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Categorizing Coming Out: The Modern Televisual Mediation of Queer Youth Identification

“We have at least invented a different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing the truth, discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open – the specific pleasure of the true discourse on pleasure.” – Michel Foucault¹

On September 27, 2009, *The New York Times Magazine* featured an article about a new wave of young self-identifying queer youth.² The story focused mainly on 12-15 year old junior high school boys and girls, and spoke to the “coming out” zeitgeist that has permeated much of the twenty-first century mediated landscape. It touched upon the fact that “millennials” are beginning to “come out” at a younger age than any previous generation and traditional schools are having a difficult time reconciling the challenges posed by this new group of vocal and visible queer youths. Although some schools identified existing support systems, many described their struggles in attempting to provide safe environments for the students. Additionally, numerous educators raised questions as to queer teenagers’ ability to truly understand their sexuality, however they had no such qualms with regards to equally mature, or immature, heterosexual students vocalizing their sexual interests.

In a world saturated with media access and excess, broadcast television is continually striving to stay relevant and reflect the social issues inherent in modern life. Post-millennial scripted television has struggled to compete with, and set itself apart from, formulaic reality shows and unrestrained

offerings from pay-cable networks. It has done so by blurring the boundaries that previously delineated and policed the lines between comedy and drama, and episodic and serial television. Some narratives structure existence within monolithic ideological fields in which the characters are solely relational to their production of queerness. Conversely, other storylines attempt to dispel the assumptions that accompany and undergird performative and normalized understandings of “coming out.” These narratives recognize the act as a forced and tendentious form of confession and sublimation. This paper explores how the “coming out” process has contained young queer individuals and asks how contestations within this seemingly normalized event manifest themselves among gay teenagers on contemporary television shows. Specifically, how have coming out narratives on broadcast networks operationalized themselves in modern unbounded televisual genres?³

While television certainly employs “coming out” narratives as generic televisual conventions, it rarely pauses to question the heteronormative presumption of “coming out” as an essentialized aspect of queer identification. Furthermore, activist and academic Dennis Altman notes that

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“there is a sharp difference between tolerance... a gift extended by the superior to the inferior and acceptance... which implies not that one pities others... but rather one accepts the validity of their lifestyle.”⁴ Televised “coming out” stories often conflate notions of visibility and tolerance with acceptance and empowerment, assuming the former obviates the need for the latter. As Suzanna Danuta Walters argues, “depicting gay characters is not in itself a televised argument for gay rights.”⁵ In order to elucidate the way modern storylines begin to problematize the “coming out” experience, this paper focuses on two specific televisual teenage “coming out” storylines from *Glee* (Fox, 2009-) and *Ugly Betty* (ABC, 2006-2010). Analyzing key episodes from the 2009-2010 television season, I examine how heteronormative ideas of confession and performativity begin to dominate the queer self-identification process. These narratives approach ideas about sexuality, acknowledgement, and “coming out” from varied points of views. Because of these diverse representations, the following analysis does not attempt to prove or disprove the supposed merit of these story arcs but rather unpacks the ability with which each narrative allows teenage queer characters to develop their own perception of “self” outside of prescribed or forced understandings. This paper explores how the spectacle of “coming out” can be altered from a life-changing event to a mere recognition of one’s own being. How it can be commented upon and understood on one’s own terms, a preference that should be interpreted autonomously from its assumed binary opposite. It investigates the ideologically binding category of “coming out” in order to see how queer narratives have been contained by this ritualized event. Moreover, I use the term “queer” to embody the full range of possibilities inherent in LGBT identities, thereby situating queerness as being relational to the discursive constructs it enters into dialogue with, rather than being oppositional to a specific normalized or totalitarian existence.⁶

My aim here is to shift the investigation of queer televisuality from a focus on representation, based in identity politics, to an inquiry into how norms are perpetuated through visual culture. Deemphasizing the “coming out” process as a semiotic indicator of sexuality, this paper examines

how varied portrayals of sexual understanding can stretch the boundaries of “acceptable” queer identification and knowledge. An argument certainly can be made in support of mediated portrayals that reflect a diversity of views, experiences, and options as they pertain to “closet” politics. However, such an examination runs the risk of cyclically returning to its starting point if it does not first examine and elucidate the binding structures which have become ideologically assumed realities.⁷ Although televisual portrayals of the “coming out” process are beginning to change, it is important to note that commonplace and/or commonsensical notions of the closet must be deconstructed before one can attempt to allow for a diversity of options within ordinary experiences. This broadening of accepted realities will, in turn, empower the anomalous or unencountered or unfamiliar to be seen as quotidian.

