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Straight Benevolence: Preserving Heterosexual Authority and White Privilege

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Straight Benevolence:
Preserving Heterosexual Authority and White Privilege

by

Robert J. Bruce

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This thesis analyzes three current and popular media sites, exploring a term I coin “straight benevolence.” An ostensibly supportive and progressive attitude adopted by heterosexuals and expressed toward gay men in the United States, straight benevolence surreptitiously subordinates gayness and further entrenches white masculine heterosexual privilege. In my examination of hip-hop artist Macklemore’s “Same Love,” seven Major League Baseball “It Gets Better” gay-advocacy videos, and the “Suddenly, Last Summer” episode of ABC’s primetime U.S. television series *Modern Family*, I take an intersectional approach to address the interanimation of sexuality, gender, and race. I ask: In what ways is gay male sexuality normalized and sanitized, which I argue are requirements for straight benevolence? What attitudes toward gayness surface? How do supposedly enlightened, even charitable, stances on gayness construct representations of ideal—straight, male, white—citizens and therefore privilege particular identities? How, in other words, does straight benevolence preserve heterosexist and racist norms?

Introduction:

Defining “Straight Benevolence”

Acceptance of the LGBTQ community in the United States appears to be advancing in more positive directions. In 2011, President Barack Obama certified the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” a 17-year-old policy proscribing openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals from U.S. military service (Bumiller, 2011). The following year, in November 2012, citizens of Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, and Washington voted to allow same-sex marriages in their states (Fantz, 2012). Last summer, the U.S. Supreme Court dismissed California’s Proposition 8, that state’s ban on same-sex marriage, and simultaneously ruled the federal Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional (Socarides, 2013; Crehan & Rickenbacker, 2007).¹ As these examples illustrate, equal rights for lesbians, gays, and bisexuals unswervingly call for the support of individuals, populations, and groups always already assumed to be straight. On the other hand, while 21 states and the District of Columbia ban employers from making hiring and firing decisions on the basis of sexual orientation and 16 states offer similar protections for gender variant individuals, no such protection exists at the national level. This means “71% of U.S. square miles have no protections” for sexual minorities (Burns & Neeman, 2012). A lack of support as represented in this final example by the U.S. Congress can correspondingly obstruct equal rights for LGBTQ individuals. Advancement, in other words, is precariously contingent upon the approval of those whose presumed heterosexuality affords authority and power.

Approval and sanctioning of gayness by those represented as straight serves as background for this thesis, where I explore a term I coin “straight benevolence”: a seemingly

supportive and progressive attitude by people presented as heterosexuals toward those constructed as gay. Research on pro-LGBTQ activism in the United States is ample (Mayberry, 2012; Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; DeTurk, 2011; Russell, 2011; Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, & Wimsatt, 2010; Wayne & Sagarin, 2010; Wilkinson & Sagarin, 2010; Stozer, 2009) and scholarship on news coverage of this form of advocacy is similarly prevalent (Moscowitz, 2013; Landau, 2009; Bennett, 2006; Warner, 2005; Aarons, 2003; Adam, 2003; Barnhurst, 2003; Gross, 2001; Alwood, 1996). This thesis builds on these conversations by examining how pro-gay advocacy by individuals presented as straight is constructed in three popular media sites: A music video, a public advocacy campaign, and a television show. I focus on gay men in particular. Honing in on gay men as the beneficiaries of straight benevolence—as well as straight men as their ostensive benefactors—allows for a critical examination of what it means to be a man in contemporary U.S. society. I demonstrate how the production of straight benevolence in three current and popular media sites that ostensibly champions gay acceptance and inclusion concomitantly constructs sympathetic, strong, even heroic heterosexuals.

I ask: How does straight benevolence implicate gay men? In what ways is gay male sexuality normalized and sanitized, which I emphasize are requirements for straight benevolence? What attitudes toward gayness surface? How are representations of ideal—straight, male, white—citizens constructed? How, in other words, does straight benevolence prop up heterosexist and racist norms? How might heterosexual masculine white dominance be reified in these contexts? I argue straight benevolence—exemplified by empathy and charity extended from a position of cultural privilege—surreptitiously subordinates gayness and preserves white masculine heterosexual power and authority.

Sexuality, Normalization, and Media

This thesis explores the construction of gay male identity in three media sites. Along with changing social attitudes toward gayness in the United States, representations of gays in mainstream media are more prevalent today than in previous decades (Dhaenens, 2013; Peters, 2011; Bennett, 2010; Draper, 2010; Fouts & Inch, 2005; Shugart, 2003; Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Dow, 2001). However, scholars note this increased representation is not without problems. Gay men must, according to Robert Westerfelhaus and Celeste Lacroix (2006), “observe certain limits imposed upon them by the conventions of the mainstream’s heterosexist sociosexual order.” As lesbian and gay characters became visible, critical scholars such as Bonnie Dow (2001) and Helene A. Shugart (2003) problematized these representations. Dow (2001) showed how the mediated confession and campaign surrounding Ellen DeGeneres coming out in 1997 were centered on obtaining consent from a mainstream, heterosexual audience. DeGeneres’s coming out was constructed as both personal and liberating, enabling “sympathetic straights” (p. 135) to overlook culturally institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism. Shugart (2003) provided a detailed overview of highly normalized gay men appearing in popular media a decade ago. Absent romantic relationships with other men and “skirt[ing] the realities and implications of homosexuality (sic) by desexualizing the characters” at that time (p. 69), Shugart argued “heterosexual male privilege” and “blatant sexism [were] reinvented and legitimized” (p. 68) as these men were consistently portrayed as more assertive and in control of their close, platonic relationships with female friends.

In 2003, Lisa Duggan developed the term “the new homonormativity”: the encouragement of gays and lesbians to pursue, without question, the standards of living, customs, and rights already enjoyed by and granted to white, middle-class heterosexuals.

Scholars have since built on this theory, as well as on Dow's (2001) and Shugart's (2003) scholarship, to examine popular media's construction of gays as ordinary and therefore non-threatening (Dhaenens, 2013; Moscovitz, 2013; Boggis, 2013; Peters, 2011; Draper, 2010; Landau, 2009; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Ward, 2008; Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). These scholars illustrate how popular media overwhelmingly incorporate gays represented as professional and attractive, family-oriented and monogamous, conventionally masculine, and white. This thesis extends these ideas to argue that these tropes are requisite for the extension of straight benevolence. Throughout, I show how gayness is juxtaposed with charitable heterosexuality. Gayness is presented as not acceptable on its own, but as requiring the consent, affirmation, and sanctioning of already privileged heterosexuality. Gay men in these media sites are rendered troubled and weak and therefore subordinate to their straight male counterparts. On the other hand, heterosexuals are portrayed as enlightened and courageous saviors. Heroism arises as coexistent with straight benevolence.

Masculine Heterosexuality

This thesis problematizes masculinity by analyzing representations of conventional white straight masculinity and representations of gay men in these media sites. R. W. Connell developed the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) to detail how not all masculinities are equal. Privileged masculinity entails control of emotions, domination over effeminate or gay men, and overt use of authority. In addition to theorizing straight benevolence as a supportive and progressive attitude adopted by heterosexuals toward gays, I also examine the ways in which male benefactors—that is, men represented as charitably sanctioning gayness—are presented as "properly" masculine and heterosexual. As

John M. Sloop (2004) underscores, “gender and sexuality are implicated in every realm of discourse,” including popular media, and this prevalence demonstrates “just how ubiquitous concerns about ‘proper’ gender and sexuality are” (p. 6). Just as I argue only professional, attractive, family-oriented, and white gay men—those portrayed, in other words, as non-threatening and normative—are constructed as deserving of straight benevolence, I explore the ways in which only individuals represented in these media sites as conventionally masculine can extend straight benevolence.

This thesis also analyzes the ways in which gayness is presented through an explicit straight masculine perspective. Monique Wittig (1980/1992) emphasizes that, “when thought by the straight mind, homosexuality (sic) is nothing but heterosexuality” (p. 28). In a similar vein, Judith Butler (1990) suggests “the replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (p. 43, emphasis in original). I ask: How is it through this privileged perspective (this “straight mind”) that those presented as straight are constructed as understanding gayness? How does benevolent discourse directed toward one of the historic targets of traditional masculinity—gay men—serve to ensure the survival of heterosexual masculinity’s privileged position? While represented as a more progressive, more enlightened, and more attenuated form of masculine heterosexuality, I suggest straight benevolence in my sites of analysis merely enables masculine heterosexual dominance to operate more furtively.

The White, Straight Savior

This thesis demonstrates connections between “white savior” narratives in media sites (Hughey 2014, 2012a, 2012b, 2010; Bell, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013; Cammarota, 2011) and the “straight savior,” who is also overwhelmingly white. The white straight savior privileges whiteness and heterosexuality (the hero is white and straight), subordinates people of color and gay individuals (represented by victims who need the help only their white straight benefactor can provide), yet fails to address overriding oppressive structures (as only one person or group of color, or sexuality, is saved), and thereby further privileges straight white supremacy. Whiteness arises, as Matthew W. Hughey (2012b) suggests, as the essential “savior of the dysfunctional racial ‘others,’ [who are] redeemable in so long as they assimilate into white society via their obedience to their white benefactors” (p. 761). I extend this critical race theory about whiteness and, by taking an intersectional approach, address the interanimation of race, sexuality, and gender. This thesis explores the ways in which white heterosexual masculine saviors in current, popular media redress racially and sexually marginalized others. White straight masculine benevolence saves those disenfranchised because of their sexuality only to the extent that they adhere to white heteronormative aesthetics. As Wittig (1980/1992) emphasizes, “heterosexual society is the society which not only oppresses lesbians and gay men, it oppresses many different/others, it oppresses all women and *many categories of men*, all those who are in the position of the dominated” (p. 29, emphasis added). I draw on Wittig here to suggest that straight benevolence, as a surreptitious form of domination, exerts power from both a heterosexual and a white position. It oppresses many categories of men. Furthermore, if, as Richard Dyer (1997) asserts, whiteness is synonymous with privilege and overwhelmingly seen as normal—and if heterosexuality provides similar access to privilege through its taken-for-granted normalcy, as

this thesis argues—white straight masculine saviors continue to exert supremacy over gay men through straight benevolence.

Methodology and Sites of Analysis

Straight benevolence constructs gayness as not permissible on its own, but as requiring the enlightened, intrepid, benevolent acceptance and sanctioning of heterosexuals. A “key-word” in the analysis of culture, according to Raymond Williams (2009), “is pattern: it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins” (p. 350). Straight benevolence—which extends from a clear, secure position of heterosexuality to gays represented as both needing and deserving of this benevolence—is a pattern I identify in hip-hop artist Macklemore’s “Same Love,” seven Major League Baseball “It Gets Better” gay-advocacy videos, and the “Suddenly, Last Summer” episode of ABC’s primetime U.S. television series *Modern Family*. I selected these media sites because, in addition to producing straight benevolence, they are recent and popular. “Mediated depictions affect cultural practices,” Mary Vavrus (1998) states, “and these in turn influence subsequent mediated phenomena” (p. 215). Dyer (1997) similarly emphasizes “how anything is represented is the means by which we think and feel about that thing, by which we apprehend it. The study of representation is more limited than the study of reality and *yet it is also the study of one of the prime means by which we have any knowledge of reality*” (p. 1, emphasis added). More specifically, analyzing current and popular media is a significant means for understanding culture during times of far-reaching social transformation (Dow, 1996; Tuchman, 1978). The move toward greater acceptance of gays in the United States is such a transformation. I consider the following media sites a reflection of this transformation and therefore as deserving of critical analysis.

Chapter One: "Same Love"

In this hip-hop song, released in 2013, straight white Macklemore explicitly expresses progressive encouragement of gay rights. "Damn right [he] support[s] it" (Macklemore & Lewis, 2012). Censorious of U.S. conservative political and religious views of gayness, he raps: "The right wing conservatives think it's a decision, and you can be cured with some treatment and religion." He also admonishes the hip-hop community's perspective on gayness, which the mainstream media problematically frames as particularly homophobic. Macklemore scolds: "We don't have acceptance for 'em, call each other faggots behind the keys of a message board. A word rooted in hate, yet our genre still ignores it." These pro-gay lyrics work to represent Macklemore as enlightened, benevolent, and charitable. He is portrayed as extending a favor—that is, his white straight support—to the gay community. The song remained on the "Billboard Hot 100" for 30 weeks, peaking at #11 in September 2013 (billboard.com). "Same Love" was Grammy-nominated for best song of the year and has been lauded in the mainstream media as "hip-hop's first gay anthem" (Lambe, 2013). Of particular note, President of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Sarah Kate Ellis stated "Same Love" and its appeal are "the latest in a long line of signs that our nation not only accepts, but celebrates the love and commitment of gay couples today" (Emery, 2014). The song is complemented by an exquisitely produced video—which was written and directed, in part, by Macklemore's musical collaborator Ryan Lewis. Like Macklemore, Lewis is also a U.S. straight white man (Lambe, 2013). The video mirrors the song in both its pro-gay message and its success. It prominently features a gay man of color and currently boasts more than 140 million views on YouTube (Macklemore & Lewis, 2012).

Chapter Two: “It Gets Better”

In September 2010 in response to a string of highly publicized gay teen suicides that were framed as a result of bullying, American sex columnist Dan Savage and his long-time partner Terry Miller uploaded the first “It Gets Better” video online (Goltz, 2012; Majkowski, 2011; Muller, 2011; Veldman, 2010). In their initial message, both Savage and Miller recount their own experiences of being bullied in school and being shunned by their families. They describe how things “got better” for them as they graduated high school and were eventually accepted by their families. Ultimately, they underscore that gay youth watching their video are not alone. Others like them either are currently going through or have gone through similar situations (Savage & Miller, 2010). Today more than 50,000 videos from everyday people, politicians, and celebrities have been uploaded to itgetsbetter.org, and nearly 600,000 individuals have taken an online pledge to “provide hope for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other bullied teens by letting them know that it gets better” (Patrick, Bell, Huang, Lazarakis, & Edwards, 2013; Goltz, 2012; Majkowski, 2011; Muller, 2011; Veldman, 2010).

Professional sports teams began adding their voices to the “It Gets Better” campaign and, ostensibly, their benevolent support of gay youth on June 1, 2011, when Barry Zito of Major League Baseball’s San Francisco Giants opened his organization’s video by proclaiming: “We all know how difficult life can be as a teenager” (“Giants and ItGetsBetter.org,” 2011). Within four months, six other Major League Baseball teams—the Chicago Cubs, the Boston Red Sox, the Baltimore Orioles, the Philadelphia Phillies, the Tampa Bay Rays, and the Los Angeles Dodgers—posted similar videos. Throughout the seven Major League Baseball videos, 35 athletes assure viewers they can relate to and empathize with the challenges of growing up gay and of being bullied. For instance, the Red Sox video includes words such as “pressure,” “fitting

in,” “fear,” and “alone.” A player then says: “It’s okay to be your own unique being” (“Red Sox and ItGetsBetter.org,” 2011). Players and coaches offer hope by suggesting “there is light at the end of the tunnel” (“Cubs and ItGetsBetter.org,” 2011) and “as you can see me now, it gets better” (“It Gets Better/Tampa Bay Rays,” 2011). GLAAD lauded the 2011 Major League Baseball season as “a particularly memorable one for those of us who support LGBT inclusion and equality and follow the national pastime” (McQuade, 2011).

Chapter Three: Modern Family’s “Suddenly, Last Summer”

The ABC sitcom *Modern Family* features two partnered gay white men, Mitchell Pritchett and Cam Tucker, as main characters. The GLAAD Media Awards—which “honor outstanding media images of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community that inspire change [and] serve as a benchmark for the media industry and complement GLAAD’s work to bring LGBT images and stories to Americans” (glaad.org)—nominated *Modern Family* for outstanding comedy series every year since the show’s inception in 2009. It has won twice, in 2012 and 2014. *TV Guide* rated *Modern Family* the 13th most-watched show in the 2013-14 season (Schneider, 2014). The series has been nominated for a total of 67 Emmys—winning 21 times, including outstanding comedy series in 2014 (emmys.com). In the initial episode of the series’ 2013-14 season—aptly named “Suddenly, Last Summer,” as this was the first episode to air after the U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings during the summer on DOMA and California’s Proposition 8 (Socarides, 2013) legalized same-sex marriages in California (where the show is set)—Mitchell’s straight sister, Claire Dunphy, kindheartedly congratulates him on his newly acquired right to marry. Hoping to hear “gay wedding bells soon” (Richman, 2013), she gives her blessing to the union. The primary storyline of the episode depicts Mitchell and Cam trying to figure out how to propose marriage to one another as straight members of their family help. In

“Suddenly, Last Summer,” heteronormative institutions are shored up as gayness is endorsed through marriage, as well as through the intrepid approval of heterosexuals.

