

Chapter Eleven

Gaywatch: A Burkean Frame Analysis of *The Daily Show's* Treatment of Queer Topics

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When in September 2007 Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad denied the presence of homosexuals in Iran before an audience at Columbia University, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* aired the sound bite followed by Stewart, as news anchor, responding that the conservative movement in the United States was very similar in that it too has no homosexuals, merely men who have sex with each other (Bodow and O'Neill, 2007d). The pseudo-exchange between Ahmadinejad and Stewart represents a fairly typical response of *The Daily Show* to a noteworthy utterance referencing queerness: an individual outside of *The Daily Show* not supporting the rights—or existence—of gay persons and a witty *The Daily Show* reply to punish the rogue. As a self-purported fake-news show, the host and correspondents of *The Daily Show* give themselves carte blanche to provide news content with commentary and subjectivity. An event in the world of politics and news affecting queer-identified persons becomes a *cause célèbre* for *The Daily Show* news team. These efforts both provide coverage to topics that otherwise receive less attention from mainstream news outlets and seek equality for the gay community by using the electronic pulpit of cable television.

For all the fun of Stewart's rebuke above—and it is fun—there remains the question of the rhetorical effects of *The Daily Show's* humor. The question I entertain here rests upon the symbolic consequences of the specific choices *The Daily Show* makes when covering issues of queer sexuality, most often instances of people thwarting or not sufficiently supporting gay rights. In the case of Ahmadinejad's denial that homosexuals live in Iran, for example, I ask about the logical connection and outcome of comparing the

Iranian president's remarks to a then-recent case of Larry Craig's—a straight-identified, anti-gay legislating U.S. senator—arrest for soliciting sex in a men's room. This particular instance punishes politicians across nationality for denying homosexuality and adds an exclamation mark to the reproof by offending conservatives in Iran and the United States with the image of gay-male sex. By doing so *The Daily Show* replicates the notion of homosexuality as a source of derision even if to advance queer acceptance. I do not mean that *The Daily Show* masks a homophobic position by espousing a pro-gay rights agenda, but rather their efforts promoting queer tolerance sometimes repeat the language of prejudice. In this example *The Daily Show* moves so swiftly to disabuse both Ahmadinejad and Republicans of their shared intolerance that the means to the end, and thus the rhetorical effects themselves, evade scrutiny. My interest, then, pertains to the specific ways in which *The Daily Show* provides coverage of GLBTQ topics to understand the value and pitfalls in their approach to supporting the gay community.

In this chapter I examine the eighty-two non-interview segments of *The Daily Show* discussing issues of homosexuality broadcast 2006–2009. Looking at segments presented as news reports or editorials rather than studio interviews enables me to concentrate on content over which *The Daily Show* writers and producers have complete creative control. Using Kenneth Burke's (1984a) discussion of poetic categories, I consider the ways in which *The Daily Show* frames gay rights and/or homosexuality itself by either offering correction to the queer-friendly when they err or totally denouncing those seen as enemies to the cause. In my analysis I see a fine yet harsh line delineating people as either friends or foes of gay rights. Additionally, the broad picture of *The Daily Show*'s treatment of queer topics suggests that though the show genuinely seeks the expansion of gay rights and acceptance in U.S. culture and abroad, the stock and trade in puerile humor sometimes clouds the issue and replicates the feel of homophobia it seeks to eliminate.

BEST F#@KING NEWS TEAM EVER

In the introduction to his third edition of *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke (1984a) sets as his goal the discussion of the various responses we have to events in our “political communities,” the ways that we symbolically make sense and manage political struggles manifest in discourse. For that purpose Burke provides a set of poetic categories—otherwise called attitudes or frames—as the means to sort out our responses to socio-political turbulence. Differentiating the categories into frames of acceptance, rejection, and transition, Burke provides a vocabulary for describing our rhetorical responses to community unrest in terms of the attitudes assumed. Such an approach seems

especially useful to understand *The Daily Show*'s rhetoric, as it seemingly exists to process for its viewers the various events of the day. Considering the combination of humor and serious news content, Geoffrey Baym (2005) argues that *The Daily Show* represents a new discursive mode that creates opportunities for alternative political engagement. Don Waisanen (2009) suggests that the political discussion *The Daily Show* participates in amounts to a form of rhetorical criticism, as supported by Jamie Warner (2007) who suggests *The Daily Show*'s humor provides an opportunity for audiences to critically engage in political discourse. The application of Burke's frames to *The Daily Show* rhetoric, then, seems especially well suited.

