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Heteronormalized Representations of Sexuality in
American Soap Operas from 1977-Present*

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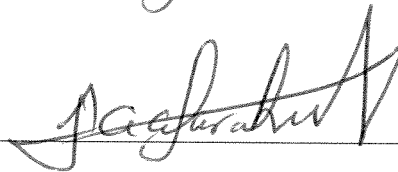
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As the World Turns...Gay, Not Queer
**Privileging Heteronormalized Representations of Sexuality
in American Soap Operas from 1977-Present**

by
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Columbia College Chicago

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Abstract

This project argues that American daytime soap operas, since the 1970s, have adopted prevailing discursive ideas of queerness, re-articulated them, and introduced new discursive understandings of queerness into popular culture. Most often, these re-articulated representations reflect a heteronormalized model, owing to myriad historically-situated discourses related to human sexuality (e.g., mental health, AIDS, and gender identity). This point is made through a broad examination of these shifting discourses, coupled with a direct analysis of salient queer characters and storylines that appeared concurrently within daytime serials. Building on Feminist and Media theory, this project includes Queer theory to frame a comprehensive historical-discursive understanding of queerness in soap operas.

Keywords

Gender / Heteronormativity / Media / Queer / Sexuality / Soap Operas / Television

Dedicated to

Mildred “Sweet Mama” Murphy
(8 Aug. 1922 – 30 Jan. 2001)
*for first introducing me to this amazing
genre—“your stories”—through which I can
continue to remember our time together*

~ and ~

Wilma “Jeanne” Cooper
(25 Oct. 1928 – 8 May 2013)
*for portraying daytime’s first lesbian
character, and also for being
a fierce, unafraid, consummate actress*

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INTRODUCTION

“How the hell can anybody respect the opinion of a man who would put his hands on another man?” (“Oil”). That was the question Blake Carrington, the patriarch of ABC’s primetime soap opera *Dynasty* (1981-1989), aimed at his gay son in the first episode.¹ Moments later, the senior Carrington added that, if not for the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removing homosexuality from its catalogue of diseases,

BLAKE: I could have endowed a foundation: “The Steven Carrington Foundation for the Treatment and Study of Faggotry.” (“Oil”)

This exchange, which underscores an understanding of queerness dictated by medical experts, laid the groundwork for what would become one of soap operadom’s most iconic gay storylines and characters.² Since that time, however, many academics who study the culturally- and socially-inscribed representations of sexual identity in soaps have failed to look beyond the significantly problematic Steven Carrington character and storyline for examples of queerness. This is especially true of analyses that focus on soaps that air on network television in the United States, and which often highlight primetime but ignore daytime programming. Such studies typically focus on the ostensibly positive or negative qualities these representations embody, rather than looking at the role of discourses—the culturally sanctioned ways of understanding and discussing a subject (e.g., the medicalized understanding of queerness deployed by Blake Carrington in the example above)—in producing these mediated representations of non-heterosexuality.

¹ The dates immediately following the first mention of a series indicate the years it was on-air.

² I will expand upon the meaning of *queerness* in a later section. In the meantime it should be understood that *queer(ness)* is used “as both an adjective—marking bodies, issues, desires, and so forth as queer—and as a verb, questioning normative articulations of the political and the very processes by which we determine the scope of what counts as political” (Hochberg 497).

This project takes a different and more comprehensive approach. Using historical and discursive analysis, the essay analyzes representations of queerness in American daytime serials over the last 40 years, and simultaneously interrogates relevant, culturally sanctioned ways of speaking and thinking about non-heterosexuality. In the process, this paper does three things: First, it shows how soap operas have adopted these ways of speaking and thinking—these *discourses*. For example, representations of queerness in soaps of the 1970s articulated non-heterosexuals as mentally unstable, abject others, a reflection of prevailing beliefs of the time. Second, this paper shows how the soap genre re-articulated these discourses to varying ends. For instance, in light of growing queer political power held by groups like ACT-UP in the 1980s, daytime began challenging more problematic discursive ideas of non-heterosexuality that erupted concurrently with the advent of AIDS. Third, the project discusses how the genre introduced its re-articulated representation of queerness into popular culture, thereby privileging certain types of queerness at the expense of others. By way of example, in the 2000s monogamy between white same-sex couples is established as normative, even as queer black men are framed as out of control, sexual threats to society-at-large. This cycle—adoption, re-articulation, and introduction—is demonstrated over the course of four parts, which look individually at the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. By calling attention to what has gone before in this way, we provoke questions about the nature of that which we are consuming presently, and are positioned to identify those anxieties being negotiated at a cultural level today.

A significant component of this work is the argument that the soap opera genre, in attempting to create a representation of queerness that conservative audiences would accept, birthed a negotiated, contemporary understanding of non-heterosexuality that has been

heteronormalized.³ As a result, those sexualized identities currently most under-represented (if represented at all) in soap operas are the ones who do not readily conform to Western understandings of ‘appropriate’ gender and queerness.⁴ Instead, viewers receive representations that are closer to the heteronormative center (i.e., heteronormalized homosexuals), and the farther from center that characters are the more derisively they are represented.

As such, a crucial element of this work involves identifying those sexual identities that exist closer to the heteronormative center and those relegated to the margins. This is because

[t]o clearly see discursive power at work [in the present], we need bodies at society’s margins. Margins are margins because that’s where the [dominant] discourse begins to fray, where whatever paradigm we’re in starts to lose its explanatory power and all of those inconvenient exceptions begin to cause problems. (Wilchins 71)

As this essay demonstrates, the margins in daytime serials are made-up of those characters who do not ascribe to normative conceptualizations of gender, as well as characters that do not fit a constructed understanding of queerness as white and monogamous. Moreover, non-conforming queer subjects are inscribed as the contemporary locus of cultural anxiety concerning human sexuality. In the end, these representations encode a hierarchy of sexual value, as theorized by feminist anthropologist Gayle S. Rubin. Thus, the margins “function in much the same ways as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism, and religious chauvinism. They rationalize the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexual rabble” (Rubin 13).

Although daytime serials are the direct objects of analysis, the information yielded is likely reflective of concurrent trends in other contemporary popular culture productions (e.g.,

³ The concept of heteronormativity will be explained more directly in a subsequent section, but can be understood in the immediate as the tendency to believe that heterosexuality, heterosexual relationships, and traditional gender roles are the universal standard by which all others should be judged.

⁴ For more on the notion of ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ notions of gender, see Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*.

reality television), creating inroads for further analysis by others. This is essential for better understanding contemporary discourses of human sexuality in the U.S. because

[p]opular culture is permeated with ideas that erotic variety is dangerous, unhealthy, depraved, and a menace to everything from small children to national security. Popular sexual ideology is a noxious stew made up of ideas of sexual sin, concepts of psychological inferiority, anti-communism, mob hysteria, accusations of witchcraft and xenophobia. (Rubin 12)

Daytime serials are also used here because the gradual, long-term connections that typically conservative soap audiences form with soap characters demands we pay heed to the discursive representations of queerness found therein. In essence, the longevity and serialization of the genre generates powerful connections between audience members and characters over time. This gives daytime producers unprecedented access to influence the understandings of queerness held by those viewers who are otherwise disconnected from knowledge about queerness and/or lack an awareness of actual queer persons within their sphere of contact. As such, understanding the discursive knowledge about queerness that is encoded in soap storylines is imperative, as the characters therein function simultaneously as the *product* of discursively produced knowledge about sexuality and *producers* of knowledge about sexuality for audiences at home. As noted by Amy Villarejo, the cross-disciplinary approach I have heretofore described is

urgently necessary for an expansive view of queer media and its future, not least because few humanities-based scholars of television have any capacity really to understand, much less to influence, production or to understand emergent industrial practices. (50)

Some work on queerness in soaps already exists, such as Roger Newcomb's "*As The World Turns* ' Luke and Noah and Fan Activism." However, these works have been conducted primarily under the auspices of Feminist and Media theories, and frequently focus on audience reactions, rather than joining the former with Queer theory in order to better understand the discursively constructed representations to which those audiences are responding. Similarly, a

comprehensive historical-discursive understanding of this topic does not yet exist—an oversight that this project begins to rectify.⁵

THEORY AND TERMINOLOGY

The function of this section is to introduce readers to the necessary terminology and theories that will be deployed throughout the remainder of the essay. It begins with a framing of the soap opera genre, including its traits and the inherent limitations of analyzing a long-running form. From there, I introduce Media Production theory as a means of situating daytime serials within a capitalist framework, which ultimately seeks to limit the representations of queerness that can be included. Next, attention turns toward Foucault's theorization of discourse. Through this section readers will come to understand how knowledge about queerness is produced on a cultural level, as well as the significance of subsequent re-productions of that knowledge in the media. Finally, the last sections introduce readers to the theoretical understandings of queer(ness) and normativity used throughout the remainder of the essay.

Defining Soap Operas

For the purposes of this work, I ascribe to the four distinct markers of the soap opera genre outlined by Chris Barker in *Cultural Studies Theory and Practice* (322-323). First, soaps maintain a constant balance between realism and melodrama, with the latter heightened through the use of “elevated acting style, dramatic music and lingering close-up shots” (323). Second,

⁵ Research for this work has been ongoing since the spring of 2010, and includes a combination of academic and non-academic sources, as well as personal insights derived from my position as an openly queer “aca-fan” (an academic who writes about that which they consume) who has spent *well over* 3,750 hours watching various daytime serials: I have personally watched almost every episode of *The Young and the Restless* since 1997, and almost as many episodes of *The Bold and the Beautiful* in that time. Furthermore, research for this project has resulted in more hours than I would like to admit watching non-heterosexual storylines on other soap operas (either live or through fan-edited videos on *YouTube*).

interpersonal relationships—especially between family members, which form “the mythic centre of the soap opera” (323)—and the constant destruction and recreation of those relationships, are at the heart of the genre.⁶ Third, core locations (e.g., a Midwestern town) play an important role in helping audiences relate to daytime serials by giving viewers something they can connect with in spite of the twists and turns within the characters’ lives. Lastly, soap opera storylines are open-ended—they can’t be wrapped up in the same time frame as a movie, and probably not even within the same time frame as the typical season-length run of other shows (circa 10-23 episodes).⁷

It is daytime serials’ open-ended nature that is particularly important to this work. Sam Ford, co-editor of the book *The Survival of Soap Opera*, notes in his essay “Growing Old Together” how U.S.-based soap operas, exactly because they are open-ended, can “tell a story over decades and create a rich multigenerational narrative that draws not only on characters throughout the history of the show, but also on the interests of viewers of all ages” (98-99).⁸ As a result, those storylines encoded with discursively produced knowledge about same-sex erotic identities are transmitted across a wide array of audience groupings, and are therefore poised to

⁶ For example, in the 2006 coming-out story of *As the World Turns*’ Luke Snyder character, producers relied on the characteristics described here to add a sense of melodrama to an otherwise realistic exchange between Luke and his parents. Over the course of that same arc, the interpersonal relationships between Luke and his mother Lily—and also between the less-accepting Lily and Luke’s more-accepting stepfather—were greatly destabilized, before ultimately being restored. (See Victoria Brownworth’s article “End of the Affair as *World Turns*” for a thorough-but-concise retelling of Luke’s entire story.)

⁷ My primary critique of Barker’s overall work on soaps is that his focus does not take daytime serials in the United States into account when discussing the types of stories that are told. For instance, he cites Geraghty’s view that U.S. soaps follow a patriarchal model (i.e., the male characters are the ones going to great lengths to keep their families together). While such a patriarchal model does exist in U.S. daytime programming, it is not as rigidly ascribed to as it is with primetime soaps, and there is just as much room for strong matriarchal characters. For this reason, it is important to turn toward U.S.-based scholars in order to expand our understanding of daytime serials.

⁸ Soap operas’ generally stable character canvas and long run-times (e.g., in March 2013 *The Young & the Restless* celebrated its 40th anniversary, and in April 2013 *General Hospital* celebrated its 50th) creates a unique problem for those who seek to study the genre’s historical importance as a popular culture artifact: daytime serials cannot be archived in the same way that artifacts with limited runs can be. This means there are limits on the depth of discourse analysis I can achieve within this work, underscoring the desperate need for new ways of thinking when it comes to archiving popular culture texts. (For more on the archiving of daytime serials, see Mary Jeanne Wilson’s “Preserving Soap History.”)

shape understandings of queerness amongst a large swath of the population. Additionally, the open-ended nature of these shows affords a rare lens through which to examine the continually shifting understandings of non-heteronormative identities in American popular culture over the last 40 years.

Another important point about daytime serials that must be raised is that “American soap operas focus on character instead of production values, actor instead of set” (Ford, “Growing Old” 86). This must be understood precisely because audiences’ repeated exposure to certain characters over such a long span of time helps cement a relationship between character and viewer: “[v]iewers come to know the facial movements and the voices of actors so well that the most minute change in expression or inflection can be meaningful” (86). For this reason, it is not uncommon for viewers to begin identifying with certain characters over time, especially when there is a sense of shared experience. This means that the response(s) of those characters, especially when confronted with queer storylines, has the potential to influence the viewer’s response(s) in similar ‘real world’ situations.

Media Production Theory

When examining the soap opera genre, it is necessary to remember that many external factors dictate the kinds of discursive knowledge about human sexuality that can be presented. Media Production theory enables this project to do so because it offers

a framework of understanding that explores the relationship between popular culture and capitalism [...] [A] “production analysis draws attention to the fact that whatever else popular culture may be, it is deeply embedded in capitalist, for-profit mass production” ([“Production Analysis”, *Cultural Politics*]). This is accomplished through analyses of pop culture artifacts (e.g., a television series) on three different levels: the microlevel looks at the workers involved in production; the midrange level looks at the institutions driving the production; and/or the macrolevel looks at the governing forces exerting control over the production. (King, “The Innovative & the Ignored”)

Representations of queerness in daytime serials are informed and indeed mitigated by their locality within the greater framework of capitalism. For this reason, what can be shown on the subscription networks, like HBO and Showtime, is a far cry from that which can be shown on ad-supported networks, like CBS and ABC. This is especially true during the daylight hours and when dealing with socially contested ideas such as human sexuality (Villarejo 50).

Media Production theory enables us to better understand the art of soap opera storytelling as a multilayered, multifaceted affair by elucidating behind-the-scenes decisions made during the production process. For instance, if one were to undertake microlevel and midrange analyses of a soap opera's production process, they might look at both the individual workers and hierarchical structure that inform the writing stage. As the process was explained to me in a personal interview with Kay Alden, the current head-writer for *The Bold and the Beautiful* (1987-Present), the development of storylines and characters, and the ways in which those characters are portrayed, begins with the head-writer directly. Typically, following that person's input, the head writing *team*, break-down writers, and dialogue writers all take part in moulding the stories and figures that will eventually be broadcast. Everything is carefully crafted, with a lot of discussion and collaboration behind the scenes to ensure that developing storylines and characters will be well received by network executives, sponsors and viewers alike (Alden, telephone interview).⁹ With these layers in mind, it becomes clear that representations of queerness in American daytime are not dictated by a single person, but rather by groups of individuals and entities occasionally working at cross-purposes.

⁹ Dana C. Gravesen's piece "Don't Drop the Soap Opera" deploys further midrange and macrorange analyses (though they are never identified as such by the author), to explore how *As the World Turns*' producers had to continually appease network executives, sponsors, and audiences in order for the series to remain popular, and therefore profitable, when crafting non-heterosexual representations.

To that end, this project incorporates some Media Production theory as a tool to highlight the role of capitalist ideology in producing the negotiated representations of queerness that are eventually featured in daytime soaps.¹⁰

The Production of (Sexual) Knowledge

In addition to understanding the structural elements that inform representations of queerness in daytime serials, it is important that readers understand the role of discourses in the production of our understandings of sexuality. As noted by cultural studies scholar John Storey, “[d]iscourses work in three ways: they enable, they constrain, and they constitute” (128). They are the sites from which entities assumed to possess some level of expertise—e.g., medical doctors—declare through regulated statements that which is and is not considered ‘normal,’ thereby conditioning our potential response(s) on a cultural level.

