

Confess the Gay Away?
Media, Religion, and the Political Economy of Ex-gay Therapy

Michael Thorn

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Abstract

The “ex-gay” movement does not encourage people to pray the gay away but confess the gay away. As a loose organization of mostly Christian ministries and psychotherapy practices that offers “freedom from homosexuality,” the movement offers religious and psychological confessions of sin and disease and testimonies of truth and belief as technologies of both self-sacrifice and identity formation. The aim is to control unwanted same-sex desire through life-long labour and struggle so as to sacrifice one’s gay or lesbian identity for an ex-gay identity. However, in the debate surrounding the movement, those opposed use confessions of trauma and harm, and testimonies of their own truth and belief, to try and sacrifice the movement in favour of gay and lesbian identities. Confession and testimony, then, which are two sides of the same coin, underlie the discourses and practices of all involved in ex-gay truth games.

In the 1970s and 80s the ex-gay movement operated in the shadows of Christianity as an embarrassing secret. This dissertation analyzes the movement from the 1990s, when, in alliance with the Christian Right, it “came out of the closet” through a cross-platform advertising campaign that generated fifteen years’ worth of “earned media” in news and popular culture entertainment. By deploying an economic discourse of consumer choice, the movement hoped to justify itself as a legitimate form of religious and psychological intervention, but the Christian Right hoped to use it to encourage the repeal of legislation protecting gay rights. Those tactics backfired, resulting in a consumer fraud lawsuit, legislation banning conversion therapy for minors, and scathing critiques and satires in mainstream popular culture. Nevertheless, the movement has legitimized itself within its own conservative Christian communities.

In this dissertation I show that limiting the ex-gay debate to commercialized and politicized concepts and strategies neglects the real problem at the heart of the controversy: the paradoxical use of confessions of self-renunciation and true-belief as technologies of self-emergence sacrifices the self to unstable and “fundamentalist” truth games; on both sides of the debate. The real problem is not whether ex-gay change is possible; the problem is confession itself, which encourages unyielding testimonies of fundamental beliefs from supporters and antagonists of the movement alike. Using a Foucauldian discourse analysis, I examine the confessional logic governing a wide range of media texts and statements, which are treated as events that seek to govern thought and behaviour in a broad sense: to influence, persuade, encourage, and convince people to govern themselves so they can govern others. I do not analyze ex-gay language itself, but trace how it functions and operates as discourse within the North American cultural wars. I analyzed the movement as a mediated cultural phenomenon currently constituted by cost-benefit calculations and marketing protocols but historically constituted by the psychological and religious governmentalities that pervade its thought and practices.

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Introduction: Confess Thy Self?

In the media debate surrounding the Christian ex-gay movement, the phrase “pray the gay away” is often used as shorthand to describe the movement’s religiously mediated sexual orientation conversion efforts. However, when one digs deeper, not just into ex-gay practices, but into the debate itself, it becomes clear that ex-gay change—regardless of whether effective or not—is less about prayer than confession and testimony. Consider writer-director Jamie Babbit’s film *But I’m a Cheerleader*, a campy, comedic tale of a lesbian cheerleader forced into an ex-gay conversion camp (featuring drag queen Ru Paul in a rare not-in-drag performance). The film, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 1999, is the second fictional pop culture text to depict the movement¹ and it is all about confession. It is an iconic depiction, an intervention in the debate that is frequently referenced and imitated. It is mentioned in a 2011 documentary called *This is What Love in Action Looks Like* about real-life teenager Zach Stark being forced into an ex-gay conversion program; it is imitated in both a 2007 episode of the popular Comedy Central animated satire *South Park*, in which the character Butters is forced into an ex-gay conversion program, and a 2013 episode of *Saturday Night Live* featuring Ben Affleck as an ex-gay counsellor. Well-researched by Babbit, the film revolves not around prayer but confession and identity politics, helping to demonstrate a primary finding of this study: today, from religion to psychology to popular culture, confessing one’s desires as one’s “true self” is pervasive, and the ex-gay debate exemplifies its pervasiveness.

But I’m a Cheerleader is about a teenager named Megan (Natasha Lyonne) who has the sinful label “lesbian” forced upon her by her Christian parents (Bud Cort and Mink Stole) and friends (Michelle Williams and Brandt Wille) even though she initially rejects the label.²

Apparently in denial of her own true self, she is shipped off to a remote country program called

¹The first is a sketch that aired in 1995 on the HBO comedy series *Mr. Show* to be discussed in Chapter 4. Some earlier fictional pop culture texts reference psychiatric conversion therapy, but not as part of the ex-gay movement.

²She also has that identity forced upon her by the film, through fantasy point-of-view shots of cheerleader erotica.

True Directions. There she is expected to sacrifice her secret desires and replace them with a new identity. Indeed, upon arrival she is swiftly compelled to confess her sinful and diseased desires as step one of a five-step program to cure her, so she can testify (which is a form of confession—see below) to a new “ex-gay” self rooted in God and heterosexuality even though her new identity still references homosexuality. Written as a satirical comedy, *But I’m a Cheerleader* almost operates as a documentary. Even if one had never heard of the movement before seeing the film, one could leave it knowing as much about the ex-gay change as were one to have read a magazine exposé specifically designed to tell all about the movement. While the film does not cover the movement’s history, it does expose its thought and practices, both religious and psychological, and now the movie is itself part of the history of the ex-gay debate.

The ex-gay movement is a loose organization of not-for-profit religious ministries and for-profit psychotherapy practices organized around the management and attempted elimination of what it considers sinful, abnormal and addictive same-sex desires and behaviours. In its attempt to sacrifice one identity in favour of another, the movement mixes Christian confession *and* prayer with confessional psychological methods that draw on now discredited psychiatric and psychological discourses from the mid twentieth century. It draws on biblical knowledge derived from conservative forms of Judeo-Christian thought, and psychoanalytic, behavioural, and addiction model theories that have since been supplanted in mainstream psychology and psychiatry by cognitive, evolutionary and neurobiological theories. Ever since the movement formed in 1973, following the psychiatric declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness, a variety of voices have participated in the debate: ex-gays, ex-gay survivors, conservative and liberal Christians, conservative and liberal psychologists and psychiatrists, and gay activists. However, mainstream media became a major player in the debate only after the movement introduced itself into the public sphere in 1998 through a marketing campaign designed to generate unpaid media coverage. Since then, news and entertainment producers have had a

significant impact on perceptions of the ex-gay “problem.” They choose what the public sees in mainstream communication channels; they provoke the most impassioned and angry responses in conservative Christian communities; they even predicted, via a 2007 episode of *Boston Legal*, that the movement would be sued for consumer fraud five years before it happened. *But I’m a Cheerleader* is one of the earliest and best pop culture interventions in the controversy. It is an ethical demonstration that skillfully accounts for, and mocks, the religious and psychological practices and strategies involved in the confessed sacrificial emergence of a new ex-gay self.

In the film, the founder and head of True Directions (Catherine Moriarty) signals the religious basis of her ministry when she says, “It’s a long path to righteousness, Megan, and it’s a battlefield of temptation out there,” but the program itself is described by counsellor Mike (Ru Paul Charles) as akin to Alcoholics Anonymous, thus signalling the addiction model component of ex-gay thought. That model is reinforced by the five steps the program (and film) is structured around. Step one is admitting (or confessing) that one is a homosexual and none of the other steps can be graduated to until step one is complete. Although Megan testifies to being Christian first—because she believes that being Christian, she cannot be lesbian—by the end of her second group therapy session, she tearfully admits to everyone that she is a homosexual. The remaining four steps are rediscovering one’s gender identity, family therapy, demystifying the opposite sex, and simulating a heterosexual lifestyle.³ Although not confessional in and of themselves, taken together, steps four and five are designed to *lead one* to a new confession, not a confession of sacrifice but a testimony of cure and a revelation of self-emergence in which one’s new ex-gay identity is celebrated. However, confession and testimony are *embedded* in steps two and three.

In step two one must testify to and perform one’s proper gender identity, which is where behavioural learning theory is depicted through the practice of ritually performing one’s proper

³ Simulating sex before marriage would be a sinful practice for real ex-gays; but the film uses it to represent the life-long struggle experienced by most in their change efforts, suggesting that ex-gays who move on to a heterosexual lifestyle underpinned by daily struggle and confession are only *simulating* that lifestyle rather than living it.

gender role through overtly feminine or masculine activities: vacuuming for girls and chopping wood for boys. In step three, confessions of complicity are elicited from one's parents so the psychoanalytic root cause of being gay can be isolated and sacrificed. A "Jewish boy (Joel Michaely) confesses his root cause as a "traumatic bris," blaming both his parents and tradition. Megan confesses hers as a period of mixed-up parental roles from toddlerhood. That has the Program Head invoke a now outdated conclusion about homosexuality from psychoanalyst Irving Bieber (1963; 1965), a researcher often referenced within ex-gay discourse. The Program Head says, "Your father was emasculated and your mother was domineering." Bieber writes that homosexuality is caused by "a detached, hostile father and a close binding, intimate, seductive mother who is a dominating, minimizing wife" (1965, 250). In the movie, as in real life, confessing one's family dynamic as an Oedipal problem to be solved is key to change. What is not depicted, and what is not part of the film's five step conversion process, is prayer.

As it happens, in 1999 the phrase "pray the gay away" had not yet entered popular discourse. In fact, *But I'm a Cheerleader* premiered only a year after the movement introduced itself to the public through its 1998 advertising campaign (to be analyzed in Chapters 1 and 2), but it was already in production before the ads appeared (Cynthia and Babbitt 2000). Thus its concern was not with the rhetoric of the debate, but the practices of the movement. Yet the film's release coinciding so closely with the movement's entry into public discourse highlights its importance as a popular culture depiction *in the debate*. By inserting itself into a controversy that was only just beginning, it heralded a proliferation of negative fictional depictions that last to this day and operate alongside and in tandem with numerous news and current affairs reports in print, broadcasting, and online. Indeed, as this study will show, the debate over ex-gay change operates almost as much through popular entertainment as it does through journalism, often blurring the distinction between the two. Both seek to influence the debate, to help govern it one might say, by presenting ex-gays "as objects of assessment and intervention" that solicit media consumers'

“participation in the cultivation of particular habits, ethics, behaviors, and skills” (quoting Ouellette and Hay’s 2008 analysis of Reality TV); albeit in this case, *contested* habits, ethics, behaviors, and skills, because whereas in journalism there has been an attempt to show both sides of the debate, in popular fiction ex-gay change is almost universally mocked.

The debate surrounding this movement is a commercialized debate, even when showcased at film festivals (which are advertised, sponsored by corporations, and supported through ticket sales), because it circulates through mass media. Gasher, Skinner, and Lorimer (2012) define mass media as “the vehicles through which mass communication takes place” and note that while it is usually understood as “newspapers, magazines, cinema, television, radio, and advertising; sometimes including book publishing... in the context of technological change... [mass media] now comprise the internet, websites, etc.” (14), and *all* “participate in the economy” (244).⁴ While the diversification of content across these media forms combined with audience fragmentation means that today it is seldom the case that any one media text will reach a mass audience, taken as a whole, the content of the ex-gay debate, which circulates through multiple forms of media to multiple different audiences, can be understood as a mass media phenomenon. This study, then, by tracing the debate across multiple channels of communication and forms of content, uses this broad definition and treats all ex-gay media as operating in a commercialized mass media environment. While social media will be addressed through specific examples, the primary focus of this study is on traditional news and entertainment, whether print, broadcast, or online. Yes, social media plays an important role in the controversy, but the ex-gay debate operates mostly through conventional media. Even and especially when politicized and used to support antigay legislation designed to repeal gay rights, or pro-gay legislation that bans conversion therapy for minors, the debate operates chiefly through news, film and broadcasting.

⁴ Much online social media is also commercialized. Consider targeted Gmail and Facebook ads, and ads embedded on YouTube. Also, as we will learn in Chapter 4, social media is often deployed by marketing firms as earned media

In that light, I argue in this dissertation that limiting the ex-gay debate to commercialized and politicized interventions in the public sphere (even well-researched interventions) obscures the real problem at the heart of the controversy: that the paradoxical use of confessions of self-sacrifice as technologies of self-emergence limits the self to a fundamentalist governmentality of unstable truth games, with the word “fundamentalist” understood in a broad sense. Indeed, the use of confessions of renunciation, true belief and self-emergence *outside* the movement *also* limits the self to a fundamentalist governmentality of unstable truth games. What is at stake here is the problem of what it means to testify the truth about oneself absolutely and unyieldingly by verbalizing one’s most secret, inner desires so as to purge them. Yet what is also at stake is the production of oneself as a new identity, one that can be testified to absolutely as a “true self”: I am ex-gay, I am straight, or I am an ex-gay survivor and I am gay. There is a double confessed pairing here, between confessions of one’s guilty desires and testimonies of fundamentally believed truth, and between confessions of self-sacrifice and confessions of self-emergence. One can see this double confessional pairing *within* the debate, but it is not addressed *by* the debate. The debate’s emphasis on prayer rather than confession is tactical. It operates strategically on both sides. For the movement, a focus on prayer offers hope for conservative Christians struggling with same-sex desire that God’s grace can change them, even though really what is offered is lifelong struggle and work. For those opposed to the movement, particularly those who do not identify as religious, a focus on prayer allows them to dismiss ex-gay change as magic so that they can claim the scientific position as theirs, even though they often misrepresent scientific data to make their point and even though the movement also claims science is on their side.

Sacrificial Confessions of Self-Emergence and the Christian Ex-gay Movement

The complicated nature of confession today, wherein confessions of desire and guilt and testimonies of truth and belief are paired with sacrificing the self so as to create the self anew

underlies the discourses and practices of all involved in ex-gay truth games, structuring even the commercial news and entertainment depicting the movement. Take for example a 2013 episode of a popular Oprah Winfrey Network documentary series, in which the President of the then most well-known ex-gay group, Exodus International, confessed his mistake in promoting ex-gay change, apologized on camera to a group of ex-gay survivors, and then shut Exodus down a day before the show was scheduled to air. “Special Report: God and Gays,” episode 9 of season 4 of *Our America*, was both prime time Reality TV entertainment and a direct and devastating documentary intervention in the ex-gay debate. In it the commercial producers of the show deployed an ex-gay confession against itself and all but confessed their own guilt in not previously condemning the movement enough. The episode follows two earlier ex-gay episodes of *Our America* from 2011 and 2012, both of which also showcased Alan Chambers. However, those episodes showcased Chambers as an ex-gay spokesperson, wherein he confessed his same-sex desire as a problem that could be solved, testified that he had changed (albeit with struggle) and declared his emergent ex-gay identity a success story that others could emulate. In the 2013 episode, however, Chambers’ confession is an atonement, an admission of the movement’s guilt, and a complete disavowal of the cause he spent almost a decade promoting. But it was also atonement for the show itself. Although the earlier episodes (both of which showcased the slogan “Pray Away the Gay” in their titles) presented the debate in a relatively balanced fashion, giving voice to various perspectives, they evoked a vitriolic response from gay rights advocates who disapprove of any ex-gay depiction that does not outright condemn ex-gay change as false and harmful (Besen 2011a; John 2011; Ward 2011). “God and Gays” was an apologetic response to those critics. It was also what Anna McCarthy (2007) calls “a neoliberal theater of suffering.”

It begins by summarizing the earlier episodes and then introduces the ex-gay survivors gathering to hear Chambers’ apology. In the episode itself, the survivors allow their stories to be told cinematically, their interviews intercut with footage of them preparing to meet Chambers;

however, several of their full interviews are available uncut on the show's website. There they testify about their long struggle to reconcile their homosexuality with their faith, noting how much they prayed for change and hoped for help from Exodus; but each also confesses failure, feelings of shame, anger, and betrayal, admissions that overshadow their prayers (OWN 2013b). Eventually everyone gathers in a Lutheran church basement and forms a meeting circle, as if for group therapy, but a cut to Chambers has him read his apology instead. It is an edited two and a half minute apology in which he asks for forgiveness by comparing his promotion of Exodus to having accidentally caused a car crash. The footage on the website reveals his full confession to have been nearly eight minutes long (OWN 2013a). That apology is more detailed, and in it Chambers says how sorry he is for the trauma he caused, acknowledges the confessions and testimonies of the many people he harmed, and atones for the "stories of shame, sexual misconduct, and false hope" he heard but did not hear well enough. Thus he confesses his failure in not properly acknowledging the pain of other ex-gays, and for not sharing and acknowledging his own continuing struggles with same-sex desire. He even accepts and utilizes the language of so many of his opponents, who (as we will learn) accuse ex-gay leaders of consumer fraud: he admits that were he to continue promoting change, it would be "truly fraudulent." He ends his apology with a series of six or seven sentences that all begin with the words "I'm sorry."

McCarthy uses the phrase "neoliberal theater of suffering" in reference to Reality TV programs that put the suffering of needy participants on display as correctable by entrepreneurial experts, both to produce profit for producers and to encourage audiences to accept such advice for themselves without state help (see Chapter 4). "God and Gays" operates in much the same way, except here the experts are failed ex-gay "entrepreneurs" who confess their failures so that the audience will not make the same mistake. However, over and above the fact that the ex-gay entrepreneur Alan Chambers did indeed close the enterprise called Exodus following filming, the most striking component of this episode (especially of the website footage) is how much it is

structured by confessions and testimonies of trauma and sexual shame, wherein an older desperate desire to change is replaced by the guilt and anger that change did not happen. Prayer is referenced in the raw footage, by Chambers himself, as well as by the ex-gay survivors who testify to what led them into the movement; but those references are not included in the episode. Indeed, this is an episode about confessing sex, not praying it away. It is also about a confession of guilt and a testimony of change, but not the kind offered by the movement. And it is about the confessions of ex-gay survivors. Much like how ex-gays are expected to confess their past as a problem to be solved and testify that their same-sex desire must change, in “God and Gays” ex-gay survivors confess their past in the ex-gay movement as a problem to be solved, testify to the harm they suffered, and confess their same-sex desire as that which they cannot change.

As should be clear by now, ex-gay confession and testimony are intimately connected. Indeed, testimony is a form of confession. In one of the best accounts of the ex-gay movement, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-gay Movement* (2006), Tanya Erzen devotes an entire chapter to that relationship (160-182). She writes that ex-gay “testimony blurs the distinction between the public and private, religious and therapeutic, making sexuality and sexual addiction part of a public discourse of confession and public intimacy” (161). She describes how testimony is the basis of an ex-gay system of confession where one is expected to account for one’s struggles with pornography, masturbation, and sexual falls, writing that “nothing is too private or painful to share” (174). She even shoves the two words together into a near hyphenated descriptor, declaring ex-gay confessions “testimonial confessions” (176). As part of her analysis she references Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1990a [1976]⁵), noting his claim that the West has become a confessing society. She highlights in particular his analysis of confession as a power relation and describes how in the ex-gay movement confession

⁵ Dates in square brackets following a reference indicate the original publication date. In the case of Foucault, for books, articles and interviews, they indicate the original French publication date; for published lectures, the date the lecture was delivered. However, original dates will only be indicated the first time a source is cited in each chapter.

is used to tie ex-gay participants to the primacy of scripture and to encourage obedience to the people running the movement. She even describes the particular ex-gay ministry she studied, New Hope Ministry, as being “part of a wider public culture of intimacy in which ex-gay confessions of traumatized identity become part of a public testimonial discourse of conversion” (179).

Erzen’s analysis is sound and this study will confirm much of what she says, especially as it relates to Foucault. However, she only draws on one of Foucault’s works and thus misses how his scholarship can help frame ex-gay confession more systematically. For example, she both interchanges and juxtaposes confession and testimony and then concludes that by “blurring the distinction between [the two], the ex-gay movement transforms therapy, traditionally a private transaction between a patient and therapist, into a public process” (181). Except it is not the movement that blurs the distinction and makes private therapy public; it is the culture of confession itself. Because in confession’s long and complicated genealogy, it and testimony have always been blurred, and together they became part of a popular therapeutic culture before the ex-gay movement emerged (Foucault 1990a; Shorter 1997). Another analysis of ex-gay struggle by Michelle Wolkomir (2006) operates similarly. She examines two church based therapy groups, one ex-gay and one ex-ex-gay, and uses confessions and testimonies from each to conclude that both privilege heterosexuality as an ideal. While not wrong, she fails to recognize and consider the broader confessional culture within which their participation occurs.⁶

While acknowledging and utilizing the important contributions that both Erzen and Wolkomir offer to understanding the ex-gay phenomenon, this study goes beyond their work in

⁶ Dawne Moon (2005) also analyzes ex-gay discourse as testimonial rather than prayer driven, arguing that both it and pro-gay discourse operate to foreclose ways of being that do not fit a gay/straight dichotomy. She even uses Foucault to make her case; however, she only references his conception of discourse as power, failing to recognize the importance of his research into confession and his historical linking of confession with testimony and ethical technologies of the self. In addition, Bernadette Barton (2012) includes a chapter on the ex-gay movement in her ethnographic description of Christian homophobia in the America Bible Belt, but the movement is not the primary focus of her study. Also she does not analyze the role of confession or testimony in the movement, and she only references Foucault in relation to conservative Christian surveillance practices.

two ways. First, it does not limit itself to only a few specific ethnographic cases but addresses instead the entire media debate surrounding ex-gay change, drawing upon and analyzing multiple case studies. Second, by focusing on the primary role confession plays in both the movement and the debate, and by situating confession within a much larger theoretical analytic, this study will account for the ex-gay movement as being part of a much larger and more complicated history of the practice. There are a number of different forms of confession at play in the ex-gay debate, some of which have already been highlighted. In both *But I'm a Cheerleader* and *Our America* we can see confessions of one's secrets, sins, and guilt, as well as testimonial confessions of one's own truth, all of which involve sex and desire. But in this study we will also encounter confessions of faith, doctrine and dogma that harken back to Christian confessions of creed.⁷

Had Erzen engaged with more of Foucault's work, she would have encountered another understanding of confession that is central to his larger analysis, and she would have recognized its placement within a longer history. In the early 1970s Foucault analyzed confessions of legal and criminal guilt, voluntary and coerced, in both *Discipline & Punish* (1995 [1975]) and the memoirs of the nineteenth century murderer Pierre Rivière (1975 [1973]). But Foucault was just as concerned with Rivière's "madness" as with his criminality, having studied historically changing discourses of mental illness years earlier in *History of Madness* (2009 [1961]). Thus it was not a huge leap to trace criminal confessions to psychiatric confessions (2006 [1973/74]), to psychological confessions of sexual desire (1990a; 2003a [1974/75]), then to ancient Christian confessions of self-sacrifice (1997a [1981]; 2007a [1980]; 2014 [1979/80]). Foucault's analysis of Christian confession, in which "the revelation of the truth about oneself [could not] be dissociated from the obligation to renounce oneself" (2007a, 187), led him to contrast "the

⁷ There are many churches that confess a denominational creed, but there are also "non-confessional" churches that do not. While technically correct, describing churches that do not confess specific creeds as "non-confessional" uses confession in a specified sense and ignores a strong link between confessing an established creed and confessing a set of basic fundamental doctrines as believed truth (Campbell 1996; Phillips & Okholm 1996). Just because a church does not confess a creed does not mean it does not testify to its own truths, beliefs, doctrines or dogma, however personalized; nor does it mean members do not confess their sins and secrets to God and each other.

obligation to hold as truth a set of propositions that constitute dogma..., to hold certain books as a permanent source of truth..., to accept the decisions of certain authorities in matters of truth... [with] the duty to explore who he [sic] is, what is happening within himself, the faults he may have committed, the temptations to which he is exposed” (1997a, 178). Thus he distinguishes between testimonies of faith rooted in dogma and confessions of the self rooted in desire; however, he also clearly and unequivocally links them together: “A Christian needs the light of faith when he [sic] wants to explore himself. Conversely, his access to the truth can’t be conceived of without the purification of his soul” (ibid). In other words, as early as the fourth century, a Christian could not testify without confession nor confess without testifying. Today in the ex-gay movement it is still the case that one cannot confess Christian truth without also testifying that one’s guilty desires need to be purged; *and vice versa*.

Foucault also demonstrates that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we came to be governed by confession in a different way: “one of the great problems of Western culture [in the last two centuries] has been to find the possibility of founding the hermeneutics of the self not, as it was in... early Christianity, on the sacrifice of the self but... on a positive, on the theoretical and practical, emergence of the self” (2007a, 189, addition in brackets from the source). When Christian confession was transmitted first into psychiatry and psychology, and then into civil society via the discourse of sex and the marketing of psychoanalysis as private practice (Shorter 1997), it was transformed and became the positive basis of the self rather than the negative (Foucault 1990a; 2003a).⁸ The result was the invention not of identity, but of identity politics, wherein confession became a technology of self-formation in resistance to the psychiatric label “homosexual” but in acceptance of the political and subjective label “gay.” That has led many to adopt LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) identities as their true selves.

⁸ Judith Butler’s claim that in the 1980s Foucault reversed his 1970s critique of confession “as a forcible extraction of sexual truth” to a manifestation “of the self that does not have to correspond to some putative inner truth” is not accurate (2005, 112). His genealogy of confession in multiple publications describes how it changed across history.

Indeed, from psychoanalysis to humanistic psychology to the cognitive revolution, there is a decades long history of discovering oneself through guided, targeted confessions of one's behaviour and past.⁹ The ex-gay movement (in spite of its mere tentative acceptance of cognitive psychology and its rejection of secular humanism) sits at the culmination of that transformation, as does the ex-gay debate; but within both, the practice of confession as self-sacrifice still lives.

In *But I'm a Cheerleader*, when Megan tearfully confesses that she is a homosexual and willingly attempts ex-gay change, she participates in a confession of self-sacrifice that has her testify to the truth of her desire precisely so it can be purged. But by testifying an ex-gay identity (however briefly), she also participates in confession as self-emergence. Likewise, in *Our America*, when ex-gay survivors confess themselves as gay and testify that they cannot change, they sacrifice and confess away their former ex-gay identities so as to ground their emergent selves in their same-sex desire. Of course, confession as self-sacrifice may appear to coincide just with confessions of sin, guilt, and one's sexual secrets, and confession as self-emergence could appear to only coincide with confessions of faith and truth (for to confess one's faith is partly to confess one's self as emergent within one's faith tradition.) But it is more complicated than that. Foucault's research shows us that in the Christian monasteries of the fourth century, confessions of faith and truth were intimately tied to obligations of obedience, "a trembling obedience, in which the Christian will have to fear God and recognize the necessity of submitting to His will, and to the will of those who represent Him" (2011 [1983/84], 333). In that context, confessing one's faith involved sacrificing oneself to the will of God, the Church, and the priest, and Erzen and Wolkomir demonstrate that such a dynamic is still at play today in the movement, where public confessions of faith and sin are authoritatively demanded for change and salvation, even in so-called "non-confessional" churches (cf. fn. 7). On the other hand, when gay rights

⁹ Cognitive-behavioural questionnaires designed to identify and isolate positive and negative thought and behaviour patterns so they can be reinforced or eliminated are an example of confessional sacrifice and emergence operating together. In other words, psychology today still operates within a larger context that has not yet escaped confession.

activist Wayne Besen appears on television to denounce the movement and proclaim that gay people should identify as who they really are, even writing in his anti-ex-gay book (2003), “the ex-gay actor must take off the costume and rediscover his or her *true self*” (33-4, my italics), he establishes one’s desires as one’s true identity. Thus to “come out of the closet” and confess oneself as LGBTQ is to confess one’s desires *as* self-emergence. The doubling of confessions of desire with confessions of truth and faith, and confessions of self-sacrifice with confessions of self-emergence, creates a quadrature wherein each confessional form is linked to the other.

For that reason I use the word confession in this study broadly, not just in reference to sin, but also identity, not just in reference to secret desires, but also professed beliefs, not just in reference to sacrificing guilt, but also proclaiming truth, and not just in reference to the Catholic church, or even Christianity in general, but also psychiatry and psychology, and yes, popular culture as well. While it is true, Foucault’s research into confession, both ancient and modern, draws on mostly European sources, and the ex-gay movement operates primarily as a North American phenomenon, as a primarily *Christian* North American phenomenon rooted also in psychoanalysis (a form of thought born in modern Europe), the ex-gay debate is part of a history of thought that reaches across the ocean and as far back as medieval Europe. Furthermore, the ex-gay debate is not limited to North America. It operates across the English speaking world as well as in Europe, Africa and Asia. There is a reason Exodus was called Exodus *International*.¹⁰ Thus confession is a complicated practice with a long genealogy and many components; however, while some aspects of early Christian confession are still at play today, they have been modified by confession’s long history, and they continue to be modified today, for confession now operates on a much larger scale, proliferating even through popular culture as an

¹⁰ Prior to its disbandment, Exodus, which also had ministries in South America, Asia, and Africa, linked to 240 separate local ministries in North America alone (Barton 2012, 118).

increasingly politicized and commodified technology of knowledge, power, and the self that operates as part of “a declarative modality of truth” (phrase taken from Brown 2006, 707).

Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and “True Believing” Fundamentalism

Although born in the 1970s, the ex-gay movement did not become part of a public debate until 1998 when it joined with several Christian Right lobby groups to promote and advertise “freedom from homosexuality” as a marketable product.¹¹ While most ex-gay psychotherapy practices charge fees, many churches offer their services for free (see Chapter 2); but by joining lobbyists to market ex-gay change as a service and product, the movement showcased itself as selling something with an economic cost and blurred the distinction between its for-profit counselling and charitable ministries. It commercialized itself and opened itself up to accusations of consumer fraud. Even *But I’m a Cheerleader* picked up on this: the parents in the film complain about how much money they are paying for their children’s cure and insist that it better work. By marketing ex-change in paid ads and submitting itself to cost-benefit analyses, the movement could not help but subject itself to a form of commodification, here defined as assigning exchange value to an item or practice previously understood in terms of its non-economic use value. The movement thus also participated in the continued commodification of confession, a process that began as far back as the early twentieth century when psychoanalysis migrated from mental hospitals into private practice (Foucault 1990a; Shorter 1997). That does not mean all confessions or the ex-gay movement have been entirely commodified, or that there is no resistance to commercialization, especially within Christian communities. But ex-gay ads situate the movement and the debate surrounding it within an economic system that increasingly

¹¹ The movement did receive some mainstream media coverage in the 1990s prior to the ad campaign and it was also the topic of a 1993 feature documentary made by gay rights activists (*One Nation Under God*). Even as far back as the 1980s it was occasionally showcased on daytime talk shows like *Donahue*. But that early coverage was fleeting. The movement did not become part of a *major* public debate until after the 1998 ad campaign (see Chapter 4).

extends the rationality of the market to non-economic domains. By selling itself with funding from Christian lobby groups, the movement also allowed its commodification to be politicized.

A 2007 episode of *Boston Legal* called “Selling Sickness” preceded by five years a real ex-gay consumer fraud lawsuit still on trial in New Jersey (see Chapter 2). The episode draws links between the commodification of ex-gay change and the role it plays in American politics. Although primarily addressing the economics and legality of selling a cure that does not work, this popular culture intervention in the ex-gay debate is also permeated by confession. It begins with a judge (Henry Gibson) confessing to lawyer Denny Crane (William Shatner) that he suffers from SSAD (Same-Sex Attraction Disorder), paid \$40,000 for a failed cure, and now wants to sue. Crane solicits help from partner Alan Shore (James Spader) because, he confesses, the case makes him uncomfortable. That has Shore confess to the presiding judge that he hopes the fact they once slept together will not negatively affect the case. At trial the ex-gay ministry being sued calls numerous witnesses to the stand to confess their past same-sex desire and testify to being cured.¹² Dismissing their testimonies as self-deluded false confessions, Shore wins the case by arguing that homosexuality is not a disease and cannot be cured because “Big Pharma” has not invented a pill to do so. In fact, he says, the real purpose of selling a gay cure is about “filling the pockets of Congress” so they can ban gay marriage. In other words, not only does the episode address the commodification of ex-gay change, it also addresses the role the ex-gay movement plays in the culture wars, where battles between social liberals and social conservatives are embedded in a complex political economy that sees two very different philosophies operate together in a very conflicted union: neoliberalism and neoconservatism.

In the past 40 years, neoliberalism and neoconservatism have worked together to alter the political economic landscape of most of the Western world. David Harvey (2007) defines neoliberalism as a set of theories and practices that propose “human well-being can best be

¹²In another case in the episode, we hear the confession of a girl (Hallee Hirsh) who was molested by her Rabbi.

advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). Raewyn Connell (2010) calls it “a missionary faith” of deregulation and commodification (23). Ouellette and Hay (2008) and McCarthy (2007) analyze television programming that encourages viewers to govern themselves based on the advice of entrepreneurial experts as part of the neoliberalization of mass media. Neoliberal practices are permeated by cost-benefit analyses, risk management discourses, and the rhetoric of individual choice. Neoconservatism, on the other hand, encourages virtue, patriotism, corporate economics and the destruction of the welfare state (High 2009). Explicitly capitalist, neoconservatism is distinct from neoliberalism by being “centered on fixing and enforcing [moralized] meanings, conserving certain ways of life, and repressing and regulating desire” (Brown 2006, 692). As systematized forms of thought (or “rationalities”), the two are opposed to each other and yet connected. Indeed, corporate expansion and the reduction of welfare dependency are directly amenable to neoliberal policies. At the same time, however, “the neoliberal rationality of strict means-ends calculations and need satisfaction... clashes with the neoconservative project of producing a moral subject and moral order against the effects of the market in culture” (Brown, 699). Although it would be a mistake to conflate neoconservatism (which is not explicitly religious and is sometimes preoccupied with foreign policy) and conservative Christianity, there are strong connections between them (see Chapter 3), and because of that the ex-gay movement as a case study highlights clear tensions between the neoliberal and neoconservative forms of thought and practice it utilizes.

It would also be a mistake to conflate the Christian Right and the Christian groups that support the ex-gay movement. Erzen defines the Christian Right as a “coalition of *politically active* fundamentalist and evangelical conservative Christians” (252 n. 2, my italics), but the ex-gay movement is supported by many Christian churches that are not fundamentalist, evangelical or politically active, as well as by some Jewish groups and psychologists. Unfortunately, in the

media debate, where the labels “fundamentalist,” “evangelical” and “conservative Christian” are used interchangeably, such distinctions disappear.¹³ The movement itself blurs these distinctions. Before Exodus closed, it was an inter-denominational organization that linked many churches together; not just fundamentalist and evangelical, but several that profess homosexuality to be a sin (Besen 2003; Drescher and Zucker 2006; Jones and Yarhouse 2007). The organization that replaced it, the Restored Hope Network (RHN) is also inter-denominational (RHN 2012). As umbrella organizations, these ministries did and do minimize religious differences so as to focus on the common goal of eliminating unwanted same-sex desire. This extends to conservative Catholic groups and groups many fundamentalists and evangelicals would not even consider Christian, such as Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), and it extends to Judaism through the group JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing), as well as into psychology and psychiatry through the group NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality).¹⁴ However, JONAH appeared only after the 1998 ad campaign, and a former member turned critic of NARTH, Dr. Warren Throckmorton, has exposed that organization as being comprised of mostly religious lay people, not secular scientists (2011a). Because of how the media and the movement obscure the differences between these groups, I will address the movement generally as a conservative Christian organization (it is primarily Christian), referring to specific denominations as required, sometimes using the longer descriptor

¹³ Consider three articles on the movement from *The New York Times* published within a year of each other. An Erik Eckholm (2012) article describes the movement as being comprised of “conservative Christian groups,” whereas a Mimi Swartz (2011) article only discusses evangelical Christianity, noting “how desperately evangelicals do not want to be gay.” A third by Benoit Denizet-Lewis (2011) describes former gay rights activist turned ex-gay advocate Michael Glatze as a “fundamentalist Christian who writes derogatorily about being gay” without referencing any other kind of Christian. As it happens, in several articles on the 2015 Gus Van Sant produced biopic of Michael Glatze (which is based on the Denizet-Lewis article) Glatze is described as a “fundamentalist Christian” in one review (Debruge 2015), a “conservative Christian minister” in another article (Ring 2014), an “evangelical Christian pastor” in another (Rolling Stone 2015), and in one more as having merely “embraced Christianity” (Fear and Reilly 2015). Even Christian writers sometimes blur these distinctions. In a *Christian Post* article on the movement, “conservative Christian” and “evangelical” are used interchangeably and the author uncritically quotes a poll that lumps “born-again, evangelical [and] fundamentalist Christians” into one category (Menzie 2014).

¹⁴In 2014 NARTH folded itself into a new organization: the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity.

“fundamentalist, evangelical, conservative Catholic and Mormon” to remind the reader of the broader religious coalition at play. Of those labels, however, there is one I will use more broadly.

When not in reference to specific Christian groups, I will use the words “fundamentalist” and “fundamentalism” to mean an unquestioned literal belief in fundamental principles that is imposed on others regardless of evidence, something that is pervasive in both ex-gay *and* pro-gay thought, religious and secular alike. Indeed, one of my primary arguments is that numerous participants in the ex-gay debate, both pro and anti, are “true believers” who engage in a form of testimonial fundamentalism. When I make that claim, I extract the word out of its Christian context to refer to a larger phenomenon (see Chapter 1). Also, when I use the descriptor “true belief,” I am not isolating any particular belief system or mean to suggest that such beliefs are necessarily “true.” I use the descriptor as it is deployed in the discourse itself. When Jim Burroway (2008) states in a YouTube video that ex-gay leaders would offer their services for free if they could because they are “true believers,” or when Lori Yearwood (1998) describes one of the architects of the ex-gay ad campaign as a “true believer,” they do not refer to any particular denominational belief, nor do they mean to enter any debates over the semantic meaning of the word “believe”; they mean that ex-gay leaders believe absolutely that they are right, that they confess their truth, regardless of arguments or evidence to the contrary. In that light, the descriptor “true believer” can also be applied to many opposed to the movement. The ex-gay debate is a “truth game,” in a Foucauldian sense, wherein different forms of conflicted and conflicting truth, which are truly believed by those professing them (or are performed as truly believed) are deployed against each other as technologies of knowledge, power and the self to govern the self and others through declarations of that which is affirmed as fundamental truth.

I do not mean to juxtapose true belief with rational thought either, although I do mean to juxtapose it with Habermas’ notion of rational deliberation (see Chapter 4). Many Christians truly believe the Bible condemns homosexuality; and many gay rights activists truly believe that

one's sexual orientation cannot be changed because it is biological—both are true believers who ground their beliefs in a particular rationality, even if they are often unprepared and unwilling to debate each other reasonably. That is to say, if one accepts the Bible as literally and inerrantly true in its apparent condemnation of homosexuality, then it logically follows and is thus rational to believe that homosexuality is a sin. Similarly, if one uncritically accepts *some* contemporary biological research into the nature of homosexuality while uncritically rejecting other studies as wrong, then it logically follows that homosexuality is biological and cannot be cured. In both examples, conclusions are rationally determined based on truly believed premises and are then deployed systematically in the debate to govern what others should believe and how others should behave in relation to homosexuality; they are, in fact, deployed as *governmental* rationalities (see below). What is not happening here is reasoned deliberation wherein both sides listen to and acknowledge the other's argument so as to collaboratively discover a common truth. In fact, in spite of the true beliefs of so many in this debate, exaggerated claims and simplified narratives that misrepresent key issues, especially as related to the science of sexuality, are not just part of the discourse of the movement, they are part of the pro-gay discourses operating against the movement (see Chapters 1, 2, and 4). But that does not undermine the role of truth in the debate. Lorna Weir (2008) differentiates between veridical, governmental, symbolic and mundane forms of truth. That is to say, there are verifiable empirical forms of truth, strategic and regulatory forms of truth, illustrative and ideological forms of truth, and everyday common sense forms of truth. The ex-gay debate oscillates between the first three, often mixing them together with little discernment, wherein, as noted above, scientific studies of ex-gay change are deployed ideologically to govern thought and behaviour. Thus when I refer to certain beliefs, ideologies, or modes of governance as being “rationalities” I mean them as systematic modes of thought and not in reference to any opposition between that which is rational and that which is not.

When I began this study I conceived of the ex-gay movement as a contradictory union of two irreconcilable forms of thought: religious literalism and psychological empiricism. But I discovered that the religious and psychological rationalities at play in ex-gay thought are not necessarily contradictory and that, in fact, psychology and psychiatry are historically founded on, and in some cases emerged out of Christian thought. Although the disciplines of psychiatry and psychology have always been adamant in their claims of scientific empiricism, they both have histories that cannot easily be disentangled from religion (Foucault 1990a; 2003a; Szasz 1960; 1970). Indeed, since before its decline as the dominant form of psychiatry, some considered the “science” of psychoanalysis to be a “temple devoted to the last remaining dinosaur ideology of the nineteenth century” (Shorter 1997, 170) or worse, a form of “faith-healing” (ibid, 312). In fact, since at least the 1990s, there has been general agreement within the disciplines of the psyche—as they finally admitted what Thomas Szasz (1960; 1965; 1970) had been accusing them of for decades—that their own twentieth century understanding of homosexuality as an illness was “little more than a scientific transformation of the ancient Judeo-Christian prejudice” (Konner 1995; see also Bootzin, Acocella and Alloy 1993; Corsini 1994; and Kazdin 2000), a matter that I have written about elsewhere (Thorn 2014). In other words, I discovered that psychological thought is not nearly as “scientific” as it claims to be, but that does not mean it is not a form of rationality. However, this is not an analysis of that which is scientific and that which is not, or that which is religious and that which is not; this is an analysis of how different forms of theological, psychological and political rationality are deployed strategically through media as forms of ethical governance in an increasingly neoliberalized political economy.

Both the Christian Right and the ex-gay movement seek to legislate morality and produce a moral subject within an explicitly condoned capitalist system even as the perceived *laissez-faire* nature of that system is resisted. As we will learn in Chapters 2 and 3, the movement’s rhetoric of choice, in which the freedom to change is situated within a sexual marketplace, does

not always sit well with Christian discourses of virtue and moralism; and yet they still operate together. In this combined discourse, the ex-gay participant is situated as an entrepreneur of the self, working to change the self through daily confessional struggle precisely to conform to a moral order that does not accept same-sex desire. However, that only reveals the ex-gay subject as a political contradiction that is insufficiently entrepreneurial for the discourse it employs, because how can a subject that submits itself to doctrine and authority to sacrifice him or herself to God's gendered will be a self-produced heterosexual enterprise in a free market of sexual choice? Thus neoliberalism and neoconservative are not always allies of the movement.

The discourse of consumer fraud, which emphasizes individual economic rights and operates through isolated court cases rather than collective government action, is agreeable with neoliberal discourse; it is also one of the most powerful weapons deployed against the movement by those promoting confession of the gay or lesbian self as one's true self. While the first ex-gay consumer fraud court case was not filed until 2012, in 2007 *Boston Legal* participated in a *rhetoric* that was already in play (see Chapter 2). But *Boston Legal* also notes neoconservative attempts by the Christian Right to use ex-gay change to limit the protection of gay rights through government intervention. In response to such attempts, those opposed to the movement have deployed similar measures. Anti-ex-gay legislation that bans conversion therapy for minors has passed in California, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia, and similar legislation is being proposed in Canada (see Chapter 3). This kind of intervention, justified to protect children from ex-gay harm, sees those opposed to ex-gay change promoting a certain kind of family morality. Additionally, privately funded media organizations, as well as some that are publically funded (i.e. the CBC in Canada and NPR in the United States), intervene through the deployment of "earned media," or "free" coverage generated by an event, and most of that has turned against the movement. Thus the commodification of ex-gay confession is problematized both within the movement by a moralism that resists the buying and selling of sex and seeks to regulate it, and

outside the movement by counter-measures and media coverage that are themselves rooted in neoliberal and neoconservative forms of thought. In other words, contract law, family values regulation, and commodified representation have all been turned against the movement.

The questions I tackle in this study are these: What does it mean to confess truth today? How can ancient confessions of sacrifice and obedience be combined with modern testimonies striving for self-knowledge and identity formation? How do such apparently contradictory forms of confession circulate within a political economy of neoliberal choice and neoconservative morality? I will show that unstable ex-gay truth games do not *masquerade* as true beliefs—they are truly believed—but their status as fundamentalist declarations of confessed truth undermines their veracity in the controversy, on both sides of the debate. Yes, the movement’s marketing of consumer choice combined with legislative interventions aimed at protecting religious rights while denying gay rights have been turned against it in the form of a fraud lawsuit and legislation banning conversion therapy for minors; and also the ex-gay subject has been revealed as a contradiction that is not “entrepreneurial” enough for the discourse it employs. Yet because the movement is rooted in the faith of true believers who reject arguments against change as being biased by politically motivated ideology, and because they have their own parallel system of Christian popular culture in which to circulate their truth claims, the movement has legitimized itself in its own communities in spite of its contradictory regimes of truth. And because the pro-gay discourses used against the movement, however successful in appearance, are founded in the same truth games, the primary confessional practices constituting the movement remain intact.

Describing an Analytic Approach and Method: A Governmental Discourse Analysis

My approach to this debate combines discourse analysis with tools derived from critical political economy but deployed through a Foucauldian grid of inquiry. It is a “governmental” approach whereby discursive statements, practices, and representations operating in a specific

political economic context are analyzed as events that seek to govern thought and behaviour in a broad sense: to influence, persuade, convince, and encourage people to change their thought and conduct through ethical self-governance *as well as* through discipline, dominance and control. Governmentality is seldom all controlling and never monolithic. Yes, within the movement, pro-ex-gay psychologists, psychiatrists, ministers, and religious leaders exercise dominance and control over participants, often imposing strict rules, managing roles and practices, and obliging confessions of secret desires and behaviours in religious and therapeutic settings; but ex-gay subjects “usually” participate by choice, voluntarily submitting themselves to this management,¹⁵ which they perceive as a supportive pastoral relationship. Furthermore, the movement’s governmentality is resisted and modified by the governmentalities of those opposed, including the gay rights movement, gay-positive psychiatry and psychology, pro-gay Christianity, and now commercial popular culture. This approach understands ex-gay governmentality to be wide-ranging, complex, and extremely conflicted—not merely the internal rhetoric of the movement *or* its rhetoric in the public sphere, but also its representation and depiction by others.

Foucault first developed governmentality as a political-economic concept, defining it in relation to classical political economy, the administrative state that emerged in Europe following the Middle Ages, and the modern managing of populations (1991 [1980]; 2007b [1977/78]). He analyzed, “the development of a technology of government based on the principle that it is already in itself ‘too much,’ ‘excessive’ ... whose necessity and usefulness can and must always be questioned” (2008 [1978/79], 319). He traced it back to the medieval Christian pastoral and then followed it forward through modern liberalism into twentieth century neoliberal theory (2007b; 2008). But he later expanded his definition to include guidance, influence and self-government, analyzing technologies of the self in particular: “Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word... is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts

¹⁵ Except when minors are forced into ex-gay therapy by their parents or guardians (see Chapters 3 and 4).

between techniques which impose coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by [the-]self” (2007c [1980], 154). In other words, the government of self and others is political, economic *and* subjective, it involves knowledge, power, *and* ethics, and it operates across historical periods (1983a [1982]; 1983b; 2000a [1977]; 2010 [1982/83]).¹⁶

I engage with Foucault holistically, considering all of his published books, transcribed lectures, and multiple interviews as being in dialogue, each a component of a larger project. In fact, in the early 1980s, Foucault himself re-described his entire life’s work in terms of analyzing three general axes of experience: knowledge, normativity, and the self (1984b). Yes, there are some who only engage with Foucault through one or two works, operating as if he analyzes only singular, historical phenomena that are not always relevant for today. But his analyses are meant to elucidate who we have become in the present. Consider what he writes at the beginning of *The History of Sexuality Vol 2* (1990b [1984]): “in order to understand how the modern individual could experience himself as a subject of a ‘sexuality,’ it was essential first to determine how, for centuries, Western man [sic] had been brought to recognize himself as a subject of desire” (5-6). The point of tracing the desiring subject back to ancient Greece was to understand who we are now, and the point of tracing governmentality back to the Christian pastoral and forward again into German, French, and American neoliberalism was also to understand ourselves today.

¹⁶ Some scholars highlight governmentality as key to understanding the links between Foucault’s different methods and periods (Bevir 2010; Dean 1994; Lemke 2011). His work on psychology, medicine, punishment, economics, sexuality, and spirituality has been categorized into three periods: a) his knowledge period, characterized by an archaeological method that uncovers epistemological similarities, dispersions, and changes between historical periods and accounts for discourse in terms of conditions of existence; b) his power period, characterized by a genealogical method analyzing apparatuses of power and changing tactics and strategies of control that accounts for discourse and practices in terms of conditions of emergence; and c) his ethics and subjectivity period, characterized by an expanded genealogical method emphasizing problematizations, “regimes of truth,” subjective self-constitution, and the contingent relationships between knowledge, power, and ethics (Dean 1994; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983; Lemke 2011). However, some argue it is a mistake to see such clear breaks between his methods and periods (Bevir 2010; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983; Lemke 2011). Indeed, Foucault characterizes archaeology as an aspect of genealogy (1984a; 2003b [1975/76]; 2007c; see also Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983) and in his final publications and lectures he analyzes knowledge, power, and ethics together (1988 [1984]; 1990b; 2011).

It is through both governmentality's broadness *and* its specificity that we can recognize confession as a primary form of governmentality. Confession exemplifies the government of self and others. It is rooted in religious, psychological, legal, and even economic knowledges, and it is a technology of power used by experts (ministers, priests, psychiatrists, psychologists, the police, judges, marketers, advertisers, etc.) to regulate, control, influence, and govern others. It also operates as a technology of the self, as a practice of self-regulation, self-purification, self-knowledge, self-control, self-liberation, and yes, self-governance. There should be no surprise, then, that confession sits at the heart of all the differing camps in the ex-gay debate: conservative Christianity confesses desire to purge it; progressive Christianity confesses desire to reconcile it; psychology and psychiatry confesses desire to cure it or reconcile it (depending on the desire's perceived deviancy or normalcy); the gay rights movement confesses desire to celebrate it and convert it into one's personal identity; and commercial media encourage and manipulate it so confessions of desire can be economically rationalized, linked to the buying and selling of commodities, and commodified themselves as products to be bought and sold. I do not argue that today's confession is yesterday's; or that the confessions that took place in the fourth century Christian monasteries Foucault studied are identical to those that structure the ex-gay movement. I argue that ex-gay confession is part of a long genealogy that reaches back to those monasteries, and elements of their practices, modified and modified again, are still in play today, even as they continue to be modified. Therefore I do not impose Foucault's analysis of confession on ex-gay discourse. Rather I see in ex-gay discourse Foucault's research, and in Foucault's research I see the seeds of the ex-gay movement. My theory and research developed in tandem, each opening up new areas of discovery in the other. It is true, Foucault drew primarily (although not exclusively) on modern European and ancient Greco-Roman and medieval sources, and the ex-gay movement emerged out of late twentieth century American evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity. However, there is enough of a genealogical connection between the movement and

Foucault's research, especially via the *general* religious and psychological knowledges the ex-gay movement draws on, for an approach and theory rooted in his work to be very fruitful.

My methodology for this study is also Foucauldian: it is a governmental discourse analysis, a study of the governing functions of tactical and strategic statements, practices, and representations. I examine the discourse through what Foucault calls a "patiently documentary" (1998a [1971], 369) search of available texts from various communication channels. I understand statements, practices, and representations as discursive "events" erupting into and modifying larger discourses and practices of knowledge, power, and ethics (1972 [1969]; 1991; 1998b [1983]; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983). I found and sampled the journalistic texts I analyzed based on key events within the debate that inspired significant coverage and then, similar to grounded theory (but still beginning with a governmental frame), I looked for repeated topics, concepts, and strategies, and categorized them according to the subject positions and objectives of the authors. As many of these texts are available online, I was able to find most through specified Google searches as well as through links made available on websites devoted to following the ex-gay debate. I found fictional and documentary texts I was not already familiar with from references within the discourse through the help of colleagues and a systematic internet search using key terms derived from my journalistic sources. I also used a TV tropes website that has categorized several examples of what it calls a "Cure Your Gays" meme across several forms of fictional media (TVTropes 2014). I sampled, categorized, and analyzed these texts based on the governing concepts, themes and strategies that emerged from my engagement with the discourse as a whole, which is how I realized that confession rather than prayer is the primary governmental strategy of the ex-gay debate (see Appendices A and B for lists of what I found¹⁷).

¹⁷ Appendix A is a chart of journalistic exposés and pop culture entertainment texts organized by release date, communication medium, genre, and the kind of judgement the text imposes on ex-gay change. Appendix B is a bibliography (separate from my References) of all ex-gay discursive texts consulted, including academic texts, organized by communication medium and whether they are pro- or anti-ex-gay.

My method, then, combines elements from Foucault's archaeological analyses of knowledge with his later genealogical analyses of power and ethics. It is a descriptive method that involves categorizing and mapping relevant statements via the discursive texts within which they occur. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) describe a Foucauldian analysis as focusing on the objectives of *serious* speech acts (48, my italics).¹⁸ I describe the objectives of *governmental* speech acts. Unlike linguistic discourse analysis, this is not an analysis of language itself. Foucault is not concerned (at least methodologically) with how language is constructed or to what it refers or signifies, but rather with how it functions and operates (1972; 1991). Likewise, I am not concerned with the grammar of ex-gay discourse or with what (or how) it signifies ideologically. I am concerned with how its manifest meanings function to control, persuade or resist within a system of conflicted ex-gay statements that also function to control, persuade or resist. Also, unlike critical discourse analysis, this is not an analysis of how power understood in terms of dominance is developed and maintained as a system of inequality; rather it is an analysis of how different forms of governing statements and practices operate in relation to each other within a contested discursive formation. A governmental approach includes analyses of power relations, but it does not assume power always operates as dominance nor always leads to systematic inequality. A governmental approach assumes power operates positively as well as negatively, usually in relation to different types of knowledge and forms of self-governance, and it is often resisted, especially in discursive formations that are still in flux.

A discursive formation is the constantly changing "totality" of statements and events that form any given discourse and no unity or agreement among statements need be assumed—even

¹⁸ Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) call Foucault's approach "interpretive analytics" and argue that, while initially semi-structuralist in its attempt to establish the theoretical rules of discourse, it became post-hermeneutic and interpretive when his archaeological method was incorporated into and began to serve his genealogical method. They show that Foucault's methods—archaeology *and* genealogy—work in sync to account for *how* discourses and practices are used, for the specific *roles* they play, and for how they came to *operate* as they do *over time*, within the contingency of history. Although they over-emphasize Foucault's early methods as autonomous and self-referential, and over-emphasize an early concern with domination (and misunderstand his refusal of absolutes as something philosophical rather than methodological), they insist that his methods are always specific, disciplined, pragmatic, and diagnostic.

if speaking agents within the formation often seek to achieve such a unity, or at least to achieve the appearance of it. The ex-gay movement and the debate that surrounds it is just such a formation, but the way science is deployed in the debate characterizes the formation not as a formalized unity but as a perpetually incomplete and conflicted formation characterized by exceptional disunity. Thus a governmental discourse analysis recognizes that statements are themselves frequently modified through the counter-governance of other statements and representations (Foucault 1991; 2007c; 2010; see also Bevir 2010; Dean 1994; Lemke 2011). Foucault established the functions and objectives of discursive statements, practices, and problematizations in terms of objects, subject positions, notions and concepts, and tactics and strategies, but without assuming any constancy to such objectives or related terms (1972). The formation of governmental statements and discourses of knowledge is referential to a domain of objects, to that which is talked about through practices of delimitation and specification, but understood by the researcher as historically specific and usually in flux. In the ex-gay debate, that can be understood as the domain constituted by the movement and its antagonists, and by the field of objects at play within its discourse, including sexual orientation, sexual desire, sexual acts, the sexual body, God, Jesus, the Bible, the family, and more. The fluctuation of this domain can be seen in the way the ex-gay body as a “changeable” object has been redefined in terms of life-long struggle rather than immediate cure because numerous psychological studies of the ex-gay body failed to demonstrate unambiguous change.

The formation of governmental statements and discourses of knowledge is also subject defining, both normatively and enunciatively, not only in terms of how subjects are talked about, but in terms of how discourses, practices, and problematizations situate the speaking subject in terms of historically specific and fluctuating positions of authority and fields of knowledge. Thus the space opened up by ex-gay discourse allows subjects (for, against, or neutral) to take up a position to speak of the movement and its beliefs and practices in terms of their positions as ex-

gay participants, ex-ex-gay survivors, pastors, ministers, priests, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, sociologists, politicians, gay activists, journalists, writers, film producers, and even economists. Discursive formations are also part of associated fields of statements characterized by both their regularity and their discontinuity—which is to say, statements understood as governmental events are situated within a specific field that is characterized by different types, levels, and functions of compatibility and contradiction that are historically specific and in flux. The field of coordination, coexistence, and subordination in which ex-gay and anti-ex-gay notions and concepts appear (and are defined, applied, manipulated, and transformed) include concepts like confession, sin, redemption, biblical truth, perversion, repression, the reparative drive, the family dynamic—even gay, straight, and bisexual, but also political economic concepts like rational choice, consumer fraud, and earned media. However, these notions and concepts are conflicted and debated; so within the movement’s own discourse the notion of homosexuality is denied as a valid category because translated biblical truth appears to forbid it; yet in pro-gay Christian discourses the notion of homosexuality *as sin* is denied because historically contextualized biblical truth is not thought to condemn modern loving same-sex relations but rather ancient forms of idolatrous same-sex child abuse.

Discursive formations are materially distinct but thematically and strategically repeatable through different mediums of communication, through different forms of change, transformation and struggle, but they are always caught up in distinct and fluctuating historical webs. Mediums of communication are key here. Foucault says that discursive statements are “*always* given through some material medium” (1972, 100, my italics), which operates as “a space in which [statements] are used and repeated” (ibid, 106). In the ex-gay debate, strategies and choices employed both for and against the movement, including confession, prayer, Bible study, reparative therapy (a form of conversion therapy), group therapy, pro-gay counter therapies, polemics, biblical interpretation and reinterpretation, and even advertising, dramatization, and

satire are deployed through mediums of communication such as preaching and counselling, therapeutic transference, academic and popular book publishing, and newspapers, radio, television, and the internet. Indeed, communication channels are of primary importance in the ex-gay debate because the choice to advertise the movement in newspapers and broadcasting was what catapulted ex-gay change into the public sphere and created the debate as it now exists.

The necessity of relying as heavily as I do on commercial popular culture for my sources is because the ex-gay movement did not become enough of a public phenomenon to be studied *as* a discursive formation until after it became an object of debate in commercial media. At that point ex-gay discourse came into its own as a discrete set of statements and events seeking cultural legitimization and scientific formalization through print, broadcasting, and new media. Foucault describes a discursive formation's development in terms of crossing four thresholds: a) the threshold of positivity, when a "discursive practice achieves individuality and autonomy" even if still in conflict; b) the threshold of epistemologization, when a model of "verification and coherence" is articulated even if there are still competing models; c) the threshold of scientificity [or disciplinarily] when statements come to comply with rules and laws for the construction of propositions and begin to escape serious conflict; and d) the threshold of formalization, when the discourse is able "to deploy the formal edifice that it constitutes" and legitimize itself without serious opposition from within or without (1972, 186-7). Mathematics, chemistry, and physics are all formalized sciences, even if new discoveries and modifications are frequent; but crossing all four thresholds is not necessary for a formation, nor is there any specific timeline or proper order of succession. The "science" of the ex-gay debate has not been legitimized or formalized, on either side; and not just because psychology is a "soft" science. Rather, some discursive formations are always characterized by discontinuity, breaks, and conflicts wherein a battle for

supremacy erupts between competing statements, subject positions, objectives, concepts, and strategies. In such cases, legitimization and formalization sometimes never occur.¹⁹

My comparative use of discursive examples from academic, journalistic and pop cultural sources, some factual and some fictional, is also justified by my method. While analytically I am sometimes concerned with factual accuracy in the discourse, my larger concern is with how discourse governs. A fictional depiction of the movement such as *But I'm a Cheerleader* can be just as influential in terms of how the movement is understood and perceived as can a factual exposé such as Wayne Besen's *Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-gay Myth* (2003). My analysis understands discourse not to *represent* truth and knowledge but to *generate* truth and knowledge; and the truth-effects of fiction can often be just as powerful as the truth-effects of non-fiction. That can be seen in ex-gay debate itself, via the often hysterical responses from within the movement to unwanted fictional popular culture depictions of how the movement operates (see Chapter 4). Whether factual or fictional, whether academic or commercial, discursive statements, governmental practices, and ethical problematizations compete with, combine with, cooperate with, and change, modify, and resist each other in games of truth that operate as wills to knowledge, wills to power, and wills to truth; and in the ex-gay movement all of these events intersect with the long established obligation to confess oneself.

Providing an Original Contribution: a Political Economy of Ex-gay Communication

This study will provide an original contribution to ex-gay research by establishing the discursive and confessional conditions of existence of the movement, not just in terms of religion and psychology, but also in terms of politics, economics, and mediated communication. To date, no ex-gay study has considered such a wide range of sources as comprehensively. I will examine

¹⁹ The focus of Foucault's early work was indeed scientific discourses, albeit the "soft" human sciences. However, he also acknowledges, even in his early work, the possibility of discursive formations of political knowledge, ethical constructions, and aesthetic representations. He writes, "Archaeological territories may extend to 'literary' or 'philosophical' texts, as well as scientific ones. Knowledge is to be found not only in demonstrations, it can also be found in fiction, reflexion, narrative accounts, institutional regulations, and political decisions" (1072, 183-4).

depictions in entertainment as well as journalistic reports and exposés, and I will treat academic studies, especially the psychological literature, as part of a mediated public debate. By mapping the discourse across its many forms, I will provide a Foucauldian re-description that shows how a movement constituted historically by religious and psychological forms of confession has been altered by our contemporary political economy; and how our political economy is itself constituted by confession. Foucault (1990a) tells us confession is “one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth” (59), and that in the twentieth century “all kinds of mechanisms everywhere—in advertising, books, novels, films, and widespread pornography—invite the individual to pass from this daily expression of sexuality to the institutional and expensive confession of his sexuality to the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, or sexologist” (2003a, 170). This study will update Foucault’s statements to show how the quadrature of confessing sin and disease, testifying doctrine and truth, sacrificing oneself to religious and psychological authority, and being born again in an identity politics of self-emergence, has been modified by our contemporary neoliberal political economy.

Most of the academic literature on the movement is comprised of psychological studies of efficacy and harm. While the majority are critical (APA Task Force 2009; Drescher 1998; Drescher, Shidlo and Schroeder 2002; Drescher and Zucker 2006; Hancock, Gock and Haldeman 2012), one is neutral (Svensson 2003), and some conducted by Christian and Jewish identified researchers are supportive (Jones and Yarhouse 2007; Nicolosi 1997; Nicolosi, Byrd and Potts 2000). The most well-known and controversial study, conducted by Dr. Robert Spitzer, was presented in 2001 as a conference paper and published in 2003. That study, which concluded some gays and lesbians can change their orientation, is considered supportive by most, but prior to apologizing for it in 2012 (see Chapters 2 and 4), Spitzer insisted it was objective and neutral. Yet it nearly legitimized the movement, receiving widespread attention because of Spitzer’s lead role on the American Psychiatric Association committee that declassified homosexuality as a

mental illness in 1973. The study, however, exemplifies problems with most psychological research into ex-gay efficacy and harm because it is riddled with methodological issues related to measurement, subject selection, and unreliable self-reports (i.e. confessions). There are also several sociological and ethnographic books and articles that focus on the subjective experiences of ex-gays and some confirm the movement's focus on confession (Barton 2012; Erzen 2006; Gerber 2008; Moon 2005; Wolkomir 2006); however, as noted above, few address just how important the practice is. My study surpasses that research, treating the movement as a mediated cultural phenomenon historically constituted by religion and psychology but permeated by cost-benefit calculations, marketing protocols, and an impoverished discourse of entrepreneurship.

Within communication studies there are a number of analyses of ex-gay news coverage and advertising that are narrowly focused on the rhetoric of specific case studies (Fetner 2005; Lund and Renna 2006; Stewart 2005; 2008). My study will address the larger political economy of ex-gay communication as it operates in a conflicted field of cultural production through processes of commodification, structuration, and mediation. Alongside those analyses, I will consider more polemical accounts that operate directly as part of the public debate. In news, magazine and book publishing there are numerous high profile journalistic exposés, most of which seek to expose the movement as a fraud (Arana 2012; Besen 2003; Cox 2010; Denizet-Lewis 2011; Slaughter 2013a; Swartz 2011). There are also several commercial "self-help" books and participant autobiographies, both from ex-gays justifying the movement (Chambers 2009; Dallas 2003; Paulk, A. 2003; Paulk, J. 1998), and from survivors condemning it as religious abuse (see Marks 2009; Rix 2010; Tousey 2006). There are also justifications and condemnations from religious leaders who do not identify as ex-gay or ex-ex-gay (Harvey 1996; Pennington 1989). By analyzing the popular discourse surrounding the movement as heated polemics that operate in governmental, confessional form, this study will escape the dichotomous

declarations of right and wrong professed by so many so as to dismantle ex-gay truth-claims and show that most agree on the necessity of confessing desire and testifying fundamental truth.

Finally, there are copious amounts of popular culture depictions and reports spanning multiple media platforms across 15 years (see Appendices A & B). They are published as books, in newspapers, and in magazines (both serious and satirical); they are produced as news and current affairs segments for television and radio, as episodes of daytime talk shows, as feature documentaries, and as fictional films and television programs (both comedic and dramatic). There are also pro- and anti-ex-gay websites, and numerous ex-gay and ex-ex-gay confessionals posted online as chat board messages, blogs, and YouTube videos. To date, however, there are no analyses of the movement as it appears in popular entertainment, and there are no analyses that consider the political and economic implications of an increasingly commodified discourse on the confessional structure of the movement. This study aims to fill that gap.

On a political economic level, it will show that both ex-gay and anti-ex-gay discourses are part of a conjoined field of neoliberal and neoconservative governmentalities. Similar to but expanding on Wolkomir's claim that both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay support groups privilege heteronormativity, I will show how the entire ex-gay debate assumes the same political economic subjectivity, wherein one's sexuality becomes the basis of one's identity as constituted by rational choice assumptions and risk management. In addition to offering the only analysis of the ex-gay movement in popular entertainment, I offer the only exploration of the movement in a legal context of consumer fraud. In that light I will elucidate how the movement's own economic and political tactics and strategies were appropriated and turned against it. As we will learn, the movement's entry into mass media through a politically motivated advertising campaign turned ex-gay therapy, largely unknown in the public sphere until that point, first into a commodity designed to create symbolic capital in the culture wars, and second into an object of political contempt in popular culture. This study will demonstrate that it was the movement's own

communicative tactics and strategies that orchestrated that change. By attempting to deploy individual consumer choice and justifications of antigay legislation to justify itself, the movement saw contract law and family values legislation designed to protect children from ex-gay harm deployed against it. Once that happened, the movement lost control of its own discourse in mainstream media even as it legitimized itself in Christian popular culture.

At the level of advocacy and strategy I will show that while antigay Christian belief systems may be the most effective short term targets to further delegitimize ex-gay claims, because confessions and testimonies of desire, sin and identity pervade the entire ex-gay debate, the real problem is the culture of confession. At the level of theory and method I will show the importance of Foucault's research to critical political economy and media studies. Whereas there is ample use of Foucault's research in cultural studies and religious studies, and communication studies sometimes utilizes Foucauldian discourse analyses, his methods and research are seldom deployed systematically and almost never in relation to governmentality as a concept that bridges the gaps between his different methods and periods of thought. Foucault tended to use what C.G. Prado (1992) calls an "acid bath of... redescription" to analyze historically elite discourses through studies of archived professional documents (15). I will show how a similar kind of acid bath of re-description can be used to analyze contemporary media and pop culture discourses.

One limitation of this study is that it tends to collapse male and female subjectivities together. That is partly a result of a blind spot in Foucault's research that often (but not always) neglects female points of view. However, that is precisely because he studied elite historical discourses, almost all of which privilege men. At the same time, ex-gay discourse also privileges male points of view. Yes, there are some strong female voices in the debate (ex-gay Anne Paulk and lesbian journalist Rachel Maddow, for example), but most voices in the debate are male and most ex-gay studies involve mainly male subjects. Even Erzen's and Wolkomir's studies are of all male groups. The fact is that more men participate in the ex-gay movement than women. A

feminist history of the ex-gay movement could be very productive and enlightening, but that was beyond the scope of this study. It is also possible, of course, that given Judith Butler's feminist work on sex, gender, and performativity (1990; 1993; 2004), psychology and power (1997), ethical self-narratives (2005), and religion in the public sphere (2011) her research could be important for a full understanding of how ex-gay change operates discursively and in practice. But I defer engaging with her here because Butler roots much of her own work in Foucault and my focus is on confession and neoliberalism understood through Foucault as a primary source and political economy understood through Foucault. The relations between Butler's work and ex-gay discourse could be fruitful future research.

Outlining the Chapters: From Confession to Political Economy and Back Again

This dissertation will show how the use of confessions of self-renunciation and fundamentalist true-belief as technologies of self-emergence sacrifices not just the ex-gay self but all subjects in the debate to unstable and fundamentalist truth games. Ex-gay participants do not try to pray the gay away, they try to confess and testify it away, and ex-gay survivors try to confess and testify the movement away. Chapter 1 will provide a history of the movement and establish the conditions of emergence of the debate in terms of the primary practices underlying it: confessions of sin, disease and harm, faith and true belief, self-sacrifice, and self-emergence. As part of my analysis, Foucault's genealogy of confession will be outlined in more detail and his account of confessions of self-sacrifice becoming confessions of truth becoming confessions of self-emergence will be explained. However, a common understanding of Foucault in which it is assumed he establishes a clear historical "acts versus identity" dichotomy will be questioned. Just as confessional self-sacrifice operates alongside confessional self-emergence in the ex-gay movement, so too does homosexuality problematized in terms of behaviour operate alongside gay rights problematized in terms of identity. In short, this chapter will operate as a history of the

movement, a genealogy of its primary practice, and a functional account of how Foucault's analytics of confession can be used to describe the movement's emergence and historical constitution.

At the heart of Chapter 2 is the irony of a consumer fraud lawsuit that resulted from the movement using mainstream advertising to "come out" in the public sphere. It will cautiously employ a rational choice cost-benefit analysis (but still using a governmental methodology) to quantify the financial and psychological costs of ex-gay change. It will also begin the process of establishing the movement's conditions of existence by describing the commodification of its confessional practices at the level of individual choice. Here I will argue that in spite of the rhetoric and legal accusations of fraud deployed against ex-gay change, the movement is not a financial scam selling a snake oil cure. Rather it is an organization run by true believers who confess their true beliefs as life-long labour. The problem is, they cannot admit the truth that their movement has been (self)-commodified, nor can they confess the scientific truth that there is psychological risk in ex-gay change. Furthermore, the movement's language of choice is undercut by an entrepreneurship limited only to the production of heteronormativity, and by an ex-gay subjectivity derived from confessional obedience rather than entrepreneurial choice.

In Chapter 3 I turn to the "culture wars" of American neoconservative politics. I will show how the movement's turn to politics left it open to anti-ex-gay legislative action because of a slow but distinct shift in societal attitudes following the high profile murder of Matthew Shepard. By combining a Foucauldian analytics of strategic truth games with Anthony Giddens' concept of structuration and the political economy of Pierre Bourdieu, I will show how the interaction of structure and agency in the cultural capital of publically confessed truth reveals the ex-gay movement as a bankrupt form of symbolic power. The chapter will also use queer political economy to critique and contextualize the limits of a rational choice analysis. It will also account for how the ex-gay movement was redesigned by the Christian Right in the 1990s to

fulfill a purpose beyond ex-gay change: to try and eliminate gay and lesbian politics (and gay and lesbian identities) through the strategic promotion of a kinder, gentler form of “love the sinner, hate the sin” antigay politics. However, that strategy failed because the unexpected event of Matthew Shepard’s murder shone an international spotlight on antigay prejudice that even the discourse of loving the sinner could not overcome. In short, this chapter will show how the movement’s occupation of an awkward space between neoliberalism and neo-conservatism saw its own legislative tactics turned against it as gay rights groups successfully campaigned for their own “family values” legislation to protect children from the ex-gay movement.

