they were unable to provide this information.

Critical Producing Alliances

As reflected throughout my research, programming executives as well as producers were vital to the commercial and critical success of these programs. These creative workers were typically involved throughout all the phases of production, from inception to exhibition, although

this varied from project to project. In addition, although operating at limited stages of production and with varying degrees of agency, these alliances would also include the rights holders, writers, directors, actors, craftspeople, and marketing and promotion executives. Collectively, I refer to these collaborations as critical *alliances*.

The titles and responsibilities of producers, writers, and rights holders are confusing and often indiscernible to scholars and critics. For every program listed here, there are multiple producers and categories of producers who operated with varying degrees of creative and critical agency. For the majority of these programs, the *executive producers* were often creative producers who were involved from inception to exhibition. However, some executive producers hired other producers or executives to manage the creative and day-to-day operations. For example, Tim Bevan and Sigurjon Sighvatsson ran Working Title Films and Propaganda Films, respectively. However, producer Alan Poul was more directly involved. Poul received producer credit on the first series but was granted Executive Producer credit on the sequels, while still operating in the same capacity.

The *producer* may be the representative from the production companies and studios who financed these projects, or he or she may be the Line Producer who oversaw the physical production, after the project had been developed and cast. In addition, there are a dozen more categories of producers that have varying degrees of agency and responsibility that differs from one project to the next. To complicate matters further, there are different industry standards between U.S. and U.K. producers with regards to credit. For the first *Tales of the City*, the credits listed U.K. producer Antony Root as supervising producer, which turned out to be an inferior credit to Poul's credit as "producer," which left Root feeling "stiffed." According to

Root, “I didn’t know, because in England what you wanted was a producer credit, and I took the producer credit on the British version, but Alan [Poul] took US producer credit.”

In addition, the rights holders sometimes received producer credit, which may or may not have meant they performed producing tasks throughout the entire project. Maupin appears as the Executive Producer on the first and third installment of the *Tales* programs and, as indicated, he was very intimately involved in all aspects of the production. Similarly Jonathan Tolins had producer credit on *Twilight of the Golds*, which he adapted from his own play, but Tony Kushner only received screenwriter for adapting his play, *Angels in America*. On *An Early Frost*, writers Cowen and Lipman received associate producer credit in order to keep the project moving forward in the wake of the Writer’s Guild strike.

Over the years, these titles have become further inflated. In 1985, for *An Early Frost*, Perry Lafferty received credit as a producer on the project, whereas today he would be recognized as an Executive Producer. Meanwhile, Art Seidel is listed as co-producer when he was the line producer who oversaw physical production; today his credit would likely be Producer. In addition, some producers and writers received no credit at all. For example, Dave Mace helped produce *Wedding Wars* but was denied credit since he worked for the producers Zadan and Meron. The Writers’ Guild denied credit to Ranberg and Flett-Giordano, who delivered exhaustive dialogue polishes on *Wedding Wars*.

For decades, programming executives have failed to receive credit on their programs, which can be seen on *IMDB*, the *Internet Movie Database*. This industrial practice has contributed to a form of “invisible labor” that also makes research about television production all the more challenging. ABC’s Brandon Stoddard was responsible for making hundreds of television movies but only has two Executive Producer credits listed. Similarly, Allen Sabinson

has been an executive at NBC, Showtime, ABC, TNT, and A&E and programmed hundreds of programs, including a numerous LGBT and AIDS-themed television movies. He only has one credit as an Executive Producer on *IMDB*. Similarly, neither HBO's Waltzer nor Showtime's Byrens have received credit despite helping to generates numerous programs.

Some cable programming executives have received credit on their projects. A&E's Fine received no credit on BBC's *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, but she would later earn Executive Producer credit on her other projects. Nonetheless, although she conceived the concept for *Wedding Wars* and helped supervise its development and production, she had left A&E by the time the program aired and was denied any credit. This practice was not solely for recognition or vanity. As indicated, even acquired and co-produced programs receive promotion as original fare on these networks, and therefore became eligible for U.S. programming awards, e.g., Golden Globes, Emmys or GLAAD media awards. These credits ensured that the network was recognized by these awards organizations, which could be used to help promote the network.

In addition to producers and programming executives, screenwriters are part of this critical alliance. As listed in this research, the screenwriters crafted critical narratives that were designed to engage and critically educate audiences. According to Zadan and Meron, Alison Cross was hired to write *Serving in Silence*

because she wrote [the TV movie] *Roe V Wade* and it was such an enormous success in terms of its controversy and everyone was talking about it, [even if] the network lost a fortune on it cause no one would advertise on it.

Playwright Jonathan Tolins changed the ending of his own play, *Twilight of the Golds*, due to critical, commercial, and personal motives.

