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(LIE)ALECTICS AND THE DISCURSIVE
DEQUEERIFICATION OF POLITICAL
SPACES BASED ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS:
A CRITICAL RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF
THE MORMON AND GAY WEBSITE

Myra N. Roberts

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(LIE)ALECTICS AND THE DISCURSIVE DEQUEERIFICATION OF POLITICAL SPACES BASED ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS: A CRITICAL RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *MORMON AND GAY* WEBSITE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, sexual orientation and identity has increasingly been added to state and federal anti-discrimination laws, prompting a rhetorical situation by the Christian Right in attempts to exempt themselves from upholding anti-discrimination laws pertaining to sexual identity and orientation. This study analyzes the *Mormon and Gay* website—a website dedicated to advancing the position of the Mormon Church on issues of non-heterosexuality. Utilizing rhetorical textual analysis, I develop two theoretical frameworks: (lie)alectics and dequeerification to demonstrate how the discourse under examination attempts to appear non-homophobic while maintaining homophobic church doctrine. I argue that this model stands to influence the First Amendment in extending the Free Exercise clause to allow religiously-identified individuals to police and punish non-heterosexual behaviors. Additionally, this research calls for the reinforcement of the Establishment clause of the First Amendment, which restricts the federal government from establishing a national religion or to privilege one religion over another. Ultimately, this research functions as a form of activism, which highlights the discourse published on the *Mormon and Gay* website as discriminatory and not a step towards acceptance as it represents itself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
A Self-Reflexive Beginning.....	1
Problem Statement, Rationale, and Research Goals.....	4
Conclusion.....	14
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUALIZATION	16
Contextualizing Homophobia in the US.....	16
Current Proposed Anti-gay Legislation.....	21
Mormon Church Origins, History, and Major Doctrinal Tenets.....	24
Mormon Doctrine and Church Policies.....	27
Mormonism’s Evolving Stance on Homosexuality.....	28
The Website: Mormons and Gays.....	37
Conclusion.....	44
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	46
Applications of Queer Theory.....	46
Intersectionality.....	51
Queer Theory.....	56
Religious Treatments.....	62
Conclusion.....	67
CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY	69
Dialectics as the Foundation of (Lie)alectics.....	69
The Nature of (Lie)alectics.....	71
Unpacking Disguised Discrimination within (Lie)alectics.....	72

An Overview of Discursive Deracialization	86
Dequeerification: A Queer Counterpart.....	89
(Lie)alectics as Dequeerified Speech.....	92
Methodology	94
Method	97
Conclusion	99
CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	101
Arrangement and Style	103
Unpacking the (Lie)alectics	106
Conclusion	130
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	132
Implications of (Lie)alectics as Dequeerified Speech	132
Conclusion	149
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS	152
Summary	152
Theoretical Contributions and Future Research	157
Limitations	162
Conclusion	163
REFERENCES.....	165

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Freedom v Oppression (Lie)alectic	73
Table 2: Religious Freedoms v Nondiscrimination (Lie)alectic.....	78
Table 3: PoF/LGBT v. Justice (Lie)alectic.....	82
Table 4: Being v Fleeting (Lie)alectic	110
Table 5: Attraction v Action (Lie)alectic.....	121

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We are daughters of our Heavenly Father who loves us, and we love him. We will stand as witnesses of God, at all times, and in all things, and in all places, as we strive to live the young women's values, which are: Faith, Divine Nature, Individual Worth, Knowledge, Choice and Accountability, Good Works, Integrity and Virtue. We believe as we come to accept and act upon these values, we will be prepared to strengthen home and family, make and keep sacred covenants, receive the ordinances of the temple, and enjoy the blessings of exaltation. (Young Women Personal Progress, 2009, p. 2)

As a young Mormon girl, I remember learning this motto and repeating it every Sunday at the beginning of the Young Women's session of my weekly church meetings. Even at the young age of 12, I not only knew the ideological assumptions expected of a faithful Mormon woman, but I could recite them from memory. The "Personal Progress" program, from which this motto is derived, is designed to help young Mormon girls "prepare for [their] future roles as faithful [women], wi[ves], mother[s], and leader[s] in God's kingdom" (Young Women Personal Progress, 2009, p. 2). From the ages of 12-18, I attended church regularly and was actively engaged in the Young Women's program. In so doing, my identity as a young Mormon woman—soon to be Mormon wife and mother—was successfully internalized...or at least I had deceived myself into thinking that it was. I held church leadership positions within the Young Women's program, was always the first one to arrive and last to leave church service projects and activities, and was always willing to give talks and bear my testimony during church services. Pious. Yes, pious might be the most apt word to describe my formative years within the Mormon Church. But despite the fact that I was doing everything that a faithful Mormon girl should do, internally, I always felt as

though I was pretending. And I was. I had a secret—that deathly secret that so many god-fearing people dread: I was gay. Am gay. And even though I tried as hard as I could to eradicate this part of myself (everything short of an exorcism), by the time I was in my twenties, I could no longer deny the underlying emotional tensions I felt at the realization that I did not want to get married (at least not to a man) or to be a mother.

Yet these realizations only fueled a need for me to reinforce my faith, because I had convinced myself that I had felt the spirit of God testify to me the truthfulness of the Mormon gospel and because living in a community comprised predominantly of other Mormons, the social backlash was too great for me to comprehend withstanding. So, I would periodically return to my Patriarchal Blessing—a blessing given to church members (usually around the age of 16) that provides insights into the individuals’ predestination—that assured me that I was predestined to “enjoy the friendship of young men and from these men choose one as my eternal companion” and that I would be “a handmaiden of the Lord, standing tall with a radiant countenance for all to see in the times of spiritual darkness,” and that if I was worthy, I would “take part in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and come forward on the morning of the first resurrection, clothed in robes of glory.”

While discouraged, members of the church would often share their blessings with friends and families as a way to compare spirituality, and compared to other blessings I read, I was destined to be a spiritual rockstar! I was preordained to bring people out of spiritual darkness and would tower over others in my spirituality and righteousness as part of the elite A-List Mormons who would usher in the Second Coming of Christ himself. I had every reason to cling to these beliefs—a reassurance that I would be among God’s favorites—a psychological need I desperately craved being the youngest of six children being raised in the

chaos of a mother with severe mental illness. I needed the church to be true. I needed God to want me—to be special and not just another inconvenience at the tail end of a troubled family. So, when my sexuality was at odds with church teachings, I found creative interpretations that allowed me to keep my spiritual belief system intact. The clause stating that I would “enjoy the friendship of young men and from these men choose one as my eternal companion” became a belief that God had created a way for me to still get married by allowing me to choose my eternal companion. And, the declaration that I would be “a radiant countenance for all to see in the times of spiritual darkness,” became a belief that my triumph over my sexuality would be a tool in God’s hands for me to tell my story and bring others to the gospel. Yet, this was a tightly-wound balancing act that was not sustainable, and eventually I would sway too far to one side or the other, lose my balance, and find myself in a state of spiritual and existential crisis unable to distinguish true from false, right from wrong, or even real from fake.

Reflecting back, my first longstanding wavering of faith was actually not in response to my sexuality. It was in response to a lesson I received during church services where my spiritual leader made the comment that those born in “third world countries” had been born in the circumstances God intended them to be born, and that it was indicative of unrighteousness in the pre-existence (*i.e.*, people deserved what they got in life because it was somehow indicative of wickedness before they were even born). That conceptualization ran so counter to who I needed God to be—a loving, good-natured father with his children’s best interest at heart. And for the first time, the more I prayed, the less I felt at peace. This belief sat sour inside of me for years before I would begin to see the parallel of my spiritual leaders telling me that God had given me this “challenge” because there was something I

needed to learn from the circumstances that I was born into. My best efforts aside, I began to realize that I would never be the pinnacle righteous wife and mother my upbringing had taught me I should want to be. Even though I wanted to, I could not reconcile the parts of my identity that grated against the characteristics of a “righteous daughter of God,” established by Mormon doctrine, and slowly my faith began to unravel as I fell spectacularly from the glory I believed I had been promised.

Yet, even as I sought to shed the copious layers of the Mormon ideologies with which my identity had been draped, I struggled to do so. Those ideologies that we are raised with, those filters we are taught to see the world through, are so intricately woven into our identity, that it is difficult (if not impossible) to completely abandon them, even when they abandon us. The first time I read Gloria Anzaldúa “Not me sold out my people but they me,” (p. 3) was the first time I realized how truly “stuck” I was in this liminal space of religion and sexuality—how long I had lived with a dirty butterfly-bandage holding together the two sides of a bloody wound that refused to heal. I began to wonder the extent to which I had contributed to the suffering of others by perpetuating this set of beliefs that so clearly creates injuries not heals them. So, I begin this project with this narrative to not only set the stage for the motivation for this study, but also to act as the justification for investigating an ideological system that has clear racist and homophobic roots as a means of providing an analysis that can act as counter-discourse in challenging and interrupting the impact of religious ideologies pertaining to positionalities.

Problem Statement, Rationale and Research Goals

Problem Statement

The founding of the United States (US) has often been referenced as a place people

fled to for the exercise of religious freedoms. Indeed, woven into the very structure of the US constitution is the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause limiting the ability of Congress to make any law that prohibits the free exercise of religion. However, defining free exercise of religion has been anything but stable. With nearly 50 landmark Supreme Court cases, the First Amendment's claims to religious freedoms have been debated, defined, redefined, and overturned over the past 138 years. Beginning with the 1878 *Reynolds v. United States* Supreme Court case, the court differentiated between religious *beliefs* and religious *practices* (Cornell Law School). This case regarded the indictment of George Reynolds on the charge of bigamy. Reynolds, being a practicing member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (more commonly known as the Mormon Church¹), argued that the law was unconstitutional and deprived him of his First Amendment rights to freely practice his religion. The Supreme Court ruled that religious duty was not a defense against criminal actions insofar as placing religious beliefs as superior to the laws of the land would in effect "permit every citizen to become a law unto himself" (*Reynolds v. United States*, p. 98). As anti-polygamy laws threatened the disincorporation and escheatment of church assets to the Federal Government, the Mormon Church published the *1890 Manifesto* aligning church doctrine with federal laws regarding marriage (Official Declaration 1, n.p.).

Today, the religious doctrines and beliefs of the Mormon Church are once again at odds with US marriage laws since the legalization of same-sex marriage in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court case. Legalizing same-sex marriage required redefining the "traditional definition of marriage," a term used by Chief Justice Roberts (2015) in his dissenting testimony, stating that the petitioners are "not seeking to join the institution, [but]

¹ From this point forward, I will reference The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by their commonly ascribed label of Mormon/Mormonism/The Mormon Church

seeking to change what the institution is,” (p. 5) suggesting that marriage—by “traditional” definitions—is an institution of unity between a man and a woman. Aligning with this “traditional” definition of marriage, the Mormon Church’s rejection of same-sex practices has been predicated upon the supposition that sexual relations are only condoned between married individuals—doctrines that were legitimized by the US Federal Government’s failure to recognize same-sex marriage. Thus, the legalization of same-sex marriage undercuts Mormonism’s rationale and justification for the exclusion of same-sex couples from membership. That is, if same-sex couples are allowed to marry, this disrupts the Mormon Church’s claims to marriage being the defining characteristic that determines the morality of sexual acts, and grounds for excommunication if those sexual acts are deemed immoral or sinful. As such, in response to this change in legislation, high-ranking Mormon officials have participated in multiple public addresses asserting/reasserting Mormonism’s religious beliefs and practices regarding sexual orientation—providing justifications for why the church will never condone same-sex relationships. This discourse being produced by the Mormon Church is problematic because it seeks to position this traditionally homophobic religious entity as non-homophobic because of its willingness to recognize sexual identities, while still seeking to exempt religious organizations from substantiating same-sex marriage, the very institution it claims legitimizes sexual expression. The potential of this discourse to shape public policy surrounding religious freedoms sets a trajectory for reversal and/or exemptions to anti-discrimination laws that would leave protected classes vulnerable to the infiltration of any person claiming religious freedoms as the justification for refusal to adhere to anti-discrimination laws.

Rationale and Research Goals: The Development of (Lie)alectics

In my initial investigation of the rhetorical significance of these discourses being produced by the Mormon Church surrounding LGBT² rights, I examined a press conference issued by the Mormon Church three months prior to the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court case. This press conference entitled *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination*, issued on January 27, 2015 called for stronger laws to protect LGBT individuals, while also calling for stronger laws protecting “Religious Freedoms” (RFs)³. During this conference, these officials called for a protection of RFs while juxtaposing advocacy for “nondiscrimination” (ND)⁴ for LGBT citizens in areas of housing, employment, and public accommodations, attempting to position RFs and ND dialectically. My analysis of the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference revealed the employment of a stylistic maneuver that allows the church to appear inclusive of LGBT legislation as a means of substantiating their claims to RFs. To accomplish this, the church attempts to position itself dialectically with the LGBT community calling for legislation that protects *both* RFs *and* ND, representing these principles as dialectical opposites. However, what emerged from the analysis of this discourse revealed a stylistic maneuver more akin to a (lie)alectic: a term I use to describe

² Both within and outside of the academy, there are several acronyms used to identify sexual identities (*i.e.*, LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQI, LGBTQIA, LGB-and Trans, among others). For the purposes of this research, I use the acronym of LGBT when referencing Mormon publications, because that is the way it is referenced in the discourse being analyzed. When referencing broader applications, I use the acronym LGBTQ because it is currently the most commonly utilized acronym.

³ I use the acronym RFs when specifically referencing the discourse of the “Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination” press conference. All other references to religious freedoms will be spelled in full and in lower case.

⁴ Similarly, I use the acronym ND when specifically referencing the discourse of the “Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination” press conference. All other references to nondiscrimination will be spelled in full and in lower case.

how the discourse appears to be inclusive of multiple truths (both, and...), but when examined closely, pairs/com pares concepts that are not antithetical in nature, and thus becomes a discourse of exclusion (yes, but...).⁵ For example, the church reports to have supported ND against the LGBT community in “fair access to housing and employment,” but then goes on to state that when these issues of nondiscrimination force “People of Faith” (PoF) to go “against his or her own conscience,” then RFs become dialectically incommensurate with ND. When examined through a lens of religious determinism, this positioning usurps the rights of LGBT individuals, and is thus a discourse of exclusion rather than inclusion.

This positioning happens in three ways. First, as noted in the above example, they claim support of LGBT rights insofar as they have supported previous LGBT legislation. Second, they claim they are not attempting to deny the LGBT community of their rights, but rather, that in addition to legislation supporting LGBT rights, there also must be stronger legislation protecting RFs. For example, during the press conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks (one of the presenters) expressed that the timing of the press conference was in response to the fact that: “Today, state legislatures across the nation are being asked to strengthen laws related to LGBT issues in the interest of ensuring fair access to housing and employment,” and later goes on to say “At the same time, we urgently need laws that protect faith communities and individuals against discrimination and retaliation for claiming the core rights of free expression and religious practice that are at the heart of our identity as a nation and our legacy as citizens” (Newsroom, 2015). In this way, the Mormon Church is arguing that only some of the human rights guaranteed to all US citizens ought to be applied to

⁵ The theoretical application of (lie)alectics will be further developed in Chapter four regarding methodology and theoretical framework.

LGBT identified individuals. They argue that the law ought to privilege RFs which would allow PoF to act in accordance with their beliefs, even when those beliefs marginalize the LGBT community and run counter to their human rights. Last, it positions itself (and other PoF) as equally discriminated against because they are not allowed to “raise their voice in the public sphere” without public backlash. Thus, the discourse attempts to represent RFs as justifiably discriminatory. Additionally, it attempts to rezone discrimination to include PoF⁶ and situate them as a marginalized community with equal claim to social justice.

My interest in initially analyzing religious discourses surrounding LGBT rights emerged from the significance of the timing of the press conference in its proximity to the passing of several religious freedom bills mirroring the rhetorical strategies of the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference. Legislation exempting religious organizations from observing federal laws protecting LGBT rights has been passed in several states (including Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, and Missouri). Indiana Governor Mike Pence (now Vice President of the US) passed Bill 101 entitled the *Religious Freedoms Restoration Act*, (RFRA) on July 1, 2015. Since that time, 20 states have passed RFRA laws and an additional 16 states have proposed RFRA legislation. Additionally, following the passing of same-sex marriage, Weatherby (2015) highlights the continuation of this movement stating:

The tension between religion and civil rights will undoubtedly continue to play out.

⁶ Furthermore, I argue that the press conference’s use of the term “People of Faith” is referencing only Christians, insofar as the only examples used in the text are in reference to Christian denominations (*i.e.*, Later-day Saints, Catholics, *etc.*) and/or Christian officials (*i.e.*, pastors, bishops, *etc.*). Additionally, I define Christians/Christianity broadly as any denomination recognizing the New Testament as scripture and/or a source of doctrine, the Mormon Church included under this definition.

Conservative states deeply rooted in religion will push back with legislative measures, such as overly robust state religious freedom laws, that aim to find a loophole around the court's same-sex marriage decision. (n.p.)

Indeed, as legislation has pushed to challenge and define some religious tenets, doctrines, and practices as discriminatory, conflicts between the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedoms, and the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of nondiscriminatory practices, have been in growing struggle during the past 75 years. Crowley (2007) examines this phenomenon in *Tolerance and the Christian Right*, arguing that since the 1970s when "previously disenfranchised groups sued for admittance to civic participation," Christian intellectuals have "redefined the liberal value of tolerance as a radical relativism that restrains Christians from passing moral judgments on beliefs and practices of which they disapprove" (p. 102).

Furthermore, in the past two decades, the Human Rights Campaign, as well as independent and grass-roots efforts, have influenced the changing of legislation, which overturned legislation that marginalizes the LGBT community (e.g., repealing sodomy laws, Don't Ask Don't Tell, and DOMA), paving the way for same-sex marriage. These changes in legislation have fueled efforts by the Christian Right (including the Mormon Church) to create discourses influencing public policy that would exempt those claiming religious freedoms from upholding anti-discrimination laws pertaining to sexual orientation and identity. In the development of the rationale and research goals, I argue that the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference is a primary example of how this proposed legislation is being developed and the extent to which it has the potential of shaping policies that directly impact the material realities of LGBTQ-identified individuals.

This study seeks to explore further applications of the (lie)alectics rhetorical strategy discovered in the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference. Since the production of the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference, the Mormon Church has continued to articulate and publish their standpoint that “feelings of same-sex attraction are not a sin and we can choose how to respond” (*Mormon and Gay*, 2016). These discourses included a press conference released on November 5, 2015 aimed at clarifying the church’s decision to change its policy on baptism for children being raised in same-sex households.⁷ Additionally, following the Boy Scouts of America’s (BSA) decision to lift its ban on allowing gay men to be troop leaders (following a lawsuit in 2015), the Mormon Church responded with a statement that they found this “deeply trouble[ing]” and that “the century-long association with Scouting will need to be examined” (Newsroom, 2015). Then, in May 2017, the church released a statement that beginning in 2018, the church will no longer participate in the BSA. In this statement, the church suggests that its decision to withdraw from the BSA is not due to the organization’s transgender policy change; yet, in a statement emailed to NPR the church “evinced some displeasure with the organization’s admittance of openly gay leaders and transgender boys in recent years” (NPR, 2017). I provide these examples to demonstrate the Mormon Church’s active production of anti-gay and homophobic rhetoric, not only to its own congregations and members, but also in public forums including television, radio, and internet publications.

Research Rationale. Of specific interest to this study is the Mormon Church’s

⁷ Prior to this change in policy, minors (under the age of 18) needed parental consent to be baptized into the Mormon Church without regard to the sexual orientation of their parents. New policy states that “children living in a same-sex household may not be blessed as babies or baptized until they are 18. Once they reach 18, children may disavow the practice of same-sex cohabitation or marriage and stop living within the household and request to join the church” (Christofferson, 2015, n.p.).

currently published website entitled *Mormon and Gay*. The website includes statements about the Mormon Church's beliefs regarding LGBT individuals and policies, as well as stories of "gay Mormons"—those individuals who claim the identity of "gay" AND choose to live a celibate life to remain compliant with church policies and retain membership in the church. I analyze the *Mormon and Gay* website's collection of discourses to determine the applicability of the theoretical framework of (lie)alectics to better understand the impacts of discourses that employ these strategies, the implications of these strategies, and the potential of this discourse to shape public policy.

The discourse of the *Mormon and Gay* website, in comparison to all religious discourse being produced surrounding LGBT issues, is warranted for several reasons. First, the theory of (lie)alectics emerged out of the examination of previous Mormon discourse, and therefore testing the generalizability of (lie)alectics to other Mormon discourse is important before expanding to other religious discourses and beyond. Second, the *Mormon and Gay* website is largely aimed at members of the church, in comparison to the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference, and therefore stands to offer a new perspective of how (lie)alectics can be utilized to reinforce ideologies within church members to avoid losing membership. Third, the *Mormon and Gay* website is one of the only websites (of this scale⁸) published by a religious organization in the US declaring the church's position on LGBT issues (*i.e.*, this discourse is unique from other discourses because of the level of organization and mass distribution employed). The next closest website of this scale is the

⁸ The *Mormon and Gay* website is a full-scale, multi-static page website including videos, testimonials, stories, and links to the official www.lds.org website published by the Mormon Church. Additionally, the website has been translated into 37 different languages, a unique facet of this website, which makes it accessible to a wider audience than any other website hosted by a religious organization pertaining to stances on LGBT issues.

Westboro Baptist Church's *God Hates Fags* website, which is only endorsed by the Westboro branch and not the Baptist church as a whole.

Additionally, I specifically look at discourses being generated by the Mormon Church (rather than a comparative study) for several reasons. First, the Mormon Church's affluence positions them in such a way as to allow the church to hold national press conferences proclaiming their beliefs in public forums. Reports estimate that the Mormon Church receives approximately \$7 billion annually in revenue via tax-exempt tithing from church members (Henderson, 2012). This does not include other offerings available to church members in the form of "Missionary Funds" and "Fast Offerings"—other donations accepted by the Mormon Church. Second, the Mormon Church has historically supported anti-gay legislation, gaining national attention and criticism for its estimated \$8.4 million financial contribution in supporting Proposition 8—the proposed amendment to the California State Constitution to outlaw same-sex marriage (mormonsfor8.com). Third, according to the National Council on Churches, Mormonism is the second-fastest growing church in the US (Newsroom, 2017), reporting an increase of 248,218 members during 2016—a total church membership of 15,882,417 as of December 2016 (Church Statistical Records). Consequently, this increase in church membership stands to increase Mormonism's annual tithing revenue and increases the number of individuals espousing and perpetuating homophobic discourse.

Research Goals. This study addresses the following goals through critical examination of the *Mormon and Gay* website. First, this examination seeks to expose the underlying anti-gay ideologies inherent in the text through identification of (lie)alectical structures in the discourse. Second, this examination seeks to provide a way to assess the implications of these (lie)alectical structures to reinforce heteronormative ideologies and act

as a preemptive counterstrike to perceived threats on dominant conservative Christian's discriminatory doctrines regarding LGBT issues. Third, this examination seeks to extrapolate the potential of such discourses to shape state and federal US policies that directly impact the material realities of LGBTQ-identified individuals.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argue the exigence for examining emerging religious discourses that have the potential to marginalize the LGBTQ community in the US. I substantiate the influential potential of the Mormon Church to impact legislative choices in exempting those claiming religious freedoms from upholding anti-discrimination laws pertaining to sexual orientation and identity. To that end, I situate the *Mormon and Gay* website as problematic discourse because it seeks to position this traditionally homophobic religious entity as non-homophobic by portraying itself as willing to recognize sexual identities, while still seeking to exempt religious organizations from substantiating anti-discrimination laws. The potential of this discourse to shape public policy sets a trajectory that will leave protected classes vulnerable to the infiltration of any person claiming religious freedoms as the justification for refusal to adhere to anti-discrimination laws.

The discourse on the *Mormon and Gay* website warrants textual analysis because the theory of (lie)alectics emerged from examination of previous Mormon discourse, and examining a larger artifact produced by the Mormon Church stands to demonstrate the generalizability of (lie)alectics to Mormon discourse, which will provide the building blocks for determining further applications of (lie)alectics. Additionally, the *Mormon and Gay* website is arguably the most in-depth publicly published website by a religious organization regarding LGBT-related issues, and examination of Mormon discourse is of additional value

because of the affluence and growth rate of the organization and their history of supporting anti-gay legislation, demonstrating the potential of these discourses to take root in public policy. Furthermore, I propose three research goals aimed at identification of anti-gay messages within the text, contextualize those structures, and provide implications of the identified messages. In chapter two, I provide background and context regarding homophobia in the US, evolution of US policies surround LGBTQ rights, a history of the Mormon Church and its doctrine, and a summary of the *Mormon and Gay* website to provide the context from which the analysis will be performed.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

To further develop the justification for this study, I first provide a brief history of the evolution of LGBTQ policies and legislation in the US to substantiate the conflict between LGBTQ rights and religious discourses. I also outline current proposed legislation affecting LGBTQ-related public policy in the US to develop the exigence of examining and challenging this discourse. Second, I provide an overview of major doctrinal tenets of the Mormon Church to contextualize the ideological assumptions being made in the discourse. Last, I provide an overview of the *Mormon and Gay* website to contextualize the quotations utilized in the analysis chapter.

Contextualizing Homophobia in the US

The contextualization of LGBTQ politics is important to understanding the rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968) that has emerged out of the evolving gay rights movement in the US—particularly the rapid changes made to LGBTQ legislation during the Obama Presidential Administration⁹—as the backdrop upon which religious discourses seeking to exempt religious organizations from upholding anti-discrimination laws pertaining to sexual identity as a protected class has emerged. This contextualization demonstrates the ways in which legislation in the US has largely been impacted by the ideological assumptions of the Christian Right surrounding issues of homosexuality and LGBTQ policies, how the influence

⁹ Note Morris's (2015) queering of rhetorical history and his reflection on Obama's influence in queer politics stating: "*We* have freed ourselves, not that the president knows, or has spoken, our history," (p. 226) noting the erasure of the groundwork of activism preceding the Obama administration in advancing LGBTQ rights, while simultaneously acknowledging Obama's fervent efforts in seeking a "more perfect union for many LGBTQ peoples, indelibly invoking the past...for a particular vision of a brighter future" (p. 238).

of the Christian Right has lost ground over the past 60 years, and how recent legislation has created pushback by the Christian Right in the development of discourses (such as the *Mormon and Gay* website) that seek to exempt themselves in the face of a trajectory of LGBTQ rights in the US mirroring the sentiment of Obama's Second Inaugural Address, stating: "Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law—for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well" (Obama, 2013, n.p.). From this place, I begin with the historical applications of LGBTQ policies in the US including historical and current legislation and court cases.

Historical Applications of LGBTQ Policies in the US. Homosexuality has had an evolutionary position in US politics, published as a mental disorder until the DSM IV in 1987, criminalized until 2003 in the *Lawrence v Texas* Supreme Court Case, gays were banned from the military until 2011, and unable to marry until 2015. I provide a brief overview of the policies, court cases, and major protest events to provide the backdrop upon which my claim that (lie)lectics function as a preemptive counterstrike to perceived threats on religious freedoms in being forced to substantiate federal legislation supporting LGBTQ rights. Particularly under the Obama Presidential Administration, the gay rights movement gained momentum repealing several discriminatory laws toward the LGBTQ community and passing of laws protecting LGBTQ citizens and advancements in equality. Indeed, at a reception for LGBTQ Pride Month, Obama declared that, as a nation, we are "reaching a turning point," and that "Hearts and minds change with time. Laws do, too." (whitehouse.gov). As laws increasingly reflect Obama's sentiment here—that the hearts of the American people are changing toward an acceptance of LGBTQ lifestyles—pressure on

conservative (Christian dominated) discourses to appear non-homophobic through the erasure of explicitly homophobic language has increased. As will be demonstrated in the analysis of this research, in its place, (lie)alectical structures emerge as an implicit tactic that allows dominant ideologies (*i.e.*, heteronormativity) to be perpetuated in a way that reduces the perceived validity of counterhegemonic voices—reinforcing dominant ideologies. That is, the progression of gay rights has created a rhetorical situation—a coming to a head—as the historical infiltration of Christian-based opposition to homosexuality has been losing ground over the past nine years. From this, discourses claiming upholding gay rights as a violation of religious freedoms have emerged and continue to grow in momentum as the current presidential administration repeatedly appoints government officials that support anti-gay and homophobic policies.

Criminalization. According to Eskridge (2009) sodomy laws in the US—largely targeting sex between members of the same sex—were inherited from British criminal law with roots in Christianity. As early as 1779, Thomas Jefferson wrote into *The Founders Constitution* of Virginia, Amendment VII listing sodomy alongside rape and polygamy as criminal acts with a punishment of castration in men and “cutting thro’ the cartilage of [a woman’s] nose a hole of one half inch diameter at the least” (*The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, n.p.). Sodomy was considered a felony prior to 1962, and even after the introduction of the Model Penal Code (MPC)—an attempt to standardize laws amongst states—many states retained sodomy laws criminalizing homosexuality. Yet, it would not be until 2003 in the *Lawrence v Texas* Supreme Court case that sodomy laws were deemed a violation of 14th Amendment’s rights to due process, invalidating all state sodomy laws, and thus decriminalizing homosexuality.

Legislation and Court Decisions. Following the decriminalization of homosexuality, the constitutionality of many discriminatory laws against LGBTQ citizens came into question, but none so notable as those occurring in the Obama Administration—arguably the first presidential administration to openly support the gay rights movement—between 2008-2016. *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, the official policy regarding homosexuality in the US Military, initiated in 1994 was overturned in 2011. DOMA (Defense of Marriage Act), signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1996 was overturned nearly 20 years later in 2013. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity issued regulations prohibiting LGBTQ discrimination in federally-assisted housing programs in 2012. The legalization of same-sex marriage in the *Obergefell v Hodges* Supreme Court case ensued shortly thereafter in 2015. And most recently, the Indiana federal court has incorporated the inclusion of sexual-orientation as sex-discrimination in the *Hively v Tech Cmty, Coll. Of Ind.*, 2017.

Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 US. On April 28, 2015, Oral Arguments were made before the US Supreme Court, stating that “the intimate and committed relationships of same sex couples, just like those of heterosexual couples, provide mutual support and are the foundation of family life in our society,” (Bonauto, 2015, p. 5) petitioning for the legalization of same-sex marriage at the federal level in the US. Bonauto goes on to say that “Here we have a whole class of people who are denied the equal right to be able to join in this very extensive government institution that provides protection for families” (p. 5). On June 26, 2015, the US Supreme Court rested those opinions in favor of “same-sex marriage.” Justice Kennedy presented the official *Opinion of the Court* statement, declaring: “The Fourteenth Amendment requires a State to license a marriage between two people of the same sex and to

recognize a marriage between two people of the same sex when their marriage was lawfully licensed and performed out-of-State” (Supreme Court Transcript for case 14-556, p. 1).