Before reviewing Burke's discussion of attitudes, I briefly outline here *The Daily Show*'s role and function in U.S. media and politics as late-night entertainment turned news and commentary outlet. Research on *The Daily Show* confirms that rather than common place late-night entertainment in the tradition of Johnny Carson, *The Daily Show* has created for itself a somewhat legitimate place in socio-political debates. Despite calling themselves fake news, *The Daily Show* has a deserved reputation for substantial reporting on the topics chosen for coverage. As a special case of “soft news (Baum, 2002), entertainment that incidentally informs, *The Daily Show* engages and educates its audience in ways sometimes comparable to mainstream news outlets thus contributing to a better informed electorate (Brewer and Marquardt, 2007; Harrington, 2008; National Annenberg, 2004). In comparison to mainstream news coverage, *The Daily Show* proves as substantive as its “real” counterparts (Fox, Koloen and Sahin, 2007) with the benefit of better length, depth, and contextual linkages (Baym, 2005). Beyond informing its viewers, research demonstrates that *The Daily Show* prepares its audience for intellectual engagement with current events (Baym, 2005) even as it peddles a cynicism that antagonizes viewers against government and mainstream news media (Hart and Hartelius, 2007). Such a move may help audiences to identify with *The Daily Show* as mutual outsiders (Burke, 1969, p. 55). Lauren Feldman (2007) suggests that connection empowers viewers feeling disaffected by the system to engage in an intellectual revolt, and with some noticeable effect (Baum, 2003; Baumgartner and Morris, 2006; Holbert, Lambe, Duido and Carlton, 2007). Even as *The Daily Show* engenders cynicism toward mainstream news media and the U.S. political system it fosters greater efficacy to engage in the political process (Baumgartner and Morris, 2006). Accordingly Robert Hariman (2007) and Lance Bennett (2007) suggest that *The Daily Show*'s cynicism creates the potential change through disrupting discourse-as-usual.

I offer this discussion of *The Daily Show*'s impact to suggest the importance of its contribution to the discussion of queer rights in terms of both content and tone. As soft news with credentials of legitimacy, *The Daily Show*'s commitment to provide content on cultural debates about sexual

orientation makes an important contribution to the show's goal of social equality. First, a cursory examination suggests that the coverage of queer-relevant topics, in terms of frequency and depth, far exceed mainstream news outlets, consistent with earlier findings (Fox, Koloen and Sahin, 2007; Baym, 2005). In fact, in one instance *The Daily Show* criticizes mainstream news outlets for not covering a GLBTQ protest in the nation's capital and follows that with a segment providing the coverage (Bodow and O'Neill, 2009c). Second, the commentaries in those instances clearly aim to support gay rights efforts and move toward social equality for sexual minorities, which research (Baum, 2003; Baumgartner and Morris, 2006) suggests may actually affect viewers' opinions. Beyond mere coverage, *The Daily Show* assumes an ethical stance with the intent to change rather than merely observe the discursive scene (Darcy, 1994). The concern for queer rights advocates, however, may lie in the tone encouraged by *The Daily Show* in its coverage of topics relevant to the gay community and the hue it casts upon the discussion.

To understand the ways in which *The Daily Show* covers queer topics I use Burke's (1984a) description of poetic categories to sort out the various responses of *The Daily Show* to current events affecting homosexuals and how its framing of the events encourages viewers to engage the debate. Poetic categories (Burke, 1984a) offer frames that serve as the rhetorical means by which we manage upsets in our daily life:

He (sic) begins. we have said. with the "problem of evil." He (sic) finds good and evil elements intermingled. But he (sic) cannot leave matters at that. Exigencies of living require him to choose his (sic) alignments. by the devices of formal or "secular" prayer. (p. 106)

Examining coverage of queer topics means understanding how *The Daily Show* chooses to frame news events affecting the gay community. According to Burke (1984a) frames fall into one of three categories: acceptance, rejection, and transition frames. Each of these categories refer to a rhetor's move to deal with a moment of tension by labeling the conflict a flaw to be corrected for return to established customs, seizing upon the problem as a proof of a system we should reject, or stuck in transition between the status quo and something new. The subspecies of attitudes contained within each family of frames carry implications for how we should understand those implicated and the course of action that ought to follow. Though Burke (1984a) covers eight attitudes, I focus here on the three that emerge across my sample: comic, burlesque, and, occasionally, grotesque responses—an acceptance, rejection, and transition frame, respectively.

