

Anatomy of a Wedding

Examining Religiosity, Feminism, and Weddings in GREY'S ANATOMY

ABSTRACT

Medical drama GREY'S ANATOMY (Peter Horton, US 2005–) features weddings as pivotal life events and has portrayed 14 unions over the program's 13 seasons on ABC. This article is a synthetic approach combining communication, gender studies, and grounded theory methodology to examine weddings in GREY'S ANATOMY through a feminist lens. We employ Judith Butler's theory of gender performance and Rich's' concept of compulsory heterosexuality to examine weddings throughout the show's extensive run. Depictions of women and weddings demonstrate dissonance between hegemonic gender performance and the potential to redefine the performance of woman in one's own ways. Tension exists between the program's portrayal of traditional heterosexual weddings and its progressive inclusion of a lesbian ceremony. We argue that the program's portrayal of both traditional white weddings and ceremonies which are more private and self-defined reflect the challenges inherent in navigating cultural expectations and personal objectives associated with performing as a woman in contemporary culture.

KEYWORDS

Wedding, Television Drama, Gender Performance, Compulsory Heterosexuality, Feminism, GREY'S ANATOMY

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1 Rich 1980, 631–660.

ANATOMY OF GREY'S

The phrase “You’re my person” is used as a term of endearment in the highly successful television drama *GREY’S ANATOMY* (Peter Horton, US 2005–). The phrase is remarkable in both its concept and its application because it is not used between characters who have joined together in a marriage or civil union; rather, it is used primarily between friends, such as Meredith Grey and Cristina Yang or Meredith and Alex Karev. Use of this phrase – one usually reserved for those in a romantic relationship – subverts viewers’ expectations and thus demonstrates how *GREY’S ANATOMY* challenges gender norms and normative heterosexuality and the importance of both platonic and romantic relationships in this program. In depicting 14 weddings over the program’s 13 seasons, *GREY’S ANATOMY* takes the opportunity to redefine what it means to perform as a woman, a professional, a wife, a mother, and a friend. This article is a critical content analysis of weddings and religiosity in *GREY’S ANATOMY* and adheres closely to feminist and gender theory.

GREY’S ANATOMY has enjoyed longevity and excellent ratings since its inception in 2005. It is currently the longest-running scripted primetime show airing on the ABC television network. The program’s broadcast constancy and positive ratings have earned it multiple Primetime Emmy and Golden Globe Award nominations and it received the Golden Globe 2007 Award for Best Television Series – Drama. The program has been noted for its effects on popular culture, including organ donation² and patient satisfaction with their doctors.³ While in reality few hospitals would have the frequency and turnover of romantic pairings and triangles featured on *GREY’S ANATOMY*, personal relationships in the program drive much of the plotline, depicting the evolution of dating, marriage, and breakups. Over its extensive run, the program features a same-sex marriage, second marriages, and large events and small services, as well as both religious and humanist ceremonies. This article is the first content analysis project to examine *GREY’S ANATOMY* while incorporating feminist theory; the only other feminist examination of the program has addressed casting.⁴ It is the first to address marriage and religion in this iconic series.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

FEMINISM, COMMUNICATION, AND RELIGIOSITY

The relationship between feminism and communication is well established, for feminist and gender studies simultaneously emerged and matured alongside

2 Morgan/Moviuis/Cody 2009, 135–151.

3 Quick 2009, 38–55.

4 Long 2011, 1067–1084.

television criticism as legitimate areas of academic study.⁵ Feminist approaches were well represented and even the primary areas of focus in many early anthologies of television criticism (for example, Baehr/Dyer,⁶ Brown,⁷ Curran/Gurevitch,⁸ Kaplan⁹). Lotz/Ross call for “methodological plurality”¹⁰ in examining television programming through a feminist lens. This article therefore blends theoretical and methodological approaches by incorporating Butler’s theory of gender performance¹¹ and Rich’s concept of compulsory heterosexuality¹² together with a grounded theory methodological approach.¹³ This “synthetic” approach¹⁴ brings together communication, feminist and gender studies, and television criticism.