Mapping “Coming Out”

The televisual landscape has typified and replicated the “coming out” ritual. The broader functions of ideological television programming have, in most instances, further absorbed the event by sublimating homosexuality, not through repression, but rather through the institutionalization and standardization of norms. This notion of deviation through discourse is influenced by Michel Foucault who argued that “abnormal” sexualities were actually created through the normalizing of heterosexuality as the ultimate “truth” of sexuality. Foucault argued that Victorian-era repression served to create sexuality by promoting a discourse which aimed to speak *about* sexuality, but in fact served to *create* the reality of sexuality. This discourse led to a standardized and “productive” concept of sex and sexuality, of which deviations were immediately noted as unnatural and categorized as such. Additionally, sexuality became not a component of the deviant but rather an all encompassing matter. These individuals were not shaped by unnaturalness but rather composed of it. Foucault further argued that confession was invented to serve as a production of knowledge which would tell the “reality” of sexuality: “the confession became one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth.”⁸ Despite

the fact that confession is meant to represent a voluntary avowal, in actuality it is truly a one-sided admission.

Television's focus on the necessity both to "come out" and to confess one's homosexuality further compounds the understanding that this declaration is a natural part of sexual identification. As Mimi White adds, "confessional discursive strategies carry possibilities for meaning, pleasure, and engagement for viewers. The modes of therapeutic discourse constructed through television...participate in the production of social and cultural identities."⁹ The concept of the televisual closet does not focus on homophobia, which implies specific acts of bias imbued with individualized qualities, but rather reinforces the notion of heteronormativity and serves to standardize and ritualize the "coming out" process.¹⁰ Furthermore, television frames this process within a distinct set of rules, analogous to the typification and repetition of genre narratives. Nevertheless, these rules are conceived to reward the heterosexual subject rather than the queer one.¹¹ There is certainly a sense of relief or liberation afforded by the openness that accompanies vocalizing an identity and this should not be diminished or detracted from. However, the freedom one associates with this process is often the result of a dominant heteronormative idea which is naturalized to seem as though it is rewarding the act itself. In reality it only serves as a further biased understanding of the hetero/homo distinction. The obligation to confess, a condition still imbued by "relations of power," has become so ingrained in society that it feels "naturalized" and no longer as a power which constrains.¹² This original understanding of the privileged and confessional nature of the televisual "coming out" process serves to reinforce ideas regarding the unequal binary established by the process itself.

The performative language associated with the event of "coming out" alters its practice to the point of fetishization. Not only must these characters confess a part of themselves, but they must also contend with the misconception that they are now a different being; by uttering this type of productive language they are somehow changed or altered. Although the "coming out" process presents itself as a production of truth, the simultaneous creation

of the event as both ephemeral and permanent obfuscates the issue at-hand. "Coming out," even in a supportive environment, continues to ask queer individuals to both vocalize and accept themselves as different than "normalized" society.

Like many television narratives, both *Glee* and *Ugly Betty's* "coming out" storylines are buoyed by ideas of family. Both "coming out" arcs gain their significance through their relationships to the family unit. Moreover, the added weight of each admission seems to come less from the importance of the statement to the individual, and more from its relation to their position within, and with regards to, their family. What is expected and required of them is altered as it pertains to this privileged unit. Both characters encounter a feeling of indebtedness in their confession, an obligation to honesty that is required from family. As Justin Suarez (Mark Indelicato) so aptly identifies: "I hate having a secret, I just feel so far away from them."¹³ Whether or not the characters "come out" in a culturally or socially prescribed or expected manner, their confession is anticipated or seemingly forced by their relationship to family. While this concept of familial honesty might not seem exclusive to the "coming out" process, it is certainly imbued with a uniqueness that is only applicable to this ritual.