In Chapter 4 I will analyze the mediation of the ex-gay debate in news and popular culture contrasting Habermas’s ideal of reasoned deliberation with Foucault’s analytics of tactics and strategies of control. Beginning with an account of the media frenzy surrounding the case of Zach Stark, a teenager forced into an ex-gay residential program by his parents, I will trace the consequences of attracting adherents and public support using “earned media,” or media coverage not paid for by the movement. I will also consider the impact of Alan Chambers’ and Robert Spitzer’s confessed apologies on the media debate, both of which operated as negative earned media. The increased visibility generated by ex-gay media left it open to journalistic scrutiny, public scorn, and scathing dramatizations and satires. Whereas the movement initially benefited from media’s tendency to oversimplify complicated issues and emphasize sensationalism and controversy over reasoned analysis, those same tendencies led it to lose control of its own image. However, by noting a different trajectory of the movement’s mediation in Christian popular culture, I will show how its creation of positive cultural capital rooted in compassion over condemnation was not a complete failure. The movement is still accepted in conservative Christian communities.

The ex-gay movement remains a contemporary problem to be solved. In spite of the movement’s neoliberal discourse, legislative lobbying, and earned media having backfired, and

in spite of several high profile confessed apologies, ex-gay change is not dead. The movement has certainly lost the public relations war it began 15 years ago in mainstream media, but it has been legitimized in its own parallel world of Christian popular culture. Short of transforming the confessional nature of contemporary society, unless the true beliefs around which the ex-gay debate revolves are changed, the movement will continue to recruit confused subjects, who experience unwanted same-sex desire, into contradictory and unstable truth games.

Chapter One: Confess the Gay Away?

The ex-gay movement is a confessional movement, and the debate surrounding it is a confessional debate. It should come as no surprise, then, that the first ad in the ex-gay marketing campaign, which appeared in *The New York Times* on July 13, 1998 and catapulted the movement into the public sphere, was structured as a full confession. Laid out below a traditionally “feminine” photograph of ex-gay spokeswoman Anne Paulk—her lips full, her eyelashes prominent, one large earring conspicuously highlighted—the ad contains a testimonial headline that reads, “I’m living proof that Truth can set you free” (Alliance For Traditional Marriage, et al. 1998a). Immediately below that Anne confesses her past difficulty with having her lesbianism called “sin,” until, she testifies, she “realized that God’s love was really meant for me” (ibid) Next, she discloses her root cause, a secret she could not speak of for years: when she was four she was molested by a teenage boy. Because of that, she admits, being a woman became a mystery; it had to be demystified (just like in *But I’m a Cheerleader*). It is not until almost half way through the ad that Anne tells us she prayed: “God please show me who you are, and fill the void in my heart” (ibid). Yet immediately after that she confesses, “Change didn’t come overnight,” because six months later, she still struggled and worked to be ex-gay (ibid).

It is not my thesis that prayer plays no role in the movement. But did Anne, who claims conversion to this day, pray the gay away? No she did not. Was prayer the primary technique by which she *tried* to eliminate her same-sex desire? No it was not. Yes, prayer was an important component of Anne’s struggle, and, in fact, she even tells us she prayed again: “Lord, You know that I really enjoy this lifestyle, but I want you to be my first love” (ibid). However, that prayer was also a confession—repentance for her sinful enjoyment of the gay lifestyle; just as important, it was a prayer she prayed *before* she joined the movement. Indeed, trying to pray the gay away better describes what people who are not yet in the movement attempt to do prior to

joining. But *after* Anne joined, prayer was supplanted by confession; the hard work of continual, daily confession. Indeed, she reveals in the ad that “Leaving homosexuality was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do. I finally saw the patterns of my same-sex attraction and came to understand the underlying needs that sparked my longings” (ibid). It was not through prayer that she saw her patterns, but the hard work of confessional therapy. From confessing sin to confessing disease, this is an ad that deploys religion and psychology together: Anne saw the patterns, the underlying needs, the longings—she saw them in her own confessions. But this is also an ad that testifies to the emergence of her new ex-gay identity; and not just hers. Below a photograph of a large group of men and women, the ad declares, “Thousands... walked away from their homosexual identities... their stories of hope and healing through the transforming love of Jesus Christ are the same” (ibid). Anne Paulk, and the “thousands” (more like a hundred) pictured below her, confessed their stories to sacrifice their gay identities so they could be born again into new ex-gay identities. The ad says that it was God’s grace that transformed them, but in the ex-gay movement there is no grace without repentance, and there is no repentance without confession.

This chapter will establish the governmental context for the confessional nature of the ex-gay movement by describing how confession operates within and around it. I will analyze confession as a strategy of self-sacrifice and self-emergence, of speaking desire aloud (through both guilt and pride) and testifying belief. I will use Foucault’s genealogy of confession, his historical tracing of Christian confession becoming psychiatric confession becoming ubiquitous confession, to establish the governmental conditions of emergence of the ex-gay movement as a case study of our present. Given the relationship between political economy and governmentality, this chapter will also begin a political economy of ex-gay confession and participation, of those who do not want to be gay and try to confess it away.²⁰ I will consider the power-relations at play

²⁰ Foucault’s work examines the history of political economy as a discipline of knowledge (1994 [1966]; 2007b [1977/78]; 2008 [1978/79]); but he also describes his work *as a form* of political economy. In *Discipline and Punish* (1995 [1975]) he situates classical and modern systems of punishment “in a certain ‘political economy’ of the body”

in ex-gay change efforts, describing how they constitute an economy of people that try to reproduce themselves as something other than they are through lifelong struggle and work. Our subjects here will be ex-gays, ex-gay survivors, and the religious and psychological experts who combine religious and psychological knowledges to govern ex-gay and ex-ex-gay subjects into either rejecting or accepting their non-heterosexual behaviours and identities.

This chapter will also describe the confessional nature of our identity politics. The ex-gay ad campaign situated the movement as part of a battle for discursive supremacy within a politics of confessed identity. Indeed, without confession and testimony there would be no identity politics. Consider a 2007 episode of the animated comedy series *South Park* called “Cartman Sucks” (season 11, episode 2) in which 8-year-old Butters is mistakenly labeled “bi-curious” by his father and forced into a Christian pray the gay away camp. There he must confess his sinful thoughts and testify to his sexual orientation change. Ironically, Butters is not bi-curious, but by the end he rejects “praying” (confessing) the gay away, identifies as bi-curious even though he does not understand the label, and testifies to the truth of his bi-curiosity in God. Even the denial of identity politics requires confession. When Greg Quinlan, President of the ex-gay group PFOX (Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays & Gays) confesses that he understands “the gays’ dread and absolute fear of heterosexuality... [because i]t’s about labeling others as ‘gay’ as early as possible... and then ensuring they do not leave the group” (2012), he tries to deny the validity of LGBT identities precisely by validating his own. But Quinlan had to confess his gay away and testify to the biblical truth of antigay doctrine before he could recreate himself as an ex-gay friend of the fearful gays whose identity politics need to be denied. Although their testimonies contradict each other, both Butters and Quinlan had to sacrifice themselves before they could recreate

(25), describing how the punished body is “involved in a political field” that is “bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use” (25-6). In *The History of Sexuality Vol 1* (1990a [1976]), from mercantilism to capitalism, he “constitute[s] the ‘political economy’ of a will to knowledge” (73) by describing “a whole grid of observations regarding sex” formed in relation to “the political economy of population” (27).

themselves and speak their “truths” as the truth of God. That is no different from Anne Paulk, who had to sacrifice herself before she could emerge as a marketable ex-gay spokesperson. In this dissertation the production of identity, and the objects of its politics—the body, sexuality, gender, religion, belief: in short, subjectivity—will be seen as the effect of a long history of a religious and psychological governmentality that mixes sacrifice and emergence together.

In that light, the ex-gay movement is also an example of how new and old discourses can operate in relation to each other, often in conflict, modifying one another while still working together as the effects of their individual genealogies. Foucault never argued that new discourses necessarily eliminate the old; he shows that they modify the old. That is why Quinlan (like Paulk) can confess himself as ex-gay, as having sacrificed his sin, while still testifying that “gay” is just a label representing fear.²¹ That is even how he can suggest that gay identity politics are about coercing people into a permanent group, about “trying to normalize sodomy by calling it ‘marriage’” (Quinlan 2012), even though he also labels his acts (confessing the gay away) his identity within a group deemed permanent. And it is why the writers of *South Park* could write a speech for Butters that addresses the paradox of identity politics in a Foucauldian way:

I am sick and tired of everyone telling me I’m confused. I wasn’t confused until other people started telling me I was... I’m not going to be confused anymore just because you say I should be. My name is Butters. I’m 8-years-old, I’m blood type O, and I’m bi-curious. And even that’s okay because if I’m bi-curious, and I’m somehow made from God, then I figure God must be a little bi-curious himself.

Butters’ speech is confessional, testimonial, and given that he is not bi-curious, nonsensical; and yet it smacks of our current “truth” as he obediently submits himself to pro-gay orthodoxy. By denying and affirming the confusion of a label that had no validity before others forced it upon him, but that he now confesses and embodies as akin to his own blood and roots in the being of God, he describes the effects of both ancient and modern cultures and language on sexuality.

²¹ Fear of heterosexuality as the cause of homosexuality comes from psychoanalyst Sándor Radó (1995 [1969]). Popular in the 1950s and 60s, his ideas have since been rejected in psychology and psychiatry (Drescher 1998).

Foucault tells us that “sexuality is not generally something about which people are silent and that must be kept secret; it is something one has to confess” (2003a [1974/75], 169); and confession is the obligation to “declare aloud and intelligibly the truth of oneself” (2007c [1980], 148), whether to authenticate that truth with difficulty or shame, whether to celebrate it as who one is, or (especially in Christianity but also in psychiatry and psychology) to use it to purify and redeem oneself for the promise of salvation (1990a [1976], 2003a, 2007a [1980]). It is also the “ritual of discourse” around which modern subjectivity operates (1990a, 61):

The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles, one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one’s parents, one’s educators, one’s doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell anyone else, the things people write books about (1990a, 59).

And the things people write advertising copy, online blogs, and television shows about. Indeed, today campaign spokespeople and fictional characters alike, molded and written to generate profit for producers, advertisers and lobby groups, must confess their “true selves” in desire.

A Brief History of the Christian Ex-gay Movement

Confessing first sin and then identity sits at the heart of ex-gay change. Even though the ads that introduced the movement into the public sphere showcase confession as key, that point seems easy to miss. In multiple references to the movement, in academia, news, and popular culture, the phrase “pray the gay away” operates as a convenient, pithy descriptive designed to crystalize what is at play in the debate. Bernadette Barton incorporates it into the title of her ethnographic study, *Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays* (2012); *The Huffington Post* has a topic page called “Pray the Gay Away” that links to thirteen recent articles on the movement (*Huffington Post, The* 2014); the television documentary serial *Our America*

incorporates it into the titles of two of its three episodes on ex-gay change: “Pray the Gay Away?” and “Pray the Gay Away: Revisited;” and *South Park* displays it on the entrance sign of the ex-gay camp Butters is forced into. A quick Google search reveals numerous ex-gay news articles, blogs and website posts that contain the words “pray the gay away,” including several recent blogs and articles about the Texas Republican Party voting to endorse “pray the gay away” therapy for adults *and* children (see Jawillie 2014; McCann 2014. *Week, The* 2014), and a review of the 2013 *Saturday Night Live* “Ex-Gay Camp” sketch featuring Ben Affleck in which the sketch is called “Pray the Gay Away” (Kirell 2013). One can also find a recently released Kindle romance eBook called *Pray the Gay Away* (York 2014), a mocking, anti-ex-gay YouTube video posted by a young gay man titled “HOW TO: Pray The Gay Away” (Tyler Oakley Aug 17, 2011), a *FunnyOrDie* webpage of comedic “Pray the Gay Away” videos, pictures and articles (*FunnyOrDie* 2014), and ads for “Thank God you can’t Pray The Gay Away” T-shirts sold by Wayne Besen’s *Truth Wins Out* website (Besen 2011b). One can even find a satirical ad for hand and body sanitizer called “Gay Away™: Spray That Gay Away!” (Waxinlyrical 2011).

Certainly prayer is a primary practice of ex-gay change, but it is not *the* primary practice. We can see this not only in that first ex-gay ad, but in *But I’m a Cheerleader*, in *Our America*, and even in *Boston Legal* and *South Park*. We can see it also in journalistic coverage of the movement. An exposé by Mark Benjamin (2005), who posed as a closeted homosexual for a conversion therapy session, makes no reference to prayer. But the first thing he was asked to do upon arriving in the office of his Christian counselor was fill out a 15 page questionnaire. He had to answer questions “about myself and my family. Mostly the questions centered on how I got along with my folks” (n.p.). In other words, he had to confess his early childhood family dynamic as a problem to be solved. In a *New York Times* report on the case of Zach Stark, who was forced into an ex-gay program by his parents (see Chapter 4), journalist Alex Williams

(2005) references confession twice in the first two paragraphs, once in the first sentence: “It was the sort of confession that a decade ago might have been scribbled in a teenager’s diary, then quietly tucked away in a drawer” (n.p.). He means the confessional plea for help Zach Stark posted to his MySpace wall, but nowhere in the article does he *discuss* prayer, using the word only once, as part of a quote from Zach, who prayed the whole ordeal would just blow over. On the Christian side of the debate, an article from *Christianity Today* tell us: “Since its beginnings in the 1970s, the ex-gay movement has engaged gay advocates in a battle of testimonies” (Stafford 2007, n.p.). The article justifies the movement, frequently referencing the testimony of participants, but it only mentions prayer once, in a list of practices that puts testimony first. The primary practice of ex-gay change, *the* practice the ties not just religion and psychology, but religion, psychology, and identity together in this movement, is confession.

The ex-gay movement is a mostly conservative Christian organization that was formed within months of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) declassifying homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973. Although emerging in part out of the “hippie” Jesus movement of the early 1970s (Erzen 2006), it was chiefly a response to declassification (Besen 2003). Indeed, prior to the 1970s, Christianity was mute on the “issue” of homosexuality, responding in the early and mid-twentieth century either with excommunication or by deferring to psychiatry and psychology (Capps 2003; see also Perry and Swicegood 1990; Weatherhead 1937 [1929]; 2010 [1931]; Wood 1960). But following declassification, the ex-gay movement emerged to fill the therapeutic void and it quickly began to take shape through the independent creation of several small church ministries across the United States and Canada. Coalescing under the leadership of the Christian umbrella organization Exodus International in 1976 (Besen 2003; Erzen 2006), it soon formed links with several mental health practitioners, many religious, who used the newly created diagnostic category “ego-dystonic homosexuality” to continue treating LGBT patients

distressed over their homosexuality (Bayer 1987 [1981]; Drescher 1998). Whether using religious methods, psychological methods, or both, in nearly all cases treatment began with voluntary confessions of one's secret desires as unwanted sexual sins in need of expulsion.

The movement grew throughout the 1980s, fueled by antigay media campaigns initiated by the Christian Right in the late 1970s and by the AIDS crisis of the 1980s (Fetner 2001; 2005). While it expanded internationally, including into Canada, it remained largely unknown outside evangelical, fundamentalist, Mormon, and conservative Catholic Christian communities (Erzen 2006; Fetner 2005). That changed in 1992 when NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) joined Exodus as an arguably secular ex-gay umbrella organization (Besen 2003; Erzen 2006) to promote what it called reparative therapy, a confessional practice rooted in both psychoanalysis and behaviourism. Cofounded by Catholic psychologist Joseph Nicolosi, Jewish psychiatrist Benjamin Kaufman, and Freudian psychoanalyst Charles Socarides, NARTH presents itself as a psychological organization that argues ex-gay change can be justified scientifically (Kaufman 2002; Nicolosi 1997) even though its membership is comprised of mostly religious lay people (Throckmorton 2011). Regardless, sacrificial confessions of the "truth" of one's deepest desires, whether conceived of as sinful or diseased, remained central.

In the summer of 1998 the movement officially "came out of the closet" and announced its existence to the world by joining 15 Christian Right lobby groups to launch its national advertising campaign. Using the confessions and testimonies of participants and supporters to promise "freedom from homosexuality," the campaign remade the movement as a prominent component of the American culture wars (Fetner 2005; Lund and Renna 2006; Stewart 2005; 2008). The ads were printed in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and the *Miami Herald* with television spots launched in 1999 (Besen 2003). They were designed to create mainstream media coverage, which they did, including a high profile

story in *Newsweek* featuring Anne Paulk and her then husband John (Leland and Miller 1998). While there had been some media coverage prior to the campaign (Besen 2003), it was not the sustained coverage that would follow the ads. The movement's success in generating sustained coverage would lead to a decade's worth of more ads, in newspapers, on billboards, subway, and bus placards, and in broadcasting (TWO 2014a), with television ads even produced in Canada;²² and that would lead to even more media coverage. At the time the ads were initiated, Exodus and NARTH had also established websites on the internet, as would ex-ex-gay survivors years later (Thorn 2012a; Toscano 2009), and shortly after, JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing) appeared on the scene to represent a smaller Orthodox Jewish wing of the movement, although it remained subservient to the Christian-based Exodus International (Besen 2003).

Although the ads were temporarily eclipsed by the antigay murder of Matthew Sheppard (see Chapter 3), in 2001 Dr. Robert Spitzer, the psychiatrist who headed the committee that declassified homosexuality, cemented ex-gay change in mass media discourse when he presented a study (published in 2003) claiming some gay men and lesbians could change their orientation through religiously mediated means. Although the study's methodology, a telephone survey of confessional self-reports, was criticized (Drescher & Zucker 2006), it created a media frenzy (Besen 2003; 2006; Drescher 2006; Lund & Renna 2006). Since then the movement has been the featured topic on multiple radio and television news, current affairs and daytime talk shows, the subject of several feature documentaries and narrative films, and has become an object of ridicule in numerous prime time dramas, television sitcoms and sketch comedy programs. One of the reasons the movement continued to have such a high profile in mainstream media even several years after the Spitzer study (over and above its continued self-promotion) was due to a frenzy of media coverage initiated in 2005 when 16-year-old Zach Stark posted a plea for help

²² The Life Productions Ministry ads aired on a Sudbury CTV station until complaints had them pulled (Rau 2008).

on his MySpace page after his parents forced him into a conversion therapy program against his will. The aftermath of that event saw the movement receive international coverage.

Recently, the movement has faced several more high profile setbacks. A 2009 American Psychological Association (APA)²³ report found little evidence gay-to-straight therapy is effective and suggests it is probably harmful (APA Task Force 2009). In 2012 Dr. Spitzer publically and officially retracted his own study, confessed his methodological errors, and apologized to the gay community for any harm he caused (Arana 2012; Barton 2012; Spitzer 2012). That same year California and New Jersey outlawed conversion therapy for minors, bans inspired by Zach Stark that were upheld by the courts in 2013; and then the District of Columbia followed suit in 2014 (Davis 2015; Kellum 2013; *New York Times* 2013). Finally, as we know, in 2013 Exodus shut down, its termination preceded by confessional apologies to ex-ex-gay survivors from Exodus President Alan Chambers both online and in an episode of the Oprah Winfrey produced documentary serial *Our America* (*Huffington Post* 2013; Hurst 2013; OWN 2013a). Despite those setbacks, the movement continues to operate under the leadership of NARTH (now the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity) and the newly formed religious umbrella organization, the Restored Hope Network (Katz 2014; Rattigan 2012; ATCSI 2014b; RHN 2012). Indeed, the Restored Hope Network (RHN) formed as a response to what its founders saw as alarming changes taking place at Exodus under Chambers' leadership, who, in early 2012, appeared as a controversial guest at a Gay Christian Network conference to confess that 99.9% of ex-gays do not really change (Hurst 2012; Rattigan 2012). Thus, even in this short history of the movement, the central importance of confession and testimony is clear.

²³ Both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association use the acronym APA.

The Problem of Desire: A Short Genealogy of Confession

Confession and truth-telling have always been interconnected, even when confessions are false, for there too they still operate as truth-games. But confessions of desire, Foucault tells us, “are constantly connected with the obligation to tell the truth about oneself” (1997b [1982], 223); not just about what one has done, but also about who one is. Even though confessions have also played a role in many criminal and religious offenses, today “the task of analyzing one’s sexual desire is always more important than analyzing any other kind of sin” (ibid). In *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault* (2009), Chloe Taylor provides a genealogy of confession rooted in and augmenting Foucault’s. In true Foucauldian style, she begins by establishing that there is little universal or transhistorical about the practice. Yet, as Taylor is quick to note, a great deal of work on the topic assumes the opposite. She quotes novelist Zora Neale Hurston (1998 [1937]) as characterizing confessional self-revelation as the “oldest human longing,” and she notes how the “curative effect” of confession assumed by Freud and Breuer (1978 [1895]) is also assumed by Erik Berggren, so much so that in his *The Psychology of Confession* (1975) he attributes its cathartic function even to Saint Augustine. She reminds us that Peter Brown (1967), in his biography of Augustine, calls Augustine’s classic work *Confessions* an “act of therapy;” that Shlomit Schuster (2003) argues both Augustine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau wished to reveal in their confessional works their “own true self;” that Georges Gusdorf (1991) traces the urge back to Adam and Eve; and that, before he realized his mistake, Thomas N. Tentler (1977) “aimed to show that confession in the Middle Ages and Renaissance functioned to respond to the psychological needs of penitents and was a practice of consolation that cured anxiety in the same way that secularized forms of confession such as autobiography, psychoanalysis and art therapy are often assumed to function today” (Taylor 2009, 1-2).

The ahistorical linking of religious confession with psychological confession, while incorrect in terms of its universal function, is not incorrect in its genealogical generality. Thus

Tentler soon realized what Foucault already knew: the link between Christian confession and psychoanalytic practice, “is one of developing and unpredictable disciplinary power, and not one of continual and unshifting discipline, nor an ahistorical response to an innate psychological need” (ibid, 2). Foucault established the emergence of confessions of desire by tracing how a shift in Christian discipline occurred in the monasteries between the fourth century and the Renaissance, wherein a focus on public penance, including physical self-deprecation, shifted to a focus on confessing one’s secret desires (1990a; 2003a; 2007a; 2014 [1979/80]). These confessions of the flesh developed slowly and remained localized until the Church initiated compulsory confession for all Christians in the twelfth century (coincidentally enough at about the same time the Church also began to actively prosecute the crime of sodomy). Although there was a period leading up to the twelfth century where outside the church confessing to anyone, priest or not, was seen as capable of granting the remission of sins, between that century and the Renaissance, the Church took the practice away from the laity and began to institutionalize it in the form of the regular obligatory confession we know in Catholicism today (2003a). Thus it was only after the twelfth century that confession became one of the most important pastoral techniques for the spiritual direction and government of souls, becoming in the process more and more associated with sins of the flesh, even also within the new Christian movement called Protestantism. It did so, Foucault argues, by isolating masturbatory desire as the root of satanic temptation (ibid). But even as confession became increasingly more subjective and more associated with sex and desire, it remained within the ritualistic settings of the Christian pastoral.

It was also in that early form of confession that testimonies of faith became confessions of doctrine and dogma, because in the context of early monasticism, the principal of obedience “must bear on all aspects of life” (2007a, 179), including faith: it must be “a trembling obedience, in which the Christian will have to fear God and recognize the necessity of submitting

to His will, and to the will of those who represent Him” (2011 [1983/84], 333). Thus faith became obedience to what was taught and what was taught was obediently testified as truth alongside the confessed truth of oneself, and of one’s sinful flesh, which was the mechanism of purification that allowed one to recognize the truth of what was taught: “A Christian needs the light of faith when he [sic] wants to explore himself. Conversely, his access to the truth can’t be conceived of without the purification of his soul” (1997a [1981], 178). That process has not disappeared today, but through psychiatry and psychology it has been transformed and medicalized. Thus, today, whether in a religious context or not, confession has become the means to understand one’s soul, to cure one’s psyche, and to discover one’s identity, but usually in relationship with a psychological expert who governs the process. Foucault shows us that this religious confessional process did not become “psychological” until the nineteenth century.

In other words, the psychologized confession that operates today in the ex-gay movement is not the specific kind of localized, ritualized confession that operated in early Christianity, wherein the practice worked to link disciples and masters in a permanent relationship of obedience and sacrifice of will (2007a). Nevertheless, there is a strong genealogical link between the two forms of confession; as we shall see, elements of that early form of confession are still at play in today’s ex-gay practices, as they are even in our general pro-gay psychology; for it was in those early confessions that the Western concern with knowing oneself by looking inward began. Although confession is not its focus (the word does not even appear in the index), Foucault’s *History of Madness* (2009 [1961]) was the first of his works to try to account for the modern obsession with looking inside oneself for truth. There Foucault offers a general account of how an objective division in Western society between reason and unreason in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was rejected in the nineteenth century for an internalized, subjectivized psychology of human desire. It is that psychology of desire that Foucault later located in the

practice of confession (1990a) and traced back to early medieval Christian monasticism (2007a; 1997a), after he described the process by which confession became psychologized (2003a).

After the Renaissance, with confession obligatory, operating across both Catholicism and Protestantism (albeit in different ways), the practice led to a form of resistance which manifested itself as demonic possession. Complimenting a well-known argument from psychiatrist Thomas Szasz (1960; 1965; 1970) that there is a direct historical link between the religious persecution of sixteenth century witchcraft in America and the psychiatric persecution of twentieth century homosexuality (which Szasz uses to blame the Judeo-Christian tradition for the twentieth century psychiatric persecution of homosexuality²⁴), Foucault draws a distinction between witchcraft and possession: in Europe witchcraft occurred in the geographic periphery, among those isolated from the Church, whereas possession was a problem within the Church, among members, especially nuns and priests (2003a). Possession, says Foucault, was the effect of compulsory confession, a bodily reaction to coerced examinations of masturbatory desire, which the Church tried to cure with exorcism. However, because exorcism proved ineffective in controlling the problem, both possession and the confessional practice that led to it were relinquished to the field of medicine, which was at that time developing a subfield eventually to become psychiatry.

By the time psychiatry and psychology emerged as disciplines of knowledge and power in the West, the confessional isolation of masturbatory desire had been too well cultivated, in Europe and North America alike, so with its transfer to medicine the realm of sexual abnormality began to emerge—but not as a result of an ancient Judeo-Christian prejudice, as Szasz argues, but because of the “evolution” of certain tactics and strategies of governance developed in and

²⁴ Thomas Szasz’s argument that the Christian campaign against witchcraft led to the psychiatric campaign against homosexuality is part of his general claim that the twentieth century prejudice against homosexuality is grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Although that was considered heretical in psychiatry when first voiced, it began to enter mainstream psychological discourse in the late 1970s and early 1980s just as psychiatry and psychology began to excise their antigay prejudice (Thorn 2014). By the 1990s and 2000s Szasz’s claim had become psychological “dogma,” and the ex-gay movement was used as evidence that the prejudice come from the religion (Kazdin 2000).

throughout the late Middle Ages. Indeed, once taken up as a medical problem, possession became the convulsion and obligatory religious confession was joined as a governmental ritual by forced psychiatric confession. At the end of the nineteenth century, psychiatric confession created the problem of hysteria, of which psychoanalysis (and psychoanalytic confession) was the “solution” (2006 [1973/74]). It was through this complex medicalization that various sexual behaviours first became pathologized, including homosexuality. To be sure, Foucault would agree with Szasz that what had “formerly been known by other names, such as heresy, buggery, sin, possession, and so forth... were renamed or reclassified as illnesses” (Szasz 1970, 137); but Foucault’s argument is more nuanced and specific. Szasz described correlations between the persecution of witchcraft and homosexuality; Foucault traced the transfer of practices.

Medicalized Christian confession did not create the psychological realm of abnormality on its own. In addition to arguing that confession isolated masturbatory desire, created the problem of possession, and was transferred into psychiatry and psychology as both the cause of and the means to cure the convulsion, Foucault also argues that the eighteenth century medical campaign against masturbation was, in a moment of historical irony, *not* the effect of confessing masturbatory desire in the church but rather the reorganization of the family in capitalism: “This very particular [medical] discourse on masturbation appears... *between* the Christian discourse on the flesh and the discourse of sexual psychopathology [but i]t is not at all the Christian discourse... [because t]he very words, the very terms of desire and pleasure, never appear” (2003a, 233-4, my italics). He shows that the medical campaign against childhood masturbation had less to do with isolating desire as the root of temptation and more with isolating it as the cause of *physical* illness, which could be prevented by creating “a new organization, a new physics of the family space” (245). In that space, parents, in consultation with doctors, could keep a constant surveillance on their children. Thus the creation of the bourgeoisie nuclear

family as an institution of guidance and control played a parallel role alongside confession in creating the modern domain of sexual abnormality. Together they created the Oedipal space and confessional practice required for a governmental political economy of sex. Is it any wonder that “traditional” family values are also part of ex-gay justifications for why gays and lesbians should want to change? The Oedipal family and sexual abnormality are two sides of the same coin.

When Foucault was writing, psychoanalysis was the dominant psychiatric discourse in both Europe and North America (Shorter 1997); and, alongside behaviourism, it was one of two dominant discourses in American psychology (Hunt 2007). Although he seldom addressed its theory, most of Foucault’s work on madness, psychiatry, psychology, sexuality, and confession operates as a historicizing critique of psychoanalysis as an institution. While acknowledging its practices as an improvement over the disciplinary techniques of forced confession that preceded it (1990a,150; 2006, 343-44), Foucault’s research still suggests that Freud’s “talking cure” bears much of the responsibility for Western society’s reliance on intrusive confessional practices as a means of deciphering subjective truth.²⁵ Indeed, confession was more than just medicalized when it moved from the Christian pastoral into psychiatry and psychology and then psychoanalysis: “it gradually lost its ritualistic and exclusive localization; it spread; it has been employed in a whole series of relationships: children and parents, students and educators, patients and psychiatrists, delinquents and experts” (1990a, 63). That happened because in the twentieth century, when psychoanalysis moved out of the mental hospital into private practice, it became popularized and commodified (1990a; see also Bennett 2011; Chodoff 1964; Shorter 1997). Although its effects have always been hard to quantify, as a slow and expensive process sold to the public on both sides of the Atlantic, and characterized in magazines, novels and film

²⁵Chloe says (2009) that in spite of describing psychoanalysis as the paradigmatic activity of the “confessing animal,” Foucault does not discuss it in depth, preferring to talk about it generally (10-11). I would argue Foucault does discuss it in depth in both *History of Madness* and *Psychiatric Power*, but the critique that Foucault did not attend “to the manners in which psychoanalytic theory and practice have developed over the years” (ibid, 11) is still valid.

as key to psychological health, Freud's "talking cure" became a very lucrative business.²⁶ That is how we became "a singularly confessing society" (Foucault 1990a, 59) Thus, even though today neurobiology dominates in psychiatry and cognitive-behaviourism dominates in psychology (Shorter 1997; Hunt 2007), it should not be surprising that ex-gay discourse relies heavily on Freud. In fact, some pro-gay discourses look back to Freud as well, even when critiquing psychoanalytic theories of homosexuality (Kort 2008). It was the science of confessed sex, exemplified by and sold to the public through psychoanalysis that helped transform confession as self-sacrifice into confession as self-emergence; and that is what help create the identity politics necessary for the gay rights movement (Weeks 1991a).

The development of a confessional science of subjectivity linked to one's "true sex" (see below), understood in terms of gender *and* pleasure, and revolving around "the unconscious of the subject, the truth of the subject in the other who knows, the knowledge he holds unbeknown to him" has invented "a different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it"—it has led to "the formidable 'pleasure of analysis'" (1990a, 70-71). Tied up with this pleasure of knowing oneself through confessing one's sex to the other was the invention of the psychiatric label "homosexual," wherein the homosexual came to be classified in opposition to the heterosexual in terms of his or her past, as "a case history, and a childhood" (ibid 43). Although invented before the work of Freud, it was psychoanalysis that took up that discourse and firmly rooted it in one's past as a problem of the nuclear family to be confessed. As part of that process, the homosexual "emerged" as a new kind of person, an abnormal kind of person. In a statement that has been misunderstood to mean that same-sex desire was only spoken of in terms of behaviour prior to psychiatry and only today is it

²⁶ Bennett (2011) tells us that psychoanalysis "has been notoriously reluctant to speak frankly of its own economics as a profession and business" (5), but Chodoff (1964) characterizes psychoanalysts as "individual entrepreneurs" (137) who justify the fees they charge because "the analyst must require *sacrificial* fees... because they provide motivation and analytic material and are beneficial in the countertransference" (138, my italics).

a form of identity, Foucault ironically writes, “Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul; the sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species” (ibid, 43). When homosexuality “began to speak [on] its own behalf” and resist the psychological discourse of abnormality, eventually resulting in psychiatric declassification, our contemporary sexual identity *politics* was born; and soon after, the Christian ex-gay movement. But, as we shall see, that does not necessarily imply an acts/identity dichotomy.

Acts and Identity in the Discourse of Our True Sex

Both the ex-gay movement and the discourse surrounding it demonstrate that today Western society insists on declaring and debating one’s “true sex.” Since the rise of psychiatry and psychology, Foucault tells us, “With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern Western societies have... obstinately brought into play this question of a ‘true sex’” (1980 [1978], vii). Foucault made that observation in relation to the nineteenth century intersex person Herculine Barbin, who was raised as a girl but was later forced to “choose” a male gender and live as a man. The reason such a “choice” was necessary was because of how gender and sexual pleasure became tied together in our modern psychological discourse of sexuality. Barbin had an affair with a woman, so to not be “abnormal” she had to be classified as a man. In other words, the problem was not that she was intersex, but that she had initially been classified as a woman and engaged in sexual relations with a woman. Her sin was as much one of forbidden desire as of transgressing gender roles. To declare one’s true sex, then, is both to testify to who and what one is as male or female *and* to confess one’s sexual desire. Both are the basis of our contemporary identity politics; and because the ex-gay movement is the effect of our sexual identity politics merged with religion, confession is the foundation of all ex-gay discourse, for and against.

As we know, our sexual identity politics came about through the slow development of confession as a method of isolating masturbatory desire as first the root of sin, then disease, and now identity. However, according to many queer theorists, sexual identity actually replaced what were once mere transgressive acts. They quote Foucault's argument that the pathologization of perversion led first to the replacement of the sodomite, "a temporary aberration" engaged in transgressive sexual "acts," with the homosexual as species (see Corber and Valocchi 2003; Jagose 1996; and Spargo 1999). They highlight his claim that this new species of homosexuality eventually created a "reverse discourse" that spoke on "its own behalf, [demanding] that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (Foucault 1990a, 101). Jeffrey Weeks (1991b) describes the same narrative (18). What were once only temporary sinful acts were replaced with a new kind of identity, the homosexual, which created as its inverse the heterosexual.

Queer theory's acts/identity dichotomy, a historical opposition used to argue that sexuality and identity are entirely socially constructed, is firmly rooted in the above reading of Foucault. Even Erzen cites this narrative in her contextualization of ex-gay identity politics:

Scholars like Michel Foucault acknowledge that same-sex behaviour has existed forever, but their work illustrates that during the late nineteenth century there was a shift from legal and criminal classificatory schemes that used labels like "sodomite" to categorize men by sexual acts to the invention of a distinct homosexual person. The sexologists in this period renamed what had been considered sinful or criminal behaviors as conditions of identity. (2006, 134)

Ironically, a similar, albeit twisted argument operates within the ex-gay movement. Christian psychologist and ex-gay apologist Gerrard Van Den Aardweg (1997), argues that it is "psychologically dangerous [to make the] *decision* to identify oneself as a different species of man [sic]: 'I *am* a homosexual.' As if the essence of that existence were different from that of heterosexuals" (23, author's italics). Van Den Aardweg does not cite Foucault, but the specificity of his language indicates an attempt to appropriate a queer argument for the service of the ex-gay

movement. But for Van Den Aardweg, the “invention” of a different species seems only to mean that a *gay* identity is socially constructed. Yet *both* he and queer theory appear to merge together a psychiatric creation of a new species with the “formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse” so as to question the very concept of identity. Although queer theory means to break down the distinction between gay and straight entirely, Van Den Aardweg means to disqualify any identity that is *not* heterosexual. Lynne Huffer (2010), however, argues queer theorists fall into a trap when they deploy an acts/identity dichotomy; if true, Van Den Aardweg and Erzen fall into the same trap.

The word “identity,” Huffer tells us, does not appear anywhere in Foucault’s discussions of the psychiatric labeling of homosexuality in *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1* (Huffer 2010, 70). More important, she says queer theory’s interpretation of Foucault misses the irony in his language and too easily accepts the English translation of “*Le sodomite était un relaps*” as “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration.” A better translation, she says, is one that considers the full text of *History of Madness* (which acknowledges the subjective experience of same-sex desire as subject forming even before the nineteenth century) as well as the clear tone of irony that is lost in the standard English translation of *The History of Sexuality*. She claims a better translation is, “The sodomite was a fall back into heresy” (73-74). That, says Huffer, implies not an aberration, but *resistance* to religious dogma. The distinction is not between acts and identity (as in queer theory) or between the sin of sodomy and being a new, albeit false species separate from the always already existent heterosexual (as for Van Den Aardweg), but rather between agency and subjectification. The “sodomite” was not the *perpetrator* of acts, but the *author* of heretically defiant acts. And the nineteenth century homosexual did not become a *personage* with a past, a case history, and a childhood, but a *character* with a past, a case history, and a childhood (69, 71-73); a character designed to be manipulated by the authors of a play—those authors being the founders of psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis and the play being the

story of psychological pathology. But, as even Weeks recognizes in the standard queer reading of Foucault, the invention of the homosexual “provided the springboard for self-definition and individual and collective resistance” (1991a, 75). Thus, when the homosexual character took on the identity “gay” in defiance of being a pathological character, he or she became the author of heretically defiant labels, which actually links the modern gay back to the medieval sodomite.

I would augment Huffer’s position by noting that Foucault’s account of homosexuality as a new species needs also to be qualified with statements he made about the use of the word “gay” by gay Catholic historian (and pro-gay theology source) John Boswell:

[T]he rejection by Boswell of the categorical opposition between homosexual and heterosexual, which plays such a significant role in the way our culture conceives of homosexuality, represents an advance not only in scholarship but in cultural criticism as well. His introduction of the concept “gay” (in the way he defines it) provides us both with a useful instrument of research and, at the same time, a better comprehension of how people actually conceive of themselves and their sexual behaviour.” (1997c [1982/83],141)

Boswell (1980), who is often situated against Foucault as an essentialist, uses “gay” to “describe persons who are conscious of erotic preference for their own gender” (43), contrasting it with the terms “homosexual,” “sodomite,” and “pederast” to indicate its difference. The later three labels are applied by others as classifications; the first is a subjective description. Boswell also makes it clear that “straight” and “heterosexual” are historically meaningless in relation to “gay” (45). In other words, for Boswell, gay and straight do not represent a dichotomy. Gay is its own self-referential term historically designed by those who authored it to represent an erotic preference, not an innate separate identity determined by one’s biology or psychology. The difference is between agency and subjectification across different historical periods; but the queer reading implies there was only agency (without identity) prior to the rise of psychiatry and psychology but now agency has been lost, replaced by identity as a tool of subjectification. Van Den

Aardweg's ex-gay reading also implies identity is a tool of subjectification, which recalls Greg Quinlan's accusation that "gay" is about labeling others so they will not leave the group.

The interesting thing about such readings, which is missed in both queer theory and ex-gay discourse, is that "gay" as the effect of resistance infers conflict, perhaps even crisis (which, as we will learn below, ties it back to the emergence of the very word identity in Erik Erikson's concept of identity crisis). So the word identity in relation to gay may still have meaning, but as the outcome of struggle, not as any necessary form of innate biology or psychology or even as a tool of subjectification. The question today is whether such struggles lead to an identity rooted in the resistance of self-conviction, wherein one's identity is authored by oneself as an agent (but as more than a simple choice), or in the resistance of simply choosing one kind of dogma over another, wherein one's identity is authored by the Other and who one "is" becomes subject more to power and knowledge than the self. For if Foucault's reverse discourse of "gay" heresy has become a key aspect of modern identity politics, it has been reversed again in ex-gay identity politics. There it operates as psychological heresy in resistance to mainstream psychology and psychiatry, which now accepts gay and lesbian identities as normal and innate. However, as we shall see, the religious aspect of ex-gay identity politics has created another reversal, because in pro-gay Christian identity politics, wherein one's gay or lesbian identity is rooted in God, pro-gay theology operates as a new Christian heresy in resistance to conservative Christianity. In all cases, there is a governmentality operating between technologies of power and the self, but in each case the line between power and the self is drawn differently.

Queer theorists want to use Foucault to problematize our modern usage of identity, which in and of itself, is not an unworthy project—identity is indeed a relatively new historical concept; however, they misunderstand the nuances of his argument and risk creating a new historical "acts versus identity" fundamentalism that overemphasizes the social construction of homosexuality as

a subjectivizing identity, something the ex-gay movement also seeks to do, albeit for different reasons. Unlike in queer theory, which ultimately seeks to break down not only the gay/straight dichotomy but also the male/female dichotomy, Van Den Aardweg and his ex-gay colleagues actually want to *deny* the queer misunderstanding of Foucault's argument precisely so as to collapse the homosexual *into* the heterosexual, precisely so that the homosexual can literally *become* the heterosexual understood in a very gendered way. Gender is key to ex-gay religion, to ex-gay psychology, and to ex-gay identity politics. Nevertheless, both queer theory and Van Den Aardweg fall into a similar problem in terms of how they understand Foucault's statement about the homosexual as a species. Both fail to differentiate between homosexual and gay.

Foucault's "gay" homosexual, who tactically uses "the same vocabulary... [and] the same categories by which [he or she] was medically disqualified" in *resistance* to being specified as a new abnormal species, does not do so declaring his or her essence to be different from heterosexuals but similar: as non-pathological. Neither is "gay" as a political identity historically dichotomous to what Foucault describes as the juridical 'acts' of the sodomite (although, ironically, "ex-gay" as a political identity is in opposition to the acts of the sodomite). As it happens, Boswell says "gay" is historically dichotomous to the *label* "sodomite," not the *acts* of the sodomite. Furthermore, it was psychiatry and psychology that created homosexuality as a new psychological "species" in opposition to heterosexuality, not gays and lesbians themselves (although now that gays and lesbians have been normalized by the discourse of sexuality as innate, gay *is* opposed to straight). Of course, contemporary conservative Christianity has now created its own psychological "species," one that strives to be heterosexual because that is all there really is (at least according to their "true" beliefs). But the ex-gay discourse falls here into what appears to be another contradiction: by denying a homosexual identity (because it is socially constructed) only to proclaim a heterosexual identity as true, ex-gays seem to forget that

for them heterosexuality itself must be personally constructed through struggle. And the key is that it *must* be. So while there is truth to Quinlan's claim that labeling others and convincing them to confess that label as their true self is a central part of today's gay and lesbian identity politics, he conveniently fails to mention that it is the same for ex-gay identity politics.

In opposition to queer theory, sodomy as an act still operates even in our contemporary discourse: in the ex-gay movement sodomy is confessed and purged and a new quasi-heterosexual character is created as an identity to be manipulated in the culture wars. So not only does the movement appropriate queer discourse against itself, ex-gays create a *contemporary* acts/identity dichotomy that contradicts queer theory even though it also contradicts the ex-gay disavowal of identity politics. It does so by sacrificing the act of sodomy for an ex-gay identity. Yet one still becomes subjectivized by one's true sex because obedience to ex-gay true belief dictates that one must strive and testify to be the only true sex there is: properly gendered heterosexuality.

Confession, True Belief, and Identity Crisis in the Christian Ex-gay Movement

The ex-gay movement crystalizes Foucault's genealogy of confession. Both confessional doublets outlined by Foucault are there: confessions of sin and guilt coupled with confessions of faith and doctrine, and confessions of self-sacrifice coupled with and juxtaposed against those of self-emergence. To begin with, the movement revolves almost entirely around confessions of one's secret inner desires and sexual sins combined with confessions of belief as rooted in doctrine. As we know, in her ethnographic study, Tanya Erzen (2006) describes both the testifying and self-declaring nature of the movement. She writes that because ex-gays "grew up hearing sermons that taught homosexuality was the most horrible sin of all," it was easy for them to accept the conservative Christian "dogma" that the Bible condemns same-sex love: "Most of the men at [the ex-gay ministry] New Hope read these [apparently antigay] biblical verses as the inspired word of God and refused to acknowledge cultural or historical context" (62). She also

writes that ex-gays “are accustomed to continually sharing testimony about the most private and harrowing aspects of their lives in public group settings” (12), later adding that confessions of “past lives of sin were a way to witness to others and to have authority” (160). In other words, testifying to the truth of one’s religiously mediated change, as justified by antigay doctrine, operates to give ex-gay leaders their expert, ministerial status; however, that happens only after they have purged themselves of their sinful pasts by confessing their transgressions to the ex-gay leaders guiding them (irrespective of occasional lapses, which can easily be confessed again).

Erzen emphasizes the personal and shame-inducing nature of ex-gay confessions. She documents several examples in support groups, to ex-gay counselors, and sometimes to entire church congregations (160-82). She even describes how a married participant struggling with “pornography addiction” shamed himself by delivering a letter to a nearby video store that ended with, “If you see me in here renting pornography please call my wife” (170). Michelle Wolkomir (2006) summarizes ex-gay confessions in a male support group she studied in this way:

A group member would stand up and share his story of his childhood, his sinful behaviour..., [his] discovery that his homosexuality was a result of psychic or physical abuse, and his progress since he put his faith in God’s healing power... [T]he speaker... described his feelings of fear and shame..., his anger at those who caused his homosexuality, and his joy and relief at learning about and pursuing a cure. (129)

This model of confession, predicated as it is on the verbal sacrifice of one’s shameful, sinful desires, also extends outside group therapy. Ex-gay counselor Joe Dallas begins his self-help book, *Desires In Conflict: Hope for Men Who Struggle with Sexual Identity* (2003), with a similar confessional paradigm. In the course of the seven page confession that begins his narrative, he describes himself in terms of “three distinct and irreconcilable lives: a wildly promiscuous kid, a rigidly pious young minister, then a compromised adult who had tried—and failed—to mix Christianity with sexual sin, hoping against hope it would all work out” (7). Dallas confesses to being molested as a child, to having a pornography addiction as a teenager,

and to finding Christ in early adulthood only to fall right back into promiscuity. His testimony includes an attempted reconciliation through the pro-gay Metropolitan Community Churches and a private confession to God: “weeping but relieved, I confessed to God what He had known all along. I had been wrong, and I had to change” (14). Although his emphasis is on confessions of sin, confessions of antigay true belief also underlie his testimony, because for him, an antigay interpretation of the Bible is absolutely true.²⁷

In all the confessions addressed in this study, individuals work to change themselves within a context controlled by others. When they do testify faith and true belief, they change themselves in relation to that belief as fundamental knowledge. Their confessions operate as what Foucault calls “technologies of the self,” whereby the self works on the self to change the self (1997b; see also 1990b; 2005), but they do so within ritualized settings organized as technologies of knowledge and power operated by ex-gay leaders, mostly Christian ministers, Christian identified psychologists and psychiatrists, and “graduated” ex-gay participants. In all cases subjects are expected to confess the most private aspects of their lives and sinful desires to others precisely so as to eliminate that sin; and, just as important (especially in terms of the power relations at play), “reluctance or refusal to give testimony is a liability” (Erzen 2006, 12). Thus ex-gay confession is thoroughly governmental. In his analysis of the experience of sexuality, Foucault outlines a general understanding of experience that revolves around three axes: “the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, [and] the axis of ethics” (1984a, 48); or put another way, “fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity” (1990b, 4);

²⁷ In the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) there are fewer than ten passages that reference same-sex behavior in a negative context, each addressing only male-male behaviour. There are only three in the New Testament that appear to reference same-sex behavior in a negative context, with only one *possibly* referencing lesbian sex. The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis is also assumed to legitimize monogamous male-female sexual relations in opposition to all others, even though the story does not end with marriage as we know it, nor does it oppose any other form of human sexual relationship precisely because there was none yet to be opposed. But when viewed as a narrative designed to govern sexuality, it implies for conservative Christians that monogamous heterosexual marriage is God’s design in condemnation of all else except celibacy. A complete list of these passages is included as Appendix C along with passages used in pro-gay theology to argue against the condemnation of homosexuality.

or put yet another way, “types of understanding, forms of normality, and modes of relation to oneself and others” (1984b, 336). Technologies of the self link ethics and subjectivity together; but when ethics and subjectivity are linked with technologies of knowledge and power, as in the case of confession, we have governmentality. Foucault says it explicitly: “This encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self I call ‘governmentality’” (1997b, 225). In the ex-gay movement, confessional governmentality is directly linked to the power relations of one’s church, and to the Bible as a source of knowledge that is absolutely true.

How one reads the Bible differs greatly across conservative Christianity. It is worth the reminder that conservative Christianity in general, and the ex-gay movement in particular, includes many different Christian denominations, most of which can be classified as evangelical, fundamentalist, conservative Catholic, or Mormon.²⁸ There are strong differences between these groups, even between evangelicals and fundamentalists, the two most closely linked via their history and connection to the Christian Right. But, as George Marsden (1991) explains, Christian fundamentalism “was originally just the name for the militantly conservative wing of the evangelical coalition” (3); however, by the 1960s fundamentalist came to describe separatist Baptists who professed end-times theology and “no longer included the many conservatives in mainline denominations” (3-4). Evangelicalism, on the other hand, is an inter-denominational movement that believes in the authority of the Bible, the historical character of God’s salvation, the redemptive work of Christ, the importance of missionary work, and spiritual transformation (4-5); and since the early twentieth century, it has had both liberal and conservative strands. It is its conservative strands that operate in the ex-gay movement.

One difference between evangelicals and fundamentalists is how they read scripture. Whereas fundamentalists understand the Bible to be infallible, reading it literally, Erzen explains

²⁸ The ex-gay movement even has connections to Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Carlton 2004).

that “many evangelicals do not..., believing there is metaphor and poetry in the Bible” (60). However, she also says that “For conservative, nondenominational Protestants, many of the distinctions between fundamentalist and evangelical practices and theology have eroded” (61). That is especially true in the ex-gay movement, where, as we know, denominational differences tend to be ignored. Indeed, almost all conservative Christian denominations agree that homosexuality is a sin. This has led to Christian groups like the Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), which most evangelical and fundamentalist churches do not even consider Christian, being accepted in the ex-gay fold. For example, a popular ex-gay weekend retreat called Journey into Manhood, which was promoted by both Exodus and NARTH, is founded and operated by a Mormon named Rich Wyler. On its website, the program proclaims that it “is not a religious retreat” but that “Men of all faiths (or no faith) are welcome” (People Can Change 2000-14). Ted Cox (2010), a journalist who infiltrated the program and wrote a scathing exposé of its practices, describes it as being religious albeit non-denominational, so that “more men from more religious backgrounds can attend, without the particulars of their faith being offended” (16). The common denominator is the Biblical dogma that homosexuality is sin.

It is true, many conservative Christian churches would not consider their belief that homosexuality is sin to be “dogma.” Most evangelical and fundamentalist Christian churches are called non-confessional precisely because they do not confess a creed, and thus, in the eyes of the faithful, they are not governed by dogma and doctrine; but on the issue of homosexuality they actually are. Even those churches that do not prescribe to an “official” system of theological principals and tenets do accept the prescribe doctrine that homosexuality is condemned in scripture. The evangelical who professes to read the Bible hermeneutically, and thus not dogmatically, and the fundamentalist who professes to read the Bible literally, and thus also not dogmatically (because they read it “as it is,” so they claim) are in fact both confessing the same

dogmatic belief that the Bible universally condemns homosexuality, because that is what they “grew up hearing” from their parents, ministers, and lay leaders. And even though contemporary Catholic theology generally eschews literal readings of the Bible and does not confess the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, preferring instead a historical-critical approach rooted in the scientific study of scripture (Helminiak 2000; Witherup 2001), those Catholics who support and promote ex-gay change agree with their fundamentalist and evangelical compatriots that the Bible unambiguously condemns homosexuality (Harvey 1996). They confess it as God’s truth, and thus Catholic ex-gays also confess homosexuality as sin and disease in relation to dogma.

Dallas’ true believing dogmatism is made most obvious when he confesses his inability to come to terms with pro-gay truth claims regarding scripture, a point that is reiterated in an appendix to his book where he engages in a sustained theological refutation of pro-gay theology. Indeed, he has also published a full book-length refutation of pro-gay theology (2007). But his true belief is not rooted in any form of self-conviction; it is rooted in his fundamentalist view of scripture: “If it’s in the Bible, affirm it as absolute truth,” he writes (94), but as far as he is concerned, there is nothing pro-gay in the Bible. Although often debated within liberal and conservative Christian churches involved in the ex-gay debate (Erzen 2006; Wolkomir 2006), pro-gay theology seldom enters the mass media debate over ex-gay change (Dallas’ writings notwithstanding). However, it is important to know that pro-gay theology rereads those few passages from Judeo-Christian scripture traditionally used to condemn homosexuality within their historical and cultural contexts to argue that, often mistranslated, they do not condemn loving same-sex relations but rather abusive forms of child sex and idolatrous promiscuity (Helminiak 2000 [1994]; McNeill 1983 [1976]; Myers and Scanzoni 2005; Pearson 2010; Scroggs 1983). Pro-gay theology derives from historical analyses that describe an ancient society organized around a slave economy and the subjugation of woman (Bailey 1955; Boswell 1980;

Nissinen 1998); but it also highlights scriptures, like the story of David and Jonathon in 1 and 2 Samuel, that could be interpreted favourably for gays and lesbians. This form of theology is slowly becoming accepted by a very small minority in conservative Christianity, although in that context it is often also confessed as fundamentalist, absolute truth. Philo Thelos (2004), a Pentecostal evangelical, writes in his defense of pro-gay theology that “Every word [of the Bible] must be understood as nearly as possible, in exactly the way the writer and original audience understood the word” (7), thus revealing a pro-gay fundamentalism, except in this case one of the fundamentals declared is one that most other Christian literalists reject, that historical and cultural context matters. Rick Brentlinger (2007), an evangelical gay Baptist, is just as fundamentalist in his belief that “the plenary, verbal inspiration and infallible authority of scripture” absolutely requires cultural and historical context to be understood (2). Meanwhile, gay rights activist Wayne Besen (2003), who is not a practicing Christian, condescendingly mocks the fundamentalism of the ex-gay movement while pushing his own fundamental belief in “the incontrovertible fact that a growing body of research points to a possible biological component to sexual orientation” (149). Besen is technically correct, but the way he expresses the scientific nuance of a growing body of research pointing to something being possible as “incontrovertible” betrays a near biblical zealotry in the way he reads and confesses science.

Whether antigay or pro-gay, whether religious or “scientific,” I thus characterize “true belief” in the ex-gay debate as a form of fundamentalism, Christian or not. On page one of his introductory chapter defining Christian fundamentalism, Marsden (1991) includes a footnote indicating that the word fundamentalism has “in recent years been applied by analogy to any militantly traditionalist religion, such as Islamic fundamentalism” (1, n. 1). Following that trend, Malise Ruthven (2009) extends his definition even further to include its role in not just Christian and Muslim cultures, but Sikh, Hindu, and even Buddhist cultures as well. He even notes that

fundamentalism “now encompasses many types of activity, not all of them religious” and lists recent examples where extreme political and economic ideologies have been referred to as forms of fundamentalism (33). However, he doubts whether “these non-religious uses of the word are analytically useful” when they stray into the semantic fields of “‘extremism’, ‘sectarianism’, [and] ‘ideological purism’” (32-34). He suggests that defining fundamentalism as “reluctance to compromise with one’s deeply held principals” is too broad a definition, that it operates as a mere analogy rather than a useful descriptor. When defined only in this way, as reluctance to compromise, I concur; however, I disagree that the word loses its analytic usefulness when extended outside religion. There are political, economic, psychological, and yes, even atheist fundamentalists, and they are not just ideologues merely reluctant to compromise. They are true believers who hold fast to and *seek to impose on others* the *fundamental* principles of what they believe; they try to govern through their beliefs, usually in the face of opposition and often in the face of evidence to the contrary. That is to say, they confess and testify their beliefs as Truth.

This fundamentalist and confessional governmentality is clear in Dallas’ account of his change. Despite his primary confession occurring in private prayer, he publicly atones for his “sinful” past by publicizing his testimony in a common publically available confessional form: the autobiographical self-help book.²⁹ Anne Paulk also published her testimony as a confessional autobiographical self-help book (2003), and so did her then husband, John Paulk (1998). And while each appears to operate autonomously by writing his or her confessional book outside the

²⁹ Dallas’ autobiography can also be classified as a spiritual autobiography, a protestant genre of non-fiction prose popular since the seventeenth century in which authors account for themselves in terms of their sinful past, often in terms of several cycles of sin and repentance, finally resulting in a conversion experience (Sim 2001; Hindmarsh 2005). While some may argue it is a mistake to identify this genre with the practice of confession, by accounting for themselves in terms of sin, repentance, and conversion, the protestant authors of these autobiographies engage in precisely the kind of simultaneous guilt-admitting, sin-sacrificing, faith-testifying, and born again self-emergent form of confession I address in this dissertation. In fact, a genealogy of modern psychological autobiographies that reach back to these earlier (and continuing) protestant autobiographies could be done that would augment with specifically Protestant evidence Foucault’s genealogy of Catholic to psychiatric/psychoanalytic confession. Ex-gay spiritual autobiographies, which draw as much on psychological concepts and strategies of confession as they do religious concepts and strategies, could be seen as the culmination of such a genealogy.

ritualized settings of their churches, the process is still governmental in a fundamentalist way because a) they had to move through their church's ex-gay rituals of power before they could confess their stories as Truth, b) they offer their confessed selves as prescriptive guidance for others who struggle to become ex-gay, and c) they believe their testimony derives from the fundamental absolutism of biblical knowledge. In other words, the humiliation of confessing "shameful" desires operates as a self-motivated governmental tactic to facilitate the purgation of desire, precisely so as to change oneself, but also to change others; because it is expected by others, because the power dynamics of the group demand it, and because the Bible demands it.

But we already know that confessions of the self are not confined to ex-gays. Erzen confesses that even she "was not immune from the pressure to confess and create a testimony that was intelligible to the ministry" she studied (179). In her study, Wolkomir (2006) compares ex-gay to pro-gay Christian testimonials. Her data demonstrates that while in each group confession and testimony operate differently they are central practices for each. In the pro-gay group, which includes ex-gay survivors, confessions of their failure to change combined with declarations of their true gay or lesbian Christian identities operate to integrate understandings of the self that were once experienced as being in conflict. Although the pro-gay support group does not confess desire to purge it, but to reconcile it, the group's use of confession supports with evidence from North America Foucault's argument that as a practice of deciphering the self, confession permeates Western society. As we know, Erzen argues the movement "is part of a wider public culture of intimacy in which ex-gay confessions of traumatized identity become part of a public testimonial discourse of conversion" (179). That several ex-gay survivors, from both sides of the ocean, have also published confessional autobiographies of their failure to change and their subsequent adoption of secular pro-gay or Christian pro-gay identities only underlines that point (see Marks 2009; Rix 2010; and Tousey 2006).

Of course, as we know, out of self-sacrifice and testimonies of belief also come forms of self-emergence. Although Erzen may emphasize the humiliating confessions of shame that begin and provide the foundation for ex-gay change, she also describes how such confessions become part of testimonial narratives designed to “strengthen their Christian identities” (67). Similarly, Wolkomir describes how her ex-gay subjects used “testimonies” to authenticate “their transformation from homosexual sinner to ex-gay (moral) Christian” (129) and how her pro-gay subjects worked to make the “transformation to a gay Christian a religious act” (110). Dallas also discusses the process whereby one’s sexual identity becomes clarified through change: “You are not simply a homosexual, heterosexual, ex-gay or whatever. You are a child of God, bearing His image and indwelt by His Spirit” (193). That both ex-gays and ex-gay survivors confess who they are in terms of identity (I am ex-gay, I am gay, I am Christian, I am gay and Christian) demonstrates our contemporary concern with self-emergence. Indeed, in spite of an emphasis in the movement on self-sacrifice, self-emergence understood in terms of identity is central to ex-gay participation, and therein lies a key link to the psychological aspect of the movement.

Just as psychological confession can also operate as self-sacrifice, via the sacrifice of anxiety and mental disease, confession as identity-forming is also psychological. In a paper available online at Stanford University, political scientist James D. Fearon (1999) argues that our “present idea of ‘identity’ is a fairly recent social construct, and a rather complicated one at that” (2). He notes that it is rooted in Erik Erikson’s psychoanalytic theory of adolescent identity crisis, wherein it refers to a form of self-image that develops out of a series of crises and contradictions in youth experience; but in academia today, as well as in popular usage, it refers to something broader and more complex, encompassing both a social and a personal meaning. As a social category it is used as a label to identify a subject as part of a group but as a personal category it refers to “some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a

special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable” (2). Weeks (1991a) describes the Eriksonian psychoanalytic view as encompassing the later academic and popular view: “personal identity roughly equalled individuality, a reality to be struggled for in the hazardous process of maturation or against the awesome weight of the social” (74).

Understanding identity as both a social label that can be applied by the other and a personal label that can be “chosen” (or confessed) from within to stabilize one’s self-image in relation to the social, even as “unchangeable,” is helpful in understanding what is at stake in ex-gay governmentality. In an ex-gay context, psychological crises (primarily *adult* crises) permeate ex-gay governmentality because there is a contradiction and a crisis *between* the personal and the social. That is to say, today the experience of same-sex desire leads some people to recognize and confess their personal sexuality as being in conflict with the community expectations of their social identity, which for most people who have confessed (or will confess) an ex-gay identity, is a religious identity. Of course, to call oneself Christian can also be experienced as something very personal—it too is a confession of the self. But the categories gay and lesbian are social categories as well and situate people within specific social groups. In fact, even though gay and lesbian categories were once rejected by society, today they are increasingly accepted and encouraged as normal for people who experience same-sex desire (Thorn 2014).

For many Christians who experience same-sex desire today, their personal religious identity is in conflict with the social categories “gay” and “lesbian,” which mainstream society now expects and governs them to accept. It is that which delineates an ex-gay crisis as a psychological crisis. Wolkomir (2006) describes how both ex-gay and pro-gay Christian groups transform their religious identities through a process initiated by what she calls an identity dilemma. For her such a dilemma manifests itself through the concept of identity codes, which “prescribe the kinds of behaviors that will allow us to be seen, by others and ourselves, as a

certain kind of person” (45). Where one code “prohibits behaviors that are mandated by the other,” an ideological identity dilemma ensues (46). Thus, if we understand an ex-gay identity crisis as happening between the personal and social aspects of one’s identity we can see it doubled in the way identity codes clash: not only does the personal identity code “gay” clash with the social identity code “Christian,” the *personal* identity code “Christian” clashes with the *social* identity code “gay.” What Wolkomir calls those “damning pieces of conservative Christian theology,” which appear to reduce same-sex desire to a shameful sin, comprise a cognitive code that creates a crisis for people who might otherwise adopt a gay or lesbian identity code. That is why the identity crises faced by conservatively-raised Christians who experience same-sex desire are often life-long crises that involve life-long struggle and work. Ex-gays must confess and sacrifice their homosexuality so as to confess and testify that their “true sex” is properly gendered as heterosexual, even if that truth has to be continually confessed and continually strived for to be “true.”

Ex-gay crises, in fact, are often experienced as *extremely* distressing, as involving horrible shame, guilt, and *severe* crisis, which once again places the problem within the domains of psychiatry and psychology. Psychiatrist Travis Svensson (2003), in his bioethical analysis of ex-gay change, acknowledges that while sexual reorientation may be possible for some, for many it “may not address the true issue to be resolved” precisely because it may not address the psychological problem of shame (329), that “feeling of loathing against ourselves,” (326, quoting A.P. Morrison 1989). Ex-gay survivor Darren Freeman, who now identifies as a gay Christian, demonstrates such loathing when he confesses a story of intense struggle in the 2008 National Film Board of Canada (NFB) documentary *Cure For Love*:

I wish I could communicate effectively at how good I was at hating myself, about how profound the sense of shame was that I had for my life, about how much I knew that God found me disgusting and terrible; and for years that sense

dominated my life and that sense drove me into the ex-gay ministry to try to find a solution, to try to make myself un-miserable to God.

Freeman's statement, combined with a confession of sexual guilt that he nearly castrated himself, crystalizes the intense personal conflict involved in religious and sexual identity formation for many who experience same-sex desire. Indeed, it provides a foundational reality for the fictional conflicts and suicides dramatized in so many popular culture depictions.³⁰ Darren's testimony also crystalizes how difficult sexual orientation change actually is, at the level of the body and the soul, as well as how difficult changing one's religious beliefs can be: because if Freeman could have simply "chosen" his sexual feelings, it is clear he would not have chosen to experience them in the way he does; but if Freeman could have "chosen" to give up his Christian identity to embrace a secular gay identity divorced from such conflict, why did he not? Weeks concludes from his historicized account of identity as a concept that it "is not a destiny but a choice" (1991, 83). However, Freeman's confession—in which he sacrifices the former ex-gay identity he accepted because of the demands of his beliefs in favour of a new gay Christian identity—precisely so he could stop hating himself—complicates that conclusion. And so does Butters' fictional testimony quoted early, in which he admits to being bi-curious even though he is not while a boy who believes he really is gay threatens suicide behind him. Butters' speech could not have the impact it does were it not based in some form of contemporary "truth."

Confession, then, really is a complicated mix of sin and sacrifice, and truth and emergence, constructed through knowledge and power and deployed through the self, inside the movement and out. Indeed, Freeman's story is an example of how ex-gay survivors must also confess their past selves as problems to be sacrificed so a new self can emerge that one can believe was always already there. But in the movement itself, the relationship between sexual sin

³⁰ For example, in the same episode of *South Park* in which Butters is forced into an ex-gay camp, he witnesses the brutally explicit suicides of two ex-gay boys and the attempted suicide of another. And a recent "article" in the satirical magazine *The Onion* is entitled "Gay Conversion Therapists Claim Most Patients Fully Straight By The Time They Commit Suicide" (News in Brief 2015).

and true belief, and sacrificing disease so one can create oneself as heterosexual, or at least ex-gay, is explicit. Although there are numerous technologies of the self deployed in conjuncture with confession to facilitate the emergence of this new ex-gay character, it should not be surprising that the practice providing the theoretical underpinning for ex-gay change is a confessional psychological practice called reparative therapy. This therapy establishes the ex-gay character with an identity via a past, a case history, and a childhood, and it situates the ex-gay as malleable through the effects of religious and psychological power and knowledge combined.

The Governmentality of Biblical Psychology in Ex-gay Discourse

The psychology of the ex-gay movement is described by Erzen in a chapter on the movement's use of Freudian theories of arrested development and its relationship to Dr. Robert Spitzer (via both declassification and his 2001/2003 ex-gay study) but also in a chapter on its use of addiction model therapies (which also rely on confession). She demonstrates that the movement's "use of medical/scientific and therapeutic models is refracted through... various [psychological] discourses, people and historical moments" (128). Wolkomir also describes many of the same discourses, people and historical moments, noting that whereas "some scholars (Nolan 1998; Rieff 1966) have posited that religious authority is being eroded and the power of religious leaders and doctrine is being usurped, to a large extent, by psychological experts, this study suggests that religious belief and a therapeutic ethos are not necessarily conflicting or competing" (131). As it happens, ex-gay Joe Dallas agrees: "Psychology is another area of controversy among Christians. It needn't be, because the study of human behavior is worthwhile. The book of Proverbs is full of psychological thought" (93). Indeed, he spends much of *Desires In Conflict* testifying to the truth of outdated psychological theories of homosexuality and defers to the discipline of psychology for his evidence of change by quoting Christian psychologist Stanton Jones: "Every secular study of change has shown some success rate, and persons who

testify to substantial healing by God are legion” (124, quoting Jones 1993, 25). However, Dallas insists that only psychological theories compatible with the Bible should be accepted, and ultimately he claims, “even if all psychiatrists currently in practice viewed [homosexuality] as healthy, that would have no bearing on the Christian position on the subject” (127). And yet in spite of the apparent primacy of religion over psychology, and in spite of a dispersion of multiple psychological practices within the movement, discursively, reparative therapy grounds the ex-gay debate in a very specific mix of behavioural and psychoanalytic psychology.

Although used synonymously with conversion therapy in the media, reparative therapy is a very specific psychological practice developed by evangelical psychologist Elizabeth Moberly (1983) and later modified by Catholic psychologist Joseph Nicolosi (1997). The behavioural and psychoanalytic theories that underlie it are foundational to ex-gay discourse (Besen 2003, 119-92; Erzen 2006, 126-59). Work by two psychoanalysts, Irving Bieber and Charles Socarides, combined with behavioural theories of learned gender identity, provide the so-called “secular” basis of nearly all the psychological practices championed by the movement, especially NARTH (Drescher 1998; see also Bieber et al. 1962, Socarides 1968).³¹ While it is true the discourse avoids common (and potentially offensive to Christians) Freudian notions and concepts like castration anxiety and penis envy, the theories underlying most ex-gay therapies revolve around unresolved Oedipal conflict wherein the child incorrectly identifies with either the wrong gender or the wrong gender role. In short, if a child grows up with a strong mother and a weak father, he or she is far more likely to become homosexual because the male child will incorrectly identify with his mother and the female child will incorrectly identify with the masculine characteristics of her mother. According to Nicolosi (1997), “Homosexuality is a developmental problem that is almost always the result of problems in the family” (25) and to “change” one must behaviourally

³¹ Bieber’s 1962 study of 106 gay men compared to 100 straight men is a commonly cited psychoanalytic study in work published by NARTH (NARTH 2010-11). And as noted earlier, Socarides is a co-founder of NARTH.

conform to one's proper masculine or feminine role, because (as Herculeine Barbin discovered a century earlier), "Gender identity is the grounding for all personal identity" (Nicolosi 1997, 154).

In other words, one's true sex, in which gender and desire are linked (Foucault 1980), is the grounding of all personal identity with identity here once again understood in a psychological sense: it is the effect of who one identifies with following an Oedipal crisis. Reparative therapy (and others like it) seeks to overcome homosexuality by encouraging subjects to confess their family dynamics as a problem to be corrected by identifying with strong gender appropriate role models who act as surrogates for the parent of the same sex. Thus, even within the movement's gender discourse, confession operates as a curative, both as self-sacrifice, wherein one's childhood is rejected as gender confusion, and as self-emergence, wherein one's true gender identity is established through a recreated childhood rooted in behavioural gender conformity. That is why, in addition to confession, very stereotypically masculine or feminine activities are encouraged to reinforce one's confessional self-emergence, activities such as sports for men and the proper use of makeup for women (Besen 2003; Erzen 2006; Nicolosi 1997); or, as depicted in *But I'm a Cheerleader*, wood chopping for men and vacuuming for women. What is interesting is how psychology and conservative antigay theology coincide in this discourse.

For ex-gays, sexual identity, gender identity, and biblical Truth are interdependent and reliant on each other. As Anne Paulk explains in *Restoring Sexual Identity* (2003), "the Bible, in fact, calls us men and women, not heterosexuals and homosexuals. In reality, the Scriptures refer to homosexuality as a behavior, not as an identity" (47). Paulk uses a "love the sinner, hate the sin" model that differentiates between *being* gay and engaging in homosexual acts and thus promotes an acts/identity dichotomy that denies the validity of being gay in any real sense—it is not about being gay or lesbian, but being properly gendered as male or female so one can behave as one should. Dallas (2003) also explains the importance of gender identity and proper

behaviour with direct reference to antigay theology: “The male-female union, introduced in Genesis, is the only model of sexual behavior consistently praised in both Old and New Testaments... While the often-used phrase, ‘God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve’ seems flippant, it’s a fair assessment of created intent” (174). According to Dallas, a Christian identity requires that one root one’s identity in the story of creation and in the sexual behaviour of Adam and Eve. Thus the historical acts/identity dichotomy created by queer theory once again reveals itself as a contemporary dichotomy. While one could argue it is still historical, because both Paulk and Dallas make their arguments using an ancient historical document written and codified long before the rise of psychiatry and psychology, their language is psychological, their theory is reparative, and their reading of the Bible is thoroughly twentieth century.