As members of the alliance, directors may contribute to the critical success or sometimes handicap the project. Openly gay director John Erman was vital to championing the gay themes

in *An Early Frost*, although he would not challenge the network over featuring same-sex affection. Straight director Roger Spottiswoode took his critical concerns public, which contributed to the backlash against *And the Band Played On* from the gay community. Openly gay director Jim Fall directed *Wedding Wars*, although vital to his getting the job was that he understood how to craft a gay-themed narrative that appealed to straight audiences. In *The Advocate*, Fall stated that he “wanted to make a point, subtly, but also show both sides without vilifying anyone, to win people over with comedy and to cast someone who has been coming into their living rooms for years now.” In my interview with Fine, she confirmed that Fall shared the same vision as the network, executives, and producers for making these happen.

Some crafts people sometimes operated with varying degrees of critical agency. In *Serving in Silence*, a makeup person helped Judy Davis create her “Kabuki” makeup, which became a point of contention with the network. On *Tales of the City*, producer Root mentioned the critical contributions made by the openly gay casting director. However, *Making Love’s* screenwriter-producer Barry Sandler described how he had to replace artwork because the production designer felt that a life-size portrait of Judy Garland would more likely be hung in a gay man’s apartment. These examples reflect how creative workers make choices with symbolic and meaningful effect, some more critically valuable than others.

In addition to the programming executives, other network executives may also play a role in the criticality of these programs. Marketing executives construct campaigns that target certain viewers, some of whom may be more critically important than others. For example, in the marketing of *An Early Frost*, NBC’s White encouraged me to interview NBC’s head of marketing, Mike O’Hare, whom he considered invaluable to attracting the support of both the media and the LGBT community for the program.

As mentioned in my literature review, the presence and critical participation of gay people in Hollywood, television is subject to debate by historians and scholars. Russo claims that, “most television movies are made by liberal heterosexuals” (1987 p. 277). Writing nearly fifteen years later, Walters (2001) reinforces this position, claiming that, “indeed, even in this time of supposed openness, there are very few openly gay producers, directors, writers, stars” (p. 114). Other scholars have affirmed that gays and lesbians have operated, often openly, within the television industry, including Gross and Capsuto. Montgomery refers to these LGBT insiders as “agents in place” who helped alert LGBT media activists about upcoming LGBT-themed programming. These conflicted accounts reflect the complicated nature of multicultural critiques of media production, especially when considering sexual orientation.

Based on my research, these LGBT TV projects were often, but not always, championed by either a gay producer or programming executive, although the straight members of the alliance were equally as vital to the critical success of these programs. Of the twenty-six subjects, more than half are gay. Whether the sexual identity of these producers informs the critical value of these projects is debatable since there were plenty of straight producers and programming executives who championed these critical projects, although often informed by their intimate knowledge of gay people and their concerns. Although straight, Lifetime’s Sheri Singer and producer Ilene Amy Berg described growing up with gay best friends. NBC’s DeKoven mentioned how much she valued her gay brother’s opinion of her gay projects. These relationships between gay and straight people seemed to be just as influential as their identities in shaping their critical intentions for making these LGBT programs. Furthermore, their relationships with gay people also exposed straight members of the alliance to the ravages of the AIDS epidemic. Although HBO’s Waltzer did not have any immediate gay friends who died of

AIDS, a closeted gay colleague asked that Waltzer include his late partner in the AIDS montage at the end of *And the Band Played On*. Showtime's Sabinson described the loss of numerous, intimate, lifetime friends to AIDS, which informed his critical motives to produce more than a half-dozen gay and AIDS-themed television movies.

Similarly, gay screenwriters were often involved in these projects but their identities did not necessarily reflect their critical participation. Of the twenty programs cited here, at least thirteen of the screenwriters were openly identified as LGBT, although there may have been more. For those projects based on underlying gay narratives, the gay playwrights were typically hired to adapt their own properties, including Jonathan Tolins (*Twilight of the Golds*), Lanford Wilson (*Fifth of July*), Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*), and William M. Hoffman (*As Is*). For original projects, gay screenwriters were often hired, especially when commissioned by the network executives. Lindsay Law hired the openly gay team of Craig Lucas and Norman Rene to write and direct *Longtime Companion*, which drew inspiration from their own experiences as New York gay men dealing with the AIDS crisis. (A few years after the program aired, Rene died from AIDS.) Lifetime's Singer deliberately approved gay screenwriter Bruce Harmon to write *Any Mother's Son*. NBC's White felt that having gay screenwriters Cowen and Lipman would benefit the writing of *An Early Frost*; however, the straight executives on the project felt more strongly that homophobia needed to be featured as part of the story. Although straight, Stephen Mazur's philosophy about crafting critical narratives was vital to the critical success of *Wedding Wars*.