This theory can be traced to the work of Michel Foucault, who posits that *knowledge*—which is produced by myriad discourses deployed by varying institutions—also implies *power*: “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (100). In essence, we use the discursive knowledge handed down by those with assumed expertise in order to produce categorizations of normalcy and deviancy. Such categorizations eventually become enshrined in our culture through other institutions, and are used as justification for the production of further discursive knowledge by still more experts. This enables power to be exerted over those who are deemed outside the norm. In one salient instance, Foucault exemplifies this process by tracing the role of the Church—understood here as an institution—in producing specific kinds of knowledge about sex (e.g., certain sexual behaviors are immoral) (18-26). This knowledge was

¹⁰ This line of inquiry also suggests future questions for analysis vis-à-vis capitalism’s role in reifying (i.e., constituting) a specific vision of ‘appropriate’ (i.e., enabled) and ‘inappropriate’ (i.e., constrained) queerness for society at large?

later enshrined in culture-at-large, in part, through laws meant to punish those deemed deviant, thus paving the way for future forms of knowledge (36). Today, we might also recognize a similar pattern in the Church's teachings on queerness, and the impact such knowledge had on the historical enactment of anti-sodomy laws (only recently declared unconstitutional in the United States).

In the long-term, self-actuating cycles are established: *regimes of truth* (i.e., “what counts as truth” (Barker 232)) are perpetuated through various discourses, those *truths* become internalized at a cultural level, and then that discursive knowledge begets further categorizations through which we judge others' normalcy/deviancy. However, this also means that discourses are perpetually unstable and, depending on the historical moment and situation, they may be deployed differently. This means that, ultimately, “[d]iscourse transmits and produces power [...] but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile, and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 101). In sum, knowledge about human sexuality is discursively produced, consumed, internalized and/or contested.

Specifically related to the work presented here, Foucault describes the historical role of discourse in constituting sexuality as such:

Through the various discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness; from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized; around the least fantasies, moralists, but especially doctors, brandished the whole emphatic vocabulary of abomination. (36)

For a slightly more contemporary example of this process, gay historian Neil Miller has noted how the discourse of psychiatry—as represented by the APA's classification system outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)—defined homosexuality (by

itself) as a mental illness until 1973 (232).¹¹ Accompanying this definition was a list of varying characteristics for the so-called affliction and, supposedly, an understanding of its causes. In turn, such knowledge not only gave society-at-large license to view those with same-sex attractions as abnormal, it also yielded certain institutionally endorsed forms of repressive medical treatment. Alex Ross briefly, if not horrifically, offers a glimpse of these ‘treatments’ in an article for *The New Yorker*:

There were experiments in electric and pharmacological shock treatment, hormone injection, castration, and lobotomy. One site of such remedies, Atascadero State Hospital, in California, later became known as “Dachau for queers.” (47)

These sanctioned actions were a manifestation of the very knowledge/power binary described by Foucault.

Another result of this particular cycle was that “[s]exuality was transformed into something akin to truth. To know one’s Self increasingly meant to know one’s sexuality” (Wilchins 50). That is, the concept of one’s identity became increasingly defined as their *sexual identity*. With this idea in mind, we began to see the sexual Self as constructed, at least in part if not in whole, by surrounding discourses. This point becomes especially important to the work presented here when one considers how the discursive knowledge about queerness produced by the APA and others, and then adopted, re-articulated, and introduced through televised representations of non-heterosexuality, likely affected/affects the queer Selves being constructed at home. It is thus imperative that we understand the relationship between historically shifting discourses surrounding issues of human sexuality, and the manifestations thereof in popular culture artifacts like soaps.

¹¹ Foucault’s argument that the concept of “homosexuality” is itself a discursive one: “This new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an *incorporation of perversions* and a new *specification of individuals*...The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology...the homosexual was now a species” (42-43).

This becomes especially true if one merely assumes that daytime serials are nothing more than mindless entertainment, when in reality they are vessels carrying discursive messages to those Selves being constructed at home. Television, as represented in this instance by daytime serials, is *one* of the primary methods by which we—heterosexual and queer alike—are exposed to supposedly authoritative knowledge about non-normative sexual identities. Glyn Davis and Gary Needham, authors of the book *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*, point out that their

first confrontations with queer images were almost solely through television, and that many of [those] encounters now serve as cherished, fond memories [...] TV contributed significantly to our emerging queer subjectivities. (6)

Davis and Needham—and indeed I, myself—are far from the only ones whose sexual identities have been at least partially constructed by the discursive knowledge encoded in the popular culture we consume. Pulling from the earlier work of Rob Cover, C. Lee Harrington also highlights how (assumed)

[e]xperts studying the development of adolescent sexual identities stress that media images help youth learn ‘how to be’ gay, straight, bisexual, etc. Since adolescents are more likely to make simplistic, preferred readings of media texts, it is crucial to examine what those preferred meanings are. (208)¹²

Lynne Joyrich’s arguments also overlap with those presented here, when she notes that “TV’s gay characters are constructed as epistemological nodal points—crucial in some ways to the production of knowledge if not to the dramas that drive the TV productions” (32). Finally, we must not forget that, as Media theorist Richard Dyer points out,

the way that social groups are treated in media representations is frequently part and parcel of the way they are treated in real life—poverty, harassment, self-hatred, discrimination, and other undesirable

¹² In the same essay Harrington provides an entire section that speaks to the ‘knowledge’—in this instance about lesbianism—decoded by various audience members during a storyline that ran on *All My Children* in 2000 (218-222).

outcomes are instituted and solidified by representation. (qtd. in Hart, “Representing Gay Men”)¹³

Yet, Foucault alone cannot provide us with the tools needed to grapple with the mission of this piece. A significant problem one encounters when attempting to apply Foucault’s discourse theory is the notion that “[d]iscourse becomes like the Borg on *Star Trek*: ‘Resistance is futile.’ In making us the cookies to discourse’s cookie-cutter, postmodernism seems to rob us of agency—any ability to act on our own” (Wilchins 103). To move beyond this quandary we must turn toward Queer theory.

Queer Theory and Mediated Representations

In summarizing *Gender Trouble* (one of the foundational texts of Queer theory), Riki Wilchins explains how author Judith Butler

tries to turn this argument [about discourse’s seeming inescapability] inside out by embracing the contradiction: it is only by assuming these various identities that we achieve agency and become intelligible social actors. [For Butler], construction is not something opposed to agency but it is the necessary ingredient for agency. (103)

At its core, then, the notion of queerness is a politicized idea that is concerned with embracing contradictions and problematizing truths as a means of attaining *agency*, or “the capacity to act [alternatively]” (Barker 14). Queer theorist Michele Aaron’s definition of *queer* also provides a good foundation for this work, describing it as

an oppositional stance immediately bound to an anti-normative trajectory and emerging from the activist politics of the AIDS era and its impact on social practices and cultural productions. [...] Queer cannot throw off its nasty history nor should it: for it is its nasty history that keeps it on its toes, keeps it daring, dancing, and not only astute to the nastiness of the present but capable of undermining it. (64)

¹³ While this is true, so too is the reverse: the way social groups are treated in real life—the way discourses constitute, enable, and constrain them—also informs the ways in which they are represented in media. The duality of this operation must be explicitly understood, as it is at the crux of my overarching political argument regarding the mediated production of discursive knowledge vis-à-vis ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ forms of queerness.

Whereas Aaron underscores how the notion of queerness resists the pervasive notion of normativity, Butler explains how Queer theory attains the agency to do so by interrogating the seemingly-authentic-but-actually-discursively-produced representations it encounters.

Furthermore, Aaron's *historicized* understanding of queerness is essential to the work outlined here. Aaron notes that one of the potential pitfalls of contemporary queer analysis is the growing danger of overlooking, or even forgetting the historically and discursively-rooted ideas that serve as queer's foundation (64). This is due in part to the collective revelry of non-heterosexual audiences when previously unseen (or *underseen*) representations are encountered. This essay, meanwhile, situates those un(der)seen representations of queerness within their proper historical and discursive contexts. As part of this re-location process I adapt Cedric Clark's and Kylo-Patrick Hart's work on the stages of representation amongst minority groups on television.¹⁴ In addition to the historical context these models provide, the concept of shifting stages of representation for minority groups—*non-recognition*, *ridicule*, *regulation*, and *respect*—and the insights gained by examining queer characters and storylines through this lens, is important to my goal of recognizing a heteronormalized understanding of queerness in contemporary daytime programming.

¹⁴ See: "Television and Social Controls" (Clark) and "Representing Gay Men" (Hart). Whereas Clark analyzed representations according to ethnicity, I argue—like Hart before me—that a similar schema can be applied to our understanding of representations of queerness. However, Hart's re-application of Clark's work is concerned with depictions of *gay men* specifically, rather than queer identities irrespective of gender and sex, causing him to overlook other identities. Hart also glosses over daytime representations, likely because, as already noted, primetime television series generally attract more academic attention than daytime. This essay serves to fill that gap, a necessity that is underscored by Dana C. Gravesen, who notes that "an explicit queer presence in serial daytime drama represents the penetration of, arguably, one of the most conservative spectator demographics represented in contemporary television discourse; as such, it warrants further investigation beyond mainstream print (and new media) reports of controversy or, conversely, acclaim" ("Don't Drop").

Heteronormativity

Queer theory is necessary for the historicizing perspective it offers. In short, it enables us to contextualize the past and present. But a specific understanding of heteronormativity is also essential to the work contained herein. As understood by Frederik Dhaenens, *heteronormativity*

relies upon fixed notions of gender, sexuality, and identity and veils its constructedness and anomalies by feigning universality and rendering the heteronormative discourse hegemonic. In this way, it succeeds in depreciating, despising or excluding those who do not comply with or conform to the demands of the heteronormative discourse which are materialized in institutions (e.g., marriage), practices (e.g., reproduction) and a rigid set of norms and values (e.g., stability, monogamy, longevity). (443)

In effect, the discourse of heteronormativity is necessarily homogenizing and exclusive of those on the margins, and it is exactly those on the margins—as recognized here through their inclusion/exclusion in daytime serials—that I identified earlier as the source of present-day anxieties concerning human sexuality in contemporary culture.

This essay posits that representations of queerness in soaps have ultimately been heteronormalized over the last 40 years—characters have been transformed into what Jen Bacon calls “queer clones,” which have been sanitized for broader consumption. They function to restore gender norms, even as they disrupt other heteronormative notions (Bacon 9). This has been the result of shifting discourses linked to queerness in the public realm (e.g., psychology, AIDS) converging with attempts by producers of daytime serials to represent queerness in a way that will maximize viewership and placate sponsors. It is toward proving this point that I now turn, through a four-part historicizing discourse analysis of queerness in daytime serials. In the course of these sections I consider not only notions of heteronormativity, but also other historically situated discourses related to human sexuality (e.g., mental health). By the end, readers are positioned to take on Queer theory’s call to challenge heteronormativity.

PART I: TESTING THE SOAPY WATERS (1970s)

In this first analysis I offer a broad historical examination of pre-1980s discourses related to human sexuality. This functions as necessary contextualization for the case studies that appear throughout the remainder of this work. Following that contextualization, I conduct case studies of two storylines that aired in American daytime serials of the late-1970s: the budding relationship between Katherine Chancellor and Joann Curtis on *The Young and the Restless* (1973-Present), and the outing of *Days of Our Lives*' (1965-Present) Sharon Duval character. These storylines demonstrate how then-current discourses related to queerness were adopted, re-articulated, and then (re-)introduced through the soap genre.

Historical Context

On 15 December 1973, spurred by the emergence of the Gay Rights Movement, the APA decided that homosexuality—by itself—could no longer be classified as a mental disorder (Miller 232). Yet, as demonstrated by the *Dynasty* scene described in the introduction, simply removing 81 words from the DSM did not spontaneously endear the gay and lesbian population to society at large. Indeed, as the following analysis shows, prior to this moment the U.S. had engaged in a rollercoaster relationship with its queer populace.

In his essay “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” John D’Emilio traces the pre-20th Century roots of queerness. Specifically, he interrogates the ways in which the rise of capitalism in the U.S. during the 19th Century contributed to the formulation of queerness as a “personal identity—[that is] an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one’s own sex” (470)—by allowing such persons to “survive beyond the confines of the family” (471). It should be noted that this ability

to survive outside of the family unit was of course tempered at the time by any or all of one's biological sex, ethnicity, and class status. As a result, from its earliest inception the discursive understanding of queerness as a visible identity was privileged, enshrining a hierarchy with the articulation of upper- or middle-class/white/male/non-heterosexuality at the top. This, D'Emilio goes on to note with a Foucauldian air, occurred simultaneously with the medical discourses' desire to define queerness. Ultimately, the confluence of these cultural shifts "affected the consciousness of the women and men who experienced homosexual desire, so that they came to define themselves through their erotic life" (471).

Moving into the 20th Century, and contrary to later popular beliefs, from the 1920s through the end of the Second World War, American culture was more accepting of queerness than it was following the war. This was a direct result of male-dominated subcultures that began to form in urban areas, loosely organized around a collective understanding of their sexual selves that was born of the earlier formulation of queerness as a personal identity, and complete with sub-categorizations (e.g., "fairy," "wolves," "trade," etc.).¹⁵ And by the 1940s, whereas gendered cultural expectations had initially thwarted women's chances at creating similar conceptualizations of their sexuality (i.e., they were expected to remain at home, restricting their chances of meeting other women with same-sex desires), World War II actually enabled the rise of a specifically lesbian subculture. This was the direct result of an urgent need for women to leave the home and occupy urban jobs vacated by men who were now on the battlefield. All of these blossoming sexual identity subcultures further benefited as an indirect result of prohibition, which shut down countless bars and forced heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals to share the limited drinking spaces, prompting intermingling and a larger societal awareness of queerness.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Chauncey's *Gay New York* for more on these terms.

¹⁶ See Chauncey's *Gay New York* for an exhaustive study of queer life in the city between 1890 and 1940.

And, lest it be thought that only white non-heterosexuals were recognized within popular culture of the time, D'Emilio notes of the Harlem scene: “The popularity in the 1920s and 1930s of songs with lesbian and gay male themes—‘B.D. Woman,’ ‘Prove It on Me,’ ‘Sissy Man,’ ‘Fairey Blues’—suggests an openness about homosexual expression at odds with the mores of whites” (471).

However, following World War II, life for queer communities in the United States took a turn for the worse, particularly during the period of the “Lavender Scare” in the 1950s. At that time, queer U.S. citizens were caught in the crossfire of warring political forces whose concerns and focus lay in the ideological struggle between capitalism and communism. Briefly, American Republicans were interested in painting the Roosevelt and Truman administrations as being lax on communism, which they feared was sweeping throughout the U.S. In their attempt to smear Democrats, Republicans falsely accused queer governmental employees—and many heterosexual employees who were accused of being gay by political opponents—of being communist agents, and therefore potential insurgents operating on behalf of the U.S.S.R. Gayle S. Rubin summarizes the events of the time in this way:

Homosexuals were, along with communists, the object of federal witch hunts and purges. Congressional investigations, executive orders [such as Executive Order 10450, which banned “unsuitable” individuals from holding government positions on the national, state, and local levels], and sensational exposés in the media aimed to root out homosexuals employed by the government. (5)

As a result, countless gays and lesbians lost their jobs—at times on a voluntary basis, in an attempt to avoid being outed by the press—and countless more were driven into hiding. Consequently, queerness was discursively conflated with communism, America’s foremost

ideological enemy of the time, through congressional hearings, press coverage, and the popular discourse—an articulation that would span decades.¹⁷

As if these politicized discursive ideas weren't enough, in 1967 CBS aired a documentary titled *The Homosexuals*, one of the very first televised specials devoted to the topic of queerness. Owing to its place in history, this documentary became the basis for countless viewers' first exposure to, and understandings of non-heterosexuality. At the show's conclusion, host Mike Wallace, in summarizing his interview with a shadow-cloaked man whose same-sex attraction endangered his marriage, declared:

The dilemma of the homosexual: told by the medical profession he is sick, by the law a criminal; shunned by employers, rejected by heterosexual society; incapable of a fulfilling relationship with a woman or, for that matter, with a man. At the center of his life he remains anonymous, a displaced person. An outsider. ("The Homosexuals", *CBS Reports*)

Thus was a discursive understanding of queer persons as deceitful threats to heterosexual stability, who were/are incapable of normal, fulfilling, and loving relationships, deployed. This articulation inscribed queer persons as abject others, abnormal by societal and cultural standards. Forty-five years later, this mis-knowledge about queer persons as a group has not entirely disappeared from the public discourse, and is at the root of many conservatives' arguments against measures that would grant marriage equality.