Chapter One:

Macklemore's Hip-Hop Benevolence

In 2013, straight white male U.S. hip-hop artist Macklemore emerged from rap—an historically black musical genre (Balaji, 2012; Hess, 2006) constructed as homophobic and hyper-masculine by mainstream media (Durham, Cooper & Morris, 2013; Penney, 2012; Wilson, 2007)—with several popular songs including his second hit, “Same Love.” The song expresses seemingly progressive support of gay rights, opposing the discriminatory pattern of Western conservatism and the supposed anti-gay pulse of hip-hop. Macklemore raps “no law is gonna change us, we have to change us” and advocates a fight “for humans that have had their rights stolen.” Conventional media has lauded “Same Love” as “hip-hop’s first gay anthem” (Lambe, 2013). The song remained on the “Billboard Hot 100” for 30 weeks, peaking at #11 in September 2013 (billboard.com). The accompanying music video—written and directed, in part, by Macklemore’s musical collaborator Ryan Lewis, also a U.S. straight white man—mirrors the song in both its pro-gay message and its success. The video, which prominently features a gay man of color, has more than 140 million views on YouTube.

In this chapter, I argue “Same Love” champions gay inclusion at the same time as it reinforces straight-masculine-white privilege. I examine the lyrics, narrative, and visual elements of the “Same Love” video to show how the song produces what I describe as “straight benevolence,” which positions gay men as weak, helpless, and in need of the support of their straight counterparts. As a patronizing extension of kindness and charity, straight benevolence subordinates gayness to masculine heterosexuality, which emerges as courageous and heroic.

The “Same Love” video represents the gay man of color as particularly troubled and vulnerable to anti-gay hostility. However, he is benevolently rescued and ultimately saved through his union with a white man. “Same Love,” in other words, shores up both heteronormative and white privilege.

Opening Notes: “Same Love” and Cultural Context

In “Same Love,” Macklemore is censorious of U.S. political and religious intolerance of gayness: “The right wing conservatives think it’s a decision, and you can be cured with some treatment and religion.” He also admonishes the hip-hop community: “We don’t have acceptance for ’em, call each other faggots behind the keys of a message board. A word rooted in hate, yet our genre still ignores it.” Mary Lambert, who is white and publically confirms she is lesbian (Hahn, 2014), accompanies Macklemore. She sings this chorus three times during the song: “And I can’t change, even if I tried, even if I wanted to. My love, my love, my love, she keeps me warm.” The pro-gay lyrics—imparted, predominantly (despite Lambert’s vocals), from a straight man and, significantly, from within a musical genre the mainstream media fashions as homophobic (Penney, 2012; Wilson, 2007)—are combined with expressive music and accompany an exquisitely produced video.

As further testament to the song’s broad appeal and activist mien, the performance of “Same Love” at the 2014 Grammy Awards in January ended with host Queen Latifah marrying 33 couples standing among the audience. Latifah first extolled the song as “a love song not for some of us, but for all of us” in her introduction (Emery, 2014). She also referred to Macklemore and Lewis as “one of the most inspiring success stories in music this past year” (Emery, 2014). Toward the end of their performance, Latifah reemerged onstage by walking through swing

doors framed by ornate columns and a high, pointed arch lit in pink and white (propped to appear as chapel doors) and married the couples. Latifah, who was deputized by Los Angeles County prior to the Grammys to administer the mass wedding (Emery, 2014), asked the 66 individuals of different races, ethnicities, and sexualities (both same-sex and opposite-sex couples were visible) to exchange rings. She then exclaimed: “By the power invested in me by the State of California, I now pronounce you a married couple!” Madonna joined the performers onstage—after being secretive in an interview immediately prior to the show, intimating “history is going to be made tonight” (Emery, 2014)—and sang her hit from the 1990s, “Open Your Heart.” While “Same Love” was nominated for best song of the year (it lost), Macklemore and Lewis won four Grammys: best new artist, best rap album (*The Heist*), best rap song (“Thrift Shop”), and best rap performance (“Thrift Shop”). History was indeed made—by the broadcasting of mass nuptials involving same-sex couples, but also by a music industry run overwhelmingly by white executives (Boosalis & Golombisky, 2010; Jhally, 2007) prodigiously recognizing a white duo within a black musical form. In a genre of music where black performers should be winning, this occurrence—the first time a white artist “swept the rap categories” at the Grammy Awards (Ramirez, 2014)—is noteworthy.

“Same Love” reflects José van Dijck’s (2006) notion that songs are frequently a “sign of their time” when they arise from a specific “sociotechnological context” (p. 358). Mass-produced music as a contemporary form of technology, in other words, often exploits popular cultural discourses, as well as society’s shared emotions and collective viewpoints. While the film is in line with scholars’ observation that gay representations in popular media are more prevalent today than previous decades (Dhaenens, 2013; Peters, 2011; Shugart, 2003), I suggest the generally positive reception of “Same Love” may have much to do with changing social attitudes

toward gayness. Along with U.S. culture in general, hip-hop's views on gayness are also shifting. Aisha Durham, Brittney Cooper, and Susana Morris (2013) observe that "when singer Frank Ocean admitted that he had fallen in love with a man, that admission was embraced by key figures in hip-hop, including women such as dream hampton and Beyoncé" (p. 725). Joel Penney (2012) similarly reflects that "[i]n both music and image ... hip-hop seems to be experiencing a profound queering moment, driven by a complex combination of aesthetic innovation, commercial pressure, and shifting social and political viewpoints" (p. 324). The moment is right, in other words, for a song like "Same Love" to emerge from within hip-hop. At the same time, critical questions arise related to the production of straight benevolence, heteronormative framing of straight and gay identities, the construction of masculinity, and representations of race—questions I examine in relation to the song and video for "Same Love."

Macklemore's Particular Beat of Straight Benevolence

The extension of straight benevolence to gays begins with Macklemore's vocals. He is constructed as straight not only in his public persona, but also through the opening lyrics of "Same Love." He raps: "When I was in the third grade I thought that I was gay, 'cause I could draw, my uncle was, and I kept my room straight. I told my mom, tears rushing down my face. She's like 'Ben you've loved girls since before pre-k. Trippin'.'" Three verses later, he recounts how his mother's confirmation of his heterosexuality resulted in him recalling he was "good at little league." Here, Macklemore marks himself as the quintessential straight U.S. man through one of the most conventional male signifiers, sports (Cherney & Lindemann, 2014; Adams, Anderson, & McCormack, 2010; Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Bulaji, 2009; Lilleaas, 2007). Macklemore also raps, "strip away the fear and underneath it's all the same love" and "I

may not be the same, but that's not important, no freedom 'til we're equal, damn right I support it." Macklemore levels gayness with straightness when he suggests that "underneath it's all the *same* love." At the same time, Macklemore distances his straight, masculine persona from gay individuals—"I may not be the same"—to shore up straight privilege. Macklemore stands at a privileged heteronormative apex—a well-defined, indisputable, and safe straight location from which he draws cultural legitimization to extend benevolence to gays.

In "Same Love," gayness does not have a voice except through a straight man. Gayness, in other words, is not acceptable in its own right. Rather, it is constructed as requiring someone who is clearly straight and masculine—as well as consistently represented as good-intentioned, well-meaning, and even heroic—to make gayness visible and acceptable. Macklemore's benevolence grants that gay individuals are fine the way they are ... that it is okay, as one lyric encourages, to "live on and be yourself." Here, Macklemore approves of gayness. Straight approval occurs again when Macklemore makes a passing reference that gay kids, who walk "round the hallway plagued by a pain in their heart," should be encouraged to "be who they are." He also recognizes gayness as a "predisposition" that cannot be "cured" or "rewired." Macklemore frames gayness in this verse as no more of a choice than eye, hair, and skin color—a sentiment resounded by Lambert's chorus (she can't change even if she tried)—and charitably grants gayness is unobjectionable because it is biologically predetermined. Overwhelmingly, Macklemore approves of gayness to the extent that it mirrors—is the *same love* as—his straightness, made clear with verses such as "whatever God you believe in, we come from the *same* one" and "strip away the fear and underneath it's all the *same* love." Heterosexuality is represented in "Same Love" as the social standard through which gayness is not only sanctioned but also understood. Macklemore consistently offers his straight assessment of gayness which

equates it with heterosexuality, suggestive of Wittig's (1980/1992) assertion that, "[w]hen thought by the straight mind, homosexuality (sic) is nothing but heterosexuality" (p. 28). In "Same Love," Macklemore positions himself as individually distinct (as heterosexual) and it is through this perspective (his "straight mind") that he makes sense of gayness before benevolently speaking to gays about their actions and their love.

In addition to approving of gayness from his well-defined straight position, Macklemore bequeaths social advancement for and rights to gays. The lyric "when everyone else is more comfortable remaining voiceless, rather than fighting for humans that have had their rights stolen" suggests he is using *his* voice to fight for certain civil liberties. However, these "stolen" rights—which could range from employment nondiscrimination and equal housing protection, which are currently denied to gays at either the federal or state levels (Moscowitz, 2013)—are never fully articulated in "Same Love." The only liberty unambiguously addressed is the right for gays to enter into heterosexuality's institution par excellence: marriage. Macklemore specifically laments, "'til the day that my uncles can be united by law." Here, he explicitly invites his uncles and, more generally, all other gays to fight to acknowledge their bonds through state-sanctioned recognition of their relationships. He also raps: "A certificate on paper isn't gonna solve it all, but it's a damn good place to start. No law is gonna change us. We have to change us." Like gayness itself fashioned in "Same Love" as requiring the approval of an enlightened straight man, the quest for marriage equality necessitates consent from heterosexuals in general.

Pervasive Accompaniments: Heteronormativity and Masculinity

While the song “Same Love” is five minutes and 30 seconds long, the video is seven-minutes, and presented like a film. At the end of the song portion of the video, credits begin to role with the statement:

A FILM BY
RYAN LEWIS
JON JON AUGUSTAVO
TRICIA DAVIS

High-end production and the absence of rap or singing performers in the video—Macklemore appears in only three seconds of the seven-minute film—work together to present this as a film rather than a music video. The film revolves around the epic, birth-to-old-age story of a gay man of color. He is mixed race. His father is black and is presented in ways that correspond to conventional representations of black masculinity—strong (Alexander, 2004) as he firmly grips his wife’s hand during childbirth, as well as physically dominant (Collins, 2004) as he towers over his son when they play football in both his son’s early childhood and adolescence. He also has darker skin than his son and his wife, who appears to be Latina. She is represented as such not only by her light brown skin but also by her “identification with religion, family, and tradition,” characteristics Arlene Dávila (2008, p. 55) notes are used to stereotype Latinas. The mixed race man’s mother attends church—with her son but without her husband—and makes the sign of the cross over her face and chest following prayer. In the film, dominant heteronormative institutions and traditions—particularly, those anchored to intimacy—work to alienate the mixed race gay man in his youth. The benevolent, anti-homophobic, pro-acceptance message of “Same Love” has, in other words, heteronormative practices as its starting point. Heteronormativity, according to Michael Warner (2005/1998), is more than ideology and is “produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life” (p. 194). Together, Warner

(2005/1998) and Jasbir Puar (2007) assert heteronormativity effects law, property, and education—facets of life ranging from those typically considered private (medical practices, for instance) to those regarded as public (nationhood and citizenship, for example). In its pervasiveness, heteronormativity also impacts aspects of the human experience—such as romance—expressed both privately and publically. The “Same Love” film opens with the private laboring of childbirth (the pain, struggles, and sweat of the protagonist’s mother) in the clinical space of a hospital. The film continues with myriad constructions of socially acceptable, heterosexist U.S. gender roles—girls sell lemonade and play with dolls, while boys climb trees and play sports. In his youth, the main character wears a Boy Scout uniform (a symbol of youthful U.S. citizenship) and awkwardly gives yellow flowers to a girl with blonde hair; he stands alone and seems anxious at a dance for teenagers as his peers pair off for slow, close dancing; and he appears nervous and pained during a game of spin the bottle (a game that usually involves kissing) as the bottle points to him.

The film reveals changes in the main character’s life as he grows from adolescence to adulthood. Instead of “destabilizing the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity” (Cohen, 1997, p. 438), the gay man in the film conforms to certain aesthetics rendered acceptable by heterosexuality. “While [gays] are now permitted access to the media mainstream,” emphasize Westerfelhaus and Lacroix (2006) “they are welcome there only so long as they observe certain limits imposed upon them by the conventions of the mainstream’s heterosexist sociosexual order” (p. 427). First, these conventions include being professional and attractive (Moscowitz, 2013; Peters, 2012; Battles & Morrow, 2002; Fejes, 2000). The primary gay man in the film has a professional job—he is shown in his office, sitting at his desk behind a computer, wearing a dress jacket, and speaking on a smartphone. He is handsome and clean-cut. Second,

gay men in popular media must be family-oriented, as well as monogamous (Moscowitz, 2013; Boggis, 2012; Landau, 2009). The main character spends time with his family at dinner, in church, and with his mother, in particular. He is in a committed relationship with another man. Next, gay male characters tend to be represented through conventional masculinity (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Ward, 2008; Battles & Morrow, 2002; Fejes, 2000). With short haircuts, close and neatly trimmed facial hair, and nice, masculine clothes, both men in the film are unambiguously manly. In sum, the featuring of a gay man—and, in due course, his male partner—is not without conditions. Throughout “Same Love,” heteronormative framing persists. Heteronormativity alienates his adolescent sexuality and then shifts to sanitize his adult sexuality by fully integrating and representing him through heterosexualized tropes.

Another significant heteronormative requirement of gay men in popular media is that they be represented as white (Moscowitz, 2013; Peters, 2011; Shugart, 2003). While the film features a gay male character of color, the narrative ultimately works to align him closer to whiteness. In stark contrast to the mixed race man, his father is shown to be reticent, pensive, and homophobic—stereotypical characteristics of black male representations in mainstream media (Alexander, 2004; Collins, 2004; Puar, 2007). Upon learning of his son’s sexuality during a family dinner, the black father gives his son a stern look, leaves the room without saying anything, and is never seen in the film again. This suggests he disappeared from his son’s life at that point, fulfilling stereotypes of absentee black fathers. Throughout his childhood and into his adolescence, the mixed race boy is presented as unhappy and isolated, the victim of the violence of heteronormative customs and institutions. He is the victim of homophobic slurs when a man walks by on the street, looks him in the eye, bumps his shoulder to his, and calls him “faggot.” However, the man of color is eventually represented as conforming to those white heterosexual

norms previously discussed, rendering his sexuality and race palatable. He grows up to be family-oriented and masculine. He also emerges as less black and more white—a tension Dávila (2008) indicates most Latinos experience (germane here, as the mixed race male is half Latino)—because he is represented as well-dressed and groomed, upwardly mobile, and professional. Constantly measured against blacks in the United States, Latinos are whitened, arise as model minorities, and garner positive cultural attention as they “[move] up the ladder” (Dávila, 2008, p. 25). Moreover, while overtly victimized throughout the first half of the film, this man is eventually saved—and his identity is further whitened—through his union with a white man. Scholars including Hughey (2014; 2012a; 2012b; 2010), Katherine Bell (2013), Michael Fitzgerald (2013), and Julio Cammarota (2011) have revealed how the white savior narrative in film privileges whiteness (the hero is white), subordinates blackness (an individual or small group is represented as damaged and in need of the help their white benefactor provides), yet fails to address any overriding oppressive structures (only one person or group of color is saved) and thereby further privileges white supremacy. Whiteness arises, as Hughey (2012b) suggests, as the essential “savior of the dysfunctional racial ‘others,’ [who are] redeemable in so long as they assimilate into white society via their obedience to their white benefactors” (p. 761). The film’s visual narrative includes a marriage proposal on the beach. The white man falls to one knee and extends a ring to the man of color. Here, he offers marriage, as well as the protection and security that institution ostensibly provides. The white man places the ring on the man of color’s finger and then stands to hug him. The white man becomes the embodiment of fortification and strength. The man of color is embraced by and takes another step closer to whiteness.