Televisual ideologies surface as frameworks of understanding, which consequently inform modern approaches to both the form and function of television's "coming out" stories. Seemingly, more and more we approach questions of queer identity as predicated on visible and axiomatic understandings of what it "means" to be a "homosexual." Inquiries into the problematic nature of identity politics have thoroughly examined how we (re)create scripts or tropes which, through repetition and ubiquity, are "overimagined" as "real" and begin to stand in for more fluid understandings of the self.¹⁴ The ubiquity of these narratives normalizes the performative acts, thereby obviating the need for further investigation into their supposed veracity. As the following examples explore, the basic premise of televisual "coming out" still presents itself in a pedestrian and heteronormative manner even as queer characters move from the fringes to the center of the televisual landscape.¹⁵ Yet, the ability of some shows to stretch the boundaries

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Kurt Hummel (Chris Colfer)

with which audiences ordinarily associate understandings of sexuality have allowed for more varied and diverse possibilities, an idea that echoes both queer theory's recognition of multifarious notions of being and its opposition to stringent binary categories.

Vocalizing "Coming Out"

Fox's hit show *Glee* approaches "coming out" in a surprisingly static and performative manner. Despite the fact that *Glee* is billed as a "postmodern" musical, the show still adheres to a stilted interpretation of the "coming out" storyline.¹⁶ The series, which is best described as a "high school dramedy," follows a group of social misfits attempting to gain control of their educational experience through the power of performance. They find solace in one another and, through the mutual understanding of their "othered" position in a world full of popular jocks and cheerleaders, channel their creativity into the Glee Club.

A common critique of *Glee* is its one-dimensional and stereotypical portrayal of many of its characters, particularly its minority individuals (for example: the sassy black diva and the shy tech-savvy Asian student). However, other critics argue that this satirical interpretation is a knowing decision meant to serve as a discourse about the assumptions and labels we often pass off as "normal."¹⁷ Because this analysis focuses on how Kurt Hummel's (Chris Colfer) individuality, outside of supposed queer tendencies, is affected by his decision to vocalize his homosexuality, I am not interested in entering into a debate about spurious representation or identity politics. Rather, this study looks at how Kurt's "coming out" serves as a production of truth in regards to his own being. His veracity is gauged not by the ultimate possibilities of self-understanding but rather by his ability to produce the specific type of ritualized truth that is expected of a "queer" in his position.

In the episode "Preggers," Kurt, who has been constructed out of queer tendencies (as is deduced by his flamboyant clothing, effeminate speaking voice, and rigorous moisturizing routine), officially "comes out" to his father. Both the actual admission of his homosexuality and the lead up to this event deserve attention. In many scenes, the other Glee Club members refer to Kurt as the "teen gay" or "gay kid." The tone that accompanies these references positions them as honest reactions, as if situating Kurt's sexuality as a minority status, but one that is no different from other marginalized communities. So while the show sets the binary structure that he is different from the "straight" kids, his difference need not be disguised or hidden.

Whereas *Glee* situates the heterosexual characters as being aware of Kurt's sexuality, he still hides it from them, denying his sexuality or acting ashamed and uncomfortable when they speak about it.¹⁸ This concept stems from an ideological position that situates the heterosexual characters as controlling power over the homosexual ones. Kurt's homosexuality can be openly acknowledged by everyone except himself; his inability to vocalize his sexual orientation on his own terms suggests that he recognizes that it is a deviant position he must not openly admit. However, when his father begins to question who his son "is," he realizes that he must confess his homosexuality in order to satisfy the



Kurt Hummel (Chris Colfer) coming out to his father Burt Hummel (Mike O'Malley)

honesty associated with his paternal relationship. Kurt's "coming out" is forced by a need to produce a "truth" about his sexuality. Although this type of confession has been naturalized throughout the "coming out" genre, it has also been accompanied by a knowing adherence to closet politics. Societal norms have deemed queerness "the love that dare not speak its name" while continuing to force LGBT individuals into confessions. This forced identification and vocalization of sexual orientation is continually embodied and repeated, and yet expected only of queer individuals. Those who identify as heterosexuals are never obliged to make this same type of sexual truth production.