One of the conservatives who would rise to challenge the place of queer persons in society was Anita Bryant in 1977, with her campaign to "Save Our Children" from the supposed threat of queer communities. This moment will be revisited in a later section, but for now it must be noted that the events surrounding Bryant's campaign "inaugurated a new wave of violence, state persecution, and legal initiatives directed against minority sexual populations and the

¹⁷ It should also be noted that there was a concurrent move to conflate gays and lesbians with sex offenders. A discussion of that particular articulation is discussed in greater detail in the section devoted to representations of non-heterosexuality in the 1990s.

commercial sex industry” (Rubin 6). Over the course of that year, queer press organizations “documented hundreds of arrests, from the libraries of Boston to the streets of Houston and the beaches of San Francisco” (Rubin 6). In short, public hostility against queer persons was pervasive and widespread during this period.

Manifestations within Soaps

Perhaps nowhere was this animosity toward gays and lesbians stronger than amongst those who fall within the boundaries of daytime serials’ primary target audiences. These viewers tend to lean toward the right of the social-political spectrum, are frequently mothers (increasing the likely efficacy of Bryant’s appeal to save the children from the grasping claws of queerness), and are often “regionally located in the Midwestern and Southern states of the United States—the South being particularly soap-savvy” (Gravesen, “Don’t Drop”). Yet none of these facts swayed *The Young and the Restless* from attempting to develop daytime television’s first lesbian storyline, or *Days of Our Lives* from featuring the genre’s first bisexual character.

Case Study #1: Katherine Chancellor

Through her relationship with the recently divorced Joann Curtis, *The Young and the Restless*’ Katherine Chancellor—a newly widowed, middle-aged, raging alcoholic—became part of daytime’s first lesbian storyline in 1977. At the urging of Chancellor’s son, Brock Reynolds, who assumed the two women would benefit from each other’s company, Chancellor and Curtis moved in together in mid-January. Before long, however, Chancellor became “excessively possessive of Joann, transferring her own antipathy toward men to the younger woman” (Irwin and Cassata 42). She lavished Curtis with expensive gifts, paid for her to go back to college, and planned a get-away for the two of them to Hawaii (“1977,” *The Young and the Restless*).

Though the dialogue never directly referenced any sort of same-sex eroticism between the pair, the benefit of hindsight and a careful re-reading of the scripts indicates producers' intentions clearly enough. For example, in an early scene, wherein Chancellor attempts to discourage Curtis from returning to school:

KAY: Oh, come now, Joann. Your husband! Ex-husband! He's at the university! That's the real reason you want to go back to school admit it! So you can be near him! [*there are seeds of jealousy in KAY'S demeanor.*]

JOANN: No, Mrs. Chancellor, Johnny's got nothing to do with it! Frankly—at the moment, I'm turned off on all men! Epecially my ex-husband!

KAY: [*beat, inwardly pleased as she studies JOANN, then a more gentle approach.*] [...] (Bell and Alden, *Episode #965* 9; underscoring in the original)

The underscored words, and in particular the emphasis the actress playing Joann is meant to place on the word “all,” connote the potential for a new form of relationship, one that is not strictly heterosexual in orientation. This breaching of exclusive heterosexuality is re-presented again and again throughout the story arc, such as when, in *Episode #985*, Katherine reiterates her belief that Joann is not “very interested in men right now” (Bell and Alden, 9), and again, in *Episode #997*, when Katherine decries women who seek men “for approval and reassurance” (Bell, Alden, and Harrower, 7).

As the storyline progresses the tone of these hints quickly grows more sinister. At one point, the stage directions even describe Katherine's overtures as a “[*subtle reaction, spider to fly*]” (Bell, *Episode #971* 2), signifying a dangerous, predatory quality to her same-sex desires that was in-line with then-contemporary discourses that reinforced the supposed threat of queerness. Chancellor's ‘insidious’ erotic interests are further encoded in the dialogue and subtext of the same scene:

KAY: [...] [*we feel and sense KAY'S deep sense of need rather than anger in her reference to JOANN—as she creates a mood and setting for JOANN'S arrival. Then off and very quietly we hear a car pull up and stop—as KAY reacts. She reaches for a book, sits down, pretends to be reading as JOANN enters, her coat on, coming from work, reacts to seeing KAY up.*]

JOANN: Mrs. Chancellor! It's after one o'clock. Are you all right?

KAY: [*looking up soberly*:] Oh Joann, you're home. [*beat*] No, I haven't been drinking. There are—other vices, you know.

[...]

JOANN: [*JOANN looks at KAY curiously tho [sic] easily, no sense of nuance as:*]

What did you mean—there're other vice besides—drinking?

KAY: This, Joann, is my secret vice. I've always had a weakness for mystery stories. The gorier, the better. When I lived alone, they unnerved me so, I couldn't read them. But now that you're here, I can indulge myself again.
(Bell, *Episode #971* 1-2)

Interestingly, two of Katherine's vices are openly referenced here, both of which can be read as clues to her 'unnatural' sexual desire: her alcohol addiction, and her love of gory mystery novels. In regards to the first, one of the discursive arguments deployed by Republicans at the time of the Lavender Scare and in the years thereafter was that queer persons were more prone to alcoholism because they were mentally unbalanced (hence one of the reasons such individuals should be kept out of governmental jobs). Though it cannot be proven here, this discursive belief could be one of the reasons why an alcoholic character was chosen as the locus for the first lesbian storyline in daytime television. The second clue, the character's professed love of gory mystery novels—a fact that has not been referenced since, to the best of my knowledge—connotes the Gothic tradition of storytelling. According to scholar Fred Botting, Gothic texts necessarily fulfill a cultural desire to transgress "the bounds of reality and possibility [...] [and also challenge] reason through their overindulgence in fanciful ideas and imaginative flights" (6)—they problematize readers' previously held certainties about the 'real world' and its social order by transgressing epistemologically understood boundaries, such as that which stands between heterosexuality and non-heterosexuality. By the end of such stories, however, "[t]he terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety" (Botting 7).¹⁸ When considered alongside *The Young and the*

¹⁸ For more on the Gothic tradition of storytelling and manifestations thereof on television, see my critique of *American Horror Story* (2011-Present) in the essay "This House Will Make You a Believer."

Restless' producers' deliberate behind-the-scenes choices discussed earlier (as well as countless other examples that appear throughout the scripts over the course of the storyline), it seems clear that the decision to reference Katherine's love of gothic novels in conjunction with "other vices" was meant to signify her abject, monstrous desire to transgress the boundaries of sexuality with the Joann character.¹⁹

By mid-February the relationship between the women had grown to the point where Chancellor's son Brock—an ordained minister, symbolic of the Church—grew concerned, and by early March, during a confrontation with Joann, he expressed that concern directly, stating:

BROCK: [*beat then carefully but very very significantly*] And yet—there's something about the extordinary [*sic*] closeness—the growing intimacy between you and the Duchess—that bothers me. (Bell and Alden, *Episode #996* 12)

By now, Brock's worries were not singular—audiences, too, had realized the direction the storyline was going in, and the majority were not pleased. Shortly after Brock's confrontation with Joann, and at his insistence, Katherine asked the woman of her desire—whose heart was drifting back toward her emotionally abusive ex-husband—to pack her bags and leave the Chancellor Estate. Finally, on 18 May 1977, the duo had one final meeting, at which point producers *retconned* the pair's erotic interests in one another²⁰:

KAY: Yes, Joann, my love for you! I was suffering from a terribly frustrated sense of mother love, a very real hunger every women has for a daughter. A young woman she, in a sense, creates in her own image.

[...]

JOANN: And Brock thought—

¹⁹ Adding further fuel to my reading of this scene through the Gothic lens, the setting is the Chancellor Estate, pejoratively referred to as "the Mausoleum" by other characters, and described in the stage directions as reflective of "the stark emptiness and loneliness of Kay Chancellor's life" (Bell, *Episode #971* 1). Frequently within Gothic texts, the first, most noticeable element is the setting: castles, forests, and old houses abound—in essence, anywhere that the monstrous *could be* lurking.

²⁰ The term *retcon*, short for *retroactive continuity*, is a popular phrase within fantasy and sci-fi circles that signifies producers' decisions to explain-away past historical events as if they never happened. For example, twenty years after *The Young and the Restless* killed-off the Phillip Chancellor III character, producers brought the character back and explained that he had actually faked his death and merely been in hiding the entire time.

KAY: He was right about one thing. My possessiveness and what it could do to your life. If he overlooked the maternal feeling I felt for you it was because I'd given him so little attention as a boy. It never occurred to him that I wanted a daughter, needed a daughter. I didn't realize it myself until now.

[...]

JOANN: [*beat, deeply grateful*:] You—you've cleared that up so much for me. I feel as if I—I'd had some kind of wonderful emotional bath.

KAY: I do, too, Joann. [*beat*] If there's ever a time you need any kind of help, please know I'm there—and don't hesitate for any reason.

JOANN: [*a measure of her trust restored*:] I won't. [*beat*] Would you like some more hot water in your tea? I think it's cold now.

KAY: [*her own nuance*:] Yes. It is cold now. [*hold...for the record, KAY is not playing games with her rationale. she believes it, has convinced herself it's true, as now JOANN does*[...]] (Bell, Alden, and Harrower, *Episode #1051* 10-11; underscoring in the original)

Encoded in this exchange—and also in earlier moments of this storyline—is a replication of the discursive notion that one's sexuality is malleable, that one can shift their erotic gaze between men and women at-will, particularly if societal pressure is strong enough. Also interesting is the characters' references to "some kind of wonderful emotional bath," signifying the character's purification through their choice to resume a life of heteronormativity. In terms of my earlier reference to elements of the Gothic within the portrayal of Katherine's sexuality, this scene also signals her character's return from abjection: she reminds audiences of her primary (and primarily desired) role as a mother, clearly indicating the family dynamic upon which so much of the discourse of heteronormativity hinges, thereby reifying "the values of society, virtue and propriety" (Botting 7). Not long after this exchange, Chancellor marries her opportunistic hairdresser, and Joann remarries her ex-husband and flees Genoa City forever.

In an interview 30 years later, Kay Alden—the former writer, head-writer, and executive producer of *The Young and the Restless*—discussed the infamous storyline, and also the sudden need to drastically reverse course as described above, with Sarah A. Bibel.²¹ Alden explained

²¹ The information shared by Alden was repeated in an independent, hour-long interview that I conducted with the famous head writer on April 24, 2010 (Alden, Telephone interview).

that she was a fresh young writer at the time, and that she had been inspired to write the story by the expanding ripples of the sexual revolution and the pro-lesbian flare of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. With these ideas in mind, Alden proposed the Chancellor/Curtis storyline to series creator William J. Bell and, with his consent, spearheaded the work on it.

“Alden,” writes Bibel, “living in Southern Missouri at the time, was interested in fully telling Kay and Joanne’s [sic] story but sensitive to how carefully the show had to tread with potentially controversial material” (“Deep Soap”). As a result, the interactions between the two female characters were meant to be subtle, lacking overt dialogue and physicality, until the episode where Katherine and Joann finally embraced.²² Alden had this to say about the audience response:

You could hear television sets clicking off all across America...The audience knew exactly what was going on. It was one of the most remarkable experiences of my career. At no other time can I remember an instant ratings drop because of a single storyline. (qtd. in Bibel, “Deep Soap”)

Bibel goes on to suggest in her piece that the storyline not only failed to draw in the progressive viewers that Alden and Bell had hoped for with the storyline, but it actually *cost* them viewers, and may in fact be responsible for the longtime drought in gay and lesbian representation within daytime television that followed.

²² The stage directions for the embrace read as follows: “[Joann goes easily and naturally into her arms. Her own arms around Kay’s neck. They hold together for a beat and then a growing physical awareness takes over as Kay pulls her perceptibly closer to her and Joann presses slightly nearer Kay. Take Kay’s reaction tenderness and then underlying desire to posses and caress this girl. Then take Joann with same awareness plus the total security she feels being with Kay. Take time over this and hold two to three beats. Then Kay steps back her arms still around Joann, a searching look at her face eye contact [sic]. An initial moment when they both realize it was a moment of mutual need and desire. Joann breaks it.]” (Bell and Alden, Episode #993 12)

Case Study #2: Sharon Duval

While *The Young and the Restless*' lesbian storyline was disavowed and swept under the rug—information about the storyline is practically impossible to find today—NBC's *Days of Our Lives* made the equally bold decision to incorporate an openly bisexual character into the show that same year.

Sharon Duval, a married woman, became the first soap opera character in daytime television to outright declare anything other than the expected heterosexual attraction when she fell in love with friend and fellow Salem resident Julie Williams. Williams, on the other hand, made no qualms about her lack of interest in pursuing a same-sex relationship with her friend. Fearing backlash from fans, the producers of *Days of Our Lives* suddenly decided to portray the Duval character as confused and suicidal.²³ She was subsequently (and quickly) hospitalized, and then written out of the show alongside her husband.

Because source-material is not archived and information is scarce, it is impossible at this time to conduct a thorough discursive analysis of this particular storyline. However, a brief consideration of its trajectory, specifically with regard to its conclusion, does highlight one of the larger discursive understandings of queerness within popular culture of the time. That is, the resolution of Duval's storyline is highly reminiscent of lesbian pulp fiction from the 1950s and 1960s, wherein "lesbians were driven to insanity or death because of the society around them" (Inness, "Novel: Lesbian"). These ignominious ends suggest a deep, pathological suffering that was reflective of then-current understandings of the queer subject.

²³ I cannot say concretely whether or not *Days of Our Lives*' sudden fear of audience reaction was informed by fan response to *The Young and the Restless*, though it certainly seems plausible that such might be the case.

Non-Recognition Stage to Ridicule Stage

In addition to the insights we can glean from these two storylines regarding attitudes and the discursive understandings of queerness at the time, they also offer a unique glimpse into the very history of queer representation in the media, which, as I noted earlier, provides a necessary contextualization for understanding the contemporary moment.

In Cedric Clark's "Television and Social Controls," the author declares that television is reflective of the dominant social structures that exist within a society and that this is achieved through the "*selection and presentation of characters* associated with its structural divisions. The commercial nature of the medium emphasizes advertising of products bought by those at the top of the social structure, and thus reinforces the status quo" (18, emphasis in the original). With this theorization of the relationship between media production and lived-experience as a driving factor, Clark, whose work was directly focused on representations of ethnic minorities on television, suggests that the inclusion of minority groups ultimately occurs in four stages: *non-recognition, ridicule, regulation, and respect*.

As suggested by the name, the first stage—*non-recognition*—is one wherein the minority group is simply not recognized in the media. Since they are not seen, they cannot be said to exist, at least on a cultural level. I suggest that Clark's non-recognition stage, in function, is not wholly dissimilar from the phenomenon Foucault describes in writing about repression and childhood sexuality in the Victorian era:

Everyone knew, for example, that children had no sex, which was why they were forbidden to talk about it, why one closed one's eyes and stopped one's ears whenever they came to show evidence to the contrary, and why a general and studied silence was imposed. These are the characteristic features attributed to repression [...] repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also an injunction to silence, an affirmation of non-existence, and, by implication, an admission that there was

nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know.
(Foucault 4).

