

FROM STONEWALL TO MILLENNIUM:
LESBIAN REPRESENTATION IN THREE LATE 20TH-CENTURY
PLAYS BY AMERICAN WOMEN

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Doctor of Philosophy

by
VANESSA MARIE CAMPAGNA
Dr. Cheryl Black, Dissertation Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

FROM STONEWALL TO MILLENNIUM:
LESBIAN REPRESENTATION IN THREE LATE 20TH-CENTURY PLAYS
BY AMERICAN WOMEN

presented by Vanessa Campagna,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Cheryl Black

Professor Heather Carver

Professor Kevin Brown

Professor Cornelius Eady

Professor Kim Marra

Professor Felicia Hardison Londré

In memory of my grandparents, Lowell and Cecilia Westhoven,
who always encouraged me to take my studies seriously.

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FROM STONEWALL TO MILLENNIUM:
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Vanessa Campagna

Dr. Cheryl Black, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

From Stonewall to Millennium: Lesbian Representation in Three Late 20th-Century Plays by American Women explores the relationship between the lived experiences of LGBT people (especially lesbians and bisexual women) and staged depictions thereof. In the dissertation's three analytical chapters, I offer close, critical readings of three representative plays by American women, one from each of the final three decades of the 20th century: *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* by Jane Chambers, *And Baby Makes Seven* by Paula Vogel, and *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son. Motivated by the New Historicist perspective that the significance of literary texts "can be fully grasped only in relation to the other expressive possibilities with which it interacts,"¹ I illuminate deeper meanings within the plays by investigating the social/political climates in which they were written and debuted.

Exploring past modes of living and staging LGBT identities and experiences is valuable because it helps contextualize the current historical moment, which is marked by aggressive social/political campaigns aimed at LGBT empowerment and enfranchisement. This project's woman-centric scope is motivated by the ongoing marginalization of women in the American theatre, typified by the disparity between productions accorded to male and female playwrights, and the corresponding disparity between productions accorded to plays by gay men and those by lesbians. These disparities are reflected in critical scholarship; as

¹ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 13.

John M. Clum has noted, “The 25 percent or less representation of lesbian playwrights in major anthologies of gay and lesbian drama is a sign of the relative invisibility of lesbian playwrights ...”² This project will be of interest to artists and scholars in the varied, but often intersecting, fields of Theatre, Performance Studies, Communication, Women’s and Gender Studies, and Queer Theory, as well as those outside of the academy who take interest in LGBT history, American history, and the arts.

² John M. Clum, “Contemporary Drama.” *Glbq: an encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, & queer culture*, last modified November 17, 2007, http://www.glbq.com/literature/contemp_drama,6.html.

CHAPTER ONE

LESBIANS IN MAINSTREAM AMERICAN THEATRE

Introduction

The 1922 New York production of Polish playwright Sholom Asch's 1905 drama *God of Vengeance*, translated from *Gott fun Nekoma* in 1918 by Dr. Isaac Goldberg, marked the American debut "of a lesbian character in an English-language dramatic presentation,"³ initiating the American theatre's venture into gay and lesbian representation. The absence of gay and lesbian characters prior to (and for decades after) 1922 reflects the generally heterosexist and even homophobic attitudes prevailing in Western society. As Nicholas de Jongh has noted, "the playhouses in both London and New York were, until the 1960s, subject to a close form of censorship which forbade the depiction of homosexuals on stage or even the discussion of homosexuality."⁴ Thus, America's theatrical mecca (Broadway and the other prominent, professional New York theatres) operated within the parameters of anti-gay legislation enforced by the New York Police Department and homophobic discourses/agendas supported by groups like the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice⁵ and William Randolph Hearst, a prominent New York publisher who adamantly opposed the depiction of homosexuality on the American stage.

Historian and queer theorist John D'Emilio has offered another explanation for the emergence of homosexual presence in life and art during the early twentieth century. In "Capitalism and Gay Identity," D'Emilio proposes that, although homoerotic attractions and same-sex desires have always existed, "gay men and lesbians have *not* always existed.

³ Kaier Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1987), 26.

⁴ Nicholas DeJongh, *Not In Front of the Audience* (New York: Routledge, 1992), xi.

⁵ The Society for the Suppression of Vice was an organization instituted in 1873 to supervise public morality.

Instead, they are a product of history, and have come into existence in a specific historical era. Their emergence is associated with the relations of capitalism.”⁶ D’Emilio notes that, prior to the rise of capitalism, welfare was dependent upon the family unit’s cultivation of land, allocation of resources, and collective effort in the acquisition of things needed for survival. This reliance upon a heterosexual nuclear family made homosexual identity, and especially a homosexual lifestyle, nearly impossible. Yet, D’Emilio continues,

By the end of the [nineteenth] century, a class of men and women existed who recognized their erotic interest in their own sex, saw it as a trait that set them apart from the majority, and sought others like themselves . . . it was possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity.⁷

In view of D’Emilio’s persuasive argument that a recognizable, nameable homosexual identity and lifestyle were new in early 1900s America, it seems unlikely that playwrights would have immediately incorporated representations thereof into dramatic texts. The 1922 production of *God of Vengeance*, with its representation of a character overtly expressing same-sex desire, is perhaps an indication of a burgeoning awareness of a new personal, and social, homosexual identity. This landmark event, however, did not usher in a flood of lesbian and gay representations on the English-speaking, American stage. Rather, homosexual characters remained a rarity for decades to follow.

Scholars Nicholas de Jongh and Alan Sinfield (among others) have noted that dramatic literature from the pre-Stonewall⁸ era engaged with queer characters surreptitiously. As de Jongh has argued, plays from the pre-Stonewall period rely “upon a series of cryptic

⁶ John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, et.al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 468.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁸ Pre-Stonewall refers to the time period before June 28, 1969. It was on June 28, 1969, that homosexual Americans rioted against police forces at the Stonewall Inn (New York, New York) to demonstrate resistance to the longstanding institutionalized oppression and discrimination based on sexual orientation.

signifiers to suggest what [playwrights] were forbidden to place in front of the audience.”⁹ Further, dramatists from the pre-Stonewall era incorporated lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) characters and themes as ominous elements in the drama, often centering dramatic action upon characters whose dissident sexualities are or become the problem of the play. Typically, these characters do not survive to the play’s final curtain; shame and internal homophobia (the fear one has of being homosexual, due to the social, political, religious, and familial hardships that can accompany such sexuality), external homophobia (the fear possessed by some, mostly conservative, heterosexuals, which can become manifest in ways that are detrimental to LGBT people), and victimization are recurrent motifs. A prominent example is the canon of Tennessee Williams, which found great success on Broadway stages during the 1940s and 1950s. Several of Williams’s plays include homosexual characters whose attractions and desires cause conflict (a notable example is Brick from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* [1955]), as well as homosexual characters who have been killed in previous action (consider Sebastian from *Suddenly Last Summer* [1958]).

Throughout the pre-Stonewall period, lesbian characters were crafted in a similarly clandestine manner. For example, Arthur Hornblow Jr.’s 1926 English translation of Edouard Bourdet’s *La Prisonnière* (*The Captive*) places lesbian content in what Teresa de Lauretis has referred to as the ‘space-off,’ homocentric content residing at the margins of dominant narratives. In *The Captive*, the staged action revolves around a heterosexual narrative about Irene and Jacques, a male suitor whom she marries and ultimately leaves in the dramatic final scene. The protagonist’s same-sex romantic interest never appears on stage; rather, Madame D’Aiguines is symbolized only by the bouquets of violets that appear in Acts One and Three.

⁹ Nicholas DeJongh, *Not In Front of the Audience* (New York: Routledge, 1992), xii.

A queer character's absence from the staged action has been convincingly referred to by Cheryl Black as "the most marginalized place conceivable"¹⁰

Sinfield has noted that "Latency fascinated [pre-Stonewall] dramatists. It enabled them to write about queers without any actual homosexuality."¹¹ However, there were rare exceptions; in the years leading up to 1969, some representations of gays and lesbians became increasingly positive and affirming, though these have received comparably little critical attention due to either having never made it to Broadway, or having received only short runs on Broadway stages because of thematic content not reflective of mainstream values. For example, plays like J.B. Priestley's *Dangerous Corner* (1932)¹² and Alan Kenward's *Cry Havoc* (1942) received relatively minimal critical attention; nevertheless, they remain important in the LGBT repertoire for daring to depict male and female homosexuality, respectively.

According to Kaier Curtin, Priestley's protagonist, Gordon Whitehouse, was the first "self-identified gay male character"¹³ to appear on Broadway. *Cry Havoc*'s central character, Stephanie (Steve), was "the only suspect lesbian role seen on Broadway during World War II."¹⁴ I have argued in my Master's thesis that *Cry Havoc* is also an important lesbian play because it includes one of the first representations of a butch lesbian and grapples with the complexities of female gender and sexuality in ways that were unprecedented during the time in which the play was written and produced.¹⁵ Despite progressive depictions of

¹⁰ Cheryl Black, "'Making Queer New Things': Queer Identities in the Life and Dramaturgy of Susan Glaspell," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 20, no. 1 (2005): 56.

¹¹ Alan Sinfield, *Out On Stage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 215.

¹² Priestley is an English novelist and playwright, but *Dangerous Corner* was imported to America and opened at Broadway's Empire Theatre on October 27, 1932.

¹³ Kaier Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1987), 161.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁵ Vanessa Campagna, "(In)Visible: Performances of Gay and Lesbian Dramatic Literature on American Stages, 1920- 1969," MA Thesis, UMKC, 2012, 84- 97.

homosexuality such as these, the emergence of gay and lesbian visibility inside theatres—as well as beyond theatre doors—was a complicated process.

Throughout the years that preceded World War Two, “Virtually every politician considered [homosexual] orientation unspeakable and [the] cause indefensible.¹⁶” After the war, Senator Joseph McCarthy’s attempt to purge the government of Communists expanded to include homosexuals, thus linking homosexuality to communism and other “Un-American” identities.¹⁷ Equated with the Red Scare,¹⁸ homosexuality was received by the public in ways that perpetuated internal and external homophobia. Yet despite, or perhaps inspired by, the virulent homophobia linked to the “Red Scare,” the post-World War II era also saw the emergence of social/political initiatives reacting to, and working against, homophobia. Attempting to liberate themselves from religious dogmas of condemnation, and medical diagnoses of degeneracy, increasing numbers of gays and lesbians worked to justify themselves as “as well-adjusted as straight [people],¹⁹” and to defend their cause as acceptable and themselves as citizens worthy of enfranchisement.

America’s first homophile organization, The Mattachine Society, was founded by Harry Hay in 1951 “to change the self-image of gay people.”²⁰ As Will Roscoe’s historical essay “Mattachine: Radical Roots of the Gay Movement” notes, “Years before women’s ‘consciousness-raising groups,’ Mattachine provided lesbians and gay men a similar

¹⁶ Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: 1940-1996* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 19.

¹⁷ Until the mid-1950s, a fear of communism characterized the post-World War II era. During the period lasting from 1950 to 1956, paranoia within the American government was particularly high, and sometimes led to political oppression against government employees. Unfair allegations and investigations were commonplace.

¹⁸ From approximately 1950 to 1956, the fear of communism led to a paranoia within American government. Political oppression ensued and Americans (particularly government employees) were subjected to unfair investigations and allegations.

¹⁹ Kaiser, 124.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

opportunity to share openly, for the first time, their feelings and experiences.”²¹

Notwithstanding, The Mattachine Society was male-dominated, having been founded by Hay with a membership largely comprised of his gay male friends. A female companion organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, formed in 1955 and served as the first lesbian group to work toward civil and political rights. Like the gay males associated with The Mattachine Society, lesbians in the Daughters of Bilitis fought to claim ‘normalcy’ and rebuke the longstanding pejorative attitudes toward homosexuality. It is important to note that the Daughters of Bilitis “had a relatively conservative focus. ... To an extent, it advertised conformity to the straight mainstream.”²² In this regard, the Daughters of Bilitis’ association with second wave feminism, which burgeoned in the 1960s, was fraught with complications (explored in greater depth in Chapter Two).

As gay and lesbian groups formed throughout the 1950s, the American theatre saw a similar growth in theatrical enterprises aimed at giving visibility to the LGBT community. Yet, the emphasis was primarily upon gay males and their experiences. In 1958, Joe Cino (an openly gay, retired dancer) founded the Caffe Cino, a performance venue that gave valuable opportunities to now-celebrated, gay male playwrights like Doric Wilson and Lanford Wilson.²³ At the Caffe Cino, dramatists depicted openly gay characters in complex and individualized manners for the first time (prominent examples include Doric Wilson’s 1961 *And Now She Dances!* and Lanford Wilson’s 1964 *The Madness of Lady Bright*). Although Mart Crowley’s 1968 *The Boys in the Band* provoked criticism for what some perceived as

²¹ Will Roscoe, “Mattachine: Radical Roots of the Gay Movement,” *Found San Francisco*, accessed on October 13, 2014, http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=Mattachine:_Radical_Roots_of_the_Gay_Movement.

²² Teresa Theophano, “Daughters of Bilitis,” *Glbq: an encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, & queer culture*, accessed on October 13, 2014, http://www.glbq.com/social-sciences/daughters_bilitis.html.

²³ It should be noted that, although Doric Wilson and Lanford Wilson share a last name, they share no familial relationship.

its depiction of internalized homophobia and self-flagellating characters, it remains a distinguished play in the gay repertoire. John M. Clum has defended the work as one that, “more than any other single play, publicized homosexuals as a minority group”²⁴ in need of liberation and empowerment. *The Boys in the Band* was still playing Off-Broadway when the riot at Stonewall Inn erupted on June 28, 1969. The riot was the first occasion on which homosexuals retaliated against police brutality and oppression.

Andrew Sullivan has described “The gay culture that exploded [after Stonewall] ...” as having “the force of something long suppressed ...” and as “coincid[ing] with a more general relaxation of social norms.”²⁵ Similar riots occurred in other cities across the nation, and so began the crusade for liberation and equality. The aim was to live openly and freely without consequence from oppressive American government policy and/or inequalities under the law, and negative attitudes and customs. Stonewall initiated that crusade, and the implications thereof extended into nearly every facet of American life. The theatre was no exception. Stonewall baptized artists in a spirit of freedom that was only limitedly accessible in earlier decades. Although heterosexism still dominated (and continues to), Broadway and Off-Broadway theatres have since 1970 delivered for mass consumption plays that unapologetically feature openly gay and—to a lesser extent—lesbian protagonists. Between the birth of the Gay Liberation Movement and the growing presence of second wave feminism, which centered upon women’s liberation in terms of sexuality, reproductive rights, and issues related to the workplace, the post-Stonewall era began with a decade of pride and celebration.

²⁴ John M. Clum, *Acting Gay* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 254.

²⁵ Andrew Sullivan, “Assimilation and its meaning. The End of Gay Culture,” *New Republic*, October 24, 2005, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/the-end-gay-culture>.

Yet, there was merely a decade of prideful celebration before catastrophe struck. That catastrophe was the 1981 AIDS outbreak. Because it was suspected that only homosexual men could contract the disease, AIDS was first known as “GRID (gay-related immune deficiency).”²⁶ By August 1982, discussion about the disease formally called AIDS was commonplace in the media,²⁷ and it was apparent that other demographics were affected. Still, gay men received diagnoses at exponentially higher rates. That year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that more than ten thousand people were infected, yet it was not until 1987 that President Reagan addressed the crisis, by which time more than sixteen thousand Americans had succumbed to the illness.²⁸ The theatre—particularly the theatre created by gay male playwrights—became a platform for social action. The plays that were born out of the epidemic were invaluable in that they raised public consciousness about AIDS, called for action, and provided emotional healing.

In the 1990s, under Bill Clinton’s presidency, some improvements were made; namely, AIDS funding to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services increased by 150%.²⁹ Now, more than a decade into the 21st century, with increased awareness and advocacy, the AIDS catastrophe in America is more under control than in previous decades. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with “better treatments, people with HIV are now living longer—and with a better quality of life—than ever before.”³⁰ As a result of the advancements made in terms of prevention of and treatment for HIV/AIDS, the

²⁶ “History of AIDS Up to 1986,” *AVERTing HIV and AIDS*, accessed on June 24, 2014, www.avert.org/aids-history-86.htm.

²⁷ Leigh W. Rutledge, *The Gay Decades* (New York: Plume, 1992), 195.

²⁸ “The AIDS Epidemic: 1981- 1987,” *The New York Times on the Web*, accessed on June 24, 2014, <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/national/science/aids/timeline80-87.html>.

²⁹ “Clinton Administration Record on HIV/AIDS,” *U.S. Department of Human Health and Services*, December 1, 2001, <http://archive.hhs.gov/news/press/2000pres/00fsaids.html>.

³⁰ “Living With HIV,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, accessed on October 13, 2014, <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/living/index.html>.

LGBT community has been able to turn attention to other matters. Other issues that have dominated mainstream discourse in the post-Stonewall era include: marriage equality, adoption laws, reproductive rights, and non-discrimination³¹ and hate crime legislation. If the pre-Stonewall era was characterized by the establishment and burgeoning of LGBT subcultures and subcultural semiotics that allowed homosexuals to circumvent homophobic laws and ‘escape’ from homophobic discourses perpetuated by medical diagnoses and religious dogmas, Stonewall initiated a new movement concerned with making homosexuality unapologetically visible in the dominant culture, and empowering the LGBT community by way of social/political enfranchisement.

Andrew Sullivan’s 2005 essay “The End of Gay Culture: Assimilation and its Meaning” candidly addresses the changing face of gay culture: “gay culture is ending. ... The distinction between gay and straight culture will become so blurred, so fractured, and so intermingled that it may become helpful not to examine them separately at all.”³² Certainly, prominent dimensions of enfranchisement include asserting a “well-adjusted” ‘normalcy,’ as did Harry Hay and his contemporaries, and by participating in the institutions on which heterosexuals have previously held a monopoly (e.g. marriage and family). As Nikki Sullivan has asserted, the assimilationist ambition is that homosexuals will be “accepted into, and [will] become one with, mainstream culture.”³³ A rebuttal to the assimilationist agenda is offered by Eric O. Clarke in “The Citizen’s Sexual Shadow,” published in 1999. Clarke posits this poignant question: “Why ... would enfranchisement in the fullest sense exclude

³¹ Non-discrimination legislation protects people from unfair and unequal treatment in a variety of areas of social life, including the workplace, and access to housing and medical care.

³² Andrew Sullivan, “The End of Gay Culture: Assimilation and Its Meaning,” *New Republic*, October 24, 2005, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/the-end-gay-culture>.

³³ Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 23.

certain modes of sexual practice?”³⁴ The question expresses skepticism about enfranchisement—under current circumstances—possessing the potential to exclude non-assimilable sexual minorities.

Sara Warner’s 2012 *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* is similarly critical of the current vogue for economic, political, and social enfranchisement of sexual minorities through assimilation with heteronormative practices and institutions, as she argues that an assimilatory brand of enfranchisement does little to problematize the inherent sexism, racism, and classism of these practices. Dustin Bradley Goltz also expresses concern about ‘normalized’ representations. His *Queer Temporalities in Gay Male Representation: Tragedy, Normativity, and Futurity*, which draws upon Teresa de Lauretis’s theorizing of “the space-off”³⁵ to call for narratives that bring homocentric characters, plots, and tropes not only to the forefront, but “beyond the tragic cycle of heteronormativity.”³⁶ Goltz has further argued that “representations normalize and privilege constructions of race, gender, heteronormativity, ability, middle-class economic positions, religion,” and that “In the grand scheme of representation, [some LGBT characters] *already* are normalized representations.”³⁷ Ron Becker has argued that lesbian and gay characters who are integrated into heteronormative scripts provide neoliberal heterosexuals “a painlessly passive way to affirm their open-mindedness,”³⁸ and fail to challenge dominant, hegemonic tropes.

With these criticisms in mind, this dissertation approaches the theme of enfranchisement broadly and acknowledges that current circumstances, although an

³⁴ Eric O. Clarke, “The Citizen’s Sexual Shadow,” *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 164.

³⁵ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 26.

³⁶ Dustin Bradley Goltz, *Queer Temporalities in Gay Male Representation: Tragedy, Normativity, and Futurity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 46.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 and 27.

³⁸ Ron Becker, “Gay-Themed Television and the Slumpy Class : The Affordable, Multicultural Politics of the Gay Nineties,” *Television and New Media* 7, no. 2 (2006): 188.

improvement from the pre-Stonewall era, are problematic and still fail to effectively treat the various and often intersecting identity components of sexuality, race, class, gender, age, etc. Consider Aaron Talley’s editorial, “Gay Pride is for White People,” in *MUSED Magazine*, an online periodical that touts the subtitle “The Authoritative Voice For ‘Modern’ Black Gay Men:”

For queer folks of color, who are subject to disproportionate levels of poverty, homelessness, violence, and health disparity—marriage provides us with very little resolve. And so, the movement that is the defining LGBTQ issue of our time is an issue that largely benefits upper middle class queer whites.³⁹

Although the complex intersections between various identity components (gender, sexuality, race, ability, class, etc.) is not the primary focus of this dissertation, the plays selected for analysis will allow me to investigate, at least to a certain degree, the implications of these intersections.

Talley’s editorial is relevant and valuable for the ways it advances an understanding of enfranchisement encompassing of other personal/social/political dimensions. These other dimensions include, but are not limited to, the opportunity to be ‘out,’ to cultivate and maintain productive homocentric relationships and friendships, access to health care and housing, the ability to procure and maintain employment, and legal protections against defamation and violence. The definition of enfranchisement taken up by this dissertation includes these varying dimensions, in addition to marriage equality (and associated rights like insurance and inheritance), adoption rights, etc. While inclusive of the heterosexual paradigm’s emphasis upon gender roles and norms, monogamous partnership, and family, this project intentionally conceptualizes enfranchisement more broadly. Taking a broad spectrum approach to enfranchisement—hopefully—works to recognize and grapple with (at

³⁹ Aaron Talley, “Gay Pride is for White People,” *MUSED Magazine*, last modified June 23, 2014, <http://www.musedmagonline.com/2014/06/gay-pride-white-people/>.

least, to some degree) the complexities of intersecting identities, to shift focus toward basic civic and human rights, and thereby destabilize the preoccupation with the elements of enfranchisement that tend toward the exclusion of non-assimilable LGBT people.

Although this study will productively engage with the perspectives expressed in twenty-first century analyses, which I find both provocative and persuasive, I begin this investigation with the perspective that concepts like ‘normalcy,’ ‘assimilation,’ and ‘enfranchisement,’ are also products of particular historical moments, and that our understanding of them changes over time. As a result, this study’s use of the term enfranchisement relates to equality in terms of recognition and value of all human beings, even as they are differently marked. At a most basic level, instances in which lesbian characters are treated equally with heterosexuals (or pursue equality) are manifestations of enfranchisement.

For lesbians, the crusade for equality and enfranchisement initiated by the riot at Stonewall Inn was galvanized by the influence and efforts of second wave feminism, which also gained momentum in the 1960s. Publications like Simone De Beauvoir’s 1949 *Le Deuxième Sexe* (translated to English as *The Second Sex* in 1953), Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970), and Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) reintroduced feminist ideals into public discourse, this time focusing not upon women’s suffrage, but upon various issues affecting women’s lives, ranging from reproductive rights to equality in the workplace. The lesbian feminism practiced by those like members of the Daughters of Bilitis focused upon the double oppression of being woman and homosexual; in this sense, liberation/empowerment/enfranchisement have been pursued on two fronts: gender and sexuality. Thus, in the post-Stonewall era, the concerns of lesbians

became distinct—at least in some respects—from those of gay men. Despite the fact that intersecting identity components (sexuality, race, class, religion, etc.) caused division among even women who identified as feminist, the feminist movement, by and large, recognized the LGBT community’s quest for equality as a feminist issue and, especially, the full enfranchisement of lesbian women as an important and pressing goal.⁴⁰

Recognizing that lesbian experience and the issues and concerns facing lesbians are, in many ways, distinguished from gay male experience and have, arguably, received less attention within both society at large and artistic practice, this project specifically investigates themes of empowerment and enfranchisement manifest in plays dealing with lesbianism. The dominance of AIDS as a theme for post-Stonewall ‘gay plays’ (as vital and important as it was) brought male playwrights like Larry Kramer and William Hoffman and gay male experience to the forefront throughout the 1980s and even into the 1990s. Even Paula Vogel’s *The Baltimore Waltz* (1990), with its female protagonist, still manages to emphasize, even if only metaphorically, gay male experience. Surely, lesbians were concerned with the AIDS crisis and shared other concerns with gay men, but women (lesbian women, in particular) also faced other issues that were given comparatively scant attention during this same era. This project seeks to allot the merited attention to three plays featuring lesbian characters, and to explore the issues and concerns therein.

This project’s woman-centric scope is also motivated by the ongoing marginalization of women in the American theatre, typified by the disparity between productions accorded to

⁴⁰ Adrienne Rich’s 1980 essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” advocates for women-identified-women; she posits lesbianism as an extension of feminism. Although the essay has received criticism from lesbians and heterosexual women alike, it is useful here for the way it demonstrates the connection between lesbianism and feminism. Cole and Cate’s 2008 “Compulsory Gender and Transgender Existence: Adrienne Rich’s Queer Possibility” is motivated by “renewed appreciation from a variety of feminisms for the kind of work Rich was doing” (279); Cole and Cate emphasize early in their essay Rich’s thesis that heterosexism negatively implicates, and is reproduced by, both homosexual and heterosexual women, thus linking lesbian and feminist aims.

male and female playwrights, and the corresponding disparity between productions accorded to plays by gay men and those by lesbians. A disproportionate number of professional productions have been accorded to male playwrights throughout the history of American theatre, a tradition that has persisted throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. According to the International Centre of Women Playwrights, as of 2008, “the percentage of total female writers produced [in America] was just over 19%.”⁴¹ In 2010, the National Theatre Conference announced a Women Playwrights Initiative, stating that “production opportunities are becoming more difficult to find for all playwrights, and that Women Writers especially face even greater challenges in getting produced.”⁴² To address “the lack of work by women playwrights at major American theatres,”⁴³ women theatre practitioners gathered in Washington D.C. in April 2014. The marginalization of lesbian playwrights in particular is taken up in a 2007 essay by John M. Clum:

Although there have been some dramas by and about lesbians in small, gay-oriented theaters, little has been produced by major theaters or has been published. ... The 25 percent or less representation of lesbian playwrights in major anthologies of gay and lesbian drama is a sign of the relative invisibility of lesbian playwrights in the commercial and subsidized theater.⁴⁴

A result of the disparity between the production rates of male and female playwrights—and the corresponding disparity between gay and lesbian playwrights—is that gay male experience is depicted in American drama more often than is lesbian experience; in turn, scholarship more often affords close readings and criticism to male-centric plays. This project works against that trajectory. In response to the dominance of male playwrights and

⁴¹ “Women Playwrights Organize in NYC,” *International Centre for Women Playwrights*, April 12, 2014, <http://www.womenplaywrights.org/jordan>.

⁴² “Women Playwrights Initiative,” *National Theatre Conference*, accessed on 15 November 2014, www.nationaltheatreconference.org/?page_id=329.

⁴³ David Marcus, “The New Definition of Women Writers,” *The Federalist*, April 4, 2014, <http://thefederalist.com/2014/04/04/the-new-definition-of-women-writers/>.

⁴⁴ John M. Clum, “Contemporary Drama.” *Glbtc: an encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, & queer culture*, last modified November 17, 2007, http://www.glbtc.com/literature/contemp_drama,6.html.

the unfortunate circumstance that plays written by women have not been produced on par with those by men and have received comparatively little critical attention, I have selected for analysis three notable works by women that dramatize lesbian experience and that are particularly suitable to illuminate the themes of empowerment and enfranchisement central to this project. The plays are *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* by Jane Chambers (1980), *And Baby Makes Seven* by Paula Vogel (1984), and *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son (1998).

Jane Chambers' *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* debuted in New York in 1980 and, by 1983, was staged on the West Coast—first at Los Angeles's Fountain Theatre and then at the prestigious Theatre on the Square in San Francisco. Early productions received Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards and/or nominations, Drama-Logue Awards, Robby Awards, and Oscar Wilde Awards. A critic from *Other Stages*, writing about the debut New York production, reported that “Chambers is good, no doubt about it, and she's certainly supplying the need—judging by the crowd this play is attracting—for a lesbian/feminist voice in the theatre.”⁴⁵ Paula Vogel is a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright for *How I Learned to Drive* (1998); she has also won an Obie Award, a Robert Chesley Award, and a Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (among others). Most notably, Vogel was inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame in 2012. Reviewing a recent revival of Vogel's *And Baby Makes Seven* (1984), *New York Times* critic Eric Grode observed that Vogel had “broached the topic of gay parenting a generation ahead of the curve.”⁴⁶ Diana Son's *Stop Kiss* won the GLAAD Media Award for Best New York Production after the play's 1998 premiere. Son is also the recipient of the Berilla Kerr Award, and other prestigious grants and fellowships. Although the three plays selected for analysis have received varying degrees of commercial success

⁴⁵ Jane Chambers, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* (New York: JH Press, 1982), introductory pages.

⁴⁶ Eric Grode, “The Inner Children of Parents-to-Be,” *The New York Times*, last modified March 25, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/theater/paula-vogels-and-baby-makes-seven-is-revived.html?_r=0.

and professional accolades, each playwright is distinguished and deserving of greater scholarly attention. Moreover, these representative plays document lesbian identity and/or experience, giving attention to the specific concerns facing lesbian women in the final three decades of the 20th century.⁴⁷ That is, these plays may increase our understanding of how America's (and the American theatre's) association with LGBT lives transitioned from the pre-Stonewall era to our current moment, in which the crusade for socio/political enfranchisement prevails. Through the analysis of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *Stop Kiss*, this project explores themes of empowerment and enfranchisement in representative, post-Stonewall, 20th-century American plays by women dealing with lesbian experience.

Because the post-Stonewall era has had far-reaching implications on both American life and theatre, *From Stonewall to Millennium: Lesbian Representation in Three Late 20th-Century Plays by American Women* studies these representative plays in relation to the environments that inspired and produced them, specifically placing the plays in conversation with their respective historical contexts in effort to illuminate the relationship between the two. It is not the aim of the dissertation to take a determinist stance and argue that historical factors produced certain representations, nor that the LGBT depictions offered by playwrights elicit particular behaviors or ideologies from audiences. Rather, this project investigates the relationship between lived lesbian identity and/or experience (as demonstrated in primary and secondary sources) and dramatized lesbian identity and/or

⁴⁷ It is important to clarify that the plays in my sample do not, as written, overtly display socio-economic diversity. In selecting these plays, I am aware of the potential for homogeneity in the stage picture and undesirable, neoliberal, exclusionary outcomes. In view of this, each of the analytical chapters emphasizes the importance of scenic and costume designs, as well as casting and directorial strategies, for achieving maximum diversity in production.

experience (as depicted in the representative plays examined in this project), and posits it as mutually reproducing and informing.

Justification

My interest in the relationship between lesbian identity and experience in real-life, embodied forms, and their counterparts on American stages is principally inspired by Michel Foucault's assertion that "The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces."⁴⁸ The Foucaultian conception of identity as a construct suggests that cultural texts—plays, for instance—are not mere aesthetic objects, but possess the power to construct. In this view, they "are discursive practices that have material consequences on material bodies."⁴⁹ Given the fact that dramatic literature and performances thereof have the agency to reflect and (re)produce identities, it is worthwhile to study their depictions of lesbian identity and experience.

This study's focus upon the final three decades of the twentieth century stems primarily from the political and social gains made during those decades. Although the path to enfranchisement has been slow (and sometimes even regressive—examples include the McCarthy era and the AIDS epidemic), it has been marked by an ultimately progressive movement toward equal rights, protections, and freedoms. Beginning in the 1950s with the formation of the Mattachine Society, organizations like the Daughters of Bilitis⁵⁰, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)⁵¹, the American Civil Liberties Union

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings, 1972- 1977*, ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon, et.al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 73- 74.

⁴⁹ Jennifer Esposito, "What Does Race Have to Do With Ugly Betty?," *Television and New Media* 10, no. 521 (2009): 526.

⁵⁰ Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was the first lesbian organization committed to civil rights. The organization was founded in San Francisco in 1955.

⁵¹ GLAAD was formed in New York in 1985 in response to negative media surrounding the AIDS epidemic.

(ACLU)⁵², and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC)⁵³ have supported the LGBT community's members and have promoted their causes. As a result of these collective—and, in some cases, ongoing—efforts, gay rights are now widely considered one of the most crucial civil rights issues of twenty-first century America.

Under President Barack Obama, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Act was repealed in September 2011. In September 2013, Vice President Joe Biden (who first announced his support of same-sex marriage in 2012) reiterated his position of personal and political advocacy: "I could not remain silent any longer. . . . It's the civil rights of our day. It's the issue of our day."⁵⁴ In June 2013, the United States Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional the (heterosexist) Defense of Marriage Act⁵⁵; currently, nineteen of the United States of America boast marriage equality legislation. In February 2014, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder expressed his view that "the current generation (must) rise to the causes that have become the struggles of our day . . . one of these struggles is the fight for equality for our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender—or LGBT—citizens."⁵⁶ While it is valuable to allot scholarly attention to the recent conversations surrounding LGBT issues that are routinely integrated into political agendas, television programs, popular music, and theatrical enterprises, this project seeks to understand how American society got to this point; or rather, how political initiatives and discourses of enfranchisement emerged and burgeoned. To that end, it is

⁵² ACLU was founded in 1920 to advocate for a variety of civil liberties, which grew to include LGBT rights.

⁵³ HRC was founded in 1980 as a lobbying organization dedicated to LGBT issues.

⁵⁴ Maureen McCarty, "Vice President Biden: Marriage Equality is the 'Civil Rights... Issue of Our Day.'" *Human Rights Campaign*. September 16, 2013, <http://www.hrc.org/blog/entry/vice-president-biden-marriage-equality-is-the-civil-rights-issue-of-our-day>.

⁵⁵ Statute 2419 was enacted on September 21, 1996, under President Bill Clinton; the law endowed states with the power to deny same-sex marriages. The law was ruled unconstitutional on June 26, 2013.

⁵⁶ Jaimie Fuller, "Holder calls LGBT rights one of the 'civil rights challenges of our time.'" *The Washington Post*. February 4, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/02/04/holder-calls-lgbt-rights-one-of-the-civil-rights-challenges-of-our-time/>.

crucial to focus upon the years immediately succeeding Stonewall (that is, beginning with 1970).

The current social/political climate contrasts starkly with that of pre-Stonewall. Thus, the final decades of the twentieth century served as a time of transition for the LGBT community—one worthy of continued scholarly inquiry. Existing on a continuum of political action that ranges from grassroots performance initiatives like protests and parades to formal occasions like landmark Supreme Court cases, the plays written and produced act as (or can at least be read to act as) rhetorical strategies that disseminate the LGBT movement's ideals and objectives, including, most notably, social/political enfranchisement.

Among the other factors that contributed to the scope of this study is the dearth of scholarship on lesbian drama. John M. Clum's seminal works *Acting Gay* and *Still Acting Gay* have effectively and comprehensively treated depictions of male homosexuality in modern drama. Similarly, Nicholas de Jongh's *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage*, also deals exclusively with depictions of male homosexuality. This dissertation's focus upon female homosexuality responds to these earlier publications' male-centric scope of inquiry, a response encouraged by the male authors themselves; for instance, de Jongh clarifies early in *Not in Front of the Audience*:

I have not included lesbians and lesbianism within the ambit of this study since I felt that such a pioneering study deserved and required the attention of a woman rather than a man. ... [this book] is a partial and limited account, since it deals with male homosexuality and not with lesbianism, which deserves and merits independent scrutiny.⁵⁷

In the following paragraphs, I introduce my own subjectivities and explicate how they inform the conceptual framework and narrowed focus of this project; my personal identification as a lesbian woman is certainly a prominent contributing factor. My gender and sexual orientation

⁵⁷ de Jongh, xiii- 2.

qualify me—in de Jongh’s view, at least—to effectively grapple with dramatized representations of female sexuality.

Drawing from Ronald J. Pelias’ *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic and Daily Life*, I wish to reveal my own normative-leaning subjectivities regarding this topic. This is not to say that the dissertation is autobiographical; contrarily, my empirical material is exclusively comprised of plays, criticism, historical evidence, and critical theory. Notwithstanding, I have embraced, and wish my readers to understand, my subjectivities as a lesbian woman who generally presents as feminine⁵⁸, as an American, as a Christian, as a Caucasian, as one from middle-class background, and as one from the generation termed “millennial.” These identity factors motivate and contribute to this study’s conceptual framework. My own identity also enables me to offer a less-heard perspective in lesbian scholarship, which, since the 1980s, has been largely dominated by butch lesbians and/or butch perspectives.

When, at the age of fourteen, I began to question my sexuality, I recall being told “It’s illegal, you know.” And, in fact, “it” (engaging in sexual relations with members of my own sex) was illegal. Missouri’s Sexual Misconduct Law was enforceable until the 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* case. Fortunately, my ‘coming of age’ transpired during dichotomous times, in which I almost continually saw positive ripostes to homophobia. It may have still been technically illegal to engage in homosexual activity in Missouri, but I saw gay couples on the streets of downtown, I heard news of gay rights activists across the country, and I saw gay characters make appearances and eventually assume leading roles in TV programs.

⁵⁸ I include the qualifier “generally,” because, although I wear makeup and have long hair, my sense of style is flexible, often blending traditionally masculine fashions with traditionally feminine fashions. In Chapter 3, I reference Arlene Stein, who has argued that lesbians can wear a crew cut and a skirt; Stein’s logic effectively captures the flexibility I enjoy in my own gender presentation.

Every major news station reported on the murder of Matthew Shepard, and I attended productions of Moises Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*. Then, in 2004—the year I graduated from high school—Massachusetts became the first state in America to legalize gay marriage. Now, ten years later, thirty-seven of the fifty United States boast marriage equality legislation. Additionally, non-discrimination acts, adoption policies, and reproduction rights are routinely introduced into district and state-level courts.

I am compelled by the advocacy and activism that has marked the past several decades, and I am interested in exploring the ways that the American theatre heralded, captured, and/or (re)produced lesbian identity and experience during the late twentieth century. I am especially interested in the political dimensions of LGBT (specifically, lesbian) life—the ways in which members of the LGBT communities of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s laid the groundwork for the incorporation and enfranchisement afforded today. Contemporary historians like David Román and George Chauncy have convincingly described history as contested and fraught with complications and contradictions; however, for many in my generation, it is difficult *not* to celebrate the current state of affairs' departure from the pervasive secrecy, shame, and violence that characterized the pre-Stonewall period and impacted the generations who lived through it. We are more protected than we were. We are more accepted than we were. We have more access to healthy, happy futures than we did previously. *From Stonewall to Millennium* explores the incorporation manifest in American social, political, and theatrical histories from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The dissertation grapples with the complexities of enfranchisement (and the accompanying complexities of identity), taking special interest in the theatre artists who used the stage and plays about lesbians as a rhetorical strategy for full and equal enfranchisement.

The decision to take representations of lesbianism as my subject is also inspired by works like Sara Warner's *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (2012), Lynn C. Miller and M. Heather Carver's co-edited volume *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography* (2003), the Five Lesbian Brothers's edited collection *Five Lesbian Brothers/Four Plays*, with a preface by Holly Hughes and an introduction by Peggy Phelan (1999), and Sue-Ellen Case's *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance* (1996).⁵⁹ These publications have given significant attention to feminist and/or lesbian solo performers and performance groups, whose works have been instrumental in giving voice to women's experiences (sexual and/or otherwise) through performance. This dissertation will complement, extend, and engage in conversation with these works as I attempt to extrapolate and analyze themes of empowerment and enfranchisement in the three representative post-Stonewall, American plays dealing with lesbian identity and experience.

This project explores the ways that plays contribute to our understanding of American lesbian identity and experience during the time period lasting from 1970 to 1999, with particular regard to issues related to enfranchisement. As a result, the study contextualizes the current moment. It is the aim of this dissertation to engage the vibrant conversations about lesbian experience in America—or, in the words of John M. Clum—"the limits on the place lesbians ... are allowed to hold in contemporary American society."⁶⁰ By analyzing a sample of representative plays that are nested with their particular historical contexts, I seek to understand the ways in which, over time, space has been appropriated for lesbians and narratives thereabout. Moreover, I seek to understand the ways that (and the degrees to which) these narratives engage the discourses of enfranchisement that emerged and

⁵⁹ See bibliography for full publication information on these lesbian/feminist works.

⁶⁰ Clum, *Acting Gay*, 2.

circulated at increasing rates during the times in which the play were written. In other words, I seek to understand how, both inside and outside of the theatre, lesbian lives have been incorporated into the mainstream—something that, in earlier decades, hardly seemed possible.

This study will be of interest to artists and scholars in the varied, but often intersecting, fields of Theatre, Performance Studies, Communication, Women's and Gender Studies, and Queer Theory, as well as those outside of the academy who take interest in LGBT history, American history, and the arts.

Research Questions, Methods and Procedures

This dissertation takes plays as cultural documents that help us to understand the LGBT community's (and, particularly, the lesbian community's) historical quest for enfranchisement, as played out both inside theatres and beyond theatre doors. Adopting a New Historicist approach to the relationship between historical context and cultural texts, questions that drive my research include: What is the social/political status quo for lesbians in the United States for each decade, particularly in regard to the question of enfranchisement? How do other identity categories (gender, race, class, ability, etc.) intersect with sexuality vis-à-vis the quest for enfranchisement? What specific issues rise to the forefront of the Gay Liberation Movement? How do theatrical representations of lesbianism relate to the lived experiences of lesbian American women in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s? In what ways do lesbian characters similarly pursue or have access to enfranchisement, and what components of enfranchisement are most emphasized? In what ways do the characters envision the future—particularly with regard to social/political enfranchisement—that differ from the past (and present)?

To explore the historical questions, I draw upon primary and secondary sources that take the three-decade time period treated in my study as their focus. These sources are discussed below in a thorough literature review. Additionally, I pursue answers to these questions by analyzing three representative texts from the three-decade time period. In order to fulfill the goals of this study, the specific criteria that guided play selections are as follows: 1) the play was written by an American woman playwright, 2) the play is of its time; that is, the action of the play transpires in the time period during which the play itself was written and produced, and that time period roughly corresponds to each of the last three decades of the 20th century, 3) the play's major themes focus upon lesbian enfranchisement (although, this term is conceptualized broadly), 4) the play's debut production—or a production soon thereafter—was in a reasonably prominent, professional, venue, where the play had (or has had since) reasonably significant impact⁶¹, and 5) within this sample, diversity of authorship was sought in terms of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

The time period studied in this dissertation project is one during which LGBT representation in the American drama burgeoned at exponential rates. In contrast to earlier eras (for instance, during World War Two, in which time Alan Kenward's *Cry Havoc* included "the only suspect lesbian role seen on Broadway"⁶²), the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s are rife with plays deserving of scholarly attention. Certainly, each decade yielded several

⁶¹ The criterion that the play was produced at a major, professional venue presumes that these theatres attracted substantial (in number) mainstream audiences. In terms of impact, this criterion operates from the assumption that the more people "reached," the higher the probability of effecting social change within American society at large. As the plays selected for analysis were all first produced in New York City—arguably, America's theatrical mecca—the criteria for audience base and impact are met. This is not to say, however, that meaningful work (that is, work that has impact) cannot be produced elsewhere. As I explicate in the text, the plays in my sample were soon staged on the West Coast. Further, the Midwest has long been home to several artistic 'centers' (i.e. Minneapolis, Chicago, Kansas City, Saint Louis, Houston, etc.).

⁶² Curtin, 253.

candidates; however, the practical need to limit the scope of the study and my desire for depth in analysis required me to select the titles that best fit the criteria.

In terms of the criteria, the fourth and fifth warrant further explanation. In this study, a play's impact (related to criterion number four) is assessed in three ways. First, the number of performances accorded to the production is consistent with, or exceeds, the general success rates appropriate to the time period and the venue. Second, the play has been published, and preferably reprinted, to confirm accessibility for future study, as well as to suggest merit and ongoing demand. Thirdly, the play has received *some* mainstream and/or scholarly attention. As *From Stonewall to Millennium* investigates enfranchisement, a discourse that gained momentum during the final three decades of the twentieth century and continues to circulate evermore widely in the current moment, it is valuable to compare initial responses to the play with contemporary readings.

Regarding the fifth criterion, one of the three selected playwrights, Diana Son, is heterosexual and an ethnic minority (Asian-American). Without question, the lines of disenfranchisement, disempowerment, and oppression in America are complicated, and this study will engage with these implications. However, that one of three writers in my sample is Asian is perhaps some indication of post-Stonewall progress, as finding an ethnic or racial minority playwright whose work meets thematic and impact criteria would have been most difficult in the pre-Stonewall era.

My close, critical reading of each text, within its historical and cultural context, is indebted to New Historicist methodology, which draws from the practices that grew out of Literary Criticism and Literary History. More specifically, I align my project with new historicism's emphasis upon periodization. As explained by Johann Gottfried von Herder, "A

people will whenever possible ... invents its drama according to its own history, spirit of the times, customs, opinions, language, national biases, traditions, and inclinations.”⁶³ More generally, the drama created and produced is inherently connected to its time period. In, *The New Historicism Reader*, H. Aram Veeseer offers a five-point definition for New Historicism, the first and third points of which correspond to Herder’s conception of drama; “1) that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; ... [and] 3) that literary and non-literary ‘texts’ circulate inseparably.”⁶⁴ Here, plays do not exist in a vacuum, but instead interact with historically and culturally specific contexts. As Gallagher and Greenblatt note in *Practicing New Historicism*,

the new historicist project is not about ‘demoting’ art or discrediting aesthetic pleasure; rather it is concerned with finding the creative power that shapes literary works ... since [their] significance can be fully grasped only in relation to the other expressive possibilities with which it interacts.⁶⁵

My project locates plays within the social, political, and artistic contexts in which the plays themselves were written and debuted. In reading texts in relation to their historical contexts, I seek to understand the correlation between lived queer experiences and the embodiment of such by characters in American drama.

Although New Historicism serves as the predominant methodology that guides the study, I also rely on a range of relevant critical theories as they apply to particular plays. I employ Performance Studies and gender theories regarding identity as performance to better understand characters’ sexualities and genders, and I draw upon queer theories that address the intersectionality between and among various identity components, as well as degrees of

⁶³ Catharin Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7.

⁶⁴ H. Aram Veeseer, introduction to *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeseer (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

⁶⁵ Gallagher and Greenblatt, 13.

‘subversion’ and ‘assimilation.’ Queer theories and additional critical theories that address identity and enfranchisement (e.g., those dealing with race, ethnicity, religion, ability, etc.) are also employed to treat the complexities of this project’s major theme of enfranchisement. My close readings of the three plays also employ semiosis, when applicable, to explore potential connotations of verbal or visual signs within a particular context. The various sources that I consult to support my analyses are discussed more thoroughly in the Literature Review section below.

For each of the three decades treated in this study, I provide an overview of the historical period and offer a close reading of its representative play. Each chapter begins with a general introduction to the time period, in which I give attention to the major social and political happenings, as well as to the prominent plays produced therein.⁶⁶ The historical overview portion aims to answer the historical questions that motivate this project: What is the social/political status quo for lesbians in the United States for each decade, particularly in regard to the question of enfranchisement? In this general overview, I give attention to the status quo for the LGBT community broadly, as well as highlight the issues and concerns specific to lesbians. What issues rise to the forefront of the Gay Liberation Movement (in particular, what specific issues are taken up by lesbian groups and lesbian women)?

In order to explore the relationship between the cultural context and the plays under investigation, I follow the historical overview with textual analyses of the selected plays. The analytic process includes a rudimentary plot synopsis to ensure readers’ familiarity with the plays included in my sample. In keeping with the New Historicist perspective, relevant particulars from the historical context are integrated into my discussion of the plays’

⁶⁶ I limit my discussion of major plays to address only those that feature LGBT characters and/or themes. I do this in order to create an opening to mention the other important works that certainly deserve critical attention, but that did not meet the selection criteria for this study.

characters and action. The larger portion of the analysis section functions to pursue answers to the theatrically-based questions that inspire this dissertation: How do theatrical representations of lesbianism and female bisexuality relate to the lived experiences of queer Americans in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, especially in relation to the LGBT community's overarching pursuit of enfranchisement? In what ways do lesbian and bisexual characters similarly pursue or have access to enfranchisement, and what components of enfranchisement are most emphasized? In what ways do playwrights envision queer futures—particularly with regard to social/political enfranchisement—that differ from the past (and present)? Following the analysis of the representative plays, I conclude each chapter by offering final remarks about recurrent motifs in the dramatic work and, thus, I attempt to understand the relationship between lesbian identity, experience, and especially enfranchisement, and its theatrical representation.