Heteronormative conventions work in the “Same Love” film to structure this union as acceptable. Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook (2009) underscore that heteronormativity obliges men to disregard each other’s bodies while Shugart (2003) and Fred Fejes (2000) suggest heteronormativity makes gay sexual attraction acceptable by rendering it invisible. The two men are depicted walking down the street together (but not holding hands) and looking at music albums together (presumably in their home, but without intimate contact). When intimacy between the two men is shown, it is awkward (they share a hasty kiss in their car as the camera suddenly shakes and later, at their wedding reception, the camera briefly reveals only the ending of a kiss as they smear wedding cake on each other’s faces), distant (the kiss at their marriage ceremony is exposed via a wide, long shot from the back of the church), or physically ambiguous or incomplete. For example, the men lay together in a hammock; however, most of their bodies and both of their faces are outside the frame. Another scene includes a close-up of their hands clasped. The scene transitions to a wide shot of them still holding hands, then leaping from a high cliff into a large body of water as their hands come apart and the otherwise rare connection of their bodies is severed. Heteronormative directives are apparent in the preceding examples, as well as in one of the film’s final scenes: When the two men kiss for an extended period of time during their wedding reception (at less than three seconds, this is the longest of four kisses between them in the seven-minute film), the lighting is dark enough so their faces are indiscernible and they are never fully shown together inside the frame. From actual lack of physical contact to production techniques obscuring intimacy, explicit desire is starkly absent in this gay male relationship. Unconcealed desire is most apparent in “Same Love” through the music itself when Lambert lends her voice (“she keeps me warm”) to the song. In this way, the lyrics of the song are not overtly gay-male-focused. What’s more, Lambert’s lyrical contribution

substantiates the cultural notion that being a lesbian woman is more tolerable than being a gay man (Moscowitz, 2013; Keiller, 2010; Barron, Struckman-Johnson, Quevillon & Banka, 2008). Her voice intimating lesbian attraction is clear. The visuals suggesting gay male desire, on the other hand and as noted, are obscure. In “Same Love” representations of gay men and their relationship are acceptable because they fully conform to—and thereby privilege—normalization processes driven by heterosexuality.

The normalization of the two men in the “Same Love” film culminates in their marriage, and the scene from the wedding reception takes on a particularly celebratory tone with lights, balloons, dancing, eating, and drinking. Puar (2007) reminds us of Butler’s argument that “the binary between heterosexuals and homosexuals (sic) has been displaced by an emphasis on illegitimate and legitimate partnerships, via the push for respectability through gay marriage” (pp. 125–126). Heterosexual legitimacy, in other words, is never in question. Gay legitimacy is always in question. Gayness in U.S. culture becomes less threatening and more ordinary through marriage (Moscowitz, 2013). Duggan (2003) developed the term “the new homonormativity,” which is the encouragement of gays and lesbians to pursue, exclusively and without question, the standards of living, customs, and rights already enjoyed by and granted to heterosexuals. I extend these ideas to suggest that what is defined as legitimate also gains salience in “Same Love” through the benevolence of heterosexuality. Macklemore raps “human rights for everybody” including marriage sanctioned through “a certificate on paper.” His straight musical collaborator, Lewis, wrote and directed a film culminating in the depiction of same-sex marriage. Together, the song and film underscore gays are the “same” as heterosexuals to the extent gays conform to heterosexual aesthetics and want to be married—a right heterosexuals are represented as progressively and benevolently granting.

“Same Love” and the Dominant Rhythm of White Privilege

Incorporating representations of blackness is a tactic Macklemore uses to authenticate himself as part of hip-hop culture. Mickey Hess (2006) has examined similar efforts by white rap artists such as the Beastie Boys, Vanilla Ice, and Eminem to “establish their hip-hop legitimacy and to confront rap music’s representations of whites as socially privileged and therefore not credible within a music form where credibility is often negotiated through an artist’s experiences of social struggle” (p. 372). Black artists are used to legitimize Macklemore and Lewis’s live performances. For instance, when the two white men performed “Same Love” at MTV’s Video Music Awards in September 2013, black singer Jennifer Hudson accompanied them onstage (mtv.com). Then, in January 2014, when Queen Latifah introduced the performance of “Same Love” at the Grammys, she introduced Macklemore and Lewis, as well as “New Orleans’s own Trombone Shorty,” who joined the performance of “Same Love.” Latifah shifts her accent (code-switches and “blackens” her speech for those five words alone) to draw attention to Shorty, who, like Latifah (who also joins Macklemore, Lewis, and Trombone Shorty on stage), is black. The song’s lyrics and the “Same Love” film also coopt black representations and imagery, conflating the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1900s with the present struggle for gay rights in order to legitimize the latter. Puar (2007) reminds that the “analogizing of race and sexuality has a protracted history in gay liberationist tenets that has eventually rendered sexuality a form of minoritization parallel to ethnicity and race. The foundational analogizing argument of gay and lesbian civil rights discourses proceeds as follows: gays and lesbians are the last recipients of civil rights that have already been bestowed on racial minorities” (p. 118). Conflating gay and racial struggles for equality suggests racism has ceased to exist and all oppression and modes of resistance are the same (Stone & Ward, 2011; Puar, 2007). This gay-black conflation becomes

highly problematic when leveraged by Macklemore. As a straight man, he has no firsthand experience of anti-gay discrimination. As a white man, he has never been the focus of racist bigotry. Rather, as a straight, white, U.S. man, Macklemore possesses absolute privilege that, as Felicia Pratto and Andrew Stewart (2012) emphasize, “means not having to worry about one’s identity and its meaning” (p. 29). From this cultural position, Macklemore constructs his views as sensible and enlightened. For instance, he raps: “It’s the same hate that’s caused wars from religion—gender to skin color, the complexion of your pigment. The same fight that led people to walk-outs and sit-ins.” Here, Macklemore essentially says, *clearly, as listeners to this song, you would agree that any form of oppression and discrimination resulting in hatred and denial of basic rights is wrong*. He sounds both reasonable and well-intentioned, and is propped up via what Hughey (2012a) calls a “‘rational’ subject position” (p. 99). As he raps, the film depicts iconic black-and-white imagery from the Civil Rights Movement—a cross burning, a young black girl holding a sign that reads “WE BELIEVE IN THE SUPREME COURT,” and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. giving a speech—and then transitions to images of almost exclusively white people waving rainbow flags (the ubiquitous symbol of gay activism) in demonstrations and in front of the U.S. Capitol building. Through this tactic, Macklemore’s heterosexuality is represented as equitable and benevolent. His whiteness is constructed as empathetic and enlightened. Overall, his straight white persona is aligned with charity and decency. He is presented as a straight white man able to make connections that gay and black people have not or cannot—respectively, that gays should appreciate they have obvious allies in blacks and that blacks should unequivocally understand their (purportedly overcome) past struggles are the same as the current struggles gay people face.

Anomalous white Macklemore goes a step further—reaching the pinnacle of white privilege—to specifically chide the predominantly black genre of hip-hop to grow past what Eric Lott (1993) has described as blacks’ supposed cultural childishness. In “Same Love,” this lack of social-maturity is exemplified by small-minded homophobia that is allegedly more pervasive within hip-hop culture than U.S. society in general. “A culture founded from oppression, yet we don’t have acceptance for ’em, call each other faggots behind the keys of a message board, a word rooted in hate,” Macklemore raps, “yet our genre still ignores it.” Here, Macklemore admonishes the largely black hip-hop audience to end its shameful and sheepish (enacted secretly “behind the keys of a message board”) homophobia. He essentially calls upon blacks to transcend to the full understanding, compassion, and wisdom associated with whiteness. Having established that he is as straight as the majority of those comprising the hip-hop audience, Macklemore exploits black hip-hop culture by drawing on the history of and experience with black enslavement and disenfranchisement. He simultaneously positions himself as more enlightened and benevolent than black hip-hop. His voice quickens in pace and increases in volume as he raps, “It’s human rights for everybody.” He then reaches a crescendo as he intensely completes the lyric: “There is no difference!” The music and Macklemore’s voice immediately return to the more subdued tone typical of the rest of the song, underscoring that Macklemore has made one of the song’s most critical points—that there is no difference when it comes to black and gay rights. This is another example of his use of a seemingly rational argument (Smith, 2013; Hughey, 2012a)—effectively and earnestly imploring, *you, who have firsthand experience with persecution, harassment, and victimization by others’ use of the “N-word,” should relate to the abject hatefulness of a word like “faggot” and should stop thoughtlessly using it.* Lyrics such as “we don’t have acceptance” and “our genre” serve to

position Macklemore within the hip-hop community, albeit as a rare progressive and tolerant part of that community who speaks with unassailable, enlightened authority.

The main post-racial storyline in the “Same Love” film also privileges whiteness. Kent Ono (2010) notes that post-racism “is a fantasy that racism no longer exists. Post-racism disavows history, overlaying it with an upbeat discourse”—such as the seemingly cheerful and optimistic narrative of the biracial couple featured in the “Same Love” film—“about how things were never really that bad, are not so bad now, and are only getting better” (p. 227). On the surface, the interracial union featured in “Same Love” appears to be an equitable one. In true post-racial form, racial differences do not seem to matter. From the proposal scene until the end of the film, the mixed race gay man is presented within his coupling with a white man as content, happy, and even triumphant. While post-racial discourse frames culturally imposed distinctions as no longer relevant or even distinguishable, however, the biracial relationship featured in the “Same Love” film is unbalanced in its privileging of whiteness. Problematic racial differences are built into the narrative. For instance, the man of color is saved—made whole—only through his white partner. When depicted in old age at the end of the film lying unconscious in a hospital bed, the man of color is portrayed as needing his white husband to care for him. His white husband is seated upright at his bedside, positioned as stronger and able to care for and provide for him. These representations and interactions reinforce the privilege and supposed strength of whiteness. At the same time, the “Same Love” film works to subordinate individuals of color. Puar (2007) notes that gayness is always already assumed to be white, while black is always already assumed to be heterosexual. This results in the seeming inevitability of homophobia among blacks (represented in “Same Love,” generally, by the intolerance of the hip-hop community and, specifically, by the main character’s black father’s reaction to his son’s

sexuality and disappearance from the remainder of the film), invariably contrasted with greater acceptance of gayness among whites—whites such as Macklemore. To be sure, Macklemore is positioned as a white savior—a straight white savior, specifically—as he raps his support for gay equality, acceptance, and rights. He, and not the predominantly black genre of hip-hop, is the progressive, enlightened straight white benefactor.

Coda: Closing Thoughts on “Same Love”

“When such a . . . popular rap artist puts marriage equality center stage at one of the biggest events of the year,” proclaimed GLAAD President Sarah Kate Ellis following Macklemore’s “Same Love” performance at the 2014 Grammys, “it is the latest in a long line of signs that our nation not only accepts, but celebrates the love and commitment of gay couples today” (Emery, 2014). The success of Macklemore’s “Same Love” as evidenced by its duration and peak on the Billboard chart, as well as its 140 million views on YouTube, is equaled by its largely positive critical acclaim as corroborated by Ellis’s declaration. However, this acclaim—similar to the production of straight benevolence, heterosexual and masculine norms, and white privilege examined in this chapter—is problematic. Scholars such as Catherine Squires, Eric Watts, Vavrus, Ono, Kathleen Feyh, Bernadette Calafell, and Daniel Brouwer (2010) have analyzed post-sexual discourse represented by Ellis’s statement. In a post-sexual world, sexuality fictitiously no longer matters and homophobia is imagined to be part of a bygone, less progressive era. Such post-sexual claims misleadingly foster a notion that U.S. society has moved beyond anti-gay discrimination and into a more enlightened moment in history—that, as Ellis suggests, U.S. citizens not only broadly tolerate gayness but also celebrate gayness. Granted, a recent Gallup poll suggests 59% of Americans today are accepting of same-sex

relations, up from 40% in 2001 (Newport & Himelfarb, 2013). At the same time, this poll reveals 41% of Americans today are not accepting of gayness. Despite post-sexual allegations, one's sexuality—one's gayness specifically—matters tremendously.

Rachel Dubrofsky (2013), through her analysis of the Fox series *Glee*, helpfully shows how a media site that purports to be beyond race actually “perpetuates racism and relies on racist tropes” (p. 83). Similarly, “Same Love”—which is not only situated post-racially (Macklemore's appropriation of vintage, black-and-white images of the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1900 suggesting that struggle is over) but also post-sexually through its enlightened, progressive, benevolent message—relies on both racist and heteronormative tropes to deliver its seemingly progressive message. To be sure, heterosexuals can be gay activists (Mayberry, 2012; Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; DeTurk, 2011; Russell, 2011; Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, & Wimsatt; 2010; Wilkinson & Sagarin, 2010; Stozer, 2009). Straight pro-gay alliances are particularly productive when, according to Maralee Mayberry (2012), they “engage in activist projects aimed at disrupting the heteronormative practices underlying lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender stigmatized sexual identities” (pp. 35–36). This is, however, different than the straight benevolence constructed by “Same Love.” The song and film superficially convey, as Ellis suggests, a necessary counter to homophobic thinking and anti-LGBTQ policies, but it does not disrupt heterosexual oppression. Rather, it merely shores up the already existing dominance of heterosexual, masculine, white authority and privilege.

Chapter Two:

Major League Baseball's "It Gets Better" Benevolence

U.S. sex columnist Dan Savage² and his partner Terry Miller reacted to the September 2010 suicide of Billy Lucas, who was a gay teen of color harassed by classmates because of his sexuality, by producing an online YouTube video recounting their own experiences being bullied in school (Kinsler, 2012; Montgomery, 2010). During the eight-minute video, both gay white men describe how life "got better" for them after they graduated high school. Their families accepted them. They met each other, fell in love, and started a family together (Savage & Miller, 2010). Inspired by this message, celebrities, politicians, and everyday people have since uploaded more than 50,000 pro-gay, anti-bullying videos to itgetsbetter.org. The website was launched less than three weeks after Savage and Miller's initial video, as the "It Gets Better" project quickly reached the YouTube channel limit of 650 videos (Hartlaub, 2010). The site enables visitors to support "It Gets Better" by connecting with the campaign on social media, making financial donations, and sending in written stories or videos to be selected by the campaign for inclusion on its website. Individuals in the videos regularly follow Savage and Miller's example. They look directly into the camera—solemnly into the eyes of viewers—and consistently affirm that growing up gay is challenging. They point out that others are currently going through or have gone through similar experiences, underscoring that gay youth watching the videos are not alone and offering hope by letting gay adolescents know that "it gets better."

The first professional U.S. sports team to post a video to the "It Gets Better" website and, ostensibly, speak out in support of gay youth through this campaign, were the San Francisco

Giants (Calcaterra, 2011; Klemko, 2011). On June 1, 2011, Barry Zito opened the Giants' video by proclaiming: "We all know how difficult life can be as a teenager" (Giants, 2011). Within four months, six other Major League Baseball teams—the Chicago Cubs, the Boston Red Sox, the Baltimore Orioles, the Philadelphia Phillies, the Tampa Bay Rays, and the Los Angeles Dodgers—posted similar videos.³ I contend that the "It Gets Better" videos by the seven professional male U.S. sports teams enact "straight benevolence," where gayness is positioned as requiring the enlightened and intrepid support of heterosexual, male, and mostly white athletes. Concomitantly, gays are constructed, first, as in need of straight benevolence and, second, as deserving benevolence through post-sexual discourse that posits sexuality as meaningless and homophobia as a thing of the past. Post-sexuality deceptively suggests society has advanced beyond sexuality and ultimately positions gayness as unimportant. Athletes problematically tell gay adolescents their sexuality does not matter, urging them to "come out" and be themselves while ignoring the potential for harassment. I also examine the use of the now ubiquitous anti-bullying discourse by athletes to argue the seven videos render gays markedly weak, victims, and subordinate to privileged conventional masculinity. I analyze the videos' production techniques—the use of scripts, of tropes common in male-dominated sports, and of lighting—as a way of accessing how straight masculine whiteness is rendered authentic and authoritative.