As discussed in this chapter, the critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies features both LGBT-themed and centered programs. These were programs produced within the multiple commercial logics and complex structures of the television industry. LGBT TV movie

producing within the television industry includes an expansive set of creative practices from inception to exhibition, including media development and promotion. Within these practices, commercial strategies and critical tactics helped ensure both the pedagogical and commercial success of these programs. These practices were conducted by an alliance of media professionals, not least of which included the multiple producers and programming executives, along with writers, directors, talent, craftspeople and other network executives. The following, concluding chapter revisits the original research questions as well as discusses the limitations and implications of this research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The thesis of this dissertation considered the critical media pedagogy conducted by multiple LGBT TV movies that have aired since the 1970s. By foregrounding critical LGBT issues and featuring progressive LGBT representations, these programs helped raise awareness, educate, and transform the attitudes of mainstream audiences about the lives of LGBT citizens. Furthermore, these programs helped advocate for, reflect, and frame these concerns on behalf of the LGBT social movement, although these were concerns that supported the LGBT Rights movement more than the LGBT liberation movement.

Most of these programs deliberately featured critical narratives, which often featured characters struggling to come out of the closet and live their lives with dignity and respect, LGBT parents fighting for the right to have custody of children, gay men with AIDS demanding access to treatment and the support of their government and the medical establishment, and gay people demanding the right to serve in the military or to marry the ones they love. Even when critical narratives were not included, these programs always featured sympathetic LGBT protagonists. Although pejoratively referred to by some LGBT critics as problem movies about gay lives for straight audiences, through the lens of critical pedagogy, these programs may alternatively be viewed as message movies or critical media interventions.

Furthermore, through critical production studies, this research addressed how this critical media pedagogy was possible. These programs were financed and produced within the complicated material and commercial interests of television networks. These conditions produced rhizomatic structures and complicated management practices, which offered the space for critical media pedagogy to occur. Furthermore, the critical media producing of LGBT-

themed TV movies involved an expansive set of creative practices from inception to exhibition. Amongst these creative practices were media development and promotion, which media scholarship has often overlooked. In addition, within these practices, both commercial strategies and critical tactics, which were not necessarily mutually exclusive, were engaged, helping ensure that these programs were commercially and critically successful.

While the rhizomatic structures within the industries provide opportunity, alliances of media professionals operating with varying degrees of agency contributed to the critical and commercial success of these programs. These alliances included most notably executive producers, amongst other producers and programming executives who collaborated with writers, directors, actors, and craftspeople. Furthermore, marketing and publicity executives engaged in critical promotion, crafting campaigns to appeal to the most critically desirable and widest possible audiences. In addition, these alliances sometimes solicited the support of LGBT organizations and media activists, whether in development, production, or promotion.

Limitations

Given such an expansive critical cultural history of LGBT TV movies across four decades, some programs may have been overlooked. Of the twenty programs included in these critical case studies, some texts received deeper and more thorough production and content analysis than others, and some production accounts were more complete than others. Most notably, vital production and reception data is missing, e.g. ratings and demographics data or memoranda detailing the notes from standards and practices. This research would have required archival research beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Furthermore, interviews with other producers, programming executives, and screenwriters, as well as directors, actors, and craftspeople, are missing. These members of the

alliance all deserve to be recognized for their critical contributions to the success of these programs. In particular, I would have liked to include an interview with those HBO executives, e.g., Colin Calendar, who championed both *Normal* and *Angels in America*, even after the backlash to HBO's *And the Band Played On*. In addition, future research into these programs ought to feature those marketing and publicity executives and the campaigns they conducted to reach the most critically-desirable audiences.

This dissertation is also missing more reliable accounts of the larger critical-medial and cultural effects of these programs beyond ratings, awards, and criticism. This data can perhaps be found in more obscure ways, for example, in the rise of HIV testing or AIDS non-profit funding after these AIDS-themed programs appeared. The television industry does not conduct research into the meanings derived by audiences from individual texts. Communications scholarship has sometimes accounted for how specific programs may have informed attitudes and understanding, although I could not find much data about these specific programs.

In addition, further research should account for how entertainment narratives, including films, television movies, and television series, are distributed and used as curricula in schools. Some of this history has been described by media historians, e.g., Alexander (2010), but does not appear to exist within academic educational research. In addition, I approached GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Educational network, which monitors and reports on LGBT curriculum and bullying school. They could provide no research that confirmed whether and how LGBT media is used within schools as critical media pedagogy designed to engage students around these concerns.

As for my proximity to the subject matter and the media professionals, this factor may have been an advantage and limitation. My professional experience provided privileged insight

into the nature of critical media production and afforded me greater access than others might typically have received to this community of media professionals. Conversely, my gay identity and producing experience may have introduced bias into the design of my study and interpretation of the data. Nonetheless, I deployed multiple methods and texts to compensate for these concerns, including, where possible, the triangulation of interviews with a producer, programming executive, or screenwriter for each program.

Furthermore, I made every effort to maintain a critical distance from my data while conducting my analysis, especially if I had been professionally involved in the production of a program. For example, in conducting a critical case study of *Any Mother's Son*, my interviews included the producer Jack Grossbart as well as Sheri Singer, who ran the movie department for Lifetime. For *Wedding Wars*, my interviews included the executive producers Craig Zadan and Neil Meron, the un-credited producer Dave Mace, the screenwriter Stephen Mazur, and Delia Fine, the A&E executive who helped conceive, develop, produce, and program the project.