TELEVISION PERFORMANCE: GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Shonda Rhimes, creator and executive producer of *GREY’S ANATOMY*, sought to portray “smart women” in this drama. Thus feminism and femininity are key to understanding central features of the program, particularly women’s depictions in the show’s weddings. Butler’s theory of gender performativity¹⁵ therefore informs this analysis. A groundbreaking scholar in feminist and queer theory, Butler argues that gender is not something that we *are*, it is something that we *do*. In other words, gender is not dictated by one’s sex as a biological determinant; rather, gender is understood by means of the “performances” that we enact day-to-day. Butler suggests that we perform according to what our culture’s gendered norms, rules, and understandings dictate. However, the performance of gender is a prerequisite for being recognized in our culture, so to be understood as a sexed and gendered individual, one must take on at least some of the norms associated with gender identity.¹⁶ It is through these performances that one is rendered socially recognizable.¹⁷ This analysis of weddings on *GREY’S ANATOMY* considers how women are represented in the context of being brides and whether this representation fits with the sociocultural performance of femininity.

Given the program’s inclusion of lesbian couples and a lesbian wedding, this analysis of *GREY’S ANATOMY* is also grounded in Rich’s pioneering essay “Com-

5 Lotz/Ross 2007, 185–202.

6 Baehr/Dyer 1987.

7 Brown 1990.

8 Curran/Gurevitch 1991.

9 Kaplan 1983.

10 Lotz/Ross 2007, 196.

11 Butler 1990.

12 Rich 1980, 631–660.

13 Charmaz 2006.

14 Lotz/Ross 2007, 185–202.

15 Butler 1990.

16 Butler 2009, i–xiii.

17 Wight 2011, 73–90.

pulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”.¹⁸ Rich argues that the pervasive cultural understandings of sex, gender, and sexual desire have culminated in a social requirement for what Rich calls “compulsory heterosexuality”. Rich suggests that heterosexuality is presumed to be a “‘sexual preference’ of ‘most women’”¹⁹ and this assumption is essential in understanding how and why women – consciously or not – accept, and even embrace, heteronormativity. Rich explains that patriarchal norms have operated so as to convince women that marriage and physical and social attachment to men are inevitable, “even in unsatisfying and oppressive components of their lives”.²⁰ Heteronormativity, in its cultural dominance, thus keeps the “heterosexual matrix” of sex, gender, and sexual desire intact.²¹ Given that GREY’S ANATOMY depicts lesbian relationships and a wedding (Season 7, Episode 20), this analysis of the program considers how compulsory heterosexuality is supported, rejected, and navigated in this scripted drama.

The following research questions are addressed in this project:

- (1) How is religion incorporated into weddings in GREY’S ANATOMY?
- (2) How do weddings in GREY’S ANATOMY support normative female gender performance and compulsory heterosexuality?
- (3) How do weddings in GREY’S ANATOMY challenge female gender performance and compulsory heterosexuality?

These research questions help to address the relationship between and amongst religiosity and gender performance, roles, and heteronormativity in weddings portrayed in this scripted drama.

METHOD

To answer the research questions, a combination of content analysis and grounded theory was employed. The 14 weddings depicted in the program were analyzed via a combination of deductive and inductive data methodologies. Weddings which occurred in the storyline but were not explicitly shown in the drama were not included in this analysis.

Content analysis methods were used to identify the predetermined, deductive category of religiosity. This category was assessed by means of ceremonial wording, artifacts/rituals, venue, and officiant. Level of religiosity was measured on a three-step scale:²² not at all religious, somewhat religious, and very

18 Rich 1980, 631–660.

19 Rich 1980, 633.

20 Rich 1980, 640.

21 Butler 1990, 151.

22 Engstrom/Semic 2003, 145–163.

religious. Wording in the ceremony (spoken by the officiant and/or bride(s)/groom) was assessed by considering phrases such as “rite”, “God”, or “Holy Spirit”. Religious artifacts and/or rituals included analysis of items and rituals such as the Christian cross or sign of the cross, the Chuppah, or “jumping the broom”. Venue was noted as either in a house of worship or in a more secular environment. Officiant was assessed by means of noting who performed the rite of marriage. If little or no religious wording or rituals/artifacts were present and the venue and officiant were secular, the wedding was not at all religious. Somewhat religious ceremonies included mention of the word God, blessings, prayers, religious wording in the vows, an identifiably religious venue (with an altar or in a place of worship), and/or a religious officiant. Ceremonies containing strong religious wording spoken by the officiant (such as “the power of God”) together with more than one religious ritual in the ceremony, a place of worship and an unmistakably religious officiant were considered very religious.

