

# **Ideals of Americanism and the American Identity in the Californian Same-Sex Marriage Debate**

An analysis of Campaign Material for the 2008 Ballot Initiative *Proposition 8*

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## Introduction

In 2008, while the entire United States nation was occupied with the possible election of the first African-American president ever, many Californians seemed more concerned with another issue. After 6 months of legal same-sex marriage in the state, petitioners had collected enough autographs to put an anti same-sex marriage law on the California ballot under Proposition 8:

### **Prop 8 ELIMINATES RIGHT OF SAME-SEX COUPLES TO MARRY. INITIATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT.**

Changes the California Constitution to eliminate the right of same-sex couples to marry in California.

Provides that only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.<sup>1</sup>

This Proposition was supported and fought by two very strong opposing sides that both worked overwhelmingly hard to convince as many other Californians as possible to vote for their side. The battle was fought not only in the streets, at rallies, protest-marches and through phone banks, but also in the media. Especially the Yes on 8 side raised millions of dollars to create and spread a collection of advertisements that were directly aimed at Californians to expose the risks that same-sex marriage would bring to the American people. Anti Proposition 8 advertisements also appeared, but much later, in a reaction to these Yes on 8 videos.

As I was an exchange student at Berkeley University during that time, I encountered some of the *Yes on 8* videos on television. My reaction to those videos has stayed with me, and they raised some questions I had until now not been able to satisfyingly answer. They made me wonder where the campaign points mentioned in the videos, such as the defense of children and religious freedom, as opposed to equality and sexual freedom, came from. More specifically, I wondered what kind of underlying assumptions, what kind of discourses lay beneath their ideals. A controversial topic, by now much discussed also within academics, I wondered how it was possible that these two opposing sides could be so explicitly contradictory in their ideals, and in their faith that they were doing the right thing for the future of California and by extension for the American nation. I wondered what kind of image of America the people campaigning in favor of, and against Proposition 8, in California in 2008 had. The videos presented certain ideal views of what a family should look like, what equality and freedom means, and how the nation should either govern and protect these ideals, or leave it to the American people to deal with. Ultimately, I wondered what the content of the campaign videos could tell about the campaigners' ideas on gender, sexuality and religion in political issues, and especially how those ideas are related to the ideology of Americanism and the American identity.

The videos can still be viewed on YouTube and via the main campaign websites of each side. Along with these campaign websites, they will be the starting point for this research. The selection of the videos used is partly arbitrary, but they are some of the first results YouTube

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <http://voterguide.sos.ca.gov> ("Official Voter Information Guide | California Secretary of State," n.d.) on 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2012.

offers when searching for campaign videos for Yes on 8 and No on 8. Moreover, several of them have received media attention in the U.S.

My main question will be directed toward the rhetoric that both sides used in their public statements and expressions to justify their opinion and to convince others of their standpoint. On what kind of concepts did their rhetoric rely? Did both sides use similar or conflicting concepts? What kinds of discourses surround their rhetoric? Here I suspect concepts like family, tradition, sexuality, religion, politics and morality will come to the fore. Eventually, I want to discuss these concepts in relation to the ideology of Americanism and the American identity.

This thesis will investigate what the arguments and statements for and against same-sex marriage, used in the media campaigns for the voting on Proposition 8 in California in 2008, say about the campaigners' ideas on sexuality, religion and its intersection, and how these ideas are connected and related to 'The American identity' and ideas of Americanism. It has come into being inspired by several publications. First, Mary E. Hunt, in her essay on the changing vocabulary of religious ethics, states that "How religions are used to shape the meaning of words and which religious people are given credence make all the difference" (Hunt, 2000, 159). Second, Michael Cobb, in *God hates Fags*, discusses the hateful Christian rhetoric against equal rights for homosexuals and the opportunity it gives gay rights activists to fight back (Cobb, 2006). Third, in an article for the Political Research Quarterly, Nancy D. Wadsworth discusses coalitional and rhetorical strategies deployed by both the Yes on 8 and the No on 8 campaign; she uses a discursive analytical approach to campaign material to exemplify how foundational intersectionality<sup>2</sup> helps examine identity politics in issues such as the same-sex marriage debate (Wadsworth, 2010). And finally, in 'Issue Culture Analysis and the Gay/Lesbian Religious Controversy', Phillip Bakelaar argues for an approach to knowledge especially useful in debates around religious issues. He aims at William Gamson's Issue Culture method, which helps packaging discourses and highlight rhetoric (Bakelaar, 2002). Through these four publications, my thesis has shaped into a discursive analysis of campaign material not unlike Wadsworth's, with a curiosity towards the Christian rhetoric that Cobb refers to and a possible reactionary rhetoric of gay rights activists. Hunt's quote about the use of religion to shape the meaning of words has made me want to investigate the use of words, of concepts, by both campaigning sides, and how these concepts fit into ideologies of Americanism and an American identity; concepts that will turn out to be crucial in the debate around legal same-sex marriage. Bakelaars favoring of Gamson's Interpretive Packages has provided me with the framework in which I will do this.

Quite a lot has been written about both of the campaigns and especially the Yes on 8 side has been substantially analyzed. The novelty of my focus lies in the eventual goal; uncovering the appeals to, and (underlying) idea(l)s about, Americanism and the American identity that these campaigns held. Moreover, my approach will be different in that I use Gamson's Issue Culture analysis and the Interpretive Package as a framework to organize my analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> As opposed to, or in combination with, Identity Intersectionality

Philip Bakelaar, agreeing with Thomas Goodnight, argues that controversies<sup>3</sup> are important areas to investigate the use of rhetoric. He offers a useful framework within which to discuss political controversies by using the issue's public discourse (Bakelaar, 2002). In this framework, he relies on Gamson's Issue Culture Methodology, and the idea of 'Communities of Conviction' surrounding any specific controversy which he has taken from McClendon and Smith (Bakelaar, 2002). These communities of conviction form a particular side of the controversy. In the case of Proposition 8 there are two clear communities: those on opposing sides of the debate. Even though there might have been plenty of communities of conviction that differed slightly from each other on both sides, only the extreme Yes on 8 side and No on 8 side were largely presented, leaving the multitude of differing communities to join either one of the crucial sides.

Both sides of a debate together construct an issue's public discourse. It is formed on both sides of a debate, in the communities of conviction that both depend on, and simultaneously reinforce it. Interpretive Packages can help identify an issue's culture; these packages form a community's arguments and rhetoric. An issue's culture is the complete set of packages surrounding an issue, thus the packages from each side of the debate, from each Community of Conviction. This complete set is an issue's 'culture' (Bakelaar, 2002).

A public discourse surrounding an issue plays a central role in the reality in which people negotiate meaning about a political issue; it is therefore relevant to understand what public discourse says about that issue (Bakelaar, 2002). Proposition 8's culture will be discussed in Chapter four. This chapter will also show how Communities of Conviction run into trouble when they are confronted with the claims of another community; this is where controversy comes into existence such as the example this thesis presents (Bakelaar, 2002). We can view the debate on same-sex marriage and the fight around Proposition 8 as such a debate, and thus as a place in time where we can investigate the use of rhetoric. The sources I will use, are a part of, and simultaneously shape, the public discourse surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage. The use of media sources highlights the mass media's significance in public controversies in the example in this text (Bakelaar, 2002). This is the reasoning behind my selection of sources. Gamson further states that "There may be packages [...] found only in the publications that [communities of conviction] control and direct to their own constituency". My focus is on these publications controlled by the Interpretive Communities themselves, addressing their (possible) followers, and not on 'independent' sources such as newspapers.

By using (parts of) the 'Convictional analysis' that flows from the above reasoning, and counting on the eight idea elements of interpretive packages to schematically disentangle the argumentative stances of the Yes on 8 and the No on 8 side, I hope to be able to find the underlying ideas advocates have about the issues that play a part in the debate. What is considered relevant? What is considered beyond the scope of argumentative questioning?<sup>4</sup> It

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<sup>3</sup> "A particular controversy is seen from a holistic position [...] as the result of a complex interaction of text, community, and culture that engages the larger community in an argumentative process of making validity claims for its interpretive stance" (Bakelaar, 2002, 172).

<sup>4</sup> Questions that Bakelaar asks to investigate in which direction contemporary argumentative engagements are heading.

will help me find the ideological structures that the two sides depend upon, and connect them to ideas of Americanism and the American identity. It will thus be a form of discourse analysis that seeks underlying structures of thought highlighting the conflict participants' language (Bakelaar, 2002) and I will be packaging the Yes on 8 discourse and the No on 8 discourse and comparing them, thus presenting the issue's 'culture'.

I will answer my questions over the course of five chapters. In chapter 1, I will briefly sketch both the socio-cultural and historical background of the issue and address the campaign players. In the second chapter I will elaborate on the Yes on 8 side, through brief descriptions and a preliminary analysis of several videos and the Yes on 8 campaign website. Chapter 3 then, will contain a similar approach to the 'No on 8' side, and these two chapters will result in a series of aspects and concepts that will all be discussed and compared in chapter 4. In this fourth chapter I will deal with the discourses surrounding gender, sexuality, and religion on both sides of the debate. I will do so by comparing both sides' interpretive packages, a term and framework borrowed from Gamson and further explained in the beginning of this chapter, to structure the comparative discourse analysis. In the final chapter, I will then connect the discourses that will surface in chapter 4 to the ideology of Americanism and the ideology of the American identity. I will do so by addressing three themes: political ideals, beliefs in authority and identity and social values. Eventually, I will conclude what the content of the campaigns for and against Proposition 8 in California in 2008 convey about the campaigners' ideas on gender, sexuality and religion in political issues, and especially how those ideas are related to the ideology of Americanism and the American identity.

A brief note on terminology; Despite its unpleasant sound, I will mostly be using the term 'homosexual' because it is both inclusive and restrictive enough for my purposes. While it refers to both men and women, as opposed to the term 'gay', it does not include bisexuality, intersexuality or queerness, aspects of sexual identity that are not addressed in either of the campaigns and are too complicated to be used in this thesis without extensive discussion. Also, I will mostly choose the term same-sex marriage over gay marriage, because it refers to a marriage between two people of the same sex only, and not to potential heterosexual marriages where only one of two partners identifies as gay. Finally, I will refer to the sides of the campaigns either as *Yes on 8* and *No on 8*, or simply as *Yes* and *No*.

## Chapter 1 Setting the stage

In this first, introductory, chapter I will offer a brief overview of historical happenings that have had a connection to, or important role in, the road up to the battle around Proposition 8. This will include several Propositions that had been on the ballot previously in California concerning homosexuality and gay rights as well as more general Civil Rights ordinances and Propositions. Then this chapter will offer an overview of the players in the battle; meaning those that played a significant role in either the *Yes on 8* or the *No on 8* campaign.

### 1.1 Historical background

The battle for and against same-sex marriage was not new in 2008, and the fight for and against gay rights in general had been raging for a much longer time, especially since the 1970's as a part of the civil rights movement. John D'Emilio describes the development of Gay history in the United States as leaping and creeping, with three leaps of growth and several periods of relatively little activity (D'Emilio, 2002).

The first leap he situates in the 1940's and 1950's; mostly the post WWII period when the awareness of oppression had dawned on a few individuals that tried to organize societies such as the Mattachine society. This period also brought the Kinsey studies on human sexuality. The second period, in which modern Gay liberation emerged, he places after the Stonewall riots and in the context of the 1968 student protests and nationwide liberation movements. This period was characterized by a growing sense of pride and confidence among homosexuals in their sexual identities. Between this leap and the third, a lot has changed in terms of legislation. The Stonewall riots, that started of this period in June 1979, are widely considered to be the beginning of the gay rights movement in the U.S. This landmark happening according to *The Gay Decades* galvanized the entire LGBT world in America, after the nation was already shaken by the civil rights movement of the previous decades. Several important happenings further taint the 70's in the U.S., such as the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental illnesses, and the passing of the first gay rights ordinance in the southern cities, in Miami.<sup>5</sup> The Miami ordinance was vigorously fought by Anita Bryant, and eventually repealed to the surprise of many (Rutledge, 1992). In March 1972, the Equal Rights Amendment, banning discrimination on the basis of sex, passed the U.S. Senate. But after a ten-year struggle, the Amendment was narrowly defeated in 1982. This happened in a period that D'Emilio labeled one of creeping forward. Before the next leap, in 1986, the Supreme Court argued once again that the separate states would preserve the constitutional right to outlaw private homosexual acts between consenting adults.

The last leap D'Emilio describes came in the wake of AIDS activism, situated between the 1987 March on Washington and the 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' debates in 1993. These debates, together with a growing organized conservative force, put the brakes on this last leap. During this period, the American Bar Association's House of Delegates finally voted in favor of

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<sup>5</sup> A similar ordinance was fought and retained in Seattle.

supporting federal legislation to prohibit discrimination against gay men and lesbians, and president Bush signed the Hate Crimes Statistics Act. This act required law enforcement officials to start compiling statistics on hate crimes resulting from an individual's race, religion, ethnic background, and sexual orientation.

#### California

In California, Proposition 8 was not the first initiative involving gay rights. Although California is seen as one of the most liberal states of the Nation, it took until 1975 for California to repeal their, by then more than a hundred years old, Sodomy laws.

The first initiative directly involving gay rights in California was Proposition 6 on the ballot in 1978. This initiative, called the 'Briggs initiative', was an attempt to ban all homosexuals and even their supporters from working in public schools. A similar 'Teacher Fitness' statute passed in Oklahoma in February of that year, but in November Proposition 6 failed, defeated by quite a wide margin (59 to 41 percent).