Further Research

Although limited to LGBT-themed TV movies, further research ought to account for the use of TV movies as a socially progressive force. In fact, as Craig (2014) has confirmed, TV message movies have featured critical and counter-narratives that foregrounded the concerns of other social movements. These were programs that featured our diverse, multicultural history, the protracted struggles for civil rights and social justice, or raised awareness and advocated on behalf of social issues and causes (environmentalism, nuclear proliferation).

ABC's *The Day After* represents one example of how other TV movies have engaged in critical media pedagogy that has been culturally and politically transformative. The program featured the fictional account of a nuclear attack on an American city and became a site of

political contestation, comparable to the backlash to LGBT-themed TV movies. As media scholar Allison Perlman (2007) explained,

While anti-nuclear groups embraced the film, political conservatives fought to keep it off the airwaves for fear that it would provoke a “public hysteria” against nuclear proliferation. Accuracy in Media, a conservative media watchdog group founded by Reed Irvine in 1969, sent letters to 450 potential sponsors to deter them from buying advertising time during the broadcast. Reverend Jerry Falwell threatened to organize a boycott of any company sponsor, while other groups demanded that ABC’s affiliates refuse to air the program. (p. 2)

Nonetheless, the program became one of the most watched programs in television history, attracted 100 million viewers, and garnered numerous industry awards and recognition by humanitarian organizations.

More remarkably, as documented by acclaimed historian Richard Rhodes (2007), President Reagan watched the program and made a notation in his diaries that the program was “very effective and left me greatly depressed...my own reaction: we have to do all we can...to see that there is never a nuclear war” (p. 169). According to the director, Nicholas Meyer, after Reagan signed the Intermediate Range Weapons Agreement with Gorbachev, Meyer received a telegram from Reagan that stated, “Don’t think your movie didn’t have any part of this, because it did” (Niccum, 2003). This account reflects the potent critical value of these texts and represents an account often missing history from media, television, and cultural studies..

In fairness, the long history of LGBT cultural workers operating within Hollywood has privileged the LGBT community. This history can be attributed to a number of cultural factors including the liberal, progressive, and more sexually permissive culture of Hollywood. However, as Bernstein has also indicated (1997), the unique nature of LGBT identity and disclosure means that LGBT cultural workers can operate more subversively within these systems to conduct work without the perception of an agenda. Furthermore, Hollywood remains

a deeply segregated institution that continues to privilege white men. The recent Hollywood Diversity Report (2014) contains numerous accounts of how minorities and women remain woefully underrepresented both on screen and behind the camera.

Implications

In addition to social movements, this research has theoretical and methodological implications for critical cultural studies. Specifically, this scholarship affirms the more holistic approach advocated by Kellner that includes production, text, and reception. In addition, this research confirms the need for better understanding of media industries and the role of media professionals who can sometimes operate with greater agency within these complex systems.

In the digital age, these systems are evolving and converging, becoming even more complex or reconstituted. New and disruptive information and communication technology are transforming the structures, production, reception, and content of media industries as well as audience practices and behaviors. These transformations demand even greater attention than ever to the new and emerging structures of media industries and the agency of digital media producers.

Furthermore, as reflected in this research, a more holistic, diagnostic system for considering the critical value of media should also include more empirically-based work, e.g., critical-industrial case studies and production ethnographies, to further account for the critical producing of these texts. This research would include consideration of the entire cycle of media producing, including the phases of development prior to production and promotion after production. As reflected in this research, media development can become a site where the most critical struggles over ideology and representation occur.

In addition, this research suggests the value of critical television scholarship, which has historically been limited. Critical media scholars have often privileged film over television. In the digital age, critical scholars might consider a more agnostic approach to media distribution to consider how these texts are circulated across multiple platforms and in multiple formats.

The corpus of critical media scholarship has typically been limited to a diagnostic analysis, often conducted through a rigid ideological lens that dismisses or fails to account for progressive media production, texts and reception. In contrast, this research represents a form of critical media advocacy grounded in empirical evidence that is nonetheless still invested in concerns over power, ideology, and representation.

While limited to a format that has long since fallen out of cultural and commercial favor, this research suggests that some cultural workers share similar concerns with critical scholars. These shared values may prove vital to addressing the larger concerns confronted around the world. As Giroux (2009) claimed,

Engaging in intellectual practices that offer the possibility of alliances and new forms of solidarity among cultural workers such as artists, writers, journalists, academics, and others who engage in forms of public pedagogy grounded in a democratic project represents a small, but important, step in addressing the massive and unprecedented reach of global capitalism. (p. 99)

In addition to critical scholarship, this research suggests that educational scholars should consider entertainment as a pedagogical tool. Entertainment is, like TV movies, an often misunderstood and maligned subject. As Gray notes, “I find it remarkably hard to offer a value-neutral definition of entertainment, since it is one of the most automatically moralized concepts” (2008, p. 5). Most definitions are limited to considerations of pleasure and distraction or framed as anti-education. Nonetheless, as far back as the 1950s, cultural anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker (1950) claimed that “all entertainment is education in some way, many times more

effective than schools because of the appeal to our emotions rather than our intellect” (p. 14).

