

# The Governmentality of Promoting Ex-Gay “Change” in the Public Sphere

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** A long-term “earned media” marketing strategy deployed by the Christian ex-gay movement backfired and now generates mostly negative media against the movement.

**Analysis** A governmental discourse analysis is used to examine media coverage representing conservative Christians struggling against unwanted same-sex desire. It does so in relation to Jürgen Habermas’ (2006) analysis of commercial media and Anna McCarthy’s (2007) notion of “neoliberal theatre of suffering.”

**Conclusion and implications:** Media coverage of the ex-gay debate showcases suffering as entertainment and does not achieve the full reasoned deliberation Habermas calls for in the public sphere. Nevertheless, it has not led to a paralysis of society’s ability to debate the issue of ex-gay “change.” Competing governmental perspectives still intersect and modify each other in ways that extend beyond mere commercialism.

**Keywords:** Ex-gay movement; Governmentality; Earned media; Media theory; Discourse analysis

## RÉSUMÉ

**Contexte** La stratégie de marketing à long terme adoptée par le mouvement ex-gay chrétien a échoué, et de nos jours elle reçoit généralement une couverture médiatique négative.

**Analyse** Une analyse de discours gouvernemental sert à examiner la couverture médiatique de chrétiens conservateurs qui essaient de réprimer leur attirance pour des personnes du même sexe. La démarche adoptée s’inspire de l’analyse des médias commerciaux effectuée par Jürgen Habermas et de l’idée de « théâtre néolibéral de la souffrance » formulée par Anna McCarthy.

**Conclusion et implications** Dans les médias, la couverture du débat ex-gay exploite la souffrance à des fins de divertissement, ne permettant pas une délibération raisonnable dans la sphère publique du type prôné par Habermas. Néanmoins, cette couverture n’a pas paralysé la capacité qu’a la société à débattre la question du « changement » ex-gay. Par exemple, des perspectives gouvernementales divergentes continuent à se croiser et se modifier de manières qui dépassent le simple commercialisme.

**Mots clés** Mouvement ex-gay; Gouvernamentalité; Média acquis; Théorie des médias; Analyse de discours

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## Introduction

In a preview posted to YouTube (Fox, 2007) for the 2011 documentary film *This is What Love in Action Looks Like* (Fox & Adelman, 2011), several title cards are intercut with mainstream media news footage. The title cards introduce the controversy of 16-year-old Zach Stark being forced into an “ex-gay” sexual orientation conversion program by his parents in 2005, and the news clips showcase conservative Christian defences and gay rights protests of the ex-gay program in question. Both preview and documentary account for the frenzy of coverage Zach’s ordeal initiated. The preview alone includes news clips from Channel 5, Fox News 13, ABC News, and CNN as well as screenshots of *New York Times* and *WashingtonBlade* articles. The documentary is a smorgasbord of media: broadcast news, print news, daytime talk shows, online social media, and also Christian broadcast news. At one point it even transforms into a media *ouroboros* (a snake eating itself), when it shows one of its own scenes in an episode of MSNBC’s *Hardball with Chris Matthews* (Matthews & Harson, 2011) that aired before the documentary was finished. Most of the coverage *Love in Action* re-presents aims to achieve journalistic “balance,” but the documentary takes a clear position: the ex-gay movement is dangerous, harmful, ineffective, and its victims include children. In making this claim it even references a fiction film, a 1999 comedy (Peterson, Babbit, Sperling, & Creel, 1999) that also addresses the forced conversion of LGBTQ teens: one of Stark’s friends remarks in an interview, “and they were like, oh my God, our friend Zach—he’s going to a straight camp, like in *But I’m a Cheerleader!*” All of this coverage, documentary included, is “earned media,” media generated by but not paid for by those seeking the coverage (Graf, 2008; Lund & Renna, 2006; Stephen & Galak, 2012). The ex-gay debate is fuelled by earned media, and it propagates through commercial communication systems generating profit for producers, shareholders, and advertisers, while those with the most invested in the issue struggle to ensure the coverage serves their purposes: either to promote and justify the ex-gay movement, or condemn and destroy it.

The Zach Stark media frenzy was initiated by a plea for help Stark posted on his Myspace page (Fox & Adelman, 2011) that circulated rapidly through social media. However, when one situates that event within the larger phenomenon of mainstream media coverage of ex-gay “change,” it becomes clear this was only one frenzy of many in over 15 years’ worth of ex-gay earned media. The primary catalyst for almost all ex-gay media coverage was not anything posted on social media, but a 1998 ad campaign paid for by several Christian Right organizations,<sup>1</sup> a campaign *designed* to create earned media (Lund & Renna, 2006).<sup>2</sup> And the reason ex-gay earned media continues to this day is because of the promotion of a study by psychiatrist Dr. Robert Spitzer (2003) that was first presented in 2001 at an American Psychiatric Association conference. The study suggested some gays and lesbians can change their sexual orientation (Lund & Renna, 2006).

The ex-gay movement is a loose organization of not-for-profit religious ministries and for-profit psychotherapy practices organized around the management and attempted elimination of what many conservative Christians consider sinful, abnormal, and addictive same-sex desires and behaviours (Besen, 2003; Drescher, Shidlo, & Schroeder, 2002; Erzen, 2006). In the 1970s and 1980s, the movement operated in the

shadows of conservative Christianity as an embarrassing secret; however, in the 1990s, after realizing a two-decade-long antigay media campaign had backfired for being too hateful, Christian Right leaders changed their strategy to offer an apparently more compassionate “love the sinner, hate the sin” (Fetner, 2005, p. 79) message promising freedom through change. It was then that fifteen highly organized Christian advocacy groups (see notes 1 and 2) joined with the little-known ex-gay movement to purchase four full-page ads offering “freedom from homosexuality” in five U.S. newspapers: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Miami Herald* (Alliance For Traditional Marriage, American Family Association, Americans for Truth About Homosexuality, Center for Reclaiming America, Christian Family Network, Christian Coalition, Citizens for Community Values, Colorado for Family Values, Concerned Women for America, Coral Ridge Ministries, Family First, Family Research Council, Liberty Counsel, National Legal Foundation, & Kerusso Ministries, 1998a; 1998b; 1998c; 1998d; see also Fetner, 2005; Lund & Renna, 2006; Stewart, 2005; 2008). The following year they purchased television spots, which aired in Washington DC (Coral Ridge Ministries, 1999a; 1999b; see also Besen, 2003), and they established websites for individual ex-gay ministries and two national ex-gay umbrella groups, the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) and Exodus International (Thorn, 2012; Toscano, 2009). The campaign was designed to generate additional mainstream media; and it did, the most notorious example being a cover story in *Newsweek* featuring ex-gay couple Anne and John Paulk (Leland & Miller, 1998; see also Gold, 2000; Holland, 1998; Rosin, 1999). However, the 15 years’ worth of earned media that has circulated since, including narrative fiction, has almost all become negative, focusing on the suffering and harm caused by trying to change one’s orientation and thus operating against the goals of the movement. Indeed, even though the ex-gay debate is fuelled by commercial earned media emphasizing conflict, controversy, and oversimplification over reasoned deliberation, and it showcases suffering for entertainment, it is still a debate that has evolved, changed, and progressed. It has done so in part because of the earned media that helps it propagate.