Going, Going, Gone: Pro-Gay Advocacy Goes Viral

Shortly after shooting and posting his video with Miller, Savage recalled: "[I]t occurred to me, when I was really turning over the Billy Lucas case in my mind, that I could talk to these kids. ... I could go on YouTube, I could make a digital video and I could post it, and I could directly address them and tell them 'It Gets Better'" (Montgomery, 2010).⁴ By the end of

September 2010, 200 “It Gets Better” videos were posted (Goltz, 2012; Muller, 2011) and the anti-bullying, pro-gay online video campaign began in earnest. As viral cultural phenomenon, “It Gets Better” has, according to Amber Muller (2011), “succeeded in moving a periphery subject, such as LGBTQ rights, into central acceptance.” (p. 276). Underscoring the popularity of the campaign (hereafter abbreviated IGB), Savage and Miller’s original video now has more than two million views on YouTube, the more than 50,000 other videos posted since late 2010 boast 50 million total views (itgetsbetter.org/about), and nearly 600,000 individuals have taken an online pledge to “provide hope for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other bullied teens by letting them know that it gets better” (itgetsbetter.org). Muller (2011) has also emphasized that “[t]he project’s inclusion in mainstream culture can be seen through the subjects ... making videos in support of the project” (p. 276). For instance, the earliest videos posted by celebrities highlighted on the timeline of the IGB website were produced, first, by gay white male celebrity blogger Perez Hilton and, second, by straight, black, female hip-hop artists Lala and Ciara. Then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton (a straight white woman) soon added a video to the campaign with President Barack Obama (a straight biracial man) following suit. While this extremely small sample of notable videos implies gender and racial diversity, a cursory review of the 50,000 videos on the IGB website suggests the videos predominantly feature men. Regarding race, Michael Johnson Jr.’s (2014) “examination of the videos ... reveals a [white] racial homogeneity in its speakers, and racial tokenism is well represented among the plethora of white voices” (p. 281). The seven Major League Baseball IGB videos are emblematic of this gendered, raced imbalance. They are comprised of 35 straight, male, and mostly white athletes. As such, the seven videos offer a good entry point for a critical analysis of how straight white masculinity is positioned in some popular discourse about being an LGBTQ ally.

In my analysis, I consider a common trope in the IGB campaign overall: heterosexual individuals voicing their acceptance, support, and, as Tina Majkowski (2011) has summarized, their message of “[d]ear Queers, just wait it out and try not to die before we get around to making things better” (pp. 163–164). The Major League Baseball IGB videos follow this straight-ally motif and, for some, suggested an important development in gay activism. GLAAD, for instance, extolled the 2011 Major League Baseball season as “a particularly memorable one for those of us who support LGBT inclusion and equality and follow the national pastime” (McQuade, 2011). Ranging in length from 30 to 84 seconds, averaging 63 seconds, the videos closely resemble mediated visual public service announcements. Effective PSAs, according to psaproject.org, range in length from 30 to 60 seconds and have a primary objective of “persuad[ing] an audience to ... adopt a particular viewpoint on a cause or social issue.” Using “concise language” and arguing from a “clear point of view” (psaproject.org), PSAs render those on screen as knowledgeable, persuasive, and authoritative. In aggregate, the seven Major League Baseball IGB videos allow for an analysis of how white heterosexual masculinity (athletes, in particular, who are held in high esteem in U.S. culture) is mediated as authoritative, and adds to recent critical examinations by Frederik Dhaenens (2013), Wendy Peters (2011), and Jeffrey Bennett (2010) of masculine representations in visual texts, including the prominence (or lack thereof) of gay representations. Of note, some critical scholars—such as Michael L. Butterworth (2013; 2006; 2005) and Diane Marie Keeling (2012)—have focused on embodied masculinity as rendered in sports. The analysis that follows enters this conversation by asking about the implications of the invisibility of gay men in the videos in terms of straight benevolence, which is extended by male and mostly white athletes. What might be the implications of the athletes’ manner of speaking to gay men—men who, in comparison to athletes (where masculine prowess

and authority are consistently exaggerated), are characterized as bullied and weak? I extend the conversation further by asking about the portrayal of male sports figures—arguably the embodiment of heterosexuality in U.S. culture—and what is suggested about racialized masculinity and straight benevolence.

The Mechanics of Palatable Gayness

The racialization of IGB in general implicates the pro-gay activist genre as most broadly palatable when “whitened.” Bolstering this argument, consider that, the day after Savage and Miller posted their video, another gay teen, Tyler Clementi, jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge in New Jersey after his college roommate at Rutgers University used a hidden camera to record Clementi having sex in their dorm room with another man (Peet, 2010) and posted the video to the Internet (Montgomery, 2010; Peet, 2010). News of his body being found in the Hudson River appeared in national media a week after Clementi committed suicide and, “[s]uddenly, unwittingly, the ‘It Gets Better’ project became national news too” (Montgomery, 2010). IGB garnered national attention and momentum not after Lucas’s suicide, but following Clementi’s suicide. Significantly, Lucas was biracial (Ford, 2012). Clementi was white, substantiating Puar’s (2013) notion that “[t]he gay and lesbian human rights industry continues to proliferate Euro-American constructs of identity” (p. 338). That identity, in other words, is white. Furthermore, the inclusion and overwhelming centering of white victims—what José Esteban Muñoz (1998) has called “the myth of the white body as the suffering gay body par excellence” (p. 131)—enables the IGB campaign to become broadly accepted. As Muñoz (1998) underscores, white individuals overwhelmingly have become the stand-in for all LGBTQ adversity while, as Jafari Allen (2013) reminds, “the stakes [remain], literally, life and death for

African and African-descended non-heteronormative and gender variant individuals” (p. 552). Puar (2007), drawing from black gay activist Keith Boykin, has also noted that the May 11, 2003, “hate-crime murder of the 15-year-old black lesbian Sakia Gunn in Newark New Jersey, received almost no media attention, comparatively speaking to that of [white gay] Matthew Shephard in Wyoming in 1998. There were 507 media stories in the first two months for Shepard, compared to 11 for Gunn in the comparable time period” (p. 132). As these examples demonstrate, advocacy is centered on the image of white individuals. The ways in which race and ethnicity come to bear on the discrimination of and violence against LGBTQ individuals is largely ignored. Further substantiating the whitening of pro-gay IGB advocacy, IGB’s online timeline includes Justin Aaberg’s suicide, which occurred two months before Lucas’s suicide (itgetsbetter.org/timeline). Aaberg, like Clementi, was also white (Crary, 2010). Major League Baseball IGB follows this unfortunate trend. In total, five lesbian or gay white non-players are included in the seven videos. However, no lesbian or gay non-players of color are included in the IGB videos. This composition strengthens white, privileged advocacy, conjures sympathetic images of white, bullied victims, and renders representations of harassed gays of color unimaginable. Gays of color are significantly absent from Major League Baseball IGB, which GLAAD, as noted previously, celebrates as both memorable and historic (McQuade, 2011).

The three lesbian and two gay representations included in two of the Major Leagues Baseball IGB videos are normalized through heterosexual standards. Two women appear in the Red Sox video. The first young woman in the video embodies conventional feminine characteristics. She has long hair and painted fingernails, she wears jewelry, and appears to be wearing make-up. While read as a “butcher” lesbian—to the extent she has short hair and her make-up is less obvious than the first woman—the second young woman in the Red Sox video is

filmed, like the first woman, with flattering lighting and a soft focus. The third woman is in the Cubs video. She is older than most others appearing in any of the Major League Baseball videos and is represented as a mother figure. She has experience: “I’ve been there.” She also imparts tender, protective, maternal advice by offering a sincere promise (that things “get better”) and by later imploring gay kids to “talk to someone who understands” (Cubs, 2011). While each of these women identifies, in her own way, “as a member of the GLBT community” (Red Sox, 2011), neither of the two non-player men do. Also appearing in the Red Sox video, the men never explicitly discuss their gayness. They speak out against bullying of gays and one specifically reflects on his own experiences of being bullied when he was younger. However, neither man acknowledges his own sexuality. In this way, the two videos substantiate the cultural notion that being a lesbian woman—particularly in the realm of male-dominated sports such as baseball (especially its variant, softball)—is acceptable (Davis-Delano, 2014; Stoelting, 2011), but only to the extent that they conform to conventional, heterosexist femininity. Male gayness, on the other hand, is silenced and concealed ... best left in the closet.

Ultimately, gay representations are fashioned as most palatable for the straight male athletes in Major League Baseball IGB when viewed through a post-sexual lens. This reconfiguration of current and historical issues ignores sexual diversity and considers anti-gay discrimination part of a by-gone era. Brouwer (2010) emphasizes we should resist the kind of “transcendent identification that eradicates difference” (p. 246) that Major League Baseball IGB asserts: *Sexuality doesn’t matter*. Major League Baseball IGB essentializes gay culture as analogous to heterosexual culture, where one’s sexuality—specifically one’s gayness—is not significantly distinguishing. For instance, the second player to appear in the Red Sox video

emphasizes “it doesn’t matter, your sexual orientation, your beliefs in life” (Red Sox, 2011). The Los Angeles Dodgers’ video begins:

Coach—Part of being a team means respecting everyone around us ...

Player 1—respecting our teammates, our coaches, our opponents ...

Player 2—and especially our fans—all baseball fans.

Player 3—Doesn’t matter which team you cheer for ...

Player 4—where you’re from ...

Player 3—or what language you speak.

Player 5—And it doesn’t matter what your sexual orientation or gender identity is.

(“Dodgers: It Gets Better,” 2011)

These examples highlight the idea that sexuality is but one of several possible individual characteristics—traits which also include one’s beliefs, birthplace, language, and favorite sports team. Sexuality problematically “doesn’t matter” (Dodgers, 2011). What Major League Baseball IGB reveals is not so much that sexual expression in general is insignificant. Here, heterosexuality is not in question. It is always already assumed and therefore never in jeopardy. Rather, in these seven videos, gay male sexuality specifically is rendered insignificant and therefore subordinated to privileged masculine heterosexuality.

Play Ball: Entering Discourse through Bullying

Anti-bullying rhetoric has become ubiquitous in establishing a clear and present danger for gay teenagers. In Major League Baseball’s IGB videos, this rhetoric enables straight male athletes to construct gayness as weakness. Players specifically verbalize “bullying” 13 times,

more than any other word used to describe adversity experienced by gay adolescents. Both the Baltimore Orioles and the Philadelphia Phillies, for instance, open their identical IGB messages with four different players, each filmed individually and then edited together in rapid succession, declaring:

Player 1—There’s nothing easy about being young ...

Player 2—about being yourself ...

Player 3—about being individual.

Player 4—Every day you experience changes, challenges, and emotions ...

Player 2—that will help define who you are for a lifetime.

Player 1—*But something you should never experience is bullying.* (“ItGetsBetter.org and the Orioles Team Up,” 2011; “Phillies and ItGetsBetter.org,” 2011, emphasis added).

The second player to appear in the Rays video emphasizes “there’s no place for *bullying* or hatred of LGBT kids or anyone in our society” (Rays, 2011, emphasis added) and the fourth player in the Dodgers’ video lets viewers know that “today, too many young people are *bullied* and tormented” (Dodgers, 2011, emphasis added). As a connection between teen-harassment and teen-suicides has become entrenched in the national consciousness, drawing “strong media and political attention, including from President Obama” (Patrick, Bell, Huang, Lazarakis & Edwards, 2013, p. 1255), recent scholarship suggests a dubious corollary (Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Ryalls, 2012; Gruber & Fineran, 2008). Explaining the now taken-for-granted bullied-suicide link for gay youth, Emily Ryalls (2102) specifically points to the media’s conflation of four different suicides in 2010 that followed “homophobic-laced bullying. Together, the boys’ suicides became part of a larger cultural narrative of gay bullying” (p. 469). Through the seven IGB videos, Major League Baseball coopts this popular narrative and, by casting gay youth as

“afraid” (Red Sox, 2011) and recurrently feeling “like they have to end their own lives” (Giants, 2011), frames gays as uniquely weak. For instance, life is “*particularly* challenging for LGB teens who face adversity in their daily lives” (Giants, 2011, emphasis added). “It is not okay for anyone to feel uncomfortable or unsafe, *something LGBT kids and teens face all too often*” (Cubs, 2011, emphasis added). “Today too many young people are being bullied and tormented. This is *especially* true for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender kids and teens” (Dodgers, 2011, emphasis added). Throughout Major League Baseball IGB, these statements from straight men—as well as words such as “difficult,” “struggling,” “tough,” “fear,” and “alone”—work to culturally substantiate gays as subordinated sufferers.

At the same time, there are rampant calls in the seven Major League Baseball videos for gays to come out: “Stay strong and be true to yourself (Cubs, 2011) and “You should never feel like you need to hide who you truly are” (Orioles, 2011) are two examples. Athletes problematically ignore the potential for the very anti-gay violence against which they purportedly speak out. Dow (2001), in her examination of one of the first highly public and simultaneously highly publicized coming-out declarations—Ellen DeGeneres in 1997—showed how the mediated confession and campaign surrounding it were centered on obtaining consent from a mainstream, heterosexual audience. DeGeneres’s acknowledgement of her lesbianism was constructed as both personal and liberating, and, for “sympathetic straights, this narrative facilitate[d] blindness toward the heterosexism and homophobia in which they are complicit” (p. 135). Major League Baseball IGB is similar. Athletes imply that outing oneself will be liberating and that one’s gayness will be broadly accepted. They ignore the privilege their heterosexuality affords, the existence of homophobic violence, and the lived experience of marginalized sexuality. The post-sexual disregard for sexual difference is once again evident in the seven

videos as athletes regularly begin anti-bullying and supposed pro-gay advocacy with generalized statements that include *all* teens. For instance, a Cubs player says “it is not okay for *anyone* to feel uncomfortable or unsafe” (Cubs, 2011, emphasis added) and a Dodgers player suggests “today *too many young people* are being bullied and tormented” (Dodgers, 2011, emphasis added). The post-gay language espoused by heterosexual baseball players does not contest homophobia per se. Rather, these athletes speak out against bullying of anyone in general. The challenges encountered by gay youth are turned into the struggles all adolescents face; yet, implicitly, the narrative about challenges faced by all adolescents is actually directed to gay youth. This troubling discursive framing—that anyone can feel unsafe regardless of their sexuality combined with the assertion, as noted previously, that gays are particularly vulnerable—works to further marginalize sexual minorities as both inconsequential and weak. Portraying gay men as fragile or pathetic is not new. Leigh Moscovitz (2013) reminds that gay men have habitually been framed as victims, “first as sufferers of mental illness in the 1950s and eventually as victims of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) in the 1980s—trapped against their will in a dangerous and corrupt lifestyle” (p. 13). In more recent years, constructing gays as helpless and even obvious targets of bullying has become yet another way of casting gays as victims. Such framing through straight-ally messages in Major League Baseball’s IGB videos works to discursively corroborate gay men as weak and straight men as benevolent saviors, the charitable heroes speaking out to defend gays. The construction of gay men as outside privileged heterosexual culture, as “other” to their stronger heterosexual masculine counterparts, is reified. Even as it is positioned as supportive pro-gay advocacy, the use of culturally entrenched language—gay men as weak, pathological

objects and straight men as authoritative, robust subjects—serves to strengthen difference and echoes broader social rhetoric that subordinates gay men.

Whether constructing gays as victims or spurring them to come out, the overwhelming majority of the words spoken by individuals in the seven videos are scripted. Scripting is obvious when players' and coaches' eyes move as they read teleprompters, something that happens frequently in each video. Scripting, in other words, is integral to the performance of advocacy in the seven videos. Authenticity emerges in Major League Baseball IGB through the rare instances when an individual on screen behaves in an unplanned manner to convey personal experience. A distinct enactment of “unscriptedness” emerges as a few onscreen seem hesitant and cautious. These individuals often stutter as they slowly and thoughtfully choose their own words. Rather than looking at a teleprompter, their eyes move to the side and away from the camera giving the appearance of self-reflexively looking inward. Overall, they emerge as more sincere and earnest than the majority of individuals reading their messages. Returning to the Red Sox video—which features three white male athletes and four white non-players—all the non-players are signified as gay or lesbian and deliver their messages without scripts. They frequently look away from the camera, appearing to reflect on their personal experiences and to choose their words carefully. Their eyes do not move along with words on a teleprompter. “Everybody ... they don't realize entirely what bullying is,” suggests a man in this video, before hesitating and stuttering: “It ... it ... you don't necessarily have to hit somebody” (Red Sox, 2011). Initially, this off-the-cuff approach stands in contrast to the single phrases scripted for the male athletes in the video. This man's words appear unplanned and unrehearsed and, as such, more personal and authentic than the brisk words crisply delivered by athletes:

Coach—Pressure ...