As reflected in the literature review, scholars from other fields like communication and sociology have started to consider the value and potential of entertainment as a tool for social change.

Furthermore, this research suggests the potential for entertainment to engage in critical media interventions and educate the public around concerns over power, ideology, social justice, multiculturalism, and representation. Critical entertainment would account for how critical media producers have the agency to subvert, exploit, and co-op media industry capital and resources to engage in critical media production. This production uses popular forms, genres, and media to conduct media interventions on behalf of larger critical concerns. In my interview with Tony Kushner, he alluded to this notion of critical entertainment. In describing his role as a cultural storyteller, he said,

My job is to entertain by telling the truth in a fictional, kinetic, format...to make something that people are going to find rich and exciting and funny and fun and upsetting and satisfying, and hopefully some will think and derive meaning. That’s really my only job.

Final Thoughts

While the LGBT social movement has been remarkably successful, it has not achieved full equality and cultural equity. Member of the LGBT community can still be denied marriage equality and protection from employment and housing discrimination in more than thirty states. The rights of transgendered citizens have been particularly neglected and poorly represented throughout media. Meanwhile, the battle for LGBT equality has moved offshore, where politicians have introduced anti-gay legislation in Russia, Uganda, and India, which has led to a rise in state-affirmed, if not state-sponsored, hate crimes.

Furthermore, the U.S. educational system has inadequately addressed the concerns of the LGBT community: “The topic of homosexuality is often deemed inappropriate for discussion in

public schools, including in sex education courses. Many public school libraries refuse to own some of the many books that address the issue in important ways” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 4). While queer studies has made its way into some institutions of higher learning, academics continue to debate even the value of teaching LGBT-themed literature in primary and secondary education at all (Clark, 2009). In 2011, California became the first and only state to mandate that LGBT history be included in school lesson plans. School remains a hostile climate for LGBT students. Recent studies have confirmed that two-thirds of all students suffer from verbal or physical abuse in K-12 just for the appearance of being gay or lesbian, while 90% of openly LGBT students are harassed (Kosciw, 2011). In 2007, diversity training for teachers incorporated LGBT concerns for the first time (NCTE, 2007).

Nonetheless, over the past four decades, LGBT citizens have secured more legal rights and protections than ever before. This success occurred in the wake of potent backlash from the religious and political Right, compounded by the devastating effects of AIDS, and despite the diversity and divisions within the movement between liberation and rights-based activism. As reflected throughout the cultural and media landscape, the LGBT community has garnered more cultural approval more quickly than perhaps ever imagined. As affirmed and documented by this research, LGBT TV movies and the cultural messengers who helped craft, produce, and promote them helped create a more tolerant and accepting world for LGBT citizens.

APPENDIX: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography offers a form of reflexivity that critically informs the subjectivities and experiences of the author-researcher. This reflexivity supports the views and methodologies espoused by Standpoint Theory (Harding, 2010). In particular, for LGBT and queer scholarship, autoethnography can also bear witness to a history that has previously been ignored, dismissed, or closeted. According to Adams and Jones (2011),

Interrogating autoethnography, queer theory, and reflexivity means conversing about ways that we—as teachers, writers, researchers, activists, humans—try to document, ease or eliminate, and bear witness to harmful social practices, occasions of relational violence, and the trials and tribulations of (desiring) normalcy. (p. 111)

The following autoethnography shows how my life has informed my interest in LGBT TV movies and affirms how these programs have critically shaped my identity as a gay man, informed my career as television movie producer and programming executive, and influenced my decision to engage in LGBT media activism. These factors and experiences have helped afford me greater access to the entertainment industry and community of TV movie producers and executives as well as greater insight into the operations, structures, and practices of TV movie producing. Conversely, this background may have subjectively informed my conclusions and introduced some forms of bias. In light of these concerns, I have made every effort to provide exhaustive data, often triangulated across multiple interviews and against historical document and critical-content analysis, to support these conclusions.

When I was in 4th grade, I discovered that movies could be educational. Rather than educational films, I am referring to Hollywood movies. In my elementary school, we watched *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, *Roots*, and *Brian's Song* every year. These race-themed films taught me more about civil rights, racism and intolerance than any textbook or

lesson plan. Along with Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks, my civil rights heroes were Jane Pittman, Kunta Kinte, and Gale Sayers. These films were morality tales, just like the comic books I read, the lessons I learned about Jews in Hebrew School, and the sermons I heard at my Baptist Church. Only these were more powerful. I drank with Jane Pittman at that water fountain. I ran next to Gale Sayers in the park. I also understood then that, when I grew up, I wanted to produce movies that featured social issues, history, or literature. I was later surprised to discover that these were not feature films but made-for-television movies.