My close readings of the plays follow a traditional approach to textual analysis, focusing primarily upon the characters, actions, and themes; however, I also interpret verbal and visual imagery within the text, or rendered in performance, to consider cultural meanings. Attention is also afforded to production circumstances of their American debut productions, as gleaned from cast lists, production photos, reviews, interviews, etc. Not only do conversations about production circumstances validate the plays' impact, but they also contribute to the dissertation's metanarrative about enfranchisement. Factors like who produced and directed the plays, and which actors performed the homosexual roles contextualize the production, and how the roles were cast (in terms of race, ethnicity, body type, gender presentation, etc.). Exploring these production circumstances engages the question of whether homocentric scripts were appropriated by heterosexuals, or whether

LGBT individuals were empowered not only in the world of the play, but also in the real world experience of producing the play. “Who is being enfranchised?” in the context of the production is a valuable question that engages the complexities of the theme I investigate.

Defining Terms

In analyzing these plays and the twenty-nine year timespan treated by this study, I frequently employ the terms “gay,” “lesbian,” “homosexual,” and “queer.” As these terms have been used both interchangeably and distinctively, it is prudent to explicate the way in which they are used in this dissertation project. I use “gay” to reference male homosexuals/ity; conversely, I use “lesbian” to reference female homosexuals/ity. “Homosexual” is used to discuss homoerotic/homocentric attraction, relationships, or identity without regard to gender, thus encompassing both male, female, and genderqueer experience. “Queer” is a more complicated term. Although I follow the trajectory of many other scholars who have used “queer” as a synonym for gay, lesbian, and homosexual, it is important that I acknowledge the fact that doing so is disputed.

“Queer” has been conceptualized from several socio-cultural and disciplinary perspectives. Most general is the definition offered by the Oxford English Dictionary, “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric.”⁶⁷ The Parents, Family, Friends, Allies (PFLAG) organization considers a queer person one “who feels somehow outside of the societal norms in regards to gender, sexuality or/and even politics.”⁶⁸ Similarly broad is the definition printed in a 1991 Queer Power Now pamphlet: “Queer means to fuck with gender.”⁶⁹ These definitions vary in their conceptions of what may and may not be regarded as queer, but the

⁶⁷ “Definition of queer in English,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, April 5, 2014, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/queer.

⁶⁸ “A Definition of Queer,” *PFLAG*. April 5, 2014, <http://community.pflag.org/abouttheq>.

⁶⁹ Anonymous, “Queer Power Now” pamphlet, cited in Cherry Smith, “What Is This Thing Called Queer,” *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 277.

unifying component among them is that queer is inherently at odds with that which is normative.

Alexander Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer* offers a similar interpretation of the term queer, which he suggests "attempts to account for the existence and expression of a wide range of positions within culture that are ... non-, anti-, or contra-straight."⁷⁰

Throughout his publication, which explores mass culture through a queer lens, Doty intentionally employs the word queer to "recapture and reassert a militant sense of difference that views the erotically 'marginal' as both (in bell hooks's words) a consciously chosen 'site of resistance' and a 'location of radical openness and possibility.'"⁷¹ Correspondingly, in *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Nikki Sullivan cites prominent queer theorist David Halperin to advance an understanding of queer identity, positionality, and/or ideology as "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant."⁷² It is evident, then, that many view queerness as that which exists apart from heteronormativity.

To account for the varying perspectives, especially within a study that takes enfranchisement as its focus, I offer an understanding of queer as existing on a continuum. At the far left are those members of the LGBT community who view themselves as separate from heterosexuals/ity and assert the difference of which Doty speaks. Contrastingly, at the far right are those members of the LGBT community who view themselves as assimilatory with heterosexuals/ity and assert the likeness of which Andrew Sullivan speaks. In using the term queer, I refer to this range of possibility and expression; as needed, I clarify the degree

⁷⁰ Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.

⁷¹ Doty, 3.

⁷² Nikki Sullivan, 43.

to which particular representations evoke enfranchisement and which resist and/or challenge it. The degree of ‘queerness’ within the sample texts is a question the study explores.

Literature Review

The American theatre’s association with queer lives and representations thereof has been documented in histories such as Kaier Curtin’s *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, edited collections by Kim Marra and Robert Schanke, including *Passing Performances* and *Staging Desire: Queer Readings of American Theatre History*, and anthologies like *Forbidden Acts* and *Out Plays* (both edited by Ben Hodges). This dissertation is situated alongside those projects in that it takes LGBT theatre as its subject and attempts to contribute to our understanding of theatrical and queer histories. However, the project departs from these earlier studies in its narrowed focus on the interplay between American LGBT experience during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s and manifestations of queer experience upon American stages throughout those same time periods. In addition to chronicling major plays and/or players, *From Stonewall to Millennium* simultaneously uses plays to understand history and history to understand plays.

This dissertation can also be viewed as a response to recent works that critique heteronormative representations in theatre, film, and television. I have previously mentioned works by Sara Warner, Dustin Bradley Goltz, and Ron Becker. Others have also offered criticism of the homonormativity and homoliberalism born from these representations. An example is Bonnie J. Dow’s “*Ellen*, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility,” which emphasizes the ways that *Ellen* and other sitcoms are “geared toward the comfort of heterosexuals,”⁷³ and so endorse heterosexism and homophobia. My project

⁷³ Bonnie J. Dow, “*Ellen*, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility,” *Critical Studies in Media and Cultural Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 2 (2001): 98.

remains mindful of the arguments made against a preoccupation with LGBT enfranchisement and representations thereof and will engage with them when relevant.

Investigating the relationship between historical context and cultural products necessitates that I rely upon New Historicist texts to guide my research and analysis. John Brannigan notes in *Transitions: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* that “All texts, all documents, are representations of the beliefs, values and forms of power circulating in a society at a given time in specific circumstances.”⁷⁴ As this project seeks to more fully understand a political aim like LGBT enfranchisement through the study of discourses about enfranchisement that emerged and burgeoned throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, New Historicism’s emphasis on intertextuality (that is, the relationship between text and environment) is critical. Brannigan’s book, as well as Adam Veaser’s *The New Historicism Reader*, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt’s *Practicing New Historicism*, and Claire Colebrook’s *New Literary Histories: New historicism and contemporary criticism* impact my readings of the six plays included in the sample. The sources share an interest “in tracking the social energies that circulate very broadly through culture,”⁷⁵ and in identifying the ways that literature (in this case, the drama) “does social work,”⁷⁶ and plays “an effective part in producing the culture [it] describe[s].”⁷⁷ My study puts plays into conversation with their respective historical contexts and offers an understanding of the theatre as an agent for social/political meaning-making and identity-building.

⁷⁴ John Brannigan, *Transitions: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 132.

⁷⁵ Gallagher and Greenblatt, 13.

⁷⁶ Veaser, 15.

⁷⁷ Claire Colebrook, *New Literary Histories: New historicism and contemporary criticism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 205.

In nesting the three plays that comprise my sample within particular contexts—the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s America—I rely on a variety of primary and secondary historical sources. Eric Marcus’s *Making Gay History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945- 1990* provides an oral history of LGBT experience throughout five time periods, the final three of which are particularly useful to my study: 1) “Part Three: 1968-1973,” 2) “Part Four: 1973- 1981,” and 3) “Part Five: 1981- 1990.” Marcus’s project includes autobiographical accounts from prominent figures in the queer community (e.g. Larry Kramer), and provides insight to the time periods from those who lived through it—thus tying the source directly to this dissertation’s interest in the relationship between theatrical representation and ‘living queer.’ Although it deviates from Marcus’s chronological structure, David Eisenbach’s *Gay Power: An American Revolution* is similarly rife with testimony from those who ‘were there’ in the formative years of the Gay Liberation Movement.

Eisenbach’s 2006 publication moves thematically, focusing on milestone moments—for instance, the introduction of gay and lesbian characters to television programs—and major philosophical and ideological shifts—for example, the 1973 removal of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, which is recounted in Chapter Nine, “It’s Official Now: We’re Not Sick.” Eisenbach’s text provides benchmarks that allowed me to situate plays within certain zeitgeists. Suzanna Danuta Walters’s *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America* also offers insight to themes that resonate with my project. Most notable are Chapters 8, 9, 10, which tackle the subject of gay and lesbian families. In these chapters, Walters explores marriage and child-rearing, institutions and practices that are

widely considered the crux of heteronormativity and assimilation⁷⁸. In terms of marriage equality, and adoption and reproductive rights, sources like Leigh Ann Wheeler's *How Sex Became a Civil Liberty* and Amy L. Stone's *Gay Rights at the Ballot Box* prove valuable in tracking the political initiatives of the LGBT community.

I also incorporate sources that give express treatment to the time periods upon which my study centers. Thomas Borstelmann's *The 1970's: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* and Robert Hargreaves's *Superpower: A Portrait of America in the 1970's* are the basis for the historical overview of Chapter One, which centers upon the 1970s. Kimberly R. Moffitt and Duncan A. Campbell's edited volume *The 1980s: A Critical and Transitional Decade* and Michael Schaller's *Reckoning with Reagan: America and its President in the 1980s* serve as the foundational works for the historical overview provided in Chapter Two's investigation of the 1980s. Finally, my Chapter Three analysis of the 1990s takes Marc Oxoby's *The 1990s* and Herbert London's *A Decade of Denial: A Snapshot of America in the 1990s* as points of departure for understanding the period. Prominent gay publications like *The Advocate*, and websites dedicated to homosexual organizations like GLAAD⁷⁹ and HRC⁸⁰ are also valuable sources, as are publications that take the women's movement as their subject (examples include Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* [2006] and Nancy MacLean's *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents* [2008]). Collectively, these

⁷⁸ Consider Queer Theorist Lee Edelman's argument in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* that "Queerness names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (3).

⁷⁹ An acronym that stands for Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, an organization that "rewrites the script for LGBT equality. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to positive change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love" (<http://www.glaad.org/about#mission>).

⁸⁰ An acronym that stands for Human Rights Campaign, an organization that works to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all.

sources create the solid historical context required by a study that employs New Historicism methodology. Themselves secondary sources, most of these works draw upon primary sources like magazines, newspapers, and television programs and news reports from the time periods included in this study.

My textual analyses of the three representative plays also draw upon critical reception from premiere audiences and critics, as well as contemporary readings of the plays offered in scholarly articles and/or reviews of revival productions. The Burns Mantle *Best Plays* volumes and the *New York Times* theatre reviews are most useful in eliciting critical responses from the debut productions. I examine available performance reviews and interviews with artists involved in productions that are included in LGBT publications; the aim is to illuminate queer reception of mainstream productions. A range of peer-reviewed essays from academic journals are incorporated into my discussion in effort to bring my interpretations of the plays into conversation with extant scholarship—the goal being to facilitate rich conversation about these plays and how they contribute to our understanding of LGBT (and, particularly, lesbian) history—past and present—and futures.

Finally, a range of critical theories are employed to illuminate or extract textual meaning(s) from the plays selected for analysis. Although the aim of my study is to explore themes of LGBT assimilation and enfranchisement in late-twentieth-century American drama, poignant questions like “Who is enfranchised?” and “Under what circumstances?” persist. Performance theory, Gender theory and Queer theory help create openings through which these questions can be more fully explored. Philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler, as well as Performance Studies scholar Richard Schechner have argued against the pre-Enlightenment idea of an essential self. For instance, Butler proposes that gender exists

“only to the extent that it is performed.”⁸¹ By noting that gender acts in the absence of anything authentic or essential, gender is revealed as a product of socialization—meaning, as a social construction resulting from a series of performances, or “restored behaviors.”⁸² In a similar vein, Danae Clark has noted that gender performativity—and, as many have argued, identity performance more generally—enables LGBT people “to pass as ‘straight’ (in certain milieux) while still choosing [homosexuality] as a sexual preference; by wearing the privilege of straight culture, one can avoid political oppression.”⁸³ As this dissertation project emphasizes themes of assimilation and LGBT enfranchisement, theories that explore the complexities of identity (e.g. Gloria Anzaldúa’s conception of identity as a process instead of “a bunch of little cubby holes stuffed respectively with intellect, sex, race, class, vocation, gender.”⁸⁴) and the performative nature of identity are particularly valuable.

I have previously mentioned that exploring motifs of assimilation and enfranchisement is contentious. I will be careful to consider the ways in which assimilation and enfranchisement are problematic. In this effort, I turn to the works of queer theorists like Michael Warner and Judith Halberstam, and Performance Studies scholar Dustin Bradley Goltz. Warner contends in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* that all cultural documents are imbued with themes of homophobia and heterosexism. Warner’s claim is echoed by Goltz’s *Queer Temporalities and Gay Male Representation: Tragedy, Normativity, and Futurity*, which takes film and television texts as evidence of the ways that queers—on and off the screen—are marginalized, lest they perform normalized

⁸¹ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 527.

⁸² Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29.

⁸³ Danae Clark, “Commodity Lesbianism,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, et.al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 197.

⁸⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) queer the writer: loca, escrita y chicana,” *Inversions: Writing by Dykes, Queers and Lesbians*, ed. Betsy Warland (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1991), 252- 253.

representations of homosexuality by participating in heterosexual institutions and practices, or by adopting heteronormative values. Judith Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* and *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* critique capitalism and heteronormativity, and locate alternatives to the heterosexual lifestyle. Together, these critical theories engage the tensions surrounding discourses of assimilation and enfranchisement.

The critical theories applied throughout the chapters of this dissertation serve the dual purpose of helping me to 1) interpret the dramatic texts and extrapolate thematic meanings, 2) locate the plays within their historical contexts, and 3) engage the plays in philosophical conversation about queer identity so that we might better understand LGBT history and imagine LGBT futures. The overarching goal is to explore the relationship between lived lesbian experiences related to enfranchisement, and theatrical representations thereof.

Organization

In this introduction, I have introduced and justified this dissertation project, *From Stonewall to Millennium: Lesbian Representation in Three Late 20th-Century Plays by American Women*. I have outlined New Historicism as a primary methodology and have provided a thorough literature review of the sources that support both the historical and theatrical components of the study. Additionally, I have reviewed an array of critical theories that supplement the study and involve it in the ongoing conversations about the place of lesbians in American society.

Chapter Two focuses on the time period lasting from 1970 to 1979, analyzing Jane Chambers's *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* (1980) as a play that is representative of the 1970s, as it was written in that decade, despite that it did not debut until early in 1980. The

action of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* transpires at a beachside vacation destination, at which a heterosexual woman falls in love with Lil, a lesbian dying of cancer. Most relevant to this study is the play's focus on coming out, and the concurrent, but divergent, liberationist and assimilationist impulses that characterized the 1970s.

Chapter Three treats the time period lasting from 1980 to 1989, analyzing Paula Vogel's *And Baby Makes Seven* (1984) as a representative text. *And Baby Makes Seven* centers upon lovers Anna and Ruth (whose 'alter egos' are little boys, Henri and Cecil, and a dog named Orphan), and their housemate and gay male friend, Peter. Peter is the sperm donor/biological father of Anna and Ruth's child and, at the heart of the play, are questions about what and who can make a family.

Chapter Four focuses on the time period lasting from 1990 to 1999, analyzing Diana Son's *Stop Kiss* (1998) as a representative text. *Stop Kiss* centers upon Callie and Sara, young women who are attacked in New York City's West Village after sharing a kiss. The play explores homophobia and violence alongside themes of sexual awakening. The play is a forerunner to conversations about hate crime legislation that would be later explored in Moises Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*.

Chapter Five provides a conclusion to the dissertation. Therein, I summarize the findings of the study, cross-referencing the plays as often as possible. I offer conclusions regarding their significance and meaning(s) and implications for future practice and study. Most importantly, I consider the tremendous shift in attitudes toward and treatment of homosexuals that transpired in post-Stonewall, twentieth-century American consciousness and policy, and how that is manifest in theatrical practice. Finally, I offer insight into the

ways these representative plays ask us to imagine the futures as we progress further into the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER TWO

OUT OF THE CLOSET AND ONTO THE BEACH:

JANE CHAMBERS' *LAST SUMMER AT BLUEFISH COVE*

The 1970s marked the rapid burgeoning of a trend for unapologetically lesbian and gay characters on prestigious, professional, Broadway and Off-Broadway stages. The drama written and produced during this decade contained more LGBT content than in any previous decade, carrying on, and expanding, the revolutionary spirit introduced by the riot at Stonewall Inn. A significant number of these plays includes themes about and/or manifestations of empowerment and enfranchisement. Moreover, while gay male experience dominated the 1960's Off-Off-Broadway "explosion,"⁸⁵ the 1970s increasingly witnessed plays by and about lesbians, or at least including lesbianism as a subtheme. Examples include Lanford Wilson's One Act play *The Great Nebula in Orion* (1971), Susan Miller's *Confessions of a Female Disorder* (1973), Martha Boesing's *Love Song for an Amazon* (1976)⁸⁶, and *Electra Speaks*, a 1980 play that is part of the Women's Experimental Theatre (WET)'s trilogy, *The Daughters Cycle*. Arguably, the most prominent example is Jane Chambers' *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, a full length drama that depicts 1970's lesbian culture and explores themes related to lesbian empowerment and enfranchisement.

Through its eight female characters (all of whom identify as lesbians, or at least engage in same-sex relationships), *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* explores lesbian identity

⁸⁵ See David A. Crespy, *The Off-Off Broadway Explosion: How Provocative Playwrights of the 1960's Ignited a New American Theatre* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2003).

⁸⁶ As Peterson and Bennett note in *Women Playwrights of Diversity*, Boesing's play is not expressly lesbian, but has been described as "woman-identified" (28), and has been classified within the lesbian-feminist genre that emerged in the 1970s.

and associated dimensions of social/political life. Chambers' characters pursue enfranchisement as manifested in the desire to be openly homosexual and to engage in homocentric relationships and friendships without consequence. The play grapples with the complexities of social/political subjectivity through depicting the assimilationist and liberationist impulses that coexisted throughout the decade. Through close, critical reading of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, I seek to understand the relationship between the lived experiences of lesbians in the 1970s and theatrical representations thereof. My analysis of Chambers' play also explores how LGBT (but especially lesbian) futures are envisioned by the playwright through her characters.

Historical Overview of the 1970s

By the end of 1969, and as the new decade dawned, members of the LGBT community began to capitalize on newly-created openings for political agency. As Dennis Altman explains in *The Homosexualization of America, The Americanization of the Homosexual*, the 1970s “saw a major increase in both the political salience of homosexuality and the size and impact of the homosexual movement.”⁸⁷ This discernable political presence is effectively demonstrated by the increased breadth and depth of LGBT organizations, which functioned not only to forge alliances between people who shared sexual minority status, but to ban together gays and lesbians who recognized the ways that their sexual identities intersected with other identity categories, often making the lines of oppression—or what has become known as the “bind”—doubly or triply difficult. *Unidos* was founded in 1970 for Chicano/a gays and lesbians; Dignity, a group for Catholic gays and lesbians, was formed in 1973 and, a year later, a group for Episcopal homosexuals (Integrity) was formed;

⁸⁷ Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualization of America, The Americanization of the Homosexual* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 108.

the African-American feminist group Combahee River Collective was also founded in 1974 to explore the intersectionality between gender/sexuality and African American race; Girth and Mirth, a group for Bears,⁸⁸ formed in 1976; and LGBT senior citizens founded Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE) in 1977. While this listing is not comprehensive, it does suggest recognition of, and an attempt to respond to, the diversity within the LGBT community—diversity that contributes to the tensions surrounding empowerment and enfranchisement. Although a strong indication of the powerful presence and commitment necessary for the LGBT community to combat institutionalized oppression, the growing number of advocacy groups at the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s also heralded shifts—even causing divisiveness—within the LGBT community. Different forms of enfranchisement became important to different gay and lesbian groups and their respective concerns and priorities.

The aims of second-wave feminism were also well underway by the 1970s, furthering the political salience of not only the LGBT community, but of the era’s Civil Rights Movements more generally. Second-wave feminism encompassed a wide range of women’s issues moving beyond suffrage (the issue at the core of first-wave feminism) to include sexuality, reproductive rights, legal inequalities, and issues surrounding women in the workplace. In a most basic sense, second-wave feminism worked to critique patriarchal hegemony and destabilize this essential component of the status quo. The interplay between feminism and women’s issues with the LGBT movement is taken up later in this chapter. At present, the critical point is that the 1970s marked the turning point for lesbian and gay social/political subjectivity, even occurring—as it did—on a wide spectrum, ranging from

⁸⁸ “Bears” is a gay subcultural terms used to reference bisexual and homosexual men who wear facial and/or body hair.

those who (like the early homophile activist members of the Daughters of Bilitis⁸⁹) wanted acceptance from the heterosexual majority and desired to assimilate with their practices and institutions; and the more subversive activists who desired a radical re-haul of the heteronormative, hegemonic status quo.⁹⁰

The terms *assimilationist* and *liberationist* have often been used to describe the two contrasting impulses:

The aim of assimilationist groups was (and still is) to be accepted into, and to become one with, mainstream culture. Consequently, one of the primary tenets of assimilationist discourses and discursive practices is the belief in a common humanity ... making differences invisible, or at least secondary, in and through an essentialising, normalizing emphasis on sameness. ... For liberationists, then, the imperative was to experience homosexuality as something positive in and through the creation of alternative values, beliefs, lifestyles, institutions, communities, and so on.⁹¹

In this respect, ‘living queer’ in 1970s America encompassed a range of meanings, experiences, and social/political affiliations that was unprecedented in earlier decades, during which the lives of gays and lesbians were directed and restricted by policy, homophobia, fear, and shame. The ways in which lesbian identity occurred on a continuum, with assimilationist and liberationist at opposing ends, mirrors other ‘cultural revolutions’ from this era; for instance, the social/political identifications of African Americans throughout the Civil Rights Movement similarly occurred on a continuum—with prominent figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X championing assimilationist and liberationist ideals, respectively. This chapter’s investigation of the historical period of 1970 to 1979, and how a representative drama produced therein reflected the contrasting impulses, requires an

⁸⁹ It is important to note that, in 1970, the Daughters of Bilitis disbanded as a national organization. However, select local chapters continued.

⁹⁰ See June Hannam, *Feminism* (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2007); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Barbara Ryan, *Identity Politics in the Women’s Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

⁹¹ Nikki Sullivan, 23 and 29.

understanding of both assimilationist and liberationist agendas, and their connection to the decade's major events and the overarching milieu.

Only a matter of weeks after the Stonewall riot, organizations located at the liberationist (or separatist/subversive/radical) end of the spectrum united to form the Gay Liberation Front, a group dedicated to addressing and counteracting systemic oppressions negatively affecting the lives of lesbians and gay men. These oppressions were particularly related (but not limited) to the denial of legal rights and protections, and the suppression of LGBT subcultural values and practices. Members of the Gay Liberation Front addressed issues facing the queer community, but also expanded their view to involve other minority peoples in America and beyond; for instance, Vietnam. The fact that the beginning of America's formal Gay Liberation Movement transpired in the midst of the Vietnam War⁹² is not without consequence. The counter-culture that emerged during the war gave rise to protests, demonstrations, and the militant exercising of free speech. These strategies were, only a few years later, employed by those queers who opposed heteronorms, sought to repeal anti-gay legislation, and admonished hegemonic values, practices, and institutions that breed exclusion and inequality.⁹³

A second important example of the connection between the Vietnam War and the Gay Liberation Movement is that The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam served as the Gay Liberation Front's namesake. The National Liberation Front, an insurgency in South Vietnam, retaliated against United States occupation. Though by predominately non-violent

⁹² The Vietnam War lasted from November 1, 1955 to April 30, 1975, and was part of both the Indochina Wars and the Cold War. American occupation of Vietnam was highly protested and is, to this day, considered by many historians a "tragedy," the consequences of which are "irreversible." See Robert Hargreaves's *Superpower: A Portrait of America in the 70's* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 338- 339.

⁹³ See Vicki L. Eaklor, *Queer America: A GLBT History of the 20th Century* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), and David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006).

means (and, admittedly, protests and riots pale in comparison to warfare), the Gay Liberation Front also resisted and rebelled against the United States, viewing the government and social policies as oppressive. In effect, freedom was the cry on battlefields at home and abroad. On American soil, queers affiliated with the Gay Liberation Front professed the imperatives outlined in “Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto,” published in 1970 by activist Carl Wittman. The manifesto’s overarching theme emphasized freedom:

Free ourselves: come out, everywhere; initiate self-defense and political activity; **initiate community institutions;** ... **Free the homosexual in everyone ... keep talking and acting free.**⁹⁴

The Gay Liberation Front’s agenda was characterized by liberation *from*—indeed, freedom *from*—past modes of thinking, being, and doing. If, as José Esteban Muñoz has argued, “Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality for another world,”⁹⁵ gays and lesbians associated with the Gay Liberation Front rejected what had been and what was, and committed themselves to pursuing what could be (that being a world without heterosexist hegemony).

The liberationist lesbian ideology of the 1970s is effectively captured by Charlotte Bunch: “In our society which defines all people and institutions for the benefit of the rich, white, male, the Lesbian is in revolt.”⁹⁶ Bunch’s quote, printed in a 1972 issue of *The Furies* (a newspaper published by The Furies Collective, a lesbian-separatist community based in Washington, D.C.), makes the important distinction that sexual identity intersects with other identities—in this case, class, race and gender. Bunch asserts the potential of lesbian identity to radically work against various components of hegemony. For some liberationist lesbians in

⁹⁴ Eaklor, 126. (Bold font mine.)

⁹⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of a Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

⁹⁶ Charlotte Bunch, “Lesbians In Revolt,” *The Furies* (Washington D.C., Virginia), Jan. 1972. (pages 8-9).

the 1970s, revolt was not merely rhetorical, but literal. According to Edward Koren, “Lesbianism in the seventies promised a life of radical empowerment.”⁹⁷

An exceptional example of revolt and radical empowerment is the all-women communities that were established in various parts of the country during the 1970s. Ariel Levy’s article “Lesbian Nation: *When gay women took to the road*,” investigates the phenomenon of the 1970’s lesbian liberationist/separatist movement and effectively synthesizes the array of communities that flourished during this time:

The lesbian separatists of a generation ago created a shadow society devoted to living in an alternate, penisless reality. There were many factions: the Gutter Dykes, in Berkeley; the Gorgons, in Seattle; several hundred Radicalesbians, in New York City, along with the smaller CLIT Collective; the Furies, in Washington, D.C.; and the Separatists Enraged Proud and Strong (SEPS), in San Francisco. There were outposts of Women’s Land all over the United States and Canada—places owned by women where all women, and only women, were welcome. . . . There is no reliable record of how many women were calling themselves lesbian separatists at the height of the movement. ‘I think it’s quite impossible to say, other than thousands,’ Lillian Faderman, the author of six books on lesbian history, said.⁹⁸

Similarly, a feminist theatre tradition (what some have called a ‘movement’) emerged in the 1970s. As Charlotte Canning writes in *Feminist Theaters in the U.S.A.: Staging women’s experience*, “Between 1969 and 1986 there was an explosion of feminist theatre activity in the U.S.A. . . . women, inspired by the growing feminist movement, formed theater groups across the country that were heterogeneous in size, repertory, organization, and politics.”⁹⁹

Notable examples of feminist theatres around the country that were active during the 1970s include Lavender Cellar (Minneapolis, Minnesota), Lilith (San Francisco, California), Los Angeles Feminist Theater (Los Angeles, California), Spiderwoman Theatre (Brooklyn, New

⁹⁷ Koren quoted in Ariel Levy, “Lesbian Nation: When gay women took to the road.” *The New Yorker*, accessed on 14 November 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/02/lesbian-nation>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Charlotte Canning, *Feminist Theaters in the U.S.A.: Staging women’s experience* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 9.

York), and Women's Interart (New York, New York). The last company to appear in the listing is particularly relevant to this chapter, as Jane Chambers was a co-founder. These companies were dedicated to creating theatre that empowered women, and enfranchised women theatre artists, who were oppressed on the basis of their gender, and many of them doubly and triply oppressed on the basis of their races and sexualities.

While departing from the dominant society to live in communes, and deviating from traditional theatre enterprises to form women-centric companies were acts of revolt and liberation, they were not the only productive methods of counteracting hegemony. As Jon McKenzie notes in "The Liminal-Norm," efficacious performative acts range "from transgressing a totalitarian power from an outside site to resisting a hegemonic power from within that very power arrangement."¹⁰⁰ To that end, there were also those who continued to live and work in the dominant society; there, they took to the streets with "flamboyant and flagrant flaunting of [their] sexuality,"¹⁰¹ shouting, "We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!" Whether a liberationist spirit motivated one to 'stay or leave,' those associated with the Gay Liberation Front—whether through membership in a participating organization or simply through ideological identification—shared a disinterest in "a story of happily ever after: love conquering all, the blessed gift of children, and a guaranteed slice of the American Dream."¹⁰² Instead, they sought a decidedly queer enfranchisement—a separate, but equal enfranchisement. Gay Power became their mantra and their social/political aim.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Jon McKenzie, "The Liminal-Norm," in *The Performance Studies Reader, Second Edition*, ed. Henry Bial (New York: Routledge, 2004), 26.

¹⁰¹ Sara Warner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), xii. (It is important to note that Warner identifies with the liberationist end of the continuum.)

¹⁰² Goltz, 83.

¹⁰³ It is worthwhile to consider the parallel between the assimilationist and liberationist (Gay Power) agendas of the LGBT movement, and the assimilationist and liberationist (Black Power) agendas of the Civil Rights

What is Gay Power? ... It is demanding to be recognized as a powerful minority with just rights which have not been acknowledged; ... while morally and psychologically on par with heterosexuality, [homosexuality] does nonetheless have unique aspects, which demand their own standards for evaluation and their own subculture.¹⁰⁴

Sara Warner's *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* celebrates the subversive strategies (e.g. *zaps*) employed by the activists who, throughout the 1970s, championed Gay Power. *Zaps* were "spectacularly theatrical mode[s] of performative protest designed to jolt the public into consciousness."¹⁰⁵ Members of the Gay Liberation Front, or otherwise subversive queers, demonstrated in public places like marriage license bureaus and bridal conventions, and on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Warner notes the effectiveness of zaps, describing them as "playful methods of social activism ... that make a mockery of discrimination and the experience of social exclusion."¹⁰⁶ Particularly relevant to this project's focus on the theme of enfranchisement is David Eisenbach's assertion that zaps "accomplished the political feat of forcing politicians to address the issue of homosexuality ..."¹⁰⁷ Activists like Marty Robinson and Jim Owles attended political rallies in order to present politicians (like Mario Procaccino, who ran for Mayor of New York City in 1969) with questions that brought homosexuality into public discourse.¹⁰⁸

Still, others like Dick Leitsch, a long-time member and once-president of the Mattachine Society, favored humanist ideology, asserting that LGBT people should take no

Movement. Similar to Gay Power, defined in text, Black Power referred to self-determination for African-Americans.

¹⁰⁴ David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (New York: Carroll & Graff Publishers, 2006), 128.

¹⁰⁵ Sara Warner, 77.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* xi.

¹⁰⁷ Eisenbach, 130.

¹⁰⁸ The Gay Liberation Front's counter-culture sensibility was very much a product of its time, again pointing to the ways that Vietnam had far-reaching implications. As anti-war demonstrations took place in Washington D.C., and throughout the country, performative protest in the public sphere became an important feature of this time period. Again, there is a striking correlation between the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the activism of militant groups like The Black Panther Party, which advocated for Black Power.

more pride in their sexualities than in their right or left-handedness. Encouraged by victories like the American Psychological Association's 1973 removal of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, the introduction of the "Equality Act" to Congress in 1974, and Harvey Milk's 1977 successful election campaign for San Francisco Supervisor, Leitsch and likeminded gays and lesbians viewed the time as ripe for capitalizing on shared humanity and likeness, and moving toward a social/political enfranchisement that makes "differences invisible, or at least secondary," a viewpoint that has been critiqued for its "essentialising, normalising, emphasis on sameness."¹⁰⁹ In sharp contrast to the liberationist agenda, the assimilationist agenda can be viewed as desiring freedom *to* gain acceptance from and *to* incorporate with dominant modes of thinking, being, and doing.

Organizations like the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, the National Gay Task Force, the Gay Rights National Lobby, and the National Gay Rights Advocates were all formed throughout the 1970s, and the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights transpired on October 14, 1979. Although liberationists also pursued legal aims, assimilationists were much more concerned with equal access to the services, protections, and institutions available to their heterosexual counterparts. A prime example is that, in 1970, Jack Baker and Michael McConnell became the first same-sex couple in the United States to apply for a marriage license; the denial of their application by a license bureau in Minneapolis and the subsequent Supreme Court case made national headlines and, in 1971, *Look* magazine ran their story. Another prominent example is the court cases surrounding the custody battle of Mary Jo Risher's divorce (which transpired over several years in the late 1970s); Risher gained national media attention, and the topic of lesbian parenting was brought into both legal and public discourses. Major popular magazines like *People* ran

¹⁰⁹ Nikki Sullivan, 23.

stories related to the court proceedings, which ultimately resulted in Risher losing custody of her children. Conversations related to child-rearing and children in general became increasingly prevalent in 1977 when Anita Bryant's Save Our Children organization was founded in response to an anti-discrimination ordinance passed in Dade County (Miami, Florida). *Newsweek's* first cover story on homosexuality dealt with the tense relationship between the climate of religious, homophobic fervor and the growing visibility of gays and lesbians.

Frank Kameny's 1971 campaign made him the first 'out' politician to run for Congress.¹¹⁰ Elaine Noble and Kathy Kozachenko—both self-identified lesbians—were elected to public office (Noble to Massachusetts State House, and Kozachenko to Ann Arbor City Council) in 1974. Despite the fact that military service by gays and lesbians was illegal, men and women from the LGBT community were drafted or enlisted for service during Vietnam; among their military-related tasks was the additional task of keeping their sexualities hidden.¹¹¹ Sergeant Leonard Matlovich gained fame (and, in the eyes of some, notoriety) upon returning to America after serving three tours in Vietnam with the Air Force. For his exemplary service, Matlovich received major commendations, including a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart; yet, in 1975, he was discharged from the United States Army because of his homosexual orientation. 1977 marked Harvey Milk's historic election to San Francisco's Board of Supervisors; during his tenure, a gay rights ordinance for the city of San Francisco was passed. Yet, Milk's political advocacy was brief—he and Mayor George

¹¹⁰ José Sarria's 1961 campaign for public office in San Francisco made him the first openly gay person to run for office.

¹¹¹ In terms of homosexuals' service in the military, it should be noted that Frank Kameny was an astronomer with the U.S. Army and worked at the Army Map Service in the nation's capital, but was fired in 1957 on the basis of his sexual orientation. Harvey Milk served in the Navy during the Korean war and was honorably discharged in 1955 for undisclosed reasons, though letters written by Milk at the time suggest his homosexuality may have been a contributing factor.

Mascone were assassinated on November 27, 1978. Undoubtedly, the progress made vis-à-vis gay and lesbian visibility in the public sphere was troubled by the tragic nature of stories like Milk's, Matlovich's, and Risher's. Indeed, throughout the 1970s, severe penalties (including being fired, losing custody of children, and even being killed) were often faced by those who had 'come out of the closet.' The proverbial road to empowerment and enfranchisement, even just in terms of being openly homosexual, was—and remains—fraught with serious complications.

By the 1970s, there was no longer (if there ever had been at all) a universal or exemplary experience of 'living queer.' Altman has observed that "As the [LGBT] movement has grown, it has also inevitably split over a number of issues and tactics. ... It would be naïve to expect otherwise; the diversity of the movement is testimony to the wide range of people it encompasses ..."¹¹² Caught between a liberationist 'separate but equal' mentality, and an assimilationist desire to participate in heteronormative practices and institutions like marriage and family, for instance, many homosexuals found the line between liberation and assimilation more challenging to walk than one might initially expect. The interplay between the two impulses is also noticeable in the sense that at least one form of empowerment and enfranchisement was particularly important to, and pursued by, assimilationists and liberationists alike throughout the 1970s: the freedom to openly identify as homosexual and to engage in productive homocentric friendships and partnerships without consequence.

¹¹² Altman, 114.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has notably declared the “closet” as the “defining structure for gay oppression in this country,”¹¹³ and both assimilationists and liberationists desired freedom from the proverbial closet, lauding the ritual act of coming out—albeit by different means, and in varying degrees. On the one hand, liberationists took to the streets shouting “We’re Here! We’re Queer! Get used to it!” In contrast, many assimilationists addressed their sexuality in the private sphere, among close groups of family, friends, and trusted coworkers. Regardless of the means through which coming out and openness was pursued, both assimilationists and liberationists found empowerment in assuming and articulating a nameable, identifiable sexuality. Sedgwick’s “Epistemology of the Closet” convincingly argues that “to come out does not end anyone’s relation to the closet;”¹¹⁴ and while this seems apt, equally persuasive is David Shneer and Caryn Aviv’s assertion that there is a power structure inherent in naming and being named. With that, LGBT people claiming their dissident sexualities—in effect, naming themselves as homosexuals—empowers and creates possibilities “for living full and meaningful lives,”¹¹⁵ which was a relatively new, and certainly an inspiring, prospect in the 1970s.

Following The Vietnam War, which ended in 1975, the United States entered “the longest and worst recession since the Eisenhower years.”¹¹⁶ As Thomas Borstelmann notes,

Faced with economic hardship, declining faith in government,¹¹⁷ and a movement to promote freer markets as the best path forward, many Americans turned increasingly in the 1970s toward the private sphere of consumerism. Advertising expenditures grew by 50 percent as an encouragement in a down

¹¹³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Abelow, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 48.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹⁵ David Shneer and Caryn Aviv, eds., *American Queer Now and Then* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 2- 4.

¹¹⁶ Robert Hargreaves, *Superpower: A Portrait of America in the 1970’s* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 111.

¹¹⁷ American faith in the government was significantly hindered by the Watergate scandal, which led to President Nixon’s resignation from the office of the presidency in 1974.

economy to keep buying—tickets for the new blockbuster-style movies, for example.¹¹⁸

The American theatre, possessing the artistic potential to attract crowds, struggled amidst the country's financial straits, made doubly difficult by the fact that New York (the theatrical mecca) was nearly bankrupt. This is not to say, however, that the 1970s were without successful productions. To succeed financially, many producers followed in the footsteps of the 1968 sensation *Hair* and produced adult musicals, which “were easy to cast with eager unknowns, usually cheap to stage, and of course not terribly hard to costume.”¹¹⁹ The extreme sexual content in adult musicals like *Let My People Come* (1974) and *Oh! Calcutta!* (1976 Broadway Revival¹²⁰) often included LGBT representation and contributed to the creation of a theatrical climate in which other productions with LGBT content could thrive.

On Broadway, the 1975—1976 Season was especially notable because of *A Chorus Line*, which transferred quickly from Joe Papp's Public Theater to the Shubert. *A Chorus Line*, like several musicals before it, features homosexual characters; however, *A Chorus Line* is distinguished in that the characters talk/sing openly about their sexual experiences. In particular, Greg and Paul are three-dimensional characters that depart from the “faggot characters seen for more than half a century in burlesque and vaudeville skits.”¹²¹ The decade closed with the importation of Martin Sherman's *Bent* (a play that powerfully explores the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany), which played the New Apollo Theatre during the 1979-1980 Broadway Season and received a Tony nomination for Best Play.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: The New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 144.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth L. Wollman, *Hard Times: The Adult Musical in 1970s New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

¹²⁰ The Broadway revival of *Oh! Calcutta!* ran for 5,959 performances (www.ibdb.com).

¹²¹ Curtin, 252.

The Off-Broadway circuit mounted 1, 027 productions from the 1969—1970 Broadway Season to the 1979—1980 Broadway Season.¹²² A prominent musical featuring LGBT characters and themes included Al Carmines’s *The Faggot* at the Truck and Warehouse Theatre, for which Carmines received two 1974 Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Music and Outstanding Lyrics. The 1975 musical *Boy Meets Boy* was also important because, with it, Bill Solly and Donald Ward created the first major musical by and for homosexuals. In terms of this study’s focus on enfranchisement, the homocentric production circumstances are certainly of interest; however, the play’s action is set in the 1930s. Of the plays depicting LGBT experience produced Off-Broadway, Lanford Wilson’s *Fifth of July* was a standout. Under Marshall W. Mason’s direction, the play was one of the premiere productions of the 1977—1978 Season. Exploring identity in the aftermath of loss and grief, the play effectively captured the spirit of the times through the dramatis personae—particularly the protagonist, a gay, paraplegic, Vietnam veteran.

The vibrant theatrical culture of Off-Off-Broadway during the 1970s produced the work of now-renowned American playwrights. Of particular note is The Other Side of Silence (TOSOS), the first professional gay theatre company, co-founded by Doric Wilson, Billy Blackwell, and Peter dell Valle. Expanding on the foundation laid by companies like Charles Ludlam’s The Ridiculous Theatre,¹²³ TOSOS viewed the theatre as a platform for

¹²² The figure of 1, 027 productions includes the following: plays, musicals, revues, revivals, specialties, foreign language productions, and foreign plays in English. The figure excludes return engagements and holdovers from the previous season. Statistics taken from Otis L. Guernsey, Jr. *Curtain Times: The New York Theatre, 1965-1987* (New York: Applause Books, 2000), pages 150- 428.

¹²³ The Ridiculous Theatre was a gay theatrical enterprise; moreover, it was the first “openly gay aesthetic” (see John M. Clum’s *Staging Gay Lives*, vii). Through focusing exclusively on writing and producing plays that depict gay and lesbian characters and themes, The Ridiculous Theatre contributed to “the growth of an influential movement...one which grew exponentially in strength and resonance with each passing decade” (see Ben Hodges *Forbidden Acts*, 11).

portraying gay culture. TOSOS was operational from 1974—1979,¹²⁴ during which time several of Doric Wilson’s plays were produced. Off-Off-Broadway theatre was especially important during the 1970s because it was there that America’s first Festival of Gay Plays was produced in 1979.

Although gay male playwrights and plays depicting male experience dominated the decade’s “gay theatre,” strong women playwrights writing on LGBT topics began to resurface; many founded feminist and/or lesbian theatre groups to have their work produced. While the separatist nature of most feminist theatre enterprises reflected the 1970’s social milieu (namely, the influence of second wave feminism), some playwrights desired a wider platform and were therefore attracted to the mainstream venues and production circumstances. Jane Chambers was one such playwright; she co-founded Women’s Interart Theatre, located in midtown Manhattan. Chambers’ work (*Late Snow*, for example) also appeared at Playwrights Horizons, an established, Off-Broadway theatre. Jane Chambers was a pioneer in reintegrating female playwrights into mainstream, professional American theatre, from which they had been largely absent since Lillian Hellman’s career waned post-World War Two. *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, written in 1976 and produced early in 1980, remains a staple in the LGBT repertoire for its depiction of complex, openly lesbian, and (mostly) feminist characters. As a critic for *WomaNews* wrote: “What a relief to see lesbians portrayed as serious and silly, strong and weak, superficial and sensitive, grasping and generous.”¹²⁵ The play garnered the attention of mainstream audiences and received positive critical reception; as a critic for *Other Stages* declared, “Chambers is good, no doubt about it,

¹²⁴ TOSOS II was founded in 2002 by Doric Wilson, Mark Finley, and Barry Childs. The company is an homage to, and a continuation of, the mission of TOSOS.

¹²⁵ Chambers, introductory pages.

and she's certainly supplying the need ... for a lesbian/feminist voice in the theatre."¹²⁶

Today, Jane Chambers (who died of cancer in 1983) is memorialized through the Association for Theatre in Higher Education's Jane Chambers Playwright Award, and *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* is often considered the most notable lesbian play from the decade.

The play's original publication was in July of 1982, but re-publications came quickly in both January and April of 1984, as well as in October of 1985. In addition to re-publications, the play has been anthologized in *Out Plays: Landmark Gay and Lesbian Plays of the Twentieth Century* and excerpts from the text appear in several scene and monologue anthologies. The play's importance to the Off-Off Broadway culture of the 1970s (and 1980s) has earned it a place within scholarship treating that broader topic, including *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York* (2010), and *A Sourcebook on Feminist Theatre and Performance: On and Beyond the Stage* (1996). Finally, the play has also received some critical attention in various publications, including Jill Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988, re-published in 2012), Sue-Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre* (1988), Janet Brown's *Taking Center Stage: Feminism in Contemporary US Drama* (1991), and Dolan's *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance* (1994). A 1988 Master's thesis by Julia Gay Anderson of the University of Kansas explores lesbian representation in Chambers' repertoire and dedicates one chapter to *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*. Anderson's chapter appears to be the most in-depth study of the play, prior to my analysis. In addition to being the first in-depth study dedicated solely to the play in nearly three decades, my analysis will be the most thorough. Anderson's chapter fits within a thesis focused on the relationship between Chambers' plays and lesbian stereotypes, as well as a more general exploration of whether Chambers' depictions of lesbians evolved throughout

¹²⁶ Ibid.

her career. To that end, Anderson engages *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* only to the extent that it relates to those two research objectives. While I share Anderson's interest in representation, my analysis also considers the play's relationship to politics, feminism, the closet, and lesbian futurity. My analysis of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* engages the critical analyses offered by others, while also contributing a more comprehensive study of the play. Due to the play's positive reception and the playwright's legacy in the American theatre, the comparative scant attention given to her best-known play is surprising. This in mind, the intention is that this chapter makes an important contribution to the body of work dealing with *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*.

***Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* by Jane Chambers**

The premiere production played the Shandol Theatre in New York City early in 1980, opening on February 13th, remaining in production (with brief hiatuses) for the next three years. The initial run at the Shandol was brief, lasting only twelve performances, but positive reception earned the play a slot in the First American Gay Arts Festival, held in June of that same year. As part of the festival, Chambers' drama was contracted for a two-month engagement at the West Side Mainstage. Due to popular demand, that production was extended for an additional four weeks. Following its run at the West Side Mainstage, a production under the direction of Nyla Lyon opened at the Actors Playhouse, where it ran from December 22, 1980, to March 1, 1981.¹²⁷ With three New York productions in quick succession receiving increasing runtimes in increasingly prestigious venues, the words printed in a *New York Post* review seem apt: "the play [was] so appealing that everyone will

¹²⁷ Production history information comes from The JH Press publication of the play. (Jane Chambers, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* [New York: The JH Press, 1982], 5 and 6.)

probably still be on the beach come winter.”¹²⁸ And, in effect, they were. By 1981, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* had reached the West Coast. In California, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* played Los Angeles’s Fountain Theatre (which seats ninety-nine) to sold out crowds for two and a half years. The production won many prestigious accolades, and a 1983 revival production opened in Los Angeles at the much larger Theatre on the Square, under Marshall W. Mason’s direction. The rapid sequence of increasingly prestigious production indicates the play’s appeal to a sizeable audience.

The action of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* transpires on beach-front property at Bluefish Cove, which Lillian (Lil) Zalinski has rented from lesbian entrepreneur Margery Eaton. The cove is “an isolated beach area near a city,”¹²⁹ a fictional location that 1970s New York theatre goers might have found reminiscent of an actual site called Cherry Grove. Located off the coast of Long Island, roughly sixty miles from Manhattan, Cherry Grove is “a summer community of predominantly gay men,”¹³⁰ that—beginning in the 1930s—saw a burgeoning lesbian presence. In her essay “Just One of the Boys: Lesbians in Cherry Grove, 1960—1988,” Esther Newton discusses three generations of lesbians, noting that most lesbian vacationers from the 1970’s generation were working class (“They weren’t Broadway celebrities and they weren’t wealthy”¹³¹), though some older, affluent lesbians from the previous generation continued to vacation during that same time. Chambers’ characters, whose ages bridge the two generations,¹³² fit better within the older generation’s socioeconomic bracket.

¹²⁸ Chambers, introductory pages.

¹²⁹ Chambers, 7.

¹³⁰ Esther Newton, “Just One of the Boys: Lesbians in Cherry Grove, 1960- 1988,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Abelove, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 528.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 529.

¹³² Although Chambers does not disclose the characters’ ages, we can determine that, excepting Donna, they are in middle age by a number of factors revealed in the text: Lil has had about a dozen long-term relationships;

Lil, the protagonist, is an assertive, seductive, commitment-shy lesbian, beloved of her friends, and dying of cancer; indeed, it is her last summer at Bluefish Cove. Although Lil's occupation is not revealed, dialogue and the play-world's given circumstance indicate that she is middle-class:

Eva: How big is [your dining room in your apartment]?