Justice Kennedy presented support for this decision based on previous court cases pertaining to laws criminalizing same-sex intimacy, stating that:

Although *Bowers* was eventually repudiated in *Lawrence*, men and woman were harmed in the interim and the substantial effects of these injuries no doubt lingered long after *Bowers* was overruled. Dignitary wounds cannot always be healed with the stroke of a pen. Ruling against same-sex couples would have the same effect—and, like *Bowers*, would be unjustified under the Fourteen Amendment. (Supreme Court Transcript for case 14-556, p. 25)

Closing the official statement of the court, Kennedy proclaims that same-sex marriage is not a disrespect for the institution of marriage, but quite the opposite: “Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization’s oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The constitution grants them that right” (p. 28). Yet, while the *Official Opinion of the Court* was in favor of the constitutionality of same-sex marriage, the ruling alone does not reflect the contested discourses that remain. This is evident when examining other Supreme Court cases arguing for equal protection under the law. In comparison to most other Supreme Court cases arguing 14th Amendment Rights, the ruling of *Obergefell v. Hodges* was a split vote 5-4, with Justice Kennedy carrying the “swing vote.” This split indicates the continued presence of contested discourses and heteronormative ideologies. That is, ideological assumptions about gender identity and sexual orientation continue to exist within a contested space defined by the arguments, debates, and resistance movements both for and against legislation extending equal protection under the law to LGBT-identified individuals—including marriage. This is

evident in a statement made by the Mormon Church on June 29, 2015 following the Supreme Court ruling in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case:

Because of the recent decision of the United States Supreme Court and similar legal proceedings and legislative actions in a number of countries that have given civil recognition to same-sex marriage relationships, the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints restates and reaffirms the doctrinal foundation of Church teachings on morality, marriage, and the family. (Mormons.org)

Here again, the Mormon Church felt the need to reassert their religious tenets opposing same-sex marriage—demonstrative of the power of the Mormon Church to speak on behalf of PoF. To contextualize the way in which the Mormon Church is attempting to position itself and other PoF as equally discriminated against, I review the history and origins of the Mormon Church. Additionally, I review the major doctrinal tenets and church policies to contextualize Mormonism’s reinforcement of heteronormative ideologies.

Current Proposed Anti-gay Legislation

While there has been a clear trend in the advancement of gay rights in state and federal laws protecting LGBTQ citizens from discrimination based on sexual-orientation, current proposed legislation tells a very different story. Several state and federal court cases are underway that argue for practice of religious freedoms as a justification for refusal to provide services to LGBTQ citizens, refusal to acknowledge same-sex marriage, and even fanatic and extremist calls to recriminalize homosexuality. I provide a brief overview of a few of these cases to demonstrate the exigence of addressing the rhetorical strategies of religious organizations (like the Mormon Church) to influence the passing of these laws into practice.

Religious Freedom Reformation Acts (RFRA). The original Religious Freedom Restoration Act was signed into law in 1993 with sweeping support by both the House and the Senate to “ensure that interests in religious freedom are protected” (supremecourt.gov). Later, the *City of Boerne v Flores* Supreme Court case in 1997 found that the law did not account for the Anti-Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and was therefore unconstitutional. In response to the case’s outcome, 21 individual states passed state-RFRAs. Most notably, following the landmark decision in the *Burwell v Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* Supreme Court case recognizing state-RFRAs as grounds for acknowledging a for-profit corporation’s claims to religious freedoms, now Vice President Mike Pence (then governor of Indiana) passed Indiana Senate Bill 101 (RFRA), which allows individuals and companies to claim that their free exercise of religions has been unduly burdened by federal or state law (*i.e.*, extending religious freedoms to the organizations and companies owned by religiously-identified individuals). While not explicitly stated, those opposing the law drew attention to the inherently homophobic nature of the law through protests and boycotts. In response, Pence signed a “clarifying measure” intended to debunk the idea that his RFRA was targeting the LGTBQ community stating that:

The RFRA does not authorize a provider — including businesses or individuals — to refuse to offer or provide services, facilities, goods, employment, housing or public accommodation to any member of the public based on sexual orientation or gender identity, in addition to race, color, religion, ancestry, age, national origin, disability, sex or military service.

Yet, the new languaging still provided ways for churches and religious organizations to be exempt from the definition of a “provider.” Criticism of this bill demonstrates the possibility of these RFRAs being a driving force for fighting back against the proliferation of pro-

LGBTQ legislation. And these speculations have been substantiated in cases like

Masterpiece Cakeshop v Colorado Civil Rights Commission.

Masterpiece Cakeshop v Colorado Civil Rights Commission Supreme Court Case.

On December 5, 2017, the Supreme Court of the US heard Oral Arguments in a *Masterpiece Cakeshop v Colorado Civil Rights Commission* Supreme Court case. The case began when a baker in Colorado refused to make a wedding cake for gay couple Charlie Craig and David Mullins arguing that he “should not be compelled to violate his religious beliefs by creating a custom dessert for the couple” (denverpost.com). Phillips argues that a “custom” cake is a form of artistic expression that constitutes speech, and therefore ought to be protected accordingly. Much of the conversation within the Oral Arguments of this case highlight the potential of RFRA to allow individuals and businesses claiming religious freedoms to discriminate against LGBTQ individuals. Justice Kagen highlights three axes that speak to this potential discrimination. First, where do we draw the line on what constitutes freedom of expression? For example, the court cites instances of the hairdresser, the invitations, and the florist. Second, he asks the question “why is this just about gay people?” (*i.e.*, what prevents this from becoming a gateway into discriminating against other protected groups?) And third, he asks the question “Why is it only weddings?” and goes on to provide the example of a same-sex couple going into a restaurant and ordering an anniversary meal. Can the chef claim freedom of expression in meal preparation any more than a baker can make claims to being a cake artist? The court has not yet ruled on this case.

Other Legislation Affecting LGBTQ Rights in the US. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reports that in 2017 alone, 27 Comprehensive Affirmative

Nondiscrimination Bills¹⁰ in 19 different states were proposed—all but three dying at the committee level. An additional 32 Incomplete Protection Affirmative Nondiscrimination Bills¹¹ were proposed in 13 states—all of which died at the committee level. In tandem with these bills, Religious Exemption Bills¹² have been proposed in 2017. There were five RFRA bills proposed in five states, an additional eight First Amendment Defense Acts (FADAs) proposed, and an additional twelve proposed bills related to marriage (namely same-sex marriage) all pertaining to the exemption of religious organizations sustaining anti-discrimination laws pertaining to LGBTQ rights. Statistics have yet to be populated for 2018.

Mormon Church Origins, History, and Major Doctrinal Tenets

This section covers the history of the Mormon Church, including the Church’s origins as well as its history of being oppressed by other Christians in the US. I outline its history of oppression to contextualize the Mormon Church’s claims to discrimination based on religion. This contextualization is important, because the discourse under examination attempts to position PoF as equally discriminated against as the LGBT community. The fact that the

¹⁰ Comprehensive nondiscrimination bills prohibit discrimination based on both sexual orientation and gender identity (or only gender identity if state law already covers sexual orientation), in a range of contexts, including employment, housing, and public accommodations. Comprehensive bills do not have overly broad religious exemptions or other carve-outs that allow discrimination against LGBT people. (aclu.org).

¹¹ Incomplete nondiscrimination bills include those that lack gender identity protections, those that do not prevent discrimination in all key contexts, and those that contain broad religious exemptions language or carve-outs, including for sex-segregated facilities.

¹² These make it easier for people to demand exemptions to generally applicable laws by allowing lawsuits challenging any governmental policy (such as nondiscrimination laws) that someone says substantially burdens her/his religious beliefs. The government must prove that enforcing the policy is the least restrictive way of furthering a compelling governmental interest.

Mormon Church experienced discrimination during its formative years illuminates the rationale for this positioning.

Mormon Church Origins. Joseph Smith Jr. is attributed as the founder of the Mormon Church. Smith was a sixth-generation American living in Palmyra, New York when the church was established in 1830. Books written about Mormon heritage suggest that Smith struggled spiritually throughout his youth during a time of religious proliferation in the US. At the age of 14, Smith investigated many of the available religious denominations but was unsatisfied with his inability to determine which church he should join. Smith claims to have prayed to God for the answer and experienced what is known as “The First Vision” in Mormon vernacular (Teachings, p. 5). While praying, Smith states that he had a vision in which God-the-Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him telling him not to join any church because none of them were true. Rather, he had been chosen by God to be the new prophet—the same as the prophets of the Old Testament—to “restore” Christ’s true gospel, which had been removed from earth at the time of Christ’s crucifixion (*Preach My Gospel*, 2004). Church records report that Smith was later baptized and confirmed as the prophet of the church by John the Baptist who appeared to him in a resurrected form. This was one of many visions Smith reports during the 10-year period between “The First Vision” and the official establishment of the Mormon Church on April 6, 1830.

During the period of time between “The First Vision,” and the official establishment of the church, by Smith’s personal records, he states that he was instructed by an angel to unearth a set of golden plates—a record of a civilization of people who sailed to the Americas from Jerusalem by God’s command to avoid the destruction at the time of the Tower of Babel (History, p. xx). Smith purports to have spent several years translating the

message engraved upon the plates into English, which he titled *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. At the inception of the church, 6 members were baptized, and within 2 years, the church had hundreds of followers (Church Statistical Reports). Missionary work was (and continues to be) a central part of Mormonism, and the church's proselytizing efforts began drawing attention, particularly because they presented *The Book of Mormon* as sacred scripture that was "more correct than the bible" (Smith, p. xx). This declaration and many of the other doctrinal tenets regarding Smith's accounts of visions and speaking with God were interpreted as blasphemous by other Christian denominations.

"Persecution of the saints." The interpretation of Mormon doctrines as blasphemous led to members of the Mormon Church experiencing discrimination by way of violence, physical expulsion, imprisonment, and murder. According to records kept by members of the Church in the mid 1800s, the violence committed against members of the Mormon Church included instances of "tar and feathering," men being pulled from their homes at night and beaten, as well as the "Mountains Meadow Massacre" in 1857, with an estimated 100-140 casualties. Church founder Joseph Smith Jr. (as well as many other members of the church) were repeatedly imprisoned on charges of treason. In 1836, Smith was imprisoned upon which a vigilante group of men broke into the jail and shot and killed Smith. Two years later, an extermination order was issued in 1838 that dictated that any Mormon in the state of Missouri was to be shot on site, leading to the first of many expulsions for members of the Mormon Church, which would eventually lead to the fleeing of Mormon members "westward," where they eventually established a settlement in Salt Lake City. Due to this expulsion, over 70,000 members of the Mormon Church traveled nearly 1,300 miles from Navoo, Illinois to Salt Lake City, Utah between 1846-1847 in covered wagons. This mass

exodus began in January and February of 1846 and thus travelers were subjected to starvation, disease, and intolerable climate conditions, resulting in an estimated 600 deaths before reaching Salt Lake City. Many have argued that it was the loss of so many men (due to cultural chivalry) that led to the institutionalization of polygamy because there were so many women and children without means of income or head-of-household support. As outlined early in this introduction, polygamy was a doctrinal tenet the Mormon Church was “forced” to abandon in order to claim statehood in Utah.

I review these instances to contextualize the Mormon Church’s perceived subjectivities contributing to its underlying motivations of its claims to present-day discrimination. That is, these experiences of church members in the mid-1800s led to the adoption of church doctrines regarding the place and purpose of discrimination within the church. That is, Mormons perceive themselves as an eternal target of discrimination, and that this is God’s intention. This perspective is predicated upon Mormon doctrine regarding “the great and abominable church,” a conceptualization of all the forces of evil banding together to attempt to destroy God’s true church (Robinson, 1988). Books documenting the “persecution of the saints,” in Mormon vernacular, have been used to reify the notion that Mormons will always be persecuted because they belong to the “one true church.” Thus, these historical accounts of violence and discrimination enacted on members of the Mormon Church in the mid-1800s are accounted for to substantiate these claims.

Mormon Doctrine and Church Policies

Lastly, I address the doctrinal tenets pertinent to this particular project—namely doctrines substantiating heteronormativity. One of the most foundational doctrines of the Mormon Church is called “The Plan of Salvation.” The plan states that all living beings were

created spiritually (in a pre-mortal life) before they were born on Earth. It includes the belief that all humans required obtaining a body in order to progress toward salvation. Grounded within this belief is the assumption that having children is essential to “God’s plan,” and therefore, homosexuality runs counter to this endeavor.

The plan of salvation. One of Mormonism’s core doctrines outlines a plan that God created to save, redeem, and exalt mortal beings called “The Plan of Salvation.” The plan consists of four major transitional states all beings must progress through in order to achieve salvation and eternal life: Pre-mortal existence, Earthly mortality, the Spirit World, and the Kingdoms of Glory. The pre-mortal existence is conceptualized as the place where God created his children spiritually, and they lived with him before the creation of earth. Mortality is viewed as a period of trial where all spirits are subjected to both death and sin (defined as any deviation from God’s will). After mortal death, the spirit then resides in the Spirit World, a temporary realm for the dead to continue to prepare for judgment day and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Based upon both faith and works, spirits will then receive a perfect, immortal body and reside in one of three Kingdoms of Glory: Tellestial, Terrestrial, and Celestial. The Celestial Kingdom is noted as the most supreme, where humans can become as God is now—creating their own worlds and own spirit children. The details of this particular doctrine are important insofar as progression through the different states of being is predicated upon heteronormative myths that reinforce the conceptualization of heterosexual intercourse as necessary to bring God’s children from the spirit world into mortal existence.

Additionally, central to the ideological assumptions of “The Plan of Salvation,” is the notion of agency. Within this narrative, during the pre-existence, God asked all of His children to propose a plan to save all humankind. In the narrative, Satan proposes the first

plan in which he guarantees full retention of all souls to God by forcing everyone to do what is correct, and therefore losing no souls to sin. In contrast, Christ steps forward and suggests that agency is essential to the process of salvation and that people must be given agency to sin, and consequently offers to pay for the sins of all humankind as the means by which people could return to God and live in his presence. I provide this overview, because it applies to the (lie)aletics discussed during the analysis of this research. The Plan of Salvation is predicated upon heteronormative ideologies, and the assumptions made within the Plan of Salvation directly relate to the church's framing of agency in what aspects of identity are chosen, and which identities are permanent, unchanging, and unchosen.

Prophetic authority and priesthood. Mormonism's stance on same-sex attraction becomes increasingly important when considering Mormonism's claim to absolute authority to speak God's will to "*all mankind*." The doctrinal canons of the Mormon Church function in accordance with the conceptualization of time as dispensations. It is important to understand Mormonism's treatment of dispensations in order to understand the church's claim to God's authority. While the term dispensation is used within many different contexts, theologically a dispensation is defined as "one of the several systems or bodies of law in which at different periods God has revealed his mind and will to man, such as the Patriarchal Dispensation, the Mosaic Dispensation, or the Christian Dispensation" (Smith, 1976, XXIII). The Mormon Church treats dispensations as a "map of God's authority on Earth since the beginning of time" (Roberts, 2011, p. 10).

According to Mormonism, during each dispensation, God has (and continues) to call prophets and grants them the power and authority to act in his name and direct his people. The Mormon Church accepts the Old Testament as doctrine "as far as it is translated

correctly” (Articles of Faith, 1981). Thus, the prophets of the Old Testament leading up to the birth of Christ are treated as having the authority to act in God’s name. When born, Christ *became* the “prophet,” the ultimate authority of God on Earth. Christ called 12 apostles and granted them his power and authority to also act in the name of God. Mormonism’s claim to authentic divining of authority stems from the perspective that: “after the crucifixion of Christ and the death of the last apostle, the authority of God left the Earth until it was restored by Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1830” (Roberts, 2011, p. 10). Elder Russel M. Ballard (1993), one of the modernly-called twelve apostles, discusses this doctrinal tenet:

While there continued to be Christians who believed basically in the message of Jesus Christ, over time the doctrines became distorted and the authority to act in the name of God—in other words, the priesthood—disappeared. After a period of years, the Apostles died who had received their priesthood, their spiritual assignment, and their ordination in the time of Christ. They took their priesthood authority with them. In short, the church Christ organized gradually disintegrated, and the fullness of the gospel was lost. (p. 28)

Because Mormons believe God called Joseph Smith as a prophet—the same as other prophets were called upon to serve God in previous dispensations—the Mormon Church claims the official power and authority to act in God’s name. Ballard (1993) proposes that: “authority is one of those concepts that most people seem to inherently understand—probably because it governs almost every facet of our lives and has done so for as long as most of us can remember” (Ballard, 1993, p. 51). This concept of power and authority systematically integrates into almost every system in our lives: education, government, families, law enforcement, cultural norms, and religious institutions. Ballard (1993) comments on the importance of this priesthood:

It includes God’s authority to perform all of the ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It also gave Joseph all of the priesthood authority he would need to restore the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the earth. Thus Joseph

Smith was authorized by God to organize His Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (p. 55)

These records outline Mormonism's unique claim to God's authority to direct the tenets of the faith. This doctrine is significant for two reasons. First, it promotes and reifies the Mormon Church's felt necessity to proclaim their beliefs in the public forum in the form of press conferences and public statements. Additionally, Mormonism's claim to direct communication with God allows Mormon church officials to receive new revelation from God usurping previous doctrine and interpretation of scripture. The employment of this doctrinal tenet is apparent in the church's change to two significant policies and doctrines. The first, as mentioned earlier in the introduction was the *1890 Manifesto* changing church policy on polygamy to align with US laws regarding marriage. The second is regarding the church's change in policy regarding African American men's right to hold "the priesthood"—the power to speak in God's name. The original doctrine banning African American men from holding the priesthood was predicated upon the belief that "blacks descended from the same lineage as the biblical Cain, who slew his brother Abel...[and] God's 'curse' on Cain was the mark of a dark skin" (Doctrine & Covenants, p. 137). Because of this belief, in 1852 the then current president of the Mormon Church, Brigham Young "announced a policy restricting men of black African descent from priesthood ordination" (Church Records and Orders). However, as justice for black Americans progressed through the Civil Rights Movement, in 1978, the then current prophet, Spencer W. Kimball purported to have prayed regarding changing the policy concerning priesthood restrictions to black men, reporting: "By revelation [God] has confirmed that every...worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood...without regard for race or color" (Church Records and Orders). Thus, the Mormon Church has historically changed church policies to align with US

law. Consequently, Mormonism's rigid clinging to doctrine regarding same-sex practices is rhetorically significant.

Mormonism's evolving stance on homosexuality/same-sex attraction. The Mormon Church holds a bi-annual conference (General Conference), at which time the prophet and apostles of the church speak and present new revelation to church members. Reviewing the digital archive of these talks, a progression of Mormonism's perspectives on homosexuality emerges. The first mention of homosexuality occurred in the April 1971 General Conference session. In his talk *The Meaning of Morality*, Elder Victor L. Brown (1971) refers to homosexuality as a tragic sin, caused by the confusion of gender and the adoption of gendered traits by members of the opposite sex (n.p.). This view of homosexuality remains consistent in subsequent years, appearing in talks by President Spencer W. Kimball in 1974, 1976, and 1980, the last of which adds masturbation to the list of "causes" of homosexuality. Kimball's (1976) contribution to the conversation about homosexuality goes as far as to suggest homosexuality "still corrode[s] the mind, snuff[s] out self-esteem, and drag[s] one down into the darkness of anguish and unhappiness" (n.p.).

The conversation about homosexuality remained similar through the 1980s and early 1990s, while adding to the list of causes of homosexuality: "failure in the home" (Benson, 1982, n.p.), "Disregarding principles and practices established by God" (Benson, 1982, n.p.), sexual sins that create "an unquenchable appetite that drives the offender to ever more serious sin" such as "acts of homosexuality" (Scott, 1994, n.p.).

While Mormonism's stance on homosexuality has remained one of objection, the language used to talk about homosexuality changed in the mid-1990s. After 1994, none of the General Conference talks contain the word "homosexuality" or "homosexual." These

terms were replaced with the phrases “same-gender attraction” or “same-sex attraction.”

Additionally, while still considering homosexuality a sin, the focus of the discourse shifted away from condemnation to one of pity. President Gordon B. Hinckley’s 1995 conference talk *Stand Strong Against the Wiles of the World* highlights this shift:

There are those who would have us believe in the validity of what they choose to call same-sex marriage. Our hearts reach out to those who struggle with feelings of affinity for the same gender. We remember you before the Lord, we sympathize with you, we regard you as our brothers and our sisters. However, we cannot condone immoral practices on your part any more than we can condone immoral practices on the part of others. (n.p.)

Even more recently, the doctrine treats homosexuality as more *commonplace*, comparing it to the ranks of other “heavy burdens,” as outlined in Elder Dallin H. Oaks’ (2006) conference talk *He Heals the Heavy Laden*:

Many carry heavy burdens. Some have lost a loved one to death or care for one who is disabled. Some have been wounded by divorce. Others yearn for eternal marriage. Some are caught in the grip of addictive substances or practices like alcohol, tobacco, drugs, or pornography. Others have crippling physical or mental impairments. Some are challenged by same-gender attraction. Some have terrible feelings of depression or inadequacy. In one way or another, many are heavy laden. (n.p.)

Here, Oaks equates “same-gender attraction” as equivalent to the burden of death and loss, substance abuse, and physical and mental impairments—a view of homosexuality as something to be endured, overcome, abandoned, and/or conquered. In this way, the church did not “change” its stance on homosexuality; it still treats it as offensive to God, sinful, and grounds for excommunication. However, the change in conversation reflects a social awareness of the changing ideological assumptions about homosexuality outside of the church, which promote tolerance, and compassion. In this way, Mormonism’s stance on homosexuality is adaptive.

Furthermore, in December 2012, the Mormon Church launched its first version of the *Mormon and Gay* website entitled *Mormons and Gays* (note plurality). The church put out a news release in October 2016 announcing their revamping of their website stating that, “The new appellation, ‘Mormon and Gay,’ reflects the reality that a person doesn’t need to choose between the two identities – one can, in fact, be gay and live faithful to the teachings of Christ” (Newsroom, Church Updates, 2016, n.p.). While to some degree or another, this has been the church’s general approach since the early 1990s, the clarity of this stance has not always been so straight forward. The previous version of the website (which is now inaccessible) had a similar format, providing several statements from high-ranking Mormon officials about the church’s stance on same-sex attraction, and mainly focused on the stories of a few individuals’ testimonials of overcoming their same-sex attraction impulses while staying faithful to the church.

One of the leading faces on the original *Mormon and Gay* website, Ty Mansfield, told his story of being willing to live a celibate life, and recounts his experiences of feeling blessed when he fell in love with his wife. Nearly ten years prior to the publication of the *Mormons and Gays* website, Mansfield published a book entitled *In Quiet Desperation: Understanding the Challenge of Same-Gender Attraction*, in which he openly discusses his experiences “struggling” with same-gender¹³ attraction, his nights of pleading for God to take it away, and his ultimate peace with choosing obedience over lust—not unlike my own experience grappling with negotiating my religion and sexuality. In this book, Mansfield (2004) makes a statement that, true to my own experience, aptly depicts Mormon

¹³ In the original *Mormons and Gays* website, same-sex attraction and same-gender attraction were used interchangeably. The term same-gender attraction is no longer used on the *Mormon and Gay* website since its update in 2016.

perspectives on same-sex attraction in the early 2000's based on his apprehension in writing the book. He states:

Once I made the decision to attempt to translate my convictions and passions onto paper, I was confronted with the difficult decision of whether or not I would attach my real name to the book. With a topic so widely misunderstood—and one in which there is such passionate controversy and divergence of belief—I was initially extremely hesitant. . . . I had to consider the implications putting my name on the work would have. In addition to my own concerns, it seemed like everyone around me had a few of their own to throw into the already scorching internal fire. (Mansfield, 2004, p. 243-244)

Furthermore, he goes on to give his own opinion regarding the appropriateness of disclosing issues of sexuality, something to which I personally received counter advice on from different spiritual leaders throughout my journey in attempting to change my sexuality. This statement reflects one of the first movements toward the church's current position on same-sex attraction, as few other books had been written about homosexuality by Mormon authors:

I do not believe it appropriate for those of us who have feelings of same-gender attraction to casually announce our challenge from the pulpit or to share it with anyone other than those who have stewardship over us or with whom we feel the Lord has guided us to share it. But I do believe that unless we who experience this challenge—and who desire to live faithful to God and refuse to suppress our feelings in quiet desperation—are willing to discuss our feelings with those who love us and who can bless and help and strengthen and support us, the misperceptions of society and those closest to us will never change. (Mansfield, 2004, p. 245)

While not formal doctrine on behalf of the Mormon Church, Mansfield's sentiment reflects my own experience of being a closeted lesbian in 2004. In fact, I remember when the book was first published, and I stole a copy from the Mormon bookstore I was working at and returned it days later, because I knew that were I to attempt to purchase the book, I would be calling my own sexuality into question. But perhaps more importantly is the way in

which Mormon discourse surrounding issues of homosexuality and same-sex attraction has changed over the past decade. The doctrine itself (theoretically) has not changed; I was told repeatedly by spiritual leaders that my feelings of attraction to women did not constitute grounds for excommunication, only if I were ever to act upon them. But what has changed is the discourse. The mere presence of the website itself is evidence of this shift, as no such resources were available to members of the Mormon Church prior to publication of the original *Mormons and Gays* website in 2012. Additionally, the website speaks to the perspective that the church believes that, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is and should be involved with the question of homosexual conduct” (Byrd, 2001, viii). At that time, the only books written about homosexuality regarding the Mormon Church were aimed at asserting Mormonism’s stance on homosexuality and society’s assault on their position:

The Church of Jesus Christ does not condemn those who struggle with homosexual attraction; it does condemn homosexual *behavior*... This policy of “hate the sin; love the sinner” is challenged by a population of people who have declared that their sexual preference is as natural to them as their brown hair, blue eyes, or short toes. In a way that is uncommon among other individuals who choose not to abide by Church teachings, those who commit homosexual acts have banded together in colleges, lobbies, and neighborhoods to gain support on various campuses, in legislatures, and in communities. As a result of a political agenda, some people across America and the world have accepted the homosexual lifestyle as a normal lifestyle. In stark contrast, the Church rejects all homosexual behavior in spite of political movements that advocate total acceptance... Thus the “gay” movement compares itself to the Civil Rights movement of the Sixties and has become one of the most divisive issues in recent political history. This movement sees the Church as not merely opposing a kind of behavior but opposing an entire developing culture; and by extension, discriminating against a segment of the population. (Byrd, 2001, p. 4-5)

This quotation clearly shows that the Mormon Church has viewed the Gay Rights Movement as assaultive since the early 2000s (if not earlier) and demonstrates that the official position of the church has been the same for decades (*i.e.*, the attraction is not a sin, but acting on it is). Yet, as the analysis of this research will show, the discourse itself (the

approach, the language, and the structure of the text) has changed to appear more accepting of gay identities and individuals without actually changing its homophobic doctrine.

Similarly, while I am unable to access the original website, my initial reading of the *Mormons and Gays* website in 2013 was that it was a PR stunt to counter negative publicity the Mormon Church had received beginning in 2008 in the backlash of their support of the Proposition 8 campaign. The new *Mormon and Gay* website is now advertised as “ministerial materials for members” (Newsroom, Church Updates, 2016, n.p.), yet still functions as discourse representing the Mormon Church as more accepting of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and sexual identities, again, without actually changing its homophobic doctrine. Thus, this shift in the discourse itself is rhetorically significant and warrants examination. As such, below I provide a brief overview of the current version of the *Mormon and Gay* website to provide the context from which the analysis of this discourse emerges.

The Website: *Mormon and Gay*

In this section, I provide an overview of each of the pages published on the *Mormon and Gay* website to provide context for the examples utilized in the analysis chapter. This is organized according to the three sections on the website: Stories, Beliefs, and Understandings. It provides an overview of the point and purpose of each section, and provides a brief synopsis of the content of each page published on the website to provide the background of the information being analyzed in this analysis.

Stories

The *Mormon and Gay* website offers a collection of six stories from members of the Mormon Church who either experience same-sex attraction themselves or are parents of gay children. These stories are first-person narratives of individuals who either experience same-

sex attraction or identify as gay or lesbian. They are the stories of how these individuals negotiate their sexual experiences and/or identities while maintaining active participation in the Mormon Church (*i.e.*, serving missions, attending church meetings, performing temple rituals, and engaging other church services). They outline the emotional journeys of these individuals, with common narratives of guilt and shame as well as the way they negotiate their agency between attraction and action (*i.e.*, negotiating whether or not to participate in same-sex sexual experiences).

Becky’s story. Becky tells the story of her experience when her son Xian came out to her as gay. She discusses her inner struggle with the dissonance between loving her son and her beliefs stemming from her religious faith as a member of the Mormon Church. She examines her experience of confusing “loving” with “condoning,” the feelings of guilt she had, and how she was finally able to learn to love her son unconditionally—regardless of his sexual orientation.

Jessyca’s story. Jessyca tells her story of accepting her gay identity while maintaining membership in the Mormon Church. She recounts being attracted to other women, and she discusses her contention with her belief that same-sex attraction was a choice and knowing that she did not choose the feelings she was having. Even though she had never acted (*i.e.*, engaged sexual behaviors) with other women, she felt high levels of guilt and shame, which led her to seek help from church leaders and a psychologist as she attempted to navigate the depression that ensued when she accepted celibacy as her reality. She finishes her story by relishing the love and support she has received from family and church leaders as she embraces her identity as a gay Mormon, a maneuver possible through the action of celibacy.

Josh's story. Josh tells his story of being a gay Mormon. He recalls feeling wounded by family and friends unintentionally, which hindered his ability to give and receive love. He discusses his process of coming out as a journey toward love, obedience, and God's will and away from loneliness, despair, and a sense of doom. He discusses the suicide of his mother and how that was the catalyst for beginning to "explore [his] homosexuality by dating men." He recounts his experience of both rejection and acceptance and considers that the cornerstone of his decision to remain active in the church—choosing a celibate life over the love he felt for the men he had been dating.

Laurie's story. Laurie discusses her story of leaving the Mormon Church and participating in relationships with other women and eventually returning to the church to marry a man who was "not only okay with [her] past, he was deeply moved by it." She states that she "has always known the gospel to be true," but that guilt and shame over her feelings of same-sex attraction at a time when "gays and lesbians were called hurtful and degrading names" and when "few people came out of the closet because it hurt too much," had driven her to stop attending church and she began drinking and using drugs. She recounts feeling guilty at church during lessons on chastity because she had been molested by an older cousin and raped by a family friend when she was 10-yrs-old and believed that (consensual or not), she had "committed 'the worst sin next to murder'" as outlined by Mormon doctrine. Laurie tells how she felt an impression that she needed to return to church. She met with church leaders and repented of her sexual sins. She considered her sexual attractions as a matter of agency, and that while she assumed it would be difficult, she would choose to "remain celibate for the rest of [her] life."