When I was a college sophomore, a movie that appeared on television changed my entire outlook on life. I had grown up in a deeply religious home and been taught that homosexuality was a sin. Authority figures in church, temple, and school reinforced this message. Like most LGBT youth, I lived in perpetual fear of being discovered and even contemplated suicide. By the time I was a sophomore, the cracks in my façade were starting to appear. I was tormented and wrestled with coming out to my friends and family. In a moment of despair, in order to escape my feelings, I turned on the television in my dorm room and discovered a movie I had never heard of called *Making Love* (1982). The film was a romantic drama about a closeted, married gay man who falls in love with an openly gay and proud man and decides to come out. In the privacy of my dorm room, this program offered to me a glimpse of a future I could never have imagined. Over the next week, I came out to my friends. A year later, I watched the TV movie *An Early Frost*, about a gay man informing his family that he is gay and has AIDS. Along with other information I had read, this program taught me that the “love that dare not speak its name” could also kill me. For the next few years, I curtailed any sexual activity until safe sex had been proven effective at preventing infection. I also realized that I wanted to make

LGBT-themed TV movies that could help mainstream audiences better understand my concerns as a gay man living in the time of the AIDS epidemic.

By the time I was a young man in my 20s, LGBT movies began to reflect my life. Like the one in *Making Love*, I discovered a community of openly gay men in Los Angeles living proudly. As in *An Early Frost*, these were also men fighting valiantly against AIDS. I met my partner, but he died five years later at the age of twenty-seven. As in the film *Longtime Companion* (1989), I watched the disease kill most of my closest friends. A year later, I watched HBO's *And the Band Play On* (1993) describe how politicians and doctors mishandled the AIDS crisis, refused funding, and delayed testing, prevention, and treatment.

The same year, *Philadelphia* (1993) became the target of a backlash from the LGBT community. After a decade of the epidemic, the first studio feature film about AIDS turned out to be the story of a straight man overcoming his homophobia. For the LGBT community, this film appeared to be too little, too late. Similarly, I witnessed the backlash to the LGBT-themed *Tales of the City* (1993) from religious and political conservatives. I joined GLAAD, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation, and became a media activist, helping lead protests against Paramount Pictures for *Braveheart* (1995) and meeting with the networks and studios about our concerns. I became aware of how media, including TV movies, were vital to framing the concerns of the LGBT movement.

When I moved to Hollywood to pursue my dream of making TV movies that featured social issues, history, and literature, I soon discovered a like-minded community of television movie producers, executives, writers, and directors. They were often gay or Jewish (or both) and included former journalists, teachers, and political activists. In my interview with NBC's Lindy DeKoven for this dissertation, she described the community of television movie producers,

executives, writers, and others as “socially repressed activists. All of us in another time may have been out there raising the flag, pounding the pavement.” I agree. With their help, I have spent twenty-five years working as a TV movie producer and network programming executive. I helped create over thirty TV movies, mini-series, and series, often based on history, literature, or social issues. These programs have reached millions, been distributed to schools and organizations across the country, and garnered over fifty Emmy nominations along with a few GLAAD Media Awards.

Over the course of my career, I have helped create two LGBT TV movies. *Any Mother's Son* (1997) told the true story of Dorothy Hadjys, who discovered that her son had been brutally murdered by his fellow sailors in the Navy just because he was gay. Furthermore, the Navy had tried to cover up the crime to avoid scrutiny, as these events transpired at the height of the political battle over gays in the military and President Clinton's military policy of “Don't Ask, Don't Tell.” While a producer, I met with Hadjys and explained my interest in telling her story. She made me promise to make this movie for television. When I asked why, she simply explained, “Where I come from, people believe TV.” Although I was unable to get the movie made as a producer, after I had been hired as a programming executive at Lifetime Television, we bought, developed, produced, and aired her story. *Any Mother's Son* became the second most watched program in Lifetime history. Accepting the GLAAD Media Award for the film, Hadjys thanked me and Lifetime for telling her story and letting the world know that her son's life “had meaning.”

In 1990, my late partner and I held a commitment ceremony and were subsequently featured in a few books about the topic. When he was dying, I was denied access to his hospital emergency room because, in the eyes of the law, we were still not a couple. These events led me

to become an advocate for marriage equality. In 1995, I produced the first-ever Freedom to Marry March. By 2004, marriage equality had become a prominent concern for the LGBT community. As a programming executive at A&E Television, I produced *Wedding Wars* (2006). Inspired by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, *Wedding Wars* is a contemporary satirical political comedy about a gay man who goes on strike to fight for marriage equality. The film's openly gay director Jim Fall stated in *The Advocate* that the program "was kind of subversive, because it really was an entertaining comedy. But the politics are clear in the movie and so I think a lot of people watched it as sheer entertainment but there's an explicit political agenda going on. It was a very clever way, I think. Kind of a spoonful of sugar thing" (Hundley, 2006, p. 59). Fall provided the perfect description of our efforts.