### **Ex-gay earned media as neoliberal theatre of suffering**

It would be nice if competing ex-gay media generated more of what Jürgen Habermas (2006) calls communicative deliberation in the public sphere. Instead, it mostly results in the conversion of discursive use-value into commercial exchange-value through the generation of media designed to produce profit for producers, shareholders, and advertisers. Of course the situation is more complicated, as this article will show, but generally speaking, the ex-gay debate does not emphasize the “cooperative search of deliberating citizens for solutions to political problems” over “the preference aggregation of private citizens” (Habermas, 2006, p. 413). Habermas (2006) explains that the “deliberative model [of communication] is interested more in the epistemic function of discourse and negotiation than in [consumer] choice or political ethos” (p. 413). The ex-gay debate, however, circulates as a product of commercial media and was initiated by an advertising campaign. Even discourses critical of the movement coming from not-for-profit advocacy groups are tied to the notion that ex-gay change is a product sold in a marketplace of self-help technologies, and they also use commercial media

to propagate their discourses.<sup>3</sup> Thus a key problem with how this debate operates is that ex-gay discourses, for and against the movement, involve the circulation of antagonistic statements in commercial media systems that emphasize sensationalism, controversy, and entertainment over reasoned, deliberative debate.

Habermas (2006) categorizes several actors who should contribute to reasoned public debate. The two most important, “without whom no political public sphere could be put to work” (p. 416), are media professionals and politicians; but he also notes the importance of lobbyists, social and political advocates, professional and scientific experts, moral entrepreneurs, and intellectuals (p. 416). All participate in the ex-gay debate, and some reasoned deliberation does occur as a result, but there is little evidence of a *cooperative* search for solutions because the debate operates as a competition. Habermas (2006) explains that mass communication is, “driven by the power of the media to select, and shape the presentation of, messages[,] and by the strategic use of political and social power to influence the agendas as well as the triggering and framing of public issues” (p. 415). More important, he explains, media organizations are commercial enterprises that contribute to “the colonization of the public sphere by market imperatives lead[ing] to a peculiar *paralysis of civil society*” (p. 422, italics added). In other words, today’s media operate as part of a larger neoliberal system. David Harvey (2007) defines neoliberalism as an entrepreneurial ideology rooted in “private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). Raewyn Connell (2010) calls it “a missionary faith” (p. 23) of deregulation and commodification. As far back as 1979 Michel Foucault (2008 [1979]) characterized it as a form of governmentality that seeks to colonize non-economic realms with free-market principles so as to redefine all labour as entrepreneurship of the self. However defined, neoliberalism treats virtually everything as operating within a competitive market. There is no doubt the ex-gay debate is thoroughly neoliberalized, especially in its reliance on earned media, and this has certainly impoverished reasoned deliberation; however, it has not led to a *paralysis of civil society* to assess the issue. While commercial media emphasize sensationalism, controversy, and entertainment over reasoned, deliberative debate, that does not mean that *some* deliberation does not still occur.

The generation of earned media is part of a marketing strategy increasingly relied on in neoliberalized media systems. Joseph Graf (2008) defines earned media as “publicity gained by means other than advertising, such as via the press or communicating directly” (p. 49). Andrew Stephen and Jeff Galak (2012) define it as “media activity that a company does not directly generate, such as press mentions in traditional media and online community posts in consumer-generated social media” (p. 624). Ex-gay earned media, then, is *any media generated* after the ad campaign, regardless of the position it takes, that participates in the debate (which was initiated by the campaign) but is not paid for by the advocacy groups involved. The generality here is important, because it means earned media can include popular culture narratives as well as print and broadcast news reports. What makes it “earned” is that the advocacy groups who want the coverage rely on others in the commercial system to produce it.

In marketing today, earned media is one of three forms of strategic media, paid and owned media being the other two (Edelman & Salsberg, 2010; Lieb, Owyang,

Groopman, & Silva, 2012). Paid media is traditional advertising and other purchased media, while owned media includes channels and space acquired by organizations selling or promoting products or messages. Whereas paid media “traditionally led marketing initiatives,” today an industry report argues, “[e]arned and owned media have become so integral to successful marketing initiatives that they are now commingling with paid media” (Lieb et al., 2012, p. 2). The report insists marketing must combine all three. Writing about the ex-gay movement’s positive coverage following the 1998 ads and Spitzer (2003) study, Sean Lund and Cathy Renna (2006) argue that earned media was crucial to the movement’s communication strategy. In fact, the ex-gay ad campaign was designed to generate earned media, and the Spitzer study was opportunistically used to do the same (Fetner, 2005). That study, initiated shortly after the ads ran, was funded by the Christian Right-backed ex-gay umbrella group Exodus, the results of which were leaked to the press before Spitzer presented them, and it generated a new batch of earned media (see Duin, 2001; Ritter, 2001; Sheehy, 2001; Talan, 2001). It was hoped generating this coverage would serve ex-gay goals because, “[e]arned media, especially that which is uncontrolled, conveys a tremendous amount of respectability and credibility” (Lund & Renna, 2006, p. 285). Yet Lund and Renna miss the dilemma of uncontrolled earned media.

Even in the early days of the debate, not all ex-gay earned media served the purposes of the movement. That should not be surprising. Graf (2008) notes that generating earned media can be risky because, “by relying on others to communicate their message, campaigns give up control” (p. 53). Some marketers address the problem of losing control of earned media by introducing an additional category: hijacked media, defined as “the opposite of earned media [, when] an asset or campaign become hostage to consumers, other stakeholders, or activists who make negative allegations about a brand or product” (Edelman & Salsberg, 2010, p. 4). However, by defining hijacked media as necessarily negative, as the opposite of “positive” earned media, the risk involved in generating any form of uncontrolled media is ignored, as is the fact that not all earned media is positive and not all hijacked media is negative. Also, in the case of a controversial product or message, many of the stakeholders involved are not just activists but media professionals, public figures, and experts, including politicians, psychologists, and religious leaders. As a metaphor hijacked media is useful in highlighting the risk involved in relying on earned media, but only if acknowledged as also being earned media. In the decade and a half since the ads and Spitzer study, the ex-gay movement has lost almost all control over its earned media because most has been hijacked.