Furthermore, when Kurt finally does come out to his father, his father says he always knew Kurt was gay. The recognition of Kurt's homosexuality is a major step for his father, yet, he says he knew because all Kurt wanted for his third birthday was a "sensible pair of heels." This attraction to women's clothing, though, (his desire for heels not shoes) is more of a sign of gender identification than sexual attraction. The separate issues of gender, sex, and sexuality are ideologically bounded and conflated, thereby reducing independent notions, each worthy of their own inquiry, into one deviant classification. Additionally, the viewer again sees mediated portrayals of the homosexual/heterosexual binary as a form of one-sided confession when Kurt's father thanks him for "telling him." Kurt must "confess" his homosexuality to his father, who is now positioned in a more powerful role. Kurt is relieved to be able to openly admit his homosexuality to his father;

nonetheless, he must do so by forced confession, allowing the heteronormative order to decide his fate once it has collected enough information.

Glee's utilization of musical conventions as a way to further storylines also plays into its establishment of "coming out" as a necessary ritual for the production of queer truth. Many numbers presented on the series serve as emotional statements about the characters performing them, and all the actors actually sing the songs. This consistency in performance has existed in every episode to date except for the performance given by Kurt in "Preggers." Instead of singing, Kurt is lip-synching to a female pop star's voice as he performs.¹⁹ This works to "other" Kurt by placing him outside the structures of understanding that frame the characters of *Glee*.

Moreover, lip-synching brings up notions of stereotypical activities for supposedly gay individuals. Rather than being able to honestly perform like the other characters, Kurt is relegated to a role of imitation that is most notably associated with drag performers. While other characters are able to shed their stereotypical misfit images through song, revealing pathos and multifaceted meaning, Kurt remains only skin deep. Furthermore, it is only after Kurt "comes out" to his father that he finally takes part as a soloist in a musical number.²⁰ In this way, Kurt's production of self and ability to integrate into heteronormative society is dependent on his participation in a traditional "coming out" narrative. Unlike the storyline in *Ugly Betty* that this paper explores later, Kurt's existence is solely predicated on his ability to conform to heteronormative understandings. At the same time, no compromise or negotiation is expected of his heterosexual counterparts. His confession serves as a production of truth which speaks only for Kurt.

Ultimately, *Glee* confines the "coming out" ritual to a prosaic process which serves not only to define Kurt's existence, but also to inform his relationships with others. It functions as both a semiotic indicator of self, but also as a moment of pathos and truth for his character. However, this truth is formed out of a subjective relationship to its heterosexual counterparts, which exist, without a required or expected confession of sexual identity, as unequal and privileged realities.

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Visualizing “Coming Out”

A second narrative structure has started to develop in tandem with questions surrounding the confessional nature of “coming out.” This storyline is caught somewhere between a relational and an oppositional reading of the performative concept of “coming out.” Its production of truth finds itself still compliant with traditional notions of the act while beginning to problematize the spatial qualities of the event. In contrast to traditional “coming out” representations, which focus on the occurrence itself, a new understanding of not just the temporal, but the spatial qualities of the event has begun to appear on television. As Henri Lefebvre argues, space is itself actively produced; it is not a passive area where “things just happen,” but rather it is the result of hegemonic forces that shape its existence in order to (re)produce desired meanings among sociable settings.²¹ In order to expand the options available to queer individuals, we must first stretch the discursive limits which currently forestall multifarious options for queer self-production.