Player 1—fitting in ...

Coach—fear ...

Player 1—alone.

Player 2—You are not alone (Red Sox, 2011)

Then, halfway through the video, the white Red Sox coach breaks from the now-predictable scripting motif. Looking down, away from the camera and likely presence of a teleprompter, he seems to look within himself to consider a variety of people to whom gay youth can turn for support, “whether teachers ... counselors ... friends” (Red Sox, 2011). This departure from script-reading momentarily marks these words and this man as different than the other straight men in Major League IGB. He provides a brief and rare moment of authenticity by a straight athlete.

In their critical analysis of *The Hunger Games*, Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014), note the white, female character Katniss Everdeen’s sincerity and authenticity is represented by her “desire to perform—her need to make people like her—and her inability to do so despite this desire. An authentic self is one that does not intentionally perform, or performs without premeditation” (p. 5). In their theorization of “performing not-performing,” Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) suggest that not-performing in a contrived situation (represented by the reality TV construct of *The Hunger Games*) is one marker of authenticity and heroism. Following this theory, I first point out Major League Baseball IGB videos are highly contrived mediated sites even though the people featured are “real” U.S. baseball players and not actors. All seven videos include understated yet optimistic music, as well as background sounds of fans cheering (though no crowds are visible). In addition and as another example of scripting, different athletes, in

completely different frames, are edited together in rapid succession and complete each other's thoughts in order to impart a single, cohesive narrative. For instance, three players in the Orioles video explain: (player 1) "there's nothing easy about being young," (player 2) "about being yourself," (player 3) "about being an individual" (Orioles, 2011). Next, I argue that the effort by a few straight players to not-perform by going against the script-reading convention in Major League IGB renders them more authentic. They are more closely aligned with the lesbians and gay men who are also unscripted. They emerge more sympathetic and more benevolent. Only three athletes—all white—in the seven videos do not obviously follow a script. The coach in the Red Sox video who breaks from a script is white. A white player in the Red Sox video later recounts "a lot of people go get therapy," then appears hesitant before slowly continuing, in an impromptu, unscripted manner, "myself included" (Red Sox, 2011). Similarly, a player in the Rays video shares that he was bullied when he "was a kid [because he] had a real bad stuttering problem." This follows his unscripted declaration that "bullying is ... uh... something that ... uh ... that happens all the time. It does hurt people and I think when you're feeling some ... uh... uh ... some hurt that you need to talk with someone" (Rays, 2011). Significantly, men of color never employ this seemingly spontaneous, off-the-cuff approach. White athletes—in contrast to athletes of color who are represented as always requiring a script to impart straight benevolence—emerge as innately authentic and naturally heroic.

In the instances of the Red Sox player and the Rays player noted above, not only do they expressly go off-script, but the players go a step further and share their own stories about seeking therapy and being bullied. Relating personal experiences in an emotional and expressive manner, and doing so without a script, strengthens the appearance of authenticity in IGB. Savage, for instance, states he "felt it was really important that, as gay adults, we show [gay adolescents] that

our lives are good and happy and healthy and that there's a life worth sticking around for after high school" (Montgomery, 2010). Savage and Miller are gay men. They both have firsthand experience of being bullied. As such, their initial message suggests embodied experiences of adversity—experiences that can be communicated in an earnest, impromptu, unscripted manner—are a benchmark for authenticity. In Major League Baseball IGB, one straight man highlights therapy-seeking and another focuses on stuttering as substantial personal challenges in their lives. They do so without the use of a script, representing themselves and their masculinity as noticeably different than 32 other players—as more understanding and empathetic. Authentic performances of straight white athletes—however rare, however different from the brand of harassment experienced by young gay viewers, however removed from persecution that could be illustrated by their black, Latino, or Asian counterparts—problematically produce authenticity as white. In short, straight white behavior is represented as “honorable” (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2013), straight white benevolence as most heroic.

On the Hyper-masculine Field of White Benevolence

Each real athlete is portrayed as unquestionably straight and clearly masculine, a privileged position giving each man authority to benevolently sanction gayness. “[T]he ‘ideal’ of heterosexuality” is, as Dyer (2006) emphasizes, “taken to be the norm of being human” (p. 357) and never at stake. The people in the seven videos I analyze are 35 always-already heterosexual male athletes and coaches. The heterosexuality of the athletes is, however, more than merely assumed. It is tangibly constructed through athleticism, strength, extreme confidence, and overt authority—characteristics indicative of hyper-masculinity (Keeling, 2012; Pringle & Hickey, 2010; Adams et al., 2010; Anderson, 2008). With background noises that incorporate cheering

crowds and metal and wooden bats whacking baseballs, all of the players and coaches are situated in baseball-related venues such as dugouts, fields, or stands. Some players hold baseball bats close to their chests and over their shoulders. All 35 wear their organizations' uniforms, including ball caps in 20 instances, reminding viewers of their status as male athletes. Many of the men use sports clichés: a Giants player references boxing when he says gays have an entire community “in your corner” (Giants, 2011); an Orioles player stresses gays have a “huge team of supporters” (Orioles, 2011); and a Rays player emphasizes “we’re standing here as your fans” (Rays, 2011). As Adams et al. (2010) indicate, male-dominated athletics in the United States are known for hyper-masculinity. These phrases fully position the men on camera as masculine—as authoritatively heterosexual, with license to tell young gays to “step up to the plate” (Rays, 2011). What’s more, the ideal viewer is masculinized as someone who “gets” the sports references. In particular, gays are encouraged to “stay strong,” entrenching heterosexuals as already tough and resilient while their gay counterparts need to constantly work toward that end. Despite phrases that ostensibly demonstrate support for gays, these constructions subtly, but no less insidiously, indict gays for their inherent frailty.

Players featured in the Major League Baseball IGB videos overwhelmingly use imposing language and give directives to anchor their heterosexual, masculine authority. “We’re here to tell you you deserve respect” (Dodgers, 2011) and “don’t be scared,” (Red Sox, 2011) are two examples. Straight men offer support and benevolence with a tone of privilege and clout. The athletes—speaking from a locus of confident hyper-masculinity typical of men’s sports (Grindstaff & West, 2011; Adams et al., 2011; Lindgren & Lélievre, 2009; Lilleaas, 2007)—have the authority to give these directives. Moreover, the overwhelmingly commanding physical posturing of the players and coaches complement the instructive statements, solidifying an

authoritative, masculine tone. Most men are standing up, with the camera positioned from the ground so they appear taller or with a tight, close-up focus so they appear large and imposing. The vast majority of men are also situated in the center of the screen, looking directly into the camera with pensive expressions. At the beginning of the Giants video, for instance, Zito stands toward the outside edge of a dugout with Giants' pennants, large orange drink coolers, and the stands of AT&T Park in full view behind him. The screen is cropped so he is in the center of the frame, with only his upper torso, face, arms (which are resting on the dugout's railings and crossed in front of him), and fingers in view. He intensely and gravely wrings his fingers as he peers into the camera—saying, “we all know how difficult life can be as a teenager” (Giants, 2011)—to verbally convey authoritative wisdom (he knows what teenage life is like) and to physically express anxious sincerity (wringing hands and fingers). Of particular note, no two men ever share a scene in any of the seven videos. Each man is always alone—represented as stoic, confident, an independent source of strength—to highlight his masculinity.

In addition to the hyper-masculinity of the straight benevolence in the videos, whiteness emerges as the most natural, most virtuous embodiment of this type of benevolence. If “race is always about bodies” (Dyer, 1997, p. 25), progressive and enlightened straight benevolence is literally framed by white bodies. White individuals open and close all seven videos. White athletes also outnumber athletes of color in the Major League Baseball IGB videos, 23 to 12. As well, if race is about “systematiz[ing] differences and [relating] them to differences of *character* and *worth*,” (Dyer, 1997, p. 20, emphasis added), a variety of production techniques highlight the character, worth, and gay-directed charity of whiteness. The lighting of Zito—the first Major League Baseball player to appear in IGB—is significant. He is lit from above, either by sun or artificial light. His ball cap creates a shadow, darkening his face from his forehead to the top of

his mouth while light brightens both of his cheeks, jawline, and chin. The next scene cuts to another player inside the dugout. This player—who's name, unlike Zito's, is never provided—is signified as Latino. His skin is markedly darker than Zito's, his mouth is outlined by a dark mustache neatly trimmed to a thin line above his lip, and he speaks with a Spanish accent. His face is not lit in the same manner as Zito's—in fact, it is not lit at all. It is noteworthy that the very next player, who is white and also well inside the dugout, is artificially lit from the side (not the case with the Latino player) so that the entire right side of his face is glowing. The visual juxtaposition of two white men with the Latino man is reminiscent of Dyer's (1997) observation that “overhead lighting [is] the standard way to produce an image of (ideal, privileged) white masculinity that [shows] it to be touched with a spark of light” (p. 119). This privileging of whiteness generally, and white benevolence specifically, is underscored by the inclusion of two additional men of color in the Giants video. One of these athletes appears only once toward the end of the video to say “se pone mejor” (Spanish for “it gets better”). While this player is outside, he is not wearing a hat that might produce a glow similar to the one encircling Zito's face. The other athlete of color appears twice in the video to emphasize gays have “an amazing future in front of” them (Giants, 2011) and to say “it gets better” in Japanese (Calcaterra, 2011). Like the other athlete of color, he is marked as other through language—something that occurs with three other players of color in Major League Baseball IGB. He is situated in the dugout and is not noticeably lit, unlike the two white athletes who glow. As Dyer (1997) has noted, “it is rare that the black actor”—or, as Muñoz (1998) would argue, any actor of color—“is in fact lit equally. Such films betray the assumption of the white face built into the habitual uses of the technology and have the effect of privileging the white man; they also contribute to specific perceptions of whiteness” (p. 98). That perception of whiteness is one of goodness and virtue

(Dyer, 1997) and is used in the Giants video to render straight white benevolence extra-heroic. White athletes, as well as their earnest words and expressions, are resplendently outlined to create a halo effect. They are rendered saint-like.

The Dodgers video provides another example of production techniques that highlight white straight benevolence. This video includes five players, and begins with athletes in the center of the frame and cropped in a close-up manner showing their necks and faces:

Coach (white)—Part of being a team means respecting everyone around us ...

Player 1 (black)—respecting our teammates, our coaches, our opponents ...

Player 2 (white)—and especially our fans ... (Dodgers, 2011)

The video is jarringly edited so the second player, who is white, is immediately depicted in extreme close up. This production technique lends gravity to his face and his emotions as he continues “ ... all baseball fans.” His white benevolence is intensified. The next time the black player is included, however, he is further back from the camera than he was originally. His message is rendered distant and impersonal. His upper torso is now in view, the only player to remain framed this way in the remainder of the video—further away from viewers, and starkly so in juxtaposition to the dramatic close-up of the white player. Consider, also, the production technique used in the Phillies video, which features four white men and one black man. Not only are the four white men shot in a similar way as Zito (their faces radiantly outlined)—and the black man is not—but the background of the stadium is cast in desolate, blurry black and white while all the players are in full color. Vibrant red uniforms and ball caps stand out in this cinematic juxtaposition, as do the faces of the four white players. The black player’s face, on the other hand, blends into the background. Dyer (1997) has suggested “[p]eople who are not white can and are lit to be individualized, arranged hierarchically and kept separate from their

environment. But this is only to indicate the triumph of white culture and its readiness to allow some people in, some non-white (sic) people to be in this sense white” (p. 103). These examples show how lighting and other production techniques actually work to distance and darken players of color. They and, by association, their straight benevolence, are rendered less *enlightened* than their white counterparts. Whiteness, in other words, is privileged. What’s more, as Jennifer Ford Stamps and Kim Golombisky (2013) have emphasized, “hegemonic masculinity maintains its dominant power by subordinating ... non-white and non-hetero men” (p. 5). In these videos, white masculine straight benevolence visually, heroically outshines people of color just as it verbally, authoritatively overpowers gay men.

Bottom of the Ninth: Closing Thoughts on Major League Baseball’s “It Gets Better”

As Gilad Padva (2007) has noted, “bashing of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) persons (particularly adolescents)” (p. 105) has become ubiquitous in mainstream media. Seven Major League Baseball teams have latched onto this popularized notion and coopted this anti-bullying rhetoric. However well-intentioned, the straight benevolence enacted by these male athletes further victimizes and subordinates gays, and suggest that one’s gay sexuality is not a significant part of one’s being and no longer matters in the supposedly progressive, post-sexual age in which we live. “Being different ... really means being extraordinary ... unique ... exceptional ... you” insist the Phillies (Phillies, 2011). One problem with statements like this is that they ignore possible practical implications.

Homophobia, whether at school or even at home, exists—“[t]he apparently sudden spate of queer suicides is also obviously at odds with the claims of purported progress by the gay and lesbian rights movement” (Puar, 2012, p. 151)—and straight men encouraging gay youth merely to be

themselves thoughtlessly puts them at potential risk. At the same time, being cast as different, as not ordinary and unique are discursive, reified representations for gayness as particularly and obviously weak. This ambivalence—the position that gays are different through their inherent vulnerability conflated with the post-sexual narrative asserting gayness no longer matters—works simultaneously and problematically to subordinate gay youth and privilege straight masculine whiteness. Major League Baseball IGB implies gay youth should feel comfortable coming out and being who they are, on the condition this resembles white straight masculinity. However, gay adolescents are also cast as always already victims—victims who require the charity and benevolence of heterosexual predominantly white athletes.

Chapter Three:

Modern Family's Gendered Benevolence

In the initial episode of the 2013-14 season of ABC's primetime U.S. television series, *Modern Family*, straight white Claire Dunphy congratulates her gay white brother, Mitchell Pritchett, on his newly acquired right to marry: "So congratulations on the whole marriage thing ... we gonna hear some big gay wedding bells soon?" (Richman, 2013). Here, Claire indicates her approval of Mitchell's union with his white partner Cam Tucker. The main storyline in this episode—aptly named "Suddenly, Last Summer," as this was the first episode to air after the U.S. Supreme Court's rulings during the summer on DOMA and California's Proposition 8 which legalized same-sex marriages in California (where the show is set)—depicts Mitchell and Cam trying to figure out how to propose marriage to one another. Straight members of their family attempt to help. In "Suddenly, Last Summer," heteronormative institutions are shored up as gayness is endorsed through marriage, as well as through the intrepid approval of heterosexuals.

The notion of "approval" serves as an important concept for this chapter, where I explore a term I coin "straight benevolence," which represents gays in popular media as needing the enlightened, sympathetic, even charitable acceptance of heterosexual individuals. There are, however, conditions for receiving the progressive support of straight individuals. In short, gay men must adhere to white heterosexual norms—constructed as professional, middle- to upper-class, monogamous, appropriately masculine, and white. Research on pro-LGBT activism in U.S. society, is ample. Scholars including Mayberry (2012), Samantha A. Montgomery and Abigail J.

Stewart (2012), and Sara DeTurk (2011) underscore how heterosexuals becoming pro-gay activists is a growing occurrence in the United States. DeTurk (2011) suggests some straight individuals become allies because “they may have socialized ... to value and enjoy differences” (p. 672). Of note for this chapter’s analysis of straight benevolence within a mediated family, DeTurk (2011) specifically cites “family” as one of these socializing mechanisms resulting in favorable attitudes toward gays (p. 672). Scholarship on news coverage of pro-gay acceptance has also emerged (Moscowitz, 2013; Landau, 2009). In fact, Moscowitz (2013) suggests increasing coverage of “contemporary gay civil rights issues like military inclusion and gay marriage in the 2000s unfolded against a backdrop of increased gay-themed programming in mainstream entertainment media” (p. 11). This chapter builds on this scholarship by examining the production of benevolence by straight individuals in a popular television show. I ask about ethnically and sexually marginalized characters featured in the episode, arguing they are constructed through post-racial and post-sexual discourse that trivializes racism and heterosexism. As Squires (2010) underscores, even though “a biracial Black man occupies the White House [and] a scatter plot of states and cities allow gay marriage (p. 212),” racially and sexually motivated discrimination and violence persist. The two-time election of President Barack Obama and the fairly recent expansion of marriage equality are noteworthy in predominantly white heterosexual U.S. society. However, post-racial and post-sexual discourse points to these singular examples as evidence that positive changes have occurred. Such a stance belies the enduring presence of culturally, institutionally embedded racism and homophobia. Although *Modern Family* is purportedly post-racial and post-sexual—demonstrated by the supposed seamless inclusion of Latinos, Asians, and gays in the family—ethnic and sexual differences are marked in problematic stereotypical ways. Ostensibly humorous depictions of

racism and homophobia in *Modern Family* insidiously downplay racist and heterosexist bigotry. In the process, heteronormative white masculinity is strengthened and privileged.