Acceptance frames consists of responses that understand moments of social unrest as the sign of a problem needing correction so the current system might resume its functioning, bettered by the experience. A comic response

sees transgression against accepted norms as the product of stupidity rather than crime (Burke, 1984a, p. 41). Accordingly, comedy laughs—literally or figuratively—at a fool to offer redemption rather than seeking the destruction of the unsalvageable so long as the target of ridicule demonstrates worthiness of redemption. In so doing comedy provides the opportunity for all society to reconsider their own behavior (Duncan, 1962; Carlson, 1988). That we call a response comic does not require it be humorous, though it certainly may be. Sometimes comedy finds use in a conversion downward in which those who are high are made low (Burke, 1984b, p. 133), creating the opportunity for those with little social and political power to feel themselves a little more equal with those who enjoy greater influence in society (Brummett, 1984; Toker, 2002). The goal of conversion downward can attempt to move the citizenry to take a more engaged approach to the topic and question the wisdom of remaining silent to the (in)action of those in power. In the case of ACT UP, the group sought to educate the public about HIV and AIDS through demonstrations like a Ronald Reagan-driven quarantine-camp float during a gay pride parade or putting on a fashion show with hospital gowns as AIDS evening wear (Christiansen and Hanson, 1996). Therefore, the value of comic responses lies in the move for dialogue (Thompson and Palmeri, 1993).

In opposition to acceptance, rejection frames exploit a moment of discord in the system to justify denouncing the current order. In describing the nature of rejection Burke (1984a) says, "It takes its color from an attitude towards some reigning symbol of authority, stressing a *shift in the allegiance* to symbols of authority" (p. 21). The burlesque approach to rejection engages in *reductio ad absurdum* of the system by targeting a buffoon (Burke, 1984a). The buffoon, unlike the clown, receives no sympathy for wrongdoing, so banishment becomes the only option (Moore, 1992). The reductionism of the burlesque response dismisses the need to consider the motivation for bad behavior; it desires to see nothing more than the external features and exploits those flaws to their fullest. Second, the buffoon receives a much harsher treatment than the clown because the audience sees nothing of themselves in the victim and thereby feels free to mock the target with conscienceless abandon (Carlson, 1988). Case studies demonstrate that burlesque responses heighten foibles to make the case for lunacy more certain (Bostdorff, 1987; Appel, 1996) with the potential, at the extreme, to dehumanize a target (Hubbard, 1998).

Where the comic frame attempts maintenance of the current order and the burlesque frame seeks a break from the dominant mode, transitional frames identify problems in the system and wish a break from it but remain ambivalent in the quest for a new way. Grotesque responses, like that of the burlesque, have no sympathy for the offender who must leave the community (Burke, 1984a; Olbrys, 2006), but unlike the burlesque buffoon, the gro-

tesque antagonist receives punishment and banishment while the system remains unchanged, making the loss of the character a hollow victory and the change incomplete (Watson, 1969; Boje, Luhman and Cunliffe, 2003; Buerkle, 2010). The only value presented by a grotesque response may be the demonstration to others of what might happen to them for committing similar crimes (Chesebro and McMahan, 2006).

Rather than merely providing description, recognizing the different frames through which *The Daily Show* discusses queer topics facilitates a discussion of the implications for the various perspectives. To that end I examine *The Daily Show's* GLBTQ rhetoric, looking at non-interview segments from the years 2006 to 2009 that discuss or reference issues affecting the queer community. Using thedailyshow.com, which makes available and searchable by keyword or date nearly every segment of *The Daily Show* episodes since 1999, I have searched for segments tagged with the keywords "gay/homosexual" or similar during the years 2006–2009.¹ Immediately I excluded segment compilation videos that never aired and in-studio interviews conducted by Jon Stewart, bringing the count of videos in the data pool to eighty-two. Then, focusing on my research question pertaining to *The Daily Show's* coverage of queer topics, I kept only those that focus on an issue affecting the gay community (e.g., gay marriage laws) or otherwise dwell on issues of homosexuality (e.g., the accusation that evangelical preacher Ted Haggard had a relationship with a male prostitute), excluding segments possessing only a passing reference to homosexuality. These filters leave me with sixty-seven segments I categorize into their respective Burkean frames (Smith and Johnston, 1991; Kaylor, 2008). For my analysis I look at each application of the frame as best I can distinguish it to create a broad statement on how *The Daily Show* treats particular kinds of events and the actors who engage in them (Burke, 1984a, p. 57; Brummett, 1979).

NOW TO DAILY SHOW SENIOR RHETORICAL CORRESPONDENT, KENNETH BURKE

As the analysis that follows demonstrates, two frames emerge as dominant strategies for *The Daily Show* to manage the tension surrounding queer topics, the comic and the burlesque. Both of these strategies have proven highly amenable to humorous applications of themselves (Carlson, 1986; Bostdorff, 1987; Christiansen and Hanson, 1996; Buerkle, Mayer and Olson, 2003); *The Daily Show* merely extends that point. More importantly, of course, the instances in which the show turns to a comic or burlesque response demonstrate how the show manages conflicts by deciding to offer correction to some and seek the expulsion of others. As I illustrate, *The Daily Show* seems

to most often offer comic correctives to those who do too little for gay rights or for those who become over-excited by issues surrounding homosexuality. In contrast, *The Daily Show* uses burlesque rejection of those who openly oppose gay rights or the general wellbeing of queer-identified persons. The sometimes fine line between *The Daily Show's* strategies and targets evinces the volatile nature of its humor that can invite one person to turn back to the fold while tossing another from a moving train. Not all segments I analyze here fit in the comic or burlesque categories, though the vast majority do.