In San Francisco, the Board of Supervisors passed a gay rights law on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1978, a law that was labeled the strictest gay rights law in the country at that time. And on December fifth 1984, as the first city in the United States, Berkeley extended spousal benefits to gay city employees and their live-in partners, both heterosexual and same-sex partners (Rutledge, 1992).

Several propositions that concerned the AIDS epidemic obviously severely affected homosexuals, but there has only been one other ballot proposition in California that directly addressed only the homosexual community. Proposition 22 in 2000 meant a limit to marriage, making it something that could only be established between one man and one woman. Whereas Proposition 8 was an amendment to the Californian Constitution however, this Proposition was merely a state statute.

California was not the first state that put same-sex marriage on the ballot, in fact other states had already voted on similar propositions since the beginning of the new millennium. And even before that, already in 1975, Arizona passed an 'Emergency Measure' that specifically banned same-sex marriage. The legalization of same-sex marriage in the U.S. began in Massachusetts, in 2004. This legalization until now has only worked on a state level because the Defense of Marriage Act, passed in 1996, prohibits the government from legalizing same-sex marriage on a federal level. Thus the battles go from state to state, and as many as twenty-eight states have since the late nineties approved amendments or initiatives that either banned same-sex marriage or established marriage as only between a man and a woman.

The Rainbow Wedding Network<sup>6</sup> offers a timeline concerning Proposition 8, including the history of same-sex marriage issues in California, dating back to 1999 when State Legislature approved domestic partnerships. A year later Proposition 22 limited marriage to opposite-sex partners, but in 2004 a legislator formulated a 'gender-neutral' wedding bill. Although never approved, it sprung hundreds of same-sex marriages, approved by San Francisco mayor Gavin

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<sup>6</sup> [www.rainbowweddingnetwork.com](http://www.rainbowweddingnetwork.com)



Newsome. These marriages were later declared null. After some legal back and forth wrangling, with several proposed bills, Veto's and declarations of unconstitutionality, in the beginning of 2008 the barring of same-sex marriage was declared unconstitutional by the California Supreme Court and for five months, before November fourth 2008, same-sex marriage was legal in California (Hart Hellman, 2010).

As a result of expanding civil rights for homosexuals and the more and more open discussions on these issues, conservative religiosity generally tended to radicalize in their opinions and expressions on (homo)sexuality. After passing in the Senate, the Equal Rights Amendment from 1972, banning discrimination on the basis of sex, immediately received a strong negative reaction from the conservative right because it would destroy the nuclear family, and give broad civil rights to homosexuals. As an example of the radicalization of religious denominations, I analyzed the evolution of the rhetoric of the SBC in *The Southern Baptist Convention's Rhetoric on Homosexuality*. This essay concluded that, if anything, the SBC has "fortified their opposition to homosexual behavior and acceptance of the lifestyle, at least in the rhetoric of their resolutions concerning sexuality and especially in their definition of homosexuality itself" (Bloemen, 2011). Other examples of radicalization against gay rights are the Briggs initiative discussed above, as well as Anita Bryant's crusade against the 1977 gay rights ordinance in Miami. Her campaign "Save Our Children" was based on her conviction that homosexuals need to recruit children to survive and grow as a movement (Rutledge, 1992). Finally, the forming of the Moral Majority in 1979 can be seen as a reaction to the expansion of civil rights. The organization, composed of conservative, evangelical Christian activists strongly opposed gay rights, abortion, feminism and pornography among other things.

In opposition, Patrick Allitt has discussed how several other churches and denominations gradually started to issue statements in favor of gay liberation and full civil rights for homosexuals, creating support groups and accepting homosexuals as members of the church. In 1970 already, the Lutheran Church had called for an end to the sodomy laws and for legislation prohibiting discrimination against gay people. And the United Church of Christ ordained the first openly gay minister in a major denomination in 1972. Moreover, the first same-sex marriage performed in the U.S., in 1970, was in fact performed by a reverend. An example of a denomination that was supportive of gay rights in case of Proposition 8 is the Episcopal church: the six Episcopal Dioceses in California had in 2008 all urged voters to vote No on Proposition 8 (Hope, 2008). Moreover, conservative Christian successes reactivated and reinforced activism in the gay movement as well, such was the case with Anita Bryant's 'Save Our Children' campaign, and such appears to have been the case after the passing of Proposition 8 as well (Allitt, 2003; Rutledge, 1992).

## **1.2 The players**

In an article on fate linking and foundational intersectionality, Wadsworth uses an intersectional, discursive analytical approach to investigate the 'coalitional and rhetorical strategies' that the *Yes* and *No* campaigns deployed. Although her research question is different from mine, her approach to the issue is quite similar; she analyses campaign ads and

website material, among other things, to examine rhetorical fate linking. In doing this, she gives an overview of the different groups that played a significant role in the campaigns for and against Proposition 8. This paragraph will discuss these organizations and groups, and also elaborate shortly on Wadsworth's conclusions regarding coalition forming (Wadsworth, 2010).

The *Yes* Campaign was started, backed and funded by a diverse coalition of people and organizations that would under different circumstances often not even see eye to eye. Several sources reveal that it was the Mormon Church, the LDS, that started the work of building a coalition to fight the 'rising tide of same-sex marriage' (Khan, 2009). Already in 1997, the LDS proposed to forge an alliance with the Catholic Church, and in 2000 a coalition of social traditionalists was successful in passing a ballot initiative that would implement the legislative 'Protect Marriage Act'. The campaign, lead by a group called Protect Marriage, worked to assemble a broad network of supporters for the cause, and eventually the *Yes* side was formed from a combination of unlikely alliances between different religious denominations and Social Conservative groups such as the American Family Association. Basically, they were working with 'any church that was willing to join', as the campaign manager himself has declared (Khan, 2009). Most of the other organizations involved also belong to the Christian right. Some of them, like the Evangelical Focus on the Family, the social conservative National Organization for Marriage, the Mormon Church of Latter Day Saints, and the Catholic Knights of Columbus were able to provide major funding. Other groups were the Orthodox Jewish congregations of America, the Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America (Allitt, 2003; Khan, 2009; Wadsworth, 2010).

The oppositional campaign, that of supporters of same-sex marriage and thus opponents of Proposition 8, formed in reaction to the successfully created referendum. It was lead by Equality for All, a coalition of LGBT organizations and individuals formed in 2006 to counter Right Wing attacks on LGBT rights at that time. Progressive, secular organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, as well as religious organizations such as the Episcopal Diocese in California, whose bishops have stated that they don't believe same-sex marriage will threaten the marriage of heterosexuals, funded and supported the campaign. The latter believe that Christian values such as commitment, love, respect and monogamy are enhanced by marriage, whether gay or straight (Hope, 2008). Many prominent individuals as well as celebrities, both homosexual and heterosexual, also donated and gave their faces to campaign videos and other media. These celebrities, not representing any organizations or groups, spoke out on their own behalf regarding the issue, only from their position as well known Americans. People that did represent groups were for instance representatives of teachers' and nurses' associations. Other affiliated groups and organizations were the Courage Campaign, the Equality Alliance, the LGBT Health and Human Services Network and a number of LGBT groups of color (Wadsworth, 2010).

### **1.3 Conclusion**

To present the situation in which Proposition 8 emerged, this chapter has provided an overview of the history of LGBT oriented laws and battles. Both nationwide and in California specifically, several Propositions have tried to reverse civil rights won by homosexuals, or restrict them in their housing or employment options. Further, some have tried to prevent same-sex couples from establishing families or commitments, in the form of civil unions as well as in the form of actual marriage. But this has often come as a reaction to extended liberties and rights that were provided by the state or federal government. Finally, this chapter has introduced the players on both sides of the debate; the mostly religious groups supporting Proposition 8 and the mostly LGBT oriented organizations battling the Proposition. Now the stage is set for a presentation of the selected campaign material created by these groups.

## Chapter 2 *Yes on 8*

In this chapter I will discuss material from the *Yes on 8* campaign. I will begin with a brief introduction to the main sources, four videos and a website: [www.protectmarriage.com](http://www.protectmarriage.com). More detailed analyses of the respective videos will follow, after which I will answer some general questions regarding the material and the use of central concepts such as education, family and tradition. Then I will switch to a brief discussion of the website's visual and textual elements, to assess whether the videos reflect the general theme of the campaign, and to look for additional information that will be useful for the discursive discussion in chapter 4. I will conclude the chapter with presenting the concepts that I will continue to work with in following chapters.

For this chapter I have chosen four videos that were used in the *Yes* campaign, plus one that was aired after the elections had taken place in reaction to the lawsuit that was filed when Proposition 8 passed. *The Parker family story* is a seven minute-long mini-documentary, arguing that the legalization of same-sex marriage will also affect heterosexual couples, because their children will be made to learn about it in school. In *It's Already Happened* a girl runs up to her mom with the children's book *King and King*, and tells her that in school she learned that two princes can marry, and that she can marry a princess. A very short advertisement called *Marriage, it's simple* shows a little girl dancing around in a pink dress. In *Where Do Babies Come From?*, a young girl asks her parents questions concerning marriage and where babies come from; her parents are both men. In the post-election ad, *A storm is gathering*, a variety of people get to speak about their fear that their lives will be affected when same-sex marriage is legalized.

These four videos are only a fraction of the *Yes on 8* campaign; it consisted of many more videos, and other material. To back up the four videos I will analyze, I will also discuss the main campaign website: [www.protectmarriage.com](http://www.protectmarriage.com). I will discuss this website by looking at imagery, and the texts that it displays. It could be interesting to compare the present shape and contents of this website to the way it looked in November 2008, but such a detailed analysis is far beyond the scope of this thesis. I will therefore discuss the state of affairs on November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008, which is available through [Web.archive.org](http://Web.archive.org), an online program that displays what a website looked like on numerous dates in the past.

For the sake of being concise, the descriptions below are selective, and in some cases paraphrases replace direct citations. I have chosen to mainly describe the elements that will be used later and leave out parts, however significant, that will be left unanalyzed.

## 2.1 The Videos

### *The Parker Family*<sup>7</sup>

This seven minute-long mini-documentary tells the story of the Parkers, who found out that their 5 year-old son was taught about a gay lifestyle and gay families “as if it is morally right” by the school he attended. The Parkers had not been notified about these lessons or given the opportunity to opt their child out.

The video is accompanied by piano and orchestra music throughout. It mainly consists of interview fragments, but these images are intermingled with shots of the Parker family in and outside their home.

It starts with an earnest female voiceover, reading out a text that is also shown – white letters against a black background -- on screen:

“If Prop 8 fails on November 4, all public schoolchildren will be affected. It’s time for everyone to get involved.” [0:00-0:08]

The scene then shifts to the U.S. Capitol, and a male voice takes over. After a few seconds, the viewer gets to see who is talking; Tony Perkins, “President of the Family Research Council”, before he goes to Massachusetts to interview the Parker family. The voiceover says that “...based on the evidence, everything changes when same-sex marriage becomes legal.” [0:31]

That evidence, the Parker family story, shows that it must be taught as normal, acceptable and moral behavior in every public school, even in kindergarten. Perkins states that “this really confuses children”. [0:50]

The Parker family, David and Tonia and their sons, are introduced: “it already happened in Massachusetts”. The family is introduced in their kitchen. The children leave and the parents stand side by side in front of the stove. Perkins asks them to tell their story because he thinks it is “... such an important story and [...] parents *need* to know what’s going on in our schools”. [1:05]

The father, David, starts to tell the story;

“At the beginning of 2005, our son Jacob was going to Kindergarten, and he came home with a diversity book bag, [including] a book entitled *Who’s in the Family?* by Robert Scotch, and that introduces children to same-sex households. [1:20]

Tony Perkins asks, on screen: “Now, wait a minute, leave me clear: your son is in Kindergarten?” [1:23]

Tonia Parker, off screen: “Yeah.” [1:24]

Tony Perkins, on screen: “And he was given a book on homosexuality and marriage?”

Tonia Parker, off screen: “Yes.”

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puI4pFRB0w0&feature=related>

Tony Perkins: “What was your first reaction when you saw this?”[1:31]

Tonia Parker answers, on screen:

“When I saw the book I was quite upset that they would couch this as diversity and include in a diversity book bag, and not give me notification they were going to be introducing this topic of homosexual relationships and homosexual behavior to my young, 5-year old child. I was very upset.”[1:32-1:53]

The boy’s age is emphasized once again, after which the father states that they

“... realized that the intention of the administrators and teachers was to affirm these relationships, and gay marriage, in the minds of children. When we went into the school, what we requested is parental notification [Tonia nods] when these issues are brought up by adults within the school, and the option to opt our child out of this kind of indoctrination.”[2:30]

David Parker explains they didn’t think it appropriate to discuss the issue with their 5 year old, if they ever would they would choose the timing and manner. The teacher told them that she had checked and it was not a parental notification issue, any adult in the school could discuss it with the children. David Parker:

“One of the reasons they [the school administrators] give is, they said: ‘Same-sex marriage is legal in Massachusetts. Therefore we can broach it any time with your child.’ [3:13] And when they are putting forward that it’s equal, then they are putting forward that it’s a morally equal alternative and *affirming* it in the minds of children.[3:21] Now, these are *young, impressionable* children.[3:25] And they [the school administrators] know very well that there are many parents who do *not* hold these beliefs, but *irrespective* of that, in an *intolerant* manner, and in an *aggressive* manner, *they* are putting forward that *we* as parents do *not* even have the right to *know* what they are saying to our children.”[3:41]

Tonia Parker states that when the teacher did not acknowledge their parental rights in the area, they

“...then went to our Judeo-Christian beliefs, and faith, and said: ‘Well, you wish to affirm homosexuality to our son. You are presenting that which is sin, as though it is not, to our son. And we cannot allow that.’”