Ricardo's story. Ricardo was born and raised in Mexico City. He tells his story as a journey that began when he was 4-yrs-old, when two men living with his family sexually abused him, prompting feelings of confusion about the sense of excitement he was feeling. He views this as “something that altered my soul and affected how I connected with and perceived men throughout my life.” He states that he’s “not sure if this even was the root of [his] physical attraction to men, but it contributed to feelings and habits that haunted [him] for years afterwards.” He states that he finds solace in the realization that his “SSA does not define [him] as a person or a son of God.”

Tonya's story. Tonya tells her story of her son Andy coming out to her as gay. She explains that, even from the time he was an infant, she felt strong impressions that he was gay, but she ignored these impressions. She describes her experience as being clumsy and insensitive responding to her son's disclosure, but that her love for her son never wavered. She discusses how she spent countless hours fasting, praying, and attending temple services to try and gain insight to why this was happening to her and her family, fueled by a pride-based grief of not being able to produce the perfect Mormon family, and eventually settling into an ability to live with a spiritual ambiguity about her son's sexuality.

Beliefs

Turning now to the second cluster of articles published under the title of *Beliefs*, these articles are centered around messages outlining Mormon doctrine regarding same-sex attraction, marriage, and sexual appetites. They reiterate basic Mormon beliefs regarding the position of home and family and the centrality of marriage to “The Plan of Salvation”—a core Mormon doctrine that outlines the journey of the soul into and out of mortality. These also establish the point and purpose of the *Mormon and Gay* website.

Church teachings. This article is largely focused around the Mormon Church’s belief that God’s love is paramount and transcends all facets of identity—race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomics, *etc.* It also focuses on the atonement of Jesus Christ as the pinnacle testimony of this transcendent love, and the central role of “keeping the commandments” as the means of maintaining worthiness of Christ’s atonement. That is, God’s love is limitless; however, Christ’s atonement is limited based on the faithfulness of those who follow the doctrines of the church. In fact, very little of this article actually says anything about same-sex attraction, homosexuality, or gender. Rather, the article is focused on the fundamental centrality of God’s law and example—a perfect example and perfect law—with love being an innate characteristic of God.

Love one another: A discussion on same-sex attraction. This article states the purpose of the *Mormon and Gay* website as well as provides the Church’s stance on their evolving approach to LGBT issues. It also addresses the way issues of same-sex attraction affect families within the Church and suggests that Mormons are at the forefront of “expressing love, compassion, and outreach.” Overall, this article sets up a model for Church members to “deal with” same-sex attraction when it presents itself in their lives.

God’s plan. This article articulates the Mormon Church’s understanding of the purpose of mortality—to gain a body and be tested (*i.e.*, to experience temptation and resist it). By making choices that are in line with “God’s Plan,” people can achieve exaltation. These choices include a multitude of decisions, including heterosexual marriage. While published on the *Mormon and Gay* website, this article makes no direct mention of homosexuality or same-sex attraction. Rather, it addresses sin in vague, overarching ways.

Christ can change our hearts. This article is a recount of the Mormon Church’s doctrine on the role of the Atonement of Jesus Christ as central to the process of salvation. It describes the human race as “fallen” and subject to opposition and temptation, and that when people give into temptation, they alienate themselves from God. The article does not specifically call homosexuality a sin, but alludes to it, as the majority of the article is spent recounting the story of a young man struggling with same-sex attraction. It tells this narrative as a success story of this individual being able to change his heart and sexual orientation through the love and support of his family, friends, and church leaders, and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Who am I? This article is a conversation about identity labels. It states that how people define themselves changes over time, and that the only truly stable identity is as a “beloved child of God.” All other identities are merely stages and not inherent characteristics of a person. The article instructs the reader to exercise caution in what labels they choose, because labels can affect the way other people treat them and may impede their ability to progress eternally. It states that labels and identities are not thrust upon people, but rather, the only “defining fact” is that “we are children of Heavenly Parents.” It closes by reiterating that it is not against church policy to choose an identity label, but that doing so may have “undesired consequences.”

Understandings

Finishing with the last cluster of articles published under the title of *Understandings*, this collection provides a series of articles including topics such as Frequently Asked Questions, Seeking Professional Help, Depression and Suicide, Self-Mastery and Sexual Expression, About Sexual Orientation, and Ten Tips for Parents.

Frequently asked questions. In this article, the church poses seven questions regarding their policies on same-sex attraction. These questions cover such territory as why they use the term “Same-Sex Attraction” instead of “Gay,” why the website doesn’t discuss gender dysphoria and transgender issues, whether or not feelings of same-sex attraction will go away through faithfulness, and whether or not the church will ever change its policy regarding same-sex marriage. Overall, the article rearticulates many of the positions stated in different articles on the website—that they will never change their stance on same-sex marriage, that many people do experience a reduction in feelings of same-sex attraction when they remain faithful to the church, and that labels are insignificant in relationship to the eternal identity as a child of God.

Seeking professional help. This article articulates the Mormon Church’s policy regarding the use of therapy in treating same-sex attraction. It states that “the Church recommends approaches that respect client self-determination,” and that therapists (in or outside of the church) should respect client’s wishes regarding changing feelings of same-sex attraction. It states that counseling and therapy can be useful tools for some people, but they are not needed by all who experience same-sex attraction. The church does not take a stance on whether or not members experiencing same-sex attraction should seek professional help.

Self-mastery and sexual expression. This article is centered around the role of the body in sexual expression and the role of marriage as the defining characteristic, which differentiates moral and immoral sexual encounters. It references the body as the means of experiencing the physical word, and that with that comes sexual passions, which need to be “bridled.” Following, the article states the Mormon Church’s policy on abstinence of sexual expression “outside of lawful marriage.” It states that sexual expression is an important

aspect of bonding between spouses, but that outside of marriage it is sinful, degrading, and perverse. It further states that many individuals choose to bridle these passions and live a chaste life.

Depression and suicide. This article is a brief overview of suicide prevention resources. It acknowledges that people experiencing same-sex attraction are at higher risk for depression and suicide, and offers the article as a declaration of love to all people struggling with suicidal ideation. It states that those living with same-sex attraction often experience great pain and sorrow, particularly if they have additional guilt for having acted in sinful ways. The article ends by encouraging members to trust in God and utilize the gospel as a source of healing.

Ten tips for parents. As is indicative by the title, this article is aimed at giving advice to parents who have children experiencing same-sex attraction. These tips include: You will never regret saying “I love you.” You have been entrusted with the care of a precious soul; did you overreact, get angry, or say things you regret? Don’t be discouraged; if you learn about your child’s same-sex attraction secondhand, don’t take it personally. It’s natural to grieve; don’t blame yourself for your child’s same-sex attraction. As a parent, the least productive prayer is “why?” The most helpful question you can ask is “how?” Surround yourself with people who build you up; and Peace and perspective go hand in hand.

Conclusion

The evolving stance on homosexuality and LGBTQ rights in the US is important to understanding the larger implications of this research: religious discourses shaping public policies that discriminate against and marginalize queer lives in the US. From criminalization to the legal entitlement to participate in the state-sanctioned institution of marriage,

perspectives on homosexuality have shifted in the US, particularly during the last ten years. With these changes, political pushback from the Christian Right seeks to take back its control over policing and punishing queer identities, behaviors, and performances. The history of the Mormon Church provides the important facts that demonstrate that this discourse has deep roots in homophobia (as well as racist and sexist ideologies) and demonstrates the ways the Mormon Church has historically responded to conflicts of interest between church doctrine and federal law. The evolution of the *Mormons and Gays* website into the *Mormon and Gay* website brings attention to the importance of the shift in the discourse itself—not in church policy, but the way the Mormon Church is talking about its policies and doctrines. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of relevant and current research regarding the theories and frameworks that inform this research.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study draws on theories, concepts, and assumptions surrounding issues of gender and sexuality including queer theory, intersectionality, and religious treatments. I review relevant and current research pertaining to feminist studies, queer theory, religious studies and their applications both in and out of the communication discipline. This chapter provides justification for this research and situates it within current conversations about queerness, intersectional identities, and critical approaches to religious analyses. First, I situate my research within applications of queer theory, defining “queer” as it applies to this study, and point out gaps in the treatment of queer theory and intersectionality and how this study contributes to decreasing those gaps. Second, to substantiate this treatment of queer theory and intersectionality, as well as identify the gap in the treatment of critical examination of religious discourses, I provide a theoretical review including: 1) literature outlining intersectionality in both feminist and queer applications, 2) literature outlining early queer theory, critiques of queer theory and the contribution of queer of color critique, and 3) literature on religious discourses and the ways in which a critical rhetorical approach can expand this treatment.

Applications of Queer Theory

This study utilizes core concepts from queer theory and seeks to complicate and push current queer theory applications, particularly queer theory’s utilization of intersectionality. In line with Rand’s (2014) call to revisit early definitions of queer, this research aligns itself

most closely to Halperin's (1995) definition of queer as "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence" (p. 61-62). Thus, within the context of this study, I use the word queer/queerness/queering to refer to identities, places/spaces, as well as actions increasing visibility of that which is at odds with dominant ideologies. Because the subject matter of this study is largely about sexuality, I confine the definition of queer/queerness/queering in applications of sexuality and gender—while still noting that queer has the potential for much broader applications. That is, this research acknowledges that within the communications discipline, most scholars narrowly apply queer theory to issues of gender and sexuality. While this research does deal with issues of gender and sexuality, I align with Halperin's approach to the definition of queer insofar as it is a broad definition (*i.e.*, queer does not have to be limited only to gender and sexuality), but for the purposes of this study, I focus on queer as it pertains to gender and sexuality.

Furthermore, in this research, I utilize queer not only as a theory but also a method. That is, I utilize "queer" as a verb—the action of examining that which is at odds with the normal (*i.e.*, dominant ideologies). In this particular study, I focus on queering heteronormative spaces, specifically an institutionalized religion whose religious doctrine substantiates and reinforces heteronormative ideals through anti-gay and homophobic rhetoric. Thus, I align with Halperin's (1995) approach to the definition of queer insofar as this research seeks to disrupt the dominant discourse of heteronormativity as it applies to LGBTQ legislation in the US.

However, aligning with this definition is not without problems. One problem facing queer theorists today is the constant paradox of the inability to define queerness. At its core,

queer studies resist stabilization; yet, it also acknowledges the necessity to utilize queerness as a facet of social change. Sullivan (2003) speaks to this problem acknowledging the limiting effects that occurred when “‘queer’ was incorporated into the realm of academia and was joined to the more ‘respectable’ word ‘theory’” (Kulick, 2005):

While Queer Theory may now be recognized by many as an academic discipline, it nevertheless continues to struggle against the straightjacketing effects of institutionalization, to resist closure and remain in the process of ambiguous (un)becoming. Queer Theory does not want to ‘straighten up and fly right’ to have the kinks ironed out of it: it is a discipline that refuses to be disciplined, a discipline with a difference, with a twist if you like. (Sullivan, 2003, p. x)

This statement highlights the tensions between “queer” as subject, and as Sullivan (2003) suggests, “it may be more productive to think of queer as a verb (a set of actions), rather than as a noun (and identity, or even nameable positionality formed in and through the practice of particular actions” (p. 50). Indeed, there is a growing tension between queer politics and activism and the academy, insofar as the academy’s theorizing of queer theory has arguably transformed “queer” into “an elitist enterprise led by a bunch of privileged academics, who having gained rights thanks to identity politics, can now comfortably turn their backs on it and downplay or even deny the importance of sexual identities for people in ‘real’ life” (Milani, 2013, p. 9). Milani goes on to suggest that:

The point that queer theorists want to make is that politics based on sexual identities can, in the best of cases, lead only to a temporary re-calibration of power inequalities, but will ultimately leave the homo/heterosexual binary intact and unchallenged (Yep 2003: 47). In order to achieve the radical project of deep social transformation of the status quo, queer approaches promote a questioning of the seemingly “normal” and widely accepted nature of the homo/heterosexual divide itself, therefore destabilizing the very truth of that normality. (p. 9)

This research grapples with this very problem: to what extent does queer theory

inform what is happening in the discourse under examination and to what extent does it “limit” and “downplay” the lived experience of LGBTQ-identified individuals negotiating everyday politics? To what extent will this research contribute to theoretical applications of queer theory and to what extent can it be utilized to mobilize social change? For example, same-sex marriage simultaneously reifies the institutionalization of sexual identities, yet exclusion from this institution positions same-sex couples in ways that limit their navigation of everyday lived experiences (*e.g.*, visiting a sick partner in the hospital, parental rights, and rights to citizenship). This research seeks to accomplish both: 1) to contribute to the conversation regarding the need to complicate, problematize, and challenge taken-for-granted norms surrounding heteronormativity, and 2) to challenge and resist the discourses that seek to position LGBTQ-identified individuals in ways that would legalize institutionalized discrimination for those claiming rights to religious freedoms.

This research is further complicated by the critiques of queer theory as an “exclusionary political movement characterized by a racialized (=white), gendered (=male), and social class (=middle-class) bias which ultimately police[s] and exclude[s] other forms of non-heterosexual identifications” (Milani, 2013, p. 6). Intersectionality has been a useful tool in embracing this concern, emerging from women of color feminist studies to challenge the exclusion of those facing multiple sites of oppression. Additionally, it addresses some of the issues surrounding the inability to define ‘queerness’ insofar as it allows for a fluidity of identity that can be conceptualized as both stable and changing. Yet, intersectionality is limited in its ability to disrupt complex sites of oppression insofar as it restricts identity markers into categories (*i.e.*, it is constrained by the very labels it seeks to disrupt). Warner (2004) identifies the skepticism surrounding identity categories as “these identity categories

are all too real,” but “warns against a too optimistic reliance on sexual identities as the catalyst for social change” (Milani, 2013, p. 7).

For example, intersectionality has predominantly been used to signify “difference,” and most specifically “women of color” (Puar, 2011). This category has now become, Puar (2011) argues, “simultaneously emptied of specific meaning on the one hand and overdetermined in its deployment on the other” (n.p.). In this way, “intersectionality always produces an Other” (Puar, 2011, n.p.), arguably because of the overemphasis on the body as the site of oppression. By contrast, Massumi (2002) talks about “event-potential” drawing focus away from the “crime taking place” or focusing on who is at fault, but rather asks the question “what are the affective conditions necessary for the event-space to unfold?” (Puar, 2011, n.p.).

This research seeks to expand upon this idea by complicating the hierarchy of positioning of identities (*i.e.*, to draw attention away from the individual actors and focus on the external factors that push and pull upon bodies to be positioned in specific ways). For example, the passing of same-sex marriage in the US is an external force prompting discourse and as an intersectional event not unlike the conceptualization of the rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968). That is, the matter of exigence stands to expand intersectionality’s treatment of how people are positioned in oppressive ways. Crenshaw’s use of the traffic metaphor focuses on the actors and events (*i.e.*, the cars involved and the accident itself). What it does not account for is how or why the cars are driving through the intersection in the first place. The driving exigence, “a form of social knowledge—a mutual construction of objects, events, interest, and purposes—an objectified social need” (Bitzer, 1968) is created before the impact. It is what bring bodies together and creates the “event-space” for bodies to

collide, crash, and reconstruct. This project utilizes notions of intersectionality to focus on the how and why components of the emerging discourse.

Intersectionality

Because this project utilizes notions of intersectionality, and particularly because the analysis of this research deals heavily with identities and how those identities are being positioned to obfuscate homophobia and reinforce heteronormativity, I offer the following review of intersectionality regarding both feminist and queer applications of intersectionality to substantiate its appropriateness for this research.

Feminist Approaches to Intersectionality

The theoretical framework of intersectionality emerged in the 1980s at the bridge between second and third wave feminism. Intersectionality was a theoretical framework, which challenged feminism's exclusion of women of color and disrupted the idea that women were a homogenous group and thus shared similar life experiences. Feminist scholarship began to examine the ways in which systematic injustices occur along lines of multi-dimensional identities (*i.e.*, when people belong to multiple discriminated groups). In this section, I will 1) review the historical roots of intersectionality, and 2) describe the major ideological tenets of the construct.

Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1989) is credited with coining the term intersectionality to examine the ways in which multiple sites of discrimination hold a material reality for women—beyond the singular category of “women.” Being a lawyer, the idea first emerged as Crenshaw observed the ways in which antidiscrimination laws treated issues of gender and race separately. However, treating these facets of identity as separate

from one another made it impossible to recognize the ways in which women of color experienced overlapping forms of injustice that were not currently represented in feminist discourses.

However, prior to Crenshaw's work in 1989, Morgana & Anzaldúa (1981) published the first edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, an anthology of prominent feminists of color calling for race-related subjectivities to be addressed, and it is credited as laying the foundation for third wave feminism. Barbara Smith, one of the contributors to the anthology, suggests that the anthology provided a way for these women to "find each other," giving the anthology a unique momentum in the development of the conceptualization of intersectionality.

Additionally, other feminist scholars, including Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Judith Butler advanced arguments that pointed to conceptualizations of intersectionality, suggesting that intersectional systems are necessary, because without them, experiences of class, gender, sexuality, *etc.*, cannot be fully understood without considering the influence of racialization. From these roots, the major ideological tenets of intersectionality emerged in both epistemological assumptions and areas of praxis. The theoretical underpinnings of intersectionality is both an epistemological demonstration of how overlapping social identities relate to systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination as a way to examine how various social identities interact with one another, and as a praxis of resisting oppression.

Beginning with the epistemological facets of intersectionality, social identities are viewed as multiple, and are best understood together, rather than separately. This lends itself to a functionalization of intersectionality as method. That is, intersectionality has become a

framework of collective assumptions about identity that can be used to critique dominant discourses and highlight the ways in which dominant ideologies are reproduced, and non-dominant ideologies are suppressed—particularly when multiple sites of oppression are present.

Collins (1990) describes intersectionality as a “matrix of domination,” drawing attention to the differences between lived experiences of women rather than their similarities (as was the case for much of first and second wave feminism). Drawing attention away from the conceptualization of social resistance through unity and solidarity, Collins demonstrates the ways in which separate lived experiences represent deeper roots of oppression and highlights a wide array of discriminatory practices fueled by dominant ideologies. Yet, intersectionality has grown to represent more than just the overlap of race and gender, snowballing to include issues of sexuality and class and continuing to move towards examining other facets of multiple identities and sites of oppression and privilege.

Queer Applications of Intersectionality

Of particular interest to my research, queer theorists began using intersectionality as a framework to complicate and destabilize first generation queer theory, which is discussed in greater detail in my overview of queer of color critiques. From the feminist perspective, I highlight the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) as she worked along the lines of both feminism and queer studies. Anzaldúa extrapolates the ways in which queer identities have been overlooked as a site of oppression and the ways in which individuals are excluded from one facet of their identity in favor of another. She states: “not me abandoned my people, but they me,” (p. 3) in *Borderlands* discussing how membership to multiple social identities can be in conflict with one another, demonstrating how oppression and discrimination can be

reproduced by members of our own intersectional identities. This includes internalized racism, sexism, and homophobia, where members of a particular social group take on (or internalize) the discriminatory ideologies and reproduce them within their own communities or within themselves.

From a self-reflexive standpoint, I have experienced tension between my own facets of identity being in conflict between the religious doxa I was raised to view the world through and my identification as lesbian and queer. That is, (be)longing—a term used by Carillo Rowe (2008) regarding group memberships—to a social identity as lesbian and queer forcibly removed me from eligibility of one of my other core identities as a member of the Mormon Church. Karma Chavez (2004) describes this experience as being “caught between Christianity and insanity” (p. 255). In this way, the queering of intersectionality functions epistemologically to highlight not just multiple facets of identity, but also to identify the multiple dominant ideologies that marginalize, exclude, and prevent individuals from claiming facets of their identity (*i.e.*, demonstrating how some identities function as mutually exclusive of one another). These ideological underpinnings are the foundation upon which another facet of intersectionality emerges, praxis.

From a praxis standpoint, and of particular interest to this study, intersectionality is used to advance some of the politically motivated functions of queer theory in mobilizing, destabilizing, problematizing, and resisting oppression of queer bodies (also discussed further below.) I mention praxis here because Munoz (1999) examines the conceptualization of identification, (counter)identification, and disidentification as sites of resistance to dominant discriminatory ideologies. Disidentification works dialectically to transcend both identification (*i.e.*, assimilation) and (counter)identification (*i.e.*, disavowal) of dominant

ideologies. Disidentification functions to work within the dominant ideological system (incorporating facets of intersectionality) as a site of resistance and catalyst for social change. At its core, queer theory seeks to disrupt heteronormativity, and intersectionality functions as not simply an epistemological framework but also as a mobilizing facet of resistance movements.

Specific to this research, I argue that (dia)lectical structures reinforce binary treatments of gender and sexuality as a means of justification for discriminatory behavior. That is, by representing LGBTQ-identities as static and at odds with specific heteronormative religious identities, the discourse under examination works to create a rhetorically coherent narrative that one can be both “Mormon” and “Gay,” while simultaneously reinforcing heteronormative ideologies by reducing identity to labels one chooses. On the *Mormon and Gay* website, the Mormon Church describes this process of labeling:

How you define yourself may change throughout your life, but first and most important, you are a beloved child of God. He is the Father of your spirit.

We should exercise care in how we label ourselves. Labels should be used thoughtfully and with the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Labels can affect how we think about ourselves and how others treat us and may expand or limit our ability to follow God’s plan for our happiness. Labels may impact our goals, sense of identity, and the people we call friends. If labels get in the way of our eternal progress, we can choose to change them.

If one experiences same-sex attraction, he or she can choose whether to use a sexual identity label. Identifying oneself as gay or lesbian is not against Church policy or doctrine; however, it may have undesired consequences in the way one is treated. No true follower of Christ is justified in withholding love because you decide to identify in this way.

One day, at the end of this short mortal journey, we will return to the presence of our Heavenly Parents. One day, all other labels will be swallowed up in our eternal identity as children of God.

As these passages demonstrate, inherent to the Mormon Church's discourse on LGBT identities is a reduction of intersectional identities as limited and ultimately inconsequential to "eternal identities," which subsume all other identities. In this way, examination of (lie)alectical structures within the discourse being produced by the Mormon Church surrounding LGBT identities, draws attention to the limitations of intersectionality as a construct—insofar as the discourse positions identities as hierarchically driven (a universal identity under which all other identities are subservient and inconsequential). That is, intersectionality as a construct does not account for a hierarchy of identities, and thus, the discourse under examination demonstrates the ways in which intersectionality can be used to reinforce dominant ideologies by implementing this sense of identity hierarchy. To contextualize this treatment of intersectionality, I review literature pertaining to the development of queer theory and the presence of intersectionality within queer theory applications utilized by communication scholars.

Queer Theory

Queer theory emerged in the early 1990s building upon feminist theories that constituted gender as a function of the essential self. Exploring the complexities of the social construction of sexual acts and identities, early queer theory emphasized the role of individual identities to disrupt previous communication scholarship essentializing gender and sexuality along a binary (*i.e.*, Gay/Straight, Men/Women). Rather, it established a perspective of gender and sexuality as defined by the individual, resisting labels, and normalizing these identities as multiple, fluid, unstable, and capable of change, and epistemologically socially constructed (Butler, 1990). In this way, the individual is empowered to establish his/her own identity—along lines that may or may not align with

dominant discourses surrounding issues of sexual identities. Rand (2014) taps into the more visceral components of the emergence of queer theory drawing attention to the “edgy and slightly scandalous” nature of this new area of study that arguably persists in the work of queer theorists today.

Early Queer Theory

Early queer theory emerged as a post-structuralist concept aimed at deconstructing gender identities and stripping away the labels being used to essentialize gender identities. At the level of the individual, it was possible to fluidly move between gay, straight, bi-sexual, and other sexualized identifiers, without requirement of establishing a stable and singular categorical position of self. For example, Halperin’s (1993) approach to queer theory established a perspective of queer based on its juxtaposition to the normative. In this way, queer is not simply one thing, nor is it required to remain stable; rather, its only defining characteristic is that it is not normative.

With this, one of the most fundamental principles defining queer theory is the point and purpose of avoiding stability. That is, many people find it difficult to define what queer theory is, and most queer theorists would respond to this by saying: exactly! In contrast to many theoretical constructs, what differentiated queer theory at its very origin was the ways in which it resisted conformity to normalized constructs of division and use of labels and categories to differentiate itself from other disciplines. In discussing the debut and proliferation of queer theory, Rand (2014) draws attention to the fact that it is not so much that the term queer resists being defined, but rather, its brilliance lies in the fact that it never denotes one particular thing.

Critiques of Early Queer Theory

Later, conversations surrounding queer issues turned toward a critique of the primary tenets of queer theory—particularly its lacking in intersectional understandings of identity, drawing attention to queer of color critiques, as well as transnational and other intersectional components of identity. For all its expansions on altering discourses about gender and sexual identities, critiques of early queer theory scholarship pointed to 1) problematic treatment of labels and identity as they relate to political resistance, and 2) inadequate treatments of intersectionality (*i.e.*, race, gender, class, *etc.*) from which queer of color critiques emerged. While early queer scholars did address issues of race, gender, and class, its narrow focus on the individual did not account for the ways in which labels can be a site of promoting collective resistance, communal relational ties, *etc.* Additionally, intersectionality emerged in the 1980s within feminist disciplines exploring the ways in which feminist scholarship was exclusionary of the voices of women of color—highlighting the fact that gender alone was not representative of all women’s experiences as a collective group. In a similar fashion, intersectionality as a construct began to appear in queer theory scholarship to complicate and problematize issues of race, class, and patriarchy, to further destabilizing heteronormativity.

Furthermore, the conceptualization of self shifted—pulling away from the conceptualization of individual as self, but rather identity (as related to self) is always already situated as part of the larger political and social constructs that inform and influence our actions and interactions. Cohen (1997) addresses this through the lens of queer politics suggesting that sexual expression always contains within itself the possibility of change, from moment to moment, even down to the exchanges between sex partners and sexual acts. This topic has also been taken up by both queer and feminist scholars alike. Carillo Rowe (2008) argues this through a metaphorical construct of power lines, suggesting that the

meaning of “self” is never individual, but is “forged across a shifting set of relations that we move in and out of, often without reflection” (p. 3). She suggests that power moves between these places, affecting where we place our bodies and who we build our affective ties with (in terms of sexual acts, and also in terms of whose lives matter to us). She discusses this concept as a politics of relation, highlighting the interconnectedness of all individuals by way of the lines of power between them.

Within this framework, one of the largest critiques of first generation queer theory came in the form of acknowledging the necessity of labels as a means of communal resistance. Cohen (1997) asserts that class and material privilege are affixed to queer politics in ways that threaten the very safety and survival of those claiming sexually resistant identities, and thus, labels provide a sense of safety when the material consequences of marginalization threaten the very well-being of those embodying queer identities. In similar fashion, Ferguson (2005) promoted a queer of color analysis within the confines of capitalism, suggesting that capitalism acts as a reinforcer of heteropatriarchal universal norms and examined the ways in which gender and sexual norms become racialized within these capitalistic contexts. For example, in their reading of Fly Young Red’s performance of gay rapping, Eguchi & Roberts (2015) suggest that “the aesthetic form of ‘black male thug’ specifically works as a survival tactic within and against white capitalistic heteropatriarchal distributions of power” (p. 145).

It is at this juncture that Muñoz’s (1999) conceptualization of disidentification comes into play. Muñoz articulates a *third mode* of engaging with dominant ideologies, one that neither adopts the enculturation of the dominant ideology nor strictly opposes it. Rather, Muñoz presents disidentification as a strategy of resistance that does not attempt to break free

of an inescapable sphere, but rather, seeks to bring about enduring structural change while simultaneously valuing “the importance of local and everyday struggles of resistance” (p. 27). That is, disidentification acts as a critique of early queer scholarship insofar as it disrupts the essentialization of gender and sexuality, and provides a way to conceptualize resistance (not as a binary of identification vs. (counter)identification), but as a way to destabilize dominant ideologies (often heteronormativity) from *within*. Eguchi & Asante (2016) read Muñoz’s disidentifications specifically to be “a process of highlighting *material* realities produced by the hegemonic ideology that work for and/or against minoritarian subjects” (p. 175). As will be demonstrated in the discussion chapter, this research seeks to identify, highlight, and resist the material realities of oppression that emerge from the conflict between LGBTQ rights in the US and anti-gay doctrines of the Christian Right to dominate public policy.

Additionally, discussions surrounding trans* bodies began to resist the “all inclusive” model of early queer theory, highlighting the under and misrepresentation of trans* persons. Johnson (2013) calls for intercultural scholars to address the lives of transgender persons as a means of interrupting and intervening in violence against trans* people. Yep (2013) makes a similar argument regarding transgender studies calling for a focus on “the body as a complex site of meaning and knowledge” (p. 118). Focusing on the body, he seeks to build upon Chavez’s (2003) concept of embodied translation to “engage the various theoretical and political impulses within queer and transgender studies” (p. 118).

Queer of Color Critique

While certainly under the umbrella of criticisms of first wave queer theory, queer of color critiques drew particular attention to issues of intersectionality and the material

structures that oppress queer bodies of color. I focus particularly on queer of color critique to examine some of the ways intersectionality has been used within queer theory as a means of complicating current uses of intersectionality. Below I outline some of the main scholarship that has emerged under the scope of queer of color critique to clarify its major tenets and highlight its contributions to queer theory.

E. Patrick Johnson introduces the notion of “Quare” meaning “odd or slightly off kilter; from the African American vernacular for queer; sometimes homophobic in usage, but always denotes excess incapable of being contained within conventional categories of being,” and beyond (p. 125). Eguchi & Roberts (2015) read Johnson to mean that the goal of quare studies is to “offer a theoretical lens to carefully interrogate complex intersections of racialized, gendered, and class knowledge(s) embedded in the material realities of LGBT people of color” (p. 145). Yep’s (2013) drive for an Intercultural approach to Queer Studies also focuses on ways to understand “other bodies,” utilizing a “Queering/Quaring/Kauering” notion of queer(ness). Eguchi, Calafell, & Files-Thomas (2014) complicate these ideas further in their analysis of *Noah’s Arc: Jumping the Broom* by examining the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, and class, arguing that the characters’ performance of black gay male fantasy is reflective of mainstream US cultural ideals.

Alexander (2003) brings this conversation back to the university, discussing pedagogical implication of “the black gay body” in the classroom. He draws attention to the still always already existing homophobia present in the classroom, stating that: “Of course a gay teacher would be teaching a course in queer theory!” He furthers his argument to include treating classrooms as a liminal space with “contesting cultural performances,” and contends that black gay teachers are positioned in such a way that they must negotiate their identity

between “the traditions of the academy” and “the social and cultural structures” impacting their lives (p. 254). Suganuma (2012) explores Japan’s queer culture. His conversation looks at Westernized perspectives on sexuality suggesting that Japanese women and men who engaged intimate relationships with Western men were often criticized and/or stigmatized as unpatriotic drawing attention to positioning of bodies of color in the media. Furthermore, Fung (2005) engages conversations about bodily energy and sexual functioning as it pertains to racial identities, focusing specifically on sexual characteristics (size of penis, vagina, testis, ovaries) that denote biologic control of behavior. This conversation can also be situated within the larger dialogue surrounding hypersexuality of race—a topic that is not directly related to my project and therefore is not examined further in this section. Overall, the queer of color critiques can be summarized to demonstrate the ways in which bodies of color are positioned within intersecting queer identities.