There is, however, a governmentality at play in ex-gay earned media that extends beyond marketing. While still rooted in the neoliberal colonization of mass media, ex-gay earned media nevertheless operate today in ways that extend beyond just profit generation. Consider reality television as earned media. In their analysis of how reality television offers guidance for audiences to conduct themselves as neoliberal citizen-subjects, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay (2008) place the medium of television “in an analytic of government emphasiz[ing] television as a resource ... [that] governmentalizes by presenting individuals and populations as objects of assessment and inter-

vention ... [and] by soliciting their participation in the cultivation of particular habits, ethics, behaviors, and skills” (pp. 12–13). They root their analysis in Michel Foucault, linking contemporary neoliberal rationalities of laissez-faire self-regulation with pastoral technologies of examination, guidance, confession, and obedience (pp. 8–18). Arguing against a tendency to think of media as *either* just political economic practice or just cultural practice, they treat television as a cultural technology that needs to be understood as “an object of regulation, policy, and program[ing] designed to nurture [a particular kind of] citizenship and civil society, and [as] an instrument for educating, improving, and shaping subjects” (p. 14). Anna McCarthy (2007) also analyzes reality television in terms of neoliberal governance: “to see reality television as merely trivial [commercial] entertainment is to avoid recognizing the degree to which the genre is preoccupied with the government of the self, and how, in that capacity, it demarcates a zone for the production of everyday discourses of citizenship” (p. 17). She acknowledges reality television’s participation in the shrinking of the public sphere and the weakening of public discourse, but notes that it produces and strengthens “arguments about governance and rights ... based in *psychologized* models of public culture ... which draw their warrants from intimate experiences and affective performances of the self” (p. 18, italics in original). While not a positive development, because reality television’s self-government fails to account for “the ineffable, self-annihilating experience of trauma” (pp. 20–21), it does not lead to a paralysis of civic engagement.

Ouellette and Hay (2008) argue that reality television governs citizens as objects of intervention and assessment, and McCarthy (2007) concludes it governs as a genre of excess that amounts to “a neoliberal theater of suffering” (p. 19). McCarthy (2007) says it showcases ineffable trauma, shame, guilt, and abjection by “putting the behaviors and life histories of others on display for our horrified pleasure, and then showing them corrected by the expertise of nonstate disciplinary figures: juries of experts, psychologists and child care specialists, medical doctors, professionals of all stripes” (p. 30). The key to understanding her concept is to recognize that it is both commercially exploitative and governmental at the same time, wherein the ethics of its governmentality are as much rooted in the culture of neoliberalism as in its political economy. While acknowledging the commercial exploitation involved in neoliberal mediation, many scholars who employ Foucault’s concept of governmentality in relation to contemporary commercial media agree that there is more at play than just marketing and profit generation. Following that point, this article argues that McCarthy’s (2007) and Ouellette and Hay’s (2008) analyses of reality television can be extended to other forms of media, including news and current affairs, but also narrative entertainment, which can also be earned media.

Ex-gay participants and correcting experts, which include religious leaders, psychologists and psychiatrists, political activists, and entrepreneurial ex-gay leaders, appear in and consult behind the scenes for multiple forms of ex-gay earned media: print and broadcast news, film and television documentaries, online blogs and videos, but also film and television narratives. Thus the ex-gay debate puts shame and trauma on display as a theatre of suffering that crosses multiple genres. Markus Stauff (2010) situates media governance *in general* within “the continual modification, adaptation and questioning

that characterizes governmental politics" (p. 266) because the common goals of all media, including narrative fiction, "consist not in representing reality but in modifying it" (p. 263). Juxtaposing approaches that centre "on the standardizing effects" of mass media with a governmental approach, he "locates the 'politics of media' on the level of problematizations and thus on the level of multiple strategies" (p. 274) that integrate "discursive reproductions and ... media-technological practices ... into governmental rationalities" (p. 278). These rationalities are frequently commercial in nature, operating to sensationalize controversy for the purpose of producing profit, but they also allow for alternative and competing governmental points of view from journalists, producers, and even narrative story writers. In the ex-gay debate suffering is lifted from the individual circumstances of ex-gay lives, generalized in both news and dramatic form, and presented back as stories that both exploit that suffering for commercial gain and operate as ethical interventions. Earned media being the fuel that drives ex-gay coverage may have impoverished reasoned deliberation in this debate, but it is still characterized by competing governmental interventions that modify the debate beyond just encouraging the buying and selling of commodities in a marketplace. This article demonstrates this by first tracing a shift in the governmentality of journalistic ex-gay earned media and then by addressing the governmentality of narrative ex-gay earned media.

### **The governmentality of journalistic ex-gay earned media**

On May 18, 2012, the *New York Times* published a front page article entitled, "Psychiatry Giant Sorry for Backing Gay 'Cure'" (Carey, 2012). It concerned Dr. Robert Spitzer officially retracting his 2003 study and apologizing to the gay community. Spitzer confessed that his study's methodology was as flawed as all the academics and activists said it was at the time (Drescher & Zucker, 2006). Yet this was only one in a frenzy of media reports on Spitzer's retraction (see Garcia, 2012; Harris, 2012; HuffPost Gay Voices, 2012).<sup>4</sup> Initiated by an article published a month earlier by Gabriel Arana (2012) in which Spitzer offered his apology in an interview, the frenzy lasted at least until July 2012 (Eckholm, 2012), although it was still receiving media attention as late as September (Bloch, 2012). Interest was strong because, in addition to legitimizing conversion therapy ten years earlier, Spitzer is considered to be the father of post-psychoanalytic psychiatry for his rewriting in the 1970s of the psychiatric "bible," the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Shorter, 1997); and he was responsible for heading the psychiatric committee that declassified homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973 (Bayer, 1987 [1981]). In 2001 these facts allowed ex-gay apologists to claim a famous atheist psychiatrist and gay rights hero now supported the movement (LeBlanc & Spitzer, 2005; Olsen, 2001; Roberts, 2001). In 2012 they allowed for a very public retraction of the most well-known and well-publicized ex-gay study. However, even though the 2012 Spitzer frenzy was the result of an article published that year, both the article and the earned media it generated were the long-term result of the combined effects of the 1998 ad campaign and 2001 promotion of Spitzer's study. Both are described in detail in Arana's (2012) article, and media interest in the topic has been relatively constant since Spitzer's study, even as it has increasingly turned negative. When we add the long list of narrative popular culture depictions discussed below, we can see a picture of a sustained generation of ex-gay earned media.<sup>5</sup>