The “Modern,” Post-sexual, Post-racial Family

“[O]des to the nuclear family” according to Suzanna D. Walters (1995), “have a long history in American culture” (p. 15). *Modern Family* constructs three variations of the two-parent U.S. household often celebrated by the mainstream. In addition to featuring two gay white men and their adopted Vietnamese daughter, Lily, a second family consists of Claire (mentioned above), her white husband, Phil, and their three white children. Their long-term heterosexual relationship and all-white family mark them as the most traditional of the three families, contrasted with Mitchell and Cam’s gay union and the mixed race composition of the third family, which includes Claire and Mitchell’s white father, Jay, his significantly younger Columbian wife Gloria, her Columbian adolescent son from a previous marriage, Manny, and Jay and Gloria’s mixed race newborn son, Joe.⁵ The series is popular and critically acclaimed. *TV Guide* rated *Modern Family* the 13th most-watched show in 2013-14 (Schneider, 2014). The series won a total 21 Emmys (emmys.com), and the GLAAD Media Awards has nominated *Modern Family* for outstanding comedy series every year. It won twice, in 2012 and 2014 (glaad.org).

With its somewhat ethnically and sexually diverse cast, *Modern Family* is constructed—even celebrated—as being beyond issues of sexuality (homophobia) and race (racism). A *Time* magazine cover story in March 2013, for instance, remarks that Mitt Romney is “an avowed fan of *Modern Family*” and makes the claim: “When even a conservative Mormon Republican can delight in a sympathetic portrayal of same-sex parenthood, a working consensus [on same-sex

marriage] is likely at hand” (Von Drehle, 2013). Using the popularity of *Modern Family*, *Time* idealistically suggests U.S. society, including its conservative faction, has become progressively supportive of gayness. Some scholars praise *Modern Family* for its depiction of marginalized sexuality. Joshua Gamson (2013), for example, acknowledges that *Modern Family* relies on many of the same troubling gay stereotypes exploited by earlier television series, but suggests the series is unapologetic in doing so. Similarly, Dhaenens and Sofie Van Bauwel (2012) assert the series exploits hyper-stereotypes of staid notions of family “to subvert many (hetero-)normative values” (p. 126). As it pertains to race, scholar Camille Rich (2014) asserts “[t]he not-so-salient political subtext that informs this current cultural favorite is that the era of interraciality has ended and the post-racial future has arrived” (p. 1342). The mainstream media have specifically expressed reservations about Gloria—presented as a “hot” Latina, a sexual stereotype of Latino women (Calafell, 2014; López & Chesney-Lind, 2014). However, the media often simultaneously champion the character. For instance, Fox News Latino (2013) identifies Gloria as “the sexy, curvy, scandalous Latina in the ABC series,” but also emphasizes that Sophia Vergara, the actress who plays Gloria, defends her character against those critical of the stereotype she portrays: “I have a lot of friends and fans who are white, Jews (sic), African-Americans (sic), Europeans, Australians and of all ages and colors whose relatives tell them they are identical to Gloria” (Fox News Latino, 2013). Here, Vergara leverages a post-racial ethos about race as homogenous (conflating Jewish, black, and white individuals) and as no longer distinguishing (“they are identical”). I am mindful of the ambivalent mainstream and scholarly reactions to stereotypes that emerge from this sitcom as I problematize racialized sexuality, representations of masculinity, and the construction of normalized gayness that frame straight benevolence in “Suddenly, Last Summer.”

All in This Family: Feminine Benevolence, Racialized Sexuality

The two main female characters in *Modern Family*—Claire and Gloria—are central to the extension of straight benevolence in “Suddenly, Last Summer.” While Claire advises her brother on how to propose to Cam, Gloria coaches Cam on how to propose to Mitchell. Much of the episode’s main storyline focuses on Claire and Gloria’s benevolence, with heterosexuality emerging as enlightened in its tolerance and bold in its sanctioning of gayness. Claire and Gloria’s enactment of straight benevolence privileges heterosexuality’s standard of living as defined by marriage and advocates for gay conformity within that institution. “Suddenly, Last Summer” is set on June 26, 2013. This date appears in text during the opening scene and is significant as this is the day same-sex marriage becomes legal in California (Socarides, 2013). Both women in this episode are depicted as immediately and instinctively assuming the gay men will marry. Claire and Gloria directly encourage Mitchell and Cam to take this step, evocative of Duggan and Muñoz’s (2009) observation that heteronormative U.S. culture calls on gays to “conform excessively to social norms” (p. 276). Claire sits down with Mitchell in a small restaurant after hearing news of the U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings. She asks him about “gay wedding bells.” She points and peers directly into his eyes:

Claire: Mitchell, okay. This is what you do.

Mitchell: Oh, boy.

Claire: It really should be your own idea, though.

Mitchell: No! Come on, come on. I need help. Please? (Richman, 2013)

As expressed by Claire, the directive to the heterosexual institution of marriage is compulsory and urgent. Although Mitchell initially seems reluctant—he wrings his hands, appearing both troubled and confused—he very soon expresses his willingness to conform. At this point in the

episode, he is also represented as needing the support and guidance of his straight sister: “I need help. Please?” In another scene, Gloria asks Cam “who proposes to who?” The dialogue continues:

Cam: “I don’t know. We’ve talked about it, if it ever became legal ...”

Gloria: “Okay, and now it is. So are you going to do it today?”

Cam: “Well, it just happened. I haven’t really had ...”

Gloria: “Oh, you have to do it today!” (Richman, 2013)

This exchange between Gloria and Cam highlights Gloria’s heterosexual assumption. Marriage is once again framed as an imperative. According to Gavin Brown (2012), “[s]ome gay people (already privileged due to their ethnicity and social class) have become incorporated into state projects” (p. 1066). At this point in the series, Mitchell and Cam’s monogamous relationship has been in place for more than 10 years. They live in the suburbs. They have adopted a child. As noted previously, they are white. Although they have already created a heteronormative existence and a nuclear family, the privilege both their class and whiteness affords makes them well suited for sanctioning their union through the state. The conversations between Claire and Mitchell and Gloria and Cam portray the two gay men as swiftly adapting to the ultimate heteronormative exigency: marriage.

Claire and Gloria also obey heterosexist demands. Specifically, their benevolent support positions them within conventional nurturing and familial feminine roles. Our culture’s prevalent gender scripts, according to Scott W. Keiller (2010), call for “reactive, receptive, communal roles for women” (p. 531). Brenda Cossman (2004) similarly asserts, “[a]ny attempt to value the relational or familial sphere must be attentive to the extent to which this is a profoundly gendered sphere of life; a gendered sphere that has constituted women as very particular kinds of legal

subjects and restricted the agency of these subjects” (p. 875). The Claire/Mitchell and Gloria/Cam pairing in “Suddenly, Last Summer” reinforce subordinating roles for women as family caregivers. Also, an emphasis on romance—a heteronormative trope aligned more with women than men—is prevalent. When Claire first meets Mitchell in the café scene above, she proceeds to tell him: “This is your opportunity. Mitchell, you should go home tonight and surprise him with a big, splashy proposal ... you cook him his favorite meal ... you open the best bottle of wine” (Richman, 2013). Claire’s reference to cooking evokes a conventionally feminine obligation. The U.S. feminine ideal of romance is implied by a “splashy proposal” accompanied by wine. In another scene, Gloria, is taking care of her baby (gendered role) in the kitchen (gendered sphere). She implores Cam, “Oh, you have to do it today! Every couple deserves a beautiful proposal story” (Richman, 2013). When Cam later reports back to Gloria by phone—“I booked the restaurant from our first date, the same table overlooking the ocean, and I’ll do it at sunset”—she responds: “That’s so romantic!” (Richman, 2013). Once again, the feminine affection for romance is highlighted. In contrast to Claire and Gloria, the primary straight male characters are distanced from the same-sex romantic storyline in this episode. This narrative distinction deepens Claire and Gloria’s gendered roles. In “Suddenly, Last Summer,” Phil is attempting to coordinate summer plans for his children so they are all gone (out of the house) the same week. Jay is focused on finalizing details for Manny’s trip to Columbia (out of the country) to visit Gloria’s family. The women hope to bring families together. The men seek to send family members away. Taken-for-granted feminine scripts (Keiller, 2010) and gendered spheres (Cossman, 2004)—women as matriarchal nurturers—are reified as Claire and Gloria openly, unswervingly, and personally care for Mitchell and Cam. Feminine roles are further concretized as subordinated to masculinity as the proposal proceedings essentially become a competition

between the gay men. Mitchell and Cam each want to be the one to propose to the other and comically foil the other's attempts, disregarding Claire and Gloria's advice. Crucially, Claire and Gloria's attempted pro-gay *feminine* benevolence is rendered meaningless. Gender comes to matter both significantly and problematically, as two men ultimately ignore the graciously and liberally provided support and acceptance of two women. White masculinity prevails as the men in "Suddenly, Last Summer" begin to take matters into their own hands.

Beyond her typical feminine presentation, Gloria is stereotypically portrayed as Latina. Her ethnic Columbian identity specifically situates her as hypersexual. "The available gender scripts for girls of color, particularly Latinas and African Americans," as Vera López and Meda Chesney-Lind (2014) explain, "emphasize their innate 'badness'" (p. 528). With Gloria, this is constructed through unconcealed sexuality and a fiery disposition. In one of the initial scenes of the series' pilot episode, Gloria and Jay are together in their well-appointed, spacious living room. Gloria describes for viewers her first husband, who was Columbian, relating that he was "too crazy ... seemed like all we did was fight and make love, fight and make love, fight and make love" (Lloyd & Levitan, 2009).⁶ Here, her passionate and sexual nature is unambiguously emphasized. In another scene in the pilot episode, Gloria overhears a white woman telling Manny's soccer coach to take him out of the game after he misses a play. Gloria begins to scream at the woman in a thick Columbian accent, saying she will take her out (kill her), displaying a stereotype of Latinas as fiery. Gloria's clothing and overt display of her body further racialize her. In an episode from the second season, the extended family is concerned about making it to Alex's graduation on time because the driveway gate is stuck. Gloria brings out a bicycle, suggesting an alternative way to get to the graduation, but mentions she never rides it because "I keep hitting my boobs with my knees" (Zucker, 2011). Gloria's reference to her

breasts, which she points to as the family stares at her, sexualizes her. In this scene, she wears a tight, short leopard print dress. Her dress further sexualizes, but also animalizes her. By comparison, the rest of the mostly white family is conservatively dressed.

Constructed as hypersexual and bestial, Gloria's ethnicity both marks and others her.

Gloria's ethnic hypersexuality is apparent as she extends straight benevolence to Cam in "Suddenly, Last Summer." She wears an extremely tight, bright blue top. A large necklace accentuates her exposed cleavage. She asks: "So tell me, Cam. How does it work when it is between two men?" He misunderstands her question as an inquiry about gay sex, rendering Gloria's first interaction with Cam in this episode explicitly sexual. He looks surprised and covers Lily's ears. "Well," he whispers, "I don't really feel comfortable talking about that in front of Lily." "I know how *that* works," she corrects him, now specifically referring to sex, "I rented the wrong movie once. Did you see *Glen, Garry, Glenn, and Ross*?" (Richman, 2013). Here, Gloria is presented as ignorant in a specifically racialized manner through her misunderstanding of the English title of a film. This mention of a gay pornographic film also frames Gloria in a highly sexual light. She may have thought she picked up the 1992 movie *Glengarry Glen Ross* starring Kevin Spacey, Al Pacino, Jack Lemmon, and Alec Baldwin, but she watched the other—the "wrong"—movie. She now knows how *that (gay sex)* works. Moreover, the reference to group sex implied by the four-man title of the film situates gayness as deviantly sexual (that is, not about sex within the confines of a monogamous heterosexual union). Implicitly, Cam's sexuality is equated with group sex, convoked with all gay male sexuality (as if this is uniform), and coded as abnormal.

While Gloria is othered by her ethnicity, Cam is othered by his class. When Cam finally realizes Gloria is asking about how a proposal "work[s] when it is between two men," he recalls:

“I have always adored my mom and dad’s story. He plowed ‘will you marry me?’ into a snowy field right outside of her window. And then he tried to re-create it for their 25th wedding anniversary. But there was no snow, so he burned it into a cornfield. Bad idea. You know, but mama did get a second ring out of it with the F.E.M.A. money” (Richman, 2013). Cam’s class is implicated by his mention of F.E.M.A., which conjures images of poverty. Moreover, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina’s destruction of New Orleans, F.E.M.A is a racialized trope (Garfield, 2007; Marable, 2006) and, when uttered by a white gay man, is suggestive of Devon Carbado’s (2013) assertion that “one might conceptualize white middle-class gay identity as a kind of ethnic whiteness” (p. 835). Furthermore, Alessandra Senzani (2010) has examined the intersections of class and gender and “how these are negotiated within the comic frame” (p. 230) in her analysis of the sitcom *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988—97). For Senzani (2010), upper-middle classness is represented on television through individuals who are well-spoken, in good physical shape, wear expensive clothes, and live in spacious houses. All three families in *Modern Family* are upper-middle class—most notably portrayed as such by their two-story, opulent, well-landscaped homes. In contrast, Cam’s allusion to a farm in the story about his parents indicates his lower-class roots. Cam is overweight compared to Mitchell and the other white members of the extended family, further indicating his working-class upbringing. He is also a self-proclaimed “farm boy” and has a Southern accent, apparent in his colloquial use of “mama” when he recounts his parents’ engagement. Carla D. Shirley (2010) has examined the ways in which U.S. Southern whites are marked as “primarily backwards and uneducated” (p. 41) by the mainstream media and non-Southern whites. Southern whites like Cam are regularly viewed as lower-class whites—“rednecks” (Shirley, 2010) and “white trash” (Swaim, 2011). It is worth noting that Claire and Mitchell’s interactions in “Suddenly, Last Summer” are as direct and personal as

Gloria and Cam's. However, Claire and Mitchell's upper-class whiteness—juxtaposed with Gloria's sexualized ethnicity and Cam's unsophisticated lower-classness—is apparent. Rather than passionate, Claire and Mitchell are portrayed as pragmatic, discussing the “the right timing” for a marriage proposal (Richman, 2013). They even talk about practical wedding gifts, including a washer and dryer. Mitchell also contemplates taxes and estate planning, supporting Brown's (2012) assertion that white, middle- and upper-class, “stable, long-term romantic couples with the resources to take care of each other's welfare in times of austerity are the flavor of the day” (p. 1066). In the process, Gloria and Cam are further marked as different than the white upper-middle class members of this family—Gloria by her Columbian ethnicity, Cam by his Southern background.