To that end, the non-recognition stage serves as an "injunction to silence" against the unseen minority group. Clark goes on to note how "[c]hild psychologists and prisoners in solitary confinement agree that exclusion is one of the worst forms of human punishment" (19).

In the second stage, *ridicule*, the minoritized group finally receives recognition in the media, but only derisively. This has a twofold effect:

The group that is being ridiculed feels that it is better, at least, than being ignored. Concurrently, by having a ridiculed group to laugh at, members of the dominant culture feel a boost to their self-esteem. So the social structure is not only reflected by television, but maintained by it. (Clark 19)

As it relates to representations of race, examples of African Americans during the second stage might include the television program *Amos 'n' Andy* (1951-1953) or the J.J. character on *Good Times* (1974-1979) ("Representing Gay Men").

In the case of daytime serials, the moment of transition between the non-recognition and the ridicule stages arrived in 1977, with the Katherine Chancellor and Sharon Duval characters. Queer women (and by extension, other non-heterosexual sub-groupings) finally received representation within the televisual realm of popular culture, but only so long as they were articulated as an abject, pathologized Other, and signified a threat to heterosexual stability (e.g., Katherine's relationship with Joann threatened the latter's ability to be with another man, just as Sharon's desire for Julie threatened her own marriage).

The interview between Bibel and Alden—and the very fact that these two shows chose to tackle such a topic—demonstrates both an initial willingness to respond to the increasingly tolerant and inclusive discourses of the sexual revolution at the time, and the cultural anxiety/resistance being felt as a result of the same (leading to representations that ultimately

ridiculed queerness). The efforts of producers were tempered by the capitalist nature of their medium: when audiences started tuning out in protest and ratings started to slip (or at least the fear thereof took hold), producers were forced to change course, and re-present more mainstream discourses. At that moment in the 1970s, this meant framing queer attractions as pathological and as a source of misery (to both the ‘afflicted’ and their heterosexual partners). Ultimately, it was implied that Chancellor and Duval had made unnatural choices that could be redeemed only through a thorough reintroduction into heterosexuality and a strict disavowal of any previous considerations.

PART II: MOVING INTO A POZ LIGHT (1980s)

By looking at daytime serials in the 1980s, and the early moments of what has since become known as the AIDS pandemic, a similar understanding of the adaptation of historically shifting discourses of sexuality—this time related to male queerness, specifically²⁴—can be attained. In this section I analyze storylines from *As the World Turns* (1956-2010) and *All My Children* (1970-2011). By dialoguing with the works of Clark and Hart, I demonstrate how the genre began to re-articulate the understanding of queerness encoded in its representations. Wholly abjectified representations of queerness, such as Katherine Chancellor and Sharon Duval, and the ostensible threat they posed to heteronormative society, were gradually replaced by carefully regulated representations—a more ‘acceptable’ form of queerness. This idea is discussed in particular relationship to the Hank Elliot storyline on *As the World Turns*. Thus, in this section I

²⁴ I specifically address male non-heterosexuality within this section for two reasons: first, both of the storylines focused on in this section hinge on the notion of male non-heterosexuality; and, second, the unfortunate reality is that information on the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s—as with many discourses—seemed far more preoccupied with the experience of men than women.

discuss how, through soaps, heteronormalized notions of *what gay men are*, and *how they live* were introduced into popular culture.

Before turning to these storylines, however, one must understand the climate of hysteria at the time, as well as the ways in which the discourses of AIDS and male non-heterosexuality were articulated together.

Historical Context

Though no one realized it at the time, when UCLA medical staff documented a previously unseen “fungal infection in [the] throat” (Miller 409) in January 1981, it marked the beginning of a terrifying sequence of events. About the only thing that seemed clear at the time was that the infection indicated a weakened immune system, and it had a penchant for targeting gay men, like other mysterious ailments cropping up around the same time.

Then, on 5 June 1981, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC)—an authoritative, federalized medical institution—publically revealed its diagnosis of five men with a “rare lung infection” (“A Timeline of AIDS,” *AIDS.gov*). The CDC categorized these men as both afflicted *and* gay, thereby producing a particularly limiting and dangerous kernel of knowledge about the disease and its potential victims. This move inscribed a level of power over its discursive subjects—gay men with AIDS—and led some antigay activists in positions of authority to question whether a cure should be sought at all. Subsequently, the CDC’s declaration was picked up by the press, which turned to other ‘experts’ for confirmation that there was “no apparent danger to nonhomosexuals” (Altman, “Rare Cancer”). This move reinforced the earlier-produced knowledge concerning the link between non-heterosexuality and AIDS.

Even more disturbing, through a host of discursive terminology that followed—such as the original name given to the disease, “Gay-Related Immune Deficiency” (GRID)—the gay

male community, which had already been othered through its noncompliance with heteronormative expectations, was abnormalized to an even greater extent. It was not until heterosexuals started to show up with similar symptoms that the virus was finally given a less alarmingly orientation-specific name: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Throughout the first half of the 1980s the disease ran totally unchecked. Its root-virus wasn't discovered until January 1983, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration didn't license the first test until March 1985. Yet even after these occasions, no one was sure how to actually *treat* AIDS. The mortality rate in the United States was staggering, especially within the gay community. As noted by Neil Miller:

[One-thousand three hundred] infected as of April 1983, by official count; 8,797 by the middle of 1985, with half of them already dead. Of the number of recorded cases, more than 70 percent were gay and bisexual men. By 1985, surveys indicated that extremely high percentages of sexually active gay men had tested positive for HIV [the root-virus of AIDS]: 50 to 60 percent in some studies in New York City and San Francisco, 25 percent in Pittsburgh and Boston. (410)

The unknowns surrounding the disease, coupled with the high probability of death, led to sweeping societal fear. Those opposed to the Gay Rights Movement quickly took to the media, exacerbating that fear by “equating homosexuality and the disease” (Miller 421). The socially conservative right wing of the social-political spectrum was particularly adept at such fear mongering, and often succeeded in masking heterosexuals' susceptibility to the virus.

This latest non-normative conceptualization of queer men—as self-destructing harbingers/victims of a new plague—was reified culturally, in part, through countless texts that depicted the disfiguring effects of AIDS specifically on gay men's bodies. As the artist Ernesto Pujol noted, HIV/AIDS “quickly created a contemporary visual history of the sadly ravaged male body” (“Desire in the Web”). Examples of such inscription could be found in both the mainstream media and ostensibly gay productions. Already by 1984, the pervasiveness of such

imagery caused feminist anthropologist Gayle S. Rubin to remark disdainfully how, just as non-heterosexuals

have had some success in throwing off the taint of mental disease, gay people find themselves metaphorically welded to an image of lethal physical deterioration. The syndrome, its particular qualities, and its transmissibility are being used to reinforce old fears that sexual activity, homosexuality, and promiscuity lead to disease and death. (26)²⁵

While many in the gay and lesbian community feared persecution—owing to the continued linkages between the community and AIDS being drawn by the media and right-wing ideologues—“a surprising degree of gay political and social progress continued in many parts of the country” (Miller 421). One such area of progress was through the portrayal of gays and lesbians in the soap operas of the 1980s.

Manifestations within Soaps

Perhaps encouraged by ABC’s seeming success in primetime with the gay, highly stereotypical Jodie Dallas character on *Soap* (1977-1981), each of the three major networks included a gay or lesbian character in their daytime programming during the 1980s. Unfortunately, none of these characters lasted very long, in part due to homophobia and (more recently) AIDS-phobia.

Another factor was that producers were reluctant to portray an established character as queer, fearing a negative reaction from audiences of the kind experienced by *The Young and the Restless* (i.e., better the character be someone who could be easily written-off).

²⁵ Examples include descriptions of the once-virile Rock Hudson as being emaciated and riddled with bedsores and lesions (Haller, “The Long Goodbye”), as well as representations of effeminate, gaunt, and dying gay men like ‘James’ in *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (1997).

Case Study #1: Dr. Lynn Carson

The first network of the 1980s to attempt another splash in the rainbow-colored waters was ABC. In 1983, *All My Children* introduced the character of Dr. Lynn Carson, a lesbian psychiatrist whose newly divorced patient, Devon McFadden, quickly developed feelings for her. According to Steven Capsuto, the storyline was originally supposed to be about a gay man, reflecting the current topicality of being gay and the AIDS epidemic (190). At the last minute, however, producers decided to change the Carson character from gay man to lesbian. Executives claimed the change was undertaken in order to break new ground—ground already broken by *The Young and the Restless* and *Days of Our Lives* in 1977—but Capsuto points out that “the timing of the change raises questions” (190): the rewrite came on the heels of breaking news in the real world about AIDS and HIV-infected blood supplies, resulting in nationwide panic and, ultimately, the widespread infection and subsequent decimation of the United States’ hemophiliac population, who were reliant on Factor VIII.²⁶

Whatever ABC and *All My Children*’s true motivations for changing the character, industry magazine *Soap Opera Digest* has cited Carson as being “the first significant gay character in daytime” (“Gay Characters”). This was in spite of the fact that only two other characters ever learned of Carson’s homogendered attractions, and that the relationship between Carson and McFadden was never fully explored. Shortly after discovering McFadden’s crush on her, Carson helped her patient ‘rediscover’ her heterosexuality and left Pine Valley for good (Joyrich 43). A popular belief is that fans’ reactions were responsible for derailing the storyline, much as they had the earlier lesbian storyline on *The Young and the Restless*. However, an alternative position referenced by Capsuto is that “ABC had announced up front that [the actress

²⁶ Factor VIII was a blood-clotting agent introduced into a hemophiliac’s system through blood transfusions.

playing Carson, Donna] Pescow would appear for just eight weeks, since she had another professional commitment to meet” (182). ABC’s statement, if assumed to be true, would then seem to imply that fan response had nothing to do with her disappearance.

Yet, in spite of lingering questions about the intentions and reactions to the character, the storyline itself remains significant for multiple reasons. First, it highlights the intentions of *All My Children*’s producers to create a storyline that exposed audiences to ideas of queerness, in spite of earlier failures in the industry. Second, it demonstrates the producers’ awareness of the then-current discourses on queerness, and a willingness to subvert the same: first by inscribing a representative of the medical community (i.e., a discourse producer) with same-sex desires that did not trouble her, and, second, by changing the physical sex of the character rather than potentially giving fodder to the AIDS-phobic and homophobic panic currently erupting in the media. Third and perhaps most importantly—that is, if we accept ABC’s statement that the character was always meant to be temporary—this was the first time producers did not kowtow to audience reactions.

Case Study #2: Hank Elliot

In 1988, CBS consented to trying another gay-themed narrative, despite the disastrous results from the aborted lesbian storyline in the late 1970s. This time, however, they met with much greater success amongst both the gay and heterosexual communities. The character of Hank Elliot, a fashion designer from New York, was added to the canvas of long-running daytime soap opera *As the World Turns*. In the 18 August 1988, episode, Elliot outed himself to fellow character Iva Snyder, saying:

HANK: There is someone [else] in New York, and we’ve been together for five years now. Iva, I’m gay—I’m involved with another man. (*As The World Turns*, 18 Aug. 1988)

The “someone else” in question—Elliot’s partner, Charles Clayton—had AIDS.²⁷

As already noted, both the media and right-wing ideologues of the time were highly engaged in perpetuating the continued linkages between gays and AIDS. *As the World Turns* took a different approach, however: one that both mirrored *and* challenged the prevailing notions about male queerness. Through Elliot’s dialogue with Snyder, the character stressed his monogamous relationship status with another man:

HANK: We believe in fidelity and mutual support, just like anyone else in that kind of relationship does. (*As The World Turns*, 19 Aug. 1988)

These words problematize the (presumed) common belief of more conservative audiences of the time vis-à-vis levels of promiscuity within the gay male community, a notion that can be traced back to earlier discourses which were perpetuated through the media (e.g., through the CBS documentary *The Homosexuals*). By stressing Hank and Charles’ “fidelity and mutual support,” writers connoted a level of “stability, monogamy, [and] longevity,” each of which Frederik Dhaenens cites as one of the “rigid set of norms and values” that signify heteronormativity. Thus, producers re-articulated a specific discursive form of knowledge about queerness, and introduced a ‘new’ idea of what it means to be in a same-sex relationship to viewers.

Moving from dialogue to imagery, the physical appearance of Brian Starcher, the actor who played Hank—what one might arguably call a “husky” frame, angular features, and lighter complexion—similarly takes from existing discourses, re-articulates them, and then introduces a new form of knowledge for audiences. Starcher’s body is in direct opposition to pervasive

²⁷ Other soap operas at the time were also addressing the AIDS crisis, including *The Young and the Restless*, *All My Children*, and NBC’s *Another World*. The difference, however, was that they introduced it through their heterosexual female characters in order to avoid controversy, and also to strike a chord with their primary audience. There were both positive and negative aspects of this approach: on one hand, it did *not* reinforce the notion that HIV/AIDS was a strictly non-heterosexual disease; on the other hand, as Deborah Rogers pointed out in a piece she wrote for the *St. Petersburg Times*, “[t]he use of AIDS as a plot device...provides a pretext for reinforcing female stereotypes and conservative sexual behavior by punishing promiscuity in women” (“How TV Portrays AIDS”).

representations elsewhere in popular culture of gay men with ravaged bodies. As a result, his—and, by extension his character's—very *body* served to disrupt the constructed vision of withering gay male bodies referenced in the Pujol quote above and seen elsewhere.

Scholars William Bridel and Genevieve Rail, along with others, have noted how these wasting representations of gay men during the early years of the AIDS pandemic encouraged a subversive physical ideal within the gay community in the late-1980s and early-1990s. Visually, this physical ideal—what has since been called the “idealized gay male body” (Bridel and Rail 137)—is still prevalent today, and it has been reproduced and reified through various cultural artifacts, including soaps. Unlike earlier representations, the ‘new’ gay male body was/is seen as neither weak nor effeminate, but rather as healthy—regardless of serostatus—and hypermasculinized (Bridel and Rail 131). With this alternative discourse in mind, I argue that the Hank Elliot character is an early mediated example of this physical ideal, which arose in response to the discourses of AIDS and queerness in the 1980s. That is to say, I believe producers purposefully articulated this newer discursively-rooted body type with an AIDS storyline and, in doing so, exposed audiences to alternative ideas about queerness and AIDS.

As the Hank Elliot storyline drew to a close his off-screen lover's health deteriorated, reflecting a sad reality for many at the time, particularly gay men. This aspect of the narrative paved the way for greater conflict between Hank and the Clayton family, as Charles lay dying in the hospital. In a particularly poignant moment from the 10 February 1989 episode, Charles' father denies Hank the right to visit his dying partner in the hospital. Through their conversation, *As the World Turns'* writers again mirrored and challenged the prevailing notions about male non-heterosexuality at the time, specifically as it relates to the AIDS discourse. Before abruptly hanging up the phone with Hank, Charles' father states bluntly:

DR. CLAYTON: You had your life with Charles, and he's paying the price for that life. (*As The World Turns*, 10 Feb. 1989)

Encoded in this line is a reproduction of the discursive understanding that same-sex eroticism results in AIDS. But so, too, is a disruption of that same message: by this point in the storyline, audiences have presumably formed at least a passing connection to the Elliot character, and, assuming those same viewers have successfully decoded and accepted the producers' intentions, they likely no longer see Elliot in terms of the promiscuous, unsafe stereotype featured elsewhere in popular culture of the time. As a result, the accusation leveled by Charles' father comes across as ignorant and petty, rather than authoritative and knowing. This creates a potential site of disruption for the discursive understanding queerness as a direct cause of AIDS.