Although Nicolosi provided reparative therapy with its name, Moberly established the foundation of the practice in both psychological theory and theology. She describes the homosexual as a psychological character *apart from God* with a past, a case history, and most important, a childhood. The objective of her work is to point the homosexual back to God. According to Moberley, unconsciously trying to “repair” a childhood deficit of love for the parent of the same-sex is the psychological basis of the condition of homosexuality. She also deduces that, in a “specialized technical sense, every adult heterosexual is an ‘ex-homosexual’... [and] the homosexual is potentially heterosexual on this basis, and only on this basis” (24-25). That is a twist on Van Den Aardweg’s characterization of heterosexuality as the only true identity (or his is a twist on hers) but it is also a twist on the psychoanalysis of Bieber and Socarides, which is rooted in the work of Sándor Radó (Drescher 1998; see also Radó 1995 [1969]). Radó argued against Freud’s discourse of universal bisexuality, claiming instead that all human beings are born entirely heterosexual. But Moberley roots her work in both Radó and Freud. She takes from Radó the language of the reparative drive and from Freud the concept of

universal bisexuality; however, she turns it back to heterosexuality as “true” via religion by claiming, “It is the attainment of male-female complementarity that is God’s plan... this is the goal of human *development*” (29, my italics). In other words, successful navigation of the Oedipus complex, wherein one homosexually but non-erotically identifies with the properly gendered parent of the same-sex so as to learn one’s proper gender identity, is the psychological process created by God to lead children to the truth of heterosexuality. Homosexuality is the effect of that process going wrong. The solution is to confess it and then behaviourally relive it.

Some ex-gay psychologists and psychiatrists, however, go even further in providing a theological foundation for their psychology. Van Den Aardweg (1997) connects conversion therapy to the Christian belief in the “darker side” we inherited from humanity’s fall from paradise: “The Christian believer may have an advantage in the therapy of homosexuality because his [sic] belief in the (undistorted) word of God gives him a firm orientation in life and strengthens his will to dispose of what he feels is his darker side and to long for moral purity” (14). Even on the Jewish side of the movement, rooting psychology in Judeo-Christian mythology is necessary to explain both the condition of homosexuality and the path out of it. For Jewish psychiatrist Jeffrey Satinover (1996), the battle against homosexuality is indeed the battle against the worst sin in the Bible, idolatry.³² And he deploys psychoanalysis to say so:

[T]here really may be no such thing as “homosexuality.” There is rather mere “human sexuality,” which in the “state of nature” is enormously diverse and polymorphous. Psychoanalysts have long argued the natural *bisexuality* of human being, but it would perhaps be more accurate to speak of natural *polysexuality* (61).

For Satinover, homosexuality and heterosexuality are only constrained manifestations of a multifarious “anything goes” sexuality. Writing as a psychiatrist, he denounces any kind of non-heteronormative non-monogamous sexuality as the first and ultimate sin, the object of the first

³² As anecdotal evidence of just how Christian the ex-gay movement is, I had to read Satinover’s book twice before I realized he is Jewish. His interpretation of the Bible is so literal and his language so similar to what one might hear on *The 700 Club*, I just assumed he was a Christian fundamentalist. I have a Christian friend who thought the same.

commandment: idolatry. He writes of “the *violent*, the *hedonistic*, and the *orgiastic*” (232, author’s italics), of which homosexuality is a part: “The dark nightlife of the gay ‘walk on the wild side’ . . . is celebrated in pop culture; it is but one piece of this pagan transformation of the modern West” (233).³³ But he also calls polysexuality “natural” because our “nature” became sinful when we were exiled from Eden, so the potential for unrestrained homosexuality is psychoanalytically just one false god away. It is, in fact, the struggle of all humanity because we are all, biblically speaking, decedents of Adam and Eve and the Oedipal conflict of every human child can be traced back to them. That is to say, the Oedipus Complex is itself the effect of Adam and Eve’s first sin combined with humanity’s continual relapse into idolatry.

As it happens, Van Den Aardweg believes the Christian believer may have an advantage in therapy because the believer longs for the Garden of Eden before purity was lost, before our darker, idolatrous, Oedipal side emerged. Thus it is the religious side of ex-gay psychology that escapes the contradiction of declaring heterosexuality “true” even though it must be created through confession, prayer, Bible study, and therapy: heterosexuality is God’s Truth, which was lost; everything else is the truth of humanity’s fallen nature that must be sacrificed. Most people sacrifice the polysexual aspect of our fallen nature in childhood through successful navigation of the Oedipal crisis, which is here redefined as Adam and Eve’s crisis; for some, however, the struggle is lifelong. Yet on the exclusively Christian side of the movement, one more form of emergent identity operates, and, once again, it mixes psychology with religion. Satinover’s Jewish discourse of idolatry notwithstanding, a focus on gender psychology allows conservative Christians who experience same-sex desire to escape condemnations of evil by creating a new identity that is rooted not just in creation, but also in Christ’s healing love. Thus, former Exodus President Alan Chambers is quick to apologize in his book, *Leaving Homosexuality* (2009)—

³³ Interestingly, however, in spite of being a trained psychiatric psychoanalyst and using psychoanalytic theory himself as evidence to back his claims, Satinover also denounces science and psychoanalysis as paganism (164-67).

written before he shut down Exodus—for those “who rail against sexual sins to the exclusion of all other sins” (15) because for him, “homosexuality [is] just another item on the list of what Jesus [can] heal” (63). He then testifies that the ex-gay process is really about finding one’s gender identity in Christ: “a large part of ‘staying the course’ after leaving homosexuality is becoming rooted in your new identity in Christ. As we focus more on our lives in Him, our former identity fades slowly away... [We accept] ourselves in our God-given gender” (133-135). For Chambers leaving homosexuality is a gendered, psychological process founded in both a new sexual identity and a new religious identity. And he is not the only one to understand the process in this way. In a confession that was posted on the Exodus website (before it was removed from the internet) a woman named Linda D. Carter described a similar process: “I began to seek the Lord in every way I knew how: through Christian television, prayer, and in reading the Bible. I noticed that my desires for women began to fade away, and soon I was not struggling with them at all. I believe this happened because I was truly focused on the Lord.”³⁴ A young man named Ethan, who appears in the first *Our America* television documentary on the movement, “Pray the Gay Away?,” says it bluntly: “Sexuality is a part of our identity as human beings, but it is not the core of our identity. My identity is now in Christ.”

There is a strange maneuver in that line of reasoning, where Christ is used both to limit one’s sexual identity (because identifying with him is more important) and as the grounding of a gendered “sex” identity, which is itself “sexualized” because it is through Christ that one becomes ex-“gay”. But given both men and women use Christ in this way, psychoanalytically Christ becomes, ironically, a “trans-gendered” parent surrogate.³⁵ Even though at the practical

³⁴ Although the link is now dead, the above quote was retrieved on May 6, 2013 from: exodus.to/testimonials_left_homosexuality_02.shtml. Carter’s testimonial is also quoted from on this chat board: <http://www.bravecaptain.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?p=14148&sid=338036ca37ab09093aa2a04705db6d94>

³⁵ Just as men are privileged over women in the ex-gay debate, gays and lesbians are privileged over transgender people, who, until recently, were seldom referenced in media reports. But transgender Christians are just as likely to end up in the movement as gays and lesbians. In fact, the most recent media focus on conversion therapy, which led to President Obama condemning it, was initiated by the suicide of transgender girl forced into therapy (Shear 2015).

level, through therapy, one identifies with a specific human father or mother-figure (via one's same-sex psychologist, or minister, or group therapy leader, or even a straight same-sex friend brought into the therapeutic process), at a spiritual level one identifies with and roots one's gender in Christ alone, whether one is male or female. Thus, Christ becomes a parent surrogate for both ex-gay men and women, which allows them to confess and sacrifice their same-sex desire while simultaneously testifying to their new ex-gay identity *in* Christ.

In all of these ex-gay arguments, what is at issue is a psychiatrized, psychoanalyzed, and behaviourally defined homosexual. Trust in the Bible is fundamental, but underneath we can see a Biblical psychology of gender at play. This discourse of gender mitigates against the harshness of some extreme antigay discourses rooted in sin, sodomy, and abomination, discourses which dominated Christian rhetoric in the 1970s and 80s prior to the ex-gay movement entering the public sphere. Thus while Foucault argues that confession lost its ritualistic and exclusive localization when it was medicalized and transmitted into psychiatry and psychology, in the ex-gay movement it actually retains its religious localization while simultaneously being employed as an internalized, subjectivized psychology of human desire rooted in both a sexual sacrifice and a new gendered emergence. Here confession and identity politics are linked by confessing the self and testifying to the truth of antigay dogma through psychology and religion mixed together. Heterosexuality and gender identity, heterosexuality and maleness and femaleness as absolutes, cannot be separated, either biblically or psychologically because not only is heterosexuality the goal of God's plan, it is the goal of all psychological development. One's true sex is key to God's plan and any deviation must be sacrificed so that heterosexuality as a religious identity, as an identity in Christ, can be testified to as one's emergent truth.

Meanwhile ex-gays become tortured receptacles of shame because the homosexual is ridiculed as a "new species," as an identity emergent from a "natural" fallen history that is really

just a powerful lie to be fought against as akin to Satan. In the process gay identities are disqualified and purified to be replaced by new identities—ex-gay, Christian, straight, man, woman, an identity *in* Christ—and they too are confessed and testified. However, outside the movement ex-gay identities are disqualified and purified through the confession of gay and lesbian identities. Whereas gay and lesbian identities were initially confessed through resistive agency to escape their psychiatric characterization, not as an identity in opposition to sexual acts, but as the author of those acts, today gay and lesbian identities have been re-appropriated back into mainstream psychology and psychiatry where they have lost their heretical authorial role to become biological characters in a discourse of diverse normality (Thorn 2014).

The Straightjacket of Gay Rights and Pro-gay Confessions

In pro-gay psychology homosexuality is celebrated as innate and true to the point of being immutable. It is a necessary confession of pride because gay people are “born that way.” As noted above, in discussing the Christian Right’s attempt to prove that homosexuality is not genetic, Wayne Besen, author of the exposé *Anything But Straight* (2003),³⁶ summarizes recent psychological studies that suggest there *may* be a genetic influence to sexual orientation as being “incontrovertible.” At the same time, he debunks NARTH studies that suggest homosexuality is caused by a failure of the child to identify with his or her same-sex parent as being ridiculous. Besen, however, is careful not to say that homosexuality is *entirely and necessarily* genetic. He merely concludes, incontrovertibly, that “a better case can be made for nature than nurture” (148). He also confidently states earlier in his book that “the ex-gay actor must take off the costume and rediscover his or her true self again” (33-4) and “Hopefully he [i.e., former ex-gay spokesperson John Paulk, who Besen photographed leaving a gay bar] will soon come to realize that he was not a true heterosexual family man; he just played one on TV” (22). For Besen, the

³⁶ In addition to his book, Besen is a frequent guest on news segments that discuss or debate the problem; he is a participant in multiple documentaries on the topic; and he runs an anti-ex-gay website called “Truth Wins Out.”

ex-gay subject striving for that allusive heterosexuality is just an actor playing a character, which here implies that his or her true identity is something else. The ex-gay is really gay, and no matter how much he or she testifies to the contrary, that is something that cannot change.

Ironically, in the above statement, Besen seems to tap into Huffer's retranslated Foucauldian account of the creation of the psychiatric homosexual and apply it to the ex-gay; however, Foucault's analysis of homosexuality, whether retranslated or not, does not establish a real true self apart from the character or personage of psychiatric discourse. For Besen, such a real true self is exactly the point. A similar true self is described by journalist and Republican gay rights activist Bruce Bawer, who explains—in direct opposition to the “lie” of the ex-gay movement— what it means to be gay. On the surface, he emphasizes the phenomenological over the biological: “To be a homosexual is not just to experience sexual attraction to another person of the same sex; it is to feel the same sense of comfort, rightness, and wholeness in a same-sex relationship that a straight person feels in an opposite sex relationship” (254). But later he insists, indeed he testifies, that feeling this sense of comfort, rightness, and wholeness is “intrinsic to [his] identity” (312). To feel comfort in one's own body, to feel that one is whole, which for Bawer merges body, mind, and spirit, is thus both phenomenological and biological even if he does not fall back on explicitly biological language. For Besen, Bawer and many others, a gay or lesbian identity is representative of a “true” psychological experience that cannot be divorced from one's “true” self: it is biology, psychology, and emotion tied together, something embodied and wired into one's thoughts and being.

Taking this one step further, in pro-gay Christianity “being gay” is celebrated as a gift from God, in spite of all the suffering that gift implies, in spite of all the struggle and pain imposed on gay people by so many who speak in God's name. Many pro-gay Christians who experience same-sex desire confess Job-like torment as an emergent declaration of God's greater

plan. They testify and assert that not only is there no real contradiction between being gay and Christian—both can be aspects of one's unified identity—it is actually God-given, a position that brings us back to that speech from Butters at the end of *South Park*'s ex-gay episode: “if I’m bi-curious, and I’m somehow made from God, then I figure God must be a little bi-curious himself.” In the first ex-gay episode of *Our America*, Exodus International founder Michael Bussee, who long ago left the movement and accepted a gay Christian identity, explains it this way: “There are two things that are true about me. I am gay and I am Christian. To try to deny either of those causes a split that is just unbearable.” He adds to this, “By calling ourselves ex-gay, we were lying to ourselves and others.” Mel White, also an ex-gay survivor, now an affirmed gay Christian minister, writes in his Foreword to Besen’s book, “God created gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people and loves us exactly as we were created” (2003, ix). In his confessional autobiography (2007), former ex-gay Jeremy Marks writes, “Thus I have come to realise, after this very long, lonely and tortuous journey, that it is possible to be really gay and really Christian” (117). The Foreword to Marks’ book is also penned by a former ex-gay, Roy Clements, who writes of Marks, “At the outset, he would have refused to accept [the label gay Christian], believing that homosexuality was a choice not an identity, a sinful practice not an innate orientation... [but] he was gay, and no amount of prayer and spiritual discipline would ever make him ‘ex-gay’” (xiii). In a piece that aired in Canada on the CBC in 2007, Toronto ex-gay survivor Darin Squire says, “God loves me *and* I’m gay; God loves me and he made me gay” (Strombo). All of these people confess their homosexuality as innate across multiple dimensions, mixing biology, psychology, and spirituality together to confirm their selves as emergent within their sex. Through their confessions, their failure to change is purged from the self and their identity as gay is revealed as absolute truth.³⁷

³⁷ None of these examples from the media contradict my earlier statement that pro-gay theology is largely absent from the ex-gay debate. It is not references to pro-gay Christianity, or even pro-gay Christian voices that are absent from media coverage, but actual articulations of what pro-gay theology is, how it operates, and what it represents.

In this discourse the slippery nature of identity is revealed again: What is the reasoning that justifies ex-gay change? Besen answers condescendingly: “The reasoning? Gay is *only* an ‘identity,’ and if people identify as heterosexual, they are not gay, even if they still have intense homosexual yearnings” (2003, 38, my italics). For Besen, such an understanding is absurd. A gay person can certainly choose their labels, but they cannot choose who they are. Thus a gay identity is legitimate, but an ex-gay identity is not. Identity here becomes something both very concrete and not good enough, because in a profound sense, all of the participants in this debate (even Butters, even Alan Shore from *Boston Legal*) say gay is *more* than an identity, it is part of one’s true self, in some cases, one’s God-created sexual self. That is why so many statements directed against the movement (as we will learn in the next chapter) are focused on the scientific (lack of) efficacy of change rather than psychological identity, because identity as a concept is slippery. So even though “ex-gay” as an identity is ridiculed and foreclosed by pro-gay advocates, it is ex-gay change that is denied first; it is, in fact, dismissed as subterfuge and contradiction: “Exodus leaders tell people they can ‘change,’ but when pressed for a specific meaning of change, with Bill Clinton-like circumlocution, they argue that it depends on what the meaning of change is” (Besen, 34-5). It is even, as we have already seen in *Boston Legal* and as we will see again in Chapter 2 via a *real* lawsuit in New Jersey, declared consumer fraud.

Those opposed to the movement can speak this truth because of their faith in the dogma of sexuality as psychologically and biologically innate, as unchangeable. It is a fundamentalism that operates with particular force in mainstream media. It allows MSNBC commentator, Rachel Maddow, to call ex-gay change quackery: “I don’t feel like anybody credible believes that gay people can click their heels together and become straight. I feel like it’s seen as a quack idea” (*Rachel Maddow Show*, *The* 2012a). It allows for an ironic reference in the title of a 2012 CBC Radio documentary about Dr. Spitzer’s repudiation of his own 2001 study: “Straightening the

Record: A Doctor's Apology" (*Current, The* 2012). Even the title of Besen's commercially sold exposé, *Anything But Straight*, is a reference to this dogma. In *Boston Legal* Bethany Horowitz (Meredith Eaton) tells the judge suing his former ex-gay ministry that she knows why he cannot change: "You're totally gay!" In that same episode the ex-gay ministry calls to the stand a stereotypical gay man with a feminine lisp who queerly says, "I never think of men now. Oh my god. The idea totally repulses me." As he testifies, the scene cuts first to a disbelieving Denny Crane, and then to the disbelieving claimant, Judge Brown, rolling his eyes. In *South Park*, at the ex-gay camp, a flaming, lisping man leaps gracefully onto the stage at an assembly, does a twirl, and declares himself cured. In the audience, an 8-year-old boy who knows he cannot change, who recognizes that the lisping man is a fraud, pulls out a gun and shoots himself in the head. The message is clear: a gay identity as a label that can be discarded by confused people who call themselves ex-gay is absurd, but one's true gay self, one's genetically determined orientation to be romantically and erotically attached to people of the same gender, to be biologically and psychologically gay, is unchangeable. How can one change what is innate? How can one change one's true sex? With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, both the ex-gay movement and those opposed obstinately bring into play this question of a true sex.

The Science and Work of Confessing Sexuality: Biology, Fluidity, Struggle

The problem with the fundamentalism of sexuality as innate is that there is still no scientific agreement (neurobiological, cognitive, psychoanalytic, behavioural or otherwise) on what actually determines same-sex desire, or any kind of sexual desire, or even if such a thing can be determined. Indeed, mainstream psychology now says homosexuality and bisexuality are multi-faceted, multi-dimensional phenomena *probably* influenced by *combinations* of genetic, environmental, and experiential factors, and that there are multiple paths different for every person (Myers 2013; Shaffer 2005; Wade et al. 2009; Weiner and Craighead 2010; Weiten and

McCann 2007). The problem with the dogma of ex-gay change is that in order for it to be scientifically justified, a psychological theory that once scandalized the Christian world must come into play: Alfred Kinsey's theory of sexual fluidity—except it has to come into play as willful choice, which ex-gay struggle contradicts. Ex-gays declare their sexuality fluid in the face of intense struggle without understanding how queer that is. On the other hand, much like Butters declaring himself bi-curious without understanding what that means, so too do gay rights activists declare not only themselves but all who experience same-sex desire gay, but apparently without understanding what that means, at least scientifically. The struggle to maintain these dogmas and to continually confess them as true is no simple matter, even without the struggle of actual change: it requires considerable labour and work. It even requires considerable labour and work for the experts, who know what the science does and does not say, but as participants in the debate, have their own true beliefs to maintain.

Dr. Jack Drescher (2006b), a pro-gay psychiatrist who frequently appears in media debates about the ex-gay movement³⁸ can *summarize* the pro-gay stance in opposition to the mental illness model as implying that it is innate and inborn, but he cannot actually *say* it:

The *normal/identity model* regards homosexuality as a normal variation of human sexual expression. This position holds that to be gay or lesbian is to be a member of a sexual minority [..., that] homosexuality is biologically inborn or that gay people are 'made that way' by their creator [..., that it] is fixed and immutable; that similar to race, one's sexual orientation is intrinsic to one's identity... The opposing side in the culture wars favors an *illness/behavior model*... [in which] homosexuality [represents] behavioral symptoms of a psychiatric illness, a moral failing, or a spiritual illness... [that] homosexual feelings and behaviors are not innate, that they are learned behavior that can be changed... through psychotherapy or through faith healing... [and] no such thing as a gay or lesbian person or identity can exist: no one is "born gay." (17-18)

Drescher is careful to not actually state which of these two positions is "true," but as he provides only two options and opposes any consideration of homosexuality as a mental illness, it is clear

³⁸ See his online biography at <http://www.jackdreschermd.net/> for a list of the numerous nightly news programs and news articles he has also appeared on and contributed to as an expert.

which side he *believes* is true. Yet in a video he made for Wayne Besen's Truth Wins Out website debunking reparative therapy, he says, "we don't know [what causes homosexuality], nobody knows, and anybody who says that they know is lying to you" (Besen and Drescher 2008)—that in spite of his online host *implying* (without actually saying) in multiple sources that it is indeed biological. It is also not insignificant that Drescher spends the rest of that video emphasizing that *they*, the ex-gay proponents, are the ones lying the most. Drescher's colleague, psychologist Kenneth Zucker (2006), also implies certainty with ambiguous language. He notes, in what seems to be a mocking tone, how bizarre it is that queer theorists and reparative therapists seem to agree on sexual fluidity: "the constructionists, just as the reparativists, have often argued that sexual orientation is more fluid than it is fixed... At times, there really is something to the expression that science and politics makes strange bedfellows." The implication here is that both the queer constructionists and the queer reparativists are wrong: sexuality is innate. And yet, as we shall see in Chapter 2, there is empirical evidence of sexuality fluidity in several ex-gay studies, both supportive *and* critical of the movement.

It is precisely because ex-gay change requires sexuality to be malleable on a continuum that Erzen argues ex-gay conversion is a "queer conversion" (13-14). She notes how Christian groups who focus exclusively on heterosexuality, as well as opponents who accuse ex-gays of repression, miss the point: "Rather than definitive change, ex-gays undergo a conversion process that has no end point, and they acknowledge that change encompasses desires, behavior, and identities that do not always align neatly or remain fixed. Even the label 'ex-gay' represents their sense of being in flux between identities" (2-3). Similarly, Lynne Gerber (2008) argues that ex-gays, "utilize discursive and cultural strategies that resemble the gender indeterminacy and gender play celebrated by queer theorists who have very different socio-political aims" (8). However, for ex-gays living within a religiously ordained heteronormative governmentality, the

fluidity of sexuality is not a spectrum that opens up new possibilities—it is a situation that must be fought against and corrected through religious and psychological work. In fact, those who identify and confess themselves as being ex-gay, or as formerly homosexual, or even as fully heterosexual in spite of still experiencing same-sex desire, often engage in a lifelong production of one's true sex. This lifelong production results in an ex-gay political economy of the body that extends beyond confessing mere dogma; it is justified through religious identification but practiced through real bodily struggle, repeated sacrificial confession and repeated behavioural gender identification. For ex-gays, their faith, their desire, and their maleness or femaleness become the objects of their strategic use of identity as a notion; and the confessions of their new subject positions, designed to reconcile conflicts and crises between identities, are employed precisely to govern the relations between their beliefs, attractions, and bodies in such a way as to minimize that struggle; however, seldom is that struggle actually eliminated.

Thus finding one's identity either in creation or in Christ in no way negates the conflict experienced by most if not all ex-gays. In fact, in Alan Chambers' 151 page book, the word struggle appears 61 times. Ex-gay confessions of struggle are very common and have been empirically demonstrated in numerous psychological and ethnographic studies. Erzen writes, "Many ex-gays admit [i.e. confess] that although some changes in behavior and identity take place, it is more probable that they will continue as 'strugglers' their entire lives" (2006, 18, my addition in brackets). A participant she calls 'Curtis' explains: "There is no such thing as a cure... You learn how to better manage your life, thoughts, and desires, and you achieve a sense of wholeness and a better relationship with God" (68). Another she calls 'Drew,' an ex-gay who labels himself a liberated celibate, not surprisingly rationalizes his struggle by referencing the Bible: "If I haven't achieved the level of healing I had hoped for, that doesn't make scripture any less true" (220-1). In the media, those who publically confess themselves as ex-gay also admit to

continual struggle. In the NFB documentary *Cure For Love* (2008), Canadian ex-gay leader Brian Pengelly says, “We need to be honest about what we mean about change... when ‘ex-gay’ is used to indicate or to say this person no longer has attraction to the same sex *at all*, that doesn’t fit my story.” The struggle associated with rooting one’s changed and changing sexuality in Christ perhaps explains why Alan Chambers created in the media what can only be described as great confusion over what sexual orientation change really means.

In 2007, as a guest on *The Montel Williams Show*, Chambers became embroiled in a hilariously frustrating argument over the exact meaning of the words “liberate” and “change.” At the time the Exodus website promised liberation for ex-gays but Chambers claimed they did not change people. That prompted Williams to say, “I’m sorry. We can play the semantic game all you want, but if I go liberate Iraq, I’ve changed Iraq!” (*Montel Williams Show* 2007). Then, while insisting that Exodus cannot even liberate people (over Williams showing a screenshot from the website saying that it can), Chambers paradoxically insisted that he himself had been liberated (*ibid*). Later, in 2009, in response to the American Psychological Association’s official report on the lack of efficacy for ex-gay therapy and the possibility of harm that may come from it, Chambers was dubious in his defence: “That flies in the face of the testimonies of tens of thousands of people just like me... [but] that’s not to say that you can flip a switch and go from gay to straight” (Ross Jr. 2009). In the first of three *Our America* episodes in which he appears, Chambers declares that “sexuality is a work in progress,” but later adds, “Sexual orientation is such an ambiguous term” (“Pray The Gay Away?” 2011). A year later, as we know, he admitted as a largely unwanted “guest” at a 2012 Gay Christian Network conference that 99.9 percent of ex-gays have not really changed, only to later clarify he meant *complete* sexual orientation change (Rattigan 2012b). Finally, as described in the introduction, in the third ex-gay episode of *Our America*, he apologized to a group of ex-gay survivors, and, before the episode even aired,

shut Exodus down and apologized to the world on the internet (*Huffington Post* 2013; Hurst 2013; OWN 2013a); however, today he remains married to his wife and still identifies as ex-gay.

The continual, life-long struggle associated with ex-gay change, which amounts also to continual life-long confession, is the reason the Kinsian psychological notion of a sexual spectrum or scale, the basis of what we think of as sexual fluidity, is necessary in ex-gay thought. It explains why Anne Paulk quotes “the enemy” as part of her explanation of identity change when she uses feminist Carla Golden and gay activist and biological researcher Dr. Dean Hamer to prove empirically that “a woman’s sexuality can be relatively fluid throughout her life” (2003, 30). Even some Christian psychological studies of efficacy utilize a Kinsian inspired scale of sexuality to measure change (Jones and Yarhouse 2009). For those who claim full heterosexual conversion, there is often a nuance and fluidity even to the language they use. Ex-gay Chris Doyle, also a reparative therapist, said in a recent episode of the *Dr. Oz Show* that “all my clients, *if* they really do their work, they’ll *stay* straight;” and in that same episode, Rich Wyler, the ex-gay Mormon who founded a gay-to-straight weekend retreat, said, “the majority of men who come through Journey Into Manhood go on to *live* a straight life” (“From Gay to Straight?” 2012, my italics). In both these statements the struggle to maintain and persist in one’s “straightness” is emphasized through the words “if,” “stay,” and “live” but there is no reference to a cure that “literally” makes one straight forever. Their language is deployed to promise freedom, but with the qualification that it is really lifelong labour. In the process, truth itself becomes lifelong labour. But if sexuality really is fluid, why do ex-gays have to work so hard to change it? One answer could be this: the different between ex-gay and queer fluidity is the application of a willful and deliberate forcing of fluidity. It is as if the ex-gay movement operates in a freezer, desperately trying to melt giant blocks of ice with just a few books of matches.

Conclusion: Confession is Today's Christian Work-Ethic

When ex-gay leader Greg Quinlan testifies that the homosexual's fear of heterosexuality goes beyond calling sodomy marriage to become something worse, coercive identity politics, he mixes elements from a medieval Christian discourse with a twentieth century psychoanalytic discourse to disqualify a very recent kind of truth-game that his own organization could not exist without. When the writers of *South Park* have Butters Stotch confess that the bi-curiosity he does not even understand is part of his very being and comes from God, they have him engage in a kind of self-emergence that reaches back to the fourth century Christian "discovery" of who we are in our flesh, but that roots itself in the much more recent psychoanalytic "discovery" that our identity is the product of our childhood crises and struggles. When Anne Paulk declares in a full page newspaper ad that after years of hard work she has sacrificed the root cause of her homosexuality, childhood sexual molestation, and has found freedom from homosexuality through faith in Jesus Christ, she acknowledges her sexual guilt and sin so as to be born again in a new identity that is both religious and psychological. The common denominator for all three is the ancient practice of confession, historically modified, and then historically modified again, and then again. The Christian ex-gay movement does not really try to pray the gay away (although they do pray); they try to confess it away: through confessions of sin and self-sacrifice, and through testimonies of true belief and self-emergence. The problem is that is the same for those opposed to the movement as well. They do not try to pray *it* (the movement) away, not even the pro-gay Christians (although they do pray); they try to confess it away, in much the same way. The debate surrounding the ex-gay movement is a profoundly confessional debate, and it crystalizes nearly 2000 years of confessional change. Even the science that is deployed in this battle for discursive supremacy is confessed as truth instead of demonstrated as truth.

Of course, the politics of how one mediates this confessional debate depends on which religious and psychological knowledges one roots one's sacrifices, beliefs, and identities in, and

on which religious and psychological experts one trusts to enunciate those knowledges; however, in spite of a myriad of specific religious and psychological practices at play here, confession underlies them all on all sides of the debate. In fact, it is precisely because the ex-gay debate is rooted in such longstanding religious and psychological forms of confession that many people who claim expert subject positions—through experiential knowledge of change or through experiential knowledge of lack of change—can enunciate the statements that they do. They confess their knowledge. It is part of their work. But the “work ethic” of how one mediates this debate reveals an interesting difference. For those opposed to the movement, especially those who identify as gay or lesbian, confessions of identity appear to end the struggle *with themselves*. The struggle against the movement may continue, as does the struggle against society’s continued heterosexism, but the crises and struggles of the self against the self that led to identity as self-emergence end. Even for queer people who preach sexual fluidity as liberation, there is little struggle, because for them change is a process that happens, not a forced event. Such is not the case for most within the movement, where it is indeed the struggle of self-emergence, the struggle for identity as part of “the hazardous process of maturation” (Weeks 1991a, 74) that becomes a life-long struggle and lifelong work. For most, Erik Erikson’s adolescent identity crises ends with adolescence; for many gays and lesbians it ends a little bit later, when one comes out; but for ex-gays it is a life-long work ethic of sacrifice and dogma.

In all these confessed struggles, it becomes very difficult to separate acts from identity, for it is the desire to act that forms the basis of one’s identity formation; but it also becomes difficult to separate agency from subjectification, for on one side of the debate confessions of antigay dogma structure the true beliefs that compel the acts of resistance of the agents at play. However, if confession changed when it left the medieval Christian monastery to become a governmental practice of pastoral care for all Christians; if it changed again when it was

transferred along with possession and witchcraft into the field of medicine to help establish the new disciplines of psychiatry and psychology; if it changed yet again when it spread out from the mental institutions into popular culture through psychoanalytic private practice; should we not expect it to change once again now that it has become a political economic work ethic in the ex-gay movement? For confession is not merely the sum of its parts, the product of a history of additions. No, with each addition the practice was modified, with every resistance the practice encountered it was changed, and with each new historical context the practice was altered. It is changing even today. The ex-gay movement emerged as a “truth-event” (a contested truth-event)³⁹ simultaneously with the truth-event of a new kind of economics and a new kind of politics: neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Today, as we will learn in the following chapters, ex-gay discourse is permeated with the language of both. It should not be surprising to discover that confession is being modified in the process.

³⁹ I mean “truth-event” in its Foucauldian sense rather than with reference to the philosophy of Alain Badiou, who conceives of the truth-event as an emergence of eternal truth from the void that a subject becomes faithful to (2003 [1997]; 2006 [1988]; 2009 [2006]). For Foucault, the truth-event, the truth-thunderbolt, “a dispersed, discontinuous, interrupted truth which will only speak or appear from time to time” (2006, 236), is differentiated from the truth-demonstration: “It is not a truth that is given through the mediation of instruments, but a truth provoked by rituals, captured by ruses, seized according to occasions” (ibid, 237). The difference is subtle, but Foucault’s definition is discursive rather than philosophical and does not necessarily imply that any given truth-event is eternal.

Chapter Two: What is the Cost of Truth and Confession?

There is a 2003 episode of *Law & Order: SVU* that is both the effect of and a direct reference to the ex-gay movement's 1998 advertising campaign. Although its primary focus is the homophobia underlying conversion therapy, "Abomination" also addresses the claim that selling ex-gay change is consumer fraud. Five minutes into the episode, detectives Elliot Stabler (Christopher Maloni) and Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay) scour the ads plastered on a New York construction site to find one of a smiling man and woman holding hands below a Christian cross that reads, "We Chose the Path of Love." The detectives were led there by a bouncer convinced he had seen their murder victim in a "gay ad." A hard cut to police headquarters has forensic psychiatrist George Huang (BD Wong) explain: "It's a Christian ministry advocating 'freedom from homosexuality' through prayer and counselling. It started in the 80s with the so-called 'ex-gay movement.'" Although not based on real people (says the show's disclaimer), the detectives investigate first the "repressed" founders of the ministry (Don Stephenson and Andrea Cirie), hinting at real-life ex-gay media personalities Anne and John Paulk; then a hate-filled preacher who pickets funerals (James Otis), strongly suggesting real-life Westboro Baptist Church preacher Fred Phelps; and finally a reparative therapist (George Segal) soon charged with murdering his son's gay lover, maybe implying real-life psychoanalyst Charles Socarides.⁴⁰ Along the way, and almost previewing *Boston Legal*'s "Selling Sickness," they discover their victim's Masters research argued that reparative therapists willingly sell a "snake oil cure."

In the previous chapter I outlined the conditions of emergence of the ex-gay movement through a genealogy of confession rooted in the work of Michel Foucault. I analyzed the way aspects of that genealogy still play out today, both in the movement and in the discourse of

⁴⁰ Charles Socarides, author of several books on the therapy of homosexuality (1968; 1975; 1978; 1989), opponent of declassification in 1973, co-founder of NARTH in 1991, and champion of conversion therapy until his death in 2005, never murdered his son's gay lover. He does, however, have a gay son, Richard Socarides, who is a lawyer, CNN political commentator, and former LGBTQ advisor to President Bill Clinton. Ironically, one of Socarides' early books, *The Overt Homosexual* (1968), is dedicated to his son, then a closeted 16-year-old.

identity politics that surrounds it. I argued ex-gays do not try to pray the gay away, but confess it away through a contradictory mix of confessions of sin and disease and true belief, and testimonies of self-sacrifice and self-emergence. I also argued a similar confessional quadrature operates outside the movement. In all cases confession is governmental, understood in a broad sense, revolving around religious and psychological power-knowledges designed to operate as technologies of the self. Put another way, the last chapter used the problem of ex-gay confession to demonstrate that contemporary society continues to obstinately engage with the question of a true sex, which has its own political economy as manifested in the twentieth century invention of identity politics wherein normative confessions of the self become life-long labours of self-formation and struggle embedded in long-standing religious and psychological power relations.

In this chapter I will argue that confession is a governmental practice that continues to be modified by our current political economy, and the ex-gay movement plugs directly into that phenomenon. I will show confession to be embedded within a neoliberal problematic of rational choice versus consumer fraud. Foucault argued that through psychoanalysis confession spread out into advertising and popular culture. I will argue that through advertising and popular culture confession has become inseparable from our economic system and the ex-gay movement is a case study of how it operates in that context. As the movement now justifies itself through the discourse of rational choice, I will consider it in relation to rational choice cost-benefit discourses. While this analysis will help elucidate how neoliberal economic theory has colonized the field of psychology, it will also reveal that the movement actually resists what amounts to its own commodification at the same time that it embraces it. As part of this analysis, I will consider the struggle for ex-gay change as a flawed technology of the self that is sold not for financial profit, but as a form of religious heterosexual entrepreneurship sold by true believers with confession as part of the business model. However, there is an impoverishment and insufficiency

associated with this entrepreneurship because it forecloses choice, denies risk, and limits entrepreneurship only to the creation of heteronormativity. In fact, the movement's engagement with the knowledge and rhetoric of rational choice, and its transformation of confession into advertised entrepreneurship, has opened it up to accusations of consumer fraud.

Ex-gay Advertising and Truth in Fraud

Unlike in *Boston Legal* (see the Introduction), the references to advertising and consumer fraud in "Abomination" are fleeting, operating first as narrative twists and second as catalysts for a more in depth exploration of ex-gay homophobia, both religious and psychological. Thus it might be easy to miss, in spite of the whole *Law & Order* franchise revolving around criminal confessions and legal testimonies, that in their ex-gay ad there is a confession of desire and a testimony of cure; because to "choose" the path of love *in this context*, and to *proclaim* it, indicates that a different path has been rejected, a sinful path confessed and sacrificed away. The claim being made is that through the light of faith the souls of the people in the ad were purified, which is what allows them to testify to their new path as truth while confessing their old path as purged. By the end of the episode, however (with advertisement and fraud forgotten in favour of confessions of homophobic murder), another confession of self-emergence is testified to: the reparative therapist's deeply conflicted (and arguably complicit in murder) son (Jonathon Tucker) comes out of the closet to reveal himself a gay man. And it all begins with that advertisement, because, as detective Benson puts it, their murder victim was literally "the poster boy for the ex-gay movement." As it happens, Anne Paulk was literally the poster girl for the ex-gay movement in 1998 when the real story "came out" and the movement's advertised offer of "freedom" introduced ex-gay change to the public and put it at the heart of a mediated debate.

We know that that first ex-gay ad was structured as a full confession. Unlike in *Law & Order*, however, Anne's confession does not end with one line of testimony. Rather it tells in

great detail of how she was “made” a lesbian through a childhood sexual assault and how, years later (after womanhood “became a mystery”), she met a former lesbian who helped her leave homosexuality through faith in God’s love and hard work. That Anne may not consider her testimony to be a confession, because for many Christians testimony and confession are not the same thing, within a Foucauldian analytic they are two sides of the same coin. What was true in the medieval monasteries of feudal Europe is, in a strange sense, also true today in North America: a conservative Christian cannot testify truth, whether personal or biblical, without confessing sin through self-sacrifice, and he or she cannot confess sin away without the light of truth as his or her testimony. The difference today is that dynamic has spread; it has been psychologized, merged with testimonies of self-emergence and identity, and, as we shall see, has even come to underlie the truth games at play in the buying and selling of economic choice.

As described in Chapter 1, Anne’s advertised testimony was typeset around a smaller photo of about a hundred people identified as ex-gay with a caption that reads, “Thousands of ex-gays like these here walked away from homosexual identities.” A larger version of that photo appears at the top of another ad printed in both *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* on July 14 and July 27 respectively (Alliance For Traditional Marriage, et al. 1998b). The testimonial nature of this second ad is not as apparent as the first, because it is buried under the “factual” delivery of statistics (because, the ad says, statistics “don’t lie”) linking homosexuality to a variety of sexually transmitted diseases, as well as to “alcohol, drug abuse and emotional and physical violence” (ibid 1998b). However, following the statistics is a summary of the confessed psychological “root causes” of so many ex-gays: “rejection from early childhood and lack of bonding to same-sex parents, sexual violence and rape, or mental and emotional abuse” (ibid). Following that is a collective testimony of true belief rooted in the right to free speech: “For years Christians have taken a stand in the public square against aggressive homosexual activism”

(ibid). Although this is an ad that professes to be about science and reason rather than testimony, even stating outright, “We want reason in this debate, not rhetoric” (ibid), at its core it is another confession. It is a collective ex-gay confession of diseases and root causes, and a Christian testimony of truly believed statistics, as well as a declaration of the right to speak that truth freely. It is an example of religious and psychological confession merged and marketed as Truth wherein conservative Christian belief is testified to as a form of rationality.

Another ad defending straight football player Reggie White’s right to publically oppose homosexuality appeared in *USA Today* on July 15 (Alliance For Traditional Marriage, et al. 1998c); and one more appeared later that month in *The Miami Herald*, which included the headline “From Innocence to Aids” and featured the parents and testimony of an ex-gay leader named Michael Johnston (ibid 1998d). In each ad, the benefit sold is “Truth,” the method of delivery is confession, and although no reference to financial cost is made, any suggestion that there is a cost (because freedom from homosexuality is being offered in an advertisement) is offset by the risks of homosexuality as sin and disease. In the Reggie White ad, “truth” is referenced repeatedly: “The truth about the non-genetic roots of homosexuality,” “The truth about ex-gays,” “The truth about raw political power,” and the “The truth about sexual sin” (Alliance For Traditional Marriage, et al. 1998c). These truths, which reference and build on ex-gay confessions of psychological root causes and the sin of sex, are declared in relation to the right to speak freely, the right to testify one’s truth publically. Indeed, for Reggie White, the right to condemn homosexuality as sin and disease is a constitutional religious right.

The Michael Johnston ad is structured around the confession and testimony of his mother, who recounts her son’s struggle with homosexuality and return to Christ within a story about a “painfully shy” boy who was “lacking confidence” and who was “ridiculed by other boys his age” (Alliance For Traditional Marriage, et al. 1998d). Although she insists that she and her

husband gave their children “a secure, loving home,” there is an implied confession of guilt, because she could not teach her son the confidence he needed, protect him from the taunts of the other boys, or prevent him from becoming “a loner” (ibid). While it is true, she also tells of her prayer asking that God “take him out of this lifestyle,” that prayer happened before Michael became ex-gay, and it is subservient to the guilt-ridden confession the her son now has AIDS. Taken together, all these ads combine religious and psychological confession with religious and statistical testimony in a marketing campaign promoting not just freedom from homosexuality, but the freedom to choose. What is interesting is that the “right” choice is telegraphed through testimonial cost-benefit analyses—the costs of homosexuality, of sin and disease, as juxtaposed with the benefits of Christian family and constitutionally guaranteed American values.

Law & Order: SVU’s “Abomination” became part of the ex-gay debate within two years of Dr. Robert Spitzer presenting (within months of published) a notorious ex-gay study that suggested some gays and lesbians could change. The episode’s focus on psychology and reparative therapy suggests the Spitzer study may have been the primary catalyst for the story; however, by opening with an ex-gay ad and by suggesting that reparative therapy is consumer fraud, the episode reveals itself as an effect (albeit a negative effect) of ex-gay advertising. Indeed, the 1998 ads were only the first of many. As we know, in 1999 television ads appeared, and in the following decade the ads spread across communication platforms, appearing on the radio, plastered across billboards, and embedded in multiple conservative Christian websites (TWO 2014a).⁴¹ Most of the ads emphasized the “truth” that change is possible with no direct reference to financial cost, relying instead on “evidence” of the cost of being gay. Nevertheless, the financial cost of ex-gay participation is a key aspect of the discourse, as evidence not only in “Abomination,” but also in *Boston Legal*, where six months of counselling cost \$40,000. The

⁴¹ As noted in Chapter 1, ex-gay television ads even appeared here in Canada in 2008 on a Sudbury CTV station

question is, are ex-gay advertisements that promote change through cost-benefit testimonies false advertising? Or do they offer freedom of choice for individuals in a market of sexual identities? Indeed, a common argument from those promoting the movement is that they “respect the autonomy and right of self-determination of individuals who, because of their personal values, religious or not, desire to seek change of their sexual orientation” (Jones and Yarhouse 2007, 377; see also Chambers 2009; Nicolosi 2006; and Nicolosi, Byrd, and Potts 2000). The promotion of the movement through advertising builds on that position, offering ex-gay change as not just freedom from homosexuality, but freedom of choice for consumers. Yet many gay rights activists do argue that the movement engages in false advertising and consumer fraud (Besen 2003; *Rachel Maddow Show, The* 2009; *Rachel Maddow Show, The* 2010). In fact, echoing *Boston Legal* (in a situation where life imitates pop culture), a recent lawsuit in New Jersey literally accuses the Jewish wing of the movement of consumer fraud in the full legal sense (SPLC 2014a). Confession, apparently, is good for the soul—unless it does not work.

Foucault cites advertising as a key aspect of the twentieth century’s confessional nature (2003a [1974/75]). As it happens, the question of one’s true sex is often used tactically in the buying and selling of fetishized commodities that appeal to consumer desires and identities. Raymond Williams (1993 [1980])⁴² once said as much when, building on Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism, he references the role of fantasy in the “inducements and satisfactions” of advertising as “a magical system” (335) where commodities are transformed into “magical signifiers” (During 1993, 320). In that light it is worth repeating Foucault’s statement that “all kinds of mechanisms everywhere—in advertising, books, novels, films, and widespread pornography—invite the individual to pass from this daily expression of sexuality to the

⁴² Williams is a foundational scholar in both cultural and communication studies. His essay on advertising was written for his 1961 book *The Long Revolution* but was not published until 1980 as an essay in his *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. While not exactly current, its publication twenty years after it was written and subsequent republication in a 1993 culture studies reader, speaks to its value in understanding advertising even today.

institutional and expensive confession of his [sic] sexuality to the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, or sexologist” (2003a, 170). When Foucault made that statement in the 1970s, advertising had long been “the source of financing for a range of general communication” (Williams 1993, 334), but it is even more so today. Mattelart (1991 [1989]) describes how “processes of deregulation and privatization of the systems of information and communication” allowed advertising to expand worldwide in the 1980s (206), and McChesney (2008a) calls it “the bone marrow of corporate capitalism” (266). Now it is also the bone marrow of the Christian ex-gay movement.

Today books, novels, films, and widespread pornography *rely on* advertising to invite the individual to confess him or herself not just to the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and sexologist, but to all kinds of people everywhere, expert or not. Indeed, the astounding ubiquity of pornography on the internet still invites some, conservative Christians for example, to confess its consumption in shame to their ministers, Christian psychotherapists, or sexoholics anonymous counsellors; however, it invites many more to shamelessly confess its consumption with pride to their friends, acquaintances, and social science pollsters, not to mention the multitude of marketing companies who advertise their commodities (and hide their spyware, even though we all know it is there) on so many pornography webpages. Confession today is both a marker of guilt and pride, of shame and identity. Nikolas Rose (1998a) summarizes Foucault’s account of confession as both identifying and subjectifying and updates its spread from psychology into today’s general society through discourses of neoliberal political economy. First he writes:

Not only does confession... characterize almost all of the proliferating systems of psychotherapy and counseling. It also provides a potent technical form that has come to install itself in a range of other practices where the conduct of personal life is at stake, from the doctor’s surgery to the radio phone-in, from the social work interview to the frank exchange of lovers. (96).

He then ties today’s psychology to the liberal and neoliberal “aspirations of freedom, choice, and identity” (97), writing that we need to understand the multiplication of confessional, behavioural,

and cognitive therapeutics in relation to “the norm of autonomy and promise of achieving it under the regime of [a neoliberal] rational management of existence” (ibid). It is interesting, however: Rose insists that the prescribed authority of psychological confession, “has replaced the claims of god and religion with those of nature and the psyche” (ibid). But it was only a year after his words were published that the ex-gay movement began to advertise ex-gay change, which fuses nature and the psyche *into* God and religion as a technology of individualized self-care. Williams (1993) places the beginning of a “psychology of advertising” (329) in the early part of the twentieth century, differentiating between “the old methods of the quack and the new methods of psychological warfare” (330); but if Williams is correct that advertising is a magical system employing psychological tactics, then confession is clearly one of those tactics, except its magical nature involves hiding itself in the process. In his introduction to William’s essay, Simon During (1993, 320) explains that “Williams’ advertising is ‘magic’ because it transforms commodities into glamorous signifiers... [and] makes us forget how much work and suffering went into the production of commodities” (320). The ex-gay ads transform the hard work and suffering of trying to reproduce oneself as ex-gay (itself a magical signifier for heterosexuality) by transforming that work and suffering into the glamorous signifiers of Christian grace and American freedom. Yet even though the confessional nature of each of the ads can easily be read if one digs deep enough, the magical power of prayer is what most people see.

Thus what Foucault was saying in regard to confession and sexuality in the 1970s is crystalized four decades later in the now very visible ex-gay phenomenon: except that today, through advertising and advertising-funded mass media, the ex-gay is invited to pass from a daily expression of his or her *changing* sexuality to the institutional and expensive confession of that sexuality to the *Judeo-Christian* psychologist, *Judeo-Christian* psychoanalyst, and *Judeo-Christian* counselling pastor *as well* as to medical doctor, the radio call-in host, the social

worker, his or her church approved lover, *and also*, as we will learn, the academic researcher, newspaper reporter, television anchorperson, and pop culture producer. However, the neoliberalization of these relationships has exposed a flaw in the magic of the system. When the transformation of the confessed commodity into a magical signifier (even and especially when confession itself is the commodity) is reduced to a contract relationship between an individual consumer and the “expert” producer of that commodity, the potential for the curtain to be pulled back and the magic revealed as fraud is as simple as filing an individual lawsuit. That corporate advertising has “magical” teams of high-priced, internationally trained lawyers to protect itself against this flaw does not change the fact that the flaw exists. For smaller, less socially accepted enterprises like the ex-gay movement, this flaw in the magic poses a real danger.

Rational Choice and the Commodification of Sexuality through Supply and Demand

The ex-gay movement emerged, grew, and entered the public sphere simultaneously with the adoption of neoliberalism, which McChesney (2008b) calls “the defining political economic paradigm of our time” (284). While not engaging with neoliberal tactics initially, when it began to advertise change as consumer choice, the movement effectively commodified itself within a neoliberal paradigm. As we know, Harvey (2007) defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). He explains that since the 1970s the turn to neoliberalism has been virtually ubiquitous. Raewyn Connell (2010) characterizes it as being so pervasive it “is now the ground from which labour parties, conservative parties, and liberal parties all proceed” (22). The deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state required by our neoliberal political economy has resulted on a macro scale in a rapid expansion of globalization and a new “information society.” On a micro scale, it emphasizes short-term

individual contracts, which Harvey links to a weakening of “professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family, and international” institutions (4, quoting Lyotard). In mass media, it has resulted in entertainment programming that depicts both real people and fictional characters as objects of assessment that solicit audiences to manage their own behaviour according to the advice of mediated experts outside the influence of state intervention (McCarthy 2007; Ouellette and Hay 2008). The tension between the ex-gay movement promoting both short-term contracts *and* traditional legislative institutions through its use of both neoliberal *and* neoconservative tactics and rhetoric will be addressed in the next chapter. The way the neoliberalization of mass media has been turned against the movement will be addressed in Chapter 4. Here I will examine the theory that justifies neoliberalism in terms of individual choice, wherein consumerism and entrepreneurship are linked in a form of thought that has infiltrated even religion and psychology: rational choice theory—the impetus for what some call “the commodification of everything” (Ball 2004; Gilbert 2008; Broad and Hunter 2010; Wallerstein 1983).

Advertising “freedom from homosexuality” as consumer choice plugs directly into the governmentality of neoliberalism. Some ex-gay ads state outright that it is the individual’s right to choose: a PFOX ad, for example (like the *Law & Order* ad), shows an attractive, smiling man under the heading “I chose to change” (TWO 2014a). These ads sell “freedom” as knowledge and power, and ex-gay rhetoric argues it is the individual’s choice to decide if such “freedom” is desirable for him or herself. It promotes a type of understanding, a form of normality (albeit an inverted ex-gay form of normality), and a mode of relating to oneself and others where shame is replaced by individual preference. On the surface this offers increased choice in the market, but under neoliberalism every realm is a market in which enterprising actors can rationally buy, sell, and choose. “Rationally” is not here defined in terms of reason or logic in a general sense, but of calculating costs and benefits to achieve maximum utility, wherein individuals make decisions as

“optimal responses to varying circumstances — different prices, incomes, skills, experiences, resource constraints, access to different technologies, and the like” (Iannaccone 1995, 77). Ex-gay ads offer the confessed experiences of participants as knowledge designed to direct people struggling with unwanted same-sex desire to change their understanding of the costs and benefits of sexuality. And yes, a key assumption of neoliberal thought is that the economics of choice can be extended to all social realms (Becker 1976; Buchanan 1999; 2003). As Foucault explains, neoliberalism “extend[s] the rationality of the market, the schemas of analysis it offers and the decision-making criteria it suggests, to domains which are not exclusively or not primarily economic” (2008 [1978/79], 323). Thus politics, psychology, religion, and sexuality can all be understood in terms of choices made by enterprising consumers operating out of rational self-interest in what become political, psychological, religious, and sexual marketplaces (Schofield 1995; Smith 1991; Iannaccone 1990; 1995; Posner 1994).

Take, for example, sex. In *Sex and Reason* (1994), former economist, now U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Richard A. Posner uses what he calls a libertarian rational choice perspective to analyze the domain of sexuality in terms of costs and benefits and supply and demand. He argues that the regulation of sexuality should assume the existence of a sexual marketplace in which individual actors can rationally weigh the costs and benefits of available sexual practices. He articulates a hierarchical model of wants and desires in which it is simply a matter of substituting one desire for another in a marketplace where economic actors rationally choose what is best for them given their individual circumstances. On the surface, Posner aims to redefine sexuality as a sexual market of choice rooted in John Stuart Mill’s harm principle: “Government interference with adult consensual activities is unjustified unless it can be shown to be necessary for the protection of the liberty or property of other persons” (3). He also notes that sexual regulations should be “evaluated by their practical consequences rather than by their conformity to moral,

political, or religious ideas” (437). Thus Posner exemplifies a form of neoliberalism that pretends it is not. Reaching back to the roots of liberalism to ground his theory, he emphasizes the applicability of the politics of Mill and the free market economics of Adam Smith for today; but then extends the applicability of classical economic liberalism to new realms well outside the domains analysed by either Mill or Smith. In the process, he limits Mill’s understanding of harm to a conceptualization of freedom rooted only in the ownership of property.

Foucault argues that neoliberal rational choice is a powerful form of governmentality in spite of the theory limiting overt political regulation because the rationality of the market, which can be manipulated, is itself what governs individual economic actors. As Foucault explains, a neoliberal economic actor is any person “who invests in an action, expects a profit from it, and who accepts the risk of a loss” (2008, 253). Such a “free” and “rational” individual becomes “governmentalizable” (252) because of the way in which the regulatory power of the market’s cost-benefit schema constitutes and limits the individual’s choices, forcing him or her to react to a finite number of potential investment risks within an illusion of self-direction. Those risks can themselves be manipulated. Foucault provides an example taken from economist Gary Becker (1968), whereby even crime can be regulated through market principles. In that case one no longer just disciplines and punishes the criminal type through the production and regulation of a criminal psyche within a panopticon (see Foucault 1995 [1975]), but also through an intervention in the crime market itself, where the supply and demand of crime is manipulated to change the risk level, to make it less appealing in terms of cost (2008). Thus the eighteenth and nineteenth century “political economy of the body” Foucault analyses in *Discipline and Punish* (1995), wherein the “soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body” (30), is transformed in the twentieth century. Yes, today the body is still invested with productive power through the harnessing and control of the psyche and the soul via discipline and

surveillance, but now the body is *also* encouraged to turn itself into a cultural enterprise; that is, it is encouraged to turn itself into a business in and of itself, even when engaging in crime. And as a business, the survival risks the body takes become intelligible through the schema of costs and benefits that can be managed through the manipulation of supply and demand.

Unlike with Becker and crime, the aim for Posner in defending a sexual marketplace is not to regulate the supply and demand of deviancy by increasing the risk of sex; it is to create a larger market of choice. Both are neoliberal strategies of governance, but Posner argues that gay and lesbian sexuality should not be regulated any differently than straight sexuality because gay and straight people alike should be able to choose how to present themselves and satisfy their own desires in the market based on their own cost-benefit analyses. For Posner, even straight people should have the choice to engage in consensual “opportunistic” gay sex if the benefits outweigh the costs, for example, when one is in prison with only same-sex companions. But by extending the logic of supply and demand to sex, Posner still articulates a governmentality that aims to control sex, even given increased choice, through an economic calculus that limits choice to the weighing of costs and benefits and effectively commodifies sexuality.⁴³

Another way of thinking about Posner’s economic form of governmentality is to consider the role expendable income played in how gay people came to be perceived economically in the 1990s. It is probably no coincidence that Posner makes what could be considered a pro-gay economic argument of choice (even if it can also serve to promote an ex-gay argument of choice)

⁴³ Posner does not discuss the ex-gay movement directly (his book was published before the ad campaign); however, he does reference sexual orientation change efforts from the 1960s and 70s in his discussion of the biology of sex. He determines, based on an assumption that homosexuality is biological, that it is unlikely any “true” homosexuals changed, arguing that those who reported change were either bisexual or “opportunistic homosexuals” (298; see also 308-309). But given he also argues that straight people should be allowed to choose gay sex when it is the most cost-effective means of experiencing sexual pleasure, it is reasonable to assume he would reach a similar conclusion for ex-gays. If ex-gays rationally determine that the costs of same-sex behaviour are too high compared to the benefits of Christian family and community but the costs of change are not, then they should be allowed to choose change. Even though Posner concludes that sexuality should not be regulated *by the government* according to religious and moral principles, he might argue that ex-gays should have the right to choose those principles for themselves.

at a time when gay people were coming to be seen as desirable economic consumers. However, an increased acceptance for gay rights combined with the recognition of gay consumer activity amounts to a distorted marketing picture of LGBTQ people as primarily gay, white males. That is to say, by tying gay rights to a cost-benefit governmentality, the benefits of LGBTQ sexuality are limited by the economics of race and gender. Several analyses of the contradictions and distortions of a marketing picture of gays and lesbians as an affluent group within capitalism are published in Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed's edited collection, *Homo Economics: Capitalism, Community, and Lesbian and Gay Life* (1997). Gluckman and Reed argue that in the 1990s a perception of gay and lesbian economic affluence led to a double-edged sword of increased positive and negative media representations: "the sword of the market is slicing off every segment of the gay community that is not upper-middle class, (mostly) white, and (mostly) male" (1997b, 7; see also Baker 1997). By focusing on only a small segment of the queer community, economic discrimination and poverty disappeared from the radar as gay and lesbian issues. Marketing surveys that participated in this phenomenon led profit seeking businesses to change their views of gay rights precisely because gay rights came to be seen as a potential economic boon following the subsiding of the AIDS crisis in the early 1990s.

Thus freedom of choice in the market does not amount to freedom from government. The form of government involved simply becomes economic; it manages populations via their consumption practices. In theory the objectives may be different in the neoliberal economic regulation of crime as compared to sexuality, but the cost-benefit governmentality is the same. In the ex-gay movement, however, it is interesting to note that both objectives operate together. Freedom from homosexuality is offered as freedom of choice in the market while at the same time homosexuality is defined as sin, mental illness, and physical disease so as to increase the perception of homosexuality as risk. In both cases sexuality is commodified in terms of supply

and demand and costs and benefits. Unfortunately for the ex-gay movement, commodification causes a problem because from a religious point of view, sexuality is a sacred gift from God.

Resisting Ex-gay Commodification through True Belief

To advertise ex-gay change as a product commodifies Christian sexuality not just because it is offered for sale, but because it is subjected to the regulatory power of supply and demand. I will discuss how different understandings of risk are used to manipulate supply and demand later. Here I will address the commodification of ex-gay change in relation to the movement's resistance to its commercialization wherein financial cost is minimized. Religious discourses analysed in the previous chapter that root sexuality in creation and an identity in Christ account for part of that refusal, because the belief that sexuality is sacred precludes it as a commercial product. Even some opposed to the movement recognize that commercial costs are not the real issue. As will be addressed below, gay rights advocate Jim Burroway (2008) suggests that to focus on cost or to call ex-gay therapy financially fraudulent is to misunderstand it. It risks losing sight of the fact that the movement is organized and maintained by "true believers," (his words), by those who believe they hold the truth regardless of arguments or evidence to the contrary. However, while the movement may resist its own commodification, as an advertised service that justifies itself through the discourse of choice and sometimes requires the exchange of money as part of short-term contracts, it cannot escape the effects of commodification. Thus while ex-gay resistance to commodification is important to note, commodification is still a factor to consider.

There is little in the academic literature that addresses the financial cost of the movement critically. In the psychological literature it is a near non-issue⁴⁴ although it is addressed in brief in some of the ethnographies. Erzen (2006) describes the cost of the residential program she

⁴⁴ The APA Task Force report on reparative therapy (2009) claims to examine its harmful effects in several ways, including cost (24), but it only addresses cost once, in a reference to the "time, money and energy" required for ex-gay change efforts, and only cites three sources that themselves barely address the issue (68).

studied, New Hope Ministries, in 2001: \$1200 upfront and a monthly fee of \$850 (97).⁴⁵ She notes that the program did not have the financial resources to offer scholarships, as with others, but it did arrange for employment in the community to offset some costs. For foreign participants ineligible to work in the United States, there was the option of volunteering in the New Hope offices (97). Ethnographers Barton (2012), Moon (2005), and Wolkomir (2006), however, either fail to address financial cost at all or do so only in passing. Barton, for example, devotes only a few lines at the end of her one chapter on the movement: “The recent merger of Focus on the Family’s ‘Love Won Out’ conferences with Exodus International (due to ‘financial challenges’) suggest that ex-gay ministries, particularly large conference-style events, do not break even on costs;” she then quotes former Exodus leader, now out-gay man Michael Bussee, as hoping that “one day groups like Exodus will go out of business” (Barton 150). In other words, she buries the costs of therapy within the context of the movement’s larger financial problems. Those problems are well known and will be addressed in the following chapter, but here they indicate that the movement’s commodification of confession does not often lead to financial profit.

The problem of trying to quantify individual ex-gay costs concretely is that the movement is a very loosely organized phenomenon that operates through local church ministries, larger specialized ex-gay ministries, *and* local private psychotherapists, with the umbrella organizations NARTH, Exodus (until its shutdown), and (now) the Restored Hope Network operating as information and connection portals (Besen 2003; Erzen 2006; RHN 2012). In other words, there is a difficulty to quantify dispersion of costs in the movement precisely because there is a difficulty to categorize dispersion of organizations and practices in the movement. Within this model, all of the church ministries operate as not-for-profit organizations and all of the private psychotherapy practices operate within the regional rules established for any psychotherapists in

⁴⁵ New Hope still runs a weekly drop-in meeting but has discontinued its residential program (New Hope 2014).

private practice. Because of the large size and uncoordinated organization of the movement in general, it is impossible to determine just how many groups are cheaply run church-based operations, how many are more expensive programs offered by special ex-gay ministries, and how many operate through private psychotherapy practice.⁴⁶ There is, however, no indication that any of these organizations make very much money.

Within the debate the issue of costs sometimes appears, albeit in piecemeal fashion and with little that allows for any concrete quantification. For example, some prices are posted on ministry websites, which themselves operate as promotional adverts (or, as we will learn in Chapter 4, “owned media”) but not all ministries do this. Of course, as not-for-profit groups, the churches that offer non-licensed counselling are not supposed to generate profit, and there is no evidence they do. But they are allowed to charge fees for the services they offer, and those fees can vary. Many of the residential programs have been discontinued, but some special not-for-profit ministries offer weekend retreats, workshops, and self-help home programs ranging from \$500 to \$2500. Many also offer phone or weekly group therapy at costs ranging from \$10 per group meeting to \$75 per hour for private phone counselling and almost all sell or link to popular ex-gay self-help books, pamphlets, DVDs, CD-Roms and MP3s ranging from \$1.99 to \$39.95. In spite of the media applying the term “reparative therapy” as a generic term for all conversion efforts, and in spite of confession being at the root of most, there is no one counselling model to which the movement adheres; however, many church programs model themselves after drug or

⁴⁶ Barton (2012) concludes that because conservative Christians value the authority of the Bible over the State, it is likely that many ex-gays “are open to receiving spiritual guidance from those without a state-sanctioned credential” (247-248, note 5 of Chapter 5). However, her data comes primarily from participants in the United States Bible Belt and may not represent the values of participants across North America, much less across the world. Also, concluding that most Christians are more open to receiving guidance from unlicensed religious leaders does not necessarily mean they would not also be open to receiving guidance from licenced psychotherapists. Certainly there is plenty of evidence in the discourse of both, and both NARTH and (until recently) Exodus (and now the Restored Hope Network) provide links to religious-based and so-called “secular” psychological-based therapists and counselors on their websites. Even the fraud lawsuit to be discussed below describes “conversion therapists that include licensed and unlicensed counselors available at a variety of locations to provide services in person, by phone or by video conferencing” (Ferguson, et al. 2012, 13). But, of course, even those licenced psychotherapists who offer “secular” conversion therapy have strong links to conservative religious groups (Erzen 2006; Throckmorton 2011a).

alcohol treatment, some even replicating specific 12-step programs (Erzen 2006). Thus, like most 12-step programs, many ex-gay practices are financed by church donations, and participants are encouraged to donate but often without any requirement to do so (Wolkomir 2006; for comparison see also, Learn About Alcoholism 2013). When that is considered in relation to Erzen's reference to scholarships and her documentation of community work programs and foreign residential participants working for the movement to help cover costs, it becomes clear that the religious side of the movement works hard to make itself affordable.

The cost of ex-gay therapy offered through a licenced private therapist can vary as widely as any kind of private psychotherapy. Therapists do not often list costs on their websites, but the costs of some profiled in the media are sometimes reported. In a *Washington Post* article about former therapist Richard A. Cohen, it says he “conducts individual therapy at a cost of \$150 for an hour-long session” (Boodman 2005). In an article for the online magazine *Salon*, Mark Benjamin, who pretended to be gay to “find out how ‘reparative therapy’ works,” documents the cost of his one-hour session as \$140 (Benjamin 2005). On a Christian transgendered website devoted to breaking down the gender binary in Christian theology, the cost of reparative therapy with Jerry Leach, “a self identified transsexual who has managed to suppress his desire/need to be Jennifer,” is quoted as \$85 per hour (Stewart 2013). As high as these costs may seem, they are consistent with the cost of psychological therapy in general, which “can range anywhere from \$5 or \$10 at a community mental health center or other government funded agency to over \$200 for a doctoral level practitioner in private practice” (AllPsych 2003).⁴⁷ Even the higher cost weekend retreats, residential and at-home programs referenced above are comparable in cost to many licenced drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, both residential and outpatient.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The cost of psychotherapy in Canada can range from \$60 to \$120 per session (Toronto Psychotherapists n.d.). In the United States it can range from \$100 - \$250 per 50 minute hour (DiPaolo n.d.).

⁴⁸ It is not uncommon for residential rehab “to cost thousands of dollars a month or more... [and] outpatient drug treatment may [cost...] several hundred dollars each month” (TheGoodDrugsGuide n.d., author's italics).

A recent survey published on the *Beyond Ex-Gay* website by ex-gay survivor, now sexology professor Jallen Rix suggests that while participation for some can indeed be very expensive, for many it is not (Rix and BeyondEx-Gay 2013a). Of the 373 participants who responded to the question about cost, 38% paid, across several years, between \$1 and \$499 compared to only 12% who paid more than \$10,000, with approximately 50% paying between \$500 and \$9999.⁴⁹ In a *Huffington Post* article about the survey, “Rix acknowledges that the survey results are not scientific and do not provide a definitive statement on the costs or benefits of efforts to change sexual orientation,” nor does the survey “distinguish between therapy performed by licensed therapists and counseling provided through ministries;” but he maintains the survey does point to “broad trends that emerged in the responses” (Shapiro 2013). In actual fact, Rix’s survey is no less scientific than most ex-gay studies, including published studies of efficacy and harm (see below), but the survey does provide useful data for a general understanding of financial cost. What is particularly interesting is the relatively large number who report paying less than \$500 and the relatively low number that report paying more than \$10,000. The survey also quantifies the average time spent in the movement as “6 years and 10 months, with a range of fifty years (19 people only attended a month or less while one person maxed the scale at 50 years)” (Rix and BeyondEx-gay 2013b). These numbers suggest, even if they cannot scientifically represent the movement as a whole, that many ex-gays who participated for a year or more report paying costs at the lower end of the spectrum.

⁴⁹ The survey also asks, “What kind of ex-gay activities did you participate in?” Of 414 people who answered, reparative therapy was only seven on the list, with 35% reporting such activity. The top three answers, “received prayer,” “one-on-one counseling,” and “self-guided” were each reported by approximately 70%. Heterosexual dating (58.5%), memorizing scripture (50.5%), and attending drop-in groups (38.5%) were the next most popular. The remaining 15 practices, which include fasting, behaviour modification, and exorcism, range from 35% to 5% (Rix and BeyondEx-Gay 2013c). Obviously these answers are not exclusive of each other, demonstrating that most ex-gays participate in more than one practice. They also show that ex-gay practices and services, whether paid for or received for free, are varying and diverse, which is one of the reasons they are so difficult to cost. It is important to note, however, that all of these practices require confession of the problem first, if only in private prayer to God.

Although he insists it is a mistake to accuse the movement of fraud, Jim Burroway (2008) is not unaware of the high cost of some ex-gay services. He discusses them in a video he posted to his blog's YouTube channel in 2008. Following a title that reads, "It's Not About Money, They're True Believers," Burroway describes the cost of a recent Love Won Out conference he attended (\$50 in advance, \$60 at the door) but then notes that only about 800 people were in attendance. He concludes, "These things are not about making money. I believe they'd be doing this [even] if... it didn't cost them a red cent." He also describes the figures quoted at the Love in Action booth for their now discontinued residential program and includes a screenshot from their website to corroborate his figures: in 2008 it cost \$3,500 for one month of residential ex-gay counselling, \$7000 for three months, \$4,500 for an additional three months, and \$1,500 for every additional month that followed. These figures are not dissimilar to the figures quoted by Erzen above and they fall within the range of those accounted for in Rix's survey. Burroway acknowledges the costs are high, saying they can "add up very quickly;" but he also notes what was discussed above: that the locally run church programs typically operate on a "very tight shoe-string budget," suggesting most are relatively affordable, if not free. He reiterates: "if we lose sight of the fact that they're true believers, we will always underestimate them."

Following Burroway, I do not argue that the movement resists its own commodification *just* because some of its services are given away for free within a charitable context. Indeed, the popular YouTube animation of Slavoj Žižek's (2010) lecture on the ethical implications of charitable giving is clear that today charity has become the "human face" of capitalism and is a "basic constituent of our economy." Žižek is not the only scholar to examine "the commercialization of charity and the commodification of compassion" (Moore 2008, 137; see also Kapoor 2013). So I recognize that the charitable status of many ex-gay groups does not protect them from commodification. But in this case, when counselling is donating out of

“compassion” for struggling gays, that compassion is not designed *by the movement* to imbed the ethics of charity within consumerism, to improve the brand of the church, or to create profit for the church’s business partners. Those effects may be the result, but charitable donations of ex-gay change arise out of their true belief that homosexuality is a sinful disease that needs to be eradicated, not just for the good of society, but because God’s word demands it. Even for-profit ex-gay counselling and therapy is rooted in the true beliefs of psychotherapists rather than their desire to maintain a thriving business; indeed, many such therapists are ex-gays themselves.

Drawing on Marx, Vincent Mosco (2009) defines commodification as simply “the process of transforming use to exchange value” (11); but when one “truly” believes in the value of what is being exchanged, such a transformation will (like ex-gay change itself) seldom be complete. So in spite of ex-gay change being commodified through the marketing strategies used to sell the idea that change is necessary, the true beliefs underlying the product sold highlight its use-value (at least discursively) as more important than its exchange value, and that is not just a marketing gimmick. That change is so often donated as charity, or that arrangements are often made to help participants absorb the cost, only underlies the point. The nature of the product itself is also a factor here. As we know, the practice of ex-gay conversion requires confession, both in terms of confessions of desire and testimonies of truth. There is thus a double exchange at play here: an exchange of money for the product of change and an exchange of confessed desire for a testimony of truth. The testimonial side of the commodification of ex-gay confession requires true belief, even and especially on the part of the seller.

At the same time, however, when the movement joined with the Christian Right to promote ex-gay change through marketing and advertising, using the rhetoric of choice, it could not help but sell out, at least in part, to that discourse. By entering the market with the offer of change and a new ex-gay identity, the movement subjected itself to the limits of cost-benefit

thought. According to Tina Fetner's (2005) analysis of the ex-gay ads, the 1998 campaign was part of a symbolic contest in which the Christian antigay movement claimed ownership of several symbols, including church, God, family, America, free speech, truth and love (79-83). Although she does not use the word "benefit," in effect, Fetner argues that the ex-gay ads offer as benefits the above listed symbols as products for purchase even if they are sometimes given away as charitable donations. Spitzer (2003) notes in his controversial ex-gay study that part of the benefit of reparative therapy is the demystification of gender roles for those who "suffer from a lifelong feeling of 'being on the outside'" (36). Within a neoliberal mode of thought, then, gender too becomes a product for purchase. Reparative therapists Nicolosi, Byrd, and Potts (2000) list seven benefits to ex-gay therapy: growth in self-esteem, self-understanding, and self-acceptance; reduced feelings of shame and guilt; increased feelings of acceptance and love; increased intimacy with one's spouse; decreased homosexual thoughts and behaviors; increased feelings of masculinity or femininity; and healthier relationships with others (1081). Through the advertising of change, all these claimed benefits become commodities.