She continues: “And at that point she reiterated: ‘This is not a parental notification issue.’”[4:07] David Parker talks about their “Sacred Duty, as parents, to guide our child.” [4:13]. He states the school was

“...*taking* the parental role for themselves” [4:24] and had “... *no* tolerance for the notion that parents have the right to be the primary directors of the child’s upbringing and moral education.” [4:36]

He explains how he told them he was"... prepared to sit there all night until I see some form of accommodation...". And that the accommodation they gave was to handcuff him and send him to jail. Tonia Parker shakes her head and with tears in her eyes utters her disbelief,

"my husband and I just want a parental notification. [5:04] We want to raise our children to know God, and God has blessed us with a sacred responsibility to raise them... for Him, and to know Him, and to know His truth." [5:15]

David Parker, initially off screen, while images are shown of him and his family in a park:

"I was willing to see how far this administration would go in denying us our rights, and squashing parental rights. [5:27]

[on screen:] And they were willing to handcuff a father and send him to jail. It was a 6 by 8 cell [Tonia sniffs], filthy, but, you know, I felt I didn't have choice at that point. In order to fulfill my role [*Tonia nods*] and duty as a father. [off screen, while images are shown of David and his sons playing] Parents need to stand their ground. If they [the authorities] intend to have a war over our parental rights, battling for the hearts, minds, and souls of our children, then let it begin here." [5:52]

Tony Perkins is again shown in front of the US Capitol, and then the end voice over says: "Do you see the implications of same-sex marriage being legalized in your state? It affects every family, and every child, including yours. Every household will find themselves dealing with same-sex marriage discussions with their kids. So, when you cast your vote this November, know the full implications of the legalization of same-sex marriage. It affects every family, including yours. So vote to protect marriage, because how you vote today affects your family tomorrow." [6:07]

### ***Yes on 8: It's Already Happened***<sup>8</sup>

This advertisement shows another family situation: a mother standing in the kitchen when a girl comes home from school with the book *King and King*.

"I learned how a prince married a prince, and *I* can marry a princess." [0:02]

The mother looks horrified. The narrator, professor Richard Peterson from the Pepperdine University School of Law, steps into the screen. He says "Think it can't happen? It 's already happened". He states that when Massachusetts legalized gay marriage,

"... schools began teaching second graders that boys can marry boys and the courts ruled that parents had no right to object." [0:12]

This refers to the Parker Family story; a reference to the court case 'Parker vs. Hurly' is presented with the words "No legal right to object" written above. Then a book on the education code is shown and a specific code is marked, that says

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PgjcqFYP4>

“7) Instruction and material shall teach respect for marriage” while the voiceover says that “Under California law, public schools instruct kids about marriage. Teaching kids about gay marriage will happen here unless we pass Proposition 8”. [0:21].

The text on the screen then says “Protect our children. Restore Marriage. Paid for by Protectmarriage.com - Yes on 8, a project of California Renewal. Major funding by Knights of Columbus, National Organization for Marriage California Committee and Focus on the Family”. The text is displayed over the image of the mother having an apparently serious discussion with the girl.

### ***Marriage: It's simple – Prop 8<sup>9</sup>***

In this very short advertisement all we see is a little girl with blond hair, wearing a pink dress, against a purple studio background. In the background a lullaby plays. She looks into the camera, dances around, and then [at 0:07] starts to play with two dolls: one male and one female, in wedding outfits. She makes them kiss one another, puts them together on a table, which is covered with a white table cloth [0:14], dances with them, blows kisses to the viewer [0:17], and then is shown again standing behind the table. She puts her little hands against one another a few times, and seems to be saying something to the dolls. Then she shoves the two dolls closely against each other. At the end of this scene, the groom slightly leans against the bride. Above this image a caption appears: “Marriage. It's Simple.” This then gets replaced by “Vote YES on Prop 8”.

### ***Where Do Babies Come From??<sup>10</sup>***

This video, showing the people that are most affected by Proposition 8, is a *Yes on 8* video titled *Where Do Babies Come From?*, with two gay fathers and their daughter. As the following description will show, without actual analysis the dialogue and story could as well be a commercial for the opposite, pro-gay marriage viewpoint :

A homely image is displayed, with sad piano music in the background; a young girl sitting on the ground with a doll and two men sitting on a couch. The girl says “Daddy?” and both men react to her. The girl then asks where babies come from. The men look at each other and sigh. ‘Daddy 1’ says: “Mommies have babies dear.” The girl asks if boys can ever have babies. ‘Daddy 2’ looks at ‘Daddy 1’, surprised by the question and perhaps curious of his reaction. ‘Daddy 1’ chuckles and says “No dear, only mommies.” The following conversation ensues:

Girl: “Megan says you have to have a mommy *and* a daddy to have a baby.” [0:18]

Daddy 2: “Maybe we should spend a little less time over at Megan’s house.” [0:22]

Daddy 1: “What Megan means is it takes a man and a woman to *make* a baby. That’s all.” [0:25]

Girl: “She said that mommies and daddies have to get married first.” [0:32]

Daddy 1: “No sweetheart, you don’t have to be married to have a baby.” [0:36]

Girl: “Then, [she hesitates] what’s marriage for?” [0:41]

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFFwBokHVfo&NR=1>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75J3TN9Zzck&feature=related>



The fact that this is a *Yes on 8* video is at first only clear through the ‘dramatic’ piano music and the sad, uneasy looks the two fathers exchange. The girl looks confused and a bit sad throughout the commercial. In the end, a voice-over states: “Let’s not confuse our kids. Protect marriage by protecting the *real* meaning of marriage. Only between a *man* and a *woman*. Vote Yes on Proposition 8.”[0:53]

### ***A Storm is Gathering***<sup>11</sup>

In this video, a group of people warns the audience for what will happen if gay marriage is legalized. They are set against a background of dark clouds representing a gathering storm. With suspenseful music in the background and earnest, serious speech, the advertisement has a scary undertone. The following sentences are each uttered by a different person:

“There’s a storm gathering.” “The clouds are dark, and the winds are strong.”  
“And I am afraid.” [0:00-0:04]

they are part of a diverse group of people that are the subject of this video. Constantly, there are dark clouds moving in the background. The people argue that some advocates of same-sex marriage have taken the issue far beyond same-sex couples.

“They want to bring the issue into *my* life.” “My freedom will be taken away.”

At this point, at the bottom of the screen a disclaimer appears that states the actors are telling stories based on real incidents, with a link to [www.nationformarriage.org](http://www.nationformarriage.org).

“I’m a California doctor, who must choose between my faith and my job.” “I’m part of a New Jersey church group, *punished* by the government, because we can’t support same-sex marriage.” “But some who advocate for same-sex marriage have not been content with same-sex *couples* living as they wish.” “Those advocates want to change the way *I* live.” “I will have no choice.” “A storm, is coming.” [0:04-0:44]

All these people sound serious, sad and earnest. Then Damon Owens from the National Organization for Marriage appears on screen, still against the cloudy background but one that slowly changes into a more colorful tableau, and shrinking as the ground he is standing on comes into view. The music changes into something more hopeful and positive, as the man states that they have hope:

“A rainbow coalition of people of every creed and color are coming together in love, to protect marriage. Visit Nation for Marriage dot org. Join us.” [0:45].

In the end, while the music ends on a high note, spoken and written is: “Paid for by National Organization for Marriage which is responsible for the contents of this ad[vertising].”

All the descriptions above can help answer questions about what the campaign tries to show and tell us regarding the issue and their view on it, and what kind of arguments, metaphors

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wp76ly2\\_NoI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wp76ly2_NoI)

and analogies the campaign uses against gay marriage. I will discuss these aspects in the following paragraph.

## 2.2 Discussion

The first thing that can be said about these four videos is that each of them presents young children and their heterosexual parents. This is remarkable: with one exception, addressed later, it presents these heterosexual families as being affected by same-sex marriage. It will infringe upon their rights, specifically their rights as parents. Second, the children's parents are the ones that are shown being concerned about the issue of same-sex marriage, together with the voiceovers and speakers in the videos. Aside from *It's simple*, they are all accompanied by a voiceover or forms of authority presenting the arguments and subject.

Moreover, the first four videos show a family or homely situation, with the members of the family in their every-day homes and surroundings and situations. These are primarily their kitchens, living rooms, and neighborhood. Thus they present personal, everyday, 'regular' families doing personal, everyday, regular things. *The Parker Family* members are spending quality time together as a family; the father plays with the kids while the mother happily watches. *It's Already Happened* and *Where Do Babies Come From?* also present family time, and conversations about same-sex marriage.

There are relevant variations though, that all hint at an impending evil coming to destroy the happy family time. *Where Do Babies Come From?* shows a girl playing but she looks confused and upset about something. *It's Simple* creates a horror movie-like situation, through the combination of images and sound: it shows the happy little girl, but it doesn't show anything else, including parents or caretakers. Moreover, it has no background images or speech, and features an eerily innocent lullaby in the background. In this way it evokes a horror-movie feel, making the possibility of impending legal same-sex marriage a serious, dangerous threat to the little child. Background music in fact has an important role in all the videos: *The Parker Family*, *It's Already Happened* and *Where Do Babies Come From?* also rely on grave or emotional piano music to emphasize the seriousness of the situation.

In *Storm*, this graveness is represented by the imagery as much as the music, that is until the representative from NOW appears with his hopeful message. Further, this video does not feature children but it represents diversity, represented mostly by African-Americans and Latino's. These people identify themselves as a doctor, a church-group member and a concerned parent. And the authoritative figure that ends the video in this video is a representative from a conservative Christian organization.

Equally important for understanding these videos is whom and what is *not* shown. The most conspicuous absentees are gay couples, and gay families who are affected by the law, voicing their opinion. These last three words are important because indeed, the campaign does feature one family with two fathers, which at first glance seems a relevant and positive addition to the group of characters portrayed. However, these fathers do not voice an opinion over the issue or the question of marriage. They are only shown as put in an awkward position when their

child asks about marriage. They do not get to answer her question about marriage. But most importantly, aside from *The Parker Family*, the videos do not present any real people and real situations.

Another significant absentee is the political figure or impartial authority. With an issue like this, one might expect political figures to explain and discuss the legal and constitutional aspects, but these are not presented or even addressed. *The Parker Family* and *It's Already Happened* show legal documents, but on closer look they do not address the actual legal or constitutional side. In fact, none of the videos address the actual issue: that of gay people being able to get married, about that this is already a possibility in California and about what will happen if same-sex marriage is no longer legal. It seems like the actual issue is avoided. Moreover, aside from *Where Do Babies Come From?* which stands out for featuring a same sex couple, the videos seem to deny that there even is such a thing as a gay family and that these families might also include children.

An element that three of the four videos have in common is that none of the featured children gets to speak directly concerning the issue<sup>12</sup>. Thus, even though the videos are, in imagery and subject, primarily about children, the children do not have a voice themselves. Instead, an authority explains the issue, or their view on the issue, and images portray authority like the White House, the 'authorities' in suits, and images of a court and law book. And a family that does not, or does not want to have anything to do with gay issues or same-sex marriage is in fact the family that gets to be the authority through experience. This as opposed to a family with two fathers that is only shown once but not explicitly addressing the issue.

Following the line of thinking of this campaign, schools are the primary place where this law would have –negative- consequences. It is surprising then, to see that no actual teachers or authorities on secondary school education are shown. Moreover, aside from *The Parker Family*, the video's do not show real people with their own arguments. Real children speaking for themselves are also absent.

### Arguments

The arguments in these videos are all quite similar and follow the same ideas and assumptions. I will discuss these assumptions, implied by the arguments, shortly. First, The videos show that children are the most important part of the argument the *Yes* campaign makes. The Parker Family video argues that, if same-sex marriage is legal, it must be taught in school. Following that, they argue that teaching kids about same-sex marriage will confuse them. Thus, same-sex marriage will confuse children. Similarly, *It's Already Happened* says teaching kids about same-sex marriage will happen, and by extension they argue that this is wrong. Thus that is the argument to end legal same-sex marriage. *It's Simple* also argues that it will affect little children. Even stronger, it argues that they are the ones that will be hurt by the law. Aside from that, through the use of a Barbie and a Ken doll, it argues marriage is between a man and a woman, or maybe that this is what children understand. Taking this further, it thus argues that this should stay this way for the sake of the child. In that same vein,

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<sup>12</sup> The girl in *Where Do Babies Come From?* does speak, but she only asks questions.

*Where Do Babies Come From?* similarly argues that same-sex marriage will confuse children, not only about marriage but also about where babies come from. *Storm*, in a slightly different manner, seems to argue that the speakers in the video, who are clearly straight people, are negatively affected by legal same-sex marriage. And this should not happen.