Through the trials Hank Elliot experienced while trying to be with his dying, hospitalized partner—which “did a lot of educating about how endemic homophobia is to all queer relationships” (“End of the Affair”)—and other valuable lessons on homophobia and AIDS-phobia contained elsewhere in Elliot's story, *As the World Turns* proved to be a valuable ally to gay men in countering the antigay messages polluting 1980s media. As a result of sensitive storytelling and the encoded pro-gay messages, head-writer Doug Marland was even given the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation's (GLAAD) Media Award in 1990.

However, the capitalist framework within which the genre operates tempered their efforts. Colleen Zenk, the actress who portrayed Elliot's coworker Barbara Ryan, had this to say about the limits and successes of the storyline as a whole, and with audiences in particular:

We were well into the AIDS crisis. By that point I don't think very many Americans were not touched in some way by the AIDS crisis. I think there was a lot more openness to it [...] By the time Doug [Marland] was telling the Hank Elliot storyline, so many people had been touched. There was more of an acceptance. The one thing I wish that had been told differently, and this was network or [sponsor Procter & Gamble] dictated, was that we never saw Hank's lover, who was dying of AIDS. A lot of people felt that was a cop-out. (Jacobs, “Colleen Zenk”)

Zenk's lament about the missing Charles character signifies the controlling interests of the network and sponsors, particularly the latter, which depends upon the stability of daytime serial watchers in order to market their products. One is left to wonder, then, how much further Marland and *As the World Turns*' producers would have pushed the envelope regarding the Elliot character were it not for corporate interference.

Regulation Stage

For the purposes of this piece, the primary significance of the Hank Elliot storyline is that it signals the transition between the ridicule stage and regulation stage for representations of queerness in daytime programming. As originally defined by Clark, the *regulation stage* is one wherein the media makers are finally forced to contend with the growing 'real world' outrage exhibited by the heretofore maligned minority group, an outrage that now threatens the social order to some degree. Subsequently, producers begin representing their former targets in capacities "devoted to the maintenance of law and order, either domestically or internationally" (20). For his own examples, Clark points out the spike in representations of Black police officers during the regulation stage (which coincided with growing civil unrest in the 'real world').

I argue that it was not until 1988 that representations of gay men on daytime television finally moved into the regulation stage. Such regulation was not achieved through characters "devoted to the maintenance of law and order," however, but rather through the maintenance of heteronormative hegemony. The Hank Elliot storyline coincided with the growing threat of radical queer groups in the 'real world,' such as the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP). At the time, ACT-UP aggressively challenged the White House, the Federal Drug Administration, and Wall Street, because they were enraged by the harmful, pathologizing

representations of gay men in the media, as well as the inattention by the government to the AIDS epidemic (“ACT UP Capsule,” *ACT UP Capsule History*). When faced with such challenges it became necessary for media makers to begin regulating their representations of queerness in a way that would placate both disgruntled viewers *and* mainstream audiences. Thus, during the regulation stage, non-heterosexual characters were slowly incorporated into daytime serials in a way that did not portray them as monsters (as they had been earlier, e.g., Katherine Chancellor), but rather as ‘normal’ gays and lesbians who adhered to societal conventions (read: heteronormative homosexuals). As I discuss in the sections devoted to the 1990s and 2000s, such regulation has continued in to the present, further cementing this understanding of heteronormalized homosexuality within the contemporary discourse of ‘appropriate’ non-heterosexuality, and constraining alternative articulations thereof.

PART III: DAYTIME THINKS OF THE CHILDREN (1990s)

The 1990s gave rise to growing societal awareness and (glacially slow) acceptance of gays and lesbians as members of society. Yet mediated representations of these sexual identities continued to be influenced by discourses that articulated queerness as a threat to American culture, particularly vis-à-vis child predation. In this section I analyze two *All My Children* storylines from the 1990s: the coming out of high school teacher Michael Delaney, and the subsequent coming out of his student, Kevin Sheffield. Through these case studies I show how, in addition to adopting and representing those discourses that articulated gay men as child predators, producers incorporated ideas that countered the same. I also demonstrate over the coming pages how these storylines mark the continued regulation of queerness in daytime serials. The focus in both case studies is on a teacher figure: first as an individual coming out, and later as an assumed

child predator. I argue here that, just as police officers are “devoted to the maintenance of law and order, either domestically or internationally” (Clark 20), teachers, as agents of socialization, are devoted to the maintenance of societal order. Therefore, by portraying a gay character as a teacher, producers connote the necessary place of gay men in society as a whole.

Before discussing the storylines and ideas directly, however, it is once again necessary to look at the historical moment that gave rise to them.

Historical Context

Following *Dynasty*’s final episode on 11 May 1989, another openly queer character would not be featured in *either* daytime or primetime soap operas for another three years.²⁸ This lack of visibility in the earliest part of the 1990s can be linked to a few factors. First, the so-called Religious Right had a stranglehold on the nation. Their influence was bolstered by the support of socially- and fiscally-conservative President George H.W. Bush, who was elected in 1989 on the heels of fellow socially- and fiscally-conservative President Ronald W. Reagan. Further, the fear of AIDS still permeated every facet of society—including, and perhaps especially, the media—leading to numerous instances of antigay discrimination and violence. Last, but not least, the nation was distracted by its involvement in the First Gulf War.

Interestingly, however, it was the U.S. military’s treatment of gays and lesbians following that war which served as an impetus for moderate change in the media’s tone toward gays and lesbians more broadly: “[i]n the wake of the Gulf War, there were countless news stories about gay soldiers—including war veterans—who were being expelled from the military” (Capsuto 283). Then, in 1992, William “Bill” J. Clinton, the Democrat governor of Arkansas, declared his

²⁸ This does not count the miniseries, *Dynasty: The Reunion*, which aired in October of 1991. It should be noted that in the reunion special the Steven Carrington character is depicted as living in Washington, DC, in a committed relationship—which I read as another signifier of heteronormalized non-heterosexuality—with Bart Fallmont.

candidacy for Presidency of the United States. Clinton promised to address the military's discriminatory policy if elected, along with other issues important to the gay and lesbian community. In the book *Out of the Past*, Miller quotes a speech Clinton gave to gay and lesbian activists prior to the California primary:

[Clinton said,] "I have a vision and you're part of it...we don't have a person to [waste]." Clinton] promised an end to the U.S. military's ban on homosexual servicemen and women; he also promised to appoint an AIDS czar and to initiate a Manhattan Project-like crash program to combat AIDS. (497)

Clinton's speech, in conjunction with a gay-friendly party platform adopted at the Democratic National Convention that year, ultimately earned him slightly more than 70% of the gay vote (Miller 499). The speech also created a snowball effect via the public debate it sparked surrounding gays in the military, which would eventually lead to a more tolerant—though not necessarily embrative, as I show here—view of gays and lesbians in the eyes of the media and the population at large. Whereas previously the discourse surrounding queerness had often gone by the wayside, it was now a recognized part of our culture—at least in the form of 'non-threatening' gays and lesbians, like the Lynn Carson and Hank Elliot characters described in the previous section. And it is with this legitimization of non-heterosexual issues through the lens of the media that we return to queerness in soaps of the 1990s.

Manifestations within Soaps

Throughout the 1990s, ABC created a slew of gay and lesbian characters that could be used to educate their existing audience about associated issues, and potentially expand their viewership. In chronological order, daytime serials *One Life to Live* (1968-Present), *General Hospital* (1963-Present), and *All My Children* each featured queer characters. A common trope used in these stories was the relationship between an adult figure, thought or assumed to be gay, and a younger

character struggling to find their sexual identity. As part of these stories, heterosexual characters—seemingly swayed by Anita Bryant’s 1977 assertion that since “[h]omosexuals cannot reproduce so they must recruit” (Miller 372)—would accuse the (perceived) non-heterosexual adult figure of taking advantage of/confusing the impressionable younger character. By way of example, in one scene from *One Life to Live* the angry father of a gay youth, in blaming the man he assumed was responsible for his son’s same-gendered attraction, shouted at his wife:

WILLIAM DOUGLAS: I hope you finally realize...what a danger Andrew Carpenter really is! [...] Who the hell else took our son away from us? (kirklandheaven, “Billy Douglas”)

In the end, the writers of these storylines would demonstrate that such fear mongering about recruitment was not warranted, and most of the enraged heterosexual characters would come around (though William Douglas never did). In a moment I will look at one such story more closely, but for now we must consider the impetus for such narratives.

Going back to my earlier analysis of the treatment of the gays and lesbians in the 1950s, Gayle S. Rubin notes how, in addition to being articulated as agents of communism, queer persons were also conflated with sex offenders:

The term “sex offender” sometimes applied to rapists, sometimes to “child molesters,” and eventually functioned as a code for homosexuals. In its bureaucratic, medical, and popular versions, the sex offender discourse tended to blur distinctions between violent sexual assault and illegal but consensual acts such as sodomy. The criminal justice system incorporated these concepts when an epidemic of sexual psychopath laws swept through state legislatures. These laws gave the psychological professions increased police powers over homosexuals and other sexual “deviants.” (5)

This particular discursive articulation of people with same-sex attractions as sex offenders is important to note, as the myth of gays and lesbians as predators of children persists today

amongst right-wing ideologues, exemplified in the moment by the debate over allowing gays to serve in the Boy Scouts of America.

It was in 1977, however, that the conflation of non-heterosexuals and sex offenders, and more overtly child molesters, became a particularly problematic political rallying point in the U.S. In January of that year, the Dade County, Florida, legislature passed a gay rights ordinance, which swiftly drew the ire of conservatives. Spearheaded by Anita Bryant, the “Save Our Children” campaign fought back against this gesture of equality, and in doing so relied on and perpetuated the myth that, since two men and two women are incapable of direct reproduction, gays and lesbians depend on predatory recruitment tactics in order to further their cause. This particular strategy yielded results: the Dade County ordinance was overturned, and so too were similar measures across America. In California, Senator John Briggs, inspired by the early success of the “Save Our Children” campaign, even proposed a measure in 1978 that would have restricted non-heterosexuals from teaching positions, though the initiative was eventually thwarted by local activists such as Harvey Milk. As wryly noted by Rubin: “For over a century, no tactic for stirring up erotic hysteria has been as reliable as the appeal to protect children” (6).²⁹

²⁹ Though it cannot be proven, I suspect that queer characters and storylines of the 1980s would likely have been dominated by the construction of non-heterosexuals as child predators were it not for the unexpected eruption and topicality of the AIDS pandemic at the start of the decade, just as representations of queerness in daytime serials during the 1970s were shaped by discourses that stressed mental instability and predatory behaviors amongst such persons. However, I believe the advent of the pandemic prompted creators of daytime serials to produce storylines that reflected the discourses that arose in response to HIV/AIDS, thereby allowing the ‘child molester’ myth to go unaddressed for the time being. As the 1980s came to a close, though, and society acclimated to the factuality of life in the era of AIDS, an uneasy sense of normalcy returned—a new normal that was, in many ways, unsure of how to handle the growing presence of openly queer individuals occupying positions in the government, the armed services and, perhaps especially, the classroom. The latter, in particular, may have called to mind the assertions made by Bryant so many years prior, resulting in the reemergence of the child predator construction during the 1990s.

Case Study #1: Michael Delaney

In 1995, over a decade after *All My Children*'s landmark storyline involving Dr. Carson, the series presented another gay-themed story. Seemingly ripped from the headlines, the story arc echoed the experience of 'real world' educator Rodney Wilson. Wilson, a high school history teacher from Missouri, outed himself to students in 1994 as part of his ongoing effort to

[f]ight for the right of every child in every school in America to be safe from fear and intimidation...fight for the right of every teacher...in every school in America to be free to live openly and honestly without fear of job loss...[and] fight for the right to have accurate information about lesbians and gays included in the textbooks and curricula of every school. (qtd. in Rapp, "Holidays and Observances")

Wilson was represented in *All My Children* by the character Michael Delaney.

Producers portrayed the Delaney character as a 'new,' more normative type of gay man from the start. For instance, he was scripted as an "ex-Marine who taught history and coached basketball at Pine Valley High School" (Tropiano 114). From the outset these traits countered discursive ideas about male queerness that were rampant in other forms of popular culture at the time, specifically by subverting the gendered traits frequently associated with queer figures during the ridicule stage (e.g., their inability to play sports, physical weakness, lack of coordination, etc.). Additionally, from Tropiano's description we can also infer Delaney's role as an (inter)national protector of law and order owing to his status as an ex-Marine. Not only does this indicate producers' awareness of the external discourse of "gays and the military" following the Gulf War, but it also firmly locates Delaney within the regulation stage of representation pursuant to Clark's original definition.

In the 20 December 1995 episode, while leading a class discussion about the Holocaust, Delaney came out to his students. Holding a cardboard sign that featured the various sigils Nazis

used to identify their victims, he pointed out how various students could have been targeted for execution, before finally announcing:

MICHAEL: Me, I [would] wear this pink triangle because I'm gay. ("Episode #6705")

Following this act, Delaney was promptly fired from his teaching position, as parents "feared that he would 'teach' his lifestyle to his students" ("Who's Who in Pine Valley"). The parents' scripted actions were reflective of the discursive myth in the 'real world' that gays recruit younger children to bolster their ranks.³⁰ Furthermore, this fear was not only displayed by the parents of male students, but also female students, as demonstrated in the scene where Anita Santos defies her parents' demand that she sever ties with Delaney:

HECTOR SANTOS (to ANITA): Come with us now!

ANITA SANTOS: No, I won't!

ISABELLA SANTOS (to MICHAEL): You taught her this—she never defied her father before.

ANITA: He [Hector] is wrong; you're both wrong! ("Episode #6716")

This brief exchange demonstrates the discourse-driven fear of predatory queerness to both male and female students and, by extension, heteronormative society *in totum*. Further connoting Delaney's threat to 'normal' society, characters also re-present the antigay, AIDS-phobic discourses of the 1980s, exemplified in the following quote by one community member who opposed Delaney's return to teaching:

JASON: Okay, remember, it's perverts like Delaney that gave AIDS household words, okay? They get it, they spread it, they don't care who pays the price. Do you want them teaching your kids? ("Episode #6737")

After a lengthy court battle and with the support of his students—and in spite of the antigay forces and rhetoric that decried his return—the Delaney character was reinstated...but

³⁰ As noted by Delaney, the campaign against him was led by "[Enid Nelson] and her moral mob" ("Episode #6716"), a possible allusion to Anita Bryant and the Moral Majority.

his articulation as a possible child predator was soon to be revisited, as the next case study demonstrates.

Case Study #2: Kevin Sheffield

Prompted by the coming out of the Delaney character, one of his students, Kevin Sheffield, began to focus on his own burgeoning gay identity. As members of the Sheffield family were confronted with Kevin's truth, their scripted responses, like those seen in the familial reactions in the preceding case study, were also informed by the discourse of gay men as child predators. Evidence of this can be found in the following scene (which was split over two days) between Kevin and his brother Jason:

KEVIN: I look up to Mr. Delaney.
 JASON: [...] Look, Delaney's got you all confused.
 KEVIN: No, I'm not confused anymore, I know who I am.
 JASON: Kevin, there's nothing wrong with you.
 KEVIN: That's right, that's right—there's nothing wrong with me. It's just who I am. [...] I tried to tell you, but I was too scared. [...] I'm gay! I'm gay.
 JASON: No, no way! No, just because someone put the moves on you, and maybe you didn't know what to say or do, that doesn't make you what they are!
 KEVIN: That's not the way it is—
 JASON: Sure it is! Delaney put the moves on you, didn't he?
 KEVIN: No, Delaney is my teacher.
 JASON: He taught you all right. Damn him!
 KEVIN: No! Delaney has nothing to do with this, Jason.
 JASON: The hell he doesn't! I'm gonna nail that pervert! (“Episode #6737”)

KEVIN: This has nothing to do with Michael Delaney!
 JASON: Don't try to protect him!
 KEVIN: Look, I am not trying to protect the guy. I have been this way since, like, the fifth grade.
 JASON: Okay, but that does not mean you're gay, all right? I know that you're a jock since the day you were born, you dated girls—Delaney did this to you!
 KEVIN: No he didn't—he doesn't even know, nobody does. Jason, you're the first person I've told.
 [...]
 JASON: That degenerate corrupted my brother—I'll smash his face in! (“Episode #6738”)

Through the character of Jason Sheffield, this scene re-produces the external discourse of gay men as child predators who depend on recruitment tactics to grow their numbers.