In the fifteen years I worked as a TV movie and series executive at A&E Television, I completed my Masters in Cinema Studies at New York University. In the program, I began to interrogate the intersectionality between social movements, media, entertainment, and education. In 2011, I executive produced a Lifetime movie, *Girl Fight*, which was inspired by the true story of a girl who was videotaped being brutally beaten by her best friends, who intended on posting the video online to fame and popularity. The story served as a cautionary tale about the perils of the Internet and digital technology and advocated for digital media literacy for both parents and students. In addition, I am a Clinical Assistant Professor at the Annenberg School of Communications and Journalism, where I teach media and entertainment management to graduate students in the Communication Management program. Within this space, I encourage students to engage in critical entertainment on behalf of progressive social change.

LIST OF PROGRAMS

A Cage without a Key

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072756/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0787484/?ref=mv_sr_1

A Girl Thing

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0249603/?ref=mv_sr_1

A Question of Attribution

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105204/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

A Question of Love

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078131/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Alexander: The Other Side of Dawn

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075655/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

All in the Family

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066626/?ref=fn_al_tt_2

American Idol

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0319931/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

American Playhouse

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0176357/?ref=mv_sr_1

An American Family

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0211195/?ref=fn_al_tt_2

An Early Frost

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089069/?ref=mv_sr_1

Anatomy of a Hate Crime

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0260698/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

And the Band Played On

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0106273/?ref=mv_sr_1

Andre's Mother

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099037/?ref=tt_ep_ep4

Angels and Insects

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112365/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Angels in America

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0318997/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Any Mother's Son

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0122951/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

Armistead Maupin's Further Tales of the City

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0245625/?ref_=nv_sr_2

Armistead Maupin's More Tales of the City

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120574/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0106148/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

As Is

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088741/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

Barbarians at the Gate

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0106356/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Barney Miller

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072472/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Basic Instinct

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103772/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Behind the Candelabra

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1291580/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Big Brother

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0251497/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Bitter Harvest

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082077/?ref_=fn_al_tt_2

Blind Faith

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099148/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Blue Window

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0822067/?ref_=fn_al_tt_2

Boys Don't Cry
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0171804/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Braveheart
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112573/?ref=nv_sr_1

Breaking the Code
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115749/?ref=nv_sr_1

Breaking the Surface: The Greg Louganis Movie
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115750/?ref=nv_sr_1

Brian's Song
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068315/?ref=nv_sr_1

Broadway on Showtime
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2391166/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Brokeback Mountain
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0388795/?ref=nv_sr_1

Brothers
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086677/>

CBS Playhouse
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0831400/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Change of Heart
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3411808/?ref=nv_sr_1

Charlie's Angels
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073972/?ref=nv_sr_3

Chicago
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0299658/?ref=nv_sr_3

Citizen Cohn
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103973/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097099/?ref=fn_al_tt_2

Consenting Adult
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088948/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Cruising

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0080569/?ref=mv_sr_1

Dallas

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077000/?ref=mv_sr_5

Dallas Buyer's Club

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0790636/?ref=mv_sr_1

Dateline

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103396/?ref=mv_sr_1

Dawn: Portrait of a Teenage Runaway

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074376/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Doing Time on Maple Drive

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104118/?ref=mv_sr_1

Dona Herlinda and her Son

http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0161195/?ref=fn_al_ch_1

Down by Law

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0090967/?ref=mv_sr_1

Drugstore Cowboy

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097240/?ref=mv_sr_1

Dying Young

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101787/?ref=mv_sr_1

Dynasty

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081856/?ref=mv_sr_2

El Norte

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0085482/?ref=mv_sr_1

Final Justice

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0161574/?ref=fn_al_tt_3

Flatliners

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099582/?ref=mv_sr_1

Freedom Writers

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0463998/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Fried Green Tomatoes

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101921/?ref=nm_sr_1

Friends

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108778/?ref=nm_sr_1

Further Tales of the City

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0245625/?ref=nm_sr_1

Gentleman's Agreement

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0039416/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Go Fish

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109913/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Gods and Monsters

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120684/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Gone with the Wind

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031381/?ref=nm_sr_1

Grey's Anatomy

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0413573/?ref=nm_sr_1

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0061735/?ref=nm_sr_2

Gypsy

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107065/?ref=nm_sr_4

Hairspray

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0427327/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Half Nelson

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0468489/?ref=nm_sr_1

Harry Potter

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0241527/?ref=nm_sr_2

Hill Street Blues

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081873/?ref=nm_sr_1

Holiday Heart

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0250425/?ref=nm_sr_1

Holocaust

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077025/?ref=mv_sr_2

House Hunters

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0369117/?ref=mv_sr_1

I Shot Andy Warhol

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116594/?ref=mv_sr_1

If These Walls Could Talk 2

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206036/?ref=fn_al_tt_4

In the Gloaming

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0119362/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

In the Life

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0248645/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

It's all Relative

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0366034/?ref=mv_sr_1

Jeffrey

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0113464/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

L.A. Law

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0090466/?ref=mv_sr_1

La Cage Aux Folles

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077288/?ref=mv_sr_1

Labor of Love

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0159519/?ref=fn_al_tt_2

Liberace

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095517/?ref=fn_al_tt_2

Liberace: Behind the Music

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0195022/?ref=fn_al_tt_4

Lincoln

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0443272/>

Longtime Companion

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100049/?ref=mv_sr_1

Love, Sidney

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081896/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

M.A.S.H.