These arguments made are mostly emotional appeals. Especially in *The Parker Family* which relies heavily on the experiences of primarily the father, who has been a victim because of legal same-sex marriage. His pain, grief and anger over his experiences, as the bad experiences discussed in *Storm*, are the basis for convincing viewers how serious the consequences will be. It thus relies on the portrayal of victimization. Moreover, the video makes a moral argument by invoking conservative, traditional, Christian beliefs by denouncing the opposite. The other videos also rely on the emotion of parents, and on their fear for harm done to their children. This fear evokes protective behavior, thus persuading towards voting against legal same-sex marriage. This protective feeling is strongly called upon in *It's Simple*, because the girl is so utterly innocent and defenseless. *Where Do Babies Come From?* seems to try to bring forth a rational argument, because it tries to show with an example how confusing the issue will be for children. The example must prove that same-sex marriage and childbirth are too difficult to explain to children. It argues that marriage is primarily about having babies and thus about children. By showing the emotional effect of trying to explain all this when same-sex marriage is legal, it tries to make the rational argument to vote against same-sex marriage.

These arguments, as said before, rely on a set of assumptions surrounding same-sex marriage. The entire campaign seems to primarily rely on the assumption that legalizing same-sex marriage will mean that public schools will be forced to teach young children about same-sex marriage. It moreover assumes that legal same-sex marriage will indeed be confusing for children and will negatively affect straight people. Finally, as *It's Already Happened* shows, it is sometimes even implied that it is possible that teaching children about same-sex marriage or homosexuality in general, will make them (decide to be) gay. Other assumptions are that anti-gay advocates will be punished for being anti-gay, and that same-sex marriage is not necessary because gays have enough rights and possibilities without the right to marry.

The above ideas show that the effect on children, and children's thoughts and understanding about marriage and the relationships between men and women as well as gender and sexuality, are considered to be the most relevant aspects of Proposition 8. It is moreover considered beyond the scope of argumentative questioning (Bakelaar, 2002) that homosexuality is morally less worthy than heterosexuality, or even that it is sinful, that a gay relationship is not equal to a heterosexual relationship. Moreover, these arguments also imply the idea that there are no gay parents or families, and that gay people cannot and do not have children, and this should be what children are taught.

After this discussion, a collection of concepts can be defined that encompasses the main theme of the campaign. These concepts, and their interpretation, will be discussed in paragraph four; first a discussion of the website [protectmarriage.com](http://protectmarriage.com) will offer some additional information as well as a reflection of what the videos already tell us.

## 2.3 Reflection on protectmarriage.com

The above mentioned description of the videos already offers a host of material to discuss with regards to discourse and the ideology of Americanism and the American identity. However, they are only a small fraction of all the material that the *Yes on 8* campaign consisted of. Therefore, in the following, I will be looking at the main campaign website; looking for a reflection of the above discussed videos as well as other concepts that might be of significance in this thesis.

### Visuals

The top banner, which says “Restoring Marriage & Protecting California Children”, holds on the left a variation of the official campaign sign: a man and a woman holding a sign that says *Yes on 8, protect marriage* over their heads. Two children stand between them, a boy and a girl. The image on the right varies, always showing families, with or without children, notably from different ethnic backgrounds. The rest of the page shows a changing menu with images and texts about the TV-ads, campaigning, rallies, the story of a family’s experience with same-sex marriage and public schools, and ‘the truth about prop 8 and schools’. Next to this menu is another menu with links to options to volunteer and help the cause: register to donate, volunteer, tell friends, endorse prop. 8. It further features a news menu and a blog menu, as well as the following sentence under ‘California voices for prop. 8’ that says: “We are at one of those moments. This is THE major change point of the last few decades...”. Finally, it holds a button with the number of online supporters, a link with resources for churches and a campaign store. The store holds clothing such as T-shirts, tracksuits and baby gear, as well as caps, bags, buttons, stickers and magnets.

### Textual

When it comes to the concept of marriage protectmarriage.com presents a clear opposition between traditional marriage and gay or same-sex marriage. Aside from that, the word marriage without either of those two adjectives is mentioned a lot; it then quite obviously refers to what they label traditional marriage and doesn’t include same-sex marriage. At several points an elaborate, explicit definition is given. The ‘nature’ of marriage is discussed, and the definition of marriage is labeled a survival issue.<sup>13</sup> Marriage is said to be not only about the desires of two adults, but also, and more importantly, as ‘the ideal relationship between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation and the continuation of the human race’.

The combination of marriage and traditional is often mentioned in combination with the verbs protect, restore or support. Not only the traditional definition of marriage needs to be protected, restored and supported, but freedom, and children and the family, are also in danger from same-sex marriage, and need protection and restoration enforced by Proposition 8. If it does not pass, people will be restricted in their freedom, because it will require ‘mandatory compliance regardless of deeply held religious beliefs’.

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<sup>13</sup> As opposed to abortion, which is termed a foundational issue.

Protectmarriage.com is full of these kinds of references to religion, not only in its images and links to other pages but especially also in the body of the texts. To give an example, while references to the constitution, law or the legislative system in general count up to eight, and references to children count up to 13, religious references can be counted eighteen times. These are not only related to freedom of beliefs, but also to those who need to act such as religious leaders, all those who will be affected, those who give testimonials on the website and to god's design of the world.

This design of the world includes rules for families or the family unit; parents and family in general are an important presence on protectmarriage.com. They are however not as frequently mentioned as children; those who, as the videos also clearly proved, are the ones that need protection from the law when it comes to same-sex marriage. At one point, family is labeled the best building block of society. Together with schools, where Proposition 8 would have its most important effect on children, this set of concepts forms the largest one together with the religious references.

Furthermore, references to the state and to legislative concepts are present but not overly, and the words system, legal, legislation, and justices come by sporadically compared to some of the other references mentioned above. However, at least twice the justice system receives a blow from proponents of Proposition 8. When discussing the legalization of same-sex marriage on a statutory level, the website refers to an 'outrageous decision of four activist supreme court judges' that went against the voice of the people.

A final relevant fact when it comes to counting words is that the opposite side, the *No* campaign, is only mentioned four times on protectmarriage.com. Four times in a negative light however, addressing it as shameless, and tricking voters as well as lying about the effects of legalized same-sex marriage.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter started with an elaborate discussion on the four selected videos of the anti-same-sex marriage side: *Yes on 8*. The above analysis provides a lot of concepts that are aspects of the debate, as seen from the *Yes* side. Several aspects of this campaign have already come to the fore, such as the important role of children and education for the argument against same-sex marriage. And a discussion on the website has both embedded these aspects within ideas of truth and the definition of marriage, as well as emphasized the stress on religious aspects. It has moreover offered a view on how *Yes* regards their opponents, and shown the historical awareness of campaigners. After this discussion, a set of concepts can be identified that will be used as a pillar of the interpretive package, discussed in chapter four, of one of the two communities of convictions around the same-sex marriage debate in California in 2008. The concepts are the following:

- Family, children, homely situations, and the idea that these are all or should all be heterosexual and traditional
- Same-sex marriage and its role as impending evil, a storm gathering, and a threat to California and its children
- Schools, more specifically public schools, sexual education and education about marriage and families, parental notification and religious beliefs
- The opposition of traditional marriage as good, versus same-sex marriage as evil;
- Judeo-Christian Beliefs
- Individual freedom and the freedom of religion

Hereafter, these concepts will help in presenting a discursive discussion that will further analyze both campaigns and will play a role in the discussion on the ideologies of Americanism and the American identity that surround Proposition 8. First, in the following chapter, I will present a similar overview of material from the opposing campaign: the *No on 8* campaign.

## Chapter 3 *No on 8*

This chapter will have a similar structure as the previous chapter, but will address the other side of the debate: the *No on 8* side. The chapter will begin with an introduction to the *No* material, and then present an elaborate factual analysis of both the videos and the website. In the conclusion I will present the list of concepts that will be used as comparative material to the results from the previous chapter.

The material I will analyze in this chapter consists of five videos. The first one, *Cartoon*, is a parody on *It's Already Happened*, discussed in the previous chapter. It is quite similar but over the top and silly, which places the actual video from the Yes campaign in a specific light. The second video, *Home Invasion*, is a dramatization of the situation that the passing of Proposition 8 will create. It shows Mormons taking away the marriage license of a lesbian couple after they invade their home. And the *Mac vs. PC* ads are simple and straightforward, yet they implicitly ridicule *Yes on 8*. A video titled *Lies* uses images from Yes on 8 videos and talks about the attacks of that campaign, while the final video, *Prop 8 - the Musical*, is a comedy that came out after November 4<sup>th</sup> on which Proposition 8 passed. It was made for the website 'Funny or Die'. This website is 'A popular US comedy website launched by [actor and comedian] Will Ferrell that hosts a mixture of skits by big name contributors and sketches by aspiring comedians (Gibson, 2008; Itzkoff, 2008). The video features some prominent Hollywood personas, several of which are openly gay themselves. The video is not only a clear argument in favor of same-sex marriage, but also clearly anti-conservative and anti-religious, and a clear critique on how Proposition 8 came into being and how the *Yes on 8* campaign made sure it passed.

As in chapter two, I will also use the main campaign-website to back up the material that the above videos provide. The website, noonprop8.com, is no longer available online but through web.archive.org, also used for the *Yes* website, I have acquired snapshots of the state of affairs in 2008. From this website I will use both imagery and texts as a background source for the conclusions that I can pull from the video analyses.

### 3.1 The Videos

Again I must stress the fact that the following descriptions are selective, as I have chosen to only list the aspects that will be addressed later.

#### *Vote NO on Prop 8 (Cartoon)*<sup>14</sup>

As a parody on the *It's already happened* advertisement, a cartoon *No on 8* ad looks basically the same: the entire advertisement is a cartoon copy of the previously discussed *It's Already Happened*. It shows drawn versions of the child, the mother and the book, here titled *Prince on Prince Action*, [0:07] and the professor, here Dick instead of Rick Peterson, has a pig nose and works for the Pepperdine University School of Jerks [0:28]. Instead of saying that she *can*

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exPoH1JX0Q8&feature=related>



marry a princess, the girl says that she is *going to* marry a princess [0:05]. The mother exclaims: “What?!” Moreover, she tells her mother that she

“... learned that some dinosaurs were vegetarians. I’m going to be a stegosaurus! [more shock from the mother] And in history class, we learned that John Wilkes Booth Shot Abraham Lincoln. I’m going to assassinate the president! [the mother throws her hands up, ‘Iehhk!’]” [0:12-0:27]

The professor tells the audience that when Massachusetts legalized gay marriage, 99% of second graders “made the choice to live the easy careless life of a homosexual.” [0:32] While he says this, a gay interracial couple is shown, and then a class of kids with their clothing turning pink. “The liberal Jew courts ruled parents had no legal rights to object” [0:39], the voiceover states. The California law book is shown again, as the professor says “Under California law, public schools instruct our kids about marriage.” [0:42] In this law book, the words ‘Teach Respect’ are highlighted.

Instead of saying kids will be taught about gay marriage, the professor says “teaching children to be *compassionate, tolerant, decent* human beings who believe in equality will happen here unless we pass Proposition 8.” [0:49] meanwhile drawn images of Westboro Baptist Church members with signs such as “God hates fags”, and then the text “Vote Yes on H8” appear on screen. The video ends with the girl holding a bible and saying “and *Jesus* turned water into wine. I am going to be an alcoholic!” [0:58] and then with the text “Vote No on 8.”

### ***"Home Invasion": Vote NO on Prop 8***<sup>15</sup>

In this video, two men in white blouses with black ties knock on a door that is opened by a young woman. At the same time, in small letters at the bottom of the screen it says

“Dramatization. Not intended to depict actual persons or events”.

The men smile and say:

“Hi, we’re from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.” [0:03] [while another woman joins the first:] “We’re here to take away your rights.” [0:07]

They hold up their wallets with a note saying ‘Enforcement Division’ like a police badge. Accompanied by scary music and sounds, they force the couple backward into their home, entering the house forcefully and taking away their wedding rings: “We’ll take these, thank you.” [0:11]

Then a voiceover accompanied by written word states:

“Fact: Proposition 8 would take away the legal rights of 1000’s of same-sex couples. Fact: members of the Mormon church have given over \$ 20 million to pass Proposition 8”. [0:14]

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q28UwAyzUkE&NR=1>

Written at the bottom of the screen is “source: ABC news, Salt Lake Affiliate”. The couple looks afraid and one of the women indignantly says; “You can’t do this”. [0:23] The Mormons laugh and one of them says “Who’s going to stop us?” [0:25]

They proceed to search the house, looking through personal items like a handbag full of make-up and similar items, jewelry, an underwear drawer, the bathroom and the mail. One of them finds the couple’s marriage license, and when one of the women says “Hey wait, we have rights!” [0:41] He proclaims; “not if we can help it.” [0:44] He tears the license in two, with the women looking on in shock and surprise. When the men stand outside they laugh and say “That was too easy.” “Yeah, what should we ban next?” [0:47]

The voiceover says, as the text simultaneously appears on screen: “Say no to a church taking over your government. Vote NO on Proposition 8”. [0:51] And then only in written word:

“Paid for by Courage Campaign Issues Committee, [couragecampaign.org](http://couragecampaign.org)”.

### ***Mac vs. PC***

A series of *No* videos based on the popular *Mac vs. PC* advertisements addresses the changing of the constitution, which it says is basically what Proposition 8 is about. They all look quite similar, with a young man representing the *No* side, and a middle aged man representing the *Yes* side, against a white, thus neutral background with casual, playful piano music playing. Here I will discuss three of those.