Religious Treatments

Research on religion within the field of communication studies has largely focused on the rhetorical analysis of religious discourses. However, little research has been done from a critical standpoint assessing the relationship of power and domination tied to religious discourse. This section will review 1) the current scholarship that has been done on religious discourses, 2) discuss the gap in critical treatment of religious discourse, and 3) overview the literature pertaining specifically to a conceptualization of Christianity as a site of privilege in the US to substantiate the necessity for this research.

Critical Critiques of Religious Discourse

In the mid to late 2000s, a small body of critically-oriented research emerged examining the religious climate in the US post 9-11, particularly as tensions between

Christian and Muslim identities became more prominent in media coverage, politicizing religion and creating more visibility of religion as core facets of identity. Sentiments of “the War on Christianity” became more visible in discourses as the conceptualization of “Religious Freedoms” became complicated by the extension of religious freedoms to non-Christians (huffingtonpost.com). Asthana (2008) asserts that the tension between secularism and religion needs to be addressed and claims that the political and religious conflicts are often represented as secularism against religion and are “incompatible value systems” (p. 305). Additionally, Keaten & Soukup (2009) situate the “religious other” and offer a model of “pluralistic interfaith dialogue,” calling out scholars for not valuing “devout faith (*i.e.*, faith in a “capital T Truth)” and suggests that, as communication scholars, “we should not act as subjects examining others under our proverbial microscopes via our ‘objective’ research methodologies” (p. 184). In essence, Keaten & Soukup (2009) were responding to the criticism of academia to be intolerant of religious beliefs as “valid,” which partially explains our discipline’s lack of attention to religious identities, particularly within discussions of intersectionality. However, Keaten & Soukup’s (2009) work does not account for international research and development done within the discipline on religious topics.

Beyond this “blip on the radar,” religion has gone largely unexamined by critical scholars utilizing intersectional frameworks, despite the fact that it is often listed in the categories of identity memberships when discussing intersectionality. Chavez (2004) argues that any study of religion and morality is inextricably tied up with intersectional facets such as race, gender, and sexuality—particularly focusing on the ways in which religious organizations are still largely separated by race and exclusionary of deviant gender and sex practices within US contexts. Additionally, Collier (2014) has included in her research in

Nepal, Northern Ireland, and the US the role of Christian churches in addressing issues of poverty.

Prophetic Pragmatism

Within the critically-oriented research pertaining to religious discourses, Cornel West's conceptualization of "Prophetic Pragmatism" addresses the role of religion in his philosophy of liberation. Stone (2011) suggests that West's ultimate objective is "Black liberation, followed by the liberation of all the oppressed people of the world" (p. 92). West's focus of prophetic practices "preaching, powerful praying, dancing, and music" is demonstrative of Stone's critique of West's prophetic pragmatism that:

In slavery, blacks were in a state of domination, yet there was just enough freedom for slaves to create songs about emancipation and final retribution on the day of judgments...After emancipation, yet still limited in freedom due to Jim Crow, African-Americans developed even more practices of freedom that served as resistance to white supremacy" (p. 104).

Essentially, West's Prophetic Pragmatism elucidates the ways in which religious practices have historically worked as a site of resistance insofar as these practices are "an Afro-American philosophy that is essentially a specific expression of contemporary American philosophy which takes seriously the Afro-American experience" (West, 1982, p. 11). In this way, West treats prophetic practices (*i.e.*, one form of religious discourse) as a site of resistance against oppression and white supremacy. In quite the reverse, this research focuses on the treatment of religious discourses that work to reify dominant oppressive ideologies, specifically heteronormativity.

Christian Privilege

Of particular interest to my body of research, I argue that Christian denominations in the US function to marginalize, exclude, and exploit non-Christians—privileging Christianity

and/or those who claim a Christian identity. For the purposes of this research, I define Christianity as any religious organization that largely derives its doctrinal tenets from the New Testament, and/or the divinity of Christ. As such, I treat Mormonism as a Christian-based religion, although it is noteworthy that other Christian denominations do not consider Mormonism to be a Christian religion. I limit the focus of this discussion to the US because this research seeks to investigate the relationship between current legislative conversations in the US that engage the tension between conservative-Christian discourses and queer activism. I begin this conversation with a discussion of how Christianity reinforces and benefits from dominant cultural practices in the US

Blumenfeld, Joshi, & Fairchild (2008) argue that the concept of religious freedom was derived from the predominantly Puritan denominations fleeing from England in search of a place where they could practice their religious beliefs freely, and that “their agenda for religious freedom was limited to their own freedom, which they did not extend to other religious groups” (p. vii). Expanding on this supposition, I argue that while there were many different denominations of Christianity in the US at the inception of the constitution, the first amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom—still drawn upon today—was created under the umbrella of predominantly Christian practices, and thus, the legislation defining religious freedom was largely influenced by the tenets of Christian ideologies. This was reinforced by the 1924 anti-immigration law called the “National Origins Act” restricting immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe as a means of “protecting our values as a Western Christian civilization” (Blumenfeld, 2008, p. 11). In more recent arguments, Harvey (2008) suggests that anti-same-sex marriage stances are directly a violation of church and state insofar as the equivocation of “American” as “Christian” had dominated moral debates of not

only sexuality but also abortion, sex education in secondary schools, school prayer, and pornography.

Additionally, Blumenfeld, Joshi, and Fairchild (2008) argue that Christian privilege comprises a large array of benefits that are often invisible, unearned, and unacknowledged by Christians and is often maintained by their relative invisibility. This invisibility is fortified by the doctrine of separation of church and state. With this invisibility, Christian privilege is not analyzed, scrutinized, interrogated nor confronted. Morris's (2015) queer reading of John Murphy's rhetorical analysis of Barack Obama's "turn to the past" speech indirectly highlights this invisibility of Christianity. This correlation is seen through the connection between Americanism and Christianity in his examination of an article published in *The Advocate* in August 2012 headlining: IN OBAMA WE TRUST. Even within discourses surrounding resistance to the Christian Right, discourses persist in utilizing Christian-oriented phrases, associating "Obama" with "God," and I argue that this instance points to an association of God and Christianity to the very core of Christian infiltration into governmental practices. That is, many of the Christian-based practices and emblems that are woven into the conceptualization of America/American are becoming a site of resistance and arguably disidentification with these practices and emblems that normalize Christian ideologies and dictate political practices that advance Christianity as a site of privilege.

As pointed to in the introduction of this research, Crowley (2007) furthers this conversation in *Tolerance and the Christian Right*, arguing that since the 1970s when "previously disenfranchised groups sued for admittance to civic participation" Christian intellectuals have "redefined the liberal value of tolerance as a radical relativism that restrains Christians from passing moral judgments on beliefs and practices of which they

disapprove” (p. 102). Crowley’s argument engages Christian privilege in discussing how “Christian conservatives” aim to reinforce dominant ideologies, insofar as they “wish to impose a standard of moral behavior on *all of us* so that they can easily discern—and discipline—those who depart from it (p. 104). I include this discussion on Christian privilege to highlight Mormonism’s potential influence to advance legislation that would seek to reinforce laws that sustain their homophobic doctrines and to propose legislation that would reverse pro-LGBTQ legislation, essentially (un)queering spaces that have made movement toward equal rights in the US as it pertains to the LGBTQ community.

Conclusion

The essential nature of any good literature review is to situate the current proposed research within the context of a web of conversations that began long before this research was conceptualized and will continue on long after it has been written. Kenneth Burke (1969) speaks to the necessity and nature of situating one’s research analogously through a cocktail party metaphor:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him [sic]; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself [sic] against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (p. 83)

Within this analogy, this chapter functions to communicate my understanding of the conversations that precede my research. Queer theory and intersectionality are complex concepts that speak to each other from different disciplines, advancing perspectives,

critiquing those perspectives with a trajectory rooted in complicating, problematizing, and challenging not only the discourses it critiques, but also the theories themselves. Within this context, I situate my research as recent, relevant, and applicable to the work of queer theory and intersectionality that precedes this study. In so doing, I offer a definition of queer as both complex and specifically focused on gender and sexuality as it pertains to the chosen topic of this research in the process of defending the place and purpose of this research to contribute to continuing conversations about the interconnectedness of these theories. Additionally, I call for more critical research to be applied in analyzing dominant religious ideologies. Next, I outline two new theoretical frameworks: (lie)alectics and dequeerification and provide an explanation of how these theories work within the methodological assumptions of critical rhetoric and how I apply critical rhetoric through textual and thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 4

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this study, I propose two new theoretical frameworks: (Lie)alectics and discursive dequeerification. Regarding the first, this research is built upon a theoretical construct that emerged from the analysis of the Mormon Church's press conference on religious freedoms and nondiscrimination. From this research, the conceptualization of (lie)alectics emerged as a rhetorical construct that demonstrates the ways in which the discourse attempts to position PoF as the dialectical opposite of LGBT-identified individuals. To extrapolate the mechanics of (lie)alectics, this chapter will first provide an overview of traditional dialectics and provide a rationale for utilizing a Hegelian approach to dialectics. Second, this chapter will provide an overview of previous research utilizing (lie)alectics as a way to demonstrate how these structures work. Regarding the second theoretical framework, this chapter provides an overview of discursive deracialization as the existing framework upon which the concept of discursive dequeerification emerges and provides an explanation of discursive dequeerification as a queer counterpart to deracialization. Last, this chapter reviews the methodological assumptions of this research and provides a detailed account of the methods used to carry out this research.

Dialectics

The theory of (lie)alectics is predicated upon traditional dialectical frameworks commonly used in rhetorical analysis of texts. At its core, dialectics describes a philosophical method of argument-making that involves the acknowledgement of multiple contradictory

truths—predicated upon the philosophical assumption that everything has an opposite, and those opposites are both in unity and mutually exclusive. Plato’s notion of dialectics (commonly attributed as the birth place of dialectics) was a back-and-forth process of presenting arguments that would progressively produce a more complete truth (*i.e.*, similar to the post-positivist procedure—the more you cannot prove a claim is false, the truer it becomes, and therefore the more counter-arguments the thesis can withstand, the more likely it is to be True)¹⁴.

Within philosophical traditions of dialectics, dealing mainly with formal logic, Plato’s form of dialectics has been critiqued for its limitation in notions of premises/theses, upon which contradictions simply lead to nothingness or a collapse of premises/theses (*i.e.*, Plato’s form of dialectics failed to acknowledge the notion that every thesis has an antithesis). This is particularly true of Hegel’s critique of Plato. Hegel suggested that reason in-and-of-itself generated contradictions insofar as in order for something to be something, it must also not be something else (*i.e.*, a cow cannot also be a horse, *etc.*). And, that in order to have a quality of something(ness), there must be other objects/entities similar enough in nature that individual “somethings” (*e.g.*, apples) can be identified and separated out enough to be distinguished from other “somethings” (*e.g.*, oranges). This notion, in-and-of-itself, is the backbone of Hegel’s approach to dialectics insofar as apples cannot be oranges, and oranges cannot be apples, but, they can both be fruits (*i.e.*, a conceptualization of something(ness) that can logically subsume both entities and create new knowledge beyond each individualized concept/entity when the nature of both entities is investigated in context of each other).

¹⁴ Note that Plato subscribed to the notion of absolute Truths that could be understood but not re-created by humans.

Within the notions of formal logic, Hegelian perspectives on dialectics is particularly suited for this study, because it calls into question the logic (or perhaps more aptly illogical nature) of the claims being made. That is, by identifying the logical fallacies within arguments set up dialectically, identifying those fallacies reveals the underlying ideological beliefs/systems at work that aim to reinforce themselves. That is, (lie)alectics is an application of identifying systems of logic that attempt to force reality to be what it wants it to be instead of what it actually is. As such, this research utilizes a Hegelian approach to dialectics, specifically his advancement of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model. Hegel advanced this model to demonstrate the ways in which multiple incommensurate truths can create new meaning without cancelling out or replacing the earlier concepts—specifically because the new meaning relies on the previous concepts for its own definition. For example, from independence and dependence a new meaning of interdependence can arise, sublimating both concepts, yet dependent upon the presence of the individual truths of each concept to understand how interdependence functions concurrently. With this in mind, I now provide an overview of the initial research from which the notion of (lie)alectics emerges as the theoretical framework for this study.

The Nature of (Lie)alectics

Turning to the discourse examined in the theoretical development of (lie)alectics, the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference calls for legislation that protects both RFs and ND, representing these principles as dialectical opposites. For example, the discourse proclaims: Yes! The Church supports nondiscrimination against the LGBT community in “fair access to housing and employment” (Newsroom, 2015, n.p.). But...when these issues of ND force PoF to go “against his or her own

conscience...especially when others are readily available to perform that function” then RFs become dialectically incommensurate with nondiscrimination (Newsroom, 2015, n.p.). Yet, under a Hegelian treatment, the dialectical representations made in the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference are inconsistent with theoretical conceptualizations of dialectics as in being unified and mutually exclusive. In this way, the discourse under examination makes stylistic maneuvers that enables the Mormon Church to appear to be inclusive of multiple truths (both, and...), but when examined closely, pairs/com pares concepts that are not mutually exclusive, and thus becomes a discourse of exclusion (yes, but...). In this example, the dialectical opposite of religious freedoms would be religious oppression, not nondiscrimination. Likewise, the dialectical opposite of nondiscrimination would be discrimination, not religious freedoms. Consequently, positioning non-antithetical ideas as though they were antithetical effectively prevents synthesis from occurring.

Thus, the conceptualization of (lie)alectics is a theory outlining stylistic tendencies within a text to represent non-dialectical ideas/concepts as dialectical opposites. The point and purpose of (lie)alectics is to accomplish exclusion of specific ideologies by appearing inclusive of multiple truths. With this understanding, I provide three examples from my analysis of the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference to demonstrate how (lie)alectics function as a rhetorical strategy of exclusion.

Unpacking Disguised Discrimination within (Lie)alectics

In doing a close reading of the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference transcript, I identified the discourse’s stylistic tendency to use textual proximity of non-antithetical ideas to create (lie)alectical tensions between two commensurate ideas. That is, the text uses juxtaposition of non-competing ideas to generate contrast between two

non-antithetical ideas. Additionally, polarized language choices also indicate these tensions. Utilizing elements of thematic analysis, I identified three significant (lie)alectical tensions that (with no potential for synthesis) pit Religious Freedoms against LGBT rights in areas of advocacy, the freedom/rights themselves, and discrimination: 1) Advocates of Religious Freedoms are *treated* as the dialectical opposite of Advocates for LGBT rights (*Advocating (Lie)alectic*); 2) Religious Freedoms are *treated* as the dialectical opposite of Nondiscrimination (*Religious Freedom / Nondiscrimination (Lie)alectic*); and 3) Areas of Discrimination are *treated* as the dialectical opposite of Democratic Justice (*Discrimination (Lie)alectic*). Below, I outline each (lie)alectic and provide examples from the text to substantiate (lie)alectics as a theory.

The advocating (lie)alectic. The first (lie)alectical tension identified in the text placed *Advocates for Religious Freedoms* as dialectically opposite of *Advocates for LGBT Rights*. However, when examined closely, it becomes obvious that the dialectical opposite of *Advocates for Religious Freedoms* would be advocates for religious oppression, and the dialectical opposite of *Advocates for LGBT Rights* would be *Advocates for LGBT Oppression*. Table 1 demonstrates how these two concepts, when placed falsely in tension, create a relationship between the two concepts being compared. Table 1 reveals the underlying ideological assumptions being made by the Mormon Church regarding issues of supporting LGBT legislation.

Passages from the transcript provide direct evidence of the (lie)alectics as well as evidence of the structural use of proximity of non-antithetical ideas and use of polarized language.

- We want to share with you our concerns about the increasing *tensions* and

polarization between advocates of religious freedom on the one hand, and advocates of gay rights on the other.

- The *debate* we speak of today is about how to affirm rights for *some* without taking away from the rights of *others*.
- *On one side of the debate* we have advocates of LGBT rights...*Meanwhile those who seek the protection of religious conscience and expression and the free exercise of their religion* look with alarm at the steady erosion of treasured freedoms.
- It is one of today's great ironies that *some* people who have fought so hard for LGBT rights now try to deny the rights of *others* to disagree with their public policy proposals.

True Dialectics		
Dialectical Opposite	Synthesis	Dialectical Opposite
Advocates for LGBT rights	→	← Advocates for LGBT oppression
Advocates for Religious oppression	→	← Advocates for Religious Freedoms

Freedom v Oppression (Lie)alectic		
Advocates for LGBT rights		Advocates for LGBT oppression
↕		↕
Advocates for Religious Oppression	Synthesis	Advocates for Religious Freedoms
(Lie)alectic: This makes it appear as though those who support LGBT rights oppose religious freedoms	No synthesis is possible	Demonstrates the underlying dequeerified portion of the speech drawing attention away from the fact that those advocating for RFs are also advocating for LGBT oppression

Table 1. Freedom v Oppression (Lie)alectic

There are several inherent flaws in treating *Advocates for Religious Freedoms* as the dialectical opposite of *Advocates for LGBT rights*. These flaws include: 1) the assumption that *Advocates for Religious Freedoms* cannot simultaneously be *Advocates for LGBT rights*;

2) it situates religious beliefs as ontologically equal (yet empirically superior) to sexual identity and orientation; and 3) it lacks ontological consistency in the treatment of agency. Together, these flaws embody ideological assumptions that suggest that there is an inherent difference between PoF and LGBT individuals and positions the latter with inferiority.

By the very nature of dialectical tensions, treating *Advocates of LGBT rights* as the dialectical opposite of *Advocates of Religious Freedoms* suggests that a single individual cannot be an advocate for both. The logical flaw of this treatment, I should hope, is quite clear. There are many examples of PoF that advocate for LGBT rights, welcome LGBT individuals into their congregations, while simultaneously maintaining their religious freedoms.¹⁵ These examples demonstrate an issue of coherence in this (lie)alectic, which is further exemplified when looking at the way the text situates religious beliefs as superior to sexual identity and orientation.

Situating *Advocates of LGBT rights* as dialectically opposite of *Advocates of Religious Freedom*, particularly when the transcript is advocating for religious freedoms that would exempt PoF from sustaining LGBT rights, positions *Advocates of LGBT rights* as inferior to *Advocates of Religious Freedoms*. This treatment of LGBT individuals as inferior is evident in the examples provided in the text (which valorizes PoF), the sheer bulk of text dedicated to outlining religious freedoms, and the simple fact that the press conference is being delivered by self-proclaimed PoF.

The transcript offers several examples and narratives that valorize PoF and demonize

¹⁵ These include Episcopalians, First Congregational churches, Lutherans, some Pentecostal denominations (Affirming Pentecostal Church, Covenant Network, The Fellowship of Reconciling Pentecostal International), some Presbyterian denominations, the United Methodist Church, and most Unitarian denominations.

those supporting LGBT rights:

Several years ago, an Olympic gold-medal gymnast—a Latter-day Saint, as it happened—had been selected to lead the American delegation to the Olympic Games. He was pressured to resign as the symbolic head of the team because gay rights advocates protested that he had supported Proposition 8 in California. Ironically, he was denied the same freedom of conscience that commentators demanded for the gay athletes he would symbolically represent.

Recently in one of America's largest cities, government lawyers subpoenaed the sermons and notes of pastors who opposed parts of a new law on religious grounds. These pastors faced not only intimidation, but also criminal prosecution for insisting that a new gay rights ordinance should be put to a vote of the people.

In these two narratives, the *Advocates for Gay Rights* are demonized, while the PoF (the Latter-day Saint gymnast and pastor) in this story are situated as both hero and victim—valorizing them, and thus, communicating superiority. This superiority is communicated in other ways as well:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes that sexual relations other than between a man and a woman who are married are contrary to the laws of God. This commandment and doctrine comes from sacred scripture and we are not at liberty to change it... There's ample evidence in the life of Jesus Christ to demonstrate that He stood firm for living the laws of God, yet reached out to those who had been marginalized even though He was criticized for doing so.

In this passage, the church asserts a belief that homosexuality is contrary to God's law. Within Mormon doctrine, God is believed to be all-knowing and all-powerful. Thus, to suggest that homosexuality is in contrast to an all-supreme being is to communicate a sense of inferiority to those who accept and uphold the standards of the God depicted by Mormonism—a form of religious determinism. Last, the transcript proclaims: “We reject persecution and retaliation of any kind, including persecution based on race, ethnicity, religious belief, economic circumstance or differences in gender or sexual orientation” (Newsroom, 2015, n.p.). Here, the arrangement of the text communicates inferiority in

placing gender and sexual orientation as the last component to be contemplated when considering persecution and retaliation.

Another way in which this positioning is accomplished is through the treatment of agency in the text. Historically, an underlying assumption of the Mormon Church is that gender identity and sexual orientation are not inherent facets of identity, but rather, an issue of agency. By positioning PoF as the dialectical opposite of LGBT individuals, this would require LGBT individuals to have full control over their choices to participate in a homosexual lifestyle—the same way that PoF have full choice over participating in religious activities. However, this perspective is flawed. There is, in fact, a significant amount of credible research that supports the biological inherency of sexual orientation (for many individuals) including the American Psychological Association. Accepting this research as valid, for this dialectic to be coherent, certain beliefs would have to be biologically inherent to PoF for issues of agency to be consistent. There is no such data that would suggest that PoF lack the agency to choose to hold certain beliefs—that religious faith and conscience are inherently biological—the way that racial characteristics and sexual identity are biologically governed. Taken together, these flaws demonstrate an inconsistent and incoherent argument that *Advocates for Religious Freedoms* are the dialectical opposite of *Advocates for LGBT Rights*.

The religious freedoms / nondiscrimination (lie)alectic. This discourse treats RF as the dialectical opposite of ND. This treatment ensures, then, that RF must be defined as discriminatory in order to *be* the dialectical opposite of ND. The subject of this discourse is specifically the (lie)alectic tension that is created by suggesting that LGBT-identified individuals should be guaranteed some rights, but that RF (even though discriminatory)

should exist simultaneously to ensure that PoF are not required to uphold those rights. Table 2 demonstrates how the relationship between these two concepts is distorted through the (lie)alectical interchange.

True Dialectics			
Dialectical Opposite	Synthesis		Dialectical Opposite
Nondiscrimination	→	←	Discrimination
Religious Oppression	→	←	Religious Freedoms

Religious Freedoms v. Nondiscrimination (Lie)alectic			
Nondiscrimination			Discrimination
↕			↕
Religious Oppression			Religious Freedoms
(Lie)alectic: Claims that LGBT nondiscrimination oppresses Religious Freedoms			Demonstrates the dequeerified speech that would recognize that the proposed RFs are discriminatory in nature

Table 2. Religious Freedoms v Nondiscrimination (Lie)alectic

The language of the text uses the words “Rights” and “Freedoms” dialectically to justify unlimited religious freedoms verses protection of some rights in some areas:

- We call on local, state and the federal government to serve all of their people by passing legislation that protects vital religious freedoms for individuals, families, churches, and other faith groups while also protecting the rights of our LGBT citizens in such areas as housing, employment and public accommodations in hotels, restaurants and transportation.
- With understanding and goodwill, including some give and take, none of these rights guaranteed to people of faith will encroach on the rights of gay men and women who wish to live their lives according to their own rights and principles.

One way this discourse justifies this positioning of RF as the dialectical opposite of ND is the treatment of the words “Rights” and “Freedoms.” Rights are defined as “a moral or legal entitlement to have or obtain something or to act in certain ways” (OED). Freedoms are defined as “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint” (Oxford English Dictionary). By treating these two terms as dialectical opposites, the discourse suggests that some people should have Rights, “legal entitlement,” while others should have Freedoms, “power to act without restraint.” Thus, to place “LGBT Rights / ND” as the dialectical opposite of the RF of PoF ensures that LGBT individuals will be guaranteed “legal entitlement” to housing, employment, and public accommodations, but that PoF simultaneously have RF – which positions PoF as exempt from sustaining these rights because they are enabled to “act without restraint,” based on their “deeply held religious beliefs” (Newsroom, 2015).

Additionally, while the transcript positions “Rights” and “Freedoms” dialectically in some places, it also demands recognition that “individual people of faith must maintain their constitutional rights,” extending the privilege of both rights and freedoms to PoF. The transcript suggests that: “The eventual outcome of this debate will influence to a large extent whether millions of people with diverse backgrounds and different views and values will live together in relative harmony for the foreseeable future” (Newsroom, 2015, n.p.). Yet, while stating that “the Church has publically favored laws and ordinances that protect LGBT people from discrimination in housing and employment” the transcript later suggests that these nondiscrimination laws violate RF in areas of housing, employment, and education:

- What kinds of religious rights are we talking about? To begin with, we refer to the constitutionally guaranteed right of religious communities to function according to the dictates of their faith:

- They would embrace such matters as employment, honor code standards, and accreditation at church schools. That is because church-owned businesses or entities that are directly related to the purposes and functions of the church must have the same latitude in employment standards and practices as the church itself.
- They include the right to use church properties in accordance with their beliefs without second-guessing from government.
- Certainly, religious rights must include a family’s right to worship and conduct religious activities in the home as it sees fit, and for parents to teach their children according to their religious values – recognizing that when children are old enough they will choose their own path.

These passages communicate the (lie)alectical trajectory of this discourse. To suggest that two different groups of people (with incommensurate beliefs) can live in “relative harmony,” but to imply that this harmony can only be achieved by enacting legislation that would exempt PoF from having to sustain LGBT rights, is indicative of the exclusionary nature of (lie)alectical discourse. That is, the discourse supports legislation that enhances LGBT rights, but then advocates the exclusion of PoF from sustaining the very same rights the transcript purports to support—employment, housing, and public accommodation.

Having been raised in the Mormon faith myself, I am able to identify the implications of these statements because of my knowledge of Mormon-related vocabulary, such as “honor code standards.” These honor code standards are aimed at discrimination regarding housing. These honor code standards are directly related to housing policies at Mormon-owned universities including Brigham Young University (BYU), BYU-Idaho, and BYU-Hawaii. Students attending these schools are required to live in BYU approved housing, which require honor code standards. These honor code standards include adherence to BYU policies. The very mention of honor code standards suggests that these properties could exclude LGBT individuals from living in these properties because the Mormon Church

opposes same-sex relationships. These properties are contracted with BYU with the caveat that “students who attend [church accredited schools] are the only tenants who can live in BYU contracted housing...no one else qualifies to live in BYU contracted housing.” (BYU Campus Housing, n.p.).

By ascertaining “BYU contracted housing,” the Mormon Church is essentially providing themselves with a way to discriminate against LGBT individuals. Thus, sustaining a RF act would ensure the church’s right to discriminate against LGBT individuals (and others for that matter) if they are not in adherence with what the Mormon Church deems appropriate based on their “deeply held religious beliefs.”

Additionally, the transcript provides several examples of areas where PoF should not be required to perform certain procedures (*i.e.*, abortions and artificial inseminations), but specifically makes this contingent for lesbian couples—not the general population. Their reasoning for this is that “others are readily available” to perform these procedures, and thus, PoF should not be coerced to go against their “deeply held religious beliefs.”

- In addition to institutional protections, individual people of faith must maintain their constitutional rights. This would include living in accordance with their deeply held religious beliefs, including choosing their profession or employment and serving in public office without intimidation, coercion or retaliation from another group.
 - For example, a Latter-day Saint physician who objects to performing abortions or artificial insemination for a lesbian couple should not be forced against his or her conscience to do so, especially when others are readily available to perform that function.
 - Another example, a neighborhood Catholic pharmacist, who declines to carry the “morning after” pill when large pharmacy chains readily offer them, should likewise not be pressured into violating his or her conscience by bullying or boycotting.

These passages, again, demonstrate the (lie)alectical approach of the discourse, calling for caveats that would exempt all PoF from performing job specifications if they go

against their “deeply held religious beliefs.” That is, the Mormon Church argues that PoF ought to be allowed to perform artificial insemination procedures for heterosexual couples, but should not be required to perform them for LGBT-identified individuals. Thus, even though LGBT identified individuals can receive these procedures by equally qualified doctors, allowing some doctors to refuse these procedures based solely on the sexual identity or orientation of the patients is evidence of the exclusionary function of this (lie)alectic argument.

Discrimination (lie)alectic. In this (lie)alectic, the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference positions PoF as equally discriminated against as the LGBT community. The transcript positions PoF and the LGBT community as existing on the same side of the dialectic, with *Democratic Justice* at the other end of the dialectic. Perhaps the most basic flaw of this (lie)alectic is that it runs counter to the implied ideologies of the other two. The first (lie)alectic positions PoF as dialectically opposite of LGBT-identified individuals in areas of advocacy; this is an inconsistent treatment that places PoF as *both* dialectically opposite and dialectically equal to the LGBT community. The second (lie)alectic positions RF as the dialectical opposite of ND—thus, it is incoherent to suggest that RF are dialectically a form of discrimination, but that discrimination is the dialectical opposite of *Democratic Justice*. Table 3 outlines this (lie)alectic. To explore this (lie)alectic further, the following excerpts from the discourse provide direct evidence of this (lie)alectic:

- [The LGBT rights] movement arose after centuries of ridicule, *persecution* and even *violence* against homosexuals.
- Today, state legislatures across the nation are being asked to strengthen laws related to LGBT issues in the interest of ensuring fair access to housing...*At the same time*, we urgently need laws that protect faith communities and individuals against discrimination and retaliation for claiming the core rights of free expression and religious practice that are at the heart of our identity as a nation and our legacy as citizens.

- Accusations of bigotry toward people simply because they are motivated by their religious faith and conscience have a chilling effect on freedom of speech and public debate. When religious people are publically intimidated, retaliated against, forced from employment or made to suffer personal loss because they have raised their voice in the public square, donated to a cause or participated in an election, our democracy is the loser. Such tactics are ***every bit as wrong*** as denying access to employment, housing, or public services because of race or gender.
- Nothing is achieved if *either side* resorts to bullying, political point scoring or accusations of bigotry.
- In addition to institutional protections, individual people of faith must maintain their constitutional rights...including choosing their profession or employment and serving in public office without intimidation, coercion or retaliation from another group...A neighborhood Catholic pharmacist, who declines to carry the “morning after” pill when large pharmacy chains readily offer them, should likewise not be pressured into violating his or her conscience by bullying or boycotting.