Simultaneously, however, producers also *disrupt* this discursive construction through Kevin's adamant assertions that Delaney never "put the moves on [him]," and that he has "been this way" since an early age. A similar disruption occurs minutes later, in a scene between Jason, Delaney, and the character Dixie Martin:

JASON: The private times, just the two of you alone—what, did you give him some beer or wine, maybe?

MICHAEL: Listen to me, we never talked about anything other than history and sports—that's it, ask him.

JASON: Oh, like he'd tell me anything you didn't want him to?

DIXIE: Come on, stop it, Jason—you're acting like a jackass!

JASON: Well you'd sing a different tune if he went in and converted [Dixie's son] Junior!

DIXIE: Junior can't be converted, any more than you could or Kevin could. You are what you are! ("Episode #6738")

Here, the Dixie character—staged so that she occupies a prominent position center-frame, between the two men—refutes the idea that a coerced conversion is even possible. Moreover, she presents audiences with the counter-discursive assertion that "You are what you are." Not only does this challenge the notion of sexual malleability that we saw in the Katherine Chancellor storyline, for instance, but it also suggests to viewers that heterosexual sexuality and queer sexuality are equally inherent, and therefore equally 'normal.' (Also worth noting in this exchange is that, through Delaney's assertion that he only discussed history and sports with Kevin during their tutoring sessions, the character again counters stereotypes about gay men—for both himself and the athletically-inclined Kevin—that emerged during the earlier ridicule stage, connoting a more masculinized and heteronormative model of gayness.)

Regardless of Delaney and Kevin's assertions that nothing happened, Sheffield's family continues to blame his teacher for Kevin's same-sex attraction. Eventually, they demand "Kevin

seek reparative therapy to ‘cure’ his homosexuality” (Kreglow, “Soaps Come Clean”). The treatment fails, and ultimately Kevin’s mother comes to accept him, though his father and Jason—who was sent to prison after he attempted to murder Delaney—do not. Shortly thereafter, Delaney and the Sheffield family were moved to *All My Children*’s proverbial backburner. Delaney was last seen onscreen in April of 1997 (when actor Chris Bruno departed the series), though other characters have referenced that he still teaches at Pine Valley High school and lives with his partner, Dr. Bradford Phillips. (Such information reinforces the character’s heteronormalized queerness, operating in the same way as Hank Elliot’s statements about his relationship with Charles Clayton on *As the World Turns*). The Kevin Sheffield character, on the other hand, has been neither seen nor referenced since an explosion in July 1998 leveled a building he was working in. Perhaps a simple explanation for their sudden departure can be found in an idea—particularly relevant at the time, which coincided with the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming—attributed to a staff writer for *Soap Opera News*, Jeffrey Epstein: “Middle America doesn’t want different types of people” (qtd. in Pela, “Gays of Our Lives”).

PART IV: LONGER LASTING SUDS (2000s)

Finally, we come to the millennial decade, which saw a host of legislative and judicial victories *and* defeats in the struggle for queer equality. In many respects, those victories that were achieved were the result of a Gay Rights Movement that deployed a discourse of sameness. In short, the discourse of sameness argues that equality is necessary because gays and lesbians are no different from heterosexuals in their values and capabilities. Riki Wilchins points out that this articulation of queerness “had to look more palatable and more gender-normative [in order to

win mainstream America's acceptance]" (16). This prompted gay rights activists to distance themselves from issues of gender-queerness, and excluded a large group of others who did not fit into the heteronormative mould as easily, namely effeminate men, masculine women, transgendered individuals, intersexed persons, and everyone else in-between on the spectrum. Not surprisingly, we have already seen manifestations of this discursive articulation in popular culture of the time vis-à-vis those soap storylines and characters from the 1980s and 1990s discussed earlier.

In this section, the same-sex relationship between *One Life to Live*'s Oliver Fish and Kyle Lewis is examined as a means of understanding the most current, dominant, heteronormalized understanding of queerness. From there, attention turns toward *All My Children*'s trans character, Zoe Luper, and *Passions*' intersexed Vincent Clarkson character. These two characters are used as a means of underscoring those sexual identities that continue to be represented problematically in soaps and popular culture as a result of their relegation to the margins, even as heteronormalized gays and lesbians are brought closer to the center of cultural 'acceptability.' Understanding how this hierarchy is inscribed and re-presented through daytime serials is essential to Queer theory's call to destabilize (or at least re-center) the boundaries of representation. Finally, this section questions whether or not contemporary representations of queerness in soaps fit into the last of Clark's stages of representation, the *respect stage*, wherein a broad range of portrayals are made manifest, resulting in a cluster of representation that is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative, and therefore more like 'reality.'

First, though, it is once again necessary to provide a bit of historical contextualization.

Historical Context

Historically speaking, the millennial decade was a momentous one for the United States' queer populace. This was especially true in terms of judicial decisions. On 26 June 2003 the Supreme Court of the United States issued its decision in the landmark *Lawrence v. Texas* case, deeming Texas' sodomy law unenforceable when applied to consenting adults. As a result of the jurists' ruling, similar laws across the country, which had been used historically to target queer communities, were marked unconstitutional. Nearly five months later, on 18 November, the judicial system sided with gays and lesbians once again, when the Supreme Court for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts declared the denial of marriage rights for same-gendered couples unconstitutional in their findings for *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*. This decision paved the way for Massachusetts to become the first state to offer legal marriage rights to gays and lesbians.

By 2004, hate crime laws had made it onto the books in more than half of the U.S. states, though efforts to push through a national hate crime prevention law ultimately failed. Just two years later, in 2006, New Jersey passed a civil union bill, the District of Columbia and three U.S. states passed antidiscrimination legislation, and the Federal Marriage Amendment backed by President George W. Bush was narrowly defeated, having received only 81% of the necessary votes. (Sadly for equality proponents, these successes were counterbalanced by the enactment of full bans against marriage equality in eight U.S. states, and the revocation of earlier antidiscrimination legislation in Kentucky.) But the judicial and legislative arenas were not the only area where queer communities made inroads during the millennial decade: developments in the science and health industries helped those affected by the AIDS virus deal with it more effectively, and there was a proverbial "baby boom" of queer parents.

Manifestations within Soaps

Most significant for the purposes of this piece, however, is the growing inclusion of queer characters and storylines in the realm of contemporary popular culture, specifically daytime serials. The early 2000s managed to do that which had not been done since the 1980s, offering representations of queerness on each of the major networks that aired soap operas. So prolific were these representations that they even caused a brief resurgence in academic attention toward the genre: in particular, much has been written recently about *All My Children*'s landmark lesbian storyline involving Bianca Montgomery, daughter of infamous *legacy character* Erica Kane, and *As the World Turns*' equally significant gay storyline involving Luciano "Luke" Snyder and his on-again-off-again partner, Noah Mayer.³¹

In particular, these storylines have resonated with academics because they defied the post-1970s trend in daytime storytelling of making background characters, who could easily be written out if audience reactions were negative, the locus of queerness. In a similar vein, they have garnered praise and attention because the characters' non-heterosexuality remained a core component of their identity for the remainder of the series. They were even allowed to engage in the same level of long-term relationship building (and razing) as their heterosexual counterparts, further connoting their 'sameness' and heternormativity. These qualities are showcased in the first of three case studies analyzing representations of queerness in daytime serials of the millennial decade.

³¹ A "legacy character" can best be described as longtime figures (and fan-favorites) that serves as an anchor to significant events or time spans in the show's deep history. In the case of *All My Children*, the Erica Kane character is considered a legacy character because she is the only figure from the show's earliest days to appear without interruption. Such characters enable present day audiences to remember past events in the context of a show that is rarely (if ever) repeated and spans multiple decades. Other examples include: Nancy Hughes on *As the World Turns*; Katherine Chancellor and Jill Foster on *The Young & the Restless*; and, Frances Reid on *Days of Our Lives*.

Case Study #1: Oliver Fish and Kyle Lewis

In January 2008, the character Oliver Fish first appeared as a member of *One Life to Live*'s local police department.³² Initially a supporting character that was romantically linked to various female regulars on the show, everything changed when Evans' character bumped into Kyle Lewis in April 2009. Other characters soon learned that the two men were once frat-brothers, and that during that time they had carried on a romantic relationship. As the story continued to unfold, it focused primarily on "the journey of Fish as he [struggled] to come to terms with his own personal truth" (Ozanich, "Gay Pride"). In an interview with *TVGuide Magazine*'s Michael Logan some months later, Sue Johnson, ABC's vice president of programming at the time, had this to say about the impetus for Fish's storyline:

Soaps have a history of exploring social issues, and there's been a lot of progress where gay issues are concerned. When we wanted Bianca to kiss Lena on [*All My Children*], we had to jump through hoops to make it happen. It seems people are more accepting of gays now. Yet, at the same time, you look at what's happened with [anti-marriage equality] Proposition 8 and you go, whoa, we haven't come as far as we'd like to think we've come. (qtd. in Tashlover, "TVGuide Magazine")

As Fish continued to struggle with his identity, the openly gay Lewis character—after being rebuffed by the still-closeted Fish once again—became involved with local gay activist Nick Chavez. Chavez, however, feared that Lewis was still in love with Fish. Hoping to save their young relationship, Chavez suggested they get married the next day, during a nationally televised "group same-sex marriage ceremony" sponsored by Llanview's fictional Gay and Lesbian Alliance. The text that follows is transcribed from the scenes wherein Chavez proposes:

NICK: [Tomorrow's mass gay wedding will show] Llanview that its gay and lesbian citizens are part of this community. We're not just strangers; we're their teachers, their doctors—and we want the same rights that

³² The role of the police officer is a direct connection to Clark's theorization concerning representations of minority groups during the regulation stage, removing any lingering doubt as to the stage of representation gay men are currently in.

everybody else already has: the right to commit our lives to the person we love.

[...]

NICK: [...] I want you to be with me tomorrow, standing beside me [...] [during] Pennsylvania's first mass gay wedding—

KYLE: What are you doing?

NICK: —because you're *my* guy, and you are the smartest, sexiest, most fascinating man I've ever met. Even if you are a little old fashioned. So how about it? Kyle Lewis, will you make an honest man out of me? Will you be my husband—

KYLE: Okay, okay! You can get off the floor though, okay?

NICK: Is that a yes?

KYLE: Yes. Yes, Nicolas Roberto Chavez, I would be honored to marry you.
("London Calling")

This exchange, like so many other moments discussed in this piece, displays soap producers' awareness of external discourses related to queerness—in this particular case, the discourse of equal marriage—and also pushes forth a specific understanding of non-heterosexuality that has been heteronormalized.

Indeed, the text above is encoded with various markers of Frederik Dhaenens' definition of heteronormativity. First, by framing Chavez and Lewis alongside the institution of marriage, producers connote the characters' desire to enter into a relationship that ascribes to a "rigid set of norms and values (e.g., stability, monogamy, longevity)" (443). Second, by having the Kyle character interrupt Nick midway through his pronunciation of the word "husband," the fixed, heteronormalizing binary of husband/wife is simultaneously evoked, disrupted, and denied application between two men. Third, through the reference to Kyle being "old fashioned" the duo is further articulated as non-threatening to the traditional, heteronormative social order. Finally, and perhaps most troubling, Chavez's claim that the wedding ceremony will show "Llanview that its gay and lesbian citizens are part of this community" is necessarily as exclusive as the concept of heteronormativity itself: it professes room for gays and lesbians within the broader community, but, through its silence on the matter, denies entrance for those with alternative identities and relationships (e.g., transpersons, intersexed individuals, etc.).

Turning to the mass wedding itself, Fish was one of the police officers assigned to crowd control duties during the ceremony. In true melodramatic soap fashion, he brought the event to a standstill when he spontaneously outed himself publicly, finally declaring his love for Lewis in the process and ensuring that Chavez and Lewis would not be united. The duo reconnected and Llanview residents and fans rejoiced! Afterward, the group marriage ceremony carried on, concluding with the following blessing from Reverend Andrew Carpenter³³:

REV. CARPENTER: Love is our pulse, our breath, and no matter who you find yourselves in love with, it's always a gift. So cherish and celebrate your love as couples, and as partners for life. You may kiss your spouse. ("Wholly Matrimony!")

Following Carpenter's proclamation, the camera scanned across the various couples that were a part of the experience. Significantly, most of the couples merely hugged, and only six couples are shown actually kissing: one newlywed lesbian couple; one non-married gay couple (Kyle and Oliver); one straight woman and the queer woman she married as a sign of solidarity; two heterosexual male-female couples; and, two heterosexual women. Perhaps the most salient pairing in terms of the 'normalization' of certain kinds of queerness, is the one between two heterosexual women. That kiss is initiated by unmarried gay-ally Roxy Balsom, and received by an antigay protestor who, though resistant, is left smiling. The Balsom character's violation of the protestor, and the protestor's spontaneous, *post hoc* display of enjoyment (i.e., the protestor's flickering smile, and the way she self-consciously primped her hair after the fact), displaces the newly married gay and lesbian characters as threats to heteronormativity, and instead articulates unmarried female sexuality as the source of heterosexual society's instability.

³³ As a nod to the series' past treatment of queerness, Rev. Carpenter is the heterosexual adult character falsely accused by William Douglas of preying on/converting his gay son in the early 1990s.

Also significant is that the only gay and lesbian characters of color shown following the queer wedding ceremony—the Latino Chavez and African American Amelia Bennett³⁴—are also the only queer characters left without a substantial relationship in the end. What this suggests is that their non-white status necessitates a lower hierarchical status—i.e., they are even farther from the culturally accepted center than white heteronormalized homosexuals, though not necessarily as deep into the margins as transpersons and intersexed persons.

And with this turn to the topic of margins, the focus now shifts toward other manifestations of queerness that are currently less accepted within the realm of daytime serials and, by extension, broader American popular culture: transgenderism and intersexuality.

Case Study #2: Zoe Luper

In 2006, viewers of *All My Children* were introduced to Freddie “Zarf Luper, a natal-male and international rock star. Three months after his August debut, the musician met and instantly fell in love with Bianca Montgomery, Pine Valley’s much-adored, and most prominent lesbian character. Though the ensuing storyline could have gone in a troubling direction—with Zarf attempting to convert or ‘cure’ Montgomery (a fact that the Montgomery character herself references in the dialogue transcribed below)—the powers-that-be behind *All My Children* were ready to “get back to more adventurous days of storytelling [in soaps]” (Brian Frons qtd. in Gold, “Soap Operas Finally”).

In a scene set on New Year’s Eve 2006, Montgomery opens her front door to find Zarf standing before her, dressed in a lacy black evening dress. Stunned and confused, Montgomery

³⁴ Bennett was the woman referenced earlier who married a heterosexual female, Dorian Lord, as a sign of solidarity...and so the latter could score additional votes in her campaign to be Llanview’s next mayor.

stammers Zarf's name, but the latter quickly and gently corrects, giving her preferred name instead:

ZOE: Zoe, my name is Zoe. I wanted you to meet me, and I thought, *the beginning of a new year, what could be more perfect?*

[...]

ZOE: It's a lot to absorb, I know.

BIANCA: I'm sorry...I...have no—

ZOE: You're surprised. Me too. And grateful to you; I've never gone out like this before.

BIANCA: I don't understand.

ZOE: I almost stayed home tonight, but when I took that final look in the mirror, and looked into my reflection, I saw your eyes and I felt calm, and safe. I knew I could share myself with you. Please tell me I wasn't wrong. You see who I really am.