This idea of engendering a non-normative space from which individuals can explore their sexuality manifests itself in the final season of *Ugly Betty*. Whereas *Glee* employs a “coming out” narrative that speaks to the assumed structure of the ritual, the experience of Justin Suarez, Betty’s teenage nephew, alters the presupposed experience. As a televisual format, *Ugly Betty*’s blending of non-traditional storylines, character interpretations, and formatting positions it somewhere between a conventional sitcom and drama. This *mélange* of styles no doubt owes its genesis to the Colombian telenovela *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea*. The show was the basis for the American version, which takes cues from the telenovela genre. As with *Glee*, its main characters navigate a world of excess, in this case that of the fashion industry and the fictional *Mode* magazine, as they attempt to reconcile issues of family, love, and self-worth. Furthermore, for Justin, his “otherness” is not only constructed out of his queerness, but also his position as a Latino. José Esteban Muñoz argues that those who occupy racial and sexual spaces outside of the mainstream (re)negotiate their standings into “disidentifications.”²² For

the Suarez family, their brownness, which operates as “a mode of attentiveness to the self” serves to reinterpret not only the possibilities and experiences of their everyday life, but also the feasibility of Justin’s unspectacular “coming out.”²³ He and his family therefore navigate his queerness outside of a whitewashed existence, one which discussions of televisual representation often obfuscate.

Although Justin’s flamboyance has always been an obvious, and yet decidedly genuine, aspect of his being, his sexuality is most directly questioned in the fourth and final season.²⁴ In the episode “Backseat Betty,” Justin’s classmates elect him high school homecoming queen in an attempt to humiliate him. However, Justin decides to play along with the joke not only by accepting the award with grace but also by giving the crown to his mother, whom he thought should have been her high school’s homecoming queen. His gesture causes the entire gymnasium filled with students, who had been laughing at the announcement, to applaud his act of thoughtfulness. As Justin returns home, Betty, his mother Hilda, grandfather Ignacio, and Marc, Betty’s openly gay co-worker, all compliment his response as “amazing,” “smart,” and “sassy:”



Justin Suarez (Mark Indelicato)



Justin Suarez (Mark Indelicato) at the homecoming pep rally. Flanked by his mother Hilda (Ana Ortiz) and grandfather Ignacio (Tony Plana).

Hilda: What you did up there took guts. Honey you know I love you, right? No matter who you are, so what those kids are saying about you...

Justin: Mom, it's a joke. I'm just playing along. I'm not gay.
[Justin runs up to his room. Hilda looks stunned as she turns to Marc for reassurance or an answer.]

Marc: [with a shrug] Then he's not.

On first examination, this rhetoric seems to fall into the similar trap of positioning “coming out” as the only appropriate forum for the discussion of sexuality. Justin’s family, however, never situates his position within the family as dependent on this vocalization. While Hilda makes reference to “what those kids are saying about” Justin, the viewer never in fact hears the students call Justin “gay.”

Furthermore, Hilda, Betty, and Marc continue to support Justin and provide unique spaces for growth that exist outside of a specifically gay focused format. In the episode “All the World’s a Stage,” Justin seeks advice from Marc about a stage kiss he must perform with a girl he has a crush on. Rather than pointing out what Marc believes to be an obvious confusion in Justin’s attraction, he offers the advice that “if you kiss someone with feeling, they know it

and you know it. It’s like everything else goes gray and you’re the only two people left in the whole world.” In addition to the obvious use of gender-neutral pronouns, Marc works to provide insightful guidance outside of a heteronormative stance. His advice never veers toward a discussion of the requirement or necessity to “come out.” Rather, it relates to Justin as an individual in need of support, regardless of sexual orientation. As modern understandings of queerness begin to be accepted as normalized states of existence, there need not necessarily be a ritualized “coming out” event.

In the spring of 2010, near the end of *Ugly Betty*’s series run, Justin and Austin’s romantic relationship began to develop (Austin is a teenage friend from Justin’s acting class). After Justin’s soon-to-be step-father catches them kissing, Justin begins to panic about what will happen if everyone finds out.²⁵ Again, he turns to Marc for advice who handles Justin’s “predicament” as a malady of teenage hormones, not an issue of sexuality. Marc does not question whether or not the kiss makes Justin gay, but rather if “this means that Austin” is his boyfriend.