"The Gay After Tomorrow"²

In the manner of the comic frame, *The Daily Show* uses humor—often sarcasm—to show others where they have gone astray in their understanding of gay rights and the gay community, suggesting that if only they will recognize their own mistake everyone's lives would be improved. *The Daily Show's* comic responses regularly travel one of two paths, 1) attempting to demonstrate the inconsistency of a stated view of gays and/or gay rights or 2) wanting to show the needlessness of homosexual panic resulting from the thought of gays improving their place in society. Many times, *The Daily Show* uses both of these strategies to help those who see homosexuality as foreign, and therefore dangerous, to either understand it as an experience not all that different from heterosexual life or to recognize heterosexuality itself as less sanctified than credited.

The Daily Show's comic theme of queer intolerance as inconsistent, or even hypocritical, takes as a given that a person unsupportive of gays shares with *The Daily Show* some common value about humanity and/or society. The jokes offered in this vein seek to build from their point of overlap to urge the fool to reconsider the matter in light of a common, established principle. An especially salient example comes from a segment on gay marriage, a favorite cause of *The Daily Show*. Covering a speech by President Bush in support of a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, Jon Stewart uses Bush's own words to show the president's inconsistencies. In one segment *The Daily Show* shows President Bush touting the virtue of the U.S. democracy as government not interfering with how citizens lead personal lives, a reference to the Republican goal of small government. Stewart then mockingly finishes Bush's sentence for him with the desire to thwart the marriage rights of gay people (Javerbaum and O'Neill, 2006a). The obvious contradiction quickly takes a key conservative philosophy of U.S. government and applies it to gay marriage, indicating that to be true to his principles on government Bush must reexamine his stance on same-sex unions. The demonstration of a logical contradiction in the absence of an insult for Bush's potential cruelty or hatred provides the hope for discussion and change.

In addition to demonstrating fools' hypocrisy, *The Daily Show* also seeks to correct errant community members by helping them see they unnecessarily suffer from homophobic panic. The clearest example of this comes when correspondent John Oliver investigates the term "radical gay agenda" at a gay pride parade. Parodying a journalist who has bought into homophobic panic, Oliver asks GLBTQ persons to state their agenda, which garners such innocuous yet vital rights as wanting their relationships with their partners recognized, wanting equal treatment, and visiting one's partner in the hospital (Bodow and O'Neill, 2009c). Covering President Obama's reluctance to act on his campaign promise to repeal the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, Stewart suggests the rationale for the public's reluctance to accept gays in the military as emanating from the fear Americans have of acknowledging humans' sexual dualism; after a brief pause, Stewart admits that description may just be for him (Bodow and O'Neill, 2009b). By making himself vulnerable and part of the joke, Stewart suggests the audience consider their homophobia as an unnecessary product of internal tension.

Two other segments featuring Lewis Black and Jason Jones, respectively, challenge the opponents of gay marriage that heterosexual marriages possess unique traits sufficient for protection from expanding the definition of legal unions. In response to U.S. Representative Phil Gingrey's claim that the love of heterosexuals deserves special status because it alone can produce a child, Black interjects that a loveless one-night stand involving alcohol and Quaaludes can also bear children (Javerbaum and O'Neill, 2006b). Reporting on the anti-gay marriage referendums approved by six states in 2006, Jason Jones further dispels the notion that heterosexual marriages, by nature, singularly possess something perfectly beautiful. Jones accomplishes this by parodying one who rejects honoring same-sex couples in committed relationships but accepts marriage as acceptable even when it includes arranged marriages, multiple marriages, and/or alcohol and violence infused marriages (Javerbaum and O'Neill, 2006e). The tactics used by Black and Jones both attempt to show that heterosexual marriages may not deserve quite the sacred pedestal they have been placed upon. Instead, Black and Jones suggest that legislators and voters reconsider the very premise that heterosexuality exists only in its most ideal forms and that same-sex couples differ greatly from heterosexual couples in the desire to enter into a union meant to recognize and honor mutual love.

The most poignant comic corrective offered by *The Daily Show* speaks directly to Ted Haggard who led the National Association of Evangelicals until Mike Jones came forward declaring he had a relationship with Haggard that involved sex and crystal methamphetamine. Ironically, Jones came forward because of Haggard's hypocrisy in supporting a Colorado gay marriage ban; as Stewart points out, a person has a problem when one loses credibility as forthright to a prostitute who deals drugs (Javerbaum and O'Neill, 2006d).