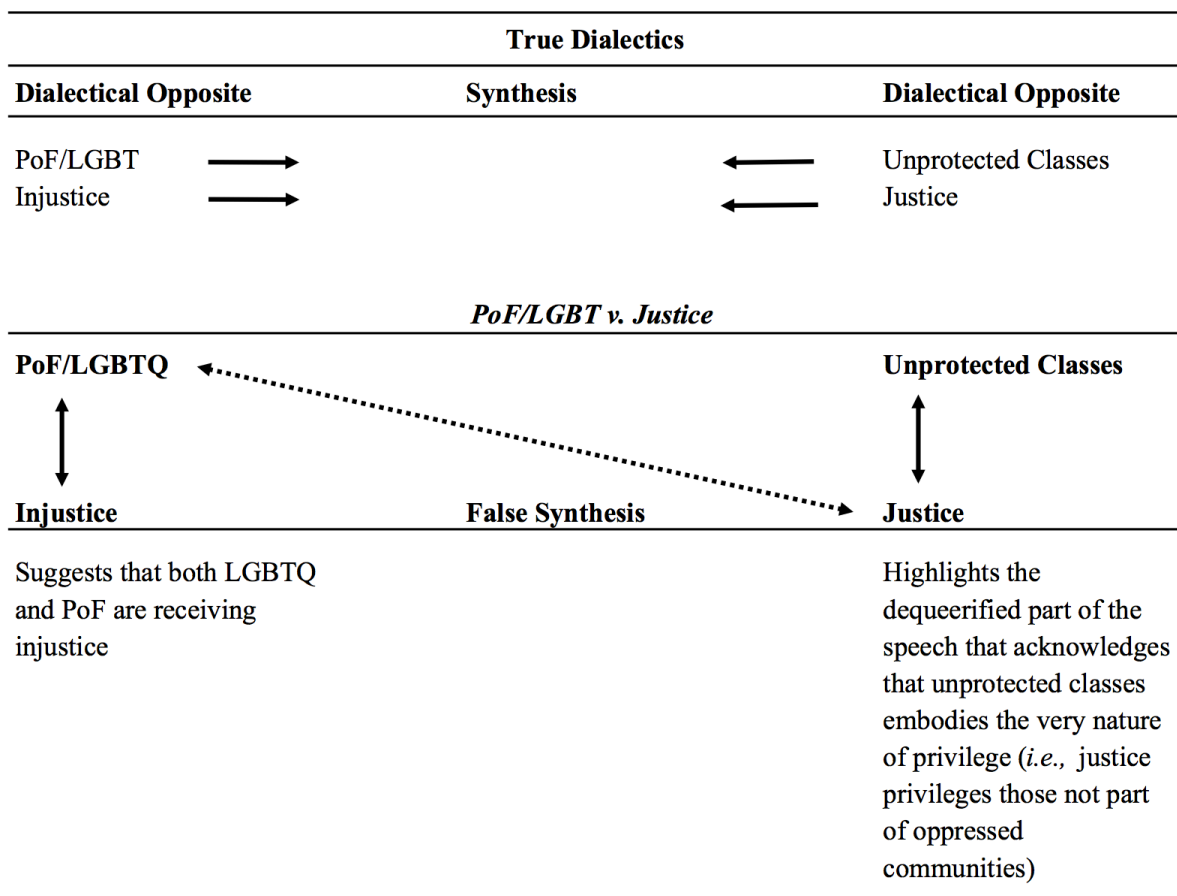


Table 3. PoF/LGBT v. Justice (Lie)alectic

There is a clear discrepancy between the listed areas of discrimination in the transcript. Perhaps the first most obvious disconnect is what is *NOT* included in the transcript, which is the acknowledgement of the presence and severity of the social injustices committed against the LGBT community. The transcript generalizes this discrimination, stating that the pursuit of LGBT rights came after “centuries of ridicule, persecution and even violence against homosexuals” (Newsroom, 2015, n.p.) and conveniently leaves out any specific examples of this historical ridicule, persecution, and violence committed against members of the LGBT community. Regarding RF however, the transcript is explicit in the injustices that have been committed against PoF simply because they are “motivated by their religious faith and conscience” (Newsroom, 2015, n.p.).

Looking closer at the listed areas of discrimination toward PoF, there is a proportional inconsistency in the areas of discrimination listed in the transcript—the listed areas of discrimination against PoF lack the level of severity and material consequence of the areas of discrimination against the LGBT community. Essentially, the Mormon Church is equating name-calling and negative reactions to their political views as instances of discrimination. The transcript is insistent that “accusations of bigotry” are a type of “bullying” that has “become so extreme that they threaten to tear apart the very fabric of society” (Newsroom, 2015). When comparing these areas of discrimination against PoF to the historical atrocities committed against marginalized communities, name-calling and negative media coverage hardly compares to a gay 21-year-old boy being heinously beaten, strung up on a barbed-wire fence, and left to die—as was the case in the Matthew Shepherd murder.

Furthermore, examining the definition of discrimination nullifies these claims. Discrimination is defined as “making an unjust or prejudicial distinction in the treatment of

different categories of people or things based solely on that distinction, esp. race, gender, age, *etc.*” (OED). The first logical fallacy in treating “accusations of bigotry” and “public retaliation” as elements of discrimination aimed at PoF solely on their self-imposed identification, is that the areas they are defining as discrimination do not meet the demands of the definition. Name-calling and negative reactions to public displays of anti-gay policies is not uniquely or solely imposed upon PoF, nor is it imposed *BECAUSE* a person claims to be a Person of Faith. Rather, the enactment of freedom of speech in the form of name-calling and political backlash is imposed on anti-gay messages—not because of who is saying it—but because it is being said at all.

In short, this pairing of PoF as dialectical equals of LGBT-identified individuals in terms of discrimination requires that faith, beliefs, conscience, and religion must be a facet of identity the way that race, gender, and age are facets of identity. Returning to my original definition of (lie)alectics as a pairing/comparing of non-antithetical concepts, the transcript does not meet the burden of proof necessary to place PoF as dialectically opposite of Democratic Justice. Yet, it is upon these areas of discrimination that the Mormon Church calls for RF that protect the rights of PoF, equating themselves as an equally marginalized community with equal claim to social justice.

I utilize these three examples of (lie)alectics to substantiate these structures as an identifiable rhetorical strategy of exclusion. As the analysis of this study will further illustrate, the particular utility of these (lie)alectics goes beyond a simple matter of false dialectics. Rather, (lie)alectics reach beyond the dichromatic nature of dialectical tensions (including false ones) and highlight the material realities of discourses that have the capacity to appear inclusive and nondiscriminatory while still promoting exclusion and

discrimination. I argue that (lie)alectical structures are similar to the rhetorical maneuvers made in deracialized speech. Bertrand's (2004) discussion of deracialization assesses the ways in which discourse constructs "new racism" through strategies of deracialization to indirectly reinforce racist ideologies. In a similar fashion, I argue that conservative discourses around issues of sexuality and gender often utilize strategies of discursive dequeerification—a proposed queer counterpart to the theoretical construct of discursive deracialization—to indirectly reinforce homophobic and heteronormative ideologies. I argue that the progression of the Gay Rights Movement has put pressure on conservative discourses to *appear* non-homophobic through the erasure of explicitly homophobic language. In its place, (lie)alectical structures emerge as an implicit tactic that allows dominant ideologies (*i.e.*, heteronormativity) to be perpetuated in a way that reduces the perceived validity of counterhegemonic voices—reinforcing dominant ideologies. To substantiate these claims and my theoretical proposal of discursive dequeerification, I provide an overview of discursive deracialization and then a discussion of its queer counterpart, discursive dequeerification.

An Overview of Discursive Deracialization

Discursive deracialization is a term introduced by Augoustinos and Every "in which the potentially racial element of the talk is removed and replaced with a non-racial explanation" (Goodman, 2017, p. 308). Discursive deracialization has been categorized as a function of new racism and post-racial rhetoric—new racism referring to the idea that "overt and obvious (old) racism is in decline but that instead a new form of racism has emerged where people are obligated to appear non-racist (Billig, 1988) but still hold views that different races are not equal" (Goodman, 2017, p. 455). Goodman and Burke (2011) looked at the potential of deracialized speech to function as justifications for rejecting asylum

seekers on the grounds of economic reasons, religion, and lack of ability to integrate—targets that have “replaced race as a common way of opposing people from different groups” (p.

459). He goes on to say that:

This certainly does not mean that the concept of race has been abandoned altogether; instead, it means that race can be a particularly unpalatable reason for opposing outgroups and so when the context requires it, non-racial arguments can be made regarding a topic that may appear to have a racial element. (p. 459-460).

Wetherell (2003) discusses how discursive psychological studies regarding race talk demonstrate how race/racism is not only denied in deracialized speech, but that it actually “sustains and legitimates social inequalities and...injustices” (p. 21). Goodman’s (2017) interpretation of Wetherrell and Potter’s (2002) study about Maori people in New Zealand “ultimately showed how the talk about Maori people in New Zealand justified and explains away the inequalities between the dominant ‘white’ and the indigenous Maori New Zealanders in ways that ignored the ongoing impact of the European colonization of the country” (p. 460). In other studies, discursive deracialization has been grounded in the notion of what race “is” and what it “is not.” In internet discussions about Gypsies, Goodman and Rowe (2014) found that contributors to the forum were explicit that Gypsies do not constitute a “race,” and therefore, any comments made “could not be attributed to racism” and thus functions to “further prejudicial ideas about minority groups, once again sustaining social inequalities (Wetherell, 2003)” (Goodman, 2015, p. 460). Bertrand (2010) demonstrates how deracialized strategies are used to index race using place names. She finds that deracialized speech in Western societies take two forms: positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. She suggests that “these two strategies...allow Whites to reproduce racism

while avoiding being perceived as racists...support[ing] “new racism,” a blatant variety that is characterized by the denial of its existence” (p. 486).

Yet, as these denials of the existence of racism persist, so too evidence of the persistence of racism can be seen, as Catherine R. Squires (2014) discusses in *The Post-Racial Mystique*:

The gap between the aspirational post-racial discourse and the brutal realities of poverty, police profiling, anti-immigration vitriol, and mind-boggling incarceration rates for blacks and Latinos/as is wide. Yet the media continue to churn out films and shows that feature scores of people of color living discrimination-free lives. Advertisements showcase knowledgeable professionals of all colors happily giving advice or buying products for their middle-class homes—right next door to their white friends. When someone reports a racist incident on the news, sources scramble over each other to deny any racist intent or impact on the event in question. They point to millionaire black athletes, Asian American collegians, and, of course, our biracial president as proof that America is post-racial. (p. 5)

Specific instances of Squire’s critique are noticeable in Washington’s (2012) analysis of media productions of interracial intimacy of TV medical dramas:

On first glance, these Black and Asian American interracial relationships on Grey’s Anatomy and ER might imply television is changing, race relations are improving, and media are in the process of moving forward to a newfound celebration of racial diversity and interracial romantic utopia. However, in analyzing the discourse surrounding the shows, it becomes clear that a “color neutral” standard, one that ignores race and racism and celebrates the invisibility of racial identity, a standard that has been part of U.S. multicultural racial discourses at least since the racial politics of the film, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), persists, despite the façade of racial progress. (p. 257)

So too, issues surrounding sexual identities have become more visible in the media through television shows like *Will & Grace*, *the L Word*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, and *Queer as Folk*—not to mention the token placement of gay characters within predominantly heterosexual movies and television including *Easy A*, *I Love You Man*, and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. And just as Squire’s notes the tendency of news sources to scramble over ways to

erase aspects of race pertaining to reported crimes, instances like the Orlando Pulse massacre highlight the deracialization of the event as notated by Eguchi (2016) in discussing the hidden facets of whiteness at play. Additionally, his discussion that despite the fact that GLBTQ people have increased visibility in the US, “they are still subjected to discrimination, prejudice, and/or violence every day” (p. 164). These issues have become a sore spot for people to legitimize their homophobia through anecdotes, examples, and the erasure of explicitly homophobic language; the following section outlines the conceptualization of discursive dequeerification and the similarity in strategies to discursive deracialization in minimizing the perceived presence of homophobia within discourses.

Discursive Dequeerification: A Queer Counterpart

In similar fashion to deracialized speech to remove the racialized portion of talk, I offer a reading of the Mormon Church’s use of (lie)alectics as a discursive dequeerification—an erasure of homophobic elements of talk, replaced with a non-homophobic alternative, and offer a conceptualization of *new homophobia*—the belief that overt and obvious homophobia are a thing of the past and thus those still holding onto beliefs that homosexuals are different and inferior to heterosexuals are obligated to appear non-homophobic. I choose the term dequeerification in comparison to something akin to dehomophobic because the discourse rejects and/or erases not only sexual identities existing along the homo/hetero binary, but all non-heterosexual identities. In essence, (queer)aphobia may be a more accurate representation of the discriminatory ideologies being concealed within the discourse than (homo)phobia. And because this is not an actual erasure of the discriminatory ideology—homophobia/(queer)aphobia are still alive and well in Mormon Church doctrine—but rather a simple discursive removal of queer-related words

and phrases from the actual discourse. Therefore, dequeerification is a more accurate representation of this discursive strategy than a term focusing on the homo/hetero binary and the ways in which it reinforces heteronormativity. The second goal of this research is to provide a way to assess the implication of (lie)alectics to reinforce heteronormative ideologies positioning all non-heterosexual identities as at odds with social norms. Here, I provide a discussion of how discursive dequeerification works in a similar fashion regarding heteronormativity (*i.e.*, discursive dequeerification reinforces heteronormativity the same way discursive deracialization reinforces racism).

In similar fashion to the “I’m not a racist, but” disclaimer, so too the “I’m not homophobic, but” disclaimer seems to precede questions like: “What is the current acceptable acronym for the LGBTQ-HIJKLMNQP community?”—essentializing the LGBTQ community with a sense of super diversity with aims to bait and trap unsuspecting, non-homophobic, heterosexuals into saying something insensitive, discriminatory, and/or homophobic. Which of course, THEY ARE NOT (note sarcasm). After all, how could they be? They have gay friends and family members, would never use the words faggot, dyke, or queer, and have *Will & Grace* saved to their favorites list on Netflix. As Squires (2014) addresses that “while the term ‘post-racial’ was not commonly used in the 1980s and 1990s [20 years following the “post-civil rights era”], discussions of the *meaning* of race—particularly the meaning of *black* identity—were widespread” (p. 3). Similarly, the momentum and inertia of the “gay rights movement” over the past decade is opening up conversations about gay identities as sexual orientation has increasingly been added to anti-discrimination laws. As such, the more protection the law provides for individuals based on sexual identity, the less the LGBTQ community appears to be oppressed and discriminated

against, and subsequently the more conversations surrounding LGBTQ rights are mimicking post-racial rhetoric in its trajectory.

For example, the “let the bigots be bigots” mentality emerges in cases like the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* Supreme Court case discussed in Chapter two, and other similar cases across the US, in which the discourse places the LGBTQ community as needlessly making waves (*e.g.*, If you’re gay, why would you want to buy a cake from a homophobic baker anyway? Take your business elsewhere. What they are doing isn’t right, but not giving them money is the best revenge)—thus representing individuals as not condoning what the homophobic person is doing, but that “bigots will be bigots,” and the world is changing, and we all just have to learn to get along until history catches up. Thus, following a similar time line to the civil rights era, notions of a “post-gay rights era” are emerging in the form of discursively dequeerified speech—even amidst the clear and explicit homophobic rhetoric that persists (and has arguably increased under the current Republican-dominated administration) in political, religious, and cultural discourses.

Furthering the connections between post-racial and post-queer rhetorics, Squires (2014) addresses the role of the Christian Right in maintaining party separation and identifications helping “white Christian media texts try to explain their own histories of racial exclusion and racist practices” (p. 69). Similarly, the *Mormon and Gay* website functions as a way for the Mormon Church to “explain” its history of exclusion of gay members and refusal to acknowledge gender identities. Additionally, while the Mormon Church subscribes to a “Political Neutrality” policy, this policy includes an addendum stating that the church “Reserves the right as an institution to address, in a nonpartisan way, issues that it believes have significant community or moral consequences or that directly affect the interests of the

Church” (Newsroom, 2011). In this way, it allows its members to vote according to their conscience and beliefs, yet many of those beliefs consistently align along party lines supporting not only homophobic legislation, but racist and sexist marginalizing policies as well—thus, demonstrating the significance of this discourse’s potential influence on public policy.

In a similar fashion, in line with the notion that (lie)alectics function to make the Mormon Church appear non-homophobic—the next section substantiates (lie)alectics as a form of discursive dequeerified speech and demonstrates how it functions to justify the continuation of anti-gay policies in modern-day politics substantiated by the Christian Right’s infiltration into party identifications associating Republican party affiliation with moral and Christian values.

(Lie)alectics as discursively dequeerified speech. As it applies to deracialization, Goodman (2017) discusses the paradoxical nature of disclaimers in deracialized speech as “otherwise there would be no need to make a denial in the first place” (p. 459). Similarly, the Mormon Church’s need to create public platforms to make clear that their church policies are non-homophobic is in-and-of-itself indicative of homophobia. So, then why the focus on (lie)alectics? Why not simply stop at the presence of the website itself as innately homophobic? Why illuminate the strategy itself? My first justification for a focus on the strategy is due to its divisive, underhanded approach; ignoring the divisiveness of this strategy turns a blind eye to the intensity of continued discrimination against LGBTQ peoples in the US. Secondly, in a political climate where politicians subscribing to notions of the Christian Right are actively proposing legislation that would advance anti-gay and homophobic public policies, understanding the strategy being used by those subscribing to

notions of the Christian Right and aligning themselves with these politicians¹⁶, can be used in activism to undermine these strategies and reveal their underlying divisive nature (*i.e.*, critical communication scholarship can be used to demonstrate how texts and discourses are used to reify heteronormativity to subjugate LGBTQ-identified individuals). Thus, I provide the following overview of how (lie)alectics function as discursively dequeerified speech.

In a similar way that disclaimers function as an indicator of race talk ‘I’m not a racist, but,’ (lie)alectics use conjunctions in a similar fashion to set up their homophobic statements as subordinated to contradicting information, as in “The attraction itself is not a sin, but acting on it is” (*Mormon and Gay*). In this example, the attraction is not labeled as homosexual or heterosexual but is inferred within the (lie)alectical tension between attraction and action, which will be further developed in the analysis chapter. And again, “While one may not have chosen to have these feelings, he or she can commit to keep God’s commandments” (*Mormon and Gay*). This passage need not define “these feelings” as heterosexual or homosexual as the (lie)alectic has already set up homosexual sex acts as at odds with God’s commandments AND subordinates homosexuality to God’s law. The absence of defining the feelings as non-heterosexual lends itself to include non-homophobic interpretations (*i.e.*, provides space for alternative non-homophobic explanations of the discourse).

Even in the examples where the website uses explicitly sexualized language, the stylistic choices in grammar and usage reveal the ways in which the discourse draws attention toward the non-homophobic portion of the sentence and deflects attention away

¹⁶ Of significance, Vice President Mike Pence who is publically supportive of and attends celebratory events in honor of James Dobson, Head of Focus on the Family, a notorious Conservative Christian and anti-gay organization, and makes public declarations promoting conversion therapy.

from the homophobic content. For example, the use of the terminology of “same-sex attraction” allows for a rhetorical maneuver in which the discourse can draw attention toward the sexual behavior, reducing the importance of sexuality as an identity, and thus creating space for homophobic doctrine to appear accepting of same-sex attraction while still being rejecting of non-heterosexual behaviors and identities.

In summary, these (lie)alectics can be seen as preemptive counterstrikes to perceived threats on dominant ideologies. Pertaining to the particular artifact examined, the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference was held exactly three months prior to the oral arguments made before the Supreme Court of the United States in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case. That is, before this case even went to trial, the Mormon Church attempted to preemptively create legislation that would allow PoF the right to discriminate against the LGBT community by way of claiming RFs. Thus, this research utilizes this theoretical conceptualization of (lie)alectics to uncover the stylistic patterns indicative of discourses working toward the discursive dequeerification of spaces via claims to religious freedoms.

Methodology

In the introductory chapter, I argue that the Mormon Church utilizes stylistic maneuvers to appear inclusive of legislation supporting LGBT rights as a means of substantiating their claims to RFs. I further developed research goals including: 1) to expose underlying anti-gay ideologies present in the *Mormon and Gay website* through identification of (lie)alectical structures, 2) to provide a way to assess the implications of these structures to reinforce heteronormative ideologies to act as preemptive counterstrikes to perceived threats on dominant religious doctrines regarding LGBT issues, and 3) to extrapolate the potential of

such discourses to shape state and federal US policies that directly impact the material realities of LGBT-identified individuals.

To accomplish the goals of this study, I employ a critical rhetorical approach to the analysis of the *Mormon and Gay* website, utilizing a proposed theoretical framework based on (lie)alectics and discursive dequeerification. The remainder of this chapter will: 1) contextualize critical rhetoric and justify its use as methodologically appropriate for this analysis, and 3) outline the specific steps that will be taken to demonstrate what the analysis of this research will produce.

A Critical Rhetorical Approach. The interconnectivity of method and paradigm is indisputable; the exact nature of this interconnectedness, however, is by turns an exchange about the relationship between these two constructs themselves. My research is informed by the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions of the critical paradigm. Ontologically, the critical paradigm subscribes to reality consisting of structural and historical activities that are transformed through dialectical interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Epistemologically, the critical paradigm subscribes to the notion of knowledge as ever changing; that is, knowledge is not simply accumulated, but rather changes as it is informed by historical contextualization of that knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). According to Guba & Lincoln, values are central and unavoidable within the critical paradigm; it adopts an intrinsic axiology—a “moral tilt toward revelation,” insofar as the paradigm seeks to confront ignorance and misapprehension. With these assumptions in mind, this research calls for a critical rhetorical approach, one that pushes for “a commitment to political change” and also treats all linguistic acts as potentially rhetorical in nature (McKerrow, 1989; Ono & Sloop, 1992).

As a project of critical examination of dominant heteronormative ideologies, I employ a critical rhetorical methodology insofar as Critical Rhetoric subscribes to the notion of reality consisting of structural and historical activities that can be transformed (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). I utilize a critical approach to rhetoric because Critical Rhetoric differentiates itself from traditional rhetorical approaches as it focuses not only on critique but also on transformation. It focuses not only on the potential influence of discourses, as is the case with traditional rhetoric, but grounds itself in an orientation of praxis—a commitment to political change (Ono & Sloop, 1992). McKerrow (1989) is attributed as one of the first scholars to propose a critical approach to rhetoric. Drawing on Foucault, McKerrow frames his approach as an orientation toward criticism that is informed by discourses of power as a means of maintaining privilege of the “elite.” He frames this through a critique of domination and freedom suggesting that essentially freedom for one person is domination for another. That is, he highlights that power has both a creative and repressive function in relation to each other. McKerrow views rhetorical critique as a transformative practice rather than a method, which recognizes the materiality of discourse. He suggests a movement in rhetorical criticism towards a critique of ideologies, and suggests that ideologies are rhetorical creations.

The goal of Critical Rhetoric is to bring about social and political change through discourse analysis. Ono & Sloop (1992) advanced an argument for a Critical Rhetoric committed to a *telos*—an ultimate purpose to the research itself—a philosophy of action. Their approach critiques traditional rhetoric for its lack of political commitment to affect change, arguing that “self-critical and ‘skeptical’ scholarship is not an end in itself. Such work does not demonstrate, sufficiently, the contingent nature of criticism and its relationship to the society in which the critic is a member” (p. 48). A critical rhetorical approach to this

research is appropriate insofar as Ono & Sloop advance the argument that “Critics have a stake in the critical act itself, and therefore should describe their purpose through *telos*” (p. 48). They define *telos* as the “temporary fixing of meaning that admits the political nature of criticism, hence its need to affect change” (p. 48).

Within their discussion, Ono & Sloop (1992) summarize Foucault stating that this is a process of creating “space, subject positions, in which excluded groups can see themselves and be seen by others” (p. 55). They suggest that the job of the rhetorical critic is to allow for a Foucaultian forward-thinking perspective that promotes above all the critic’s choice of subject matter, discourse, and audience in relation to the reality she or he wishes to create. In this way, Critical Rhetoric is as much about critics’ roles in their own critical beliefs as it is as about the method by which a discourse is analyzed. That is, the rhetorical strategies used by the critic in talking or writing about their analysis is of equal importance to the rhetorical strategies used in the discourse under examination. In this way, the application of Critical Rhetoric is further substantiated as appropriate for this research when considering the self-reflexive moves I must make as the researcher. That is, having been a member of the Mormon Church myself for over 28 years, raised within the throws of Mormon doctrines (including its positioning on same-sex practices), and “coming out” as a lesbian at the age of 31, certainly played a role in my “choice of discourse” from a Foucaultian perspective—and that choice, in and of itself, has rhetorical significance that must be accounted for in this research. A critical rhetorical approach foundationally allows the researcher, in this instance me, to navigate the texts I am examining in ways that utilize my “insider” knowledge-base as an epistemologically rigorous and valid methodological tool.

Lastly, following these ontological and epistemological assumptions of the critical paradigm regarding the function of language, this research seeks to draw out the interconnecting role of language and social life. Additionally, it focuses on the dialectical tensions formed by language to other elements of social life. This situates not only language itself as the central tool for analysis, but also the systematic structuring of language as a tool of creating reality—in this instance, a dialectical one. Thus, this research focuses on language as an indicator of ideology. This methodological approach reveals the ideological assumptions present in the *Mormon and Gay* website and the implications of those ideologies to influence public policies regarding LGBT rights.

Method

Textual and Thematic/Cluster Analysis. To accomplish the goals of this research, I utilize textual analysis as the first step of data collection. For the purposes of this research, I define “text” as any written, printed, or spoken item consisting of verbal language (*i.e.*, words, sentences, *etc.*). As substantiated in chapter one, I have chosen to examine the *Mormon and Gay* website because of Mormonism’s positionality and its potential social impacts. This website includes six main links titled: Home, Stories, Beliefs, Understanding, Videos, and About. These pages include written and video testimonials, official declarations of church policies, links to documents published on the Mormon Church’s larger www.lds.org website, and links to resources for gay Mormons and parents of gay children. This research is comprehensive and examine all posted material published directly on the *Mormon and Gay* website. It do not, however, examine documents linked to (but not directly published) on the *Mormon and Gay* website. As websites are not static, and information can

be posted or removed at any point in time, I downloaded individual papers and saved them based on the date and time downloaded.

Using a printed copy of these downloads, I perform a close reading of the discourse posted on the *Mormon and Gay* website with the express purpose of identifying (lie)alectical structures in the text. Identification of these structures utilizes *stylistic indicators*¹⁷ (*i.e.*, grammar, syntax, sentence structure, textual proximity¹⁸ and vocabulary choices¹⁹). After examining the stylistic structure of the text, I group the identified stylistic indicators together thematically (*i.e.*, categorize patterns in the text that denote or signify (lie)alectical structures). This includes, for example, the consistent use of the transcript's use of the word "advocate" to indicate an "Advocating Dialectic," as was outlined in the theoretical framework section of this chapter. After completing the analysis of the text, I then analyze these (lie)alectical structures and provide implications for how these rhetorical constructs reinforce heteronormativity and stand to influence future state and federal legislation that would allow organizations and individuals to discriminate against LGBT-identified individuals on the grounds of Religious Freedoms.

Queer Theory as Method. As indicated earlier in this chapter, this research treats "queer" as a verb—the act of queering spaces. Thus, my textual and thematic/cluster analysis is informed by a specific focus on identification of heteronormative ideological assumptions present in the text as a means of queering institutionalized religious spaces. That is, this

¹⁷ My use of the term *stylistic indicator* to mean grammar, sentence structure, *etc.* is not a unique treatment of textual analysis. However, I coin and utilize the term *stylistic indicator* to draw attention to the rhetorical treatment of style to act as a function of language and its ability to be an indicator of ideology.

¹⁸ Specifically, the placement of non-antithetical ideas in close proximity to each other

¹⁹ Specifically, the use of polarized language.

research is predicated upon the assumption that heteronormative messages are present within the text, and through the use of textual and thematic/cluster analysis of the discourse, these heteronormative ideals will emerge from the discourse providing the dominant ideological backdrop upon which the queering (or act of identifying that which is at odds with the norm) can be performed.

Conclusion

Overall, (lie)alectics can be seen as both an error in reasoning and a discursive strategy, which obfuscates obvious homophobia, and in some cases, literally removes homophobic phrases and words in entirety from discourses through the process of dequeerification. The discussion of discursive deracialization in this chapter functions to demonstrate how discourses can be stripped of explicitly homophobic language in similar ways; discourses get stripped away of explicit racist language to resist accusations of racism. In addition to the research done on discursive deracialization, I propose (lie)alectics as a specific strategy of discursive dequeerification—one that does not work solely by removing homophobic language from the discourse, but also creates logical fallacies that represent themselves as reason (i.e., comparing non-antithetical ideas as though they were incommensurate), making the discourse appear benign in its homophobic trajectory. In the examples provided in this chapter, I substantiate (lie)alectics as a useful theoretical framework in understanding how homophobic discourses are resisting labels of homophobia and will function to deconstruct the discourse on the *Mormon and Gay* website. Thus, in the next chapter, I utilize (lie)alectics and dequeerification and theoretical frameworks upon which my textual analysis of the *Mormon and Gay* website is predicated.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

In chapter one, I proposed a study that would analyze the *Mormon and Gay* website to examine the way the Mormon Church is utilizing (lie)alectical structures to instruct its members how to respond to LGBT issues and represent themselves as a non-homophobic entity. The Mormon Church historically has altered its doctrines when those beliefs have conflicted with federal law.²⁰ However, in this instance, the church is choosing to retain its anti-gay policies even in the face of the federal recognition of same-sex marriage in the US. To avoid labels of homophobia and potential legal repercussions for refusal to acknowledge a protected class, the Mormon Church must establish their anti-gay policies as also protected by federal law, which they have attempted to do in press conferences (such as the one discussed in Chapter four). Analysis of Mormon discourses aimed at the public has demonstrated how the Mormon Church has used these (lie)alectical structures as a preemptive counterstrike to these perceived threats. However, the church is faced with another problem in maintaining their anti-gay policies.

As the national climate continues to shift towards the recognition of homophobia as pervasive and problematic, the church has experienced resistance from its own members

²⁰ Recall that in 1890, the Mormon Church abandoned its practice of polygamy when the federal government threatened to disenfranchise the church if they continued to practice plural marriage. And again, in 1978, the church changed its policy on African American men allowing them to be anointed into the church's priesthood.

toward its anti-gay policies.²¹ As such, the church is met with a second challenge; to avoid losing membership due to its homophobic doctrines, the church must also provide a way for its members to make sense of the true dialectic that one cannot be Mormon and engage in same-sex practices. That is, it must represent its anti-gay policies as non-homophobic. Thus, this analysis examines how the church utilizes (lie)alectical structures on its published website *Mormon and Gay* to represent their anti-gay policies as non-homophobic in nature. This accomplishes three things: 1) It normalizes homophobic beliefs as natural and justified, 2) gives its members a way to negotiate their own dissonance when faced with their own feelings of same-sex attraction and/or the same-sex attraction experienced by others (especially family members), and 3) gives its members a way to talk about same-sex attraction with others without appearing homophobic.