While Justin is not sure how or when to tell his family, his mother figures out that his sneaking off with Austin and “hanging out in his room with the door closed” must mean that they are romantically involved. In order to help Justin feel more comfortable about his sexual identification, his mother and grandfather decide to throw him a surprise “coming out” party. However, Marc stops the party, which is complete with rainbow flags, cookies, decorations, and balloons, and convinces Hilda that the gathering is a bad idea. Despite the fact that Hilda is attempting to be supportive, the show situates the party as a metonym for the traditional “coming out” event. Hilda and Ignacio are worried about how they can make Justin feel more comfortable, though they endeavor to do so by explicitly pointing out that he is different. It is not a celebration of his finding love, or coming to an understanding of himself, but rather a party which establishes his identity as not “normal,” and also in need of acceptance by non-queer individuals. As Hilda pleads her case to Marc, he tries to distinguish the subtleties inherent in queer self-production:

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Hilda: This is one of the most important things that will ever happen to Justin and he needs to know that we accept him. When he walks in we're going to yell...

Hilda and Ignacio: We know you're gay and that's ok!

Marc: Stop. Stop this right now... Have you people lost your minds, you cannot do this.

Hilda: Why not, we're fine with it.

Marc: It's not about you being fine with it. It's about Justin being fine with it.

As Larry Gross observes, "television typically takes the point of view of straights struggling to understand," and there has historically been a lack of emphasis on the queer individual.²⁶ Their place within these narratives is often relegated to that of object rather than subject. However, the central action of these storylines should not be acceptance by the heterosexuals but rather "self-acceptance by the homosexual."²⁷

Marc is able to avert the awkward "coming out" party and later Justin invites Austin to his mother's wedding. As the episode comes to a close, Hilda and her husband take part in their first dance. They are soon joined by Betty and her boss Daniel, Ignacio and his girlfriend, and Marc and his best-friend Amanda. Justin surveys the group before taking a deep breath, grabbing Austin's hand, and guiding him out onto the dance floor. As they begin to dance, Justin's family, both literal and figurative, takes stock of the new queer couple. His "coming out" does not involve a discussion, a confession, or a surprise party. No acceptance needs to be vocalized, no preference affirmed.

Queering "Coming Out"

As "coming out" is typified and continually manifested across the televisual landscape, the resulting codifications, in turn, construct a standardized rite of passage for both queer characters and viewers. As David Russell elucidates, these structures are "mutually (re)constructed



Betty (America Ferrera) at Justin's "coming out" party

by participants historically" causing semiotic structures to (re)produce and enter into states of collective cultural memory as both seemingly reflective and representative frameworks.²⁸ These portrayals and narratives carry with them wide-ranging residual meanings and consequently shape how performative sequences are carried out as ritualistic events in modern life. While arguments can be made both for and against the supposed verisimilitude of these narratives, their ubiquity across mediated texts should not substitute for critical engagement. What is operationalized as an intrinsic and simple aspect of queer identification is, as Walters writes, "a profoundly troubling act."²⁹ Certainly, the unified experiences of the queer community should not be discounted, but often the limiting boundaries of modernism restrict the fluidity queer theory argues for. As Gross highlights, "Richard Dyer has pointed out that... 'what we should be attacking in stereotypes is the attempt of heterosexual society to define us for ourselves, in terms that inevitably fall short of the 'ideal' of heterosexual society... and to pass this definition off as necessary and natural.'"³⁰ Reoccurrences, which manifested themselves through repetition, have consequently served as validation of these socially performative events.

Perhaps "coming out" needs to be disassociated from the ritual that the process seems to embody. Just as we argue that notions of "queer" are neither unequivocally progressive nor reactionary, so too must notions of "coming out" place constitutive discourses outside of assumed categories that delimit its existence. As John L. Jackson states, "The problem is that these tales can be both

'too tightly scripted' and corrosively mobilized to make social differences appear absolute and natural."³¹ "Coming out" could then be seen not as merely another event to be tolerated, but rather as a dynamic and unaffected state of being which neither remakes nor defines one's identity.