Using a familiar *The Daily Show* bit, "Meet me at camera three," Stewart decides to address Haggard directly.³ Speaking mano-a-mano, Stewart chides Haggard for his self-hatred and denial, whose condemnations punish himself. Going on, Stewart explains that you cannot escape "gay," and that though you cannot "catch" homosexuality it will catch up with you even as you attempt to deny it. As reassurance, Stewart informs Haggard that accepting one's own homosexuality can make a person's world a more beautiful place, as TDS cuts to a shot of Stewart with a beautiful meadow behind him (Javerbaum and O'Neill, 2006d). The instance neatly captures the breadth of comic responses used by *The Daily Show* and the potential for their rhetoric to better the community. First, Stewart points to the obvious hypocrisy of denying a natural impulse Haggard, himself, cannot control. Second, Stewart attempts to talk Haggard off of his proverbial ledge to see that a happier life awaits him once he recognizes that queer sexuality holds the potential for joy and not destruction. Carlson (1986) clarifies that in order for any movement to be fully comic and have the greatest potential for social change it requires those wanting change and those who need to enact it must believe in the inherent value of our shared humanity. Stewart's outreach to Haggard, in the face of the show's opposition to Haggard's record against the gay community, works very much toward the goal of recognizing the humanity in others and urging Haggard to find it within himself. Though perhaps less heartfelt in tone, *The Daily Show* segments that engage a comic perspective by indicating contradictions or dispelling homophobic panic rely upon bringing out the shared decency of people to create a more humane society.

"You Have No Idea"⁴

To some of the very same issues addressed above (e.g., gay marriage) *The Daily Show* sometimes sees an offender without potential for salvation. In those situations in which people err greatly against norms of civility that support the queer community, they cut themselves off from change and deserve neither mercy nor acceptance back into the fold. *The Daily Show's* use of burlesque responses help to depict those who oppose queer acceptance and rights as beyond comprehensibility and therefore not worthy of actual engagement. When *The Daily Show* chooses to burlesque someone, somewhat consistently the rejection focuses on the person or group's understanding of human sexuality rather than the position itself (e.g., attacking homosexuality rather than defending gay marriage bans). The following examples contrast starkly against those discussed as comic correctives, for in the cases below *The Daily Show* makes unreasonable and barely human buffoons of the offenders.

Coverage of President Bush's 2007 Surgeon General nominee's, James Holsinger, confirmation hearing provides a clear example of *The Daily Show*

unable to imagine engaging another person on queer issues. Using a 1991 report Holsinger wrote for the United Methodist Church, *The Daily Show* identifies their inability to respect the man by quoting a pedantic report Holsinger wrote describing why anal sex is not natural, which Stewart describes as being the attempt to use science to justify an irrational fear of homosexuals (Bodow and O'Neill, 2007c). Nowhere in Stewart's response do we find a sense that the target merely needed to recognize his mistake. In fact, *The Daily Show* makes a point of demonstrating that Holsinger remains unrepentant by showing him before a Senate confirmation hearing dismissing his report as speaking to a different time (i.e., twenty years prior). In turn, Stewart dismisses Holsinger's excuse as inane for suggesting that people go through a phase "experimenting" with intolerance. The *sine qua non* of the burlesque response here lies in *The Daily Show* not offering Holsinger a moment of correction but instead showing pure intolerance for his mistakes. Deciding that Holsinger wrote out of ignorance and fails to fully grasp his mistake, *The Daily Show* decides he is a buffoon who cannot be engaged on the topic. Rejecting Holsinger from the discussion of reasonable opinions serves to sideline him and those who would repeat his words and keep them from influencing the debate of ideas and policy direction.

A similar case of burlesquing a fool as simply beyond comprehension comes from a two-part segment on sexual reorientation featuring *The Daily Show* correspondent Jason Jones. Jones begins the segment by interviewing a man whose parents purchased sexual reorientation audio tapes for him to change his attraction to men. During the segment we hear clips from the tapes, which *The Daily Show* sees as hopelessly idiotic, such as telling the listener that ejaculating inside of a woman is pleasurable (Bodow and O'Neill, 2007a). To symbolize the sexual reorientation movement, Jones interviews Richard Cohen, certified sexual reorientation coach. Cohen attempts to illustrate the natural laws of heterosexuality by holding out the index finger of one and inserting it into a ring created by the fingers of his other hand, symbolizing a penis and vagina in coitus, explaining that this pairing works while two men—symbolized by bumping his two index fingers as metaphorical penises—does not. To show the coach's inanity, Jones replies dryly to Cohen that he doesn't believe that bumping penises into each other is how male-male sex works (Bodow and O'Neill, 2007a). As the scene progresses, *The Daily Show* provides clips of Cohen's unusual manners, including loudly belching and spontaneously engaging in stretching exercises. Later we see Cohen walking Jones through part of the reorientation process, Cohen holding Jones in his arms like a small child to recreate father-son bonding. The oddity of seeing one man swaddling another to expunge homoeroticism marks Cohen's practices as entirely odd. Jones, mockingly, attempts to use the technique acquired from Cohen to convert a gay man, whom we see at the segment's conclusion—a fictional six-month follow-up