In keeping with qualitative data analysis methods, the rigorous practice of grounded theory outlined by Glaser/Strauss²³ and Charmaz²⁴ informed the process of understanding the roles of gender performance, gendered roles, and compulsory heterosexuality. The first step of initial coding included an open observation of the lead-up to each couple’s wedding, with a focus on women and their roles and behavior, together with each wedding ceremony. The initial reading of data in the qualitative analysis process provides a thick and rich description.²⁵ Axial coding is the next stage of the analysis, which includes sorting, synthesizing, and organization of large amounts of data.²⁶ In the present analysis, this step involved identifying themes and categories evident in each couple’s relationship, again with a focus on women, together with identifying characteristics of each wedding ceremony. Finally, theoretical coding “weaves the... story back together” as seen in Glaser²⁷ and Charmaz.²⁸ In this project, the final stage involved comparison and consideration of roles and relationships in order to identify how GREY’S ANATOMY depicts women, religiosity, and weddings in contemporary culture.

23 Glaser/Strauss 1967.

24 Charmaz 2006.

25 Geertz 1973.

26 Creswell/Poth 1998, 206.

27 Glaser 1978, 72.

28 Charmaz 2006, 63.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RELIGIOSITY

Of the 14 weddings throughout 13 seasons of *GREY'S ANATOMY*, there were nine in which religiosity was able to be assessed; the remaining four wedding ceremonies were not shown in the program and thus sufficient information was not available for the purposes of assessing religiosity.

Four weddings were considered “not at all religious”: Meredith and Derek’s union via Post-it (a private and personal ceremony of commitment), Meredith and Derek’s official ceremony in a courthouse, Miranda and Ben’s nonreligious wedding, and Callie and Arizona’s same-sex wedding. These weddings had no religious rituals or artifacts and no religious wording, were not held in a religious setting, and were not officiated by a religious figure. Four weddings were considered “somewhat religious”: the ceremonies for Izzie and Alex, Christina and Preston, Amelia and Owen, and Catherine and Richard. These ceremonies included religious wording such as “ancient rite” and “blessings” (Izzie and Alex), religious rituals such as the Chuppah (Cristina and Owen), visible artifacts such as crosses in the venue (Catherine and Richard), and the couple being married by a religious officiant in a house of worship (Amelia and Owen). Only April and Matthew’s aborted wedding was considered “very religious” in its strong religious language (“God’s power” and “Heavenly Father”).

Overall, weddings featured on *GREY'S ANATOMY* can be considered religious in that they incorporate mainstream and generally expected religious elements in contemporary American ceremonies, such as holding the wedding in a house of worship, use of somewhat religious language, and the incorporation of a few religious artifacts or rituals. Interestingly, the only wedding that was considered very religious (April and Matthew’s) was called off at the altar as the love triangle involving April, Jackson, and Matthew was dramatically revealed. The two couples whose weddings were not at all religious were particularly poignant figures in the program. Meredith, focused on her career, puts little attention on religious issues and has minimal interest in planning and hosting a wedding; it was her partner, Derek, who suggested and insisted upon being married, and despite Meredith’s disinterest argues, “Well, it’s for the baby” (S7, E20). Callie and Arizona’s non-religious ceremony is important because they are the only same-sex married couple in the drama. The lack of religiosity in this ceremony between two women is reflective of the finding that same-sex weddings offer a site of resistance to social norms.²⁹ However, there are traditional elements of this wedding, such as white dresses and even a veil, together with the customary father-daughter dance. Thus we suggest

29 Fetner/Heath, 2016

that while this wedding was *not religious*, this is not to suggest that it was *non-traditional*.

