

DOES VISIBILITY ACTUALLY HELP? : TELEVISED  
POPULAR CULTURE AND SUPPORT  
FOR LGBT RIGHTS

By

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DOES VISIBILITY ACTUALLY HELP? : TELEVISED  
POPULAR CULTURE AND SUPPORT  
FOR LGBT CAUSES

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## CHAPTER I

### THE REAL (CHANGING) WORLD: THE CHANGING POLITICAL OPINIONS/PUBLIC POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES

*“I thought that you were some kind of new generation who saw things differently. Who just kinda came into the world, knowing what it’s taken me years of struggling to find out.” – Mike O’Malley, about an offensive term used by one high school student toward his openly gay son on the TV Show Glee (Murphy, R. 2010).*

In 1973 the University of Chicago performed the first poll on support for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered individual’s<sup>1</sup> rights; they found that 88% of all adults found sexual relations between two adults of the same sex to be wrong at least part of the time (AEI 2008). In 1986, the Supreme Court held that the United States Constitution did not guarantee a right to commit sodomy in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986); in Idaho it was a crime that was punishable by life imprisonment (Curry et al. 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> From here onward I will refer to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals by the acronym LGBT.

The shocking thing about those decisions and laws is not that they were made but rather how quickly they were overturned. Within ten years of the *Bowers* decision the Court ruled in *Romer v. Evans* (1996) that it was unconstitutional for a state to legally discriminate against LGBT individuals. By 2003 the Supreme Court had overruled *Bowers* entirely saying that there was, “*No legitimate state interest which can justify its intrusion into the personal and private life of the individual*” (*Lawrence v. Texas* 2003). Idaho even began to display more tolerance, inducting former Senator Larry Craig into the state Hall of Fame despite having pleaded guilty to lewd conduct in a Minnesota airport restroom (AP 2007). By 2010 at least five states allowed legal marriages between two individuals of the same-sex.<sup>2</sup> These political events have been moving along with public opinion on the matter. By 2006 the University of Chicago had found that the percentage of Americans who found LGBT conduct unacceptable had dropped by almost 40%. Polling from the Pew Research center has even found data suggesting that a plurality of Americans support giving either same-sex couples the right to marry or join in civil unions as opposed to allowing neither (AEI 2008). There is scholarly evidence in this area as well with many articles demonstrating the growth of support for LGBT rights issues from the 1970s (Lin 1999, Herek 2006, Schafer and Shaw 2009). At the end of the chapter there is a chart (Chart 1-1) which shows the change in public opinion from 1985 until 2008 on the same-sex marriage debate with some major political events graphed

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<sup>2</sup> These states are Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, and New Hampshire. Same-sex marriages are also legal in the District of Columbia. The reason I say ‘at least’ is because of the constantly evolving legal battle in California, which as of this writing had legalized same-sex marriages, but they were currently halted awaiting a legal appeal.



alongside which seems to indicate that political actions are happening in response to public opinion (Franklin 2008).

The question then becomes, what has caused this change? What has changed since the early 1970s that has made LGBT individual rights such an evolving issue? One clue we have to this puzzle is that there is a definite “age gap” on the issue of same-sex marriage<sup>3</sup> (Jones 2009, Sager 2009, Douthat and Salam 2008). Polls and studies have consistently found that younger people are more supportive than older ones, why is that? It is highly unlikely, to respond to the *Glee* quotation at the beginning of the article, that younger generations just came into the world more accepting of LGBT individual’s rights. They had to be socialized to this belief, and if their parents are still less likely to support such things, they logically aren’t the reason for the evolution on this issue. Rather there is something else that socializes younger members of our society, something the majority of children watch every day, and that thing is television. In this thesis I am going to discuss whether or not fictionalized popular culture has been responsible for increasing support for allowing legalized same-sex marriages. I will argue that one of the leading indicators of support for LGBT rights is the volume of LGBT characters in popular culture, particularly televised popular culture. I will cover this in more detail in the next chapter but television has several unique characteristics that make it particularly effective

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<sup>3</sup> There could be a potential ‘chicken or the egg’ problem here with research demonstrating that LGBT individuals are far more likely to support the Democratic Party, just like younger people (Schaffner and Senic 2006). This paper will argue that women are more likely to support LGBT rights, and that leads them to the Democratic Party, but it could be argued that they are more likely to be Democrats and therefore support the party platform.

in affecting social change. The basic theoretical framework I am going to test in this project is as follows:

*LGBT characters have been increasing the visibility of LGBT individuals and issues on television screens since the early 1970s in the wake of both broader societal changes and major political visibility spikes such as the Stonewall Riots. This increase of visibility over time has led to more Americans becoming normalized with LGBT individuals, activity, and behavior just as if (though to a lesser degree) they had personal face-to-face interactions with open LGBT individuals. As both LGBT identity and activity has become more and normalized and the visibility level has continued to rise tolerance for LGBT individuals has also risen which can be tested quantifiably with polling data on the different aspects of LGBT rights. Popular culture is a leading indicator of these changes in public opinion. When visibility of LGBT individuals is high it can cause governmental responses which can be both positive and negative.*

The goal of this project will be to compare television programming against public opinion on a myriad of LGBT issues in the political debate from morality to equal employment in both the private sector, and the U.S. military. This topic is important because political science literature has clearly demonstrated that public opinion molds public policy (Stimson et al 1995), so if something like television is shown to be molding public opinion then it can be said to be affecting public policy<sup>4</sup> as well. Rather than

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<sup>4</sup>In the United States same-sex marriages could be legally implemented on the state level by three methods; judicial rulings that have determined that LGBT individuals have a legal right to marry within the borders of a state, a legislative body passing a law legalizing same-sex marriages, or ballot initiatives passed by the

simply making this assumption however I will attempt to test television's affect on public policy as well.

Before moving on I should take a moment to define a few of the key terms and concepts that will be used throughout the thesis. The first term that needs clarification is same-sex marriage. When I use this term I will only be referring to full marriages rights to LGBT couples including the title of marriage.<sup>5</sup> Unless specifically noted in the paper I will not discuss civil unions. The reason for this exclusion is that the term civil union has wildly different definitions in different states. In some states they are full marriages in everything but name but in others they allow for only partial marriage rights (Nelson 2009). Including them would therefore add an unnecessary level of confusion into the discussion.

The other complex term that I am going to discuss throughout the thesis is popular culture. For the purposes of this project I will be defining popular culture as the sum of

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majority of the public within a given state. The first two have been used successfully while the third, ballot initiative passed by a majority of the public has been attempted but never successfully used. On the federal level same-sex marriage could only be implemented by Congressional repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act or Supreme Court ruling that the Act is unconstitutional. The Defense of Marriage Act states that the federal government does not, and will not, recognize same-sex marriages granted by states. It also gives states the right to not recognize those marriages either. The key is that authors like Stimson et al (1995) have shown that those methods are affected by the perception of public opinion.

<sup>5</sup> I should point out that whenever the term same-sex marriage is used in this paper it refers to the marriage of two people of the same-sex. While it is legal in all fifty states for a gay man to marry a lesbian woman it would not be a topic that would be particularly interesting to study or provide insightful answers to political scientists.

ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images, and other phenomena preferred as an informal consensus as manifest in the preferences and acceptance/rejection of features in facets like cooking, clothing, consumption, and entertainment. This definition is rather large and cumbersome, but it allows us to begin to understand what I will be discussing in this paper on what will be discussed in this paper. Throughout this paper I am interested in the culture presented on television outside of news coverage. While news coverage is a good way to understand the events of the day but it is something that has been studied quite a lot by political scientists. When political scientist, especially American political scientists study television they usually focus on the news media, campaign messages, or political ads. Even when political scientists reach out into more unconventional areas of study like late-night comedy shows they narrow that focus down to politicians appearing on those shows (Parkin 2009). This makes sense on an intuitive level, news coverage and newsmakers affects people's opinions of the news. News coverage also has the ability to frame the public agenda through the stories it covers. Discounting popular culture however is a mistake because popular culture reaches a much larger audience than the typical nightly news broadcast. It should also be noted that researchers like Streitmatter (2009) have analyzed both popular culture and media coverage on television and found that television has advocated the more progressive position for far longer than the media. He argues that relatively positive portrayals of gay men were on TV as early as *Soap* in the late 1970s while the media was still using stereotypes in their coverage of the AIDS epidemic more than a decade later.

This argument, that popular culture can cause political change, should not be construed to say that popular culture is the only thing causing political change. It would

be an extreme over simplification to do so, and offensive to political activists who worked throughout this time period. Let's remember that prior to the first LGBT character on television the first Gay Liberation Day March had been held (1970), the Stonewall riots had occurred (1969), and states like Illinois had de-criminalized sodomy (1961). This should also not be seen as an attempt to belittle the contributions of lobbyists and organizations who have worked on changing the political culture in Washington D.C. and various state legislatures across the country. That being said what this paper is attempting to do is quantifiably test an assumption that has been made by cultural theorists and people in the media that culture has an effect on political debate (Schiappa et al. 2006). Debates dealing with LGBT individuals are therefore especially interesting to research in this respect because they are unique in that they are almost entirely over matters of culture. Arguments about same-sex marriage for instance rarely deal with civil rights specifics, rather the majority end up debating cultural concerns such as religion and cultural acceptance.

In this paper I attempt to make a quantitatively analytical argument in favor of the power of culture to affect American political opinions. This was not any easy task. Chapter Four will go into more detail on this but many decisions were made as to what was and what wasn't included. In this thesis I study the number of recurring LGBT characters in televised popular culture until 2008. The thesis will define recurring as any character that appears in at least three episodes of a television show after publically coming out of the closet. It does not include "special episodes" of television programs, or characters that were LGBT in everything but name. It does however include characters that appeared fairly infrequently, characters that many might dismiss because they don't

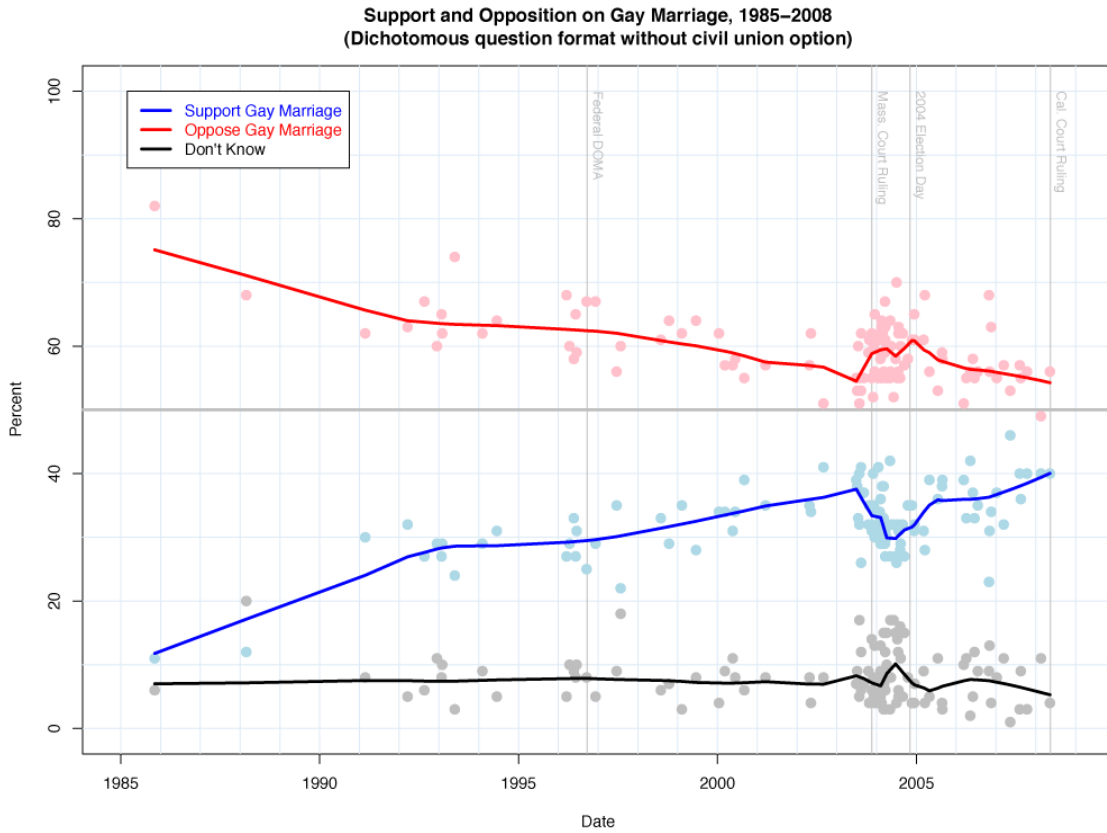
appear in every episode. This thesis then will therefore not please everyone. Cultural studies experts may look at it and argue that I have grossly oversimplified the way that popular culture is absorbed by the general public. Formal modelers may look at this work and balk at ever trying to include a cultural variable into our models. Queer theorists will probably look at this and ask what is so great about sitcoms? They would point out that while television may make a liberal argument for inclusion it portrays a heteronormative world in which LGBT individuals are still set up as the “other” to traditional heterosexual relationships. I think that all of those points are valid, and would certainly not argue that a simple counting of culture is the true measure of its impact. That being said just as the most powerful pieces of quantifiable data need some qualitative element to verify the causation even the most qualitative of pursuits needs some kind of causal element.

Methods aside, the goal of this project is to attempt to demonstrate that popular culture has been at least partially responsible for the growth of acceptance of LGBT identity and activity. In Chapter Two I will look at the literature that has been done on the subject by dividing it into three areas; the effect of popular culture on public opinion polls, the effect of public opinion on governmental action, and the portrayals of LGBT individuals and activity on television in general. Chapter Three will then take this base of research and develop some theoretical hypotheses to try and apply the lessons of the literature to the rising support for LGBT individuals. Chapter Four will deal with the methodology used to try and test the hypotheses I develop. Chapters Five and Seven will then present the quantitative data I have collected on these issues, a time series study of public opinion and television characters and a survey of individuals’ political opinions and television viewing habits. Chapter Six features a small quantitative analysis of the

affect that television has had on governmental actions but it also has two qualitative case studies that demonstrate how spikes in visibility can cause governmental reactions.

Chapter Eight will then conclude with a discussion of what these results mean and ideas for further study.