In the ex-gay movement, then, commodification and true belief coexist in a conflicted union. The use of neoliberal rhetoric results in religious and psychological change becoming colonized by and made intelligible through a rational choice cost-benefit grid that resists but does not escape the process of commodification. That true belief sits at the foundation of this change, whether directly exchanged for money or not, cannot be dismissed but neither can the effects of commercialization. One strategy employed to downplay the commercialization of change is to direct the problem of risk away from money and towards health and sin. That is evident in the very advertisements that tied the ex-gay movement to a neoliberal political economy to begin with. On the one hand, that strategy subsumes the problem of commercialization within the larger problem of salvation, now understood in terms of being saved from sin *and* disease, which

allows true belief and confessed testimony to trump cost. However, while change is promoted in relation to particular understandings of God's truth and physical health, it now also requires the calculating of participation costs (time, energy and money) in relation to the risks of remaining unhealthy and sinful. In other words, the risk of lost time and money is calculated in relation to the risk of lost salvation. There is still ample space for true belief here, but in neoliberalism, risk itself is a political economic concept that participates in the economic colonization of all of society. However, in such a totalizing context, the ex-gay movement is in no position to monopolize risk. Risk can be and is used against them as well. What is interesting is that in this context, there would no knowledge of risk without confession.

Psychological Health Risks and Confessional Cost-Benefit Ratios

While the ex-gay movement emphasizes the risk of homosexuality in its cost-benefit model of ex-gay change, increasingly the risk of psychological harm is emphasized by its opponents. In both cases, the knowledge of risk is used to change the cost-benefit ratio of choosing to accept either an LGBTQ or an ex-gay identity. Ulrich Beck (1992 [1986]), who describes contemporary society as being a "risk society," defines risk in relation to today's, "systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself" (21). Distinguishing between risk and natural dangers, Beck characterizes risk as depending on decisions, as being produced by society, and as thus being "politically reflexive" (183). In other words, risk, which is human made, has "become a political issue... that transforms incalculable hazards into calculated risks" (Elliott 2002, 295).⁵⁰ That places the use

⁵⁰ Risk society is similar to Foucault's "biopolitics" (his initial grounding for governmentality), the modern liberal practice of managing populations through statistical analysis and rationalized calculations of bodies (2000b [1983]; 2007b [1977/78]; 2008). However, Wearing and Dowse (2000) argue that Beck's risk society does not so much describe three centuries of liberalism; it "provides a framework for understanding shifts towards a risk society as a post-welfare future" (1) wherein the uncertainty of socially manufactured risk impacts on identity production in the "individualizing and normalizing mode of neo-liberalism" (3). Elliott (2002) also considers risk society in terms of "the shift from Keynesian to monetarist economic policies," which is the economic basis of neoliberalism (305).

(and the production) of risk in the ex-gay debate firmly within a political economy of modern confession where confessions of medical and psychological problems related to one's true sex become the basis of both cost-benefit calculations and cost-benefit discourse.

As we know from the ex-gay ads, the risks emphasized by the movement are sexually transmitted diseases, unsafe and immoral sex acts, and psychological problems considered intrinsic to the homosexual condition. Even violence, death and suicide are promoted as risks. In an article posted to the Restored Hope Network website by ex-gay David Kyle Foster (2012), the following dangers of the gay lifestyle, all confessed from his past, are listed: "drug addiction, alcoholism, sex addiction, voyeurism, exhibitionism, the desire to take my life and the dangerous risks to lose it, etc." (n.p.). However, when not relying on the personal confessions of ex-gays, selected statistics from mainstream AIDS research is cited, either research from the 1980s before AIDS education became widespread or more recent research where statistics are quoted without the context provided by the cited researchers. For example, both in a PFOX pamphlet and on the website Ex-gayTruth.com, the increased risk of contracting AIDS for gay males is cited as intrinsic to homosexuality using statistics from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Coy 2012; PFOX 2014) without acknowledgment that the Center cites antigay stigma and discrimination as causal factors in the increase of those problems (CDC 2011; 2014).

When such data is not decontextualized, it is often attributed to research from NARTH, the ex-gay "scientific" umbrella group that devotes most of its attention to highlighting the risks of homosexual behaviour. A NARTH funded project called "Facts About Youth" summarizes its article on homosexual health risks with the following concluding statement: "Identification with a GLB community appears to lead to an increase in promiscuity, which in turn leads to a myriad of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and even early death" (Facts About Youth n.d.). On its own FAQ page, NARTH (n.d.) writes, "individuals who engage in homosexual behavior have a

significantly greater risk for some physical and psychological health problems compared to heterosexually oriented individuals,” including “anxiety, depression, [and] suicidality,” and it cites the probability of getting AIDS from male-male anal sex as being “roughly 18 times greater than the estimated risk for vaginal intercourse.” One prominent NARTH article about homosexual health risks is devoted to the practice of “fisting,” which it suggests is a dangerous and common form of “homosexual gratification” (Cretella and Sutton n.d.).⁵¹ A note at the bottom of the article links to five more articles on gay related health risks and informs the reader they “are just a sample of over 80 articles on the NARTH website... written on various aspects of the medical and mental health risks associated with homosexual behaviors” (ibid). In fact, in a 121 page response to the APA’s negative report on conversion therapies (see below), NARTH devotes nearly 35 pages to several decades worth of research on health risks associated with homosexual behaviour (including, again, the risk of fisting), although it is important to note that none of the research is critically assessed (Phelan, Whitehead and Sutton 2009).⁵²

It is interesting that while threats of damnation and hell for homosexuals are still common in the larger conservative Christian discourse on homosexuality (see Chapter 3), within ex-gay discourse itself it is the medical and psychological risks that are highlighted, with either personal confessions of one’s dark past or NARTH funded research (much of it rooted in the confessions of study participants) providing the “facts” for the calculations of gay risk.⁵³ That is itself an effect of the neoliberalization of the discourse. As an advertised form of change that is justified

⁵¹ The article defines fisting as “the sexual practice of inserting a large object or one’s fist into the anus of one’s sexual partner, in some cases up to one’s forearm” and falsely alleges that government funded LGBTQ groups are teaching the practice to children as young as 14. A quick Google search reveals this allegation to be prominent among several right wing online news sources, blogs and video posts in the United States where it is referred to as Obama’s “Fistgate” (see LaBarbera 2009; Mass Resistance 2012; Unruh 2009).

⁵² NARTH’s research is generally published in its own journal (the *Journal of Human Sexuality*) rather than in mainstream peer-reviewed psychological journals, and the organization is frequently accused of misrepresenting research and is considered by many to produce “junk science” (Respect My Research 2009; see also Bayly 2008a; Bayly 2008b; Beckstead 2001; Besen 2009a; Diamond 2008; Lenz 2012; Religious Tolerance 2010).

⁵³ The calculation of homosexual risk was even deployed by quoting HIV statistics among gay black youth in an open letter to football player Michael Sam after Sam confessed to being gay (LaBarbera & McCartney 2014).

through the rhetoric of freedom and choice, the risk of not changing needs to be calculable. Most medical and psychological studies include quotable statistics whereas no such statistics exist for incidents of life after death salvation. At the same time this discourse of calculable risk extends also to those opposed to the movement, where the need to calculate risk manifests itself in psychological studies that focus either on statistically measuring efficacy and harm (the psychological equivalents of benefits and costs) or on problematizing the experience of change so as to highlight the qualitative risks of self-delusion and psychological harm.

Of course, the most well-known psychological study of efficacy is the 2001/2003 study by Robert Spitzer approved and promoted by the movement that has since been confessed by its author as methodologically unsound (Spitzer 2003; Spitzer 2012). Based on phone interviews with 143 men and 57 women, most of whom were referred by Exodus and NARTH, Spitzer reported that 100% of females and 98% of males testified to at least some change of attraction towards heterosexuality, with 84% of women and 50% of men reporting exclusively heterosexual attraction and 7% of women and 24% of men reporting predominantly heterosexual attraction five years after therapy.⁵⁴ At the time, Spitzer concluded from those confessions that it is possible for some people to change their sexuality. Not surprisingly, it did not take long for several critical studies of efficacy problematizing that conclusion to appear.

In fact, the study that is most often used to combat Spitzer's is one that was conducted and published during the same period by Shidlo and Schroeder (2002). Although not given nearly as much media attention as the Spitzer study, the Shidlo and Schroeder study is one of the most cited in the psychological literature. Of 202 participants, 87% confessed their efforts were

⁵⁴ Those figures are later qualified when Spitzer reports that only 37% of females and 11% of males reported complete or near complete change *in all ten* sexual orientation measures used, which included a sexual attraction scale, a self-identity scale, a frequency of sexual behavior scale, a yearning for romance scale, and percentages for masturbation and use of gay pornography (42). Also, Spitzer maintained complete heterosexual conversion to be rare, offering no account of efficacy in general because he confined his subjects only to those claiming success.

unsuccessful with only 13% testifying to success.⁵⁵ However, 77% admitted experiencing significant long-term damage, including disorientation and confusion, depression, substance abuse, and serious attempts at suicide.⁵⁶ The study, which (quite significantly) calls itself a “consumers’ report,” has become foundational for anti-ex-gay calculations of risk because it concludes that ex-gay change is probably harmful for most. Indeed, the 2009 American Psychological Association report on reparative therapy, which received widespread media attention, relied heavily on the Shidlo and Schroeder study for its own conclusions (APA Task Force). That study examined 83 peer-reviewed articles published between 1960 and 2007 and concluded, “efforts to change sexual orientation are unlikely to be successful and involve some risk of harm” (v). Officially tabled in Toronto at the 2009 annual convention, the report was followed by a resolution, adopted 125 to 4, stating that mental health professionals should not tell clients they can change their sexual orientation (Crary 2009).

Not all critical studies of efficacy quantify harm. Many focus instead on either the low percentage of people who claim success or the unsuccessful experience of trying. For example, A. Lee Beckstead (2001), who began his study by describing the ex-gay advertising campaign, analyzes reports of change in terms of inconsistencies between self-reports and objective data rooted in measurements of sexual orientation. He concludes that the movement’s confessions of change are more about identity than changing orientation.⁵⁷ By that he means ex-gays testify to having a new identity, “ex-gay,” and may even change their behaviour, but their underlying feelings of sexual desire do not change. Several studies, however, do emphasize harm. Smith, Bartlett and King (2004), interviewed 31 people in Britain who testified to no benefits from ex-gay treatment, confessing instead to an increased sense of isolation and shame. Beckstead and

⁵⁵ Of that 13%, only 4% reported a complete heterosexual shift, 3% claimed they were mostly successful (some counting celibacy as success), and 6% confessed they were successful but still struggling.

⁵⁶ Significantly, some people, including people who were unsuccessful and have since taken on a gay identity, testified to positive experiences from therapy, and some even claimed both help *and* harm.

⁵⁷ Other studies that emphasize lack of efficacy include Fjelstrom (2013) and Maccio (2011).

Morrow (2004) conducted a study of Mormon participants in a program called Evergreen. They found that many who did not change confessed the following harms: “false hopes and disappointments, increased self-hatred, decreased self-esteem, increased denial and emotional distress, dehumanization and being untrue to self, increased depression and suicidality, lost loves and friendships, wasted time and resources, a slowing down of the ‘coming-out’ process, decreased capacity for same-sex intimacy, and lost faith and spirituality” (671). Of the total sample, eight attempted suicide and one was hospitalized for a nervous breakdown. Weiss, et al. (2010) published a qualitative study of three ex-gay and two ex-ex-gay internet message boards that found only 5% of ex-gays testified to success with most of the sample confessing to struggles with pornography, masturbation, fantasies and clandestine affairs as well as with depression, suicidal ideation, and guilt. Former ex-gays confessed to guilt, depression, identity confusion, and fear. Although few of these studies are addressed in the popular discourse, they are central to the mainstream psychological discourse deployed against the movement.

A recent study that has received attention in several gay and lesbian magazines and blogs as well as in some mainstream news sources is the survey by Jallen Rix quoted earlier. In addition to the cost of therapy, Rix’s study also attempts to quantify harm, reporting that of 413 people who answered the question, “Do you feel you were harmed by your ex-gay experience?,” only 31 (7.5%) were *not* harmed, 76 (18.5%) confessed to being “harmed a little,” 110 (26.5%) to being just “harmed,” 129 (31%) to being “harmed a lot,” and 67 (16%) confessed ex-gay change “devastated my life” (Rix and BeyondEx-Gay 2013d). A follow up question listed over 45 different forms of harm, including fear of sex, paranoia, feeling suicidal, loss of faith, and loss of money. The top responses of shame, emotional harm, and depression were reported by 309, 305, and 276 people respectively (Rix and BeyondEx-Gay 2013e). The results were reported in *The Huffington Post* (Shapiro 2013), on the website *Think Progress* (Ford 2013), and by

GLAAD (Giovanniello 2013). On the same website that published the survey, ex-gay survivor and activist Peterson Toscano documents his own experience speaking to over 1000 ex-gay survivors (Toscano 2013). He lists several common experiences of harm, including emotional, psychological, spiritual, relationship, financial, career, physical, sexual, and developmental harm and he writes several paragraphs justifying his use of the label ex-gay survivor.

Most of the studies of efficacy and harm that are used to quantify the costs and benefits of ex-gay change (including more sympathetic studies to be discussed below) suffer from the same methodological problems; ironically, the same problems that Spitzer admitted to when he apologized for his own study in 2012: over-reliance on potentially biased self-reports, imprecise definitions and measurements (of not only efficacy and harm, but of sexual orientation itself), a lack of differentiation between practices, a lack of longitudinal methodology, and no control groups (APA Task Force).⁵⁸ That researchers on both sides of the debate point out the same problems in each other's studies without fully accounting for their own is common. In particular, the problematic reliance on participant self-reports by researchers across the debate is often used against rival studies to demonstrate bias. The Spitzer study was problematized by researchers critical of the movement for relying on the biased self-reports of ex-gays recruited through ex-gay organizations (Drescher and Zucker 2006), and the Shidlo and Schroeder study was problematized by NARTH researchers for relying on the biased self-reports of failed ex-gays recruited through LGBT organizations (Rosik 2014). In other words, in the quantification of ex-gay change, confession itself is the problem. Self reports are both confessions of desire, unwanted and wanted, and the sacrifice of desire (yes, dear researcher, I once desired same-sex relations, but I eliminated them and now I desire opposite sex relations, or I once desired change, but it did not work and now I accept my same-sex desire), and testimonies of change or lack of

⁵⁸ And as was already noted, many health risk studies relied on by NARTH and other antigay elements of the discourse are either now discredited studies from before homosexuality was declassified as a mental illness or more recent studies whose conclusions are misrepresented by NARTH.

change (it is true dear researcher, my change was successful, or the truth is, change is not possible because I did not change). They are also confessions of illness and its sacrifice, for both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays (yes, Mr. and Mrs. Scientist, I was once homosexual, which is diseased, but now I am not, or because I tried to change and it did not work, I now suffer from depression and suicidal ideation and need help to eliminate these problems) and testimonies of self-emergence and pride (it is true, Mr. and Mrs. Scientist, I am ex-gay and I am proud to be ex-gay, or I am gay and proud to be gay.) But scientifically, how can we accept such self-reports as truth? From the pro-gay point of view, ex-gays are biased and self-deluded and will confess that they have changed even if they have not; from the ex-gay point of view, gays and lesbians are biased and self-deluded, misunderstanding their own suffering, which is not caused by conversion therapy but by their continued participation in a sinful and diseased lifestyle.

But if confessed self-reports are a key problem in the accurate accounting of risk in the ex-gay debate, they are also the solution and the foundation. Without them, there would be no studies of efficacy or harm to quantify as part of the cost-benefit calculations required to assess risk; and without them the easiest way to discount rival research and increase the risk level of rival practices would disappear. Consider the studies published by A. Lee Beckstead. As already noted, in 2001, he published a study designed in part to add to already existing research demonstrating that, “self-reports of sexual reorientation have not been consistent with objective data” (93). Although here specified only to sexual reorientation, in a paper written in response to the Spitzer study (2006), Beckstead notes *in general* that “self-reports are unreliable measures” (78). Yet Beckstead’s 2001 conclusion, that “No substantial or generalized heterosexual arousal was reported, and participants were not able to modify their tendency to be attracted erotically to their same sex [even though they] continued to self-identify as heterosexual” (103), is itself rooted in confessed self-reports. The 2004 study by Beckstead referenced above (co-authored

with Susan L. Morrow), which demonstrated conversion therapies have, “the potential to increase self-hatred, hopelessness, discrimination, and difficulties in intimacy and led some to commit (and others to attempt) suicide” (686), was similarly rooted in self-reports. In no way discounting the validity of Beckstead’s research, which he characterizes as analyzing experience rather than trying to prove efficacy or harm, the point I want to make is that the problematic role confession plays here is representative of the problematic role it plays in the entire debate: in fact, the problem of confession *is* the debate. Through it the freedom to choose is actualized and through it the cost, benefit and risk of one’s choice is produced and deployed.

Thus the production of gay and ex-gay risk, itself the result of the confessed problematization of one’s true sex, is used throughout the ex-gay debate as a means to construct and manipulate cost-benefit ratios against the cost-benefit ratios of the opposing camp. Although the rhetoric of choice is deployed as justification for the movement, unlike in Posner’s model of sexuality where a larger market of choice is the objective, here Becker’s model of crime prevention takes precedence. On both sides of the debate risk is deployed to limit choice, to manipulate the supply and demand of identity production so as to privilege one identity over another precisely because, it is argued, there is too much risk involved in accepting the oppositional identity. In fact, the objective is to use risk to narrow choice down to only one option: if one experiences same-sex desire in the movement one must become ex-gay and struggle to become straight; outside the movement, one must be (remain) gay. Either way, one must be one’s “true self” rooted in one’s “true sex.”

The ex-gay debate, then, provides evidence to support Beck’s (1992) insight that in neoliberalism risk is a political problem because it is just as often deployed to manipulate the outcome of cultural battles like the ex-gay debate as it is to assist individuals in making personal choices in the marketplace. However, in *A God of One’s Own* (2010 [2008]), Beck argues that

“the age of individualization is also the age of do-it-yourself religions” (49), wherein he differentiates between two types of faith: a more traditional closed system rooted in the God “assigned to us at birth,” and an open system of personal choice rooted in a “God who has a firm place and a clear voice in the intimate heart of one’s own life” (139). Beck privileges the God of choice over the God of tradition. As Gabe Mythen (2013) puts it, “Despite the obduracy of Abrahamic faiths, Beck predicts that the free will of individuals will chip away at the exterior of monotheistic religions and shape their future façade” (121). But Mythen critiques Beck’s argument for not considering the appeal for many of a unique “value form” in the monotheistic faiths that privileges tradition and allows people to root their faith in “entrenched ancient narratives” (123). He argues that there is still a strong tendency in religion today wherein “an anomalous aspect of identity construction in which the ‘do-it-yourself’ maxim is replaced by the godly mantra ‘do-it-for-me’” (Mythen 2013, 123). Summarized in this way, it appears as if both Beck and Mythen oversimplify religion in their arguments, failing to recognize profound differences related to forms of individualism and tradition that operate even between different Christian groups, not to mention different religious groups in general. However, in relation to ex-gay change, this summary helps highlight an important tension within the movement. Because in the ex-gay movement, even evangelical Christians who would not normally think of themselves as engaging in a form of faith rooted in ancient traditions nevertheless accept unquestioningly a traditional antigay interpretation of scripture while simultaneously allowing the objects of their faith to be deployed in an economic truth game stressing individualism and free choice. Thus an ex-gay acceptance of the expansion of neoliberal choice operating in tandem with the development and strategic deployment of calculable risks situates the ex-gay movement in an awkward space between conservative Christian beliefs and economic individualization. In that space, ex-gay participants risk engaging in individualized practices that may not work and may

cause psychological harm in a lifelong struggle of confessional work. In a neoliberal context such active engagement is called entrepreneurship; in an ex-gay context, it requires one to subject oneself to the true beliefs of the movement as a heterosexual entrepreneur of the self.

Heterosexual Entrepreneurs of the Self in a Psychologized Enterprise Culture

By employing the rhetoric of choice and engaging in cost-benefit truth games, the ex-gay movement situates its therapeutics within a particular understanding of subjectivity: that of a neoliberal actor defined by both rational choice and entrepreneurship. As we know, Foucault (2008) defines a neoliberal actor as any person “who invests in an action, expects a profit from it, and who accepts the risk of a loss” (253). That is nearly the dictionary definition of an entrepreneur, minus only the requirement of creating a business or enterprise. But there is more to Foucault’s definition than just accounting for investment, profit and loss. For Foucault, a neoliberal actor is him or herself an enterprise, “enterprise” being a notion that is diffused and multiplied in neoliberalism (148). Even as a consumer, Foucault notes, drawing again on Becker (1968), a neoliberal actor is a producer and entrepreneur of his or her own satisfaction, and through consuming invests in him or herself as human capital (Foucault 2008, 226-7). The way neoliberal thought seeks to colonize non-economic domains is precisely through a redefinition of labour as entrepreneurship. Now labour is no longer considered just an element of production, but also as an agent of change. Thus *homo oeconomicus*, or “economic man [*sic*,]” is not just the classical economic “man of exchange” but “human capital,” an enterprise, an entrepreneur of the self: “the stake of all neoliberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo oeconomicus* as partner of exchange with a *homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself” (226).

As it happens, Foucault reached back to the medieval Christian pastoral to explain the individualizing effects of modern political and economic forms of governmentality. He extended a paradoxical medieval Christian concern with sacrificing the flock to save the individual so the

entire flock could also be saved into the biopolitics of modern liberal and neoliberal capitalism through the reciprocal play of “individualisation and totalisation” (1999 [1979], 152; see also 2007b; 2008). In the ideal of early Christian governmentality, when confession was but one of many disciplinary practices, the role of the pastor was to guide and save one’s flock by affirming the importance of the individual, not *over* the group, but as equal to and as an individuated part of the group. If one member of the flock was lost, paradoxically, the entire flock had to be sacrificed to find, bring back, and save that one member, precisely for the salvation of the entire flock, but precisely for the salvation of the pastor also. Although the paradoxical concern with the whole flock and every individual in the flock was initially conceived of in spiritual terms and directed towards salvation in the afterlife, in liberal governmentality it was modified to become a worldly focus on managing individuals in the present; to “police” them as members of large populations that could be studied and organized statistically.⁵⁹ An economic actor today is individualized as a singular self-enterprise but is integrated into the totality through an economic governmentality that extends the notion of the enterprise to all social realms so everyone collectively becomes an enterprise even when defined as a consumer. In other words, neoliberal thought modifies both pastoral governmentality and classical economic thought to advocate for a collective governmentality of individual free choice rooted in the production of human capital that is itself an investment, but just as often through individual consumption as through producing goods in a traditional business. In that view *homo oeconomicus* becomes the

⁵⁹ In the mercantilist transition to modern capitalism the paradoxical concern with simultaneous individualizing and totalizing operated through disciplinary practices designed to ensure the salvation of the state through the large-scale policing of individual welfare in the state’s interest; in early modern laissez-faire capitalism the concern operated through the state’s modified role in creating and protecting a civil society that could police itself through economic exchanges rooted in individual self-interest; in the Keynesian era the concern operated through calculated state interventions in the economy designed to protect both civil society as a whole and individuals in particular from the excesses of individual self-interest (individual self-interest had to be protected from itself); but today, in the neoliberal era, it operates through the paradoxical creation and management of multiple “free” markets where individual self-interest is itself produced through the guidance of experts but defined as entrepreneurship precisely so the state does not need to intervene. In that sense, neoliberalism returns to the pastoral idea of sacrificing the flock to save the individual to save the flock because welfare state intervention is sacrificed for the good of the choosing individual precisely to save the state as the protector and arbitrator of competing enterprises.

paradoxical correlate of a specifically neoliberal governmentality, one that no longer retreats in *laissez-faire* style from regulating the “free” market but instead actively intervenes to extend a market model to all social domains as a primary grid of intelligibility. *Homo oeconomicus*, then, becomes “someone who pursues his [sic] own interest, and whose interest is such that it converges spontaneously with the interest of others... [and] who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment” (2008, 270).

The pastoral paradox arises here because in neoliberalism the economic actor left alone to choose is obligated to choose through cost-benefit analyses in artificially regulated markets that are not primarily economic but could not be artificially regulated without individual choice. The labour of ex-gay change conceived of in neoliberal terms, whether paid for or not, is thus entrepreneurial; it produces (or is claimed to produce) if not full heterosexual human capital than at least heteronormative human capital. The ex-gay entrepreneur of the self invests in the action of sexual orientation change, expects to derive from that the cultural profit of heterosexuality (or at least heteronormativity) and is willing to accept both the struggle of life-long labour and the risk of loss: perhaps the loss of sexual pleasure, especially if celibacy rather than marriage is the end result, but also the loss of the time, energy, and finances required to orchestrate such change. For some this even leads to entrepreneurship in a more traditional “business” sense, in that some ex-gays become ex-gay counselors and therapists. Both Besen (2003) and Shidlo and Schroeder (2002) note that many ex-gays who claim success are also employed by the movement. Besen alleges that “almost no [ex-gay] ministers who claim heterosexuality have real jobs; they are almost always full-time professional heterosexuals” (55), noting that of 44 success stories on the Exodus website in 2003, “68 percent (30 of 44) [were of] full-time ministry leaders” (56). Shidlo and Schroeder note that seven of the eight in their study who reported complete heterosexual conversion were employed by the movement as conversion therapists (253). But the neoliberal

multiplication of the enterprise does not require actual employment to be an entrepreneur; so the above examples are only the literal entrepreneurs who represent the general diffusion of the concept across the movement. In general, the neoliberalized entrepreneurship of ex-gay change requires only the self working on the self to change the self in relation to cost-benefit ratios. Employment in the movement is merely a bonus. However, in constructing their cost-benefit ratios, ex-gay entrepreneurs can only accept and account for the loss of time, money and energy. Because of their true beliefs, they must deny the risk of harm. Ex-gay approved psychological studies provide them the means to do so, either by denying harm outright, or by ignoring it to focus only on efficacy. But by doing that, they deny part of their own cost-benefit calculations.

Whereas psychological studies of efficacy and harm in mainstream psychology operate to heighten the risk level and discourage ex-gay investment by demonstrating limited efficacy and potential harm, psychological studies from researchers sympathetic to the movement (mostly NARTH researchers) operate to encourage investment by quantifying the struggle as possible, manageable and *not* harmful. Like the Spitzer study, some ex-gay studies merely operate to highlight change *as possible*, quantifying success very broadly so as to account for more success.⁶⁰ For example, a study of 248 participants by pro-ex-gay researchers claiming success in therapy concludes that participants reported, “experiencing significantly more heterosexuality than they recall experiencing at age 18” (Schaeffer et al. 2000, 61), and a follow-up study of 140 of the original 248 (Schaeffer et al. 1999)⁶¹ concludes that 61% of 102 males and 72% of 38 females were *behaviourally* successful in “abstaining from any type of physical homosexual conduct” (Schaeffer et al. 1999, 329). By defining the experience of change vaguely, success in term of behaviour alone, and by discounting the significance of the dropout rate between studies,

⁶⁰ The first study of religiously mediated ex-gay change, which quantified 11 cases of “success,” was conducted by a Christian psychiatrist and his psychologist wife (Pattison and Pattison 1980). It has since been discredited (Capps and Carlin 2008; Haldeman 1994; Throckmorton 2011b) but is cited by many ex-gay supporters as evidence of change (Harvey 1996; Jones and Yarhouse 2007; Nicolosi 1997; People Can Change 2000-12; and Satinover 1996).

⁶¹ The follow-up study was published first.

the authors suggest a far higher investment return than studies published in mainstream psychology. However, it is more common for sympathetic studies to quantify different kinds and stages of success, not only to account for a higher investment return but also to allow for different stages of labour in a lifelong confessional process.

A study by Nicolosi, Byrd, and Potts (2000), whose results are repeated across the discourse—in media appearances by ex-gay spokespeople, as (oddly enough) anecdotal evidence in Wolkomir’s ethnographic study (2006, 149), and even on the witness stand in *Boston Legal*—is the first example of this strategy. Conducted immediately following the advertising campaign, the authors document that of 882 participants, 34% claimed to be heterosexual after therapy, 30% claimed limited change in the direction of heterosexuality, and 35% confessed to still being exclusively or mostly homosexual. By claiming complete change for 34% and some change for 30%, the authors are able to claim 64% success with the potential for life-long labour buried in the results. A longitudinal study by pro-ex-gay psychologists Jones and Yarhouse (2007; 2011) takes this investment logic even further. The first part of their study was published as a book in 2007 and the second as an article in 2011. They use multidimensional measurements of sexual orientation and categorize six outcomes. The following categories and percentages from their 2011 paper quantifies the results for the 61 remaining participants (of an original 98) at the six-year mark but do not include the 37 who dropped out: Success: Conversion (23%); Success: Chastity (29.5%); Continuing: Small Change (16%); Continuing: No Change (6.5%); Failure: Confused (5%); and Failure: Gay Identity (20%). As can be seen, these authors create four categories to account for success and continuing struggle allowing them to claim 52.5% success and 22.5% continuing for a total of 75% who report continued investment. Yet chastity is counted as success, no change for some still supports investment, and 5% of the failures are defined as confused rather than gay (because they report no change, will not continue, but refuse

to identify as either gay or ex-gay—in other words, they refuse to fall into a gay/straight binary, so they must be confused). Also, like the Schaeffer et al. study, the dropout rate is dismissed as irrelevant to the quantified results, thus once again allowing for the report of a higher level of positive investment. Most important, in their measurement of harm, Jones and Yarhouse conclude that, “the attempt to change sexual orientation did not appear to be harmful on average” (2011, 424), which allows them to deny that level of risk as a factor in ex-gay investment.

While it may appear that I impose investment language onto psychological studies that do not themselves use such language, many do include justifications rooted in the language of choice. For example, in the conclusion to their 2007 book, Jones and Yarhouse include a discussion of the debate over choice emphasizing “the right of client self-determination” (379). Indeed, Yarhouse has published a full paper on the topic (1998) in which he describes the ex-gay debate as the “right to choose” debate (248). Also, in the first few pages of the book, where positive reviews are quoted, psychologist Rogers H. Wright praises the authors for returning to the “almost forgotten principals that it is *the patient’s right to choose*, and that *the patient has the capacity to do so*” (4, author’s italics). And, significantly, the final sentence of the Nicolosi, Byrd and Potts (2000) papers is as follows: “We think that it is time for mental health professionals to preserve the rights of all homosexually oriented people, gay or dissatisfied, religious or nonreligious, to choose and pursue their own values and lifestyle” (1086-7).⁶² In other words, pro-ex-gay studies of efficacy and harm (or lack of harm) operate to introduce positive cost-benefit ratios and categories of change into a discourse of choice precisely so as to justify the continued production of ex-gay labour. Even Jones and Yarhouse characterize this labour as “an extensive investment of time, money, and energy” (2007, 80).

⁶² The hypocrisy of their statement, given the role NARTH plays in pathologizing homosexuality, is striking.

None of this should be surprising because today psychology *in general* participates in a neoliberal “enterprise culture” through what Nikolas Rose (1998b) calls a “therapeutics of the self.” That makes today’s psychology governmental in a neoliberal sense and, significantly, Rose characterizes neoliberalism as a “mentality of government” that includes all three axes of Foucault’s analytic: knowledge, power, and subjectivity. Rose summarizes the neoliberal writings of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman as stating, “the well-being of both political and social existence is to be ensured not by centralized planning and bureaucracy, but through the ‘enterprising’ activities and choices of autonomous entities—businesses, organizations, persons—each striving to maximize its own advantage by inventing and promoting new projects by means of individual and local calculations of strategies and tactics, costs and benefits” (153). Thus Rose isolates within neoliberalism a political rationality of calculating risk rooted in apparatuses of expertise that are themselves grounded in the authority of knowledge so as to create regulatory programs designed to encourage the “‘self-steering’ capacities of subjects themselves” (153-155). In other words, in neoliberalism an ethics of choice is constituted by a power-knowledge of calculations of risk as orchestrated by experts, often psychological experts. The rise of a therapeutics of the self is part of this governmentality.

This therapeutics of the self is both neoliberal *and* confessional and, like ex-gay therapeutics, is often promoted through advertising. Rose begins his analysis of neoliberal therapeutics of the self by describing a late 1990s British advertising campaign that marketed a therapeutic self-help hotline. Although he does not discuss the campaign using the word confession, it should go without saying that the hotline would serve little purpose without a constant stream of them. As Rose describes it, the ads solicited emotional, work, and sex related problems from consumers that could be solved for “the cost of a telephone call” (150). Rose’s concern is how the campaign operates in relation to the logic of neoliberalism and how a

therapeutics of the self only furthers that logic. In the context of “reforms of macroeconomic policy, organizational culture, social welfare, and the responsibilities of citizens, this little advertisement may seem trivial” but Rose insists it is not (ibid). While other political and sociological analyses focus their attention “on postmodernism, globalization, postfordism, and the like” (ibid), he suggests that this new logic of therapy within neoliberal economics can help focus our attention on the “enterprise culture [that] accord[s] a vital *political* value to a certain image of the human being” (151, author’s italics). Rose argues the cultural success of this image is rooted in an understanding of the individual as free with the right to choice that resonates “with basic presuppositions concerning the contemporary human being that remain widely distributed in our present” (ibid). In other words, advertising, consumerism, entrepreneurship, and even therapy are linked in neoliberal thought through a particular understanding of subjectivity that combines psychology with freedom. That is another reason why psychological studies of ex-gay efficacy and harm can be understood as manipulating cost-benefit ratios in a governmentality of entrepreneurship.

It may seem contradictory to link entrepreneurship and consumerism via advertising and confession *in this way* because the self-actualisation of being an enterprise appears opposed to the management of consumption. The entrepreneur advertises to the consumer, manipulates constructed confessions and testimony to convince the consumer, and solicits confessions from the consumer to know how to psychologically manipulate him or her all the more; but the consumer merely “chooses” from the choices provided. However, we already know from Foucault’s analysis of Becker that neoliberalism redefines consumption entrepreneurially. Rose’s emphasis on the role of psychology in neoliberal rationality reveals that this redefinition of consumption applies to therapy as well. Acknowledging that the “introspection, confession, and management by expertise” (159) implied by psychological therapy may seem to oppose the

confident spirit of enterprise required in entrepreneurship, he insists that is an illusion: “Therapy can offer to free each of us from our psychic chains. We can become enterprising, take control of our careers, transform ourselves into high fliers, achieve excellence, and fulfill ourselves not *in spite of* work but *by means of* work” (158). In language remarkably similar to that used by the movement, Rose also writes, “you can change, you can achieve self-mastery, you can control you own destiny, you can truly be autonomous... [you can be] an entrepreneur of [yours]self” (ibid). In such a context, cost-benefit ratios and confessions of the self combine to produce entrepreneurial labour, not just in the ex-gay movement, but across the neoliberal world.

Rose, however, makes one claim the ex-gay debate problematizes. Similar to Beck, he writes that in advanced liberal democracies, “The guidance of selves is no longer dependent on the authority of religion or traditional morality; it has been allocated to ‘experts of subjectivity’ who transfigure existential questions about the purpose of life and the meaning of suffering into technical questions of the most effective ways of managing malfunction and improving ‘quality of life’” (151). The ex-gay debate complicates that claim because in the movement, the guidance of selves is still dependent on religious authority and “traditional” family values; but it has been allocated *as well* to ‘experts of subjectivity,’ many of whom transfigure questions about life and suffering into technical questions of effective management that remain, sometimes paradoxically, consistent with the authority of religion and family values. Indeed, as we know, in the ex-gay movement, “religious belief and a therapeutic ethos are not necessarily conflicting or competing” (Wolkomir 2006, 131). That is because the movement appeals to the authority and control of the pre-neoliberal knowledges of psychoanalysis and behaviourism (which can easily be deployed in the service of conservative family values) rather than cognitive psychology (which came to prominence alongside neoliberalism and is technically more compatible with it because of a focus on encouraging patients to change thought patterns rather than explaining and controlling

desire and behaviour). Nevertheless ex-gay psychology is still colonized by neoliberal thought via the rhetoric of choice, the encouragement of self-directed change, and cost-benefit analyses, and cognitive psychology is still confessional via its requirement that patterns of thought be spoken aloud so they can be changed; and both require experts to administer them. Like Beck, then, Rose's analysis of neoliberalism does not account for the awkward space between true belief and individualization even if it is more nuanced. However, aware as he is of Foucault's work, Rose does not claim that today's therapeutics of the self is something entirely different that has replaced older religious, cultural, and parental forms of authority. He suggests it is continuous with those forms of authority, constituting a modified governmentality. The ex-gay movement as a case study allows us to see it as *more* than continuous.

In the ex-gay movement, today's therapeutic culture is co-existent with and supportive of those older forms of authority. The problem for the movement in terms of its own discourse is that the continued existence of such forms of authority contradicts its claim of freedom of choice and denies a level of risk instead of factoring it into a full cost-benefit ratio. First, the ex-gay promise of freedom is both freedom of choice and freedom from choice; it is the freedom to choose heteronormativity and it is freedom from the wrong choice of homosexuality. Thus, far from increasing choices, the movement works to limit them by forcing the individual to react only in relation to a finite number of religious and heteronormative investments—because ultimately the freedom offered is just the freedom from what the movement calls sin and disease. For all the freedom and hope advertised, the lifelong entrepreneurial work of sexual orientation change cannot really promise a path to increased career opportunities. Its goals and objectives are limited to the goal of heterosexuality (or a reasonable facsimile thereof) and/or celibacy, Christian fellowship, maybe family, and *for some* a career within the movement, perhaps as a spokesperson, counsellor or therapist, but little else. Indeed, the enterprising entrepreneurship of

innovation and profit generation expected by the architects of neoliberalism is mostly foreclosed by the movement's largely charitable political economy and true beliefs. It is not financial profit that is generated, but life-long confessional labour that forecloses other kinds of entrepreneurship because all of one's energy is invested in religious heteronormativity. Thus, in spite of its appeal to what is essentially heterosexual entrepreneurship, the movement's entrepreneurship is insufficient, impoverished, and only partially justifiable through a neoliberal discourse.

Even in terms of consumerism the movement falls short. Following Foucault, Rose notes that consumption in neoliberalism is "a key site for the deployment of new presuppositions concerning the self... [where] consumers are constituted as actors seeking to maximize their 'quality of life' by assembling a 'life-style' through acts of choice in a world of goods" (161-62). But in the ex-gay movement, consumption, like choice, is restricted. For example, in ex-gay residential programs consumer products, especially those associated by prejudice with 'gay culture,' are disallowed.⁶³ Outside residential programs, ex-gays are instructed to avoid places and businesses where consumer-friendly gay lifestyles are celebrated (Erzen 2006); and both personal and business relationships with former LGBT friends are disavowed. Thus, here the neoliberalization of the movement partially breaks down. I say partially because ex-gay consumerism and entrepreneurship is limited but not foreclosed. Along with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s and 80s came the rise of a parallel Christian popular culture fueled by the rise of Christian televangelism and mass-media enterprises (see Chapter 4). In that context, the neoliberalization of ex-gay confession as heterosexual entrepreneurship can thrive alongside other forms of innovative profit-oriented forms of entrepreneurship, but only in that context.

More important, however, is the denial of harm as risk. In the process of turning the ex-gay into a heterosexual entrepreneur, the ex-gay body is still disciplined in spite of individual

⁶³ In one documentary on the movement, *This Is What Love In Action Looks Like* (2011), former ex-gay Peterson Toscano complains that not only were his show tunes confiscated, but also a Bach CD.

choice. In addition to trying to manipulate a market of choice through studies of efficacy and harm, the denial of harm also works to discipline the body and the soul through shame and abjection (see Chapter 1). First, when the movement manipulates choice by highlighting the health risks of a gay lifestyle, it strategically deploys shame and abjection as risk. When the religious rhetoric of homosexuality as sin is added, such shame and abjection is only augmented. But it is precisely that which is often experienced as harm by those who leave the movement in perceived “failure.” The problem for the movement is that because it is operated by true believers, it cannot acknowledge that particular risk because they are doing God’s work and God’s work, if obediently submitted to and followed through on with faith, should not cause harm, at least not “real” harm. Those who “fail” are either disobedient or not working hard enough; they are not true entrepreneurs. On the surface that may seem like a neoliberal solution to a neoliberal problem; but it is just the deployment of more shame as well as a contradiction. Unlike with the ideal of pastoral governmentality, the pastor does not here sacrifice the flock to save the individual to save the flock; rather through submission to authority and by denying risk, one sacrifices him or herself to the flock, to save the individual. Yes, this sacrifice is also to save the flock, but because the flock is not sacrificed, the power of the pastoral paradox is lost and replaced with a mere contradiction between individual choice and the needs of the group. To make matters worse, in the context of a contested discursive field where harm is deployed as an unacceptable cost by those who oppose the movement, the denial of harm makes the movement vulnerable to another tactic from those who opposed it: accusations of consumer fraud.

Ex-gay Neoliberalism Eats Itself: Consumer Fraud Versus True Belief

The ex-gay movement does not really argue for more consumer choice in the sexual marketplace. They argue that *they* should be given the freedom to exist in today’s sexual marketplace but ultimately and ideally the sexual marketplace should not include anything that is

not consistent with Judeo-Christian principals. The sexual marketplace, in other words, should be limited to monogamous heterosexual married sex. That, of course, goes against Posner's (1994) theory, which argues that sexual regulations should be decided on the basis of "practical consequences rather than by their conformity to moral, political, or religious ideas" (437). However, the ex-gay position is slippery, emphasizing in their mainstream rhetoric not their heteronormative *should*, but instead their right to be included as an option. In their testified religious views, however, heterosexuality is God's ideal and everyone should want God's ideal. Just as the Christian Right argues in principle for religious freedom so they can have the right to try to convert everyone else to Christianity, Christian ex-gays argue for the sexual right to choose so they can have the right to try to convert every LGBTQ person into becoming ex-gay. But what if the freedom to choose infringes on the rights of others in the sexual marketplace through fraud? What if the ex-gay movement is knowingly misrepresenting its product? In 2012, five years after *Boston Legal* depicted the movement as fraud and nine years after *Law & Order: SVU* suggested it sells a snake oil cure, a real consumer fraud lawsuit was filed against the movement in New Jersey. That lawsuit is justified by the movement's denial of the risk of harm.

Black's Law Dictionary (Black 1990) defines fraud as "A false representation of a matter of fact, whether by words or by conduct, by false or misleading allegations, or by concealment of that which should have been disclosed, which deceives and is intended to deceive another so that he [sic] shall act upon it to his legal injury;" it then lists three elements required to prove it: a misrepresentation meant to deceive, a victim's reliance on that misrepresentation, and damages (660). Rosoff, Pontell and Tillman (2004) define consumer fraud as "the use of deceit, lies, or misrepresentations to entice consumers to buy goods and services" (48). Both definitions require deceit or "knowing" misrepresentation. In a paper tracing socio-legal changes in understandings of consumer fraud, Holtfreter, Van Slyke, and Blomberg (2005) note that ancient Hebrew culture

was the first to, “articulate laws designed to protect consumers from unscrupulous sellers” (253). In the sixteenth century, however, the combined forces of, “the Enlightenment emphasis on reason... [and] the Calvinist doctrines of productivity, individualism, and competition called into question the logic behind intervention in consumer affairs” (254). That led to the laissez faire notion, ‘buyer beware’ (255). Although technological advances allowing for more sophisticated means of deceit eventually led to increased government intervention to protect consumers from fraud, since the rise of neoliberalism, “self-regulation coupled with governmental deregulation” has allowed for an increase in the level and amount of consumer fraud (263-4). Today it is less legislative government’s role to regulate fraud and more the role of the courts where the problem is not dealt with in general but on a contract-by-contract basis.

Blanket accusations of fraud leveled against the ex-gay movement in the media have been quite common, especially from gay rights activists like Wayne Besen. In an MSNBC interview with Rachel Maddow (*Rachel Maddow Show, The 2010*), Besen says outright, “We call it consumer fraud.” In *Anything But Straight* (2003) he describes reparative therapy as a “lucrative industry,” writing, “Today they continue to ignore mountains of evidence pointing to the failure of the ex-gay ministries because the truth interferes with their presumably biblically inspired mandates to raise heaps of money and deny gay people civil rights” (21) and later adds, “In this author’s view, reparative therapists are detestable, money-hungry con artists who lure and bamboozle susceptible people with misleading promises and false hopes” (158). In an article denouncing the first ex-gay episode of Lisa Ling’s *Our America*, he calls the movement an industry of “fraudulent victimizers” (Besen 2011a). Maddow herself said as much the year before her interview with Besen when she interviewed ex-gay therapist Richard Cohen and turned from Cohen to address the audience: “There’s no evidence of what Mr. Cohen suggests. He’s operating an organisation that would sell you a lot of products that would convince you that

it is true” (*Rachel Maddow Show, The* 2009). And, as we already know, ex-gay consumer fraud is suggested in *Law & Order: SVU* and dramatized in *Boston Legal*, where Judge Brown sues an ex-gay group called Better Tomorrow for \$40,000 (a number that is not supported by my analysis of costs above) because they failed to cure him of his Same Sex Attraction Disorder.

On the internet, accusations of fraud are also widespread, led, not surprisingly by Besen. His *Truth Wins Out* website even has a page of links labelled, “‘Ex-Gay’ Consumer Fraud Division” (TWO 2014b). However, none of the links actually point to official *legal* accusations of financial fraud—not even to the New Jersey lawsuit. In fact, only a few links provide financial data or outline specific economic practices. It is true, one linked page, called “‘Ex-Gay’ Ads” (TWO 2014a) archives several examples from the ex-gay ad campaign, suggesting that misrepresentation of the products and services sold is a key issue; and another linked page, called “‘Ex-Gay’ Industry Snapshot” (TWO 2014c) provides the operating budgets of most of the major ex-gay organizations; but the remaining links mostly describe the histories, practices, and key operators of the larger ex-gay organizations with little that *financially* justifies accusations of consumer fraud—beyond the general claim that ex-gay therapy and counseling simply do not work. In other words, until recently, such accusations operated only on the level of persuasive discourse for primarily political reasons. But, as noted, that changed in late 2012 when a lawsuit was initiated in New Jersey that officially accused the Jewish wing of the movement, JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing), of engaging in consumer fraud (SPLC 2014a). The difference between the lawsuit and the rhetoric of fraud is the lawsuit is not *just* based on the general and false idea that the ex-gay movement is making “heaps of money” from a cure that never works; the lawsuit is rooted in specific claims of efficacy that ignore and deny evidence of harm. And although JONAH is Jewish rather than Christian, it only formed in 1999 (*after* the ad campaign), and it is strongly linked with NARTH and was linked to Exodus when Exodus

existed, thus it is part of what really is the *Christian* ex-gay movement. Indeed, numerous fundamentalist Christian and conservative Catholic discursive statements against the lawsuit, communicating alarm and concern, are in the public sphere (Browder 2013; Miller 2014).

The lawsuit was filed in November 2012 against JONAH by four male plaintiffs, two of their mothers, and the social advocacy group the Southern Poverty Law Center (ibid). Available in full as a downloadable PDF on the SPLC website, the suit (Ferguson et al. 2012) accuses JONAH of violating section 56:8-2 of New Jersey's Consumer Fraud Act, which prohibits the "act, use or employment by any person of any unconscionable commercial practice, deception, fraud, false pretense, false promise, [or] misrepresentation... in connection with the sale or advertisement of any merchandise" (11, quoting New Jersey's Consumer Fraud Act.) The suit contends that the Plaintiffs paid for JONAH's services based on a series of misrepresentations causing the Plaintiffs "to suffer depression and other emotional harm when they were unable to change their sexual orientation" (4). It also requests in its "Prayer For Relief" (a particularly ironic legal term in this case) that JONAH's business license be revoked (23). Interestingly enough, financial costs are quoted in the suit almost in passing; it states in general that services "can cost participants more than \$10,000 per year for individual and group sessions as well as weekend retreats" (4) and it claims "Defendants typically charged Plaintiffs \$100 for each individual session and \$60 for group sessions" (14).⁶⁴ But on closer scrutiny it becomes clear that the lawsuit focuses much more on the issue of misrepresenting psychological benefits,

⁶⁴ Count I of the suit, filed by Benjamin Unger, does not supply specific financial costs, but it does claim costs were paid and notes "the ascertainable loss of paying for the costs of repairing the damage caused by Defendants' 'treatments'" and further claims that Unger was unable to work for one year after therapy (19). Count II of the suit, filed by Chaim and Bella Levin, states that "Bella Levin suffered the ascertainable loss of fees paid to JONAH" and adds that Chaim Levin "also paid several hundred dollars for JONAH sessions" (20). Count III, filed by Sheldon and Jo Bruck, is more specific, claiming "the ascertainable loss of approximately \$500, \$100 for each session" and includes, without specifying the exact amount, "payment of fees for legitimate mental health services that her son required to overcome damage caused by Defendant's 'treatments'" (22). Count VI, filed by Michael Ferguson, claims "the ascertainable loss of approximately \$1,000" and also notes "the ascertainable loss of paying for reasonable costs of repairing damages caused by Defendants' 'treatments'" (23).

suggesting that because the therapy does not work in spite of JONAH's advertisements and claims, the organization is guilty of fraud regardless of the actual costs involved.

Not surprisingly, JONAH denies the validity of the suit, stating, "The lawsuit is without merit, and is designed to create a chilling effect upon speech and programs that assist people in overcoming unwanted same-sex attractions" (Duke 2012). In a press release statement posted to their website, JONAH declares, "SPLC's allegations... ignore the thousands of people who have already benefitted from programs such as those offered by JONAH and others, many of whom are now living their life long dreams, including traditional marriage and children" (JONAH 2012). For JONAH, the benefits of ex-gay counselling and therapy—traditional marriage and children—outweigh the costs, both financial and psychological, because (however difficult change may be) religious people who "suffer" from same-sex attraction are "entitled to receive such help [and] support in a way that respects their personal values" (ibid). Furthermore, JONAH (like the ex-gay ads) maintains that "thousands" now live free of homosexual desire; so clearly, for some at least, \$10,000 per year is a worthwhile cost to pay. However, a motion filed by JONAH to limit its damages to only the costs of its own services—because the lawsuit also claims the costs of subsequent counselling to undo the harm caused by JONAH's methods—was denied (SPLC 2014a; 2014b). Although the costs of subsequent counselling are not specified in the lawsuit, according to the gay magazine *Advocate*, JONAH could now be liable for three times the costs of that counselling (Ring 2014). Most recently, a partial summary judgment has denied key aspects of JONAH's defence, disallowing its claim that homosexuality is a mental illness and denying it the ability to quote specific statistics of efficacy from pro-ex-gay psychological studies (SPLC 2015; Superior Court of New Jersey. 2015).

These setbacks for JONAH point to the complicated nature of psychological costs and risk, especially in a neoliberal context. In *Psychotherapy Is Worth It: A Comprehensive Review*

of *Its Cost-Effectiveness* (2010), Lazar, Sledge and Adler remind us that in relation to therapy, “Cost is a complex idea” (11). In fact, they distinguish between costs and charges, defining charges as “a manager’s efforts to recoup costs based on considerations of cost, market, and regulatory compliance” and costs as “the value of the resources being withdrawn from society to bring about a particular treatment” (ibid). So here the costs of established, accepted and mainstream psychotherapy are added as *social* costs to the movement. The argument is that when former ex-gays use psychotherapeutic resources to reverse the damage of ex-gay therapy, those resources become unavailable to others in need of mainstream therapy. Indeed, the cost of therapeutic harm inflicted on participants goes beyond just removing mainstream therapeutic resources from the pool—it also removes productive labour from the workforce while those harmed by ex-gay therapy work to reverse that harm. Here again we see the paradoxical and reciprocal play of individualization and totalisation reminiscent of the Christian pastoral but in this case it operates in relation to those opposed to the movement. To save the individual ex-gay from the movement, mainstream psychotherapy for those who are not ex-gay is sacrificed but it is sacrificed for the good of all LGBTQ people who can only benefit from any action that further discredits the movement. The social costs of this phenomenon are then claimed as part of a lawsuit rooted in individual contract law as a further tactic to save all LGBTQ people by discrediting the movement even further. In this reasoning, even the entrepreneurship of individuals currently in the movement becomes a social cost that must be recouped because the movement is withdrawing the resources of those individuals from potentially more important and more beneficial employment in the LGBTQ community.

If successful, the lawsuit could represent a serious blow to the movement, especially if more lawsuits result. For example, some conservative Catholics worry the lawsuit might impact on Courage, the largest Catholic ex-gay ministry (Browder 2013). But it is also an example of

the dangers the movement opened itself up to when it subjected itself to a neoliberal discourse, because now that discourse is being used against it in the full legal sense in relation to what Robert Mawby (1989) calls, “the delicate balance between discouraging commercial fraud and encouraging capitalist enterprise” (88). At a discursive level, the charge of misrepresentation of the advertised product arises out of duelling cost-benefit analyses that treat risk very differently. The lawsuit plaintiffs allege misrepresentation precisely because ex-gay cost-benefit analyses reframe the risk of lack of efficacy in terms of life-long work and deny the risk of harm outright. Acknowledging what all the studies demonstrate, that only a small percentage of participants are [so they claim] fully successful in the conversion process, the ex-gay movement situates that success in the hard work of labour, which allows them to reframe lack of success not as a therapeutic problem but as both a motivational problem on the part of the participant and the effects of sin. Christian political commentator Gina Miller (2014), who characterizes the SPLC lawsuit as an “evil assault on freedom,” puts it this way: “I am not aware of any therapists who guarantee conversion, any kind of therapists. When sin has a powerful hold on someone, it's never easy to let it go, but it is possible” (n.p.). As for the risk of harm, that gets twisted back into their accounting of the health risks of a homosexual lifestyle, which are also the effects of sin. Once again, Miller sums it up nicely: it is not reparative therapy that “causes suicidal behavior, depression, anxiety, drug use and promiscuity... [because] the truth is that any time we embrace sin, which is behavior that contradicts God's commands and His design for mankind, we are subjecting ourselves to all kinds of self-destructive potential” (ibid). Such a response, of course, is the response of a true believer; but that in itself could, theoretically, be a problem for the lawsuit, although the recent summary judgement suggests otherwise.

Nevertheless, you will remember Jim Burroway's (2008) warning that, “if we lose sight of the fact that they're true believers, we will always underestimate them.” That still could be the

Achilles' heel of the lawsuit as it must be proven in court that JONAH *willfully* misrepresented its services, which may be hard to do given that the counsellors who run JONAH are convinced that what they offer is legitimate. In fact, within the delicate balance between discouraging fraud and encouraging enterprise," true belief may not even be the issue. At around the same time the movement began to advertise itself, the U.S. Court of Appeals struck down Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rules designed to regulate health claims for dietary supplements on First Amendment grounds provided there are some studies supporting the health claims used (Vladeck 2000). The FDA argued that health claims that cannot be definitively proven as either true or false pose a serious consumer risk but the court ruled that disallowing a company from making a claim drawn from even one scientific study violated freedom of speech. The problem is, there was nothing in the ruling that distinguishes between "studies that are tentative, inconclusive, preliminary, nonreplicable, or out of step with mainstream science" (138). It should not be difficult to see how that ruling *could have been* relevant in assessing the legal status of conflicting ex-gay studies. It appears to have not been considered in the summary judgement against quoting specific statistics of efficacy, but when you add ex-gay true belief to the quagmire, the legality is still complicated. In other words, in a neoliberal context this lawsuit appears to violate free choice; however, in the face of multiple studies that demonstrate harm at least for some, the willful neglect to acknowledge that possibility could, and probably does, cross a legal threshold.

Irrespective of the outcome, the lawsuit is a neoliberal response to what has become an increasingly neoliberalized problem. Although the testified true beliefs and the confessions of one's true sex that link the contemporary political economy of ex-gay participants to a long history of religious and psychological confessional governmentalities certainly complicates and modifies this political economy, it is now firmly rooted in rational choice cost-benefit grids of intelligibility. For example, neither the lawsuit nor the multiple critical psychological studies of

efficacy and harm addressed above question the rational choice extension of cost-benefit models to the realm of sexuality, not to mention psychology and religion. Indeed, the lawsuit argues that the claimants were prevented from making true rational choices in their assessment of ex-gay therapy because the costs and benefits of ex-gay therapy were misrepresented. Thus, the claimants were denied the knowledge they needed to make the proper cost-benefit calculations. But if the lawsuit is successful and more follow (no doubt with considerable media attention), in a small way the “magic” of the advertising that underpins today’s rational choice model of economic thought will be lessened. The potential for long-term abuse of the system will be exposed and the ease with which rational cost-benefit calculations can be (and according to neoliberal theory, must be) manipulated will draw the curtain back on the process. Of course, consumer fraud lawsuits happen all the time, so it is not the lawsuit per se that will lessen the magic, but the unusual media exposure multiple lawsuits will garner if that path is followed.

Conclusion: From Advertising Truth in Fraud to the Culture Wars

I began this chapter with an account of a popular culture reference to the 1998 ex-gay ad campaign that introduced the movement into the public sphere and subjected both ex-gay and pro-gay confessions of truth and desire to the regulatory power of a neoliberal political economic system. Although that episode of *Law & Order: SVU* quickly moved past ex-gay advertising to focus instead on religious and psychological homophobia, for a brief moment it returned to ex-gay political economy to suggest in passing that ex-gay change may amount to consumer fraud. Four years later an episode of *Boston Legal* would address the discourse of fraud in depth by actually dramatizing an ex-gay consumer fraud lawsuit. Although at the time no such lawsuit had ever been initiated, now one is working its way through the New Jersey legal system. The regulatory power of neoliberalism is at work, first through popular culture and now through the courts, although it remains to be seen how that power will finally manifest itself. Regardless, by

subsuming itself within the logic of neoliberalism the ex-gay movement may have miscalculated the ability of a capitalist political economy to account for testified true beliefs and sacrificial confessions of desire in the “rational” manipulation of the supply and demand of sexuality.

It might appear at first that within a neoliberal model of rational choice the question of ex-gay change as a political issue is no issue at all. Given that some testify to success and benefit from ex-gay therapy, however contested and difficult to quantify that may be, from a rational choice perspective freedom to choose in the marketplace should prevail. Any adult who knows the risks of change should be allowed to “rationally” choose the ex-gay option regardless of cost and without the stigma of fraud undermining the transaction. It should be an individual’s right to try to be a heterosexual entrepreneur of the self regardless of difficulty. But rational choice theory has been challenged: it has been accused of social colonization (Green and Shapiro 1994), which the preceding analysis bears out; it has been critiqued for “taking methodological individualism to the extreme and [for] viewing the state as a [mere] independent arbiter of competing interests” (Mosco 2009, 219), which the preceding analysis also bears out; it has been accused of being masculinist (England 1989), as has the ex-gay movement; it has been critiqued for being falsely universalist and naively utilitarian (Zafirovski 2000); for ignoring hedonism and irrationality even when such is acknowledged in the classical economics that rational choice theory looks back to (Zafirovski 2012); because it distorts the social influence on human action and choice (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]; Cornwall 1997); because it falsely assumes that actors have adequate knowledge to make rational choices in the market (Simon 1982a; 1982b; 1982c); and even for being theoretically degenerated (Smelser 1992).

The discourse of ex-gay consumer fraud positions itself against the movement in relation to the critique of not having adequate knowledge in the market. But if the movement is guilty of consumer fraud, then it is the movement itself that withholds adequate knowledge of efficacy

and harm from ex-gay consumers. Theoretically that could be solved by simply acknowledging *all* the psychological research and admitting that change may not be possible for everyone. However, it is not neoliberal thought that prevents the movement from embracing that option, but the movement's own fundamentalist true beliefs, with fundamentalism understood here both in the broad sense defined in my Introduction, *and* in its Christian sense, for as we know, even the evangelical, conservative Catholic, and Mormon participants in this movement adhere to a fundamentalist interpretation of those scriptures that appear to address same-sex behaviour. The dilemma of the movement engaging with and utilizing neoliberal discourse is that because it is today's dominant economic discourse, it can also be deployed against them. The fact that aspects of religion, psychology and sexuality can be manipulated through rational choice calculations may have seemed advantageous when the decision to promote ex-gay change as a consumer product was made. But the role confession plays in those manipulations complicates the movement's ability to negotiate the subtleties of neoliberalism.

By advertising ex-gay change as choice and subjecting it and homosexuality to cost-benefit calculations, the movement participates in the commodification of sexuality, which is problematic within Christianity because of the sacred nature of sexuality as God-given. While the movement's true beliefs resist that commodification to some degree, once advertised, justified as freedom of choice, and rationalized in relation to risk in a neoliberal system, even when provided as part of a church's charitable work, ex-gay change becomes commercialized within the regulatory power of supply and demand. Confession plugs into this problematic both as testimony of truth and confession of desire. The movement resists its own commodification through testimonies of truth that allow it to exchange those testimonies for ex-gay confessions of desire, which then become part of the labour required for change. That confessional process privileges the use-value of heteronormativity over the exchange-value of the transaction itself,

but it is also the confessional process manifested as quantified self-report statistics that provides the foundation for the cost-benefit calculations used to manipulate risk in the larger debate.

By manipulating risk as it does, the movement denies part of its own science, which is one of the reasons ex-gay change struggles unsuccessfully to cross the discursive threshold of scientificity outlined in the Introduction. But the movement also allows the commodifying power of cost-benefit ratios to limit ex-gay subjectivity to an impoverished form of entrepreneurship because the enterprise culture of the movement is a therapeutics of the self limited to the religious production of heteronormativity. In spite of its rhetoric, instead of working to create a larger market of choice, as in Posner's analysis of sexuality, it opts instead for Becker's model of a criminal market wherein supply and demand is manipulated through risk to limit choice. By doing so the movement situates itself against competing cost-benefit ratios that are also rooted in confession and that also use Becker's model to manipulate supply and demand through risk to limit choice in the opposite direction. To combat the opposing model, the movement must deny and ignore part of the risk of their product. By subjecting ex-gay change to this logic while simultaneously denying part of its risk, the movement limits choice rather than increases it and opens itself up to accusations of consumer fraud rooted in a lack of acknowledgement of scientific truth. To explain it another way, ex-gay change is insufficiently entrepreneurial because its reliance on older religious and psychological structures of authority that define homosexuality as sin and disease denies the freedom of choice required by entrepreneurship without tapping into the true paradox of a pastoral governmentality; it merely denies the freedom of choice actually claimed by the movement. It severely limits its entrepreneurship only to the production of heteronormativity to the exclusion of all other forms of entrepreneurship. Heterosexual entrepreneurship is not enough of an enterprise to encourage increased economic participation, either as a business and employer or as a consumer; but it is also insufficiently

entrepreneurial because its basis in the confessed true belief that change is possible for all who believe and try hard enough denies the calculable risk of loss. And that in spite of the accuracy of their own cost-benefit calculations requiring that acknowledgement.

The addition of a new form of identity rooted in the implicit rejection of all forms of sexuality not heterosexual (or that do not strive to be heterosexual) is a denial of choice even as it claims to be rooted in choice. In fact, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the economic drive on the part of the Christian Right to create ex-gay symbolic profit in the culture wars is directly related to their opposition to the legitimization of gay rights. Their objective is not more choice but rather discursive supremacy through disenfranchising the legitimacy of all LGBTQ identities. Yet much the same can be said of the symbolic profit gay rights activists seek to generate, because their goal is the disenfranchisement of ex-gay identities. While gay rights activists accuse the movement of consumer fraud as if to protect consumers from economic deceit, they do not address consumers as agents of choice, but as victims of religious obfuscation; and in response they impose their own ideology as totalizing. Ex-gay participants are denied choice by both sides in this debate and little serious investigation of why people might want to “rationally” choose to change in the first place is addressed. Thus, ex-gay discourse has a contradictory relationship to neoliberal “rational” thought. The rhetoric, of course, insists on the right of the individual to choose, and the practices certainly do require the self to work on the self to change the self; however, they are practices essentially “forced” on participants through the manipulation of shame and abjection masked in the language of choice. But, that of course, is why the rhetoric is governmental: it combines religious, psychological, and economic knowledges with the power of cost-benefit calculations to encourage ethical self-governance.

In the next chapter I will address the way the social construction of desire (and choice), or, as queer political economist Richard Cornwall (1997) puts it, the social mis-articulation of

desire, is deployed in the American culture wars as a governmental tool of manipulation and control at a social level much larger than rational choice theory accounts for. There we will have to engage with another political ideology the ex-gay movement ties itself to: neoconservatism. The ads that introduced the ex-gay movement into the public sphere and continue to proliferate are more than just attempts to sell a “useful” product in the neoliberal “free market” of technologies and entrepreneurs of the self. Their efforts to influence, persuade, regulate and control extend to—perhaps are even intended primarily to—impact upon the very public political wars between the Christian Right and the LGBTQ community. The issue at that level is not individual costs or benefits, or even necessarily social costs and social benefits; for when one is a true believer at war, one usually believes that the benefit of winning the war outweighs the cost of waging it. In battles that operate at the level of culture, there is usually much more at stake than mere costs and benefits, whether understood individually or collectively. Even the ex-gay ads telegraph that, for the argument in no less than two of those ads, that it is a constitutional right to condemn homosexuality, directly and very purposefully situates the ex-gay debate within the culture wars by making free speech an issue of gay rights versus religious freedom.

Chapter Three: Neoconservatism and Ex-gays in the Culture Wars

The ex-gay movement is not just a phenomenon of individual choice the status of which can be decided by consumer fraud court cases and statistical calculations of efficacy and harm, nor is it just a mix of religious and psychological knowledges deployed to control individual sexual behaviour through a particular kind of “ethical” self-governance. It is also a component of the culture wars, which involve competing testimonies of truth in the sphere of legislative government that are often thought of in terms of Right versus Left. James Hunter (1991) defines the culture wars as “the struggle to define America... [through] systems of faith... [that make] claims to truth about the world” on issues like abortion, sexuality, education, and the role of religion in society (56). The ex-gay movement shows the culture wars are also linked to an uneasy union between a political rationality that seeks (among other things) to legislate tradition and morality (neoconservatism) and an economic rationality of open markets and entrepreneurial freedom (neoliberalism). Although seldom represented in narrative entertainment as a political player linked to the culture wars, the movement is depicted as such in a 2000 episode of *Law & Order: SVU* called “Bad Blood.” There two antigay Christian leaders with political ambitions, William Langdon (Jerry Lanning) and his assistant (Stephen Barker Turner), are implicated in the murder of Langdon’s ex-ex-gay son.⁶⁵ By connecting antigay politics to the murder of a gay man covered in the media as news, the episode evokes the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard,⁶⁶ an event that changed how the issue of gay rights was perceived in the culture wars and directly impacted the Christian Right’s ex-gay marketing strategy, itself a component of the culture wars.

In the last chapter I engaged with the political economy of ex-gay change at the individual level, at the level of costs and benefits, using the flawed language of rational choice to

⁶⁵ “Bad Blood” is one of three “ex-gay” *Law & Order: SVU* episodes, including 2003’s “Abomination” and a 2007 episode called “Sin.” There is also a 2007 ex-gay episode of the original *Law & Order* called “Church.”

⁶⁶ “Abomination” also references Shepard, indirectly, via a fundamentalist minister who pickets the funeral of the episode’s ex-gay murder victim, much like Westboro Baptist church preacher Fred Phelps did at Shepard’s funeral.

investigate the movement in terms of paid participation. I showed that the commodification of the movement, while certainly a rhetorical factor in the larger ex-gay debate, is resisted by the true beliefs upon which the movement is based and by the true believers through whom it operates. However, by introducing itself to the public through an advertising campaign, the movement could not help but signal its complicity with neoliberalism, even as the forces that oppose it did the same. Indeed, pro-gay studies designed to quantify ex-gay efficacy and harm buy into the movement's individualization of risk; and the rhetoric of consumer fraud has since manifested itself as a real lawsuit attacking the movement through individual contract law. But I also showed that the multifaceted practice of confession structures ex-gay ads, the participant self-reports upon which studies of efficacy and harm rest, and a consumer fraud lawsuit that may begin the process of bankrupting the movement. Confession—in which ancient and modern technologies of government (understood in a broad sense) are mixed into a quadrature of confessing sex and desire, sacrificing sin, disease and harm, testifying truth and belief, and declaring one's emergent identity in one's desire—even structures the entrepreneurial therapeutics of the self that situate ex-gay practices in a psychologized political economy of consumerism. In short, in the previous chapter it was shown that the movement is embedded in a complex set of relations tied to neoliberalism as our dominant political economy and confession as one of our key governmentalities, wherein religious, psychological and economic power-knowledges are deployed as technologies of self-sacrifice and self-emergence.

This chapter will account for the ex-gay movement and the debate surrounding it by addressing two things: the economics of socially constructed and often “misarticulated” choice; and a second political economic phenomenon in addition to neoliberalism that also intersects with the movement: neoconservatism. In the United States especially, but in Canada and other Western countries as well, the moralistic politics of neoconservatism also structures our social

relations, producing as the offspring of its battle with progressive politics and its tension with neoliberalism this phenomenon called the culture wars. Neoconservatism as a rationality (which is not by definition religious and is often more concerned with foreign policy) represents much more than just faith-based groups fighting for “traditional” morals in the culture wars; however, it does provide a political foundation for the Christian Right to fight that fight. This chapter, then, will go beyond the rational choice approach of Chapter 2 to address the movement at a sociological level in terms of relations between the individual agents who choose to engage with the movement and the larger social structures that allow it to operate as an institution. As loosely formulated and focused on individuality as the movement is, it is still organized, funded, maintained, and fought against by groups of people with social, cultural and political agendas; and it is a major factor in recent cultural battles operating over the proper government of homosexuality. Indeed, the movement was introduced into the culture wars to generate religious and cultural capital so the Christian Right could modify the structuration of the relationship between neoliberalism and neoconservatism in America on that issue. Because homosexuality operates as an amoral issue in a market-based economy, the use of the movement by key stakeholders in American right wing politics is just as much about tilting the Republican Party towards neoconservatism as it is about testifying against gay rights. However, that plan appears to be backfiring. Using the ex-gay movement as symbolic capital to lobby against legislation protecting gay rights has ironically resulted in legislation banning conversion therapy for minors.

Theoretically, this chapter will show that the combined and conflicted political-economic relations between neoliberalism and neoconservatism manifest themselves socially as a destabilizing force in the structuration of American society. Structuration is a sociological theory that accounts for individual agency as a factor in how the structures of society are produced, maintained, and modified. At the social level, individual agency manifests itself through the

confessed true beliefs of those debating cultural issues like homosexuality. In the case of the ex-gay movement, the cultural and social influence coming from the Christian Right and the conservative religious communities they represent operates on one level to encourage religious people who experience same-sex desire to disavow that desire, to “choose” to change so they can conform to community expectations; on another level it operates to encourage moralistic government at the political level through legislation and regulation. Meanwhile, on the progressive side of the culture wars, people who experience same-sex desire are encouraged to identify as gay or lesbian, and media are expected to represent gays and lesbians positively while demanding the government protect them through legislated appeals to human rights. Neither side, of course, seriously questions neoliberal assumptions, preferring instead to focus on more easily debated cultural issues, which effectively allows neoliberalism to have its cake and eat it too. Regardless of whether choice or fraud prevails, or whether gay rights are legislatively protected or disqualified, the logic of the market as a social regulator continues—what is up for grabs is what other kind of rationality will operate in unison with the market to further regulate society; and that has implications for the social construction of confessed desire.