GREY'S ANATOMY WEDDINGS: SUPPORTING FEMALE GENDER PERFORMANCE AND COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

All of the weddings in GREY'S ANATOMY lent at least some level of support to feminine gender performance and the social construct of compulsory heterosexuality. The main themes in this affirmation are the portrayal of a white wedding, depiction of the nervous, irrational woman obsessively planning her wedding, the inevitability of or need for a man fulfilled via marriage, and the notion of a fairytale or happy ending.

GENDER PERFORMANCE

Most of the weddings in GREY'S ANATOMY support the traditional “femme” performance of woman. The wedding ceremonies of Izzie and Alex (S5), Cristina and Preston (S3), Miranda and Ben (S9), April and Matthew (S10), April and Jackson (S11), and Amelia and Owen (S12/13) all featured floral décor, fairy lights, and brides in white dresses. Even the wedding of Callie and Arizona (S7), the only lesbian wedding in the series, featured both women in white dresses; neither was a less feminine or “butch” partner. The concept of a woman looking feminine and beautiful, particularly on her wedding day, is of particular note. In the lead-up to Cristina's wedding with Preston (S3), Cristina's mother and future mother-in-law both demand that she looks her best and thus subject herself to beauty treatments that she would not normally receive or plan (Preston's mother insists that, in keeping with family tradition, Cristina remove her eyebrows entirely). Further, Cristina asks her friend Callie, “That last dress was okay, wasn't it? I mean, it was too tight and I couldn't breathe, but a wedding's just one day, right?” (S3, E23). It is of particular note that the “pain for beauty” trope was most forcibly imposed upon Cristina, who is arguably the least femme character in the show, given her intent not to have children and to focus exclusively on her career and also her sometimes cold and unemotional disposition.

Weddings in the program depict several women as obsessive, irrational, or overly emotional. The qualities of emotionality and obsessiveness fit with the hegemonic expectation of women as “hysterical”. For example, when Izzie is planning Meredith and Derek's wedding, she is focused almost exclusively on wedding preparation and makes unreasonable demands of the couple and their friends, such as insisting that Derek try on multiple outfits in the midst of his surgical schedule and that friends stop treating patients at work to try samples of the catering. Izzie's excitement for the wedding is noted when she repeatedly

shouts, “Wedding day!” throughout Season 5, Episode 22; this obsession earns her the title “bridezilla” from her friends and colleagues. In Season 9, Episode 9, it is revealed that Miranda is a “jittery bride”, despite her lack of enthusiasm and limited involvement in planning the wedding. Irrationalism on the wedding day is shown when supporting characters assess the brides as “crazy”, such as when April is convinced that seeing her future husband, Matthew, before the wedding is bad luck, and when Amelia believes that her wedding is doomed because it is raining. The notion of female hysteria as inherent to being female is part of the hegemonic understanding of being a woman. This social role has been challenged by feminists³⁰ and redefined as a form of patriarchy, oppression, and male domination. Despite the strides made in feminist scholarship and activism, this popular drama demonstrates that the image of the overly emotional, irrational woman is still perpetuated in contemporary culture.

COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

Although a lesbian wedding is featured in *GREY’S ANATOMY*, the program lends notable support to Rich’s concept of compulsory heterosexuality.³¹ We argue that the lesbian characters and plotlines in the program are not enough to significantly challenge patriarchy to the point that the concept, at least in this program, is threatened. The “inevitability of marriage”,³² together with submission to a man and his leadership, is clearly discernible in *GREY’S ANATOMY*’s weddings. For example, both Meredith and Cristina, despite their focus on and dedication to career, get married to satisfy external factors rather than their own personal wishes. Meredith feels no need or desire to formalize her relationship with Derek via marriage but is convinced to do so as a prerequisite for being the mother of Zola, the Malawian child that the couple adopts. Similarly, Cristina feels that in order to support and satisfy the wishes of her colleague and mentor Preston Burke, she needs to accept his proposal and marry him. Preston clearly outlines Cristina’s submission to him in Season 3, Episode 23: “[Cristina] hates change. I lead. I have to. And then she’s grateful.” The notion that men’s status is superior to women’s is also clear when Callie reports that she feels “weird” working with her intern and husband, George, because “I’m his boss and his wife” (S3, E15). The acquiescence and notion of submissiveness on the parts of each of these women indicate the inevitability of attachment to men even when women do not want it; thus marriage becomes an “unsatisfying and oppressive [component] of their lives”.³³