Lil: ... It's very tiny. Actually, it's not a dining room, it's an alcove. ... [it] is a very small apartment.

Eva: But I have so much gorgeous furniture. Do I have to leave it all for George? ... We can get a bigger apartment.

Lil: ... Honey, I can afford *this* apartment.¹³³

While by no means wealthy, Lil affords an apartment in the city and is able to take extended vacations during the summer months, which allows audiences to infer that she is reasonably comfortable. Even more socio-economic privilege is afforded to Eva, whose material wealth is made obvious by the dialogue (“I have so much gorgeous furniture”), as well as Chambers’ description in the stage directions: “[Eva] is dressed in proper resort clothing—everything about her says upper middle class.”¹³⁴

Bluefish Cove is inhabited almost exclusively by lesbians, almost all of whom are connected to Lil through past romances, friendships, or through their lovers. The exception is Eva, who arrives at the cove by coincidence after leaving her husband, though she becomes connected to Lil and engages in a same-sex relationship almost immediately. A profile of the other six characters illustrate that they, like Lil, are relatively privileged—most having higher socio-economic statuses on par with that of Eva. Annie Joseph is a *famous* sculptor and has been Lil's best friend since *college*; Annie's partner of nine years is Rae. Kitty Cochrane is

Annie went to college with Lil, so is roughly the same age; Eva was married for twelve years; Rae has college-age children; Kitty has completed an M.D., worked as a doctor, and is now transitioning into a profession as a feminist writer; and Sue's relationship with Donna is intergenerational.

¹³³ Chambers, 72-73.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

Lil's ex-lover and is a *reputable doctor* and a feminist author of rising notability; her partner is Rita.¹³⁵ Sue is a well-to-do woman in an intergenerational relationship with Donna (a femme if there ever was one); Donna also once had an affair with Lil. The eight women have come to spend their fourth summer together at Bluefish Cove, which indicates on-going financial stability.

Dramatic action is incited when Lil invites Eva, who she assumes is a lesbian, to the friends' party to inaugurate the summer season; when it becomes clear that Eva is heterosexual (or at least has had no lesbian experiences), it is too late to revoke the invitation:

Lil: (*Trying to ease out gracefully.*) Eva, you might feel out of place.
Eva: (*Misunderstanding.*) Because I'm single? Well, you are, too. ... somebody might have a single houseguest or a bachelor brother, you never know, we might get lucky. ... I promise not to cut in on your territory
Lil: Somehow I'm not worried about that. It's just a bunch of beach bums, just the residents of the Cove. It's no big thing.
Eva: It is to me.¹³⁶

Although the majority of the lesbians in the group openly identify as homosexual, Kitty does not. Convinced that her professional reputation will be ruined should the public learn of her lesbianism, Kitty keeps her sexuality hidden from public knowledge. Distressed by the prospect of a straight woman attending the party, Kitty tries desperately to protect her secret:

Kitty: Well, I can't see any other way of doing this: we'll all just have to pretend we're straight.
(*Rae shakes her head helplessly. Annie, who has poured a drink for Lil, takes both glasses and heads for the door, disgusted.*)
Annie: I'm just about to give up on you, Kitty.
Kitty: I can say Rita's my cousin.
...
Rita: But Kitty, we'd have to lie all the time. I mean, if the woman is living in Holly House, she's going to see us everywhere, every day, on the beach, at the picnic tables, in the glen, on the path ... I don't know if we could carry it off, Kitty.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ I have added italics to the description for emphasis.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14- 15.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20- 21.

Without support from the others, Kitty reluctantly forfeits her scheme.

Not long after Eva arrives, she discovers through a series of uncomfortable quid-pro-quo conversations that Lil and her friends are lesbians. Eva then embarrasses herself by upsetting Sue and Donna after misidentifying them as mother and daughter, instead of lovers. In spite of the evening's foibles, a bond develops between Eva and Lil. And so, later that evening, Eva returns to Lil's cabin and confesses her curiosity about same-sex relationships:

Eva: How did you know you were?

Lil: (*Challenging her.*) What?

Eva: (*Forcing herself to say it.*) Gay. ... Kitty Cochrane's book says you can be bisexual. That it's the most natural way to be. ... (*Shyly.*) I thought about you ever since I saw you on the beach today—at the part tonight, I could feel you watching me. I thought I could. (*Lil shrugs; admitting it.*) I sensed something was happening between us, I mean, I've never felt this kind of thing with a woman ... ¹³⁸

Lil hesitates to become involved with Eva, whose sexual awakening is just beginning, but then again, Lil is a free spirit. She has “never, repeat *never*, gone shopping with anybody for matching sheets and drapes at Bloomingdale's,”¹³⁹ so remains open to possibility. Act One ends with the potential for a relationship to blossom between Eva and Lil.

By the top of Act Two, half the summer has passed, most of which time Lil has spent in bed with Eva, making love and making plans for moving Eva into Lil's city apartment come fall. As Lil's friends have, throughout the last decade, settled down in domestic partnerships, she has had “a hundred women.”¹⁴⁰ Yet, she now talks of traveling to Amsterdam, where gays and lesbians can get married, “just like ordinary folks.”¹⁴¹ What Lil does not talk about is her cancer. Excited by the prospect of spending a lifetime with Lil, Eva

¹³⁸ Ibid. 60- 63.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 102.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 74.

contemplates coming out to her mother. It is in this scene that the earlier trepidation about coming out expressed by Kitty manifests in Lil.

Lil: Does she vote the liberal ticket? Did she march for civil rights? Did she protest the war in Viet Nam? Did she boycott the grapes¹⁴² and support the draft evaders?

Eva: No.

Lil: Don't tell her then. It's ten to one she'll disown you as a pervert. ... I keep reading stories in the gay press about how eighteen-year-olds announce it to their families over Christmas dinner and everybody hugs each other and it's all hunky-dory. Well, maybe that happens to eighteen-year-olds, but it's never happened to anybody I know.¹⁴³

Eva, although not an eighteen-year-old, is experiencing a 'coming of age,' and so embodies a youthful optimism about sharing her love with the rest of the world: "We can't live in a vacuum forever."¹⁴⁴

Midway through the play, Lil's illness worsens significantly. A blackout suggests the passing of time, during which Lil has been hospitalized; when the lights fade up again, she has just returned to the Cove. Fall is approaching, and the group has stayed past their planned vacation to nurse Lil. Eva stays on, too, despite the hurt feelings caused by everyone having kept from her the truth about Lil's cancer. Although Lil passes before the final curtain, she confesses during the play's climactic scene, "I'm in love—for the first time in my life, I feel totally alive."¹⁴⁵ And despite the fact that she has, throughout her life, resisted monogamy

¹⁴² "Boycott the grapes" refers to a strike waged by Filipinos and Latinos against the "Delano-area wine grape growers protesting years of poor pay and conditions. The Filipinos asked Cesar Chavez, who led a mostly Latino farm workers union, the National Farm Workers Association, to join their strike. ... Cesar's union voted to join the Filipino workers' walkouts on Mexican Independence Day, September 16, 1965." The strike and boycott lasted from 1965 to 1970. (See "The 1965-1970 Delano Grape Strike and Boycott," *United Farm Workers*, last modified 2006,

http://www.ufw.org/_board.php?mode=view&b_code=cc_his_research&b_no=10482.)

¹⁴³ Chambers, 75-76.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

and lifelong partnership, Lil says to Eva, “How can I say goodbye to you?”¹⁴⁶ and allows Eva to remain by her bedside.

The characters in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* introduced complex lesbian representation to mainstream theatre, just as actual LGBT citizens became increasingly more visible and vocal in mainstream society. Chambers’ characters move beyond earlier depictions of lesbianism in that their narratives (with the possible exception of Eva’s) are not limited to sexual awakenings (*The Captive*, 1926), punishment for ‘degeneracy’ (*The Children’s Hour*, 1934), unrequited love (*Cry Havoc*, 1942), sadism and grimness (*The Killing of Sister George*, 1964); instead, the lesbians vacationing at Bluefish Cove are openly lesbian and are free to lead ordinary, happy, productive, fulfilling lives. Such representations had not previously been seen, and are part of what makes *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* a phenomenon. The play is also important because Chambers’ characters are three-dimensional, social and—though to a lesser degree—political beings. Like their real-life counterparts, Chambers’ characters negotiate their identities and relationships (romantic or otherwise) in relation to tenuous liberationist and assimilationist impulses, as well as in relation to the closet and the complicated process of pursuing the enfranchisement associated with being openly homosexual and cultivating productive homocentric friendships and relationships.

Liberationist Impulses

Gay and lesbian communities were not a new development in the late-1960s/1970s, but their presence was much more visible and active than in previous decades—and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 103.

centuries, even—when they first emerged.¹⁴⁷ Despite the fact that major events like Stonewall, the election of gay officials, and the removal of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual transpired during the time period between the burgeoning of an American gay subculture and the writing and performing of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, the play captures the persisting inequalities that affected the lives of gays and lesbians inside and outside of Chambers' play-world. With that, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* troubles the notion of progress, and the need for a lesbian community (or, to borrow again, from Koren, a “penisless reality”) emerges as an important theme in the drama.

Just as a significant number of gay and lesbian organizations were formed in the years directly following Stonewall, and just as it has been projected that thousands of liberationist lesbians lived in women-only communes during the 1970s, Act One makes expressly clear that Bluefish Cove is a treasured community for *lesbian* women; as Lil confesses to Eva, “... I thought you were one of us. ... It was a logical assumption. Marge Eaton has never, in recorded history, rented a cabin in Bluefish Cove to a heterosexual.”¹⁴⁸ When, at the end of the first scene, Lil realizes that Eva is heterosexual, she immediately tries to deter her from attending the party. The scene's subtext communicates that a straight woman's presence would somehow alter or jeopardize the special bond shared between the lesbians. Later in the act, Lil's dialogue expresses in words the bond and its cultural/historical significance:

Lil: Bluefish Cove has been a gay women's haven for thirty years or more. These cabins were built by two elderly 'maiden ladies' –that's what the locals call them. One of them's still alive in a nursing home, up island. Couple of

¹⁴⁷ Excellent sources that document the emergence of gay subcultures include George Chauncey's *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), and James F. Wilson's *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010).

¹⁴⁸ Chambers, 48.

years ago, a bunch of us drove up to see her ... brought her a bouquet of lavender.¹⁴⁹

Lil's dialogue suggests the need for spaces appropriated by and for LGBT people—a need that is as valuable to the characters' lives as it was in those of earlier generations. The passage above also emphasizes the importance of community through its reference to lavender. When LGBT subcultures were first formed, a series of covert semiotics were adopted in order that gays and lesbians might reveal themselves to one another without having to self-disclose their sexualities (i.e. come out of the closet) and risk legal repercussions and violence. Lavender, violets, and a single red carnation were flowers commonly used to indicate homosexuality. The gesture of offering the elderly maiden a bouquet of lavender suggests the appreciation had by Lil and the others for LGBT culture and members of the earliest LGBT communities. To Lil's mind, Eva's ignorance of this history—compounded by her lack of real-world experiences that would elicit her understanding of a need for preserving history, semiotics, and sustaining a sense of community—renders her unfit for participation in the community: “you won't be comfortable here, Eva. You're out of place.”¹⁵⁰ For Lil and the others, “Bluefish Cove is more than just a lesbian beach colony ... it's family”¹⁵¹ and it must be protected.

In *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, Lillian Faderman writes:

By the early 1970s there were active lesbian-feminist groups in most states, scores of newspapers and journals that were predominantly or exclusively lesbian-feminist, and numerous bookstores that sold only women's culture books. ... [Lesbian-feminists/Lesbian separatists] dreamt grandiosely about

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

multiplying their institutions all over the country so that their values would eventually predominate.¹⁵²

The values esteemed by these women were rooted in female autonomy; “Their vision was of a totally self-sufficient community where lesbian-feminists would be able to take care of their own.”¹⁵³ Despite the fact that the action of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* transpires at a vacation destination, rather than a commune or co-op to where the characters have permanently retreated, the given circumstances of the play reflect—at least to a degree—the liberationist/separatist spirit of the times. Indeed, temporary and/or seasonal events like Olivia cruises, vacations to destinations like Cherry Grove, and the National Women’s Music Festival were all a part of the thriving 1970s lesbian culture.

Although the play captures a liberationist/separatist sentiment by placing the action in an exclusively lesbian beach community, the characters in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* do acknowledge the emergence of an open, proud, decidedly-homosexual culture beyond the cove. To varying degrees—and with varying consistencies—the lesbians in Chambers’ play-world have come out of the closet and into that lesbian community. Evidence of liberationist lesbian identity is manifest throughout the play, most notably through the characters’ recurring (self)identification as “dykes.” In a 1974 essay published in *The Tide: A Feminist Lesbian Publication, Written By and For the Rising Tide of Women Today*, Jeanne Cordova discusses the change in usage of the word “dyke” from the pre-Stonewall era to the post-Stonewall era.

In pre-liberation lesbian subculture, the terms BUTCH and DYKE were both used to define women who adopted masculine roles. ... The contemporary

¹⁵² Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 219.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 226.

redefinition of a DYKE as ‘a strong, independent, aggressive, self-defined woman’ ... is a term proudly used by lesbian and radical feminists today.¹⁵⁴

Locating the play’s language within its own time illuminates specific connotations; Chambers’ characters referring to themselves and one other as dykes does not relate to their gender performances (e.g. their ‘butchness’), as the word often connotes in contemporary vernacular.¹⁵⁵ Rather, dyke implies the woman-identified-woman and self-sufficiency that Levy and Faderman have attributed to the lesbian-feminist culture of the 1970s.

The characters in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* do not mask behind Victorian-era romantic friendships, regardless of the fact that Kitty, on occasion, might wish they did. Neither do the characters let their sexual identities and relationships go unnamed (as many did in pre-Stonewall decades). The women, almost without exception, are dykes. The two pseudo- exceptions, discussed at length below, are Donna and Eva; however, an important caveat is that both women are nonetheless able to perform ‘dyke’ identity to an acceptable degree. In the words of Annie, “Walks like a duck, talks like a duck, hangs out with ducks, must be a duck.”¹⁵⁶ If “duck” is taken as a metaphor (or aurally-similar term) for “dyke,” Chambers leads audience to believe that all eight characters are, indeed, dykes. The pride that Cordova suggests was associated with dyke identification during the 1970s illustrates a liberationist sentiment within the group; audiences see in them the same “flagrant flaunting” that Sara Warner sees in the liberationist groups and gay (in the fullest sense of the word) performative acts that burgeoned post-Stonewall.

Eva and Donna’s sexualities are more ambiguous—perhaps even more fluid—than are those of the others.

¹⁵⁴ Jeanne Cordova, “What’s In a Name,” *The Tide: A Feminist Lesbian Publication, Written By and For the Rising Tide of Women Today*, June 1974, 21- 23.

¹⁵⁵ Butch/femme arrangements will be discussed later in the chapter.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

Donna: I don't have to stand here and be insulted by a bunch of dykes.
Annie: Oh, and what are you, sweetheart? Chopped liver?
Donna: I'm bisexual. Or I could be if I wanted to.¹⁵⁷

This exchange illustrates Donna's sexual freedom. Unlike most of the other characters, Donna liberates herself, at least philosophically, to the potential of exploring a range of sexual experiences:

Donna: When we took that cruise to St. John's last year, I could have had every man on shipboard, couldn't I, Sue?
Sue: To tell the truth, dear, I thought you did.
Donna: Well, I didn't! But nobody could blame me if I had. I certainly don't get any at home!¹⁵⁸

Rae acted with a similar sense of liberation in previous action when she cheated on her husband with Annie; for this reason, it is not surprising that they encourage Lil to pursue her attraction to Eva, stating that "Maybe she is [straight] and maybe she isn't."¹⁵⁹ But unlike Rae, who ultimately assumed lesbian identification and has now been committed to Annie for nine years, Eva's sexual orientation remains ambiguous throughout the play.

Certainly, Eva openly engages in a same-sex relationship and professes a desire to be open and honest with the people in her life beyond the Cove, but she never explicitly self-identifies as lesbian, or even bisexual.¹⁶⁰ That is, there is no "firm and absolute commitment to gay [sic] identity." Like Lil, Eva experiences her first lesbian romance by chance—by the simple fact that she "fell in love with a woman."¹⁶¹ For Lil, attraction to women then lasted a lifetime; but once Lil has died, it is less clear whether or not a queer future is in the proverbial cards for Eva.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Chambers, 55.

¹⁶⁰ Admittedly, this could be due in part to the fact that Lil is the protagonist, so Eva's personal journey is not of primary focus; notwithstanding, when the play is critically read, the lack of concrete sexual identification merits discussion.

¹⁶¹ Chambers, 60.

According to Dustin Bradley Goltz, possessing sexual ambiguity or fluidity makes characters like Eva and Donna *more* radical and liberationist than the other characters because they destabilize a principle tenet of heteronormativity, that being the gay/straight binary:

Ironically, the first requirement in constructing an identifiable gay representation is a firm and absolute commitment to a fixed gay identity, thus reifying and supporting the coherence of a hetero/homo binary. ... the normative gay must pledge complete loyalty to a fixed and unwavering gayness that poses no threat or potential bleeding into the discrete category of heterosexuality. ... the foundational myth of heterosexuality must be respected, carefully protected, and never called into question.¹⁶²

To be clear, textual evidence does not suggest that Donna and Eva assume sexual orientations that work against the gay/straight binary as an intentional strategy for destabilizing heteronormativity. However, this does not negate the fact that their presence in the drama captures—even if only in a nuanced manner—the 1970’s liberationist spirit that championed sexual freedom and challenged normativity. The free love movement¹⁶³ had flourished from the mid-1960s to the early-1970s, and by the late 1970s, many feminists (not unlike Dr. Kitty Cochrane) were concentrating their efforts on sexual liberation. As Gayle Rubin has noted, “One [strain of feminist thought] has criticized the restrictions on women's sexual behavior ... This tradition of feminist sexual thought has called for a sexual liberation ...”¹⁶⁴ The sexualities assumed by Donna and Eva reflect some of the most subversive, liberationist values of the era—values that, in effect, endorse queerness, taken here to mean “a wide range of impulses and cultural expressions, including space for describing and

¹⁶² Goltz, 94.

¹⁶³ In *The Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 2nd edition, Mari Jo Buhle writes that the concept ‘free love’ “originated in the mid-nineteenth century ... [and] meant an absence of legal ties.”¹⁶³ Evoking a libertarian sensibility, free love emphasized limiting governmental powers and opposed regulations that intruded on private matters, to include sexual practices.

¹⁶⁴ Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, Abelow, et.al., eds. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 28.

expressing bisexual[ity].”¹⁶⁵ Although at least one character, Annie, insists that she has “never had the slightest heterosexual tendency,”¹⁶⁶ the same is not true for several other characters in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*.

In addition to Donna and Eva’s more fluid or ambiguous sexualities, and Rae’s previous marriage to a man, exposition reveals that Rita got pregnant in college and that even Lil had sexual encounters with men when she was younger. Therefore, despite the prevailing dyke identity, sexuality occurs on a continuum in Chambers’ play-world. Adrienne Rich’s foundational essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” first published in 1980, similarly conceptualizes female sexuality (specifically, lesbianism) as occurring on a continuum: “If we consider the possibility that all women ... exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbians or not.”¹⁶⁷ At the time the article was written, Rich saw a lesbian continuum as a subversive strategy that enables women to undermine patriarchy and heterosexism, and “to address the disconnect between heterosexually-identified and lesbian feminists.”¹⁶⁸ While many have found the continuum contentious for its potential ability to make lesbianism synonymous with friendship between women, Rich’s essay clarifies that lesbian existence is reserved only for “women who have made their primary erotic and emotional choices for women.”¹⁶⁹ In *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, both the lesbian continuum and lesbian existence operate within the play-world.¹⁷⁰ As characters like Eva and Donna respectively

¹⁶⁵ Doty, 2.

¹⁶⁶ Chambers, 61.

¹⁶⁷ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Abelove, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 240.

¹⁶⁸ Adrienne Rich, “Reflections on ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality,’” *Journal of Women’s History* 16, no. 1 (2004): 9.

¹⁶⁹ Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality,” 249.

¹⁷⁰ It is important to note that, in the 21st century, Rich acknowledged (in “Reflections on ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality’”) that she now finds many of the ideas “flawed, outdated, and in certain important ways no

move in and out of the continuum, the gay/straight binary is destabilized and the play becomes more queer, more liberationist.

David Eisenbach notes in *Gay Power: An American Revolution* that, within a few weeks of the riot at Stonewall Inn, a pamphlet circulated in New York City, stating “DO YOU THINK HOMOSEXUALS ARE REVOLTING? ... YOU BET YOUR SWEET ASS WE ARE.”¹⁷¹ The revolt was against the status quo, which had heteronormativity as its foundation. To draw from queer theorist Judith Halberstam, the characters in Chambers’ play who maintain sexualities beyond the gay/straight binary are perhaps the most subversive characters in the play in their “refus[al] to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline.”¹⁷² While the all-woman cast and dyke characters may have drawn mass audiences and received praises from critics, the potential bisexuality and sexual ambiguity of two of the play’s characters are particularly interesting for the purposes of this chapter. Indeed, the inclusion of a homocentric, separatist community, and the presence of characters whose sexualities lie away from the far ends of the sexual continuum, locate *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* within the decade’s liberationist spirit. However, the play simultaneously reflects the other component of the era’s major dichotomy—that is, assimilationist impulses.

Assimilationist Impulses

When considering *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*’s assimilationist tendencies, an important starting point is examining the drama’s political undertones. Certainly, through her protagonist and the seven supporting characters, Chambers tells a touching, “human” story about life, death, love, and friendship. However, the play also tells a powerful story that, in

longer representative of [her] thinking.” Yet she maintains that the article continues to present an effective “critique of the presumption that heterosexuality is ‘beyond question.’”

¹⁷¹ Eisenbach, 123.

¹⁷² Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 88.

some ways, hinges on the social/political circumstances shaping the lives of lesbian women. I have previously cited passages from the play, as well as from other primary and secondary sources, that reference the political climate of the 1970s (e.g. the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights and Gay Rights movements, the Latino Farmworkers Strike, and conservative vs. liberal ‘tickets’ in the 1972 re-election of Richard Nixon and the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan). I have also drawn from Dennis Altman to advance an understanding of the decade as one in which the voice and presence of minority peoples within politics became increasingly salient. Indeed, for political liberals, and particularly for feminists and members of the LGBT community, the pursuit of empowerment and enfranchisement increased after Stonewall and throughout the 1970s, often transpiring through political means. As Michael Bronski effectively describes:

The progressive politics of the late 1960s were predicated on the principle that a person had complete autonomy and control over her or his body. This included freedom from violence, control of reproduction, the ability to engage in any consensual sexual behavior, and the freedom to take drugs. The massive number of men killed in Vietnam or returning wounded or mutilated was a constant reminder ... of the fragility of the body as well as making your own choices about it.¹⁷³

Certainly the characters vacationing at Bluefish Cove (like Americans living outside of theatre doors) have a heightened awareness of the body’s fragility, albeit primarily because of Lil’s cancer rather than the Vietnam War.

In relation to Bronski’s comments about the politics of the era, Lil can be viewed as possessing a desire for autonomy over her body: “This is my body, my life. I’ll decide what’s going to happen to me.”¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, Lil is only adamant about her right to refuse further cancer treatment; in seemingly sharp contrast to the spirit of the times, neither she nor the

¹⁷³ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 207.

¹⁷⁴ Chambers, 93.

other characters exhibit the fervent liberationist political ideals demonstrated by many others in the LGBT community. Robert McRuer has noted that the Gay Liberation Front aimed “to generate social change based on new and different ways of understanding the world.”¹⁷⁵

Contrastingly, the lesbians at Bluefish Cove seem content with their non-sanctioned “marriages.” The characters fantasize about destination weddings in progressive European countries like Amsterdam, but they never once mention political action related to fighting for marriage equality in the United States—in fact, they do not even seem to envision that such equality is plausible, at least within their lifetimes.

The lesbians at Bluefish Cove acknowledge the repercussions that homosexuality can have on one’s career (recall the anxieties expressed by Kitty early in Act One). Chambers’ lesbians are also aware of the dangers that can result from engaging in public displays of affection: “You might have gotten away with doing that with George but if you and I tried it, there’d be a Sheriff waiting ...”¹⁷⁶ Despite being cognizant of their disenfranchised status, the lesbians at Bluefish Cove do not—at least within the play—write to their representatives, participate in protests, demonstrations, or zaps. Unlike ardent liberationists, the women in the play, although politically aware, are not politically active.

Perhaps the characters’ failure to engage in direct political action is an intentional choice on the playwright’s part; after all, does a group of discontented lesbians easily make for an evening of *entertainment*? Emily L. Sisley’s “Notes on Lesbian Theatre” emphasizes that *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* attracted not only lesbian and gay audiences, but patrons from a much wider, mainstream demographic of “straight people ranging from teens to senior

¹⁷⁵ McRuer, 33.

¹⁷⁶ Chambers, 73.

citizenry.”¹⁷⁷ Further, Chambers has remarked: “[Audiences] seem most concerned that it’s two hours of good entertainment.”¹⁷⁸ This mentality was pressed upon Chambers by her agent who said, with regard to her earlier play *Late Snow*, “Fags are funny, dykes are gloomy.”¹⁷⁹ It is not beyond the realm of possibility, then, that politically-charged lesbians simply do not ‘fit’ within the *pièce bien faite* formula that Chambers employed in attempt to challenge the “gloomy dyke” assumption.

Theatre historian Felicia Hardison Londré has illuminated a relationship between *pièce bien faite* dramaturgy (epitomized by the genre’s master, Eugene Scribe) and middle-class sensibility: “[Scribe’s plays drew] middle-class audiences in droves to the theatre ... [where his plays would] seize and hold [their] attention.”¹⁸⁰ It is plausible that mainstream audiences were receptive of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* not only because of the play’s humanistic tendencies (depicting lesbians as ‘regular’ people who have relationships, friendships, jobs, and leisure time just like straight people), but also because the characters within the play-world occupy middle-class socio-economic statuses similar to their own. Perhaps Chambers’ lesbian characters lack the political motivation characteristic of many liberationists because they are afforded privilege on other fronts—specifically, class and (implied in the play and reinforced by production circumstances) race.

Lisa Henderson’s *Love and Money: Queers, Class, and Cultural Production* explores the entanglement between queerness and social class. Convinced that queerness and class are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually affecting and reproducing, she cautions against

¹⁷⁷ Emily L. Sisley, “Notes on Lesbian Theatre,” *A Sourcebook on Feminist Theatre and Performance: On and Beyond the Stage*, ed. Carol Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), 57.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ William Hoffman, *Gay Plays: The First Collection* (New York: Avon Books, 1979), x.

¹⁸⁰ Felicia Hardison Londré, *The History of World Theatre From the English Restoration to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 258.

failure to recognize the discourses' interplay, arguing that "at the nexus of queer and class, is the displacement of the trauma of one category onto the trauma of the other."¹⁸¹ She further maintains that—in cultural productions—"modes of acquisition" play a major role in "the class markers of queer worth."¹⁸² Seen in this light, the lesbians in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, while 'traumatized' on one level, are validated on another. Similar to Goltz's assertion that some LGBT characters are still 'normalized,' Henderson argues that some LGBT characters are already 'worthy.' Because all of the characters vacationing at Bluefish Cove have a degree of socio-economic and racial privilege, their relatively "advantaged" (or less dis-advantaged positions) may contribute to their lack of overt political action.

Although Chambers gives no explicit description of her characters' races or ethnicities, one might assume that they share their creator's race, which is white. Extant photos from two of the earliest productions suggest that, without exception, white women routinely played the most prominent roles: Lil, Eva, Annie, and Kitty. However, production photos also depict that the 1980 Actor's Playhouse Production featured Lauren Craig, an African-American actress, in the role of Rae, and that the 1983 production at San Francisco's Theatre on the Square featured Joan Pringle, an actress who appears to be either African-American or Latino, in the role of Rita.

¹⁸¹ Lisa Henderson, *Love and Money: Queers, Class, and Cultural Production* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 25.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 34.



Figure 1
 (Clockwise from top) Joan Pringle as Rae, Susan Sullivan as Lil, Katherine Cortez as Eva, and Camilla Carr as Kitty in the 1984 production at Theatre on the Square.



Figure 2
 (From left to right) Lauren Craig as Rae and Hollie Barron as Annie in the 1980 production at the Actors Playhouse.

These circumstances indicate that the racial minorities vacationing at Bluefish Cove ‘escape’ the double-oppression via their attachment to successful white women (Rita is attached to Kitty, a doctor and author; and Rae is attached Annie, the famous sculptor). The lesbians in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, then, can be viewed as disinterested in the “playful methods of social activism and mirthful modes of political performance”¹⁸³ enacted by many liberationists because their disempowerment is not as significant as that faced by lesbians who are also disenfranchised because of their races and/or their socioeconomic statuses. Such privilege would seem to increase the likelihood of assimilationist identifications, even among still-oppressed sexual minorities.

An assimilationist spirit is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that all eight characters are in committed and monogamous relationships throughout the majority of the play. Annie and Rae are together the entire drama, as are Kitty and Rita. Lil and Eva’s romance begins at

¹⁸³ Sara Warner, xi.

the end of Act One and they are monogamous throughout Act Two. Sue and Donna are together until the latter half of Act Two. Despite the fact that flirtatiousness is palpable in the drama, and despite the fact that exposition reveals that several characters have histories of infidelity, they all remain loyal to their partners during the staged action, which lasts one full summer. More striking is that several of the characters refer to themselves as married, or as having previously been married to other women.

Eva: Were you ever married?

Lil: Oh, sure. Lots of times.

Eva: I was only married once. For twelve years.

Lil: (*Stunned.*) Twelve years? I had one that made it two years and eight months. Eight long months. Rae and Annie will approve of you. They've been together nine.¹⁸⁴

Lil: [Eva's] nice looking.

Annie: I saw her from the window.

Lil: Ah-ah.

Annie: Not me. I'm a married lady.¹⁸⁵

Although Lil's conception of marriage seems to deviate from the traditional heterosexual understanding that includes longevity, it remains noteworthy that the lesbian women use language coined by heterosexuals—and, arguably more importantly, language at the foundation of heteronormativity—to describe their relationships and experiences.

While one could argue that this appropriation of language, *by lesbians*, is queer and liberationist, the play-world is not one in which 'straight language' is adopted by the LGBT community; instead, the play-world is one in which a feminist, separatist vocabulary is encouraged. Audiences learn early in the play that Dr. Kitty Cochran is writing a new book, *Coming Together: The Search for Connubial Equality*, which espouses her feminist viewpoints, one of which is that "We need to develop our own [woman-centered]

¹⁸⁴ Chambers, 11.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

language.”¹⁸⁶ Kitty is hyper-aware of the power associated with language and so encourages her friends to move beyond the vocabulary established by patriarchy. Never, however, does Kitty urge her friends to avoid *heterosexist* language in favor of homocentric language. To that end, the characters’ use of a word like ‘married’ seems to work as a rhetorical strategy for achieving an assimilatory brand of enfranchisement. In Chapter Four of *Queer Temporalities in Gay Male Representation: Tragedy, Normativity, and Futurity*, Goltz draws from literary theorist Kenneth Burke to discuss ‘symbolic mergers,’ which essentially function as “bridging devices”¹⁸⁷ between the LGBT community and heteronormativity. Goltz argues that symbolic mergers “are actively seeking entrance into narratives of heteronormative temporality, pleading their devotion to these normative scripts in an effort to gain access to normative identification.”¹⁸⁸ In view of what is known about audience reception of the play, it appears likely that the domestic and monogamous coupling and heteronormative language within the play-world acted as mergers, ensuring that *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* appealed to heterosexual audiences, as well as homosexual.

Stephen Seidman, in *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* explores the idea of “good sexual citizen[s],”¹⁸⁹ which he defines as ‘normalized’ homosexuals whose lifestyles “leave heterosexual marriage and family ideals, as well as dominant gender divisions uncontested.”¹⁹⁰ Seidman’s arguments illuminate *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*’s assimilationist tendencies and how they relate to enfranchisement in three important ways: 1) Lil’s conversion from noncommittal coupling to a lifetime commitment to

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 32.

¹⁸⁷ Goltz, 84.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 93.

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Seidman, *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Eva, 2) the butch/femme pairing within the play's couples, and 3) the attachment formed between Annie and Rae's biological children.

A cat never appears on stage, but dialogue throughout the play references alley cats in relation to Lil, making the alley cat a symbol for the protagonist. Exposition early in Act One reveals that Lil was unfaithful to Kitty in the two years that they were together and that, as a result, Kitty began to call Lil an alley cat, likely because it was thought that she cannot help but stray. In Act Two, Lil self-references as an alley cat and perpetuates the metaphor:

Eva: You're upset. You're not feeling well.
Lil: I feel fine. Alley cats recover quickly.¹⁹¹

Read out of context, it appears as though Lil is speaking only of her health, but when the dialogue is placed within the context of the scene, it can become clear that she is also referring to her emotional disposition. Lil's next lines urge Eva to leave her, and assert that she is capable of moving on from her feelings for Eva. Through the symbolic metaphor of the alley cat, Lil is set up as non-conforming to the heteronorm of monogamous partnership. And yet, despite her best efforts to maintain this identity, Lil falls in love with Eva.

By employing the dramaturgical device of peripeteia, Chambers' protagonist evolves into a woman who resents that her cancer will prevent her from spending a lifetime with Eva:

Lil: You could offer [Rae] a lifetime.
Annie: You don't know yet what you could offer [Eva]—it's not the quantity of time, Lil, it's the quality—and you've got lots of quality, my friend.¹⁹²

Lil embraces the 'quality over quantity' mentality proposed by Annie and commits herself to Eva for the time she has left. The fact that Lil confesses to her friends that she is in love for the first time in her life allows audiences to believe that conversations about cohabitating and traveling to Amsterdam for a wedding would come to fulfillment, if only Lil were to live

¹⁹¹ Chambers, 102.

¹⁹² Ibid., 56.

long enough. It can be argued that Lil's declaration of love, itself, reifies the heteronormative paradigm. As Nancy Dean has noted, "[Chambers'] subject, ultimately in [*Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*], is the preciousness of life and loving ..."¹⁹³ Jill Dolan maintained that "*Bluefish Cove* is about romance more than it is about lesbian sexuality, and stories of romance ultimately reinscribe the family,"¹⁹⁴ the nucleic unit at the crux of heteronormativity. Should Lil have lived until the play's final curtain, she would not have been found alone on the rock at the Cove's shoreline, as she was in the play's opening, but with Eva.

The fact that the lesbian protagonist falls in love and desires a lifelong, monogamous, domestic partnership is unremarkable; plenty of plays share a similar plot. However, Lil and Eva's relationship reinforces the play-world's emphasis on domestic partnerships and leaves audiences without an alternative view of lesbianism.¹⁹⁵ As Janet Brown notes in *Taking Center Stage: Feminism in Contemporary U.S. Drama*, "While Lil and a few of the other women are supposed to have led promiscuous lives in the past, the community at present seems quite settled, mostly in relationships that are depicted as loving and secure."¹⁹⁶ Related to Brown's comment is that the play reprimands (even if usually through humor) promiscuity and, particularly infidelity:

Annie: Didn't Kitty follow you to the motel?

Lil: Pounded on the door, made a complete ass of herself. Donna and I jumped out the window, bare-assed, with our clothes under our arms. Good thing we were on the first floor.

¹⁹³ Nancy Dean, "Introducing *The Quintessential Image* By Jane Chambers," *Amazon All Stars: Thirteen Lesbian Plays, with Essays and Interviews*, ed. Rosemary Curb (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2000), 4.

¹⁹⁴ Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Second Edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 109.

¹⁹⁵ It is true that Sue breaks up with Donna, but it is only so that she can find a woman who will love her, rather than her money.

¹⁹⁶ Janet Brown, *Taking Center Stage: Feminism in Contemporary U.S. Drama*, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1991), 134.

Annie: And Kitty never let you back in your apartment?

Lil: Never. Changed the locks and put my things out in the hallways like an Indian matriarch divorcing her husband.¹⁹⁷

Annie: I love a possessive woman.

Rae: Well, you've got one. (*About Eva.*) She's skinny and she's got blue eyes—and if I catch you looking crocksided at her, I'll snatch you baldheaded.¹⁹⁸

In view of passages like the two quoted above, the protagonist's conversion from desiring sexual freedom to longing for the quintessential 'happily ever after' is a critical point when analyzing the play's assimilationist tendencies. Additionally, because the protagonist experiences a tremendous shift, it is important to consider the thematic ramifications. As Brown convincingly suggests in her analysis of the play, the play begins with Lil single "and struggling with feelings that she has done nothing worthwhile with her life."¹⁹⁹ By the play's end, Lil has fallen in love and resents that illness prevents her from living and loving longer. In this sense, the play depicts life-long love and domestic, monogamous partnership (tenets of heteronormativity) as highly desirable, and even the qualifiers that make life worthwhile. In Act Two, Lil confides in Annie, "When I was going to the clinic for chemotherapy, I met this woman whose tumor'd just stopped, disappeared ... for seventeen years, until her kids were grown, she felt fine. It's all in having something to live for, Annie. I have Eva to live for now."²⁰⁰

The characters' gender presentations, as well as the couples' arrangement (or in the case of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, non-arrangement) in butch/femme pairings are also important considerations. As a point of departure, it is valuable to return to Newton's essay

¹⁹⁷ Chambers, 24.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹⁹ Brown, 134.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 79- 80.

about Cherry Grove, which reports that the lesbians who vacationed at Cherry Grove during the 1970s “often came in butch/femme couples.”²⁰¹ Prominent gender and queer theorist Sue-Ellen Case has argued for the subversive potential of the butch-femme couple in her essay “Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic.” According to Case, the butch-femme couple is one in which

the butch is the lesbian woman who proudly displays the possession of the penis, while the femme takes on the compensatory masquerade of womanliness. these women play on the phallic economy rather than to it. Both women alter this masquerading subject’s function by positioning it between women and thus foregrounding the myths of penis and castration in the Freudian economy.²⁰²

In a less theoretical and more practical sense, the butch-femme couple fulfills ‘traditional’ norms by having a masculine and feminine presence in the pairing, but subverts heteronormativity because the norms are articulated by two women, the butch being the one “who represents by her clothing the desire for other women.”²⁰³ According to Case, the butch-femme couple represents “free[dom] from biological determinism, elitist essentialism, and the heterosexist cleavage of sexual difference.”²⁰⁴ In effect, a butch-femme aesthetic (as described by Case) may destabilize the assumed, coerced, and performed sexed and gendered identities that have been critiqued by Foucault, Butler, and others. Chambers’ play, however—and to a greater extent, the earliest productions thereof—do not reflect, to any noteworthy degree, the kind of subversive butch-femme aesthetic theorized by Case. Conversely, traditional gender norms are left uncontested, thus reinforcing the play’s assimilationist sensibilities.

²⁰¹ Chambers, 56.

²⁰² Sue-Ellen Case, “Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic,” *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 300.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 302.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 305.

It is true that the play’s central relationship between Lil and Eva seems to evoke a butch/femme sensibility, at least on paper. Lil is a champion fisherwoman, a champion skier, and a smooth talker, whose pick-up lines have secured her dates with many women. In a most basic sense, Lil is endowed with actions and attitudes that are (stereo)typically assigned to males/considered masculine. Lil is dominant and refers to Eva with feminine pet names like “honey,” “sweetheart,” “darling,” and “angel.” When the two women talk about cohabitating in Lil’s New York apartment, it is clear that Eva might become an obliging, if not submissive, housewife once more: “Well, I can get a job. Some kind of job. Can’t I? Do you want me to work? ... What do you want?”²⁰⁵ In *Lil and Eva*, we see traces of heteronormative gender attitudes, and manifestations—however small—of gendered power relations manifested in a masculine/feminine binary. Nevertheless, the earliest New York and California productions cast conventionally attractive, feminine actresses in both roles:



Figure 3
Jean Smart as Lil in the premiere production at the Shandol Theatre.



Figure 4
(From left to right) Carolyn Cope as Eva, and Jean Smart as Lil in the 1980 Westside Mainstage production.



Figure 5
(From top to bottom) Susan Slavin as Eva, and Carolyn Aaron—who replaced Jean Smart—in the 1980 Actors Playhouse production.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 71.

Although some critics of premiere productions recognized in Chambers a strong, feminist voice in the American theatre, others did not. Indeed, “*Bluefish* received criticism for its lack of radical lesbian characters.”²⁰⁶ Production photos suggest that the lack of a butch presence may very well have been what some audiences found missing when they attended live productions.

Butch-femme gender dynamics might also be read into the relationship between Sue and Donna. Donna is overtly feminine; she is “*a beauty in her 20s*,”²⁰⁷ who wears “*useless sandals and a giant beach hat and the smallest possible bikini*.”²⁰⁸ Dialogue informs audiences that Sue provides for Donna by buying her shoes and designer clothing. In effect, Donna is a *demimondaine*, kept by the older, wealthier woman, Sue:

Sue: She’s not the first pretty young thing I’ve kept. I don’t expect she’ll be the last. . . . I have never known anyone, in fact, who loved me and who loved my bankbook—except with this one. . . . I know exactly where I stand.²⁰⁹

In addition to financially providing for Donna, Sue also acts chivalrously by helping Donna across the rocky shoreline, escorting her from Lil’s cabin back to their own. In Act Two, Sue helps prepare a beach fire while Donna sits and watches. As presented in the text, Sue appears to be a butch, a “‘masculine’ wom[an] who made explicit the existence of lesbianism . . .”²¹⁰ Yet, the accessible production photos indicate that the role was not cast with a butch actress, and neither was the role costumed to embrace a butch aesthetic. Consider the image below; not only is Sue (2nd in on the left) petite and feminine, but the photo seems to suggest that the casting director took some liberty regarding the given circumstance that Sue and Donna’s relationship is intergenerational—and noticeably so,

²⁰⁶ Peterson and Bennett, 73.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²¹⁰ Nikki Sullivan, 27.

given that Eva mistakes Sue for Donna's mother. Research indicates that Dianna Turley Travis was approximately 45 years old when she played Sue; however, a date of birth for Shannon Kriska, who played Donna, could not be located.



Figure 6

The cast of the 1983 production at L.A.'s Theatre on the Square.

From left to right:

Camilla Carr (Kitty), Dianna Turley Travis (Sue),
Lee Garlington (Rae), Shannon Kriska (Donna), Linda Cohen (Rita),
Jean Smart (Lil), Nora Heflin (Annie), and Sandra J. Marshall (Eva).

Although not comprehensive, the photos included herein are representative of the accessible photos from the earliest productions. These images are important because they make clear that, while the script is endowed with a modest butch-femme aesthetic, it was not actualized in the earliest New York and California productions. In terms of the play's assimilationist tendencies, this point is especially significant.

Lesbian/Woman, a 1972 book by Daughters of Bilitis leaders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, offers insights that contextualize the absence of butch-femme couples in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*. The book documents the aims of the organization, one of which was to move “away from the earlier bar culture and its symbolic systems to a more dominant

identification ... [erasing] butch-femme behavior, its dress codes, and lifestyle from the lesbian community.”²¹¹ Some feminists and lesbians living in the 1970s viewed the butch role and butch-femme coupling as an imitation of the “traditional male-female or husband-wife pattern,”²¹² and so to align the lesbian social/political agenda with second wave feminism, the Daughters of Bilitis and mainstream feminist lesbians argued against a butch-femme aesthetic. Though not yet realizing—or at least not embracing—the subversive potential of a butch-femme aesthetic (as had Sue-Ellen Case, and as would scholars like Seidman, Goltz, and Dolan in the years to come), Chambers, the casting directors, and the costumers for the earliest productions of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* created characters and designs that can be read and accepted as appropriate to their historical moment, in which assimilationist tendencies existed alongside liberationist tendencies.

A production rendered with a more liberationist style—achieved through casting, costuming, and performance—is possible. My analysis locates openings in the script that would allow for such a production conceit to be textually justified, particularly in terms of butch representation in casting and performance. In addition, artistic liberties such as casting a racial minority in the role of Lil, or directing scenes so as to emphasize economic disparities between characters (for instance, the scene in which Lil and Eva discuss the apartment in the city) would further diversify a cast of characters that otherwise reads as a monolith (white, conventionally attractive, young). Such a production could significantly alter the play’s potential to subvert heteronormativity, and empower and enfranchise lesbians and female sexual minorities.

²¹¹ Ibid., 296.

²¹² Ibid.

Enfranchisement as Manifest in the Desire to be Openly Homosexual Without Consequence

Although liberationist and assimilationist trajectories often diverged in quite opposite directions, the two impulses were not entirely mutually exclusive. Contrastingly, members of the LGBT community were united in their quest for enfranchisement as manifest in the desire to live open and honestly, without consequence, and to have access to productive homocentric relationships. In *The Queer Renaissance*, Robert McRuer identifies the time period lasting from 1969 to 1979 as “a decade of redefinition by lesbian and gay communities.”²¹³ A major component of this redefinition related to self-disclosure, which had become commonly, and metaphorically, referred to as ‘coming out of the closet.’ McRuer discusses the popularity gained by the slogan “‘Out of the Closets and into the Streets!’” and notes that “newly available gay and lesbian identities were claimed and proclaimed through the act of ‘coming out.’”²¹⁴ *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* is inclusive of coming out narratives, thus reflecting the pursuit of this particular form of enfranchisement.

Although Eva never articulates a nameable lesbian or bisexual orientation, she experiences an intense sexual awakening; her actions throughout the play, as well as her wishes and desires can be viewed as a coming out narrative. Another, more obvious, example of coming out is offered by Rae in exposition about the beginning of her relationship with Annie. Rae was forthright in her divorce, coming out to her husband and admitting that she was leaving him for a woman. Rae also came out to her children:

Eva: Do your kids understand—about you and Annie?

Rae: Oh, (Annie and I) worried ourselves sick about that. We practiced just how we were going to tell the kids. ...²¹⁵

²¹³ McRuer, 32.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 32- 33.

²¹⁵ Chambers, 85.

It is important to note that, although the act of coming out was liberatory for LGBT citizens living in the 1970s, as well as for the characters in Chambers' play, the coming out process is complicated. Notice that Rae says that she and Annie "worried [themselves] sick." Though the empowerment and enfranchisement attained through coming out is desirable, the act itself is encumbered with complications and even consequences. In addition to Rae and Annie's struggles, consider Kitty, who conceptualizes the closet as a threshold that is routinely and intentionally crossed, or not crossed.

The stakes are high in the case of Dr. Kitty Cochrane, whose professional career is flourishing: "This could ruin my career! ... I'll lose my credibility."²¹⁶ Despite professing a strong feminist sensibility, Kitty keeps her lesbianism secret from the public, which she contests "isn't ready. The public is still trying to accept concepts of equal rights and the clitoral orgasm. It would be a catastrophe for me to come out of the closet now."²¹⁷ While one cannot help but find Lil's teasing of Kitty humorous ("Knock, knock, Kitty, can you hear me through the closet door?"²¹⁸), paying close attention to the play's dialogue and given circumstances—reflective of the American culture during the time in which it was written and produced—affords Kitty compassion. By Act Two, Lil encourages Eva to remain closeted: "Tell [your mother] you have a roommate. ... Don't tell her [the truth]. It's ten to one she'll disown you as a pervert. ... Just say you have a roommate and keep your mouth shut. Unless, of course, you get off on verbal flagellation and suicide threats."²¹⁹ It is clear that Lil understands that the closet is a space to be routinely negotiated. Modern theorists have also conceptualized the closet in such a way that empathizes with Kitty's struggle.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 16- 17.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 27.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 74- 75.