The frenzy surrounding Spitzer's apology is a noteworthy example of the ex-gay movement losing control of its earned media. Arana's (2012) initiating article mostly recounts his own unsuccessful attempts to change his orientation but includes an interview with Spitzer. There, Spitzer explains how he requested that the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, the journal that published his study, retract it, but the journal declined. Spitzer asked that Arana publish the retraction instead. That led to a lengthy report on MSNBC by Rachel Maddow (Maddow & NBC News, 2012a). When the story was picked up by several mainstream media outlets (see above) and online blogs (Gonzales & Burroway, 2012; Throckmorton, 2012; Towle, 2012), it inspired Spitzer to write a second letter to the journal requesting a retraction. Although his letter was leaked to the gay rights website *Truth Wins Out* (Becker, 2012), it was only after the *New York Times* article that it was published by the journal as an official retraction (Spitzer, 2012). Meanwhile, news of the apology continued to circulate, leading to the radio documentary "Spitzer's Apology Changes 'Ex-Gay' Debate," which aired on National Public Radio (NPR) (2012), and finally, several months later, to another radio documentary, "Straightening the Record: A Doctor's Apology" (Bloch, 2012), which aired in Canada on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The apology continued to be referenced in coverage of other ex-gay events, such as the banning of ex-gay therapy for minors in California (Levs, 2012; Pappas, 2012), the closing of Exodus following an apology from Exodus President Alan Chambers (Norton, 2013), and a confession from former ex-gay spokesperson John Paulk that he is still gay (Schlanger & Wolfson, 2014).

One aspect of the movement losing control of its media is very noticeable in the Spitzer coverage: there are almost no pro-ex-gay voices included. Even up to 2011, it was common for ex-gay representatives to be interviewed in addition to opponents. For example, in two *New York Times* articles published a year before Spitzer's apology, ex-gays were given a voice and treated with some begrudging respect (Denizet-Lewis, 2011; Swartz, 2011). But since the apology, journalists almost exclusively voice the pro-gay side, either shutting ex-gay spokespeople out or challenging them directly. In a CNN News (2012) segment on the banning of ex-gay therapy for minors that aired six months following Spitzer's apology, the anchorwoman, Brooke Baldwin, interrupted ex-gay therapist David Pickup twice with contradicting quotes from the Governor of California and the American Psychological Association, and then allowed CNN's senior medical correspondent to further challenge him. The interview degraded into a shouting match with Baldwin insisting, "Sir, with all due respect, this is my show," later adding, "you don't ask us questions!"

In the past journalists did not usually challenge ex-gay advocates themselves, but invited pro-gay advocates to challenge them instead.<sup>6</sup> This shows a clear shift in how the ex-gay topic is covered now that Spitzer has rejected his own study, a shift that works against the goals of the movement. However, this shift actually began shortly after the media frenzy surrounding Zach Stark. The earned media generated from that event highlighted a number of problems with how the ex-gay movement treated its participants, especially its teenage participants, but also brought to the forefront psychological studies published after Spitzer's that challenged his conclusions and demon-

strated the possible harmful effects of “change,” including reports of self-mutilation and suicide (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002; Weiss, Morehouse, Yeager, & Berry, 2010). Indeed, reports of harm are common from people leaving the movement, and after the Stark controversy the media began paying more attention to that issue (Borger, 2005; Cloud, 2005; Lafsky, 2009). Nevertheless, it was not until Spitzer repudiated his own study that most mainstream media began rejecting ex-gay claims outright, even if a certain level of deliberation has operated in the movement’s earned media since the Stark controversy.

Whether some reasoned deliberation breaks through or not, exaggeration, simplification, and the exploitation of controversy are definite problems with how media operates in a commercial system. In the first few years of the ex-gay debate, the convergence of paid, owned, and earned media allowed Christian Right leaders and the ex-gay movement to deploy often inaccurate or highly contentious religious, scientific, and political discourses to temporarily legitimize not just the “science” of ex-gay change but also the politics of a “love the sinner, hate the sin” antigay ideology (Fetner, 2005). However, now that the movement has lost control of its earned media, exaggerated claims and simplified narratives promoting “misrepresentative interpretations of complex issues” (Lund & Renna, 2006, p. 289) are also the purview of those who oppose ex-gay change.

Lund and Renna (2006) analyze ex-gay earned media in terms of a tendency to emphasize conflict and controversy over objective science, suggesting profitable controversy is why earned media worked in favour of the movement at the time. They explain how coverage of the ad campaign and Spitzer’s study was “framed by antigay political groups and gay organizations that faced off in a series of televised debates ... provid[ing] sets of dueling quotes for newspapers” (p. 286) with “the near-complete absence of objective scientific voices [in] the discussion” (p. 287). In the process, Spitzer’s qualified conclusion, that some ex-gays change but most do not, was reported as a clear assertion that change is possible, and concerns with the study’s methodology were ignored. However, even though ex-gay earned media no longer operates in the movement’s favour, it is still characterized by an emphasis on conflict and controversy and a manipulation of science.

Consider Arana’s article about Spitzer and a television report by Rachel Maddow (Maddow & NBC News, 2012a) that followed. As part of his history of conversion efforts, Arana (2012) makes an inaccurate claim about the use of aversion therapy, while also inaccurately describing the procedure:

As a consequence of [declassification], extreme forms of reorientation therapy—aversion therapy involving electrocution or nausea-inducing drugs, for instance—had stopped being used. A small group of therapists continued to practice talk therapy that encouraged patients to see homosexuality as a developmental disorder, but they remained on the fringe. (para. 19)

Maddow makes a similar claim: “The antigay we-can-cure-you folks did stick around for years, for decades even, but frankly they were on the fringes of quackery, of pseudo-religious, pseudo-medical antigay politics” (Maddow & NBC News 2012a). In truth,

aversion therapy and other forms of gay-to-straight therapy were practised by many psychiatrists and psychologists outside the ex-gay movement well *after* declassification (Bayer, 1987; Thorn 2014). In fact, declassification did not marginalize conversion therapy to the dustbins of quackery until nearly two decades later. Between 1970 and 1990 there was no mainstream agreement on the topic, and conversion therapies even continued to be described and promoted in many psychology textbooks (Thorn, 2014). Also, while aversion therapy *sometimes* involves the use of a small electrical charge to create discomfort, it never involves significant electrocution: aversion therapy is not electroconvulsive therapy.<sup>7</sup> It is doubtful Arana purposefully means to equate the two, but his choice of language and failure to clarify what he means by “electrocution” obscures the science and creates confusion.