Queer Political Economy and the Social Misarticulation of Desire

As much as freedom of choice is used in the ex-gay debate to justify ex-gay practices, such practices are pushed onto participants through the psychological manipulation of shame and abjection. Examples from Chapter 1 testify to that, demonstrating the extreme crises ex-gays experience in trying to reconcile their sexuality with their beliefs, as do psychological studies of harm discussed in Chapter 2 that list shame, depression, and emotional harm as common ex-gay experiences. It is worth repeating testimony from Darren Freeman in the documentary *Cure For Love* (2008) about the shame that drove him first to nearly castrate himself and second to join the ex-gay movement: “I wish I could communicate effectively at how good I was at hating myself,

about how profound the sense of shame was that I had for my life, about how much I knew that God found me disgusting and terrible.” As many studies attest to, that shame does not end after joining the movement. Darin Squire, who posted his story to the website of the recently reformed New Direction Ministry of Canada,⁶⁷ confesses the shame he felt in that very ministry before it changed direction: “I was not praying enough, not attending church enough and not applying the lessons enough. I was shamed over and over, made to feel so insignificant – even stupid. After all, New Direction was almost as infallible as the bible and if I struggled, we all knew whose fault it was!” (2014). For Darin, shame and abjection were deployed as tactics of control, and such tactics are deployed at both the individual and cultural level.

We cannot forget, however, that the movement’s manipulation of shame and abjection is not necessarily malicious even if it is harmful. It is orchestrated by true believers convinced, rightly or wrongly, that they are doing either God’s work or the good work of encouraging a healthy moral psychology. The role the movement plays in the culture wars requires that true belief. Many conservative Christians are convinced their manipulation of shame and abjection is helping both the ex-gays they hope will change and the political culture they hope can be reformed. The ex-gay episodes of *Law & Order* discussed here account for the social context of shame, but only “Bad Blood” situates it as in issue in the culture wars. In “Abomination” we see the effects of shame and abjection through the character Ian Tate (Jonathan Tucker), as he struggles to reconcile the truly believed psychological theories of his reparative therapist father (George Segal) with his feelings for the man his father murdered. The episode demonstrates how Ian’s subjectivity was constructed in relation to the beliefs his father taught him, because, initially, he falsely confesses to the murder to protect his father. “Bad Blood,” however, accounts

⁶⁷ New Direction Ministries of Canada used to be an active ex-gay ministry in Toronto, Canada and was affiliated with Exodus International until 2007. In fact, it has been showcased as an ex-gay ministry in both *Cure For Love* (2008) and on the CBC current affairs show *The Hour* (Strombo 2007). Between 2007 and 2010, however, the ministry radically changed direction and began the “transition from being an ex-gay ministry to embracing an identity as bridge-builders in the midst of diversity around faith and sexuality” (New Direction 2014).

for shame and abjection through the testimony of Langdon, a Jerry Falwell type Moral Majority leader who “spouts off about how gays can be cured” at fundraisers organized to help finance his run for Congress. Refusing to acknowledge his own son as gay, calling him rebellious and confused instead, Langdon declares homosexuality “a crime against God” and claims that his son was healed. One can only imagine the struggle such beliefs created for Langdon’s son growing up, but here the problem is confessed as a political problem. Langdon having a gay son is an “issue,” like, as his assistant explains, the political problem Newt Gingrich had explaining away a lesbian half-sister. Whether politicized or not, the contradiction between ex-gay rhetoric and the ex-gay experience cannot be accounted for in rational choice justifications that rely on promises of freedom and market-based calculations of costs, benefits, efficacy, and harm. Yet this kind of contradiction is not limited to the ex-gay experience. It is a problem with neoliberal economics in general, which ignores a gap between its own philosophy and human experience. As it happens, this gap both puts neoliberalism in tension with neoconservative politics and helps neoconservative agents manipulate the ideals of neoliberalism to their own ends.

I noted at the end of Chapter 2 that Mosco (2009) critiques rational choice theory (what he calls public choice theory) for its extreme individualism. While he recognizes within it an important acknowledgment that politics and economics are interconnected (28-9; 51-2; 217-20), and even cites the neoliberal work of Richard Posner as an example of an approach that argues markets are produced and governed through political intervention (51; 217), he still critiques the theory for neglecting to recognize the sociological production of desire and the effects of multiple socio-cultural processes on individual decision making. In short, rational choice theory neglects to recognize “the power of marketing to construct wants and the complexity of human desire” (62). To augment Mosco’s critique with Foucault’s, by redefining subjectivity in terms of human capital, by seeking to govern human desire and behaviour only in terms of calculable

costs and benefits, rational choice theory neglects to consider the power of multiple societal forces in constituting not only the choices available in the market, but also the subjectivity of the “choosing” entrepreneurs who enter the market. We already know that when individual ex-gay practices such as targeted confessions of same-sex desire and the reparative therapy of homosexuality are situated within a political economy of choice, it becomes clear that there is very little freedom involved. Even accepting rational choice risk calculations, the choice to be ex-gay, to transform oneself into a heterosexual entrepreneur of the self by confessing one’s desire as sacrifice is a choice very much limited to the costs and benefits of participation in conservative Christian communities. That is to say, when ex-gays are asked to calculate the (alleged) risks associated with homosexuality against the (denied) risks of ex-gay therapy, they are asked to do so in a very specific socio-cultural context, a context that is, in fact, responsible for constituting ex-gay subjectivity with cognitive codes that encourage the guilt, shame, and self-hatred that leads so many to desire ex-gay change to begin with. In other words, the ex-gay desire to change is a socially constructed desire that is now encouraged all the more through marketing campaigns that construct that desire as religious, psychological, *and* economic.

Of course, Michel Foucault is well known for analyzing subjectivity as a social construct, whether it be criminal subjectivity constructed by the panopticonic gaze (1995 [1975]) or sexual subjectivity constructed by the biopolitics of religion, medicine, and capitalism intersecting with the control of populations (1990a [1976]). Many others have followed in his footsteps, especially with regard to the construction of sex and gender (see Butler 1990; 1993; 2004; D’Emilio 1998 [1983]; Weeks 1985; 1991a; 1991b), but social constructionism has also been thoroughly debated, misused, and misunderstood (Alcoff 2006; Delamater and Hyde 1998; Hacking 2000; Norton 2008). Indeed, a recent debate over the concept by writers who also participate in the ex-gay debate has erupted online with both Brandon Ambrosino (2014) and Michael W. Hannon

(2014) using social constructionist theories (using Foucault in particular) to argue that sexuality is entirely a choice. Ambrosino does so from a pro-gay point of view (his homosexuality is his own choice, he argues), and Hannon does so from a conservative religious point of view (there is neither homosexuality *nor* heterosexuality, only sinful acts). Both writers have inspired “vitriolic responses” online, many rooted in essentialist arguments that there is no choice involved in being gay because it is genetic, in particular from Gabriel Arana (2014) and Mark Joseph Stern (2014); but as Jesi Egan (2014) points out, “Hannon and the other choicers deeply (and, it should be said, perhaps willfully) misunderstand Foucault: ‘Social construct’ doesn’t mean ‘not real’” (n.p.). He explains further: “Concepts like sexuality aren’t just names that we can take on or cast off at will. They are structures built into the very fabric of modern society” (n.p.). Later I will address correspondences between Foucault’s work and Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory, thus allowing a role for agency in Foucault’s analytics that many fail to see; here I note the social constructionism debate and its relationship to choice only to point out that choice, whether rational or not, cannot be divorced from the influence of one’s culture, society, and community.

There is a mathematical account of economic desire that supports a social constructionist philosophy and helps account for the political economy of ex-gay desire. In “Queer Political Economy: The Social Articulation of Desire” (1997) economist Richard R. Cornwall argues that people can be influenced by social factors to misarticulate their desires because of what he calls “homopreference networks.” He conducted ten mathematical simulations of economic decision-making wherein individuals enter markets without knowing what they want but pool information with others to help determine the best choices. By using sociocognitive models of economic inefficiency that assume cognitive codes evolve socially, like languages, Cornwall shows that approximately one third of people with minority preferences are led “into the closet” to misarticulate their desires based on irrelevant cognitive codes or misguided thinking. Far from

the pareto efficiency of rational choice theory, where it is assumed individual market transactions will naturally lead to an efficient allocation of resources, Cornwall argues that even as economic actors we are “dependent on our linguistic communities for our abilities to perceive, categorize, and articulate desires” (90). As such, our economic choices will not always be rational and will not always lead to economic parity because we are often influenced by incorrect information from others. In addition to citing psychological research, Cornwall surveys work in sociology, sociolinguistics, history, and philosophy (including Foucault), which demonstrates that socially learned codes play an enormously important role in determining how we perceive ourselves, others, and reality. The problem is that these codes make it easy to accept irrelevant variables as indicators of differences and similarities, thus biasing one’s networks by excluding what may be good choices made by people who are incorrectly perceived as cognitively mismatched.

Although Cornwall makes no reference to the ex-gay movement in his paper, and his models admittedly exclude subjective experiences like shame and abjection, queer political economy can help us see why ex-gays “choose” to accept the economic inefficiency of the movement. It could be argued that ex-gays misconstrue their desire due to illusory categories associated with the largely conservative Christian (and sometimes Jewish) homopreference networks in which so many are raised. Indeed, the movement literally founds itself on what may be “irrelevant” sociolinguistic codes derived from those few passages in the Bible that appear to condemn same-sex desire, at least when they are taken out of their socio-historical context (see Chapter 1). As it happens, the most common statistic associated with successful ex-gay change quoted by the movement, approximately one third, matches Cornwall’s statistic of one third of all economic actors who are led “into the closet.” But Cornwall also argues that were shame and abjection included in his models, they would increase the percentage of people misarticulating their desires. As we know, the movement claims another approximate one third that continues to

struggle even when unsuccessful in their efforts. Such individuals could be accounted for in Cornwall's calculations by including shame and abjection as socio-cognitive influences. In other words, ex-gays may choose change because a general misarticulation of desire is built into the very structure of our political economy, which is only augmented by the additional factors of community fed shame and abjection rooted in a long history of religious and psychological confession. At both this level and at a larger cultural level, neoconservatism, via an uneasy alliance with neoliberalism, seeks to manipulate such misarticulated choices to its own ends, to convince individuals that in spite of their desire for freedom, it is also in their interests to support moralistic legislation aimed at curtailing individual freedom.

Neoconservatism, Neoliberalism, and the Culture Wars

The culture wars are more than just battles between political liberals and conservatives: they also highlight tensions between neoliberalism (which is technically neither Left nor Right) and neoconservatism (which represents the extreme Right). Ex-gay confessions often sit at the heart of those tensions. Indeed, below we will learn that the Christian Right deploys the movement as a form of testified truth to generate what is called cultural capital in the culture wars on the issue of homosexuality. In doing that it seeks also to modify the structuration of North America's political economy. It seeks to manipulate the uneasy ties between neoliberalism and neoconservatism so as to infuse the political governance of both economics and morality with its own understanding of biblical Christianity. However, a problem has arisen for the movement in that regard. Much like the use of neoliberal language to promote ex-gay change in free markets resulted in a neoliberal backlash in the form of accusations of consumer fraud, as will be discussed below, the Christian Right's attempt to use neoconservative regulatory measures to roll back gay rights in the United States has resulted in a regulatory backlash in the form of legislation banning reparative therapy for minors. In short, just like the neoliberalization

of the movement eventually backfired, so too has its neoconservativization. But even without its own tactics being deployed against it, the movement puts itself in an awkward space when it tries to justify itself through both neoliberal choice and neoconservative morality.

Although the term “culture wars” dates back to nineteenth century Germany (Spahn 1910) and was deployed in English in America as early as the 1920s (McClymer 2001; Dionne 2008), as noted earlier, its current usage comes from James Hunter’s *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991). Hunter argues that since the 1960s, American politics has become polarized between Left and Right in relation to a number of “hot button” cultural issues (all of which are important to the Christian Right), including gun control, the separation of church and state, censorship, feminism, women’s rights, abortion, and, of course, homosexuality.⁶⁸ In other words, according to Hunter, the struggle over moral issues in the U.S. is no longer between different faith traditions but cuts across them as political issues. He claims the moral religious struggle in America is not between Catholics, Protestants and Jews, but between a union of conservative Catholics, evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants, and Orthodox Jews and a union of left-wing secularists and progressive religious groups. Thus the culture wars are about “competing moral ideals as to how public life ought to be ordered and maintained... [as] *translated into the signs and symbols of public discourse*” (Hunter 2006, 14, author’s italics). As it happens, within a year of Hunter publishing his thesis, Republican politician Pat Buchanan would confirm Hunter’s insight in a speech to the 1992 Republican Convention. Using virtually identical language, he told his partisan audience that “a culture war” was taking place, a “struggle for the soul of America” (Thomson 2010, 4, quoting Buchanan).

The culture wars are intimately connected not only to the rise of neoliberal economics but also to the rise of neoconservatism, which, although not explicitly religious, has religious

⁶⁸ “Culture wars” is also a term used to describe battles between conservatives and liberals over government funding of education and the arts as it pertains to teaching and depicting moral problems related to sex (Irvine 2000; Jensen 1995; and Lowe 2007). This study understands those battles as being one aspect of a much larger contested field.

undertones and is deeply concerned with matters of truth. As Wendy Brown (2006) explains, although neoconservatism is explicitly capitalist, especially in its rhetoric against the evils of communism, unlike neoliberalism, it is “centered on fixing and enforcing [moralized] meanings, conserving certain ways of life, and repressing and regulating desire” (692). Understanding the relations between neoliberalism and neoconservatism will help elucidate ex-gay governmentality because those relations structure the ex-gay debate. Indeed, a question asked by Brown about how to think together neoconservatism and neoliberalism could also be asked of the movement’s relationship to neoliberalism: “How does a rationality that is expressly amoral at the level of both ends and means... intersect with one that is expressly moral and regulatory... ?” (692).⁶⁹

There is a clear tension between neoliberalism and neoconservatism, and yet in the last 40 years they have worked together to remap the political-economic landscape of America. Raewyn Connell (2010) references this tension when she discusses the relationship between neoliberalism and the Christian Right’s “antigay neoconservatism” (34). She says, there is “a deep transformation of culture” at work in the neoliberal project (27). Because of its obsession with deregulation and endless commodification, she calls it “a missionary faith” (23). However, arguing against Harvey’s (2007) view that an alliance between neoliberalism and the Christian Right is mere Republican opportunism, she asserts that “neoliberalism as a social project always requires the maintenance of alliances and the temporary solution of cultural tensions” and “involves transformation in many different arenas” including changes in culture (35). Thus the apparent contradiction between, for example, the freedom Richard Posner calls for in the sexual marketplace and the extreme heteronormativity called for by the freedom to choose an ex-gay identity could simply be considered one temporary solution at play in the maintenance of a particular kind of free-market regulation. But it is more than that because there is a much closer

⁶⁹ Brown clarifies that “It is not strictly accurate to denote neoliberalism as amoral” because the belief that a market rationality can determine moral issues is itself a moral position; but neoliberalism “takes distance from conventional moral discourse” whereas neoconservatism is firmly rooted in it even when not explicitly religious (note 5, 711).

relationship between neoliberalism and neoconservatism than Connell allows for. As Brown (2006) points out, neoliberalism's "devaluation of political autonomy..., transformation of political problems into individual problems with a market solution..., [and] the production of the consumer-citizen as available to a heavy degree of governance and authority" (703) devalues democratic values and profoundly enables the authoritarianism of neoconservatism (702-5).

The rise of today's Christian popular culture showcases how the neoliberal enabling of neoconservative authority operates in a Christian context. In the 1960s a conservative form of popular Christianity arose, one that often obscures the differences between evangelicalism and fundamentalism, and it aligned itself with the rhetoric of economic "freedom" (Green, Guth, Smidt, and Kellstedt 1996; Marsden 1991; 2006; Stephens and Giberson 2011). It is most associated with televangelism and, according to Hadden and Shupe (1987), one of the earliest policies of American economic deregulation actually helped create televangelism as we know it. In 1960 the U.S. Federal Communications Commission allowed television and radio stations to sell airtime to religious groups for a profit and still get public interest credit towards their license requirements, whereas prior to that religious airtime had to be provided for free. The result was the rise of Christian televangelism, which saw Christian capitalists like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Jimmy Swaggart outbid more mainstream Christian groups for the purchase of both airtime and television stations. These televangelists quickly became authoritarian leaders of the Christian Right, governing Christian thought from their electric church thrones, promoting conservative morality and economic freedom simultaneously.

Of course, as Hadden and Shupe explain, the "electric empires of the Pat Robertsons, the Jerry Falwells, the Billy Grahams, and the Jimmy Swaggarts are the direct descendants of [nineteenth century] parachurches" wherein televangelist "techniques to raise money and mobilize believers" were first developed (61). Furthermore, evangelical and fundamentalist

groups have been marketing Christian consumer products since the nineteenth century; however, neoliberal economic restructuring in the 1970s and 80s allowed Christian consumerism to grow and become explicitly political. As Vincent Miller (2003) argues, consumer capitalism helped create consumer religion, in which conservative Christianity participates, and, as Scott Kline (2007) argues, “commodified, consumer religion enables certain conservative political leaders to claim a tradition as their inheritance and, in turn, mobilize alienated consumers/voters in the US culture wars” (n.p.). The problem is that conservative Christianity and the kind of neoliberal economic policies supported by many neoconservatives are not always agreeable. Yes, like Kline, Frank Thomas (2004) argues that neoconservatives use culture wars rhetoric to dupe middle class white and working poor voters into supporting a neoliberal agenda that is at odds with their own interests. However, Thomas’s argument has been problematized by studies that demonstrate middle class and working poor Protestant voters do not always vote Republican (Greeley and Hout 2006; Green, Guth, Smidt, and Kellstedt 1996). In a similar vein, Andrew D. Walsh (2000) traces a long history in evangelical, fundamentalist, and Catholic Christianity of fighting against laissez-faire capitalism. He compares the contemporary opinions and voting patterns of secular Americans with religious Americans to demonstrate that the reality of what is at stake in the culture wars goes well beyond a simple Religious Capitalist Right/Secular Progressive Left dichotomy. In other words, to say without qualification that neoconservatives use the culture wars to dupe Christian voters into supporting a neoliberal agenda misses the tensions between the two rationalities. Nevertheless, today all three rationalities are connected and even if not all conservative Christian groups buy into this political economy, many do.

Both neoliberalism and neoconservatism became prominent in the 1970s, just as the ex-gay movement was born and the Christian Right became a political force, but neither is identical with the Christian Right. We encountered some of the tensions between the Christian Right and

neoliberalism in Chapter 2, but there are also differences between the Christian Right and neoconservatism. In a historiography of American neoconservatism, Brandon High (2009) roots neoconservatism's forty years of existence in two groups: ex-Marxist Jewish intellectuals, i.e. "the 'New York Intellectuals'" (478) and "apparatchiks of the Democratic party" (481) who defected to the Republicans in the 1970s, which included Jewish, Catholic and atheist social conservatives. Together they formed a movement concerned with encouraging virtue, anti-communist patriotism, a moralistic and pro-Israel rational for foreign policy, corporate economic expansion, and the reduction of welfare dependency; the last of which was directly amenable to neoliberal domestic policy with most of the rest being amenable to neoliberal globalization policies. Although neither Christian nor libertarian themselves, to have an impact on politics both groups "had to take their place alongside Republican party stalwarts, long-time Reagan associates, Christian evangelicals, and libertarians in [an] uneasy Republican coalition" (483). By the 1990s, neoconservatives managed to marginalize some of their more "liberal" opponents within the Republican Party "by allying themselves with a group which they could not ignore: the Christian Right" (488). In other words, although separate and distinct, the neoconservative movement and the Christian Right are intimately connected. In fact, although High is clear in his distinction between the two, other scholars are more comfortable collapsing them together (Brown 2006, 696; Marzullo 2011, 762). At the same time, neoliberalism's arguably "amoral" disinterest in family values morality aligning with neoconservatism on economic issues while clashing with it on moral issues is precisely what helps create a space in which the culture wars can thrive, even and especially in relation to the Republican Party.

We can see how that operates within the Republican Party over the "hot button" issue of gay rights. Economically conservative and sometimes Christian gays and lesbians have tried to carve out a space for themselves in opposition to neoconservative Republican Christians. In

describing that phenomenon, Lisa Duggan (2003) argues the neoliberal expansion of free market values to new domains cannot help but be linked to sticky cultural issues like class, race, and identity, and therein lies the tension with neoconservatism. In that book and in her 2002 essay, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” she argues a new “third way” gay rhetoric has emerged in the West, “between the moral conservatism of the religious Right and the perceived ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘civil rights agenda’ of the progressive Left” (2002, 179). She shows that a new conservative gay rights organization called the Independent Gay Forum (IGF) represents a “new neoliberal sexual politics” (179). On their website gay conservatives post articles targeted against, on the one hand, “conservative moralists, antigay church doctrine, and exgay propaganda,” and on the other, “queer cultural and intellectual radicalism” (176-7). She discusses two conservative activists in particular who frequently write against the ex-gay movement, Bruce Bawer and Andrew Sullivan. As we know, a great deal of gay rights rhetoric deployed against the movement is in alignment with neoliberal sexual politics; and even when self-labeled “liberal” gay activists like Wayne Besen are strongly contrasted with “conservative” activists like Andrew Sullivan (Airhart 2007b; Monteagudo 2006), we can still see a strong neoliberal governmentality at play in the ex-gay debate on both sides. It creates a contested field of production where social conservatives compete with social liberals and economic neoliberals; because as we know from Richard Posner, many neoliberals see the free market as allowing for *more* liberal social relations, not less.

Although she is the first to note their alliances, Brown (2006) also recognizes the danger of collision between “the neoliberal rationality of strict means-ends calculations and need satisfaction... [and] the neoconservative project of producing a moral subject and moral order against the effects of the market in culture” (699). The ex-gay movement is a case-study in how that collision plays out. Indeed, as we saw in the last chapter, the lifelong struggle of the ex-gay

heterosexual entrepreneur can be argued against using the same individualized contract law espoused by neoliberalism; and as we shall see below, the Christian Right's desire to regulate morality can be turned against it in the form of government bans on reparative therapy; finally, as we shall see in the next chapter, the ex-gay movement's entry into free market popular culture to promote itself has been turned against it by more progressive film and television entrepreneurs who oppose the regulation of desire implied by ex-gay change. So, whereas Kenneth Saltman (2006) argues that, "Neoliberals all too readily accept what neocons put forth as 'the right knowledge' because they can measure it [and] Neocons readily accept the entrepreneurial spirit of neoliberalism because they can prosthetize [sic] through standardization" (352), I argue the ex-gay debate shows that neoliberals do not always accept "the right knowledge" and the neocon acceptance of the entrepreneurial spirit is always fraught with peril.

What is clear is that the uneasy alliance between neoliberalism and neoconservatism, which has dominated especially in the United States but also in Canada and Britain since at least the 1980s (see Hatt, Caputo and Perry 1990; Nevitte and Gibbins 1984), has helped produce both the culture wars and the conditions of existence for the ex-gay movement's deployment therein. But it is also the case that the alliance between neoliberalism and neoconservatism is itself deeply enmeshed in problems of truth and confession. As it happens, Brown (2006) ends her analysis of their relationship by turning to the problem of truth—religious truth in particular. She notes that religious truths "are relentlessly tethered to a declarative modality of truth" that actually fills a void created by a disenchanted world "short on meaningful truths," a void she argues is accelerated by neoliberalism (707). The declarative modality of truth specific in religion, she says, is a component of neoconservatism in general, which declares "what is true, right, and good without any necessary reference to facticity" (ibid). In other words, while

neoliberalism tethers truth to the market, thus making it both flexible and calculably modifiable, neoconservatism compensates by making “moral-political fetishes of truth” (ibid).

What Brown misses in her analysis is that the declarative aspect of religious and neoconservative truth is rooted in confession, in confessional testimonies of truth that, as we know, cannot be entirely separated from subjective confessions of both sacrificial and productive desire. It is too easy to simply label neoconservative and religious truth games as fetishistic. The truths declared and testified to in the culture wars are truly believed truths, even and especially when they are not concerned with facticity and even if they are also modifiable in the ever-changing struggle for discursive supremacy at play in the changing structuration of the culture wars. However modifiable truth may be in the ex-gay debate, its modification is more about the tactics and strategies of *delivering* truth than changing truth. When true beliefs themselves are modified, it is often only after extreme crisis. As Hunter (1991) reminds us, “On political matters one can compromise; on matters of ultimate moral truth, one cannot” (46). Unfortunately for the Christian Right, the truth of truth in the culture wars is at risk in the linking of neoconservatism with neoliberalism; because in neoliberalism truth is calculable and modifiable in relation to costs and benefits regardless of morality. In other words, neoconservatism fuels the culture wars with confessions of truth but neoliberalism subsumes and consumes the culture wars within cost-benefit calculations, caring little for who wins; either way the individual is still governed through the regulatory power of both the “free” market and the structuration of contested neoconservative truth games. It is in that context that the Christian Right’s use of the ex-gay movement to tilt the culture wars to the right appears to have backfired. As it happens, the seeds for that reversal were laid almost as soon as the ex-gay ad campaign began.

Matthew Shepard and Ex-gay Advertising in the Culture Wars

The ads promoting the ex-gay movement as freedom of choice were also designed to impact the relationship between neoliberal and neoconservative politics at the juridical and legislative level. In fact, some like Wayne Besen suggest the ad campaign was designed *primarily* to fulfill a political purpose entirely unrelated to the goal of individual change. Besen argues the ads were a strategy designed to influence the 1998 midterm elections in the U.S. (2003, 208-210). He believes the primary target of the ads were Republican lawmakers, many beholden to Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, and the ads were designed to persuade politicians to change then recently enacted laws protecting LGBT people from discrimination. As part of his evidence, Besen quotes several ex-gay leaders who felt betrayed by the ad campaign, in part because the ads were perceived to have initiated a Christian Right “fundraising bonanza” from which ex-gay ministries initially received “next to nothing” (221-222). As far as Besen is concerned, “if the affluent right-wing groups truly believed Exodus had merit, they would have dumped tens of millions of dollars into expanding these programs” (222).

That evidence, which is anecdotal and weak, directly contradicts Besen’s allegation quoted in the previous chapter that reparative therapy is a lucrative industry of con artists;⁷⁰ however, Besen does provide better evidence for political manipulation a few pages earlier via a quote from Bob Carter, a Christian Right spokesperson. In 1999 Carter was quoted in the *The Washington Post* as saying they ran the ex-gay television ads in Washington first because, “that’s where the policymakers are,” thus revealing a legislative purpose over and above any therapeutic purpose (Besen 2003, 215, quoting Carter, in Rosin 1999). For Besen, that admission plus complaints from the movement’s leaders about receiving little benefit from the ads highlights a

⁷⁰ In relation to the discourse of fraud, it is possible Besen makes a distinction in his own mind between the religious charitable side of the movement, which he argues is used by the Religious Right but receives no financial benefit, and the psychological private practice side of the movement, which is allowed to make profit within the guidelines and expectations outlined for all private psychotherapy practices. However, if he makes such a distinction in his mind, he does not make that clear on the written page, at least not in relation to his accusations of fraud.

political use of the movement that shows little real concern for any “change” offered. And yet we will learn below that the Christian Right provides financial support for the movement beyond funding ads, and many ex-gay groups are divisions of larger Christian Right organizations. Yes, Besen clearly shows a disconnect between the primary goals of the movement and the Christian Right’s larger goals, but he overemphasizes the conflict. There is no doubt that the movement’s uses go well beyond individual therapy and counselling; but that does not change its relationship to true belief. Freedom here is as much freedom from sin for *all of society* as it is freedom for the individual to choose to reject sin. Thus the conflict here is between economic freedom and political freedom; but just because they did not dump “tens of millions of dollars” into a movement catering only to a minority within a minority does not demonstrate a lack of belief; it merely demonstrates the realization that ex-gay financial capital is better spent in the culture wars. Because if the culture wars are lost, it does not matter how large a budget individual ex-gay ministries operate with or where that money comes from; political success for the movement hinges not on money, or efficacy, but on the de-legitimization of gay rights in general. Only then can the movement dream of becoming a real success. Unfortunately, that goal was sidetracked early by an event complete outside either the Christian Right’s or the movement’s control.

As we know, the larger political role of the movement is depicted, however briefly, in *Law & Order: SVU*’s “Bad Blood” via the planned Congressional run of a Christian Right leader as problematized by his own *ex-ex-gay* son’s brutal murder. Produced and aired in 2000, that episode strongly evokes a real gay murder that directly impacted U.S. congressional politics. In fact, Besen argues the ex-gay goal of influencing the 1998 elections failed precisely because of the media frenzy surrounding the brutal murder of gay University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard that same year, which put an immediate halt to any and all attempts to change anti-discriminatory laws for LGBTQ people in the U.S. In other words, the ex-gay movement’s role

in the culture wars is intimately tied to the role Matthew Shepard's death played. It is, in fact, embedded in the Matthew Shepard story.⁷¹ Shepard, a 21-year-old gay white male, was beaten, tied to a fence, and left for dead in Wyoming on October 6, 1998, just a few months after the ex-gay ad campaign debuted. He was discovered near death the day after his beating and succumbed to his injuries in hospital on October 12. His story quickly made national news, and, even before he died, he became the gay rights poster boy for the push to enact anti-hate crime laws. Although the first federal hate crime bill inspired by Shepard (as well as by James Byrd Jr., a black man who was beaten and dragged to his death by white supremacists that same year) failed to get past the committee stage, the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act* was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2009. In between that success and Shepard's death, his murder was used by the gay rights movement to draw attention to the problem of homophobia at a national level, and the legacy of his murder is credited as changing American attitudes to gays and lesbians (Johnson Jr. 2010). As Scott Hoffman (2011) outlines in his article on Shepard's "martyrdom," that shift in attitudes can be measured in polls on acceptance of gays and lesbians.

Gallup found that only 44 percent of Americans in a November 1996 poll thought that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal. That grew to 50 percent in the February 1999 results. An April 2004 poll by the *Los Angeles Times* found that among respondents aged eighteen to twenty-nine, 62 percent said that gays and lesbians should have the same civil rights protections as women and minorities. Surveys by the Pew Research Center in 2006 and Hamilton College in 2007 found similar results. (146)

Indeed, Hoffman states outright, "evidence suggests that Shepard's popular martyrdom may have contributed to a greater awareness and acceptance of the gay community in America" (145).

⁷¹That connection seems to have been lost on the editors of *Culture Wars in America: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints and Voices*. Neither the two-volume first edition (Chapman 2010), nor the three-volume second edition (Chapman and Clement 2014) makes any significant reference to the ex-gay movement although both address the hate-crime policy initiatives Shepard's death inspired. Both editions do have a listing for Charles Socarides, who fought the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973, co-founded NARTH in 1992, and has a gay son who worked for President Bill Clinton; but there is no separate entry for NARTH, nor any other ex-gay group; there is not even an entry for Dr. Robert Spitzer, who declassified homosexuality and dethroned psychoanalysis as the dominant psychiatric discourse (Shorter 1997).

As it happens, Hoffman also notes the relationship between Shepard's death and the ex-gay ad campaign. After listing advances for gays and lesbians in the religious field in the 1990s, he describes the ad campaign as the Christian Right's response to those advances. He notes the plan by Exodus and Focus on the Family to hold a "National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day" for October 11, 1998 and writes, "This was the world in which Matthew Shepard found himself on that fateful October night" (128). In Hoffman's list of advances for gays and lesbians made since Shepard's death, he includes the American Psychological Association's "rejection" of reparative therapy in 2009, which occurred the same year Congress passed the hate crime prevention bill (145). In making these connections, however, Hoffman is not just drawing correlations; the connection between Shepard's death and the ad campaign is explicit, both in the media coverage of the event and in the impact Shepard's death had on the ad campaign itself.

As noted, Shepard's death occurred only a few months after the newspaper campaign began, and the television ad campaign was announced two days after Shepard's beating. His death also occurred the day after the National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day, which was first organized the year before by ex-gay spokesperson Michael Johnston. The proximity of these ex-gay events with the Shepard story did not go unnoticed in the *New York Times* article published the day after Shepard died. There both a representative of the Family Research Council and ex-gay spokesperson John Paulk are quoted as condemning Shepard's murder while complaining that the hate-crime laws proposed in the wake of Shepard's beating "have nothing to do with perpetrators of violent crime and everything to do with silencing political opposition" (Brooke 1998). However, the article follows that quote with a reference to the just announced television ad campaign and says of it, "Gay leaders charge that these advertisements help create a hostile climate for homosexuals, a climate that can lead to violence" (ibid). Two months later the political connection between Shepard's death and the ad campaign was all but confirmed:

[S]pokespersons for gay liberation were quick to accuse the so-called Religious Right of creating the hostile environment in which hate crimes against gays flourish. Their surreal thesis indicted anyone who publicly condemns homosexuality as playing a part in Matthew Shepherd's death. Gay activists cited as Exhibit A the recent "truth in love" advertising campaign, which claimed that a change of sexual orientation is possible and produced ex-gays to prove it. (*Christianity Today* Editorial Board 1998)

Of course, like the Family Research Council and John Paulk, this editorial condemns Shepard's murder but is adamant that "Not enough traditional Christians have engaged in dialog with people on the other side over the implications of sanctioning same-sex behavior" (ibid). Given such reports in the media, it should not be surprising that for more than a decade following Shepard's death, while the gay rights movement virtually canonized Shepard as a saint in its efforts to get federal hate-crime legislation passed, the Christian Right would do everything in its power to convince the American public that freedom from homosexuality was not only possible and necessary for the proper functioning of society, but a right of free choice as well.

Had it not been for the Spitzer study temporarily legitimizing ex-gay therapy in 2001, it is possible Shepard's death may have ended the movement's promotion in mainstream media in the early days of the new century. Indeed, the impact of Shepard's death on the ad campaign was immediate. Even though the television ads were announced in October 1998, they were delayed until mid-1999 "due to the public outcry over the murder" (Lund and Renna 2006, 283) because the campaign took a "public relations hit, perhaps the most damaging to date" (Gallagher and Bull 2001, 274). Writing about a different hate-crime in another part of America two years later, journalist David A. Neiwert (2004) takes a brief detour into the Matthew Shepard story. After describing the National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day, the *Newsweek* cover story devoted to John and Anne Paulk, and the announcement of the ex-gay television ads, he writes that the death of Shepard "changed everything" (101). As Besen (2003) puts it, "Overnight, the right wing went from victor to vanquished in the culture wars. The success of their ex-gay campaign essentially evaporated into thin air" (214). Besen even quotes reparative therapist Joseph

Nicolosi as complaining about having to move a NARTH meeting because of protesters angered by Shepard's death: "A kid gets killed in Wyoming, and we can't even have a scientific meeting" (159, quoting Nicolosi in Heller 1998). Tanya Erzen (2006) documents the impact Shepard's murder had on individual members of the ex-gay ministry she studied in 2000. Although most of her subjects were willing to condemn both Shepard's death and Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church (which picketed the funeral), one ex-gay participant was willing to go further: "When I was at church the very last time they were talking about Matthew Shepard and his sin and what a tragedy it was, and I wanted to stand up and say, You are the problem. You're the reason Matthew Shepard got murdered" (66, Erzen quoting Lars). In other words, the death of Shepard reverberated through both the Christian Right's larger political campaign and through the ex-gay movement at an individual level, and it highlighted conservative Christian antigay attitudes in a way that directly contradicted the supposed message of compassion from the ads.

Evidence of the ad campaign's initial failure in the culture wars, at least at the level of legislative politics, was clear when the GOP lost five seats in the House and picked up nothing in the Senate in the 1998 elections. That the Christian Right was unhappy about that situation can be seen in the response from Focus on the Family's James Dobson, who directly blamed House Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich and demanded he resign (Besen 2003, 223). That the Christian Right, for a short time at least, began to see homosexuality as a losing issue in the culture wars can be seen in the decision by one of the key Christian Right initiators of the ad campaign, Janet Folger (who Besen describes as being "shell-shocked by her dealings with volatile ex-gays"), to switch attention in early 2001 to what she considered a more lucrative cultural issue: abortion (ibid, 224). Indeed, a year after Shepard's death, the movement could not shake his legacy, although to be fair, in some cases it created self-inflicted wounds. For example, it is hard to see how the decision to hold another National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day on

the day before the anniversary of his death could have led to anything but conflict. When the “stars” of both one of the ex-gay newspaper and television ads, Michael Johnston and his mother, spoke at that event, someone in the crowd yelled, “Remember Matthew Shepard’s mother” and shortly after someone hurled a pie in Michael Johnston’s face (Erzen 2006, 206).

As further evidence of the ad campaign’s initial failure, Besen lists a series of ex-gay public relations embarrassments that all occurred in the year following the campaign’s launch: “In a one-year period, [former ex-gay] Wade Richards came out publically, John Paulk—[who along with his wife Anne was] the centerpiece of their ad campaign—was exposed [by Besen] in a gay saloon, and London [England]’s largest ex-gay star, Jeremy Marks, renounced the ex-gay ministries” (222). Such ex-gay scandals and defections are not uncommon; in the following years many more would be exposed, including scandals involving the above mentioned Michael Johnston, who was caught soliciting unprotected sex online under an assumed name without acknowledging his HIV status (Besen 2007; Perry 2008), and NARTH psychologist George Rekers, who was caught on vacation with a gay rent boy (Bullock and Thorp 2010; Schwartz 2010). There was also a major defection in Canada that saw New Direction Ministries in Toronto break from Exodus, reject reparative therapy, and announce plans to begin building bridges to the Toronto LGBT community (New Direction 2014). However, what Besen fails to recognize is that such scandals and defections have little bearing on the matter at the political level. From an ex-gay entrepreneurial point of view, such transgressions can be explained by the struggle and work required in heterosexual self-transformation; from the Christian Right theological point of view, such transgressions are further proof of the sinful disease homosexuality represents, and the defections are merely lost souls who have succumbed to the evil influence of Satan.

That the ex-gay ad campaign launched the movement directly into the culture wars is of no doubt. There is also no doubt that the unexpected and tragic death of Matthew Shepard

negatively impacted the Christian Right's ability to use ex-gay change to effect antigay legislative change. But that event and the role it played in the culture wars did not stop either the movement or the Christian Right from continuing to fund ex-gay ads. As noted, another media frenzy would change the tied of the wars again. Besen explains: "Just when it seemed that the topic was fading from the radar screen, Dr. Robert Spitzer... thrust it again into the spotlight" (2003, 225). Spitzer's study was discussed in the previous chapter, and the media frenzy it led to will be discussed in the next chapter as will his later confessional apology. Here it is important to know that in 2001 that study gave new life to the movement's role in the culture wars. It led to more ads promoting ex-gay change appearing across media platforms and the "scientific" suggestion that change may be possible led to increased debate over the status of homosexuality. It allowed the Christian Right to continue using ex-gay change to try and alter the structuration of the relationship between neoliberalism and neoconservatism in the culture wars.

Structuration, Governmentality, and Political Economy

In considering the political-economic role ex-gay communication plays in the culture wars we need to consider that way individual agency interrelates with social structure. When the Christian Right deploys ex-gay communication both to manipulate the desires of individuals who might choose ex-gay change and to tilt to the right the relationship between neoliberalism and neoconservatism, they are playing truth games in an arena where it is very difficult to separate individual agency from societal influence. And yet the Christian Right is made up of individual agents who choose to manipulate misarticulated desires so as to change social structures. They willfully deploy communication tactics and strategies in a political economy that mixes choice with regulation. Mosco (2009) says there are three primary processes to consider in the political economy of communication: commodification, structuration, and spatialization. Here I will address structuration, which is a sociological concept first developed by Anthony Giddens (1976;

1984; 1991; 1992). The concept helps us escape both a dichotomy between structure and agency in so much social scientific thinking and the tendency for theories of structure to ignore change.

Structuration aims to circumvent the problem of both determinism, implied by structuralist and poststructuralist theories, and fully autonomous freedom, implied by utilitarian theories of purposeful action (like rational choice) by accounting for the reciprocal relationship between agency and structure. Andreas Reckwitz (2002) labels these dichotomous theories as “the model of the homo economicus and the homo sociologicus” (244), with homo economicus, “reach[ing] to contemporary Rational Choice Theory” and homo sociologicus being “rooted primarily in structuralism and semiotics, phenomenology and hermeneutics, and in Wittgensteinian language game philosophy” (245). The model of homo economicus, “explains action by having recourse to individual purposes, intentions and interests... [whereas] homo sociologicus explains action by pointing to collective norms and values” (ibid). Giddens’s theory aims to reconcile these extremes by accounting for agency within structure: “Human beings, in the theory of structuration, are always and everywhere regarded as knowledgeable agents, although acting within historically specific bounds of the unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of their acts” (Giddens 1982, 222); however, “structures must not be conceptualized as simply placing constraints on human agency, but as enabling” (1976, 161). Structuration, then, is an active process wherein the rules of social life become “generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life” (1984, 21).

The words “enactment” and “enabling” account for how human practices constitute, reproduce, *and* change the rules of social life. As Sewell (1992) explains, “human agency and structure, far from being *opposed*, in fact *presuppose* each other” (4, author’s italics). The social construction of choice, then, does not deny agency. Even when ex-gays, or consumers in general, misarticulate their desire and choose based on mistaken cognitive codes, they still choose. The

problem, says Sewell, is that the “metaphor of structure implies stability” (2) and thus in structural and poststructural theories, “change is commonly located outside of structures, either in a telos of history, in notions of breakdown, or in influences exogenous to the system” (3). That is why theories of structure are excellent at accounting for how systems of power maintain the status quo but have difficulty accounting for historical change without appealing to an outside force. Giddens’s theory does so by accounting for how human actions initiate change *from within* using the resources made available by the very structures that are changed through agency: “Giddens insists that structures are not merely rules, but rules and resources, or ‘rule-resource sets’” (Sewell 1992, 9); understanding “human beings as *agents* is to conceive of them as *empowered* by access to resources of one kind or another” (10, author’s italics). The tendency for power structures to reproduce themselves is well known. Ex-gay communities provide resources and rules that encourage not only the misarticulation of desire but also the reinforcement, through the agency of Christian leaders, of already existing structures. Thus structures enable and constrain social action, but they are still sustained and reinforced rather than radically reworked. In other words, change is not ubiquitous. However, reproduction is not automatic either: “Structures are at risk, at least to some extent, in all of the social encounters they shape—because structures are multiple and intersecting, because schemas are transposable, and because resources are polysemic and accumulate unpredictably” (Sewell 1992, 19). Thus the enabling and constraining of agency by structure and the reinforcing and modifying of structure by agency can lead to both the reproduction of systems of power *and* changes to those systems.

Structuration theory, then, is another way of accounting for what Foucault calls the government of self and others, and is thus compatible with a Foucauldian governmental analysis. Foucault, however, is often associated with post-structuralism, and some consider him to have “attacked the view that the individual subject has an innate capacity to think and act with any

significant degree of autonomy” (O’Donnell 2003, 756). Indeed, Giddens himself writes, “Power moves in mysterious ways in Foucault’s writings, and history, as the actively made achievement of human subjects, scarcely exists” (1992, 24). But Giddens misunderstands Foucault; and O’Donnell only references the view that Foucault attacks the subject so he can argue against it: “Foucault’s works can sustain more than one interpretation about the relationship of agency and structure” (O’Donnell 2003, 757). Indeed, his aim is to reconcile the works of Foucault and Giddens noting that “Foucault’s later writings began to indicate greater scope for human agency” (756). O’Donnell explains that “Foucault’s concept of discursive formations should not preclude analysis of those points and periods when history is punctuated by acts of will, choice and imagination, either individual or collective” (766). He concludes that “structuration theory encompasses the limitations as well as the power of agency... [and] Giddens need not seem so antagonistic to Foucault and the post/structuralists. Both see social life as an integrated whole, refusing to separate the individual from society even for theoretical purposes” (765). Reckwitz (2002) also sees Foucault and Giddens as compatible. He outlines a theory that challenges the extreme articulations of homo economicus and homo sociologicus, listing several theorists who often seem incompatible yet who he considers to “stand opposed to both the purpose-oriented and the norm-oriented models of explaining action” (246). Those authors include Giddens, the late Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu. Although he acknowledges that his account is an idealized model of practice theory that ignores “the peculiarities of the single authors” (244), it still “invites us to regard agents as carriers of routinized, oversubjective complexes of bodily movements, of forms of interpreting, knowing how and wanting and of the usage of things” (259). According to Reckwitz, in other words, Giddens, Foucault, and Bourdieu (and several others) all analyze human practices in a way that accounts for the mutually reciprocal play of agency and structure in terms of body, mind, things, knowledge, and discourse.

Structuration theory considered in relation to Foucault's analytics of power (Foucault never developed a *theory* of power) allows us to account for relations between large and small systems of power that reproduce and modify systems of governance, often at the same time. In fact, Giddens's theory is not only compatible with Foucault's definition of governmentality (because it operates at the intersection of knowledge, normativity and subjectivity), it also connects back to the problem of truth understood in a Foucauldian sense. As Mark Haugaard (2012) reminds us, power and authority are not limited to "heads of corporations, political or military figures," because, "authority is dispersed right across society [and] associated with every social role imaginable" (78). Such an understanding connects back to truth because, as Foucault explains, "Power cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the basis of, and thanks to, that power... We are obliged to produce the truth by the power that demands truth and needs it in order to function: we are forced to tell the truth, we are constrained, we are condemned to admit the truth or to discover it" (2003b [1975/76], 93).

The reciprocal reproduction and modifications of truth and power in a system in which both are dispersed across society via every social role imaginable is, by necessity, a key aspect, if not *the* key aspect, of structuration. It is worth quoting Haugaard at length in this regard, because in one short paragraph he connects together Foucault's analytics of truth and power, Giddens theory of structuration and, notably, Pierre Bourdieu as well, via the notion of social capital:

While struggles for power can be found everywhere, power is not some kind of metaphysical force which *is* everywhere. Power does nothing, wills nothing and, as a thing in itself, is nowhere. It is agents who are and who will, it is agents who struggle, it is agents who create truth claims and use them to empower themselves to positions of authority. Yet, these agents are not free to do so as they wish. They are constrained, but not by structure as a metaphysical force, or by systems... they are constrained by the necessity to make their structuration practices count as valid in the eyes of others. As will be seen, truth is useful in making certain forms of social [and cultural] capital count. (74, author's italics, my addition in brackets)

I will explain Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital below. For now, suffice it to say that his linking of those forms of capital with economic capital (understood within a critical and social political economy rather than an individualized rational choice political economy) provides a political economic specificity to several structuration processes. Structuration is not just an entry point to the study of political economy; it is a political economic process in and of itself, especially in a social environment where economic calculations are extended to all social realms. That it can also be conceived of as a form of governmentality (which, as we know, is a concept Foucault developed in relation to liberal and neoliberal forms of political economy) only underlies the point. That confession is also a form of governmentality—that it structures religious and psychological knowledges, institutions and forms of selfhood, that it operates through structures and human agency, that it produces truth as cultural and social capital for individuals and institutions, and that it is used tactically and strategically in marketing campaigns and entrepreneurial therapeutics of the self—this all helps situate the ex-gay movement within specific political economic processes that both enable and constrain human action.

In other words, understanding structuration as a form of governmentality connected in our society to truth confessed as cultural capital provides a framework within which to further understand the political economy of the ex-gay movement. The movement was born just as most of the Western world began to shift from Keynesian style welfare economics to neoliberal style rational choice economics. Thus, while neoliberal thought may not explain the movement, it has structured it, both as a social institution and as a producer of subjectivity. But it was also born and bred simultaneously with the increased politicization of fundamentalist and evangelical Christianity in North America, which occurred in part through the agency of individual Christian leaders. As we know, the rise of the Christian Right is a factor in the rise of neoconservatism as a political rationality, and in the 1980s and 90s, neoliberalism and neoconservatism operated

together, in spite of their differences, to change the political-economic landscape of the United States. It is within that context that the movement came of age in the 1990s, joining with the Christian Right to justify itself through a marketing campaign promoting freedom of choice while also espousing an exceptionally moralistic framework that structures choice through shame and abjection. In other words, in the culture wars, the ex-gay movement encourages the social misarticulation of desire to conform with its own understanding of truth and tradition.

Funding an Ex-gay Political Economy of Truth

Although the ex-gay movement began in the early 1970s, as we know it did not become a major factor in the culture wars until the 1990s. Prior to that, it existed in relative isolation, largely unknown outside fundamentalist, evangelical, Mormon, and conservative Catholic communities where it existed only to be called on in need (Erzen 2006; Fetner 2005). In the early days its loose organization was fragmented with a much smaller Exodus International tying its multiple ministries and psychotherapeutic practices together. The establishment of NARTH as a second umbrella organization in 1991 signalled the beginning of the movement's growth. In the years between that and the ad campaign, links with various Christian Right organizations were formed and the fruits of that labour were realized when the movement began advertising itself. In order to extend the encouragement of its own specific kind of misarticulated desire beyond a limited Christian sphere into the public sphere, it required financial capital. The funding came from the Christian Right,⁷² a coalition of politically engaged fundamentalist, evangelical, and (in some cases) conservative Catholic organizations that came to prominence in the 1970s and 80s through the creation of multiple televangelist media empires (Marsden 2006 [1980]; Miller 1986;

⁷²The newspaper ads cost \$600,000 and the television ads \$1 million. Both were financed by fifteen different not-for-profit Christian Right groups (Besen 2003; Fetner 2005; Lund and Renna 2003), including the Family Research Council (a Christian advocacy group associated with Focus on the Family founded by Christian psychologist James Dobson), the American Family Association (founded by Donald Wildmon of American Family Radio), and the Christian Coalition (founded by Pat Robertson of *CBN* and *The 700 Club*).

Stephens and Giberson 2011). However, as primarily not-for-profit organizations, neither the ex-gay movement nor the Christian Right are supposed to use financial capital to generate more financial capital, even if they sometimes do produce a “slight profit” (Burke 2007). That is not to say the Christian Right, and televangelists in particular, are not known for their incredible fundraising abilities—they most certainly are (Hadden and Shupe 1987; Frankl 1987; 1998); or that some Christian leaders (Jim and Tammy Faye Baker for example) have not been caught engaging in fraudulent financial activities (Frankl 1998); or that Christian Right fundraising is not frequently perceived as a mere money-making scam (Posner, S. 2008). But, in truth, the political economic goals of the Christian Right are not financial.

Christian Right fundraising, advertising, and lobbying is designed to generate symbolic profit in cultural and political fields in the form of Christian truth. Indeed, much of their financial capital is funnelled through American Political Action Committees (PACs) designed to pool campaign resources and contributions and direct them towards specific *political* campaigns. Such has been the case since the 1980s (Koenig and Boyce 1985; Wilcox 1988). But we cannot forget that like the ex-gay movement, the Christian Right is made up of true believers. In short, it is a movement made up of agents of change trying to modify the structuration of American politics, and since 1998, the ex-gay movement has been one of its tools of change. Indeed, as we know, the ex-gay ad campaign was just as much about influencing the 1998 congressional elections as it was about promoting the movement itself. But the movement is still frequently showcased on Christian Right websites and in Christian Right broadcasting as evidence of God’s great work (for example on Pat Robertson’s *The 700 Club*), and it is used by Christian Right lawyers in legal arguments against gay marriage (*Rachel Maddow Show, The 2012a*),⁷³ but whatever money is

⁷³ In her MSNBC coverage of the Spitzer apology, Maddow had constitutional lawyer Kenji Yoshino discuss the role pro-ex-gay psychological studies play in arguments against gay marriage. In reference to the constitutionality of laws surrounding the protection of sexual orientation, the “immutability criteria” that demands homosexuality be functionally immutable to justify its protection is threatened by arguments and studies that support ex-gay change. While Yoshino notes there are problems with the immutability criteria because, by comparison, “we would never

raised from those efforts is seldom used to support the *practice* of ex-gay change. Indeed, even before Exodus shut down, the movement was in financial trouble.

According to reports from the anti-ex-gay websites *Ex-gay Watch*, *Truth Wins Out*, and *Box Turtle Bulletin* (which frequently obtain and analyze ex-gay IRS 990 tax forms), prior to its closing Exodus had a yearly operating budget of one million (TWO 2014c), but in 2005 it only claimed a total revenue of \$808,000 (Airhart 2007a). By November 2011 it was holding emergency meetings to develop plans for escaping financial ruin (Roberts 2011).⁷⁴ Similarly, NARTH only has a yearly operating budget of \$178,000 (TWO 2014c), but in 2009 it had total revenues of \$137,143 with \$166,835 in expenses, leading to a loss that year of \$29,692 (Burroway 2013).⁷⁵ As Warren Throckmorton, former NARTH supporter now evangelical critic of the movement, notes, “NARTH has never been a wealthy organization and conference attendance has declined in recent years” (2013). Indeed, most ex-gay organizations, even the larger ones like Love in Action (now Restoration Path), have yearly budgets ranging from as low as \$25,000 to about \$750,000 (TWO 2014c). And while some ex-gay groups are official divisions of larger Christian Right organizations, for example, “Love Won Out” is a division of Focus on the Family (TWO 2014c; Stephens and Giberson 2011), there is some evidence the movement is underwritten by the Christian Right over and above those relationships and ad funding, although much is legally hidden (Airhart 2007a; 2013). So while the ex-gay movement is certainly not a “cash cow,” at least not for itself, that it is used by the Christian Right for purposes beyond just promoting ex-gay change is clear.

say that religion is not going to be protected because you can change your religion,” he still notes that, “it seems to have this very odd and deep rooted traction in the [defence of marriage] case” (*Rachel Maddow Show, The* 2012a).

⁷⁴ Tanya Erzen also notes the financial difficulties experienced by Exodus: “as recently as 2003... the organization owe[d] \$100,000 to vendors because fewer attendees than expected appeared at the 2003 annual conference... [and] operating expenses [were] \$15,0000 a month over revenues” (2006, 45).

⁷⁵ NARTH lost its tax-exempt status in 2012 for failing to file its paperwork (Burroway 2013; Throckmorton 2013).

Thus the political economy of the ex-gay movement is not a political economy of profit and commodification; it is a political economy of truth. The Christian Right uses the movement to generate *cultural* profit in the form of symbolic truth. In a 1976 interview, Foucault said of truth, “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth—that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (2000a [1977], 131). He then outlined a contemporary “political economy” of truth (ibid, Foucault’s quotations) that consists of five traits: 1. it is centered on scientific discourses and institutions; 2. it circulates broadly through apparatuses of education and communication; 3. it is subject to constant political and economic incitement; 4. it is produced and governed, not exclusively but primarily, by and through a few major political-economic apparatuses; and 5. it is a site of political and social struggle. The ex-gay debate and the truth regimes it generates are indeed produced by just a few major political-economic apparatuses, including media organizations but also the medical disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. Although the movement was created, at the time, by largely subjugated religious and psychological discourses and apparatuses, it utilized the media’s reliance on sensationalism and controversy to produce a debate and a struggle with and within mainstream psychological apparatuses as well as with increasingly mainstream LGBTQ political groups. Thus, and especially through its mainstream mediation, the ex-gay debate now circulates as part of a political and economic regime of truth even if it is always and thoroughly contested within it.

Although Foucault’s analysis in that interview is focused on scientific and pseudo-scientific discourses, through his concept of governmentality he later expanded his analysis to include political, ethical, and subjective truth. However, as Lorna Weir (2008) points out, even

though many scholars have picked up on his notion of “regimes of truth,” Foucault only used that phrasing in the one interview. In his later writings and lectures on ethics, he uses “games of truth” more frequently, and, with that in mind, Weir seeks to “theorize ‘truth regime’ in the spirit of Foucault’s last work on the multiplicity of truth games and the negotiated relations between truth and power found in ancient practices of the self” (385). Noting how today truth regimes “may enter into stable relations, or may engage in contests of domination” (369), Weir differentiates between four kinds of truth—veridical or empirical forms of truth, governmental or regulatory forms of truth, symbolic or ideological forms of truth, and mundane or common sense forms of truth. Following from this schema, she demonstrates how in some debates today “symbolic and veridical truth collid[e], with the symbolic formula of truth attempting to subordinate and colonize the veridical” (383).⁷⁶ That is useful for understanding the collision of symbolic and veridical truth in the ex-gay debate. As we know, the ex-gay movement is firmly situated within today’s general political economy of truth, it being an intense site of political and social struggle centering on both truly believed and confessed psychological discourses and truly believed and confessed religious discourses. Weir characterizes both political and religious discourses as symbolic forms of truth. Symbolic truth, she explains, “supposes things can exist in the invisible without being present and can only be made present by being represented” (377). The mixing of science, religion and politics in the ex-gay debate leads to violent collision of symbolic and veridical truth; however, in this debate both forms of truth are also confessional.

Following that line of thought, we can see that ex-gay ads are not just vehicles designed to sell a product or promote a cause through games of truth; they are also a collection of deeply personal confessionals designed to collectively change thought and behaviour through shame and abjection both inside and outside conservative Christianity by representing as symbols the

⁷⁶ In her article she analyzes another culture wars debate in the United States, one not unconnected to the ex-gay debate, between natural scientists and the Christian Right over the concept of “intelligent design.”

changed thought and behaviour of those who testify to having changed. It is on that level that socially misarticulated desire and choice is manipulated. At the same time, psychological studies of efficacy and harm that constitute the veridical truth claims in this debate, almost all of which are rooted in the quantification and qualitative analysis of participant self reports, are also confessional. Both the ads and the studies, then, link political and scientific truth games together through confession. They work to create what Pierre Bourdieu calls “cultural capital” and what David Swartz calls “religious capital,” a concept Swartz isolates within Bourdieu’s concept (Swartz 1996). Before we can address Swartz’s concept, however, we need to outline Bourdieu’s larger theory of capital, which, when understood in relation to other important concepts he developed, further situates the ex-gay debate as one of structuration.

Cultural Capital and Religious Capital in Ex-gay Truth Games

Capital, financial or otherwise, is a resource that agents can accumulate and exchange to try and reinforce or change social structures through investment, acquisition and representation.⁷⁷ The Christian Right in the United States used its financial capital to fund the ex-gay ad campaign and change American social structures because, by the end of the 1990s, homosexuality had been reimagined both psychologically as a normal variation of human sexuality and culturally as a legitimate sexual identity worthy of mainstream representation in popular culture. In Bourdieuan terms, they exchanged financial capital to try and generate cultural capital to reverse changes in the increasingly pro-gay structuration of American society. Cultural capital is part of what McKinnon et al. (2011) refer to as Bourdieu’s “holy trinity” of concepts: field, capital, and habitus (356). A field is simply a cultural or social site of conflict or struggle in which actors compete for positions of power within a hierarchy (Johnson 1993, 8). Bourdieu draws his concept of capital from Marx but extends it to other fields to distinguish

⁷⁷ To represent to others that one has capital can augment one’s social reputation.

between three primary types of capital that can be accumulated: economic, cultural and social. As my concern here is with cultural and social capital I will focus on those definitions. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as “a form of knowledge, an internalised code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for, or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts” (ibid, 7). He defines social capital as sets of relationships which support cultural capital but also as “honourability and respectability” within and between social groups (1977 [1973], 503). In both cases, capital is “a resource (symbolic or material) that can be used to maintain or improve one’s position in a given field” (McKinnon et al. 2011, 357).

It is the notion of habitus, however, that most explicitly links Bourdieu’s analytics to Giddens’s theory of structuration (and thus also to Foucault’s governmentality). A habitus is “a lasting, generalized and transposable disposition to act in conformity with a (quasi-) systematic view of the world and human existence” (Bourdieu 1987 [1971], 126). Verter (2003) explains it in simpler terms as an “Internalized and naturalized... mode of thought and behaviour... [that orders] one’s choices and structur[es] one’s activities” (154). Baker and Miles-Watson (2010) further note that “habitus also mediates between ‘the individual, the subjective’ and the social and collective. The habitus is thus socialized subjectivity” (22). In other words, Bourdieu’s habitus can be conceived of as akin to Giddens’s structuration, which Sewell (1992) also recognizes: “Bourdieu recognizes the mutual reproduction of schemas and resources that constitute temporally durable structures—which he calls ‘habitus.’ His discussion of habitus powerfully elaborates the means by which mutually reinforcing rule-resource sets constitute human subjects with particular sorts of knowledge and dispositions” (15). Capital, then, whether economic, cultural or social, is a means by which agents produce, reproduce, and modify their social subjectivity—their habitus or structuration—even when that subjectivity is misarticulated.

A number of writers in addition to Swartz have extended Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital to include religious and/or spiritual capital (McKinnon et al. 2011; Verter 2003).⁷⁸ Some note that the concept comes from Bourdieu even if he did not elaborate on it beyond one article (Bourdieu 1991 [1971]). Verter says that Bourdieu distinguishes between two types of religious capital: "religious symbolic systems (myths and ideologies)... and religious competences (mastery of specific practices and bodies of knowledge)" without elaborating on "how religious capital might be related to other species of capital (157); and McKinnon et al. remark that "While Bourdieu seems to suggest that one can speak of religious capital without a religious field... he largely side-steps the issue" (358). Most of these authors, then, extend the concept of capital into the religious field using Bourdieu's larger notion without worrying about his specific discussions of religion. As Verter explains, "his theory of cultural capital posits a sophisticated model of symbolic competition, personal interdynamics, and individual choice that, when applied to the religious sphere, offers a complex and useful alternative to rational action theory... [but] one must—quite paradoxically—turn away from his writings on religion" (150).

The reason it is useful to understand what the Christian Right generates as specifically religious, even while noting that it is subsumed within the cultural, is because the role the Christian Right plays in the culture wars is an explicitly religious role. It operates within a political economy of truth in which its fight to monopolize political and economic structures in the United States is conformed to biblical truth, the very same biblical truth used to encourage Christians who experience same-sex desire to misarticulate that desire as a desire for ex-gay change. In effect, the Christian Right uses the ex-gay movement, complete with its rhetoric of choice, to tilt the culture wars to the *religious* as well as the political right. But while both

⁷⁸ Others draw on James Coleman (1988) to link religious and spiritual capital to social and cultural capital with Coleman linking social capital to human capital through the neoliberal theorist Gary Becker (Finke and Stark 1992; Iannaccone and Klick 2003; Stark and Finke 2000). For the more neoliberal inclined theorists, "Spiritual capital is a subset of religious capital and a subset of human, social and cultural capitals" (Baker and Miles-Watson 2010, 28).

cultural and religious capital are used to try and alter the structuration of our dominant political economy, as we will learn below, religious capital is also used to try and alter the structuration of the Christian Right's relationship with homosexuality so as to emphasize compassion over moral condemnation while still calling it sinful. However, that in itself is also part of the cultural capital generated to change the political structuration of homosexuality, hence religious capital being a subset of cultural capital. Nevertheless, there is one form of capital that Swartz tells us needs to be distinguished from religious capital: the "human capital" of rational choice theory.

Whereas human capital emphasizes the investment of labour time in creating human beings as free market entrepreneurs, religious capital is a power resource that religious actors compete for and try to monopolize within fields of religious and cultural production. Such fields are spaces of competition and struggle constituted by domination and subordination. As Swartz explains, through religious capital, "a group of religious specialists is able to monopolize the administration of religious goods and services," including salvation, thus creating symbolic political power within the religious field (75; see also 74). We can see the Christian Right's desire to produce monopolizing symbolic power in the ex-gay debate through its saturation of multiple forms of communication with ads across several years. In addition to newspapers and television, the movement also uses radio and billboard posters and the internet to sell ex-gay change and generate religious capital.⁷⁹ In this context the selling of change cannot be separated from confessions made by subordinate actors struggling to legitimize their identities both within a larger society hostile to their interests and within their own religious homo-preference networks (which, as we know, have a history of being hostile to anything "gay"). Their

⁷⁹ In 2005 and 2006 there were a series of billboard campaigns funded by various ministries across the U.S., some costing as much as \$4000, some featuring models, some not, but all asking questions like, "Gay? Unhappy?" and "Are you Gay or Lesbian and don't want to be?" (Airhart 2006; Exodus International 2005; Staff Writer 2006; TWO 2014a;). Campaigns like these are not exclusive to the U.S. We already know about the ads that aired on CTV in Sudbury, Ontario, but more recently, in the U.K., a group promoting conversion therapy purchased ad space on the London subway; however, London mayor Boris Johnson banned them from being displayed (BBC 2012).

confessions are used by dominant players to create religious legitimacy for antigay ideologies within both mainstream *and* Christian fields of symbolic production; but it is done through the language of neoliberal freedom. Thus even though both cultural capital and religious capital operate relatively autonomous from economic capital, they are all exchangeable, and in this context the exchange of financial capital for religious capital is orchestrated for political ends.

We can see the movement's desire to produce religious capital as symbolic power through the concepts and images deployed in its ads. In all media used, when living subjects are represented visually, either in tandem with their confessions or when accompanying questions directed at the target demographic, they are usually situated within a "family friendly" setting. They are also usually highly gendered, such as the photo of Anne Paulk described in the previous chapter. That is to say, ex-gay ads tend to present very feminized or masculinized images, albeit modestly dressed, family-oriented feminized and masculinized images that reinforce one's proper pro-creative, heteronormative, ideally "married" place in the world. Lighting, colour scheme and set-design evoke a warm and compassionate nuclear family nostalgia, emphasizing what is at stake in the culture wars from the conservative Christian point of view—that the "traditional" family is under attack (Guth 1996; Stephens and Giberson 2011). The television ads are not dissimilar. One features several ex-gay couples holding young children (presumably their own), all dressed in modest, gender-specific clothing, all insisting they are "living proof" of change (Coral Ridge Ministries 1998a). Another features ex-gay Michael Johnston (from the *The Miami Herald* newspaper ad) sitting next to his mother in a comfortable 50s-style family room, both confessing Michael's struggles with promiscuity, drug abuse, and HIV, and testifying to his salvation through Jesus Christ. Their testimony is intercut with emotionally laden photographs of Michael as a child and teenager (Coral Ridge Ministries 1998b).

Not only do the ads symbolically privilege a heterosexual identity over all others, including, ironically, even an ex-gay identity, they also delegitimize all other forms of sexual identity not rooted in heterosexuality. An ex-gay identity, although clearly subservient to heterosexuality, is the only other sexual identity allowed legitimacy because it is at least rooted in the desire to be heterosexual. Rhetorically, the ads operate on the surface to legitimize ex-gay identities in addition to gay and lesbian identities in a sexual marketplace, offering freedom of choice in an economically “democratic” environment; however, at a deeper level, that freedom is symbolically monopolized by heteronormativity *and* heterosexuality through the administration of only one family oriented path to a healthy lifestyle. The objective of the concepts and notions deployed is to create cultural legitimacy for the idea that Christians who experience same-sex desire deserve the right to choose an ex-gay identity so as to gain access to the heterosexual path of salvation, while any gays and lesbians who exercise their right to choose an LGBT identity do so only in the context of disease, abuse, immorality, and damnation. A Christian family values worldview is thus invoked that is tied directly not to neoliberal choice but to neoconservative authority. In other words, as an agent of change, the Christian Right uses both the ads and the misarticulated agency of the ex-gays in the ads to alter the structures of American morality.

It is in such a context that the newspaper ad featuring self-identified “straight” football player Reggie White operates. As we know, that ad is designed as a defence of free speech, of White’s constitutional right to publically condemn homosexuality. But it also accuses homosexual activists of engaging in threats, intimidation, and blackmail, and (ironically) of desiring only raw political power (Alliance for Traditional Marriage, et al. 1998c). On the surface, the ad is about defending individual human rights, about creating a safe space for White to voice his views, but, at the same time, it is designed to monopolize the field and delegitimize all views that disagree (Fetner 2005) even as White accuses those opposed of doing precisely the

same thing (which they are). Like Foucault's analysis of neoliberal interventions in the supply and demand of crime outlined in the previous chapter, White's intervention seeks to manipulate the supply and demand of gay sex discursively and governmentally so as to symbolically increase the perceived risk level, but this time associating that risk with the loss of democratic freedom. So the rhetoric of neoliberalism is choice and freedom and so too is the rhetoric of the ex-gay movement; yet neither actually delivers on that promise because one limits choice to the dictates of supply and demand and the other to "traditional" family values. Of course, the interventions of gay rights activists are not much different, as they seek to make ex-gay change significantly less appealing in terms of cost through the rhetoric of financial fraud and psychological harm. They misrepresent the relationship between the two so as to monopolize the cultural field with the truth of one's true sex, offering only one real choice: be who you already are. In that way the culture wars reveal themselves to be a political economy of truth operating not just between Left and Right, but between neoliberalism and neoconservatism. But within that awkward space created by the tension between the two rationalities, the Christian Right realized they had to deploy their cultural and religious capital in a very specific way.

The Christian Right and the Neoliberalization of True Belief

The ex-gay movement was created to fulfill a specific purpose at the individual level—to offer freedom from homosexuality to struggling religious people who experience same-sex desire; but in the 1990s it was reimagined and used to fulfill a larger purpose, a religious purpose related to the generation of cultural and religious capital in the culture wars to influence legislation change. But it was also used to create religious capital in the face of a growing perception in the public sphere that conservative Christianity was tainted by hate. The ex-gay ads were designed in part to change that perception, by rooting Christian opposition to homosexuality in compassion so that the Christian Right could engage in the culture wars on that

issue from a more positive cultural position. A shift in the perceived public understanding of conservative Christianity's position on homosexuality was necessary because the ads were not the first media tools the Christian Right deployed against homosexuality. Tina Fetner (2005) roots the 1998 ex-gay ads in a very specific albeit largely failed antigay campaign that was initiated in the 1970s by Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, Pat Robertson and born-again singer Anita Bryant. Similarly, Stephens and Giberson (2011) note that the Christian Right, which considered "AIDS to be God's punishment on the gay community for a sinful lifestyle" (14), used popular culture, through media savvy Christians like Dobson, Falwell and Robertson, to "zero in on abortion, feminism, and homosexuality as the chief enemies of the traditional family" and the ex-gay movement is an extension of that (106; see also 116-128, 224-232). The first antigay campaign was exceptionally hateful. In trying to change that, a shift in the way biblical truth was testified to by conservative Christians in the culture wars was required. But that only resulted in conflicting statements that were still perceived as negative rather than positive.

The first Christian antigay media campaign began between 1977 and 1979 when Bryant founded the antigay group "Save Our Children" and successfully crusaded to overturn anti-discrimination laws protecting gay men and lesbians in Dade County, Florida (Fetner 2001; Stephens and Giberson 2011; SPLC 2005). Following that, Dobson founded Focus on the Family, which now has its own ex-gay wing, and Falwell founded the Moral Majority, a national Christian movement that included a public "declaration of war" on homosexuality that was only augmented by the AIDS crisis of the 1980s (Stephens and Giberson 2011; SPLC 2005). The founding of those groups, vitally important events for the rise of a newly politicized Christian Right, were so widely reported in the media, and the media was used by those groups so efficiently to propagate their antigay message (in particular through televangelism) that even

psychology textbooks in the 1980s began to reference them in their discussion of antigay prejudice (Thorn 2014). Many of those advocacy groups paid for the ex-gay ad campaign.

The 1998 ads, however, represent a *radical* change in direction for the Christian Right. Fetner explains that in its first two decades of its existence the ex-gay movement “remained out of the spotlight,” even within Christianity (75), so the ad campaign represented a “strategic shift... accompanied by a tactical innovation” (76). She writes, “The ex-gay groups allow Christian antigay activists to condemn homosexuality without abandoning homosexual people. Through a policy of ‘hate the sin, love the sinner,’ activists can take stands against equal rights for lesbian and gay people and respond to criticisms by offering an alternative to homosexuality” (76). Stephens and Giberson (2011) also describe the public emergence of ex-gay ministries in the 1990s as “a kinder face on evangelical disapproval [of homosexuality]” (130). So too does Besen (2003), who argues the Christian Right’s strategic shift was the result of a realization that the “overt hostility” directed towards LGBT people prior to the 1990s by the Christian Right had backfired (114-115). On *The Rachel Maddow Show*, while discussing Congress woman Christine O’Donnell’s role in promoting ex-gay change, he notes, “Polls started showing that the whole fire and brimstone part of the ministry that they were doing, ‘gays are going to Hell,’ wasn’t playing, so they had to do something more kind and gentle” (*Rachel Maddow Show, The* 2010). In *Anything But Straight* (2003) he quotes a Focus on the Family official as saying, “To the extent we can control our public image, we must never appear to be bigoted or mean-spirited” (115). He later quotes Human Rights Campaign Executive Director Elizabeth Birch as saying, “The lesson of the nineties for the extreme right is the up-front, hard-core extreme gay bashing was actually costing them a price... so they began to move strategically into more sophisticated ways of implanting the same messages” (201). However, as much as this shift operated to change the public perception of Christian homophobia in the culture wars, it also operated to change the

perception of homosexuality within conservative Christian communities, which were increasingly forced to acknowledge via both the movement and the AIDS crisis that many of their own children were engaging in the so-called “sin of sodomy.”