Dustin Bradley Goltz argues in *Queer Temporalities in Gay Male Representation: Tragedy, Normativity, and Futurity* that “the line between ‘in the closet’ and ‘out of the closet’ is not ... stable or fixed.”²²⁰ Unlike traditional rites of passage, which are enacted linearly and are usually definitive and transformational,²²¹ Goltz proposes that the coming out ritual is enacted circularly. In a similar vein, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues in *Epistemology of the Closet* that LGBT persons might not ever be fully liberated from the closet: “there are remarkably few of even the most openly gay people who are not ... in the closet with someone personally or economically or institutionally important to them.”²²² When coming out, members of the LGBT community face risks like ostracism, abandonment, mortification, financial ruin, legal repercussions, and even violence; therefore, they are plagued with questions about how, and to whom, they will detach themselves from assumed heterosexuality. At what time, and in which places, can gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer identity be assumed? Because of questions like these, Goltz cautions that “Working within the closet metaphor requires an understanding that the closet is a daily and moment-by-moment negotiation, contingent upon context, social assumptions, and shared social cues.”²²³ While an effective metaphor, the closet is a complex metaphor, and aptly so, as coming out is a complex act. *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* effectively dramatizes these complexities. For instance, in the play’s opening scene, Lil did not tell Eva that the party being thrown would be attended exclusively by lesbians:

I couldn’t. I couldn’t just say, all the women in this cove are lesbians—
because I don’t have the right to make that kind of announcement for them.
They have to make the decision to tell that themselves and **everybody doesn’t**

²²⁰ Goltz, 19.

²²¹ See Victor Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial (New York: Routledge, 2004), 89- 97.

²²² Sedgwick, 46.

²²³ Goltz, 19.

make the same decision at the same time—it's a mess, that's what it is, a mess.²²⁴

Despite the fact that the women vacationing at the Cove have come to terms with their sexualities enough to engage in same-sex relationships, talk openly with one another about their romantic and sexual experiences, and vacation at a lesbian destination, dialogue makes clear that the majority of the women have struggled/continue to struggle with *full* disclosure.

The lesbians in Chambers' play have vacationed at Bluefish Cove for four summers because, there, they are afforded the freedom to fully assume lesbian identity and enjoy homocentric companionship without the negative consequences that they have experienced—or know that they are subject to experience—beyond the Cove, in hegemonic 'straight culture:'

Annie's mother won't allow Rae in the house. Sue's brothers won't allow her to visit her nieces and nephews. Rita was trained to be a teacher, you know, junior high school math. Her father called the school board and reported her. My mother feigned a suicide attempt and then had a nervous breakdown. Her shrink finally convinced her that my sexuality was not her fault and now she has disowned me.²²⁵

Beyond the loss of familial love and support, Chambers' lesbians have also come to terms with the lack of institutional/governmental support. For instance, Rae did not receive "one red cent,"²²⁶ in her divorce because she left her husband and, more specifically, left him for a woman.

Unlike heterosexuality, which Michel Foucault argues has been empowered and enfranchised through "educational establishments, discourses, and discursive practices,"²²⁷ homosexuality is disempowered and disenfranchised. Judith Butler has expanded on

²²⁴ Ibid., 48. (Bold font mine.)

²²⁵ Lil to Eva, Ibid., 75- 76.

²²⁶ Ibid., 84.

²²⁷ Nikki Sullivan, 40.

Foucault's ideas, explicating that the enfranchisement of heterosexuality—enacted to so great an extent as to create a heteronormative monolith and hegemony—“[cultivates] bodies into discrete sexes with ‘natural’ appearances and ‘natural’ heterosexual dispositions.”²²⁸ As a result, we are constructed to assume that others possess ‘normative’ sexual orientations; coming out, then, is an imperative for lesbians and gay men in ways that it is not for straight women and men; coming out is the requisite act to acquire liberation from oppressive assumptions²²⁹ and acquire empowerment and enfranchisement. The lesbians in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, even with their classed and raced privileges, face the most basic—though still profound—inequities surrounding LGBT empowerment and enfranchisement.

Chambers' writing, equally witty and poignant, communicates the characters' very real desires for, and their pursuits of, the form of empowerment and enfranchisement manifest in assuming homosexual identities, coming out, and creating productive homocentric relationships. Consider the scene that transpires upon Lil's return to the cove from the hospital; she is bombarded by her friends, who act like a team of dedicated nurses. Lil asserts, “I'm an adult human being. **I have a few civil rights left**,”²³⁰ offering a sharp rebuttal to her friends' overbearingness. The line serves the dramatic function of giving the character continuity; through it, Lil is revealed as the same spunky, assertive woman introduced in the play's opening scene. However, the line of dialogue is rich with subtext and the poignancy is palpable, as it communicates Lil's personal knowledge of her disenfranchisement, her less than full access to civil rights. It is not difficult to imagine how

²²⁸ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 192.

²²⁹ Bonnie J. Dow's “*Ellen*, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility” offers a strong critique of the coming out ritual. She carefully notes that, although the act of confession allows and “authentic self to emerge” (96)—that is, a self that works against the assumed heterosexuality—the act transpires within a power relation. Specifically, Dow argues that coming out narratives are acted as much for the benefit of the listener as for the LGBT individual herself, positing homosexuality as a personal problem that must be negotiated (i.e. confessed to the dominant [or, in this case, enfranchised] person/group).

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 93. (Bold font mine.)

LGBT theatre-goers, as sexual minorities and second-class citizens (some more oppressed than others due to class, race, social/cultural practices and values, etc.), might have related to this line of dialogue. In this respect, the humanist impulses in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*'s forge an additional bridge between liberationists and assimilationists.

By the premiere production of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* on February 13, 1980, the Equal Rights Amendment had been passed by Congress, but pended the states' ratification (an initiative that failed in 1982, early in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*'s production history); gay rights laws were repealed in more than a handful of states, and antigay laws prevailed throughout most of the country²³¹; marriage equality was illegal in all fifty states; the majority of anti-discrimination laws did not encompass discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; and homophobia had re-emerged in the media and popular discourses due to organizations like Save Our Children and the Moral Majority Coalition (founded in 1979). Stonewall initiated the Gay Rights Movement, but the narrative of progress existed alongside a backlash narrative of continued discrimination, disempowerment, and disenfranchisement. Given these circumstances, LGBT audiences might have empathized with Lil's desire to retain what autonomy and agency she possesses, even in the face of a life-threatening illness.

Last Summer at Bluefish Cove presented before audiences characters who, living in the 1970s, have only just begun to experience social/political empowerment and enfranchisement. The characters realize their own marginalization and use the homocentric (and, as I have argued, separatist/liberationist) community at Bluefish Cove as a coping mechanism. In this way, the play works metadramatically by rewriting the experiences of

²³¹ It was not until the 2003 Supreme Court ruling in the *Lawrence v. Texas* case that antigay laws were formally removed from 'the books' in a number of the US states.

characters like Karen and Martha from Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934), who (having been suspected as lesbians) are convinced that neither productive lives in society, nor positive engagements with the future, are possible:

Karen: Let's pack and get out of here. Let's take the train in the morning.

Martha: The train to where?

Karen: I don't know. Some place; any place.

Martha: A job? Money?

Karen: In a big place we could get something to do.

Martha: They'd know about us. We've been famous.

Karen: A small town, then.

Martha: They'd know more about us.

Karen: Isn't there anywhere to go?

Martha: No. There'll never be any place for us to go.²³²

Just as Hellman's 1934 play is of its moment, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* is a product of the time period in which it was written and produced. The drama's characters and given circumstances would likely have resonated with those in attendance at the premiere production and those that followed soon after, as these individuals would have lived through Stonewall, seen the birth and burgeoning of the Gay Liberation Movement and second wave feminism, and voted gay and lesbian officials into office. Notwithstanding, they still would have lived with the daily oppressions and the moment-by-moment negotiations of the closet.

Like their counterparts living beyond the stages of the Shandol Theatre, or West Side Mainstage, or the Actors Playhouse, Chambers' characters recognize the potential for, and possess desires for, fully-enfranchised lives. For Lil and her companions, this seems to entail not only being 'out' without jeopardizing one's personal and professional relationships, but also the ability to raise children (as Annie and Rae do²³³), and to get married. Without

²³² Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), 102- 103.

²³³ Dialogue makes clear that Annie co-parents Rae's children; for example, when talking to Eva at the party in Act One, Annie says "I just feel like Rae's [children] are half mine" (Chambers 129). Additionally, in Act Two, Rae informs Eva that Annie is the one play for the children's college educations, since Rae was left without

question, the characters' assimilationist ideals work to orient *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* primarily, but not exclusively, to a conservative, neoliberal form of enfranchisement. Janet Brown's *Taking Center Stage: Feminism in Contemporary U.S. Drama* argues that, while the play fails to directly attack patriarchy [and, by proxy, heteronormativity], it acts as a rhetorical strategy that works against it by "asserting the normality and even familiarity of [lesbian] women's lives."²³⁴ The 'normalcy' and 'familiarity' about which Brown writes is inextricably bound with the heteronormative paradigm. This apparent alliance between the play and that paradigm has been viewed contentiously by contemporary critics like Jill Dolan.

In response to criticism, Chambers acknowledged, "I'm a middle-aged, middle-class, WASP dyke. That's what I know."²³⁵ This quote makes clear that, with *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, Chambers did not intend to represent all lesbian experience, but merely lesbianism as she embodied and experienced it. The consequence of such an artistic choice, and the ethical and social/political implications of it, raises a poignant question: Who is the play for?

John Simon's review of the play (published in *New York*) engages the question of spectatorship:

Make your homosexual audiences happy with little lesbian in-jokes and the implication that straights are mostly closet inverters just waiting to be brought out by truly liberated homosexuals Make your heterosexual audiences happy by showing the straight emerging from the closet as a very fine person who loves and supports her dying lover and ends up a mature woman free to choose any kind of sexuality (but leave the ending prudently open). ... Show

child support following her divorce. Certainly, Annie and Rae are the most heteronormative/assimilationist of the lesbians vacationing at Bluefish Cove.

²³⁴ Ibid., 135.

²³⁵ Peterson and Bennett, 73.

just enough lesbian sexual interplay to titillate all audiences, but not enough to jolt any but the staunchest puritans²³⁶

Although Simon's review also harshly critiques Chambers' writing as "unenlightening and uninvolved,"²³⁷ the review nonetheless captures a major theme of this chapter—that the 1970s was a time in which liberationist tendencies entered the social sphere and existed alongside assimilationist modes. The contrasting milieu, inclusive of subversive and 'normative' ideals, contextualizes a *WomaNews* review, which notes that "The play is a joy for lesbians and a revelation for heterosexual women."²³⁸ But what *kind* of lesbians would have found joy in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*? What *kind* of lesbians would have empathized with the characters, their identities and lifestyles, their circumstances, and their desires? What *kind* of lesbians would have been empowered, even enfranchised, by having witnessed a play like *Last Summer at Bluefish* played out upon a mainstream stage?

The fact that *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* is a realistic drama also has implications in terms of spectatorship. In "Staging lesbian and gay New York," Robin Bernstein proposes that lesbians "were eager to see their lives reflected on stage,"²³⁹ and were therefore receptive of Chambers' plays. Here, too, we see the term "lesbians" used broadly, providing little clarification regarding the particular lesbian identity that would be attracted to the play and the depictions therein. Several feminist and queer critics have critiqued realism, drawing from the work of Bertolt Brecht and the more contemporary scholar, Jill Dolan. Dolan asserts that realism has limitations:

²³⁶ John Simon, *John Simon on Theatre: Criticism, 1974- 2003* (New York: Applause Theatre & Books, 2005), 185.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Chambers, introductory pages.

²³⁹ Robin Bernstein, "Staging lesbian and gay New York," *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York*, ed. Cyrus R.K. Patell and Bryan Waterman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 209.

[B]ourgeois realism reinstates the unitary, transcendent lesbian caught in a binary opposition with heterosexuality. ... [Realism's] ideology is so determined to validate dominant culture that the lesbian position can only be moralized against or marginalized.²⁴⁰

However, Elaine Aston and Sheila Stowell, among others, have acknowledged realism's potential, even within feminist theatre/theatre inclusive of feminist characters and themes. Stowell, in particular, has argued that realism's recognizable structure and language do not forfeit a play's ability "to challenge rather than to reinforce 'normative ideology.'"²⁴¹ The analysis of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* presented in this chapter aligns with Dolan's claim insofar as no character in the realistic play is a bold departure from an assimilationist trajectory and the play validates dominant culture. To that end, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* appears to be a play for assimilationist lesbians—for lesbians whose socio-economic statuses, gender presentations, relationships, desires, and conceptions of the future amalgamate with heteronormativity.

It is also possible that lesbians were not Chambers' target audience. Consider the following quote (offered by Chambers to Alvin Klein of the *New York Times*), in which Chambers expresses her hopes that, by encountering lesbian characters and lesbian people who are comfortable in their sexualities, "the rest of the world will become more comfortable with [them]."²⁴² While modern scholars like Goltz, Seidman, Dolan, Warner, and Dow critique narratives that are "geared toward the comfort of heterosexuals,"²⁴³ arguing that they do little to problematize heteronormativity, doing so might not have been Chambers'

²⁴⁰ Jill Dolan, *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 162- 163.

²⁴¹ Sheila Stowell, *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Plays of the Suffrage Era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 100.

²⁴² Alvin Klein, "Play's Theme: Lesbians Without Apology," *New York Times* (New York, NY) Feb. 8, 1981.

²⁴³ Dow, 98.

intention.²⁴⁴ The play is a product of its time, and in the 1970s, ‘comforting’ heterosexuals remained a practical imperative in order to end a history of persecution and violence. The previous decade’s riot at Stonewall Inn was merely the beginning of a crusade that would require decades of ongoing efforts. Further, the historical overview of the 1970s included herein demonstrates that a portion of the LGBT community was genuinely interested in assimilating with the heteronormative paradigm; from a New Historicist perspective, we can expect to see plays and other cultural documents reflecting that circumstance. While I do not disagree with the concerns raised by late 20th and 21st-century scholars regarding, what has become, a preoccupation with heteronormativity in political and mainstream discourses,²⁴⁵ I maintain that putting lesbians and gay men into that paradigm has queer potentiality; it *does* “make strange” heteronormativity and destabilizes (or at least alters) its authority.

The play’s assimilationist tendencies are greater than its liberationist. That said, this analysis also reveals that liberationist lesbians—or at least a liberationist sensibility—are not disenfranchised (or, at the very least, are not ignored) in and by the play. The action of the play transpires in a decidedly queer space; a queer-appropriated space; and a proud lesbian identity assumed and enacted independent of the dominant culture is a fundamental given circumstance in the play-world. Production circumstances also depict a liberationist, or decidedly queer, sensibility. The first three New York productions were produced by The Glines, a professional, homosexual theatre company founded in 1974 to “develop positive

²⁴⁴ Angelina Weld Grimke’s 1928 play, *Rachel*, treats the subject of racial discrimination. Grimke, an African American woman, aimed the play toward white women, typified through the play’s subthemes dealing with motherhood and middle-class Christian values. Chambers would, by no means, have been the first playwright whose work served as a political strategy to form alliances between minority and mainstream identities.

²⁴⁵ Here I refer not only to assimilationist aims like marriage equality legislation (championed by the Human Rights Campaign, for instance), but to representations in mainstream media (the hit TV sitcom *Modern Family* being a prime example).

self-images and dispel negative stereotyping.”²⁴⁶ Finally, the June 1980 production at the Westside Mainstage, being part of the First American Gay Arts Festival, presumably attracted audiences comprised of mostly members of the LGBT community. *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* and the earliest productions also enfranchised at least one lesbian, Jane Chambers herself. Chambers was an open lesbian and self-identified dyke.²⁴⁷ Chambers routinely understudied for productions and played the role of Kitty for two weeks in the Actor’s Playhouse production.²⁴⁸ Additionally, Chambers reported that she wrote about what she knew; in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* the playwright’s personal, embodied knowledge as “a middle-aged, middle-class, WASP dyke,” but also as a lesbian who had lost a friend to breast cancer.²⁴⁹ We can infer that the lesbians in Chambers’ personal circle, and those in similar circles, would have also been empowered and enfranchised by the play. Bearing these considerations in mind, it seems reasonable to argue that the play’s predominantly assimilationist characters and themes may be balanced (or at least tempered) by homocentric production circumstances.

Last Summer at Bluefish Cove brought significant mainstream attention to lesbian experience—similar to the way that Mart Crowley’s *The Boys in the Band* had given audiences insight into a strictly gay male culture eleven years earlier. True, Chambers’ play does not reflect the breadth and depth of lesbian existence, but how could any single play? The play falls short of effectively grappling with intersecting identity components, and its characters and themes engage with conversations about empowerment and enfranchisement in ways that do not trouble these very notions. However, as I mention in Chapter 1, our

²⁴⁶ DJM Productions, “Mission Statement,” *The Glines*. Last modified 2010. <http://www.theglines.com/>

²⁴⁷ It is unclear, however, how Chambers defined this word.

²⁴⁸ My research on the potential homosexual orientations of other cast members and members of the production staff and design team was inconclusive. It should be noted, however, that Jean Smart is heterosexual.

²⁴⁹ Chambers was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor in 1982, resulting in her all-too-soon death.

understanding of terms like ‘empowerment’ and ‘enfranchisement’ are temporal and shift over time. A contemporary reading of the play encourages a more critical examination; while the play might be even more remarkable and celebrated today had Chambers included not only unapologetically lesbian characters, but lesbian characters who also represent various socio-economic, racial, and gendered/aesthetic demographics, and/or characters whose aspirations, ambitions, and world views were more liberationist or aligned with post-modernism or post-structuralism, plays are products of their specific times and places. In the case of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, the context is the late 1970s- early 1980s in America. Perhaps it is unrealistic to expect that the play would have done these things.

This chapter has attempted to analyze Chambers’ play as a cultural document reflective of its own time and specific circumstances. In doing so, I have argued that the play effectively provides insight into some of the experiences of lesbians living in the 1970s. As modern audiences, we can appreciate these insights, while accepting that they are not exemplary of all lesbian experience. Jacqueline Taylor’s “Exemplary Lesbian,” effectively debunks the notion of an exemplary (or “true,” “authentic”) lesbian. Turning a critical eye to synecdoche, Taylor claims authority over her own experiences and identity, but not over lesbianism. I reference Taylor’s work because it enforces the critical point that not one person, or one character, or even one play can adequately and comprehensively depict lesbianism.

Chambers’ play introduced a lesbian/feminist voice to mainstream American theatre at a time when that voice was virtually unheard. She created space for other lesbian voices (some who offer greater diversity in their characters and themes), including Paula Vogel and more radical, liberationist performance groups like Split Britches and Five Lesbian Brothers.

In 2010, the Five Lesbian Brothers debuted and published *Oedipus at Palm Springs*, a play that follows two lesbian couples as they vacation. Chapter Five of Sara Warner's *Acts of Gaiety* suggests that *Oedipus at Palm Springs* critiques the LGBT community's preoccupation with assimilation. Certainly, the play is metadramatic in its evocation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, but perhaps it can also be viewed metadramatically in that it offers a liberationist interpretation of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*'s plot concerning lesbian couples on vacation and, more generally, lesbian domesticity. Indeed, as Warner has argued, *Oedipus at Palm Springs* ultimately subverts the heteronormative paradigm; by the play's end, the protagonist (Prin) is deserted by her lover/daughter, as well as by her friends. The salient point, however, is that she avoids an impending engagement and subsequent marriage, as well as the (inevitable?) trappings of child-rearing. Prin escapes the narrative of heteronormative temporality and is afforded an alternative, *queerer* future—a future withheld from Lil, and the type of future that seems incompatible with the lesbians in Chambers' play thirty years earlier. That said, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* engages the theme of futurity.

Through the play's focus on enfranchisement as manifest in the desire to openly engage in same-sex relationships and/or lesbian identities, and cultivate productive, happy lives, Chambers shows audience that lesbians *can* access the future. The protagonist dies from cancer—a circumstance beyond her control and entirely unrelated to her sexuality. Suicide and violence are absent from the narratives with which Chambers' characters are inscribed; this fact alone makes the play revolutionary in its subversion of the anti-hero narratives²⁵⁰ that dominated mainstream stages for many decades. Further, we know that the

²⁵⁰ Nicholas de Jongh describes the gay anti-hero in *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 14- 15, as “the [character] with no future, sure to be punished by the play's end, with sexual orthodoxy and the secure straight and narrow thoroughly approved.” Plays that include LGBT characters have, throughout history, been constructed using what Donileen Loeske calls formula stories:

protagonist dies because the play responds to the death of the playwright's friend; there is little evidence to suggest that the plot point connotes symbolic meaning related to homosexuals' estrangement from the future. Ostensibly, had Lil's cancer been surmountable, she would not stand alone on the rocky shoreline, as she does in the play's opening scene, but with Eva. The women would build a life together, one that we know (through textual evidence) is fulfilling and rewarding for both parties; a life that we know is possible because of Annie and Rae, and Kitty and Rita.

Criticism is warranted, particularly with regard to how representation in cultural productions work to empower and enfranchise some (in this case, middle-class, conventionally attractive, mostly feminine, and mostly white women), while excluding others. Indeed, we must investigate the troubling connotations related to themes of empowerment and enfranchisement; and we must approach with great trepidation any official narrative of progress. Yet, as modern scholars, we can also celebrate the ways that the 1970s zeitgeist afforded the opportunity for a play like *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* to depict lesbian experience as Chambers knew it, and to trail-blaze a lesbian/feminist voice in mainstream theatre.

“recognizable and predictable plots, characters, and morals” (“The Empirical Analysis of Formula Stories,” *Varieties of Narrative Analysis*, eds. Jaber Gubrium and James A. Holstein [New York: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012], 253.).

CHAPTER THREE

NATHAN HAS TWO MOMMIES:

QUEER FAMILIES AND QUEER FUTURES IN PAULA VOGEL'S

AND BABY MAKES SEVEN

While the 1970's milieu afforded lesbians increased visibility, and while advancements were made in relation to their social/political empowerment and enfranchisement, there were also complications that destabilized any linear narrative of steady progress. Chapter Two of this project outlined specific defeats that were faced, and emphasized the inequalities that persisted throughout the 1970s. The critical point at present is that such instances of regression set the proverbial stage for the 1980s, an era that would see continued regressions resulting from at least two major circumstances. First, under the Reagan administration, a palpable conservatism reemerged in America. Specifically, with the dawn of the new decade, and the inauguration of a new and conservative president, women's empowerment and enfranchisement came under renewed attack. As Dean Baker explains in *The United States Since 1980*, President Ronald Reagan was "more conservative than the Republican mainstream on a number of social issues, most notably abortion. ... [he] took a strong anti-abortion position into the election and [ultimately] made it the mainstream position within the Republican Party."²⁵¹ In addition to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling²⁵² being subject to overturn, the Equal Rights Amendment (which "would have explicitly given

²⁵¹ Dean Baker, *The United States Since 1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 63.

²⁵² The outcome of this United States Supreme Court ruling stated that the 14th amendment, and particularly the right to privacy granted therein, extended into the right of women to have an abortion.

women equal rights in the constitution”²⁵³) failed, in 1982, to secure ratification by the requisite 38 states.

Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award, also emphasizes that the 1980s saw a backlash against the feminist movement, which had made significant gains in the previous decade. Faludi’s empirical material demonstrates the ways that the media created and perpetuated an anti-feminist spirit, one that blamed second wave feminism for the concerns—or, as Faludi convincingly argues, *mythical* concerns—like an “infertility epidemic” and a “man shortage,” that women of the 1980s faced. Faludi debunked these myths through social, political, and economic analyses and, upon the book’s debut, it was heralded as “the most vehement and unapologetic call to arms to issue from the feminist camp in years.”²⁵⁴

A second circumstance that presented the LGBT community with setbacks in the 1980s was the outbreak of the AIDS disease. As discussed in Chapter One, AIDS was first referred to as “gay pneumonia” or “gay cancer” because the disproportionate rates at which gay males were infected led many to (incorrectly) assume that male homosexuals were the only at-risk demographic. Consider this headline from the *San Francisco Chronicle*: “A pneumonia that Strikes Gay Males,”²⁵⁵ or this headline from the *New York Times*: “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals.”²⁵⁶ Despite the fact that, by 1982, scientific research had formally debunked this misconception, the gay male community still shouldered the burden of blame, and was the target of much fear-mongering and homophobia. It would be untrue to

²⁵³ Ibid., 76.

²⁵⁴ Mary Eberstadt, “Wake Up, Little Susie,” *American Spectator* 25, no. 10 (1992): 30.

²⁵⁵ “A pneumonia that Strikes Gay Males,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco: CA), Jun. 6 1981.

²⁵⁶ Lawrence K. Altman, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals,” *New York Times* (New York: NY), Jul. 3 1981.

say that lesbians were not concerned with the AIDS crisis or were not, at least to a certain degree, affected by its ramifications. In the wake of AIDS, the LGBT community as a whole faced a significant resurfacing of pejorative attention in mainstream media.²⁵⁷ The disease was not only considered a medical condition, but was also conceptualized as having spiritual and ethical dimensions. Extreme religious fundamentalists equated homosexuality with sin and AIDS with God’s judgment—his plan to punish homosexuals and purge the earth of them. An example is Jerry Falwell, who routinely linked AIDS not only to God’s contempt for homosexuals, but to God’s contempt for a society that tolerates—no less, enfranchises—homosexuals. Further, a webpage authored by Michigan State University notes that “A correspondent to the *Philadelphia Daily News* wrote in January 1985, ... ‘God is telling us to halt our promiscuity. God makes the germs, and he also makes the cures. He will let us find the cure when we *straighten* out.’”²⁵⁸ Within conservative circles and through their media platforms, AIDS even became referred to as WOGS, standing for Wrath of God Syndrome.

Paula Vogel’s 1984 play, *And Baby Makes Seven*, was written during this era of social/political conservatism, and debuted during the height of the AIDS crisis and the accompanying homophobia. Because issues and concerns specifically facing women were largely (and, to a degree, understandably) overshadowed throughout the 1980s as a result of AIDS, Vogel’s play is particularly valuable for the ways it provides necessary insight into the lives of lesbian women living during this tumultuous time—narratives that were often dismissed or, at the very least, given comparatively scant attention. *And Baby Makes Seven*

²⁵⁷ In addition to coverage in major newspapers, radio and television news broadcasts, and magazines, mainstream popular entertainments like soap operas, made-for-TV movies, and even Primetime programs integrated AIDS-related narratives (these typically featured gay male protagonists).

²⁵⁸ Michigan State University Board of Trustees, “Sin, Sex, and Science: The HIV/AIDS Crisis,” *Michigan State University*, <http://history.msu.edu/hst425/resources/online-essays/sin-sex-and-science-the-hiv-aids-crisis/>, accessed on January 29, 2015.

explores the lives and relationship of lesbian couple Ruth and Anna, who aim to start a family with their gay male friend and housemate, Peter. The premiere production received mixed-to-poor reception and failed to garner significant critical attention. The productions that followed soon after received similarly mixed reviews, though later productions transpiring outside of New York elicited more favorable responses. For example, *Philadelphia City Paper*, a weekly newspaper, responded to a 1999 production by Hoopskirt Theatre Company, saying “What’s remarkable about *Baby* — a really lovely play — is the sense of innocence and optimism that rises from the potentially dark subject matter. We feel confident that this family, despite its idiosyncrasies, will make fine parents ...”²⁵⁹ Despite the fact that the play was not an immediate ‘hit,’ it is an exemplary play from the decade for the ways it explores futurity (a theme that preoccupied queer consciousness in the face of AIDS, which seemed a guaranteed death sentence during the epidemic’s earliest years). Moreover, reproduction was a significant issue within the 1980’s lesbian community. As I discuss below, by the mid-1980s, a ‘lesbian baby boom’ was well underway, leading to conversations about empowerment and enfranchisement as manifest in access to heterosexual institutions and practices like marriage and parenting. This chapter provides a historical overview for the decade and offers a close, critical reading of *And Baby Makes Seven* within that context. My analysis of Vogel’s play explores how it depicts empowerment and the pursuit of enfranchisement through queer parenting, as well as how the playwright envisions queer futures/a queer utopia.

²⁵⁹ David Anthony Fox, “The Kids are All Right,” *Philadelphia City Paper* (Philadelphia, PA), Oct. 14- 21, 1999. <http://citypaper.net/articles/101499/ae.theater.baby.shtml>.

Historical Overview of the 1980s

The 1980 election of Ronald Reagan introduced a president whose political agenda placed him on the far right even within the Republican Party, thus establishing what has become known as the New Right. Reagan's election was afforded, at least in small part, by the support of the Christian Right (CR), an extension of the Moral Majority of the 1970s characterized by political interests inherently tied to the teachings of Christianity and are focused upon the preservation and even legislation of conservative Christian tradition, particularly with regard to mores and regulations related to gender and sexuality. Indeed, the CR was drawn to Reagan's conservative agenda; however, it is important to qualify that the "disproportionate support for Reagan did not come from the Christian Right but from conservatives of high education ... and from people who considered controlling inflation to be the most important issue in the election."²⁶⁰ Although research indicates that it was not support from the CR that 'won' Reagan the election, it is reasonable to assume that its members would have supported the resulting social conservatism.

Interestingly, the shift toward conservative politics that occurred during this period was not limited to America. As Kimberly R. Moffitt and Duncan A. Campbell state in the Introduction to their 2011 publication *The 1980s: A Critical and Transitional Decade*,

there was [an international] shift to the political right starting in Britain in 1979 with the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, followed by Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in 1980, Helmut Kohl as West German chancellor in 1982, Yasuhiro Nakasone as Prime Minister of Japan in 1982 and finally Brian Mulroney as Prime Minister of Canada in 1984.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Stephen D. Johnson and Joseph B. Tamney, "The Christian Right and the 1980 Presidential Election," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, no. 2 (1982): 123.

²⁶¹ Moffitt and Campbell, 5.

In America, the Christian Right's presence in the political sphere was (and remains) seen in several social issues, and was marked by an attempt to preserve/re-establish traditional gender and sexual mores, women's reproductive rights and LGBT rights being two of the leading issues.

Despite the fact that President Reagan appointed the first female justice, Sandra Day O'Connor, to the United States Supreme Court in 1981, and regardless of the fact that, in 1984, Geraldine Ferraro became the first female politician to run for the Vice Presidency on a major party ticket, women's rights were subject to challenges from an increasingly influential, self-appointed 'moral majority.' I have previously noted that the marginalization of lesbians occurs on at least two fronts (those being gender and sexuality), so during this time, the rights of lesbian women were especially vulnerable. As acts of redressive action from within the LGBT community, "Lesbian" was added to the names of both the Gay Activists Alliance of Washington, D.C., and the National Gay Task Force in 1986. A similar conscientiousness regarding inclusivity of and empowerment for women homosexuals was evident in the forming and naming of new organizations—for instance, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in 1980, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) in 1985, National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum in 1988, and the National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Organization (LLEGÓ) in 1989. Extending the activism initiated in the previous decade by liberationist factions like the Gay Liberation Front, and the dozens of other gay and lesbian groups involved with NACHO, the organizations that formed throughout the 1980s maintained prominent presences in the social/political spheres. And yet, as Tina Fetner explains in *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism*, the decade's return to conservatism changed the terrain of the

“organizational field.”²⁶² Fetner notes that, when confronted with a shifting landscape, organizations either resist or engage. The majority of LGBT organizations, and at least those with the most prominence, engaged the altered social/political milieu.

Fetner argues that the changing landscape resulted in “the lesbian and gay movement ... rejecting much of its New Left ideology.”²⁶³ Located in Washington, D.C., the HRC became the country’s foremost lobbying organization, urging elected officials to support legislation dealing with the empowerment and enfranchisement of the LGBT community. LAMDA Legal Defense became increasingly active during the 1980s, advocating in child custody cases, inheritance challenges, military discharges, and supporting issues like same-sex marriage. In 1986, the Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International was established to further develop the initiatives of its parent organization, the Gay Father’s Coalition. Sheila Jeffery’s *Unpacking Queer Politics: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective* deals with the changing LGBT culture—more radically referred to by the title of the book’s first chapter as “the failing of the Gay Liberation Movement.” Jeffery draws heavily from John D’Emilio, who has asserted that the Gay Liberation Movement failed because of a strong assimilationist desire for “entry into the system ... [which] ended up constructing a prescriptive sexual politics.”²⁶⁴ Jeffery also cites Karla Jay and Allan Young, whose *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* deserves to be quoted at length for the way it illuminates the movement’s shifting aims:

Like our straight counterparts in the New Left, we were infatuated by the slogan “Revolution in our lifetime.” But we were oblivious to the fact that such far-reaching goals had little meaning for the great masses of American

²⁶² Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 50.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁶⁴ John D’Emilio, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), xxv and xxvii.

people – even most gay and lesbian Americans – encumbered as they were with jobs, homes, children, and other responsibilities. ... So what is the ‘real’ gay liberation? Is it the assimilation of gay people into every stitch of the fabric of existing American life?²⁶⁵

The Christian Right and Ronald Reagan’s election to the presidency contributed to the conservative social/political climate, one that increased the salience of assimilationist impulses.

A prominent example of this impulse that is directly related to the lived experiences of lesbian women is the ‘lesbian baby boom.’ George Chauncy’s *Why Marriage: The History Shaping Today’s Debate Over Gay Equality* notes that

There were already many lesbians and gay men with children, but most of those children had been born when they were married or otherwise involved with people of the other sex, before they had come out as gay. ... But the lesbian baby boom of the 1980s represented something new: a generation of women who lived openly as lesbians and no longer felt obliged to marry a man to have a child.²⁶⁶

Groups for lesbian mothers formed in many of the country’s major metropolises, including New York City, Washington D.C., San Francisco, and Portland. In addition to the formation of these groups, same-sex parenting gained mainstream attention through coverage in leading magazines and newspapers, such as the *New York Times*. Consider Gina Kolata’s 1989 article, “Lesbian Partners Find The Means to Be Parents:”

Although no one knows how many lesbian women are having babies, experts cite a number of indications of a boom. Hundreds of women are attending a growing number of workshops for lesbians thinking of having children. Informal networks have sprung up, enabling lesbians to find sperm donors. Lawyers are formulating custody agreements to try to insure legal rights for lesbian mothers, their female partners and the fathers [sic] of their children.

²⁶⁵ Karla Jay and Allan Young, *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), xxxvii and xliv.

²⁶⁶ George Chauncy, *Why Marriage: The History Shaping Today’s Debate Over Gay Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 105.

Support groups and social organizations are sponsoring picnics, parties and other events to keep lesbians with children from feeling isolated.²⁶⁷

Perhaps most notably, information related to same-sex parenting circulated widely due to major publications like Lesléa Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies*, a 1989 book for children with lesbian parents.



Figure 7
Willaim Haefeli cartoon, published in
The New Yorker, 2011.

Indeed, lesbian parenting emerged as an important concern for many members of the 1980's lesbian community, resulting in the birth of a sub-culture for lesbian mothers.²⁶⁸ Emily la Bonte's *Lesbian Motherhood: Using Oral Histories of the 1970'S [sic] and 1980'S to Examine How Lesbian Women Relate on Parenting* reinforces Kolata's assertions, noting that a majority of lesbian parents in the 1970s and 1980s (interviewed for a previous study

²⁶⁷ Gina Kolata, "Lesbian Partners Find The Means to Be Parents," *New York Times* (New York: NY), Jan. 30, 1989.

²⁶⁸ It is important to note that issues related to "non-traditional" parenting were not limited to lesbians; indeed, families were reimagined and actualized by heterosexual feminists, as well. A notable example is Wendy Wasserstein, who gave birth to a daughter, Lucy, on September 12, 1999. Wasserstein was 48 when she became a mother and never disclosed the identity of Lucy's biological father.

conducted by Ellen Lewin) revealed that they “self-identify best with other lesbian mothers,”²⁶⁹ and intentionally choose “to associate with other mothers.”²⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, the vogue for lesbian and gay parenting fueled conversations related to marriage equality. The country’s first domestic partnership ordinance was passed in Berkeley, California in 1984, and a 1989 ruling from the New York State Court of Appeals declared that same-sex couples who have lived together for at least ten years are legally considered a family. Another significant indication of the increase in assimilationist impulses from the 1970s to the 1980s is that on October 10, 1987—one day before the second, and significantly larger, National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights—2,000 same-sex marriages were performed en masse at a wedding mass, witnessed by a supportive crowd of approximately 7,000. Despite the fact that marrying, or parenting with, a same-sex partner arguably queers the heteronormative paradigm, both acts are usually enacted in ways that reify ‘traditional family values’ and conceptions of ‘normalcy.’ Again, then, we see the era’s conservatism manifest even in the lives of gays and lesbians.

In *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* Lillian Faderman emphasizes that liberationist lesbians who had maintained their New Left sensibilities did not consider it “a positive sign to see lesbians who had once proclaimed virtues of non-monogamy ... become ‘conventional.’”²⁷¹ The shifting “organizational field,” and the resulting push toward an assimilationist brand of enfranchisement as manifest in the freedom to marry and create families, not only reacted against the separatist culture that flourished during the 1970s, but was inextricably tied to systems of privilege and, as a result, to systems of exclusion. To

²⁶⁹ Emily la Bonte, “Lesbian Motherhood: Using Oral Histories of the 1970’S [sic] and 1980’S to Examine How Lesbian Women Relate on Parenting,” presented at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research, La Crosse, Wisconsin, April 11- 13, 2013.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Faderman, 281.

again quote Fetner, the focus of prominent, mainstream LGBT organizations turned to “middle-class lesbian and gay concerns and neglect[ed] the political demands of bisexual people, transgender people, poor lesbians and gay men, and a host of others . . .”²⁷² Many lesbians and gay men recognized the ways in which the movement’s aims did not reflect their needs. Similarly, many women who identified as feminists and associated themselves with the women’s movement throughout the 1970s realized the ways in which Second Wave Feminism had absorbed a white, middle-class sensibility that did not reflect the burdens carried by women of color, or women who were socioeconomically disadvantaged. As a consequence, the women’s movement splintered in the 1980s, as various niche groups formed to better reflect intersecting identity components. Arlene Stein discusses these changes, in terms of lesbian experience, in *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian*

Generation:

... the vision of collective identity embodied by the Lesbian Nation came under increasing scrutiny [beginning in the 1980s]. In the wake of what came to be known as the feminist “sex wars,” the critique of the false universalism of the women’s movement lodged by women of color, and the rise of the “lipstick lesbian,” it became more and more difficult to speak of one “lesbian community,” one “lesbian world,” and indeed one “feminism.”²⁷³

As Moffitt and Campbell have argued, a white, yuppie (young, urban, professional) culture prevailed in the 1980s, effecting the exclusion of non-assimilable citizens. The mainstream lesbian community also reflected the yuppie culture. Consumerism became another important issue in the 1980s lesbian community. Two prominent examples of this include the travel and the fashion industries. Olivia Records started a luxury lesbian cruise line, and fashion-consciousness burgeoned among many lesbians; in the words of Arlene Stein, “You could

²⁷² Fetner, 45.

²⁷³ Arlene Stein, *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 15.

dress as a femme one day and a butch the next. You can wear a crew-cut along with a skirt. Wearing high heels during the day does not mean you're a femme at night, passive in bed, or closeted on the job."²⁷⁴ The lesbian aesthetic became more versatile. Butch, androgynous, and lipstick lesbians were among the various gender presentations that proliferated in this era.²⁷⁵

While the 1980s saw the emergence of middle-class, self-identified lesbians, who were well-adjusted to life in a capitalist society, and possessed ideals and desires that enabled them to productively assimilate with a conservative society, space was also occupied by more subversive, liberationist voices and practices. This is perhaps best evidenced by the lesbian scholarship that emerged from the academy during that same decade.

Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), Monique Wittig's "One Is Not Born a Woman" (1981), Teresa de Lauretis's "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" (1988), and Biddy Martin's "Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]" (1988) are some of the most influential works of critical theory that were published in the 1980s, serving as forerunners to Judith Butler's renowned *Gender Trouble*, which was published in 1990. Collectively, these lesbian scholars grapple with gender and sexuality, expose the oppressiveness of heteronormativity, and explore identities outside of its confines. Though their work does not reflect the mainstream experience of lesbians living in the 1980s, but rather responds to it, these scholars represent—or at least allude to—a subculture of women whose lived experiences did not fit within the prevailing conservative program outlined above.

²⁷⁴ Arlene Stein, "All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go? Style Wars and the New Lesbianism," *OUT/LOOK*, Winter 1989, 37.

²⁷⁵ See Danae Clark's "Commodity Lesbianism," *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

A subversive, liberationist spirit among lesbians also existed outside the academy. In popular culture, Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* captured with playful cynicism the disillusionment some lesbians felt. In a 1987 comic strip entitled "Getting Respectable," lovers Clarice and Toni grapple with monogamy and lament the practice as "too linear" and "uncool," but go on to incorporate it into their relationship. The strip culminates with Clarice and Toni making the 'mature' decision to open a joint checking account. However, Bechdel's comics from the 1980s were not exclusively critical; *Dykes to Watch Out For* also highlighted (as she calls it in the 1987 strip below) "the spirit and outrageousness" that persisted. As "Pride and Prejudice" indicates, there were lesbians and gay men whose practices and gendered performances subverted heteronormative conventions and thus embodied the theories articulated by leading lesbian scholars.



Figure 8
 “Pride and Prejudice”
Dykes To Watch Out For
 1987

The works of lesbian theatre artists also manifest a subversive, liberationist spirit.

Consider Split Britches, a troupe comprised of three lesbians who

created a unique ‘postmodern’ style that served to **embed feminist and lesbian issues of the times**, economic debates, national agendas, personal relationships, **and sex-radical role playing** in spectacular and humorous deconstructions of canonical texts, vaudeville shtick, cabaret forms, lip-synching satire, lyrical love scenes, and dark, frightening explorations of class and gender violence.²⁷⁶

In a similar vein to Split Britches’ plays of the 1980s (e.g. *Beauty and the Beast* and *Dress Suits to Hire*), the Five Lesbian Brothers performance group was founded in 1989, and they have since been lauded for their work—consider gay playwright Paul Rudnick’s opinion of the Brothers’ work as “gaspingly hilarious and blithely **subversive**.”²⁷⁷ Lambda Book Award and Obie Award-winning performance artist Holly Hughes also emerged in the 1980s with works like *Well of Horniness* and *The Lady Dick*. Since then, Hughes has gained a reputation as a daring and innovative artist, whose overt treatment of female sexuality brought her to national attention as one of the NEA Four.²⁷⁸ Finally, it should not be overlooked that lesbian-feminist performance criticism also emerged during the 1980s; notable examples include Jill Dolan’s *The Feminist Spectator* (1988) and Sue-Ellen Case’s *Feminism and Theatre* (1988).

It is quite clear that the divergent assimilationist and liberationist ideals that coexisted throughout the 1970s persisted into the 1980s. As Stein has noted, “There is no single story of lesbian life: there are many stories, many simultaneous and overlapping

²⁷⁶ B.J. Wray, “Split Britches,” *GLBTQ: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture*, last modified December 11, 2002, http://www.glbtq.com/arts/split_britches.html. (Bold font mine.)

²⁷⁷ Paul Rudnick quoted in “Five Lesbian Brothers/Four Plays,” *Theatre Communication Group*, accessed January 31, 2015. <https://www.tcg.org/e-commerce/showbookdetails.cfm?ID=TCG353>. (Bold font mine.)

²⁷⁸ The NEA Four refers to four solo performance artists who, in 1990, lost funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, due to the ‘controversial’ subject matter explored in their works. The other members of the NEA Four are Tim Miller, Karen Finley, and John Fleck. Of the four, Finley is the only one to identify as heterosexual.

‘conversations.’²⁷⁹ I have illustrated above the diversity within the lesbian community of the 1980s—the contrasting impulses, aesthetics, desires, and orientations toward empowerment and enfranchisement. Doing so, hopefully, works to reinforce just how contested these themes are.

Despite the fact that lesbian identity and lived experiences occurred on the assimilationist/liberationist spectrum, a conservative agenda that aligned homosexuals with heterosexuals, their institutions, and practices proliferated in the 1980’s mainstream. Not only did this stem from the resurfacing of conservatism introduced by the Raegan administration, but as a result of the AIDS crisis. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has discussed some of major social consequences of the disease:

As the nature of AIDS became apparent, the baths closed, the [gay] couple came under unanticipated stress, colleagues and friends found they had other priorities ... HIV and AIDS reopened the whole legitimacy of gayness: it still required justification, it still hurt.²⁸⁰

AIDS caused retrograde motion in American progressiveness regarding homosexuality. Homosexuals were considered lascivious, promiscuous, and infectious; flagrant homophobia resurfaced and gay and lesbian identity became suspect—even cause for caution. Amidst these tensions, many gays and lesbians felt the urgent need to re-assert their normalcy; assimilatory practices helped with this. Moreover, in the face of a health epidemic related—at least in some respects—to sex acts, conservative practices like using protection and being monogamous were assumed by many in the LGBT community. Advocacy groups like ACT NOW (AIDS Coalition to Network, Organize, and Win) formed and promoted the message “that *men* need to take responsibility for protecting their sexual partners.”²⁸¹ A similar

²⁷⁹ Stein, *Sex and Sensibility*, 15.

²⁸⁰ Cited in Sinfield, 314.

²⁸¹ Cindy J, Kistenberg, *AIDS, Social Change, and Theatre* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 143.

approach was taken by many lesbians, who saw “getting respectable” as a way to distance themselves from the disease. A study conducted from June 1, 1980 to September 30, 1989 reported that 79 women whose sexual relations occurred only with same-sex partners had received AIDS diagnoses. The results further detailed that 95% of the 79 contractions resulted from intravenous drug use.²⁸² Adopting a more conservative lifestyle enabled lesbians to feel safer and healthier during the epidemic. Lillian Faderman addresses this shift in lesbian culture in *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*:

Because of their concern [about AIDS], monogamy came to look attractive even to women who had been personally and ideologically against it in the past. ... But it was not AIDS alone that made the lesbian community much more sober than it was in the 1970s. ... The ‘clean and sober’ movement operated to help stem the party frenzy that many lesbians said they experienced in the 1970s. ... The campaign to ‘just say no’ and live ‘clean and sober’ that was waged in the mainstream throughout the ’80s caught fire in the lesbian community.²⁸³

These coping mechanisms and acts of self-advocacy were a rejoinder to the lack of government intervention and funding for the AIDS health crisis—and indeed, in reaction to the government’s apparent apathy toward the deaths of thousands of homosexuals, as manifest in President Reagan’s failure to even address AIDS until 1987.

For years, the LGBT community rallied to advocate for themselves. The now-famous ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, founded in 1987) was one of several organizations that formed in response to the epidemic, and its members were especially vocal in demanding government action and vying for the support of the heterosexual majority. Other important organizations included the People with AIDS Coalition, the AIDS Action

²⁸² S. Y. Chu, J. W. Buehler, P. L. Flemming, and R. L. Berkleman, “Epidemiology of reported cases of AIDS in lesbians, United States 1980-89,” *American Journal of Public Health* 80, no. 11 (1990), 1380- 1381.

²⁸³ Faderman, 281- 282.

Council, and the AIDS Civil Rights Project. Many lesbians (e.g. Maxine Wolfe²⁸⁴) became active in the organizations, but many more others wondered how their genders and sexualities allowed them to become effectively involved in an issue that devastated a community/lifestyle/demographic other than their own. In interviews with Laraine Sommella that were collected and published in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, Wolfe recounts the trepidation she felt, prior to her involvement with ACT UP: “At that point, I just decided there wasn’t anything I was going to be able to do about this shit because coming from the lesbian community, I wasn’t a gay man. . . . Who was I to tell gay men how to do stuff about AIDS?”²⁸⁵ Notwithstanding, there was a visible and valuable lesbian presence in the response action to AIDS; for example, Dennis Altman has credited lesbians and feminists with influencing the gay community’s orientation to health care—after all, health care had long been a lesbian and/or feminist issue, due to reproductive rights, as well as breast cancer.²⁸⁶

Throughout the 1980s, a strong relationship was formed between AIDS initiatives and the American theatre. Playwright Jeff Hagedorn was commissioned to write *One*, a one-man show depicting, through a thirty minute monologue, a gay male protagonist who has contracted AIDS. With regard to *One*, David Román has asserted, “Audiences are asked to empathize with the person with AIDS. . . . The monologue sets out to solicit the spectator’s

²⁸⁴ Wolfe is an important lesbian figure who co-founded the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City, which remains the largest collection in the country of artifacts relating to lesbian history.

²⁸⁵ Gordon Brent Ingram, et. al., eds., *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 411.