30 Cixous/Clement, 1975.

31 Rich 1980, 631–660.

32 Rich 1980, 631–660.

33 Rich 1980, 640.

The “need” for marriage is another important theme in endorsing compulsory heterosexuality in this program. As a Christian, April firmly believes that sex should only be enjoyed within the confines of marriage, thus necessitating her union with Jackson, with whom she regrets losing her virginity. Further, as a respected and busy surgeon, Miranda struggles with being a single parent and views her marriage to Ben as providing a father figure for her young son, Tucker, and a parenting and household partner for herself. The program lends support to the cultural truth that having a marital partner is the most economically and socially effective familial structure. The need for marriage in order to both create and maintain the nuclear family is portrayed in these situations, thus endorsing the notion of compulsory heterosexuality.

GREY’S ANATOMY WEDDINGS: CHALLENGING FEMALE GENDER PERFORMANCE AND COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

The portrayal of weddings in GREY’S ANATOMY does a great deal to challenge both feminine gender performance and the social construct of compulsory heterosexuality. The main themes in the subversion of expected gender performance are seen in the characters’ disinterest in a “white wedding” and the importance of career over marriage. Compulsory heterosexuality is clearly rejected when no woman in the program adopts a partner’s surname and when marriage is perceived as a contract rather than a traditionally gendered fairy-tale.

GENDER PERFORMANCE

While nearly all of the weddings portrayed on GREY’S ANATOMY featured performance in a white dress, the exceptions are meaningful in considering how “woman” is played out in this program. Most notably, lead character Meredith is unenthusiastic about hosting a wedding and loathes the notion of being a traditional bride. She openly tells her future husband, Derek, “I’m not really a church-wedding bride or a poufy white dress bride” (S5, E20). Even though Izzie is planning Meredith and Derek’s wedding for them and Meredith does not have to worry about the details, she resists the notion of a traditional wedding: “Now I have to go home and put on a corset and pantyhose and a petticoat and look like one of those idiots on top of a wedding cake” (S5, E22). When Meredith and Derek eventually get married legally at City Hall, they “didn’t have time to get rings” (S7, E20), again rejecting traditional expectations. Further, well before the City Hall wedding, Meredith and Derek draft their promises to one another on a blue Post-it, sign it, and consider themselves married. Meredith’s rejection of attention and celebrated femininity, together with her disinterest

in planning a wedding, is clearly an interpretation of gender as Meredith wants to perform it. Given Meredith's role as the lead character in this long-running series, her rejection of hegemonic gender roles is of particular importance.

Meredith's best friend Cristina, when marrying colleague Owen, also rejects the "white wedding" trope. Cristina chooses a red wedding dress, arguing that wearing white is "sexist and vaguely racist" (S7, E1). Even when preparing to marry Preston, Cristina suggests her rejection of the white wedding: "I'm gonna like being married. It's the wedding part that's ridiculous" (S3, E25). This rejection of the "big wedding" and "big day" themes associated with female gender performance is meaningful in that Cristina also demonstrates the ability to design her own version of gender performance in a way that works for her.

Four of the weddings in *GREY'S ANATOMY* are either delayed or postponed because of professional priorities. For example, in Season 5, Episode 24, patients' surgeries take priority over Meredith's planned City Hall wedding. Derek suggests, "Look, we could do this another day", to which Meredith replies, "I love you, and I do want to marry you today. But there is no time." This indicates Meredith's feelings that the wedding is simply a formality. Similarly, on the day of Cristina's wedding (S3, E25), Cristina does not rush to get to her own wedding after a scheduled surgery: "Oh, crap. I'm gonna be late for my own wedding." Miranda, too, forgets that she has her ceremony to attend because she is performing a surgery (S9, E10). It is also telling that Catherine and Richard postpone their entire wedding in order to help with a trauma; Catherine suggests that the catering be redirected to the hospital and served to medical staff (S11, E23). Gender performance that prioritizes career over marriage is anathema to the traditional performance of woman, in which the bride is focused on her appearance and wedding ceremony. The weddings which were delayed, interrupted, or lost on account of the woman's professional priorities indicate a challenge of hegemonic gender roles and suggest a redefinition of gender performance with an increased focus on career and work.

COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

Perhaps the most obvious challenge to the notion of compulsory heterosexuality is that none of the women who get married in *GREY'S ANATOMY* take the surname of their partner; this is true for all of the heterosexual marriages as well as the same-sex wedding in the program. There are only two weddings in all of the 13 seasons in which taking the surname of the marital partner is addressed. First, after Callie and George had eloped in Las Vegas (S3, E14), Callie returned to Seattle, and her peers began to taunt her by calling her "Callie O'Malley". The moniker does not last longer than three episodes, and Callie is called Dr. Torres for the rest of her tenure on the show. Second, when Cristina is preparing to marry Preston Burke, Preston's mother, Jane, tells Cristina, "Five generations of

Burke women have worn this [necklace] on their wedding day. It's a way of joining the family, becoming a Burke" (S3, E25). Cristina replies, "... a Burke." This exchange clearly indicates that Cristina has no intention of becoming "a Burke". In depicting 14 marriages in which none of the women change their surnames, *GREY'S ANATOMY* rejects the notion of compulsory heterosexuality in which a woman submits to her husband (or partner) by taking a new surname and thus assuming at least part of his identity. Rather, the program maintains women's identities as professionals and birth names of all women in the program remain intact.

The notion of compulsory heterosexuality is also challenged by brides in the program when they assert that marriage is not a fairytale but rather a contract. Meredith, for example, clearly perceives her formal wedding as planned by Izzie, her marriage via Post-it, and the City Hall ceremony as simple legalities. Meredith tells Cristina, "I'm getting married today. Mhm. City Hall. No muss, no fuss, just quick and dirty" (S5, E24). The notion of the fairytale wedding which is fussed over and planned is not part of Meredith's desire or intention. Similarly, Catherine and Richard enter their engagement knowing that marriage is "a merger, it's a contract" (S11, E22). Perhaps the most blatant rejection of the inevitability and female "need" for marriage is the union between Teddy, a cardiothoracic specialist, and Henry, a patient; the two are married with the purpose of ensuring Henry receives Teddy's health insurance. This fulfills none of Teddy's material needs and is a contract which serves only Henry. This subversion of the female "requirement" for marriage is a clear rejection of compulsory heterosexuality as Rich outlines it.³⁴ These weddings reject the notion that women need, desire, and seek heterosexual marriage for economic and social protection.

CONCLUSION

As a highly recognized and markedly successful television drama, *GREY'S ANATOMY* contains a depiction of both gender performance and compulsory heterosexuality, together with the important cultural event of the wedding, that offers a significant contribution to contemporary television culture. This theoretically and methodologically synthetic study³⁵ combined communication theories, women's and gender studies, and grounded theory based qualitative data analysis.

GREY'S ANATOMY exhibits a lack of consistency in its portrayal of gender performance, compulsory heterosexuality, and religion – there is no singular mes-

34 Rich 1980, 631–660.

35 Lotz/Ross 2007, 185–202.

sage about how to be a woman or how to get married. These portrayals may be considered dissonant in that they lack uniformity, as the program does not offer a streamlined view of gender performance, what it means to be heterosexual or homosexual, or how these performances play into religious weddings. Even singular characters simultaneously exhibit elements of heteronormativity and challenge compulsory heterosexual expectations and patriarchal constraints (for example, Callie is a same-sex bride, yet wears a white dress; Meredith rejects the poufy wedding and focuses on her career, yet wants to acknowledge herself as a wife and mother). While this dissonance is evident, we argue that the lack of constancy in how to perform as a woman, together with diversity in both heteronormative and homosexual weddings, can be considered a strength in this scripted drama. The complexity in expression for women in a variety of situations is arguably a reflection of how women must constantly navigate the rigors of personal expression and cultural acceptance in contemporary culture. This struggle is consistent with Butler's argument³⁶ that women ought to be able to perform "woman" in whatever way they wish, yet in order to be understood as a sexed and gendered individual, one must inhabit at least some of the norms associated with gender identity.³⁷ This tension between wanting to perform as one wishes (such as Meredith telling her partner, Derek, that she's not a "church-wedding" bride) and how one's culture expects one to perform (such as being married before adopting a child) is dynamic and, we argue, portrayed in a way that is illustrative of Butler's description of the complexities of gender performance.