**Chart 1-1: Changes in Public Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage Over Time (Franklin 2009)**



## CHAPTER II

### THE GLEE-TERATURE – FROM THE LOG CABIN REPUBLICANS TO ELLEN

*I always felt like we were going to win [the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell] because I spoke to so many young people in the 90s, and when I speak to campuses. In the beginning I was an anomaly, people would be like, "What is it like to be gay?" and "I've never met a gay person before." By the end of a decade of being in that position the kids were just totally over it. They had seen Will and Grace; they'd watched Ellen and Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. Their media and their culture had moved so dramatically and now they had gay support groups in high school, they had gay role models, celebrities. In Washington politics leaders are not leaders, they're always followers. They always follow the culture." - Rich Tafel, founder of the Log Cabin Republicans on NPR's Morning Edition (Edwards 2010).*

Within this chapter my goal is to give a brief overview of the literature that I have based the theoretical framework of the project on. As mentioned in the opening chapter I argue that portrayals of LGBT characters within popular culture have had an effect on public opinion and public policy. While this is not a particularly new argument in academia<sup>6</sup>, it

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<sup>6</sup> Cultural studies scholars have been making arguments like this for a long time.



is one that political scientists have generally ignored. This means that the use of literature must be creative, examining each segment of the argument one at a time. At the end of the paper I will put all of the literature together into one coherent package that will enable the development of testable hypotheses.

To understand the intersection of popular culture and public policy a person must understand that there is an intermediate step between them, which is public opinion. Therefore I think that the best way to proceed in the literature is to examine what scientists have said about these two vitally important pieces. What has the literature shown us about the ability of popular culture to affect public opinion, and what has it said about how public opinion shapes public policy? In the middle of this discussion I will look at the debate in the literature over whether popular culture has provided a positive portrayal of LGBT individuals to the public.

### **Television, Culture, and Their Effects on Public Opinion**

This thesis takes a strong opinion that culture has had an effect on both the general public and public policy. This argument flies in the face of rational choice style arguments that discount culture almost entirely and focus instead on the rationality of individuals. These arguments have been generally rejected by cultural studies experts and political scientists interested in the effect of culture on political action. Marc Howard Ross in particular wrote in rejecting these assumptions that, “What [rational choice scholars] lack is thoughtful consideration of where interests come from in the first place, how interests get defined in specific cultural contexts, and the ways that culture structures appropriate ways to pursue them” (Ross 2007, pg. xiv). I think that for purposes of this

book we can instead focus more on literature that has dealt with the affect that culture has had on politics. The literature shows that popular culture has an effect on understanding (Cormick 2006), acceptance (Hermes 2006, Howe 2008), increasing the level of public discourse (Polletta and Lee 2006), and even making voting more socially important to reality show watching Americans (Williams 2005). Some political scientists even argue that you can use culture as the mode to compare states to one another (Merelman 1991). There is, however, no universally accepted opinion on the importance of culture, much less televised popular culture. The argument that culture, specifically televised popular culture, has had a positive effect on political opinions is not universal. There are political scientists who argue that television has negatively impacted the American political process. Among those researchers are people like Putnam (2000 and 2001) and Condry (1993) who argue that television drives down political participation, increasing apathy and aggressiveness while causing some “psychosocial malfunctioning.” The debate seems to be over whether television brings, in the words of Jon Stewart, “clarity or noise” (Bulger 2008).

Any examination of this subject requires at least a brief discussion of Queer Theory, a theoretical framework that originated in cultural studies, but has a great deal of relevance to this topic. Queer theory is a complex look at the role of gender roles in defining how our culture operates (Sullivan 2003). This theory has interesting applications to political science on many fronts as articulated by Susan Burgess when she wrote that an aspect of the theory<sup>7</sup> was that, “popular culture provides a unique insight

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<sup>7</sup> Another interesting aspect of Queer Theory is that it is fun. It states that sometimes governmental actions and judicial decisions are best understood ironically. This is why she titles her article breaking down

into the everyday operation of political power that may under certain circumstances transform, rather than simply mirror, status quo power relations” (Burgess 2006, pg. 401). Queer theorists though generally look at our current slate of popular culture and find it at best un-helpful, and at worst harmful. Not only has popular culture not always produced accurate portrayals of LGBT individuals (*The Boys in the Band* - Friedkin 1970) but queer theorists argue that any portrayal of a LGBT individual seeking approval from heterosexuals is inappropriate (Britzman 1995). There is some evidence that the narrative structure of serialized television (Leaker 2007) and producers fascination with beautiful people (Dove-Viebahn 2010) contribute to popular culture’s proposed inability to actually help on this issue.<sup>8</sup> The most nuanced opinion in this area is from Suzanna Danuta Walters who argues that television both helps and damages LGBT rights causes. It helps by presenting LGBT individuals as real people, but hurts in that the increased visibility can lead to legislative backlash. (Walters 2001) There is also some quantifiable data to back this nuanced position. Barth and Perry (2009) argue that the appearance of homosexual issues on television lead to an anti-gay marriage Constitutional amendment in the state of Arkansas despite the lack of immediate salience in the state.

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Supreme Court decisions, “Queer (Theory) Eye for the Straight (Legal) Guy” a not so subtle reference to the long running and ground breaking reality television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Collins and Metzler 2003-2007).

<sup>8</sup> Leaker (2007) argues that the marginalization of a character on the soap opera *All My Children* (Nixon 1970-2010) occurred not because of any active bias, but rather because of the demands of the soap operas narrative structure. With only one lesbian character you can’t have the character “hooking up” with new people every few months. Dove-Viebahn (2007) argues that *The L Word* (Chaikin et al 2004-2009) is biased toward ‘lesbian chic’ because only beautiful women are on television.

Despite the concerns of queer theorists, there has also been research that argues that popular culture has had a positive effect on support for LGBT individual rights. (Rollet 2007, Griffin 2008, Avilau-Saaverda 2009, Richardson 2009) The interesting thing about these articles is that they aren't studying positive portrayals of LGBT individuals and they still find evidence that even stereotyping can turn public opinion LGBT causes.<sup>9</sup> This makes the post-Stonewall visibility of the 1970s important to study because prior to that research shows us that LGBT content was absent from classic Hollywood productions (Noriega 1990). There are even subtler articles that argue that pieces of popular culture that don't even have LGBT characters or episodes but merely hint at the debate can influence public opinion on the issue. These can include things as far apart as children's programs (Dennis 2009), to costumed superheroes (Williamson 1997), to the final frontier of space itself (Falzone 2005). Queer theorists would argue that even seemingly positive portrayals of LGBT individuals on television still have a tendency to portray the lifestyle as something foreign and strange, which may not be hurting the case for legalized same-sex marriages but it isn't helping progress the debate. However this point is debatable as there are articles that make the argument that by when

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<sup>9</sup> Of these the Richardson (2009) article might be the most patently offensive. It studied a British reality television show called *Playing it Straight* (Abela and Griffin 2005-2010) which was a take-off of the standard dating show where one woman selected a fiancé from a group of bachelors. In this case however some of the men were actually gay who pretend to be straight in order to win a cash prize if they are selected by the woman. Richardson argues that even though the premise is offensive by demonstrating that gay men can be masculine it expands the culture's knowledge of and acceptance of LGBT individuals. *Playing it Straight* in the UK was take-off of an American version (Alvarez 2004) of the show which appeared on Fox, and later went on to have a version in Australia too. (Murphy, K. 2004)

culture presents LGBT activity as an outside of the mainstream it is working against public support/acceptance for LGBT individuals in their daily lives (Battles and Hilton-Morrow 2002, Landau 2009).

This project exclusively looks at televised popular culture. The reason for this is that television has several unique functions that make it particularly effective for causing social change in the area of LGBT rights. The first reason to focus on televised popular culture is that researchers like Streitmatter (2009) have found it to be a more powerful advocate on the issue than either films or news coverage. The second reason is that survey data has already shown us that television can be effective in driving up tolerance for LGBT individuals (Schiappa et al 2006). Streitmatter (2009) also makes one more important distinction about television's importance in effecting social change, it is harder to avoid. If a book or a movie has LGBT characters or themes in them, it is easier for a person to avoid those mediums. Someone has to go out and purchase a book or leave their house to attend a movie. Television is transmitted directly into most people's living rooms allowing easier access to people with that form of popular culture.

There are also market forces that may be moving televised popular culture in a more tolerant direction. I will discuss this in more detail when we get to Chapter Seven, but researching the history of landmark appearances of LGBT characters like *Ellen* and *Will & Grace* shows that television executives have pushed to make them "more gay" rather than toning content down (Kaufman 2008, Savage 2006). While in certain cases this has negatively impacted the piece of popular culture<sup>10</sup> television executives have

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<sup>10</sup> *Ellen* was frequently criticized during its run because it focused too much on LGBT issues.

continued to increase the visibility of LGBT characters and activity, even when overall sexual contact has diminished (Hetsroni 2007). Television executives seem to have decided that LGBT content increases either viewership or advertising revenue. Walters (2001) discusses this focus on LGBT individuals as double income, no child households as important to advertisers targeting individuals with disposable income. Popular culture may not have actually begun the changes of acceptability, but it has certainly responded to those critiques by dramatically increasing visibility. It should be noted however that while television executives have their eyes on the bottom line, people engaged in producing the culture do have political motives in mind. When asked about his role as an openly gay man on the television show *Soap* Billy Crystal talked about how he wanted present his character in a positive/non-stereotypical way (Tropiano 2002). When John Barrowman, the actor who portrayed “omni-sexual” character Captain Jack Harkness on *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*, was asked who his character was targeted to his response was everyone. “I wanted kids to like him, and I wanted women, men, I wanted everyone to like him.” was the actor’s intent with the character (McFarland 2007). So while the appearance of LGBT characters on television is a reflection of television executives’ feelings on the overall market, the actors/writers/and directors involved often have their own political motives.

When considering the policy implications of television we have to realize that television is an important tool in studying public opinion. Public opinion is a tricky thing to truly measure, even in today’s day and age of polling data from multiple sources, because it is based on the incomplete picture of events that the ordinary public possesses. There have been entire books dedicated to the lack of public knowledge that ordinary

citizens possess. (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1989<sup>11</sup>, Campbell et al 1960, and Page et al 1987) Does a low level of political knowledge make it more likely that public opinion will actually change on the issue? Research shows that the lack of knowledge possessed by the public on political issues makes them more malleable to those people who have a large outlet to the public (Page et al 1987), a concept that is well documented in American politics with regard to the President (Neustadt 1980, Kernall 1997) but the theory of “going public” could be applicable to anyone with a large enough forum to expose political views. With respect to same-sex marriage I am arguing that the lack of input from political leaders has been filled by televised popular culture. The idea that a cultural source could impact public opinion holds validity even during times where politicians are discussing the issue frequently. During the final week of March in 2009 if you added the average viewership of the evening news broadcasts on NBC, ABC, and CBS you would still not equal the amount of people who watched the Wednesday night edition of Fox’s *American Idol* broadcast (Bauder 2009). Earlier political science research has looked at how popular culture reflects and amplifies militarization and the “war on terror” (Regan 1994, Croft 2006, Lustick 2006) but this paper is attempting to show that popular culture does not simply amplify public opinion but it can also mold it. This paper attempts to answer whether or not the predominance of LGBT popular culture has actually had a tangible affect on the outlooks, opinions, and biases of the general public or has it simply made us apathetic and disagreeable?

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<sup>11</sup> The Delli Carpini and Keeter article features a great example of how people know more about popular culture than they do about the workings of the political system. In the study they show that more Americans know who William Shakespeare was than who the current Vice President of the United States is.

## **Public Opinion and Governmental Actions**

The final area I want to cover is the research that has been done on how public opinion affects governmental policy decisions. There has been quite a bit of research on how public opinion has affected governmental policy over an extended period of time. One of the more comprehensive articles on this topic is Stimson et al. (1995) where the authors quantitatively demonstrate that the perception of public opinion affects all branches of the federal government, from the House of Representatives to the Supreme Court. This research mirrors similar conclusions that have been developed by studying governmental actions in the short term. There are many articles that demonstrate how public opinion affects decisions made by courts (Mishler and Sheehan 1993, Mishler and Sheehan 1996, Lin 1999, Michaelson 2000, Eskridge 2002, McGuire and Simpson 2004, Klarman 2005, Stroughtenborough et al. 2006) and that is the branch that is supposed to be insulated from the public. If the court system is being molded by how the public feels about an issue, then we can safely assume that branches of the government that stand for re-election are even more highly affected by it.

The conclusion that governmental policy is influenced by the general public opinion on an issue is important because, as mentioned earlier in the paper, support for equal civil rights and marriages for LGBT individuals has been steadily rising at a higher rate than any other minority group (Franklin 2008, AEI 2009, Schafer 2009). The rate of increase is probably most responsible because of younger voters entering the electorate. There have been multiple studies which show that younger people are more likely to support LGBT individual's rights and same-sex marriages than their parents (Brumsaugh et al. 2008, Jayakumar 2009). Jayakumar's article is especially interesting in this context



because it argues that one of the reasons for this discrepancy is the “college experience” or to put it even more basically, social contact. Essentially the argument is that people who have met, or been around LGBT individuals are more likely to support them. There has been research which has found that there is such a thing as a “parasocial contact” which says that the contact theory is also in affect in people who simply watch television programs featuring LGBT characters (Schiappa et al. 2006). The question is whether the concept of parasocial contact theory is going to affect governmental policy. Cultural studiers like Walters (2001) have found evidence of governmental backlash to increasing LGBT visibility but there has been no political science research into the area.

When considering governmental response to LGBT visibility it should be noted that governmental response does not have to be positive. Government is especially vulnerable to concepts like Lebow’s (2008) feedback loop. While public opinion may be consistently changing in a positive direction, governmental institutions may be responding to groups that don’t have their opinions change as quickly. Lebow himself writes that, “National policymaking elites invariably contain people with varying outlooks on the world and associated policy preferences.” (Lebow 2008, pg. 564) In the United States it is also important to note that it in many districts it makes electoral sense for politicians to respond negatively to LGBT visibility. Especially early in the debate over different aspects of the debate public opinion polls still showed a majority had a negative opinion toward granting some of these rights to LGBT individuals. This concept of feedback is also seen in cultural studies like Walters (2001) who shows how visibility of LGBT individuals in popular culture has both advanced and negatively impacted the political debate over LGBT rights. These concepts do not only exist when dealing with

LGBT individuals, they have also appeared when discussing race relations as well. Authors like Andrei Markovits and Lars Rensmann examined the affect of organized sports on politics and written that, “There is also little doubt that the NBA’s global presence with stars such as Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, LeBron James, and Kobe Bryant has helped solidify the legitimacy, attractiveness, and acceptance of African Americans – Barack Obama included – as public figures in the white-dominated societies and cultures of Europe and America” (Markovits and Rensmann pg. 11, 2010).