### ***Family***<sup>16</sup>

A regular looking, casually dressed young man introduces himself as *No* on Prop 8. A middle aged, slightly overweight man in a suit and tie, wearing a helmet and shield, then says  
“and I’m *Yes*. [...] I’m protecting this couple from gays and lesbians getting married. Don’t worry everyone, you’re safe!” [0:02]

A heterosexual couple is shown; a woman in a casual dress and heels and a man in a white blouse and trousers. The woman says:

“Actually, we’re fine. Same-sex marriage has been legal here for months and nothing’s happened”. [0:10]

*Yes* looks surprised and says, in apparent disbelief:

“You’re telling me it doesn’t undermine the sanctity of your marriage?” [0:16]

To which the woman replies “No, we’re fine”. *No* says: “See? They’re cool. That’s equality”. [0:21] The woman adds

“Yeah I would feel really horrible if two people who love each other as much as we do, couldn’t get married”. [0:24]

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUIQPnUUGU0&NR=1>

Yes jumps in and says

“Exactly, horrible. That’s how I feel. We’re going to go door to door on this... What’s that?” [0:28]

That last bit he proclaims when a girl comes running up to the couple. The man of the couple explains that they can’t come because they are spending the day with their kids. Yes:

“What do you mean your kids?! What about family?! Where are some people’s priorities? I’m gonna go get them.” [0:37] No continues:

“That’s a good question. Where *are* people’s priorities? We’re all Californians. We’re all *equal*. Let’s keep it that way. Vote no on Prop 8.” [0:34]

### ***And She's the California Constitution***<sup>17</sup>

This video starts with the same introductions as the previous one, followed by a woman stating: “And I am the California constitution”. [0:02] Yes comments on her beauty and says “I am totally gonna amend her”. [0:10] No tells him he should not do that because she is perfect the way she is, but Yes thinks she would be “.. even better with a little discrimination in her, you know what I mean?” [0:15] He buffs himself up when he walks up to her, and asks her what she is into. She tells him:

“Well, equality, justice, I guess you could say I’m all about giving everyone a fair shot. What are you into?” [0:28]

He answers:

“Me? You know, just eh, deciding what’s appropriate for everyone else, government interference in personal life, judgment...” [0:36]

To which she replies that he should go play with something other than the state constitution. No apologizes to the constitution for the situation, and then turns to the camera.

“Leave our constitution alone. Support marriage equality. For everyone. Vote no on Proposition 8”. [0:51]

### ***I eliminate rights***<sup>18</sup>

Here, the same introductions are followed by the following dialogue:

No: “I maintain the current constitution and give everyone equality in the eyes of the law”. [0:03]

Yes: “And I eliminate rights (chuckles). Oh but just for certain people so it’s cool.” [0:06]

No: Right.. I’m into fairness and dignity.” [0:11]

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yU4udzEbcdQ&feature=related>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9T7ux8M4Go&feature=related>

Yes: “Me too, totally”. (No reacts confused) “No just not for everyone. I want to ‘preserve tradition’ [pointing to the camera and giving a thumbs-up].” [0:13]  
 No: “” By putting discrimination *in* the constitution?” [0:18]  
 Yes: “Yep.  
 No: “”That doesn’t sound like the California I know.” [0:21]  
 Yes: “Ok. You know what? Name *one* thing more important to Californians than stopping same-sex marriage. Alright?” [0:23]  
 No: “The economy, unemployment, healthcare, the war, the environment?” [0:29]  
 Yes: “Boring. I’d like to see where all this fairness and dignity is gonna get ya”. [0:34]  
 No: “Yeah, me too. We’re all Californians. We’re all equal. Let’s keep it that way. Make sure you, your friends and your family vote no on Proposition 8”. [0:37]  
 Yes: “What?” [0:45]  
 No: “Yeah. It’s the right thing to do buddy”. [0:47]

### *Lies*<sup>19</sup>

This video shows several TV’s next to, and piled on top of each other. These TV’s display different *Yes on 8* videos, repeatedly and with about a second of static when the ad ends before it restarts. It starts with two TV’s, but then the camera slowly zooms out and it captures five TV’s on each side; some display the same videos. What they transmit is also audible in the background, as well as the static.

A male voiceover, talking directly to the spectator, says:

“Their attacks have come before and they always use the same scare tactics. This time they want to eliminate rights, and they’re using lies to persuade you. Prop 8 will *not* affect Church tax status, [0:15] that’s a lie. And it will *not* affect teaching in schools. [0:18] Another lie. It’s time to *shut down* the scare tactics.” [0:02-0:23]

After that last sentence, it looks as if the TV is turned off and the screen goes black. White letters appear on screen and they say the same as the voice over: “Keep government out of *all* of our lives”. [0:24] Then a blue screen appears and in big white letters “Vote No on Prop 8”. The voiceover says “Don’t eliminate marriage for anyone. Vote no on Prop 8”. [0:27] Finally, beneath the message to vote No, written is

“Paid for by No on 8, Equality for All, major funding from No on 8 - equality California and Human Rights Campaign/HRC California Marriage PAC – No on Prop 8.”

### *Prop 8 - the musical*<sup>20</sup>

In this video made for the website ‘Funny or Die’, numerous Hollywood celebrities have joined together to make fun of the entire issue while still pressing the point that a ban on same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, discriminatory and unwise. It begins with a cheerful

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKAqbQIWQhc>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.funnyordie.com/videos/c0cf508ff8/prop-8-the-musical-starring-jack-black-john-c-reilly-and-many-more-from-fod-team-jack-black-craig-robinson-john-c-reilly-and-rashida-jones>

group of people of different nationalities, sexes and sexualities in casual and colorful clothes, representing a very leftist group of people, looking happy and singing and dancing in a loose and slightly messy, perhaps unprofessional, choreography.

A (Gay and gay-friendly people): “what a time to be black, a girl, or gay”. [0:12]

Then, from behind a parasol, a man and woman dressed up in black and gray, looking neat, apparently representing Conservatives or the Religious Right, appear with a piece of paper that says “Prop 8”.

B (Lead Prop 8 proponent): “look, nobody's watching, it's time to spread some hate. And put it in the constitution: Proposition 8!” [0:26]

They are then joined by a number of other people looking conservative; dressed in dark clothes, standing straight and looking severe, and more people stand in front of the happy pro-gay group, listening to the conservatives’ plea:

B: “they'll teach kids about sodomy!” [0:38]

This extra group of people runs to a voting booth and Proposition 8 is implicitly passed. The proponents agree that they were spreading a lie but say they don’t care, and say gay love is a sin. Then Jesus appears to address the groups of people, and lecture the conservatives on their supposed following of the bible. He says the bible also says shellfish is an abomination, and that you can stone your wife or sell your daughter as a slave.

B: “well we ignore those verses”. [1:39]

C: “well then friend it seems to me you pick and choose [...] well please choose love instead of hate! Besides your nation was built on separation of church and state”!  
[1:46]

As Jesus leaves he shouts:

B: “see you later sinners”! [1:56]

After Jesus disappears, another man appears and sings the final part of the show, an argument about how gay marriage might actually be good for the nation because they will save the economy with expensive weddings and divorces. This convinces the conservative Proposition 8 supporters and in the end the two groups join together to express their Americanism and their support for gay marriage.

Everyone: “I can see, America's calling me! Yes, gay marriages will save the economy!!!” [2:42]

## 3.2 Discussion

At first glance, these five videos are all very different in imagery and in subject. They present a cartoon; a dramatic invasion of privacy; a pro- and a contra- Prop 8; a commentary on the other side's campaign videos and even a musical. Yet, as was the case with the *Yes on 8* campaign, there are many similarities in the videos as well. This paragraph will discuss these similarities in themes and ideas.

Three of the videos show representations of discussions about Proposition 8, between the opposing sides. These videos present quite strongly and obviously the differences between the two sides, creating a clear opposition: *No on 8* is generally fair, righteous and honest as well as casual, colorful, young and cheerful, while *Yes* is generally mean, unfair and selfish as well as middle-aged or old, serious, colorless and formal. This clear difference represents the difference between liberals and conservatives. Moreover, in two of the three videos, the *Yes* side is represented by strongly religious people.

Three of the five videos in fact show religious figures, two of them belonging to a specific denomination, in a very negative light: Mormons invading a home, Westboro Baptists picketing against homosexuality, and generic religious figures purposefully writing hate into the Constitution.

Authority is represented by both people and things in this collection of videos. The book about the Education code, a piece of paper representing the right to marry, rings to represent a marriage, and badges that represent the authority to take rights away from others are objects representing some form of authority. People representing authority are less present, there is Jack Black as Jesus, a woman representing the constitution, a professor representing the law and two men as Mormons representing some form of authoritative position to take rights away from others. Also, in the *Mac vs. PC* ads, the shown authority is the *No on 8* man, who is portrayed as an authority on the subject by he speaking the most and having the last word. This series of ads also features a heterosexual couple as authority through experience. The only ad that explicitly reveals its sources is *Home invasion*, which shows that information is used from ABC news. Most of the authority comes from voiceovers in these videos. These authorities are not shown, and they are not introduced, so they are not presented as well known authorities. Aside from that there are only actors speaking. The voiceovers are there mostly to give truth-value to arguments and examples of both sides of the campaign.

While two of the videos have a child in them, children are not the main subject. One child is coming home from school and is the catalyst for following examples and arguments, like in the *Yes* video it parodies. The other is merely a tool to comment the use of children in the *Yes* campaign, when spending time with children is not seen as caring about family.

Three of the videos especially debunk arguments and videos from the opponents campaign, directly by calling them lies or indirectly by overstating them and applying their logic to other issues. *Lies* literally floods us with *Yes* lies.

Background music is not as present as in the *Yes* campaign. There is some suspenseful music, but there is also some casual and theatrical music, and two videos do not have background music at all. This goes along with the neutrality in background color of one of the three. The rest of the videos has either a dark background or a comforting background that brings up a positive feeling, such as the beach setting in the musical video. Written text plays a significant role in several cases.

As in the *Yes* campaign, there is significance in what is not shown and said in these videos. None of the videos show any ‘real people’ or ‘real families’<sup>21</sup>. Neither do they show any average voters or advocates or affected parties from either side: no politicians, no judges and no other independent or impartial parties. And only two videos show homosexuals, of which only one shows an already married couple and the effect proposition 8 will have on their lives. None of the videos, moreover, address tradition and the definition of marriage. And although *Home Invasion* shows a textual disclaimer, it does not say that their video is not what will actually happen but only a metaphorical comparison. Just like *Cartoon* does not state that they are showing a parody of a *Yes on 8* video. And last but not least, the videos that show a supposedly levelheaded and neutral discussion about Proposition 8, the *Mac vs. PC* ads, do not address religious arguments at all.

#### Arguments

The most prominent argument is one that is based on the arguments of the opponents. It is the argument that the *Yes* campaign is telling lies and using nonsensical arguments and unrealistic ideas of what will happen if same-sex marriage becomes legal. This includes the argument made in *Prop 8 - the Musical* that the religious rejection is not fair because it is based on a pick-and-choose strategy. The argument about what kids will be taught in schools is countered by saying that kids will learn to be decent and tolerant, and to have respect for marriage.

Another prominent argument is that of the separation of church and state. The videos imply that religion is the driving force behind *Yes on 8*, and *Home Invasion* explicitly states that the Mormon church is taking over the government. This means that the church is interfering with people’s lives by making the government decide who can and cannot get married, defying the separation of church and state. Finally, all of these arguments refer to the constitution; people have rights, thus gays and gay couples have rights, and this includes the right of marriage. This is a matter of fairness and dignity, and equality for all. The arguments are expressed mostly by declaring what is wrong, untrue and unfair in the opponents’ videos, by speaking of rational things such as the law and the state, and by stating the assumed obvious with regard to these concepts.

These arguments are mostly rational and political, they are based on the idea that legalizing same-sex marriage is the right thing to do when it comes to ideas of humanity and the Constitution, and thus the law. The arguments are much less based on emotions, even though in some videos emotions do play a role. These are mostly anger at the *Yes* side and its tactics,

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<sup>21</sup> There are only actors, none of the videos are in documentary style.

and they are evoked by showing the ridiculousness of *Yes on 8*'s arguments. The musical even shows how *Yes on 8* finds joy in spreading hate. *Home Invasion* evokes fear and indignity, on top of anger, because it shows an extreme situation to represent what the law will do to married gay couples. And the *Mac vs. PC* series has made the *Yes* side look unsympathetic as opposed to the *No* side. They make *Yes* look bad literally, by making the man representing *Yes* overweight and generally un-charming.

As was the case in the previous chapter, here again the arguments are based on certain assumptions about viewers and about what is good and true. The most important assumptions on this side are for instance that the *Yes* side is unfair and just wants to spread hate, and that this is based on their religious views. Moreover, it is assumed that the Separation of Church and State is indeed the way to go. In fact, so they assume, the *No* side's arguments are common sense which everyone should understand. Finally, it seems as if *No on 8* assumes that many opponents of same-sex marriage believe that teaching children about homosexuality will influence them in their sexual choices.

The tactics of the *Yes on 8* campaign and the supposed lies they are spreading, as well as the separation of church and state, are considered the most relevant aspects of Proposition 8, together with the constitution and ideas of fairness and dignity, equality and the loss of rights. It is, further, considered relevant that the Mormon church has donated a large amount of money to the campaign. Additionally, unquestionable is that the constitution says everyone should have equal rights and that marriage is in fact a right that should be part of equality.