Given the continued discourse of hate coming from some Christian leaders even today, it is debatable whether such a change in tactics worked. The movement is still characterized by gay and human rights activists as a hate group (Besen 2003; SPLC 2005), and, as we know from Chapter 1, ex-gay leaders themselves have complained about those Christians “who rail against sexual sins to the exclusion of all other sins” (Chambers 2009, 15). Just recently a 2013 *New York Times* article even quoted current Focus on the Family president Jim Daly as saying, “We’ve said we hate the sin and love the sinner. But when you peel it back, sometimes we hated the sinner, too. And that’s not the Gospel” (Freedman 2013). That such a quote came 15 years after the ad campaign was initiated is significant, but at the same time the ads themselves still employed negative characterizations of gays and lesbians in spite of their attempt to emphasize compassion. Deploying contradictory strategies to try and govern how the public perceives homosexuality is not new for the Christian Right, as evidenced in the collection of articles about gay and lesbian life in capitalism edited by Gluckman and Reed (1997) discussed in the last chapter. There it is shown that the 1990s marketing shift aimed at gay men with disposable income led the Christian Right to appropriate those surveys and “portray gay men and lesbians as a rich special interest [group] undeserving of civil rights protection” (Gluckman and Reed 1997b, 8; see also Hardisty and Gluckman 1997). That does not mean they stopped arguing that LGBTQ people are also, as Fred Fejes (2001) paraphrases, “pathetic, mentally ill sex perverts and child molesters who are threats to religion, home, family and the state” (203; see also Minor 2013b). Rather, according to the above authors, the Christian Right came to argue that queer people are both a privileged special interest group *and* mentally ill degenerates.

Gluckman and Reed's collection was published a year before the ex-gay ad campaign began, and Fejes' essay was written before the impact of the campaign became apparent, so they had yet to see the shift in Christian Right tactics towards "compassion" and "help" for gay people. But, as noted above, even the supposedly compassionate ex-gay ads can still be seen as emphasizing the degenerate side of Fejes' point. For example, *The Washington Post* and *Miami Herald* ads state, respectively, "There are problems for homosexuals even condoms can't fix. Studies... show a high degree of destructive behaviour among homosexuals, including alcohol, drug abuse and emotional and physical violence" (Alliance for Traditional Marriage, et al. 1998b), and "Homosexuality is often a fast life of anonymous sex, drugs, alcohol, physical exhaustion in pursuit of pleasure, and even physical violence" (ibid 1998d). Yes, the ads preach compassion and offer help, but they do so suggesting that to refuse such help is to choose a life of diseased, violent degeneracy. Thus, the 1990s economic context of a "double-edged sword" of gay rights advancements adds an additional component to our understanding of the ex-gay ad campaign. The Christian Right's change in tactics was not just due to its own previous strategic failing; it was due also to a specific economic shift in how gay white male consumers were perceived by corporate America (see Chapter 2).

There is another problem with the tactic of replacing compassion with hate. Hateful Christian portrayals of gays and lesbians did not end with the ad campaign. Indeed, the notion that gay sex is considered not just sinful but among the worst of all sins was made clear by Jerry Falwell two days after the attacks of September 11, 2001 when interviewed on Robertson's *The 700 Club*. Falwell blamed the tragedy on pagans, abortionists, feminists, and gays and lesbians (*700 Club, The 2001*; Stephens and Giberson 2011); and Robertson fully agreed, since making countless more antigay statements of his own, including, "I would think it is somehow related to demonic possession" (*700 Club, The 2012a*; see also Edwards 2012) and it is "the attack of Satan

against the society we live in” (*700 Club, The* 2012b). The official position of the Catholic Church, as expressed by then Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus), is more nuanced; and although it appears Pope Francis is moving away from such rhetoric, this is still the official Catholic statement on homosexuality: “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder” (Ratzinger 1986).

Of course none of these leaders identify as gay or as ex-gay. None confess, at least in public, to experiencing same-sex desire or to have ever psychologically changed their experience of sexual desire. They root their expertise on this topic not in personal sexual knowledge, nor in any expert knowledge of psychology, but in theological knowledge, something of which they all consider themselves experts and something to which they testify to believing as absolute Truth. For them, the primary Truth that underlies the motivation of the movement is biblical even if the language they use to describe their distaste is sometimes psychological, especially that of Ratzinger.⁸⁰ In other words, the discourse of hate against homosexuality is rooted in true beliefs and even while acknowledging that Christianity is supposed to be a religion of love, the belief that homosexuality is among the worst of all sins is for many a matter of ultimate moral truth that cannot be changed, regardless of the politics of the culture wars. And yet, these same Christian leaders now also support the supposedly more compassionate discourse of change. In fact, ever since the ad campaign, tied up with this understanding of same-sex behaviour as sin, as ordered towards evil, as demon possession, and as the attack of Satan, is the ex-gay notion that it is controllable and malleable, that—as Robertson, Falwell, and Ratzinger have all attested to—it can be modified, changed, or un-acquired. “We’ve had many people who have indeed left the homosexual lifestyle and gone into a heterosexual relationship and been very, very happy,” said

⁸⁰ Genesis Chap 3, Genesis Chap 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, 1 Cor. 6:9, Romans 1:18-32, and 1 Tim. 1:10 are all cited in Ratzinger’s 1986 letter on the pastoral care of homosexuals, in which he notes, “the Church’s teaching today is in organic continuity with the Scriptural perspective and with her own constant Tradition” (Ratzinger 1986).

Robertson (*700 Club, The* 2011); and, before his death, Falwell wrote in an online editorial about the treatment ex-gays receive in mainstream media, that many “former homosexuals, sometimes known as ex-gays... have prevailed over their previous existence” (Falwell 2006). As for the Catholic position, gay Christians can “receive the Lord’s grace so freely offered there in order to convert their lives more fully to his Way” (Ratzinger 1986).

The apparent ease with which Robertson, Falwell, and Ratzinger shift from the extreme language of blame, Satan, demon possession, and intrinsic moral evil to the much more benign language of “leaving the lifestyle,” “prevailing over one’s previous existence,” or receiving “the Lord’s grace” to convert to “His way” is indicative of how interconnected the ancient concept of sin and the more recent psychological practice of treating sexual abnormality as disease are in ex-gay discourse. But it is also indicative of how the religious capital and symbolic power of the movement have been modified to mitigate the worst and most hateful antigay Christian rhetoric, even to the point of modifying the statements of key Christian leaders. By introducing the movement into public discourse as a political economic tactic in the culture wars, a particular kind of compassion was inserted into what was once *just* a discourse of hate, suggesting now a desire on the part of conservative religious leaders to help rather than *just* condemn. The problem for conservative Christian true belief, however, is that the fire and brimstone biblical condemnation of homosexuality could not simply be abandoned, so now it exists alongside the discourse of compassion and change and operates in the culture wars as a contradiction.

The space opened up between hate and compassion by the movement, even in the discourse of those with a long history of reigning hellfire upon gays and lesbians, combined with the realization that change was really a lifelong entrepreneurial labour of struggle, created a space of confusion that was filled by the ever-changing discourse of ex-gay leaders like Alan Chambers. He has also modified his true beliefs as a result of his role in the culture wars, leading

eventually, as we know, to the shutting down of Exodus and a televised apology. Ironically, Chambers discovered that true compassion for gays and lesbians required the rejection of the Christian Right's compassion. However, even in the face of that confession and apology, Chambers technically remains "ex-gay," a heterosexually married true-believing Christian father of two (adopted) children. Nevertheless, whatever his true beliefs are now, they are not what they were when he began his role as an ex-gay spokesperson. So the 1998 ad campaign was indeed a radical change in direction for the Christian Right, because Chambers is not the only ex-gay to follow the path of confessing the movement's failure while remaining heteronormatively Christian; there are also Jeremy Marks (2009), who once ran an ex-gay ministry but has since left the movement and confessed an apology for promoting it while remaining heterosexually married. So Fetner (2005) is correct in saying the movement allows conservative Christians to "condemn homosexuality without abandoning homosexual people" (76); however, she could not have realized the effect that strategic shift would have in the long run. By putting the movement front and center in the culture wars, the Christian Right ironically orchestrated the neoliberalization of its own true beliefs. However, part of the space of confusion that allowed for this neoliberalization was also created by the coincidental occurrence of the ad campaign beginning just before the death of Matthew Shepard, which both undercut Christian antigay politics and derailed attempts to revoke legislation protecting gay rights. It also inspired gay rights activists to fight for more legislation protecting gay rights. What is interesting is that as the cultural capital created by ex-gay change in the culture wars became increasingly contested, and in particular, as ex-gay change came to be seen as a threat to LGBTQ youth, gay rights activists were able to deploy their legislative efforts in an almost neoconservative manner.

Gay Rights and the Neoconservatization of True Belief

Just like the ex-gay movement's adoption of neoliberal choice backfired and led to accusations of contract violations in the form of a consumer fraud lawsuit, the movement's attempt to influence legislative change through the promotion of neoconservative "traditional" values backfired and led to legislative change aimed against the movement; first in the form of hate-crime prevention legislation and second in the form of banning reparative therapy for minors. In other words, on the progressive side of the culture wars the ex-gay movement is also used tactically and strategically to create cultural capital and symbolic power. There it is defined as a problem to be solved, although not all agree on how effective that campaign has been. Fetner (2005), for example, describes a series of pro-gay ads created by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRCF) that mimicked the style and structure of the ex-gay ads by using "a virtually identical format" (83). She argues this response promoted "very little of the LGBT movement's political agenda" because they *merely* responded to the ads in the language already established by the Christian Right (85). She adds, "There was no mention of any pending legislation or any proposals for change" (ibid). In some ways—as can be seen in the efforts of anti-ex-gay groups like *Truth Wins Out*, *Box Turtle Bulletin*, and *Ex-Gay Watch*—little has changed in that respect. Today, attacks against the movement remain targeted and revolve almost entirely around discrediting the claims the movement itself makes. Thus the claims of the movement, whether valid or not, are still the primary focus of attention in ex-gay media coverage. However, that argument may be reductive. As will be seen in my discussion of the movement's mediation in popular culture in the next chapter, gay rights advocates appear to be winning the battle in mainstream media precisely by using such tactics, even to the point of having the movement's own "earned" media turn against it.⁸¹ But anti-ex-gay activists now

⁸¹ Earned media, which will be discussed in the next chapter, is essentially media coverage of an event or issue that is not paid for by those initiating the event. The ex-gay movement generated earned media coverage first by initiating the ad campaign and second by promoting the results of Spitzer's study.

appear to be winning the battle on the legislative front, and once again, precisely by countering the movement on their own terms. That is to say, in the battle over the sanctity of family values, gay rights activists are now seeking legislation to protect children from ex-gay harm.

In both the United States and Canada, resistance to the broad governmental role of the movement is now happening at an explicitly legislative level. In 2012 California became the first American state to pass a law banning reparative therapy for minors, with Governor Jerry Brown signing the law in the autumn of 2012 (Levs 2012). New Jersey followed suit in 2013 (Siebold 2013) and the District of Columbia in 2014 (Davis 2014). Although Zach Stark is not named in relation to these bills, just like the media frenzy surrounding the death of Matthew Shepard led to anti hate-crime legislation, it is likely the media frenzy surrounding the story of 16-year-old Stark being forced into a conversion therapy residential program by his parents in 2005 led to these bans. Of course, the cause and effect link is easier to see in the case of Shepard, whose name is included in the title of the legislation; but Zach Stark is indeed the boy who catapulted the issue of reparative therapy for minors into the public sphere even if it took the APA's 2009 Task Force report to inspire legislators to actually address the problem. In fact, in an article on a website devoted to the progressive advancement of reproductive and sexual health and justice issues in Maryland, Martha Kempner (2013) begins her discussion on the then planned legislation in New Jersey by referencing Stark's story: "In 2005, a 16-year-old boy named Zach Stark used his MySpace page to tell the world about his experience at Refuge, a two-to-six-week fundamentalist Christian camp. Stark's parents had sent him there in the hope of changing his sexual orientation from gay to straight" (n.p.). The article also describes the APA report and details several of the scandals and confessional apologies associated with people from the movement. Kempner ends her article by bringing it back to the proposed legislation and the problem of getting it past the state's republican Governor: "Given that every major medical

group has opposed conversion therapy, it seems safe for [Chris] Christie to come out strongly against it without losing too much ground with conservatives. Still, it will be interesting to see what he does if the law ends up on his desk” (n.p.). As it happens, Christie signed the bill.

The California legislation was challenged in court for violating free speech, but the law was upheld by a federal appeals court in August of 2013. The court argued, “The First Amendment does not prevent a state from regulating treatment even when that treatment is performed through speech alone” (Lovett 2013). Reporting for both CNN and ABC on that event, Josh Levs justifies the law via reports of harm from both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association and quotes Governor’s Brown’s tweet: “This bill bans non-scientific ‘therapies’ that have driven young people to depression and suicide” (Levs 2012a; Levs 2012b). As noted, New Jersey was the second American state to ban reparative therapy for minors, with New Jersey’s Governor Christie signing it into law the week before the appeals court decision on the California case. As justification, Christie cited the APA’s 2009 report on reparative therapy and his personal belief “that people are born with the predisposition to be homosexual” (Johnson 2013). The law was later upheld by New Jersey U.S. District Court, with the judge arguing the ban does not infringe First Amendment rights because of “the long-standing principle that a state generally may enact laws *rationally* regulating professionals, including those providing medicine and mental health services” (Karlman 2013, my italics).⁸² When we consider that such legislative bans apply specifically to minors under the age of 18, the irony of the legislation becomes clear, especially in relation to the awkward marriage of neoliberalism and neoconservatism at play in the culture wars. On the neoliberal side, freedom, here understood as the all-important American right to freedom of speech, is curtailed to protect children from harmful therapy, even therapy rooted only in speech,

⁸² The bans, however, only apply to licensed psychological counsellors not religious counsellors (Elias 2013).

which on one level could be seen as upholding a certain aspect of neoconservative family values: the protection of children from societal harm. That this legislation was called for and promoted by the progressive gay rights movement only heightens the irony.

Meanwhile, in Canada, although no laws have been passed to ban ex-gay therapy for either minors or adults, in 2012 the national Official Opposition political party, the New Democrats (NDP), passed a party resolution to call for the Canada Revenue Agency to revoke not-for-profit charity status from any church organization offering conversion therapy or ex-gay counselling (Boesveld 2012), and in 2015 the Ontario New Democrats proposed legislation to delist it from Ontario's health care plan (Ferguson 2015). Outside North America, it is already common, in New Zealand for example, to disallow charitable status to organizations engaging in ex-gay practices (Boesveld 2012). Thus the movement is under siege from both gay rights activists and government regulation; but these gay rights victories come with their own set of true beliefs. Indeed, justifying these institutional and regulatory interventions in the sexual marketplace is the discourse of innate sexuality and psychological harm, although seldom are the nuances of either issue discussed. That is, the true belief that one is "born that way" and cannot change without excessive risk is deployed to justify regulating free choice and free speech, albeit, at this point at least, only for minors in the United States.

Yet there is some suggestion laws of this nature have stalled in the United States. A report in *The Washington Post* says that although state legislators in New York are considering a ban on reparative therapy for minors, "similar measures have floundered in as many as nine other state legislatures... [where proposed bills] have either been defeated or left to languish" (Wetzstein 2014a). The article quotes ex-gay and practicing reparative therapist, Christopher Doyle, as saying, "the bills were losing because of a coordinated effort by ex-gays to introduce themselves to lawmakers and talk up the potential benefits of the practice" (ibid). The article also

quotes that friend of ex-gays and gays we met in Chapter 1, Greg Quinlan, as ironically suggesting lawmakers now realize they are trying to restrict youth counseling to only “one thought” (ibid). An article posted a month later by the same *Washington Post* author, however, situates the issue differently: “The battle over whether sexual orientation can be changed is a burgeoning front in the gay-rights culture war [because both sides]... claim that psychology and psychiatry support their view” (Wetzstein 2014b). That article discusses, in addition to the California and New Jersey bans, the lawsuit against JONAH in New Jersey and a recent decision by Texas Republicans to officially support reparative therapy. It does not suggest legislative measures have floundered but rather they are embroiled in that contested field of production that is the culture wars. Indeed, conversion therapy for minors was banned in the District of Columbia just a few months after those articles were written (Davis 2014) and President Obama publically condemned such therapies in April 2015 (Shear 2015). Regardless, that attempts to ban reparative therapy for minors have been resisted by primarily Republican politicians is not evidence that such legislation is failing; it is evidence that it is being resisted by neoconservative elements in the political field, just as efforts to pass hate-crime prevention legislation were also resisted by neoconservative elements (but were eventually passed), and just as efforts to repeal legislation protecting gay and lesbian rights in the 1990s were resisted, successfully I might add, by progressive elements in the political field.

Conclusion: From Structuration and the Culture Wars to Ex-gay Earned Media

It was less than two years after the ex-gay ad campaign was tied to the brutal murder of Mathew Shepard that *Law & Order: SVU* aired its ripped-from-the-headlines episode beginning with a Christian Right leader preparing to run for Congress to further his neoconservative agenda in spite of the brutal murder of his ex-ex-gay son. Three years later, *Law & Order: SVU* would air “Abomination,” another ripped from the headlines episode that addressed the ex-gay

movement, this time as part of a sustained ex-gay narrative. Although that episode focused its attention on the psychological side of the movement with an important nod to the discourse of consumer fraud, it also depicted an extreme right Christian hate-group picketing the funeral of the episode's ex-ex-gay murder victim. As we know, Fred Phelps and his fellow Westboro Baptist church members picketed the real funeral of Mathew Shepard in 1998, which encouraged a gay rights discourse that blames Shepard's death on Christian antigay prejudice even though the Christian Right vigorously disavows any connection with the Westboro Church. In the following chapter, we will explore in more detail how commercial popular culture represents and depicts the ex-gay problem. But—episodes of *Law & Order* and one brief mention in *Boston Legal* aside (see Chapter 2)—it is rare to see the movement depicted in popular culture as part of the culture wars; or to see the ex-gay debate depicted in relation to its political economic structuration. While none of the ex-gay episodes of *Law & Order* treat the culture wars in depth, preferring instead to focus on matters criminal and psychological, one episode acknowledges, if only in passing, that the ex-gay movement exists in a larger political-economic context. Both *Law & Order* episodes also acknowledge the social influence of family shame and abjection.

The political-economic context the movement exists in is a political economy of truth that, ironically, is both neoliberal and neoconservative. That irony resides in the fact that neoliberalism could care less for any truth that cannot be decided by the law of supply and demand. Nevertheless, it is within the space of tension that exists between neoliberalism and neoconservatism that the Christian Right uses the ex-gay movement to generate religious and cultural capital to change the larger structuration of our contemporary political economy. It aims to shift our current governmentality to the Right and increase the worth of tradition and family values in relation to market-based economic freedom. At the individual level, community-based conservative values work to encourage subjects to misarticulate their desire, to misinterpret

freedom and choice in relation to not just the limits of supply and demand, but also of biblical truth. In that way, even individual entrepreneurial choice becomes a structured and structuring sociological phenomenon. However, on another level the promotion and marketing of religious conservative values by neoconservative political forces operates to change how certain moral issues are represented and regulated by the media, the courts, and government legislatures.

The 1998 ex-gay ad campaign operated at both the individual and collective level to change the way homosexuality is structured in our contemporary social relations. Continued ad campaigns work to encourage religious people who experience same-sex desire to misarticulate their desire and choice in relation to the true beliefs of their communities with little concern for the verifiable nature of those truths. For the Christian Right, symbolic truth is more important than veridical truth. But the ads also work to modify the way conservative Christian communities condemn homosexuality, emphasizing compassion and help over hate and rejection. Over and above that, they work to impact judicial and legislative government directly, to encourage lawmakers to repeal pro-gay laws in favour of increased moral regulation of the sexual field. That such endeavors contradict the rhetoric of freedom and choice promoted in the ads is not considered a problem. What is a problem, however, is the way such endeavors have backfired. The timing of the ad campaign in relation to Shepard's murder created an event that situated the ads not in the realm of Christian compassion and freedom, but rather as a potential cause of antigay prejudice. Although the publishing of the Spitzer study temporarily gave the movement new life, as we shall see in the next chapter, eventually that study was disqualified and apologized for; and in addition to the passing of hate-crime prevention legislation bearing the name of Shepard, legislation banning reparative therapy for minors has now been passed in three states, as the District of Columbia followed California and New Jersey's lead in 2014 (Davis 2014). Just like the movement's use of neoliberal rhetoric backfired and resulted in a consumer

fraud lawsuit, the movement's use of neoconservative legislative tactics has resulted in legislation that protects children from ex-gay harm. However, I do not mean to say a reversal has occurred. I mean that progressive elements aligned with gay rights groups are using neoliberal and neoconservative tactics against the movement, attacking it through its own rationalities.

Whether or not such progressive tactics succeed remains to be seen. The lawsuit, in which the claimants have won a partial summary judgement already, is still in play; and legislation designed to protect children from reparative therapy is receiving strong resistance from neoconservative politicians. Nevertheless, the ex-gay movement is on the defensive. Having lost considerable religious capital in the culture wars over scandals and defections, the movement is now threatened judicially and legislatively. Neoliberalism and neoconservatism are being turned against it as contract law and family values are used to undermine the movement's truth value; if not to completely destroy it then at least to push it back into conservative Christian churches alone, with its psychological scientific side severed and illegitimized. In other words, an effort is being made to use the fact that the movement is embedded in the culture wars, and is part of the structuration of neoliberalism's ties to neoconservatism, as a means by which to change the structuration of the movement itself, to prevent it from crossing the threshold of scientificity and achieving discursive formalization. Where there is power, there is resistance, and where there are confessed truth games, there are opposing confessed truth games. Today's political economy of truth is by its very nature a political economy of confession; for today—and the ex-gay movement exemplifies this—one speaks truth by confessing truth, even in the field of politics. Furthermore, the ex-gay desire to change is the effect of confessing the testimony of other Christians in conservative Christian homopreference networks, including family; and the wants and desires that connect economics and politics together in our contemporary governmentality are the effects of confessing truth.

There is, however, another factor involved in the culture wars surrounding homosexuality. Indeed, there is another factor involved in the very structuration of the culture wars and not only has that factor been addressed in every chapter of this study so far, it has in large part provided the data that I have been analyzing. I am, of course, referring to the mediation of the movement in and through mass media and popular culture, where it is represented and depicted as part of the public sphere in news and entertainment. When I begin each chapter's analysis with a description of just such a representation, in *Boston Legal*, in *South Park*, and in *Law & Order: SVU*, and when I quote from popular news and current affairs broadcasts, articles, and blogs, I am analyzing the primary means by which the culture wars are fought. It is through these representations and depictions that ex-gay knowledge, rationality, and practices are communicated in the public sphere so that individuals may know of their existence and various levels of government can be encouraged to act in relation to the movement. What is important to know about this, however, is that for nearly two decades the ex-gay movement existed largely outside the public sphere, with little media representation and next to no government intervention. It was the ex-gay ad campaign that changed that. It was the ad campaign that made the movement a matter of public concern, and that made it a matter to which judiciary and legislative levels of government were compelled to address themselves. That happened not just because the ads marketed ex-gay change to struggling Christians with unwanted same-sex desire, nor just because the ads addressed themselves to Republican lawmakers in an election year; it happened because the ads generated more media coverage, which led to more exposure, which led to even more media coverage. In short, the ad campaign generated earned media for the movement; indeed, it was designed to generate earned media. The problem is, just like its neoliberal and neoconservative tactics backfired against it, so too did its earned media.

Chapter Four: The Ex-gay Debate and the Earned Media that Fuels it

In a 2007 extended preview posted to YouTube for the 2011 documentary film, *This Is What Love In Action Looks Like*, several black title cards with white text are intercut with mainstream media news footage (Fox 2007). About five minutes in, a collage of news clips are shown of gay rights protests and Christian Right responses to the controversy of 16-year-old Zach Stark being forced into an ex-gay program by his parents. First they are cut back-to-back in rapid style editing with the sound blended together, then they are juxtaposed as they slide across the screen (still with blended sound), eventually settling into a longer clip from a *Channel 5* news segment. That clip is followed by three *Fox News 13* segments, which are themselves followed by a much shorter national *ABC News* clip wherein the sound continues as the image cuts to that of a *New York Times* “on the web” article, then to just the visual of a *CNN* clip, then to a *WashingtonBlade.com* article, and finally to a title card that reads, “The Protests Continued for eight weeks...” Although the documentary itself is largely uncritical of the commodified nature of social, broadcast, and print media in its celebration of the role media played in “saving” Zach Stark, it does account for the frenzy and circulation of media coverage his ordeal initiated. Indeed, over and above the YouTube preview, the documentary is itself a smorgasbord of media clips, from broadcast news, to print news, to daytime talk shows, to online social media, and even Christian broadcast news. At one point, the film transforms into something of an ouroboros (a snake eating itself) when it shows, on a television set, one of its own scenes as aired on MSNBC’s *Hardball with Chris Matthews* (2011) from before the documentary was released.

As we know from Chapter 2, an analysis of the economics of the ex-gay movement using rational choice theory considers the commodification of sexual orientation change in terms of consumer choice versus financial fraud that extends into the domain of psychology wherein the benefits and risks of ex-gay change are quantified. This allows the domains of psychology and

sexuality to be colonized by free market regulation, suggesting that we can understand the conditions of existence of the movement through a neoliberal grid of intelligibility. As we know from Chapter 3, both critical and queer political economy tells us that such an analysis, while useful in describing the movement at the micro level, fails to consider the social construction of sexual and economic desire as well as sexual and economic choice. We know also that a rational choice analysis fails to consider larger political processes involved in constituting the conditions of existence of the movement, particularly its involvement in the culture wars. Neither analysis, however, addresses processes of mediation, at least not directly, and neither provide insight into the movement's commodification as circulated mass media in the public sphere.

In this chapter I will extend my analysis of ex-gay commodification to address how the ex-gay debate is governed through its mediation in and as commercial news and popular culture. I will follow the expansion of ex-gay discourse across various communication channels via the phenomenon of using paid and owned media to generate additional media coverage free of charge. This tactic is designed to manage how media consumers perceive ex-gay issues through a mix of communicative obfuscation, confessed true beliefs, and the kinds of sensationalism and controversy that fuel media industries. In this way I will establish the communicative conditions of existence of the debate at the level of mass mediation wherein processes of deliberation and representative accuracy become subsumed within a commercialized straightjacket of dueling sets of truth claims. In other words, this chapter will show that when we follow the movement's "earned media" as it circulates through news and popular culture, we will still find ourselves encountering the structuring role of the culture industries in commodifying ex-gay change. Ex-gay earned media is more than just coverage of the ex-gay debate; it is sensationalized infotainment, drama, and comedy designed to sell audiences to advertisers, critiques and exposés of the movement as commodities in and of themselves, *and* to "governmentalize" by presenting

real and fictionalized individuals and populations “as objects of assessment and intervention... [that solicit media consumers’] participation in the cultivation of particular habits, ethics, behaviors, and skills” (Ouellette and Hay 2008, 12-13). Here we will see how ex-gay thought and action has been changed through the agency and truth claims of not just the primary actors in the debate, but also news and popular culture writers and producers.

In news and current affairs, following first the ads and then the Spitzer study, ex-gay earned media worked in favour of the movement both because journalistic “objectivity” demanded both sides of the debate be told and because a commercial interest in controversy and simplistic explanations allowed scientific nuance to be obscured. However, beginning with the media frenzy surrounding Zach Stark, but especially since Dr. Spitzer apologized for the faults of his own study in 2012, that same interest in controversy and simplistic explanation combined with a shift from an “objectivity” frame to one of “responsibility” has led to news and current affairs earned media working against the movement. In narrative and fictional popular culture, however, ex-gay earned media has consistently been negative, with the movement being universally mocked, ridiculed and exposed as a problem to be solved. The movement now struggles to defend its legitimacy in the public sphere, not just because its own scientific claims have been problematized, but because it has lost control of its own earned media. Unfortunately neither the initial focus on balanced coverage in news nor the trend toward increasingly negative earned media in both news and popular entertainment has resulted in Habermas’ kind of reasoned deliberation; rather it has resulted in what McCarthy (2007) would call a “neoliberal theatre of suffering.” For that reason, as we follow the circulation of earned media via marketing protocols in the public sphere we cannot lose sight of the structuring practice of confession.

Confessions make the best earned media, whether fundamentalist testimonies of truth, apologetic admissions of sexual guilt, or declarations of one’s self rooted in desire or the denial

of desire. That is especially true in the ex-gay debate; but confession turns our psyches and souls into the kind of sensationalism and controversy that can be bought and sold as governing entertainment across mass media. As “the vehicles through which mass communication takes place,” mass media include newspapers, magazines, cinema, television, radio, advertising, book publishing, and now the internet (Gasher, Skinner, and Lorimer 2012, 14). Today sacrificial confessions of sex and desire and self-emergent testimonies of truth and belief (as well as sacrificial confessions of truth and belief and self-emergent testimonies of sex and desire), real and fictional, circulate through multiple forms of mass media to diversified audiences as ethical demonstrations, linking together disavowals of sin and disease with psychological self-actualization and economic entrepreneurship in a spectacle of governing entertainment. This chapter will use the ex-gay movement as a case study of that phenomenon. The movement has learned the hard way that confession is dangerous, for the its own confessions of truth have created a different kind of confession over which it has little control: confessions and testimonies of ex-gay failure that can be bought and sold in a marketplace of psychologized entertainment.

Zach Stark and the Dilemma of Ex-gay Earned Media

In 2005, 16-year-old Zach Stark was forced into an ex-gay program for teenagers called “Refuge,” itself a division of the longest running ex-gay ministry, Love in Action. Just before Stark left for Refuge, he posted a plea for help on his social media MySpace page, setting off a viral media frenzy. At the time, it was hard to know who was winning the public relations battle in the debate over ex-gay change because seven years after the initiation of the ad campaign and four years after a media frenzy surrounding the infamous Spitzer study, the movement was still receiving some respect, or at least something akin to balanced coverage in mainstream news and current affairs programming. That began to change when Stark posted his MySpace plea for help. In addition to starting a media frenzy (see Airhart 2005; 2008; Borger 2005; Cloud 2005;

Palazzolo 2005a; Palazzolo 2005 b; *Paula Zahn Now* 2005; *Ukgaynews* 2005; Williams 2005; Zhang 2009), it would eventually lead to the banning of reparative therapy for minors in California, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia, and it would set the stage for several major ex-gay confessional apologies, including from Dr. Robert Spitzer and Exodus President Alan Chambers, as well as from Refuge's ex-gay program leader, John Smid. Just as important, it also led to several *more years*' of earned media. Earned media is a marketing term for "free" and ideally positive media coverage generated from an initiating event often (but not always) designed to create such coverage, like the "free" mainstream media coverage of the ex-gay debate generated by ex-gay advertising. Writing about positive ex-gay news coverage following the Spitzer study, Sean Lund and Cathy Renna (2006) argue that the concept of earned media is crucial for understanding ex-gay communication. I concur, but in the Zach Stark case, most of the coverage generated by that event was not positive for the movement. Indeed, while the Stark media frenzy would make sure the ex-gay issue continued to be addressed within mainstream news right to this day, it did so as a problem to be solved.

In other words, when the movement began advertising itself in 1998, via the discourse of rational choice, justifying itself by appealing to cost-benefit calculations, and offering, in exchange for true belief, heterosexual entrepreneurship as cultural capital, it also submitted its communications strategies to a marketing rationality. As we know, in this rationality, the movement reluctantly but strategically commodified confession even as it resisted that commodification by appealing to Christian family values and neoconservative tradition for confession's spiritual benefits. The primary *communicative* goal, however, was not to *sell* either confession or ex-gay change; it was to create unpaid promotional coverage for the Christian Right's fight against homosexuality. And in spite of the Matthew Shepard murder curtailing their legislative agenda, the goal of generating earned media was initially successful, leading

immediately to several mainstream newspaper and broadcast news reports (*All Things Considered* 1998; Goodstein 1998; *Hannity & Colmes* 1998; Kornbut 1998; *Nightline* 1998; Schoofs 1998; Yearwod 1998) and a high profile *Newsweek* cover story featuring the confessed testimony of Anne and John Paulk (Leland and Miller 1998; see also Besen 2003, 204).

Although the movement had been showcased a few times in the 1980s and early 1990s on daytime talk shows like *The Phil Donahue Show* (Besen 2003, 94; Stephenson 2000, 60), the coverage was limited and it presented the movement as a fringe phenomenon. The movement also began to receive some mainstream news coverage in the mid-1990s, following the establishment of NARTH and resulting from early non marketing based promotional efforts from the Christian Right (Chin 1995; *Larry King Live* 1994; Ybarra 1993); however, such coverage was relatively isolated. The ad campaign, on the other hand, resulted in a proliferation of sustained earned media that has circulated for over fifteen years (see Appendices A and B). But that eventually led to a failure of the movement's earned media strategy, because most of the coverage that has been generated since Zach Stark has been negative. Stark's MySpace post, of course, was not itself earned media, nor was it paid media designed to generate earned media; it was an event that rejuvenated media interest in the ex-gay story, interest that reaches back to the 1998 ad campaign and the 2001 Spitzer study via the earned media they generated. The Zach Stark media frenzy was an extension of that media.

The truth is, generating earned media can be a dangerous game, and the ex-gay debate exemplifies that. Joseph Graf (2008) defines earned media as "publicity gained by means other than advertising, such as via the press or communicating directly" (49). Stephen and Galak (2012) define it as "media activity that a company does not directly generate, such as press mentions in traditional media and online community posts in consumer-generated social media" (624). Such definitions do not capture the contemporary importance of earned media, nor the

dilemma of relying on it. In marketing today, earned media is one of three forms of convergent promotional strategies, with paid and owned being the other two (Edelman and Salsberg 2010; Lieb et al. 2012). Paid media is traditional paid advertising or purchased media spots, and owned media includes media channels and space owned by the company or organization selling or promoting the product or message (such as catalogs, websites, databases, or retail stores or campaign offices). Whereas paid media “has traditionally led marketing initiatives,” the authors of a recent advertising industry report argue that today “Earned and owned media have become so integral to successful marketing initiatives that they are now commingling with paid media” (Lieb et al. 2012, 2). In that report (published fourteen years after the first ex-gay ad campaign), they insist that marketing today should combine all three kinds of promotion.

It would seem, then, that the movement was ahead of its time in 1998, because their paid newspaper and television ad campaigns coincided with the launch and promotion of several owned websites (i.e. Exodus, NARTH, and several smaller sites) and immediately led to the generation of free media coverage in the form of newspaper and magazine articles and television news and current affairs reports. And, as Lund and Renna point out, news of the Spitzer study (which the movement funded and the results of which they leaked to the press) only augmented that convergence by creating another earned media frenzy (see Duin 2001; Ritter 2001; Sheehy 2001; and Talan 2001).⁸³ Distinguishing between two types of earned media—uncontrolled, such as a news article, where the reporter controls the story, and controlled, such as an op-ed, where the organization creating the media has control over the message—Lund and Renna explain that the movement hoped their uncontrolled media would serve the goals of ex-gay change: “Earned media, *especially* that which is uncontrolled, conveys a tremendous amount of respectability and credibility” (285, my italics). I, however, would qualify their assessment: whereas earned media

⁸³ The earned media of event-specific frenzies can be categorized as discursive “events” in the Foucauldian sense (1972; 1991). They represent repeated tactical statements circulating as discourse that change the direction of the discourse they occur within. They can also elicit counter-tactical statements that have that same power.

can convey those qualities, it is not guaranteed. In contested fields such as the culture wars, the generation of earned media (here a form of religious capital) is fraught with peril because it is situated within governmental processes of mediation well outside the control of any cultural, political, or special interest group.

As it happens, in a recent marketing report published by a major transnational firm, McKinsey & Company, the problem of losing control of earned media is addressed by adding two new forms of promotional media to the paid, owned, and earned categories (Edelman and Salsberg 2010). One addition is “hijacked media,” which is defined as “the opposite of earned media: [when] an asset or campaign become hostage to consumers, other stakeholders, or activists who make negative allegations about a brand or product” (4). Although the report acknowledges a general category of “other stakeholders” as potential hijackers of media brands and products, it mostly focuses on problematic “activist” consumers who use social media to organize boycotts. Also, in defining hijacked media as necessarily negative and as the opposite of positive earned media, it forecloses the clear risk involved in generating any form of uncontrolled media and misses that not all earned media is good. Joseph Graf (2008), writing about earned media in political campaigns, notes that “earned media and social media... have an enormous drawback in that, by relying on others to communicate their message, campaigns give up control” (53). He describes a number of recent situations in American politics where political messages designed to generate increased media coverage were either used out of context by rival campaigns to demonstrate the opposite of the media’s intent or the messages were simply misrepresented by the media. Thus, while in some cases earned media is “hijacked,” it does not necessarily have to be to turn negative. Misrepresenting a message in the news does not necessarily imply that it has been deliberately commandeered; it could have simply been misunderstood; or certain controversial or extravagant aspects of the message stressed for their

entertainment value. Furthermore, as the case of ex-gay earned media demonstrates (ex-gay promotion being both a marketing *and* a political campaign), in the case of a truly controversial product or message, many of the stakeholders involved in turning earned media against itself are not just “activists” but media professionals like journalists and broadcasters as well as public or expert professionals like politicians, psychologists and religious leaders. In other words, as a metaphor, “hijacked media” is useful in pointing to the risk involved in generating earned media, but only if it is acknowledged as being a form of earned media itself.

When one considers the role of confession in ex-gay earned media, the risk level only increases. In the 2007 preview for *This is What Love in Action Looks Like*, John Smid, Love In Action’s then program director, is shown only in news clips with a title card explaining that no one from Refuge agreed to be interviewed to “speak their truth.” But in 2010, Smid confessed his mistake, recant his ex-gay ways, apologized, and left the program (Smid 2010; Roberts 2010; Venn-Brown 2011). In fact, it was that event that led to the *Hardball* “ouroboros” segment referenced earlier, in which they showed a clip from the then not-yet-released film that would eventually become part of the film as a clip from *Hardball*. In the ex-gay debate, earned media makes it possible for ex-gay confessions to eat themselves. Indeed, ex-gay advertising and earned media showcasing confessions of change are what made it so easy for Stark’s parents to commit him to the Love in Action program after he confessed his same-sex desire; but the proliferation of ex-gay earned media is also what made it so easy for mainstream news to turn Stark’s social media testimony into an anti-ex-gay media frenzy. That frenzy transformed Smid’s ex-gay testimony of truth into an ex-gay confession of failure, which occurred at the same time an earned documentary film, itself a hodge podge of earned media and ex-gay survivor confessions, was being produced about the event. Not only did the film depict Smid’s confession, it depicted it as earned media promoting the film within the film; then the producers

invited Smid to tour with the film on the festival circuit. There Smid's ex-gay confession became an anti-ex-gay testimony of truth turned again into earned media for the film's DVD extras.

Given the focus on exploiting social media in advertising industry reports, it is clear that through earned media, marketing has colonized social media, and is now redefining it as a promotional tool rather than a social connection tool (Wallsten 2010). In the case of Zach Stark, in spite of his post not being earned media initially, we can see a case study of social media becoming earned media, reproduced "for free" in news and popular entertainment to generate more interest in the ex-gay controversy. Stephen and Galak (2012) differentiate between earned media in traditional outlets, such as news reports, and "the increased emphasis marketers place on social approaches" such as word of mouth and online social media. They conclude that traditional outlets have greater reach, but social media circulation happens more frequently and much faster. The case of Zach Stark bears that out. That social media plays a role in ex-gay earned media circulation is also clear from the blogs and chat boards analyzed in at least one psychology study of efficacy and harm (Weiss et al. 2010), but also from the numerous participant posts on YouTube, both from those promoting ex-gay change as possible and beneficial and from former participants insisting ex-gay change is impossible and harmful (see, for example, kolt20 2013; and Dickert 2013). This kind of social media is not itself earned media, but it can assist in generating earned media and it can be incorporated into earned media. Another important point Stephen and Galak make is that "sometimes even negative publicity can have a positive marketing effect" (625, citing Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2000; and Berger, Sorensen, and Rasmussen 2010). No doubt, when the ex-gay ad campaign was developed, the possible effects of negative coverage were considered but the truism that "any publicity is good publicity" triumphed in their cost-benefit calculations. However, they did not anticipate the extent to which their earned media would turn against them in traditional media

outlets. The Zach Stark story was by no means good publicity for the movement. In fact, its impact has been devastating. We already know from Chapter 3 that it played a key role in inspiring efforts to ban reparative therapy for minors, and, as we shall see, it also began a process that has seen almost all ex-gay media coverage turn against the movement.

Ex-gay earned media also further highlights the neoliberalization of ex-gay discourse. In fact, earned media is a concept that showcases how neoliberalism colonizes other social realms with economic imperatives *in general*, because through earned media, politics and marketing become virtually synonymous. That is why so much of the discussion surrounding earned media in academia is devoted not to business marketing, but political marketing (Graf 2008; Wallsten 2010). Today nearly all promotion and publicity is understood in economic terms, not just in politics but also in entertainment and religion;⁸⁴ and ex-gay earned media crosses all three fields. In other words, today, earned media is vital to the perpetuation and circulation of media coverage for any product or campaign. That its uncontrolled nature carries risk only augments its role as a neoliberal protocol rooted in risk management. The reason I call it a protocol, invoking its status as a procedural rule, is because of the already cited marketing reports highlighting the necessary convergence of earned, paid, and owned media in successful promotion. Whereas there was a time when earned media was merely a by-product of paid advertising (Stephen and Galak 2012), now it is a governmental imperative (Lieb et al. 2012).

Earned media is now part of the structuration and governmentality of media circulation in general and operates as a circulatory cultural protocol as well as an economic protocol. In fact, if we consider circulation theory as one aspect of how earned media “flows” in the public sphere, it can help extend earned media beyond its marketing origins to help understand how the cultural flow and circulation of ex-gay confessional sensationalism and controversy has backfired.

⁸⁴ See Lovett and Staelin (2012) on the use of paid and earned media in building entertainment brands, and Iannaccone (1995) and Finke and Stark (1992) for rational choice “supply and demand” theories of religion.

Circulation theory is concerned with “what happens...when [cultural] objects in circulation are transfigured even as they effect change around them” (Wershler 2012, 626; see also Gaonkar & Povinelli 2003; Heiser 2005; Lee & LiPuma 2002; Straw 2009). In an article on the circulation of Marshall McLuhan’s work in contemporary economies of knowledge, Darren Wershler (2012) links circulation theory to Eugene Thacker’s (2004) conception of protocols, insisting that “protocol governs circulation” (627). Wershler notes that circulation theory “shares political economy’s interest in production and consumption, but adds to it a concern with what happens *in between*” (626, by italics). But to think of earned media as a circulatory protocol is not to replace political economy with governmentality; it is to make the links between them stronger.⁸⁵

Objects in circulation, like media reports, strategically changing as they themselves change, highlights governmentality as the proper analytic through which to understand mass media circulation. Will Straw (2010) defines circulation in terms of “the conditions under which cultural forms occupy social space, interconnect and move in relation to each other” (23), but he emphasizes the interfaces between cultural objects and human beings focusing on new mobile technologies. Wershler, however, emphasizes “the *procedures* for defining, managing, modulating and distributing information” (626, quoting Thacker 2004, my italics), noting that protocols are “the very form by which *control* exists in a decentralized, networked milieu” (627, my italics). But understanding protocols as rules and procedures for managing circulation does not negate their potential role in modifying the concepts, statements, or products in circulation, for by its very nature there is always a tension between stability and change in governmental procedures. Protocols are merely one way to manage how change does or does not occur. Indeed,

⁸⁵ As we know, Mosco (2009) classifies three aspects to the political economy of communication: commodification, structuration, and spatialization. Rooted in the work of Lefebvre (1979), he defines spatialization as “*the process of overcoming the constraints of space and time in social life*” (2009, 157, author’s italics). Drawing on Harvey (1990; 2006) and Giddens (1990), he discusses it in terms of global capital’s ability to restructure spatial relations between people and diminish time and space as controlling influences. However, he also highlights Castells’s (1989) notion of “the space of flows,” which allows for the construction of local and global networks that are not dependent on specific locales (ibid 158). Thus Castells’ notion opens up a space for circulation theory within political economy.

as we know, before Foucault named governmentality “governmentality” he insisted on the importance of “the circulation of knowledge” (1972, 53) in archaeological analyses by focusing in part on “the circulation, the transfer and the modification of concepts” (ibid, 61).

Earned media, then, circulates and modifies. Unfortunately, in a neoliberal context, the governmental ability for earned media to circulate and modify objects, subject positions, concepts, and strategies is directly tied to commodification. Like all news, current affairs, and popular culture narrative depictions of the ex-gay movement produced since 1998, *This Is What Love In Action Looks Like* is both an extension of the movement’s original ad-generated earned media *and* a governmental and confessional intervention in the ex-gay debate. Indeed, as Gay Hawkins (2001) explains, documentaries in general are governmental forms and ethical mediations “where difference is represented, where we are invited to understand the truth of the other [in the...] examin[ation of] the extraordinary in the everyday” (420). In other words, documentaries seek to modify our understanding of the events they depict. But *This Is What Love In Action Looks Like* is a labour of love produced by gay rights activists and ex-gay survivors of the Love In Action program who wanted to expose the program as a failure and fraud. The production struggled for years before the product could be finished, and when it was, it was limited to the film festival circuit. It is very useful here as a tool to describe the media frenzy surrounding the Zach Stark event, but in the overall debate its relative lack of commercial appeal limits its impact. The commercial news and current affairs programming it re-represents is the more impactful and thus governmental earned media. The impact of social media is the exception here, because Stark’s social media cry for help was not initially a commodified event, and yet it had great impact. However, it quickly *became* commodified through traditional media coverage, precisely because of its circulatory power, and it is that power that has led the marketing industry to colonize social media by transforming it into both earned and paid media.

Thus the generation of earned media is a primary circulatory protocol in the mediation and modification of the ex-gay debate, and it is thoroughly governmental. In fact, earned media, once just a resource, is now a rule *and* a resource in the structuration of our neoliberal political economy. But ex-gay earned media initially circulated to convert the financial exchange value of ex-gay change into use-value in the culture wars. It preyed on commercial popular culture's easily commodified preoccupation with sensationalism and controversy. The irony of that goal for the movement is that generating financial profit from sensationalism and controversy in commercial news and popular culture has been instrumental in turning the tide *against* the movement. That is to say, the movement's attempt to generate earned media to further mediate and circulate its solution to the "problem" of homosexuality has backfired in the form of negative earned media that critiques, problematizes, and mocks the movement giving little credence to its point of view. One of the most recent examples of that is the media frenzy surrounding Dr. Robert Spitzer's apology for his notorious 2001/2003 ex-gay study.

Robert Spitzer's Confessed Apology and another Ex-gay Earned Media Frenzy

On May 18th 2012, the *New York Times* published a front page article entitled, "Psychiatry Giant Sorry for Backing Gay 'Cure'" (Carey 2012). Although no doubt the most high profile, it was only one of many newspaper, radio, and television reports from one of the most recent ex-gay media frenzies. Beginning with an article published a month earlier in the popular liberal magazine, *The American Prospect* (Arana 2012), the frenzy lasted at least until June 2012, although it was still producing media as late as September. This was a major ex-gay event because, in addition to scientifically legitimizing reparative therapy through his infamous study ten years earlier (Spitzer 2003), Dr. Robert Spitzer is considered by some to be the father of post-psychoanalytic psychiatry for his rewriting in the 1970s of the psychiatric "Bible," the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders* (Shorter 1997); *and* he was the man

responsible for heading the psychiatric committee that declassified homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973 (Bayer 1987 [1981]). At the time of the study, that allowed the Christian Right to claim that a famous atheist psychiatrist and gay rights hero now agreed with them (Olsen 2001; Roberts 2001; LeBlanc 2005). But in 2012 Spitzer officially retracted his study and apologized to the gay community, confessing that his study's methodology was flawed (Spitzer 2012)—as flawed as all the academics and activists said it was at the time (Drescher and Zucker 2006). He also confessed his motivation for publishing the study: that he has “always been drawn to controversy” (Carey 2012; Arana 2012). In other words, he confessed the “cost” of his desire for controversial publicity, for generating earned media for himself, but in the process, he created even more publicity for himself. Confession really is the best kind of earned media.

The frenzy surrounding Spitzer's apology is a perfect example of the movement losing control of its earned media in spite of their earlier promotional success. The initiating 2012 article, written by ex-gay survivor Gabriel Arana, recounts Arana's unsuccessful attempts to change his orientation but includes an interview with Spitzer. There Spitzer explains how he requested that the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, the journal that published his 2003 study, retract it but the journal “declined.” Spitzer asked that Arana publish the retraction instead, which led to a lengthy report on MSNBC by Rachel Maddow (*Rachel Maddow Show*, *The* 2012b). Then the story was picked up by several newspapers and online blogs,⁸⁶ and that inspired Spitzer to write a second letter to the journal requesting a retraction. Although his letter was leaked to the gay rights website Truth Wins Out, it was only after the *New York Times* article that his letter was finally published by the journal as an official retraction (Spitzer 2012). Meanwhile, news of Spitzer's apology continued to circulate, leading first to a radio documentary called “Spitzer's Apology Changes 'Ex-Gay' Debate” that aired on NPR on May 21st (*Talk of the Nation* 2012),

⁸⁶ According to *Media Matters For America*, as of May 21, CNN and Fox News had not reported the story (Rudman 2012). Both, however, do reference it in their coverage of the reparative therapy bans (Levs 2012b; Pappas 2012).

then to a flurry of online news articles and blogs, and finally, several months later, to another radio documentary called “Straightening the Record: A Doctor’s Apology,” which aired in Canada on the CBC (*Current, The* 2012).⁸⁷ Following that, the Spitzer apology continued to be referenced in coverage of other ex-gay events, such as the banning of reparative therapy for minors in California, New Jersey and D.C., and the closing of Exodus International.

One aspect of the movement losing control of its media is noticeable in the Spitzer apology coverage: there are no pro ex-gay voices in the mainstream articles, television reports, or radio documentaries related to that event. In the early days of ex-gay earned media, even up to 2011, it was common for ex-gay representatives to be interviewed in addition to those against the movement. Even *The New York Times*, just one year prior, published articles that gave ex-gay participants a clear voice and treated them with some sympathy and respect (Denizet-Lewis 2011; Swartz 2011). Since Spitzer’s apology, however, reporters and anchorpeople almost exclusively voice the pro-gay side, either shutting ex-gay spokespeople out or directly challenging them on air. Indeed, six months following the Spitzer apology, in a CNN segment on the banning of reparative therapy for minors, a reparative therapist named David Pickup was interviewed (*CNN News* 2012; *Huffington Post* 2012a). Although given an opportunity to explain his point of view, he was quickly challenged by the CNN anchorwoman, Brooke Baldwin. In the segment, she interrupts him twice with quotes from the Governor of California and the American Psychological Association and then again to allow CNN’s senior medical correspondent to further challenge him. The interview quickly degrades, with the participants aggressively speaking over each other. Eventually Baldwin insists, “Sir, with all due respect, this is my show,” later adding, “you don’t ask *us* questions!” (ibid). In the past it was seldom the reporter or

⁸⁷ Both the CBC in Canada and NPR in the States are considered public broadcasting and are not-for-profit, with the CBC receiving some funding from a yearly government grant and NPR operating on government subsidies. But the CBC also receives funding from advertising revenue (approximately 30%), NPR from corporate donations, and both compete for audiences with private broadcasters. Thus their ex-gay reports still count as commercial earned media.

anchorperson who challenged ex-gay experts but pro-gay experts like Wayne Besen, invited on such broadcasts precisely for that purpose.⁸⁸ Thus a clear shift can be seen in how the ex-gay topic is covered in the news now that Spitzer has publically rejected his own study.

Even though the 2012 Spitzer frenzy was the result of an anti-ex-gay article published very recently, the media generated by that article, including the article itself, still operates as earned media created by the combined effects of the original ad campaign and ex-gay promotion of Spitzer's study. In fact, both the ad campaign and the study are described in detail in Arana's article, and media interest in the ex-gay movement has been relatively constant since Spitzer's study. For example, there were the already mentioned *New York Times* articles published a year before the Spitzer apology (Denizet-Lewis 2011; Swartz 2011), plus a year before that journalist Ted Cox infiltrated an ex-gay retreat and published a scathing report (Cox 2010). Also, Rachel Maddow has devoted several shows to the movement (*Rachel Maddow Show, The* 2009; 2010; 2012a; 2012b); in 2009 the American Psychological Association tabled a report on reparative therapy that created its own media storm (Associated Press 2009; Besen 2009b; Broverman 2009; Crary 2009; Lafsky 2009; McMullen 2009); and there was, of course, also the frenzy surrounding Zach Stark (see above). When we add to these the long list of continuing narrative popular culture depictions that will be discussed below, we can see a picture of a sustained generation of earned media occasionally erupting into frenzies in which the word "earned" in no way implies anything positive.

One reason ex-gay earned media is now negative is because the movement operates as an antigay organization, something that is no longer condoned in mainstream media. Indeed, news coverage is often framed and governed by the political views of news organizations and their

⁸⁸ For example, in a 2010 CNN report, Besen debated Peter Sprigg from PFOX but the CNN anchor largely stayed out of the conversation (*CNN News* 2010). And in 2011 Besen appeared on MSNBC to discuss the controversy over then Presidential candidate Michelle Bachman's husband "secretly" offering reparative therapy at his clinic. There the anchor insisted that the Bachmans had also been invited to participate but refused (*MSNBC News* 2012).

employees, as well as by larger social hegemonies (Davis and Kent 2013; Gans 2003; 2004 [1979]; Tuchman 1978). As R.M Entman (1993) explains, “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (52). Lund and Renna (2006) and Craig O. Stewart (2005) situate coverage of the Spitzer study within news production framing practices that emphasize cultural conflict over scientific accuracy. Stewart argues that “the macro-level news frame of conflict invites the interpretation that a serious study is challenging the scientific establishment [and...] micro-level choices... characteristic of news discourse support[ed] positive evaluations of both Spitzer’s *ethos* and the objectivity of his study” (155). That the study could be perceived as antigay had little effect on its framing. But in the last ten years the movement has failed to demonstrate the truth of its promise of change and news coverage of gay and lesbian issues has increasingly become positive (Geske and Brown 2008; Li and Liu 2010). That has changed the way ex-gay issues are framed by media.

Today the responsibility of promoting positive LGBT psychology is now taking precedence over conflicts between gay rights and ex-gay activists, partly because the 1990s marketing “discovery” of gay white male disposable income has slowly led media organizations to realize that there are consequences to alienating gay consumers. As it happens, Stewart’s focus on conflict is rooted in the work of Valkenburg, Semetko, and de Vreese (1999). They identify four kinds of news framing: conflict, human interest, responsibility, and economic consequences. Whereas ten years earlier, ex-gay news coverage emphasized conflict, there has been a clear shift to responsibility framing rooted in economic consequences. Stewart defines those two forms of framing as follows: “The responsibility frame makes present an individual’s or group’s ‘responsibility for causing or solving a problem’ [and...] the economic consequences frame

makes present ‘the economic consequences [a news item] will have on an individual, group, institution, region, or country’” (149, quoting Valkenburg, Semetko, and de Vreese 1999, 552, Stewart’s addition in brackets). Part of the shift to a responsibility frame is rooted in the work of gay rights activists emphasizing the psychological harm of ex-gay therapy. But it is also because the commercial nature of mass media and its primary reliance on advertising revenue has led to a perceived positive impact of gay disposable income on the economy, which, so it is argued, benefits all of society. However the conflict aspect of framing ex-gay media has not disappeared.

As noted, Lund and Renna (2006) also analyze ex-gay earned media in terms of a media tendency to emphasize conflict and controversy over objective science, suggesting that the Spitzer coverage worked in favour of the movement at the time. They connect the dots between the ad campaign and a frenzy of media reports on Spitzer’s study, noting how the study’s coverage was characterized by the ad campaign and how both were “framed by antigay political groups and gay organizations that faced off in a series of televised debates... provid[ing] sets of dueling quotes for newspapers” (286). The manipulation of science by the movement was countered by pro-gay scrutiny of the study’s confessional methods and limitations but with “the near-complete absence of objective scientific voices [in] the discussion” (287). In the process, Spitzer’s qualified conclusion, that some ex-gays do change but most do not was reported as a near absolute assertion that ex-gay change is possible and extensive scientific concerns over relying on confessed self-reports were ignored. For that reason (at least at the time) ex-gay earned media tended to operate in the movement’s favour. Today ex-gay earned media no longer operates in favour of ex-gay goals, but it is still characterized by a journalistic emphasis on conflict and controversy, a manipulation of science, and an absence of objective scientific voices.

Ex-gay Earned Media and the Production of Simplified Inaccuracy

The question of the use and misuse of science is a fundamental question *within* the ex-gay debate and thus it cannot be ignored; however, at the level of description and analysis, and at the level of its governmentality, its use or misuse is not the point even if it must be accounted for. What is more important is *how* science is used or misused. The truth is, now that the ex-gay movement has lost control of its earned media, exaggerated claims and simplified narratives that promote “misrepresentative interpretations of complex issues” (Lund and Renna 2006, 289) are just as much the purview of those who oppose the movement as of those who support it, even as they *all* cloak themselves in the guise of science. The irony of ex-gay “science” failing to cross what Foucault calls “the threshold of scientificity” (see the Introduction)—because it clearly and obviously operates as ideology—is that anti-ex-gay science experts are perceived in the public sphere as being scientifically legitimate even though their science is also ideological. On the ex-gay side, exceptionally problematic half-century old psychoanalytic evidence that is today rejected even by most psychoanalysts is peddled as legitimate science (Thorn 2014), and so are more recent studies rooted in problematic confessions (see Chapter 2). But on the pro-gay side methodologically biased confessional studies are also promoted, and it is deemed scientifically legitimate to oversimplify both the practices of the movement and the reality of contemporary sexual orientation science, especially when its nuances are inconvenient to the cause.

In a debate where science figures so predominantly—even and especially when operating in relation to discourses not necessarily scientific, such as religious and political discourses, not to mention sexual identity discourses—choices are made as to how science will be deployed, as to how it will be used and misused. Those choices are part of the communicative strategies involved in battling for discursive supremacy in a discursive formation that has not crossed the threshold of scientificity and has little hope of doing so. As it happens, in *The Archaeology of*

Knowledge (1972 [1969]), Foucault devotes his final chapter to the discursive relationship between science and knowledge (178-95), saying this about science and ideology:

If the question of ideology may be asked of science, it is in so far as science, without being identified with knowledge, but without either effacing or excluding it, is localized in it, structures certain of its objects, systematizes certain of its enunciations, formalizes certain of its concepts and strategies; it is in so far as this development articulates knowledge, modifies it, and redistributes it on the one hand, and confirms it and gives it validity on the other; it is in so far as science finds its place in a discursive regularity, in which... it is or is not deployed, functions or does not function, in a whole field of discursive practices. In short, the question of ideology that is asked of science is... the question of its existence as a discursive practice and of its functioning among other practices. (185)

Ideology, then, “is not exclusive of scientificity” and by “correcting itself, by rectifying its errors, by clarifying its formulations, [scientific] discourse does not necessarily undue its relations with ideology” (186). For example, when *The New York Times* science writer, Benedict Carey (2012), describes in his article on Spitzer’s apology the doctor’s role in the psychiatric declassification of homosexuality as driving “a broader reconsideration of what mental illness is, of where to draw the line between normal and not” (A1), he accurately accounts for a key scientific clarification. However, while he does so within a narrative that acknowledges the role gay activism played in inspiring Spitzer to accept that role, in the way he structures the narrative, he buries the politics below the science and obfuscates the fact that declassification was also “an action *demand*ed by the ideological temper of the times” (Bayer 1987, 3-4, my italics).⁸⁹ In fact, Carey’s own article, published on the front page of a major newspaper, presents itself as rectifying a scientific error (through Spitzer’s confession) but fails to recognize that it is itself

⁸⁹ As further evidence of the relationship between science and ideology in this debate, NARTH co-founder Joseph Nicolosi and ex-gay apologist Dr. Jeffrey Satinover both quote the above statement from Bayer to support the ex-gay position; however, they misunderstand Bayer’s point. Yes, Bayer’s full statement says that declassification “was not a conclusion based on an approximation of the scientific truth as dictated by reason, but was instead an action demanded by the ideological temper of the times” (Bayer 1987, 3-4; quoted in Nicolosi 1997, 9 and Satinover 1996, 35); however, Bayer later acknowledges and discusses *in detail* all the scientific evidence used to argue for and against declassification. His conclusion, that politics exceeded science, does not deny science’s role in the event; rather his study demonstrates that politics played a role on both sides of the debate in addition to science. He argues there was no way it could have been otherwise because “the status of homosexuality is a political question, representing a historically rooted, socially determined choice regarding the ends of human sexuality” (5).

also an ideological intervention in the ex-gay debate. Foucault's point is that it does not need to be one or the other—it can be both—the question is, how is it deployed within the debate? In this case it is deployed to eradicate the validity of Spitzer's entire study even though there is useful (albeit misinterpreted) data in that study. Spitzer's apology now circulates in place of his study.

As we know from Foucault, discursive statements are “always given through some material medium” (100) operating as a “space in which [statements] are used and repeated” (106). Much like how Williams (1993 [1980]) characterizes advertising as a system where commodities are transformed into magical signifiers (see Chapter 2), Foucault characterizes the influence of mediums of propagation as transforming discursive statements, whether ideological, scientific, or both, into magical signifiers. He speaks of a mediated “notion of influence, which provides a support—*of too magical a kind*...—for the facts of transmission and communication” (1972, 21, my italics). There a “a succession of dispersed events” appear as a discursive unity (even when not yet unified), deployed as such “as if through the mediation of a medium of propagation” (22; 21). In the past ten years a succession of dispersed and mediated events have occurred, beginning with Zach Stark's 2005 cry for help that led to John Smid's apology, which also included and was accelerated by the American Psychological Association's 2009 rejection of conversion therapy as a recommended practice, and which culminated in 2012 and 2013 in Spitzer's apology, the banning of conversion therapy for minors in two states, the filing of a lawsuit against JONAH, and Alan Chamber apologizing and shutting down Exodus. These events led to the *appearance* in the media of the ex-gay movement's demise (Slaughter 2013a; Sosa 2013) even though no such thing has happened. Nevertheless, an ideological and “limited space of communication” became the key place where “formal identities, thematic continuities, translations of concepts, and polemical interchanges [were] deployed” (Foucault 1972, 126-7) to create the illusion of complete ex-gay failure in spite of the replacement of Exodus by The

Restored Hope Network and the continued mediation of ex-gay notions and concepts. Indeed, the commercial mass media, as limited by the cost-benefit rationality of marketing, allowed, for a time, the influential propagation and intervention of the (magical) repetition of positive ex-gay statements deployed ideologically as science.

As we know, the strategic effect desired by the movement in 1998 was the circulation of unpaid media to further the propagation of ex-gay statements, including statements of science, at the least possible cost. Through the tactical convergence of paid, owned, and earned media, it deployed its scientific, religious, and political discourses in such a way as to temporarily (and magically) legitimize not just the outdated science of ex-gay change but also the politics of an antigay ideology. The goal was to achieve the formalization of a full discursive formation as a religio-political science; however, that goal has not been achieved. Indeed, with Spitzer's repudiation of his own study, there is very little hope the movement will ever achieve its goal of crossing the thresholds of scientificity and formalization. There is no tragedy here as NARTH is well known for misrepresenting science (Respect My Research 2009; see also Bayly 2008a; Bayly 2008b; Beckstead 2001; Besen 2009a; Diamond 2008; Lenz 2012; Religious Tolerance 2010). Yet through the earned media generated by the movement itself, the pseudo-science of *anti-ex-gay* conversional impossibility now stands ready to cross the threshold of scientificity through the circulation of pro-gay scientific misrepresentations, disqualifications, and opinions.

Take, for example, the first Spitzer apology article by Gabriel Arana (2012). Arana's choice of vocabulary and his reductive account of the impact of homosexuality's declassification on attitudes to gays and lesbians lead him to make a common exaggeration: "As a consequence of [declassification], extreme forms of reorientation therapy—aversion therapy involving electrocution or nausea-inducing drugs, for instance—had stopped being used. A small group of therapists continued to practice talk therapy that encouraged patients to see homosexuality as a

developmental disorder, but they remained on the fringe.” Such a description, although true in its generality, is inaccurate in its specifics: first, aversion therapy continued to be practiced by many psychologists for over a decade *after* declassification (Bayer 1987); second, aversion “shock” therapy does not involve significant “electrocution;” that is, aversion therapy is not electroconvulsive therapy (formerly called electro-shock therapy).⁹⁰ Thus the opposition of truth and error here operates as an uneasy double. On the one hand, the whole point of Arana’s article is to distinguish between the truth of being gay and the error of ex-gay change, but Arana’s discursive strategies ignore the opposition between truth and error at the micro level.

Arana is a former ex-gay who truly believes his path through the movement was a mistake. His inconsistent truth and error strategies are, in their own way, no doubt genuine in their purpose. But when the opposition between truth and error becomes a differential strategy deployed by supposedly neutral media reporters, its ideological basis becomes more obvious. Whereas Arana at least makes it clear aversion therapy is not a *current* practice of the movement, in Canada the CBC Radio report on the Spitzer apology highlights aversion therapy as a contemporary ex-gay practice (*Current, The* 2012). Based on an interview with the Rev. Deana Dudley, a lesbian minister who once participated in the movement, it is reported, “These programmes to ‘cure’ homosexuality included more than talk therapy. Ex-gay groups use a range of treatments, including prayer and exorcisms and, as Dudley discovered, experiments that seemed to be borrowed from the movie *A Clockwork Orange*” (ibid). Whereas the reference at least points to a more accurate understanding of aversion therapy, what Rev. Dudley actually describes is not an ex-gay practice. She describes a *referral* from the ex-gay organization she was involved with *in the early 1980s* to a *secular* neuro-psychiatric institute in San Francisco. The narrator of the program distorts that information to imply that aversion therapy still *is* a

⁹⁰ In other words, it is not the practice we are familiar with from low-budget horror movies, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975), or more recent television shows like *American Horror Story* (2012) and *Wilfred* (2012).

practice within the movement. But aversion therapy was largely a secular psychological practice that the ex-gay movement sometimes recommended but did not practice itself.⁹¹

In her report on the Spitzer apology, Rachel Maddow avoids the aversion therapy confusion but does reinforce a common exaggeration of the impact of declassification: “The antigay we-can-cure-you folks did stick around for years, for decades even, but frankly they were on the fringes of quackery, of pseudo-religious, pseudo-medical antigay politics” (*Rachel Maddow Show, The* 2012b). Maddow actively mocks the scientific qualifications of ex-gay proponents but at the same time deploys a misrepresentation of declassification’s impact so as to further her position as scientific truth. She is not alone in perpetuating this misrepresentation. In a 2011 critique of an ex-gay episode of *Our America*, the media spokesperson for GLAAD condemns the episode because “It’s been nearly 40 years since the American Psychological Association (APA) concluded that being gay is not a ‘disorder’ and is not in need of a ‘cure’” (Ward 2011). In the already discussed 2003 episode of *Law & Order: SVU*, “Abomination,” the impact of declassification is also exaggerated when the 1973 date of declassification is used at trial to suggest the views of a NARTH-style expert witness are outdated by 30 years. Today pre-declassification views are psychologically outdated and remain only on the “ex-gay” fringes of psychology; but declassification did not *immediately* marginalize gay-to-straight conversion therapy to the dustbins of quackery in 1973, and it did not stop licenced secular psychologists from trying to “cure” people using either psychoanalysis or aversion therapy until several years later. In fact, declassification only *started* a near 20-year debate on the matter: between 1970 and 1990 there was no mainstream agreement on the topic, and conversion therapies continued to be described and promoted in many textbooks and practiced in the field (Thorn 2014).

⁹¹ There are practices in the movement that are rooted in the same psychological thinking as aversion therapy. For example, it is sometimes the case, as revealed in a documentary produced by the Association of Gay & Lesbian Psychiatrists called *Abomination* (2007), that some ex-gays wear a tight elastic band around their wrists and every time they have a “gay” thought, they snap the band to cause themselves pain. Nevertheless, as much of an aversive practice as that is, it is not the practice described by the CBC and there are no drugs or electrical shocks involved.

There is also misrepresentation of bisexuality and sexual fluidity in today's anti-ex-gay earned media, a problem also highlighted by Lund and Renna (2006): "No one in the media considered addressing the subject of bisexuality in the initial coverage [and that] points to... a lack of diversity [in reporting] that often results in obvious angles and criticisms going unheard" (289). For them, failing to address bisexuality resulted in failing to recognize an important aspect of what might have helped explain some examples of conversion. It demonstrated the media's inability to see through the black and white nature of ex-gay claims. Such gaps and distortions worked in the movement's favour. Today the tendency to ignore bisexuality and sexual fluidity in discussions of ex-gay claims continues, but now it works against the movement. It serves to promote the point of view that sexual orientation is entirely innate and biological, which is the primary argument used by gay rights activists against ex-gay claims. As we know, however, evidence suggests that sexual orientation cannot be explained so easily (see Chapter 1), yet that understanding is seldom represented in the ex-gay debate.

In an NPR radio documentary about Spitzer's apology, the subject of sexual fluidity is raised, but not by the broadcast producers or scheduled guests on the show. Rather, it comes from a call-in listener who identifies himself as a straight therapist who has worked with same-sex attracted patients: "There's a tendency to paint this as a black and white thing when the research also shows very clearly that sexuality is not a static thing, period" (*Talk of the Nation* 2012). He goes on to discuss the spectrum between gay and straight that he says we all fluctuate on as well as the current bias in psychology to assume all people who experience same-sex desire are necessarily gay. However, invited guest Benedict Carey (the science writer who wrote *The New York Times* article on Spitzer's apology), suggests that argument may be a slippery slope. While acknowledging that there is some evidence of fluidity in women, he states there is very little evidence of "zig-zagging back and forth" for men. He is both correct and incorrect. Yes,

there is more evidence of fluidity in women than men, and zig-zagging back and forth is not common; but that is a far cry from saying that male sexuality cannot be fluid. The truth is, nobody knows what “causes” anyone to have any kind of sexual orientation and nobody knows why or how it may or may not change—a point made (as we know from Chapter 1) by Dr. Jack Drescher on (ironically) Wayne Besen’s *Truth Wins Out* website (Besen and Drescher 2008).

It is not surprising that the facts of ex-gay science would be oversimplified in media reports. In a commercial media environment that emphasizes fast visuals and short sound bites, a simplistic narrative plays to producers’ perceptions of increasingly short audience attention spans, even in news and current affairs. However much accuracy and objectivity are still stated goals of journalism, there is ample evidence in news reporting that the commercial interests of addressing a public conceived of as consumers trumps the social needs of informing a public conceived of as citizens (Skinner, Compton, & Gasher 2005). At the same time, there is more at play in misrepresenting ex-gay science than just the commercial interests of media producers and advertisers. For one, the kind of strategic battles over truth and error described by Foucault, where science is used and misused to promote governmental goals, extend back centuries, long before the rise of commercialized mass media. For another, when considering ex-gay coverage within an analytic of government structured by true belief, confession, and the culture wars, misrepresentation operates at a different level. It operates as confessed testimony. Mirroring the true beliefs of the movement, many gay activists believe the stakes of the conflict allows for distortion because of the greater truth of the rights being fought for. As Arana writes, “From a political standpoint, it matters a great deal whether sexual orientation is inborn or a choice... [because] social conservatives object to homosexuality on the grounds that it is a lifestyle choice... By arguing homosexuality is inborn, those in the gay-rights movement are able to preempt this line of attack” (2014, n.p.). Later, however, he retreats from his political “confession,”

declaring that LGTB activists “are committed to the ‘born this way’ narrative not as a civil-rights strategy, but for the simple reason that it’s true” (ibid). By doing so he himself distorts scientific evidence for political ends, thus fulfilling his own confession, but he does so in a way that does not require him to abandon his testified and fundamental true beliefs.