Concluding this literature section I think that it has become obvious that popular culture affects public opinion and that popular culture affects public policy. In the next sections I will attempt to deal with the more difficult challenges, quantifying popular culture and developing a theoretical framework from which to derive hypotheses.

## CHAPTER III

### DOCTOR WHO-POTHESES : THEORIES AND RELATIVE DISCUSSIONS IN STATISTICS

*Lovely species the Atlans, we should visit them sometime... Very relaxed, sort of cheerful... well that's having two heads of course, tough to be a snob when you have an extra head... Of course then they started to have laws against same-self marrying, what's that about? But then again, that's the church for you. – The Doctor from the Doctor Who episode 'Time of the Angels' (Moffat 2010)*

Based on the literature available I have developed the basic theoretical framework:

*LGBT characters have been increasing the visibility of LGBT individuals and issues on television screens since the early 1970s in the wake of both broader societal changes and major political visibility spikes such as the Stonewall Riots. This increase of visibility over time has lead to more Americans becoming normalized with LGBT individuals, activity, and behavior just as if (though to a lesser degree) they had personal face-to-face interactions with open LGBT individuals. As both LGBT identity and activity has become more and normalized and the visibility level has continued to rise tolerance for LGBT individuals has*

*continued to rise tolerance for LGBT individuals has also risen which can be tested quantifiably with polling data on the different aspects of LGBT rights. Popular culture is a leading indicator of these changes in public opinion. When visibility of LGBT individuals is high it can cause governmental responses which can be both positive and negative.*

This framework can be broken down into four separate testable hypotheses. The first point to emphasize in this section is that the visibility of LGBT characters on television has definitely increased over time. This is not a conclusion that should only be studied with basic character counting because of the evolution of television programming since the early 1970s. While it is easy to say that from 1970 to 1975 there were only five recurring LGBT characters on television and in 2003 *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Collins and Metzler 2003-2007) crammed five gay men into one reality television show so that automatically means that television has made progress. It would also be a fact to note that there are many more channels and television shows for modern audiences to choose from. However television catalogers at the media center of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) have found that the percentage of LGBT characters has risen over time (GLAAD 2010). The fact that the percentage of LGBT characters has increased may seem obvious but it is extremely important and worth stressing. The percentage of LGBT characters on television is a necessary condition to proving anything else in this paper. If the percentage of LGBT characters increasing was incorrect then nothing else in this book would be a valid conclusion. That is because if the percentage was not increasing, visibility would not be going up and arguing simply presenting the pure numbers of LGBT characters would be an ineffectual way to study

the issue. This increase is even more important to note because it also means there has been an increase in LGBT conduct as well. The LGBT conduct increases actually run contrary to conduct of all other couples on television which has actually been decreasing over the years (Hetsroni 2007).

In Chapter Two I covered how popular culture has affected public opinion and how both can affect governmental actions. For the theoretical framework of this book to be correct it has to not only demonstrate how televised popular culture affects public opinion polls, but that it affects political decisions. These two aspects can be hypothesized rather simply.

*Hypothesis One: As the number of LGBT characters in popular culture has increased over time public opinion can be shown to rise. In this case popular culture is a leading indicator of public opinion polling.*

*Hypothesis Two: As the number of LGBT characters in popular culture has increased over time the amount of governmental decisions relating to LGBT individuals and LGBT rights can be shown to rise. In this case popular culture is a leading indicator of governmental actions.*

The key in both of these hypotheses is that popular culture is predicted to come first. If trend lines in public opinion on the issue show that television programming is actually trailing behind public opinion or even moving at the same time, then at least a portion of the hypotheses would be false. In order for televised popular culture to be a leading indicator it must lead public discourse on the issue. If television is trailing public opinion then it is merely a pure expression of the free market which was moving ahead of

the government. Even if televised popular culture is shown to not be leading public opinion, if the two variables are correlated it still remains an interesting variable for political scientists to study. Future research would simply need to be tailored to televised popular culture as an expression of public opinion, not a driving force of it.

There is a third and final hypothesis of this thesis deals with how much change I expect to find in public opinion of LGBT individuals and issues. One thing we know about changing public opinion on LGBT issues is that it has been shown that people who have contact with LGBT individuals in their daily lives are more likely to be supportive of increasing political rights for LGBT individuals in the abstract (Jayakumar 2009). The concept is often called the “Social Contact Hypothesis.” What this book attempts to find evidence of is a “Parasocial Contact Hypothesis”, or evidence of social contact through the recurring characters in televised popular culture. The term “Parasocial Contact” comes from an article that found evidence of increasing tolerance of LGBT individuals and activity in people who watched the NBC sitcom *Will & Grace* (Schiappa et al. 2006). The book predicts that there will be evidence of parasocial contract, but that it will not be as strong as pure social contact.

*Hypothesis Three: A person who has social contact with LGBT individuals will be more supportive of LGBT issues than a person with no contact at all. A person who watches LGBT characters on television only will be less supportive than an individual with personal contact but more supportive than a person without contact or television viewing habits.*

I expect that Hypothesis Three will be valid because while the public is being influenced through the medium of television it is a reasonable assumption to think that you will be more affected by your friends and relatives than the characters on television. The struggles of your co-worker or uncle will likely be a larger influence on your political opinion than the struggles of Marge's lesbian sister in *The Simpsons* episode "There's Something About Marrying"<sup>12</sup> (Burns 2005). Popular culture is influencing the public over time through visibility and normalization but Hypothesis Three predicts that your responsiveness will be less than that of a person who can view the political issue through a friend or relative.

To understand the final hypothesis it will be worthwhile to develop a formal model to visualize the concept. This is therefore an attempt to develop a testable equation to predict the likelihood an individual will be supportive of LGBT rights, more specifically same-sex marriage. In this evolving issue it will be helpful for political scientists to have a model for determining what variables positively affect public opinion on same-sex marriages and which variables negatively affect it. The most recent research on support for same-sex marriages says that support for same-sex marriages are a function of a person's religion, their attitude toward LGBT individuals in general, and

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<sup>12</sup> This was the Simpson's "same-sex marriage" episode. In the episode, the town of Springfield decides to legalize same-sex marriages in the wake of a scathing travel review attempting to bump up tourism. The majority of the episode deals with Marge's conflicting moral stances; on one hand she supports the rights of same-sex couples to be married, on the other she doesn't want her sister Patty to marry another woman. The episode attempts to dispel the notion that a lesbian will turn back to heterosexuality if they meet the right person. It was described by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation as a "ray of light." (BBC News 2005)

their opinion on traditional gender roles (Gaines and Garand 2010). Other research, referenced earlier, has shown us an “age gap” between the young and old on this issue (Jones 2009, Sager 2009, Douthat and Salam 2008). By combining these two strands of research I can develop a formal model for the level of support for same-sex marriage.

$$S = N - (A + G + R)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{Support} = & (\textit{Social Contact}) - (\textit{Age} \\ & + \textit{Traditional Gender Roles Support} \\ & + \textit{Religious Participation}) \end{aligned}$$

In this equation **S** is the level of support for same-sex marriages, **N** is the number of homosexuals a person actually knows, **A** is the number of years older than 30 the person is, **G** is the person’s favorability toward traditional gender roles, and **R** is the person’s religious outlook.

If my hypotheses are correct another variable would need to be added to the positive side, **T** for the television programming providing parasocial contact with LGBT individuals. This would make a final proposed model of

$$S = (N + T) - (A + G + R)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{Support} = & (\textit{Social Contact} + \textit{Parasocial Contact}) - (\textit{Age} \\ & + \textit{Traditional Gender Roles Support} \\ & + \textit{Religious Participation}) \end{aligned}$$



Comparing this new model to the initial model develops the fourth hypothesis. This model implies that given two people with identical, or near identical, demographics a person's television habits will cause any differences that we see between them.

*Hypothesis Four: Given two individuals with identical demographics, differing only on television viewing habits, the person who views more television with LGBT characters will be more supportive of LGBT rights.*

If Hypothesis Four is confirmed then the value **T** in the above equation will be shown to have a value greater than zero.

In concluding this chapter I want to reinforce the tests that will be performed in the book. For the proposed theoretical framework to be valid the increasing number of LGBT individuals needs to be shown to have lead public opinion in increasing support for LGBT individuals and issues. This increase in visibility and normalization also needs to have lead to an increasing amount of governmental action in response, though that action can be either positive or negative. The general public is affected by televised popular culture through parasocial contact which works similarly to the social contact hypothesis but works through identification with fictionalized characters that appear regularly on screen. In the next chapter I will go into more details on the planned tests I will use to test the hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER IV

### MY SO-CALLED METHODS – TESTING THE ROLE OF TELEVISION IN CHANGING PUBLIC OPINION

*“I do not advocate that we turn television into a 27-inch wailing wall, where longhairs constantly moan about the state of our culture and our defense. But I would like to see it reflect occasionally the hard, unyielding realities of the world in which we live.... This instrument can teach... but it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends.” –Edward R. Murrow*

In this chapter of the thesis I am going to discuss the research design that will be used in to test the four hypotheses formulated in Chapter Three. In this project I am going to perform three separate but related tests that will attempt to confirm my hypotheses; the first is a Large-N statistical analysis of the number of LGBT characters on television and the changes in public opinion over a decade long time. The second test will be an attempt to verify the affect of televised popular culture on governmental actions. While there will be a statistical test in this section it alone will not prove a relationship so I will also add two brief case studies showing how television programs can increase LGBT visibility and how they increase LGBT normalization. In the third test I will also provide a survey to a

number of people to test whether television viewing habits and political opinions are correlated.

### **Test Number One: Macro Analysis of LGBT Characters over Time**

The first section of the research design is a statistical, large N, regression analysis on the number of LGBT characters on television as compared to public opinion polling on support for LGBT equal rights and same-sex marriages. The data about LGBT characters will be taken from David Wyatt's (Wyatt 2009) data set of every LGBT character to appear on television complete with the years that those characters' episodes originally aired. The reason for performing this large scale correlation is to test and see if the relationship between television and public opinion has been there throughout time. The survey can give us a snapshot of today, but not of the evolution of the issue. It is also useful for telling us whether or not television has been a leading indicator of the public opinion change, or merely a reflection of the public. While there is a good deal of literature that argues that television and popular culture can change public opinion and broadcast standards, (Ziv 2007, Neuwirth 2006) none of it has been quantified, which this study attempts to do. There are some concerns about this study, one being that while honoring same-sex marriages is something that is a state level decision<sup>13</sup>, I am using national polling data.<sup>14</sup> The answer is that because television shows are broadcast on a

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<sup>13</sup> As mentioned earlier the state level decisions evolve from the current federal law in this area, the Defense of Marriage Act (or DOMA). DOMA, in addition to defining marriage on the federal level, allows individual states to determine for themselves how they define marriage.

<sup>14</sup> In this paper I will look at polling data compiled by both the American Enterprise Institute (AEI 2008) and the Pew Research Center (Masci 2009).

national basis to break the data down on the state level a study would need to go into viewing figures to accurately determine who is watching what. The best and most reliable data on viewing figures are Nielson rating, which are both expensive and have legal issues dealing with their usage in academic studies.

For the purposes of this study I will be tweaking the Wyatt data set because my theoretical story requires a slightly tougher standard than the simple collection of data. For purposes of this study LGBT characters are defined as characters that are both open about their LGBT status and have appeared on at least three (3) episodes of the program. The one additional caveat is that if a character is initially portrayed as straight, or the topic was left up to the viewer to figure out sexual orientation for themselves the three episode rule begins from the episode that they “came out.”<sup>15</sup> There are three reasons for this focus on recurring characters; the “parasocial contact” theory, normalization, and as a basic control for viewership. Social contact, personally interacting with an individual or group of individuals, implies a prolonged relationship. In this respect the three episode requirement should be thought of as the minimum threshold that all television characters have to meet to maintain parasocial contact with a television viewer. While television programs like *M\*A\*S\*H* have had individual episodes advocating for some gay rights (Regier and Markowitz 1974) by only having the LGBT character on screen for a single

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<sup>15</sup> The ultimate example of a character that fits in the Wyatt data set and would be excluded from this study is Serena Southerlyn from the long running show *Law & Order*. Serena’s LGBT status was revealed in the final scene of her final episode. (Sweren and Johnson 2005) This was not the last time her character was seen on television, *Law & Order* is rerun in syndication constantly; however it was the last time she filmed an original scene for the show.

episode the viewer never has a chance to create any kind of parasocial contact with the character. The second reason for the three episode requirement is normalization. For a group of individuals, or an activity, to be normalized a viewer has to be exposed to it on more than one occasion. This is also a unique ability that television programming has that movies and books often do not have.<sup>16</sup> The third and final reason for this focus on recurring characters allows us some measure control over viewership. I don't think that you can assume that even the most dedicated television viewer will see every single episode of a television show. This means that people will miss individual programs, a significant problem especially in the early days of this dataset before the VCR and the TIVO. Recurring characters allow a better measure of control over assuming that a viewer will have been exposed to characters and their storylines.