on the therapy offered—passionately kissing another man. This closing bit puts the exclamation point on *The Daily Show*'s burlesque rejection of sexual reorientation practices.

As with comic responses, *The Daily Show* regularly discusses stories surrounding gay marriage, but the burlesque responses suggest that the target has no potential for discussion. We see an example of this when four correspondents travel to the Republican national convention to interrogate the frequent use of the term "small town values." As the correspondents show, a commitment to marriage defined as a man and a woman serves as the only consistent and solid operationalization of the term among convention goers. The buffoonish words of one conventioner explains that gay citizens can have rights the rights of straight citizens if only they would marry someone of the opposite sex because one's sexual preference is not justification for special rights (Bodow and O'Neill, 2008c). As this example shows, *The Daily Show*'s problem with "small town values" comes not from a lack of support for gay marriage but an unwillingness or inability to engage the topic in a rational manner (i.e., suggesting gays and lesbians become heterosexuals to gain equal rights).

In addition to a regular interest in stories related to gay marriage, *The Daily Show* also frequently covers stories related to the U.S. military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. Two segments nicely demonstrate burlesque responses by focusing on terminally flawed notions about homosexuality. Discussing the case of Bleu Copas, an Arabic translator discharged from the military for being gay, *The Daily Show* interviews Paul Cameron, an anti-gay rights activist, to provide a buffoonish figure to embody the policy. Cameron fills the role nicely by discussing gay men as sexually obsessed and engaged in atypical acts, such as drinking one another's urine (Javerbaum and O'Neill, 2006c). Later, Cameron warns that gay men, naturally overcome by their desire for fellow soldiers, will assault the unsuspecting as they sleep by performing fellatio on them or penetrating their rectums (Javerbaum and O'Neill, 2006c). Using Cameron's views *The Daily Show* dismisses "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" by bringing out powerfully ignorant understandings of gay-male sexuality.

A second, similar example uses footage of a House of Representatives committee on the military's policy. Most powerfully, *The Daily Show* draws from the testimony of a former Army ranger who talks about the need to keep warm at night through skin-to-skin contact with other soldiers, which he fears would create sexual arousal for gay service members. Stewart rejects the retired officer's ridiculous beliefs that same-sex desire becomes so overwhelming it arises during the most inappropriate situations, suggesting that an erection from performing nighttime patrol speaks to a larger concern than sexual orientation (Bodow and O'Neill, 2008a). Here again *The Daily Show* denounces the policy by targeting the absurd assumptions about homosexual-

ity implicit to the idea. Because the ideas expressed come across as incomprehensible, *The Daily Show* can refuse the commitment to dialogue that a comic approach engenders. The result means to deprive the targeted persons and ideas of any credibility or place in a serious discussion so as to reject the position all together.

JON STEWART, MEET ME AT CAMERA THREE

In the preceding analysis I argue that *The Daily Show* approaches most stories affecting GLBTQ persons through either a comic or burlesque perspective depending upon whether or not the show deems the persons in question capable of an intelligent, productive engagement. If the target seems only to violate a shared principle (e.g., equality) or poses an irrational fear, *The Daily Show* suggests that learning can occur and change made. By contrast, for those whom the show recognizes as too dull or hate filled for a reasonable discussion then change becomes impossible and rejection occurs. There are several cases from the sixty-plus segments in the analysis that do not fit within the comic or burlesque frames. These cases illuminate something about *The Daily Show* in general that merits discussion in the context of the specific segments and the breadth of the data analyzed here.