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068098/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Making Love

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084293/?ref=nv_sr_1

Meet the Press

http://www.imdb.com/media/rm763739904/tt0149490?ref=tt_ov_i

Milk

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1013753/?ref=nv_sr_1

Modern Family

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1442437/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Muriel's Wedding

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110598/?ref=nv_sr_1

My Beautiful Launderette

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091578/?ref=nv_sr_1

My Best Friend's Wedding

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0119738/?ref=nv_sr_1

My So-Called Life

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108872/?ref=nv_sr_1

My Two Loves

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091585/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Normal

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0338290/?ref=nv_sr_5

Northern Exposure

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098878/?ref=nv_sr_1

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098032/?ref=nv_sr_1

Our Sons

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0102613/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Paragraph 175

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0236576/?ref=nm_sr_1

Paris is Burning

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100332/?ref=nm_sr_1

Parting Glances

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091725/?ref=nm_sr_1

Partners

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084477/?ref=nm_sr_6

Pedro

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1281383/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Personal Best

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084489/?ref=nm_sr_1

Philadelphia

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107818/?ref=nm_sr_2

Project Runway

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0437741/?ref=nm_sr_1

Queer as Folk

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0262985/?ref=nm_sr_1

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0358332/?ref=nm_sr_1

Raiders of the Lost Ark

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082971/?ref=nm_sr_1

Roc

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101184/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Rock Hudson

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100505/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Roe vs. Wade

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098212/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Roomates

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111014/?ref=fn_al_tt_2

Roots

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075572/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Roseanne

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094540/?ref_=nv_sr_1

RuPaul's Drag Race

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1353056/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Second Serve

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091913/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

Sergeant Matlovich vs. the U.S. Air Force

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078233/?ref_=fn_tt_tt_5

Serving in Silence: The Margaret Cammermeyer Story

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114395/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Shahs of Sunset

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1997999/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Short Cuts

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108122/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Soap

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075584/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Soldier's Girl

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0324013/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Something to Live for: the Allison Gertz Story

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Splendor in the Grass

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0055471/?ref_=nv_sr_1

Stand and Deliver

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094027/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

Star Wars

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076759/?ref_=nv_sr_2

Survivor

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0239195/?ref_=nv_sr_2

Testament

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086429/?ref=nm_sr_2

That Certain Summer

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0069368/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109045/?ref=nm_sr_1

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071175/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Avengers

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054518/?ref=nm_sr_3

The Biggest Loser

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0429318/?ref=nm_sr_1

The Birdcage

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115685/?ref=nm_sr_1

The Boys in the Band

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0065488/?ref=nm_sr_2

The Celluloid Closet

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112651/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Colbert Report

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The Color Purple

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088939/?ref=nm_sr_1

The Daily Show

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115147/?ref=nm_sr_1

The Day After

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0085404/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Golden Girls

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088526/?ref=nm_sr_1

The Fifth of July

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083935/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0113416/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Laramie Project
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0257850/?ref=nv_sr_2

The Lego Movie
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1490017/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Lost Language of Cranes
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1975984/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Matthew Shepard Story
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0267736/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Missiles of October
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071847/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Newsroom
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1870479/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Normal Heart (HBO)
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1684226/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Phil Donahue Show
http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0004882/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Player
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105151/?ref=nv_sr_3

The Price of Love
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114179/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

The Real World
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103520/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Rocky Horror Picture Show
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073629/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Ryan White Story
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098237/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Silence of the Lambs
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0102926/?ref=nv_sr_1

The Thin Blue Line

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The Times of Harvey Milk

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088275/?ref=nm_sr_1

The Truth About Alex

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The Waltons

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The Way We Were

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070903/?ref=nm_sr_1

The West Wing

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0200276/?ref=nm_sr_1

The Women of Brewster Place

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098674/?ref=nm_sr_1

Tongues Untied

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103099/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

Tootsie

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084805/?ref=nm_sr_1

Top Chef

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Traffik

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096716/?ref=nm_sr_2

Transformers

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Twilight of the Gods

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120392/?ref=nm_sr_1

Two Mothers For Zachary

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116340/?ref=nm_sr_3

Upstairs, Downstairs

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066722/?ref=mv_sr_2

Victor Victoria

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Waiting for the Moon

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Walkout

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Wedding Wars

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What if I'm Gay?

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0339895/?ref=fn_al_tt_1

What Makes a Family

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0251474/?ref=mv_sr_1

Will & Grace

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Wit

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