In the dataset I will also be focusing solely on the stated sexual orientation of the character, and not the actor nor what the audience is made to presume. I feel that it would be inappropriate to code the CBS comedy *How I Met Your Mother* (Bays and Thomas 2005) because it stars the actor Neil Patrick Harris, who is an openly gay man in his personal life. To do so would not only presume a level of knowledge by the viewer that I feel would be inappropriate, and it would violate the theoretical framework that I am attempting to test because the actor is playing a ladies' man on the television show. I have also chosen not to code a character like Mr. Wilberforce Claybourne Humphries

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<sup>16</sup> It is definitely true that there are prolonged characters in both books and films; even Shakespeare had a few recurring characters in his plays. However television, because of the serialized nature of its storytelling and the way it is transmitted into people's homes without them having to seek it out make it unique in its ability to normalize behavior.

from the long running British television show *Are You Being Served?* (Lloyd and Croft 1972) who is never openly declared to be a LGBT individual. While the humor of Mr. Humphries came from jokes that insinuated his sexual orientation, the fact that he never came out and always attempted to claim that he was not LGBT make him ineligible for coding in this test.<sup>17</sup> Also excluded from this dataset are characters that are shown to not be LGBT, but pretend to be throughout the series. Characters like Jack from *Three's Company* (Nicholl et al. 1977-1984) would therefore be excluded from the dataset. A final potentially controversial inclusion in this dataset is that I include reality television show participants. Including these participants, even though they are not actors playing characters is important for several reasons. Reality television has, along with scripted popular culture television, seen a similar growth in the number of LGBT individuals who participate on it. Reality television participants also meet the earlier criteria; they appear on multiple episodes and appear as open LGBT individuals. Finally to not include reality television show is to belittle its seemingly large contribution in this area. One of the first openly gay men on television was on what we would today classify as a reality television

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<sup>17</sup> I mention *Are You Being Served?* for one more important coding reason. I am interested only in the growth of LGBT characters on American television, however that does not mean that television shows produced in Britain or Canada are immediately out, their air time however is altered to the time when it was originally broadcast in America. *Are You Being Served?* originally aired on the BBC, but was then picked up and ran for several years on local PBS affiliates in the United States. Another good example of this fluctuating time scale is with the British science fiction show *Doctor Who*. In Britain the show introduced the character Captain Jack Harkness in 2005 in the episode *The Empty Child* (Moffat 2005). In America however the show wasn't broadcast until 2006 on the Sci-Fi channel. As such it is classified as 2006, instead of 2005.

show.<sup>18</sup> Taking it a step further, the first same-sex “wedding” on television was on a reality television show, MTV’s *Real World* in 1994 (Bunim and Murray 1994). The argument against inclusion would be that reality television shows, since they put real people on television as opposed to scripted characters, are sufficiently different from scripted television as to require their own study. For the purposes of this study however I go back to the basic theoretical framework that this study is testing, which never differentiates between real and scripted characters, the only criteria I have is that a reality television show participant/judge must be open about their LGBT status. One final point on the television airdates that I should mention is that I am only focusing on the original air dates of television shows, not reruns or syndication viewings. This admittedly is missing out a potentially influential piece of the puzzle;<sup>19</sup> however it makes the study much easier to perform. Future studies in this area may find interesting results in seeing if LGBT characters have an influence in the syndication rate of a program; however this study is not equipped to deal with these questions because they would require state polling data and much more research into the types of shows run in local markets.

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<sup>18</sup> The show in question was *An American Family* and it ran on PBS in 1973. It followed around an American family as they went about their daily lives. In the 1970s it was called a documentary, but it followed the same format that current shows we classify as reality TV like *Kate Plus 8* (Hayes 2008) and *Teen Mom* (Dolgen 2009) do today.

<sup>19</sup> It is arguable that *Will & Grace*’s influence is still felt today, because it is still being run in syndication on Lifetime, and that Abby Sullivan from *Law & Order* should count because her character is seen in reruns on networks like TNT. The problem with such classifications is that, while they could work with respect to cable television, local network affiliates have their own syndicated programs which means that including them would require differentiating different areas of the country from one another.

In this part of the study I attempt to measure public opinion on LGBT rights by using polling data. Specifically I am going to look at historically compiled data from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI 2008) and the PEW Research Center (Masci 2009). The historical data will be on questions about LGBT rights in the broadest since, dealing with questions about acceptance and whether LGBT activity was wrong. The reason for this focus is that polling on specific issues didn't begin appearing until recently<sup>20</sup> and a major portion of this section of the research is to reach back to the very beginning of this process. We are lucky on this front because there was a University of Chicago poll that came out just prior to when a lesbian character appeared on *All in the Family* (Bogart 1975) which is usually described as a water-shed moment in the history of LGBT characters on television (Neuwirth 2006). These are all national level polls that I will be using, the reason being that I'm comparing them to nation-wide broadcasted television programs. It is also quite difficult to locate good, historical, state-level polling on some of these issues. I will also be using polling dealing primarily with four separate areas of LGBT rights; legal same-sex marriages/civil unions, open service in the military, support for non-discrimination in employment, and opinions on the moral implications of LGBT activity.<sup>21</sup> The reason for the different questions being tested is that people may support one aspect of the LGBT rights debate but do not support others (Craig et al. 2005).

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<sup>20</sup> It was the 1990s before a poll was performed on "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and the mid to late 1990s until a poll on the legality of same-sex marriage was performed.

<sup>21</sup> It would probably be an accurate statement to say that public opinion on the morality of LGBT behavior does not fit easily into a discussion about LGBT rights. A person's moral opinion does not automatically correlate to a political action. However it is included for two main reasons; one theoretical and the other



## **Test Number Two: Legislative Responsiveness**

The second portion of this study will focus on whether or not these increases have been shown to coincide with governmental action in this area. To do this I will be using a small database from Regina Werum and Bill Winders compiled in 2001. This data includes both bills that either grant/protect LGBT individuals rights and those that deny/remove rights from LGBT individuals. While it will differentiate between positive LGBT bills and negative bills, I am more interested in the sheer volume of all the bills together. The reason I am interested more in the volume of bills, rather than which side actually won in them, is because of points brought up by both Walters (2001) and Streitmatter (2009) who note that increased popular culture visibility can bring both positive and negative consequences. Also remember from the chapter two that governmental actions are more likely to be affected by a Lebow (2008) feedback loop that would result in actions contrary to the growing public opinion. Whether or not there is a correlation between the general public and political action in this area will be the goal of this test. The data also includes proposed legislative actions, because legislative responsiveness must factor in ineffective responses and much as effective ones. When previous studies (Stimson et al. 1999, Page et al. 1987) have demonstrated the affect public opinion has on public policy outputs they have looked at generalities rather than particular issues. The hope is to quantifiably demonstrate that Walters (2001) and

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practical. In the theoretical story this thesis attempts to test, I argue that television normalized LGBT individuals, activities, and behavior. If that is true then we would expect to see an increase in public opinion on the morality of LGBT activity. This measure is also included for a practical reason, it is the question that has been polled consistently over a period of three or more decades.

Streitmatter (2009) are correct; if televised popular culture is correlated to governmental action then we need to broaden our concept of legislative responsiveness. This focus on governmental action is also important because of two important points. First, if popular culture is only moving public opinion and not causing any real political changes, then that is an interesting phenomenon, but it makes no real long-term impact. Secondly, if television is not a leading factor of governmental actions, then it is possible that perhaps governmental actions are the leading indicators of public opinion. Political scientists have found evidence that governmental actions, even low information governmental actions, can influence public opinion. (Flemming et al. 1997, Johnson and Martin 1998, Hoekstra 2003) It is important to at least catalog the number/date of governmental actions so we can know whether or not governmental actions respond to the public or if governmental actions lead the public and set their own agenda.

The Werum and Winders dataset, while comprehensive, only covers a short period of time, a five year period from 1995-1999. To enhance the results in this area I include two case studies on major events in televised public opinion; Ellen DeGeneres's "coming out" and the arrival of "Will & Grace" on television screens. The goal of this section is to attempt to enhance the quantified data gained from the small test that I am able to perform for the limited time period. I choose these particular cases not only because of their prominence in cultural studies, but because they articulate the two ways television programs influence the general public. Ellen DeGeneres is an excellent example of a dramatic increase in visibility due to the unique circumstances and marketing of her coming out. "Will & Grace" demonstrates the normalization that television programming can have on a group of individuals or a type of behavior. While

this is particularly controversial with Queer Theorists it has been shown to positively affect public outlooks toward LGBT individuals (Schiappa et al 2006).

### **Test Number Three: Are Television Viewers Quantifiably Different Than Non-Viewers?**

The final part of this research design is a survey designed to better establish the relationship between political opinions and popular culture television viewing. Assuming that the tests of the Wyatt dataset are proven valid will not by itself prove what variable is causing the other. It could simply be explained that the two things are not necessarily related at all, they just happen to be increasing along the same time period. The survey will attempt to establish that there is a correlation between a person's political opinion and the types of television shows that they watch. The survey has thirty-five questions on it; ten biographical, five that deal with the types of television shows that a person watches, eight dealing with a person's attitude toward LGBT rights, seven that deal with hypothetical television viewing, and six that deal with a person's opinions on gender relationships. The survey, presented in full in Appendix 1, is designed with so many biographical questions so that the results can attempt to compensate for areas that political science literature can demonstrated have an effect on public opinion for LGBT issues. These areas include areas such as religion (Barth and Perry 2009), personal interactions (Brumsbraugh et al. 2008), age (Jones 2009, Sager 2009, Douthat and Salam 2008), ideology (Schaffner and Senic 2006), and opinions of gender roles (Gaines and Garand 2010). The survey also asks about the types of channels that a person watches because it is also possible that some channels are more LGBT friendly than others, and therefore more likely to address issues without actual characters, which would be missed

by the dataset that I use. The questionnaire was offered to students at Oklahoma State University and received 255 responses.<sup>22</sup> Because the survey was only given to college students it opens itself up to several standard bias complaints. This study, while using a convenience sample, should be less affected by these concerns. By studying college students the majority of our sample will fall into the 18-35 advertising demographic, the demographic that television programmers and advertisers are targeting programming to. While this study does not attempt to argue that television programming is consciously attempting to sway public opinion,<sup>23</sup> the fact remains that by looking predominately at the group that television is trying to reach, if we don't see any movement, then it is unlikely that the phenomena exists at all.

This survey along with the long-term polling data are used together in attempting to prove causation. In attempting to determine if television is the actual causal factor in moving public opinion on LGBT rights, then two things are required to be verified. The first thing is that television appearances of LGBT characters are required to pre-date the change in public opinion. This step will hopefully be verified by the first test, the Wyatt (2009) dataset as compared to public opinion polls. If the television output trends upward prior to the public opinion trending upward then it is possible that television is a leading indicator of the public's mood. The two things could be unrelated however, and that is where the survey comes in. The survey should demonstrate that a person's television

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<sup>22</sup> The questionnaire was not given as paper copies to the students; rather it was posted online using the program Survey Monkey. Students would log on in their own time and complete it online.

<sup>23</sup> This study doesn't argue that television isn't trying to influence public opinion either; it simply is arguing that it does.

viewing habits are correlated with their viewing habits. By itself the survey could be dismissed as having the causal chain backwards, that ideology drives popular culture and not visa-versa, or that the survey results should be viewed with caution before drawing comprehensive results from them (Barabas and Jerit 2010). If the survey shows a correlation, and I can demonstrate that television changed before public opinion, then I think that the two pieces of evidence argue in favor of my theoretical framework being validated.

## CHAPTER V

### TIM GUNN'S GUIDE TO STATISTICS – MAKING THE DATASETS WORK.

*“Excluding [black individuals] from television, intentionally or not, could be seen as part of a wider exclusion from British society. Television was influential. By not including black people... it reinforced the image of black people as other, as outsider.” – Narrator Noel Clarke discussing the representation of black individuals on British television broadly, and the program Doctor Who more specifically, from the 1950s to the 1980 (Guerrier 2010).*

At this point in the thesis I will begin to actually test the hypotheses laid out in Chapter Three. Before getting into the actual tests of Hypothesis One I want to present the results of the modified Wyatt dataset (2009). The increase in recurring LGBT characters is present at the end of the chapter in Chart 5-1. Looking at the data shows that since 1971 LGBT characters have been a fixture of television programming every year except one (1974). Looking at this chart also dispels another commonly held assumption about LGBT visibility in televised popular culture. Many scholars begin their examinations with Ellen DeGeneres and “The Puppy Episode” of the sitcom *Ellen* which was broadcast

in the spring of 1997.<sup>24</sup> While I do not want to diminish the importance of this episode (see Chapter Seven for more information on “The Puppy Episode”) the chart shows that LGBT visibility did not begin to take off *Ellen*, in fact “The Puppy Episode” appears right in the middle of an upswing that was already occurring. Note that this increase begins in the 1980s and continues upward in a curvilinear fashion fairly consistently until the early 2000s. Remember that the modified Wyatt dataset is counting all recurring characters, which means that it does not give a special credit to *Ellen* for having a lesbian lead and opposed to *Spin City* (Goldberg and Lawrence 1996-2002) having a gay male secondary character. This chart shows us that based solely on LGBT recurring character visibility begins much earlier than originally theorized.

### **The Affect of Television on Public Opinion**

This chapter will attempt to use the modified Wyatt dataset to test Hypothesis One. The hypothesis expects the following.

*As the number of LGBT characters in popular culture has increased over time public opinion can be shown to rise. In this case popular culture is a leading indicator of the public opinion polling.*

To test this hypothesis I ran a standard regression model with the number of LGBT characters as the independent variable against various polls over that have been

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<sup>24</sup> For instance edited volumes like Thomas Peele’s *Queer Popular Culture* often begin with chapters on Ellen DeGeneres and “The Puppy Episode” (Reed 2007). Scholars like Streitmatter (2009) are correct when they point out that visibility begins much earlier than *Ellen* and includes ground-breaking shows like *Soap* (Harris 1977-1981) which receive less attention then they probably deserve.

fielded on various LGBT issues since 1973 as the dependent variable. The list is a modified version of the Wyatt dataset (2009) which counts the number of recurring openly LGBT characters on television each year from their initial appearance in 1971 until 2008. The poll dealing with morality comes from a poll fielded sporadically from 1973 until 2006 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago<sup>25</sup> and compiled by the American Enterprise Institute (2009). The second poll I chose to use is a poll on equal employment from Gallup<sup>26</sup> from 1977 until 2008 compiled by the American Enterprise Institute (2009). The final two tests use a question on same-sex marriage and open service in the United States armed forces from the PEW Research Center<sup>27</sup> (Masci 2010). Charts 5-2 through 5-5 display the trend lines of these signs over time. Table 5-1 gives the results of the regression analyses for each of these polls and the number of LGBT characters on television. Each of these charts and tables is at the end of the chapter.

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<sup>25</sup> The wording of this poll is, “What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex – do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?” While this question may not be the most neutrally worded, it is the only data that we have that asks the same question over a thirty three year period dealing with LGBT individuals. In the regression data I only counted the percentage of persons who answered “not wrong at all.”

<sup>26</sup> The question read, “In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities.”

<sup>27</sup> The question wording for the same-sex marriage question was, “Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?” The open service in the military question asked, “Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military?”



Both the graphic representations and the regression analyses demonstrate that there is a strong relationship between the number of LGBT character on televised popular culture and public opinion of LGBT issues. In all four of these questions the affect was found to be positive and statistically significant all the way down to the .001 level. These results demonstrate that the number of LGBT characters on television is a significant force in improving four separate areas of the LGBT debate. This finding gives evidence for, at least the first half of Hypothesis One. It shows that over a period of thirty five years televised popular culture has had a statistically significant affect on public opinion polls.