To engage this study, I performed a close reading of the *Mormon and Gay* website looking for (lie)alectical structures present in the text and analyzed their function. Two (lie)alectical themes emerged from this analysis: 1) *Being v. Fleeting*, and 2) *Attraction v. Action*. These themes were identified using the rhetorical canons of arrangement and style, including choices in textual proximity (arrangement), as well as language and grammatical choices (style). Below, I provide a justification for using arrangement and style as measures in the identification process of (lie)alectics. Second, I outline the identified (lie)alectics and provide textual examples to substantiate their presence in the text.

Arrangement and Style

²¹ On April 4, 2015, an estimated 50 members of the Mormon Church stood during the 186th Annual General Conference and publicly shouted “opposed” to sustaining the top Mormon leaders in response to the church’s stance on same-sex marriage; In November 2015, approximately 1,500 members of the Mormon Church congregated at LDS Headquarters resigning from the church in protest of new church policy banning children of same-sex couples from being baptized or blessed.

The five canons of rhetoric have been and continue to be a cornerstone of many rhetorical studies. The canons themselves are tools in both the production and analysis of rhetorical discourse. That is, by the very nature of discourse, authors/producers must use elements of both arrangement (organizational choices) and style (language and grammar choices), because these canons are built into the core structure of language use. They also function as tools to deconstruct texts, which allows rhetorical scholars to draw conclusions about an author's/producer's intentions based on the assumption that language users make choices, and those choices can be interpreted to have intentionality. That is, this approach to rhetorical analysis assumes that the discourse aims to accomplish something and that the language choices of the author/producer of a text are evidence of that intentionality. As Solomon (1978) suggests:

Modern sociolinguistics, in contrast, concentrates on the social implications of stylistic variation. From this viewpoint, style—in the sense of choices about diction, syntax, tone, and even content—is an important ingredient in discourse of all levels, and stylistic variation is crucial in signaling, maintaining, and changing the social relationships which exist between participants. Each individual possesses a linguistic repertoire from which to choose the level of style best suited to a particular situation. (p. 173-174).

I would add grammar to Solomon's list of facets constituting style. While not every instance of word choice, grammar, and organization are intentional on the part of the author/producer (or indicative of (lie)alectics), the patterns within a text (*e.g.*, a tendency toward using passive voice) can be seen as an unintentional/intentional use of style and arrangement, but with an intentional goal (*i.e.*, avoidance of taking responsibilities as in "mistakes were made"). In this way, I use elements of style and arrangement as indicators of a larger strategy at work in the text (*i.e.*, (lie)alectics).

Grammar and Dialectics / (Lie)alectics

Grammar is an important function in analyzing the stylistic choices present in a text, because elements of grammar have specific purposes and functions in meaning making. That is, nouns function to identify (persons, places, and things), adjectives function to describe, *etc.* Thus, sentence set up, language choice, and the order of those language choices govern, to an extent, how the reader interprets the meaning of the message. This analysis focuses in on two specific grammatical elements in the text that denote (lie)alectics: Conjunctions and adverbs.

Conjunctions. When examining a text for the presence of dialectics/(lie)alectics, it is important to examine the way a text uses conjunctions, because conjunctions determine the relationship between two or more ideas, and are thus revealing of what information the author/producer wants to draw attention to and what information the author/producer wants to draw attention away from—and that is because conjunctions come in two forms: coordinating and subordinating. Coordinating conjunctions are placed between sentences or clauses of equal rank or equal emphasis (*e.g.*, Sam is taking algebra and Spanish). In this example, algebra and Spanish are equally emphasized and could be rearranged interchangeably with each other. Coordinating conjunctions include: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so. Subordinating conjunctions are designed to emphasize the main clause over the subordinate clause (*e.g.*, The store was fully stocked, because it had just received a shipment). In this example, “because it had just received a shipment” is subordinated because the focus of the sentence is the fact that “The store was fully stocked,” as evidenced by the fact that one could not rearrange the sentence to say “The store had just received a shipment, because it was fully stocked.” The meaning is changed when the clauses are rearranged. While there is an exhaustive list of coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions are

fewer. Examples of subordinating conjunctions include, but are not limited to: after, although, as, because, if, inasmuch, just, rather, since, though, whereas, while, until, *etc.*

Adverbs. An additional grammatical element that is significantly prominent in the text as an indicator of (lie)alectics is adverbs. Adverbs are words or phrases that modify or qualify a verb, adjective, or another adverb—similar to the way an adjective modifies or qualifies a noun. Examples of adverbs include: Before, after, already, nevertheless, some, sometimes, mostly, always, *etc.* Adverbs are a significant indicator of (lie)alectics in the texts on the *Mormon and Gay* website because they are most often used to contradict previously stated material. For example, in the article *Love One Another: A Discussion on Same-Sex Attraction*, published on the *Mormon and Gay* website, it states: “Everyone experiences the desperation of temptation and the emptiness of sin. This is the common condition of humankind. **Nevertheless**, Latter-day Saints believe that the ‘good news’ of Jesus Christ shows that these adversities are not final. They are part of the test of mortality that all people undergo.” This passage attempts to unite members of the Mormon Church as having a common purpose with all of humanity. It then goes on to differentiate Latter-day Saints from non-Mormons. While not stated explicitly, because this article is published on the *Mormon and Gay* website, it can be inferred that the word “adversities” is a referent to “same-sex attraction.” In this way, this example demonstrates how the discourse utilizes adverbs to both unite and separate members of the Mormon Church as accepting of LGBT individuals, yet also sets itself aside as accessing higher truth that is not available to those who do not subscribe to Mormon doctrine’s take on the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Qualifiers. One particular type of adverb is called a qualifier. Qualifiers are typically adverbs (although sometimes adjectives) that function specifically to attribute a quality to

another word, usually a noun. In the case of the *Mormon and Gay* website, it is important to note that with little exception, the word “gay” is used as a qualifier, not a noun. That is, sentences such as “Josh is a gay Mormon,” are common, whereas sentences such as “Some women may also use the term *gay* to describe themselves,” are rare. When qualifiers are nouns, and not adverbs, they are often used to denote specificity regarding the abnormal (*i.e.*, male nurse, lady doctor, foreign student, *etc.*). As such, using the word “gay” as a qualifier is indicative of the presence of (lie)alectics insofar as it denotes the presence of the incommensurate nature of the words “gay” and “Mormon.” That is, it substantiates gayness as at-odds with Mormonism insofar as the qualifier is necessary to separate out “gay Mormons” from “straight Mormons,” ...or just Mormons.

Unpacking the (Lie)alectics

If one experiences same-sex attraction, he or she can choose whether to use a sexual identity label. Identifying oneself as gay or lesbian is not against Church policy or doctrine; however, it may have undesired consequences in the way one is treated.
- *Mormon and Gay, 2017*

Beginning with my own personal experience of negotiating my gay identity while remaining active in the Mormon Church for nearly 30 years, this section maps out the (lie)alectics present in the discourse on the *Mormon and Gay* website and outlines what the discourse aims to accomplish. Although I can now trace back my attraction to other women as beginning as young as seven or eight years old, the first time I can remember mentally asking myself if I might be gay, I was 16-years-old, tormented by an unmistakable giddiness of sexual attraction at complete odds with my internalized notions of goodness and righteousness—and thus masquerading as deep friendship and/or sisterly-type love, as there was no other framework for interpretation of my experience at that time. In fact,

retrospectively, I felt like a sinner just for experiencing an increased heart rate at the sight of the best friend (*i.e.*, secret crush). Rationalization aside, I knew what I was feeling was “wrong” and that to disclose such a wrongness might leave me vulnerable to shaming, public ridicule, and possible excommunication from the church that governed my understanding of reality. Indeed, there was no official church policy in 1998 that protected me from excommunication were I to discuss my sexuality with a church leader.

The “Born This Way” notion was at the cornerstone of Mormon doctrine’s rejection of homosexuality, suggesting that there were root causes for homosexuality (*i.e.*, pornography, masturbation, and sexual abuse), rejecting the notion that people could be born with biological facets of identity as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, *etc.* Thus, choosing a sexual identity label was not an option—nor was voicing the attractions I was experiencing. I felt beyond isolated; I felt a sense of silent desperation, unable to speak my truth yet unable to escape the ideological framework that defined my very existence as unacceptable/unwelcome/unwanted and at complete odds with church doctrines. The church which claimed to be my salvation provided me with no framework to negotiate my sexual identity. Likewise, many people in the Mormon faith have been left in this same space—a growing space creating exigency within the church to provide a framework for individuals to make sense of their sexual identities in a way where they can remain members of the church while still experiencing this type of attraction. The following (lie)alectics are examples of how the Mormon Church is attempting to do this in line with this analysis’ assertion of what the discourse accomplishes.

The Role of Agency within (Lie)alectics

Agency largely drives the (lie)alectics in this discourse. Agency is defined by the Mormon Church as “the ability and privilege God gives us to choose and to act for ourselves” (lds.org). Also within Mormon doctrine, the spirit is endowed with moral agency but cannot “act” (*i.e.*, agency/choice is rooted in the body). The body is the vehicle by which the spirit is able to enact its will and desires, *etc.* The body is viewed as the root of all evil/temptation commonly referred to as “the natural man” in Mormon vernacular, stemming from a verse in the Book of Mormon: “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). This correlation between agency and the body is important to understanding the ideological assumptions underpinning the (lie)alectics that emerged from the discourse.

This is important because the (lie)alectics are largely governed by what the Mormon Church is defining as what we have agency over and what we don’t. For example, the discourse represents the nature of existence as beyond our control (*i.e.*, we are all children of God, whether or not we accept this truth or not; we all existed spiritually before we were born, and we will all die and be resurrected)—no agency. Yet, sexuality (being rooted in the body) is something we can choose to act on or not act on—agency. As will be demonstrated in the following (lie)alectics, the discourse utilizes these notions of agency to create a constellation of beliefs that, when taken together, allow the Mormon Church to have gay members without changing its doctrine regarding homosexuality. It accomplishes this by 1) defining identity as Eternal in nature with overlapping Fleeting identities grounded in the body only and that will no longer exist when the body and spirit are separated, and 2) shifting

the responsibility of homosexuality to the individual by creating a conflict between the Attraction itself and the agency of the individual to Act upon his/her sexual impulses.

Being Verses Fleeting: Straightening Out Intersectionality

The first (lie)alectic that emerged from the discourse is a tension regarding identity, which I am calling *Being v Fleeting*. Historically, the Mormon Church has treated homosexuality, not as an identity, but as an affliction—something outside of the individual/being itself—a susceptibility of the body, but never an actual component of the individual/being itself. However, as both state and federal laws have increasingly added sexual orientation and sexual identity to their lists of protected classes, discourses resisting treatment of sexual identity as an identity have been challenged, including the Mormon Church. Essentially, the purpose of this (lie)alectic is to provide the Mormon Church with a way to acknowledge the existence of homosexual identities, while simultaneously preserving those identities as at odds with Mormon Church doctrine (*i.e.*, homosexuality exists, but it exists as a part of the body and is therefore not eternal in nature). Here, the primary existential dialectic (Being → Becoming ← Nothing) comes into play.

In this dialectic, originally proposed by Hegel, either something exists or it does not. Yet, the conceptualization of *Becoming* simultaneously cancels out both *Being* and *Nothing*, but it also preserves them insofar as the very definition of *Becoming* relies on the previous conceptions for its own definition. The very nature of this dialectic is in conflict with Mormonism's historical treatment of sexual orientation and identity (*i.e.*, either sexual orientation and identity exist or they don't). That is, historically, the church has placed sexual orientation and identity as synonymous with *Nothing*, simply denying their existence beyond a feeling or impulse. However, this maneuver is increasingly difficult to uphold in the

emergence of sexual orientation and identity being recognized as not only an identity, but a protected identity. To adapt, the discourse represents *Being* as the dialectical opposite of *Fleeting*. As already substantiated, the true dialectical opposite of *Being* is *Nothing*, not *Fleeting*. And the dialectical opposite of *Fleeting* is *Eternal*, not *Being*. By crossing these two dialectics, a relationship between *Being* and *Eternal* is established, and a relationship between *Nothing* and *Fleeting* is established. Table 4 provides an overview of how the transference of the true dialectic becomes (lie)alectic in nature.

True Dialectics				
Dialectical Opposite		Synthesis		Dialectical Opposite
Being	→	Becoming	←	Nothing
Eternal	→	Transitioning	←	Fleeting

<i>Being v Fleeting (Lie)alectic</i>	
Being ↓ Eternal	Nothing ↓ Fleeting
<p>By transferring the dialectical tension between these two dialectics, there is now a relationship between Being and Eternal as commensurate, (<i>i.e.</i>, if Being and Fleeting are incommensurate, then Being and Eternal must be commensurate--Eternal being the dialectical opposite of Fleeting), which fuels the notion that individuals have no agency in the nature of their spirit as a "child of God" and Eternal.</p>	<p>On the opposite side, the relationship between Nothing and Fleeting reveals the dequeerified portion of the discourse: Same-sex attraction, rooted in the body, is not an eternal identity. Therefore, same-sex attraction is not an identity (<i>i.e.</i>, nothing).</p>

Table 4. Being v Fleeting (lie)alectic

In this (lie)alectic, *Being* and *Nothing* are both states-of-being determining existence (*i.e.*, either something exists or it doesn't). And *Eternal* and *Fleeting* are incommensurate adjectives that describe the nature of existence (*i.e.*, either something is temporary or it is permanent in its existence). The (lie)alectical switch to *Being v Fleeting* creates a relationship between *Being* and *Eternal* that suggests that existence is never-ending—a fundamental belief of the Mormon Church—and provides a way for the Mormon Church to dictate what the nature of that Eternal state of Being is: a child of God.

This (lie)alectic gets at the very nature of *Being*, and by defining *Being* as a state-of-being characterized as *Eternal* and thus dialectically at odds with any *Fleeting* identities, this (lie)alectic allows for homosexuality to be grouped together with an entire host of *Fleeting* identities (*i.e.*, old/young, fat/skinny, hairy/bald, even-tempered/short-fused, beautiful/ugly, *etc.*)—primarily rooted in the body—and thus no more despised or rejected than any other facet of identity that might²² be at odds with the eternal identity as a “child of God.” This is evidenced by the text:

In our mortal lives, we may be given or assign ourselves many labels. Some labels may describe affiliations or a stage of life, and other labels may reflect physical characteristics like tall, short, brunette, bald, or redheaded...Throughout our lives our identities change. We inevitably change from young to old. Our views may change, and with those views, we may change our affiliations. (Who Am I?)

One day, at the end of this short mortal journey, we will return to the presence of our Heavenly Parents. One day, all other labels will be swallowed up in our eternal identity as children of God. (Who Am I?)

²² Recall that Mormonism allows for change in its doctrine through prophetic revelation. Returning to two key examples: 1) Before 1978, being black was incommensurate with membership in the church and now it's not, and 2) Before 1890, it was perfectly acceptable to identify as a polygamist, and now it is grounds for excommunication from the Mormon Church. These examples demonstrate how any facet of identity can be deemed at odds with Mormon Doctrine.

In these examples, the speech is dequeerified by nesting homosexuality amidst a list of physical characteristics that commonly shift over time—without explicitly cataloguing same-sex attraction within the list—reducing the visibility of the homophobia by representing homosexuality as a facet of identity that can be labeled and avowed, but ONLY IF it is treated as a *Fleeting* identity. The dequeerified portion of the speech is also obvious when considering the fact that none of the other mentioned facets of identities pointed to in the discourse (*i.e.*, hair color, height, *etc.*) are at odds with Mormon doctrine, and thus creating the illusion that Mormonism’s stance on sexual identities is not homophobic in nature, but rather a rejection of any *Fleeting* identity that is at odds with the *Eternal* nature of the soul. This treatment can be seen in several other examples from the discourse discussing labels:

*The ultimate defining fact for all of us is that we are children of Heavenly Parents, born on this earth for a purpose, and born with a divine destiny. **Whenever** any of those other notions, **whatever** they may be, gets in the way of that ultimate defining fact, then it is destructive and it leads us down the wrong path (Who Am I?)*

*We should exercise care in how we label ourselves. Labels can affect how we think about ourselves and how others treat us and may expand or limit our ability to follow God’s plan for our happiness. **If** labels get in the way of our eternal progress, we can choose to change them. (Who Am I?)*

In these examples, subordinating conjunctions are used to direct the attention of the reader toward the *Eternal* component of the sentence and away from the *Fleeting*. That is, it states clearly that we are “children of Heavenly Parents,” and then follows this sentence with the dequeerified portion of the speech, subordinating *Fleeting* identities “whatever they may be” to the stated *Eternal* identity. Additionally, this allows the discourse to get around explicitly stating that homosexuality or same-sex attraction is at odds with Mormon doctrine; rather, it is one of many other identities that could be at odds with Mormonism, but aren’t. In

the second example, the text uses another subordinating conjunction to create a sense of conditionality that provides a way for the individual experiencing same-sex attraction to avoid the previously stated consequences (*i.e.*, we're not saying you can't take on a sexual identity label, but if you do, you may be treated differently and stunt your eternal progression, and therefore you can always choose—have the agency—to not take on a sexual identity label).

To reiterate, in these examples, the text does not make any specific reference to sexual identities, but rather uses several examples of temporary characteristics and categories that change over time, implicitly inferring sexuality functions in the same manner, and as such, the ways we label ourselves may be accurate in one moment and not another—that sexual identities are not immutable. This is another way that the church is able to allow its members to take on an identity label while simultaneously rejecting the notion that sexuality is an inherent part of identity—rather simply a label that may or may not apply at different points in time toward a predestined future. In this same article, the discourse goes on to say:

*If one experiences same-sex attraction, he or she can choose whether to use a sexual identity label. Identifying oneself as gay or lesbian is not against Church policy or doctrine; **however**, it may have undesired consequences in the way one is treated. (Who Am I?)*

Here, the church explicitly states that its members can identify as gay or lesbian, but then goes on to subordinate this “agency” to choose a sexual identity with a direct threat that members who do so “may have undesired consequences.” And these consequences are scattered throughout the narratives on the *Stories* page. Laurie shares her experience that, “I do get treated differently sometimes, even avoided or shunned by a few” (*Laurie's Story*), and Josh explains that, “Trying to live a single, celibate life as a gay member in the Mormon Church is difficult. There are sacrifices made, lonely nights felt, and sorrow that the eye

cannot see” (*Josh’s Story*). Ricardo recounts his experience with the undesired consequences of labeling his sexual identity: “Embracing [my attraction to men] might be difficult for some Mormons to understand. It can seem as if by embracing my same-sex attraction, I am breaking a commandment” (*Ricardo’s Story*). Tonya recounts her experience when her son Andy came out to her as gay and the ambiguity and discomfort she felt around her son choosing to take an identity label:

Regardless of the fact that my love for Andy didn’t change after he told me, I still felt like the rug had been pulled out from under me spiritually. I had a lot of questions and a lot of fears....During his mission he experienced deep depression and severe anxiety. As part of the process of healing from mental illness, Andy decided he would like to be able to live more authentically and identify openly as a gay Mormon. Dylan and I asked that Andy wait to tell others until we could share his experiences with family members, which he graciously agreed to. The prospect of telling his siblings filled us with concern. (Tonya’s Story)

Tonya’s discomfort with her son’s sexuality demonstrates that these “undesired consequences” of using gay labels in the Mormon Church occur at many different levels—inside and outside of familial relationships. Similarly, Becky tells her story of struggling to accept her son’s sexual identity stating: “When Xian said to me, ‘Mom, I don’t know what my future is, but marrying a girl does not seem possible,’ it was tough to hear...I admit it took me a while to truly understand what ‘unconditional love’ meant. I confused ‘loving’ with ‘condoning.’” (*Becky’s Story*). Becky’s experience with her son’s sexuality demonstrates a lingering “undesired consequence,” insofar as she continues to reject her son’s choice to engage his sexuality despite her sentiments of love for him. Overall, these examples show the “undesired consequences” experienced by members (and their families) who decide to openly identify and take on a label as gay. These examples of lived experiences of gay Mormons demonstrates the ways in which the (lie)alectical tensions between *Being v Fleeting* are materialized—states of interpersonal conflict, ambiguity,

shunning, isolation, and loneliness. Yet, their stories reach back into the (lie)alectic through internalized homophobia in an acceptance of their sexual identities as *Fleeting*. For example, Ricardo describes his experiencing as being “happy to know in my heart that my SSA does not define me as a person or as a son of God” (Ricardo’s Story). Laurie describes her struggles with her sexuality as a blessing, stating:

My faith is more seasoned now. I depend on the Lord in all things and have grown to trust that somehow, someday, all of this truly is giving us experience. Even though the very jaws of hell have seemed to gape open wide after me, at several times throughout my life, I do have a perfect knowledge that it is for my good (see D&C 122:7). (Laurie’s Story)

Her account demonstrates how members of the Mormon Church are incorporating the *Being v Fleeting* (lie)alectic in her conceptualization of her experience as a progression that will “somehow, someday” eventually lead to a resolution of her internal conflict between her sexuality and her religion. Tonya’s story reinforces this even more:

One of the greatest gifts I received during that season of my life was the ability to live with, for lack of a better term, spiritual ambiguity. I don’t have all the answers to spiritual questions that surround same-sex attraction. I want answers, but I can’t have them now. Reaching that point, where my faith was not troubled by ambiguity, was essential to finding the peace I needed. (Tonya’s Story)

In Tonya’s story, she discusses in great detail her struggle with the ambiguity of her son’s sexuality that was in complete conflict with her faith. Her negotiation of this as not being able to have the answers “now” is indicative of the Eternal portion of the (lie)alectic (*i.e.*, she may not have all the answers now but expects to understand the complexities of her son’s sexuality at some point in the future). This negotiation allows members of the Mormon Church to accept their ambiguity surrounding sexual identities, and allows the Mormon Church to appear accepting of multiple sexual orientations and identities, when in reality, as

has been shown, the way in which it pairs and subordinates *Fleeting* identities to the notion of *Being* a “child of God,” demonstrates the ever-present rejection of sexual identities as identities.

Again, this is a way for the Mormon Church to preemptively position themselves as non-homophobic by representing themselves as accepting of gay identities and individuals (in the here and now) while simultaneously maintaining their anti-gay ideologies that ultimately reject any non-heterosexual identity as a permanent facet of *Being*. Additional examples from the text directly support these claims:

*Our identity may be in flux, **but** there is one aspect of who we **are** that is eternally fixed. We will always be children of God. (Who Am I?)*

*How you define yourself may change throughout your life, **but** first and most important, you **are** a beloved child of God. (Who Am I?)*

In these two examples, I hone in on the use of “to be” verbs in these statements in addition to the use of the “but” subordinating conjunction to further substantiate the claim that by the nature of (lie)alectics, the crossing of these two concepts creates a relationship between *Being* and *Eternal*. “To be” verbs are used to denote existence of a person or thing. Specifically, they are used to denote the discourse’s treatment of the essence of *Being* as synonymous with the conceptualization of “child of God.” That is, the text assumes that in order to be at all, one must necessarily be a “child of God,” and then uses the subordinating conjunction “but” to minimize all other facets of identity to this one governing, primary identity. Thus, by suggesting that “Our identity may be in flux” and following it with a “but,” denotes that any part of an identity that is “in flux” or changeable is lower in rank or importance than the “eternally fixed” identity as a “child of God.” This kind of ranking of

identities allows for an acceptance of identities other than “child of God,” while simultaneously cancelling out the centrality of those other identities. Again, no specific reference to sexual orientation or identity is made, and thus, these examples demonstrate the erasure of explicitly homophobic language.

In other examples, the discourse explicitly uses terms such as same-sex attraction, gay, and lesbian in their discussion of labels, but in ways that still constitute dequeerified speech:

*Sexual orientation may refer to emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction **as well as** a sense of identity. For some, it is helpful to distinguish between sexual attraction, emotional attraction, and identity, **rather** than grouping them all together as “sexual orientation.” (About Sexual Orientation)*

*Same-sex attraction (SSA) refers to emotional, physical, romantic, or sexual attraction to a person of the same gender. **If** you experience same-sex attraction, you may or may not choose to use a sexual orientation label to describe yourself. **Either way**, same-sex attraction is a technical term describing the experience without imposing a label. This website uses this term to be inclusive of people who are not comfortable using a label, **not** to deny the existence of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity. (Frequently Asked Questions)*

*...some who experience same-sex attraction choose not to use a label to describe themselves. How people choose to identify may change over time. **Attraction is not identity**... There are active Church members who experience same-sex attraction **and never** choose to identify themselves using a label. Our primary identity will **always** be as a child of God. (About Sexual Orientation).*

*Words mean different things to different people, and the definition of a word can change throughout our lives. What does the word gay mean to you? Is it a feeling? an identity? a lifestyle? The usage of the word gay has been changing **as** society and culture change. Identifying as gay may mean you experience same-sex attraction but choose not to act on these feelings. Or maybe this label describes how you express yourself emotionally, physically, sexually, or politically. (Frequently Asked Questions).*

In these examples, the explicit use of the terms same-sex attraction, gay, lesbian, and bisexual are utilized to draw attention to the ways these concepts are at odds with Mormon doctrine regarding gender, sexual orientation, and identity. Again, utilizing conjunctions and

adverbs, attraction is separated out from identity in a way that allows the Mormon Church to appear accepting of gay identities while simultaneously either subordinating or modifying non-heterosexual identities.

In the first example, all types of sexual attraction are grouped together and using the adverbial phrase “as well as,” separates off identity as unrelated to attraction. This demonstrates the church’s treatment of identity as something it is willing to acknowledge but then goes on to state its true position is that there is a distinction between attraction, and sexual orientation and identity. Utilizing the adverb “rather,” modifies the first part of the sentence “it is helpful to distinguish between sexual attraction, emotional attraction, and identity,” reducing its importance to the idea of “grouping them all together” as problematic.

Both the second and third examples function to highlight the church’s acceptance of its members choosing to take on an identity label while deflecting its underlying encouragement of its members to not do so despite the fact that they “can” (have agency to) under new church doctrine. In the second example, the conditional conjunction “if” is used to denote the specificity of audience—those experiencing same-sex attraction—to amplify the appearance of the church’s acceptance of sexual identity, by allowing their members to choose an identity label if they want to. It then goes on to subordinate this appearance of acceptance using the subordinating conjunction “either way” to define what they really mean by same-sex attraction “a technical term describing the experience without imposing a label.” Lastly, it then uses the adverb “not” to reinforce the stance that the church does not deny the existence of sexual identity as a means of modifying the main content of the website with an assertion that any identity other than “child of God” is insignificant and *Fleeting*.

In the third example, the discourse clearly states “Attraction is not identity,” which explicitly supports the analysis of the first example, which separates off sexual identity from all other forms of sexual attraction. It further utilizes the adverbs “never” and “always” to denote the sense of permanence between *Being* and “child of God,” conflicting with the *Fleeting* problem of negotiating whether or not to label an identity that will eventually no longer be in conflict with the essence of *Being*. Taken together, these elements point to one of the aforementioned functions of the website to provide members of the Mormon Church with ways to negotiate their own dissonance with their non-heterosexual identities. Additionally, it gives members of the church a way to talk about same-sex attraction with others without appearing homophobic, because it allows members to represent themselves as non-homophobic even though they belong to a church that has historically represented itself at odds with homosexuality in entirety.

In the last example, the discourse focuses on the nature of change, drawing attention to the *Fleeting* portion of the (lie)alectic (*i.e.*, what is today may not be tomorrow), and narrows in on the way that terminology surrounding gay identities has changed with “society and culture,” lending itself to the notion that it is not church doctrine that is changing by recognizing sexual identity, but rather that society has changed its treatment of sexual identities in such a way that the Mormon Church can now acknowledge sexual identity as an identity without compromising its perceived integrity of its doctrines regarding homosexual practices. Furthermore, this speaks to Mormon Church doctrine pertaining to social change. Members of the Mormon Church are taught that, “We are living in an evil and wicked world. But while we are in the world, we are not of the world. We are expected to overcome the world and to live as becometh saints. . . . We have greater light than the world has, and the

Lord expects more of us than he does of them” (Teaching of the Mormon Church, 2013, n.p.). Putting the last example from the website in context of Mormonism’s belief that its members are living *in* a wicked world that they must not be a part *of*, highlights even more the *Being v Fleeting* (lie)alectic. That is, experiencing same-sex attraction is a part of *Being* in the world, and as the world changes (and its treatment of sexual identities), Mormons must find new ways of *Being* in the world, but not of the world. The *Being v Fleeting* (lie)alectic provides Mormonism with a way to function within the shift in society’s treatment of sexual orientation and identity being added to anti-discrimination laws, without having to alter its doctrines regarding the nature of *Being* a “child of God” that conflicts with its notions of sexuality, as well as its differentiation between attraction and identity. In accordance with the argument that these (lie)alectics normalize homophobic beliefs as natural and justified, this treatment allows members of the church to accept the Mormon Church’s change in doctrine allowing members to take on a sexual identity without altering their entire belief system about homosexuality as normal and justifiable, and a way to discuss their homophobic beliefs in ways that represent their religious beliefs as not in conflict with sexual identities. To make this whole maneuver possible, the second identified (lie)alectic provides the means by which those who avow homosexual identities can remain members of the Mormon Church and abide by its homophobic doctrine (*i.e.*, by restraining their agency).

Attraction Verses Action: Restrictions of Agency in Gay Mormon Identities

The second (lie)alectic, which I have titled *Attraction v. Action* examines the ways in which the Mormon Church is attempting to negotiate their rejection of homosexuality without having to acknowledge their homophobia. In this (lie)alectic, the church represents *Attraction* as the dialectical opposite of *Action*, when in reality, the dialectical opposite of

Attraction is *Repulsion* and the dialectical opposite of *Action* is *Inaction*. Table 5 demonstrates how crossing these two dialectics creates a relationship between these two concepts and leads to a (lie)alectical tension and demonstrates how this process leads to dequeerified speech.

True Dialectics				
Dialectical Opposite		Synthesis		Dialectical Opposite
Attraction	→	Ambivalence	←	Repulsion
Inaction	→	Preparation	←	Action

<i>Attraction v Action (Lie)alectic</i>	
Attraction ↓ Inaction	Repulsion ↓ Action
By transferring the dialectical tension between these two true dialectics, there is now a relationship between Attraction and Inaction as in harmony (<i>i.e.</i> , if Attraction and Action are incommensurate, then Attraction and Inaction must be commensurate--Action being the true dialectical opposite of Inaction).	On the opposite side, the relationship between Repulsion and Action reveals the dequeerified portion of the discourse: Homosexuality is repulsive.