By comparing the teaching about marriage and same-sex marriage to teaching about dinosaurs and the man who assassinated the president, the *Cartoon* video aims to show how teaching about same-sex marriage is not a gay agenda and will not make children decide to be gay, but is only a lesson about contemporary society. Moreover, the connection is made between what the bible says about homosexuality and what the bible says about eating shellfish; *Prop 8 - the Musical* argues that both are described as an abomination, but that one is ignored and the other held onto. Finally, the amendment to the constitution is compared to the changing of a woman's characteristics to fit the needs and likes of a man, and the addition of Proposition 8 to the constitution is compared to an actual home invasion; an invasion of privacy.

### **3.3 Reflection on Noon8.com**

Analogous with chapter two, this paragraph will present a discussion on the content of the main campaign's website, in this case the no longer existing [www.noon8.com](http://www.noon8.com). I will begin with a visual description, after which I will discuss the textual content in relation to as well as in addition to the content of the above discussed videos.

#### Visual

The top banner is dark blue, with on the left in white letters Vote NO on PROP 8 with a red cross through the 'o' in No. Bright red letters in the middle of the banner say "Unfair. Wrong." On the right there is a button that says 'Donate today'. The menu consists of "Home", "about Prop 8", "Take action", "News", "Español" and "Spread the word". On the



right there is a vertical menu on every page with seven short cuts to pages about volunteering, spreading the word, signing up to receive information, taking action, social media, another donation button, and a red square indicating how much time there is left until the polls close. At the top of every page is a signup form where visitors can enter their email addresses and zip codes to stay connected and receive information about the campaign.

On the homepage, another large horizontal banner, divided in two, features on the left half four pictures of individuals; Dianne Feinstein, Barack Obama, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Maria Shriver. Obama's picture has the words "Divisive and discriminatory" written on it, and Schwarzenegger's says "It should never happen". The right half is gray and says, in large white letters: "We need every vote". In slightly smaller font it says "Make history today!" and "Vote NO on Prop 8!". At the bottom there are two links, one that says "Find your voting place" and one that says "read what's on the Ballot".

The "download" page features a collection of buttons, banners and profile images that can be downloaded and used for active *No* followers to put on their own websites and profile pages, and forms and flyers to print and spread out. The buttons and banners are all in the same style; blue with, in white, the words 'No on 8' or 'Vote no on Prop 8', and some feature the slogan "Unfair. Wrong." The Video menu features videos of numerous *No* ads from different -groups of- people, such as celebrities for example. The "Take Action" menu features a table with widgets for several social media possibilities such as Facebook and YouTube.

### Textual

The textual content of the website is, in total, not that vast. When following all the links, it turns out that many link to the same pages. The main menu is on the home page with important recent news items, that can also be found on the news page. The headings are bold and the articles that were on the front page on November 4<sup>th</sup> were about prominent figures speaking out against Prop 8, about educators reacting to a new *Yes on 8* ad, and about parents that are angry because their child was used in a *Yes* ad without their permission. Most of the text can be found in the "About Prop 8" menu. The first page has four headings linking to pages with more information: "Why vote no on Prop 8", "Facts vs. Fiction", "Who opposes Prop 8" and "What is Prop 8". Underneath are links to texts in Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese.

When looking closely at the texts under the above mentioned headings<sup>22</sup>, a few things become clear. First, the words 'unfair' and 'wrong' are used more than 10 times and mostly together, when labeling Proposition 8. The same goes for 'eliminate fundamental rights' and in slightly lesser amounts 'treated differently' and words such as discrimination, intolerance and denying dignity and respect. Aside from one other combination of words, these words with negative connotations are mentioned significantly more often than other, and positively connotated, words.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Who opposes Prop 8' only lists newspapers and prominent organizations and individuals against prop 8 and thus does not offer useful texts to analyze.

The other set of words that is mentioned frequently and signifies a relevant line of thought, is ‘group of people’ and related words that hint at the same thing: ‘gay and lesbian people’, ‘same sex couples’, ‘group of Californians’. Relevant for now is that these sets of words are often followed by words that set the people they refer to apart from ‘other people’ or ‘everyone else’.

Although the word ‘law’ is also mentioned quite often, clearly less mentioned is the constitution. It is mentioned even less often than the words government or government interference. And just like these words, positive words such as freedom, equality, dignity and respect are mentioned less than the words with a negative connotation.

On several accounts, the website features examples of newspapers opposing Proposition 8, and it also features a list of examples of other authoritative sources; leaders of for instance nurses and teachers. Teachers are mentioned somewhere else as well; under the heading of ‘Facts vs. Fiction’ they are said to agree that Proposition 8 has nothing to do with schools, contrary to what the *Yes on 8* campaign states.

Under the heading “What is Prop 8” falls a plea for fairness, dignity, and freedom, and against the elimination of rights for certain people. References are made to freedom of religion and freedom of speech, and to the insignificance of domestic partnerships. Lastly, a husband and father speaks about his two heterosexual sons and lesbian daughter, with a plea to have her keep the rights her brothers will always have.

### **3.4 Conclusion, Set of concepts**

This chapter, as did chapter two, offered descriptions of a set of videos, followed by a discussion on general themes. A discussion on the website has added ideas of truth with a section on Facts vs. Fiction, and ideas on authority through references to news outlets and celebrities speaking out against Proposition 8, as well as expanded on ideas already apparent from the videos such as the opposition between heterosexuals and homosexuals. Here, as on the *Yes* side, the historical awareness has also come to the fore. These discussions have provided several sets of concepts that will be used to test the campaign’s ideas on Americanism and the American identity, as presented through discourses that will be discussed in the following chapters. These concepts are to be listed in the following sets:

- Lies, tactics, attacks and general negative concepts regarding the *Yes on 8* campaign
- Equality, fairness, dignity and respect
- Court, Law, government, constitution, church/religion and freedom, and their roles in the debate around same-sex marriage
- Family, love and marriage

These concepts will, together with the sets from chapter two, in the following chapter be discussed as part of interpretive packages surrounding Proposition 8 and the issue of same-sex marriage. Eventually, this will lead to a discussion on the ideologies of Americanism and the American identity as seen through opponents and proponents of Proposition 8.

## Chapter 4 Comparing Interpretive Packages

The previous two chapters presented factual descriptions of campaign material from both sides of the debate, with some generalities and conclusions. This chapter will follow up on those descriptions and take them further, analyzing the implications of the discursive elements employed in the campaigns and on the websites. This will be done through a comparison of the two sides' interpretive packages, adding *concepts* as an extra pillar to the framing aspects. This chapter adopts a discursive approach to the campaign material, focusing on issues of gender and sexuality, as well as on the religious aspect of the debate. Because of this discursive approach, the focus lies in the 'visual images' pillar. Other important pillars in this chapter are the moral appeals, the consequences, and the depictions; moral appeals and consequences constitute a large part of at least one of the two campaigns, and the depictions help in defining discourses around several important issues concerning Proposition 8. I thus deem these the most relevant in relation to this thesis. I will begin this chapter with an explanation of Gamson's interpretive package theory and my use of this framework, after which I will go over the pillars one by one, combining some and elaborating on others depending on their relevance and their role in the campaign. This discussion will show how the opposing sides are at several points informed by competing or overlapping discourses. The chapter will thus offer a discursive analysis of both the *Yes* and the *No* campaign, guided by Gamson's interpretive package framework. The question this chapter will ultimately answer is 'What kind of discourses on concepts such as gender and sexuality, religion, marriage and family are adopted by the *No on 8* and the *Yes on 8* campaigns?'

### Interpretive Packages

Both the *Yes* and the *No* side form a Community of Conviction concerning the issue of marriage and particularly same-sex marriage (Bakelaar, 2002). Advocates of these Communities of Conviction, states Bakelaar, come with an interpretive package surrounding an issue. These packages consist of two aspects, the framing aspect and the reasoning/justification aspect. The framing aspect consists of five elements used by advocates of the community: specific metaphors, catchphrases, depictions, exemplars and visual images (Bakelaar, 2002,). The reasoning/justification aspect consists of explanations about the coming into being of a situation (Roots), supposed consequences and the use of specific moral appeals. Through these three aspects, "advocates encourage particular ways of reasoning about issues" (Bakelaar, 2002, 174). These eight idea elements together form the communities' arguments and rhetoric; the interpretive packages are its argumentative stances and the justification of those stances. Because I approach the campaigns discursively, to establish the ideologies surrounding Americanism and the American identity that they convey, I mainly focus on the Visual Images pillar. I interpret this pillar as addressing the way people and things are represented. Moreover, I want to add the element 'concepts' to the Framing Aspect, because certain concepts and their particular use help shape the frame in which the issue is introduced and discussed more specifically. Thus, in the following, I will discuss and compare the two sides' interpretive packages, beginning with the Framing Aspects to which I have added concepts, and then the Reasoning and Justification aspects.

## 4.1 Framing aspects

### Metaphors and Catchphrases

Metaphors are not that frequently employed in the Yes and No sides fighting over same-sex marriage, the only significant one can be found in the *Yes* campaign. Here, on several occasions, same-sex marriage is compared to a storm or monster threatening California and especially Californian children. These metaphors are fear inducing and signify a serious danger looming over Californians that should be averted. Another comparison is of that between teaching children about the existence of homosexuality, and indoctrination. On the No side, there are not so much metaphors deployed, but some comparisons are made. Actual home invasion is used as a metaphor for the taking away of the right to marry from gay couples, the freedom to marry is compared to the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion and is thus seen as a fundamental civil liberty.

When looking at the Catchphrases both sides of the campaign have come up with, a fundamental difference between the approaches of the two becomes clear. The Yes side's catchphrases aim to convince people that bad things, about to happen, need to be avoided. Specifically children and the institution of marriage need to be protected from these things. The No side on the other hand, uses catchphrases that appeal to rules that should be at the center of American governance, such as laws, fundamental rights, and the separation of church and state. 'Unfair. Unnecessary. Wrong' also appeals to these concepts by implying that they will be violated if Proposition 8 passes, which is wrong.

### Exemplars

Examples used in the *Yes on 8* campaign are of effects of the legalization of same-sex marriage on straight people, most notably the Parker Family situation in Massachusetts. *The Parker Family* uses a single event as exemplary, as evidence for what will happen to schoolchildren. This single issue, presented in documentary style as a family story, is offered as a consequence of the legalization of same-sex marriage. The seriousness of these negative consequences is pushed to the forefront to make the case against same-sex marriage. *Where Do Babies Come From?*, dealing with the connection between marriage and having children, presents the same sex parent household as an example of why these couples should not have children; it creates difficult situations when trying to explain these matters to the children in question.

The *No* campaign uses the example of how a couple feels when their marriage right is taken away. On their website, they let a father with two straight sons and a lesbian daughter speak, as an example of how restricting marriage to opposite-sex couples is unequal and unfair. To put things in perspective, and to indicate how ridiculous the *Yes on 8* arguments are, *Prop 8 - the Musical* offers examples of other biblical interdictions, such as the eating of shellfish, and discusses how these are handled. And one of the *Mac vs. PC* advertisements, *I eliminate Rights*, lists a number of current issues that should be more important to Californians than the de-legalization of same-sex marriage.

## Depictions

In the *Yes* campaign, same-sex marriage activists are portrayed as recruiters, because the effect of legalizing same-sex marriage, the obligation of teaching about same-sex marriage, is labeled 'indoctrination'. Moreover, the campaign for same-sex marriage or against Proposition 8 was portrayed as the pushing of a gay agenda because, as *Storm* argues, advocates of same-sex marriage are not content with civil unions. Although on the *Yes* campaign website the *No* side is only mentioned sporadically, they are always addressed in a negative light, as in the videos.

On the *No* side, the battle over same-sex marriage was fought primarily with critiques on the campaign of the opponents. Discrimination, judgment, the preservation of tradition at the cost of a minority, even hate, are accusations used to describe what the opposition is doing and out of which sentiments they are doing it. The blame is put on special interest groups, and the *Yes on 8* campaign is labeled deceptive. The Musical gives some extra examples; in it the *Yes* side speaks of sodomy, a concept that refers to illegitimate sexual practices, and the words sin and abomination. And *Lies* is very clear and straightforward in commenting on *Yes* when it repeats the words 'lies', 'attacks' and 'scare tactics' multiple times. *No* moreover depicts religious activists as mean-spirited and unfair; especially Mormons are shown in a bad light. 'Home Invasion' all but demonizes them by how they are represented. Proponents of Proposition 8 in general are not positively represented in this campaign, and their campaign material is used in *Lies* to accuse the *Yes* side of lying, and attacking gays and gay activists. Thus, both sides of the campaign use negative depictions of their opponents to convince voters to join their side.

Depictions of authority play a significant role in both campaigns, whether it is by presence of authoritative figures or through their absence. The two campaigns use authority and authoritative figures or sources in different ways. The *Yes* campaign for instance features representatives from organizations who speak out about Proposition 8, such as Damon Owens from the National Organization for Marriage (NOM) in *Storm*, Tony Perkins from the Family Research Council in *The Parker Family* and law professor Richard Peterson from Pepperdine University in *It's Already Happened*. These supposedly authoritative figures, aside from Richard Peterson<sup>23</sup>, are in fact affiliated with organizations that are by definition against same-sex marriage: NOW is an organization that wants to protect marriage from the legalization of same-sex marriage, and the Family Research Council is a Conservative Christian organization. These so-called authorities are thus in fact biased representatives of conservative organizations, far from neutral, that do not share objective information on the issue. Other videos, such as *Where Do Babies Come From?* on the *Yes* side and *Home Invasion* and *Lies* on the *No* side, feature voiceovers that speak about the issue as authorities, from the campaign's point of view. They are however not introduced, and do not represent an organization or governmental institution, thus we do not know who is speaking. We can assume however that these people are saying what the campaign managers want the public to hear, giving one-sided information instead of facts or comparisons that would make people

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<sup>23</sup> A professor at Pepperdine University of Law. The university however issued a statement saying they did not agree to his participation in the videos.

seriously consider the issue. Although the *Yes* campaign thus does feature some authoritative voices speaking about the issue, actual, impartial authorities such as judges or politicians, teachers or authorities on secondary school education are, as in the *No on 8* campaign, absent (here) .