While all four areas of LGBT rights were found to be statistically significant that should not be taken to mean that television was shown to be equally effective across all areas of the debate. The coefficient values demonstrate that it takes more characters to raise opinions on different issues. Public opinion in different areas rose at different rates with the quickest rate of increase being in the area of open service in the armed forces. Following that was legalized marriage, then morality and equal employment. The number of percentage points increase by characters went down as well. These results show us that public opinion on LGBT rights is not universal and crossing across all issue areas but quite complex. There are definitely people who disapprove of LGBT activity for moral reasons but some of those people also think that equal legal rights should still be guaranteed. The increase shows that people are more likely to receive certain messages from LGBT television characters but others take more parasocial contact to actually have their opinions' changed.

## **Data Concerns – A Small “N”**

The quantitative results here indicate that televised popular culture has had a net positive effect on the public opinion toward LGBT individuals. However it would be untruthful to not acknowledge some concern that arise when looking at the bare numbers. The main concern from this basic data is that both values are increasing over a period of time and therefore finding a regression is not exactly a ground breaking finding. The primary concern that I have when looking at the results presented is when looking at the incredibly high R-Squared values that are seen in all four questions studied. From a statistical sense I believe that this problem arrives from a basic lack of data.

As much as this study desires to present quantitative results, this data concern is one that presents itself again and again. The problem is that the first television program that features a recurring LGBT character doesn't appear on American television screens until 1973. This means that when calculating a yearly number of LGBT characters the study only has a maximum number of variables of 35. This problem is then compounded by the small number of polls fielded by researchers in the previous decades. While the University of Chicago was polling on the public's opinion of the morality of LGBT behavior as early as 1973 the poll was not given on an annual basis (AEI 2009). The same problem is seen in PEW Research polls on equal employment which date back to 1977 but also have large gaps of years in between them (Masci 2011). The PEW Research polls on military service and same-sex marriages don't begin until the early 1990s and still feature gaps. This makes any firm test of public opinion over time difficult to confirm without at least a small amount of statistical concern.

## **Is Television Leading?**

These results, while strong, do not however answer the second half of Hypothesis One. Hypothesis One seeks to discover whether or not televised popular culture has been a leading variable of public opinion. The study is interested in knowing whether popular culture preceded the rise in public opinion. While all the tests have been performed with public opinion as the dependent variable it is almost impossible to say with any scientific certainty which variable came first. As mentioned in the first section the availability of polling data does not line up with the availability of television programming data. I believe that the leading effect of television programming on public opinion will be better demonstrated in Chapter Seven when I test the survey results. At this point in the thesis however the aggregate time series data force the an inconclusive conclusion on the second half of the hypothesis.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter the goal was to test aggregate time series data on public opinion toward LGBT rights issues as compared to the number of LGBT characters on television. The regression analyses give evidence that over time television has had an overall positive effect on public opinion toward the morality of LGBT individuals, their right to equal employment, their ability to serve openly in the United States armed forces, and in their support for same-sex marriages. While research in this area is difficult due to the low number of polls that have been performed in this area over time, all the research leads me to conclude that there is a highly positive and significant relationship between public opinion and the television programming presented to a society. The following

chapters will expand on this conclusion, detailing how television programming has affected the actions of elected government officials and a more thorough testing of the effect of television on the general public's opinions.

Charts from Chapter Five.

Chart 5-1: Number of LGBT Characters on Television Over Time

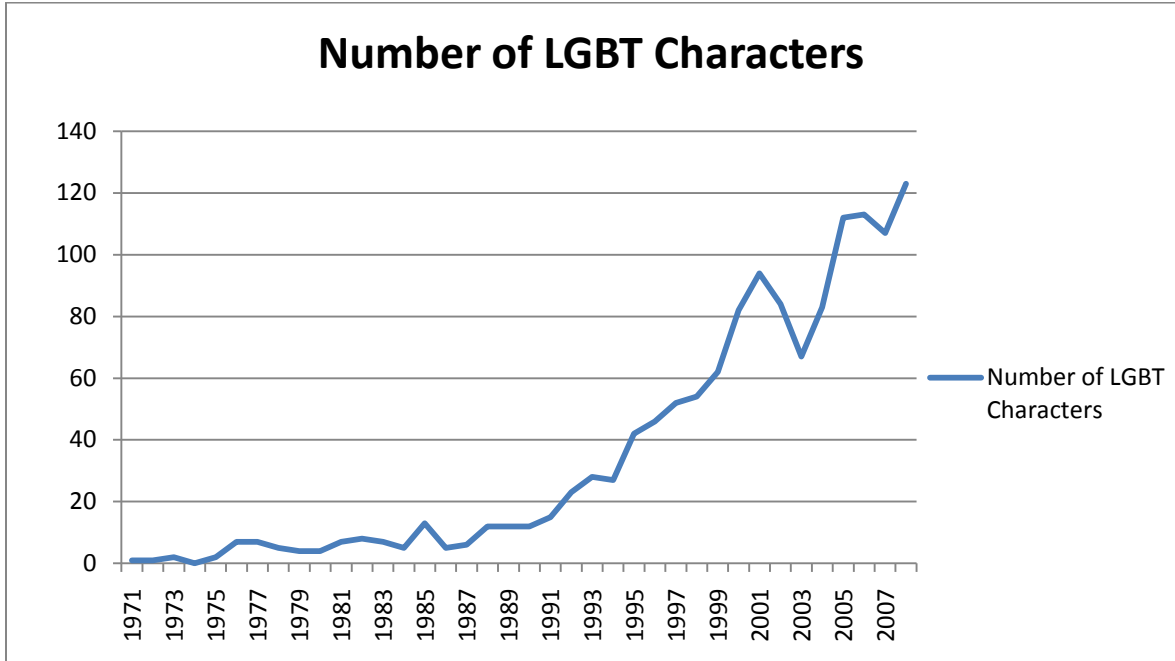
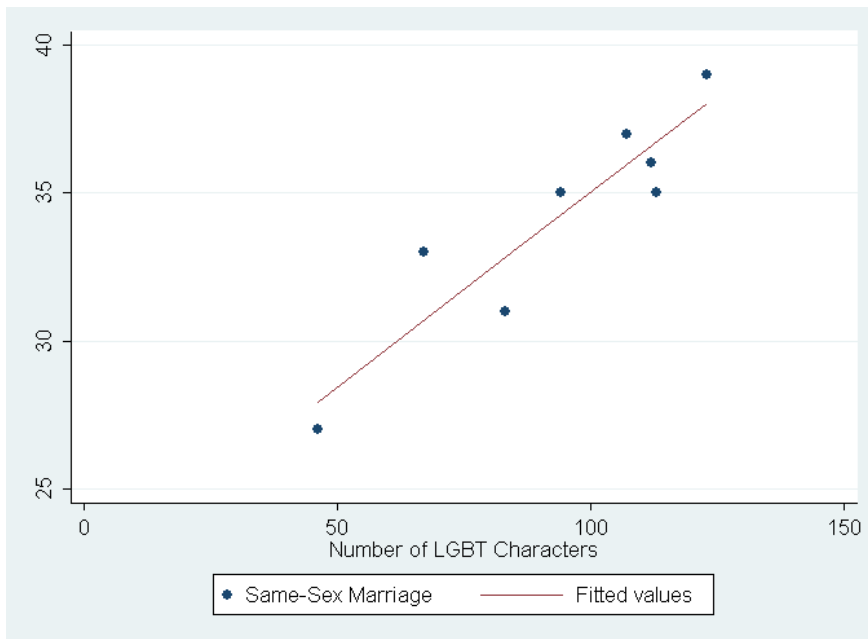
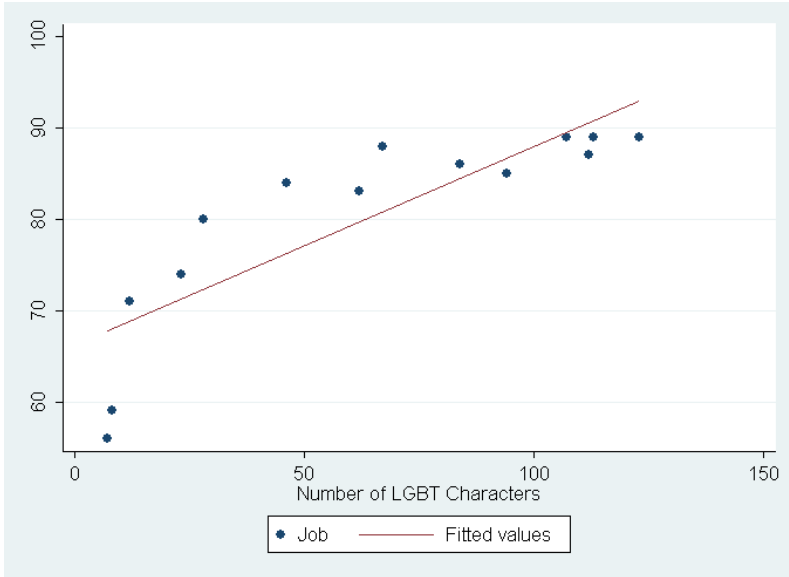


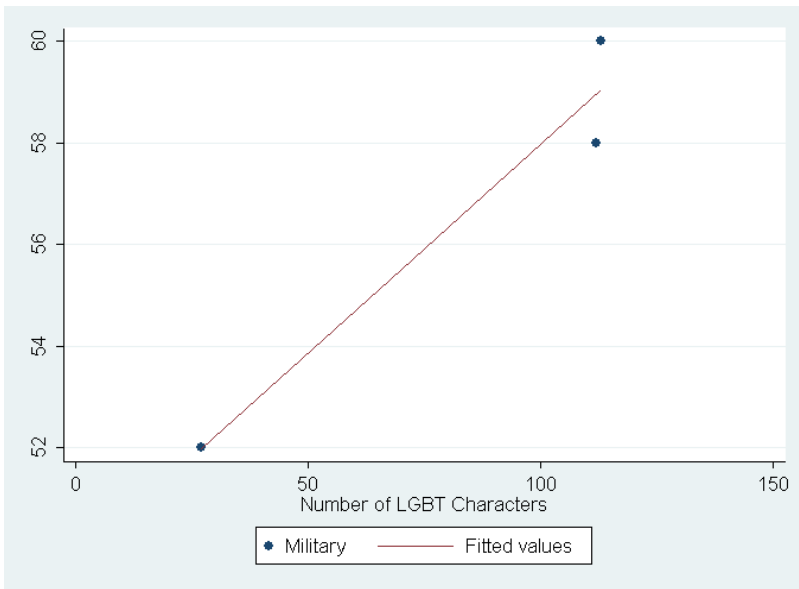
Chart 5-2: LGBT Characters and Same-Sex Marriage



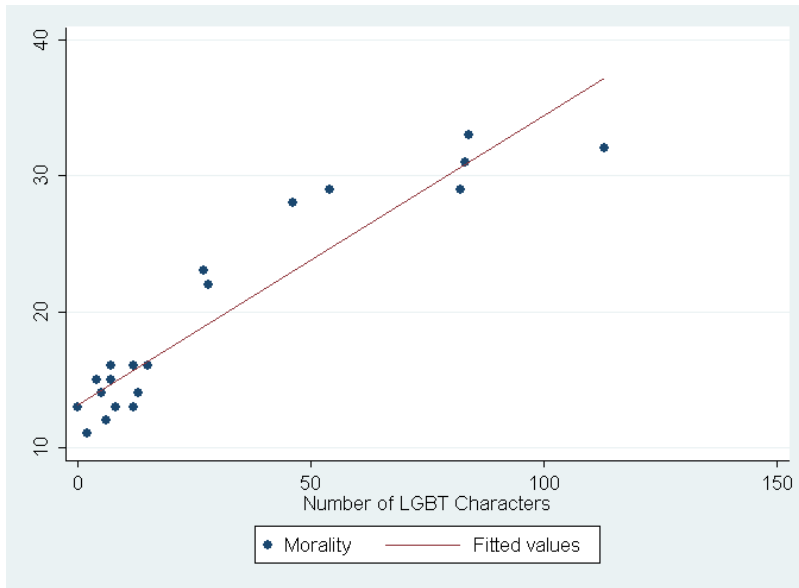
**Chart 5-3: LGBT Characters and Equal Employment Support**



**Chart 5-4: LGBT Characters and Open Military Service**



**Chart 5-5: LGBT Characters and Moral Acceptance**



**Table 5-1: Regression Analyses of LGBT Characters and Public Opinion**

**LGBT Activity is Moral**

Coef.		4.56
Std. Err		0.23
N		99
R-Squared		0.81
Root MSE		16.65
F/df/p	403.04/98/0.00	

**LGBT Individuals Should Not Be Discriminated Against at Work**

Coef.		4.64
Std. Err		0.29
N		154
R-Squared		0.63
Root MSE		20.69
F/df/p	256.91/153/0.00	

**LGBT Individuals Should Be Allowed Legal Marriages**

Coef.		6.49
Std. Err		0.27
N		89
R-Squared		0.87
Root MSE		8.75
F/df/p	579.58/88/0.00	

**LGBT Individuals Should Be Allowed Open Service in Armed Forces**

Coef.		11.02
Std. Err		0.58
N		39
R-Squared		0.91
Root MSE		10.32
F/df/p	357.08/38/0.00	



## CHAPTER VI

### THE L(EGISLATIVE) WORD – TELEVISED POPULAR CULTURE AND GOVERNMENTAL ACTION

*“Meaning and culture are not epiphenomenal; they are not merely extensions of political power, which the puppet masters manipulate in a rational manner to control the masses. Rather, political power is itself constituted and rooted in culture, shared meanings, and in the perceived correctness of a leader’s actions” – Dr. Mark A. Wolfgram (2011).*

In this chapter I want to test Hypothesis Two. Hypothesis Two says that the volume of LGBT characters within popular culture affects public policy. We saw in chapter five that popular culture had a correlation with public opinion but is that the only thing it is correlated with? Is television actually making a significant difference in the legislative agenda of the various state governments?

Where the previous chapter dealt only with aggregate data and quantifiable results this chapter will also feature two case studies from the five year period from 1995-1999 that I am going to quantifiably test. This is a change from the more quantified previous

chapters of the project. I will use quantifiable data in this chapter but will also add in a qualitative case study to enhance the results. It is not possible to discover large macro-level results from a five year sample of data. What I hope to demonstrate with the statistics and qualitative descriptions is that the same macro-level processes that happen with respect to public opinion are happening with governmental actions in the sample. If they are happening in this time period it is reasonable to expect that they are at work today as well.