Paterfamilias: Conventional Masculinity, Post-sexual Nuances

As noted, primary straight male characters in “Suddenly, Last Summer” remain relatively distant from the main same-sex proposal storyline, in contrast to Gloria and Claire who are front and center. Yet, the men's reactions to the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions, their brief comments on Cam/Gloria's and Mitchell/Claire's scheming, and their interactions with one another suggest much about conventional masculinity. As Simon Lindgren and Maxime Lélièvre (2009) suggest, traditional masculinity is marked by inherent discomfort with gayness. Jay—consciously and overtly represented as “old school”—is the archetypal conventional man unnerved by gayness and gay rights. Jay becomes problematic in “Suddenly, Last Summer” through interactions with his newborn son, Joe. Heterosexuality emerges as a taken-for-granted norm, while homophobia is constructed as innate. In one of the episode's opening scenes, Gloria is holding Joe in her arms as she opens the door to her house to let Cam and Lily enter. Cam, who is on the phone with

Mitchell, exclaims: “Oh my God. Oh my God! We won. It’s fantastic! We’ve waited so long.” Gloria asks, “What we won? What did we won? (sic)” and grabs the phone from Cam. Mitchell explains to Gloria that the U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings have legalized “gay marriage.” After Mitchell hangs up, Cam confirms to Gloria, Lily, and Jay that same-sex marriage is sanctioned in California. Joe’s head is over Gloria’s shoulder and, as Cam ends his statement with “it’s legal for a man to marry another man,” there is a sound of the baby spitting up. Lily says, “Ew. He threw up.” Jay reassures Lily that “he just needs some time to get used to the idea, honey” (Richman, 2013). Of note, Valerie Rohy (2012) and Jamie Landau (2009) highlight how heterosexuality is always already assumed (Rohy, 2012; Landau, 2009). Heterosexuality is, as Dyer (2006) emphasizes “taken to be the norm of being human” (p. 357). A newborn portrayed as literally sickened by the mere mention of same-sex relationships is emblematic of these scholars’ assertion. Even more problematic, Joe is represented as innately homophobic. Toward the end of the episode, Jay is lamenting having to set up a picnic inside Mitchell and Cam’s bedroom. (This is an attempt by Gloria to set up a romantic environment for Cam’s proposal to Mitchell.) “We never had these problems,” says Jay, “this is what happens when they let men marry men.” Joe retches again as Jay wonders aloud, “that cannot be a coincidence” (Richman, 2013). The construction of Joe as naturally and inherently homophobic belies that he could only be taught by heteronormative conditioning to be homophobic.

Through Jay, conventional white straight masculinity marginalizes gayness. More significantly, humor works to position gayness as laughable. As the families’ definitive white heterosexual patriarch, Jay regularly stresses Cam’s sexuality throughout the series. Jay refers to Cam as “MacGayver” when Cam asks for a paper clip and olive oil to fix a driveway gate that is stuck (Zuker, 2011). When Cam attempts to better position a pillow on the couch of a house he

and Claire are trying to sell, he asks, “There, is that straight?” From the back of the room Jay glares at Cam and replies, referring to Cam rather than the pillow, “Nothing about that looks straight” (Richman & Wrubel, 2013). When Jay first hears the news about the legalization of same-sex marriage from Cam in “Suddenly, Last Summer”—“Jay, hold on to your hat ... but as of today in California, it’s legal for a man to marry another man!”—Jay barely acknowledges the statement and only momentarily makes eye contact with Cam. Jay waves his hand dismissively and merely says “yeah, I’m happy for you guys.” Here, he is constructed as obviously not wanting to engage in a conversation about same-sex marriage and immediately changes the subject to Manny’s missing birth certificate, which Manny needs to travel to Columbia. Later, as Jay and Gloria are secretly inside Mitchell and Cam’s house setting up a bedroom picnic for the men’s impending proposal, Gloria appears eager, excited, and happy. “I got the picnic basket,” she says as she smiles, “but you know what is going to be hard to find?” Jay responds, glibly: “My interest in this whole damn thing?” Gloria humorously points out she cannot find a checkered tablecloth. As Kelly Kessler (2014) suggests, placing Mitchell and Cam “opposite actor Ed O’Neill of chauvinistic *Married ... with Children* (FOX, 1987–1997) fame makes their narrative development and punch even more intertextually gratifying” (pp. 143–144). While this juxtaposition does heighten the comedy in the series, I argue a character like Jay is possible only in a series that views itself and U.S. society as post-sexual. Jay comes to epitomize not institutional homophobia and anti-gay discrimination—those are purportedly parts of a bygone era—but is presented as an old, bumbling straight individual man. Jay is essentially excused for his discomfort with gayness because he is deliberately constructed as out-of-touch. Yet gayness is consistently and quite literally rendered a joke.

In one of the most problematic scenes of “Suddenly, Last Summer,” Jay is with Gloria’s son, Manny, outside a local courthouse to get a copy of Manny’s missing birth certificate. As Jay and Manny walk toward the courthouse, Jay says in a repulsed tone, “Look at that line. Probably everybody getting their gay marriage license” (Richman, 2013). The camera pans quickly to reveal a long line of gays and lesbians. Manny corrects Jay by suggesting, “I think it’s just called a marriage license” (Richman, 2013). Here, Manny epitomizes the post-sexual generation. He is much younger than Jay and, here, he is framed as a corrective to Jay’s passé mindset. Post-sexual discourse imagines homophobia as a thing of the past (Jay) and the younger generation (Manny) is widely assumed to automatically “get” gay rights. Post-sexuality ignores the existence of institutionalized LGBT discrimination and the presence of bigoted “Jays” of all ages in society. As the scene continues, a misunderstanding emphasizes gayness’s presumed pathology. Finally arriving at the back of the line, Manny tells Jay in a panicked voice that he is scared. He bleats: “I’m not sure I want to go through with it” (Richman, 2013). Manny gingerly touches Jay’s right upper arm and elbow with both of his hands. The frame is cropped so that only Manny, Jay, and two male couples on both sides of Manny and Jay are visible. The four gay men look on, unaware Jay and Manny’s conversation is about Manny’s long-distance trip. Rather, the gay men believe they are witnessing an older gay man forcing an adolescent boy into marriage as the conversation continues between Manny (“I’m still kind of young to be doing this”) and Jay (“I already paid for you, and your mother signed off ... this is happening”). Jay turns around to face Manny, eventually putting his arms around Manny’s shoulders. Jay and Manny’s physical closeness to one another intensifies the misunderstanding of the actual gay men surrounding them and amplifies the ostensibly humorous depiction of simulated pedophilia. Scholars have noted that more than a century of gay stigmatization results in viewing gays as “pedophiles and

recruiters to the ‘lifestyle’” (Boggis, 2012, p. 355) and that “homosexuality [as a supposed sickness] results from bad influences, recruitment, or seduction” (Rohy, 2012, p. 102). Jay’s words to Manny, which also include “we didn’t drive all the way down here for that piece of paper for you to get cold feet at the last second” and “what happened, anyway? ... you’ve been looking forward to this day for months,” serve as a reminder of the always already assumed pathology of gayness. Clearly, straight Jay is not a pedophile. Humor results from taking the most straight, masculine, old-school man and making him appear unwittingly gay. Once again, gayness is implicated as a joke by conventional straight white masculinity. More problematically, however, gayness is also rendered abnormal, dangerous, deviant, and sick.

White Homonormativity: Family Value, *sine qua non*

Just as straight benevolence sanctions gayness, I argue heteronormative conformity is requisite for gays to be the focus of straight benevolence. When it comes to their rearing of Lily, Mitchell and Cam are often normalized through their coding via conventional familial gender roles. According to Dhaenens (2012), “[f]rom a heteronormative point of view, a gay couple with a more ‘feminine’ and a more ‘masculine’ partner will be assumed to have divided its tasks and roles according to gendered behavior” (p. 226–227). Although Kessler (2014) proposes “*Modern Family* gives its gay adoptive fathers license both to develop and transcend stereotypes ... tough/tender, bat-wielding/scrap-booking, ex-ice skater, ex-football player” (p. 143), even these supposedly surpassed stereotypes rest firmly within a heterosexist binary. Mitchell, who is the family’s sole income earner for much of the series, similar to Jay and Phil,⁷ is more conventionally masculine than Cam. In “Suddenly, Last Summer,” Cam is represented as Lily’s primary caretaker, often caring for her alongside Gloria taking care of her children. When they

first arrive home with baby Lily in the pilot episode, Mitchell comments that Lily did not sleep on the plane. He suggests that maybe she couldn't because the Vietnamese orphanage where they adopted her was filled with women caregivers, that maybe she needs to be close "to a woman's shape." Mitchell immediately hands Lily to Cam, instantly feminizing him. Cam explains: "Yes. I've gained a few extra pounds while we were expecting the baby. ... [T]he body does a very nesting, maternal, primal thing where it retains nutrients." Traditional masculine-feminine familial roles, in other words, are ascribed to the two gay men from the beginning.

I also argue Mitchell and Cam's embodied whiteness is another factor that renders them suitable beneficiaries of straight benevolence. Moscovitz (2013), Peters (2011), and Shugart (2003), among other scholars, underscore that a principal heteronormative prerequisite for gay men in popular media is that they be white. I am also mindful of Hyun Yi Kang's (2002) assertion "that what *matters* about how cinema represents race is the illusion of human *bodies*" (p. 100, emphasis in original). In a television series such as *Modern Family*, just as in cinema (Kang, 2002), Mitchell and Cam's whiteness is visible. This extends beyond physical markers (such as the complexion of their skin) to the unrecognized, taken-for-granted advantages both their class and race affords. Even more noteworthy, their *heroic* whiteness, just like their normalized masculine-feminine gender roles, is established early. The first scene introducing Mitchell and Cam in the pilot episode begins with Mitchell on a plane holding Lily on his lap. A man sitting two seats over from Mitchell and Lily says, "She's an angel. You and your wife must be thrilled." Cam then comes down the aisle of the plane holding food, a diaper bag, toys, and baby bottles. He sits next to Mitchell and Lily. Nearby passengers begin staring at them with surprise and curiosity, which makes Mitchell uncomfortable and angry. He stands up and shouts: "This baby would have grown up in a crowded orphanage if it wasn't for us!" (Lloyd & Levitan

2009). In Hughey's (2012b) analysis of U.S. films featuring "dysfunctional" (p. 764) people of color, he notes "an ideal white person emerges as possessive of Messianic characteristics that can fix the previously hopeless non-white (sic) pariah" (p. 764). Mitchell and Cam are constructed as valiant white benefactors who save a baby not only from a crowded orphanage, but—through the perspective of privileged, upper-middle class U.S. whiteness—from a third-world, impoverished, over-populated country. As noted above Mitchell and Cam's class further substantiates their whiteness. Cam may come from a working-class background; however, Mitchell is his access point to the full privileges of whiteness. (Mitchell is a successful attorney and provides a lavish home and wardrobe for Cam). Their white masculine upper-classness essentially allows them to overcome their gayness, rendering them suitable saviors for a young Asian (othered) girl and, overall, fashioning their gayness as acceptable throughout the series. In "Suddenly, Last Summer," Cam drives Mitchell in their black leather-trimmed car to an ocean-side restaurant with outside seating. Wearing dress pants, button up shirts, and blazers, both men approach the host as Mitchell calls the restaurant "fancy" (Richman, 2013). The construction of Mitchell and Cam as white upper-middle class men is evocative of Jacques Rothmann's (2013) observation that gay characters in mainstream programs "have come to be viewed as groups with higher levels of disposable income, on the one hand, and those who display high levels of claims to entitlement of their basic human rights through equal representation on television, on the other" (p. 72). Through their whiteness and upper-middle classness, Mitchell and Cam emerge as the poster gays for progress.

Ultimately, Mitchell and Cam's gayness is approved and their same-sex marriage is sanctioned—problematically, if not also humorously and poignantly—in one of the episode's final scenes. As they finally propose to one another the men conform to heteronormative tropes

that render same-sex attraction invisible (Shugart, 2003; Fejes, 2000) and require men to ignore each other's bodies (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). Mitchell and Cam are driving back from dinner when they get a flat tire. They pull off to the side of a hillside road, exit the car, and get tools and a spare tire from the trunk. They reminisce about changing other flat tires, life before Lily, vacations in Yosemite (suggesting class), and their first apartment together (indicating upward mobility). As they talk, they do not make eye contact. They are close together, hunched over the tire well. However, they never come into physical contact. Physical intimacy is completely absent. Cam walks away to look out over the city in the valley below, saying, "You know, it's a different world down there than it was 24 hours ago" (Richman, 2013)—referencing the Supreme Court's decisions and leveraging a post-sexual narrative about how same-sex marriage has somehow changed the world and obliterated homophobic discrimination. He turns back to face Mitchell and their eyes meet for the first time in this scene. However, this brief connection quickly ends as their tire rolls down the hill, and Cam yells: "Oh, my gosh. Oh, my... oh, my God. Oh, my God!" (Richman, 2013). After they both calm down, Mitchell says "let's do this" and Cam walks over to help Mitchell put on the spare tire. They both kneel down on one knee to lift up the tire, and Cam realizes they are in a perfect pose to propose to each other. Given that another heteronormative trope of mainstream media constructs gay men as masculine (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Ward, 2008; Shugart, 2003; Battles & Morrow, 2002; Fejes, 2000), both men assume the traditionally masculine position for proposing (on bended knee). It is noteworthy that Mitchell and Cam exemplify familial male-female roles in their raising of Lily. Mitchell earns the income and is more conventionally masculine. Cam cares for Lily and is more traditionally feminine. In their same-sex relationship and at this moment in "Suddenly, Last Summer," however, both men emerge as equally masculine. Not only does this work to sanitize

their same-sex attraction, but it renders them conventionally masculine and able to overcome the attempted benevolence of their female family members. Masculinity—even gay masculinity—trumps femininity. Mitchell looks up at Cam and also grasps the situation. With tears in their eyes, they both simultaneously, emotionally, and tenderly say “yes.” Significantly, there is no verbal proposal. Heteronormativity, although it permits some gay representations into mainstream media, consigns gayness as unspeakable. Even after the pseudo-proposal, there is no physical intimacy. There is not even a kiss. In “Suddenly, Last Summer,” heteronormativity works to obfuscate the embodiment of gayness.

Racist and Sexist Ties That Bind: Closing Thoughts on *Modern Family*

The mainstream media and some scholars applaud, in particular, the portrayal of Mitchell and Cam on the series. This is in step with Quinn Miller’s (2014) assertion that, as it pertains to U.S. sitcoms in general, “a range of unselfconsciously unconventional and exceedingly extreme characters [are regularly portrayed] to explore the experience of being out of sync ... with social hierarchies” (p. 142). However, Senzani (2010) similarly cautions “it is crucial to always acknowledge that even when a sitcom seems to challenge hegemonic discourses, such critical meanings are necessarily ‘contained’” (p. 230). They are, in other words, “contained” within a 22-minute format while culturally institutionalized discrimination endures. *Modern Family* may regularly pass the imaginary border into a post-racial and post-sexual era, seeming to trouble racism and homophobia, but it does so superficially by ignoring the existence of racist and sexist discrimination in U.S. culture. First, post-racism implies ethnic and racial differences are nonexistent. However, this chapter demonstrates that Gloria is overtly stereotyped. She is constructed as passionate and fiery. Her attempted benevolence is presented as highly sexualized,

while Claire is constructed as pragmatic and practical. Finally, post-sexual discourse suggests sexuality no longer matters, that straight and gay people are now the same. In many ways, Mitchell and Cam reflect this sameness. Like most gay characters in popular media, Mitchell and Cam are upper-middle class, white, male, and they want to be married. In the end, white masculinity—gay, but exceedingly normalized—is strengthened and remains privileged.

Concluding Thoughts on Straight Benevolence

This thesis conducted a close critical analysis of the production of straight benevolence in a few current, popular media sites, arguing that progress for gay men—ranging from general social acceptance to marriage equality—is presented as requiring straight approval. This supposed advancement for gay men calls upon them to succumb to heterosexist normalizing tropes. Using homonormativity as a lens for analyzing media, other critical scholars are doing important work on problematic gay representations. Their work provides a vital foundation for my theorization of straight benevolence. Westerfelhaus and Lacroix (2006) explore the normalizing of gay representations in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Peters (2011) looks at how gay identities in *Queer as Folk* are sanitized, made safe and palatable for heterosexual viewers. Jimmy Draper (2011) examines the conflation of gay with straight in the construction of metrosexuality, specifically as rendered in the men’s magazine *Details*. Dhaenens (2013) demonstrates how “depicting gayness as homonormative jeopardizes the emancipatory potential of gay representation” (p. 104) through an analysis of queer representation in *Torchwood* and *True Blood*. This thesis adds to this work by exploring the idea of straight benevolence to provide a meaningful framework for analyzing troubling constructions of gayness. In “Same Love,” Major League Baseball IGB, and *Modern Family*’s “Suddenly, Last Summer,” gayness is constructed not as permissible on its own, but as requiring the enlightened, intrepid, benevolent acceptance and sanctioning of heterosexuals. It is also my hope that this thesis adds to future scholarship regarding the interanimation of sexuality, gender, and race. By taking an intersectional approach—theorizing “sexuality in a manner that is fully inclusive of the ways

race, class, and gender mutually shape and are shaped by each other” (Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 159)—I show how straight benevolence props up heteronormative, racialized, and gendered norms.