Bisexuality and sexual fluidity are also misrepresented in ex-gay earned media, a problem first highlighted by Lund and Renna (2006). In the first decade of the debate, failing to address bisexuality resulted in silence on something that might have helped explain some examples of conversion. Initially the omission worked in the movement’s favour. Today the tendency to ignore sexual fluidity continues, but now it serves to promote the idea that sexual orientation is entirely biological and fixed, a primary argument deployed against ex-gay claims.

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

Carey is both correct and incorrect. Yes, there is more statistical evidence of fluidity in women than men (Weiten & McCann, 2010), but that is different from saying male sexuality cannot be fluid. The truth is, nobody knows what causes anyone to have any kind of sexual orientation, and nobody knows how or why it may or may not change (Weiten & McCann, 2010); a point even made by Dr. Jack Drescher, a critic of ex-gay therapy, on Wayne Besen’s gay rights website (Besen & Drescher, 2008) even though Besen (2003) promotes the view that homosexuality is innate. It is significant that sexuality fluidity is addressed in the NPR documentary, but it is only addressed because of a random caller; and Carey, as the invited guest, dismisses that perspective.

Given Habermas’ (2006) analysis of media, it should not be surprising that science would be oversimplified in commercial media. However much accuracy and objectivity are stated goals of journalism, there is ample evidence that in media the commercial interests of addressing a public conceived of as consumers trumps the social needs of informing a public conceived of as citizens (Skinner, Compton, & Gasher, 2005). That has only worsened under neoliberalism (McChesney, 2008). However, as the debate

over bisexuality in the NPR documentary shows, even when science is oversimplified, it is still possible for some reasoned deliberation to occur. Also, as Patti Valkenburg, Holli Semetko, and Claes de Vreese (1999) point out, there are other imperatives influencing the framing of commercial media stories, including responsibility frames, wherein producers attribute responsibility for a social problem to a particular group so as to suggest a target for potentially solving the problem. Indeed, many media producers now work to expose ex-gay therapy as harmful, blaming those who offer it and actively arguing they should stop. That does not justify misrepresentations by opponents of the movement any more than it does by proponents, but it does complicate narratives that see only economic interests at play in the neoliberalization of popular culture. It demonstrates a shift that shows a certain kind of reasoned deliberation is still at play. Initially journalistic ex-gay earned media focused on the possibility that sexual orientation could be changed, thus situating the discussion within a responsibility frame of personal choice. Now the focus is on inefficacy and the possibility of harm, thus situating the discussion within responsibility frames of consumer fraud and public health (see note 3 regarding ex-gay consumer fraud).

### **The governmentality of narrative earned media**

An analysis of how narrative earned media operates in the ex-gay debate as a neoliberal theatre of suffering can further show that some reasoned deliberation is still at play in this controversy. While McCarthy (2007) limited her use of the metaphor to reality television, it can also be applied to narrative fiction. Yet it is still worth beginning with reality television because it too is a form of narrative. Of course, reality television is a highly commercial genre that seldom *appears* to operate within a responsibility frame; but if we follow Ouellette and Hay (2008) and McCarthy (2007), it can be seen to operate with its own kind of psychologized, market-based interventionist responsibility frame. The ex-gay debate intersects with reality television most notably when participants appear on sensationalist daytime talk shows such as *The Montel Williams Show* (Williams & Letnom Productions, 2007) and *The Tyra Banks Show* (Handprint Entertainment & Bankable Productions, 2007) to confess their ex-gay struggles. But there were also two one-episode reality television “documentaries” that aired on TLC in 2011 and 2015: *Ted Haggard: Scandalous* (TLC & Relativity Television, 2011) and *My Husband’s Not Gay* (TLC & Hot Snakes Media, 2015). The first focuses on the reformation of evangelical Christian preacher Ted Haggard, who was caught smoking crystal meth with a gay prostitute in 2006 and then entered an ex-gay program. The second showcases three heterosexually married Mormon ex-gays, their wives, and a new man joining their group trying to find a wife.

Both programs focus on intimate familial experiences and performances of the self that draw on shame wherein the participants are presented as objects of assessment from which audiences can learn. In *Scandalous* (TLC & Relativity Television, 2011) Haggard is presented as a loving family man ashamed of his past behaviour who now channels his shame and guilt into helping others. He and his family work to build a place of worship in their barn that accepts anyone, even gays and lesbians; yet they still expect the sacrifice of sin within a heteronormative family-oriented context, and they expect others to help themselves. At one point Haggard and his wife rush to a

park to help a meth-addicted woman in clear distress. Haggard asks her, “If I decide to go to work for you, are you going to work for yourself?” His emphasis on facilitating self-help shames the woman into taking responsibility for her own behaviour, but it also mirrors his shame of having to take responsibility for his own drug use and “sinful” homosexual behaviour. *My Husband’s Not Gay* (TLC & Hot Snakes Media, 2015) privileges the choice to be straight as primary, but allows a governmentality of shame to operate under the surface. When the non-married member is set up on a blind date, he arrives at a difficult moment when he must confess to his date that he is attracted to men. The audience is situated to sympathize with his struggle and have compassion for the shame he experiences, but also to accept the advice of his ex-gay peers that he needs to work to change himself.

Both of these examples operate just as McCarthy’s (2007) analysis would suggest. They put the behaviours of participants struggling with same-sex desire on display as traumatic neoliberal performances of the self for the entertainment of others. But both programs operate primarily within a pro-ex-gay context: it is same-sex desire that is being corrected and modified, which gives credence to the movement at a time when it had lost control of most other forms of its earned media. However, there were outcries against both programs by pro-gay advocacy groups, especially against *My Husband’s Not Gay* (TLC & Hot Snakes Media, 2015), which ensured the programs were not renewed as multiple-episode series (Boardman, 2015; Bolles, 2015; Underhill, 2011; Variety Staff, 2015). TLC tried to capitalize on the ex-gay controversy but misjudged the extent to which media coverage had shifted away from accepting ex-gay claims. The responsibility frame the network situated the narratives within was not one that addressed efficacy or harm; it was a frame of personal responsibility, wherein individuals are expected to take responsibility for their own choices within a marketplace of moral alternatives. With respect to film and television narrative fiction, however, choice and personal responsibility were never really the issues. Similar to recent journalistic earned media, ex-gay narrative fiction focuses on issues of efficacy and harm. Except unlike journalistic earned media, which only began to turn against the movement after the Zach Stark controversy, ex-gay narrative media has been almost exclusively negative since *before* the 1998 ad campaign.