To test this I have used data first published by Regina Werum and Bill Winders in 2001. Their research is invaluable because while its time period is rather brief (1995-1999) it is complete in a way that other research on legislative actions often miss. The most important addition this dataset makes is that it covers legislative actions both proposed and successfully implemented. While legislation that doesn't pass is not in and of itself something that is affecting the general public it does give a good feel for what issues the legislature either feels are important or feels that the general public will find important. Proposed legislation also ties up legislative processes and therefore is a valuable window into what issues the legislature is actually spending their time on. The second point of interest is that the Werum and Winders dataset is that they include both instances of positive legislation dealing with LGBT individuals and negative legislation.

The fact that the dataset covers both positive and negative proposals of LGBT issues, is very important because of what research has shown us about visibility. Cultural studies experts who work on concepts like visibility like Suzanne Walters (2001) have noted that visibility has both a positive and a negative component. In public opinion polls this is a difficult concept to locate, especially because of the incredibly negative starting point we see in polling on issues dealing with LGBT individuals (Masci 2009). When considering legislative action, especially early in the political debate, it is vital to look at both proposed bills that are in favor of LGBT rights and proposed bills that are opposed to them. While public opinion has steadily been on the

rise in the major areas of the debate it still started off quite low. This means that legislatures have had to choose between rising public opinion on one side and majority support on the other.

### **What Does the Data Say?**

Looking at the following data (Chart 6-1) the thing to notice is that there are two major jumps in the number of bills being proposed at the state level. The first jump is between 1996 and 1997 and a major jump is between 1998 and 1999. The difference between bills considered by state houses increased slightly between 1995 and 1996, and was negligible between 1997 and 1998. What happened to cause those increases and why is one so much more massive than the other? It doesn't matter if we are talking about legislation that favors or opposes LGBT individuals particularly, something has caused a massive change in legislative priorities. We can infer that some major event had to occur from the work of Congressional scholar R. Douglas Arnold (1990) who, like many scholars, argued that legislators' chief desire is to be re-elected. Arnold writes that legislators' actions are tempered by the attentiveness of the general public. In the event of an inattentive public legislators are more likely to take the politically safe option because of the fear of backlash. While I have demonstrated that it is highly likely that television has played a role in increasing public opinion, the evidence presented in this paper has also been gradual, and even today opinion is also divisive on aspects of the LGBT civil rights debate. It would make sense that unless legislators were forced by some event to respond that they would avoid the issue as much as possible.

I have attempted to perform a basic regression model, despite the limitation of the number of variables, in order to provide some statistical basis for the case studies that will follow. In the first table (Table 6-1) I use LGBT characters as the dependent variable and governmental actions as the independent variable. In the second table (Table 6-2) I use a poll conducted by the Comparative Institutional Research Program and UCLA of college freshman on the importance of

governmental legislation dealing with LGBT rights. Theoretically the second should be correlated, it's a measure of people who argue for increasing government regulation<sup>28</sup>. The tables at the end of the chapter (Table 6-1 and Table 6-2) show the results of two separate regression analyses.

While the small number of observations means that this test is by no means comprehensive, and political scientists will view the specific numbers with some trepidation, what should be noted is the extent to which one is extremely significant, and the other is the opposite. LGBT characters are extremely significant to governmental actions on the state level. Public opinion in favor of the government repealing anti-LGBT legal statues however was extremely insignificant.

I freely acknowledge that with such a small time period of data to examine it is difficult to make a definitive answer with only tables and charts. To enhance these results I want to perform two brief case studies on the two of the major events dealing with LGBT rights and individuals from 1995-1999. These events; "The Puppy Episode" of the sitcom *Ellen*, and Will & Grace's debut and move to Thursday evenings all helped to dramatically raise the visibility and perceived normalcy of LGBT individuals. As the paper hopes to show all three had a quantifiable impact, and the television shows seemed to have the largest impact.

### **State Government Response to Federal Actions**

One possibility is that these state level actions are a response to legislative action and debate on the federal level. If this is the case we should see a great deal of activity of action on

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<sup>28</sup> The poll is a Likert scale question stating "It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relations." I have compiled the percentage of respondents who said that they felt they either strongly or somewhat disagreed with that statement. I use this poll not only because it asks about the need for government regulation, or the repeal of that legislation, but because it was fielded every single year of the dataset.

the federal level, but what is interesting is that we don't. It has been argued that the legislative process in America is an attempt by legislatures to send signals to groups (Kartmann 1989) and even to their fellow legislators within their party (Hasecke and Mycoff 2007). If the state legislatures of the time were attempting to send a message to the federal government, then they were incredibly far behind the times. The last major change on the federal level was the Defense of Marriage Act, which was passed in 1996. DOMA is widely referred to as a response to a state of Hawaii court case which came very close to legalizing same-sex marriages, but that case (Baehr v. Miike 1996) predates that act as well. There is a measurable increase in the number of state actions in 1997 from 1996 however this increase pales in comparison to the increase that happens from 1998 to 1999. That increase is not explained by major federal actions because DOMA was the last major federal legislation dealing with LGBT issues until the Matthew Shepard action in early 1999. Nor can we argue that state legislatures were following the lead of a new Congress, because the election of 1998 led to the exact same make-up as the previous Congress (University of Michigan 1998). Another explanation for some of the increase comes from real world events like the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard. In late 1998 the openly gay college student Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered by two individuals because of his sexual orientation. The brutality of the murder made it a national headline and has been immortalized in popular culture. It certainly requires some of the responsibility for increasing legislative action, but legislative action increased across the board and not just in the area of hate crimes law. There have to be additional explanations.

When we accept the Kartmann (1989) argument, that legislative acts can be seen as a signaling mechanism, the question is who they are signaling. As the last paragraph shows state legislatures could not have been responding to the national legislature because the time frame is simply unworkable. When examining the major events dealing with LGBT individuals on a broad national scale however there are two events that happened post-DOMA and prior to our major

jump of legislative activity in 1999. Two of them are entirely creations of televised popular culture and the third was a tragedy which was seized on and re-broadcast as popular culture. These two events are, in chronological order, “The Puppy Episode” of *Ellen* and the premiere of *Will & Grace*. The coupling of these three events, all of which happened within an eighteen month period, were a major bump in the visibility of LGBT individuals and concerns and helped to lead to the increased salience of those issues. Within the remainder of the chapter I want to examine the broad cultural impact of these events and how visibility led to the quantifiably different legislative focus.

### **The Puppy Episode – Ellen DeGeneres/Morgan comes out**

The first of these events to happen chronologically was when ABC broadcast “The Puppy Episode” of the sitcom *Ellen* in April of 1997 (DeGeneres 1997). The episode featured DeGeneres’s character Ellen Morgan, realizing that she is a lesbian and coming out to her friends. Much has been written about the content of this episode and the series moving forward and so I will not go into great detail on that discussion here.<sup>29</sup> What I want to focus on rather is “The Puppy Episode” as a cultural event and how it pushed the visibility of LGBT individuals through the medium of popular culture.

Understanding the cultural impact of Ellen’s coming out means understanding that for many different reasons, it was an event. The “coming out” of character Ellen Morgan began almost a year before hand when show producers began negotiating with ABC about having the character come out (Lo 2005). Word was leaked of the impending episode more than six months prior to the actual event and was heralded and discussed on the internet by organizations like

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<sup>29</sup> If you want a more detailed analysis of the impact of The Puppy Episode on both popular culture and Ellen DeGeneres’ later career good examples are the analyses of Jennifer Reed (2007) or Rodger Streitmatter (2009).

GLAAD (PinkNews 2007) and the discussion was so prevalent that it was actually parodied on an episode of the popular *The Larry Sanders Show* by DeGeneres herself. (Holland 1996) While there was negative backlash from the rumors and then the official announcement (Tracy 2005, Tropiano 2002) ABC did not pull the episode. In fact they even rejected an early draft of the episode for not going far enough (Kaufman 2008). The event was hyped even further by gags on the show itself and appearances Ellen made on talk-shows. (Reed 2007) Finally Ellen DeGeneres came out herself as a lesbian on the cover of TIME magazine itself a mere two weeks prior to the episodes air date (Handy et al. 1997) and appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* with her then girlfriend the day “The Puppy Episode” was broadcast. (Marchessault and Sawchuck 2000, pg. 81)

Even the opponents of The Puppy Episode did little to stop it from becoming an event, in fact their actions actually made it seem even more impactful. Groups like the American Family Association got advertisers to pull support from the episode (in the case of JC Penny’s and Chrysler) and permanently (in the case of Wendy’s). However each of these events was covered by the media and hyped the episode even more. When groups in Abilene, Texas and Birmingham, Alabama attempted to ban the show their attempts were either unsuccessful or caused LGBT activists to arrange for the episode to be shown on movie theatre screens (Lapham 1997).

When it was finally shown, The Puppy Episode reached an estimated 42 million viewers, the highest ratings of the show’s history (Lo 2005). While it should be noted that *Ellen*’s coming out did not inspire change overnight and it did not save her television show, nor did it demonstrate that ABC was particularly interested in advocating for a progressive cause. When the show returned for Season Five ABC placed a parental advisory warning on the series (Johnson 2008, pg. 158) something which upset DeGeneres (Ehrenstein 1998, pg. 315) However ABC, DeGeneres, and critics of The Puppy Episode did succeed in making the episode a cultural event. This event dramatically raised the visibility of the LGBT community across the country. The

record ratings of the event coupled with its critical appeal (it won both an Emmy and a Peabody award) allowed it to reach a much higher audience than the show *Ellen* did on a normal week. The organization GLAAD credits this increase in visibility with an increase in tolerance for LGBT individuals (PinkNews 2007).

The Puppy Episode may have broken ground with respect to the event it created and that it dealt with a lead character, but it was not the only way in which televised popular culture increased visibility on LGBT individuals between DOMA and the 1999 legislative increase, but it was not the only one. The next event chronologically happened outside of the umbrella of popular culture, however its adoption by popular culture gave it a second life.

### **Will & Grace – LGBT Characters and Normalcy**

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1998 NBC television broadcast the first episode of the situation comedy *Will & Grace* (Kohan and Mutchnick 1998-2006). The program, coming on the heels of *Ellen*'s cancellation the previous spring, was a slight gamble in that it similarly had a LGBT lead character. The comedy, based around four characters in New York City two of whom are gay men, ended up running on NBC for eight years and almost 200 hundred episodes. In this section I want to focus on the first season (which ran in to early 1999) and the response to it.

While the hype leading up to the premiere of *Will & Grace* was not the same as the hype leading up to *Ellen* there are some important similarities. The first is that NBC was obviously interested in a series that had LGBT characters and themes. The original pitch featured a number of characters who were removed at the request of Warren Littlefield who asked the creators to focus in on the relationship between the straight woman and the gay man (*Will & Grace* 2003). The actor John Barrowman ended up being rejected for the role of Will Truman because he



“wasn’t gay enough” (Savage 2006).<sup>30</sup> It premiered to decent ratings for NBC which became higher once the show was moved from its original time slot opposite Monday Night Football to the NBC Thursday night comedy line-up (Nielsen ratings 1999).

While this is not an attempt to develop a content analysis of the television show I do want to note that the content of a typical *Will & Grace* episode is quite different from the final season of *Ellen*. While both shows prominently featured LGBT characters *Will & Grace*, especially the first season, features remarkably little LGBT content. During the first season an overarching theme is that Will has just ended a long term relationship and “needs time” before he will be ready to begin dating again. While Grace constantly tells Will he needs to get back on the dating scene<sup>31</sup> Whenever Will does go on a date, Grace is on a date with the same individual and the two characters bicker over who is actually on the date (Idelson and Lotterstein 1999). At the same time however, while *Will & Grace* is not presenting a world with a LGBT physical contact, it also very rarely features any backlash to its LGBT characters or the characters struggling with their orientation.<sup>32</sup> Creator David Kohn argued this was part of the reason for *Will & Grace*’s prolonged success saying that, “*Will & Grace* had a better shot at succeeding where *Ellen* failed, however, because Will has known about his homosexuality for twenty years. He’s not exploring that awkward territory for the first time as *Ellen* did. The process of self-discovery and the pain most gay men go through is fascinating, but the average American is put off by it” (Thompson 1998).

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<sup>30</sup> The irony of this statement is that John Barrowman actually is openly gay, whereas Eric McCormack is straight.

<sup>31</sup> Explicitly pointing out in episode nine, “The Truth About Will & Dogs”, that “you deserve someone who is at least potty trained, its time” (Kohan and Mutchnick 1998).

<sup>32</sup> There are some obvious exceptions, but they generally fall in later seasons (outside of the period I am attempting to study here).

The lack of self-discovery and the lack of conflict between Will's LGBT status and the larger world is something that makes the show very controversial to cultural studies experts. The show has attracted a good number of criticisms from the cultural studies field for the ways it portrayed its LGBT characters and situations. Some cultural studies experts have argued that because of this lack of conflict the show portrays a hetero-normative viewpoint (Battles and Hilton-Morrow 2002). Some even go farther than that, arguing that the gay man/straight woman dynamic portrayed in television and films is inherently sexist (Shugart 2003). There is also research which argues that *Will & Grace* is inherently feminizing gay men (Linneman 2008). If *Ellen* should best be understood as an event *Will & Grace* should be understood as a normalizing factor.

What *Will & Grace* lacked in a nuanced representation of the struggles of the LGBT community in the late 1990s and early 2000s it made up for in its normalization. The show, through its use of the standard tropes/plotlines of situation comedies it demonstrates to the American public that LGBT individuals are the same as the same individuals they've seen on television for decades. There are actual statistics that back this statement up. When researchers found evidence for the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis, they were testing based exclusively on *Will & Grace* episodes (Schiappa et al 2006).

### **Conclusion: Television Makes Government Move**

This chapter has attempted to answer the question of whether or not televised popular culture in the area of LGBT rights can be said to influence governmental actions. In order to answer this question I presented a piece of data, Werum and Winters dataset (2001) which counted the number of proposed state legislative actions for a three year period from 1997-1999. The most interesting finding in this data is that while 1997-1998 levels are relatively stable the values almost double in a single year in 1999. Going off the assumption that these legislatures

would have to be acting on some sort of external stimuli to have a jump that high, I went searching for the stimuli.