²⁸⁶ Audre Lorde delivered a speech entitled “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” in 1977 to raise awareness and incite activism about breast cancer; this was nearly a decade before ACT UP implemented the now-famous slogan “Silence = Death.” (See Ulrike Boehmer, *The Personal and the Political: Women’s Activism in Response to the Breast Cancer and AIDS Epidemics* [New York: State University of New York Press, 2000], 12.)

compassion ... to support actual people with AIDS.”²⁸⁷ Throughout the early years of the decade, *One* was performed in gay bars, subaltern theatre venues, and at health benefits. As the decade progressed, many prominent New York stages became sites of AIDS activism; a significant contributing factor to this was that playwright Larry Kramer was a cofounder of ACT UP. Kramer’s celebrated play *The Normal Heart* offers a semi-autobiographical account of his experiences as a gay man and AIDS activist living in New York during the 1980s. The play debuted at The Public Theatre in 1985 and received acclaim for its poignant relevance and stark truths:

Ned: We're all going to go crazy, living this epidemic every minute, while the rest of the world goes on out there, all around us, as if nothing is happening, going on with their own lives and not knowing what it's like, what we're going through. We're living through war, but where they're living it's peacetime, and we're all in the same country.²⁸⁸

William Hoffman’s masterpiece, *As Is*, was dedicated to the memory of thirty-seven of the playwright’s friends, whom AIDS had claimed as victims. The play premiered at Circle Repertory Company in February 1985 and transferred to Broadway’s Lyceum Theatre in April.

A decade later, plays dealing with AIDS and following the lives—and sometimes deaths—of gay male characters continued to be written. Tony Kushner’s opus *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, Part One: Millennium Approaches* transferred to Broadway in 1993 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. *Part Two: Perestroika* debuted the following year. Female playwright Paula Vogel, whose playwriting career began in the 1970s, won the 1992 Obie Award for Best Play for *The Baltimore Waltz*. The play is dedicated to the memory of Vogel’s brother, Carl, who died of AIDS in 1988.

²⁸⁷ David Román, *Acts of Intervention* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 48.

²⁸⁸ Larry Kramer, *The Normal Heart* (New York: Nal Books, 1985), 208.

Although the play follows a female protagonist diagnosed with Acquired Toilet Disease (ATD), the final scene reveals that the play's action has served as a fantastical metaphor for the character's brother and his illness with—and ultimate death from—what can be inferred as AIDS.

Without question, AIDS was a dominant theme on prominent stages throughout the 1980s, but this did not entail a lack of plays dealing with other themes—including, as we see in Vogel's *And Baby Makes Seven*, themes related to lesbianism. The American theatre had a rather impressive decade in the 1980s, even despite the country's financial hardships (beginning in the late 1970s, "oil prices continued to rise, pushing inflation to levels not seen since data had been kept. The Federal Reserve Board responded by raising interest rates to unprecedented levels ... [which] sent the economy into a recession in the spring of 1980."²⁸⁹). According to *Curtain Times: The New York Theatre, 1965- 1987*, from the 1979—1980 Broadway and Off-Broadway Season to the 1986—1987 Broadway and Off-Broadway Season, more than 1,000 productions were mounted.²⁹⁰

In terms of standouts among musicals and plays containing LGBT content throughout the 1980s, I have previously mentioned the acclaim garnered by Kramer's and Hoffman's plays. In addition to these plays, the 1980—1981 Broadway Season included a revival of Lanford Wilson's *Fifth of July*, and the 1983—1984 Broadway Season featured the debut of Jerry Herman and Harvey Fierstein's *La Cage aux Folles*, the first Broadway musical to depict a gay family. "I Am What I Am," one of the musical's most famous numbers, was quickly adopted as the anthem for the LGBT community. Fierstein had also achieved success

²⁸⁹ Baker, 44.

²⁹⁰ This figure includes the following: plays, musicals, revues, revivals, specialties, foreign language productions, and foreign plays in English. The figure excludes return engagements, concert versions, and holdovers from the previous season. Statistics taken from *Curtain Times: The New York Theatre, 1965- 1987*, pages 150- 428.

earlier in the decade when *Torch Song Trilogy* opened Off-Broadway in the 1981—1982 Season, and then transferred to Broadway, winning the 1983 Tony Awards for Best Play and Best Performance (for the playwright’s portrayal of the central character, “a drag queen who tires of hectic promiscuity and manages to form a meaningful attachment”²⁹¹). Both of Fierstein’s plays emphasize humanist themes (e.g. a shared humanity between homosexuals and heterosexuals) and the decade’s moderate values, like the importance of relationships and family.

The important feminist play of the 1980s was Wendy Wasserstein’s *The Heidi Chronicles*, which won the Tony Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1989. By chronicling twenty years in the life of the protagonist, Heidi Holland, the play’s central motif is the evolving role of women in American society. The play’s action begins in the 1960s, transitions into the 1970s and offers a compelling depiction of second-wave feminism, and culminates in the 1980s, with the disillusionment and betrayal felt by Heidi. Her feelings result from both the new decade’s social/political ‘backlash,’ as well as a failed romance with one of the play’s two prominent male characters, Scoop Rosenbaum. While Wasserstein’s play does not actively engage LGBT issues, it is an important play for its treatment of a feminist theme on Broadway.

Lesbian-feminist voices were not heard on the most prominent of stages in the American theatre; however, they were far from absent. Women-centric theatre initiatives that developed in the previous decade—for instance, the Women’s Interart Theatre, cofounded in the 1970s by Jane Chambers—continued to flourish. New enterprises also emerged; a notable example is the Women’s One World (or WOW) Cafe Theatre, “A women’s theatre collective in NYC’s East Village, which promotes the empowerment of women through the performing

²⁹¹ Guernsey, 473.

arts.”²⁹² The WOW Cafe was established in 1981, growing out of an international women’s theatre festival held in New York in 1980. Similar to the many gay male playwrights who ‘got their starts’ at Joe Cino’s cafe, “Historically, WOW has been a majority lesbian woman’s space. ... WOW especially welcomes women and transpeople of color, and women and trans people who identify as lesbians, bisexual and queer.”²⁹³ Lesbian playwright-performers Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver co-founded the WOW Cafe Theatre and went on to create the now-famous lesbian performance troupe Split Britches with Deb Margolin in 1980. Other notable lesbian playwright-performers whose early works debuted at WOW include Holly Hughes (*The Well of Horniness* [1983]) and the women who, in 1989, became The Five Lesbian Brothers (Maureen Angelos, Babs Davy, Dominique Dibbell, Peg Healey, and Lisa Kron).

During this same time, Paula Vogel, who had taught playwriting as a graduate student at Cornell until 1976, began to develop a reputation as a professional playwright. Vogel’s plays from the late 1970s to mid-1980s include *Desdemona, A Play About A Handkerchief* (1979), *The Oldest Profession* (1981), and *Baby Makes Seven* (1984). Although it would not be until 1992 that Vogel would win an Obie Award (for *The Baltimore Waltz*) and until 1998 that she would become a Pulitzer Prize-winner (for *How I Learned to Drive*), a trajectory was set early in her career—one that would make Vogel “known for her dark yet comic treatment of emotionally charged subject matter ... from aging prostitutes (‘a look at the sexuality of older women’); to lesbian motherhood; to a sister’s relationship to a brother who has died of

²⁹² “WOW Mission Statement,” *WOW Cafe Theatre*, accessed November 31, 2014, <http://wowcafe.org/story/>.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

AIDS.”²⁹⁴ Vogel tackles lesbian motherhood in *And Baby Makes Seven*; in doing so, she not only provides audiences with a play that is socially and culturally relevant to its moment, but—as David Savran has suggested—she also offers a play with characters who “script more creative, bountiful lives . . . and [redress] a history of oppression.”²⁹⁵

***And Baby Makes Seven* by Paula Vogel**

And Baby Makes Seven premiered Off-Off Broadway at the Eighteenth Street Playhouse in New York City in 1984 and was published by Dramatists Play Service, Inc. that same year. The original production was produced by Theatre with Teeth and directed by Vogel. The production at the Eighteenth Street Playhouse did not elicit mainstream attention—in fact, it received little attention at all, and even less positive attention. Steven Drukman of the *New York Times* wrote in a 1997 article that “[*And Baby Makes Seven*] was not critically well received, and Ms. Vogel, a lesbian, heard additional criticism from the gay community²⁹⁶”²⁹⁷ Eric Grode, writing for the *New York Times* in 2014, also references the play’s unsuccessful premiere production and the criticism that followed: “Ms. Vogel’s prescience has at times been credited for the play’s lack of success.”²⁹⁸ It seems surprising that a play dealing with mainstream, assimilationist themes (family/parenting) and debuting in New York City during the height of the country’s first lesbian baby boom would have been so ill-received, yet my research has not provided any published accounts of favorable reception to the earliest productions. However, the fact that subsequent productions followed

²⁹⁴ Simi Horwitz, “Paula Vogel: Not Pulitzer Winner, But Playwright Getting Out of the Way,” *Back Stage*, February 21, 2001, <http://www.backstage.com/news/paula-vogel-not-pulitzer-winnerbut-playwright-getting-out-of-the-way/>.

²⁹⁵ David Savran, “Driving Ms. Vogel,” *American Theatre*, October 1998, np.

²⁹⁶ The specific criticisms will be taken up later in this chapter.

²⁹⁷ Steven Drukman, “A Playwright on the Edge Turns Toward the Middle,” *The New York Times*, last modified March 16, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/03/16/theater/a-playwright-on-the-edge-turns-toward-the-middle.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3As>.

²⁹⁸ Eric Grode, “The Inner Children of Parents to Be,” *The New York Times* (New York: NY), Mar. 25, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/theater/paula-vogels-and-baby-makes-seven-is-revived.html?_r=0.

the play's premier seems to suggest that some people in the business—if not the critics—found the play meritorious. To my mind, the apparent lack of published, positive critical reception indicates the subversiveness of putting LGBT people into the heteronormative paradigm. It is reductive to assume, as a significant number of contemporary scholars have, that doing so reifies that paradigm and possesses little to no legitimate potential for queer meaning-making and world-making. My analysis of *And Baby Makes Seven* attempts to accentuate the queer potential affiliated with enfranchisement as manifest in queer families and parenting.

Despite the premiere production's failing, *And Baby Makes Seven* was not retired to the mines of failures and flops; rather, three other productions were mounted throughout the late 1980s and into the early 1990s. The play's second production was at San Francisco's Theatre Rhinoceros and opened in February of 1986. By 1989, the play was staged at Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska. And, in 1993, *And Baby Makes Seven* returned to New York and played the Lucille Lortel Theatre, under the auspice of Circle Repertory Company. 1993 also saw the re-printing of the script. The Circle Repertory Company production featured notable actors Peter Frechette, Mary Mara, and Cherry Jones, and gained more attention than its predecessors, most likely due to the fact that the same company had produced Vogel's acclaimed *The Baltimore Waltz* one year prior. However, some critics also cited the changing times as a contributing factor; for instance, *Variety*'s Jeremy Gerard was careful to note in his review that "it is true that more gay and lesbian couples are having children."²⁹⁹ That said, the play was still controversial—to the extent that some audiences walked out of the theatre when Jones and Mara kissed.

²⁹⁹ Jeremy Gerard, "Review: 'And Baby Makes Seven,'" *Variety*, May 11, 1993, <http://variety.com/1993/legit/reviews/and-baby-makes-seven-1200432275/>.

Although *And Baby Makes Seven* was not a phenomenon like Chambers' *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* was four years earlier, the play is meritorious not only for the way it reflects a trend within lesbian culture from the decade in which it was written and produced, but because the play continues to resonate with American LGBT issues and thus has maintained its presence in the American theatre, typified by the 2014 revival at the New Ohio Theatre. Like the productions of *And Baby Makes Seven* that came before it, critics who attended the New Ohio Theatre production were less-than-enthusiastic. As Grode says in the opening lines of his review, "Times and social mores may change, but the sight and sound of grown-ups mimicking high-pitched children will never *not* get old. This is the main problem bedeviling Paula Vogel's 1984 play, 'And Baby Makes Seven,' ... The central conceit is reductive, repetitive and extremely off-putting."³⁰⁰ The analysis that follows functions to explore the relationship between Vogel's play and the social/political context from which it was born, particularly in terms of the empowerment and enfranchisement of lesbians vis-à-vis the creation of queer families and parenting. However, because *And Baby Makes Seven* remains a lesser-known play in Vogel's repertoire—so much so that the play has only been studied within the context of Vogel's career and/or alongside her foremost plays (*The Baltimore Waltz* and *How I Learned to Drive*), or as a reference point in larger studies dedicated to lesbian-feminist representation in American drama—I hope that my investigation will offer some insight into the overwhelmingly negative reception received throughout the past twenty years, as well as provide an alternative, positive reading.

And Baby Makes Seven is rather short in terms of two-act dramas, totaling only forty-five pages in the *Dramatists Play Service* publication. In typical Vogel fashion, the play's structure departs from Aristotelian or neo-classical models—particularly in terms of its

³⁰⁰ Grode.

episodic structure and its bypassing of dramatic realism, as the play's two female actors double in various roles. The time is New York City in the present, and the action transpires within a city apartment over the course of approximately one year.³⁰¹

The plot follows lesbian couple Ruth Abrams and Anna Epstein, whose close friend—and sometimes lover—Peter Leven (a gay man) has been living with them for six months. Ruth and Anna have three imaginary children, whose presences are highly integrated into their lives:

Anna: ... We are doing the kids more often. All the time now.

Peter: Yes — it's become an obsession. ... You're doing it all the time.³⁰²

The three children are Henri, Orphan, and Cecil. Henri and Orphan are personified by Ruth, and Anna personifies Cecil. At the top of the Prologue, the three young boys are heard “*talking in their beds.*”³⁰³ The topic of conversation is reproduction. Cecil, a child genius, provides Henri and Orphan with a textbook explanation: penis, vagina, ejaculation, sperm, egg, fetus, baby. The children laugh riotously and Peter enters the bedroom, urging them to go to sleep. Peter is quickly coerced into telling a bedtime story—they request the quintessential ‘Where do babies come from?’ story. At first reluctant, Peter agrees:

Peter: All right. (*Pause.*) Now then, babies are made when a man — Hey! What are you doing! Stop that!!!

Henri: I'm just hugging you.

Peter: Well, don't hug me there! Now then, when a man and a woman really, really love one another, they decide to make a baby to share that love —

Cecil: Oh, brother. Just tell it straight, will you, Uncle Peter?

Peter: Okay. A man rams his hot throbbing member into a woman and humps so hard that he explodes just as she's screaming: ‘Don't stop, don't stop!’ Is that straight enough for you?³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Anna is not pregnant in the Prologue; she is pregnant by Scene 1; Nathan has just been born by Scene 13; Nathan is still an infant by the Epilogue.

³⁰² Paula Vogel, *And Baby Makes Seven* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1993), 10.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 8- 9.

Two important things happen in this exchange; first, the heterosexual paradigm is integrated into the narrative through emphasis on both biological reproduction and “traditional” norms of monogamous partnership that surround biological reproduction. This heterosexual paradigm is accentuated by the incorporation of the word “straight,” which carries double meaning and is used twice within the short exchange. Second, the scene introduces audiences to the sexual dynamics within Ruth, Anna, and Peter’s threesome; although Ruth and Anna are a couple, both women engage in intimate acts with Peter (whose name is of no little consequence and can be viewed as making Peter himself into a phallic symbol).³⁰⁵ Although Peter’s conception of family seems rooted in heteronormative conceptions and practices—heterosexual monogamy and love, for instance—that same heteronormative paradigm is destabilized by the fact that three people (a lesbian couple and a gay man) comprise the play’s central, intimate partner relationship.

Anna “*is very pregnant*”³⁰⁶ by Scene 1. Peter’s dialogue informs audiences of what has transpired between the Prologue and the present scene: “We entered into a contract; now the three of us have equal say in the bringing up of our child.”³⁰⁷ Although Peter’s use of the word “contract” carries legal connotations, the dialogue gives no further allusion to this; the contract Peter refers to is the contract that was established the night that Ruth furnished him and Anna with a bottle of champagne and a room at an inn, where Peter and Anna had sex (the ‘natural’ way) and conceived the child that, by the play’s end, is Nathan.

Anna: No turkey baster for little Emma. The bottle of champagne from Ruth, the little inn —

Peter: The innkeeper thinking we were newlyweds —

³⁰⁵ It is worthwhile to mention that, in *Dress Suits to Hire*, a character named Little Peter intrudes on a lesbian couple. Whether or not there is a metadramatic connection is unknown, but the parallel is, at least, interesting.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

Anna: Our little plots ... The Nubian boy spread on a Persian rug, the English schoolboy being disciplined — which was your favorite

...

Peter: Anna? I just want you to know ... that the fantasies weren't ... necessary. ... I really miss breasts.³⁰⁸

By the end of Scene 2, Peter touches one of Anna's breasts; Ruth enters, joins the two by touching Anna's other breast. In this scene, as in the Prologue, heteronormativity and queerness coexist. We can't quite pin down this relationship because it routinely defies our expectations.

Peter takes his role in the ménage-a-trois seriously; he and Ruth practice holding and bathing techniques using a baby doll, he is "being careful"³⁰⁹ when out at night with men (the reference to AIDS, although brief, is palpable and evocative of the times), and—most importantly—he pleads with Ruth and Anna to do away with the imaginary children. Anna concedes more easily than does Ruth, agreeing that the trio will be "bringing up the baby differently than [the imaginary children]."³¹⁰ In essence, it is time that the threesome recognizes the line between "reality and you know [to mean fantasy],"³¹¹ and get serious. The play's conflict results from the characters' struggles to become mothers and fathers; Peter drowns the baby doll and can only laugh at his unpreparedness. In Scene 5, Ruth laments forfeiting the imaginary sons: "Look, I want to get my last inch of fantasy out of them."³¹²

And by Scene 8 (the first scene of Act 2), Anna emphasizes the sense of loss she feels.

... I sit here, bloated and tethered like some goddamn Goodyear blimp on Super Bowl day. I'm supposed to give up coffee, smoking, drinking, fucking, spicy foods, and I'm expected to be understanding of what Ruth wants, what Peter needs. Who the fuck am I, some kind of knocked-up Miss Manners?³¹³

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 14.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 14.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

³¹¹ Ibid., 12.

³¹² Ibid., 20.

³¹³ Ibid., 28.

It is as if Peter, Ruth, and Anna find playfulness—gaiety, even (to borrow from Sara Warner)—incompatible with parenting a biological child. Even the imaginary children notice a change in their parents; early in Act 2, Cecil and Henri agree that Anna and Ruth have not acted like themselves “Ever since that baby.”³¹⁴

One by one, the imaginary boys are killed. In Scene 6, Anna finds Ruth/Orphan “bound in a chair with kitchen nylon cord rope. She has a gag in her mouth.”³¹⁵ Orphan has contracted rabies and will soon die; by the scene’s end Ruth has enacted Orphan’s death, which Vogel notes should resemble a scene from *The Exorcist*. The loss is excruciating; Ruth pleads with Anna, “I don’t see why we can’t change the . . . the narrative at this point,” Anna insists, “We can’t stop now. Not in the middle of the story.”³¹⁶ And so, the two remaining boys are also killed. Henri disappears (presumably to return to France via a ride on a red balloon), and Cecil dies a Julius Caesar-esque death at the hand of Peter:

Peter: Look, I didn’t want it to happen this way. I never meant to hurt anybody. I thought . . . that . . . that the kids should just go away, not be hurt. (*Starts to laugh and splutter.*) I mean, I’m not a . . . murderer, for God’s sake, I’m just a . . . a —
Cecil: A father?

Before his death, Anna/Cecil encourages Peter to change the narrative—he need not be like his own father, who left the family; he need not conform to what society has dictated fathers to be and do; and, most of all, he need not “be afraid . . . to play with [his] child.”³¹⁷

When Nathan is born, Ruth faces shock and disappointment because he looks like Peter, rather than Anna. Although the play could deeply engage with the biological complexities of parenting in lesbian and/or multi-partner families, the play’s final two scenes

³¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 21.

³¹⁶ Ibid. 34.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

and Epilogue focus upon Peter. As indicated by Vogel's stage directions, the scene is characterized by "*an underlying depression and sleep deprivation.*"³¹⁸ Peter has worked all day at his office job, and has come home to cook pasta and eat around the table with his family. Although "Most men dream of this,"³¹⁹ Peter is unfulfilled; when he blows bubbles into his glass of water, it becomes unmistakably clear that he misses Henri, Orphan, and Cecil. By the Epilogue, all three children have been resurrected. Inside the New York City apartment, a family of seven lives happily.

Enfranchisement as Manifest in Queer Families and Parenting

I discussed in Chapter 1 that this dissertation approaches the theme of enfranchisement broadly, emphasizing humanist connotations and identifying ways that the sample of plays empower LGBT characters (and, by association, audiences) through depicting them as equal to their heterosexual counterparts. In *And Baby Makes Seven*, Paula Vogel carefully ensures that her characters and their relationships are legitimized and considered 'on par' with 'traditional' families; this is typified by the play's final stage directions: "*We see Peter, Anna, and Ruth cradling Nathan in their apartment — one apartment among hundreds of their neighbors. Lights stream from adjacent windows where other families in privacy keep their own nightly vigils. The play ends as we hear Nathan's giggles and squeals.*"³²⁰ Here, Vogel accentuates family as a prominent—even universal—theme. Although each family has its./ own unique rituals (ostensibly performed by a unique constituency of family members, under unique sets of circumstances), family itself (a combination of adults and children) is ubiquitous.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 42.

³²⁰ Ibid., 45.

Joanna Mansbridge's 2014 publication, *Paula Vogel*, dedicates the second chapter, entitled "Reimagining Family: *And Baby Makes Seven*," to the play. Mansbridge notes that "Dramatizing family dynamics offers a microcosm through which to examine broader cultural values and question national principles, such as freedom, individuality, opportunity, and happiness."³²¹ As the analysis below illustrates, *And Baby Makes Seven* employs the family as a vehicle through which lesbians and a gay man pursue enfranchisement and the future, thereby locating the play within, and making it reflective of and/or reactionary to, the time period's "cultural values" and "national principles."

Anti-hero narratives proliferated in pre-Stonewall LGBT plays, which often sentenced lesbian and gay characters to death³²² (exemplified by the plays of Tennessee Williams, in which homosexual characters have often died in previous action), or at least to abandonment and loneliness (consider the title character of Lanford Wilson's *The Madness of Lady Bright*³²³). In sharp contrast, *And Baby Makes Seven* features only the metaphorical deaths of imaginary children (who are ultimately resurrected); the lesbian and gay parents live to the play's final curtain and, throughout the drama, have each other's company, as well as that of a third partner. *And Baby Makes Seven*'s emphasis on parenting also puts the play in sharp contrast to more subversive contemporary works like Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, the protagonist of which views children as incompatible with his gay lifestyle:

³²¹ Joanna Mansbridge, *Paula Vogel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 49.

³²² It is important to emphasize that, although Lil (the protagonist in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*) died, the cause of her death, cancer, had no relation to her sexuality. In addition, the other seven characters with lesbian or bisexual identities live to the play's final curtain, so 'punishment' is not the motivation behind Lil's death.

³²³ Although it appears only a coincidence that *And Baby Makes Seven*, like *The Madness of Lady Bright*, features imaginary children, it is valuable to mention that the imaginary children function differently in the two plays. Whereas, in Wilson's play, the boy and girl serve the dramaturgical function of the confidant for the tormented, aging protagonist, the three boys in Vogel's drama are a source of playfulness, joy, and imagination.

Prior I: You have no wife, no children.
Prior: I'm gay.³²⁴

And Baby Makes Seven occupies an interesting space within the LGBT repertoire—a liminal space, even. While the lesbian and gay characters gain entrance to the normative script of “happily ever after: love conquering all, the blessed gift of children . . .,”³²⁵ the critical point is that they do so *on their own terms*, engaging with that normative script through decidedly queer means. These specific means are discussed in the following sections. The salient point at present is that Vogel's 1984 play enfranchises lesbians (and gay men) to a greater extent than is afforded by mere assimilation.

Many of the contemporary queer theorists that I have cited throughout this project (Dustin Bradley Goltz, for instance) have critiqued cultural texts that “[construct] a ‘normal’ gay who wants the same things as ‘everyone else.’”³²⁶ In this scenario, the ‘wants,’ entail a family, and ‘everyone else’ refers to the heterosexual majority. In *And Baby Makes Seven*, all three characters embody this ‘normalized’ position. In terms of Peter's embodiment, consider this exchange from Scene 2:

Peter: Maybe we made a mistake . . . threesomes never work.
Anna: Now is not the time to get cold feet. You've been saying since college that you wanted to have a child . . .
Peter: I know, but —³²⁷

Despite having some doubts about the non-traditional arrangement of a gay man raising a baby with two lesbians, Peter capitalizes on the opportunity to fulfill his desire. Later in the scene, there is an allusion that Peter played with dolls as a child; the exposition functions not only to challenge traditional gender norms (a topic that will be taken up in what follows), but

³²⁴ Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993), 86.

³²⁵ Goltz, 83.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

³²⁷ Vogel, 16.

also to suggest that perhaps Peter's longing for "what everyone else wants" has existed since before college, again introducing family as a ubiquitous theme.

Dialogue does not indicate in any direct terms how long Ruth and Anna have desired to have children; however, the text suggests that creating a family has been in the characters' consciousnesses for quite some time. In Scene 1, when Peter suggests that Henri, Orphan, and Cecil be terminated, Ruth responds "The boys [Ruth and Anna's first three children] have been here for a long, long time!"³²⁸ Toward the play's end, in Scene 13, Ruth tells Peter that she and Anna "really started talking about having a child after [their] first year together,"³²⁹ and although we do not know how long ago that was, it seems reasonable to infer that it has been at least a few years.³³⁰ It is also important to note that, although it is Anna who carries Nathan, Ruth also possessed a desire to biologically reproduce:

Ruth: And I used to image that somewhere in the United States, there must be a pioneer geneticist, a woman in a lab coat we could go to, who would take some DNA from Anna and some DNA from me — and she'd combine us in a petri dish in a little honeymoon culture at just the right temperature — and then this growing synthesis would be transplanted in one of us ...³³¹

Indeed, Vogel's three human characters possess what many consider a heteronormative desire: the desire to be parents—more specifically, biological parents.

Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* engages politics and cultural texts to support his thesis "that *queerness* names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

³³⁰ This inference can be made based on two considerations: 1) Peter admits that, although he has been with Ruth and Anna for six months, he sometimes feels "in the way" (14); this circumstance allows audiences to assume that Peter struggles to integrate into Ruth and Anna's much longer history, and 2) In Scene 13, Ruth speaks of she and Anna's first year together with nostalgia ("You know how it is, that first year ... you spend every waking moment in side glances at your lover" [40]), affording the interpretation that it transpired a substantial time ago.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 40- 41.

of reproductive futurism.”³³² The Child has been positioned by liberationist scholars like Edelman and Goltz (among others) as the preeminent symbol of heteronormativity, straight temporality, and the future. Edelman argues that futurity is “blindly committed to the figure of the Child,”³³³ as evidenced by society’s interest in and commitment to marriage and reproduction (i.e. biological futurism). Edelman’s line of thinking appears in Jane Chambers’ *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* when Lil, who is dying of cancer, says the following to her long-time friend Annie:

Lil: Someday sculptures by Anne Joseph will be in the Metropolitan and dedicated little art students will pry into your life ... And books by Kitty Cochrane will be on library shelves a hundred years from now. ... And Rae has two grown children and they’ll have children. That’s a kind of immortality.³³⁴

The Child is a symbolic merger with heteronormativity and, by proxy, those who procreate are positioned relationally to the future. Resulting from biological imperatives is the historical narrative that LGBT people (unable to reproduce by ‘traditional’ means) are anti-child and therefore anti-future. The anti-child narrative casts the homosexual as “a pervert, a child molester, and a threat to innocent children everywhere,”³³⁵ and traces of this narrative appear within Vogel’s *And Baby Makes Seven*.

It would be an unfair overstatement to refer to Peter as a pedophile, but he does seem to possess a fetish for young boys. Most notably, Nathan was conceived while Anna and Peter role-played various scenarios, including “The Nubian boy spread on a Persian rug, the English schoolboy being disciplined ... the young Greek sailor, swabbing the deck on his

³³² Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³³⁴ Chambers, 25.

³³⁵ Goltz, 88.

knees in the hot Mediterranean sun ...”³³⁶ In these fantastical sexual escapades, Anna assumed the role of a young boy—though Peter now protests that “fantasies ... weren’t necessary.”³³⁷ Similarly, the intimate moments between Peter and Ruth transpire only when Ruth is performing Henri, an eight-year-old French boy. Although Peter tells Henri that he likes little boys, but “Not like that —,”³³⁸ Anna instructs Henri (only two pages later), saying “... no g-r-o-p-i-n-g. Remember? Not even if Uncle Peter wants you to.”³³⁹ The contradictions within the text make it difficult to ascertain what Peter’s sexual predilections entail, and I imagine that much is dependent upon an actor’s choices in performance.³⁴⁰

An anti-child sensibility is also integrated into the play through the fact that Ruth and Anna do not merely stop manifesting the three boys’ presences in the apartment, but make a pact to kill them:

Ruth: I can’t just stop doing them, just like that. ...

Anna: So what are you proposing?

Ruth: We’re going to tidy up the plots. No loose ends dangling. Starting tomorrow. We’re going to kill them. One by one. First Orphan. Then Henri. Cecil will be the last to go.³⁴¹

Although each of the adult characters struggle to bring Ruth’s plan to fulfillment, they succeed. The death scenes are written with the potential to elicit the play’s most effective moments, as they are rife with emotional and physical conflict, and are entertainingly metadramatic by drawing inspiration from iconic plots (*The Exorcist*, *The Red Balloon*, and *Julius Caesar*). Notwithstanding, the most salient circumstance is that the characters agree to

³³⁶ Vogel, 14.

³³⁷ Ibid., 11.

³³⁸ Vogel, 11.

³³⁹ Vogel, 12.

³⁴⁰ My research has not led to studies that elaborate on the correlation between *And Baby Makes Seven* and *How I Learned to Drive*, which includes an incestuous relationship, in which one participant is a much older uncle. Notwithstanding, it is valuable to note that, should Peter possess an attraction to/fetish for young boys, such predilection would add an additional queer/non-normative element to the drama.

³⁴¹ Vogel, 20.

kill their imaginary children, with whom they have previously strongly identified (e.g. **Ruth:** “Peter — if they go, I go” [10]).

Alongside the anti-child narratives within Vogel’s dark comedy, however, are strong pro-child narratives. Anna is pregnant; the characters’ actions—for better or for worse—are motivated by the desire to be effective parents to the baby that will soon come into their lives; and they ultimately bring the three imaginary boys back to life. Unlike Edelman, who urges queers “*not* to choose the Child,”³⁴² Peter, Anna, and Ruth always (in one form or another) choose the Child and, moreover, they do so without forfeiting what Edelman refers to as “the jouissance, the corrosive enjoyment, intrinsic to queer (non)identity.”³⁴³ Although the play was not necessarily ahead of its time in treating the subject of lesbian mothers (as Grode has suggested), it prefigured scholarship about parenthood and queer utopia that has only recently surfaced by envisioning a positive interaction between the two. In this respect, Vogel’s play is an entry point to troubling the arguments presented by those like Edelman and Goltz.

Jane Ward’s essay “Radical Experiments Involving Innocent Children: Locating Parenthood in Queer Utopia,” operates from the basis that parenting can be “unhinged”³⁴⁴ from Edelman’s conceptions. Ward employs autobiography as a critical tool to support her thesis that the practice of parenting has queer potentiality; she writes, “What [my partner and I] know is that we have staged our child’s world with queer scenes, imagery, objects, and sensations—because these are the cultural material of own [sic] lives— ...”³⁴⁵ As examples, both Ward and her partner have vaginas, but one is called Mom and the other Dad; when

³⁴² Edelman, 31.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁴⁴ Jane Ward, “Radical Experiments Involving Innocent Children: Locating Parenthood in Queer Utopia,” *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. Angela Jones (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 232.

³⁴⁵ Ward, 234.

reading stories as a family, liberties are taken to ensure that feminist, queer, and genderqueer perspectives are included; most important to Ward and her partner is that Yarrow (the child) is raised gender neutral. Ward argues that children are “quite skilled at public sex, public masturbation, genderfuck performances, defiant identifications, risk taking, and radical reconfigurations of public and private spaces,”³⁴⁶ and that “To parent queerly is to *stage* children’s worlds ...”³⁴⁷ The play-world of *And Baby Makes Seven* is precisely that, a children’s world set up immediately by Vogel’s description in the Characters list that Peter Leven “*Has the appearance of a precocious child.*”³⁴⁸ Further, the scenic element of a clown nightlight symbolizes the childlike atmosphere of Peter, Anna, and Ruth’s New York City apartment.

It takes little stretch of the imagination to envision the ways that, like Yarrow’s, Nathan’s life will be staged queerly. First and foremost, let us consider the “queer scenes.” A critical given circumstance in *And Baby Makes Seven* is that Peter is not a sperm donor. As Anna humorously declares, “no turkey baster”³⁴⁹ was involved in the child’s conception; later, as Cecil, Anna tells Peter that he is “going to make a wonderful father.”³⁵⁰ Peter is an integral part of the family, and Nathan will be raised in a home with three parents, none of whom are married; they never even discuss marriage. By drawing from this given circumstance, an opposing argument can be made to Jack Halberstam’s critique that “An ideology of family pushes gays and lesbians toward marriage politics and erases other modes of kinship in the process.”³⁵¹ Although Halberstam is not a steadfast proponent of the

³⁴⁶ Ward, 236.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 237.

³⁴⁸ Vogel, 5.

³⁴⁹ Vogel, 14.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 38.

³⁵¹ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 71.

antisocial thesis³⁵² and, in the quote above, assumes a position of critique to respond to the 21st-century preoccupation with marriage equality, Vogel's play does provide an entry point to destabilizing the notion that ideology of family, as a whole (rather than only strict, limited, heteronormative conceptions of family), is a culprit of erasures and exclusion.

Peter is also an integral part of the three-way sexual relationship. As previously mentioned, Scene 2 culminates with Peter and Ruth touching Anna's breasts, and Anna's sigh of pleasure alludes to an impending ménage-a-trois. Although it is Anna who has sex with Peter and becomes pregnant, there are sexual undertones in Ruth and Peter's relationship. In the Prologue, Ruth (as Henri) tells Peter "I want to have your baby!!!"³⁵³ and in Scene 1, Ruth (again as Henri) "*sits in Peter's lap, wriggling suggestively.*"³⁵⁴ Finally, dialogue in Scene 2 suggests that Peter also has male sexual partners:

Anna: Did you have a good time with the boys? (*Peter becomes beet red.*)

Peter: Umm ... well, not a bad time, you know ...

Anna: Promise me you're being careful ...

Peter: I'm being so careful.³⁵⁵

Nathan's parents are pansexuals whose sex practices are non-monogamous. Unmistakably, the heteronormative paradigm is destabilized early in the play through this "queer scene."

Other, though less overt queer scenes, are manifest in the mostly-covert integration of bondage, discipline, sadomasochism (BDSM). BDSM is an umbrella term that references a range of erotic practices that may or may not be jointly enacted. While bondage and discipline are similar to sadism and masochism, there is a key difference; bondage and discipline involve "physically restraining a person with devices or psychologically

³⁵² The antisocial thesis comes from Leo Bersani's *Homo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), which suggests that homosexuality "necessitates a massive redefining of relationality," and that the homosexual possesses "a potentially revolutionary inaptitude ... for sociality as it is known" (7 and 76).

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

restraining them with commands ... it often may not involve any physical pain, only physical restraint.”³⁵⁶ In contrast, Dr. Neel Burton defines sadomasochism as “the giving or receiving of pleasure, often sexual, from the infliction or reception of pain or humiliation.”³⁵⁷ Burton’s 2014 article in *Psychology Today* attempts to de-stigmatize consensual sadomasochistic practices, which have—since the 1980s—been contentious within mainstream discourses. The second wave feminist movement of the 1980s was complicated not only by the identity politics discussed earlier in the chapter, but also due to what have become known as the sex wars. Gayle S. Rubin articulates in her essay “Thinking Sex,” a “conservative, anti-sexual discourse”³⁵⁸ that emerged in the 1980s within some feminist circles. Primarily concerned with forging an anti-pornography movement, the conservative agenda of these feminists condemned, and viewed as tantamount with phallogocentrism, “every variant of sexual expression ... Within this framework, monogamous lesbianism that occurs within long-term, intimate relationships and which does not involve playing with polarized roles, has replaced married, procreative heterosexuality at the top of the value hierarchy.”³⁵⁹ This analysis has previously addressed the ways that *And Baby Makes Seven* works against a conservative sexual program that would scrutinize and even condemn both non-monogamy and role-playing. Dialogue also alludes to possible BDSM tendencies.

Most notably, one of the scenarios enacted by Peter and Anna while trying to conceive a child included a young school boy, who was being **disciplined**. A less overt example in Peter and Anna’s sexual relationship is that Anna’s other roles were similarly

³⁵⁶ “BDSM: Bondage, Dominance, Sadomasochism,” *SexInfo Online*, University of California, Santa Barbara, last modified May 21, 2013, <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/article/bdsm-bondage-dominance-sadomasochism>.

³⁵⁷ Neel Burton, “The Psychology of Sadomasochism,” *Psychology Today*, August 17, 2014, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hidden-and-seeking/201408/the-psychology-sadomasochism>.

³⁵⁸ Rubin, 28.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

submissive: “The Nubian boy **spread on the rug** ... young, Greek sailor, swabbing the deck **on his knees** ...”³⁶⁰ While the biological imperatives of reproductive sex demand that Anna be the ‘receiver’ (commonly referred to in BDSM practices as the ‘bottom’) in the sex act, the character assignments also suggest power differentials, ostensibly in terms of age and perhaps even social class.

A BDSM aesthetic can also be read into Ruth’s performance of Orphan’s death. Stage directions at the top of Scene 6 indicate that “*Ruth is loosely bound in a chair with kitchen nylon cord rope. She has a gag in her mouth.*”³⁶¹ The mise-en-scène responds to the given circumstance that Orphan has been bitten by a rabid dog and therefore must be restrained; however, it should not be overlooked that both Ruth and Anna take great pleasure in their fantasies, which (in previous scenes) has led to flirtation and seduction. While the scene at hand does not include intimacy between Ruth/Orphan and Anna, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that these “queer scenes,” or even “queer sensations” (to again employ Ward’s terminology) would be recognized by audiences who engage in BDSM practices. Moreover, it is possible that actors and directors could integrate eroticism into the scene’s subtext to evoke a more intentional queer aesthetic. To draw upon Zachary Stewart’s review of the 2014 revival, “it’s a settled matter: These are decidedly not the just-like-you finicky gay parents ... These people still exist on the sexual and cultural fringe.”³⁶² Capitalizing on potential queer scenes and queer sensations bolsters Ward’s thesis for the queer potentiality of parenting.

³⁶⁰ Vogel, 14. (Bold font mine for emphasis.)

³⁶¹ Vogel, 21.

³⁶² Zachary Stewart, “*And Baby Makes Seven*,” *Theatermania*, March 23, 2014, http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/03-2014/and-baby-makes-seven_67961.html.

In terms of what Ward calls “queer images,” one must consider the role-play that is instrumental within the play-world. As I have previously mentioned, both Anna and Ruth assume male roles when portraying Henri, Orphan, and Cecil. Some, an example being *Playbill*'s Carey Purcell, have gone so far as to interpret the imaginary boys as Anna and Ruth's alter-egos. In addition, I have noted that Anna assumed a series of young male roles when having sex with Peter. Given the fact that the imaginary children return to the play-world in the Epilogue, coupled by the fact that a change in sexual practices was never a point of contention between the characters, there is ample reason to believe that Nathan will be raised among queer images, by way of gender-bending and role-playing. At this point, it is also helpful to consider production circumstances, in particular how casting and/or costuming has increased (or at least has the potential to increase) the queer images within the play-world.

I have noted that Vogel describes Peter as looking like a precocious *child*; could this mean that Peter does not exhibit ‘traditional’ masculine aesthetics like being tall and brawny? Could it mean that he does not wear facial hair? Exposition reveals that Peter played with dolls as a child (an example of the genderfucking in which children participate, according to Ward); has he retained any effeminacy in adulthood? Ted Montague and Michael DeMartini played Peter in 1984 and 1986 productions, respectively, but my attempts to procure production photos featuring these actors have thus far been unsuccessful. Peter Frechette portrayed the role of Peter in the 1993 Circle Repertory Company production. While the photo below effectively captures Peter's enthusiasm about becoming a father, it offers little insight to how queer the character was created by Frechette, the director, and the costume designer.

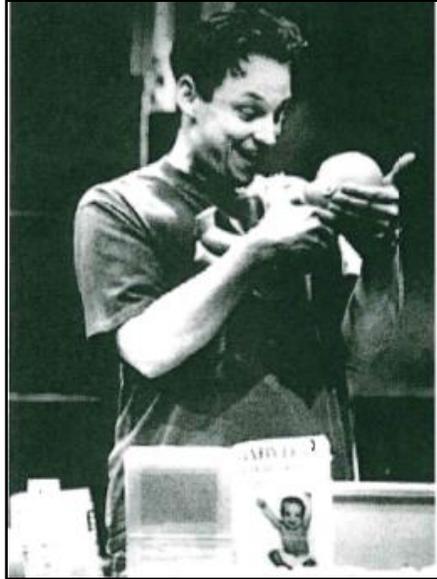


Figure 9
Peter Frechette in the 1993
Circle Repertory Company
production at the Lucille
Lortel Theatre.

Because Frechette is an openly gay actor, whose resume includes the portrayal of numerous gay roles, it is reasonable to assume that the actor portrayed the role believably. Whether or not this includes flamboyancy, effeminacy, or genderqueer manifestations is more difficult to determine.

In the character introduction for Anna, Vogel only notes that she is “A little overweight right now,”³⁶³ ostensibly due to being pregnant. Although Vogel provides more description of Ruth, she is still largely ambiguous: “Short, dark and intense.”³⁶⁴ Could dark be taken to mean that Ruth is a racial minority, or does Vogel refer to Ruth’s more sinister disposition (after all, it was Ruth who insisted that the imaginary boys be killed)? Does “intense” mean that Ruth lacks the quintessential nurturing spirit typically expected of mothers? Is Ruth’s short stature a reflection of Vogel (who stands only 5’1”), and if so,

³⁶³ Ibid., 5.

³⁶⁴ Vogel, 5.

should Ruth also appear “mannish,” as Simi Horowitz of *Backstage* has described the playwright? The 1984 production featured Cary Bickley as Anna, and Sondra Allen as Ruth. In the 1986 production, Karen Lynn Seaton was cast as Anna, and Sandra Langsner played Ruth. Unfortunately, no photos from these productions are accessible. Notable actresses Cherry Jones (an open lesbian) and Mary Mara portrayed Anna and Ruth in the Circle Repertory Company production.



Figure 10
(From top to bottom)
Mary Mara as Ruth, Cherry Jones as
Anna, and Peter Frechette as Peter in the
premiere production.

Neither Jones nor Mara was conventionally attractive to the extent that Jean Smart (who had portrayed Lil in Jane Chambers’ *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* only four years earlier) was, but both actresses appear predominantly feminine. The photo above is difficult to assess because the actors are lying down, which prohibits a thorough analysis of the semiotics of dress.

The lack of accessible production photos, while disappointing, is not surprising. Perhaps it seemed of little value to preserve poorly-received productions of a play that the

playwright referred to as her “Scottish play.”³⁶⁵ Given the bleak circumstances of the earliest productions, heavily influenced by homophobia, it is not unexpected that their histories are preserved less than are those of more successful plays. These considerations aside, the salient point at present is that the descriptions Vogel provides about her characters allow directors, casting directors, and costumers to queerly imagine the characters’ bodies in the theatrical space.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler notes that “the inner truth of gender is a fabrication” and “true gender is a fantasy.”³⁶⁶ These ideals invite subversive gender performances, drag and camp performances. Production circumstances can capitalize on such invitations and further incorporate “queer images” by bypassing conventional norms regarding gender presentation in casting and/or costuming. In effect, Vogel’s vague descriptions require (queer) interpretation and imagination; Vogel invites theatre practitioners and audiences alike to embrace “the spirit and outrageousness” embodied by the gender-bending dyke in Bechdel’s 1987 comic. As a result, two important things can potentially happen: first, the lesbian and gay characters who engage with the heteronormative paradigm do so *on their own terms*, in part by constructing and performing subversive gender identities; second, critiques that locate enfranchisement as a practice intrinsically bound to the heteronormative paradigm are troubled, as that very paradigm is queered by visual aesthetics.

In Vogel’s play, not only are fabrications and fantasies about gender destabilized, but so are fabrications and fantasies regarding what constitutes a family. Just as Butler contends that an essential, true gender does not exist, Vogel’s play shows that an essential, true family

³⁶⁵ Carey Purcell, “A Tight Knit Family: From *Falsettos* to *Mothers and Sons*, a Look at Gay Families on the Stage” *Playbill*, June 30, 2014, <http://playbill.com/features/article/a-tight-knit-family-from-falsettos-to-mothers-and-sons-a-look-at-gay-famili-323088/P9>.

³⁶⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 186.

does not exist. Joanna Mansbridge's analysis of the play similarly draws upon Butlerian theory, emphasizing Butler's claim that "The critical promise of fantasy ... is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality."³⁶⁷ Mansbridge views *And Baby Makes Seven* as a fantasy that works to destabilize what has been deemed as true and real.

Many critics and scholars have recognized the ways that *And Baby Makes Seven* productively replaces one (negative) fantasy with another (positive fantasy). David Savran has lauded the play: "And Baby Makes Seven celebrates **fantasy** and the power of narrative--and gives a new meaning to 'family values.'"³⁶⁸ Savran later expanded on this idea, asserting that "Vogel's women [including Anna and Ruth] are themselves playwrights who attempt to write their way out of difficult situations and script more creative, bountiful lives."³⁶⁹ A 1990 review in the *Los Angeles Times* focuses on the theme of Vogel's short play: "'And Baby Makes Seven' hardly takes any time at all before concluding that **fantasies** are just fine, thank you. Dream on."³⁷⁰ Constance Zaytoun of Purpleman Theater (the company responsible for the 2014 revival) reported to Mark Blankenship of *TDF Stages*, "[The play's] about the **invention** of your life and your family ..."³⁷¹ The initial source of conflict in the play is Peter's reticence about making indistinguishable the line between reality and fantasy—or fantasy and fantasy, when the play is viewed through a Butlerian lens.

³⁶⁷ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 29.

³⁶⁸ David Savran, "Paula Vogel's Acts of Retaliation," *American Theatre* 13, no. 4 (April 1996): 46. (Bold font mine for emphasis.)

³⁶⁹ David Savran, "Driving Ms. Vogel," *American Theatre* 15, no. 8 (October 1998): np.

³⁷⁰ Don Shirley, "Stage Review: 'Baby Makes Seven': Amusing Child's Play," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), Mar. 12, 1990. (Bold font mine for emphasis.)

³⁷¹ Mark Blankenship, "Is It Finally Time for Paula Vogel's 'Gay Family' Play?" *TDFStages*, accessed on December 1, 2014, <http://wp.tdf.org/index.php/2014/03/and-baby-makes-seven-paula-vogel/>. (Bold font mine for emphasis.)

Regarding Henri, Orphan, and Cecil, Peter warns that the line between fantasy and reality is “getting dangerously thin.”³⁷² Inculcated to believe that living, breathing, biological children are *the* appropriate children, Peter urges Ruth and Anna to refrain from evoking the imaginary children. Anna agrees more readily than does Ruth, who concedes soon after, under the condition that the boys be killed off one by one so as to preserve the fantasy for a few days more. Further, Peter has been coerced to believe that a two-person arrangement is *the* basis for a family, and so questions his belonging: “I ... I have my doubts sometimes. ... sometimes, with you and Ruth ... I feel like I’m in the way. ... Maybe we made a mistake ... threesomes never work.”³⁷³ Yet, Peter also believes that children “need a strong male role model.”³⁷⁴ Indeed, the heteronormative model of a family permeates the play-world through Peter’s (and, to a lesser degree, Anna and Ruth’s) anxieties. Notwithstanding, the play ultimately undermines the heteronormative model of a family. Peter, Anna, and Ruth are reunited with Henri, Orphan, and Cecil. By the Epilogue, Nathan has been born, and baby makes not just seven, but a *family* of seven. Like Ward and her partner, Vogel’s characters realize that queerness need not entail estrangement from institutions like family and practices like parenting. In that same vein, they recognize that institutions like family and practices like parenting do not necessitate that participants give up their queerness, their playfulness, or their imagination; in essence, gaiety—in its fullest sense—can still exist. Peter, Anna, and Ruth recognize the fallacy of the essential family and ultimately embrace fantasy and play as tenets of their family; the threesome not only imagines queer alternatives, but lives queer alternatives.