The Daily Show broadcast several segments dealing with queer topics that fall within the grotesque category. As a transitional frame, the grotesque attempts to reject the current way of doing but continues to cling to it. Consequently the response ejects a grotesque character while perpetuating that person's condemned traits. Several segments dedicated to U.S. Senator Larry Craig's arrest and guilty plea for soliciting sex in a Minneapolis airport men's room demonstrate a grotesque response by attempting to reject his stance against gay rights through making jokes in which his supposed homosexuality serves as the punch line (Buerkle, 2010). Likewise, during the 2008 Republican national convention in St. Paul, Minnesota, four male correspondents took part in protesting the Republican party's tradition of denying rights for the gay community by stating—with blatant references to Craig's arrest—that all Republicans are closeted homosexuals, as captured neatly by John Oliver who says that Republicans have come to Minnesota for secret, same-sex rendezvous. (Bodow and O'Neill, 2008b). As the bit continues we go into the staged site of Craig's arrest where men receive oral sex through holes in stall walls and half-naked men dance under a disco ball. The jokes here cut both ways, seeking to punish Republicans for intolerance by hoisting them on a homophobic petard yet operating at the expense of a homosexuality drawn as a caricature of sexual compulsiveness. The message becomes a muddled annoyance with Republicans for supposedly thinking the kinds of

things about gay men *The Daily Show* depicts as a shared joke about gay men.

The grotesque example above proves instructive for a habit that occurs across a number of *The Daily Show* segments' coverage of queer topics, namely the use of hetero-masculine adolescent humor that giggles over the mere thought of same-sex contact among persons.⁵ My own analysis of the comic and burlesque framing of those who do not fully support the needs of the gay community provides a *prima facie* case for *The Daily Show* as consistently protesting for queer citizens equal rights. That said, further examination demonstrates a tension in the show's rhetoric that ostensibly promotes equality but cannot divorce itself from the impulses of homophobia in their humor even as they challenge the same. As Burke (1984a) reminds us, frames do not exist in "chemical purity" (p. 57). Indeed, a number of segments evince a primary orientation that either accepts or rejects the primary actor of the story, yet the segments may include moments of homophobic humor that in isolation would suggest queer intolerance. In making a point about the silliness of those who support "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" based on a belief of gay person's sexual obsession, Jones begins a strip routine while Copas, a discharged Arabic linguist, attempts to translate a passage from Arabic to English (Javerbaum and O'Neill, 2006c). The laughter in that moment comes from Jones in his underwear, dancing under a disco ball to a techno beat while thrusting his pelvis and buttocks against Copas. The point about respecting same-sex desires gets lost under an adolescent joke about homoeroticism. Additionally, in a segment about hair-product producer Garnier Fructis sponsoring NASCAR driver Brian Vickers, correspondent Samantha Bee interviews an effeminate-appearing man about his disapproval of the Garnier sponsorship as unmanly. Bee makes a series of winking comments to the audience about his sexuality, causing studio audience laughter to peak when he confesses he use to have an attraction to men (Bodow and O'Neill, 2007b). Here, *The Daily Show* wants to make the point that homophobia comes from a person's own sexual insecurity, but the setup leaves us laughing at the man for his struggle to define himself sexually. The logical inconsistency of selective acceptance and rejection to promote gay rights then bears internal conflict with homoerotic desire as a punch line.

CONCLUSION

I raise the specter of *The Daily Show*'s occasional use of homophobic-tinged humor to highlight both a potential problem of the show's rhetoric and the complexities of the show's function in U.S. society. Fred Fejes and Kevin Petrich (1993) complain of heterosexually defined images of GLBTQ, a

problem we can see persisting in U.S. representations of homosexuality (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Raley and Lucas, 2006; Landau, 2009). Therefore, *The Daily Show*, as a queer-friendly site, requires further and ongoing discussion of how it attempts to speak for and about the gay community. As I discussed earlier, *The Daily Show* does encourage its audiences to critically engage in events of the day. Hariman (2008) suggests that in the final analysis *The Daily Show's* political humor has the potential to redeem and seek the greater good even in the very moments it thrashes against decency. Perhaps so, but the thrashing itself has consequences in terms of the direction of discussion and the tone maintained. *The Daily Show's* primary use of comic and burlesque responses ultimately seeks change through peaceful—though not necessarily cooperative—means. The comic frame, in its fullest, manifests a humane and evenhanded view of society (Carlson, 1986). Though a rejection strategy, the burlesque possesses some sense of mercy by neutralizing opponents (Appel, 2005) and rendering them too foolish to bother wasting any more energy on (Selby, 2005). Both approaches as used by Stewart and company seek to change the community for the better using humor. Even still, we must always interrogate humor for the ways in which it cuts off communication with those it disapproves of and sometimes makes collateral damage of the people it wishes to help (Smith and Windes, 1997).