In a 1995 episode of the HBO sketch comedy show *Mr. Show* (Cross, Odenkirk, Miller, & Moffitt, 1995), a fictional televangelist host (Bob Odenkirk) of a Christian talk show called *Good News* interviews the ex-gay founder of a fictional ministry called Overcome named Burton Quim (David Cross). In the sketch, fictionalized footage from a decade’s worth of Quim’s appearances on *Good News* is aired to show his long journey in and out of the movement. For each appearance, there is corresponding footage of him drunk at all-male sex parties. Neither the televangelist nor Quim seem concerned about his lapses (they are the ones showing the footage) because each time he returns, Quim confesses with shame that he is “now who God wants me to be” and his terrible lapses “into homosinuality” are explained as “slips into temptation” caused by the “unrelenting homosexual cabal.” After showing a clip from Quim’s last appearance, in which he turns to the camera to let his struggling gay Christian audience know they are “making a choice, a terrible, terrible choice,” the televangelist explains that next

Quim will tell them about his most recent gay lapse as well as "the lapse he has planned for August, which should take him to Rio de Janeiro."

The sketch is funny, but it is also a surprisingly credible account of ex-gay "change." It spoofs the process as one of extreme denial, but also represents a common ex-gay struggle in which the self works on the self to change the self as lifelong confessional labour with frequent setbacks, a process I discuss in my dissertation (Thorn, 2015). Were it not for the ridicule, one could almost see it as a positive depiction of a struggling but hard-working heterosexual entrepreneur trying to get his sexual enterprise off the ground after years of false starts. Yet the show's governmentality is one of mockery, as is the governmentality of *But I'm a Cheerleader* (Peterson, Babbit, Sperling, & Creel, 1999), the film referenced in *This Is What Love in Action Looks Like* (Fox & Adelman, 2011). *Cheerleader* is the satirical story of a lesbian teenager (Natasha Lyonne) forced into an ex-gay program. When referenced in *Love in Action*, a friend of Stark explains, "What I didn't realize is how accurate the movie was." Although an absurd, campy comedy, *Cheerleader* predicted the reality of Stark's ordeal by more than half a decade. And even though both were produced before the ex-gay ad campaign, together *Mr. Show* (Cross, Odenkirk, Miller, & Moffitt, 1995) and *Cheerleader* heralded a proliferation of fictional depictions produced after the campaign that operate alongside and in tandem with the numerous documentary, news, and current affairs reports in print, broadcasting, and online; however, the fictional depictions intervene more forcefully, offering devastating critiques of the movement. Whereas TLC's ex-gay programs operate governmentally as ethical demonstrations of neoliberal self-care within an apparent pro-ex-gay context, most fictional depictions operate as ethical demonstrations of shame that show how *not* to take care of oneself.<sup>8</sup> Although the shame depicted belongs to fictional characters, it represents the real shame that pervades the movement. It is the *general* shame of being ex-gay, and the harm caused by trying to change, that is put on display in narrative popular culture for our entertainment; and it is the writers and producers who offer the behaviour correction by demonstrating to the audience the ridiculousness of being ex-gay.

The Christian Right organizations that planned the ex-gay ad campaign must have failed to consider the impact of fictitious accounts of their cause, prime examples of the kind of hijacked earned media their efforts would generate in addition to news and current affairs coverage. They failed to recognize the significance of the fact that just a few years after the subsiding of the AIDS crisis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001), after mainstream psychology accepted homosexuality as a normal variation of human sexual response (Thorn, 2014), and after marketing geared at gays and lesbians (primarily gay white males) came to be seen as profitable (Gluckman & Reed, 1997), a for-profit commercial representation appeared on HBO ridiculing the movement, not just for laughs but also for subscriber fees. As an early strike against the movement, *Mr. Show* (Cross, Odenkirk, Miller, & Moffitt, 1995) generated income and profit for media producers by capitalizing on something controversial, but it also intervened ethically to try and modify perceptions of the issue. The fictional depictions inspired by the ad campaign continue that intervention.

The extent to which negative fictional depictions critique the movement, and in what way, varies. Many, especially those in comedic narratives, are short and operate as punch lines. In an episode of *Malcolm in the Middle* called “Lois vs. Evil” (Amiel, Begler, & Holland, 2000) a teenage boy, Francis (Christopher Masterson), pretends to be gay to seduce a teenage girl. Later he is tricked into ex-gay group therapy at a local church by the girl he had hoped to sleep with. The transition from Francis nearly “getting the girl” to ending up in therapy is a fast, hard cut to a short but funny scene in which he sits bewildered among a group of stereotypically gay youth listening to a fire-and-brimstone preacher denounce homosexuality. Just as short and punchy is a scene from *Arrested Development*. In the episode “Notapussy” (Weiner, Dornetto, & Spiro, 2005), white collar criminal George Bluth Sr. (Jeffrey Tambor) is enlisted to deliver “startled straight” testimony at a town fair to criminally at-risk youth. However, he accidentally enters a church-sponsored ex-gay “startled straight” tent. There, several young men, including George Sr.’s son-in-law, Tobias (David Cross), listen with rapt attention to his negative description of being imprisoned in close quarters with horny opportunistic men devoid of female affections. In both shows the scenes are short and never referenced again. Nevertheless, they promote a particular kind of selfhood through ethical demonstrations. The ethics of trying to change that which should not be changed are dismissed as idiotic, shaming those who try.

Short comedy sketches similar to *Mr. Show* (Cross, Odenkirk, Miller, & Moffitt, 1995) are common, appearing on *Saturday Night Live* (Meyers & King, 2013), *The Daily Show* (Stewart and Mad Cow Productions, 2007), and *The Colbert Report* (Colbert & Busboy Productions, 2010). In Canada, on the CBC’s *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* (Howell, Crawford, & Jones, 2010; Macdonald, Crawford, Jones, & Reynolds, 2009), there is a recurring sketch in which a flamboyantly gay “ex-gay” couple (Cathy Jones and Gavin Crawford) comment on various LGBTQ issues, including the It Gets Better Campaign and the adoption of a child by gay couple Elton John and David Furnish. The couple displays over-the-top, stereotypical gay behaviour as they reveal their true desires through a series of amusing Freudian slips and double entendres. Short “one-liner” comedic references are also frequent, appearing in shows such as *The Simpsons* (Swartzwelder & Moore, 2003), *Futurama* (Rowe & Chesney-Thompson, 2010), *Community* (Miller & Russo, 2010), *The Middle* (Brown & Koch, 2010), and *Archer* (Reed, 2011). In such cases, the governmentality is less about treating audiences as objects of intervention and more about exploiting the shame of being ex-gay as entertainment to keep non-ex-gay audiences laughing, but the movement is still represented as a joke.