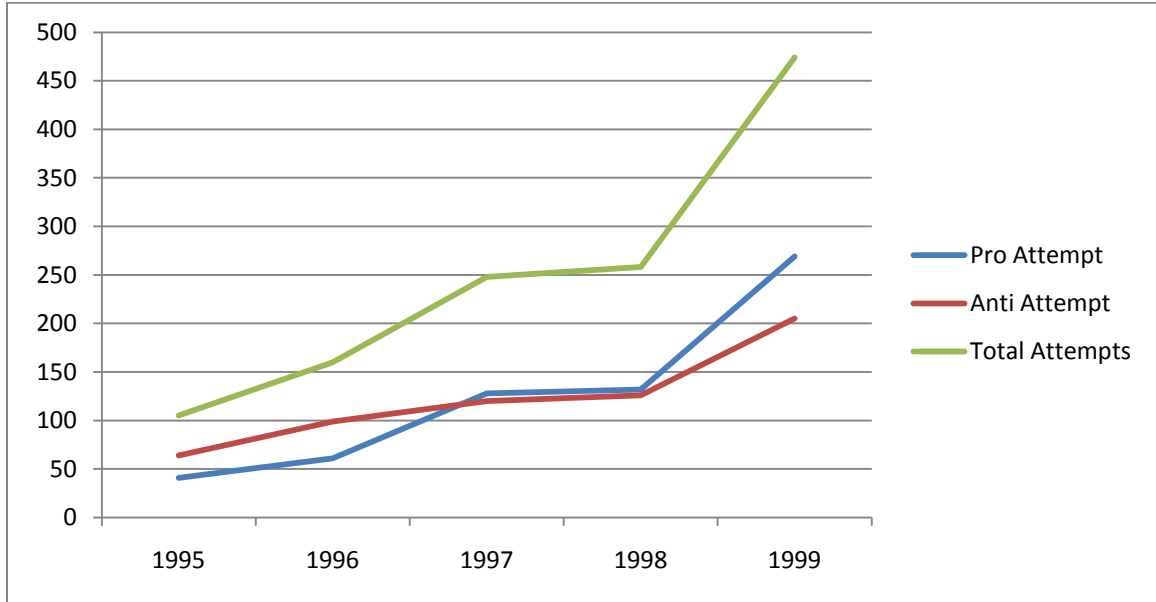
I found little evidence that the state governments could have been responding to any national governmental push on the issue, because in 1997 and 1998 there was no national governmental push on the issue. DOMA was passed in 1996, but if there was going to be a rush of state actions based off that law then we should have seen them much earlier. There is a good deal of evidence that at least some of the bump was related of the death of Matthew Shepard, however I find it lacking as a complete description. The Werum and Winters dataset clearly shows an increase in all issue areas in 1999 and some are in as dramatic an increase as hate crime legislation.

The other major events in LGBT visibility history that happen in this area come from popularized television culture. In the spring of 1997 Ellen DeGeneres and ABC crafted and built up a major event solely around her “coming out” on national television. When researching that episode remember that *Ellen* is not only important because she came out as a LGBT individual, she is important because she was sold as an LGBT individual. People tuned in the see ‘The Puppy Episode’ as much for a sense of history as they did to laugh at the jokes. Within eighteen months *Will & Grace* is released which tones down much of the conflict of LGBT life in American society. While there were definitely negatives with taking this approach, one positive was that it made being LGBT normal to Americans who did not have LGBT individuals in their personal lives.

The increases in state legislative action should not be interpreted as completely beholden to the characters and storylines on television of the time. Real world events, like the Defense of

Marriage Act and the Matthew Shepard tragedy, certainly had an impact on the increase, but it cannot explain everything.<sup>33</sup>

**Chart 6-1: State Legislative Attempts at Bills Targeting LGBT Individuals**



**Table 6-1: LGBT Characters and Government Actions**

Source	SS	df	MS			
Model	226.73459	1	226.73459	Number of obs =	5	
Residual	10.06541	3	3.35513667	F( 1, 3) =	67.58	
Total	236.8	4	59.2	Prob > F =	0.0038	
				R-squared =	0.9575	
				Adj R-squared =	0.9433	
				Root MSE =	1.8317	

characters	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
totalattem~s	.0534499	.0065019	8.22	0.004	.0327578	.074142
_cons	37.89097	1.814425	20.88	0.000	32.11666	43.66528

<sup>33</sup> The Werum and Winters dataset shows that hate crime legislation went from 21 bills considered in 1998 to 87 bills in 1999. I would generally attribute this increase entirely to Matthew Shepard's murder and subsequent media coverage.

**Table 6-2: Public Opinion in Favor of Governmental Regulation/Actions Dealing with  
LGBT Individuals**

Source	SS	df	MS			
Model	2.86690439	1	2.86690439	Number of obs = 5		
Residual	10.3330956	3	3.4443652	F( 1, 3) = 0.83		
Total	13.2	4	3.3	Prob > F = 0.4289		
				R-squared = 0.2172		
				Adj R-squared = -0.0437		
				Root MSE = 1.8559		

gayrights~t	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
totalattem~s	.0060103	.0065878	0.91	0.429	-.0149552	.0269757
_cons	66.10344	1.838394	35.96	0.000	60.25285	71.95403

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SURVEYED LIFE OF THE AMERICAN TEENAGER (COLLEGE STUDENT EDITION)

*“It is important to recognize that it is popular culture conventions that help make gay and lesbian characters palatable for a mainstream audience, thus, creating the space for increased media visibility of gays and lesbians” – Kathleen Battles and Wendy Hilton-Morrow (2002).*

In this chapter of the thesis I want to focus on the general public’s political opinion as correlated with their television viewing habits. The goal of this chapter is to go more in depth on the results presented in chapter five. Now that the project has statistically shown that rises in the volume of LGBT characters on television is significant when dealing with several areas of the LGBT rights debate, I want to see if that significance also holds true on an individual level. It is an attempt to discover whether or not individuals that watch LGBT characters on television are more likely to be supportive of LGBT issues.

This chapter therefore is an attempt to test the final two hypotheses from Chapter Three. Hypothesis Three suggested that merely watching a LGBT character on television regularly would have a positive effect on LGBT issue support. This concept of parasocial

contact has had some research evidence in the past (Schiappa et al. 2006) but that was based on a single television program and was testing support for political rights and privileges.

This chapter will also attempt to answer Hypothesis Four. It will attempt to discover whether two individuals with similar demographics will have statistically significant difference of opinion if their television viewing habits are different. Once those two hypotheses have been answered the validity of the formal model can be ascertained. Remember that back in Chapter Three I wrote a model to predict the likelihood of a person's being in favor of an LGBT rights issue was

$$S = (N + T) - (A + G + R)$$

Where **S** is the level of support, **N** is the level of social contact with LGBT individuals a person has, **T** is the level of LGBT characters the individual views on a regular basis, **A** is the person's age over 30, **G** is the person's favorability toward traditional gender roles, and **R** is the intolerance of the individuals' religion. If Hypothesis Three and Four are correct then this simple model could therefore be a starting point for having a mathematical predictor for the level of support of people for LGBT rights and issues.

To test these hypotheses I am using a survey given to 255 college students during the spring of 2011. Obviously this is a convenience sample and is not going to be representative of the general public, however I believe that the sample still holds a great deal of value because of the age group it targets. Young adults are one of the groups that are most likely to be supportive of LGBT rights (Jones 2009, Sager 2009, Douthat and Salam 2008). Young adults though are also one of the prime target demographics for both television producers and advertisers. This means that I am going to be looking for evidence that a group of people who are being targeted by television are listening to a message they are already likely to be favorable toward. This makes it easier to test whether or not television is really affecting its target audience, and if I find no evidence of it in this test I would argue that no evidence of it would be found in a more general

audience test. The convenience sample also makes it easier to hold demographics constant, and that makes testing Hypothesis Four easier. If people with identical demographic backgrounds can be shown to have differences in the likelihood they will support LGBT rights then Hypothesis Four will be confirmed.

### **Is Television a Positive Influence on LGBT Issues?**

In the remainder of this chapter I want to perform some correlation tests on the respondent's answers to the survey. The goal of the survey was to ask about both their television viewing habits and their political opinions. These respondents answers were then correlated using the statistical methodology on the Survey Monkey website. This allows me to test the percentage of people who support one political opinion over another.

The first test I want to perform is just a basic test, controlling for no other variables to see if there is any difference in the political opinions of people who listed themselves as viewers of television programs with LGBT characters and those who do not watch those programs. The survey questions dealt with four different aspects of the LGBT debate; tolerance, job opportunities, same-sex marriage, and open service in the armed forces.<sup>34</sup> In this test I gave the survey respondents ten television shows all on the air during the Spring of 2011 and with the

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<sup>34</sup> While the entire survey is reproduced in Appendix 1, I wanted to specifically point out the questions asked specifically. All questions were five point likert scale questions asking for the respondents' agreement with various statements. The tolerance question said, "I am tolerant toward LGBT activity." The job opportunity question said, "I think that LGBT individuals have the right to not be discriminated against in employment." The same-sex marriage question said, "I support the right for LGBT individuals to have legally recognized marriages." This question came after a question dealing with civil unions so respondents would not be confused as to what they were answering. Finally the open-service question said, "I support the right of LGBT individuals to serve openly in the United States Armed Forces."



exception of one, all were frequently in the Nielsen rating top twenty-five shows for the week<sup>35</sup>; five with LGBT characters and five without. While this method obvious leaves out many important shows that deal with LGBT individuals, it was effective in capturing responses. 100% of the respondents answered that they watched at least one of the ten television shows regularly.

This survey is testing viewers who claim to watch at least one of the five television programs featuring a recurring LGBT character. I perform four separate tests controlling for certain variables and holding various things constant. All the results are in Table 7-1 at the end of the chapter. The numbers in the chart contain the percentages of the survey respondents who stated they agreed that LGBT should receive the protections asked about. The first comparison does not control for any variables, rather it compares television viewers' political support as compared to a null hypothesis, all television viewers. If Hypothesis Three is incorrect then we should see no real difference between the two numbers. The second comparison features only survey respondents who claimed to have no social contact with LGBT individuals. As with the first test I perform a comparison between television viewers and a null hypothesis of all viewers.

The third and the fourth comparisons in Table 7-1 attempt to test Hypothesis Four, when demographics are controlled for do we see a difference in the level of support based solely on

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<sup>35</sup> The ten television programs were; *American Idol*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Brothers and Sisters*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigations*, *Dancing With the Stars*, *Glee*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *House*, *Modern Family*, and *Two and a Half Men*. The only show not in the top twenty-five was *Brothers and Sisters*. All the shows were in at least their second season so as not to have a bias against new programs. All the programs appeared on network television, so all viewers would have access to them. One point of concern is that a majority of the television programs with LGBT characters appear on ABC. The reason for this is verified in GLAAD's report on the previous year's television programs, ABC has many more LGBT characters than any other network (GLAAD 2010a). While *American Idol* and *House* have had LGBT characters on previously they did not have any on during the time the survey was being conducted.

television viewing habits. Using the formal model I control for several demographics. In the third comparison I control for variables that would make a person more likely to support LGBT individuals and rights. The respondents are all in the same age group, they all have social contact with LGBT individuals, they profess to be opposed to traditional gender roles,<sup>36</sup> and attend religious services infrequently.<sup>37</sup> In the fourth comparison the opposite demographic bias is tested so television can be tested in people whose demographics make them less likely to be supporters of LGBT rights. The respondents are all in the same age group, they all have social contact with LGBT individuals<sup>38</sup>, profess support for traditional gender roles, and attend religious services multiple times a month.

When looking at the table the thing that should stand out is that of the sixteen total comparisons to the null, fifteen are positive responses and thirteen feature a 2.5 percent increase. The questions dealing with tolerance, non discrimination, and same-sex marriage were almost universally positive. While the first two tests leave open to possibility that demographics and ideology could be causing the differences, but tests three and four control for that possibility and

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<sup>36</sup> The respondents in this case disagreed with the statement, “I think that in a relationship between a man and a woman, the man is the head of the household.”

<sup>37</sup> An attempt was made to ask about religious denomination, in case there was a large population of people who professed to be a member of a religion or denomination that is in favor of LGBT rights. However this was not needed because only one respondent claimed to be a member of a religious denomination that supports equal protection for LGBT individuals and couples, and that respondent did not attend religious services enough to be coded as a religious individual. The frequency was based on the following question, “How often do you attend religious services? Once or twice a....” People who answer that they only attended religious services once or twice every couple of months were coded as infrequent visitors.

<sup>38</sup> Ideally respondents in this area would have had no social contact with LGBT individuals, however once all those demographic areas were coded for, and then television was factored in there were no respondents who fit all the criteria and did not watch and LGBT character on television.

still find a positive increase. The only area of the LGBT debate that doesn't neatly fit into this conclusion is open service in the United States Armed Forces. Even when the numbers were small, the vast majority of the variables tested achieved statistical significance, even at the .01 level. The only exception was found in the predicted opponents section where none of the variables achieved this level of significance, and some were not significant at all. I will discuss the implications of this finding more in the conclusion section, but it is an interesting contrast to the extreme significance found on the supporters section of the model.

The other thing to notice is that while the increase caused by television is important, and should be considered by future political scientists the increase is much less than social contact. This is predicted by Hypothesis Four, television allows people to visualize the political debate but not as much as a friend or relative does.

### **Conclusion: What Has the Survey Shown Us?**

The test of the survey participants give us an initial look at how the television viewing habits of young adults affect their public opinion. This chapter finds verification for the final two hypotheses of the project. The survey verifies that while television viewing of LGBT characters has a positive effect, it is less of an effect than social contact. The survey also verifies Hypothesis Four for morality, equal employment, and same-sex marriage debates. This chapter finds evidence that the formal model is effective.

$$\mathcal{S} = (\mathcal{N} + \mathcal{T}) - (\mathcal{A} + \mathcal{G} + \mathcal{R})$$

By finding positive differences amongst similar demographic groups also lends more evidence to verify the second half of Hypothesis One. It is not easy to explain those differences without giving television viewing the credit and if it is causing that change it may be causing the other changes that have been seen in the earlier chapters.

While the survey has given evidence that Hypothesis Three and Hypothesis Four are correct for most aspects of the debate, they do cast doubt on opinion on open service in the armed forces. There are some possible reasons for the inability to verify these results. The first is that between the time the question was formulated and the time it was given to survey respondents, the United States repealed its policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (Stolberg 2010). The other reason is that while television programming has dealt with both tolerance and long-term relationships amongst LGBT individuals, there have not been many television programs dealing with recurring LGBT characters in active service in the armed forces.

Now that all the tests have been run, and the results presented the final chapter will feature a few concluding thoughts and some ideas for further studies that could build upon these results.