In the final analysis, *The Daily Show* would seem to have a genuine interest and concern for promoting gay rights. Their use of grotesque tones vis-à-vis comic and burlesque responses suggest a lack of follow-through in their thinking rather than the sign of profiteers using whoever they can to sell a laugh for ad revenue's sake. The use of frames with sometimes homophobic overtones may speak most to the show's sense of desperation. The cynicism that research finds present in *The Daily Show* coverage and audience effects likely emanates from the show's own sense that they exist in a system where the struggle for equality is Sisyphean in nature. If a rhetor believes that the struggle will be without end, then desperation becomes inevitable. Between needing to make a joke work as well as possible for ratings' sake and focusing on producing the most potent content rather than the most strategic for equality's sake, we can expect to see homophobic humor, especially when produced by heterosexual-dominated outlets, persist in pro-gay messages. *The Daily Show* exists in a hetero-normative culture in which passing homophobic comments often go without note. Not surprisingly, the language and sentiment of homophobia even pervades the discourses meant to challenge sexual prejudice. That *The Daily Show* undercuts its own pro-gay rights message does not doom the message/goal to failure. Rather, my analysis indicates that *The Daily Show* must be more mindful of its rhetorical structure and that *The Daily Show* may be less innocent than it would prefer to consider itself when it comes to homophobia.

I want to complete my analysis of *The Daily Show* with mention of the singular example of the epic frame, the only other frame present across all cases studied. The epic frame focuses on a hero, as emblem of community ideals, who must endure great strife to vanquish those who would undo the status quo (Smith and Johnston, 1991; Buerkle, Mayer and Olson, 2003). *The Daily Show's* example pertains to the story of a young schoolboy who engaged in civil disobedience by refusing to say the Pledge of Allegiance so long as gay citizens do not enjoy "liberty and justice for all" (Bodow and O'Neill, 2009d.). As the segment progresses the studio audience claps and cheers for the boy who challenges queer intolerance in the face of his schoolmates' homophobic jeers. The story is light on humor but sufficiently inspiring. Such stories won't consistently sell airtime; in fact, this story is the second half of a dual story segment—the first half mocking a man who feels discriminated against by a gay manager. For all the talk of *The Daily Show* as informing the electorate, encouraging political engagement, and keeping accountability, we must remember its primary role as revenue generator (Hart and Hartelius, 2007), which may sometimes trot out humor that slanders, inadvertently harms, or antagonizes friends and foes alike to serve capital needs while losing sight of loftier ends (Ramsey and Santiago, 2004). My analysis means to recognize *The Daily Show's* contribution to the discussion of gay-rights and its potential detractions, neither to applaud nor condemn but encourage an ongoing comic conversation on the use of humor to serve humane ends.

NOTES

1. Specifically, terms included in the search were: bisexuality, gays, gays and lesbians, gay marriage, gay pride, gay pride parade, gay rights, gay sex, homophobia, homophobic, homosexual, homosexuality, homosexuals, lesbian, lesbians, and transsexual.
2. Taken from a segment of the same name.
3. Under the current circumstances the camera shot is filtered so that viewers can only see through a small hole in the middle of the screen to create the "glory hole cam." The effect of this particular choice contributes to homophobic-tinged humor I discuss in the concluding section.
4. Taken from a *The Daily Show* segment of the same name.
5. Ironically, *The Daily Show* specifically reproaches male-adolescent homophobia (Bodow and O'Neill, 2009a).

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Chapter Twelve

Modern Hebrew Prophets? *The Daily Show* and Religious Satire

Brian T. Kaylor

When the Reverend Jim Wallis appeared on *The Daily Show* on January 18, 2005, he told Jon Stewart, "The Hebrew prophets used humor and truth-telling to make their point, which I think you do very well so maybe you're one of the prophets." Wallis has reiterated the point, even featuring the Jewish comedian on the cover of his Christian magazine *Sojourners* and as a key example in his book *Rediscovering Values*. In the interview with Stewart for the July 2009 *Sojourners* cover story entitled "The Truth Smirks," Wallis started by making his prophet comparison again, but this time added "satire" to the list of characteristics that Stewart shared with the Hebrew prophets (Wallis, 2009b, par. 1). On other occasions, Wallis has further explained his argument. Following Stewart's interview of CNBC's Jim Cramer in March of 2009, Wallis wrote on his "God's Politics" blog, "Last night, millions of Americans went to Sunday school, or more accurately, Sunday school came to them through Comedy Central" (Wallis, 2009a, par. 1). He added that in the midst of an economic crisis that is also "a moral crisis," the program "sounded like a mix between a confession and a good old values lessons" (Wallis, 2009a, par. 1-2). Wallis concluded, "I hope pastors and Sunday school teachers across the country watch this show and take notes because what's needed from our pulpits is being preached by a comedian" (Wallis, 2009a, par. 5). The following Sunday, Wallis preached at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and referred to Stewart's interview of Cramer when discussing Jesus kicking the money changers out of the temple. Wallis called Stewart's effort "a modern enactment of that parable" (Wallis, 2009b, par. 10). Wallis is clearly a proponent of Stewart's prophet status.