BIANCA: [*slaps ZOE across the face in anger*] Yeah, I do. How could you? I believed you. What's the game tonight, Zarf? Lay the lesbian?

ZOE: Oh, Bianca—

BIANCA: You think this is a trip? Get yourself all decked out because I'm into women? Why not? The big, sexy, beast rockstar gets kinky to nail the lesbo—it's a great idea. You start 2007 with a masquerade party of your own.

ZOE: It's not a masquerade. You are finally seeing the real me, who I truly am. (“Episode #9522”)

This scene clearly marks representations of trans identity as being a step even farther removed from the culturally accepted center than similar representations of gays and lesbians.³⁵ The accuracy of this statement is reflected in the alternating looks of confusion and disgust, of abjection, which dance across Bianca's face. Similarly, Montgomery's immediate suspicion of Zoe's motives—the assumption that a heterosexual, biological man would only dress as a woman for the purposes of exploiting Bianca's attraction to women—assumes heterosexist questions about the (presumed) essential nature of human sexuality, and redirects it onto an even more

³⁵ As a reminder, for the purposes of this piece I am using the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's definition for *transgender*: “An umbrella term (adj.) for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Use the descriptive term (*transgender*, *transsexual*, *cross-dresser*, FTM or MTF) preferred by the individual. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically” (“GLAAD Media Reference Guide,” *GLAAD*)

marginalized sexual identity grouping, transgendered persons, while simultaneously articulating gays and lesbians (those with ‘normal’ queer identities) as being closer to the heteronormative center of cultural acceptability.

In short, Bianca’s response in this scene establishes a hierarchy of sexual value, with trans identities (represented through the Zoe character) situated below heteronormalized homosexuality and heterosexuality, respectively. Scholar Gayle S. Rubin argues that such systems

function in much the same ways as do ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism, and religious chauvinism. They rationalize the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexual rabble. (13)

In this way, they are akin to metaphorical walls that establish the margins of culturally sanctioned eroticism (Fig. 1). Interestingly, when Rubin first wrote the essay in which the accompanying image appears—in 1984—she designated then-contemporary American culture’s view of transsexuality (the discursive term that preceded transgenderism) as being one of

“unmodulated horrors incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence” (15). Almost 30 years later, it seems American culture’s views have not changed all that much.

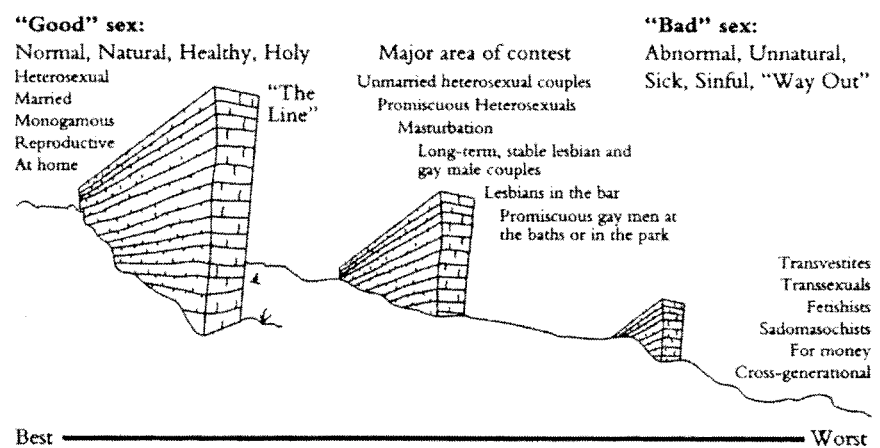


Figure 1 (source: Rubin 14)

Perhaps fearful of alienating mainstream audiences with their sudden depiction of a marginalized queer identity, *All My Children*’s writers immediately launched into Zoe’s backstory, humanizing her experience and making it more difficult for viewers to discount the

woman behind the mask: they wrote of Zoe first putting on a dress at the age of five; of the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father after he caught his son dressed as a woman; and, of the time she cast all of her lunch money into a wishing well in the hopes of becoming a real woman. All the while, as audiences are (presumably) drawn in—through either their own senses of empathy, or through Bianca’s reactions as their proxy—Zoe’s dialogue is peppered with phrases that re-present essentialist and traditional heteronormative conceptualizations of gender and gender roles:

ZOE: When did you first realize you were a girl?

BIANCA: I don’t remember not knowing. Always. But that there were differences between boys and girls, and that I was a girl—I don’t know, maybe four or five.

ZOE: Me too. I wanted beauty and light, soft things—oh, hello there! [*ZOE picks up and cradles a baby doll laying nearby, connoting a desire for motherhood*—dresses, and dolls, and rainbow-colored stuffed ponies. I got overalls and cars and trucks, and sports equipment. I wanted to pick flowers, and I was expected to wrestle in the dirt. (“Episode #9522”)]

Notably, however, producers also manage to expose the constructed, discursive nature of such ideas. They do so through Zoe’s explanation of her own desires, which conflict(ed) with society’s gendered expectations for someone born with a penis. In this way, the soap opera genre—through Zoe’s story—deploys contemporary discourses related to transgenderism, but also manages to present a more sympathetic understanding of what it means to be transgender than is encoded in the oft-derisive representations found elsewhere (e.g., media coverage of transgender children).

A short while later, Zoe comes out to Bianca a second time, this time as “a woman who loves women” (“Episode #9522”). In doing so, she problematized notions of gender identity and sexual identity, and their relationship to erotic desire. Many heterosexual viewers encountering the notion of transgenderism for the first time, as well as many gay and lesbian viewers, were likely left reeling by Zoe’s scripted revelation, as it managed to simultaneously suggest a

heterosexual (i.e., physical) and non-heterosexual (i.e., gendered) attraction to Bianca. That is, the combination of Zoe's physical attraction and anatomical make-up signified heterosexual eroticism (pursuant to the popular discursive understandings of the time); conversely, the combination of her physical attraction and expressed gender identity signified lesbianism within the popular discourse. Eleanor Morrison's analysis of audience responses to the Zoe/Bianca pairing confirms this confusion on the part of audiences, and also notes how Bianca's established sexuality was muddled by extension: "the Zoe/Bianca pairing 'had fans questioning [Bianca's] sexuality,' due to Zoe's status as pre-operative transwoman, female in identity but male in body" (658).

As the storyline progressed, *All My Children's* producers followed the Zoe character's journey from physical man to physical woman. At the time, Matea Gold pointed out that "transgender characters have remained a rarity [on television]. Until now, Showtime's *The L Word* [2004-2009] was the only television program to follow a character's transition from one gender to another" ("Soap Operas Finally"). In regards to earlier references to the role of capitalism in shaping daytime serials and the discursive knowledge they re-present, the fact that the only other television show to explore this issue aired on a subscription channel is significant. Yet, notwithstanding the rarity of such stories, *All My Children's* handling of Zoe's transition was both careful and sensitive, while nonetheless perpetuating the sexual hierarchy discussed earlier.

As one of the first steps of this journey toward a physical transition, the Zoe character visited an endocrinologist to obtain hormones on 8 March 2007 ("Episode #9569"). Rather than featuring a quick doctor's visit that yielded immediate results, as many television series operating under time and sponsorship constraints might be inclined to do, specific medicalized

knowledge about the transitioning process was presented to Zoe and, by extension, viewers. Not only did the Dr. Massey character explain aspects of protocol like Harry Benjamin's Standard of Care, she also laid out key risks and benefits of hormone treatment (e.g., fat distribution, circulatory and organ damage, the dangers of "off the street" hormones, etc.).

The second step of Zoe's journey saw her attend a support group meeting for transgendered persons following her visit to Dr. Massey. Significantly, these scenes were unscripted, and featured actual trans persons discussing their lived experiences (Hernandez, "'All My Children'"). Participants of varying ages and ethnicities educated each other—and, more importantly, viewers—on their individual encounters with "the journey." Highlights of their conversation encompassed their differing levels of certainty about the next step(s) in their transitions, and their understandings of love in relationship to their selves and others. One particularly interesting exchange that emerged from this scene follows:

JENNY, GROUP LEADER: The main thing that we all want is to be loved, to be like other people, to get on with the business of life. And it's hard to be different. I think...sometimes, though, I think, part of the journey we go through is figuring out how to make this thing that's our curse into our greatest blessing.

[...]

JENNY: It's so wonderful when we have people that understand us, and when people get us. That's very, very powerful. The question I want to ask all of you: if you have someone in your life who gets you? Do you have someone in your life who understands?

BETTY, GROUP MEMBER: My wife was just odd enough as a teenager, and hung out with the—the odd kids, that when I told her she kind of went off and did her research, and did her reading, and asked really good questions. And she may not be 100% comfortable, but she gets it. She knows it's real, she knows it's not something I'm making up, she knows I didn't choose to be trans. [...]

JENNY: What about you, Zoe, do you have someone who really understands you?

ZOE: I don't think I would be in this room if I didn't [now have the support of Bianca], 'cause I was literally dragged down the hallway, and she's right outside those doors. She's been with me, she took me to the endocrinologist, which is why I'm here. ("Episode #9570")

This particular string of dialogue is worthy of attention for the ways in which it reifies the sexual hierarchy. Working backwards, Zoe once again explains how her ability to openly pursue transition is only made possible through the continued support of Bianca, who, through her status as an out lesbian, signifies both resistance to the heteronormative system that keeps trans people marginalized, and also a culturally accepted form of queerness that is able to move more freely in society. In terms of a hierarchy, then, Bianca functions as a necessary link between the center and the margins. Meanwhile, Betty's wife represents the heterosexual top of the hierarchy, and it is understood that her ability to accept Betty is rooted in both her own oddity and a past spent with "odd kids." This articulation discursively frames Betty herself as the *new* non-normative person in her wife's life, and similarly re-inscribes the wife as 'normal.' (Also relevant, of course, is group leader Jenny's declaration of their ultimate goal: to be considered "like other people"—i.e., closer to the heteronormative center.)

The discursive knowledge about transgenderism that was featured over the course of the Zoe storyline served to both normalize and abjectify those who identify as such. Secondly, it served to re-present a hierarchy of 'acceptable' human sexuality and identity. In regards to the first point, through the story's honest, serious look at the notion of what it means to be a transgendered person, *All My Children's* producers problematized the common discursive belief that trans people are living a masquerade, performing counter to their 'real' identities for the nefarious purpose of preying on unsuspecting others—a common discursive belief. Similarly, by focusing on Zoe's visits to Dr. Massey and the trans support group, producers challenged the belief that those who undertake the transition process do so lightly (psychologically and/or physically). In effect, producers normalized trans issues for audiences at home. However, it was also made clear that Zoe's ultimate acceptance of her trans identity hinged entirely upon her

relationship with Bianca. Indeed, the latter was needed not just for support in coming out, but all the way through the transitioning process. In terms of the sexual hierarchy discussed earlier, then, a heteronormalized-albeit-queer intermediary was necessary in order for this representation of transgenderism to move from the farthest end of the continuum of cultural acceptability, to a slightly less abjectified position.

But who, then, has now come to occupy the position of most-abjectified, particularly as reflected within daytime serials?

Case Study #3: Vincent Clarkson/Valerie Davis

The answer to the above question is found through an analysis of NBC's *Passions*. Though the series' treatment of queerness was not entirely problematic—producers did offer the very first representation of same-sex attraction between two African American women in daytime programming³⁶—because of *Passions*' unique brand of quasi-sci-fi-fantasy storytelling, other narratives and representations of queerness therein *were* troubling. It is with the introduction of *Passions*' "Blackmailer" character in 2006, eventually revealed as Vincent Clarkson (played by Phillip Jeanmarie), that the series' portrayal of queerness became especially problematic.

Originally written as a mentally unstable, gay, black man, the Clarkson character was coerced by his grandfather into attacking the citizens of Harmony, *Passions*' fictional community. He committed a litany of heinous deeds, including rape and the murder of at least two people, one of whom was his half-sister's lesbian lover. Clarkson was also portrayed as a willing participant and instigator of incest: he raped his paternal half-sister twice, knowingly carried on a long-term affair with his half-uncle, and even had sex with his own father.

³⁶ This storyline resulted in *Passions* being nomination for an "Outstanding Daily Drama" award during the 2006 Annual GLAAD Media Awards. It was notable for two reasons: it featured the first time two female characters were portrayed in bed together during a daytime drama, and also a moving scene wherein the Simone character "discusses the civil rights movement with an older relative who has lived through segregations...[and] says she's lucky that segregation no longer exists, but she still feels oppressed because she's gay" ("2006 — 17th Annual").

Clarkson's penchant for incest, specifically, is the first discursive articulation that must be underscored. Foucault refers to incest as the "rule of rules" (109), one of the earliest cultural taboos that must not be violated. In explaining how and why incest must be considered the ultimate taboo, Foucault notes that eroticism between family members has been discursively prohibited through the overlapping of two *technologies of power* operating within Western cultures: the deployment of alliance, "a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions" (106) that is devoted to maintaining societal order through inscribing and enforcing legally permissible and non-permissible behaviors between individuals and partners; and, since the 18th Century, the deployment of sexuality, "a new apparatus which was superimposed on the previous one, and which, without completely supplanting the other, helped to reduce its importance" (106). Foucault explains the symbiotic relationship between these concurrent systems thus:

In a word, the deployment of alliance is attuned to homeostasis of the social body, which it has the function of maintaining; whence its privileged link with the law; whence too the fact that the important phase for it is "reproduction." The deployment of sexuality has its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way [...] The family is the interchange of sexuality and alliance: it conveys the law and the juridical dimension in the deployment of sexuality; and it conveys the economy of pleasure and the intensity of sensations in the regime of alliance. (107-108)

Within our heteronormative Western society, the family unit—that interchange for the deployment of alliance and sexuality—functions as an agent of socialization and a model of 'acceptable' sexuality, an operation that is dependent upon the preservation of ordered binaries, particularly the husband-wife and parent-child. To violate that order through an act of incest, then, exposes sexuality's always-already status as a subject of power, and poses a potential disruption to "the sway of law and right" (Foucault 110). Thus, by engaging in the ultimate

societal taboo, *Passions*' Clarkson character is automatically positioned in opposition to the heteronormative cultural order. (On a similar level, the character's scripting/behaviors actively re-presents the false parallel between homosexuality and incest frequently invoked by the likes of former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum, and other right-wing ideologues who use such rhetoric as a means of dehumanizing and stigmatizing the queer community.)

Finally, Clarkson's portrayal as a rapist and murderer reinforces the myth of gay men as predators, a discourse often used to imply that gay men specifically cannot control themselves sexually. Lest we forget, this same discursive understanding was referenced in the case studies devoted to Michael Delaney and Kevin Sheffield. However, in light of the fact that Clarkson is embodied by and portrayed as an African American male, a double-stigmatization occurs: discursive articulation of black men as savages is also re-presented.

Following the end of Clarkson's affair with his uncle, Chad Harris-Crane—a relationship that will be discussed in greater detail shortly—it was revealed that the villain was not a 'biological man' after all.³⁷ In September 2007, viewers watched as Valerie Davis (played by Daphnee Duplaix Samuel)—a female character who had been a part of the *Passions* canvas for a full two years before Vincent Clarkson was even mentioned—suddenly began speaking with both her own voice *and* that of Jeanmarie's Clarkson. The camera never moves away from Samuel's face, leaving no doubt in audiences' minds that it is supposed to be her character speaking both parts of the exchange:

VOICE/FACE OF VALERIE: Okay, you can come out now!
 VOICE OF VINCENT: Good job fooling our mother like that.
 VOICE OF VALERIE: Thank you.

³⁷ Although I use the term *biological man* here, the term itself is inherently problematic as it implies an essential chromosomal makeup of 'man-ness'—as if the XY chromosomal pattern is superior to other articulations, and the only grounds upon which a person could be considered a full man. Rather, I use the term for the sake of simplicity, to designate a discursive shift in terms of how audiences were meant to relate to the story, from the 'Known' (if not the Self) to the 'Other.'