Choosing the “correct” side of the debate is thus political, scientific, and confessional. With the culture wars moving towards a gay rights understanding of ex-gay truth, it is easy for mainstream news and current affairs to follow suit. As more evidence builds that ex-gay change is suspect, it becomes easier to report it as scientific fact even though most of the scientists involved are more careful in their claims. So, while Lund and Renna were correct, *at the time*, that ex-gay earned media worked in favour of the movement, times have changed. What they could not have foreseen is that the more ex-gay earned media continued (and continues) to be generated, circulated, and deployed, the less influence the movement would have over it. Indeed, some fifteen years after the first ex-gay ads appeared, and over a decade since the Spitzer study appeared, the movement has lost all control over its coverage in mass media; and without that influence their hope of crossing the threshold of scientificity grows ever more remote. Of course, there is indeed scientific evidence discounting ex-gay claims; and numerous policy statements from mental health organizations as well as multiple reports of harm experienced by former participants, anecdotal or not, are extremely compelling and hard to dismiss. But commercial media coverage fails to recognize the lack of *definitive* certainty in that data, choosing instead to present the issue of ex-gay change as scientifically, if not culturally, settled.

The ex-gay debate is fueled not by reasoned deliberation in the public sphere, as Jürgen Habermas would want, but by fundamentalist declarations of true belief. According to Habermas (2006a), “The deliberative model is interested more in the epistemic function of discourse and negotiation than in rational choice or political ethos [emphasizing] the cooperative search of

deliberating citizens for solutions to political problems [rather than] the preference aggregation of private citizens” (413). It “is a demanding form of communication” (ibid) but “If it works, only considered public opinions pass through it” (418). He categorizes several types of actors who (are supposed to) contribute to reasoned public debate. The two most important, “without whom no political public sphere could be put to work,” are media professionals and politicians; but he also notes the importance of lobbyists, social and political advocates, professional and scientific experts, moral entrepreneurs, and finally intellectuals (416). All participate in the ex-gay debate, but as the preceding analysis makes clear, there is little evidence of a cooperative search for solutions, and while public debates are supposed to “ensure the formation of a plurality of considered public opinion” (416), it is clear the ex-gay debate does not. As it happens, in debates that intersect with religion, Habermas calls for “cooperative acts of translation” between religious and nonreligious actors so as to facilitate the deliberation of reasoned opinion (2006b [2005], 11). But he distinguishes between fundamentalist and nonfundamentalist religion, insisting that only “nonfundamentalist religious communities can become a transformative force in the center of a democratic civil society” (2011, 25). He also recognizes that today’s media do not facilitate the right circumstances for reasoned deliberation (2006a). As we know, the ex-gay debate suggests that it is more than just *religious* fundamentalism preventing reasoned deliberation in the public sphere, and media professionals are far more interested in capitalizing on fundamentalist controversy than contributing solutions.

Ex-gay communication involves the circulation of multiple and frequently antagonistic fundamentalist discourses (including secular fundamentalist discourses) as mediated through commercial systems that emphasize sensationalism, controversy, and entertainment over reasoned debate. It operates through the marketing protocols put in place when the movement began promoting itself through paid, owned, and earned media. Ideally, competing earned media

should have generated communicative deliberation so as to lead to an increase in considered and enlightened opinions on the topic of ex-gay change; however, the tendency for commercial media to tactically prey on sensationalism and controversy over and above reasoned deliberation resulted in the conversion of the use-value of the discourse of both sides in the debate back into commercial exchange value, via the generation of mass media advertising revenue. Commercial media cares little for the way any side in a debate represents or misrepresents key issues to try and achieve discursive supremacy; because the circulation of controversial misrepresentation is both entertaining and profitable, regardless of the truth of specific claims. Having said that, just because media operates in that way *in general* does not mean that at the micro level of individual productions—where journalists, producers, and writers often negotiate their own cultural and political views with commercial imperatives—other forms of social deliberation cannot take place. It does not mean that media cannot sometimes effectively comment on controversial issues. Ironically, that seems to happen in this debate more in fiction than news and current affairs, but what is more important is that the Christian Right and the movement did not even consider the strategic importance of narrative and fictional earned media in their media strategy.

Ex-gay Earned Media in Popular Narrative Entertainment

Unlike news and current affairs, which has only recently turned against the movement, fictional depictions of and references to ex-gay change are almost exclusively negative, and that has been the case since *before* the 1998 ad campaign. Indeed, as we already know, the first ex-gay film, *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999), operates *as if* it were the effect of the ad campaign, because it was released a year later; however it began production prior to 1998. That film is now a key part of the debate; it is even referenced by one of Zach Stark's friends in *This is What Love in Action Looks Like*: "And they were like, oh my God, our friend Zach. He's going to a straight camp, like in *But I'm a Cheerleader*." But there is an even earlier example of negative ex-gay

earned media. In an episode of the sketch comedy show *Mr. Show* that aired November 10, 1995, a televangelist host (Bob Odenkirk) of a *700 Club* style show called *Good News* interviews the ex-gay founder of a ministry called Overcome named Burton Quim (David Cross). The sketch is less than three minutes long, but in it, fictionalized footage from a decade's worth of Quim's appearances on *Good News* is aired to show his long journey in and out of ex-gay "change." For each prior appearance on *Good News*, there is corresponding (and hilarious) footage of him drunk out of his mind at all-male sex parties. Neither the televangelist nor Quim are concerned (indeed, they are the ones showing the footage) because each time he returns to the show Quim confesses that he is "now who God wants me to be;" and his drunken sex parties (what the televangelist calls his terrible lapses "into homosinuality") are explained as "slips into temptation" caused by the "unrelenting homosexual cabal." After showing a clip from Quim's last appearance, in which the televangelist insisted Quim turn to the camera to let the struggling gay Christian audience know that they are "making a choice, a terrible, terrible choice," the televangelist explains that in the next broadcast Quim will tell them about his most recent gay lapse as well as "the lapse he has planned for August, which should take him to Rio de Janeiro."

The sketch is very funny, but it is also a surprisingly credible account of ex-gay change. Yes, it spoofs the process as one of extreme denial, but it also manages to represent the common ex-gay struggle in which the self works on the self to change the self as lifelong confessional labour. Were it not for the clear ridicule, one could almost see it as a positive depiction of a struggling but hard-working heterosexual entrepreneur trying to get his sexual enterprise off the ground after years of false starts. But its governmentality is, in fact, one of mockery. Similar to how Ouellette and Hay (2008) and McCarthy (2007) argue Reality TV operates governmentally as ethical demonstrations of neoliberal self-care (see below), *Mr. Show* operates as an ethical demonstration of how not to take care of oneself as an entrepreneur. While it is only one example

of an ex-gay depiction that aired on a speciality channel during a time of increased audience fragmentation, as one of many (see Appendix A), it is part of a mass media collection of fictional ex-gay depictions that all intervene as devastating critiques of the movement. But this depiction also reveals an interesting facet of the movement's role in the culture wars. Aired three years *before* the ads, *Mr. Show* depicts the movement's early promotion in *Christian* popular culture.

Mr. Show reveals that the movement's promotion began much earlier than the ex-gay ads, and the first audience targeted was not so much the mainstream public as conservative Christians. It is true, there have been numerous promotions of the movement on shows like *The 700 Club* since 1998, but Odenkirk and Cross did not create their sketch in a vacuum. In the parallel world of Christian popular culture the modification of a hateful Christian discourse began early. But it did not *just* begin in the local churches and homes of struggling Christians experiencing unwanted same-sex desire; it began in conservative Christian media, including on commercially owned networks that used fine-tuned 100-year-old fundraising techniques to raise money from true believers to help fight for the Christian cause in the culture wars. The Christian audience was governmentalized in two ways through this coverage: they were asked to treat homosexuality with compassion (because some Christians experience same-sex desire as well); and they were asked to donate to the cause, so ministries like Exodus could continue their good work in the trenches and lobby groups like Focus on the Family and the Christian Coalition could continue their good work in Washington. This early coverage was not paid media or earned media, but owned media; and it was the first step in the convergence of different forms of media in an ex-gay marketing strategy. It even helped begin the process of generating earned media in mainstream popular culture. Indeed, it generated not only the *Mr. Show* sketch, but some preliminary, albeit haphazard, mainstream news coverage (Chin 1995; *Larry King Live* 1994; Ybarra 1993).

But when the Christian Right planned its ad campaign it must have missed that episode of *Mr. Show*. Thus it missed a prime example of the kind of fictional earned media its promotional efforts were liable to generate *in addition* to the expected news coverage. There was a failure to recognize the significance of the fact that just a few years after the subsiding of the AIDS crisis, after mainstream psychology accepted homosexuality as a normal variation of human sexual response, and after the marketing discovery of gay white male disposable income, a for-profit commercial representation appeared on HBO mocking and ridiculing the movement, not just for laughs, but for subscriber fees as well. In other words, the Christian Right missed that the neoliberalization of ex-gay discourse began even before its advertising campaign, and that process was already settling in to promote the opposite point of view. As a very early pro-gay strike in the ex-gay chapter of the culture wars, *Mr. Show* began a neoliberal “cash cow,” a phenomenon that has generated income and profit for media producers and advertisers preying on sensationalism and controversy to this day. That does not deny the agency of the writer-comedians Odenkirk and Cross, who may very well have mocked and ridiculed the movement on the basis of their own personal convictions. It is just that their convictions and aesthetic sensibilities plug into a larger political-economic rationality, a rationality that provides the communicative means to mediate and propagate their convictions based on cost-benefit calculations. Indeed, whereas news and current affairs media attempted to maintain something akin to “balance” on the topic of ex-gay change right up to the Spitzer apology, negative fictional representations and exposés began circulating very shortly after the advertising campaign was first initiated and they extended across media platforms.⁹² While *Mr. Show* and *But I’m a*

⁹² Fictional depictions extend beyond just film and broadcasting. Since 2000 there have been at least five novels released on the topic, four critical (Danforth 2012; Isensee 2000; Reardon 2008; York 2014) and one oddly celebratory (Godwin 2007); and in 1999 there was a *Mad Magazine* spoof of the ex-gay ad campaign (Berlo 1999). The movement is also referenced in the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV* (TVTropes 2014), and former ex-gay Peter Toscano (who appears as an ex-gay survivor in multiple ex-gay documentaries, including *This What Love in Action Looks Like* and *Cure For Love*) wrote and continues to perform an off-Broadway play called *Doin’ Time in the HomoNoMo Halfway House* (2008), a performance of which is downloadable from his website (Toscano 2014).

Cheerleader are the exceptions, most are the effect of the circulation of ex-gay discourse in the public sphere *following* the ad campaign. In other words, critical or not, they are all examples of ex-gay earned media, whether the Christian Right would like to admit it or not.

The extent to which negative fictional depictions critique the movement, and in what way, varies. Many, especially those in comedic narratives, are short and operate as punch line jokes. In an episode of *Malcolm in the Middle* (2000) called “Lois vs. Evil,” teenage Francis (Christopher Masterson) confess that he is gay (even though he is not) to seduce a teenage girl at a private school. At the end of the episode he is tricked into ex-gay group therapy at a local church by the girl he had hoped to sleep with. The transition from Francis nearly “getting the girl” to ending up in the ex-gay movement is a fast, hard cut to a very short but funny scene in which a bewildered Francis sits with a group of stereotypically gay youth (one of whom winks at him) listening to a fire-and-brimstone preacher denounce homosexuality. Just as short and punchy is a scene from *Arrested Development* (2005). In the episode “Notapusy,” white collar criminal George Bluth Sr. (Jeffrey Tambor) is enlisted to deliver “startled straight” testimony at the town’s state fair to *criminally* at-risk youth. However, he ends up in a church-sponsored “startled straight” tent by accident. There, several male youth and George Sr.’s closeted son-in-law Tobias (David Cross from *Mr. Show*) listen with rapt attention to his descriptions of being imprisoned in closed quarters with (and receiving unwanted “reach-arounds” from) horny opportunistic men devoid of the affections of women. One of the youths asks if the men were “good looking,” which only confuses George Sr., who does not realize he is in the wrong tent. In both shows, the scenes are short and never referenced again. Nevertheless, they promote a particular kind of selfhood through ethical demonstrations. In these cases, the ethics of trying to change that which should not be changed are dismissed by the writers of each show as idiotic.

Even shorter comedic references are also frequent, appearing in shows like *The Simpsons* (2003), *Futurama* (2010), *Community* (2010), *The Middle* (2010), and *Archer* (2011). For example, in *The Simpsons* episode “Treehouse of Horror XIV,” in response to a character yelling “Hey, 700 Club, you look like a healthy specimen,” Ned Flanders replies, “Well I did finish first in the walk for the cure. Of homosexuality!” In such cases, the governmentality is less about treating audiences as objects of ethical intervention and more about using the entertainment value of the movement to keep audiences watching the shows and advertisements. They are too short and decontextualized to offer a clear ethical demonstration, although in most cases the ridicule is still clear enough. The point is to use the movement for a cheap laugh rather than to use humour to critique the movement. That does not mean such shows do not seek to influence the ethical self-regulation of audiences in other ways, but with regard to the movement itself, its narrative use-value is transformed into exchange-value almost exclusively in relation to ratings and advertising revenue rather than social critique. Many more depictions, however, especially those in dramatic narratives, are sustained, in-depth critiques. Their governmentalities are more complicated, critiquing the movement thematically and intervening by “educating” audiences in tactical and strategic ways. While designed first and foremost to be entertainment, they are meant to be much more than sensationalism. It is precisely because of the nuanced ways many of those shows address the movement over and above exchanging use-value for commercial revenue that each of my chapters uses ex-gay depictions as entry points for specific thematic discussions.

Not all popular culture depictions of the movement, however, are as considered as *Boston Legal*, *South Park*, and *Law & Order: SVU*. There is also an episode of *Criminal Minds* (2013) called “Broken” that focuses on the psychological damage inflicted on participants in a cult-like ex-gay residential program. In the episode a former resident becomes homicidal, and when the program is later raided by the FBI, its teenage victims are pictured as mindless automatons

strapped into ridiculous looking electric shock machines and drugged to near-unconsciousness. Although clearly drawing on the Zach Stark controversy, the episode depicts practices that have never been part of the ex-gay movement proper, it grossly exaggerates the arguably “mindless” nature of participation, suggests ex-gay therapy *is* (rather than should be) criminal, and superimposes homicidal ideation over suicidal ideation, suggesting that one of the harms of ex-gay therapy is murder. The ethical demonstration that ex-gay therapy is harmful is clear, but the spectacle of its portrayal of harm suggests that the exchange-value of sensationalized controversy outweighs the educative use-value of the demonstration. Thus ex-gay harm is played up to keep our eyeballs glued to the screen for the commercials. At the same time, however, the governmentality of the depiction also operates to rhetorically criminalize the movement. And it downplays debates over highly politicized and divisive issues in favour of psychological profiling. However, by rooting its discourse in such extreme forms of misrepresentation, *Criminal Minds* obscures rather than highlights legitimate psychological problems associated with the movement, and as we will see, it opens itself up to legitimate ex-gay complaints.

Yet unlike news and current affairs, or even documentaries, the governmentality of fictional popular culture is seldom concerned with accuracy.⁹³ In fiction, themes and notions are explored in various ways, but seldom to represent an issue “objectively,” much less empirically. Narrative governance is seldom about representing reality as it is; it is about intervening in reality to modify it by example. In the case of the ex-gay movement, narrative critiques tend to operate through the legitimate practices of dramatization, parody, and satire to deploy extreme

⁹³ There are numerous academic studies that investigate the implications of inaccurate pop culture representations on the attitudes of audiences. Many in cultural studies examine inaccurate depictions of minority groups, including sexual minorities. In communication studies there is a long history of studying media effects, frequently in relation to representation, and there are numerous studies in law and criminology that investigate inaccurate representations of science in film and television. Indeed, many recognize the *Law & Order* franchise in particular as politically interventionist but critique it based on the ideology of its accuracy (Britto et al 2007; Lee, S. 2004; Quinn 2002; Rhineberger-Dunn and Rader 2008; Soulliere 2003; and Sutton et al. 2000). However, by placing television in an analytics of government, representation as *mere* ideology (as false consciousness) is deemphasized.

depictions as weapons against the movement's credibility, to intervene and convince viewers to reject the movement, often because the writers and producers themselves believe the movement is flawed. The use of exaggeration is a rhetorical device that in most cases is not expected to be taken as the "gospel" truth. In *South Park*'s "Cartman Sucks," wherein several very young ex-gay participants commit suicide in front of their peers, the writers and producers do not mean to suggest that prepubescent boys are prone to shooting themselves in the head while participating in ex-gay therapy; rather, they mean the extreme depiction to satirically dramatize evidence of teen and adult suicides and teen and adult suicidal ideation so as to highlight it as a problem to be solved. The choice to dramatize that evidence through exaggerated depictions is a tactic designed to make a point rather than reflect reality. That financial revenue is generated through the depiction's entertainment value cannot be forgotten, but the specific nature of the critique points to a governmentality beyond mere commercialism.

In general, all mainstream ex-gay fictional representations, even those operating as punch line jokes or deploying extreme inaccuracies, operate collectively as a powerful form of resistance to the monopolizing intentions of ex-gay religious capital in the culture wars. The generation of ex-gay earned media cannot be separated from the social and political goals of the Christian Right. But much of this earned media has been hijacked. It is still earned media, but the movement has lost influence over it.⁹⁴ For nearly 15 years news and current affairs tried to remain "objective" and "neutral" in its reporting on ex-gay change, but not so with film and television entertainment. From even before the ad campaign began, popular culture writers, directors, and producers have been resisting strategic attempts by the Christian Right to use the ex-gay movement to change the structuration of society's response to homosexuality. Although none of these depictions operate to generate religious capital themselves, they do undermine the

⁹⁴ Edelman and Salsberg (2010) describe hijacked media in terms of activists turning advertising against itself. They do not consider that an entire industry might also "hijack" earned media and turn it against itself.

religious capital generated by the movement, at least in mainstream media they do, and in that way they create cultural capital for the pro-gay side.⁹⁵ Thus mainstream ex-gay discourse, both “factual” and narrative, demonstrates the way different fields of cultural production can interact and impact upon each other even when working to produce different kinds of profit. However, just as secular popular culture resists the monopolizing intentions of ex-gay religious capital, that too is answered and resisted by ex-gay advocates who see the secular point of view as equally monopolizing, and the “accuracy” of those depictions, *as they see it*, is precisely the point.

Ex-gay Earned Media in The Christian Culture Industry

Conservative Christian responses to negative ex-gay narrative depictions are numerous. In some cases they are introduced into the public sphere through sociological observation or the posting of private correspondence, but often they circulate as confessed true believing earned media. Although most of the conservative Christian responses to *Law & Order*'s “Abomination” can no longer be found, a response from former ex-gay apologist, now critic of the movement, Warren Throckmorton (2003) is still available online, as is a complaint from Jerry Falwell (2006) in which he bemoans the way “former homosexuals are depicted on the networks” as offenders. Also, in 2003 *Ex-gay Watch* reported on the mobilization of a letter-writing campaign by Exodus to protest the episode (Airhart 2003).⁹⁶ Exodus called for the intervention of ex-gays, asking them to write personal letters of rebuke designed to correct the network through sheer numbers. However, given that the *Law & Order* franchise has depicted the movement negatively

⁹⁵ The most recent ex-gay film, which premiered at Sundance in January 2015 (Debruge 2015), may complicate this trend in spite of being produced by Gus Van Sant, a gay filmmaker, and starring gay actor Zackary Quinto and gay-friendly actor James Franco (Anderton 2014; Seigler 2014; Setoodeh 2014). *I am Michael* is based on the true story of former gay activist turned ex-gay Christian pastor, Michael Glatze, who is a frequent object of Wayne Besen's contempt (Besen 2009c; 2010; 2013b) but was the focus of a 2011 *New York Times Magazine* article noted earlier for being one of the last earned media examples to show some sympathy for the ex-gay position (Denizet-Lewis 2011). As the first ex-gay biopic, *I am Michael*, was made with Glatze's permission and support (Martinez 2014), and, prior to its release, some in the gay media questioned how critical the film might be (Portwood 2014) or noted that it was positioning itself to be *about* the culture wars rather than an intervention *in* the culture wars (Ring 2014). Now that it has been released, it is being described as “even-handed” and impartial (Debruge 2015).

⁹⁶ Evidence of the campaign's deployment can still be found on one ex-gay chat board (Henry B 2003).

since, clearly the letters had little effect. Recently there was widespread negative response to *Criminal Minds*. Jack Minor (2013a), of the Christian magazine *World News Daily*, condemns the portrayal of “members of the ex-‘gay’ community as ticking time bombs who are potential serial killers,” and Christopher Doyle in the *Christian Post* calls the episode “outrageous and reprehensible,” confessing that it “deeply offended me and my family, my clients and their families, and the counselors that help them” (Doyle 2013a). Negative references to that episode can be found in several more *Christian Post* articles (Doyle 2013b; Kumar 2013); and the ex-gay group “Voices of the Voiceless” organized a petition against CBS; although, as of February 2014, it only had 41 signatures (Voices of the Voices 2014).

It is interesting that some private ex-gay interventions confessing dismay at narrative depictions of the movement have entered the public discourse through other means. In her study, Erzen (2006) documents the writing of one letter of rebuke, by New Hope director Frank Worthen, against a 2000 *Will and Grace* episode that depicts ex-gay support groups as “pick-up” clubs for closeted gays; and even though the members of New Hope were not allowed to watch the episode, they still debated its implications (94-95). More salient, 12-year-old correspondence between ex-gay Mike Haley, of Focus on the Family, and Jon Kinnally, a *Will and Grace* story editor, was recently discovered and posted online. In his letter, Haley complains of gross misrepresentation in an ex-gay episode of the show, noting “how frustrating and painful it is to be mocked” (*Huffington Post* 2012b). In Kinnally’s humorous response, he apologizes for any offense, which he insists was unintended, but notes how funny the episode was and then gives Haley his dating “statistics” followed by a not-so-subtle suggestion that they meet for sex (*ibid*). That correspondence speaks to the multiple governmentalities involved in commercial depictions of the movement. Yes, *Will and Grace* was a high-rated network show in a commercial system; however, as a production written, directed, and produced by real human beings with real desires

and opinions, it was also a vehicle for those producers to intervene personally. Kinnally, a gay writer, meant his depiction to undercut ex-gay politics. He sought to educate his audience about the movement's hypocrisy, presenting his story as an ethical demonstration designed to combat demonstrations from the movement. But Haley's letter was equally governmental. Although the attempt failed, he sought to change the ethics of the show, to educate the writers and producers about the negative effect their depiction had on ex-gay viewers. But while he tried to keep his intervention private, what he received for his efforts was further public mocking.

In addition to operating as ethical demonstrations and moral exercises, these petitions and letters are also indicative of the kind of consumer response one is supposed to have in a neoliberal market of choice. Gone are the days of the overt and widespread censorship associated with the Hollywood Production Code and the Catholic Legion of Decency (Quicke 2009), as now outraged citizens are encouraged to self-actualize (and then actualize others) through influence and persuasion rooted in individual choice. But letter writing campaigns from minority groups within minority groups (ex-gays being a minority of the minority that experience same-sex desire) are more likely to demonstrate that anti-ex-gay depictions are having the desired effect of influencing ethical conduct. For every one person who writes a letter in anger, there are numerous more who watched the show and enjoyed. However, in a neoliberal system that subsumes the culture wars within it, the Christian Right is not content to merely respond to mainstream popular culture; they also produce their own popular culture.

Although I have yet to find evidence of fictional narrative accounts of ex-gay change produced by the Christian Right, some news and current affairs ex-gay media are produced by the movement itself, as well as by the Christian advocacy groups that fund it. Indeed, that is exactly the kind of media that *Mr. Show* mocked three years before the ad campaign began. Today Christian programming continues to promote ex-gay goals, even and especially now that

the ex-gay point of view in the culture wars is losing ground. Take a segment from Pat Robertson's *CBN News* that aired in July of 2011, the week after it was reported that then Presidential candidate Michelle Bachman's husband had been caught offering reparative therapy in private practice even though he insisted he does not offer such services. Entitled "A Cure for Homosexuality? The Debate Continues," the segment responds to that controversy not by defending Bachman but by defending ex-gay change (*CBN News* 2011). In it, Mark Yarhouse, co-author of the Jones and Yarhouse study discussed in Chapter 2, is interviewed. Given Yarhouse's employment at Robertson's Regent University, he presents his study in a surprisingly objective way. He acknowledges that research on reparative therapy "is not particularly convincing;" explains that success is hard to measure because "people define success differently;" and admits, "we really don't know the cause of [homosexuality]." However, the *CBN* producers still misrepresent his study by neglecting to mention the study's high dropout rate. At the same time, they correct misinformation propagated in the secular media regarding the American Psychological Association's stance on conversion efforts, explaining (correctly) that the APA has not *condemned* reparative therapy, but merely "raised concerns" about it, indicating that it is "*unlikely* to be successful" and there is "*some* risk of harm." Such a tactic is common on both sides, wherein the other's misinformation is corrected while one's own is presented as truth. That implies that true belief operates to blind participants to their own forms of obfuscation. Although Yarhouse is very careful about what he says, he still allows *CBN* to misrepresent him.

As it happens, *CBN*'s coverage of the ex-gay debate operates as part of the convergence of paid, owned, and earned media in the Christian Right's marketing strategy. *CBN* and *The 700 Club* are not earned media, but owned media: their programming is produced and paid for by a broadcast network with direct ties to Robertson's Christian Coalition, a group that helped fund the 1998 ad campaign. The same can also be said of a pro-ex-gay current affairs serial called

Pure Passions (hosted by former male prostitute turned born-again Christian, David Kyle Foster), which began production in 2006 (*Pure Passion* 2014a; 2014b). Produced with the assistance of the movement, it continues to be aired in multiple languages on many conservative Christian channels across the world, including on *CBN* (*Pure Passion* 2014a; 2014b; see also Besen 2006b). There is, however, plenty of coverage in Christian news and magazine publishing, as well as in Christian online blogs, which is earned media because such sources have no known *direct* financial ties to the movement. In that light, it is important to note that the strategic generation of earned media in Christian popular culture carries far less risk than earned media in mainstream popular culture. The movement is frequently covered in the magazine *Christianity Today* in a positive light, which is exactly what the Christian Right wants. Indeed, a search within the online version of the magazine reveals the movement to have its own dedicated topic page complete with an abstract and no less than 30 articles published since 2000, seven of them in the last two years (*Christianity Today* 2014). A search of the magazine *The Christian Post* using the key word “ex-gay” reveals an astounding number of results, with numerous articles posted in 2012 and 2013, including two from within a month of the search (*The Christian Post* 2014; Moore 2014; Gryboski 2014). The Christian Magazine *WND* (*World News Daily*), also known for publishing multiple pro-ex-gay articles, even published an online multimedia article in 2013 that included an embedded video for an “Ex-Gay Anthem” by ex-gay singer-songwriter Dennis Jernigan (*WND* and Jernigan 2013). Yes, most of the Christian magazines are for-profit enterprises but in this debate true belief takes precedence.

Negative coverage in the Christian press of unfavourable depictions of ex-gays in mainstream media combined with the large amount of positive Christian-produced pro-ex-gay media speaks to the one element of success that can still be claimed by the movement. Whereas it is clear that the Christian Right and the ex-gay movement are losing two key battles they

initiated with the 1998 ad campaign—to be accepted as legitimate within mainstream North American culture, and to influence political decisions related to protecting LGBT rights—they have won one battle. Over fifteen years since the ad campaign began, the movement has a very high profile in conservative Christian communities and it is now largely accepted as genuine. Indeed, in spite of the recent proliferation of negative earned media in mainstream popular culture, the movement still exists and engages in debate.

Governmental Communicative Action in the Public Sphere

If mass media facilitated the kind of communicative action Habermas calls for in the public sphere, it is possible the problem of ex-gay change could have been solved a decade ago through reasoned deliberation. Indeed, he calls for reasoned deliberation between secular and religious actors (2006b; 2011). He even goes so far as to praise religion for having “a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life” (2006b, 10). He insists on the rights of religious actors to participate in granting deliberative feedback: “deliberative politics is as much a product of the public use of reason on the part of *religious* citizens as on that of *nonreligious* citizens” (2011, 24, author’s italics). But Habermas also argues that “Mediated political communication in the public sphere can facilitate deliberative legitimation processes in complex societies only if a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments, and if anonymous audiences grant feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society” (2006a, 411-12).

Unfortunately mass media does not operate in that way. It may require and encourage rational calculations of costs and benefits but it does not require the rational deliberation of Enlightenment thinking. As this study demonstrates and as Habermas himself acknowledges, “the *dynamics* of mass communication are driven by the power of the media to select, and shape the presentation of, messages[,] and by the strategic use of political and social power to influence

the agendas as well as the triggering and framing of public issues” (2006a, 415, author’s italics). He adds to that “prima facie evidence” that mediated political communication does not facilitate deliberative politics today because most media organizations are commercial enterprises that contribute to “the colonization of the public sphere by market imperatives lead[ing] to a peculiar paralysis of civil society” (422). It is almost as if he recognizes Foucault’s governmentality, and the deployment of communicative tactics and strategies as mechanisms of conformity, change, and persuasion, as a necessary concept to flesh out his understanding of communication.⁹⁷ Yet Habermas is not entirely correct that the neoliberal colonization of the public sphere (and the media organizations that constitute it) leads to the paralysis of civil society.

While neoliberal colonization does paralyze the kind of deliberative communication Habermas’ ideal governmentality calls for, it does not prevent civil society from communicating in a different way. In their analysis of how reality television offers guidance for audiences to conduct themselves as neoliberal citizen-subjects, Ouellette and Hay (2008) place the medium of television “in an analytic of government emphasiz[ing] television as a resource... [that] governmentalizes by presenting individuals and populations as objects of assessment and intervention... [and] by soliciting their participation in the cultivation of particular habits, ethics, behaviors, and skills” (12-13). They root their analysis in Foucault, linking contemporary liberal and neoliberal rationalities of laissez-faire self-regulation with pastoral technologies of examination, guidance, confession, and obedience (8-18). However, through a term taken from

⁹⁷ Habermas does not consider his and Foucault’s approaches compatible because he categorizes Foucault as an anti-Enlightenment post-modernist (Habermas 1990 [1985]). But Foucault is nothing of the sort. Indeed, he considers his form of critique to be rooted in a Kantian form of critical thought that constantly subjects rationality to its own criteria of questioning (Foucault 1984a; see also Rajchman 2007). That is why David Ingram (2005) argues that Habermas’s conception of communication is an ideal that in reality “must incorporate something like ‘strategic action’ in Foucault’s sense of the term” and that Foucault’s understanding of power relations does not necessarily foreclose deliberation and consensus (242). Ironically, in Foucault’s early articulations of technologies of the self, he cites Habermas as the source of the analytic schema upon which he builds the concept: “According to some suggestions by Habermas... one can identify three major types of techniques in human societies: ...techniques of production, techniques of signification, and techniques of domination... But... there is in all societies, I think, in all societies whatever they are, another type of techniques: ...technologies of the self” (2007c [1980], 153-4).

Raymond Williams' analysis of television as a cultural form, they also consider television as a "cultural technology." For Williams (2003 [1974]), considering TV as a cultural technology requires situating it within "the social history of television as technology" and "the social history of the uses of television" (3). For Ouellette and Hay, arguing against a tendency to think of media as *either* just political economic practice *or* just cultural practice, considering TV as a cultural technology requires its analysis as "an object of regulation, policy, and program[ing] designed to nurture [a particular kind of] citizenship and civil society, and [as] an instrument for educating, improving, and shaping subjects" (14). They emphasize the use-value of television content as a form of government, deemphasizing both representation as *mere* ideology and commercialization as *just* revenue generation (227, n. 18).

By cultivating a certain kind of citizenship, television does not paralyze civil society. Today, however, it does help reconstitute society in terms of an individualized market-based schema, leading to a different form of governance that links civil society to the state and media within an entrepreneurial grid of intelligibility, one that even manages to neoliberalize trauma. Anna McCarthy (2007) also analyzes Reality TV in terms of neoliberal governance, and she draws on Foucault to do so: "to see reality television as merely trivial entertainment is to avoid recognizing the degree to which the genre is preoccupied with the government of the self, and how, in that capacity, it demarcates a zone for the production of everyday discourses of citizenship" (17). She acknowledges that Reality TV participates in the shrinking of the public sphere and the weakening of public discourse, but notes that what it produces and strengthens are "arguments about governance and rights that are based on *psychologized* models of public culture... which draw their warrants from intimate experiences and affective performances of the self" (18). Noting that such a model operates as a "familial process" because it is in the family "that people learn how to govern, and be governed by, affects such as shame and kindness" (19),

she juxtaposes neoliberal self-governance rooted in entrepreneurship against “the failure of self-government” rooted in “the ineffable, self-annihilating experience of trauma” (20-21). In short, she showcases “the structures of civic subjectivity formed where trauma and governmentality meet” (21) in a way that highlights the shortcomings of neoliberal communication without falling back into an entirely negative analysis that sees nothing but standardization and repression in the commercial mediation of public discourse.

The ex-gay debate intersects with Reality TV in a few areas, most notably when ex-gay apologists, participants, and former participants appear on sensationalist daytime talk shows like *The Montel Williams Show* and *The Tyra Banks Show* to confess their ex-gay struggles. But there were also two one-episode Reality TV “documentaries” that aired on TLC in 2011 and 2015: *Ted Haggard: Scandalous* and *My Husband’s Not Gay*. The first program focused on the reformation of Christian preacher Ted Haggard who was caught smoking crystal meth with a gay prostitute in 2006 and then entered an ex-gay program. The second showcased three heterosexually married Mormon ex-gays, their wives, and a new man joining their support group trying to find a wife. In each program intimate familial experiences and performances of the self that draw on both shame and kindness are presented as objects of assessment for the audience to learn from. In *Scandalous*, Ted Haggard is presented as a loving family man ashamed of his past behaviour who now channels his guilt and love into helping others. He and his family work hard to build a place of worship in their barn that accepts anyone, even gays and lesbians, yet they still expect their worshipers to work hard to sacrifice their sinful ways within a family oriented context. At one point Haggard and his wife even rush to a local park to meet a woman addicted to meth and encourage her to enter rehab. With the three of them sitting on the grass together, the woman clearly agitated, traumatized, and in distress, Haggard asks her “If I decide to go to work for you, are you going to work for yourself?” In one of the key plot lines of *My Husband’s Not Gay*, the

new member joining the group is set up on a blind date. As the camera follows him on his date, we come to the difficult moment when he must confess to her that he is attracted to men. The audience is situated by the narrative of the show to sympathize with his struggle, to have compassion for the shame and trauma he experiences in having to admit this, not only to a woman he is on a date with, but also because he does so on television for the world to see.

Commercialized ex-gay mediation demonstrates that in today's public sphere trauma and shame do indeed operate in relation to a neoliberal rationality. In that light, McCarthy characterizes Reality TV as a genre of excess that amounts to "a neoliberal theater of suffering" (19). She describes Reality TV programs as showcasing trauma, shame, guilt, and abjection by "putting the behaviors and life histories of others on display for our horrified pleasure, and then showing them corrected by the expertise of a variety of nonstate disciplinary figures: juries of experts, psychologists and child care specialists, medical doctors, professionals of all stripes" (30). It is interesting, though, that in TLC's ex-gay Reality TV, the experts correcting shameful behaviour are the very people struggling to modify their shameful behaviour. They are "experts" because of their religious beliefs and because they have already "changed," with the focus of each program being a demonstration of the struggle they experience in relation to those beliefs and that change. McCarthy's analysis, however, does not just apply to ex-gay Reality TV, it applies to the ex-gay debate as a whole, where ex-gay participants and correcting experts, which include religious leaders, political activists, and entrepreneurial ex-gay leaders, appear in articles, news reports, film and television documentaries, and even film and television fiction to put ex-gay shame and trauma on display as a theatre of suffering.

As we know, a considerable amount of ex-gay discourse circulates through news, current affairs, and more traditionally produced feature and television documentaries. Considering the shift that has taken place in the ex-gay debate from journalistic "balance" and "objectivity" to

critique and exposé, it is clear that traditional news and current affairs also governmentalize by presenting ex-gays and the ex-gay movement as objects of assessment and intervention. Furthermore, even when “balanced,” governance and rights that are based on psychologized models of public culture have always been the norm in this polemic. However, as we know, numerous references, depictions and representations in narrative “fictional” popular culture also circulate in the ex-gay debate. That is why in this chapter I extended the spirit of the above arguments beyond Reality TV to not just news and current affairs, but to narrative entertainment as well. Markus Stauff (2010) situates media governance *in general* within “the continual modification, adaptation and questioning that characterizes governmental politics” (266) because the common goals of all media “consist not in representing reality but in modifying it” (263). He juxtaposes approaches that centre “on the standardizing effects” of mass media with a governmental approach. He “locates the ‘politics of media’ on the level of problematizations and thus on the level of multiple strategies” (274) that integrate “discursive reproductions and... media-technological practices... into governmental rationalities” (278). Following Stauff, I show that while mass media has always worked to govern and modify thought and behaviour, it now operates as such *in general* within a fragmented, neoliberalized market of expanding “choices.” Yes, today it is seldom the case that any one media text will reach a mass audience, but taken as a whole, the content of the ex-gay debate, which circulates through multiple forms of media and content to multiple different audiences, operates in general as a mass media phenomenon. Also, today’s media still incorporate rationalities from older liberal discourses and, of course, from neoconservative rationalities that operate in conflicted tandem with neoliberal rationalities. *Law & Order: SVU* episodes devoted to the ex-gay problem are perfect examples, wherein a

neoliberal focus on individualized responsibility that tends to eschew larger social processes operates within what McCarthy characterizes as secure narratives of state-based governance.⁹⁸

But in *Law & Order*'s "Abomination," different governmental rationalities are combined to demonstrate the opposite of one of McCarthy's key points; that in neoliberalism trauma is "inassimilable and unrationalizable [and] ultimately ungovernable" (33). She argues that the "real" traumas of Reality TV participants are not assimilable because they are donated rather than rationalized so as to advance the entrepreneurial careers of Reality TV producers (32). Quoting Rose (1999) she also suggests that trauma is an implicitly false and colonizing rhetoric in neoliberalism because it "has moved beyond the consulting room and now forms part of the texture of everyday experience, where... it is more a matter of bearing witness to pain suffered than giving voice to inner guilt" (McCarthy 2007, 27, quoting Rose 1999, 90-1). Based on that she argues the only place for trauma in neoliberalism is "as a kind of biopolitical leverage that subjects, acting as citizens, use to claim agency in relation to structures of authority" (28). However, in "Abomination," Ian Tate's (Jonathon Tucker) trauma—the shame and abjection he received from his reparative therapist father (George Segal), and his witnessing of his father murder his gay lover—is narratively assimilated and rationalized through the governmentality of confession, and the narrative also solicits the audience to rationalize and assimilate his trauma vicariously. By confessing his homosexuality to his father and then testifying against him in court, Ian is able to overcome his trauma, and in the final scene he assimilates his experience by labelling it part of a learning process that will now allow him to continue as a self-sufficient and openly gay individual. The state-based governance of the court *and* a neoliberalized governance

⁹⁸ McCarthy differentiates the governmentality of Reality TV from that of narrative television when she suggests that "leftists cultural critics" prefer "the secure narratives of state-based governance told in procedural shows like *Law and Order*" (34). Such a differentiation, however, in no way negates the governmental rationalities underlying other television contents and over forms of media. Ouellette and Hay, for example, note that narrative television has indeed operated governmentality since before the 1970s to provide "ethical demonstrations and moral exercises" (26-7) even if it did not always focus on a specifically neoliberal model of ethical self-governance.

of self-actualization (in which Ian's coming out allows him to continue his life independent of the state) are combined here precisely to rationalize and assimilate his trauma.

McCarthy's assessment may not even be entirely accurate for Reality TV. It may be true that Ted Haggard, his wife, the addict he attempted to help, and the ex-gay men and their wives featured in TLC's ex-gay Reality TV programs all donated their trauma to the producers of the show, and in the process showcased it as suffering rather than guilt; however, that did not prevent confession from rationalizing and assimilating their trauma. Trauma is not false just because its confession today does not always give voice to inner guilt. By assuming that trauma, and by extension confession, must purge guilt to be legitimate, McCarthy accepts only ancient Christian or early psychoanalytic confessional governmentalities. In neoliberalism a rationality of trauma can indeed be constructed, especially when the rationalities of neoliberalism and confession are combined. Even more than that, the case of the ex-gay movement demonstrates, in both profit-driven fiction and Reality TV, that even when combined with neoliberal discourses, even when deployed as a tool of agency in relation to structures of authority, confessed trauma does not necessarily lose its guilt inducing, self-sacrificial nature. In "Abomination" Ian still bears the guilt of being complicit in the murder his father committed, and, in fact, to avoid *legal* responsibility for that guilt, he sacrifices his father. In *Scandalous* and *My Husband's Not Gay* the ex-gay participants showcase their struggle precisely to rationalize the guilt they feel for experiencing same-sex desire, and to sacrifice that guilt to religious obedience. Yet we cannot forget that numerous participants in the ex-gay debate, through neoliberalized media channels, have confessed their guilt in having supported and led the movement, not the least of whom is Alan Chambers. Both his guilt and the trauma of the survivors he apologized to have been rationalized, assimilated and made governable, not through reasoned deliberation, but through the circulation of governing earned media.

The Oprahfication of Ex-gay Confessions and Apologies

As we know, the Oprah Winfrey produced documentary serial *Our America*, hosted by Lisa Ling, has produced three episodes about the ex-gay movement in which then Exodus president Alan Chambers has confessed his shame and testified his truth; from testifying to the shame of his same-sex desire and the truth of his change, to confessing the truth of his struggle (and lack of change) and the shame of his involvement in ex-gay harm. The first two episodes operated as more or less balanced accounts of the movement, interviewing and eliciting confessions and testimonies of truth and shame from both current and past participants of the movement (those in favour and opposed) so as to present both sides of the debate. That is the kind of earned media the Christian Right and the movement hoped for and for a long time received. They never expected ex-gay claims would go unchallenged in mainstream coverage. The initial strategy was to elicit coverage that presented ex-gay truth claims in addition to pro-gay truth claims and build cultural capital aiming *eventually* to monopolize the issue. They were not concerned with whether or not ex-gay coverage amounted to a neoliberal theatre of suffering; they were concerned with whether or not ex-gays had a voice in that theatre. However, by 2011 the tide was turning against the movement and “balanced” perspectives were increasingly denounced by those opposed. They also were not concerned with whether or not the ex-gay issue was presented as a neoliberal theatre of suffering; they were only concerned that ex-gay suffering be presented in the “correct” way, dramatized as the unnecessary suffering of LGBTQ people.

Yes, the suffering caused by the movement was represented in the first two episodes, but to the horror of pro-gay advocates, those episodes also allowed ex-gays to present their suffering as the suffering of being gay. Thus Backlot.com, an online website devoted to “gay men interested in mainstream entertainment” (*Backlot, The* 2013), complained that in spite of Ling stating previously that she disliked seeing peoples’ faith manipulated, she “didn’t seem to mind at all that peoples’ faith and hope were being manipulated in order to make them become

‘straight’” (John 2011). Besen, in the gay magazine *The Advocate*, accused Ling of incompetent reporting, calling the episode “an indulgent, shallow piece that included embarrassing factual inaccuracies resulting from a lack of research and lazy reporting” (Besen 2011a). The LGBTQ advocacy group GLAAD dismissed the very need for debate: “It’s deeply concerning to me that the question ‘[Can a person] pray the gay away?’ is even being asked today. It’s even more concerning to see it being presented as a debate by any reputable media institution” (Ward 2011). Reasoned deliberation between different perspectives on ex-gay change is not an option in this controversy. From the perspective of gay rights advocates, there is no reasoning with what is clearly wrong. Just like the Christian Right and the leaders of the movement, they are true believers. The problem is that too many in this debate believe that they are so *fundamentally* right as to disallow for an engagement between points of view. Instead there are tactics and strategies of governmental persuasion deployed in all directions, and each of the parties involved believe they are being perfectly reasonable in doing so.

The third ex-gay episode of *Our America*, “Special Report: God and Gays,” in which Chambers voluntarily faces a group of ex-gay survivors, received a very different response. We know that after listening to their testimony, trauma, and suffering, Chambers confessed his mistake in promoting the movement, apologized for the harm he caused, and shut Exodus down. There was no effort to give both sides of the story in this episode. Chambers and his wife were the only ex-gay representatives, and they were only there to admit their mistakes and ask for forgiveness. This episode was a display of anguish, complete with accusations of abuse, admissions of guilt and atonement for mistakes made. In his online apology, Chambers even went so far as to confess that Exodus has “been imprisoned in a worldview that’s neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical” (Hurst 2013, quoting Alan Chambers). As it happens, Chamber’s apology followed in the footsteps of a widely reported event from

January 2012 in which he appeared as a surprise guest at a Gay Christian Network (GCN) conference and confessed to the survivors in attendance that 99.9% of ex-gays do not change. “God and Gays” completed what he started there. Chamber’s GCN apology was not widely reported on, but because his *Our America* apology was accompanied by an apology posted on the Exodus website and the news that Exodus was closing, it was reported on by multiple North American news outlets, including all the major Canadian organizations.⁹⁹

It should be no surprise, then, that many gay rights activists responded very differently to “God and Gays” than the previous two episodes. Again, they could care less that ex-gay survivor testimonies of harm were put on display for their entertainment value; only that they validated the suffering and trauma caused by the movement. Besen (2013a) was very enthusiastic about both the episode and the event it inspired. He describes it as “riveting TV. It was raw. It was honest. It was factual,” He even went so far as to say that Ling, “did a phenomenal job by asking all the right questions and holding ‘ex-gay’ activist Alan Chambers (if he can still be described as such) accountable for misleading his clients.” GLADD remained suspicious, noting that many are “skeptical about possible motives behind the apology,” but they refrained from describing the episode itself negatively (Shamy 2013). The response from Backlot.com was more positive, with columnist Lyle Masaki noting that while the “two previous episodes... didn’t go well, to put it mildly... considering the latest news about Exodus (which I’m still trying to convince myself is actually happening) this might go pretty well” (Masaki 2013). So, from two episodes designed to present a balanced perspective on the ex-gay debate (albeit without reasoned deliberation—just confessions of desire and testimonies of truth), we move to one that initiated the closing of the

⁹⁹ Most of the Canadian articles were taken off the American wire from the Associated Press or Thomson Reuters. Sun Media published its own generic article attributed to Québecor Media Inc. (QMI Agency 2012). In mainstream news, only the *Globe and Mail* published a unique article penned by its own staff writer (Mahoney 2013). Having said that, Chambers’ apology, coming within a year of Spitzer’s apology, did produce its own Canadian “earned media,” first in the form of a CBC radio segment that aired the same day the story broke (*As It Happens* 2013), and later in a three part *Toronto Star* series written by the journalist Graham Slaughter (2013a; 2013b; 2013c).

largest ex-gay group in the world, complete with a major confession from an ex-gay leader broadcast over the air and posted online. If the Spitzer apology did not signal the movement's near complete loss of control of its own earned media, then the Chambers' apology certainly did. That was not at all the kind of religious capital the ex-gay movement had hoped to generate when they began advertising themselves fifteen years earlier. But the primary practice around which the movement revolves, confession, remained intact. It is, in fact, the practice of confession that allowed the whole event to be a theatre of suffering for all involved.

We know, of course, that prior to the closing of Exodus there had been many more cases of ex-gay participants admitting failure or worse, but none as devastating to the movement as Chamber's apology. And that in spite of some being caught in clandestine homosexual affairs with news of their failures propagating through the media like wildfire, including in the parallel culture of conservative Christianity (Bailey 2010; Evangelical Press and Veenker 2000; Lee, A. 2002; Samuel 2010). Perhaps the most damaging of these events (prior to Chambers' apology) was when Besen personally photographed ex-gay spokesperson John Paulk, husband of ex-gay ad model Anne Paulk, leaving a gay bar in 2000 (Besen 2003).¹⁰⁰ Not only did Besen deliver that photo and story to the commercial media almost immediately after he took it, he used the publicity to write and sell his own commercial book. Since then, John has confessed his is gay, divorced his wife, and apologized (Brydum 2013).¹⁰¹ But Chambers did not close Exodus because he was caught in a clandestine affair nor was he forced out of the closet through exposure. His apology came as a personal choice largely untainted by any *specific* controversy.

There is also the case of Michael Bussey, one of the former ex-gays Chambers apologized to in "God and Gays." Bussey and his then soon-to-be husband Gary Cooper helped found Exodus International in 1976; but they both left in the early 1980s when they fell in love

¹⁰⁰ That happened just two years after both John and Anne appeared on the cover of *Newsweek Magazine* as a successful ex-gay couple (Leland and Miller 1998).

¹⁰¹ However, Anne continues to identify as ex-gay and now works for the Restored Hope Network (Steffan 2013).

and became a couple (Besen 2003; Erzen 2006; *Our America* 2011). Although Cooper has since died of AIDS, Bussey continues to be an outspoken critic of the movement. The difference between Bussey and Chambers is that Bussey did not apologize for his ex-gay involvement until after he left; and in spite of being a co-founder, he was in no position to stop Exodus from expanding after he left. Furthermore, because in the 1980s the movement still operated in the shadows of conservative Christianity, there was very little coverage of what happened. By contrast, Chambers issued his apology while still sitting as President of Exodus, while still working as an ex-gay spokesperson, and he did so within a 15-year-old culture of ex-gay earned media. Because of that, he was able to convince the Exodus board of directors to shut the operation down. In that sense, Chambers' apology as a media event can also be differentiated from the case of John Smid, who we know from the Zach Stark story. Smid also admitted that he is still gay and LGBTQ people cannot change their sexual orientation (Hurst 2011; Roberts 2010; Smid 2010). But Smid was forced into the controversy that led to his confession by the very focused negative media coverage of Stark's ordeal, much of which centred on Smid himself. Also, like Bussey, he did not apologize for his involvement until after he left Love in Action, which left him in no position to close it down (although the organization did shut down its teen program in 2007 and has since changed its name to Restoration Path).

In all these cases, commercial popular culture's tendency to highlight sensationalism and controversy was ultimately unhelpful for the ex-gay cause, but Chambers confession stands out as being the most damaging. Recognizing the power of popular culture to communicate to large audiences, he willfully used a popular television program to undermine his own organization and blindside his own supporters in a very profound way. Creating yet another media frenzy, he even helped create a discourse within the debate suggesting that the movement was "on its last legs" (Slaughter 2013a), or even dead (Sosa 2013). Of course, the closing of Exodus by no means

signaled the end of the movement. We cannot forget that a splinter group, The Restored Hope Network, had already established itself as separate before Exodus closed, and that it then positioned itself to take over where Exodus left off. In fact, RHN was established precisely because that group's founders (Anne Paulk being one) so strongly disagreed with the direction Exodus was heading under Chambers. Indeed, as this chapter shows, the movement is still accepted in conservative Christian communities. Nevertheless, Chambers' apology demonstrates the power wielded by popular entertainment over ex-gay discourse—a power rooted in tactics, strategies, and governmentality rather than reasoned deliberation. However, it also demonstrates what all the other ex-gay apologies also show, as well as the pro-gay coverage of all those events: that the ex-gay debate is indeed a neoliberal theatre of suffering that puts trauma and shame on display; and it does so as both entertainment and intervention, as a way to produce profit for media producers and advertisers *and* as an ethical display cultivating certain habits and behaviours, albeit not the habits and behaviours sold by the movement, at least not anymore.

Thus this theatre of suffering also shows that whatever political economic benefit there is, or has been, for the Christian Right in generating ex-gay earned media, it still operates within that conflicted space where neoliberalism and neoconservatism meet. In that space the market-based protocol of earned media that allows ex-gay statements to circulate as quickly and widely as they do meets the conservative family values true beliefs of traditional “protect the children” religion. Unfortunately for the movement, that is precisely the space strategically turned against them by their adversaries. It is in that space where Chambers' apology was used to generate increased revenue as well as increased publicity for *Our America*. It was in that space that television and newspaper producers as well as the marketing companies and advertisers sponsoring the show became the financial benefactors of the harm Chambers caused. They utilized his confession, as well as those of the ex-gay survivors in the episode, to feed off the

sensationalism and controversy of a movement—and a debate—that could not exist without confession, but they did so against the movement’s interests. It could even be said that Oprah Winfrey herself was an executive producer of the closing of Exodus International. In fact, if we are going to follow the logic of a cost-benefit schema, as the “executive producer” of that confession, it could also be said that Oprah Winfrey and ex-gay “star” Alan Chambers together delivered a target audience of ex-gay media watchers (probably mostly anti-ex-gay media watchers) as consumers to the advertisers and sponsors of her show, thus demonstrating in a profound way how our profit-driven, market-based political economy is increasingly operating to turn ex-gay earned media events against the movement. But in that space there is also a battle of true beliefs over the welfare of family and children, with both sides claiming the role of child welfare advocate as their own. For following from the display of Zach Stark’s misery, the media frenzy it created, and the cries to save the children from gay rights activists it inspired, there came narrative popular culture depictions that ridiculed the movement in ways it could not have imagined. The political economy of the Christian ex-gay debate is truly a *political* economy.

But when neoliberalism meets true belief, whether it be neoconservatism or inverted bizarro-pro-gay neoconservatism, neoliberalism still structures, governs, and changes true belief. It would be a mistake to reduce what some consider a triumph for gay rights in popular culture entertainment merely to the economics of advertising and demographics—there is far more involved in the societal shift towards acceptance of LGBTQ identities and subjectivities than just that.¹⁰² But at the same time, the targeting of gay white male disposable income is clearly at least one primary factor in the relatively rapid shift in increased positive thought directed towards gay people in the 1990s. Thus, the targeting of gay white male disposable income is also a factor in over 15 years of critique and ridicule of the movement in popular culture entertainment. And that

¹⁰² For example, a near 20-year shift in psychological thinking on the nature of homosexuality demonstrates that the establishment of positive professional mental health attitudes to homosexuality just preceded the discovery of gay male disposable income by corporate America (Thorn 2014).

is precisely how earned media, in spite of its apparently “free” nature, is still representative of a process of commodification; because one of the reasons ex-gay earned media is still created is precisely because so many who create it expect to generate considerable revenue in the process. The political economy of the Christian ex-gay debate is truly a political *economy*. But it is also a political and economic theatre of suffering, with which neoliberalism is just fine.

This Is What Confessed, Commodified True Belief In Action Looks Like

The ex-gay debate is a controversy fueled by the circulation of earned media, earned media being a protocol (and a resource) of circulation in our neoliberal political economy that is also governmental. It has more than the power to persuade. It has the power to modify and change the structure of the debate within which it operates. Much of that earned media—the newspaper and magazine articles, the television news segments and current affairs programs, the television dramas and satires, the feature films, even the narrative books (see footnote 92)—are themselves commercially produced for profit. Earned media may not be paid for by those who financed the initiating event, but it is paid for by someone—and usually not without expectation of a return, even if that return is sometimes social or cultural in addition to being financial. Thus earned media (not surprisingly, given that it is a marketing protocol) is indeed a process of commodification. And yet, working within the commercial media industry are individual writers and producers, some of whom have personal beliefs on ex-gay change and who see no problem using commercial for-profit media to make a point, personal or political, to offer ethical demonstrations of how to behave or how not to behave. But there are also true believing writers and producers who invest what financial capital they can in social and cultural projects that have little hope of making money. So ex-gay earned media is both commercial and deliberative, although it does not encourage the *reasoned* deliberation of Habermas, but rather the strategic

and true believing deliberation of a confessional, pastoral, governmentality of theatrized suffering. Confession makes the best earned media, whether for profit or not.

Remember, *This is What Love in Action Looks Like* is a low-budget, independent documentary made by pro-gay true believers who had little of hope of making money. Indeed, most of the documentaries condemning the ex-gay movement are low-budget projects made by true believers, including *Abomination: Homosexuality and the Ex-gay Movement* (2006), *Cure For Love* (2008), and *Chasing the Devil: Inside the Ex-gay Movement* (2008). The feature film *But I'm a Cheerleader* was also a low-budget production with little hope of making money, at least not in the short-term. Such projects are even made by different kinds of true believers that represent different subject positions within the ex-gay debate. *Love in Action* was made by gay rights activists and former ex-gay participants. *Abomination* was made by the Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists. On the ex-gay side of the debate, there is even an ex-gay produced documentary in the works produced by Pure Passions ministries called *Such Were Some of You* (Hurst 2014). There are even, as we know, numerous short videos made at very little cost by ex-gay participants and former participants posted to YouTube and other social media sites.

Most of the low-budget productions listed above resist the commodification of ex-gay earned media in spite of their sale in mainstream popular culture (or in spite of being posted on commercially operated social media sites) precisely because they are not made to make financial profit—cultural and social profit, yes, but not financial. But in the current political economic climate, resistance may be futile. Ouellette and Hay are correct in placing television in an analytic of government that goes beyond understanding representation as *mere* ideology or commercialization as *just* revenue generation; but that does not mean ideology and revenue generation are not important. Yes, that there is any capital at all to devote to the true beliefs of pro-gay productions, commercially marketable or not, is testimony to the current social status of

LGBTQ identities. But one of the reasons LGBTQ identities gained that social status was because of the marketing discovery of gay white male disposable income (see Chapter 2 & 3). Furthermore, *This Is What Love In Action Looks Like* and other documentaries like it would not exist were it not for the general commodification of ex-gay earned media, especially the news and current affairs earned media upon which it depends. A strong argument could even be made that Zach Stark would not have been rescued from Refuge were it not for the tendency in profit-driven news programming to highlight sensationalism and controversy. But it should now also be clear that this debate would not exist without either the practice of confessing one's true sex as either a problem to be solved or an identity to be celebrated, or, for that matter, without the practice of confessing one's true beliefs as public testimony. Yes, it is true, that the ex-gay movement has lost control of its earned media is a factor of both the commercial nature of mass media, which has determined that profit lies on the pro-gay side, *and* the governmental influence of true believing pro-gay writers and producers; but the shift to highlighting harm over efficacy across ex-gay earned media has not led to reasoned deliberation in the public sphere, it has led to the rationalization of a confessed neoliberal theatre of suffering.

The cost-benefit analysis in Chapter 2 began an analysis of the political economy of the ex-gay movement at a micro level by addressing the process of commodification; however, that analysis was limited by the assumptions of rational choice theory. The analysis in the following chapter addressed the structuration of the movement at the macro level, through an exploration of how the larger financial organization of the movement connects it to the Christian Right and the contemporary American culture wars the Christian Right initiated in the 1970s. The analysis in this chapter followed the movement's earned media through a process of mediated circulation that saw competing governmentalities fight for discursive control of that media. Whereas for a few years following the ad campaign and the Spitzer study the movement seemed to benefit from

at least its news and current affairs earned media, that began to change following the media frenzy surrounding Zach Stark. Following the frenzy surrounding Dr. Spitzer's apology several years later, the ex-gay movement all but lost the war in mainstream popular culture, and that was only accentuated when Alan Chambers teamed up with Lisa Lang and Oprah Winfrey to confess what appeared to some to be a self-inflicted death blow to the movement.

The problem with that narrative, however, as accurate as it is, is that the confessional, true believing, and neoliberalized processes at play in this debate are keeping the ex-gay movement alive in spite of having turned against it. On the one hand, the movement is funded, maintained and operated by confessing true believers, and even though it sometimes sees high profile true believers defect to the pro-gay side, there remains a core base who continue to legitimize it within their own communities. On the other hand, on the mainstream "liberal" side of the culture wars, increasingly negative depictions of the movement in news, current affairs, and narrative popular culture are themselves structured by the commodification of mass media, which likes its sensationalism and controversy to have a marketable shelf-life. Circulating through commercial media, the ex-gay debate has become another neoliberal theatre of suffering where trauma and confession are deployed as governing entertainment easily exchangeable for financial profit. However, unlike in McCarthy's analysis, in this theatre of suffering trauma and confession are assimilable, rationalizable, and governable in addition to being exchangeable. Although no longer rationalizable in mainstream culture according to the statements of the movement, confession and trauma are governable according to the pro-gay rationalizations of the movement as a horror that must be rejected through the confession of one's true self as gay or lesbian. McCarthy's insight into how Reality TV suffering works to make financial profit for producers is still valid in an ex-gay context, but that does not foreclose cultural profit for the goals of gay rights activists as well. But at what cost?

Conclusion: The Fundamentalism of Confessing the Gay Away

The problem with and for the Christian ex-gay movement *is* confession. Yet mass media coverage of the ex-gay debate reduces the movement's aim to praying the gay away. Indeed, as we know, the first two ex-gay episodes of Lisa Ling's *Our America* are entitled "Pray the Gay Away?"; *The Huffington Post* has an entire topic page called "Pray the Gay Away;" in the *South Park* episode "Cartman Sucks," Butters is sent to an ex-gay camp that displays "Pray the Gay Away" on its entrance sign; and a Google search reveals multiple news articles, websites, blog posts, YouTube videos, and memes that characterize the movement as one that prays the gay away. Bernadette Barton (2012), in spite of only considering the movement in one chapter, even titled her ethnographic study of gay struggles in the American south, *Pray the Gay Away*; and included on its cover a photograph of a "Pray The Gay Away" church notice board. In contrast, this dissertation has argued that the ex-gay movement does not really encourage its participants to *pray* the gay away—it asks them to *confess* the gay away as part of obligatory, lifelong entrepreneurial labour; and it does that so ex-gay confessions can be circulated through earned media as cultural capital in the unstable truth games of the culture wars. In fact, confession underlies the entire debate, including the practices of those opposed. Pro-gay testimonies of lack of efficacy and confessions of ex-gay survivor harm and trauma, not to mention eagerly accepted ex-gay confessions of apologetic guilt, have been turned against the movement's objectives and now prevent it from achieving legitimacy outside its own Christian communities.

It is ironic that the movement exists because of confession but is on the defensive and losing key battles in the culture wars because confession is used against it; yet ex-gay change has been legitimized within conservative Christian communities precisely because confession and testimony keep it alive. There is little doubt that many people leave the movement unchanged, having failed to either pray *or* confess the gay way, and legion testify to having experienced

harm. There is also little doubt that a minority confess to having successfully changed, even if their testimony betrays daily struggle and sometimes even denial. But harm and efficacy are not *really* the issues. Important as they are (and they are) without widespread confession—of desire, belief, sacrifice, and emergence—there would be no ex-gay debate. Of course, there would probably be no debate over “gay” rights at all, for without resistance to psychiatrized confession, testifying one’s desires as identity formation might never have resulted. Without confession, experiencing same-sex love might not have become the basis of either oppression or liberation. Thus the ex-gay movement shows us that today *in general* confession is a central practice around which we organize ourselves. It sits at the core of our religious practices, our psychological practices, and our identity politics; and now it structures our consumerism.

I argue that in the ex-gay debate the paradoxical use of confessions of self-renunciation and true-belief as technologies of self-emergence rooted in desire, by both the movement *and* its opponents, sacrifices the self to a governmentality of unstable, commercially sponsored truth games. Inside the movement and out, the practice of confessing sin, disease, and trauma as self-sacrifice while testifying true belief and sexual identity as self-emergence in a popular culture of commodified fundamentalism surrenders the self to a form of pastoral government infused with psychologized cost-benefit ratios and risk management rhetoric. The debate even shows us that the problem of fundamentalism itself is a problem of confession because it is the result of testifying true belief without reasoned deliberation. A focus on prayer, however, obscures the confessional nature of the phenomenon. On the one hand, it isolates a uniquely religious practice as key to sexual orientation change so ex-gay leaders and apologists can exploit a belief in God’s grace to encourage struggling participants to keep trying harder even though a life-long labour of confession is the reality of change. On the other hand, it allows those opposed to rhetorically

separate themselves from the “magic” of ex-gay practices and claim the more reasonable, “scientific” position even as they base their own beliefs in confessed fundamentals.

A rhetorical focus on prayer also obscures the political economy of the debate. It allows participants in the debate, whether for or against, to limit their strategies to commercialized and politicized interventions that rely on neoliberal and neoconservative concepts, objectives, and strategies. It is easier to make prayer, which is magical and tied to the movement, an issue of choice or fraud and the focus of moralistic regulation, than confession, which is earthly and extends outside the movement. While there is no doubt that gay rights activists have successfully allied themselves with commercial popular culture and have turned the political economy of the ex-gay movement against itself very effectively, by ignoring confession, the primary practice that drives the ex-gay desire to change remains intact. Accusations of consumer fraud, political lobbying to legislate pro-gay family values, and the deployment of earned media against itself situate gay rights confessions of true belief against ex-gay confessions of true belief without addressing the problem of confessing true belief itself, whether it be religious, psychological, political, or economic. Even as all misrepresent ex-gay issues through exaggerated claims and simplified narratives while claiming both God (or nature) *and* science as always already on their side, ex-gay and anti-ex-gay true believers believe absolutely, and they confess their beliefs as fundamentals, even when faced with evidence to the contrary.

The Political Economy of Confession and Earned Media in the Culture Wars

The questions I asked to begin this dissertation concern the contemporary meaning of confession: What does it mean to confess desire today? How can ancient confessions of sacrifice and purification be combined with modern confessional regimes striving for self-knowledge and identity formation? How do such apparently contradictory forms of confession circulate within a political economy of neoliberal choice and neoconservative morality? I have shown that the

media debate surrounding the ex-gay movement reveals answers to all these questions by crystalizing the current relations between confessional purification, testimonial obedience to truth, confessed self-knowledge, and testified identity formation within our contemporary political economy. Confessions of purification and obedience are not just practices of our ancient Christian past. Foucault's research traces the genealogy of confession as it has been transformed, through historical rupture and discontinuity, from confessions of purification and obedience into practices of self-knowledge and identity formation. My research demonstrates that the ruptures and discontinuities at play in that genealogy actually allowed purification and obedience to survive to this day, however modified, and it shows that today they continue to operate alongside self-knowledge and identity formation, however uneasily, as key forms of governmentality.

When ex-gay leader Greg Quinlan testifies that homosexuality is a coercive form of identity politics rooted in a fear of heterosexuality that goes beyond calling sodomy marriage, he combines a medieval Christian discourse with a mid-twentieth century psychoanalytic discourse. Ironically, he does so to disqualify a very recent kind of truth-game that his own organization cannot exist without—how can an organization that asks its participants to identify as ex-gay condemn identity politics? At the same time, when Butters confesses in *South Park* that his sexuality is part of his very being and comes from God, he engages in a kind of self-emergence that paradoxically reaches back to the fourth century Christian discourse of discovering our sinful selves in our own flesh, and that in spite of the fact his speech is aimed against that discourse. To hide the paradox, he roots his self-emergence in the more recent psychoanalytic discovery that our identity is the product of our childhood crises and struggles; and then, as our identity politics expects us to do, he celebrates that identity as a gift. The common denominator for both Quinlan and Butters is the ancient practice of confession, historically modified, and then

historically modified again. That Quinlan is a real human being whereas Butters is an animated fictional character is of no consequence in terms of the discourses they confess.

This contemporary combination of apparently contradictory practices reveals the following: confessions of purification and truth do not actually contradict confessions of trauma and identity formation, at least not operationally—they can indeed operate together, both religiously and psychologically, and they have for well over a century. Yet this lack of explicit contradiction does not mean they do not operate in tension or that new paradoxes and contradictions do not emerge from their interplay—neither the ex-gay subject nor the *ex-ex-gay* subject can escape this confessional “reciprocity” unscathed or unchanged—both find their bodies and minds twisted and distorted by (to ironically borrow terms from psychoanalysis) the denials, projections, rationalizations, and reaction formations produced in the process. Thus to obediently confess desire as purification today can still mean something similar to what it did centuries ago, in that it still operates within structures of pastoral authority designed to control the human soul—but today it is not *just* sacrificial. In spite of the sacrifice of sinful desires, the new Christian self is in fact defined by desire, because today Christian desire defined conservatively is as much heterosexual desire as it is desire for God. That is the confessional effect of our identity politics coming into conflict with our religious politics. But today the sacrifice of so-called sinful desires has as its inverse the sacrifice of *calling* desire sin, so desire can be celebrated; each correspond with the emergence of a new self.

In evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity in particular, sacrifice and emergence are combined to create a discourse of rebirth, of being born again. Outside those forms of Christianity, however, a similar kind of rebirth still operates, but with some of its objects and concepts reversed. That is, within secular pro-gay discourse especially—but also within a growing Christian pro-gay discourse—obedience to traditional religious authorities on sex is

sacrificed, along with the shame and guilt of discovering that one's desires are in conflict with those authorities. Unfortunately, however, a form of fundamentalism often comes into play even here: gender, sex and sexual orientation dichotomies are confessed as absolutes because the pro-gay subject is required to sacrifice all other gender and sexual identities so as to either declare him or herself gay or lesbian or to declare publically that of course he or she accepts LGBTQ people, with gay and straight understood as the only two "real" options to choose from. The confessions at play in the case of Zach Stark, in the banning of reparative therapy for minors, as well as in the New Jersey lawsuit, all operate to confess ex-gay change as a problem that needs to be eliminated, but in the process a considerable amount of queerness is also sacrificed. As much as "LGBTQ" is often used to describe the gay community holistically, the BTQ of that coalition is too often sacrificed, and the ex-gay debate obscures that loss.

Thus the movement, and the debate surrounding it, shows that we still obstinately engage with the question of a "true sex," but now confessions of our true sex have become (especially for ex-gays) life-long political and economic labours of struggle embedded in long-standing religious and psychological power relations. It is true that ex-gay change is a technology of the self that is sold not for financial profit, but as religious heterosexual entrepreneurship designed to generate cultural capital. But confession operates here as an ex-gay business model, and marketing protocols are deployed in its circulation. Yet this business model does not quite conform to the requirements of our political economy. From a neoliberal point of view, ex-gay entrepreneurship, the political economy of the ex-gay body, is impoverished because it forecloses choice, denies risk, and limits entrepreneurship only to the creation of heteronormativity.

The ex-gay movement emerged as a contested truth-event simultaneously with the emergence of a new kind of economics and a new kind of politics: neoliberalism and

neoconservatism. The movement embraced this new political economy overtly with their 1998 advertising campaign. Since then, while those involved have been distracted by prayer, ex-gay confession has been commodified and politicized, and now even the science that is deployed in this battle for discursive supremacy is *confessed* as commodified truth instead of *demonstrated* as empirical truth. Today confession is still our primary political economy of truth, but it is now also part of our actual political economy. Indeed, if confession changed when it left the medieval Christian monastery to become a governmental practice of pastoral care for all Christians; if it changed again when it was transferred along with possession into the field of medicine to help establish the new disciplines of psychiatry and psychology; if it changed yet again when it spread out from the mental institutions into popular culture through psychoanalytic private practice; should we not expect it to change once more now that it has become a political economic work ethic, advertised as a product to be bought and sold according to the supply and demand of rational choice? Within our contemporary political economy, confessions of sacrifice and confessions of emergence operate to bind neoliberal choice and neoconservative morality together, however uneasy that marriage may be. Here an explicit contradiction does emerge, because economic freedom of choice independent of morality and legislative restrictions on choice directly rooted in morality are not logically compatible. Indeed, the current problems of the ex-gay movement are the result of just how difficult it is both to advertise freedom of choice and to legislate morality together, especially in the mainstream public sphere. That the movement has been able to negotiate that difficulty for as long as it has (even if it is now failing to negotiate it well), and that those opposed have been able to negotiate that same difficulty and use it, in part by embracing it, to turn the tables against the movement, is indicative of how such a contradiction can be effectively managed and governed through confessions of sin, truth, sacrifice, and emergence; and that in spite of the contradiction.