**Table 7-1: Survey Results - Percentage of Respondents**

Type of Coding	Tolerance	Equal Employment	Same-Sex Marriage	Open Service in USAF
<b>All Respondents</b>				
Television Viewers	69.7	81.8	50	70.5
Null Hypothesis	63.3	74.5	43	64.6
No Television Viewers	57.2	64.7	36.2	55.4
Difference with Null	<b>6.4</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5.9</b>
Television Differences	<b>12.5***</b>	<b>17.3***</b>	<b>13.8***</b>	<b>14.6***</b>
<b>No Social Contact</b>				
Television Viewers	41.2	58.8	41.1	41.2
Null Hypothesis	34.1	49	21.3	40.4
No Television Viewers	30	47.4	10	40
Difference with Null	<b>7.1</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Television Differences	<b>11.2***</b>	<b>11.4***</b>	<b>31.1***</b>	<b>1.2***</b>
<b>Predicted LGBT Supporters</b>				
Television Viewers	86.6	93.3	86.7	90
Null Hypothesis	84.1	90.9	81.8	81.8
No Television Viewers	82.4	72.3	76.4	58.8
Difference with Null	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>8.2</b>
Television Differences	<b>4.2***</b>	<b>21***</b>	<b>10.3***</b>	<b>31.2***</b>

Predicted LGBT Opponents

Television Viewers	48.6	71.5	22.8	48.6
Null Hypothesis	47.8	62.7	19.4	50.8
No Television Viewers	47.1	53	12.6	52.9
Difference with Null	<b>0.8</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>-2.2</b>
Television Differences	<b>1.5</b>	<b>19.5*</b>	<b>10.2*</b>	<b>-4.3</b>
Number of Cases	<b>268</b>			

## CHAPTER VIII

### UNHAPPILY EVER AFTER – CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND IDEAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

*Bill Simmons - [Visibility] is like baby steps. Every step is a good step. It doesn't matter who takes it or what's said, what matters is that the step happened.*

*LZ Granderson – Yeah, I would definitely agree with that because you never know where anyone is at any particular point.*

*The preceeding is part of a discussion on Bill Simmon's podcast on sexual orientation in popular culture, sports, and sports coverage.*

The goal of this thesis has been to make a quantifiable claim about the impact of televised popular culture on public opinion of LGBT rights. In a broad sense it has also been an attempt to quantify and formally model the affect of culture on the American electorate. Now that quantifiable data has been produced and tested, one of the goals of researchers moving forward should be to increase and hone the data and expose the model to new variables.

## What Have We Learned?

Looking at the results gathered in this book we should see that the affect televised popular culture has had on public opinion and on state governments is seemingly contradictory, slow and methodical in one area and lightning quick in another. Television may be correlated with both but why does the electorate behave differently than the government? Television's power to change public opinion is slow, increasing support steadily over a period of many years. It uses its presentations of LGBT characters to increase both LGBT visibility and normalize behavior to the general public. While normalization is controversial with cultural studies experts and queer theorists it has been a statistically significant affect from the 1970s to the late 2000s. This affect could be because the Wyatt dataset used in this project takes all LGBT characters on televised popular culture without any content analysis. While it would be tempting to use content analysis to pick out characters and shows that don't fit modern conceptions of what is an effective portrayal of an LGBT individual, to do so would leave out the characters and themes that might be influencing others. Keeping a complete Wyatt dataset may make the results less meaningful to cultural studies experts but it makes them no less significant.

When dealing with governmental actions, especially state actions, the response is much more dramatic and sudden. When considering the government it is important to consider both the content and the context in which a piece of popular culture has been developed. When an event like "The Puppy Episode" of *Ellen* dramatically increases visibility through not only the culture itself but through the event of the culture itself the government is more likely to respond, in both positive and negative ways. If there is a conclusion to be noted in this combining these two conclusions it is that outside of some hypothetical threshold the government is not going to respond to steady increases in the broader popular cultural narrative. What is required to spur on government action in a significant manner is a spike in visibility or normalization from the general public, to which the government may respond in either a positive or negative way.



The survey confirmed the broad macro-level conclusions of Chapter Five by correlating the opinion of people on the politics of the LGBT debate and their television viewing habits. The results showed that with the exception of public opinion on the ability of LGBT individuals to serve openly in the armed forces, public opinion was positively impacted by viewing LGBT individuals on television. The impact of popular culture was not as strong as the impact of social contact but it was statistically significant. Even when holding demographics constant viewing LGBT characters on television still had a positive effect on public opinion.

### **So What? : The Chicken or the Egg Problem**

The major criticism that could be leveled against this project is that I cannot say with complete certainty that televised popular culture has had the effect that I argue that it has had. It is entirely possible that there was some effect prior to television's first broadcast of an LGBT character. This effect would have caused the climate to be acceptable for a LGBT character to appear on television and then even if television has an effect it is because of this beginning event. An obvious example of this kind of event would be the Stonewall riots of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969 which predated the appearance of LGBT characters on television by a few years. It is possible that this event spiked visibility and made it okay for the producers of *All in the Family* to have Archie encounter a lesbian. If some major event was the catalyst I am not testing for that. I still think that the results would still stand, that there is a definite divide between people who watch LGBT characters on television and those who do not but it would take the role of catalyst away from televised popular culture. The culture in this case would be reflecting a change that had already begun to take place and then accelerating it, which would still be an interesting finding.

It may also be argued by some that I haven't demonstrated causation. Perhaps merely asking certain questions is not enough and I'm getting a selection bias. This argument would say that people who watch *Glee* are those people who already support LGBT rights and those who do

not support LGBT rights just won't watch *Glee*. My response to that critique would be that even if we assume that this thesis has only located one gigantic selection bias, it points out a major hole in existing literature. I attempted to control for every demographic that political science has found evidence for increasing LGBT support and still found a difference amongst television viewers. If television is not causing this change then I would argue that it points toward another demographic difference that needs to be discovered. The idea that there is some demographic that needs to be discovered is one that might be verified by the contrasting significant on the support side of the model and the opponent side of the model. While I think that the opponent test was far from perfect<sup>39</sup>, that result could be drawn from that test. Something causes these people to be different, even though existing literature predicts that they should stay the same. While that finding may not be as significant as trying to prove the existence of a para-social contact it is still an interesting finding.

### **Ideas for Further Study**

One most potentially interesting way to push this research forward would be to perform some comparisons between different television markets within the United States. If a researcher had complete Nielsen ratings for a given market, and polling data from that market, a researcher could compare different areas of the country. A researcher could take data from three comparable markets; one from a state that opposes LGBT rights, one from a state that is in favor, and one from a middle of the road type state and compare the viewing habits. This would also allow for more control of what reruns were being aired in those markets and how syndicated television varies amongst them. This would allow a researcher to perform a similar test to the test in Chapter

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<sup>39</sup> In particular I am concerned that I had to violate the social contact section of the model. The reason is that if I took out people with social contact then I end up with an n less than 10 which gives strange results.

Five, but more precise and with the added testing ability of making comparative conclusions as well.

One interesting potential avenue of research would be to attempt and perform coding based on references to LGBT activity in televised popular culture that isn't explicit. There is literature (Dennis 2009) which argues that children's programming supports LGBT rights through subtle references that children do not initially "get" but increase their overall tolerance level and become more obvious as children grow older. Subtle references in popular culture do not only move opinion on social issues, but some researcher has found they may affect our children's acceptance of the rule of law (Manderson 2003). This could lead us to consider television programs like 1967's *Star Trek* as normalizing influences because Gene Roddenberry noted that if LGBT activity were normalized by the 23<sup>rd</sup> century Captain Kirk and Spock would have most likely been a couple (Falzone 2005). While research in this area would be incredibly difficult to quantify it would make for interesting insights especially in light of the quantifiable evidence of this book.

The most interesting expansions of this book to me would be to collect more data and rerun the governmental action test of Chapter Six and the survey of Chapter Seven. I have already presented the modified Wyatt dataset and the Werum and Winters dataset but updating the data another decade would make the results in Chapter Six more convincing and allow for more effective statistical testing. The survey from Chapter Seven proves the hypothesis in a "best case" scenario, young college educated adults. It would be interesting to offer the survey to a more representative audience made up of older Americans and featuring more ethnic and educational variance. Making these tests broader and more representative would make it the results here representative of the country as a whole and validate the book on a larger scale.

In concluding this book I can only say that political scientists, especially Americanists, have done a fairly poor job of integrating culture into our analyses. Integrating variables like televised popular culture into our study of politics will allow political scientists to produce a more complete picture of the forces that influence public opinion. It may be a regrettable fact of the American culture but people like to watch television, they don't like Congress. People pay attention to the characters and subplots of their favorite television shows they don't pay attention to the workings of the Supreme Court. Moving forward it makes only logical sense that we study television more broadly than we have in the past. To fail to do so leaves open a wide range of possibilities and a whole host of variables that we have never before considered. My hope is that this book is by no means the final word on the subject of popular culture's relationship to LGBT rights and issues. I would hope that this book is a beginning of a larger debate on the affect of popular culture on the political process. As same-sex marriage court cases move forward challenging the Defense of Marriage Act and LGBT individuals transition into open service in the United States Armed Forces political scientists will also need to produce more literature dealing with LGBT issues.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I – SURVEY

For the following five questions, please select the best answer.

1. Gender:      Male    Female

2. What ethnicity would you identify yourself as, please select all that apply:

White/Non-Hispanic    African-American    Hispanic

Asian                      Native American    Other

3. How old are you:    16 or Under    17-23    24-30    31-37    38-44    45-51    52+

4. Would you classify yourself as religious?:    Yes                      No

5. Please write down the religion and denomination that you follow in the blank below?

6. How often do you attend services? Once or twice a....

Week                      Month                      Couple of Months                      Year                      Never

7. Which political affiliation would you more closely identify yourself with?

Liberal    Conservative

8. Do you know personally a lesbian, gay man, bisexual, or transgendered individual?

Yes    No

9. Do you know someone who spends time with (more than four hours a week) a lesbian, gay man, bisexual, or transgendered individual?

Yes No

10. Do you attend work, school, church, or some other activity with at least one lesbian, gay man, bisexual, or transgendered individual?

Yes No

**For the following questions, when television is referred to please include any time watching television on online sources. Examples of acceptable methods of television viewing include Hulu.com, Youtube.com, or individual network websites such as NBC.com. Also include any time watching television on digital recording devices (DVRs) and anytime watching a television show on DVD. Do NOT include any time spent watching feature films on DVD.**

11. How many hours of television would you say that you watch in a given week?

1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 40+

12. Which of the following channels would you say that you watch on a regular (at least one program watched regularly) basis, please select all that apply.

ABC NBC CBS Fox PBS ESPN Bravo TNT TBS USA FX

Any Home-Shopping Lifetime Syfy BET MTV MTV2 VH1

SpikeTV Food Network Discovery Any Christian Themed

ABC Family Nickolodeon A&E Comedy Central History Channel

Cartoon Network(including Adult Swim) Other:\_\_\_\_\_

13. Including DVDs, reruns, and television programs broadcasted on the internet, please circle all of the following television shows that you have watched on more than one occasion.

American Idol                      The Big Bang Theory                      Brothers and Sisters  
CSI: Crime Scene Investigations                      Dancing With the Stars                      Glee  
Grey's Anatomy                      House                      Modern Family                      Two and a Half Men

14. Which of the following television genres would you say that you watch regularly (at least 2 times per month), please select all that apply.

Comedy                      Drama                      Reality TV                      Sporting Events

15. Which of the above genres would you say that you watch the most?

\_\_\_\_\_

**In the following series of questions I will be asking about whether or not you would be more or less likely to watch a television show based on some criteria. For each question please consider only the criteria mentioned in that question. (Do not consider Question #21 when answering Question #22). Please keep the following in mind; first, when the word character is used, it also includes reality show contestants/stars. Second, the questions will refer to characters that happen to be lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, or transgendered individuals which I will refer to as LGBT characters.**

16. I would be less likely to watch a television show that had a LGBT character on one or two episodes.

Strongly Agree    Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

17. I would be less likely to watch a television show that had a LGBT character as a recurring character. (Recurring is defined as at least three episodes a season)

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

18. I would be less likely to watch a television show that had a LGBT character as the lead.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

19. As a young child (younger than twelve years old) I watched television programs with LGBT characters.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

20. I would be less likely to allow young children (under the age of twelve) to watch programs that have LGBT characters on for one or two episodes.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

21. I would be less likely to allow young children (under the age of twelve) to watch programs that had LGBT recurring characters. (Recurring is defined as at least three episodes a season)

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

22. I would be less likely to allow young children to watch programs that have LGBT characters as the leads.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

**The following questions will ask about your opinion on lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered (LGBT) issues. Please answer every question honestly and to the best of your ability.**

23. I am tolerant toward LGBT activity.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

24. I am tolerant toward LGBT individuals.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

25. I think that being attracted to someone of the same-sex is something that can be cured.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

26. I support LGBT individuals have the right to not be discriminated against in employment.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

27. I support LGBT individuals have the right to legally binding civil unions to people of the same-sex. (For the purposes of this question a civil union is defined as full marriage rights given to same-sex couples without giving them the title of married)

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

28. I support allowing gays and lesbians to have legally recognized same-sex marriages.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

29. I support allowing LGBT individuals to serve openly in the United States Armed Forces.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

30. I support the right of same-sex couples to adopt children.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

**The following questions all deal with your opinion on the role of women and men in the household. Please give the best possible answer to the following questions.**

30. I feel that a woman's place is in the home.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

31. I think that in a relationship between a man and a woman, the man is the head of the household.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree



32. I feel that women should not be put in management positions in business over similarly qualified male candidates.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

33. I feel that women should not be put in leadership positions in religious institutions, such as deaconships, pastors, priests, etc...

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

34. I would be less likely to vote for a female candidate for a legislative (House of Representatives or Senate for example) position than a similarly qualified male candidate.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

35. I would be less likely to vote for a female candidate for an executive position (President or Governor for example) than a similarly qualified male candidate.

Strongly Agree   Agree                      Don't Know                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree

VITA

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Thesis: DOES VISIBILITY ACTUALLY HELP? : TELEVISED POPULAR  
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Scope and Method of Study: This study used both quantitative, large-n analyses of both collected data on television programs and a newly created survey as well as a qualitative study of the impact of televised popular culture on legislative action. The goal of the study is to determine whether or not LGBT characters in televised popular culture have had a statistically significant impact on public opinion in the LGBT rights debate.

Findings and Conclusions: The study finds evidence that both over the history of LGBT characters on television and today, visibility of LGBT individuals in popular culture has a statistically significant impact on public opinion dealing with LGBT rights. This study also finds some evidence that visibility in popular culture has actually been more significant to legislative bodies' responsiveness than public opinion has. This study therefore concludes that future research on LGBT rights should take into consideration the effect that culture has had in the evolving debate and political scientists in general should consider culture more as a driving force in motivating political change.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Jeanette Mendez

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