Table 5. Attraction v Action (lie)alectic

In the true dialectic, both *Attraction* and *Repulsion* are states-of-being characterized by movement: movement toward something (attraction) or movement away from something (repulsion). Thus, the dialectical sublimation of these concepts would be to be pulled in both

directions (ambivalence). Yet, claiming a state of “ambivalence” to LGBTQ issues would undermine the church’s strict anti-gay policies. Nor can church members occupy the clearly homophobic space of *Repulsion*. By cross canceling these two dialectics (Attraction/Repulsion, Action/Inaction), the discourse creates a relationship between *Attraction* and *Inaction* as commensurate with one another, and thus places *Action* as dialectically in tension *Attraction* insofar as *Attraction* is aligned with *Action*’s dialectical opposite *Inaction*. And the indicator that something is (lie)alectical in nature is the fact that no synthesis is required between *Attraction* and *Action*, because these are not true dialectical opposites. This accomplishes two things. First, it provides a way for those experiencing/encountering same-sex attraction to not have to occupy the space of repulsion in order to remain a member of the church. Secondly, this is an enactment of dequeerified speech when looking at the other side of the (lie)alectic that equates *Repulsion* as commensurate with *Action*. That is, when looking at this side of the (lie)alectic, the correlation between *Repulsion* and *Action* reveals the true underlying ideological assumptions of the discourse: The Mormon Church is repulsed by homosexuality. This treatment of *Attraction* as the dialectical opposite of *Action* can be seen in the discourse through the grammatical indicators covered earlier in this chapter. The following three examples come from the *Self-Mastery and Sexual Expression* article published under the *Understanding* page on the *Mormon and Gay* website.

*Sexuality is an important part of being human **and** is also a source of passions that need to be bridled. **Despite** these intense feelings, there are Latter-day Saints who faithfully adhere to the Lord’s moral law over many years.*

***Within** the context of marriage between a man and a woman, sexual expression is an important aspect of bonding between spouses. **However**, if we express ourselves sexually outside the bounds the Lord has set, we not only jeopardize our ability to choose well; we also reject the pattern the Lord set for our eternal happiness.*

*The power to create mortal life is the most exalted power God has given his children. Its use was mandated in the first commandment, **but** another important commandment was given to forbid its misuse.*

In these examples, the use of conjunctions and adverbs work to pair messages of attraction and action and act as indicators of dialectical comparisons. In the first example, sexuality (attraction) is paired with the (inaction) of bridling these sexual passions using the coordinating conjunction “and,” to denote equal importance of both concepts. The text then goes on to use a subordinating conjunction (despite) to minimize the presence of the sentence preceding it—minimize the attraction itself as subordinate to the fact that “despite” the fact that an individual might experience same-sex attraction, the *more important* facet of the equation is that church members “adhere to the Lord’s moral law” (*i.e.*, abstinence/inaction). This functions as dequeerified speech, which allows the Mormon Church to appear accepting of people as sexual beings without having to acknowledging different sexual practices, preferences, or orientations. This (lie)alectic provides a way for the church to avoid specifically stating anti-gay views, but rather frames *all* sexual expression as a choice, drawing attention away from the church’s explicit homophobia. The connection between sexual attraction and morality is not a unique doctrine to the Mormon Church. However, the way the discourse groups these ideas creates a tension between sexual attraction and bridling these passions in a way that diverts the attention of the reader away from the correlation between *Action* and *Repulsion*, making it appear more accepting of same-sex attraction than it actually is. Thus, the discourse is dequeerified and appears to be accepting of multiple sexualities and orientations—representing same-sex attraction as no different than any other sexual attraction—and that the church is no more repulsed by same-sex attraction than by

heterosexual attraction. And when considering the context of the discourse—a website devoted to discussing the Mormon Church’s stance on same-sex attraction—the fact that they do not explicitly state any reference to homosexuality or same-sex attraction is evidence of how the discourse pairs these ideas to communicate their homophobia implicitly.

In the second example, the discourse utilizes adverbs to pair attraction and action in (lie)alectical ways using a similar strategy in the first example, but goes on to define where and when²³ sexual expression in appropriate (*i.e.*, marriage). Building their argument upon the notion that the institution of marriage is the defining factor between moral and immoral sexual relations, it is able to appear as though its objection to homosexuality lies in the agency of individuals to choose to not have sex outside of marriage, again, avoiding explicit rejection of same-sex attraction. Yet, simultaneously, prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage in the US, the church consistently funded and supported homophobic activism that prevented same-sex couples from joining the very institution that is the defining characteristic that would allow same-sex couples to participate in moral sexual relations—forever relegating them to the margins as that which is at odds with the assumed normal (*i.e.*, heterosexual marriage)—as demonstrated by its explicit inclusion of “between a man and a woman” when defining marriage. Additionally, the church continues to advocate for legislation that would allow religious organizations to not observe same-sex marriage on grounds of religious freedoms, which demonstrates further why these declarations are (lie)alectical in nature. This (lie)alectic dequeerifies the church’s discourse about homosexuality because it places the burden of the Church’s position on same-sex attraction on the shoulders of the individual: either comply with Church doctrine (inaction) or be

²³ Recall that adverbs qualify or modify a noun, verb, or adjective

excommunicated (repulsion). This makes it appear as though the church is providing a way for individuals to synthesize *Attraction v Action* through agency, when in reality, no dialectical tension actually exists between these two concepts—allowing the Mormon Church to appear accepting of LGBT-identified individuals. This is an additional element of dequeerification insofar as this (lie)alectic makes it appear as though the church has gay church members undercutting any claims that the Mormon Church is homophobic (*i.e.*, the church is attempting to erase its homophobia by providing ways for LGBT-identified individuals with a way to join or retain membership in the church through agency—an unnecessary synthesis that draws attention away from the far side of the (lie)alectic that reveals the correlation between *Repulsion* and *Action*). Thus, they can claim that they are not denying membership to LGBT individuals, as these individuals can choose to conform to church policies or not—drawing attention away from the fact that the very policies themselves are homophobic in nature.

In the third example, the discourse utilizes the coordinating conjunction “but” to indicate that the misuse of sexual expression is of equal importance as its use, because of its procreative nature. The procreation argument for the demonization of homosexuality is not new or unique to Mormonism. Yet, what is unique is the pairing of the terms “use” and “misuse” on a website entitled *Mormon and Gay*. This indicates an attribution of “rightness” or “wrongness” to sexual expression. Retreating back to its implicit strategy, the passage does not explicitly state that homosexuality is a “misuse” of procreation, rather only that there are multiple ways in which procreation can be misused. This passage is (lie)alectical in nature because, again, it makes it appear as though the church is inclusive of same-sex attraction (insofar as they reject *any* “misuse” of procreation)—placing both heterosexual and

homosexual sex acts as a misuse of sex and procreation. However, within the contexts of a conversation about the Mormon Church's stance on same-sex attraction, the implicit implication here is that homosexuality is a "misuse" of sex and procreation. Again, these examples function as dequeerified speech as they allow the church to appear non-homophobic, insofar as they reject fornication among same-sex and heterosexual individuals alike—effectively erasing the homophobic aspect of the discourse.

However, reviewing church disciplinary policies regarding heterosexual fornication versus homosexual fornication tells a very different story indeed. Within the Mormon Church, there are levels of church discipline applied to various sins committed by its members. Less severe sins require a confessing of sins to an approved church leader. Mortal sins (including fornication) can result in "disfellowship," a practice in which the individual remains a member of the church, but is not allowed to participate in sacramental practices, give public prayers, hold church offices, or attend certain meetings. Disfellowship lasts for one-year, at which point the individual goes before the church disciplinary board again; the board determines whether or not sufficient repentance and reparations have been made. Excommunication occurs when an individual commits a sin deemed to be "too grievous" (*i.e.*, murder, incest, rape, *etc.*) to remain a member of the church, and then individuals are thus excommunicated and no longer considered members of the church.

The discrepancy in the Mormon Church's representation of heterosexual fornication as equally grievous as homosexual fornication on the *Mormon and Gay* website is debunked by their own disciplinary policy which disfellowships heterosexual fornicators and excommunicates homosexual fornicators. Thus, the discourse misrepresents itself as non-homophobic through (lie)alectical structures that pairs/compares heterosexual and

homosexual attractions as equally at odds with the (lie)alectical opposite of acting on those attractions outside of marriage, when in reality, their homophobic doctrines are evidenced in their church disciplinary policies.

An additional three examples of this (lie)alectic are found in the article *Church Teachings* under the *Beliefs* page on the *Mormon and Gay* website.

*Feelings of Same-Sex Attraction Are Not a Sin **and** We Can Choose How to Respond*

*Let us be clear: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes that the experience of same-sex attraction is a complex reality for many people. The attraction itself is not a sin, **but** acting on it is. **Even though** individuals do not choose to have such attractions, they do choose how to respond to them.*

***While** same-sex attraction is not a sin, it can be a challenge. **While** one may not have chosen to have these feelings, he or she can commit to keep God's commandments.*

All three of these examples use similar strategies to the examples given from the *Self-Mastery and Sexual Expression* article, and I include these examples to reinforce how these (lie)alectics are salient throughout the entire discourse. I also include these examples, because they are more explicit than the examples from the *Self-Mastery and Sexual Expression* article, stating clearly that acting on same-sex attraction is a sin, a challenge, and a violation of God's commandments. They inferiorize the attraction itself with subordinating conjunctions such as "even though," and "while," making the (lie)alectical requirement of not acting on the attraction the focus of the sentence and the defining characteristic of Mormonism's inclusivity of those who experience same-sex attraction and utilize their agency to choose to uphold righteous behavior.

Considering all of these examples, in the introduction of this chapter, I argue that one of the things the discourse accomplishes is to normalize homophobic beliefs as natural and justified. This in-and-of-itself is a form of dequeerification, and the analysis of these passages reveals how the discourse attempts to normalize sexuality as a facet of human

nature, yet consistently subordinates homosexuality—reinforcing heterosexuality as the “normal” and “natural” form of sexual expression. By setting up *Attraction* as the dialectical opposite of *Action*, the discourse is able to normalize heterosexuality without having to occupy the true dialectical space of repulsion (*i.e.*, it can maintain a stance of heterosexuality as the only natural form of sexual expression without appearing to be repulsed by homosexuality).

Additionally, I argue that another thing the discourse accomplishes is that it gives its members a way to negotiate their dissonance when faced with their own feelings of same-sex attraction and/or the same-sex attraction experienced by others (especially family members). The *Attraction v. Action* (lie)alectic emerges within the *Stories* page published on the website, as six members of the Mormon Church narrate their experience of “coming out” (or having their children “come out”) as gay Mormons—each story containing elements of this (lie)alectical tensions they each felt between their attraction and actions:

Becky’s Story: *[Recall, Becky recounts her experience of her son Xian coming out to her as gay]. More than anything, I wanted to hear him say that **even though** he was gay, he was staying committed to the gospel.*

Jessyca’s Story: *[At times] I felt that I couldn’t take the loneliness of not having someone while living in the gospel, **but** I also felt that I couldn’t live in a gay relationship because of my testimony and the knowledge God has blessed me with about His sacred plan.*

Josh’s Story: *I began to explore my homosexuality by dating men. For the first time I understood why heterosexual couples fell in love and what that actually felt like. **But** deep down, spiritually, I felt God wanted something different for me.*

Laurie’s Story: *Then something unexpected happened. I fell in love with a woman I’d been dating. **But** despite the fact that my feelings for her were so strong, my testimony carried a great deal of weight too—both in the sense of a strong conviction of the gospel as well as the weight of the conflict.*

Ricardo’s Story: *This year has been significant because I finally acknowledged that I am attracted to men. I always felt it but never really understood it, nor did I know*

how to live authentically. Embracing this might be difficult for some Mormons to understand. It can seem as if by embracing my same-sex attraction, I am breaking a commandment. For me, nothing can be further from the truth. That understanding and authenticity have brought peace to my life.

Tonya's Story: *[Again, recall, Tonya recounts her experience of her son Xian coming out to her as gay]. After telling our other children, we sent an email to our parents and siblings entitled "Out and About," explaining a few things about Andy's experiences as a gay Mormon. There was no social media announcement, no blog. It just wasn't a secret anymore. The important thing is that Andy feels safe just being himself, something he had never experienced.*

In these examples, these members of the Mormon Church attest to how difficult it is to negotiate feelings of same-sex attraction—acknowledging their attraction to members of the same-sex and then pairing those experiences (using coordinating conjunctions) to the inner conflict they feel over their sexual attractions being at odds with church policies and/or their testimony of the truth of the church. By reading the stories of others who have successfully navigated their way through this struggle, this discourse provides its readers with a way to stay in the church and acknowledge their same-sex attractions. That is, according to the discourse, members of the Mormon Church who experience same-sex attraction are not required to be repulsed (occupy the dialectical opposite of their attraction), but rather, must simply be like any other unmarried member of the Mormon Church and choose celibacy as a means of “adher[ing] to the Lord’s moral law,” as described in the first example.

Additionally, it provides parents with a framework of how to respond to their children’s sexuality, as in Becky’s story about her son Xian. Becky states that “I confused ‘loving’ with ‘condoning,’ in discussing her struggle to accept Xian’s sexuality, but then came to realize that she did not have to “choose” between her son and the church, stating: “I’m Mormon and I have a gay son. I love him with all my heart, might, and soul. And I love

my religion with all my heart, might, and soul. It's the core of who I am. I will never, never, ever turn my back on my son, and I will never, never, ever leave my religious faith. Period” (*Becky’s Story*). In this way, the (lie)alectic works in reverse (*i.e.*, Just because I am not repulsed by my child’s sexuality does not mean I condone it). It provides parents with a framework that does not require them to be repulsed by their child’s sexuality or to choose between their child and their religion.

Furthermore, it (in theory) alleviates the true dialectical tension of ambivalence by allowing members to acknowledge their feelings of same-sex attraction and not have those feelings be at odds with church policy (*i.e.*, just don’t act on those feelings). That is, the discourse acknowledges that same-sex attraction is a “complex reality for many people,” and thus, provides a way for members of the Mormon Church to accept their sexuality (and/or sexuality of their children) without feelings of conflict or ambivalence. This reduction/elimination of ambivalence and providing a framework where one can be *both* Mormon *and* gay stands to affect member retention in addition to augmenting the appearance of the Mormon Church as a non-homophobic entity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an analysis of the *Mormon and Gay* website to substantiate my claims that the discourse normalizes homophobic beliefs, gives members of the Mormon Church a way to negotiate same-sex attraction in themselves and others, and gives them a way to talk about same-sex attraction with others without appearing homophobic. Identifying two (lie)alectics (*Being v Fleeting*, and *Attraction v Action*) demonstrates how the discourse creates logical fallacies that, when examined closely, reveal the unstated ideologies present in the discourse. These (lie)alectics are evidence of a rhetorical strategy that when the discourse

crosses two concepts and represents them as dialectical, a relationship between these two concepts now exists discursively and the examination of this relationship reveals the underlying assumptions of the Mormon Church and its aim to remove/draw attention away from the homophobic nature of the discourse (*i.e.*, dequeerification). That is, the *Being v Fleeting* (lie)alectic draws attention away from the relationship between Fleeting/Nothing to downplay the homophobic doctrine that equates queer identities fleeting and therefore ultimately nothing. And again, in the *Attraction v Action*, the relationship between Repulsion/Action is never acknowledged, while the connection between Attraction/Inaction is utilized to generate a narrative of acceptance through abstinence—all the while wielding agency as the justification for their seemingly non-existent homophobia. The next chapter will provide a discussion of the implications of such discourses to impact public policies affecting the everyday material realities of those claiming non-heterosexual identities.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

To begin this chapter, I return to the goals of this research to 1) expose underlying anti-gay ideologies on the *Mormon and Gay* website inherent in (lie)alectical structure of the text, 2) provide a way to assess the implications of these (lie)alectical structures to reinforce heteronormative ideologies, and 3) extrapolate the potential of such discourses to shape state and federal US policies that directly impact the material realities of LGBTQ-identified individuals. Chapter six accomplished the first goal of identifying and interpreting the *Being v Fleeting*, and *Attraction v Action* (lie)alectics and how these structures reinforce homophobic beliefs, how they give members of the Mormon Church a way to negotiate same-sex attraction in themselves and others, and how the texts give members a way to talk about same-sex attraction with others without appearing homophobic.

In this chapter, I address the second and third goals of this study and discuss the implications of this discourse. To accomplish this, I provide a discussion of the implications of (lie)alectic functioning as dequeerified speech, including: 1) addressing my positionalities within this research, 2) examining new homophobia within the context of the Christian Right, 3) discussing the current structure of the First Amendment and proposed alterations that would reinforce homophobia, and 4) extrapolating extended consequences of such discourse to infiltrate the redefining of the First Amendment.

Implications of (Lie)alectics as Dequeerified Speech

The implications of this rhetoric rings so disturbingly clear to me that I find myself by turns not knowing where to begin this section. And it is because these implications are so

obvious to me that it was at this juncture that I realized I must begin this discussion by returning “home” as it were, and address my own positionalities in interpreting this discourse. Returning to the fundamentals of Critical Rhetoric, and Ono & Sloop’s (1992) reading of Foucault, my choice in the subject matter of this research and the rhetorical strategies I have used to deconstruct the text are of equal importance to the examination and analysis itself. That is, Critical Rhetoric acknowledges the significance of the researcher’s choice in artifact insofar as positionalities affect the overall goal of Critical Rhetoric: a commitment to bring about social change, a *telos* (Ono & Sloop, 1992)—and for me, a commitment to affecting political and social change in the treatment of LGBTQ individuals in the US. I also begin this conversation here because it is important to assess one’s own positionalities through good reflexivity, and given that I identify as a lesbian and was raised in the Mormon Church, it is important for me to account for this fact in my discussion of my analysis, lest I simply be grinding an axe against the Mormon Church for my years spent subscribing to its oppressive ideologies. Thus, I offer an inside look into the mind of an ex-Mormon lesbian—a woman who believed so wholeheartedly in the religion she was raised on that she spent 28 years digesting and accepting homophobic and racist ideologies as absolute Truth, and emerges nearly a decade later dismantling those same ideologies in a single (albeit small) effort to resist these types of discourses.

Inside the Mind of the Lemming: My Story of Internalized Homophobia

Growing up in a small farming community in Southeastern Idaho (93% Mormon, 74% white, and 2% non-heterosexual)²⁴, I was raised on narratives of post-racial and homophobic rhetoric justifying the lack of diversity and acts of discrimination as sanctioned

²⁴ According to 2000 US Census data while I was living in Blackfoot, Idaho.

by Mormonism's version of a white, heterosexual God. Positioning African Americans as decedents of Cain and Native American populations as the decedents of an equally condemned character in *The Book of Mormon*²⁵, and from a “hate the sin, love the sinner” model, I experienced first-hand the ideological structures occurring at both micro and macro levels, which policed queer bodies and regulated them to the margins (*i.e.*, the only “presumed” lesbian I even knew about was fired from my high school for “insubordination.” If there were other gay people living in the town of Blackfoot, Idaho, they were successfully covert in their identities). As such, there was no modeling in my life for what I was biologically experiencing nor any conceptualization of what lesbianism was—not even to embrace stereotypical media representations of lesbianism until 1997 when Ellen “came out” during the infamous “Puppy Episode” of her self-named sitcom. So, it wasn't until my sophomore year of high school that I began to experience my sexual impulses as somehow attached to an “identity,” and it would not be long before my identity became a matter of constant negotiation. Identifying with a religion that framed homosexuality as a sin, my sexual identity evoked a sense of shame—a point of non-identity, or an avoidance of labeling my identity—lest I be what I condemned.

Tracing back my journey of maturation, my first “non-celebrity / fantasy” female crush occurred at summer camp—as so many of these stories do. She was a camp counselor—four years older than me—leading the games, sing-alongs, and spiritual devotionals by the campfire each night. So much of the camp was centered around developing a personal relationship with God through communing with nature, prayer, and

²⁵ According to Mormon doctrine, the Native Americans are the descendants of Laman, a wicked ruler in *The Book of Mormon*, and were cursed with a darkened skin so that “they might not be enticing unto [God's] people.”

scripture study. So, the majority of my interactions with “Jane” became mingled with the powerful, overwhelming, full-body emotional reaction I had come to associate as the presence of the holy spirit whispering God’s truth to me. And it started getting difficult to differentiate between the feelings of attraction I was having for Jane and this “burning sensation” associated with the spirit of God, and thus very easy to rationalize them all as the latter.

So, every time I experienced sexual attraction to Jane, it became quite easy to pass it off as feeling the spirit of God in response to this spiritual giant that I “looked up to,” as an older, more mature, protagonist figure in my life. Yet, as so many of us who have emerged from the proverbial closet will tell you, denial is a fair-weathered bitch; and I found myself chronically kneeling in prayer admitting to God that I wasn’t sure if what I felt for Jane was righteous or not and pleading for forgiveness if I had engaged impure thoughts or desires. And I can still remember the most harrowing night of all. After receiving a lesson on chastity the previous Sunday, I met with my spiritual leader plagued with guilt over my discovery of masturbation at twelve-years-old. I couldn’t even say the word; I had to write it down and slide the paper across the mahogany table. Having been told that masturbation caused people to become too familiar with their own bodies and would eventually lead to feelings of being attracted to other women, I went home and I pleaded with God to “take it away,” (not even quite sure what “it” was) bargaining with promises of increased prayer, fasting, service, scripture study, certainly abstaining from “self harm” behaviors, and never engaging with Jane again—a strategy of avoidance that would serve me for the next six years remaining in the isolated community of rural Idaho.

My second notable crush was no less cliché than the first—my first college roommate. I attended a small Mormon college in eastern Idaho in a town hardly bigger than the one I was raised in. Sharing a room with two twin beds, we had positioned the beds in such a way as to allow us to hold hands at night when we would fall asleep. I facilitated this under the ruse that it was my first year away from home and would cry myself to sleep every night. So “Jenn” would hold my hand at night, eventually escalating to sleeping in the same bed, and on the night we first kissed, I felt so much guilt that I locked myself in the 15-square feet of our apartment’s bathroom—curled up in the bathtub, contemplating suicide—until after she left in the morning. When she returned home that evening, we both decided we should confess what had happened to our spiritual leader, at which time Jenn told him that she did not have feelings for me, but I could not do the same. I was removed from the apartment and sent to live in another building that had a single room with no roommate, and I began work with a therapist who specialized in issues of “gender confusion,” (*i.e.*, conversion therapy).

After working with therapists for nearly two years, I consulted with my spiritual leader about the fact that I wasn’t experiencing any change in my heart, despite the therapy, and prayers, and scripture reading, and fasting—nothing seemed to be helping. He recited a passage of scripture that told me that if I confessed and denounced my sins publicly, I would be filled with the Lord’s spirit and receive immediate forgiveness in my repentance. So, during the next Fast and Testimony²⁶ meeting, I “outed” myself as having feelings for other

²⁶ Every first Sunday of the month, the Mormon Church observes what is called Fast and Testimony meeting. All members of the church fast for two meals and donate the money they would have used for those meals to go to impoverished church members. During church services on that Sunday, the pulpit is left open for members to voluntarily stand and bear

women, but that I was devoted to doing God’s will, and then waited for my glorious forgiveness—which, of course, never came. In its place, shame and humiliation followed through exclusion, ridicule, and betrayal by the people I felt I needed the most support from. So, I fled—away from what had once been my safety net—to the only other safe haven I knew, family. I lived with my brother in Portland, Oregon and worked for a Mormon bookstore, but with a new set of church members I would never disclose my sexuality to, all the while still attending church and subscribing to the doctrines of my youth.

So, when I started classes at Portland Community College in Oregon in 2002, the world outside of Idaho was frightening to me. I had never encountered a lesbian, as far as I was aware, and I feared the dreaded myths of *the liberal agenda* and *the gay agenda* to seduce all heterosexuals into a homosexual lifestyle. I viewed tolerance as a radical relativism that left me vulnerable to a world that would validate my attraction to other woman and that must not be fostered. Yielding to these fears, I turned to the comfort of church spiritual leaders who reinforced my internalized homophobia and guaranteed me that if I stopped engaging my root cause of homosexuality—never again looked at pornography or engaged in masturbation—these feelings of same-sex attraction would go away.

I had bought into the notion of the “war on Christianity,” and still believed that through faith, prayer, fasting, and scripture study, my efforts to “pray the gay away” would be met with an eternal reward far better than any temporal relationship I might engage in this mortal world; Living and engaging with people outside of “the Church” would not lure me into giving into my temptations, no matter how the world assaulted God’s plan. It would be another long ten years before the layers of my faith would be stripped away one-by-one until

witness of their testimony of the church, including struggles they’ve had with sin and temptations.

I no longer attended church and stopped believing in the principles of Mormonism enough to investigate my sexuality. Yet, even after leaving the church and taking on the identity of lesbian, I still felt no anger toward the Mormon Church. By the time I had accepted my sexuality as an identity in 2013, the Mormon Church had already started shifting toward their church policy that same-sex attraction was not a sin, only the act. Even having lived through the horrors of being gay while attempting to stay active in the Mormon Church, I still did not see the harm underlying the ideologies and doctrines (*i.e.*, live and let live). I did not begrudge people their faith in something that brought them comfort, even if that faith despised me; in some ways, I missed the security of my religious beliefs and felt a sense of jealousy for those who could continue to blindly believe in a predestined future that gave their lives purpose and meaning.

So, when I started investigating Mormonism's stance on homosexuality more thoroughly in my graduate works beginning in 2013, I did not choose my artifacts of examination from a deep-rooted need for revenge, nor did I anticipate finding anything more nefarious than a redundant "hate the sin, love the sinner" model that many other Christian denominations subscribe to. Yet, my knowledge and experiences of living the life of a "gay Mormon" *before* it was okay to be a "gay Mormon" primed me to see beyond the surface of this discourse. And the emergence of (lie)alectics could only come from these experiences that would take me many more years to label them for what they actually were: Trauma. Knowing firsthand the injury that comes from "splitting," a psychological phenomenon of trauma, where individuals separate off parts of themselves that are incompatible with their core identity and see the world in extremes of all-or-nothing and black-and-white thinking, was I able to see the incompatible nature of the ideologies present in Mormonism's discourse

surrounding LGBTQ issues. In essence, these strategies existed in my psyche long before I began my investigation, and it was not until I looked at them through a lens of homophobia that I was able to understand the importance of this project.

I once ran into a former mentor at the National Communication Association conference who criticized my decision to continue researching Mormonism, telling me that she thought I chose to research Mormonism because it was “easy,” and that I was avoiding stretching myself as a scholar. Nothing could be further from the truth. Drudging through one’s own trauma week-after-week for over two years is not easy; it is a commitment. It is a commitment to utilizing my positionalities to bring about social change.

With that, I also bring an insider perspective on the mindset of the Christian Right’s attempts to shape public policies. While most other Christian denominations do not recognize Mormonism as a Christian religion, Mormons do consider themselves Christians and endorse many of the same beliefs of Evangelical Christians in the US (*i.e.*, pro-life, anti same-sex marriage). Aligning with those beliefs, while I was active in the Mormon Church, I wholeheartedly believed that to vote for a presidential candidate who supported something I did not believe in was a sinful act. God had a plan for me, and part of that plan was to bring others unto Christ and to avoid sin and temptation. *Ergo*, I believed that religious freedoms guaranteed Christians the right to shape public policy based on beliefs alone. I had no conceptualization of what the First Amendment actually did or did not guarantee US American citizens, only that I felt oppressed when in the presence of others participating in behaviors that contradicted my religious beliefs. My ability to rationalize any inconsistency with my paramount belief system is now quite troubling to me, especially when contemplating the fact that many people within Christian-based faiths are taught to be

stalwart in their beliefs and not waver in the face of false Gods and prophets (*i.e.*, non-religious politicians). Understanding this mindset and its ability to rationalize circuitous logics of homophobia ignites the exigence in addressing discourse that would parade itself around as non-homophobic—both from within and outside of the belief system. So, I include my story here to make it clear that this discourse is not benign. What it asks of its members is not benign. What it asked of me was not benign. And, the implications of this discourse to shape public policy surrounding religious freedoms in the US are not benign. Thus, the remainder of this chapter unpacks new homophobia and the potential of this discourse to reshape the First Amendment and religious freedoms in the US to marginalize and discriminate against protected classes.

Fostering Internalized Homophobia

Knowing that had I stayed the course of Mormonism, I might very well have been a good candidate to be represented on the *Stories* portion of the *Mormon and Gay* website—an articulate, educated woman *still* devoted to doing God’s will—I dedicate this section of my dissertation to those members of the Mormon Church who are directly impacted by the Church’s position on same-sex attraction. In this section, I highlight the material realities of what living as a gay Mormon truly asks of these individuals, and highlight the implications of (lie)alectics as a tool to maintain membership regardless of the impact on individuals and families in the Mormon Church.

Returning to the *true* dialectic: *Attraction* → *Ambivalence* ← *Repulsion*, as the (lie)alectic is a ruse representing itself as a means of being *both* Mormon *and* Gay, what the discourse truly asks of these individuals is to live in a constant state of ambivalence about their sexual identity—to be eternally at odds with a core portion of who they experience

themselves to be. And you see the true dialectic of ambiguity seep out in the captions introducing these stories. *Jessyca's Story* is introduced by saying: "She still isn't sure whether she will remain single, but that's her plan right now. She's not sure she will ever find a guy she can be attracted to." Similarly, *Josh's Story* is introduced saying: "He doesn't know what his life will look like in a few years, but he knows God is with him to show him what it's supposed to look like today." In fact, *Tonya's Story* explicitly refers to same-sex attraction as a spiritual ambiguity: "According to Tonya Miller, coming out is a process, not an event. At least, that's what she witnessed with her son Andy. And despite the spiritual ambiguity that still surrounds being a gay Mormon, the important thing is that Andy feels safe being himself, something he had never experienced before."

New Homophobia and the Redefining of Religious Freedoms by the Christian Right

While a goodly portion of the Christian Right continues to pay little interest to curtailing their blatantly homophobic objection to homosexual lifestyles, advancements in LGBTQ legislation in the US has increasingly placed religious organizations in a Catch-22 of *new homophobia*—either they maintain their anti-gay policies overtly and endure social backlash and accusations of discrimination for their homophobic beliefs, or they remove the overt homophobic portion of their discourse and rebrand their homophobia as a "conditional acceptance" of sorts. Returning to discussions of discursive deracialization and dequeerification, just as Goodman and Burke (2011) suggest that race can be viewed as a particularly "unpalatable reason for opposing outgroups," so too religious organizations are reframing their arguments as fundamental violations of First Amendment rights to side-step the homophobic context of their underlying reasons for claiming those rights in the first place. In a similar maneuver to Goodman and Rowe's (2014) study regarding the

racialization of Gypsies, the fundamental nature of these arguments regarding LGBTQ rights being in conflict with religious freedoms is grounded in factors of identity (*i.e.*, does sexuality constitute a facet of identity?)