VOICE OF VINCENT: No, dear, thank you. [*VALERIE laughs as she walks over to a mirror and peels off her face, revealing VINCENT beneath.*]

VOICE/FACE OF VINCENT: Mother should have a hard time believing I'm gone for good, because I'm not. No, Mommy, your little boy is alive and well...and mad as hell. [*laughs*] ("Episode #2043)

Thus was the Vincent Clarkson character re-coded not as a gay black man, but as an *intersexed* individual, nonetheless still informed by the earlier problematic encodings concerning sexuality and race.³⁸ In this way, the sudden revelation that the psychotic Clarkson character was intersexed, and had been living an ongoing secondary life as Valerie Davis—itself a possible indication of some kind of multiple personality disorder—served to seriously pathologize intersexuality, and represent it in an absurdist, mocking way not dissimilar from representations of gays and lesbians during the ridicule stage.

The character's retconned identity and abjectified gendered state, which is intended to lie somewhere between the poles of absolute maleness and absolute femaleness, was subsequently maintained throughout the remainder of the series: producers decided to employ both actors—Jeanmarie and Samuel—in their alternating depictions of Clarkson henceforth. Similarly, the inclusion of a pregnancy storyline, which concluded with Clarkson's mother helping him deliver the baby that his own father sired, further establishes the character's ostensibly dis-ordered and contrary nature. At the end of the birthing scene, Vincent asks:

VINCENT: What'd I have, Mommy, a boy or a girl?

JULIAN [VINCENT'S FATHER]: Please, let it be one or the other. Oh, dear God, don't tell me...

EVE: Relax, Julian, Vincent's just give birth to a perfectly healthy baby boy.

VINCENT: Did you hear that, Daddy? I had a boy—we had a son together.

JULIAN: We're sure that it's just, uh...just a boy, that there's nothing extra?

EVE: Yes, Julian, I'm sure it's a boy. It's just a boy.

[...]

³⁸ As a reminder, for the purposes of discussing the storyline on *Passions* I am using the term *intersex* as defined by Emi Koyama, founder of Intersex Initiative: "intersex in humans refers to bodies that are not clearly differentiated or consistent. Examples of intersexuality in humans include a genetic male born with external appearance of female genitalia, or a genetic female born with an enlarged clitoris that may appear like a penis" ("From 'Intersex' to 'DSD'").

VINCENT: [*to the baby*] Hey there little guy, I'm your daddy—and your mommy.
[...]

JULIAN: You're sure that everything is...okay, that nothing's going to show up later?

EVE: Yes, of that I am certain, Julian. Vincent's baby is all boy. ("Episode #2192")

Throughout this exchange, Clarkson's gender is repeatedly located *outside* the culturally accepted, essentialized binary of male and female. Similarly, the repeated references to Clarkson's incestuous liaison with father Julian re-inscribe him as a threat to the family unit and, by extension, the dominant heteronormative order.

In essence, the producers of *Passions* took a subject position that is rarely seen in popular culture artifacts of the day, and one which certainly had *never* been represented in daytime serials before, and they portrayed it in a way that was so abjectified and problematic that no other term can be used to describe it than *hyper-abnormalized*. Intersexuality was discursively encoded, in this instance, as a threat to both heteronormative society (through Clarkson's incestuous acts), and the heterosexual and queer populace (through his attacks against people who identified as both). Therefore, intersexuality was articulated as a disruptive, intrusive identity position that must be locked away for all times—as the Clarkson character eventually was.

Yet, it is not only *Passions*' intersexed storyline that reinforces problematic discursive notions of queerness. Indeed, the portrayal of Clarkson's lover and uncle, Chad Harris-Crane, is also troubling. Though married to a woman, the Harris-Crane character frequented gay bars and (unknowingly) carried on a sexual affair with his nephew for months. All the while, he maintained that he was not gay, and even thanked Clarkson for not trying to stop his wedding to Whitney Russell ("Episode #1909"). Add to this Harris-Crane's dark complexion, and the resultant mixture is a clear nod to the stereotype of a black man living on the "down-low."

Moreover, in the depiction of one of Harris-Crane and Clarkson's sexual encounters we find a blatant encoded message about queer black men and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). As Harris-Crane and Clarkson prepare for sex, the camera zeroes-in on the former selecting a condom out of a large blue box ("Episode #1909"). Ostensibly, producers intended for this action to be read by audiences as a tacit reminder of safer-sex practices, an "embedded health message" (Jensen and Jensen 275) about a topic frequently ignored within the wider daytime serial genre. However, it is exactly *because* safer-sex practices are absent elsewhere in the soap genre that this liaison between two black men stands out.³⁹ In essence, since neither heterosexual couples nor queer *white* couples in soaps are seen actively using protection methods, audiences are left to wonder if Vincent and Chad use condoms out of necessity (i.e., are they afflicted by an unknown STI, like AIDS?).

Even aside from the genre-specific conventions that might lead to such questions, the very *presence* of a condom in the scene described connotes what Nicole Vitellone has identified as the "(in)visible sign of contagion" (29). In her essay "'I Think It More of a White Persons Sort of Awareness,'" Vitellone posits "that the performativity of the condom concerns the making of racialized, classed, and ethnic differences" (19). She argues that "the condom is powerful in AIDS culture in terms of categorizations and differentiation" (20). At the heart of Vitellone's theory is Cindy Patton's earlier works on AIDS and the media, which focused on how the U.S. media presented black males as needing protection because they lacked self-control and were at-risk (Vitellone 22, 24). As a result, when juxtaposed with people of color in the media the condom becomes no longer a sign of social and personal responsibility, but rather a sign of

³⁹ Admittedly, safer-sex practices *are* occasionally referenced elsewhere in the genre, specifically in those rare instances where heterosexual white women are portrayed as infected "whores" who engage in unsafe practices, as in the AIDS storylines of the 1980s that involved females (see: Treichler, "Beyond Cosmo" and Vitellone, "'I Think It More'").

infectious diseases. Thus, when *Passions*' producers made the choice to focus on the box of condoms instead of Chad and Vincent, they were (sub)consciously reifying the black non-heterosexual subject's status as an at-risk, out of control figure. This understanding is further highlighted by the fact that, unlike depictions of same-sex eroticism between white gays and lesbians that came before and after, the ones between Harris-Crane and Clarkson are neither implied nor post-coitus, but rather aggressive and in public spaces (as opposed to the controlled privacy of a bedroom) ("Episode #2002").

The end-result of *Passions*' treatment of the intersection of sexuality and race is that queer characters of color were pathologized, both mentally (as in the case of Clarkson) and physically (as in the case of Harris-Crane). Similarly, through the story and scene elements that become the focus of relationships between non-white queer characters (i.e., notions of incest, a box of condoms, etc.), such figures—and the identities they represent—were discursively marked as being 'different' from white queer subjects. These factors work together to represent still more layers within the hierarchy of sexual representation proposed by Rubin: Harris-Crane joins *One Life to Live*'s Latino Nick Chavez and African American Amelia Bennett below heterosexuals and white queer subjects, while Vincent Clarkson/Valerie Davis is exiled to the farthest margins. And between these two groups stands *All My Children*'s transgendered Zoe Luper.

Given the problematic nature of the queer identities discussed throughout the section on the millennial decade, one is left to wonder: when might we reach the final stage of Clark's stages of representation in the media, the one optimistically referred to as the *respect stage*?

Respect Stage (or Comparability Stage)

Clark defines the final stage of his model, the *respect stage*, as one wherein a broad range of representations are made manifest, resulting in a cluster of representation that is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative, and therefore more like ‘reality.’ In Hart’s take on the model, which focused specifically on representations of gay men, he designates the 1990s as the time when depictions reached the respect stage, his reason being that “major network primetime shows began to increasingly represent diverse and inclusive gay male characters that cumulatively reflect the wide range of roles that gay men occupy in American society” (“Representing Gay Men”).

However, this essay has looked at mediated representations of the queer community *in totum*, and in doing so I have underscored the hierarchical nature of the representations being shown in daytime serials. Consequently, I have problematized the idea of applying the notion of ‘respect,’ as traditionally understood, to the cluster of representations seen today. For this reason, I alternatively identify this final stage as the *comparability stage*. Reclassifying the final stage as such indicates that part of the ascendant group (i.e., heteronormalized gays and lesbians) is now close enough to the mainstream ‘norm’ that they can be discussed in relatively similar terms, while nonetheless maintaining distinctive differences. Similarly, the notion of objects being comparable grants further flexibility in discussing the individual progress (or lack thereof) of different sub-groups that make up the greater whole—i.e., where representations of transgenderism fall on Clark’s scale, in comparison to representations of intersexuality.

As the analysis in this section has shown, representations of queerness on television—understood in this instance as a singular group—entered the comparability stage during the millennial decade. Ostensibly positive images of non-heterosexuality (e.g., Kyle Lewis on *One*

Life to Live) were paired with overtly negative depictions of queerness (e.g., Vincent Clarkson on *Passions*). Similarly, heteronormalized lesbians and gays (e.g., Bianca Montgomery on *All My Children*) were depicted alongside characters representing less ‘normalized’ queer identities, like *All My Children*’s trans Zoe Luper. Each of these characters—and others not discussed here—reflected a wide range of queer identities in both positive and negative ways during the first decade of the new millennium.

CONCLUSION

Through the preceding four-part historical and discursive analysis, this essay has considered the role of myriad discourses in the (re-)production of knowledge about queerness within popular culture. Specifically, this project has examined representations of non-heterosexuality in American daytime serials since 1977. I have shown how the producers of soap operas adopt historically shifting discourses surrounding issues of sexual identity, re-articulate them, and then introduce new forms of discursive knowledge about queerness into popular culture.

As demonstrated in the first part of my analysis, queer characters in soaps of the 1970s, such as *The Young and the Restless*’ Katherine Chancellor, were articulated as mentally unstable, abject others. Nonetheless, the very presence of queer characters on television at the time was considered progress. However, even these ridiculing portrayals of queerness were too much for conservative audiences at the time, and when viewers starting tuning out producers were forced to re-present more mainstream discourses which, in the 1970s, painted queerness as anathema. Thus, characters were ‘redeemed’ thorough a reintroduction into heterosexuality, and a strict disavowal of any previous considerations. This was a reflection of the cultural anxiety/resistance to queerness at the time.

The second part of my analysis showed how, in the 1980s, then-current discourses of human sexuality and disease fostered cultural fears about AIDS. These fears subsequently saturated soap storylines involving gay men, such as the Hank Elliot narrative on *As the World Turns*. Interestingly, however, growing political power in the ‘real world’—as represented by queer activist groups like ACT-UP—necessitated that producers of soap operas move away from representations that ridiculed non-heterosexuals. To that end, storylines increasingly fostered a different discursive model of queerness, one that relied on normal’ gays and lesbians who adhered to societal conventions (read: heteronormative homosexuals).

This regulated vision of queerness continued into the 1990s, as demonstrated in the third part of my analysis. Though the discourse of AIDS did not wholly disappear from representations of queerness in soaps of the 1990s, the greater focus was a reflection of growing anxiety concerning interactions between (perceived) gay men and children in the ‘real world.’ This anxiety was bolstered by ideologues representing the discourse of religion, even as gays and lesbians were slowly being accepted by society at large. As shown, the soap opera genre helped facilitate this cultural acceptance by acknowledging the myth of child predation, but then disrupting it through characters like Michael Delaney and Kevin Sheffield. In this way, the genre again helped foster a new understanding of queerness.

Finally, in the fourth part of my analysis, I examined the relationship between *One Life to Live*’s Oliver Fish and Kyle Lewis characters as a means of understanding the contemporary heteronormalized understanding of queerness in soaps. This was then contrasted with *All My Children*’s trans character, Zoe Luper, and *Passions*’ intersexed Vincent Clarkson character. These comparisons enabled me to underscore those sexual identities that continue to be represented problematically as a result of dominant discourses today, and therefore remain on the

margins of cultural ‘acceptability.’ Lest we forget, it is toward these marginalized identities that we must look, in order to understand the boundaries of the present discourses surrounding issues of human sexuality:

The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize the field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls ‘outside,’ gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently.” (Butler 149)

With this information in hand, then, where do we go from here? As discourses shift and representations of queerness continue to change, we must keep in mind those who remain on the margins of cultural acceptability. At the moment, and based on the case study of *Passions* featured in this writing, mediated depictions of intersexuality are amongst the most problematic, seemingly stuck somewhere between the non-recognition and ridicule stages, in spite of estimates that claim anywhere between 1:2,000 to 1:4,500 U.S. citizens identify as such (Weil, “What If”). Similarly, responsible representations of transgenderism should be advocated, as should depictions of bisexuality as a self-identified preference (as opposed to an identity claimed only for retconing purposes)—after all, once such stories and experiences become part of the mainstream discourse, there is a greater hope that the treatment of these marginalized social groups within our broader culture will improve, as suggested by Richard Dyer. In a similar vein, the positive inclusion of queer people of color is practically non-existent and needs to be challenged—though, as soap actress Victoria Rowell and others have pointed out, the under-representation of *all* people of color, gay and straight, is a huge problem within the genre as a

whole. And questions of asexuality seem particularly problematic for the relationship-dependant conventions of this genre and other mainstream forms of popular culture.

While we cannot change how queer characters have been portrayed in American daytime serials over the last 40 years, we can—and we must—analyze such representations, and incorporate the insights we gain into shaping the representations of queerness moving forward. We must not forget that the soap opera genre has an enormous and traditionally conservative audience pool, and that “the representation of queer characters on soap operas offers a significant opportunity to educate and enlighten millions of viewers who might otherwise have no (knowing) contact with gay, lesbian, or bisexual people” (Kreglow, “Soaps Come Clean”).

In working toward more inclusive representations for the future we can look to the work of James M. Croteau and Susanne Morgan in challenging homophobia within the discourse of AIDS education (“Combating Homophobia”).⁴⁰ First, we should seek representations that are primarily, though not totally, depicted in an affirmative matter. In keeping with the ideas of the comparability stage, and the kinds of stories dictated by the soap opera genre, all queer characters should *not* automatically be depicted as essentially moral figures. Rather, a realistic spectrum of non-heteronormative characters, with traits that range between good, bad, and anywhere in-between, is necessary. Second, representations of queer characters within soap operas must be heavily scrutinized, and encoded heterosexism and homophobic messages and/or insinuations—whether intentional or not—must be scrubbed, or at least acknowledged and problematized. Given the industry’s extraordinarily fast rate of production, and the many people who assist in the construction of soap storylines, implementing these ideas would be undeniably difficult. Everything from scripting choices, to direction, to gestures and speech patterns of the

⁴⁰ Though I have modified it slightly for the purposes of my own argument, the original idea of using Croteau’s and Morgan’s work as a basis for creating more inclusive representations was suggested by Hart in regard to representations of gay men.

actor/actress would need to be carefully evaluated before the episode ever aired. Thus, while I argue that such actions are necessary, I also understand how impractical they may seem.

Finally, an effort must be made to abolish the various hierarchies of representation that are present in the genre. Just as gay and lesbian characters cannot be portrayed solely as living an inferior 'lifestyle' to their straight counterparts, characters whose desires or physical features fall elsewhere on the spectrums of love and gender must not be marginalized and maligned in favor of heterosexuals and heteronormalized homosexuals. The dominance of heteronormativity within the genre must be challenged, just as the normalization of whiteness must be challenged. To that end, viewers should not be content with representations that exclusively normalize young, white, middle- and upper-class, Protestant, gay men and lesbians. Such narrow portrayals are not only inaccurate, but they do a huge disservice to lesbians, transgendered individuals, intersexed persons, bisexuals, poor people, black people, Hispanic people, the aged, non-Christians, *ad infinitum*.

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