³⁷² Vogel, 12.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

The scenarios and queer family depicted in Vogel's play, fictitious as they are, parallel some of the real-life families that emerged (to a noticeable extent) in the 1980s and continue in our present day. Laura V. Heston's "Utopian Kinship?: The Possibilities of Queer Parenting," explores empirical material from interviews Heston conducted with LGBTQ parents in Massachusetts (as part of a larger study, the sample of which also includes LGBTQ parents in New York). One of the questions that motivated Heston's study was: "Is the future which LGBTQ people with children represent necessarily an assimilationist one?"³⁷⁵ Heston, like Jane Ward, takes interest in the queer potential of parenting; she notes that "Essentially, researchers expect gay and lesbian families to revolutionize parenting ... Though no family [she] met were perfect models of problem-free, antinormative, queer kinship, the practices they engage in gesture toward a queer future ..."³⁷⁶

With the play's queer potentiality considered, the negative reactions toward the productions of the 1980s, and even the 1993 production, are less unexpected. While a noticeable trend for lesbian parenting may have emerged within the lesbian community, conservatism pervaded in 1980's America; people were still reluctant (to put it mildly) to see open lesbians on stage—no less, open lesbians who kiss each other and discuss the sex acts they perform with their openly gay male companion, and who are bringing a child into the world. In 1984, Paula Vogel's play boldly gave lesbian and gay characters access to the most sacred heteronormative script (that of the Child), but did so under queer conditions, empowering lesbians and gays in the most liberationist sense: making them separate but

³⁷⁵ Laura V. Heston's "Utopian Kinship?: The Possibilities of Queer Parenting," *Utopia: A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. Angela Jones (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 246,

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

equal. Amidst criticism, Vogel has maintained that “There’s something wonderful about people disliking my work so much.”³⁷⁷

Vogel, herself, had “wanted to have children badly” and “went through planning having a baby,”³⁷⁸ but it did not work. *And Baby Makes Seven* emerged in response, maybe even as a catharsis, to the playwright’s personal disappointment. In this sense, the play functions to empower Vogel herself, and others who hope for motherhood and have experienced similar complications and frustrations. By giving voice to the desire for enfranchisement as manifest in creating queer families, the play enfranchises LGBT parents and would-be parents. Productions also enfranchised Vogel as a lesbian playwright (and director of the 1984 premiere), and LGBT actors like Peter Frechette and Cherry Jones. Yet, Vogel has also noted that, when she wrote *And Baby Makes Seven*, she was “envision[ing] a sexual utopia ...”³⁷⁹ Through the play’s theme of fantasy, Vogel empowers and enfranchises not only lesbian mothers and gay fathers, but presumably anyone who fantasizes—whether it be about procreating and parenting, or about alternative, queerer ways of identifying, loving, fucking, and communing.

And Baby Makes Seven’s troubled history, however, suggests that the broader thematic implications have often been overlooked. Some lesbian-feminists, for instance, took issue with the play. Vogel has recalled, “‘Complaints went like, ‘Why did you write these imaginary children as boys?’ But I don’t speak for all lesbians and I don’t want to.”³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Paula Vogel, quoted in Horowitz, 1.

³⁷⁸ Paula Vogel, quoted in Karjean Ng, “Theater Role,” *The Advocate*, February 1999, 43.

³⁷⁹ Paula Vogel, quoted in Zachary Stewart, “*And Baby Makes Seven*,” *Theatermania*, last modified March 23, 2014, http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/03-2014/and-baby-makes-seven_67961.html.

³⁸⁰ Paula Vogel, quoted in Drukman.

Vogel's plays are not written for particular audiences; not even lesbian audiences. Consider this excerpt from a 1998 interview between Vogel and David Savran:

DS: When you're writing do you have an imaginary audience in mind? Do you write for a friend, for a family member, for your lover?

PV: It depends on the play. I don't think of an anonymous mass audience.

...

I really don't care what people think anymore. The difficulty is that it's easier to find proponents of *How I Learned to Drive* and *Baltimore Waltz*, and much harder to find supporters of *Desdemona*, *And Baby Makes Seven* and *The Mineola Twins*. I'm not really sure why that is. I'm feeling that my actual physical shape on the word, being a 'lesbian, female playwright,' interferes with the reception of the play. I think we do this game. We look at a play and receive the play according to what we think a woman playwright or lesbian playwright should write.³⁸¹

In a similar vein, Paula Vogel's plays are not intended to empower or enfranchise one particular group over another. As she articulated to Simi Horowitz, "the questions that most concern me are, 'Is it a responsible work? And will it hurt anybody?' ... I'm never P.C. But I do believe all plays are political. I'm not talking about propaganda. But if you're looking at issues we face as a community, well, that's political."³⁸² As this chapter's historical overview of the 1980s indicated, LGBT families were a part of the social/historical moment out of which the play was born. It was also a political issue; in 1986, the Gay Fathers Coalition that was founded in the 1970s became the Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International. Vogel's play and this organization share an emphasis on equality—that all families, despite looking, acting, or comprised differently from one another, are families nonetheless. Mansbridge effectively states in her analysis of the play that "nontraditional families and unconventional genders are not imagined in opposition to some hegemonic norm, but are rather positioned as revised versions of these norms."³⁸³ The play evokes the forward-thinking

³⁸¹ Savran, "Driving Ms. Vogel," 19 and 98.

³⁸² Paula Vogel quoted in Horowitz, 1.

³⁸³ Mansbridge, 55.

spirit of the times, which imagined lesbians and gay men participating in (and even re-inventing) institutions and practices from which they had previously been excluded. And the play evokes an even greater forward-thinking sensibility in revising the heteronormative paradigm to such great lengths as to include queer scenes and sensations, and queer images.

I view the play as a rejoinder to heteronormative scripts that engage with empowerment and enfranchisement in ways that facilitate exclusion. To my mind, *And Baby Makes Seven* provides audiences with insight into Vogel's personal conception of queer life and queer futurity:

I would like to see my life with [my partner] in Provincetown. I would like to see our old age together. I would like to see the children in our families as adults. I would like to see my friends in a community together. I would like to see that future as not a possibility, but having happened.³⁸⁴

Although Ruth, Anna, and Peter share their creator's interest in a traditional, 'conservative' narrative of growing old together, creating stable relationships with friends, lovers, and children, they do so in decidedly queer ways. The characters relish fantasy, and the play gives audiences permission to do the same—to play out their wildest fantasies. Vogel should take comfort that the work is not only responsible, but offers empowerment and enfranchisement to all who, in the words of José Esteban Muñoz, recognize the ways that queerness can “imagine a future ... [to] see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present ... [and to] dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world ...”³⁸⁵ For Vogel, a re-imagined, re-invented family—one that deserves the description 'queer' for the ways it abandons the configurations, traditions, and practices of the heteronormative family—is but one vehicle through which that future can be envisioned and actualized.

³⁸⁴ Paula Vogel, quoted in Mary Louise Parker, “Paula Vogel,” *Bomb*, Fall 1997, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2108/paula-vogel>.

³⁸⁵ Muñoz, 1.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIVES LIVED FULLY: DIANA SON'S *STOP KISS*

“Lesbians Come Out Strong: What are the Limits of Tolerance?” was the cover story for the June 21, 1993, issue of *Newsweek*. Much of the article centered upon butch/femme aesthetics and stereotypes (a topic dealt with in Chapter 2 of this project), and grappled with what Danae Clark has called “wearing the privilege of straight culture.”³⁸⁶ Lesbians who present a more “traditionally” feminine appearance are often able to ‘pass’ as straight and go ‘undetected’ in the dominant culture; the associated privileges are not afforded to butch lesbians, thus evoking the article’s subtitle related to the *limits* of tolerance. For the purpose of this chapter, however, it is the notion that “lesbians c[a]me out strong” during the 1990s that is particularly important, as it indicates the growing discernible presence of open lesbians not only in American society (a presence that had been pioneered by lesbian and gay homophile organizations since the 1950s), but in popular media and American culture more widely.

This trend developed rapidly in the early 1990s despite, or perhaps in reaction to, the 1980’s anti-feminist/lesbian backlash; ultimately, the decade was marked by significant lesbian visibility in the mainstream. Consider the following examples: in the February 7, 1991, *L.A. Law* episode, “He’s a Crowd,” primetime television audiences encountered a same-sex kiss—the first televised kiss between two women—shared by characters C.J. Lamb and Abby Perkins. In 1992, prominent musical artist k.d. lang came out in an interview with *The Advocate*’s Brendan Lemon:

³⁸⁶ Danae Clark, “Commodity Lesbianism,” *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 197.

... people want to know why I'm androgynous, they want to know if I'm gay—they want to know. I'm different. I mean, I don't think I'm that different. I get a little tired of the issue, because ultimately I'm a musician. ... when I'm asked the question, I say yes. But I don't want to sit here and talk about it, although we are.³⁸⁷

Melissa Etheridge (also a famous singer/songwriter) publically identified as a lesbian in January 1993 at the Triangle Ball, a celebration of Bill Clinton's first inauguration. 1993 also saw Roberta Achtenberg becoming the assistant secretary of Housing and Urban Development, securing open lesbians a presence within the federal government.³⁸⁸ In 1994 *Roseann* famously aired a same-sex kiss between the title character (who identifies as straight) and a lesbian character, Sharon. The episode was entitled "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and unmistakably evoked the legislation enacted by President Clinton.

The *Newsweek* cover story responded to notable coming out stories of the early 1990s, but also foreshadowed what was still to come in the 1990s—a relentless continuation of the vogue for lesbian visibility in mainstream political and popular culture. In 1994, Sheila Kuehl was elected to the California Assembly (the lower level of state government in California), and in 1998, Tammy Baldwin became the first open lesbian elected to Congress. Cultural memory related to lesbianism in the 1990s, however, tends to focus upon Ellen DeGeneres, who gained fame with the sitcom *Ellen*. DeGeneres appeared on the April 14, 1996, cover of *Time* with the headline "Yep, I'm Gay."³⁸⁹ Sixteen days later, in "The Puppy Episode," Ellen Morgan (the title character of *Ellen*, portrayed by DeGeneres) also revealed her lesbian sexuality. The episode was nationally broadcast and offered primetime television

³⁸⁷ k.d. lang, quoted in Brendan Lemon, "k.d.: A Quite Life," *The Advocate*, June 16, 1992, 34-36.

³⁸⁸ The lesbian politicians elected in earlier decades were appointed to state and city-level positions.

³⁸⁹ In 1997, actress Anne Heche, who had previously dated only men, became romantically involved with DeGeneres. The couple dated for approximately three years. Since their split, Heche has been married to two men. DeGeneres is now married to actress Portia de Rossi.

its first openly lesbian, leading character.³⁹⁰ The overt foray into mediated depictions of lesbian experience and identity existed alongside continued representations in the American theatre; especially, depictions and narratives increasingly related to the theme of enfranchisement.

Arguably, the preeminent example is Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, Part One: Millennium Approaches*, which premiered on Broadway at the Walter Kerr Theatre in 1993.³⁹¹ The play's protagonist, Prior Walter, is an openly gay AIDS patient who wrestles with the angel of death, demanding to be blessed with "more life"³⁹² because "the time has come, we will be citizens."³⁹³ Through the play's central character, Kushner raises significant questions related to LGBT identity and citizenship/enfranchisement. These questions include: Does a queer engagement with the future exist? If so, what does queer futurity entail? What are the terms and conditions of the citizenship Prior demands for himself and his fellow queers? My article "Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: History, Futurity, and Queer Lives*" (2014) analyzes the play's main themes of history and futurity to explore these questions, and emphasizes the ways that a decidedly queer future incumbent on citizenship and enfranchisement is imagined by the playwright.³⁹⁴

³⁹⁰ Studies like Ron Becker's "Gay-Themed Television and the Slumpy Class : The Affordable, Multicultural Politics of the Gay Nineties," Bonnie J. Dow's "*Ellen*, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility," C. Lee Harrington's "Lesbian(s) on Daytime Television: The Bianca Narrative on *All My Children*," and Glynn Davis and Gary Needham's *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics* (2009) have explored the ways in which the 1990s were a decade marked by gay and lesbian visibility in television and, to some extent, media in general. I draw from these studies later in the chapter to explore televised representations.

³⁹¹ Kushner won the 1993 Tony Award for Best Play, as well as the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for drama; he was the first openly gay playwright to have his play win either award, no less both. *Part Two: Perestroika* debuted the following year, winning the 1994 Tony Award for Best Play.

³⁹² Kushner, 266.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 280.

³⁹⁴ Vanessa Campagna, "Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: History, Futurity, and Queer Lives*," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 26, no. 3 (2014), <http://jadtjournal.org/2014/11/17/tony-kushners-angels-in-america-histories-futures-and-queer-lives/>.

In this chapter, I take Diana Son's *Stop Kiss* (1998) as my subject and explore how the enfranchisement of lesbians was conceptualized in this representative American drama of the 1990s. Son's play is especially appropriate for this study because it engages the theme of enfranchisement (albeit less overtly than does Kushner's play). Additionally, *Stop Kiss* serves as an appropriate counterpart to my work with *Angels in America* because it grapples with the theme of enfranchisement *without* a prophetic, heroic protagonist like Prior, and without metaphorical and/or fantastical angels who bless the sick and offer life. Instead, with Son's play, audiences encounter the harsh realities faced by disenfranchised sexual minorities who have no angel, and whose lives are not played out within a pseudo deus-ex-machina narrative.

Stop Kiss was written and debuted during what has been called the Gay Nineties,³⁹⁵ yet it portrays an alternative view of the time period than that appearing on the glossy covers of magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time*, or on televisions in 'living color.' The 1990s were bifurcated times. It was a time during which lesbian celebrities came out "strong," but *Ellen* ran for only one additional season before the series was cancelled on the basis of being 'too gay.'³⁹⁶ Similarly, while President Bill Clinton invited LGBT individuals to meet with him at the White House, gave the keynote address at the first HRC dinner in 1997 and (in 1999) declared June Pride Month, he also acquiesced to conservatives and enacted homophobic legislation like Don't Ask, Don't Tell (1994) and the Defense of Marriage Act (1996). And, although a few open lesbians won elections throughout the decade, many more faced

³⁹⁵ This reference queers the phrase "Gay Nineties," which was first used in reference to the 1890s, a time during which French culture and art was characterized by frivolity.

³⁹⁶ As Joyce Luck writes in *Melissa Etheridge: Our Little Secret*, "the dreaded backlash against [Etheridge's] sexuality never materialized (only a predictable measure of homophobic grumbling)" (see Joyce Luck, *Melissa Etheridge: Our Little Secret* [Toronto: ECW Press, 1997]. 144). Neither did Lang's coming out have detrimental effects on the singer's career—some interpreted the song "Meat Stinks" as the militant typification of both the singer's vegetarianism and lesbianism (practices that have often been linked in popular myth), but such interpretations posed no legitimate threat to Lang's career.

homophobia, some even becoming victims of hate crimes. In view of these circumstances, it seems fair to view the 1990s as a time when mainstream media attention and popular culture was conflated with acceptance and social/political progress. In reality, as the *Newsweek* cover made unequivocally clear, there were limits to tolerance. The limits to tolerance were further explored in the July 5, 1993, issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, which featured a poll entitled “Where A Concerned America Draws the Line.” By drawing upon *Stop Kiss* as an exemplary play of the decade, this chapter seeks to interrogate the limits of tolerance and understand the ways that lesbian characters and their real-life counterparts of the 1990s conceptualized enfranchisement. My analysis of the play explores the ways in which the titular kiss reflects those limits and the mainstream attention/legitimate progress paradox.

Broadway producer George C. Wolfe has described *Stop Kiss* as a play demonstrating “that the not-so-simple act of caring, shared between two people, truly is a brave and revolutionary act.”³⁹⁷ While the story Son has written of Callie and Sara evokes the universalizing, humanistic perspective articulated by Wolfe, the same-sex attraction and intimate act of kissing that is at the crux of the characters’ relationship and the plot’s critical point (not to mention the play’s title) moves beyond “caring” and is an unfortunate omission in Wolfe’s introduction to the play’s 1999 Overlook Press publication. The bravery of which Wolfe speaks is requisite—if not entirely, then in large part—because of the dangers associated with LGBT experience and identity—dangers that Callie and Sara come to know well. The summary of the play, printed on the back of the same 1999 publication, argues that “The tragic consequences of their kiss . . . serve as both an indictment of hatred and a moving study of the perils inherent in living life fully.”³⁹⁸ While I appreciate that this latter remark

³⁹⁷ George C. Wolfe, “Introduction,” *Stop Kiss*, Diana Son (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999), 9.

³⁹⁸ Diana Son, *Stop Kiss* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1999), back cover.

addresses the drama's salient plot points, I argue that when a woman lives in an at-risk position (one that renders her subject to being accosted and beaten) simply on the basis of her gender and sexual preference, she is *not* "living life fully." When a person's access to the pleasures, freedoms, or otherwise **fullness** of life is limited by homophobia and homophobic violence, her ability to live life fully is jeopardized. Her access to life itself is jeopardized. With these critiques in mind, my analysis of *Stop Kiss* explores how enfranchisement, which this project takes as a necessary component to "living life fully," is manifest in the desire for access to sexual agency, and to safety and legal support and protections.

Historical Overview of the 1990s

Ronald Reagan was a two-term Republican president succeeded by his Vice-President, George H.W. Bush, in 1988. Under the Bush administration, the antifeminist backlash and New Right conservatism that had characterized the Reagan years continued, but were tempered by Bush's desire for "a kinder, and gentler nation."³⁹⁹ Chapter 3 of this study explored the Baby Boom that developed in the lesbian community throughout the 1980s and the related emergence of gay rights initiatives dealing with adoption and marriage equality. These issues persisted into the new decade and were accompanied by new legislative actions. President Bush enacted the Ryan White CARE Act⁴⁰⁰ in 1990; that same year, he also signed into law the Hate Crimes Statistics Act.⁴⁰¹ In 1991, the Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Bill was re-introduced to Congress bearing the support of 110 co-sponsors, but ultimately failed to secure the necessary votes.

³⁹⁹ George H.W. Bush, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination," (presentation, Republican National Convention, New Orleans, LA, August 15- 18, 1988).

⁴⁰⁰ The Ryan White CARE Act provides Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency; the legislation works to assist those without medical insurance and/or the financial stability to effectively cope with AIDS.

⁴⁰¹ The Hate Crimes Statistics Act required that data related to crimes committed on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or disability be collected and recorded by the Attorney General.

With Bush as Commander-in-Chief, the United States fought the Persian Gulf War in 1991, which was (by and large) considered successful until the country faced a recession marked by “the economy growing at a meager 1% annually, and unemployment steadily rising.”⁴⁰² Grim economic circumstances contributed to President Bush’s unsuccessful 1992 campaign for re-election. The Democratic Party’s candidate, Bill Clinton, won the popular vote and a wide Electoral College margin. Many members of the LGBT community were encouraged by Clinton’s liberal ideals; more than any previous candidate endorsed by the Democratic National Campaign (DNC), Clinton had vied for the ‘gay vote,’ speaking at LGBT fundraising events and rallies, and making LGBT enfranchisement one of his commitments to the country. As Vicki L. Eaklor notes in *Queer America: A GLBT History of the 20th Century*, “Clinton spoke for an America that included lesbians and gay men, and against discrimination, promising to end the ban against homosexuality in the military once he became president.”⁴⁰³ In short, Bill Clinton was a president with a vested interest in the enfranchisement of LGBT citizens. I previously mentioned some of the ways that President Clinton upheld his promise—working with the HRC, welcoming members of the LGBT community into the oval office, and hiring openly LGTB individuals to positions within the national government. In addition to these efforts, President Clinton introduced and renewed legislation designed to support LGBT Americans. The Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act was introduced to the House and Senate in 1993 and officially enacted in 1995. The Act “allow[s] judges to impose harsher penalties for hate crimes, including hate crimes based on gender, disability and sexual orientation that occur in national parks and on other federal

⁴⁰² “Biography: 41. George H.W. Bush,” *PBS*, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-bush/>.

⁴⁰³ Eaklor 198- 199.

property.”⁴⁰⁴ The Ryan White CARE Act and the Hate Crimes Statistics Act were renewed in 1995 and 1996, respectively. And in 1998, Clinton signed an executive order that prohibited discrimination within the federal government against lesbians and gay men. These victories, however, were accompanied by large-scale setbacks.

“Ending the ban” on the military service of LGBT individuals did not mean allowing **open** homosexuals to serve. Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (the colloquial name for Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue, Don’t Harass, and abbreviated DADT) was the compromise President Clinton made with oppositional forces in the national government and leaders in the nation’s armed services, who resisted lifting the ban on service by lesbians and gay men. The legislation, which was signed into effect in 1994, hinged on an understanding of the closet as a liminal space, one entered and exited depending on circumstance. The military was to be an exclusively closeted territory, and the assumption was that, if lesbians and gay men are not open about their sexualities and do not “pursue” intimate relationships with their fellow service women and men, then harassment will not occur. The troubling notion that it is the responsibility of sexual minorities to protect themselves (through silence, no less) will be taken up later in this chapter.

Beginning in 1993, Congress was hard at work on a new piece of legislation to ensure that the national government was “on record as opposing same-sex marriage.”⁴⁰⁵ The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was a response to the 1993 court case *Baehr v. Lewin* (later *Baehr v. Miike*) in Hawaii, which resulted in the court ruling that “denying marriage licenses to same-sex couples denied them equal protection under the law and constituted sex

⁴⁰⁴ “Hate Crimes Timeline,” *HRC*, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/hate-crimes-timeline>. The fact that the Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act does not address hate crimes that do not transpire on federal property is a significant shortcoming.

⁴⁰⁵ Eaklor 215.

discrimination.”⁴⁰⁶ By 1996, the Hawaii Supreme Court made a landmark ruling in favor of same-sex marriage. However, appeals and a constitutional amendment from the state legislature (supported by voters) defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman brought the cases to an end, banning same-sex marriage. The events surrounding the cases brought public and political conversations related to same-sex marriage to an unprecedented level—one at which a future bearing marriage equality seemed possible. Despite the fact that, in a June 1993 interview with *The Advocate*, President Clinton articulated his straight-forward personal opinion on the topic of marriage: “I remain opposed to same-sex marriage,”⁴⁰⁷ the president sought a separation between his personal opinions and federal policy, and thus considered DOMA unnecessary. But in September 1996, the bill appeared on his desk in the Oval Office and was signed into law on September 10.

That same day, Congress defeated the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a measure that would have prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the work place and in affiliated processes like hiring, promotion, and termination. Although ENDA was only narrowly defeated at the federal level (49-50), the degree of protection for LGBT citizens seemed similarly disappointing in several state-level governments. Four years earlier, Coloradan voters approved Amendment 2, which prohibited making the LGBT community a protected minority class. Sources report that the majority of Coloradoans opposed affirmative action and viewed any policy that would make sexual minorities a protected class as a continuation and extension of that practice. Another example is the 1998 repeal of Maine’s Gay Rights Law. As *The New York Post* reported:

Maine voters have narrowly chosen to make their state the first in the nation to repeal its law protecting gay men and lesbians from discrimination, according

⁴⁰⁶ Eaklor 215.

⁴⁰⁷ Bill Clinton, quoted in Jeff Yarbrough, “Bill Clinton Interview,” *The Advocate*, June 1996, 50.

to all-but-official referendum results published today. ... Casting ballots on Tuesday in a single-issue "people's veto" plebiscite, nearly 52 percent of voters backed the repeal despite pleas from the state's popular independent Governor and almost a half-million dollars in campaign spending by gay, lesbian and civil rights advocates. The new law they struck down had barred discrimination against gay men and lesbians in employment, housing, credit and public accommodations.⁴⁰⁸

However, amidst these discouraging defeats were important advances in state-level governments. In 1992, Oregon voters defeated Ballot Measure 9, which had deemed homosexuality unnatural, and linked it with pedophilia, sadism and masochism. Further, the ballot measure sought to prohibit the spending of government money on any enterprise associated with and/or encouraging such practices. Two years later, a similar proposed piece of legislation, Proposition 13, also failed to secure the necessary votes in Oregon. Idaho's Proposition 1, which aimed to prohibit LGBT individuals from obtaining minority status, was also defeated in 1994. What many perceived as a major achievement of the decade was the 1996 re-election of President Clinton.

This achievement transpired, with the support of the LGBT community, in spite of the enactment of DADT and DOMA, and contention related to AIDS. In terms of AIDS, "disappointment with Clinton's record on AIDS was widespread, even among campaign donors and supporters he appointed to his advisory commission on AIDS."⁴⁰⁹ From 1981 to 1995, AIDS diagnoses increased exponentially, with over half million reported diagnoses by 1995. Kristine Gebbie, who was appointed as Clinton's AIDS czar in 1993, resigned in August 1994, and received harsh criticism from the HIV community for having accomplished nothing during such a critical time. Donna Shalala, the Secretary of Health,

⁴⁰⁸ Carey Goldberg, "Maine Voters Repeal a Law on Gay Rights," *The New York Times* (New York: New York), Feb. 12, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/02/12/us/maine-voters-repeal-a-law-on-gay-rights.html>.

⁴⁰⁹ Sean Strub, "Bill Clinton's LGBT Shame: Where was he then?" *Salon Media Group*, last modified February 1, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/02/01/bill_clintons_lgbt_shame_where_was_he_then/.

was also criticized for lack of sufficient action. In the August 1994 edition of *POZ Magazine*,⁴¹⁰ Sean Strub urged Shalala to “kick some butt at the FDA, CDC, and NIH ... to cut the red tape, expedite new treatments, dramatically increase anonymous testing, reempower the Office on Alternative Health and increase funding for prevention and care.”⁴¹¹ Call-to-actions such as Strub’s responded to the fact that “The peak incidence of deaths was 50,877, reached in 1995.”⁴¹² Certainly, these circumstances (compounded by homophobic legislation) made Clinton’s affiliation with the LGBT community during the re-election campaign contentious; however, Bob Dole, the Republican presidential nominee, was viewed as an even worse alternative. Factors that accounted for this include the following: 1) Dole’s values were “rooted in the small Kansas town in which he grew up: love of God and country and family, commitment to honesty, decency and personal responsibility, and self-reliance tempered by a sense of community;”⁴¹³ 2) Dole publically spoke out against the “mainstreaming of indecency [a term that he left ambiguous];”⁴¹⁴ and 3) Dole was affiliated with the Republican Party (a party that, historically, did not engage favorably with women’s rights and other civil rights issues). Ultimately, Clinton received “overwhelming support from gay Americans.”⁴¹⁵ An extensive survey, published by the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut and based on the polling of 16,637 voters as they left voting booths across the country, reports that 69% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual voters cast ballots in

⁴¹⁰ *POZ Magazine* is a publication that serves the community of people living with and those affected by HIV/AIDS. See www.poz.com.

⁴¹¹ Sean Strub, *Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival*, Reprinted edition (New York: Scribner Publishing, 2014), 326.

⁴¹² Dennis H. Osmond, “Epidemiology of HIV/AIDS in the United States,” *University of California, San Francisco*, last modified March, 2003, <http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/InSite?page=kb-01-03#S1.4X>.

⁴¹³ “Where Bob Dole Stands on Civil Rights,” *Dole Kemp '96*, accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.dolekemp96.org/main.htm>.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ Richard Socarides, “Why Bill Clinton Signed the Defense of Marriage Act,” *The New Yorker* (New York: New York), Mar. 8, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/why-bill-clinton-signed-the-defense-of-marriage-act>.

favor of Clinton.⁴¹⁶ Bill Clinton also became the first candidate to be formally endorsed by the HRC.

A major outcome of Clinton's second term was the national attention given to hate crimes, which had received growing media attention since the late 1980s. On May 19, 1988, Rebecca Wight and her partner of two years, Claudia Brenner, became the victims of anti-gay violence while camping in the Appalachian Mountains. Stephen Ray Carr fired eight bullets at the two women, who thought they were at a secluded campsite (Carr was 85 feet away). Wight received two of the bullets, the second of which ruptured her liver and killed her. Brenner received five bullets, but, due to their locations, lived through the traumatic event. The eighth bullet missed. The crime and the related trial was documented in major news sources like *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Boston Globe*, in local papers across the country (to include *Portland Press Herald*, *Syracuse Herald American*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*) and LGBT and otherwise liberal publications like *The Advocate*, *Gay Community*, and *The Progressive*. *Eight Bullets: One Woman's Story of Surviving Anti-Gay Violence* (published by Firebrand Books in 1995) provides an autobiographical account of Brenner's experience.

Another, larger headline broke when Brandon Teena was murdered on December 31, 1993, in rural Nebraska. Born with female anatomy and named Teena Renae Brandon, Brandon was transgender and lived as a heterosexual male. When Brandon's biological identity was revealed during a run-in with local police because of forged checks, John Lotter and Tom Nissen (friends of the woman with whom Brandon was in a relationship) reacted violently. As recounted in the *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Queer Culture*,

⁴¹⁶ "How Groups Voted in 1996," *University of Connecticut*, access on February 8, 2015, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/elections/how_groups_voted/voted_96.html.

[the two men] began to vent their rage, first humiliating Teena, then raping her. Teena reported the rape to the police, but the two went free, and on New Year's Eve, 1993, they shot Teena. The story became a nationwide issue, raising the problem of homophobic violence.⁴¹⁷

The 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*, directed by Kimberly Pierce, tells the Brandon Teena story and garnered significant critical acclaim. The film is the subject of a chapter in Lisa Henderson's *Love and Money: Queers, Class, and Cultural Production*.

On June 7, 1997, the president's weekly radio show was dedicated to addressing hate crimes. In saying, "[Hate crimes] are acts of violence against America itself,"⁴¹⁸ Clinton spoke of the enfranchisement of minority groups more overtly than had any previous leader—essentially, positing that minorities are not merely citizens of America, but symbols or embodiments of America. Clinton emphasized the necessity of stronger hate crime legislation and commissioned Attorney General Janet Reno to review the existing legislation and collaborate with the national government to formulate and execute action steps. Accordingly, The Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which extended existing hate crime legislation to include victimization on the basis of sexual orientation and gender, as well as disability, was introduced to both the House and the Senate in November 1997. Although gains were being made, the trend for violence against members of the LGBT community continued.

In June 1998, three white supremacists living in Jasper, Texas, offered to drive James Byrd, Jr. (aged 49) home, but instead beat him, "stripped him naked, chained him by the ankles to their pickup truck and dragged him for three miles over rural roads outside

⁴¹⁷ Monica Baroni, "Teena, Brandon," *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Queer Culture*, ed. David A. Gerstner (New York: Routledge, 2011), 554.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Jasper.”⁴¹⁹ The victim’s right arm and head were severed from his body, resulting in his death. Only three months later, Matthew Shepard, an openly gay college student from Laramie, Wyoming, was also brutally beaten after receiving a ride from two men (Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson). McKinney and Henderson tied Shepard to a fence and left him to die. After eighteen hours on the fence, Shepard was found by a cyclist and was life-flighted to a hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado. Days later, on October 12, 1998, Matthew Shepard died. His funeral was mercilessly picketed by the Westboro Baptist Church, a fundamentalist church based in Wichita, Kansas, whose members have earned notoriety for picketing the funerals of fallen soldiers and homosexuals, as well as for celebrating AIDS and events like the 9-11 attacks on the Twin Towers as God’s retribution on America, a “doomed” country.



Figure 11
Westboro Baptist Church founder, Fred Phelps, picketing the funeral of Matthew Shepard.



Figure 12
Members of the Westboro Baptist Church, picketing a military funeral.

Counter-protests and vigils were held across the country in Matthew Shepard’s honor. The largest of the vigils was sponsored by LGBT organizations like the HRC and GLAAD, and transpired on the steps of the nation’s capital building.

⁴¹⁹ “Hate Crimes Timeline,” *HRC*, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/hate-crimes-timeline>.

In 1998, Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theatre Project travelled from New York City to Laramie, Wyoming, where they conducted the interviews that comprise the celebrated docu-drama, *The Laramie Project* (2000).⁴²⁰ The growing media attention dedicated to hate crimes in America renewed the urgency for passing legislation that would protect LGBT Americans, but the outcomes of such initiatives were negative. Legislation proposed in Wyoming failed in a 30-30 tie, and a proposed Hate Crimes Prevention Act was rejected by the House of Representatives in 1999. This was the end of the ‘Gay Nineties.’ This was the end of the decade in which lesbians were “coming out strong.” This was the cultural backdrop that makes Diana Son’s *Stop Kiss*—a play in which a kiss between two women (who struggle as they experience their first same-sex attractions) results in a hate crime violent enough to result in one woman’s hospitalization and coma—representative of its time.

However, the very fact that the lives of, and issues facing, the LGBT community appeared in widely-circulated magazines, in local and national newspapers, on nation-wide broadcast radio and television news programs, and on the millions of Internet sites that were developed in the 1990s⁴²¹ indicates that LGBT people were being woven into the proverbial fabrics of mainstream America. In terms of the entertainment industry, 1990s TV is worth special consideration, as it was characterized by a series of homocentric moments. In addition to those discussed earlier in this chapter, MTV’s *The Real World* featured Pedro Zamora (an openly gay, HIV-positive man) in the 1994 San Francisco season. Primetime

⁴²⁰ The play was so successful that, in 2002, HBO commissioned a made-for-TV film. On October 12, 2009, a companion play, *Laramie: Ten Years Later* debuted as a staged reading in almost 150 theatres across the United States.

⁴²¹ The growth of the Internet throughout the 1990s was astronomical; in 1993, the Internet accounted for just 1% of the information shared through two-way telecommunications networks, but by 2000, that percentage had increased to 51%. “Telecommunication has been dominated by digital technologies since 1990.” (Martin Hilbert and Priscilla López, “The World’s Technological Capacity to Store, Communicate, and Compute Information,” *Science* 332, no. 6025 (2011): 60- 65.)

programs like *My So-Called Life*, *Seinfeld*, *Roseanne*, and *Friends* introduced minor or supporting LGBT characters and plotlines from 1993 to 1996. *Will & Grace* debuted in 1998, featuring the first leading gay male character in a primetime program. But what of these representations? Ron Becker's "Gay-Themed Television and the Slumpy Class: The Affordable, Multicultural Politics of the Gay Nineties" explores the intersection between televised LGBT representation and neoliberalism, the ideology that he argues dominated the 1990s and affected the depiction of lesbian and gay lives in significant ways.

During the 1990s, globalization became a buzzword. Afforded in large part by the improved American economy and growing work force under the Clinton administration,⁴²² America was reclaiming its superpower position and working to "cut across traditional political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries ... [to foster] tight global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections."⁴²³ Yet, as Becker argues, the improved market economy and related resurgence of opportunity for individual entrepreneurship also worked to pit global-mindedness against individualism, self-reliance, and meritocracy. Becker contends that, from this second circumstance, emerged a SLUMPY (Socially-liberal, Urban-Minded Professional) class, its members predominantly fiscally conservative and affiliating with "neoliberal discourses that celebrated the free market."⁴²⁴

As the 1990s were a time when globalization and a related theory and practice,

⁴²² "By the end of [Clinton's] term, 22.7 million new jobs had been created, unemployment dropped to a 30-year low, and gross domestic product grew by 35 percent overall through the longest period of sustained growth in U.S. history. ... Average hourly wages increased by 6 percent after accounting for inflation, and median household income grew by 14 percent, the highest increase for a two-term president. ... Poverty rates dropped to near record lows. And of course the federal budget went from enormous deficits to enormous surpluses, with the federal government on track to becoming effectively debt free by 2009—for the first time since Andrew Jackson was president" (See <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/report/2011/10/28/10405/power-of-progressive-economics-the-clinton-years/>.)

⁴²³ Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.

⁴²⁴ Becker, 198.

multiculturalism, became increasingly important in forming a “worldwide network of maximum productivity,”⁴²⁵ the SLUMPY class had to confront their privilege, which occurred on several fronts, including gender, class, sexuality, and race. To Becker’s mind, “Consuming cultural difference [by watching ‘gay-themed television’] seemed to offer the possibility of being transformed—or at least of reconciling their privilege with their ideals of social equality.”⁴²⁶ Becker’s thesis is that the wealth of televised representations of lesbians and gay men that developed in the 1990s was not created for the LGBT community or its enfranchisement, but for the SLUMPY class—or, more broadly, for anyone who needed “a painlessly passive way to affirm their open-mindedness.”⁴²⁷ In short, LGBT characters and narratives were merely products created for the benefit and perpetuation of hegemony.

Bonnie J. Dow shares Becker’s cynicism. In “*Ellen*, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility,” Dow analyzes Ellen DeGeneres’s coming out and proposes the convincing argument that both the *Time* magazine article and “The Puppy Episode,” were “geared toward the comfort of heterosexuals.”⁴²⁸ Consider this excerpt from the *Time* interview, which provides insight into Ellen’s personal lesbian identity, as well as the trajectory for her character:

My dad said the most hilarious thing when I told him what I was going to do on the show. He said, ‘You’re not going to go all flamboyant, are ya?’ I was like, ‘Yeah, Dad, I’m going to completely change. I’m going to start wearing leather vests. I’m going to get one of those haircuts that they all have.’⁴²⁹

Although scholars like Becker and Dow hesitate to view representation itself as positive, others took the opposite view and celebrated TV’s venture into LGBT representation as

⁴²⁵ Schechner, 263.

⁴²⁶ Becker, 197.

⁴²⁷ Ibid. 188.

⁴²⁸ Dow, 98.

⁴²⁹ Ellen DeGeneres quoted in Bruce Handy, “He Called Me Ellen DeGenerate?” *Time*, April 14, 1997. <http://time.com/3484943/he-called-me-ellen-degenerate/>.

politically and socially efficacious. A notable example is GLAAD, which recognized the potential impact of exposing millions of TV viewers to narratives that diverge from heteronormativity. The GLAAD Media Award was established in 1991 “to recognize and honor various branches of the media for their outstanding representations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community and the issues that affect their lives.”⁴³⁰ In 1995, GLAAD inaugurated an annual Where We Are on T.V. survey, a quantitative analysis of LGBT representation on American television. Of course, mainstream American theatre had included depictions of lesbian and gay lives since the 1920s, and the outstanding work of LGBT artists and LGBT-related productions had, for decades, been honored at the Drama Logue Awards, Drama Desk Awards, Drama Critics Circle Awards, Obie Awards, and Tony Awards.

Because it was not until 1996 that multi-drug therapies became widely available and AIDS-related mortality rates saw a rapid decline, AIDS remained a prominent topic on the American stage throughout the 1990s. As previously mentioned, Tony Kushner’s Tony Award-winning and Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on American Themes*, debuted in two parts in 1993 and 1994, respectively. Other important playwrights who wrote about AIDS include Robert Chesley, who began writing AIDS-related plays in the 1980s; his *Dog Plays* (1990) responds to his own AIDS diagnosis.⁴³¹ Paula Vogel’s metaphorical, dream play, *The Baltimore Waltz*, also dealt with AIDS. The play premiered in 1992 at the Circle Repertory Company, and won the Obie Award for Best Play. Lesbian actress Cherry Jones, who had played Anna in *And Baby Makes Seven*,

⁴³⁰ “Submissions,” *GLAAD Media Awards*, accessed on February 8, 2015, <http://www.glaad.org/mediaawards/submissions>.

⁴³¹ AIDS claimed Robert Chesley quickly; he died in December of 1990. The Robert Chesley Award for Gay and Lesbian Playwriting is presented annually by Publishing Triangle in Chesley’s honor.

portrayed the central character, also named Anna.⁴³² Larry Kramer's *The Destiny of Me* (1993) was the sequel to his 1985 *The Normal Heart*. The play follows the same protagonist (Ned), who grapples with his identity as a leader of the gay community, and fights for political action responding to AIDS. Also in 1993, Paul Rudnick gained fame with *Jeffrey*, the first AIDS narrative written in the comic genre. The play earned Rudnick an Obie Award, an Outer Critics Circle Award, and the John Gassner Playwrighting Award.

Some of the decade's most notable plays came from Terrence McNally, who had gained prominence as a playwright in 1985 with *The Lisbon Traviata*. *Lips Together, Teeth Apart* (1992) was McNally's first produced play of the 1990s and it centers upon two heterosexual male couples on holiday at the gay vacation destination Fire Island. The couples reside in a house inherited by a woman named Sally upon the AIDS-related death of her brother. The play emphasizes the heterosexual community's responsibility to engage and help in the time of crisis. McNally went on to earn critical acclaim with *Love! Valor! Compassion!*, the action of which revolves around eight gay men vacationing at a summer lake house.⁴³³ AIDS is among the homocentric topics explored in the play, which was described by Vincent Canby of *The New York Times* as "the kind of solid, serious, non-musical American comedy that Broadway hasn't seen in years."⁴³⁴ The 1994 Off-Broadway premier garnered Obie Awards for Best Performance and Best Playwright. The 1995 Broadway production won two Tony Awards (Best Play and Best Actor), and two Drama Desk Awards (Outstanding Play, Outstanding Featured Actor in a Play). *Corpus Christi* was

⁴³² Because both *And Baby Makes Seven* and *The Baltimore Waltz* include autobiographical material (admittedly, to very different degrees), the use of Anna as a character name might be explained by the fact that Paula Vogel's middle name is Anna.

⁴³³ The given circumstances of *Love! Valor! Compassion!* are reminiscent of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*.

⁴³⁴ Vincent Canby, "'Love!' Hits Broadway Running, Like a Broadway Hit," *The New York Times* (New York: NY), Feb. 15, 1995. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/15/theater/theater-review-love-valour-compassion-love-hits-broadway-running-like-broadway.html>.

McNally's later play of the decade and debuted in 1998; this play radically depicts Jesus and the twelve disciples as modern-day gay men who live in Texas.

The standout among 1990's musicals was Jonathan Larson's *RENT*, which debuted at Broadway's Nederlander Theatre in 1996. The plot is a modern adaptation (with significant liberties taken) of Puccini's opera, *La Bohème*. Several of the musical's featured characters have AIDS, though at least two of the contractions (Rodger's and Mimi's) are from intravenous drug use, as opposed to sexual transmission.⁴³⁵ The vast range of LGBT individuals represented within the cast of characters makes *RENT* particularly important; examples include a transvestite (Angel Dumontt Schunard, who is typically portrayed by an actor of color⁴³⁶), a bisexual female (Maureen), a lesbian (Joanne, who is also typically portrayed by an actor of color), an African-American gay male (Tom Collins), and a heterosexual Jewish male (Mark Cohen). Thematically, the musical relates to the interests of this project because the characters grapple with American life, and death, at the turn of the millennium. AIDS and Capitalism are posited as two of the primary antagonistic forces that make life, no less enfranchisement, difficult for class, gender, sexual, racial, and health minorities. Ultimately, the musical's major theme is a riff on the ancient Roman notion *carpe diem*, as manifest in "Finale B," which includes the infamous line "No day but today."

With the exception of Vogel, many of the decade's significant playwrights were white men. A forthcoming multi-volume publication from Bloomsbury Methuen gives decade-by-decade attention to the twentieth century; the representative and notable dramatists explored in the 1990s volume are Tony Kushner, Terrence McNally, Paula Vogel,

⁴³⁵ The fact that the Clinton administration did not approve AIDS research funds to extend to transmission through needles was a major point of contention for many HIV/AIDS activists.

⁴³⁶ Belize, a character in *Angels in America* is African-American and is a former drag queen, so there seems to be some—albeit unintentional—connection between Belize and Angel, at least in terms of the intersecting identity components.

and Suzan-Lori Parks; within this listing white, gay males are in the (albeit small) majority. An important qualifier is that all of the men are openly homosexual, and at least one is a religious minority (Kushner is Jewish). Important plays of the decade not treating the subject of AIDS and written by women include Split Britches' *Belle Reprise* (1991), a play that queers Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Holly Hughes also continued to create important work throughout the 1990s; two prominent examples are *World Without End* (Hughes's first autobiographical piece, written in 1989) and *Clit Notes* (1996). I take the liberty to include *World Without End* because it debuted late in the 1980s and, more importantly, because it shares a theme with Diana Son's *Stop Kiss*. The shared theme is sexual fluidity. *World Without End* "includes an account of a one-night stand with a man, [from which] certain lesbian critics concluded that Hughes was going straight. Never interested in offering simple answers or definitions—especially for a word like 'lesbian'—Hughes suddenly found such simplifications demanded of her and projected onto her."⁴³⁷ Joan Lipkin's 1999 play *Small Domestic Acts* also included themes related to sexual fluidity. As Stacy Wolf has noted, "*Small Domestic Acts* both accepts lesbian identity as a real, material, and sexual position while simultaneously emphasizing the fluidity of sexuality itself."⁴³⁸ This chapter's understanding of enfranchisement as a term that encompasses a desire for sexual agency relates to sexual fluidity—to the notion that sexuality occurs on a continuum, and that identities are malleable. Sexual agency means that a woman possesses

⁴³⁷ C. Carr, "Introduction: Holly Hughes," *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jo Bonney (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000), 287.

⁴³⁸ Stacy Wolf, "Playing With Gender: Lesbian Identities, Theatricality, and the Social in Joan Lipkin's *Small Domestic Acts*," *Amazon All Stars: Thirteen Lesbian Plays, with Essays and Interviews*, ed. Rosemary Keefe Curb (New York: Applause Books, 1996), 224.

the autonomy to explore her attractions and desires, to ‘try on’ alternate sexual identities without negative repercussions.⁴³⁹

Stop Kiss (1998) is Diana Son’s most well-known play, though her career began earlier in the decade. Son, a Korean-American playwright born in Dover, Delaware, moved to New York to study Dramatic Literature at New York University under Professor Una Chaudhuri. During her senior year, Son interned at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, and, in 1993, she received a Van Lier Fellowship at New Dramatists. Also in 1993, Son was one of six playwrights invited by Chiori Miyagawa to form the Asian American Playwrights Lab, a Playwrights Unit in residence at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre. *R.A.W.* (*‘Because I’m a Woman*), a play born out of Son’s residency at the Public Theatre, was her first play to expressly engage her identity as an Asian-American. As Son recalls in an artistic statement anthologized in *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color*, setting out to write a play that will “‘deal with what it is to be Asian American,’”⁴⁴⁰ was daunting. The complexities of representation are effectively captured by this statement.⁴⁴¹ It is important to note that, while the action of *Stop Kiss* transpires in New York City, and although the premiere production featured Asian-American actress Sandra Oh in the role of Sara and African-American actor Kevin Carroll in the role of George, the original published script includes no description of the characters’ races or ethnicities. However, the 2000 re-publication with Dramatists Play

⁴³⁹ The most notable play written by a woman in the 1990s is arguably Paula Vogel’s *How I Learned to Drive* (1997), which earned the Pulitzer Prize for drama. Although the play does not treat themes related to homosexuality, Vogel’s exploration of human sexuality continues in the work, as it deals with sexual abuse and incest.

⁴⁴⁰ Diana Son, “Artistic Statement,” *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color: An Anthology*, eds. Kathy A. Perkins and Roberta Uno (New York: Routledge, 1996), 290.

⁴⁴¹ In previous chapters I have drawn attention to those like Jacqueline Taylor, who argue against exemplarity, and debunk the notion of synecdoche.

Service, Inc. includes this note: “The cast should reflect the ethnic diversity of New York City.”⁴⁴²

In terms of *Stop Kiss*, the title came first. A one-act play bearing that title came second, years before the full-length drama would debut at the Public Theatre. The original concept was based on a scene in which a woman kisses her friend’s cheek to stop a tear. The kiss is meant as a compassionate gesture, but is mistaken as romantic. From this act, an opening is created for the women to explore whether they *want* the kiss to carry romantic connotations.⁴⁴³ Despite the fact that the one-act play was not produced or published, Son remained interested in a narrative that interrogates the “blurry line between the emotional engagement two women can have and how it can be crossed into sexuality.”⁴⁴⁴ The devastating crimes committed against members of the LGBT community throughout the 1990s provided fodder for the full-length’s play’s inclusion of significant plot points relating to homophobia and, specifically, a hate crime. Although Son classifies *Stop Kiss* as a love play, she acknowledges the ways that it is reflective of its time, and therefore possesses political dimensions: “(It is a political play) in the sense that politics is a way of **looking at events that happen to people.**”⁴⁴⁵

Stop Kiss was written with the support of Playwrights Horizons. The 1998 GLAAD Media Award for Best New York Production went to *Stop Kiss*, and Son earned the 1998 Berilla Kerr award for playwriting. In addition to these awards, which testify to the play’s merit and impact, *Stop Kiss* is the subject of J. Tanaka’s interview with Diana Son, “Only

⁴⁴² Diana Son, *Stop Kiss* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2000), 5.