The tension in navigating both resistance and compliance to compulsory heterosexuality is evident in *GREY'S ANATOMY*, and we also suggest that the program's depiction is a robust interpretation of the contemporary struggle for many women as professionals and/or as lesbians. The program is one of the first mainstream scripted dramas to depict a lesbian wedding and certainly one of the few that do not fall victim to "dead lesbian syndrome"³⁸ or the "bury your gays" trope.³⁹ Television narratives in which gays and lesbians die have been used since 1976 for shock value; by 2016, there had been 166 queer female television characters who died,⁴⁰ a number which is arguably more shocking than the narrative itself.⁴¹ Thus, *GREY'S ANATOMY* makes strides for LGBTQ+ representation, although it is still bound by Rich's concept of compulsory heterosexuality:⁴²

36 Butler 1990.

37 Butler 2009, i–xiii.

38 Bradley 2016.

39 Waggoner 2017, 1–15.

40 Riese 2016.

41 Waggoner, 2017.

42 Rich 1980, 631–660.

the brides both wear white and enjoy a ceremony which is similar to a heteronormative wedding in all ways except in having two brides.

The interplay amongst gender performance, feminism, sexuality, and religion in *GREY'S ANATOMY* is particularly visible in the weddings depicted in the drama. An equal number of weddings were not at all religious and somewhat religious, while only one was considered very religious (and it was aborted at the altar). All of the female characters are both career-focused and feminist; thus it cannot be argued that a feminist framework or personal outlook is likely to result in a particular degree of religiosity in a wedding. Further, the one same-sex marriage, while not religious per se, is nevertheless notably traditional in its incorporation of white dresses, vows, the father-daughter dance, a veil, and rings. Overall, *GREY'S ANATOMY* pays particular attention to “tradition” in its depiction of weddings, without necessarily including religious elements. The perpetuation of the “white wedding” trope in this program is in keeping with Ingraham’s media analysis⁴³ which suggests that the image of the white wedding has become a powerful symbol of heteronormativity and traditional gender arrangements. We therefore suggest that a traditional wedding does not necessarily imply that it is religious in tone or purpose. Rather, a wedding which holds to traditional elements and expectations adheres to the idealized image of a bride in a white dress with a “perfect” day. Yet in contrast to Ingraham’s argument, this analysis shows that *GREY'S ANATOMY* does very little to reinforce gender hierarchies given its unmistakable depiction of strong female characters together with a married lesbian couple.

Exceptions to the traditional wedding trope are the two weddings of Meredith and Derek, who in both instances reject both religiosity and tradition. Again, this demonstrates that *GREY'S ANATOMY* does not build upon the heteronormative narrative in which gender roles are traditional and enforced. It would have been particularly interesting for viewers to have seen the wedding of April and Jackson, which was presented in the program as a flashback, without vows or details indicating the level of religiosity. This lack of detail meant this wedding could not be included in our analysis. Had this wedding been shown, it would have helped to illustrate the coexistence of tradition and religiosity in the wedding of a career-focused female with a strong religious background.

In sum, the sociocultural expectations of gender performance and the pervasive notion of compulsory heterosexuality as demonstrated in *GREY'S ANATOMY* indicate tension and dissonance in individuals, groups, and scripted drama situations. This analysis is consistent with Butler’s arguments⁴⁴ that gender performance, while theoretically up to the individual, demands a particular level of

43 Ingraham 2008.

44 Butler 1990; Butler, 2009, i–xiii.

conformity in order to reach sociocultural acceptance. While both contemporary culture and this program have progress to make in terms of accepting and depicting unconventional gender performances and confidently rejecting heteronormativity, the professionally strong, socially confident characters in the program are overall in keeping with the feminist agenda. When best friends in the program tell each other, “You’re my person”, they are not referring only to their friendship; they are redefining and reinventing how both men and women can interact and rely on one another, specifically in a way that is unique, indomitable, and intentionally challenging.

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GREY’S ANATOMY (Idea: Shonda Rhimes, USA 2005–).