In Chapter One, I discussed the production of straight benevolence, heteronormative framing of straight and gay identities, masculinity, and the representation of race in “Same Love.” Straight in his public persona (Lambe, 2013) and represented as such through the song’s lyrics, Macklemore’s vocals are central to the production of benevolence. Macklemore draws legitimation from his heterosexuality and whiteness to extend benevolence to gays. I demonstrated how Macklemore’s incorporation of blackness—from his hip-hop musical style to the visual images of the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1900s and the narrative about the gay man of color featured in the film—places Macklemore at the height of white heterosexual privilege. In Chapter Two, I extended my theorization of straight benevolence and the notion of white straight masculine dominance over gays to show this power imbalance in several IGB videos featuring 35 professional male athletes. The videos, produced by seven Major League Baseball teams, position gayness as requiring the ostensibly progressive and supportive benevolence of heterosexual, male, and mostly white athletes. Similar to “Same Love,” gays are constructed as in need of the charitable kindness of heterosexual men. Moreover, gays are framed as deserving straight benevolence through post-sexual discourse that posits sexuality is meaningless and no longer differentiating. Gayness is specifically and problematically rendered meaningless and unimportant. As discussed in Chapter Two, the now ubiquitous anti-bullying discourse employed in Major League Baseball IGB presents gays as inherent victims and subordinate to conventional masculinity. In the seven videos, straight masculine whiteness emerges as the voice of authentic authority. “Same Love” and Major League Baseball IGB have

much in common. In these sites, gayness is presented as requiring the benevolent support and acceptance of heterosexuality, of conventional masculinity, and of whiteness. Without the sanctioning of straight masculine whiteness, gays are problematically constructed as troubled, weak, and in need of saving. In the process, white straight men—from Macklemore to white athletes in the IGB videos examined—are presented as well-intentioned, enlightened, and extra heroic because of their approval of gayness.

The focus of Chapter Three, *Modern Family*'s "Suddenly, Last Summer," allowed for a critical examination of the sexualized and racialized construction of straight benevolence. Analysis of this episode of *Modern Family* also enabled an opportunity to delineate the gendered implications of straight benevolence. Claire and Gloria's close, personal involvement with Mitchell and Cam's union entrench conventional feminine roles. This chapter demonstrated that, unlike Macklemore's and Major League Baseball's benevolence, the straight benevolence offered by Claire and Gloria is constructed as intimate and nurturing. The women are presented as family caregivers. These roles are rendered more palpable as the straight male characters are largely absent from this episode's primary same-sex proposal storyline. Another distinguishing feature of "Suddenly, Last Summer" compared to "Same Love" and Major League Baseball IGB is that the gay men in the sitcom eventually disregard the benevolence of the women. Initially, they are presented as troubled and confused, and as needing and wanting the support of their straight female family members. Ultimately, however, they propose to each other on their own terms, drawing on the strength and history of their relationship, becoming their own heroes. Mitchell and Cam's class, desire to be married, and whiteness presents them as ordinary—as non-threatening—and therefore as suitable beneficiaries of straight benevolence. Significantly, unlike Macklemore's acceptance (presented as progressive and rational) and the athletes' support

(constructed as authoritative and heroic), Claire and Gloria's attempted feminine benevolence is rendered trivial and inconsequential. Moreover, Claire's white feminine approval is presented as pragmatic, while Gloria's Latina support is represented as passionate. Like Macklemore and Major League Baseball's masculinity, Mitchell and Cam's masculinity prevails. Contrasting the production of straight benevolence in "Same Love," Major League Baseball IGB, and "Suddenly, Last Summer" brings about a remarkable commentary on race, gender, and the presentation of gayness. Namely, straight white men are the most privileged in their dominance of gay men; however, straight women—whether white or Latina—are subordinate to white gay men.

As noted earlier, advocacy against discrimination and hatred of gays by straight individuals in U.S. society, in general, is a fortunately growing occurrence (Mayberry, 2012; Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; DeTurk, 2011; Russell, 2011; Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, & Wimsatt, 2010; Wayne & Sagarin, 2010; Wilkinson & Sagarin, 2010; Stozer, 2009). Mayberry (2012) specifically asserts heterosexual activism is most "empowering" when it is inherently inclusive of LGBTQ perspectives. LGBTQ-straight "alliances" enable individuals to "develop the confidence needed to exert control over their environment" (p. 41). What is noteworthy in "Same Love," Major League Baseball IGB and "Suddenly, Last Summer" is that gay progress is consistently represented as requiring straight approval and acceptance. In this song, online video advocacy campaign, and network television episode, heterosexual and racial norms are reified and gay empowerment is presented as one-sided. In "Same Love," the gay man of color is whitened, saved by his white partner in the film's narrative, and implicitly supported by the lyrics of a white hip-hop artist. Major League Baseball IGB presents 35 male, mostly white, athletes as overwhelmingly authoritative as they dismiss the importance of sexual difference. In

Modern Family's "Suddenly, Last Summer," Mitchell and Cam reject an association with Claire and Gloria's feminine benevolence, substantiating and privileging white masculinity's dominance. Straight benevolence is not a co-constitutive "alliance" (Maybery, 2012). As I have argued, straight benevolence consistently relegates gay advancement as always contingent upon gay men obeying heterosexist, racist imperatives.

Implications for Masculinity

My theory of straight benevolence is primarily concerned with how straight men are explicitly juxtaposed with gay men. At a time when conventional U.S. white patriarchal heterosexuality imagines itself as threatened (Squires, 2010; Lindgren & Lélievre, 2009)—gays infiltrating marriage, immigrants of color crossing borders, a gay black man attempting to enter the U.S. National Football League but feeling "like a stray dog" (Trotter, 2014)—scholars are doing important work on representations of straight men in media. For instance, Keeling (2012) points to aggression and dominance as key traits of hyper-masculinity. Lindgren and Lélievre (2009) draw, in part, from Connell's (1987) theorization of hegemonic masculinity to examine MTV's *Jackass* and its portrayal of over-the-top maleness. Valerie Palmer-Mehta (2009) similarly argues that *The Man Show*, a sketch comedy show that aired on Comedy Central from 1999 to 2004, "opens up a space for the performance of mediocre masculinity, a morphing form of hegemonic masculinity that enables traditional power relationships to prevail in a changing social context that is increasingly intolerant of performances of traditional masculinity" (p. 1055). *The Man Show* incorporated overtly misogynist discourse and images, providing a place for the festering of white heterosexual male bitterness. The following from Palmer-Mehta's (2009) scholarship is worth quoting at length:

Emphasized femininity and traditional power relations on *The Man Show* are seen most clearly in the interactions between the hosts [Jimmy Kimmel and Adam Carolla] and the Juggy Girls. Several times during the half-hour program, Jimmy and Adam command “Dance, Juggy Girls, dance!” In response, the young, predominantly white, presumably heterosexual women smile and dance enthusiastically for the studio and home-viewing audiences. Although the content of the show frequently entails misogynistic remarks, the women smile perpetually and nod affirmatively at the hosts and the audience (p. 1056)

Palmer-Mehta asserts fantasy gratification, while fleeting, is employed on *The Man Show* as a means for avoiding and belittling the difficulties straight white men have in “navigating [their] place in contemporary society” (p. 1070). It is my hope that the theorizing of straight benevolence can open up future inquiries into how straight white men are represented as unquestionably masculine and dominant. An important line of inquiry lies ahead: How do constructions of straight-gay relationships in media produce conventional ideals of white male heterosexuality and stereotypical notions of male gayness?

As critical scholars, we can learn much by examining other straight-gay relationships in popular media. Constructed through the inclusion of gay characters accepted by and extremely close to their straight male counterparts, how are homosocialism and homoeroticism marked and racialized? Possible sites of analysis include Audience Network’s *Kingdom* (first aired in 2014 and features a Latino gay man who is a physical therapist treating a white straight mixed martial arts fighter) and ABC’s *Scandal* (first aired in 2012 and includes a gay White House chief of staff who closely advises the U.S. President on both national and personal matters). How do constructions of strength and aggression (mixed martial arts fighter) and power (President) signify these men as clearly straight and masculine? Framed in a variety of more nurturing roles

in the same media sites (therapist and adviser, respectively), what is implied about male gayness? How is gayness racialized and classed? What are the implications for the maintenance of white heterosexual maleness? By leveraging the notion of straight benevolence to analyze mediated straight-gay relationships, it is my contention that critically examining current and popular media will enable scholars to ascertain much about what it means to be a gay man in contemporary U.S. society.

What's Next for Pro-Gay Advocacy?

As I submit this work, the U.S. Supreme Court is deliberating on *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, an historic case simultaneously challenging four states' same-sex marriage bans (Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee). According to an April 2015 *New York Times Magazine* article, "the high court of the United States is [now] poised to decide whether the federal constitution requires *all* states either to license same-sex marriages or to recognize those marriages if they're performed elsewhere" (Bazelon & Liptak, 2015, emphasis in original). Arguments about whether the U.S. Constitution affords same-sex couples the right to marry were presented April 22, and a ruling is expected later this summer. Of note, Justice Kennedy stated during the April proceedings that "[t]his definition [of marriage between a man and a woman] has been with us for millennia. And it's very difficult for the court to say, 'Oh, well, we know better'" (Liptak, 2015). All represented as straight by the news media, the justices hold the power to deny gays marriage equality or benevolently grant gays access to the heterosexual institution of marriage. If they lean toward the latter decision, they will, in Justice Kennedy's own words, "know better." Many will view the justices as progressive, enlightened, and "on the right side of history" (Wolf, 2015). The explicit extension of pro-gay support by heterosexuals and the growing acceptance of

gayness in the United States are related. Grossberg (2010) reminds that relations such as this are contextual, situated in specific times and places, and produce knowledge at particular historical moments. “[T]he identity, significance, and effects of any practice or event,” he emphasizes, “are defined only by the complex set of relations that surround, interpenetrate, and shape it, and make it what it is. . . . Cultural studies thus embodies the commitment to the openness and contingency of social reality, where change is the only given” (p. 20). At this moment in U.S. history, gay advancement is unequivocally contingent upon straight approval. Even more problematic, gay men are presented as in need of saving and remedying by their straight counterparts who, in turn, emerge as enlightened and heroic. This notion of straight approval, exemplified by the U.S. Supreme Court, is also reflected in “Same Love,” Major League Baseball IGB, and *Modern Family*’s “Suddenly, Last Summer.”

In closing and as a departure from the critical work bolstering my arguments in this thesis, I paraphrase the two most common questions my academic colleagues, friends, and family ask when I discuss this work with them. First, “isn’t it good that straight people are represented as showing support for gay men?” In answering this question, I often take my lead from Dow (1996): “I can honestly say that I have never written about any kind of television programming that I did not enjoy watching,” she explains. “Thus, part of what I do in my work is attempt to dissect my own pleasures and interests” (p. xii). “Same Love” struck me as progressive when I first heard it on the radio, and I was drawn to the song in part because of this, but I soon began wondering about the implications of a white straight man emerging from hip-hop to address current gay rights issues. The San Francisco Giant’s IGB video initially seemed supportive—surprisingly so, given that athletes represent the pinnacle of U.S. masculine heterosexuality. I was troubled, however, by the ways in which many of the athletes were represented as knowing

better than the gay youth they addressed. *Modern Family* is a television program I watch regularly, laughing at the families' antics, relishing in my particular affinity for Mitchell and Cam, but always wanting more from their relationship, which is not terribly nurturing and consistently seems sterilized. My answer to this question about my research recognizes that pro-gay support by individuals presented as clearly straight may initially seem like a positive step. However, homophobia, sexism, and racism are contained in these sites *despite the sites being constructed as progressive and enlightened*. The benevolence itself is problematic, particularly the ways in which race and gender are implicated. There are three significant issues I outline in my response: First, without straight support, gayness is presented as weak, troubled, deviant. Next, straight benevolence calls upon gay men to adhere to white heterosexual norms in order to receive benevolence. Gay men must be presented as professional, middle- to upper-class, monogamous, appropriately masculine, and white ... or they must be whitened, as occurs in the video for "Same Love" with the mixed race protagonist. Finally, straight benevolence constructs white men as heroic, entrenching white masculinity's cultural power and privilege.

The second question is more challenging: "If these are examples of 'bad' pro-gay advocacy offered by straight people, what does 'good' activism by straight people look like?" On a personal level, I concur with Duggan (2011) that activism should "[c]ontinue to generate and press forward with a friendly critique of the agenda of the mainstream LGBT organizations," which she summarizes as "the 3Ms—inclusion in the major neoliberal institutions of marriage, the military, and the market" (p. 1). As a critical scholar, however, this is not a question I directly answer in my work. Yet my thesis does show how straight benevolence in "Same Love," Major League Baseball IGB, and *Modern Family* surreptitiously reinforces a problematic power dynamic that privileges heteronormativity. I can, in other words, connect the production of

straight benevolence in media sites to discourses in U.S. society. Macklemore raps: “I may not be the same, but that’s not important. No freedom ’til we’re equal. Damn right I support it” (Macklemore & Lewis, 2012). Straight people like him, he suggests, should support equal rights for members of the gay community. In Major League Baseball IGB, Barry Zito explains “there’s no place in society for hatred and bullying against anyone” (Giants, 2011). In other words, not only are gays encouraged to “be [their] own unique being[s]” (Red Sox, 2011) in these advocacy videos, but Zito and other athletes press straight viewers to stop harassing and bullying gay youth. When in *Modern Family* Claire says “congratulations on the whole marriage thing” (Richman, 2013), and when she and Gloria proceed with well-meaning attempts to facilitate Mitchell and Cam’s proposal, they provide examples of the same-sex marriage support that should accompany supposed pro-gay activism. Returning to the second question—“what does ‘right’ advocacy look like?”—it is not so much that this song, these online videos, and this television episode get pro-gay advocacy “wrong.” Rather, the interest is in how they represent advocacy: via the trope of straight individuals possessing power to approve and sanction gayness. In culture (and popular media is very much part of culture), straight benevolence—extended to gays who are represented as both deserving of and needing this benevolence—preserves heterosexual authority and the privilege of whiteness.

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Endnotes

¹ Overturning the Defense of Marriage Act did not require states to allow same-sex marriage; however, same-sex couples “married and living in states that recognize gay marriage will be treated as married by the federal government” (Socarides, 2013). The Court also ruled that proponents of Proposition 8, California’s same-sex marriage ban, “lacked sufficient legal standing to bring an appeal” (Socarides, 2013). A lower court’s ruling in favor of same-sex marriage in California would stand.

² The sex-advice column started by Dan Savage, “Savage Love,” first appeared in *The Stranger* in 1991. It has since grown beyond this weekly alternative Seattle publication and, today, appears in more than 50 papers in the United States and Canada (savagelovecast.com). In addition to regular columns in print, Savage began podcasting in 2007 and 439 episodes are now posted to savagelovecast.com.

³ Major League Baseball’s Seattle Mariners posted an “It Gets Better” video on August 11, 2011. This video was produced in concert with the Seattle Seahawks (National Football League), the Seattle Sounders (Major League Soccer), and the Seattle Storm (Women’s National Basketball Association). The Seattle video is not included in this analysis due to the inclusion of teams outside baseball.

⁴ While outside the scope of this chapter’s analysis, the benevolence displayed by two white men (Savage and Miller) charitably taking up the cause of a boy of color (Lucas) is noteworthy.

⁵ Joe Prithett is born toward the end of *Modern Family*’s fourth season.

⁶ *Modern Family* is produced as a faux documentary, similar to other popular shows such as *The Office* (NBC, 2005–2013) and *Parks and Recreation* (NBC, 2009–2015). Unseen camera crews follow the daily lives of these families and record their interactions. Main scripted narratives are regularly interrupted with characters speaking into the camera, usually from their living rooms, offering their equally faux, scripted perspectives.

⁷ Cam becomes a substitute teacher in the second episode of the series' fifth season, as Lily starts kindergarten. Gloria never holds an income-earning job, Claire begins to work for her father's business, Pritchett's Closets & Blinds, in the fifth season's second episode. Prior to that, she was a housewife.