⁴⁴³ Daniel Yurgaitis, “Director’s Notes on the NSU Theatre presentation of *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son,” *Northern State University*, last modified December 11, 2006, http://www3.northern.edu/wild/0607Season/StopKiss/NTS_StopKiss.htm.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (Bold font mine.)

Connect: An interview with the playwright,” published in the summer 1999 issue of *American Theatre*. Tanaka’s interview is valuable to my analysis of Son’s play because it provides context for the work, delivered directly from the playwright. *Stop Kiss* is also the subject of a peer-reviewed article by Mengmeng Jiang, “Rewriting the Self-Identity in Diana Son’s *Stop Kiss*,” which was published in *Asian Women*, a Korean-based, peer-reviewed journal associated with the Research Institute of Asian Women. Jiang’s essay relates to my analysis because it emphasizes a theme of identity—specifically, how identities can be rewritten. I share Jiang’s interest in this theme, as it relates to my discussion of Callie and Sara’s respective character developments, as well as to my assertion that the play enfranchises Son, a heterosexual woman. Although published studies on *Stop Kiss* are scant, *Stop Kiss* is mentioned in scholarly works like Ann M. Fox and Joan Lipkin’s “Res(crip)ting Feminist Theater Through Disability Theater: Selections from the DisAbility Project,” and *Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the 21st Century*, a 2014 publication edited by Penny Farfan and Lesley Ferris. Fox and Lipkin include *Stop Kiss* in their study because the attack on Callie and Sara leaves the latter in a debilitating condition. *Stop Kiss* is mentioned in Esther Kim Lee’s contributed chapter to *Contemporary Women Playwrights*, “Asian American Women Playwrights and the Dilemma of the Identity Play: Staging Heterotopic Subjectivities,” because of the lack of race specificity in this play by Son, a Korean-American.

Several Masters theses focus exclusively upon the play. Examples include “The Fear of *Stop Kiss*,” by Elizabeth P. McKnight of the University of Louisville, “Speaking Truth to Power: Creating the Role of Callie Pax for ‘Stop Kiss,’” by Molly Fonseca of the University of Arkansas, and “Defining the Themes of Diana Son’s ‘Stop Kiss’: Analyzing the design

process,” by Brian Saxton, also of the University of Arkansas. What these theses share is a focus on the artistic process of acting in, or designing, a production of *Stop Kiss*. McKnight and Fonseca both portrayed the role of Callie; in their respective Master of Fine Arts theses, both artists incorporate their acting journals as empirical material, approaching the play from a subjective, embodied perspective. Comparatively little attention is given to detailed textual analysis—for example, Fonseca discusses themes in under two pages. Saxton’s thesis places the University of Arkansas production, for which he served as scenic designer, within the play’s larger context, dedicating attention to topics such as production history, playwright biography, and LGBT drama. Saxton also focuses on his personal experience with the play. My exploration of *Stop Kiss* is markedly differentiated from these earlier projects, as it does not contain any autobiographical experience of engaging with the text in performance.⁴⁴⁶ My purpose is to employ historical research on 1990s America and textual analysis to extrapolate and analyze themes of lesbian enfranchisement.

***Stop Kiss* by Diana Son**

The premiere production of *Stop Kiss* opened off-Broadway at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre, in conjunction with the New York Shakespeare Festival, on December 6, 1998. The production was produced by George C. Wolfe, and directed by Jo Bonney. Jessica Hecht, Sandra Oh, Kevin Carroll, and Rick Holmes originated the play’s principle roles, Callie, Sara, George, and Peter. Diversity was not written into the play’s original edition—beyond the fact that the action transpires in New York City, an exceedingly diverse locale—however, Son is committed to colorblind casting (“if you put in that extra time and effort, and look beyond the usual pool of actors the casting director, theatre, director, playwright have

⁴⁴⁶ Although I have portrayed Callie in an acting workshop, and have served as faculty mentor for a student-directed production of *Stop Kiss* at Monmouth College, this project does not explore those experiences.

become comfortable relying on, you can and will find a talented actor of color who is right for any role you are casting”⁴⁴⁷), so the debut cast effectively reflected New York City’s diversity. In addition to Oh and Carroll, the roles of Mrs. Winsley and Nurse were portrayed by Sandra McClain, an African-American actress, and Saul Stein (a Jewish actor) played Detective Cole.



Figure 13
(From left to right)
Jessica Hecht, Kevin Carroll,
and Sandra Oh



Figure 14
(From left to right)
Sandra McClain and Jessica Hecht

The premiere production did not transfer to Broadway, though this circumstance is not a reflection of the play’s reception. As Ben Brantley’s states in his review for *The New York Times*, “‘Stop Kiss’ has probably generated the warmest advance word of mouth of any downtown production this season. Only two days into previews, it had sold 85 percent of the tickets for its five week run.”⁴⁴⁸ To meet the audience demand, the initial five week run was extended, not once, but three times. Throughout its run at the Public Theatre, *Stop Kiss* received critical acclaim in several of New York’s newspapers. Brantley’s *New York Times*

⁴⁴⁷ Diana Son, “Author’s Statement,” *Contemporary Asian American Plays*, Version 3.0, ed. Chay Yaw (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2011), 396.

⁴⁴⁸ Ben Brantley, “‘Stop Kiss’: Comic in Spirit, Serious at Heart,” *The New York Times* (New York: NY), Dec. 7, 1998.

review referred to the play as “sweet, and sad and enchantingly sincere;”⁴⁴⁹ the *New York Daily News* reported, “There’s so much that is vital and exciting about STOP KISS;”⁴⁵⁰ and Francine Russo of *The Village Voice*, despite problematically interpreting Son’s theme as “giving into your heart’s desire sparks doom,” offered the production team accolades: “Jessica Hecht’s jittery, smart-mouthed Callie makes us laugh, and Sandra Oh’s Sara is beguiling. Throughout, director Jo Bonney lets loose the frenetic rhythms of the city and of mating—sirens, raucous music, and thundering footsteps punctuated by the perfectly timed pauses that precede comic explosions.”⁴⁵¹

Stop Kiss also gained attention, though unfavorable, in *The Advocate*. Don Shewey writes:

[Callie and Sara’s] much-anticipated first kiss is delayed until the play’s final moment, whereas early on we learn the aftermath of that kiss: a brutal beating that leaves Sara speechless in a wheelchair. This sends a couple of strangely mixed messages—if you come out, you’re going to be punished; it’s OK to approve of gay people as long as they’re victims (if not of AIDS, then of gay bashing)—that seem to have more to do with pandering to mainstream straight audiences than with reflecting some truth about gay life.⁴⁵²

Certainly, each critic is entitled to his own opinion, yet in view of the national attention given to brutal hate crimes committed against LGBT people during the 1990s, it seems odd that Shewey critiques *Stop Kiss* for not adequately reflecting the lived experiences of LGBT Americans.⁴⁵³ However, the critical point at present is that *Stop Kiss* had significant impact in its time, and has continued to have a significant impact. In 2014, Los Angeles’s Pasadena

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Quoted on back cover of Son, *Stop Kiss* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2000).

⁴⁵¹ Francine Russo, “Fateful Love,” *The Village Voice* (New York: NY), Dec. 15, 1998, <http://www.villagevoice.com/1998-12-15/theater/fateful-love/full/>.

⁴⁵² Don Shewey, “When girls collide,” *The Advocate*, February 2, 1999, 51.

⁴⁵³ It is important to note that Son responded to the review printed in *The Advocate*. I address her response later in the chapter as I discuss the relationship between production circumstances and enfranchisement.

Playhouse presented *Stop Kiss*⁴⁵⁴; in conjunction with the production, the lesbian magazine *Curve* ran an article on the play. The article's subtitle, "**Landmark play** 'Stop Kiss' by Diana Son addresses issues of anti-lesbian violence, and love" indicates that the writer viewed the play favorably. The article describes the play as "fresh, funny, moving, and touch[ing] upon the serious theme of anti-LGBT violence."⁴⁵⁵

Stop Kiss was not revolutionary for including two women characters who possess homoerotic feelings and desires for each other. Lesbians had been on Broadway and Off-Broadway stages for decades—some of them even kissing and having babies (e.g. *And Baby Makes Seven*)! But the play had *something* revolutionary about it. The excitement of discovering America's newest talent among female playwrights was one contributing factor—not to mention the fact that she was Asian-American. As reported by *New York Newsday*, "We are amazed how fast we have come to trust this new playwright, Diana Son."⁴⁵⁶ The fact that the real-life issues of human sexuality, homophobia, and violence reverberates throughout the play also made the work compelling for many audiences. To that end, *Star Ledger* reviewed the play as "thought provoking and ultimately moving."⁴⁵⁷ And, as George C. Wolfe stresses in his introduction (even if to a fault), the humanist story of connection between two people makes the play identifiable, even to those not a part of the LGBT community;⁴⁵⁸ for example, the heterosexual playwright herself, who is "more

⁴⁵⁴ It is worth mentioning that this production featured an Asian-American actress, Angela Lin, as the protagonist, Callie.

⁴⁵⁵ Melanie Barker, "It's In Her Kiss: Landmark play 'Stop Kiss' by Diana Son addresses issues of anti-lesbian violence, and love," *Curve*, November 5, 2014, <http://www.curvemag.com/Events/Its-In-Her-Kiss-248/>. (Bold font mine.)

⁴⁵⁶ Diana Son, *Stop Kiss* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2000), back cover.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *This* is what allows for commercial success (and the related impact), a circumstance that the reviewer from *The Advocate* is ostensibly less likely to understand than is a theatre critic for a major New York newspaper.

interested in how people are alike and not different.”⁴⁵⁹ In short, *Stop Kiss* introduced to mainstream American theatre a rising playwright, and provided mainstream audiences with a narrative sadly reflective of its time—one that raises (even if unconsciously) poignant questions related to lesbian enfranchisement, as manifest in the desire for access to sexual agency, and access to safety and legal protections.

Stop Kiss is comprised of twenty-three scenes, which are structured non-linearly. The chronological dislocation aids tremendously in the suspension of disbelief, which is especially important because the play’s action (which transpires in under two hours’ run time) spans from Callie and Sara’s first meeting to their initial flirtation, to their first fight, first kiss, the resulting crime and subsequent police investigation, and Sara’s hospitalization and recovery. Told out of sequence, the play’s narrative moves quickly (but effortlessly) between only the critical moments in Callie and Sara’s relationship. The lack of exposition, gradual plot development, and character evolution are not, in themselves, problematic. Yet, I would be remiss not to clarify that, in production, *Stop Kiss* requires actresses with tremendous skill to effectively play these isolated moments.

The thread of continuity throughout the play is Son’s use of symbols and metaphors; in particular, the play is driven by the metaphor of swerving to avoid disaster:

Callie: So if you were driving down the highway and saw a pothole in the road ahead what would you do, straddle or swerve?

Sara: Mm, straddle. You?

Callie: Straddle.

Sara: (*About Callie*) Swerve.

Callie: Nah ah.

Sara: Yes you would.

...

Callie: O.k., a rabbit. Straddle, swerve, or brake.

Sara: (*Like this is an option.*) Straddle a rabbit.

Callie: Sport utility vehicle—four-wheel drive, you could. ...

⁴⁵⁹ Mengmeng Jiang, “Rewriting the Self-Identity in Diana Son’s *Stop Kiss*,” *Asian Women* 27, no. 4 (2011): 43.

Sara: Screech to a break, check the rabbit, then—smoke. You?

Callie: Break.

Sara: *Swerve.*

Callie: Why do you keep saying that?⁴⁶⁰

The play's central character, Callie Pax, swerves. She is a traffic news reporter in her late 20s to early 30s, who has lived in New York City for eleven years—ever since a high school guidance counselor completed a college application for New York University on her behalf. Callie lives in a spacious apartment located in a nice neighborhood; she used to share the space with her ex- boyfriend, Tom, who had inherited it from his aunt. Tom also provided the connection that helped Callie land her job, which she finds uninteresting and unimportant, but continues to hold because she lacks the motivation to seek alternate employment.

Callie has been sexually involved with her college friend, George, for somewhere between seven to twelve years (“we’ve been doing this since we were . . . twenty”⁴⁶¹). They both also date other people, but will “probably get married . . . or not.”⁴⁶² Callie’s life is characterized by ambivalence and swerving—to avoid conflict; to avoid making decisions; to avoid change; to avoid pursuing what she really wants. Most notably, Callie, who has only ever identified as heterosexual, swerves when she begins to develop feelings for Sara, who has just moved to New York from Chesterfield, a suburb outside of Saint Louis, Missouri. The two are introduced in previous action through mutual friends, and Callie agrees to keep Sara’s cat, Caesar, since Sara’s new apartment does not allow pets.

Like Callie, Sara has consistently and exclusively identified as heterosexual: “Callie, I know that neither you nor I have ever—well, at least I know that I haven’t . . .”⁴⁶³ But, unlike Callie, Sara is more prone to indulging her curiosities; rather than swerve, she more

⁴⁶⁰ Son, *Stop Kiss*, 62.

⁴⁶¹ Diana Son, *Stop Kiss* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1999), 36.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 105.

readily stops and engages. We see this quality in Sara throughout the play, beginning with the fact that it was Sara's gumption and hunger for experience that brought her to New York. In recent previous action, she applied for a grant to teach third grade in the Bronx because she was convinced that there was something *more* to experience than life in the Midwest (which was always "so easy"⁴⁶⁴) offered. Sara wants to investigate the raucous noises that come from the apartment above Callie's; she wants to become more assertive so that she can stand up for herself when men on the street make sexist remarks as she passes (whereas Callie's M.O. is to keep walking); and she wants to travel to "Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Micronesia—."⁴⁶⁵

In Saint Louis, Sara taught at a private school and lived with her boyfriend of seven years, Peter, with whom she remains in contact. She had a close relationship with her family ("My parents live like, half an hour away. I go there for dinner when it's not even anybody's birthday"⁴⁶⁶) and enjoyed a strong circle of coworkers and friends. Although Saint Louis has an LGBT community, Sara never went to any of the lesbian bars:

Callie: In Saint Louis, do they—or have you been to?

Sara: We have a couple places like that but I've never been.⁴⁶⁷

Despite her lack of previous experience with and even exposure to LGBT culture, Sara is the character who stops to acknowledge and act (even if tentatively) on the feelings that begin to develop between her and Callie. Consider Scene 5, which centers upon Callie and Sara's plan to have dinner together at Vong, an upscale restaurant.

When the lights come up, Callie holds various clothing items up to her body, pondering over the decision of what to wear. She is obviously nervous. She has offered to

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 113.

pay for dinner. It is obviously a date. But when George arrives (Callie buzzes him into her building, mistaking him for Sara), Callie's intentions are questioned, and she becomes defensive:

George: You have a date?

Callie: No!

George: With *who*?

Callie: It's not a date, I'm just meeting my friend Sara for dinner.

George: Who the hell is Sara?

Callie: I told you, that friend of a friend of a— (*Refreshing his memory.*)
She's new in town, I'm taking care of her cat—⁴⁶⁸

Callie's referring to Sara as her **friend** is introduced in this early scene and is a recurring motif throughout most of the play. When Sara arrives, it is with a bouquet of baby roses for Callie. Although she "*shyly*"⁴⁶⁹ offers the roses to Callie, the critical point is that she does it. Callie accepts the flowers, "*goes to kiss Sara on the cheek, but retreats. Sara takes the cue late, now her head is sticking out.*"⁴⁷⁰ It is Callie who swerves in this scene.

She swerves again in Scene 11, in which she has invited Sara to accompany her to a work-related awards ceremony. Sara arrives to Callie's apartment late and underdressed, and Callie becomes upset: "I have to go to this thing and I want you to go with me but I don't want you to wear what you're wearing and I don't want you to wear my clothes. What will people think if we walk in together and you're wearing my clothes?"⁴⁷¹ A fight erupts and Sara leaves. Scene 13 depicts the fight's aftermath; Callie wants to call Sara (ostensibly to apologize) but she cannot bring herself to dial the numbers. She swerves and calls George instead, saying that she needs a "sushi fix,"⁴⁷² which is followed by sex.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁷² Ibid. 98.

Callie knows she swerves; a monologue she delivers to George in Scene 8 clearly demonstrates the character's self-awareness:

You know, I would stand here at the door with Sara and say 'goodnight,' 'take care,' 'see ya tomorrow,' 'get home safe—' When what I *really* wanted to do was plant her a big fat, wet one. Square on the lips. Nothing confusing about it. She wouldn't have to think 'Maybe Callie meant to kiss me on the cheek and...missed.' You know, just right there. Not between friends. Not a friendly kiss at all. Bigger. So she'd know. She'd know for sure.⁴⁷³

In Scene 15, Callie even confesses to Sara, "I do, I know—I sometimes...swerve."⁴⁷⁴ But rather than stop—rather than act on her desires, rather than answer Sara, Callie swerves.

Consider Scene 17; Sara is leaving Callie's apartment, and "*Sara opens her arms, and they hold each other. They keep holding. Callie lets go.*"⁴⁷⁵

However, Sara also sometimes swerves. In Scene 19, Sara says to Callie⁴⁷⁶ "I've started something here, and I—that's what—because it's...I love...New York!"⁴⁷⁷ The subtextual meaning that it is Callie who Sara loves is less than subtle, but Sara swerves nonetheless. Similarly, Callie sometimes stops. Indeed, the play is titled *Stop Kiss*. The play's narrative, inclusive of a hate crime committed against two women during an intimate act (kissing), hinges on the fact that Callie does stop and engage meaningfully with Sara. Scenes 21 and 23 depict the night of the kiss, the night of the crime. In Scene 21, Sara invites Callie to Henrietta's, a lesbian bar in the West Village, and Callie (knowing that it is a lesbian bar) accepts. Scene 23 depicts Sara and Callie at 4:15 in the morning, having just left Henrietta's. As they walk down the street, laughing and talking, Callie kisses Sara.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 115. (Bold font mine.)

⁴⁷⁶ George is present, but the stage directions [e.g. "*Again she looks at George: Why can't he disappear?*"] make it clear that the women are only talking to each other (page 126).

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 126- 127.

Sara: Huh.
Callie: What?
Sara: You just did that.
Callie: Yes I did.
Sara: Nice.⁴⁷⁸

Sara suggests that they go somewhere, but Callie says no. She has stopped and wants to keep stopping. (“*They ... connect lips, put their arms around each other. And kiss.*”⁴⁷⁹) The hate crime that results from the kiss is only revealed in exposition during earlier scenes. The kiss is the play’s final moment.

The scenes depicting the evolution of Callie and Sara’s relationship, summarized here in a fairly linear manner, are written non-sequentially and are interspersed with scenes of Callie being interviewed by Detective Cole, visiting the hospital, and meeting with Mrs. Winsley (a neighbor woman who called the cops during the attack). Scene 20 is a particularly important scene; Callie watches from the doorway as Peter shares with Sara the long-term plans that he and her parents have been making, since “she’ll need rehabilitation, maybe home care.”⁴⁸⁰

Peter: The doctor says we can move you soon. Your parents and I have been talking. I agree that you should stay with them after you get out of rehab. You’re welcome to stay at our old place, of course, if you want to, I would take off from work so that I could—well, I’m going to take off from work anyway. ... You do want to go home—
Sara: (*Water drops from Sara’s eyes.*)

Callie can see that Sara is crying and determines to **stop** Peter’s plans; she asks a nurse to teach her how to bathe and care for Sara. By Scene 22, Callie helps Sara get dressed and says, “Choose me.” This time, Sara does not cry, but smiles. Despite one brutal outcome of

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 93.

their kiss, a second, much more optimistic outcome is also reached. In the words of Diana Son, “love wins.”⁴⁸¹ Callie stopped for Sara not once, but twice.

In my analysis of *Stop Kiss*, I explore why the characters swerve. Specifically, I explore the ways that swerving is often a consequence of patriarchy and heteronormativity. I argue that one of the ways enfranchisement is manifest in *Stop Kiss* is through Sara and Callie’s desire for access to sexual agency. Further, my analysis explores the play’s unseen scene—the hate crime. I explore violence against women and sexual minorities within the context of Son’s play to support my argument that enfranchisement is also manifest in the desire/need for access to safety and legal protections.

Enfranchisement as Manifest in Sexual Agency

In Chapter 2, I introduced Dustin Bradley Goltz’s contention that “complete loyalty to a fixed and unwavering”⁴⁸² sexuality is an imperative to the heterosexual/homosexual binary, a tenet of heteronormativity. My discussion in that chapter highlighted the subversiveness of bisexual characters, or characters whose sexualities are more fluid (e.g. Eva and Donna from *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*). I extend that earlier conversation in this analysis of Callie and Sara, and the metaphorical act of swerving. As noted above, both Callie and Sara identify as heterosexual and have had no previous same-sex attractions—yet the larger portion of the play is comprised of flashback scenes that depict the women’s departures from that exclusive heterosexuality. Although they share only one kiss, Callie and Sara go on dates, hold hands, embrace each other, and sleep in the same bed on one occasion.

⁴⁸¹ Rachel Nash, “Asian American Theatre,” *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, last modified March 14, 2011, <http://aatheatre.web.unc.edu/category/diana-son/>.

⁴⁸² Goltz, 94.

In Scene 7, Sara decides to sleep on Callie's couch because it is too late to take the train home and the \$10 cab fare is too expensive⁴⁸³:

Sara: Would you just lie in bed here for just a minute to see if [Caesar] comes. ... Since he's been sleeping with you. (*Callie gets in next to Sara and pulls the covers up.*) ... Do you see him?

Callie: Who?

Sara: Caesar.

Callie: Not yet. (*They both lie there staring at the ceiling. After a while,*) Huh? (*Pause.*) Are you asleep? (*No response. Callie turns and looks at Sara.*) You're not asleep already, are you? (*No response. Callie draws her feet under the covers and turns her back to Sara. Sara opens her eyes.*)⁴⁸⁴

In production, the sexual tension in this scene is palpable as the two women lie together. Consequently, the elusive cat becomes a strong symbol of the same-sex attraction that is at the periphery of Callie and Sara's growing relationship. Simultaneously, the play's overarching metaphor of swerving is also manifest, as the women swerve away from each other, whether by pretending to be asleep or by physically turning away.

Lisa M. Diamond's *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* reports and analyzes research findings from a longitudinal study conducted by the author. For ten years, Diamond (a psychologist) followed a research group comprised of approximately 100 women, each of whom she interviewed every two years. The aim of the study was to track "different patterns of attraction, behavior, and sexual identification from adolescence to adulthood."⁴⁸⁵ Diamond's hypothesis, as well as the results of her empirical investigation, emphasize that "*women's sexual desires show more variability than do men's*, both over time and across situations. ... Extensive evidence also points to greater variability in female same-

⁴⁸³ Considerations related to the safety of women are discussed later in this chapter.

⁴⁸⁴ Son, *Stop Kiss*, 70- 72.

⁴⁸⁵ Lisa M. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 10.

sex sexuality than in male same-sex sexuality.”⁴⁸⁶ From this emerges the concept of sexual fluidity, which Diamond defines as “situation-dependent flexibility in women’s sexual responsiveness.”⁴⁸⁷ But how are variability, flexibility, and fluidity reconciled within a system that requires “complete loyalty to a fixed and unwavering identity”? As *Stop Kiss* shows, reconciliation is, at present, not easily reached.

In Scene 5, George learns that Callie is taking Sara to dinner at Vong. George demands of Callie, “Who the hell is Sara?”⁴⁸⁸ Although it is revealed in Scene 3 that George “never likes anyone [Callie] is dating,”⁴⁸⁹ one can easily imagine the way an actor might deliver the line to convey additional dislike, concern, aggravation, etc. over the fact that this new person is a woman.⁴⁹⁰ Such a delivery would foreshadow George’s emotional, and at least somewhat patriarchal, response to hearing the news of the hate crime in Scene 8:

George: You wanna know how fucked up and worried about you everyone is right now? ... Why didn’t you answer your phone? ... How do I know anything but what I see on the god-damn—

Callie: What did you want—me to call you from the hospital?

George: Yes! ..Come and get me. That’s what you could’ve said. (*Pause.*) Are you hurt? (*Callie doesn’t respond.*) Did a doctor look at you? ... Let me see [your cracked rib.] ... Do you want me to call anyone? ... Do you want me to spend the night? ... Do you want me to go?⁴⁹¹

George is Callie’s longtime friend, so his expectation of communication is reasonable and his desire to be helpful is expected; that said, Scenes 5 and 8 are both tinged with complexities related to masculinity and patriarchy. Callie has ‘always been’ heterosexual and her sexual relationship with George has existed for approximately a decade. A result of these two circumstances is that he feels threatened by, and helpless in the face of situations related to,

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁸⁸ Son, *Stop Kiss*, 48.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁹⁰ Such a reaction would not necessarily mark the character as homophobic, but rather indicates a sense of shock or discomfort with Callie’s atypical behavior.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 73- 76.

Callie's involvement with a woman. The fact that Callie and George have sex in the previous, off-stage action that precedes Scene 15 testifies not only to Callie's struggle with experiencing same-sex attractions, but to the struggle of disengaging from the stronghold of patriarchy and heteronormativity.

Issues related to masculinity and patriarchy are manifested to a greater extent in Peter (whose name, then, appears symbolic). Scene 12 transpires in the hospital lobby, where Callie and Peter sit together, each of them waiting to visit Sara. Because Peter and Sara dated for seven years, he is confused about, and noticeably upset by, her relationship with Callie. Moreover, he believes that he is *entitled* to information about it:

Peter: I'd like you to tell me what happened that night. (*Silence. Peter waits long enough to figure out Callie's not going to answer.*) Please. (*Slight pause.*)

Callie: I'm sorry.

Peter: What.

Callie: I can't.

Peter: Why can't you?

Callie: Everything you need to know has been in the papers, on the t.v.—

...

Peter: Tell me! (*Callie doesn't answer.*) Why couldn't you protect her? ... (*Callie turns away from him.*) Could I have— (*He turns her back.*) Hey, was he bigger than me?

Callie: No! (*Peter steps back.*)

Peter: Why was she protecting you? (*Callie holds on his eyes but doesn't answer.*)⁴⁹²

The bullying nature of Peter's dialogue evokes that of Detective Cole in Scene 6 and is bolstered by his manipulation of Callie's body. However, unlike her actions in Scene 6, here Callie stands her ground and is not pressured into divulging information to the male character.

In terms of heteronormativity, Scene 12 also reveals that Sara's parents are struggling: "Anita is...wrecked, and Joe—they're...I mean, Sara's their only daughter—."⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² Ibid., 94- 97.

Surely, Anita and Joe's primary concern is their daughter's health, but the line (delivered by Peter) is ambiguous enough to allow one to infer that the "wrecked" feeling is compounded by the fact that Sara's injuries result from a hate crime. Perhaps Anita and Joe are "wrecked" that their 'previously-straight' daughter was kissing another woman. Since Sara is their only daughter, is Anita and Joe's idyllic heteronormative future inclusive of grandchildren in jeopardy? The lines afford multiple interpretations and it comes as no surprise that Callie swerves under the pressure and attempts to exit the hospital waiting room.

Patriarchy and heteronormativity are underlying forces in *Stop Kiss*, and these forces seem to motivate Callie's (and, on occasion, even Sara's) swerving away from same-sex intimacy. The characters approach their homoerotic feelings with significant hesitation for almost the entire play, and this is demonstrative of the tension between fluidity (which, according to Diamond, is natural) and the heteronormative paradigm. This tension is also symbolically manifested by Callie's Magic 8 Ball, which has a tendency to avoid direct yes and no answers, but instead lands "sort of in-between two of them."⁴⁹⁴ The Magic 8 Ball, then, is a symbol of Callie and Sara's sexualities, as well as the societal expectation that sexualities will fall into strict categories.

Callie and Sara continue to see each other and become more intimate, despite their intermittent swerving away from such a relationship, and their desires for freedom from heteronormative paradigm and the associated pressure to maintain a "fixed" sexuality become increasingly evident. These desires are articulated, although metaphorically, by Sara in Scene 11. In the middle of Callie and Sara's fight, which stemmed from Sara arriving late and underdressed for the awards ceremony, "*The clomping from the upstairs starts again.*"

⁴⁹³ Ibid. 92.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 24.

Callie: There's my cue. I'm leaving now, I don't care what you do.

Sara: Yeah go, get chased out of your own apartment again.

Callie: What?

Sara: Better to plan your life around someone else's schedule⁴⁹⁵ than have to face them and tell them what you have **every right**—⁴⁹⁶

Within the context of the scene's preceding lines—namely, Callie's fear of what people will think if she and Sara arrive together, with Sara wearing Callie's clothes—it is fairly obvious that Sara is not only referring to Callie's passivity toward her noisy neighbor, but her passivity in relation to the potential same-sex relationship. Sara realizes that they have “every right” to possess feelings for each other *and* act on them (i.e. have sexual agency). Ultimately, Callie realizes this, too. In Scene 15, Callie and Sara reconcile from their fight: “*Sara touches Callie's hand.*” Rather than pull away—rather than swerve—“*Callie squeezes Sara's hand.*”⁴⁹⁷ By Scene 20, Callie offers to let Sara borrow her clothing (something that was previously out of the question); they go to Henrietta's and, in the early hours of the next morning, share their first kiss.

However, in engaging scholarship on sexual fluidity in relation to *Stop Kiss*, it is paramount to note that sexual fluidity does not necessitate changes in sexual identity. Diamond emphasizes, “Women in my study did report changes in their attractions, but rarely to a degree that pushed them into a different category of sexual orientation.”⁴⁹⁸ Drawing from Diamond's study, Leslie C. Bell conducted a survey of twenty women in their twenties in order to understand the ways that young women navigate their sexualities in early adulthood. Bell writes of those heterosexuals in her sample who had same-sex relationships or encounters that “they did not experience the identity transformation characteristic of

⁴⁹⁵ The loud, clomping noise happens every Thursday and Saturday at 6:00pm, and Callie always plans to be “out or doing something loud” (40), rather than file a noise complaint or confront the noisy neighbor.

⁴⁹⁶ Diana Son, *Stop Kiss*, 89. (Bold font mine.)

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁹⁸ Diamond, 143.

traditional coming-out stories. My findings echo those of Diamond ...⁴⁹⁹ Although it could be argued that any deviation bypasses the heteronormative demand for a “fixed” sexual identity, perhaps this is not so, provided that the identity itself is unchanged. Such considerations are semantic in terms of this project; the salient point is that, in Son’s play, Callie and Sara’s sexual identities are not unequivocally changed. Rather, lesbian identities are assigned to the women by other characters.

Lesbian identities are projected onto Callie and Sara as early as the play’s second scene. It is the early morning after the crime and Callie is in a hospital exam room, having just been examined by a doctor. Detective Cole begins his preliminary questioning; no more than five lines in, he refers to Sara as Callie’s **girlfriend**. Throughout the script, Son is careful to use the two-word “girl friend” when dialogue references a platonic relationship, so the lesbian connotation in the detective’s line is unmistakable. Callie quickly corrects him, “My friend—Sara...”⁵⁰⁰ Callie refers to Sara as her friend two additional times in the scene. Audiences learn that the violence committed against Callie and Sara was a hate crime in Scene 4, in which Detective Cole questions Mrs. Winsley, the woman whose apartment is located near Henrietta’s, and who called the cops after she heard the perpetrator call Callie and Sara “pussy eating **dykes**.”⁵⁰¹ To the assaulter’s mind, a passionate kiss signifies lesbian identity. In addition, Mrs. Winsley articulates her view that, “Two women in a West Village park at four in the morning? What’s the chance they’re *not* **dykes**.”⁵⁰² In this regard, Callie and Sara did not even have to be kissing to be assigned lesbian identity—their mere presence

⁴⁹⁹ Leslie C. Bell, *Hard To Get: Twenty-Something Women and the Paradox of Sexual Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 147.

⁵⁰⁰ Diana Son, *Stop Kiss*, 26.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.* (Bold font mine.)

in a gay community (in the words of Mrs. Winsley, “Graceland for gay people”⁵⁰³) is sufficient grounds for suspected lesbian orientation.

Following the attack, lesbian identity is ascribed to Callie and Sara by members of the media, who report the event as a “**Gay** bashing.”⁵⁰⁴ In Scene 14, Callie speaks to Sara, who is still in a coma: “And the newspapers, the t.v., the radio—my station, my own station ... Now everybody—the guy at the deli—I used to be the blueberry muffin lady, now I’m the **lesbian** traffic reporter whose lover got beat up.”⁵⁰⁵ As a result of the media attention, Callie receives letters from people within the LGBT community, especially lesbians who have also been the victims of hate crimes: “they wrote me these heartbreaking letters telling me what they’ve been through...and they tell me to speak truth to power.”⁵⁰⁶ To the writers of these letters, Callie is not only a lesbian, but prime material for a lesbian activist.

In addition to projecting lesbian identities onto Callie and Sara, heteronormative conventions lead at least two characters to assume that Callie and Sara are in a committed, even long-term, partnership. Consider this exchange of dialogue between Sara’s nurse and Callie from Scene 16:

Nurse: I’m gonna give her a bath now.

Callie: Oh, alright. (*She starts to leave.*)

Nurse: I’ll show you so you can do it. (*Callie stops. Slight pause.*)

Callie: Oh—that’s very—but I don’t think I should, I’ve never—

Nurse: You’ve seen the worst of her. Most of her bruises are on her face. Her body looks fine. There’s nothing to be afraid of.

Callie: I don’t know if she’d want me to.

Nurse: It won’t hurt my feelings, you know. I’m sure she’d like it better if you do it.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 74. (Bold font mine.)

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 100. (Bold font mine.)

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 109- 110.

If Callie had been able to finish her thought, the nurse might have learned that Callie has never seen Sara naked, that the two are not that intimately involved; but because Callie visits Sara every day, and ostensibly also because of the media hype, the nurse makes assumptions about their relationship and even projects desires and preferences onto a character in a coma. Mrs. Winsley makes similar presumptions in Scene 18, when she and Callie meet at a local coffee shop:

Mrs. Winsley: Are you close with [Sara's family]?

Callie: No...Not close.

Mrs. Winsley: I know what it's like with in-laws. It took years before mine...Have you and Sara been together long?

Callie: Um...no.

Mrs. Winsley: Oh, I'm sorry I thought you two were—

Callie: I know.⁵⁰⁸

The nurse and Mrs. Winsley are two of the play's most compassionate and affirming characters, and yet heteronormative conventions lead even them to contribute to the narrative of lesbian identity and committed partnership that is written for Callie and Sara. The simple fact is that enfranchisement manifest in sexual agency means that Callie and Sara are free to be lesbians...**or not.**

When Callie "*leans in closer [to Sara, in the hospital bed].*)," and asks "Do you know me?"⁵⁰⁹ she seems to be in a moment of identity crisis—does one kiss make her a lesbian? Does loving Sara make her a lesbian? Prior to the crime, Callie and Sara appear far from certain about their potential lesbian orientations. Consider this excerpt from Scene 21:

Callie: We'll just go [to Henrietta's].

Sara: It's just a bar.

Callie: With a whole bunch of lesbians in it.

Sara: And us. (*They lock eyes, hoping the other will say something perfect. They keep waiting.*)⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 119- 120.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 133.

If this scene is representative of Callie and Sara's sexual identities prior to the crime, it is clear that neither woman is, at that juncture, certain of what bearing a same-sex attraction has on her identity. Much less are they ready to come out as lesbians. What Callie and Sara need, then, is the freedom, autonomy, *agency* to explore their sexual fluidities. They are denied that opportunity, at some point and to varying degrees, by almost every other character in/referenced in the play. A slight exception is the attacker, who, upon seeing two women kissing, was hopeful of sexual fluidity. As Callie reports to Detective Cole in Scene 6, "he said something—'Hey, save some of that for me.'"⁵¹¹ However, the crucial caveat is that the characters were proffered with access to sexual fluidity only within the parameters that it would satisfy the dominant, seemingly white, male figure (i.e. patriarchal objectification of women/lesbian fetishism).

Despite these circumstances, sexual agency is not completely withheld from the characters. Callie and Sara make the decision to go to a lesbian bar together, and they share a kiss. There are two additional instances in which Callie possesses sexual agency. In Scene 18, Mrs. Winsley asks her, "How's your girlfriend?"⁵¹² For the first time, Callie does not correct and clarify that Sara is her friend: "Sara—she's better. Alert and responding."⁵¹³ I interpret the dash as being loaded with subtext; although a dash typically signifies only a slight pause, it is in this moment that Callie makes important choices regarding her feelings for Sara, about her relationship to Sara, and about the association between that relationship and the outside world. In making these choices—even as she does so quickly, internally, and subtly—Callie exercises agency. Callie also exercises agency in Scene 20 when she determines to stand by Sara. Despite the patriarchal and heteronormative forces that

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 59- 60.

⁵¹² Ibid., 118.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

complicate and even punish sexual fluidity, and especially acting on same-sex attractions, Callie wants to be with Sara; she approaches the nurse's station, and asks, "Do you have time now? To show me how to [give Sara a bath]?"⁵¹⁴ In these scenes, the protagonist, once again stops; she makes independent choices about her life and exercises agency in terms of her attractions and relationships.

While Son has spoken of *Stop Kiss* as a love play, my analysis suggests that it is also a play that empowers women to explore their sexualities, despite cultural norms that work against such practices, favoring instead rigid identity classifications. In this regard, the play can empower and enfranchise all women. Diana Son's reflection on the titular kiss staged by Jo Bonney in the premiere production offers some insight into how the play resonated with women across the spectrum of sexual identities: "[Bonney] staged a really lovely, yummy kiss. And tons of women--gay, straight, whatever—would say to me afterwards 'GREAT kiss.'"⁵¹⁵ Diverse audiences empathized with the characters during the play's climax; this testifies to my contention that *Stop Kiss* has something for/is for all women. Charles Isherwood's review in *Variety* also indicates the play's ability to enfranchise a demographic that extends beyond just lesbians or the LGBT community: "[Son] is commenting obliquely on the danger of repression and the importance of self-discovery."⁵¹⁶ Isherwood's remark places *Stop Kiss* (a representative 1990s play) in sharp contrast to Ron Becker's view of representative 1990's television. Unlike the television programs studied by Becker, *Stop Kiss* is not specifically "geared toward the comfort of heterosexuals."⁵¹⁷ Through its emphasis on sexual fluidity, and through its resulting deconstruction—or at least manipulation—of the

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁵¹⁵ Yugaitis.

⁵¹⁶ Charles Isherwood, "Stop Kiss," *Variety*, December 7, 1998, <http://variety.com/1998/legit/reviews/stop-kiss-1200456274/>.

⁵¹⁷ Dow, 98.

heterosexual/homosexual binary, heterosexual audiences were likely challenged. And, hopefully, liberated, empowered, enfranchised. In addition to these considerations, *Stop Kiss* enfranchises women broadly because it focuses on an under-represented portion of women.

In framing and justifying her own study, Diamond carefully specifies that

we now know from research using representative samples that individuals with bisexual attractions actually outnumber individuals with exclusive same-sex attractions, especially among young women. Combined with the fact that most individuals with same-sex attractions do not publically identify themselves as lesbian/gay/bisexual, this means that studies of self-identified lesbians and gays actually focus on a very small and unrepresentative subset of all sexual minorities.⁵¹⁸

Through central characters Callie and Sara, *Stop Kiss* highlights this under-represented group, and in doing so, empowers and enfranchises its many members.

As far as production circumstances are concerned, it seems particularly significant that *Stop Kiss* was written by a heterosexual playwright. As part of her response to the unfavorable review published in *The Advocate*, Son expressed her feeling that “There is suspicion of me—of what I’m using the play to say--because I’m not gay ...”⁵¹⁹ Just as Callie and Sara desire enfranchisement to explore their homoerotic attractions, and just as they need to be enfranchised in order to have the freedom and agency to be or not be lesbians without negative consequence in either outcome, Son needs a similar enfranchisement to explore female same-sex desire in her writing. Mengmeng Jiang addresses this in her essay “Rewriting the Self-Identity in Diana Son’s *Stop Kiss*,” asserting that “the ‘kiss’ in the play comes as a cataclysmic leap of self-awareness, trust and commitment,⁵²⁰ not solely as a statement of race and sexuality. It not only exposes the violence, bias and inequality of

⁵¹⁸ Diamond, 27.

⁵¹⁹ Yugaitis.

⁵²⁰ It is worthwhile to note that I disagree with Jiang’s assertion that the kiss signifies commitment, as it is not until later (in the actual sequence of events) that Callie determines to stand by Sara. To my mind, it is not until saying to Sara, “Choose me,” that Callie demonstrates commitment.

society, but also surpasses the writer's self-identification as a heterosexual Asian American woman and rewrites her identity within the fulfillment of humanity without superiorities of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality."⁵²¹ Perhaps a similar experience was afforded to director Jo Bonney, who is married to writer/performer Eric Bogosian?

It also seems significant that the premiere production cast women who identify as heterosexual in the roles of Callie and Sara. Granted, both women had previously played lesbian characters, but portraying Son's leading characters afforded the actresses an additional opportunity to embody what, for many American women, is a lived reality (both in terms of sexual fluidity and violence). The fact that Oh has publically discussed her own sexual fluidity⁵²² makes her an even more appropriate fit for Callie; presumably, playing the role could have further validated her own experiences. To public knowledge, Jessica Hecht is exclusively heterosexual. My research did not elicit information regarding the sexualities of the other actors and members of the production team.

Enfranchisement as Manifest in the Pursuit of Access to Safety and Legal Protections

I previously noted that Diana Son views *Stop Kiss* as a political play insofar as it is a play that looks at real circumstances faced by real people. However, the fact that those circumstances (i.e. violence against women, sexual minorities) are bound up in civil rights inequalities makes the play more political than it appears, and arguably more political than even the playwright recognizes, or at least acknowledges. As I noted in Chapter One, drama can function as a rhetorical political strategy; *Stop Kiss* does function as such, raising questions about access to safety, legal protections, advocacy, political and legal action, and

⁵²¹ Jiang 33.

⁵²² See Chrisanne Eastwood, "The Story of Oh," *The Advocate*, September 30, 2003, 60.

civil rights. These questions are raised because central characters Callie and Sara are victimized on the basis of their sexuality (sexual activity, more precisely).

Literary theorist Kenneth Burke's concept of the tragic frame is a symbolic structure that uses victimage to purify or impose order upon embodied experiences. Dustin Bradley Goltz has extended Burkeian theory to analyze televised representations of gay lives, arguing that homosexual characters are overwhelmingly scripted as sacrificial scapegoats whose narratives are censored, if not altogether purged. Borrowing from Goltz's methodology, an analysis of the pivotal plot points in *Stop Kiss* reveals a similar occurrence of victimage, which accounts for the title's double meaning. *Stop Kiss* not only refers to the fact that Callie and Sara stop swerving and finally kiss, but also to the critical action of the kiss being stopped by a sexist, even homophobic, man's verbally and physically violent interaction with the characters. Indeed, because of their same-sex attractions and homocentric actions, Callie and Sara are placed within a tragic frame.

The presence of a tragic frame in *Stop Kiss* accounted for the negative review published in *The Advocate*. Recall Shewey's resentment of what he interpreted as Son's theme: "if you come out, you're going to be punished; it's OK to approve of gay people as long as they're victims ..."⁵²³ Although my analysis of *Stop Kiss* has offered an alternative thematic interpretation of the play (one associated with empowerment and enfranchisement), I do not dispute Shewey's contention that Son has Callie and Sara punished, thus placing them in victim positions. However, I contend that the tragic frame operates productively in Son's play-world, as it raises awareness of real-world issues and, even if covertly, advocates for political and legal action steps that would provide minorities with more access to safety and better protections. In effect, the tragic frame bolsters the play's affiliation with

⁵²³ Shewey, 51.

enfranchisement by depicting the urgent need for it. It is important to qualify, however, that the tragic frame is more complex than the attack on Callie and Sara. The police action in response to the attack is similarly tragic, as response time is delayed and the subsequent investigations are rampant with victim blaming.

In Scene 4, Mrs. Winsley is interviewed by Detective Cole about the night of the attack:

Mrs. Winsley: I didn't see anything till I heard the other one screaming. I went to the window then I called nine-one-one.

Det. Cole: What'd you see then?

Mrs. Winsley: He was beating on both of them. I yelled down that I called the cops and I threw a couple flower pots at him. My spider plants— ... those two girls are lucky that I am [a fitful sleeper] and that I was up and that I did something.

Det. Cole: You called nine-one-one.

Mrs. Winsley: And my flower pots. ... They fell near him. He stopped and took off.

Det. Cole: You stopped him.

Mrs. Winsley: Well it wasn't the cops, took thirty minutes for someone to show up. You'd think it was Harlem, not the West Village.⁵²⁴

This exchange of dialogue is important because it introduces the motif of privilege. In this early scene, the West Village is positioned as a site of privilege, at least in comparison to Harlem. New York audiences would certainly have been familiar with these prominent locales and would therefore have been able to easily understand the class and race disparities implied by Mrs. Winsley's dialogue. "Harlem has long been synonymous with African-American culture," and despite the vibrant arts culture that burgeoned in Harlem early in the 20th century (consider Langston Hughes and Josephine Baker), it has been, and remains, an area with high poverty and crime rates. A 2013 article published in *The New York Times* specified that violent crime is as concerning now as it was "during the horror days of the

⁵²⁴ Son, *Stop Kiss*, 43- 45.

1980s and '90s.”⁵²⁵ John Hagan and Ruth D. Peterson report, by 1995 the leading cause of death among Africa-American males was homicide.⁵²⁶ The correlation between poverty and crime is evident through the preponderance of crimes related to drugs and theft. In contrast, more than 75% of the West Village population is Caucasian, with the majority of those living in the area working white collar jobs; it is estimated that violent crime in the West Village is 60% lower than in other parts of New York City.⁵²⁷ This in mind, police forces from the 6th Precinct should have been able to respond to the crime committed against Callie and Sara much more quickly. A major question raised in this scene, then, is “What took the police so long?”

In exploring this question, it becomes clear that, while the West Village is a more privileged area than some New York neighborhoods, lines of oppression are complex. As a result, the West Village is less privileged than others, and a contributing factor might be the area’s large LGBT population. Mrs. Winsley’s comical reference to the West Village as “Graceland for gay people”⁵²⁸ would likely have resonated with New Yorkers, as the famous riot at Stonewall Inn transpired in the West Village, and the village has long been home to the LGBT community—for instance, The Center (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center) was founded in 1983. In addition to public knowledge of the West Village as a prominent gay neighborhood enclave, Mrs. Winsley may have specified to the nine-one-one dispatcher that the attack appeared to be motivated by sexism and homophobia.

⁵²⁵ Ginia Bellafante, “Violent Crime Fell? Tell it to East Harlem,” *The New York Times* (New York: NY), Jan. 5, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/nyregion/violent-crime-fell-tell-it-to-east-harlem.html>.

⁵²⁶ John Hagan and Ruth D. Peterson, *Crime and Inequality* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1995), 37.

⁵²⁷ “West Village, New York, NY Crime Rates and Statistics,” *Areavibes*, accessed February 27, 2015, <http://www.areavibes.com/new+york-ny/west+village/crime/>. Note: Although not a scholarly source, www.areavibes.com utilizes reputable sources like US Census Data, FBI Uniform Crime Reports, and Council For Community and Economic Research.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

Although it is not clear whether Mrs. Winsley's initial report noted that the attacker called Callie and Sara dykes, the sharing of these details might have impacted the police department's response time. The historically tenuous relationship between police forces and the LGBT community has been documented by several notable scholars, including George Chauncey and Lillian Faderman. While *Stop Kiss* allows only for conjectures about why the police were delayed in arriving to the scene of the crime, the salient point is that this given circumstance is an opening for contemplating the issues surrounding anti-LGBT violence and whose lives matter/are worthy of being saved. For instance, Melanie Barker of *Curve* finds the play's grappling with "issues of anti-lesbian violence" significant enough to merit incorporation in her article's title, "It's In Her Kiss: Landmark play 'Stop Kiss' by Diana Son addresses issues of anti-lesbian violence, and love."

Bias and prejudice within the police force is depicted overtly through the character of Detective Cole, who audiences first encounter in Scene 2, in a hospital examination room following the attack. The detective attempts to gather basic information about the attacker, but engages in racial profiling as he does so: "What'd the guy look like? ... Was he black? (*Callie shakes her head no.*) Hispanic?"⁵²⁹ While it is the detective's job to elicit information from Callie, his tactic shows prejudicial attitudes about racial minorities and perpetuates stereotypical correlations between race and propensity for criminal behavior. Later, in Scene 6, during a follow-up interview with Callie, gender biases—or at least narrow-mindedness about gender—arise:

Det. Cole: Do you remember telling me that the bartender at the white horse tavern that night was a *guy*?