In Goodman and Rowe's (2014) study, respondents concluded that the identity of "Gypsy" did not constitute a "race," and therefore opposition to the notion of Gypsy was not an instance of racism. Similarly, state and federal anti-discrimination laws have increasingly included sexual identity as a protected class, which is the defining characteristic that places religious freedoms in conflict with anti-discrimination laws—especially when reflecting on the (lie)alectics present on the *Mormon and Gay* website that clearly relegate sexuality as a feeling or temporary characteristic and not an identity inherent to an individual. Thus, in the same way that Wetherell and Potter's (2002) study of the Maori people in New Zealand revealed the way that the deracialized speech "explain[ed] away the inequalities between the dominant 'white' and the indigenous Maori New Zealanders in ways that ignored the ongoing impact of the European colonization of the county," dequeerified speech explains away the inequalities of LGBTQ citizens as an unavoidable consequence of being at odds with religious freedoms that refuse to acknowledge sexuality as a facet of identity, and therefore justify calls to exempt those claiming religious freedoms from treating LGBTQ people as a protected class. To better understand this maneuver, I provide a brief overview of the history of the First Amendment's rights to freedom of religion, and offer an explanation of what religious freedoms *are* and what they *are not* to demonstrate exactly what dequeerified speech stands to accomplish in altering the role and function of religious freedoms in the US.

The First Amendment: What constitutes a Religious Freedom?

The First Amendment of the US Constitution includes two clauses pertaining to religion. The first clause, the Establishment Clause, prohibits the government from establishing a national religion or to privilege one religion over another (whitehouse.gov). The second clause, the Free Exercise Clause, guarantees the freedom of all American citizens to accept any religious belief and engage in religious rituals. It also guarantees that a person cannot be compelled to violate their religious beliefs (whitehouse.gov). However, some provisions have been made, revisiting the *Reynolds v United States* case discussed in chapter one, the courts concluded that individuals cannot reasonably excuse themselves from upholding the law because of their religious beliefs, otherwise every citizen must be permitted to become a law unto him/herself.

Yet, applications of religious freedoms are rarely this clear or straight forward. Michael McConnell (2002) discusses the ways the First Amendment is often in conflict with itself in *Religion and the Constitution*:

If there is a constitutional requirement for accommodation of religious conduct, it will most likely be found in the Free Exercise Clause. Some say, though, that it is a violation of the Establishment Clause for the government to give any special benefit or recognition of religion. In that case, we have a First Amendment in conflict with itself—the Establishment Clause forbidding what the Free Exercise Clause requires. (105)

This is certainly the case in current proposed cases such as the *Masterpiece Cake* Supreme Court case and other proposed legislation covered in the chapter four. Here, I argue that (lie)alectical discourses, as an element of dequeerified speech, have the potential to accomplish alterations in the First Amendment's rights to freedom of religion in two significant ways. Legitimizing homophobia as a religious freedom and/or exempting religious organizations from federal anti-discrimination laws by defining their doctrines as

non-homophobic, 1) redefines what constitutes a compulsory violation of religious beliefs, and 2) extends religious freedoms to policing behaviors, policies, and bodies into conformity with the doctrines of the dominant religious organizations within the US—already substantiated as Evangelical Christians and the Christian Right.

Redefining Violations of Religious Freedoms. As part of the Free Expression Clause of the First Amendment, citizens of the US are guaranteed that they cannot be compelled to violate their religious beliefs. This guarantees that those subscribing to religious objections to homosexuality cannot be compelled by the government to engage in homosexuality. However, proposed legislation, such as the *Masterpiece Cake* Supreme Court case, would extend these violations of religious freedoms to include the sale of goods and public accommodations to LGBTQ individuals as being compelled to violate their religious freedoms because providing services and public accommodations is a form of participation in the ceremonies they object to.

Since this study is examining the Mormon Church, a clear-cut example of this is that under current applications of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, the government cannot compel someone claiming membership in the Mormon Church to drink alcohol, because complete abstinence is in fact a core Mormon doctrine. However, proposed legislation would be the equivalent of allowing Mormon Uber or Lyft drivers to refuse to drive someone to a bar or club if their rider admits her/his intentions to drink that night (*i.e.*, the act of driving the passenger to a location that contradicts their religious beliefs would constitute participation in the actions that occur after the transaction is complete). In like fashion, refusing to sell a cake based on the notion of what that cake is being used for after it

is purchased is not currently protected under the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. Current proposed legislation seeks to change that.

For example, plaintiff General Francisco, in the *Masterpiece Cake* case, compared forcing a Christian baker to make a cake for a gay wedding to be the equivalent of forcing “a gay opera singer to perform at the Westboro Baptist Church just because that opera singer would be willing to perform at the National Cathedral” (Oral Arguments, pg. 47)—equating making a cake as a form of speech, which would violate the Free Expression Clause of the First Amendment that an individual cannot be compelled to violate her/his religious beliefs. This suggests that engaging issues of speech is enough to outmaneuver anti-discrimination laws.

Similarly, in the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference released by the Mormon Church prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage, while not official proposed legislation, is quite clear about this intended trajectory:

In addition to institutional protections, individual people of faith must maintain their constitutional rights. This would include living in accordance with their deeply held religious beliefs, including choosing their profession or employment and serving in public office without intimidation, coercion or retaliation from another group. For example, a Latter-day Saint physician who objects to performing...artificial insemination for a lesbian couple should not be forced against his or her conscience to do so, especially when others are readily available to perform that function. Another example, a neighborhood Catholic pharmacist, who declines to carry the “morning after” pill when large pharmacy chains readily offer them, should likewise not be pressured into violating his or her conscience by bullying or boycotting. (Newsroom, 2015, n.p.)

This movement toward redefining what constitutes Free Expression under the religious freedoms clause of the First Amendment is particularly affected by the (lie)alectical frameworks outlined in chapter six and the application of dequeerified speech in the presentation of arguments made for changes to protected rights for religiously identified

people. That is, the defining characteristic that currently prevents these types of maneuvers from being constitutional is the addition of gender and sexual orientation as a protected class to anti-discrimination laws. However, ideologies such as the *Being v Fleeting* (lie)alectic puts forth a religious belief in conflict with state and federal recognition of gender and sexual orientation as a facet of identity warranting placement among other protected classes, giving organizations like the Mormon Church traction in their calls for exempting “people of faith” from sustaining anti-discrimination laws that directly contradict/interfere with their own protected class of subscribing to a particular religious organization, and/or with church doctrine that does not recognize sexual orientation as a facet of identity.

Additionally, the *Attraction v Action* (lie)alectic provides another avenue upon which claims to exemption can be legitimized. The *Attraction v Action* (lie)alectic is predicated upon the notion that a person can be gay and retain membership in the church so long as that individual does not act on their sexual impulses to engage in homosexual sex acts. In this way, an objection to providing public accommodations to a gay couple can be represented as a rejection of service that is not grounded in issues of sexual orientation. That is, the Mormon Church openly recognizes sexual orientation as an acceptable characteristic of individuals, and what they are objecting to is the action of the individuals—not the individuals themselves. And anti-discrimination laws, being grounded in facets of identity, currently make no accommodations for discrimination based on people’s behaviors. Thus, what the discourse has the potential to accomplish is backdoor state-sanctioned discrimination of LGBTQ people based on religious freedoms grounded in dequeerified speech that erases the homophobic nature of the discourse.

Extending Religious Freedoms: A Slippery Slope of Discrimination

This discussion would be incomplete without furthering the implications of allowing religious organizations and individuals to exempt themselves from observing anti-discrimination laws in one category (sexual orientation) without recognizing the potential of such a maneuver to be utilized as justification in exempting themselves from observing anti-discrimination laws that apply to any other protected class (*i.e.*, race, gender, class, other religions, *etc.*). Justice Kennedy acknowledges this concern on the part of the court in the *Masterpiece Cake* case pointing to cases involving conflicts between religious beliefs regarding mixed marriages stating that: “the problem is that America’s reaction to mixed marriages and to race didn’t change on its own. It changed because we had public accommodation laws that forced people to do things that many claimed were against their expressive rights and against their religious rights” (p. 56). Here, Kennedy points to the initiation of anti-discrimination laws that prevented religious organizations from discriminating based on race, which has since been extended to class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. In essence, what Kennedy is pointing to here is that in areas of public accommodations, *etc.*, social change was forced through the government’s enforcement of anti-discrimination policies. As such, providing an exception to religious organizations to any of these protected classes necessarily puts all protected classes at risk for religious organizations to legitimize racism, classism, sexism, *etc.*

To pose a few hypothetical situations, imagine for a moment a religion with similar tenets to the Mormon Church on receiving revelations from God (*e.g.*, changing policies on polygamy) and now subscribes to the notion that homosexuality is God’s answer to issues of over-population. The proposed changes to the First Amendment in allowing religious freedoms to supersede anti-discrimination laws would likewise allow that religious

organization, businesses owners affiliated with that religion, and individual members of that religion to refuse service to individuals participating in heterosexual sex. Similarly, a religious organization opposed to inter-racial relationships or marriage could likewise refuse to recognize that marriage as not based on race, but on the behavior of performing sexual acts between people of different races. And a religious organization subscribing to the notion that a woman's place is in the home would be equally protected in refusing employment to women—not *because* they are women, but because their religious belief objects to the behavior of women engaging in gainful employment.

As ridiculous as these hypothetical scenarios are, and I chose hyperbolic situations specifically to point out the ever-inherent problem of the discourse's underlying aim to redefine religious freedoms in the US; Where do we draw the line? If we allow individual doctors to refuse medical services to lesbian couples as a matter of evoking their First Amendment rights (as is directly proposed in the *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference example), how do the courts differentiate between a religious belief that is discriminating based on the behaviors of a lesbian couple and the behaviors of an unmarried couple, which the Mormon Church purports to equally oppose? How do the courts differentiate between the proposed amendments to provide exemptions to anti-discrimination laws in *any* other area if exemptions are made on the grounds of sexual orientation and identity? And religious affiliation being a protected class itself, what prevents anyone claiming exemption of anti-discrimination laws from discriminating against *anyone* who participates in *any* behavior contradictory to *any* doctrine of that individual or entity? Mormon doctrine has bylaws about not having tattoos. What differentiates their claims to exemptions to serving LGBTQ individuals from exemptions of individuals who participated

in the behavior of getting a tattoo? Or an individual who drinks alcohol? Or coffee? Or an individual who violates their modesty codes by wearing a sleeveless shirt?

What I hope this list of questions highlights is the underlying threat of the proposed alterations of the First Amendment to allow dominant religious ideologies to govern and police others who violate the personal moral values of the Christian Right, and that while LGBTQ issues are the central focus of current proposed religious freedom acts, the latitude of these changes would require a religious organization only to adopt a doctrine based on behavior (*e.g.*, an African American who performs blackness) to legitimize their exclusion and discrimination.

This brings the conversation back to the argument that these (lie)alectical structures are a preemptive counterstrike to perceived threats on religious freedoms. Specifically, the rhetorical situation that has emerged out of the most recent presidential administrations in the US that have expanded anti-discrimination laws to include sexual identity as a protected class, religious organizations subscribing to homophobic doctrines will find themselves at odds with federal law in denying membership to their religious organization based on sexual identity. The Mormon Church's erasure of their homophobia through the (lie)alectical structure that allow them to conditionally allow LGBTQ-identified individuals to be members of their faith will exempt them from their discriminatory behavior being recognized as discriminatory. It will allow them to continue to exclude LGBTQ individuals in conditional ways.

Conclusion

The ever-contested history of the construction of law has been at the very heart of how rights are created, changed, perceived, and talked about. (Lie)alectical discourses have

the potential to alter First Amendment rights surrounding issues of religious freedoms through a process of dequeerification—positioning religious organizations as non-homophobic through the discursive erasure of explicit homophobic doctrines and beliefs. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the addition of sexual orientation and identity to anti-discrimination laws has put homophobic religious organizations in a position to redefine religious freedoms if they are to maintain their homophobic doctrines. Cases such as the *Masterpiece Cakeshop v Colorado Civil Rights Commission* demonstrate the continuing conflict between First Amendment rights to religious freedoms and Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection under the law for protected classes. So too, the *Mormon and Gay* website demonstrates the underlying rhetorical strategy of the Mormon Church to appear non-homophobic as a means of defense against accusations of homophobia. By so doing, the Mormon Church can claim to have gay members of their congregations, while maintaining a constructed space of homophobia with doctrines that position non-heterosexual identities as at odds with its doctrine. Thus, having gay members, any act of discrimination against LGBTQ-identified individuals can be perceived—not as discrimination related to an individual’s identity—but as a refusal to provide service based on an individual’s behavior.

Furthermore, following this model, a religious organization need only develop any belief—rooted in behavior—to sidestep anti-discrimination laws, allowing them to police and punish behaviors that are incongruent with their religious beliefs (*i.e.*, same-sex marriage, interracial marriage, artificial insemination for lesbians or interracial couples, *etc.*). Returning to Crowley’s (2007) discussion on Christian privilege in the US, this chapter is an explication of her statement that “Christian conservatives wish to impose a standard of moral behavior on all of us so that they can easily discern—and discipline—those who depart from it” (p.

104). In quite the opposite direction, this chapter calls for the protection of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment—the portion of the First Amendment that restrains the government from passing legislation establishing a national religion or from privileging any religious entity over another. Arguably, allowing conservative Christians the right to discipline/punish behaviors they deem sinful is an establishment of legislation privileging Christianity over other belief systems (i.e., a Christian belief that homosexuality is a sin does not entitle the government to take away other citizen's right to sin)—lest the government align itself too closely with doctrines of Christianity to claim non-establishment of a national religion.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The development and application of (lie)alectics as a theoretical framework has been upwards of a three-year project beginning in 2015 when the Mormon Church released their *Religious Freedoms and Nondiscrimination* press conference comparing religious freedoms to nondiscrimination as dialectically in tension with each other. My interest in this comparison grew as I was able to repeatedly identify this pattern throughout the discourse and has expanded as this theory has held true of the discourse on the *Mormon and Gay* website, and here I provide a summary of this research.

In Chapter one, I argue the importance of examining emerging religious discourses, which aim to marginalize the LGBTQ community in the US. The vector of influence the Mormon Church has to impact legislative choices is substantial and has the potential to exempt those claiming religious freedoms from upholding anti-discrimination laws pertaining to sexual orientation and identity. To that end, I argue that the *Mormon and Gay* website is problematic discourse because it seeks to position the Mormon Church—a historically homophobic religious entity—as non-homophobic by portraying itself as willing to recognize sexual identities, while still seeking to exempt religious organizations from substantiating anti-discrimination laws. The potential of this discourse to shape public policy sets a trajectory that would leave protected classes vulnerable to any person claiming religious freedoms as the justification for refusal to adhere to anti-discrimination laws.

The discourse on the *Mormon and Gay* website warrants textual analysis because the theory of (lie)alectics emerged from examination of previous Mormon discourse, and

examining this more comprehensive artifact stands to demonstrate the generalizability of (lie)alectics to Mormon discourse, which will provide the platform for determining further applications of (lie)alectics. Additionally, the *Mormon and Gay* website is arguably the most in-depth publicly published website by a religious organization regarding LGBT-related issues, and examination of Mormon discourse is of additional value because of the affluence and growth rate of the organization and its history of supporting anti-gay legislation. In this chapter I propose three research goals aimed at identification of anti-gay messages within the text, contextualize those structures, and provide implications of the identified messages.

In chapter two, I argue that the evolving stance on homosexuality and LGBTQ rights in the US is important to understanding the larger implications of this research: religious discourses shaping public policies that discriminate against and marginalize queer lives in the US. Homosexuality has been at the center of US legislation from its criminalization to state-sanctioned marriage, with extensive changes in legislation over the past ten years. With these changes, political pushback from the Christian Right seeks to reclaim and exert its historical influence over policing and punishing queer identities, behaviors, and performances. The history of the Mormon Church provides the important facts that demonstrate that this discourse has deep roots in homophobia and demonstrates how the Mormon Church has historically responded to conflicts of interest between church doctrine and federal law. The evolution of the *Mormons and Gays* website into the *Mormon and Gay* website brings attention to the significance of the way the Mormon Church is representing its doctrines and policies that are still homophobic in nature.

In chapter three, I provide a review of current literature related to queer theory, intersectionality, and critical treatments of religious discourses to position my research within

the larger conversations surrounding these issues. I utilize this chapter to develop the justification for this research and situate it within current conversations about queerness, intersectional identities, and critical approaches to religious analyses, and to substantiate this research as recent, relevant, and applicable. I offer a definition of queer as both complex and specifically focused on gender and sexuality, and demonstrate how this research fills gaps in applications of queer theory and intersectionality and calls for more critical approaches to analysis of religious discourses. This chapter functions to communicate my understanding of the conversations that precede my research. Queer theory and intersectionality are complex concepts that are in conversation with each other from different disciplines, developing perspectives, critiquing those perspectives with a trajectory rooted in complicating, problematizing, and challenging not only the discourses it critiques, but also the theories themselves.

In chapter four, I outline (lie)alectics and discursive dequeerification as theoretical constructs that can be used to deconstruct hidden ideologies within a text. (Lie)alectics can be treated as both fallacious in reasoning and a discursive strategy, which obscures blatant homophobia, and in some cases, removes homophobic phrases and words in entirety from discourses through the process of dequeerification. The discussion of discursive deracialization in this chapter functions to demonstrate how discourses can be stripped of explicitly homophobic language in similar ways that racialized speech within explicitly racist discourses gets stripped away to resist accusations of racism. In addition to the research done on discursive deracialization, I propose (lie)alectics as a specific strategy of discursive dequeerification—one that does not work solely by removing homophobic language from the discourse, but also creates logical fallacies that represent themselves as steeped in reason and

reasonableness (*i.e.*, comparing non-antithetical ideas as though they were incommensurate), making the discourse appear nonthreatening in its homophobic trajectory. Through providing examples, I substantiate (lie)alectics as a useful theoretical framework in understanding how homophobic discourses resist labels.

In Chapter five, I provided an analysis of the *Mormon and Gay* website to substantiate my claims that the discourse normalizes homophobic beliefs, gives members of the Mormon Church a way to negotiate same-sex attraction in themselves and others, and gives them a way to talk about same-sex attraction with others without appearing homophobic. Identifying two (lie)alectics (*Being v Fleeting*, and *Attraction v Action*) demonstrates how the discourse contains unstated ideologies that are concealed within logical fallacies of comparing non-antithetical ideas. These (lie)alectics are evidence of a rhetorical strategy that when the discourse crosses two concepts and represents them as dialectical, a relationship between these concepts is created discursively and the examination of this relationship reveals the underlying assumptions of the Mormon Church and its aim to remove/draw attention away from the homophobic nature of the discourse (*i.e.*, dequeerification). In the *Being v Fleeting* (lie)alectic, attention is drawn away from the relationship between Fleeting/Nothing to downplay the homophobic doctrine that equates queer identities as fleeting and therefore ultimately nothing. And again, in the *Attraction v Action*, the relationship between Repulsion/Action is never acknowledged, while the connection between Attraction/Inaction is utilized to generate a narrative of acceptance through restraint—all the while wielding agency as the justification for their seemingly non-existent homophobia.

In chapter six, I discuss the potential influence of the rhetorical strategies employed on the *Mormon and Gay* website to affect public policy. As reviewed in this chapter, the ever-contested history of the construction of law has been at the very heart of how rights are created, changed, perceived, and talked about in the US. (Lie)alectical discourses aim to modify First Amendment rights surrounding issues of religious freedoms through a process of dequeerification—positioning religious organizations as non-homophobic through the discursive erasure of explicit homophobic doctrines and beliefs. The addition of sexual orientation and identity to anti-discrimination laws has put pressure on homophobic religious organizations to redefine religious freedoms if they are to maintain their homophobic doctrines. The conflict between First Amendment rights to religious freedoms and Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection under the law for protected classes are evident in cases such as *Masterpiece Cakeshop v Colorado Civil Rights Commission*. In like fashion, the *Mormon and Gay* website demonstrates the underlying rhetorical strategy of the Mormon Church to appear non-homophobic as a means of defense against accusations of homophobia. In this way, the Mormon Church can claim to have gay members, while maintaining a constructed space of homophobia with doctrines that position non-heterosexual identities as at odds with its doctrine. And as such, having gay members, any act of discrimination against LGBTQ-identified individuals can be perceived—not as discrimination based on an individual’s identity—but as a refusal to provide service based on an individual’s behavior.

Furthermore, this alteration in the functionality of the First Amendment means a religious organization need only develop any belief—rooted in behavior—to sidestep anti-discrimination laws, allowing them to police and punish behaviors that are incongruent with their religious beliefs (*i.e.*, same-sex marriage, interracial marriage, artificial insemination for

lesbians or interracial couples, *etc.*). This move mirrors Crowley's (2007) sentiment that the Christian Right wishes to impose their moral values upon US policies as a means of easily discerning and disciplining behaviors they disagree with. In quite the opposite direction, this chapter presents a call for the protection of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment—the part of the First Amendment that restrains the US government from passing legislation establishing a national religion or from privileging any religious entity. I close this chapter arguing that allowing conservative Christians the right to discipline/punish behaviors they deem sinful is a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment insofar as it privileges Christian beliefs over other belief systems. That is, the federal government cannot take away the rights of its citizens to sin, simply because the Christian Right deems the behavior sinful, without violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Thus, its own way, this dissertation is a call to take back religious freedoms, not pertaining to the Free Expressions clause of the First Amendment, but to reclaim the right of US citizens to evoke their First Amendment rights to not be governed by a religiously affiliated government and/or public policies shaped by those religious beliefs, tenets, and doctrines.

Theoretical Contributions and Future Research

Now, having provided a summary of this research, I provide an overview of the theoretical contributions of this research as well as future applications for (lie)alectics and discursive dequeerification in critical rhetoric, queer approaches to cultural communication, critical applications of linguistics, and to critical social psychology.

Critical Rhetoric

Contributions. Returning once again to Ono & Sloop's (1992) call for a *telos*—a commitment to social change, this research does precisely that. Utilizing a rhetorical analysis, this research uncovered strategies that have the potential to alter the very foundation of the Constitution of the United States, and that ever called upon First Amendment that has been utilized to police and punish those who dare defy the domination of the Christian Right in US politics. As noted in chapter seven, the Mormon Church's evolution in their treatment of homosexuality has essentially found a loophole to anti-discrimination laws, and were this ideology to spread to other Christian approaches and similar strategies be used in denying services, *etc.* based on behavior, rather than identity, the potential of this discourse to dominate and oppress LGBTQ people (and beyond) is profound and dangerous. Resisting this discourse is essential to prevent further policing of behavior and social punishment for those expressing non-heterosexual identities. Thus, the theoretical application of (lie)alectics and dequeerification contributes to the body of research being done in Critical Rhetoric, especially Queer Critical Rhetoric.

The theory of (lie)alectics and discursive dequeerification advances applications of Critical Rhetoric by demonstrating how the arrangement and style of a text function to reveal unstated ideological assumptions hidden within a text. It allows for the rhetorical analyst to utilize functions of language to identify the dominant ideologies the discourse reinforces and the researcher seeks to disrupt. The theory of (lie)alectics provides a way of talking about what the discourse has the potential to accomplish, revealing the strategies used by the authors/producers of a text, and creating new discourse that can disrupt the advancement of oppressive ideologies.

This particular study itself advances Critical Rhetoric by providing a way to directly interrupt the advancement of homophobic and heteronormative ideologies directly related to US public policies. This research is an enactment of Critical Rhetoric's call for political and social change and adds to the body of research being done in Critical Rhetoric that does the same. For example, in Pezzulo's (2003) *Touring "Cancer Alley"* article, she states that: "This essay aimed to illustrate how drawing on theories and practices of performance may enable one to appreciate more fully the inventional possibilities of resistance" (p. 246)—calling for the rhetorical application of invention to function as a site of social and political change. Similarly, (lie)alectics function as stylistic possibilities of resistance by locating who and what needs to be resisted—especially in discourses that have been dequeerified—enabling readers to identify the assaultive ideologies playing out in the discourse. Ultimately, (lie)alectics are a rhetorical strategy implemented within discourses to disguise oppressive ideologies, and thus, identification of these (lie)alectics provides ways to remove that disguise and reveal the discourse for what it really is and what it really does—in this case reinforcing homophobia and heteronormativity.

Future research. Certainly one major question that remains is whether or not the theory of (lie)alectics has applicability beyond just the rhetoric being put forth by the Mormon Church and/or in religious discourses in general. Utilizing a similar methodology in terms of textual analysis has the potential to reveal whether or not these (lie)alectical structures are inherent in other religious rhetoric as well as other general discourse. Additionally, similar studies have the potential to determine whether or not (lie)alectics extend beyond being an indicator of homophobia, or if these (lie)alectical structures also apply to other discourses of oppression of marginalized communities (*i.e.*, race, gender, class,

nationality, *etc.*). For example, a (lie)alectical analysis of President Trump’s border wall speeches has the potential to reveal the deracialized components of his discourse and provide a way to create counter-discourse in political resistance to the building of a border wall. A (lie)alectical analysis of political coverage of the #MeToo movement has the potential to reveal the receptiveness of this discourse and what ideological assumptions are being perpetuated within media representations of current social and political movements toward change.

In addition to (lie)alectics, the potential of discursive dequeerification to be utilized as a theoretical framework is profound. Similarly to Bertand’s (2003) use of discursive deracialization in her interviews on place and space, dequeerification can be used by critical rhetoricians in similar types of studies to examine new and different ways that dequeerification presents itself in speech—even beyond (lie)alectics.

Critical Applications of Linguistics

Contributions. Certainly (lie)alectics embodies a linguistic approach to rhetorical analysis, specifically a Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach (Halliday)—largely utilized in Norman Fairclough’s approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. SFL takes a functional orientation to language on several levels. That is, “In general, it means that a focus on what language does is more important than looking at how it does it (its structure)” (O’Donnell, 2012, p. 5). (Lie)alectics contributes a new perspective on how the function of language can be used in social contexts to achieve particular goals. (Lie)alectics demonstrates how the structure and function of language is an essential element in understanding what exactly the language is doing and *how* it is doing it. And the more we

understand how a discourse accomplishes what it does, in addition to what the discourse actually accomplishes, the greater the potential to disrupt the impact of the discourse.

The type of grammatical analysis used to identify these (lie)alectics demonstrates how the rules of grammatical structures are indicative of the underlying ideologies and an embodiment of SFL's assumption that "meaning implies choice" (O'Donnell, 2012, p. 5). Essentially, meaning is contingent upon the structure and rules of grammar and syntax in order for the message to have meaning (*i.e.*, you can't just place words in any order and have it make sense—have meaning). Thus, (lie)alectics demonstrates one way in which the systematic rules of language can be analyzed in ways that reveal the underlying goals of the producer of the discourse.

Future Research. While applications of linguistics have been used in CDA across many disciplines, the theory of (lie)alectics can be used to expand upon linguistic theories to further investigate the relationship between language and culture. That is, (lie)alectics provide a new way of conceptualizing the formations of logic through language insofar as it demonstrates the way that language can be set up to appear logical—yet, only within the context of a specific constellation of beliefs. (Lie)alectics looks at the functional components of language (*i.e.*, subject (noun), action (verb) etc.) and how those components work together to create fundamental logics that can then be identified, acting as proof of the larger ideological system the language itself is occurring within. This type of micro-analysis creates additional critical applications of linguistic analysis.

Queer Theory

Contributions. This study contributes to Queer Theory insofar as it adds to the goal of Queer Theory to work as a tool to deconstruct dominant social norms reinforcing

heteronormative ideals. Analyzing the role of religion, as fundamentally tied to constitutional rights, draws attention to the ways in which dominant heteronormative ideals are already being reinforced and the extent to which current conversations advocating for religious freedoms to be redefined to limit and punish non-heterosexual practices contributes to queer treatments of religious texts. Additionally, (lie)alectics as a theory contributes to applications of Queer Theory because it is fundamentally an identification of binaries that need to be problematized and challenged.

Future research. The content of this research lends itself to many different potential studies to be done utilizing a queer approach. Particularly for performance studies, important future research questions to ask are: How are gay Mormons performing these (lie)alectical identities? Are there elements of performance that are unique to gay Mormons in comparison to other gay religious individuals? Queer theory also provides an autoethnographic space to be explored in a larger conversation about my experiences living as a “closeted” gay Mormon. Additionally, the conceptualization of dequeerification provides opportunities to queer new spaces (*i.e.*, identification of dequeerified speech is an act of queering).

Critical Social Psychology

Discursive deracialization emerged from critical cultural psychology, and thus discursive dequeerification directly expands and builds upon the work of social psychologists utilizing critical approaches to examining power relationships. In the same way that discursive deracialization can be used to identify notions of new racism and post-racial rhetoric, so too discursive dequeerification adds to the conversation of the emergence of new homophobia. Discursive deracialization has been utilized across multiple disciplines, include

rhetoric, and discursive dequeerification has a similar potential to contribute to queer applications being utilized across the academy.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that as a discourse analysis, several interactive aspects of this website were not examined (*i.e.*, videos, images, web links, *etc.*) that leave questions unanswered, such as: Why were these six individuals chosen to share their stories on the *Mormon and Gay* website and not others? And how might that also be a form of dequeerification? Additional research of the visual rhetoric on the website could expand this understanding.

Additionally, this study was limited to studying Mormon discourse. This is in part because the theory of (lie)alectics was not fully substantiated before the reading of the discourse, and as such, there are no comparative studies. Therefore, studying one specific religion (that is producing a great deal of discourse surrounding LGBTQ rights) was necessary in order to demonstrate how (lie)alectics work in one context in order to be able to do comparative studies. However, analyzing discourse from a single religious organization does not speak to the generalizability of (lie)alectics as a theory. Further research is needed to substantiate that generalizability, and below I provide several examples of possible applications of (lie)alectics in future research.

Conclusion

The implications of these (lie)alectical strategies to directly affect public policy creates an exigence in disseminating this information to educate eligible voters about the potential deterioration of anti-discrimination laws in the US. Thus, this dissertation is not destined to remain a manuscript on a library shelf and/or digital text on an online archive.

Nor would a book—in its current form—be of much benefit to those unfamiliar with its thick theoretical constructs, laden with grammatical deconstruction and discipline specific terminologies. For all of the useful applications of (lie)alectics and discursive dequeerification within academia, the specificity of this theoretical construct makes it difficult to distill down into palatable consumption by my ultimate target audience: political forums consumed by US American voters. That is, in order for someone to understand (lie)alectics, they must first have some basic comprehension of dialectics. And in order for someone to understand dequeerification, they must first be acquainted with discursive deracialization—neither concepts recognizable to anyone I have talked to outside of scholars utilizing critical approaches to textual, discourse, and media analysis. So, the question then becomes, how does this work translate into something beneficial in activist spheres. It is my hope that this dissertation can create dialogic spaces between academics and social activists in reaching the audiences required to resist this rhetoric.

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