Many more depictions, however, especially those in dramatic narratives, are sustained, in-depth critiques. Their governmentalities are more complicated, critiquing the movement thematically, intervening by “educating” audiences in strategic ways. Designed first to be entertainment, most are meant to be more than just commercial sensationalism. The *Law & Order* franchise (Eid & Makris, 2007; Fazekas, Butters, & Zakrzewski, 2003; Harbinson & Pattison, 2007; Petersen, DeNoon, & Fields, 2000) has depicted the movement several times, with its most focused narrative being a 2003 episode of *Special Victims Unit* called “Abomination” (Fazekas, Butters, & Zakrzewski,

2003). Beginning with a nod to the ex-gay ad campaign, the episode depicts an ex-gay ministry run by a couple (Andrea Cirie and Don Stephenson) who appear based on former ex-gay spokespeople John and Anne Paulk. Eventually the show focuses on a secular ex-gay therapist accused of murdering his son’s gay lover. That therapist (George Segal) appears based on a co-founder of NARTH, psychoanalyst Charles Socarides (Moch, 2013). Although sensationalizing the controversy by connecting it to an ex-gay murder (something that has never happened), the episode’s description of the movement’s history and most well-known practice, reparative therapy, is mostly accurate. More important, the show addresses and explores thematically the shame and suffering that underlies the desire to change. That the episode so clearly mirrors real life further underlies how even fiction can operate in relation to McCarthy’s (2007) neoliberal theatre of suffering; except here the exploitative governmentality also operates within a responsibility frame that questions the claims of the movement and blames it for the harm it has caused.

A 2007 episode of *South Park* called “Cartman Sucks” (Parker, 2007) operates similarly. Paying homage to *But I’m a Cheerleader* (Peterson, Babbit, Sperling, & Creel, 1999) by having the character Butters (Matt Stone) forced into an ex-gay conversion camp, it portrays the anguish and suffering of young LGBTQ people brought up to believe their sexuality conflicts with God in an over-the-top, satirical manner meant first to entertain. At several points, pre-pubescent boys graphically commit suicide, but in exaggerated shock-humour style, with one boy shooting himself in the head at a group assembly. The use of exaggeration here is a satirical rhetorical device that is not expected to be taken too seriously. The writers and producers do not mean to suggest that young boys are prone to publicly shooting themselves while participating in ex-gay therapy; but they do mean their depiction to dramatize real evidence of teen and adult ex-gay suicides and suicidal ideation (see Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002; Weiss et al, 2010) so as to highlight it as a problem to be solved. Thus, in the manner of reality television, fictional narrative governance also intervenes to modify reality by example while simultaneously exploiting that intervention for commercial gain. Yet, in these cases, the governmentality is more sustained and reasoned.

Both *Law & Order* (Fazekas, Butters, & Zakrzewski, 2003) and *South Park* (Parker, 2007) question the claims of the movement and expose the harm it causes, but they do so without shaming individual ex-gays into taking responsibility for their own choices within a marketplace of moral alternatives. Nevertheless, both programs are commercial enterprises designed to make a profit in a marketplace of television choices, and both put psychologized ex-gay suffering on display as an ethical demonstration that shames the movement as a whole. They even do so in a way that suggests the ex-gay problem can be solved through the intervention of entrepreneurs within a neoliberal system: not in the narrative itself, but outside the narrative. It is the writers and producers of the shows who intervene to educate and correct, operating as creative entrepreneurs of the self who re-present the knowledge they have learned from research and behind-the-scenes expert consultants. However, a sustained critique of the movement in an episode of *Boston Legal* called “Selling Sickness” (Kreisberg, Brinkerhoff, & Bernstein, 2007) does introduce a neoliberal governmentality into the

narrative itself by focusing on the issue of consumer fraud, and it does so five years before a real consumer fraud lawsuit was actually filed against the movement (Brydum, 2015; also see note 3).

A 2013 episode of *Criminal Minds* called “Broken” (Dunkle & Teng, 2013) further underscores the level to which narrative fiction operates to exploit ex-gay suffering within a neoliberal system. In this case, however, the exploitation undercuts its own ethical governmentality. The episode focuses on the psychological damage inflicted on participants in a cult-like ex-gay residential program. One could argue this representation goes too far, as many ex-gay supporters have (Doyle, 2013; Kumar, 2013; Minor, 2013), especially because it is not satirical and thus cannot use comedy as an excuse for its extreme exaggeration. In the episode a former resident (Patrick John Flueger) becomes homicidal, and when his ex-gay program is raided by the SWAT team, its teenage victims are depicted as mindless automatons strapped into bizarre electric shock machines. Drawing in part on the Zach Stark controversy, the episode reproduces and extends some already discussed misrepresentations in journalism by depicting practices that have never been part of the movement proper, and by grossly exaggerating the “mindless” nature of participation. It also suggests ex-gay therapy is criminal over and above false representation and suggests that one of the harms of ex-gay therapy is murder. The ethical demonstration that ex-gay therapy causes harm is clear, but the spectacle of the portrayal suggests the exchange-value of sensationalized controversy outweighs the educative use-value of the demonstration. Thus *Criminal Minds* (Dunkle & Teng, 2013) obscures rather than highlights legitimate psychological problems associated with the movement and undercuts its own demonstration. Yet, it still showcases for our pleasure, trauma, shame, guilt, and abjection as problems to be solved through the intervention of creative entrepreneurs within a neoliberal system.

## Conclusion

The ex-gay debate circulates via earned media and is rooted in a neoliberal marketing strategy. Devised by Christian Right leaders to change the nature of the debate surrounding homosexuality, it deployed a promotional campaign wherein advertising was used to colonize other forms of media content, especially news and current affairs, at no extra cost. However, there is danger in generating earned media: 1) it can be “hijacked,” misunderstood, or simply opposed; 2) because it is tied to commercial media systems, it circulates most effectively when driven by conflict and controversy over reasoned deliberation; 3) it can be fictionalized and satirized in ways opposed to the goals of those generating earned media. Indeed, earned media designed to promote the ex-gay movement has backfired in the form of negative media that critique, problematize, and mock the movement, giving little credence to its point of view.