Callie: Sara ordered the drinks.

Det. Cole: So you didn't get a good look at the bartender?

Callie: I didn't.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 29- 30.

Det. Cole: Not even enough to tell if it was a girl or a guy.⁵³⁰

If this scene is representative of Detective Cole, the character views gender from a binaristic perspective, non-encompassing of gender fluidity and gender-queer presentations. While Detective Cole's objective in the scene is to provoke Callie because he is not convinced that she has told him the full truth about the night of the attack, his dialogue evokes hegemonic attitudes relating to gender. In addition to racial and gender biases, Detective Cole also exhibits sexism in his interviews with Callie. In Scene 2, he calls Callie "honey"⁵³¹ and refers to her and Sara as "a couple of good-looking girls."⁵³² The fact that he, in Scene 6, again refers to the two grown women as "girls"⁵³³ further signifies his sexism, simultaneously reinforcing the patriarchal influence within the play-world.

With these racist, heteronormative, and sexist considerations in mind—coupled with Callie's own confusion related to sexual fluidity and her first same-sex romantic attraction—it is no surprise that she initially lies to Detective Cole about the attack. Presumably because she is afraid—or, at the very least, insecure—to admit that she and Sara had been at a lesbian bar, Callie tells the detective that they had been at White Horse Tavern, rather than Henrietta's. Additionally, Callie refrains from truthfully answering the question "What were you doing [at Bleeker and West 11th at 4:15am]?"⁵³⁴ because it would require disclosing that she and Sara were kissing. In *Stop Kiss*, full access to legal support and protections are withheld from the protagonist; the need for enfranchisement is abundantly clear.

The full truth regarding the night of the crime is revealed in Scene 6, during Detective Cole and Callie's second meeting. By this point, Detective Cole has been informed by Mrs.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 28.

⁵³² Ibid., 31.

⁵³³ Ibid., 59.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 28.

Winsley that the attacker called Callie and Sara “Pussy-eating dykes,”⁵³⁵ but he pressures Callie to tell him herself. This scene evokes Bonnie J. Dow’s understanding of the coming-out ritual from a Foucaultian perspective, highlighting the power dynamics between the confessor and the audience. Dow argues that, rather than liberate and empower the confessor, the act of coming out places the LGBT person in a submissive position characterized by revealing her identity and/or practices to a—more often than not—heterosexual audience. In this negotiation, according to Dow (who draws upon Douglas Crimp), “the secret being kept isn’t homosexuality; it’s homophobia and heterosexism,”⁵³⁶ which demands that dissident sexuality be confessed at all. The circumstances of Callie’s confession align with Dow’s theories, as she is certainly submissive to Detective Cole’s dominance: “What upset [Sara] so much? ... Did he call her something. Like a name? ... What’s a name that might upset her? ... How about bitch? ... A pussy-eating bitch?”⁵³⁷ As if being verbally and physically assaulted once were not enough, Detective Cole bullies Callie into making an emotional confession that recounts the attack’s gruesome details.

Matters are worsened by the fact that Detective Cole holds Callie and Sara accountable for the crime committed against them—in effect, assigning blame not to the culprit but to the victims. The troubling notion that it is the responsibility of women and/or sexual minorities to protect themselves is evidenced by Goltz, who effectively states in *Queer Temporalities*: “Logics that assume ‘violence comes with the territory’ of gayness have not disappeared in the wake of increased visibility.”⁵³⁸ This heterosexist logic is epitomized in Detective Cole:

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 59.

⁵³⁶ Dow, 135.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 57- 58.

⁵³⁸ Goltz, 49.

Det. Cole: ... why would he call you dykes. (*Pause.*)

Callie: Because we were kissing. (*Detective Cole gestures—there it is.*)⁵³⁹

The gesture is the essential element in the exchange above, as it solidifies what Detective Cole has believed all along—that Callie and Sara must have been engaging in homosexual conduct to ‘warrant’ being called dykes and, even worse, to ‘provoke’ a man to beat them.

Gregory M. Herek and Kevin T. Berrill argue that “an important component of sexual ideology ... [is] the belief that sexuality belongs only in the personal or private sphere of life,”⁵⁴⁰ but due to public institutions like marriage, as well as through the dominance of heteronormative scripts within mainstream culture, the public vs. private sexual ideology applies more strictly to homosexuality and “creates a basis for stigmatizing it when it becomes visible.”⁵⁴¹ Burke and Goltz extend this notion beyond stigmatization to include victimization. In *Stop Kiss*, characters are not only stigmatized and victimized, but even blamed for the crime committed against them. Victim blaming is a process through which poetic justice is realized in real-world scenarios because it assumes that sufferers deserve their misfortunes.⁵⁴² An outcome of the just world hypothesis (founded in the belief that good is rewarded and bad is punished, and that the world is therefore fair), victim-blaming relates to the “comes with the territory” ideology critiqued by Goltz and embodied by Detective Cole. To understand why Callie and Sara ‘deserved’ to be victimized and blamed for those actions, consider a 2002 study on rape conducted by Viki and Abrams: “The authors found that victim blaming increases ... when a victim’s character does not conform to traditional

⁵³⁹ Son, *Stop Kiss*, 59.

⁵⁴⁰ Gregory M. Heck and Kevin T. Berrill, *Hate Crimes: Confronting Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 94.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² See Andrew M. Colman, *A Diction of Psychology*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press), 2008.

notions of femininity.”⁵⁴³ Callie and Sara’s engagement in a homoerotic act destabilizes heteronormativity and its related gender norms, but this is not the only factor that makes them responsible for the outcome of the kiss. As evidenced in the dialogue below, Sara defended herself and Callie by standing up to the male attacker, which (to Detective Cole’s mind) is not the appropriate action for a woman to take:

Callie: We were sitting on one of the benches, talking to each other...when this guy says something. ... Something like, ‘Hey, you want to party—’

Det. Cole: What did you say?

Callie: I didn’t.

Det. Cole: Sara said something.

Callie: Yes

Det. Cole: **So she provoked him.**

Callie: What!?

Det. Cole: She told him to ‘fuck off,’ and that’s when he hit her, right?

Callie: No.

Det. Cole: **I mean, if the two of you had ignored him or walked away, this wouldn’t have happened, would it?**

Callie: If *he* hadn’t started—

Det. Cole: But Sara had to say something and that’s what got him pissed, that’s why he wanted to hit her. Why did she say something?

Callie: He started it, he—⁵⁴⁴

Whereas Detective Cole’s initial interview with Callie (Scene 2) included attempts to gather information about the attacker—his race, style of dress, markings on clothing, etc.—Scene 6 is overwhelmingly characterized by the detective’s attempt to determine information about Callie and Sara’s actions, and, as it became available, to use that information to assign blame. Rather than pursue additional information that could lead to an arrest, Detective Cole pursues information about the victims’ behavior. Callie is left to feebly offer clues, without provocation—the attacker was vomited on by Callie because of her being punched in the stomach; he hurt his knee by smashing Sara’s head into it; he ran off with a limp, headed

⁵⁴³ Sana Sheikh and Meghan E. McNamara, “Insights from Self-Blame and Victim Blaming,” *Psychology Inquiry: An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory* 25, no. 2 (2014): 242.

⁵⁴⁴ Son, *Stop Kiss*, 56- 57. (Bold font mine.)

west. Detective Cole discusses no police action being taken to find the perpetrator and there is not even a mention of future prosecution; in fact, Detective Cole is absent from the remainder of the play. Callie and Sara have no advocate in the legal system. To the best of audience members' knowledge, protective services, as well as the legal system, failed Callie and Sara.

Political enfranchisement of the LGBT community in relation to hate crimes would not be blatantly and unapologetically called for until Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* (2000):

Jonas Slonaker: Change is not an easy thing, and I don't think people were up to it here. ... You know, it's been a year since Matthew Shepard died, and they haven't passed shit in Wyoming ... at a state level, any town, nobody anywhere, has passed any kind of laws, anti-discrimination laws or hate crime legislation, nobody has passed anything anywhere. What's come out of it? What's come out of this that's concrete or lasting?⁵⁴⁵

However, Diana Son's *Stop Kiss* can be viewed as a forerunner to overtly political dramas because of its incorporation of scenes and characters that collectively depict LGBT Americans as a minority group in need of the safety and legal protections that come with full social/political enfranchisement. In looking at *Stop Kiss* metatheatrically, it is also worthwhile to consider Geoffrey Nauffts's 2009 play *Next Fall*, which—like *Stop Kiss*—features a same-sex couple, one member of which is hospitalized in a coma (though not as the result of an attack). Act 2, Scene 6 of Nauffts's play reveals Adam sleeping with Luke in his hospital bed; Luke's conservative father, Butch, enters the scene and explodes in anger. He was previously unaware of his son's homosexuality and orders Adam to leave the room. Callie's access to Sara's hospital room is also not guaranteed because she and Sara are not

⁵⁴⁵ Moisés Kaufman, *The Laramie Project* (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 2001), 87.

domestic partners.⁵⁴⁶ Callie's access to Sara's hospital room (like Adam's access to Luke's) is at the discretion of Sara's parents. When Mrs. Winsley asks Callie if she is close to Sara's parents, Callie responds, "No...not close."⁵⁴⁷ Peter emphasizes to Callie in Scene 12 that "[Sara] needs her **family**. And **they** need to take care of her."⁵⁴⁸ Despite these circumstances, Callie is still able to visit Sara daily and, in this respect, she is lucky. Although LGBT rights related to hospital visitation are not a subject matter taken up by Son in any explicit manner, the play is an entrance point for considering such enfranchisement-related issues. It is likely that audiences would have considered these issues since, beginning in 1983 with Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson, medical rights and associated court cases had been in the news. Take, for example, the *New York Times* article, "Disabled Woman's Care Given to Lesbian Partner," published on December 18, 1991, when a Minnesota Court of Appeals case finally ruled in favor of Karen Thompson's legal guardianship over Sharon Kowalski, who was left wheelchair-bound and brain-damaged after a drunk driver hit her vehicle.

In depicting the still-harsh realities faced by LGBT people in the 1990s (including complexities regarding sexual fluidity, lesbian identity, lack of access to safety, and inadequate legal action and protections), *Stop Kiss* depicts two primary recourses for those who experience same-sex attractions and/or contemplate same-sex relationships and identities: 1) remain closeted, or 2) "speak truth to power." Although the closet is certainly explored in Scene 2 when Callie hides from Detective Cole the homocentric particulars of the night of the attack, the closet is also explored in *Stop Kiss* through the use of a symbol. In Scene 15, Callie shows to Sara the award that she received the night of the ceremony (to which Sara did not accompany Callie because of their fight):

⁵⁴⁶ In the state of New York, same-sex domestic partnerships have been recognized since 1998.

⁵⁴⁷ Son, *Stop Kiss*, 119.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 93. (Bold font mine.)

(Sara looks [at the award]. She walks over to the bookshelf and slides some photographs out of the way.)

Sara: Put it here, o.k.?

Callie: Not there.

Sara: Why not?

Callie: Everyone will see it.

Sara: Just keep it there. (*Callie reaches for it.*) Stop it.⁵⁴⁹

While this exchange further establishes the principle characters (Callie as trepidatious and Sara as assertive), Callie's shyness about the award can be interpreted to symbolize her struggle with awakening sexual fluidity. The sequence of dialogue transpires directly after Callie and Sara hold hands for the first time, followed by Callie breaking the contact. This context makes the symbol more easily discernible for audiences. Moreover, Callie's desire to hide the award (here, a symbol of same-sex attraction) from public view can be read as a symbol of the closet, a hiding space. Indeed, confining homoerotic attractions and desires to the closet is an option, requiring only that Callie continue to swerve.

However, this is not the course of action taken by Callie; ultimately, she stops to kiss Sara, and she later stops again to ask of Sara, "Choose me." To that end, *Stop Kiss* presents a second option—a more empowering alternative. The letters written to Callie in the aftermath of the crime urge her to "speak truth to power," and though Callie doubts her own knowledge of what that means, her actions prove otherwise. In asking Sara to choose her as a caregiver (and, ostensibly, as a girlfriend/partner), Callie rejects the violence committed against her on the basis of sexuality, claiming her feelings for Sara and refusing to have them stolen in fear and shame. She also subverts traditional notions of family, of which Peter spoke. Callie *acts* truth to power and follows Sara's urging to "face them and tell them what [she] has every right—."⁵⁵⁰ In effect, Callie becomes her own advocate and begins to fight for

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 89.

enfranchisement. This motif is what the reviewer from *The Advocate* failed to extrapolate from the play. Perhaps Shewey's perceptions were colored—maybe even predetermined—by the preponderance of narratives from which LGBT empowerment and enfranchisement are withheld. As Goltz argues,

Normalizing violence against gay men enacts a tragic ritual where dominant audiences are temporarily permitted to identify with nonnormative sexual desires—through a gay character—and then redeem themselves and heteronormative perfection through symbolically sacrificing the gay representation. ... the gay male body in contemporary media is subjected to repeated violence.⁵⁵¹

However, *Stop Kiss* is quite different from the narratives featuring gay males analyzed in Goltz's work. Son's central characters are women, they are lower-middle class⁵⁵², and if the production is cast as the playwright envisions and requests in the note included in the 2000 publication, they are racially diverse. In effect, Son's characters are nearly triple minorities, prior to even developing feelings for each other. Additionally, Sara holds philosophies that work against the heteronormative paradigm: "All my friends are married or getting engaged, having babies or wishing they were—and lately when I hear about it, I think—why? ... Marriage. Why would you say to anyone, 'I will stay with you even if I outgrow you.'"⁵⁵³ The fact that the two women have fluid sexualities further secures their nonnormative identities and subsequent disenfranchisement.

In all fairness, Callie and Sara are somewhat (to borrow Becker's term) Slumpy.⁵⁵⁴ They are socially liberal (they poke fun at Rudolph Giuliani in Scene 1), they live in an urban community, and have professional careers—despite that neither is white collar, nor lucrative.

⁵⁵¹ Goltz, 50.

⁵⁵² Recall that Sara is in New York on a teaching fellowship at an elementary school in the Bronx, a social-economically disadvantaged area; she lives with two roommates. Callie lives in a spacious apartment in an upscale neighborhood only because it was inherited. She works as a news traffic reporter and finds it "impossible to live [in New York City]" (Son 21).

⁵⁵³ Son, *Stop Kiss* 36.

⁵⁵⁴ Socially-liberal, urban-minded, professional.

However, in comparison to Matthew Shepard, who Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki have argued is identifiable—as a person, news headline, and character—to mainstream audiences because he is “a white, middle-class ‘innocent’”⁵⁵⁵ male, Callie and Sara offer significantly fewer entrance points to normativity and, as consequence, heteronormative identification. The fact that they manage to overcome victimization and will, or so it appears, move forward in some kind of same-sex relationship (the parameters are ambiguous because Sara still needs significant rehabilitation) is dramaturgically atypical and socio-politically subversive.

While the tragic frame is a literary device employed by Son, tragedy does not triumph and this is an empowering circumstance. *Stop Kiss* is mild in terms of LGBT narratives (the characters are not even formally out of the closet, no less into the LGBT community) and homoerotic content (one kiss pales in comparison to the overt sexuality encountered a decade earlier with Vogel’s *And Baby Makes Seven*), but the play by no means offers straight audiences a “painlessly passive” interaction with the Other. Whereas Goltz argues that dramatized representations of homosexuality most often culminate with, or at least include, the sacrifice of the homosexual character, it is Detective Cole who is symbolically sacrificed in *Stop Kiss*. As he is absent from the staged action after Scene 6, Callie and Sara are able to gradually discard the blame assigned to them. Heterosexism and misogyny, having been embodied in Detective Cole, are purged in Son’s play-world, not homosexuality. This reading of the play also offers additional meaning to the attacker’s absence from the staged action. In contrast to the wealth of absent homosexual characters in American drama—consider the plays of Tennessee Williams—access to the stage/agency is withheld from the character who commits the crime. Poetic justice triumphs, even as Son’s central characters

⁵⁵⁵ Goltz, 50.

face an unjust situation, and the incorporation of this literary device works to enfranchise LGBT people and sexual minorities more generally.⁵⁵⁶

Further, through the characters of Mrs. Winsley and the nurse, Callie and Sara experience enfranchisement more directly; in turn, so do sexual minority audience members. I noted in Chapter 1 that this project conceptualizes enfranchisement broadly, to include instances in which LGBT characters are treated equally with their heterosexual counterparts. The empathy Mrs. Winsley shows Callie in the coffee shop scene, her inclusive language, and concern over whether the care given to Sara and Callie by the doctors at St. Vincent's hospital has met expectations enfranchises Callie. The nurse's ready acceptance of the women's relationship, and her willingness to prepare Callie for Sara's home healthcare, enfranchises the characters. Through these scenes, *Stop Kiss* posits Callie and Sara as unequivocally sympathetic, likable, in need of—and deserving of—equal treatment/enfranchisement. *Stop Kiss* advocates for sexual minorities and this is best illustrated by the fact that the kiss is the play's final, hard-won, and “yummy”⁵⁵⁷ moment. In *Stop Kiss*, the future is imagined in the act of not swerving in the face of powerful hegemonic norms and dictates; it is imagined in surviving. Only then can we speak and act “truth to power.” *Stop Kiss* envisions LGBT people and sexual minorities (especially women) rising up and fighting for ourselves—doing for ourselves those things that the dominant culture has failed to do and, through our acts of resistance, setting a precedence for what “living fully” can and should be.

⁵⁵⁶ By sexual minorities, I mean those like Callie and Sara who do not identify as LGBT. I also use the term to refer to those who are questioning their sexualities, those whose sexualities are not represented by LGBT, and those who prefer not to label their sexual identities.

⁵⁵⁷ Diana Son, quoted in Yurgaitis.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

From Stonewall to Millennium has investigated the relationship between theatrical representations of lesbian and female bisexual identities and experiences, and the social/political climate of the final three decades of the 20th century. Particular attention has been allotted to exploring the ways that each play relates to/reflects the specific historical contexts in which it was written and produced. Scholars like Bailey and Farber, Moffitt and Campbell, and Oxoby have described the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as transformational, critical, transitional, diverse, and fascinating periods of U.S. history. As the turn of the millennium and the earliest years of the 21st century have been marked by aggressive social/political campaigns aimed at the empowerment and enfranchisement of LGBT Americans, exploring the relationship between these decades and the empowerment and enfranchisement of LGBT people is especially relevant to contextualizing the current historical moment. This study has illuminated how, during this era, women and lesbian playwrights used the theatre as a rhetorical strategy for engaging themes of, and issues related to, LGBT empowerment and enfranchisement. Integral to this work has been the close, critical readings of three representative plays by American women: *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* by Jane Chambers, *And Baby Makes Seven* by Paula Vogel, and *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son.

As delineated in Chapter One, questions that motivated this project include the following: What is the status quo for lesbians in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s? What specific issues rise to the front of the LGBT movement during these decades? How do stage

depictions relate? To address these questions, the Historical Overview sections within the three analytical chapters draw upon primary and secondary sources. A salient finding from the analysis of Chambers' *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* is that, beginning in the 1970s, there was no singular status quo. Dennis Altman has argued that, as the LGBT movement expanded after Stonewall, it "inevitably split over a number of issues and tactics."⁵⁵⁸ The special interest groups that formed during this decade helped LGBT Americans address the issues and concerns stemming from intersecting identities—gay and Catholic, lesbian and senior citizen, bisexual and Latina, etc. More generally, the rapid development of political aims and social interests resulted in the emergence of liberationist and assimilationist communities and agendas. Whereas liberationists sought empowerment on their own terms and a separate (non-assimilationist/non-homonormative) but equal form of enfranchisement, assimilationists were motivated by humanist ideology and desired to be brought fully into the folds of American society, with equal access to existing social/political infrastructures.

My analysis of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* grapples with these divergent, though not mutually exclusive, impulses, notably manifested in the liberationist locale of the play's action (a lesbian vacation destination) and the characters' assimilationist behaviors and values (traditional gender presentation, conventional beauty, monogamous coupling, viewing lifelong love as worthwhile, etc.). The chapter also discovers how the play illustrates the common ground shared by liberationists and assimilationists, as the 1970s were marked by a pervasive, increased emphasis on the ritual act of coming out, and having the freedom to do so without negative ramifications. *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* depicts this prominent issue through several characters—principally, Eva and Kitty—and effectively portrays the closet as a liminal space. Lesbian enfranchisement is manifest in Chambers' play through the

⁵⁵⁸ Altman, 108 and 114.

characters' desires to be openly homosexual and to engage in homocentric relationships and friendships without consequence.

Chapter Three's investigation of Vogel's play within the 1980s context predominantly explores the LGBT community's unprecedented entrance into the heteronormative paradigm vis-à-vis family and parenting. The significant and surprising finding of this chapter relates to the queer potential of these typically-assimilationist practices. With the AIDS epidemic resulting in health concerns⁵⁵⁹ for LGBT people, and a resurgence of flagrant homophobia within mainstream society, the status quo for many lesbians (even for those who had, only a decade earlier, identified as liberationist) became more conventional, which created an entrance point for exploring same-sex marriage and a host of family-related topics like child custody, adoption, and donor insemination. According to George Chauncey, "the lesbian baby boom of the 1980s represented something new: a generation of women who lived openly as lesbians and no longer felt obliged to marry a man to have a child."⁵⁶⁰ Through Anna and Ruth, *And Baby Makes Seven* reflects the decade's burgeoning population of lesbian parents.

Despite how seemingly heteronormative and conservative this appears at surface, my analysis of the play reveals the subversive and empowering potential of creating queer families. Domestic though they are, Vogel's characters are wildly imaginative and offer a rejoinder to the decade's more traditional milieu (they do not entertain the idea of marriage, are arranged in a ménage-a-trois, and have imaginary children alongside an impending biological child). When undertaken à la Vogel's characters, creating families captures the liberationist spirit that persisted in the 1980s—consider the cartoon artistry of Alison

⁵⁵⁹ As a consequence of AIDS, another major issue at the forefront of the LGBT movement during this decade was access to governmental support and funds for AIDS-related research for prevention and intervention.

⁵⁶⁰ Chauncey, *Why Marriage?*, 105.

Bechdel, the performance work of those like Holly Hughes, and the emerging critical theories of Judith Butler and others—regardless of the more conservative surrounding context. In this respect, *And Baby Makes Seven* conceptualizes lesbian enfranchisement as having access to heteronormative scripts **and** the authority to queer them.

Chapter Four's analysis of Diana Son's *Stop Kiss* within the context of the 1990s and the turn into the new millennium engages this project's central themes of empowerment and enfranchisement most overtly. It was during this decade that lesbians achieved (at that point) maximum mainstream attention through being featured on the cover of major print publications like *Newsweek* and *Time*, as well as through earning places on Primetime television and leadership positions within the national government. One predominant component of this decade's status quo was related to advocacy, epitomized by celebrities coming out as LGBT or as allies, and LGBT driven and/or targeted political campaigning and legal action. However, the fact that the central characters in Diana Son's *Stop Kiss* struggle with their sexual awakenings and are hesitant to come out of the closet and into the LGBT community undermines the perception of the decade as a time when coming out was unambiguously easier and safer than ever before.

This study addresses the narrative of steady progress for America's LGBT population that has been propagated—or that, at the very least, can be extrapolated from general media and popular discourse. While *From Stonewall to Millennium* celebrates political victories and the various “mile markers” of progress that enable the inference of incremental progress, it also works to trouble any unequivocally linear, uncontested narrative. Indeed, history is fraught with complications and contradictions. The social/political progress achieved in the 1990s is destabilized by homophobic legislation like DADT and DOMA, and especially by

the brutal, often life-threatening violence that continued to be committed against lesbians and other sexual minorities.

The torturous murders of those like Brandon Teena and Matthew Shepard are echoed, to a degree, in *Stop Kiss*, as Son's central characters endure a violent attack. With *Stop Kiss*, audiences receive a sharp reminder of the dangers associated with visibility, and the urgent need for empowerment and enfranchisement is evident. Major issues for the LGBT community during the 1990s, then, dealt with access to sexual agency, as well as to safety and legal protections. Through Callie and Sara, *Stop Kiss* depicts these issues and, by proxy, explores enfranchisement through the central characters' struggles with internal and external homophobia, including anti-homosexual violence and insufficient legal protection.

The particulars that characterize the social/political climates of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s are manifested in each of the three plays that comprise my sample; indeed, each play manages to depict with a fair degree of accuracy the lived experiences of many (though not all) lesbians of their respective eras. Throughout this project, I have re-iterated that a single play is not capable of representing the entirety of any population, and—when possible—I have quoted the playwrights to clarify their intentions to depict individual characters, not to represent all female sexual minorities. The plays analyzed in this dissertation depict the current circumstances when the plays were written and hold “the mirror up to nature,”⁵⁶¹ as the playwrights experience/envision it. In these plays, audiences encounter compelling narratives, empathetic characters, and identifiable given circumstances, all related to elements of the (often harsh) real-life identities and experiences of LGBT people.

⁵⁶¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 248.

However, my analyses also reveal that each of the three plays ultimately leave audience with sanguine themes; namely, love. Lil falls in love with Eva and dies having done something “worthwhile.” Ruth, Anna, and Peter love their imaginary children and resurrect them, even if in opposition to norms. Callie and Sara love each other, so will move forward in a relationship, despite facing an injurious attack. Perhaps the familiar and reassuring theme of love was a dramaturgical choice to help the plays receive favorable mainstream attention? People, regardless of sexual orientation, have always—and will always—love. Yet, the analytical chapters demonstrate that the plays in my sample are rife with allusions, and sometimes even the overt reference, to the world beyond the theatre doors and its social/political dimensions. In view of this circumstance, the plays in my sample empower and enfranchise sexual minorities.

Although the plays analyzed in this project were not written as social/political propaganda pieces, and neither do they *overtly* call for social/political reform, they act as rhetorical political strategies, prompting contemplation and conversation about the empowerment and enfranchisement of women sexual minorities. For discerning audiences or readers (and don’t we hope that they all are?), *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *Stop Kiss* reflect the major events, trends, and ideologies circulating within the environments out of which the plays were born. Collectively, the analytical chapters demonstrate that the plays in my sample align with the New Historicist perspective that drama is invented “according to its [creator’s] own history, spirit of the times, customs, opinions, language, national biases, traditions, and inclinations.”⁵⁶² With this perspective in mind, each decade and corresponding play has particulars, but these are accompanied by

⁵⁶² Gallagher and Greenblatt, 7.

continuities that make the sample reflective of the larger timespan of 1970 to 1999 and allow the plays to engage one another.

A predominant continuity is that, in these three decades and the corresponding plays, members of the LGBT community are viewed as social/political minorities and, because of heterosexism and homophobia, are subjected to oppression, disempowerment, and disenfranchisement. Events like the November 27, 1978, murder of Harvey Milk, the failure of the American government to acknowledge and respond to AIDS with urgency, and the July 1993 *U.S. News and World Report* story about concerned Americans “draw[ing] the line,” are merely three of too many examples that make clear the critical point that, despite the victories and advancements that transpired following the riot at Stonewall Inn on June 28, 1969, the LGBT community was still a minority group that was (and, according to some, should be) treated as second-class citizens—if citizens at all. Again, I emphasize that a metanarrative of progress is reductive and dismissive of the complex and ongoing lines of oppression.

I noted in Chapter One that John M. Clum lauds Mart Crowley’s *The Boys in the Band* (1968) for being the first play that “publicized homosexuals as a minority group.”⁵⁶³ The trajectory initiated in Crowley’s play is extended in the plays of Chambers, Vogel, and Son. In *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, the eight characters vacation at a lesbian beach cove—a location in which they can have respite from their minority statuses. Early in the play, the mere presence of a heterosexual woman threatens the lesbians, their freedom and the good time they intend to have. This is a strong indication of the oppression they must feel when away from Bluefish Cove during the fall, winter, and spring months. The characters speak of this oppression throughout the drama. Kitty feels that to come out would be to

⁵⁶³ Clum, *Acting Gay*, 254.

jeopardize her career; Lil acknowledges that public displays of affection or prideful flaunting of her lesbian sexuality and relationships could risk trouble with police officers; Rae knows well from her divorce proceedings that the courts rule unfavorably on matters relating to child custody, child support payments, and other financial settlements.

Minority status and oppression are more clandestine in *And Baby Makes Seven*, but are nonetheless integral forces in the play-world, driving the characters' choices and attitudes. Most notably, it is through the integration of reproductive discourse that Vogel's characters are disenfranchised. In "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet," Michael Warner critiques what he calls reproductivity for its inherent heterosexism and even homophobia, noting that

Probably most lesbians and gay men have at some point encountered the oblitative heterosexual rationale in which it is asserted that if everyone were queer, the race would die out (i.e., so don't be queer). ... [this illogic] presupposes that there are no lesbian or gay parents, that people who have gay sex do not have other kinds, that heterosexuals only have sex when they want to reproduce, that sex always means coupling ...⁵⁶⁴

Anna, Ruth, and Peter represent the homosexuals who are discounted in reproductive rhetoric. They are representative of the lesbians and gay men who have children. They are representative of the LGBT people who engage in sexual practices that depart from their predominant sexual identifications; and they are representative of those who resist traditional coupling (i.e. marriage and monogamy). The exclusionary discourse that fails to reflect their sexualities, relationships, and practices is, indeed, heterosexist and homophobic. The discourse casts those like Ruth, Anna, and Peter as Others—as disenfranchised minorities. It is no surprise then that Vogel's characters believe they must kill Cecil, Henri, and Orphan to prepare for a 'legitimate' child. It is no surprise that they doubt their non-traditional ('non-

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 9.

legitimate') domestic and sexual arrangements. It is no surprise that Ruth feels some inferiority to Peter and Anna, who are Nathan's biological parents. Heterosexism and homophobia are unseen and unheard forces in Vogel's play-world, but their presences are affecting.

Arguably, the central characters in *Stop Kiss* are most aware of the LGBT community's minority status. When the play begins, both women identify as heterosexual and are thus a part of the majority and are afforded its privileges—to wear what they want, kiss who they want, and have sex with whomever they want (wherever they want, no less [in Scene 19, George references a time when Callie had sex with a stranger in a public bathroom]) without consequence. To Callie and Sara's minds, homosexual culture, even in a progressive, urban area like New York City, is a second-class culture limited to subcultural environments (neighborhood enclaves like the West Village, and bars like Henrietta's). Further, the women seem very aware of how the LGBT community is judged and ostracized by their heterosexual counterparts. Why else would Callie be so preoccupied with worry over the ramifications of her feelings for Sara being "found out" by George, her coworkers, and Detective Cole? In the play's final scene, the characters definitively begin to explore LGBT identity and experience by going to Henrietta's and sharing a kiss; almost immediately, they are assigned minority statuses and become targets for slander and violence.

In Chapter One, I introduced Michael Warner's persuasive contention that "themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture." *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove, And Baby Makes Seven*, and *Stop Kiss* bolster Warner's assertion, as these pejorative forces are far from periphery. This unfortunate circumstance not only links the plays, but is yet another way that the plays in my sample reflect the time period in

which they were written and first produced. The characters in these plays envision and pursue enfranchisement (albeit different forms thereof) because they are disenfranchised minorities. The fact that these plays feature minority characters who encounter heterosexism and homophobia raises important questions about my sample's relationship to pre-Stonewall representations and the preponderance of antihero narratives and narratives structured according to the tragic frame. It is crucial to note that none of the plays studied in this project fit within either literary device. Indeed, a second much more affirming continuity between *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *Stop Kiss* is that female, sexual minorities are protagonists in the Aristotelian sense; they are identifiable and empathetic, they are depicted as ethical. They are not cast as degenerates "with no future, sure to be punished by the play's end."⁵⁶⁵ Contrarily, they survive to the plays' ends. Even as Lil dies from cancer, her presence is symbolized by her work shirt, to which Eva clings tightly as the lights fade to final blackout. Motifs of suffering and punishment are continually met with positive rejoinders—love, companionship, community, and (for all but Lil) access to the future.

In terms of the future, additional questions that motivated this dissertation project were: "How do the playwrights use these plays to imagine the future?" and "How is the future envisioned in relation to the past and present?" Because *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *Stop Kiss* work metatheatrically as ripostes to the large repertoire of plays that withhold futures (and, especially, productive, empowered, and enfranchised futures) from lesbian and gay characters, I am reminded of a line from Kushner's *Angels in America*: "We aren't going away. . . . We will be citizens."⁵⁶⁶ In

⁵⁶⁵ de Jongh, 14.

⁵⁶⁶ Kushner, 280.

Chambers, Vogel, and Son's plays, openly homosexual characters struggle, but they ultimately overcome. Lil is an exception to this, but it is important to again stress that the cause of her death has no relationship to her sexuality. Further, the critical point is that, in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, the other seven characters (also sexual minorities) live on. The playwrights recognize that past and present histories are unjust to sexual minorities, but their plays also act as auspicious signs for what Jean E. Howard has called "a less injurious future."⁵⁶⁷

Through positive motifs like love, community, companionship, and access to the future, and through strong, resilient women characters, these plays advocate for the possibility of healing and repair. Even as the characters do not actively or overtly pursue radical social/political reform, they desire and pursue forms of empowerment and enfranchisement that make a happier, healthier, safer, freer future seem accessible, and surely worth working and hoping for. A valuable question is, "To what extent do these plays engage **queer** history, **queer** lives, and **queer** futures?" As the plays in my sample debuted in mainstream theatres, the discernable assimilationist nature of all three plays is expected. This is not to say, however, that mainstream enterprises should not or cannot engage decidedly queer characters and discourses. A positive finding of my analyses is that the plays in my sample do include decidedly queer motifs—albeit, to varying degrees—, paying some homage to LGBT history, depicting some elements of queer life, and envisioning the potentiality for queer futures.

My analysis of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* stressed the importance of Lil's dialogue about the elderly woman who founded Bluefish Cove, and to whom she and the

⁵⁶⁷ Jean E. Howard, "Tony Kushner's Angel Archive and the Re-Visioning of American History," *Hemisphericinstitute.org*, accessed on July 9, 2014. <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-91/howard>.

others once delivered a bouquet of lavender (a semiotic symbol of homosexuality in the early decades of the 20th century). My analysis of *Stop Kiss* noted that Mrs. Winsley's dialogue alludes to the West Village's long association with the LGBT community. Although Chambers' and Son's plays are rife with assimilationist values and practices, references to the past integrate queer culture into both plays. In addition, the fact that both plays include characters whose sexualities do not fit within the heteronormative paradigm (namely, the homosexual/heterosexual binary), the plays offer queer variations on traditional conceptions of identity and relationships. *And Baby Makes Seven* similarly destabilizes the homo/hetero binary, as Ruth and Anna are involved with Peter, who also has relationships with other men. It is clear that Vogel's play also subverts the heteronormative value of monogamy. Further, the play has decidedly queer content in terms of how it depicts the future as attainable through the creation of queer families. Ruth, Anna, and Peter will, ostensibly, earn the kind of legacy afforded by reproductive futurism through their son, Nathan, but will do so amidst homocentric circumstances. In Vogel's play, lesbians and gay men not only have access to the future, but have the agency to reshape what the future looks like, and the means by which it is achieved.

In Vogel's play-world, as within those of Chambers and Son, characters make choices (some of them even queer choices) that shape their lives and futures. The fact that the characters make these choices is not revolutionary, as nearly all plays hinge on the dramatic technique of a character making a pivotal choice. What is especially significant about this sample of plays, however, is that it features **women sexual minorities** who make the pivotal choices, and thereby direct the terms and conditions of their own lives. Certainly, the influence of feminism is another thread of continuity among the three plays.

Last Summer at Bluefish Cove's Lil stands up to doctors and loved ones alike in order to live out the end of her life as she desires; Kitty makes determinations related to what personal information her public has access; Rae and Eva have both chosen to leave their husbands; Eva has loved a woman, but with that woman deceased at the end of the play, the parameters of Eva's future are wide open. In *And Baby Makes Seven*, Ruth and Anna have chosen a three-way partnership with Peter; with him, they have started a biological family; they choose to kill and then resurrect their three imaginary children. Vogel's characters routinely toe the line between the heteronormative script and their own inventions, ultimately deciding that their version of family is preferable and equal to all others. Callie and Sara of *Stop Kiss* decide to explore their attraction to one another, choose to experience and engage with LGBT culture by going to Henrietta's, and (against the plans laid out by Peter and Sara's parents), they elect to move forward in life together.

Through these characters and the choices they make, audiences not only encounter a future that is accessible to lesbians and other sexual minorities, but are exposed to a panoply of possible futures. When these three plays are read in conversation, the multitude of choices available becomes clear. One can be gay, or lesbian, or bisexual, or refuse identity categories altogether. One can couple, or triple, or be married, or be single (recall that Donna breaks up with Sue in Act 2 of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*). One can reproduce children, co-parent others' biological children, or never become a parent at all. Further, my analysis of each play has discussed the immense potential for casting and costuming to add additional meaning and depict alternatives to heteronormativity, neoliberalism, and even homoliberalism. By emphasizing diversity in productions, the future can be read as a place where one can present as butch, or femme, or androgynous, or have fluid gender presentation that changes based on

desire and/or circumstance; one can be fat, or thin; conventionally attractive, or not; one can present race and class identifications, or not. In *Love and Money*, Lisa Henderson encourages crossing identity borders; the plays in my sample offer—or, at least, can offer—audiences insight into the myriad possibilities of what their identities and embodiments might look like. For plays that read (and have, by and large, been staged) as predominantly assimilationist and conventional, they include refreshing alternatives of LGBT lives and futures (the work required of theatre artists to actualize, to the fullest extent, the plays' disruptive potential is discussed below).

A sixth question that motivated this study was: What is the significance of these plays? Arguably, the fact that they presented alternative lives and futures to 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s mainstream audiences is significant. With *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, a play dealing with lesbianism was presented on a major New York stage and received a substantial run for the first time since Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934). In the fifty-six year interim, women playwrights struggled to have their works produced in mainstream, professional venues—especially those playwrights whose works were homocentric. Narratives about gay men proliferated Off and Off-Off-Broadway in the 1960s and 1970s, and found commercial success in the 1980s and 1990s with AIDS-related dramas by those like Larry Kramer, William Hoffman, Tony Kushner, and Terrence McNally. The re-emergence of plays about homosexual women was a marked achievement and considerably enhances the historical significance of these plays (especially the earlier two).

The critical analyses demonstrate that advancements and incremental progress related to the LGBT community within mainstream American society seems to correlate with the emergence and production of plays like *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *And Baby Makes*

Seven, and *Stop Kiss*; however, the persisting heterosexism and homophobia could have easily squelched such productions, as was the case in earlier eras. It is no small feat that, amidst a climate of social/political inequities, disparaging discourses, violence, homophobia, and misogyny, mainstream audiences encountered plays dealing with lesbian empowerment and enfranchisement—no less, plays written by women who are themselves minorities. Chapter Two noted the importance of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* in introducing to mainstream American theatre a lesbian/feminist voice, one echoed by Vogel. *Son* possesses a strong feminist voice, and one that advocates for lesbians. Collectively, the three plays in my sample are significant not only for documenting the lived experiences of lesbian women at the end of the 20th century, but for appropriating space within mainstream theatre for gender, race, and/or sexual minority voices. And, in fact, each playwright in my sample is a double minority: Chambers and Vogel are female and lesbian, and *Son* is female and Asian-American.

Chapter One introduced the unfortunate statistics related to the disparities between mainstream productions accorded to both male playwrights and Caucasian playwrights. With regard to these statistics, *Son*'s success is particularly noteworthy. I would be remiss, however, not to address the outcomes of these playwrights' works being produced in mainstream theatres. To frame this conversation, I draw from *Technologies of Gender*, in which Teresa de Lauretis conceptualizes "the space off, the elsewhere ... a movement from the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex-gender system, to the space not represented yet implied (unseen) in them."⁵⁶⁸ Crucial to de Lauretis's thesis is

⁵⁶⁸ de Lauretis, 26.

that subjects possess the agency to change the dominant space when they “walk out”⁵⁶⁹ of it and move into the space off.

Mainstream theatre, a commercial industry of mainstream American society, is inherently a space represented by/in dominant representations, discourses and sex-gender systems. However, that LGBT plays are produced in the mainstream theatre raises important questions; namely, are these plays existing in the dominant space or the space off? And what are the implications in terms of enfranchisement? My analyses of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *Stop Kiss* highlight both the plays’ assimilationist tendencies, as well as their queer and liberationist potentialities. Further, I have explored the degree to which production circumstances (casting and costuming, especially) enfranchised lesbians and other members of the LGBT community. While information was not as accessible as I had hoped, what was continually apparent was the tendency to cast Caucasian, feminine, conventionally attractive actresses in leading roles, which were portrayed—even when not expressly written—as having upward social mobility. This selective demographic, when represented time and again, becomes the elite few who are enfranchisable, to the exclusion of others. With these circumstances in mind, a significant finding of this project is that the narratives that appear Otherly, and that seem to be classified in the “space off” simply because they deal with lesbians are, in actuality, quite reflective of the dominant space, its representations, discourses, and systems. This, however, does not have to be the case.

From Stonewall to Millennium has implications for future practice and studies—one of them being that artists can “walk out” of the dominant space and into the space off. So often that “walk out” has meant abandoning commercial enterprises altogether and working

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

in small, unsubsidized, low-budget venues. But the space off is a liminal place—a place not fully dominant, but neither outside of the dominant. Directors, casting directors, and costumers can make intentional choices that reflect sensitivity to and advocacy for the complexities of sex, gender, race, and class, thereby empowering and enfranchising the minorities that embody those disadvantaged positions. Diana Son has acknowledged the power and responsibilities accorded to directors and casting directors:

But, in my experience, if you put in the extra time and effort, and look beyond the usual pool of actors the casting director, theatre, director, playwright have become comfortable relying on, you can and will find a talented actor of color who is right for any role you are casting. And my assumption, when I see my other people's plays cast with exclusively white actors when the text does not specifically demand it, is that people in positions of power were lazy.⁵⁷⁰

Son's critical point that artists must put in sufficient work to diversify the stage picture—and by doing so, give the production process culturally, socially, and politically equity—can apply to identity categories beyond race.

In drawing from both de Lauretis and Son, I advance what is perhaps this study's most significant finding—that LGBT representations in mainstream American theatre can, and must, inhabit the space off by featuring gender outlaws, sexual 'deviants,' the socio-economically disadvantaged, and racial minorities. And if Son, who has—since *Stop Kiss*, written race-specific roles, cultivated close relationships with racial minority actors that routinely appear in her plays [namely, Sandra Oh], and maintains close ties to the casting of her plays—is any indication, plays in the space off can still be successfully produced. And if Vogel's *And Baby Makes Seven* is any indication, plays that trouble dominant tropes and fail to find immediate commercial success, resurface and become texts with which we continue to engage (recall the recent 2014 production).

⁵⁷⁰ Son, "Author's Statement," 396.

In Chapter One, I discussed the early-20th-century emergence of lesbian and gay characters on American stages. I introduced the overarching trajectory of LGBT representation in pre-Stonewall drama: living, but absent, characters; characters who have died in previous action; characters who die during the staged action; characters who live, but only because their lives conform to heteronormative scripts (they are saved by assimilation). I have noted the importance of *The Boys in the Band* in depicting the gay community as one in need of empowerment.⁵⁷¹ The analyses in this project show that the final three decades of the 20th century gave rise to characters who bypass antihero and tragic narratives, who pursue empowerment and enfranchisement, and who have access to the future. These plays provide audiences with insight not only to what LGBT life was like in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, but also glances into what the future might look like. While José Esteban Muñoz has famously argued that “queerness is not yet here”⁵⁷² (and it is not yet “here” in terms of mainstream society and its theatre), *traces* of queerness are here; *entrance points* to queerness are here; *potentiality* for queerness is here. These circumstances put us in excellent position to not only “think and feel [the] then and there”⁵⁷³ of queerness, but to more intentionally and more fully manifest it on mainstream stages.

During the final three decades of the 20th century, the LGBT community gained access to mainstream society, and its stages. While a tremendous feat, what Tony Kushner has described as “the great work”⁵⁷⁴ is not yet finished. As the plays examined in this study have entrance points to the space off, we artists of the current theatre must capitalize on them as we cast, direct, and design productions. Further, current playwrights must endeavor to

⁵⁷¹ Consequently, the play was still being performed when the riot at Stonewall Inn transpired.

⁵⁷² Muñoz, *Cruising*, 1.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Kushner, 280.

write plays that move beyond mere traces, entrance points, and potentiality to depict expressly queered versions of LGBT life, and visions for LGBT futures. Narratives of progress are not linear and uncontested, but this should not deter us from attempting to take what appears to be the next step into the space off.

In *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *Stop Kiss*, characters pursue what they identify as desirable and necessary forms of empowerment and enfranchisement. Through studying these plays, I have cultivated profound respect for the characters, and the playwrights who penned them. I am optimistic about the social/political circumstances affecting the lives of 21st-century LGBT Americans, and anticipate continued depictions of lesbianism in the American theatre. Yet, as I imagine the lived experiences and stage representations that I will encounter over the next several decades, I find myself nervous of Andrew Sullivan's 2005 conjecture that mainstream visibility and acceptance will, in the new millennium, lead to "The distinction between gay and straight culture [becoming] so blurred, so fractured, and so intermingled that it may become more helpful not to examine them separately at all."⁵⁷⁵ My analytical chapters document the events, trends, and ideologies that contextualize Sullivan's remarks. Moreover, the autobiographical narrative included in Chapter One outlines components of my own identity that make quite easy for me the assimilationist homoliberalism, and the blurring and intermingling of which Sullivan speaks. Yet, because the plays in my sample identify—even if covertly, even if nominally—liberationist, queer rejoinders, I have begun to contemplate a queerer future for myself. If for me, perhaps for others, too? While *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, and *Stop Kiss* reflect their own time, I find that they also guide us to the future—to the space off.

⁵⁷⁵ Andrew Sullivan, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/the-end-gay-culture>.

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VITA

Vanessa Campagna earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from the University of Saint Mary (Leavenworth, Kansas) in May 2008. Following graduation, she worked professionally as a singer and dancer in Kansas City, Missouri, under contract with Cedar Fair Entertainment Company. Additionally, during the 2008- 2009 academic year, Vanessa performed for the Bureau of Concerts and Lectures (Lawrence, Kansas) in a stage adaptation of Mark Twain's celebrated story *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The production toured nationally. The following academic year, Vanessa played various roles in a regional production of *American Tall Tales*, under the auspices of Stories in Motion, a Theatre for Young Audiences company that she co-founded.

In fall 2010, Vanessa began graduate coursework at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC). Under the direction of Dr. Felicia Hardison Londré, Vanessa completed the 36 credit hours required for the Master of Arts in Theatre (with emphases in Theatre History and Dramaturgy), and wrote her M.A. thesis, "(In)Visible: Performances of Gay and Lesbian Dramatic Literature on American Stages, 1920- 1969." During her time at UMKC, Vanessa was a Graduate Teaching Assistant and earned a promotion to the position of Adjunct Lecturer; she served as production dramaturg for two productions at the Unicorn Theatre, a professional, regional company; and she directed and choreographed for several regional and community theatres.

Vanessa began doctoral coursework at the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU) in fall 2012. Vanessa completed required courses in two years, during which time she taught Acting for Non-Majors, Performance of Literature, and co-taught Honors Colloquium: Creativity for Non-Arts Majors. At MU, Vanessa also served as House Manager for the Donovan Rhynsburger Theatre and the Corner Playhouse. As a member for the Graduate Theatre Organization, Vanessa served as representative to the Graduate and Professional Council, and served on two campus-wide committees. She was also a member of the executive board for the Department of Theatre's High School Partnership Program. Finally, she was an active member of the Interactive Theatre Troupe, and volunteered as an acting coach for Irene Ryan nominees.

In spring 2014, Vanessa passed with Distinction the oral defense of her comprehensive exams. She moved to Monmouth, Illinois, in August 2014 to begin a full-time Visiting Assistant Professorship in the Department of Theatre at Monmouth College (Monmouth, Illinois). At Monmouth College, Vanessa teaches Introduction to Liberal Arts, Classical Theatre History, Modern Theatre History, Script Analysis and Dramatic Literature, and World Drama. Forthcoming in July 2015, Vanessa will formally join the faculty of Monmouth College in a Tenure-track position.

Vanessa's primary research interests center on LGBT representations in 20th century-American drama, and gender and queer theory. Her work in this area can be found in *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, and *Proud Heritage: Peoples, Issues, and Documents of the LGBT Experience*. Vanessa is also interested in TV Studies, the historical avant-garde, pedagogy, and theatre for social change.