The *Yes on 8* campaign features some ‘regular’ citizens that have stories to tell concerning the issue, presenting them as authorities through experience. They have lived through the consequences of the legalization of same-sex marriage, and thus should be able to offer valuable and relevant information, they have a certain form of authority that others do not. The Parker family is a clear example: the parents get to tell a firsthand story about their son and his school and teachers. But the children, or even people from the school that are part of their story, do not get to speak. This begs the question who has a voice and who is silenced; *Where Do Babies Come From?* proves that gay people are silenced in the *Yes* campaign.

### Visual images

Aside from the above discussed authoritative figures, the *Yes* campaign makes use of several objects signifying authority, such as the White House and in several cases a law book. The White House connotes the highest leadership of the United States, an obvious authority. The law book represents the laws and regulations of the country, signifying knowledge and truth. These objects thus symbolize authority, some of the highest forms possible. This adds serious credibility to what is said in the videos. The most important visual images in the *No* campaign are those of mean-spirited religious people and in general, negative images of proponents of Proposition 8. These religious representations will be discussed in the section on concepts. In the following, I will first elaborate on the visual representations of gender and sexuality in both campaigns, starting with *Yes on 8*.

The images and references to family that the *Yes on 8* campaign deploys, are quite one-sided and limited. To begin with, the official campaign sign consists of a man and a woman holding a sign that says “Yes on 8, protect marriage” over their heads, with two children standing between them, a boy and a girl. *The Parker Family* also presents a father and mother with two children. The video shows the father actively playing with his sons while the mother happily looks on. With an active male and supportive female parent on the sidelines, this is the perfect nuclear family (Juschka, 2001). A similar representation of the family, although less defined, is visible in *It Already happened* where a mother is seen at home working in the kitchen when her daughter comes home from school. This mother is fulfilling a stereotypical gender role as the stay at home mother who cooks and takes care of the house and the children. Another version of the gender role is evident in *It’s Simple*. The girl we see dancing is a typical girly-girl, with her blond hair and blue eyes she is the younger version of the perfect woman in her long, pink, conservative<sup>24</sup> dress. Her dancing and playing with Barbie-dolls only fortifies this image.

Thus even young children are fulfilling stereotypical gender roles and understanding and complying to gender differences. Even in *Where Do Babies Come From??*, with a girl with

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<sup>24</sup> Long, closed to the neck, with a lot of lace and frill.

two fathers, the normative gender roles are evident through the emphasis on the fact that ‘mommies have babies’ and boys cannot, and through the attention paid to the idea that marriage has no other function than for a man and a woman to have a baby. This marital function is also represented by the child in *It’s Simple*: she is the ultimate example of the result of a consummated marriage. Moreover, she is playing with two Barbie dolls; a man and a woman in wedding outfits. Adding that clearly heterosexual image to the other family images in the campaign, a very heteronormative discourse surrounding family and love becomes apparent (Berlant, 2009). Some of the videos seem to deny that there even is such a thing as a gay family and that these families might also include children, leaving the question of what will happen to them untouched.

*Where Do Babies Come From?* in fact does show a homosexual family. But this representation of a gay family is problematic. Here, relevant is that this video shows a gay family to be undesirable, because the child is confused about marriage, about having children and about her two fathers. This assumes same-sex marriage or homosexuality to be confusing, undesirable or even abnormal and unacceptable. This takes a step beyond heterocentrism and touches upon heterosexism, especially when considering the following: *Storm* clearly places heterosexuals above homosexuals in a hierarchy valuing both groups’ emotions and feelings. The effects of de-legalizing same-sex marriage on homosexual families is not addressed. And *The Parker Family* openly opposes homosexuality as acceptable, as normal, as moral. The campaign website even states the following: “[Proposition 8 will prevent] consequences to Californians who will be forced to *not just be tolerant* of gay lifestyles, but face mandatory compliance [...]” (emphasis mine), thus implying that even tolerance is a step too far.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, the *No on 8* campaign overall also seems quite normative with regard to gender, especially since it is mostly men who get to speak on the issue. *Home Invasion* shows two women, but they are the ones whose house is being invaded and they are clearly victimized. Their femininity is not only in their appearance but also in their fear, and even in their belongings. The symbolism in one of the *Mac vs. PC* videos is also relevant in this respect. The Constitution, represented by a woman, is bothered, almost harassed by the man representing *Yes on 8*. He wants to mold her to his likes, it seems like he feels that he can do that as a male subject to a female object. He is represented as macho, sexist and even heterosexist, because of his behavior. What makes this example more complicated is the fact that it is the *No on 8* side representing the *Yes on 8* side as such, it is not the *Yes* side itself that is presenting itself in this way.

Additionally, it needs to be addressed that the *No* side quite clearly makes a distinction between homosexuals and heterosexuals. This is different from the *Yes* side, that tends to deny, or at least avoid addressing homosexuals’ existence. The binary positioning in the *No* campaign results in essentialist representations of homosexuals as opposed to heterosexuals, creating an us-them opposition. By claiming rights as a minority group, *No on 8* represents homosexuals as a minority and as a group that needs to fight for rights that groups fitting the norm already have. Instead of focusing on similarities between homosexuals and

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<sup>25</sup> From noonprop8.com. (“No On 8, Don’t Eliminate Marriage For Anyone,” 2008)

heterosexuals, the campaign mostly emphasizes that difference. This signifies an essentialist discourse on identity that does not take note of the constructedness of identity categories, evidently on both sides of the debate.<sup>26</sup>

The diverse group of people featured in *Storm* consists of White, African-American and Latino, young and old men and women. Although the other videos are less diverse and only feature white, middle class families, the *Yes* website is, like *Storm*, very diverse in its representation of the American population. The top banner changes every few seconds to show different images of racially diverse families. Moreover, the website offers material such as flyers in more than fifteen languages, including Russian, Armenian and Hmong for instance. The *No* campaign in contrast, is significantly lacking in its representation of racial and ethnic diversity. It only has 5 languages on its website, and that is including English. Only *Prop 8 - the Musical* features several African-Americans<sup>27</sup> and one Asian-American as part of a group, and the first verse starts with how good the times are for blacks, gays and women now that Obama is president. However, there are some differentiating remarks to be made. *Prop 8 - the Musical* does not hide the fact that it has a conscious focus on diversity, whereas *Storm* does not address it. *Storm* represents diversity without calling attention to it, thus taking diversity for granted. *Prop 8 - the Musical* actively addresses diversity and therefore represents different ethnicities, but mostly only to show that something is lacking in American diversity: the full inclusion of homosexuality.

When it comes to sexual diversity, both sets of material that have been analyzed are comparable since in both sets only one clearly gay couple is featured. The gay fathers in *Where Do Babies Come From?* seem an important and noteworthy addition to the group of characters portrayed in the *Yes* campaign, if not for the issue of voice that will be discussed shortly. The gay couple in *Home Invasion* is harassed but they get the chance to say something, even if this does not change the fact that their marriage license is taken away. They are in fact represented as victims of Proposition 8, a negative representation of homosexuals as weak but a relevant representation of the consequences of the proposition for homosexuals. Showing the lesbian couple as victims of an invasion of privacy and a stripping of their rights effectively evokes a feeling of unfairness and the idea that this should not happen. *Yes on 8* also uses victimization to promote their stance on the matter: the father in *The Parker Family* is represented as a tragic hero and a victim of the law when he breaks down in tears speaking about his night in prison. And the speakers in *Storm* are presented as victims of the legalization of same-sex marriage.

It is important in this matter to ask the question who is speaking on whose behalf in the videos and on the website, because in several instances one side of the campaign is representing the other side of the campaign, with clear effects. The *Yes* side, who is against same-sex marriage, nevertheless uses the image of a homosexual family in their video. This couple is however depicted in an undesirable situation that is represented as difficult, possibly too difficult and

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<sup>26</sup> perhaps the No side embraces the label of “Other” for the purpose of identity politics, relying on a form of strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Two on the *Yes on 8* and one on the *No on 8* side.



therefore should not be supported. They are moreover not speaking directly about the issue or directly to viewers, they are the silenced minority that has to sit by and be talked about, be spoken for, but be quiet. They do not have a voice. The *No* side also represents a gay family, but it represents them as victims instead of individuals with agency or the possibility to do something about the situation they are put in. And *Yes on 8* supporters, and especially religious supporters, are represented very negatively.

### Concepts

As mentioned before, I have added the pillar ‘Concepts’ to the framing aspects of the interpretive packages surrounding Proposition 8. These concepts give insight in the way the two sides think about certain issues, and what kind of discourses on ideas like family, religion and marriage they adopt. Here, these concepts will be addressed one by one, in relation to both campaigns.

### *Children*

Children are the number 1 players in the *Yes* campaign, or better said: the number 1 pawns. Together with heterosexual married couples and heterosexual families, the campaign presents them as the ones who will be most affected by the legalization of same-sex marriage. Because children do not yet understand everything, and need to be protected from things that can harm them, they are not themselves able to decide. Therefore, they are the perfect tool: the concept of the child is perfect as the living embodiment of the static concept of marriage that the *Yes* side wants to protect. Children need to be protected from corruption of their innocence, and thus from same-sex marriage, because it is immoral and it is confusing for them, especially its function. Marriage is related to family, and, as this campaign argues, is there for couples to have children. Marriage, family and having children are intimately connected and unable to exist without each other, is the message. And that leads to the idea that marriage can only be between a man and a woman, because marriage is meant to create a family, which includes having children. According to the *Yes* side, having children is not possible for gay couples and parents are always heterosexual, so same-sex marriage is not necessary. As the girl asks in *Where Do Babies Come From??*, if it is not necessary to be married to have a baby, what is marriage for?

### *Schools*

The reason children are in danger of being corrupted and confused, is because schools are the location, according to the *Yes* campaign, where the legalization of same-sex marriage will have the most effect. According to them, the outcome of this ballot will decide what sort of education about marriage and sexuality children will receive in public schools. If same-sex marriage is legal they will also have to be taught about it.

The Parker family’s son goes to a public school, where religious values and ideas should not play a role in the education children receive. Yet, when the mother explains her reaction to the book that included a gay family, she states that they went to their Judeo-Christian beliefs. Although the Parker family argues that their concern was about parental notification in the

matter<sup>28</sup>, the video actually confirms the role religious values play in the rejection of same-sex marriage, even when it involves a public school.

### *Family*

I have already addressed the way the *Yes* side represented family. At one point, family is labelled the best building block of society, explaining the intense focus on this concept. The visual images in the campaign refer to the traditional, nuclear family, with a working father, a stay-at-home mother and their children. Since the focus in the videos is on families with children, the concept of family for the *Yes* side clearly only implies heterosexual families with children. Since same sex couples cannot have children, they are automatically excluded from the concept. This package of characteristics is attributed to the concept of ‘Family Values’ which will be more elaborately discussed in chapter 5. The *No* campaign makes much less use of the concept of family, it only reacts to the way *Yes* uses the concept without really seeming to care about it<sup>29</sup>. Aside from the visual images, that of the lesbian couple in *Home Invasion*, the straight family with the child in the *Mac vs. PC* series, and the written example of a father and his three children who gets to speak on the website, *No on 8* does not actively address the concept of family. But the campaign itself generally focuses on inclusion and equality, implying the continuation of these concepts in their ideas of family.

### *Freedom, equality, fairness and dignity*

The *Yes* campaign has, in several instances, a strong focus on freedom. *Storm* for instance uses the concept of individual freedom. It argues that the individuals in the video, heterosexual people, will be limited in their individual freedom because they do not accept same-sex marriage. Because, as the website states, if same-sex marriage remains legal many people will be restricted in their freedom, since this legalization will require “mandatory compliance regardless of deeply held religious beliefs”.<sup>30</sup> In other words, they will lose the freedom to oppose same sex marriage and homosexuality. This can, but does not automatically, relate to religious freedom, although this is what the campaign focuses on especially in *Storm* and *The Parker Family*. The tension between freedom and equality, which the Proposition 8 debate evidences, will be addressed in chapter 5.

On the *No on 8* website different kinds of freedom are addressed, such as freedom of religion and freedom of speech. The campaign offers pleas for fairness, dignity and equality, meaning not to eliminate the rights of certain people. Concepts such as equality, fairness and dignity are the most prominent concepts in the *No* campaign. In reaction to *Yes*’ arguments about what schools will teach children, the videos speak about teaching children respect and to be tolerant, decent human beings. Proposition 8 would mean an *elimination* of a fundamental right for one group of people, and thus the opposite of equality, fairness and dignity.

### *Institutions*

Rational and supposedly neutral, independent concepts played an important role in the *No* campaign, next to the moral principles mentioned above. These are the Institutions that should warrant those principles. The videos in the *No* campaign all address these institutions that are

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<sup>28</sup> They make the connection of same-sex marriage to parental notification rights.