On the other hand, perhaps modern understandings of "coming out" do not yet mirror the possibilities of queerness, especially as younger generations come to understand and interpret sexuality in far more fluid ways. As Gross contends, "we need to reconsider ways of thinking about queerness based on the experiences of pervasive invisibility in order to comprehend the experiences of today's and tomorrow's kids, growing up in a culture that acknowledges queerness."³² This productive and performative event is simply the start of a renegotiation of one's self. Even though "coming out" often feels like the unloading of years of burden, it is only the beginning of navigating what it means to be visible in a decidedly heteronormative and homophobic society.³³ Judith Butler argues that there is power to be found in the rebuking of typification and repetition. She states that "the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition [is what] exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction."³⁴ Similarly, the continued investigation of modern televisual "coming out" narratives enables society to recognize the essentializing of a culturally produced ritual, and subsequently necessitates the expanding of possibilities of queer identity production.



Justin (Mark Indelicato) and Austin (Ryan McGinnis) share their first dance as a couple.

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End Notes

- 1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 71.
- 2 Benoit Denizet-Lewis, "Coming Out in Middle School," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 27, 2009, 36-44.
- 3 I am using the term "unbounded" to reflect television shows which defy traditional categorization. Rather than adhering to conventional and/or historical notions of the sitcom or drama they combine and stretch these fixed structures.

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- 4 Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1971), 59.
- 5 Suzanna Danuta Walters, *All The Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 118.
- 6 Consequently, when the words gay or homosexual are deployed it is under the auspice that these definitions will again represent the multifarious notions of “being” which are accepted by the LGBT community. Additionally, while labels such as “gay,” “homosexual,” and “queer” carry with them historical and cultural associations, the substituting of one for the other should be seen as solely situating them within a critical media analysis.
- 7 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
- 8 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 59.
- 9 Mimi White, *Tele-Advising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 19.
- 10 This theory speaks to a universalizing view of heterosexuality as the dominant and normalized production of self, which a queer individual then deviates from when vocalizing their homosexuality.
- 11 Amy J. Devitt, *Writing Genres* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2004).
- 12 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 60.
- 13 See episode “The Past Presents the Future,” season 4, episode 19, first broadcast April 7, 2010 by ABC.
- 14 See John L. Jackson, *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- 15 Lynn Joyrich, “Epistemology of the Console,” *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 3 (2001): 439-67.
- 16 Edward Wyatt, “Not That High School Musical,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2009, AR26.
- 17 Glen Garvin, “Be Gleeful about ‘Glee,’” *San Jose Mercury News*, September 8, 2009.
- 18 See episode “The Power of Madonna,” season 1, episode 15, first broadcast April 20, 2010 by Fox. In this episode Kurt was able to reclaim his status as a homosexual, stating proudly, “I’m gay. We make culture.” Though this acceptance and comfortableness with his minority status comes only after his ritualized “coming out.”
- 19 Kurt, who lip-synched to Beyonce’s original recording of “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)” has been the only character to obviously lip-synch to another singer’s vocal track.
- 20 See episode “Wheels,” season 1, episode 9, first broadcast November 11, 2009 by Fox. This episode, which aired five weeks later, involved Kurt intentionally losing a “sing-off” so that his father would not suffer the ridicule of a son singing a song originally intended for a woman.
- 21 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).
- 22 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
- 23 José Esteban Muñoz, “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position,” *Signs* 31, no. 3 (2006): 675-88.
- 24 Early into 2010 it was announced that *Ugly Betty* would not be renewed by ABC and thus the show’s creators altered that year’s storylines in an attempt to tie together loose story ends in the final few episodes.
- 25 See episode “The Past Presents the Future.”
- 26 Larry Gross, *Up From Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and The Media in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 83.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 David R. Russell, “Rethinking Genre in School and Society: An Activity Theory Analysis,” *Written Communication* 14 (1997): 504-54.
- 29 Walters, *All The Rage*, 291.
- 30 Larry Gross, “Gideon Who Will be 25 in the Year 2012: Growing up Gay Today,” *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007): 121-38.
- 31 Jackson, *Real Black*, 12-13.
- 32 Gross, “Gideon Who Will be 24 in the Year 2012,” 125.
- 33 Some examples are the Defense of Marriage Act, Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, and numerous state laws which both forbid homosexuals from adopting and even outlaw the “act” of homosexuality.
- 34 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 192.