For nearly 15 years, news and current affairs tried to remain “balanced,” but not so for film and television fiction. From the beginning, popular culture writers and producers resisted strategic attempts by Christian Right leaders to use the ex-gay movement to change the structuration of society’s response to homosexuality. Now news and current affairs follow suit. The problem for those opposed to the movement is that commercialized conflict and controversy too easily translates into a neoliberal theatre of

suffering. This does not mean that all ex-gay media is necessarily exploitative at the expense of any positive form of governmentality; it means that whatever ethical governmentality is at play, it operates in part by putting suffering on display as entertainment in a context characterized and governed by market-based principles. Nevertheless, ex-gay communication circulating through marketing protocols and operating as a neoliberal theatre of suffering has not led to a *paralysis* of civil society to engage with the issue, as Habermas’ (2006) analysis of commercial media would suggest.

The ex-gay debate is still a debate and there are various perspectives at play within it. Some are more considered than others, but most participate because their investment extends beyond marketing and profit. That the debate is sensationalized and often devolves into misrepresentation is unfortunate, but it is still a debate that matters. The suffering put on display for our enjoyment is no less important to acknowledge even though it fuels advertising revenue and generates profit. Although the scope of this article does not allow for an analysis of ex-gay harm, evidence of harm is compelling regardless of how much it may be exaggerated by the neoliberal parameters that frame the debate. If one is willing to take the time to critically examine the ex-gay debate, it is still possible to identify and assess ex-gay efficacy and harm through some reasoned deliberation and to see that ex-gay change is seldom successful and often harmful.

## Notes

1. The groups are the Alliance for Traditional Marriage, American Family Association, Americans for Truth About Homosexuality, Center for Reclaiming America, Christian Family Network, Christian Coalition, Citizens for Community Values, Colorado for Family Values, Concerned Women for America, Coral Ridge Ministries, Family First, Family Research Council, Liberty Counsel, National Legal Foundation, and Kerusso Ministries.
2. It is important to distinguish between conservative Christianity in general and the Christian Right as a collection of organized political factions. Conservative Christianity in the United States includes a wide variety of fundamentalist, evangelical, and conservative Catholic leaders and congregants, including media producers, but they do not operate as an organized entity and they are not always politically engaged. The Christian Right, however, is a collective of politically active evangelical, fundamentalist, and conservative Catholic advocacy groups and voting blocks that promote socially conservative causes at the government level. They came together in the late 1970s when several advocacy groups, including Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition, and James Dobson’s Family Research Council, began strategically coordinating their activities (Besen, 2003; Fetner, 2001; 2005; Stephens & Giberson, 2011).
3. They also argue ex-gay change is a harmful product falsely advertised (TWO, 2014), and a successful consumer fraud lawsuit was recently filed against an ex-gay ministry (Brydum, 2015). However, using consumer fraud as a weapon against the movement buys into the marketing of ex-gay change even if it turns that marketing against itself. It still accepts ex-gay participants as consumers in a marketplace, and it still relies on commercialized media systems to notify consumers of the harm of ex-gay fraud.
4. CNN and Fox News were two of only a few who did not report on Spitzer’s apology at the time (Rudman, 2012), but both reference it in later coverage (Levs, 2012; Pappas, 2012).
5. In addition to the 2005 Zach Stark frenzy, there were two *New York Times* articles published a year before Spitzer’s apology (Denizet-Lewis, 2011; Swartz, 2011); in 2010 journalist Ted Cox (2010) infiltrated an ex-gay retreat and published a scathing report; Rachel Maddow has devoted several shows to the topic (Maddow & NBC News, 2009; 2010; 2012a; 2012b), and in 2009 the American Psychological

Association tabled a report on ex-gay therapy (APA Task Force, 2011) that created its own media storm (Associated Press, 2009; Broverman, 2009; Crary, 2009; Lafsky, 2009).

6. In 2010 gay rights activist Wayne Besen debated ex-gay spokesperson Peter Sprigg on CNN News (2010), but the anchor stayed out of the conversation. In 2011 Besen appeared alone on MSNBC News (2011) to discuss the controversy over then presidential candidate Michele Bachman's husband "secretly" offering reparative therapy at his clinic, but the anchor insisted the Bachmans had been invited to participate in the interview.

7. Aversion therapy "is a behaviour therapy in which an aversive stimulus is paired with a stimulus that elicits an undesirable response" (Weitan & McCann, 2010, p. 671). The idea is to condition an automatic negative response to the behaviour being treated. Electroconvulsive therapy, however, "is a biomedical treatment in which electric shock is used to produce a cortical seizure accompanied by convulsions" (Weitan & McCann, 2010, p. 679).

8. Fictional depictions do not just appear in film and broadcasting. Since 2000 there have been at least six novels, five critical (Da Sandra, 2015; Danforth, 2012; Isensee, 2000; Reardon, 2008; York, 2014) and one oddly celebratory (Godwin, 2007); and in 1999 there was a *Mad Magazine* spoof of the ad campaign (Berlo, 1999). The movement is also referenced in the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV* (TVTropes, n.d.), and former ex-gay Peter Toscano (who appears in multiple documentaries, including *This Is What Love in Action Looks Like*) wrote and continues to perform an off-Broadway play called *Doin' Time in the HomoNoMo Halfway House* (Toscano, 2014).

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# Canadian Journal of COMMUNICATION

## EDITOR POSITION

*The objective of the Canadian Journal of Communication is to publish Canadian research and scholarship in the field of communication studies. In pursuing this objective, particular attention is paid to research that has a distinctive Canadian flavour by virtue of choice of topic or by drawing on the legacy of Canadian theory and research. The purview of the journal is the entire field of communication studies as practiced in Canada or with relevance to Canada.*

The Canadian Journal of Communication seeks an editor to take over from **Michael Dorland**, whose term will expire in January 2019. Potential applicants should submit two documents (to Michael Dorland ([michael.dorland@carleton.ca](mailto:michael.dorland@carleton.ca)), chair of the succession committee. Other members are **Penelope Ironstone** ([pironsto@wlu.ca](mailto:pironsto@wlu.ca)) and **Ian Reilly** ([i.reilly@concordia.ca](mailto:i.reilly@concordia.ca)):

- a formal and full letter of application with curriculum vitae and the names of three referees;
- a letter of institutional support for the Journal indicating the exact nature and extent of that support from an authorized university official.

The successful applicant will be a senior scholar (full professor or established associate professor) with a notable research record. He or she will have a broad understanding of Canadian communications scholarship. Preference will be given to applicants with reading competence in both official languages: English and French.

He or she will also have the support of his/her department and university and broad acceptance within the communications community. For example, for the past 12 years the CJC has enjoyed support of the editor's university in the form of a phone/net equipped office, a three-credit course release, and \$11,000 annually for an assistant editor.

The letter of application should include an editorial vision statement including why the applicant is interested in becoming editor and the role the applicant intends to play in the development of the journal. The term of appointment is three years subject to a one-time renewal.

**Deadline for applications is January 30, 2018.**