For the Christian Right, the choice to be born-again, the choice to be ex-gay, needs to be fought for as a moral issue “out there” in the secular world where Christian choices are (it is truly believed) under attack; but at the same time, in the communities that the Christian Right claims to represent, it is also known and accepted that such choices are really moral obligations. In that way, within Christian popular culture, the contradictions between different forms of confession, and between politics and economics, appear to disappear, and they do so precisely through confessions of truth and faith that celebrate choice while denying choice. However, outside the movement choice falls to the wayside as well, even as neoliberalized popular culture is embraced, itself rooted in choices understood in terms of marketing demographics. One does not choose to be gay, therefore one cannot choose to be ex-gay. The choice to live as one wants, to choose one’s lovers, one’s entertainment, and one’s commodities, to live free from ineffective and harmful forms of pseudoscience and economic fraud—that is all offered within the requirement to live according to one’s own true nature confessed as the obligatory truth of the self. In other words, anti-ex-gay activists do not address ex-gay and ex-ex-gay consumers as true agents of choice, but as victims of religious obfuscation, and in the process they impose their own ideology as totalizing. This argument is not to deny the validity of LGBTQ labels as self-chosen markers of identity and being; it is to problematize the insistence imposed from the outside that one *must* “choose” (one *must* confess) such labels if one experiences same-sex desire or gender non-conformity. Choice is denied by both sides in this debate, and little investigation of why people would even want to “rationally” choose to change to begin with is addressed.

Foucault argued that psychoanalysis spread the logic of confession into public discourse. Although psychoanalysis is no longer the dominant discourse in psychiatry and psychology, the ex-gay debate, in which it still plays a role, demonstrates psychoanalytic confession’s continued impact. Indeed, through an analysis of contemporary discourses of advertising and popular

culture, I have argued that confession has become inseparable from our contemporary political economy. We are all categorized—gay, straight, ex-gay, ex-ex-gay—and invited to pass from a daily expression of our (either changing or inherent) sexuality to confessions of that sexuality to the psychologist, psychoanalyst, and counselling pastor *as well* as to our doctors, social workers, and academic researchers, *but also* to the newspaper reporter, television anchorperson, radio call-in host, marketing specialist, and pop culture producer. But when confession is commodified and transformed into an advertised magical signifier that hides the struggle of change, when it is transformed into a contract relationship between a confessing consumer and the “expert” producer of confessed commodities, the potential for the curtain to be pulled back and the magic revealed as fraud is as simple as filing a lawsuit, itself structured by confession.

The political economy of the ex-gay debate, then, reveals a flaw in the magic of our economic system because rational choice both requires confession and is undermined by it, opening up a larger space for fraud and the unreasonable “true believing” denial of fraud. For enterprises like the ex-gay movement, this flaw poses a real threat because it cannot afford the teams of high-priced lawyers needed to protect its commodified confessions. For those of us observing the ex-gay debate, it allows us to see a flaw in our larger political economy that would otherwise be hidden from us. The fact that certain aspects of religion, psychology and sexuality can be manipulated through rational choice calculations in a neoliberal system may have seemed advantageous when the decision to advertise ex-gay change as a consumer product was made. But the role commercialized confession plays in those manipulations complicates the movement’s ability to negotiate the subtleties of neoliberalism in a way that goes beyond rational choice and cuts to the core of conservative Christian beliefs about homosexuality. By selling change as choice and subjecting it to cost-benefit calculations, the movement participates in the commodification of change because confessions of change become commodities themselves.

However, given the sacred nature of sexuality as God-given in Christianity, that specific kind of commodified change is sacrilegious. Even when resisted by true belief, even when offered as a charitable donation, once advertised, justified as freedom of choice, and rationalized in relation to neoliberalized risk, ex-gay change becomes commodified within the regulatory power of supply and demand. Neoliberalism cannot help but monetize sexuality.

The contradictions in ex-gay political economy, however, threaten more than just the movement; they also threaten the Christian Right as it uses the movement as a weapon in the culture wars. As we know, the ex-gay debate is not just a debate over choice and change; it also a battle for discursive supremacy in larger culture debates over morality, and while confession and identity sit at the crux of that war, the commodification of confession and identity has made it more difficult for the Christian Right to alter the structuration of contemporary morality. To be sure, the unexpected coincidence of Matthew Shepard's murder occurring simultaneously with the launch of the ex-gay ad campaign delivered a blow to the Christian Right's neoconservative strategy, but the greater problem of advertising change while denying change followed the Christian Right's use of the movement much further than Shepard's death. The impact of Shepard's death on the culture wars operated in the tension between conservative religion and secular progressivism. What the ex-gay debate helps demonstrate is that the culture wars are more than just a struggle between conservative religion and secular progressivism; they are also the effect of a tension between the market-based rationality of calculable individual choice and the moral-based rationality of tradition and orthodoxy. The Christian Right straddles that tension, seeking to produce ex-gay symbolic truth and present it as much more important than ex-gay veridical truth. That is why they have embraced the rhetoric of praying the gay away just as much as those opposed, even as their own "scientific" studies of efficacy and harm reveal confession as their primary practice. Ironically, and in spite of Matthew Sheppard, the Christian

Right was almost successful in using the ex-gay movement to fight the culture wars for nearly a decade because today's political economy of truth is a political economy of confession; today one speaks truth by confessing truth, even in the field of politics. But, as we know, where there is power, there is resistance, and where there are truth games, there are opposing truth games. That is why the proliferation of earned media in commercial popular culture, including news and entertainment, directed at multiple different demographics, is what drives the whole debate, and it is that which has turned the debate against the movement.

A pro-gay shift in popular culture in the 1990s, led in part by marketing surveys revealing the existence of gay white male disposable income is what inspired Christian Right lobby groups to embrace the ex-gay movement as a marketing tool for conservative Christian values. As I have shown, it was the advertising of ex-gay change, designed to produce earned media, that launched the movement into the public sphere. Indeed, the ex-gay debate is a controversy fueled by the circulation of paid, owned, and earned media; earned media being the most important because it is now a primary governmental protocol of circulation in our neoliberal political economy. Earned media, especially confessed earned media, has more than the power to persuade. It has the power to modify and change the structure of the debates within which it operates. For that reason, ex-gay earned media is both commercial and deliberative, even if it does not inspire the *reasoned* deliberation of Habermas, encouraging instead the strategic and true believing deliberation of confessional, fundamentalist governmentality.

Ex-gay advertising and the earned media it produces continues to this day. While the Christian Right's earned media strategy failed on the legislative front, for a time ex-gay earned media worked "objectively" (as defined journalistically) in favour of the movement by giving them a voice in a so-called "balanced" debate. That was only propelled and encouraged by the Spitzer study, which put the Christian Right in a position to at least continue to try to fight on the

legislative front; however, they failed to address and negotiate the almost exclusively negative earned media being produced within the narrative entertainment industry. Narrative entertainment and infotainment, fictional and documentary depictions in film and television—movies like *But I'm a Cheerleader* and *This is What Love in Action Looks Like*, and television shows like *Boston Legal*, *South Park*, and *Law & Order: SVU*—introduced the movement to different marketing demographics as a social problem and a joke. And then the Zach Stark media frenzy turned even news and current affairs earned media against the movement, by removing the necessity for journalistic “objectivity” because the movement had been revealed as dangerous to children. That set the stage for several public ex-gay confessions of failure that worked against ex-gay goals, including apologies from Dr. Robert Spitzer, Exodus President Alan Chambers, and Refuge’s ex-gay program leader, John Smid. That is why, even though earned media initially worked to promote ex-gay science, now the science of ex-gay change remains unable to cross the thresholds of discursive legitimacy.

The impact of this earned media, the extent to which it proliferated, and the effect it had on the debate as a whole can be measured indirectly through the multiple forms and genres of popular entertainment in which it appears. In news and current affairs the movement has been addressed in media enterprises that cross the political divide, in conservative and liberal programming alike, and in popular entertainment depictions and references to the movement span numerous kinds of programs, from mainstream family dramas and comedies to more targeted programming aimed at specific demographics. But the fact remains, the movement has been problematized in the public sphere because of earned media, and because of just how pervasive and demographically encompassing that earned media is. Thus, if Christian confession is the problem, then neoliberalized commercial confession appears on the surface to be the solution, at least in so far as it forced the movement into retreat. But the movement is only in

retreat; it is not on its deathbed; it has been legitimized in Christian popular culture where it matters most, where those who will end up in the movement live and socialize. Thus confession is still the problem, because all neoliberalized confession has managed to do is slip the problem under the secular carpet. The whole media debate has become a neoliberal theatre of suffering where trauma and confession are deployed as governmental entertainment designed to facilitate the exchange of financial profit. However, unlike in McCarthy's analysis of Reality TV, in this theatre of suffering, confession can be assimilated and rationalized to become governable through pro-gay depictions of the movement as a horror that must be rejected through the confession of one's true self as gay or lesbian. And yet, the movement still exists, because the core practice underlying it remains unchallenged.

Despite confession permeating the debate, including progressive, liberal and pro-gay rhetoric, it is inside the movement that confessional practices reveal themselves to be the most problematic. The movement combines ancient Christian practices of confession with neoliberal freedom of choice and neoconservative structures of authority in a way that exposes the most glaring fissures and contradictions. The Christian Right's promotion of consumer choice combined with trying to legislate the denial of gay rights has backfired. The ex-gay movement now faces a real consumer fraud lawsuit, legislation banning reparative therapy for minors, and numerous critical and mocking depictions on TV, in film, online, and in news and fictional entertainment. In spite of the movement's attempt to position ex-gays as entrepreneurs of the heterosexual self, the ex-gay subject is exposed in its own earned media as a political contradiction that is insufficiently entrepreneurial for its own discourse. Subjects that so clearly sacrifice themselves to restrictive religious doctrines and questionable psychological authorities on matters of sex and gender cannot be self-produced enterprises in a free market of sexual choice. Nevertheless, because the movement is comprised of true believers who reject arguments

against the movement as being biased by politically motivated pro-gay ideology and have their own parallel system of Christian popular culture, ex-gay change has become legitimate in many Christian communities in spite of the contradictory regimes of truth that surround it. As much as pro-gay rhetoric and practices are also rooted in a mostly denied and dysfunctional marriage between the Judeo-Christian tradition and the pseudo-sciences of the psyche, it is hard to deny that the contradictory truth games at play within fundamentalist, evangelical, conservative Catholic, and Mormon religious communities are the most harmful, especially for the religious youth in these communities who experience same-sex desire in the face of disapproving friends and family. Praying the gay away has been debunked. Confessing the gay away has not.

Theoretical Implications and Limitations of a Foucauldian Governmental Approach

This dissertation has operated as a Foucauldian political economy of ex-gay communication in media (whether supportive, oppositional, or arguably neutral) in relation to the subject positions, concepts and notions, tactics and strategies, and governmental objectives at play in that communication. As a governmental analysis of discursive events that seek to govern thought and behaviour in a broad sense, this study was a Foucauldian acid bath of re-description that not only showed how a movement constituted historically by religious and psychological apparatuses of power and knowledge has been altered by our contemporary neoliberal and neoconservative political economy; it also operated as a case study of how confession has constituted and been modified by that same political economy. I went beyond psychological, ethnographic, and rhetorical studies of the movement. I treated it as a mediated cultural phenomenon historically structured by the confessional governmentalities that pervade its thought and practices, even as it is now also structured by cost-benefit calculations, marketing protocols, and an impoverished discourse of entrepreneurship. In addition to analyzing the movement itself, I also showed the importance of Foucault's research for contemporary critical

political economy and media studies. I showed how Foucauldian tools can be used, in addition to analyzing archived historical discourses, to analyze contemporary discourses that propagate through popular media and modern culture—not just confessional ex-gay discourse but also, for example, the discourse of rational choice.

There is very little research exploring the links between confessions of desire and rational choice consumer culture. This dissertation has aimed to address that gap, at least in part, by using the ex-gay media debate as a specified case study. I have shown how the discourse of rational choice allows free market regulation to colonize both the domain of sexuality and the domain of psychology through confessions of desire. Although that might suggest that we can understand the conditions of existence of the ex-gay debate through a grid of free market intelligibility, my analysis demonstrates the limitations of such an approach. Although helpful in some respects, Foucauldian governmentality and a Foucauldian infused critical political economy offer far better tools of analysis than a rational choice perspective. It was a Foucauldian critical analysis, rooted in the concept of governmentality—but bolstered by theoretical concepts from queer political economy, Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Jürgen Habermas, and others—that allowed us to understand how the Christian Right uses the ex-gay movement politically. It allowed us to see how they tried to use the movement, however unsuccessfully, to generate religious and cultural capital in the culture wars to try to shift the structuration of our political economy to the political right, to increase the worth of conservative family values over market-based economic freedom but without undermining economic freedom, rather through economic freedom. It was an analysis that also allowed us to see how those opposed to ex-gay change have used that same political economy to turn ex-gay tactics and strategies against the movement, by exploiting the same tensions between neoliberalism and neoconservatism, but shutting down just as much choice in the process. In the ex-gay debate, individual choice is revealed as a structured

and structuring sociological phenomenon. This is partly hidden from its association with the culture wars, but that is consistent with a queer and critical political economic analysis that acknowledges rational choice to be a useful tool that describes the movement at the micro level, but fails to consider the social construction of sexual desire and economic choice, and of economic desire and sexual choice.

Although there have been several excellent analyses of the ex-gay movement, in psychology, sociology, and media studies, none have addressed the discourse of the movement as systematically as this dissertation. In terms of analyses of ex-gay rhetoric, no study has considered as wide a range of conflicted media texts as comprehensively. In terms of ex-gay participants, no study has situated the confessions of participants as both the objects of the debate and as strategic instruments (or strategic enterprises) within the debate. By establishing the discursive and confessional conditions of existence of the movement, I showed how those conditions have been and continue to be modified in relation to the ex-gay as an impoverished entrepreneur of him or herself. In terms of the “science” and ideology of sexual orientation conversion, my analysis showed why ideological legitimization of ex-gay change has failed in the public sphere even as it has succeeded in conservative Christian popular culture. That is to say, as a discursive formation, ex-gay change has failed to cross the thresholds of scientificity and formalization; however, it *has* crossed a particular kind of threshold of legitimization that allows it to continue to have a profound impact on Christian culture, especially on young Christians who struggle with same-sex desire whilst living in fundamentalist, evangelical, and conservative Christian homopreference networks. While harm and efficacy may be the key issues focused on in most ex-gay discourse, identity and true belief as confessed and influenced by community expectations are much more important factors to consider. Thus, at the level of advocacy and strategy, I have shown that while contemporary conservative Christian belief

systems may be the most effective short term targets to address in any attempts to further delegitimize ex-gay claims—because confessions of identity, desire and sin pervade not just the movement, but the entire discourse surrounding it—the problem of the movement is not just a problem of theology or psychology; it is a problem of confession.

The movement's entry into mass media through its politically motivated advertising campaign turned religiously mediated ex-gay therapy, largely unknown in the public sphere until that point, first into a commodity designed to create symbolic capital in the culture wars and second into an object of political contempt in popular culture. This study demonstrated that it was the movement's own communicative tactics and strategies that orchestrated that change, because once those tactics and strategies were deployed, the movement lost control of its public discourse. In strategically generating earned media, the Christian Right failed to recognize that mocking fictional depictions of the movement, accurate or not, can be just as influential as more-or-less "balanced" accounts in mainstream news generated to showcase the movement's point-of-view as part of a larger debate. By following Foucault and treating discourse as not representing truth and knowledge, but as generating truth and knowledge, the truth-effects of fiction were shown to be just as, if not more powerful than the truth-effects of non-fiction.

In terms of the confessional nature of the debate, and in terms of confession as ex-gay practice, by analyzing the popular discourse surrounding the movement as heated polemical rhetoric that operates in governmental, fundamentalist, confessional form, I was able to dismantle truth-claims rooted in the notion of accuracy to show that all in the debate problematically agree on the necessity of confessing desire. In that light, I demonstrated the following: conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist Christians confess desire to purge homosexuality so that faith in God's gendered creation can be professed and consumed as absolute truth; the gay rights movement confesses desire to celebrate it, consume it, and convert

it into one's personal identity so that the desire to change one's orientation can be sacrificed absolutely; psychology and psychiatry confess desire to cure it, reconcile it, or celebrate it depending on their political economic relation to the "scientific" truth of being gay or ex-gay; progressive Christianity confesses desire to reconcile it to its own conflicted relation with conservative Christianity; and commercial popular culture encourages and manipulates both confessions of celebrated desire and confessions of the desire to change so that confession can be rationalized and commodified for consumption. In this way, I established the confessional governmentality of the movement as a religio-psychological technology of power in a commodified and consumerist social context.

In short, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, the ex-gay debate was shown to involve such a conflicted web of religious and psychological objectives, professional and personal subjectivities, ideological notions and concepts, and communicative tactics and strategies, that it cannot not be reduced to the singular phenomenon of praying the gay away. However, when understood in relation to the psychological and religious knowledges that constitute it, it can be understood as exemplifying the ancient Christian turned psychological turned neoliberal practice of confession. Of course, this dissertation also demonstrated that there is nothing singular about confession; today it operates as sacrifice, emergence, testimony, *and* consumption, with different governmental objectives depending on the subjective positions from which it emanates. In accomplishing all that I have, I have produced the most comprehensive and encyclopedic analysis of the ex-gay movement to date.

At the same time, the comprehensive and encyclopedic nature of this dissertation is also one of its limitations. By focusing on so much, so as to establish as broad an understanding as possible of the conditions of emergence and existence of the ex-gay debate, I paid little attention to various distinctions and discontinuities among the multiplicity of discourses and practices at

play in the movement. For example, in spite of gender being such a key area of conflict within the debate, I was unable to engage with the subjugation of female experiences within both ex-gay and anti-ex-gay discourses. Perhaps future work that considers the scholarship of Judith Butler in relation to ex-gay change efforts can rectify that limitation. Also, there are many different Christian (and Jewish) groups and ministries and many different psychological practices and therapies that offer ex-gay change, and they all mix and match a variety of technologies of change, including numerous religious practices and numerous psychological practices spanning psychiatry, psychoanalysis, behaviourism, and now even cognitive behaviourism. It was my contention, however, that all are linked to and based in some form of confession, which is why I did not address the details of these many micro-practices in and of themselves. I will confess that I have risked replacing the over generalized focus on prayer within the current debate with an over generalized focus on confession. But confession is not a singularly structuring monolithic practice. It is a multifaceted practice rooted in centuries of historical change that operates today in many different forms, and with many different objectives. One way to emphasize the multiplicity of practices would have been to consider individual ex-gay and ex-ex-gay subjective experiences more overtly, but I limited my study to a discourse analysis of the ex-gay debate. The resulting Foucauldian emphasis considers individual experience as mediated by subject positions evident in mediated discourses. But as I noted earlier, qualitative and ethnographic studies already exist, and I find them consistent with my analysis.

Pro-gay theology exists as a discourse that operates at the level of individual belief and experience within progressive Christian churches and communities that oppose the movement. It is only addressed in passing in my analysis because it is largely absent from the mediated ex-gay debate I studied, dismissed by the conservative Christians and ignored by the secular gay rights advocates, it is lost amidst the focus on psychological efficacy and harm and consumer fraud.

Given the true beliefs of most participants in the ex-gay movement, and given the continued existence of the movement in conservative Christian communities, pro-gay theology may be one of the best strategies to combat ex-gay discourses *within* conservative Christian networks. There is some evidence that that is already happening, albeit slowly. My focus on popular mediated discourse, and on subject positions rather than subject experiences, prevented me from exploring that solution. I reference it here as an avenue of future research, because even the ethnographic studies already published that address pro-gay theology do not treat it as a possible solution.

Another area of research that could prove fruitful in finding a solution to the ex-gay debate, which the nature of this study did not allow me to address, is Foucault's re-discovery of the ancient, largely pre-confessional practice of *parrhesia*. The practice of *parrhesia* may offer us a way to at least begin the dangerous but necessary task of thinking confession anew. For Foucault, this practice, which, like confession, also connects technologies of the self with technologies of power, can help us see things differently:

[W]ith *parrhesia* we have a notion which is situated at the meeting point of the obligation to speak the truth, procedures and techniques of governmentality, and the constitution of the relationship to self. Truth-telling by the other, as an essential component of how he [sic] governs us, is one of the essential conditions for us to be able to form the right kind of relationship to ourselves that will give us virtue and happiness." (2010 [1982/83], 45)

As it was practiced in ancient times, *parrhesia* was not a confessional practice, although there were aspects of it that coincided with confession because it was a testimony. As Foucault explains in the final lecture he delivered before he died (2011 [1983/84]), in the Christian New Testament *parrhesia* operates as a practice of courageously speaking God's truth in self-confidence, even in the face of punishment or death, and even and especially *against* dogma. Today, in the ex-gay movement, and in conservative Christian communities in general, truth-telling as the bold courage to speak the truth of God and truth-telling as the confessional, mistrustful need to purge the self of sinful desire have become intertwined with a belief in the

truth of the Bible as the absolute, literal word of God. It is that kind of fundamentalism that pervades the ex-gay debate and prevents the flawed economic, political, and psychological solutions currently at play within it from impacting the Christian communities that continue to support the movement. Perhaps future research into the relations between confession, pro-gay theology, and *parrhessia* can open up a new space to discover new solutions.

The Problem is Confession: of Desire *and* True Belief

Outside the ex-gay movement, “praying the gay away” has almost been completely debunked because people believe it does not work. However, inside the Christian communities that continue to support the ex-gay movement, there is still absolute true believing faith that “praying the gay away” will work if participants just work hard enough, love God with all their hearts, and read the Bible as the truth of God. The movement is on the defensive, but it has reached a deadlock that even the apologies and confessions from those who once supported it cannot break. Indeed, they only seem to further strengthen the fundamentalism operating on all sides in the debate. This dissertation does not claim to have found the solution to that deadlock, but by subjecting the debate to an acid bath of redescription, I have proposed a framework to redefine confession as the primary problem and practice that underlies the conflict; however, I have also revealed that very few recognize confession to be as central as it is, either to the ex-gay movement or to society in general. Respecting the rights of individuals to choose what is best for them provided the choices they are offered are real choices, I propose the solution to the ex-gay problem must begin by acknowledging that the real problem of this debate lies in the practice of dogmatically confessing our desires and our fundamental “true” beliefs as our selves.

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Appendix A: *Selected* Earned (and Owned) Media Interventions in the Ex-gay Debate

Writer/Producer	Title	Year	Medium	Genre	Focus	Judgment
Donahue	2 or 3 episodes, titles unknown	1980s/1990s	TV Serial	Talk Show	Primary Topic	Sensationalizes†
Sylvia Pennington	Ex-Gays? There are None! What it Means to be a New Creature in Christ	1989	Book	Testimonial Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Joe Dallas	Desires in Conflict: Hope for Men Who Struggle with Sexual Identity	1991	Book	Confessional Guide	Primary Topic	Justifies*
America Undercover	Why Am I Gay?	1993	TV Serial	Documentary Series	Secondary Topic	Explores
First Run Features	One Nation Under God	1993	Feature Film	Documentary	Primary Topic	Condemns
Mr. Show	What to Think	1995	TV Serial	Sketch Comedy	One Sketch	Ridicules
Leroy Aaron	Prayers for Bobby	1996	Book	Novel: True Story	Secondary Plot Line	Condemns
John F. Harvey	The Truth About Homosexuality: The Cry of the Faithful	1996	Book	Testimonial Guide	Primary Topic	Justifies*
Gerard J.M. Van Den Aardweg	The Battle for Normality: A Guide for (Self-) Therapy for Homosexuality	1997	Book	Testimonial Guide	Primary Topic	Justifies*
Newsweek/John Leland and Mark Miller	Can Gays Convert?	1998	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Explores
New Times Los Angeles/ Matthew Heller	Getting Straight	1998	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Explores
John Paulk	Not Afraid to Change: The Remarkable Story of How One Man Overcame Homosexuality	1998	Book	Confessional Guide	Primary Topic	Justifies*
Ignite Entertainment	But I'm a Cheerleader	1999	Feature Film	Comedy	Primary Plot Line	Demeans
Law & Order: SVU	Bad Blood	2000	TV Serial	Crime Drama	Secondary Sub Plot	Reproaches
Malcolm in the Middle	Lois vs. Evil	2000	TV Serial	Comedy	One Scene	Makes Fun
Will and Grace	Girls, Interrupted	2000	TV Serial	Comedy	Major Sub Plot	Ridicules
Rik Isensee	The God Squad: A Spoof on the Ex-gay Movement	2000	Book	Novel: Parody	Primary Plot Line	Demeans
Christianity Today/Ted Olsen	Ex-Gays Are For Real, Says Study	2001	Feature Report	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Supports*
Associated Press/Malcolm Ritter	Study: Some Gays Can Go Straight	2001	Feature Report	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Neutral
New York Post/Kate Sheehy	Gays Bash Study That Says 'Go Straight'	2001	Feature Report	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Questions

National Review/ Deroy Murdock	Gays Can Go Straight	2001	Feature Article	Opinion Piece	Primary Topic	Justifies
Queer as Folk (U.S.)	Move it or Lose it	2001	TV Serial	Drama	Major Sub Plot	Condemns
Queer as Folk (U.S.)	Very Stupid People	2001	TV Serial	Drama	Major Sub Plot	Condemns
Queer as Folk (U.S.)	A Change of Heart	2001	TV Serial	Drama	Major Sub Plot	Condemns
Home Movies	Time to Pay the Price	2002	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	One Joke	Makes Fun
Maximum Vacuum Prods.	Fixing Frank	2002	Feature Film	Drama	Primary Plot Line	Condemns
The Shield	Barnstormers	2003	TV Serial	Crime Drama	Minor Sub Plot	Explores
The Simpsons	Treehouse of Horror XIV	2003	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	One Joke	Makes Fun
Law & Order: SVU	Abomination	2003	TV Serial	Crime Drama	Primary Plot Line	Condemns
Funny Boys Films	Latter Days	2003	Feature Film	Drama	Sub Plot	Condemns
Wayne Besen	Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex- Gay Myth	2003	Book	Testimonial Exposé	Primary Topic	Condemns
Anne Paulk	Restoring Sexual Identity: Hope for Women Who Struggle with Same-Sex Attraction	2003	Book	Confessional Guide	Primary Topic	Justifies*
Single Cell Prod.	Saved	2004	Feature Film	Comedy	Minor Sub Plot	Dismisses
The New York Times/Alex Williams	Gay Teenager Stirs a Storm	2005	Feature Article	Journalistic Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Mark Benjamin	My Gay Therapy Session	2005	Feature Article	Testimonial Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
The Washington Post/Sandra G. Boodman	A Conversion Therapist's Unusual Odyssey	2005	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Explores
Time/John Cloud	The Battle Over Gay Teens	2005	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Secondary Topic	Explores
Sugar Rush	Episode 8	2005	TV Serial	Romantic Drama	Major Sub Plot	Reproaches
BBC	Sad to be Gay	2005	TV Special	Documentary	Primary Topic	Critiques
Arrested Development	Notapusy	2005	TV Serial	Comedy	One Scene	Ridicules
Veronica Mars	Ahoy Mateys	2005	TV Serial	Drama	Minor Sub Plot	Reproaches
T Joe Murray Videos	Fish Can't Fly	2005	Feature DVD	Documentary	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Scrubs	My Fallen Idol	2006	TV Serial	Comedy/Drama	One Joke	Makes Fun
The Venture Bros.	Assassinanny 911	2006	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	One Joke	Makes Fun
The Ointment	The Ex-gay Movement	2006	Online Serial	Satirical News	Primary Topic	Ridicules
Ariztical Entertainment	Eating Out 2: Sloppy Seconds	2006	Feature Film	Comedy	Secondary Plot Line	Makes Fun
Insight Film Studios	Shock to the System	2006	Feature Film	Crime Mystery	Major Plot Line	Critiques

Ben Tousey	My Egypt: Why I Left the Ex- gay Movement	2006	Book	Confessional Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Christianity Today/Tim Stafford	An Older, Wiser Ex-Gay Movement: The 30-year-old ministry now offers realistic hope for homosexuals	2007	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Justifies*
The Montel Williams Show	Homosexuality- Is There a Cure?	2007	TV Serial	Talk Show	Primary Topic	Sensationalizes†
The Tyra Banks Show	Ex-gay Survivors	2007	TV Serial	Talk Show	Primary Topic	Sensationalizes†
Boston Legal	Selling Sickness	2007	TV Serial	Comedy/Drama	Primary Plot Line	Condemns
Law & Order	Church	2007	TV Serial	Crime Drama	Primary Plot Line	Condemns
South Park	Cartman Sucks	2007	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	Primary Plot Line	Ridicules
Law & Order: SVU	Sin	2007	TV Serial	Crime Drama	Primary Plot Line	Condemns
30 Rock	Jack Gets in the Game	2007	TV Serial	Comedy	One Joke	Makes Fun
Garbus Kroupa Productions	Save Me	2007	Feature Film	Drama	Primary Plot Line	Condemns
For the Bible Tells Me So	VisionQuest Productions	2007	Feature Film	Documentary	One Segment	Demeans
Exodus International	The Question of Homosexuality: A Conversation for Youth About Same Sex Attraction	2007	Feature DVD	Educational	Secondary Topic	Supports*
Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists	Abomination: Homosexuality and the Ex-gay Movement	2007	Short DVD	Documentary	Primary Topic	Condemns
Thomas L. Godwin	Ex-Gay: A Novel	2007	Novel	Science Fiction	Primary Plot Line	Supports
Inspector Lewis	Life Born of Fire	2008	TV Serial	Crime Drama	Primary Plot Line	Reproaches
Greek	Highway to the Discomfort Zone	2008	TV Serial	Comedy/Drama	Primary Sub Plot	Demeans
The Venture Bros.	The Family That Stays Together, Stays Together: Part 2	2008	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	One Joke	Makes Fun
Rick & Steve the Happiest Gay Couple in the World	Mom Fight	2008	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	Major Sub Plot	Demeans
National Film Board of Canada	Cure for Love	2008	Feature Film	Documentary	Primary Topic	Explores

Thousand Words Prods.	Religulous	2008	Feature Film	Documentary	One Segment	Demeans
Coqui Zen Entertainment	Chasing the Devil: Inside the Ex-gay Movement	2008	Feature DVD	Documentary	Primary Topic	Critiques
Robin Reardon	Thinking Straight: A Novel	2008	Novel	Drama	Primary Plot Line	Reproaches
Associated Press/David Crary	Psychologists repudiate gay-to-straight therapy	2009	Feature Report	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Discover Magazine	Is it Possible to Systematically Turn Gay People Straight?	2009	Feature Article	Journalistic Exposé	Primary Topic	Condemns
Dr. Phil	Little Boy Lost	2009	TV Serial	Talk Show	Secondary Topic	Sensationalizes†
The Tyra Banks Show	I Hate Being Gay	2009	TV Serial	Talk Show	Primary Topic	Sensationalizes†
The Oprah Winfrey Show	Evangelist Ted Haggard, His Wife and the Gay Sex Scandal	2009	TV Serial	Talk Show	Secondary Topic	Sensationalizes†
The Tyra Banks Show	Hell to Pay: Gay Teen Exorcisms	2009	TV Serial	Talk Show	Primary Topic	Sensationalizes†
God Bless America	Episode 6	2009	TV Serial	Documentary	Major Sup Topic	Explores
In the Life	Ties That Bind	2009	TV Serial	Documentary	Primary Topic	Exposes
Family Guy	Family Gay	2009	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	Primary Plot Line	Ridicules
Grey's Anatomy	Invasion	2009	TV Serial	Drama	One Segment	Condemns
Degrassi: The Next Generation	Beat It (Parts 1 and 2)	2009	TV Serial	Teen Drama	Primary Plot Line	Reproaches
Once Upon a Time Films	Prayers for Bobby	2009	TV Movie	Drama	Secondary Plot Line	Condemns
Media Rights Capital Prods.	Brüno	2009	Feature Film	Comedy	One Segment	Ridicules
Floating Ophelia Productions	Diagnosing Difference	2009	Feature DVD	Documentary	Indirect Reference	Critiques
New Direction Ministries of Canada	Bridging the Gap: Conversations on Befriending our Gay Neighbours	2009	Short DVD	Educational	Secondary Topic	Reconciles
The Gay Christian Network	Through My Eyes	2009	Short DVD	Documentary	Secondary Topic	Reproaches

Jeremy Marks	Exchanging the Truth of God for a Lie: One Man's Spiritual Journey to Find the Truth about Homosexuality and Same-Sex Partnerships	2009	Book	Confessional Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Alan Chambers	Leaving Homosexuality: A Practical Guide for Men and Women Looking for a Way Out	2009	Book	Confessional Guide	Primary Topic	Justifies*
Ted Cox	My Journey into Manhood: Undercover at a Gay Conversion Camp	2010	Feature Article	Testimonial Exposé	Primary Topic	Condemns
Big Love	The Greater Good	2010	TV Serial	Drama	Major Sub Plot	Reproaches
Community	Physical Education	2010	TV Serial	Comedy	One Joke	Makes Fun
The Middle	The Fun House	2010	TV Serial	Comedy	One Joke	Makes Fun
House	The Choice	2010	TV Serial	Drama	Primary Plot Line	Condemns
Futurama	Proposition Infinity	2010	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	Primary Plot Line	Ridicules
EastEnders	Episode dated July 13, 2010	2010	TV Serial	Drama	Minor Sub Plot	Questions
The Dating Guy	Brother From Another Tanning Booth	2010	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	One Joke	Makes Fun
Needs More Gay	Ex-Gays Need More Gay	2010	Online Serial	Educational	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Waltzing Penguin Prods.	You Should Meet My Son	2010	Feature Film	Comedy	Major Subplot	Ridicules
Porch Productions	Mississippi Queen	2010	Feature Film	Documentary	Primary Topic	Reproaches
New Direction Ministries of Canada	The Youth Room Has a Closet: Talking With Youth About Homosexuality	2010	Feature DVD	Educational	Primary Topic	Reconciles
Jallen Rix	Ex-Gay, No Way: Survival and Recovery from Religious Abuse	2010	Book	Confessional Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Frank Worthern	Desiny Bridge	2010	Book	Confessional Guide	Primary Topic	Justifies*
The New York Times/Benoit Denizet-Lewis	My Ex-gay Friend	2011	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Explores
The New York Times/Mimi Swartz	Living the Good Lie	2011	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches

CBN News	A Cure for Homosexuality? The Debate Continues	2011	TV Report	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Justifies*
Anderson Cooper 360	The 'Sissy Boy' Experiment	2011	TV Report	Special Report	Secondary Topic	Condemns
TLC	Ted Haggard: Scandalous	2011	TV Special	Reality TV	Indirect Reference	Sensationalizes†
Our America	Pray the Gay Away?	2011	TV Serial	Documentary Series	Primary Topic	Explores
True Life	I Want to be Straight	2011	TV Serial	Documentary Series	Primary Topic	Explores
Archer	A Going Concern	2011	TV Serial	Comedy (Animated)	One Joke	Makes Fun
Sawed-Off Collaboratory Productions	This is What Love in Action Looks Like	2011	Feature Film	Documentary	Primary Topic	Condemns
The American Prospect/Gabriel Arana	My So-Called Ex-Gay Life	2012	Feature Article	Confessional Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
The New York Times/Benedict Carey	Psychiatry Giant Sorry for Backing Gay 'Cure'	2012	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
The New York Times/Erik Eckholm	Rift Forms in Movement as Belief in Gay 'Cure' Is Renounced	2012	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
National Post/Sarah Boesveld	Pray Away the Gay: Conversion Therapy Groups Face Heat Over Charitable Status	2012	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Talk of the Nation (NPR)	Spitzer's Apology Changes 'Ex-gay' Debate	2012	Radio Report	Special Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
The Current (CBC)	Straightening the Record: A Doctor's Apology	2012	Radio Report	Special Report	Primary Topic	Condemns
The Rachel Maddow Show	The Disturbing History of 'Pray Away the Gay'	2012	TV Report	Special Report	Primary Topic	Condemns
The Rachel Maddow Show	Gay cure retraction undermines Prop 8 case	2012	TV Report	Special Report	Primary Topic	Condemns
Dr. Oz Show	Diagnosis: Mystery--Curing the 'Gay'	2012	TV Serial	Talk Show	Primary Topic	Sensationalizes†
Our America	Pray the Gay Away? Revisited	2012	TV Serial	Documentary	Primary Topic	Explores

Funny How I Seize It	Ex-Gays	2012	TV Serial	Comedy	Primary Topic	Ridicules
American Horror Story: Asylum	I am Anne Frank, Part 1	2012	TV Serial	Horror	Major Sub Plot	Condemns
Emily M. Danforth	The Misadventures of Cameron Post	2012	Book	Novel	Secondary Topic	Reproaches
The New York Times/Samuel Freedman	Focus on the Family Works to Change Its Message	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Christianity Today/Melissa Steffan	Former Ex-Gay Spokesman John Paulk Apologizes Amid Divorce	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Supports*
The Globe and Mail/Jill Mahoney	Christian ministry claiming to 'cure' homosexuality closes with apology	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Christianity Today/Melissa Steffan	After Exodus: Evangelicals React as Ex-Gay Ministry Starts Over	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Supports*
National Review/Maggie Gallagher	Not All Sexual-Orientation Change Therapy is Consumer Fraud	2013	Feature Article	Opinion Piece	Primary Topic	Supports
Edge Boston/Sosa, Chris	Closed for Business: The Death of the 'Ex-Gay' Movement	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Exposé	Primary Topic	Condemns
Toronto Star/Graham Slaughter	Toronto Christian Program Tries to 'Heal' Gays	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Toronto Star/Graham Slaughter	Former Participants Speak Up about Healing Program	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Toronto Star/Graham Slaughter	Healing' Gays Still Qualifies for Charitable Tax Status	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Exposé	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Huffington Post/Lila Shapiro	Conversion Therapy Survey Reveals Real Harm In Gay 'Cure.'	2013	Feature Article	Journalistic Exposé	Primary Topic	Condemns
As It Happens (CBC)	Exodus International Closes	2013	Radio Report	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Dr. Phil	Shocking Mom Revelations	2013	TV Serial	Talk Show	Brief Discussion	Sensationalizes†
Stephen Fry: Out There	Episode #1	2013	TV Special	Documentary Mini-Series	Major Subplot	Condemns

Our America	Special Report: God and Gays	2013	TV Serial	Documentary	Primary Topic	Reproaches
Criminal Minds	Broken	2013	TV Serial	Crime Drama	Primary Plot Line	Condemns
Saturday Night Live	Ben Affleck/Kanya West	2013	TV Serial	Sketch Comedy	One Sketch	Ridicules
Arrested Development	A New Attitude	2013	TV Serial	Comedy	One Joke	Makes Fun
Kids React	Kids React to Gay Marriage	2013	Online Serial	Docu-Comedy	One Reference	Reproaches
The Christian Post/Nicola Menzie	Can Another 'Gay-Friendly' Faith Group Help Steer the Conversation for Christians	2014	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Supports
Bent TV	Report on the Ex-gay Movement	2014	TV Serial	Documentary	Primary Topic	Exposes
Mastering Life Ministries	Such Were Some of You	2014	Feature Video	Documentary	Primary Topic	Supports*
Breaking Glass Pictures	Saugatuck Cures	2014	Feature Film	Comedy	Primary Plot Line	Demeans
Sara York	Pray the Gay Away: A Southern Tale of Good Triumphant Over Evil	2014	Novel	Romance	Primary Plot Line	Reproaches
The New York Times/Michael Shear	Obama Calls for End to Conversion Therapies	2015	Feature Article	Journalistic Report	Primary Topic	Reproaches
TLC	My Husband's Not Gay	2015	TV Special	Reality TV	Primary Topic	Sensationalizes†
RabbitBandini Productions	I Am Michael	2015	Feature Film	True Story	Primary Plot Line	Explores
Paladin Pictures	Stained Glass Rainbows	2015	Feature Film	Documentary	Secondary Topic	Explores
The Daily Show	Multiple Episodes	2000-15	TV Serial	Satirical News	Multiple Segments	Ridicules
The Colbert Report	Multiple Episodes	2005-15	TV Serial	Satirical News	Multiple Segments	Ridicules
This Hour Has 22 Minutes	Multiple Episodes	2000-15	TV Serial	Sketch Comedy	Multiple Sketches	Ridicules
Pure Passion TV	Multiple Episodes	2005-15	TV Serial	Documentary	Primary Topic	Supports*

Note: This chart is not exhaustive of ex-gay earned media. It showcases most pop culture entertainment depictions as well as selected key articles, broadcast news reports, broadcast documentaries, and published books so as to situate the entertainment depictions in relation to key events in the discourse. It is ordered first by year, and then within each year by news articles, broadcast reports, television depictions, film and video depictions, and published books, with each subgroup ordered by date of release. Although specific dates of release are not listed in the chart, they can be found in Appendix B.

†Most ex-gay earned media is sensationalized to some degree; Reality TV earned media is hyper-sensationalized

*Most productions that support or justify the movement are ex-gay or Christian Right produced

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Note: This list is not exhaustive of all ex-gay media discourse, especially news reports of earlier ex-gay events. But it includes key examples from the discourse (not all are directly cited in this study.)

Ex-Gay Advertising and Ex-Gay Advertising Coverage

Alliance for Traditional Marriage, American Family Association, Americans for Truth About Homosexuality, Center for Reclaiming America, Christian Family Network, Christian Coalition, Citizens for Community Values, Colorado for Family Values, Concerned Women for America, Coral Ridge Ministries, Family First, Family Research Council, Liberty Counsel, National Legal Foundation, and Kerusso Ministries. July 13, 1998.

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- Simpsons, The*. Aired November 2, 2003. "Treehouse of Horror XIV." Season 15, Episode 1. Produced by Bat Groening, Tomb Gammill, Run Hauge!, Gouge Eyer, and Decadent Dave Mirkin. Directed by Steven Dean Moore. Written by Triple Admiral John Swartzwelder. Gracie Films, 20th Century Fox Television, Curiosity Company.
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- Arrested Development*. Aired November 7, 2005. "Notapusy." Season 3, Episode 4. Produced by Mitchell Hurwitz, Diane Mercer and David Shafer. Directed by Lev L. Spiro. Written by Ron Weiner and Karey Dornetto. Imagine Entertainment, 20th Century Fox Television, and Hurwitz Company.

- Veronica Mars*. Aired November 23, 2005. "Ahoy Mateys." Season 2, Episode 8. Produced by Dan Etheridge, Howard Grigsby, Joel Silver, and Rob Thomas. Directed by Steve Gomer. Written by John Enbom and Cathy Belben. Rob Thomas Productions, Silver Pictures Television, and Warner Bros. Television.
- Scrubs*. Aired May 2, 2006. "My Fallen Idol." Season 5, Episode 21. Produced by Janae Bakken, Debra Fordham, Liz Newman, Mark Stegemann, and Randall Winston. Directed by Joanna Kerns. Written by Bill Callahan. Doozer and Touchstone Television.
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- Boston Legal*. Aired February 6, 2007. "Selling Sickness." Season 3, Episode 14. Directed by Andrew Bernstein. Written by Andrew Kreisberg and Corinne Brinkerhoff. David E. Kelley Productions and 20th Century Fox Television.
- Law & Order*. Aired February 9, 2007. "Church." Season 17, Episode 14. Produced by Dick Wolf and Peter Giuliano. Directed by Constantine Makris. Written by Rick Eid. Wolf Films and Universal Worldwide Television.
- South Park*. Aired March 14, 2007. "Cartman Sucks." Season 11, Episode 2. Produced by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. Written and Directed by Trey Parker. Comedy Central and Paramount Pictures.
- Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. Aired March 27, 2007. "Sin." Season 8, Episode 17. Produced by Dick Wolf, Gail Barringer, and David DeClerque. Directed by George Pattison. Written by Patrick Harbinson. Wolf Films and Universal Network Television.
- 30 Rock*. Aired October 11, 2007. "Jack Gets in the Game." Season 2, Episode 2. Produced by Tina Fey, Matt Hubbard, Jerry Kupfer, Jeff Richmond, and Don Scardino. Directed by Michael Engler. Written by Robert Carlock. Broadway Video, Little Stranger, and NBC Studios.
- Inspector Lewis*. Aired March 9, 2008. "Life Born of Fire." Season 2, Episode 3. Produced by Michele Buck, Chris Burt, Ted Childs, Rebecca Eaton, and Damien Timmer. Directed by Richard Spence. Written by Tom MacRae and Colin Dexter. ITV Productions and WGBH.
- Greek*. Aired April 7, 2008. "Highway to the Discomfort Zone." Season 1, Episode 13. Produced by Anne Kenney, Michael Lange, Nellie Nugiel, Shawn Piller, and Lloyd Segan. Directed by Nick Marck. Written by Carter Covington. Piller Squared/The Segan Company.
- The Venture Bros.* Aired August 24, 2008. "The Family That Slays Together, Stays Together: Part 2." Season 3, Episode 13. Produced by Christopher, McCulloch, Rachel Simon, and Steven S.H. Yoon. Williams Street. Directed by Christopher McCulloch. Written by Doc Hammer and Christopher McCulloch.
- Rick & Steve the Happiest Gay Couple in All the World*. Aired December 2, 2008. "Mom Fight." Season 2, Episode 3. Produced and Directed by Q. Allan Brocka. Written by Q. Allan Brocka and Phillip J. Bartell. Cuppa Coffee Studios.
- Family Guy*. Aired March 8, 2009. "Family Gay." Season 7, Episode 8. Produced by Seth MacFarlane, Kirker Butler, Shannon Smith, and Kara Vallow. Directed by Brian Iles. Written by Richard Appel. Fuzzy Door Productions, 20th Century Fox Television, and Fox Television.
- Gray's Anatomy*. Aired October 15, 2009. "Invasion." Season 6, Episode 5. Produced by Tammy Ann Casper, Linda Klein, and Jeff Rafner. Directed by Tony Phelan. Written by Mark Wilding. ShondaLand, Mark Gordon Company, and The ABC Studios.
- Degrassi: The Next Generation*. Aired November 1, 2009. "Beat It: Part 1" and "Beat It: Part 2." Season 9, Episodes 7 and 8. Produced by Linda Schuyler, Stefan Brogren, and David Lowe. Directed by Stefan Brogren. Written by Matt Huether. Epitome Pictures.

- Big Love*. Aired January 17, 2010. "The Greater Good." Season 4, Episode 2. Produced by Daniel Attias, Patricia Breen, and Peter Friedlander. Directed by David Knoller. Written by Paul Redford. Anima Sola Productions, Playtone Productions, Home Box Office (HBO).
- Community*. Aired March 4, 2010. "Physical Education" Season 1, Episode 17. Produced by Dan Harmon, Jake Aust, Emily Cutler Krasnoff, Patrick Kienlen, and Heather Petrigala. Directed by Anthony Russo. Written by Jessie Miller. Foster Productions, Harmonius Claptrap, and Russo Brothers.
- The Middle*. Aired March 24, 2010. "The Fun House." Season 1, Episode 18. Produced by Eileen Heisler, DeAnn Heline, and Werner Walian. Directed by Chris Koch. Written by Roy Brown. Blackie and Blondie Productions and Warner Bros. Television.
- Futurama*. Aired July 8, 2010. "Proposition Infinity." Season 6, Episode 4. Produced by Matt Groening, David X. Cohen, and Claudia Katz. Directed by Crystal Chesney-Thompson. Written by Michael Rowe. The Curiosity Company and 20th Century Fox Television.
- EastEnders*. Aired July 13, 2010. "Episode dated July 13, 2010." Produced by Bryan Kirkwood, Susan Mather, and Lorraine Newman. Directed by John Greening. Written by Richard Zajdlc. Peter Anderson Studio.
- House*. Aired May 3, 2010. "The Choice." Season 6, Episode 19. Produced by David Shore, Sara Hess, and Marcy G. Kaplan. Directed by Juan J. Campanella. Written by David Hoselton. Heel & Toe Films, Shore Z Productions, and Bad Hat Harry Productions.
- The Dating Guy*. Aired December 8, 2010. "Brother from Another Tanning Booth" Season 2, Episode 10. Produced by Mark Satterthwaite and Mark Steinberg. Written by Robin J. Stein. Directed by Jamie Whitney and Joseph Sherman. Marblemedia.
- Archer*. Aired February 3, 2011. "A Going Concern." Season 2, Episode 2. Produced by Adam Reed, Matt Thompson, Neal Holman, Eric Sims, and Casey Willis. Written and Directed by Adam Reed. Floyd County Productions and FX Productions.
- American Horror Story: Asylum*. Aired November 7, 2012. "I Am Anne Frank: Part 1." Season 2, Episode 4. Produced by Alexis Martin Woodall and Chip Vucelich. Directed by Michael Uppendahl. Written by Jessica Sharzer. Brad Falchuk Teley-Vision, Ryan Murphy Productions, 20th Century Fox Television.
- Criminal Minds*. Aired February 20, 2013. "Broken." Season 8, Episode 15. Produced by Jeff Davis, Rick Dunkle, and Ian Foster Woolf. Directed by Larry Teng. Written by Rick Dunkle. Touchstone Television, Paramount Network Television, and Mark Gordon Company.
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1. Biblical Passages Used to Condemn Homosexuality

Genesis 2: 24

(King James Version)

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

(New Revised Standard Version)

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

(GOD’S WORD translation)

24 That is why a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and they will become one flesh.

(Common English Bible)

24 This is the reason that a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife, and they become one flesh.

(Amplified Bible)

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall become united and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 19: 1-11**(King James Version)**

1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;

2 And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.

3 And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:

5 And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

6 And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him,

7 And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly.

8 Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.

9 And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door.

10 But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door.

11 And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.

(New Revised Standard Version)

1 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2 He said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the square." 3 But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. 4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; 5 and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." 6 Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, 7 and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. 8 Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." 9 But they replied, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down. 10 But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. 11 And they struck with blindness

the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door.

(GOD’S WORD Translation)

1 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gateway. When Lot saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed with his face touching the ground. *2* He said, “Please, gentlemen, why don’t you come to my home and spend the night? You can wash your feet there. Then early tomorrow morning you can continue your journey.”

“No,” they answered, “we’d rather spend the night in the city square.”

3 But he insisted so strongly that they came with him and went into his home. He prepared a special dinner for them, baked some unleavened bread, and they ate. *4* Before they had gone to bed, all the young and old male citizens of Sodom surrounded the house. *5* They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to stay with you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

6 Then Lot went outside and shut the door behind him. *7* “Please, my friends, don’t be so wicked,” he said. *8* “Look, I have two daughters who have never had sex. Why don’t you let me bring them out to you? Do whatever you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, since I’m responsible for them.”

9 But the men yelled, “Get out of the way! This man came here to stay awhile. Now he wants to be our judge! We’re going to treat you worse than those men.” They pushed hard against Lot and lunged forward to break down the door. *10* The men inside reached out, pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. *11* Then they struck all the men who were in the doorway of the house, young and old alike, with blindness so that they gave up trying to find the door.

(Common English Bible)

1 The two messengers entered Sodom in the evening. Lot, who was sitting at the gate of Sodom, saw them, got up to greet them, and bowed low. *2* He said, “Come to your servant’s house, spend the night, and wash your feet. Then you can get up early and go on your way.”

But they said, “No, we will spend the night in the town square.” *3* He pleaded earnestly with them, so they went with him and entered his house. He made a big meal for them, even baking unleavened bread, and they ate.

4 Before they went to bed, the men of the city of Sodom—everyone from the youngest to the oldest—surrounded the house *5* and called to Lot, “Where are the men who arrived tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may have sex with them.”

6 Lot went out toward the entrance, closed the door behind him, *7* and said, “My brothers, don’t do such an evil thing. *8* I’ve got two daughters who are virgins. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them whatever you wish. But don’t do anything to these men because they are now under the protection of my roof.”

9 They said, “Get out of the way!” And they continued, “Does this immigrant want to judge us? Now we will hurt you more than we will hurt them.” They pushed Lot back and came close to breaking down the door. *10* The men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house with them and slammed the door. *11* Then the messengers blinded the men near the entrance of the house, from the youngest to the oldest, so that they groped around trying to find the entrance.

(Amplified Bible)

1 It was evening when the two angels came to Sodom. Lot was sitting at Sodom’s [city] gate. Seeing them, Lot rose up to meet them and bowed to the ground.

2 And he said, My lords, turn aside, I beg of you, into your servant's house and spend the night and bathe your feet. Then you can arise early and go on your way. But they said, No, we will spend the night in the square.

3 [Lot] entreated and urged them greatly until they yielded and [with him] entered his house. And he made them a dinner [with drinking] and had unleavened bread which he baked, and they ate.

4 But before they lay down, the men of the city of Sodom, both young and old, all the men from every quarter, surrounded the house.

5 And they called to Lot and said, Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know (be intimate with) them.

6 And Lot went out of the door to the men and shut the door after him

7 And said, I beg of you, my brothers, do not behave so wickedly.

8 Look now, I have two daughters who are virgins; let me, I beg of you, bring them out to you, and you can do as you please with them. But only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.

9 But they said, Stand back! And they said, This fellow came in to live here temporarily, and now he presumes to be [our] judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them. So they rushed at and pressed violently against Lot and came close to breaking down the door.

10 But the men [the angels] reached out and pulled Lot into the house to them and shut the door after him.

11 And they struck the men who were at the door of the house with blindness [which dazzled them], from the youths to the old men, so that they wearied themselves [groping] to find the door.

Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13

(King James Version)

18:22. Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.

20:13. If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

(New Revised Standard Version)

18:22. You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

20:13. If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.

(GOD'S WORD translation)

18:22. Never have sexual intercourse with a man as with a woman. It is disgusting.

20:13. When a man has sexual intercourse with another man as with a woman, both men are doing something disgusting and must be put to death. They deserve to die.

(Common English Bible)

18:22. You must not have sexual intercourse with a man as you would with a woman; it is a detestable practice.

20:13. If a man has sexual intercourse with a man as he would with a woman, the two of them have done something detestable. They must be executed; their blood is on their own heads.

(Amplified Bible)

18:22. You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination.

20:13. If a man lies with a male as if he were a woman, both men have committed an offense (something perverse, unnatural, abhorrent, and detestable); they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

Deuteronomy 23:17**(King James Version)**

17 There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.

(New Revised Standard Version)

17 None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute.

(GOD'S WORD translation)

17 No Israelite man or woman should ever become a temple prostitute.

(Common English Bible)

17 No Israelite daughter is allowed to be a consecrated worker. Neither is any Israelite son allowed to be a consecrated worker.

(Amplified Bible)

17 There shall be no cult prostitute among the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a cult prostitute (a sodomite) among the sons of Israel.

Romans 1:18-32**(King James Version)**

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

(New Revised Standard Version)

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. 29 They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters,[a] insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

(GOD'S WORD translation)

18 God's anger is revealed from heaven against every ungodly and immoral thing people do as they try to suppress the truth by their immoral living. 19 What can be known about God is clear to them because he has made it clear to them. 20 From the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly observed in what he made. As a result, people have no excuse. 21 They knew God but did not praise and thank him for being God. Instead, their thoughts were pointless, and their misguided minds were plunged into

darkness. 22 While claiming to be wise, they became fools. 23 They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for statues that looked like mortal humans, birds, animals, and snakes.

24 For this reason God allowed their lusts to control them. As a result, they dishonor their bodies by sexual perversion with each other. 25 These people have exchanged God's truth for a lie. So they have become ungodly and serve what is created rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen!

26 For this reason God allowed their shameful passions to control them. Their women have exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 Likewise, their men have given up natural sexual relations with women and burn with lust for each other. Men commit indecent acts with men, so they experience among themselves the punishment they deserve for their perversion.

28 And because they thought it was worthless to acknowledge God, God allowed their own immoral minds to control them. So they do these indecent things. 29 Their lives are filled with all kinds of sexual sins, wickedness, and greed. They are mean. They are filled with envy, murder, quarreling, deceit, and viciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, haughty, arrogant, and boastful. They think up new ways to be cruel. They don't obey their parents, 31 don't have any sense, don't keep promises, and don't show love to their own families or mercy to others. 32 Although they know God's judgment that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do these things but also approve of others who do them.

(Common English Bible)

18 God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodly behavior and the injustice of human beings who silence the truth with injustice. 19 This is because what is known about God should be plain to them because God made it plain to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—God's eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they are understood through the things God has made. So humans are without excuse. 21 Although they knew God, they didn't honor God as God or thank him. Instead, their reasoning became pointless, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 While they were claiming to be wise, they made fools of themselves. 23 They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images that look like mortal humans: birds, animals, and reptiles. 24 So God abandoned them to their hearts' desires, which led to the moral corruption of degrading their own bodies with each other. 25 They traded God's truth for a lie, and they worshipped and served the creation instead of the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 That's why God abandoned them to degrading lust. Their females traded natural sexual relations for unnatural sexual relations. 27 Also, in the same way, the males traded natural sexual relations with females, and burned with lust for each other. Males performed shameful actions with males, and they were paid back with the penalty they deserved for their mistake in their own bodies. 28 Since they didn't think it was worthwhile to acknowledge God, God abandoned them to a defective mind to do inappropriate things. 29 So they were filled with all injustice, wicked behavior, greed, and evil behavior. They are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, deception, and malice. They are gossips, 30 they slander people, and they hate God. They are rude and proud, and they brag. They invent ways to be evil, and they are disobedient to their parents. 31 They are without understanding, disloyal, without affection, and without mercy. 32 Though they know God's decision that those who persist in such practices deserve death, they not only keep doing these things but also approve others who practice them.

(Amplified Bible)

18 For God's [holy] wrath and indignation are revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who in their wickedness repress and hinder the truth and make it inoperative.

19 For that which is known about God is evident to them and made plain in their inner consciousness, because God [Himself] has shown it to them.

20 For ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature and attributes, that is, His eternal power and divinity, have been made intelligible and clearly discernible in and through the things that have been made (His handiworks). So [men] are without excuse [altogether without any defense or justification],

21 Because when they knew and recognized Him as God, they did not honor and glorify Him as God or give Him thanks. But instead they became futile and [a]godless in their thinking [with vain imaginings, foolish reasoning, and stupid speculations] and their senseless minds were darkened.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools [professing to be smart, they made simpletons of themselves].

23 And by them the glory and majesty and excellence of the immortal God were exchanged for and represented by images, resembling mortal man and birds and beasts and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their [own] hearts to sexual impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves [abandoning them to the degrading power of sin],

25 Because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever! Amen (so be it).

26 For this reason God gave them over and abandoned them to vile affections and degrading passions. For their women exchanged their natural function for an unnatural and abnormal one,

27 And the men also turned from natural relations with women and were set ablaze (burning out, consumed) with lust for one another—men committing shameful acts with men and suffering in their own [b]bodies and personalities the inevitable consequences and penalty of their wrongdoing and going astray, which was [their] fitting retribution.

28 And so, since they did not see fit to acknowledge God or approve of Him or consider Him worth the knowing, God gave them over to a base and condemned mind to do things not proper or decent but loathsome,

29 Until they were filled (permeated and saturated) with every kind of unrighteousness, iniquity, grasping and covetous greed, and malice. [They were] full of envy and jealousy, murder, strife, deceit and treachery, ill will and cruel ways. [They were] secret backbiters and gossipers,

30 Slanderers, hateful to and hating God, full of insolence, arrogance, [and] boasting; inventors of new forms of evil, disobedient and undutiful to parents.

31 [They were] without understanding, conscienceless and faithless, heartless and loveless [and] merciless.

32 Though they are fully aware of God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them themselves but approve and applaud others who practice them.

1 Corinthians 6: 9-10**(King James Version)**

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

(New Revised Standard Version)

9 Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, *10* thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

(GOD’S WORD translation)

9 Don’t you know that wicked people won’t inherit God’s kingdom? Stop deceiving yourselves! People who continue to commit sexual sins, who worship false gods, those who commit adultery, homosexuals, *10* or thieves, those who are greedy or drunk, who use abusive language, or who rob people will not inherit God’s kingdom.

(Common English Bible)

9 Don’t you know that people who are unjust won’t inherit God’s kingdom? Don’t be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, both participants in same-sex intercourse [Or submissive and dominant male sexual partners], *10* thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won’t inherit God’s kingdom.

(Amplified Bible)

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived (misled): neither the impure and immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality, *10* Nor cheats (swindlers and thieves), nor greedy graspers, nor drunkards, nor foulmouthed revilers and slanderers, nor extortioners and robbers will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God.

1 Timothy 1: 10

(King James Version)

10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;

(New Revised Standard Version)

10 fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching.

(GOD’S WORD translation)

10 Laws are intended for people involved in sexual sins, for homosexuals, for kidnappers, for liars, for those who lie when they take an oath, and for whatever else is against accurate teachings.

(Common English Bible)

10 They are people who are sexually unfaithful, and people who have intercourse with the same sex. They are kidnappers, liars, individuals who give false testimonies in court, and those who do anything else that is opposed to sound teaching.

(Amplified Bible)

10 [For] impure and immoral persons, those who abuse themselves with men, kidnapers, liars, perjurers—and whatever else is opposed to wholesome teaching and sound doctrine.

2. Biblical Passages used to Support Pro-Gay Theology**1 and 2 Samuel****(King James Version)**

1 *Samuel 18: 1-4.* And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2 And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

1 *Samuel 20:30.* Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?

1 *Samuel 20: 41-42.* And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.

42 And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city,

2 *Samuel 1:26.* I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

(New Revised Standard Version)

1 *Samuel 18: 1-4.* When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. 3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

1 *Samuel 20:30.* Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan. He said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"

1 *Samuel 20: 41-42.* As soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more [meaning of Heb uncertain]. 42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city.

2 *Samuel 1:26.* I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

(GOD'S WORD translation)

1 Samuel 18: 1-4. David finished talking to Saul. After that, Jonathan became David's closest friend. He loved David as much as he loved himself. 2 (From that day on Saul kept David as his servant and didn't let him go back to his family.) 3 So Jonathan made a pledge of mutual loyalty with David because he loved him as much as he loved himself. 4 Jonathan took off the coat he had on and gave it to David along with his battle tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt.

1 Samuel 20:30. Then Saul got angry with Jonathan. "Son of a crooked and rebellious woman!" he called Jonathan. "I know you've sided with Jesse's son. You have no shame. You act as if you are your mother's son but not mine.

1 Samuel 20: 41-42. When the boy had left, David came out from the south side of the rock and quickly bowed down three times with his face touching the ground. Then they kissed each other and cried together, but David cried the loudest [Hebrew meaning uncertain].

42 "Go in peace!" Jonathan told David. "We have both taken an oath in the Lord's name, saying, 'The Lord will be a witness between me and you and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'" So David left, and Jonathan went into the city.

2 Samuel 1:26. I am heartbroken over you, my brother Jonathan. You were my great delight. Your love was more wonderful to me than the love of women.

(Common English Bible)

1 Samuel 18: 1-4. As soon as David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan's life[or soul] became bound up with David's life, and Jonathan loved David as much as himself. 2 From that point forward, Saul kept David in his service[c] and wouldn't allow him to return to his father's household. 3 And Jonathan and David made a covenant together because Jonathan loved David as much as himself. 4 Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his armor, as well as his sword, his bow, and his belt.

1 Samuel 20:30. At that, Saul got angry at Jonathan. "You son of a stubborn, rebellious woman!" he said. "Do you think I don't know how you've allied yourself with Jesse's son? Shame on you and on the mother who birthed you![or and shame on your mother's nakedness.]

1 Samuel 20: 41-42. As soon as the boy was gone, David came out from behind the mound and fell down, face on the ground, bowing low three times. The friends kissed each other, and cried with each other, but David cried hardest. 42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace because the two of us made a solemn pledge in the Lord's name when we said, 'The Lord is witness between us and between our descendants forever.'" Then David got up and left, but Jonathan went back to town.

2 Samuel 1:26. I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan! You were so dear to me! Your love was more amazing to me than the love of women.

(Amplified Bible)

1 Samuel 18: 1-4. When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own life.

2 Saul took David that day and would not let him return to his father's house.

3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own life.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, even his sword, his bow, and his girdle.

1 Samuel 20:30. Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan and he said to him, You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do not I know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother who bore you?

1 Samuel 20: 41-42. And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose from beside the heap of stones and fell on his face to the ground and bowed himself three times. And they kissed one another and wept with one another until David got control of himself.

42 And Jonathan told David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and yours forever. And Jonathan arose and departed into the city.

2 Samuel 1:26. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me. Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10

(King James Version)

Matthew 8:5-13. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

Luke 7:1-10. Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:

5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:

7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

(New Revised Standard Version)

Matthew 8:5-13. When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him 6 and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.” 7 And he said to him, “I will come and cure him.” 8 The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” 10 When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” 13 And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.” And the servant was healed in that hour.

Luke 7:1-10. After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. 3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. 4 When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy of having you do this for him, 5 for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.” 6 And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; 7 therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. 8 For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” 9 When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” 10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

(GOD’S WORD translation)

Matthew 8:5-13. When Jesus went to Capernaum, a Roman army officer came to beg him for help. 6 The officer said, “Sir, my servant is lying at home paralyzed and in terrible pain.” 7 Jesus said to him, “I’ll come to heal him.”

8 The officer responded, “Sir, I don’t deserve to have you come into my house. But just give a command, and my servant will be healed. 9 As you know, I’m in a chain of command and have soldiers at my command. I tell one of them, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and another, ‘Come!’ and he comes. I tell my servant, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”

10 Jesus was amazed when he heard this. He said to those who were following him, “I can guarantee this truth: I haven’t found faith as great as this in anyone in Israel. 11 I can guarantee that many will come from all over the world. They will eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 The citizens of that kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness. People will cry and be in extreme pain there.

13 Jesus told the officer, “Go! What you believed will be done for you.” And at that moment the servant was healed.

Luke 7:1-10. When Jesus had finished everything he wanted to say to the people, he went to Capernaum. 2 There a Roman army officer’s valuable slave was sick and near death. 3 The officer had heard about Jesus and sent some Jewish leaders to him. They were to ask Jesus to come and save the servant’s life. 4 They came to Jesus and begged, “He deserves your help. 5 He loves our people and built our synagogue at his own expense.”

6 Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the officer sent friends to tell Jesus, “Sir, don’t bother. I don’t deserve to have you come into my house. 7 That’s why I didn’t come to you. But just give a command, and let my servant be cured. 8 As you know, I’m in a chain of command and have soldiers at my command. I tell one of them, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and another, ‘Come!’ and he comes. I tell my servant, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”

9 Jesus was amazed at the officer when he heard these words. He turned to the crowd following him and said, “I can guarantee that I haven’t found faith as great as this in Israel.”

10 When the men who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant healthy again.

(Common English Bible)

Matthew 8:5-13. 5 When Jesus went to Capernaum, a centurion approached, 6 pleading with him, “Lord, my servant is flat on his back at home, paralyzed, and his suffering is awful.”

7 Jesus responded, “I’ll come and heal him.”

8 But the centurion replied, “Lord, I don’t deserve to have you come under my roof. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. 9 I’m a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and the servant does it.”

10 When Jesus heard this, he was impressed and said to the people following him, “I say to you with all seriousness that even in Israel I haven’t found faith like this. 11 I say to you that there are many who will come from east and west and sit down to eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the children of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.” 13 Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; it will be done for you just as you have believed.” And his servant was healed that very moment.

Luke 7:1-10. After Jesus finished presenting all his words among the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 A centurion had a servant who was very important to him, but the servant was ill and about to die. 3 When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to Jesus to ask him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they earnestly pleaded with Jesus. “He deserves to have you do this for him,” they said. 5 “He loves our people and he built our synagogue for us.”

6 Jesus went with them. He had almost reached the house when the centurion sent friends to say to Jesus, “Lord, don’t be bothered. I don’t deserve to have you come under my roof. 7 In fact, I didn’t even consider myself worthy to come to you. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. 8 I’m also a man appointed under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and the servant does it.”

9 When Jesus heard these words, he was impressed with the centurion. He turned to the crowd following him and said, “I tell you, even in Israel I haven’t found faith like this.” 10 When the centurion’s friends returned to his house, they found the servant restored to health.

(Amplified Bible)

Matthew 8:5-13. As Jesus went into Capernaum, a centurion came up to Him, begging Him, 6 And saying, Lord, my servant boy is lying at the house paralyzed and distressed with intense pains.

7 And Jesus said to him, I will come and restore him.

8 But the centurion replied to Him, Lord, I am not worthy or fit to have You come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant boy will be cured.

9 For I also am a man subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my slave, Do this, and he does it.

10 When Jesus heard him, He marveled and said to those who followed Him [who adhered steadfastly to Him, conforming to His example in living and, if need be, in dying also], I tell you truly, I have not found so much faith as this with anyone, even in Israel.

11 I tell you, many will come from east and west, and will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,

12 While the sons and heirs of the kingdom will be driven out into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

13 Then to the centurion Jesus said, Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed. And the servant boy was restored to health at that very [d]moment.

Luke 7:1-10. After Jesus had finished all that He had to say in the hearing of the people [on the mountain], He entered Capernaum.

2 Now a centurion had a bond servant who was held in honor and highly valued by him, who was sick and at the point of death.

3 And when the centurion heard of Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to Him, requesting Him to come and make his bond servant well.

4 And when they reached Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying, He is worthy that You should do this for him,

5 For he loves our nation and he built us our synagogue [at his own expense].

6 And Jesus went with them. But when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent [some] friends to Him, saying, Lord, do not trouble [Yourself], for I am not [a]sufficiently worthy to have You come under my roof;

7 Neither did I consider myself worthy to come to You. But [just] speak a word, and my servant boy will be healed.

8 For I also am a man [daily] subject to authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my bond servant, Do this, and he does it.

9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and He turned and said to the crowd that followed Him, I tell you, not even in [all] Israel have I found such great faith [as this].

10 And when the messengers who had been sent returned to the house, they found the bond servant [b]who had been ill quite well again.

Matthew 19: 4-12

(King James Version)

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

10 His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.
 11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.
 12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

(New Revised Standard Version)

4 He answered, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." 7 They said to him, "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?" 8 He said to them, "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery." [a]
 10 His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."
 11 But he said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

(GOD'S WORD translation)

4 Jesus answered, "Haven't you read that the Creator made them male and female in the beginning 5 and that he said, 'That's why a man will leave his father and mother and will remain united with his wife, and the two will be one'? 6 So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, don't let anyone separate what God has joined together."
 7 The Pharisees asked him, "Why, then, did Moses order a man to give his wife a written notice to divorce her?"
 8 Jesus answered them, "Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because you're heartless. It was never this way in the beginning. 9 I can guarantee that whoever divorces his wife for any reason other than her unfaithfulness is committing adultery if he marries another woman."
 10 The disciples said to him, "If that is the only reason a man can use to divorce his wife, it's better not to get married."
 11 He answered them, "Not everyone can do what you suggest. Only those who have that gift can. 12 For example, some men are celibate because they were born that way. Others are celibate because they were castrated. Still others have decided to be celibate because of the kingdom of heaven. If anyone can do what you've suggested, then he should do it."

(Common English Bible)

4 Jesus answered, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the creator made them male and female? 5 And God said, 'Because of this a man should leave his father and mother and be joined together with his wife, and the two will be one flesh.' 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, humans must not pull apart what God has put together."
 7 The Pharisees said to him, "Then why did Moses command us to give a divorce certificate and divorce her?"

8 Jesus replied, “Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because your hearts are unyielding. But it wasn’t that way from the beginning. 9 I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

10 His disciples said to him, “If that’s the way things are between a man and his wife, then it’s better not to marry.”

11 He replied, “Not everybody can accept this teaching, but only those who have received the ability to accept it. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been eunuchs from birth. And there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by other people. And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs because of the kingdom of heaven. Those who can accept it should accept it.”

(Amplified Bible)

4 He replied, Have you never read that He Who made them from the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be united firmly (joined inseparably) to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?

6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder (separate).

7 They said to Him, Why then did Moses command [us] to give a certificate of divorce and thus to dismiss and repudiate a wife?

8 He said to them, Because of the hardness (stubbornness and perversity) of your hearts Moses permitted you to dismiss and repudiate and divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been [a]so [ordained].

9 I say to you: whoever dismisses (repudiates, divorces) his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

10 The disciples said to Him, If the case of a man with his wife is like this, it is neither profitable nor advisable to marry.

11 But He said to them, Not all men can accept this saying, but it is for those to whom [the capacity to receive] it has been given.

12 For there are eunuchs who have been born incapable of marriage; and there are eunuchs who have been made so by men; and there are eunuchs who have made themselves incapable of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let him who is able to accept this accept it.

Matthew 22: 37-40

(King James Version)

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

(New Revised Standard Version)

37 He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

(GOD'S WORD translation)

37 Jesus answered him, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the greatest and most important commandment. 39 The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ 40 All of Moses’ Teachings and the Prophets depend on these two commandments.”

(Common English Bible)

37 He replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

(Amplified Bible)

37 And He replied to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (intellect).
38 This is the great (most important, principal) and first commandment.
39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself.
40 These two commandments sum up and upon them depend all the Law and the Prophets.