<sup>29</sup> Mac vs. PC: ‘Kids?! What about Family?!’

<sup>30</sup> From protectmarriage.com (“Protect Marriage - Yes on 8 » Home Page,” 2008)

there to govern a country and a people in a fair and equal way. The law and the constitution are invoked as black and white proof of what should be legal, and the court is used as the guardian of these two, and that which should make sure that what these documents say or don't say about marriage should be practiced. On the other hand the connection between the government and privacy or freedom is also made; by stating that de-legalizing same-sex marriage is government interference, something that should be avoided. The connection is also made between government interference and the separation of church and state, because Proposition 8 is mostly a religious proposition. There are not that many references to institutions like these in the *Yes* campaign, unless they are blows to the justice system with regard to legalizing same-sex marriage, or references in the examples from Massachusetts.

### *Religion*

An important role in both campaigns is reserved for religion. In negative and positive ways, religion is either used or addressed, whether implicitly or explicitly, to give explanations, make a point or ground an opinion or sentiment. *Yes on 8*, whose campaign is majorly funded and coordinated by religious organizations, obviously has a positive stance towards religion and even religion in politics. The most obvious examples are to be found on the website, which is full of religious references, and it links to specific religious organizations as well as offers resources especially for churches. And as opposed to the videos, the number one concept on the website is not family or children, but religion. In both *Storm* and *The Parker Family* there are references to religious ideas that convince people that children should not be taught about same-sex marriage, or about the sin of homosexuality. *The Parker Family* uses, implicitly and explicitly, religious arguments for a political issue. In *Storm* we also hear a reference to religion where the person's religious convictions are presented as the decisive factor in the issue of same-sex marriage. Moreover, several of the videos refer, in captions at the end, to religious organizations that supported the campaign and the video. Finally, Conservative Christian ideals and beliefs are invoked through the denunciation of what the *Yes on 8* side sees as unfit: homosexuality is explicitly but also implicitly labeled as a sin and as immoral based on religious values about family and sexuality.

The No on 8 side is at times extremely anti-church, and especially anti church-involvement when politics and gay rights are considered. Especially *Home Invasion* conveys this sentiment; it blames the Mormon Church for the anti-gay campaign and denounces their involvement in politics, making them look like monsters by the way they are represented. *Prop 8 - The Musical* makes religious voters look intolerant, mean and bigoted, it represents the church in general as unfair when it comes to following the bible<sup>31</sup>, and nosy when it comes to politics and the separation of church and state. Labeling the church as intolerant is also done in *Cartoon*: the video pretends to be an anti same-sex marriage video and shows a drawing of Westboro Baptists, connecting them to mainstream religious groups who are in favor of Proposition 8.

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<sup>31</sup> 'We pick and choose'.

## *Marriage*

Ultimately, the debate and campaigns around proposition 8 revolved around the questions of what marriage is and what it is for, and in fact the question whether same-sex marriage even exists. The previous concepts all had an important influence on the interpretation of the concept of marriage the two sides adopt in their campaigns. Some of this has already come to the fore, such as the connection between marriage and family; and marriage as a right.

Speaking about *gay*<sup>32</sup> marriage automatically sets it apart from, or even in opposition to, the concept of marriage. Adding the word *gay* to the word *marriage* automatically makes 'marriage' the normative and thus 'same-sex marriage' the deviant. Moreover, it creates an exclusion; same-sex marriage is excluded from the overarching term *Marriage*. In the *Yes* campaign the opposition is also posed between same-sex marriage and *traditional* marriage, to make the division clearer and to offer some form of legitimization. The term *traditional* automatically puts marriage in the normative category. Calling marriage *traditional* gives it the character of something that carries with it valuable aspects that remind us of history, and it gives it the character of something that one can argue should be preserved; traditions often evoke the need to protect them. Marriage in this debate becomes something that needs to be protected from barbarians who have no sense of what is important. Thus the concept of tradition is added to the concept of marriage to give marriage a certain character. And the opposition between same-sex marriage and traditional marriage automatically implies a negative connotation for same-sex marriage; it is the evil in this comparison, the threat to a tradition. The argument that Proposition 8 is necessary because traditional marriage needs to be restored fortifies this idea, and helps create the following thought; same-sex marriage is something bad, it is a storm gathering and society needs to be protected from it.

As previously mentioned, marriage is termed a 'survival issue' on the *Yes* website; it is a concept or an institution that ensures the continuation of our species and the continuation of traditional values and norms that are deemed essential to our survival. For *Yes on 8*, this is why procreation, and thus family and children are so important in the debate around same-sex marriage. It explains why the argument in this paragraph applies to the traditional form of marriage, and excludes same-sex marriage. Marriage is in a sense a necessity. Same-sex marriage is something bad because homosexuality is something bad; it does not fit God's design of the world because it is only about the desires of adults and does not help in the continuation of the species.

On the *No on 8* side, the definition of marriage is in fact hardly addressed. It is not explicitly defined in the videos, and it is not discussed on the website. It is however implicitly defined in two ways; in *Prop 8 - The Musical* as profitable<sup>33</sup> and in for instance *Home Invasion* as a right that everyone should have.

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<sup>32</sup> Or same-sex; the two terms can be interchanged here.

<sup>33</sup> Same-sex marriage will mean business; expensive weddings, tattoo's, divorces and tattoo removals, etcetera.

## 4.2 Justification/reasoning aspects

### Roots and Consequences

According to the *Yes* campaign, the roots of the problems addressed in its examples lie in the legalization of same-sex marriage. The fight for same-sex marriage, and the negative aspects of it, lie in the pushing of a gay agenda by activists. As Michelle Goldberg shows in the second chapter to her book *Kingdom Coming*, this idea is definitely not new (Goldberg, 2007). The negative sentiment on same-sex marriage is partly explained by the fact that activists for same-sex marriage had gone behind the backs of Californian voters and had four judges decide on the issue. The consequences in turn will be confused children and parents having their parental rights denied, as well as the diminishment of national morale and values. According to the opponents, religious organizations are seen as the root of the fight against same-sex marriage and gay rights in general; their conservative ideas and intolerance are the cause for the attempt to write discrimination into the constitution. The consequences are quite clear: legalized discrimination and intolerance, an invasion of privacy, and the taking away of rights from people and families while they are treated differently than others. The constitution will become discriminatory; a serious consequence and something that should be prevented.

### Moral appeals, appeals to principle

The *Yes* campaign strongly appeals to the principles of upholding traditional family values and freedom, in this case freedom of religion and freedom to choose to be against same-sex marriage and generally against homosexuality. Moreover, it very strongly appeals to the defense and protection of children, one of the core aspects of a healthy society. It thus appeals strongly to people's emotions, whereas the *No* campaign appeals more strongly to common sense, and with that feelings of justice, fairness, equality and dignity. The ads appeal to ideas of freedom. Texts on the website also quite clearly appeal to people's 'better nature', and an assumed universal stance against discrimination and differences as a base for unequal treatment.

*Yes on 8's* appeals to emotions come through for instance the earnest music that accompanies the videos and the dramatic voices that earnestly introduce a world in which same-sex marriage is legal. These voices are heard in *The Parker Family* as well as in *It's Already Happened*. Moreover, these two videos use words such as 'your family', 'your state' and 'your vote', directly addressing viewers and making the issue personal, effectively engaging them in the issue, making the assumption that every viewer will be negatively affected. Aiming at viewers' children makes the matter even more pressing, because obviously children need to be protected and should definitely not be endangered by new<sup>34</sup> laws. *Marriage, It's Simple* is most obvious in this case: The add makes same-sex marriage seem like something that will gravely affect this innocent child, as if at any moment a monster can come in and devour her, the monster being same-sex marriage. In *Storm*, same-sex marriage is not an implicit monster, but explicitly a storm gathering. With suspenseful music in the background

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<sup>34</sup> Same-sex marriage was at that time already legal in California. A new law would thus de-legalize it, instead of possible legalizing it for the first time.

and again the severe, serious way of speaking of the frightened people this video seems designed to implant fear.

Where the style of the *Yes* campaign videos can be considered slightly manipulative, the *No* videos often ridicule things that are said or used on the *Yes* side. *Cartoon* is a copy of a video from the *Yes* campaign, but ridicules everything that was said in that original video. It is basically a ‘ridiculization’ to lay bare the perceived nonsense it proclaims. This ridicule is enforced by the drawn version of the child, the mother and the book (here titled *Prince on Prince* action) and the look of the professor. Moreover, this video makes the *Yes* side look discriminatory, by having the man in the video say the ‘liberal Jew courts’ instead of just the court, having him express anti-Semitic sentiments in between his account on the same-sex marriage trial in Massachusetts. In the *Mac vs. PC* series, the ‘family’ argument is ridiculed by having the person representing *Yes* make a difference between kids and family: *Yes* asks the parents to choose the fight against same-sex marriage, in his words ‘protecting families’, over spending time with their child. This video makes the *Yes* side look unfriendly and unlikable in general through the appearance of the man who represents *Yes* and by having him make a fool out of himself. This is comparable to what happens in *Prop 8 - the Musical*, where the *Yes* side is made to look mean and unfair, and money-driven by having them change their minds immediately when an economic argument for same-sex marriage is made.

### 4.3 Conclusion

By filling out the framework of Interpretive Packages, this chapter has offered different forms of information. The briefly discussed pillars: the metaphors and catchphrases, exemplars, roots and consequences and moral appeals, have offered clear oppositions and contradictions in the opposing campaigns, presenting an image of the debate in which the opposing sides are talking at cross, addressing different issues and not addressing issues that the opponents moot. In some cases, the other sides’ campaigns are addressed, but generally not in a constructive way. The more broadly discussed pillars Visual Images, Depictions and Concepts have offered analytical points that can be tested against the ideologies of Americanism and the American identity. These analytical aspects, or discourses in constructionist thinking, shape ideologies of nations, identities and communities. As the current chapter has shown, the same-sex marriage debate is infused by heteronormative as well as religious discourses around family and sexuality, and informed by discourses of authority and morality. Discourses around the opposition further play a role in the campaigns. These discourses often oppose each other or only partially work side by side, and even the campaigns’ catchphrases show a fundamental difference in approach to the issue by the two opposing sides. The above discourses all, to a larger or lesser extent, add to the ideologies of Americanism and of the American identity. The following chapter will show how these sometimes opposing, contesting discourses shape the ideologies that the two campaigns adhere, and implicitly promote.

## Chapter 5 Americanism and the American Identity

Americanism, and the American identity, are both ideological frameworks that are and have been culturally constructed over time. Ideas about what Americanism is and what an American identity entails are as old as the nation itself. From the beginning early settlers had specific ideas of what this new land would be and offer newcomers, mostly as opposed to Europe: “Unlike Europe, America stood for liberty, opportunity, religious toleration, [...] equality before the law, and a better tomorrow for everyone.” (Mann, 1979, 58) In his 2006 monograph *Americanism and Americanization*, Mel van Elteren describes Americanism as “...a characteristic of the United States, referring to principles and practices believed to be essential or inherent to the American National Culture.” (Van Elteren, 2006, 3) Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin more specifically state that the term ‘Americanism’ has two meanings: it signifies both that which is distinctive about, and those who are loyal to, the United States. This loyalty stems from a defence of the political ideals of the nation (Kazin & McCartin, 2006). Their book offers “...an understanding of the concept in all its complexity – as an ideology, an articulation of the nation’s rightful place in the world, a set of traditions, a political language, and a cultural style imbued with political meaning.” (Kazin & McCartin, 2006, 13) In a similar vein, Smith-Rosenberg calls Americanism “...a host of conflicting political discourses, religious beliefs, and social values.”

These conflicting discourses, beliefs and values are at the root of the same-sex marriage debate. This chapter will address the conflicting discourses that shape the Ideologies of Americanism and the American identity for the *Yes on 8*-campaign and the *No on 8*-campaign. It will do so in three paragraphs which loosely relate to three categories, inspired by Smith-Rosenberg: ‘Political Ideals’, ‘Beliefs in Authority’, and ‘Identity and Social Values’.

### 5.1 Political Ideals

Kazin and McCartin (2006) list the oldest of the political ideals of the American Nation: self-government, equal opportunity, freedom of speech and association, a belief in progress and, slightly newer: social equality. Van Elteren (2006, 82) however, writes that Americanism has “...proved to be a flexible ideological framework.” For the founders, America was to stand for a balanced and representative government (Mann, 1979), but history has proven how interpretations of this American ideal have differed enormously between and even within groups of political affiliation. The most obvious difference, that between conservatives and progressives, is a simplification of the political spectrum but will be used here for the sake of clarity. Generally, the *Yes on 8* and *No on 8* campaigns fit into this political division, as the former adheres to conservative political values and *No on 8* to progressive ones. Although Mauk and Oakland (2005) suggest that most Americans favour a minimal government, conservatives generally argue more strongly against state intervention than progressives do. For conservatives, it threatens individualism since it in a sense asks of all its citizens to comply with a limited, state-prescribed idea of, in this case, marriage and it interferes with self-government. But for contemporary progressives, social rights and equality seem more important, they thus favour more state-involvement.

*Yes on 8* argues that same-sex marriage has as a consequence more government interference, particularly in education. This is undesirable, and thus they want to de-legalize it; they want to maintain the right to oppose homosexuality. *No on 8* on the other hand wants the government to warrant their rights and equality; this requires the government to interfere in matters of law.

If we look more closely at the campaigns and the political arguments they use, however, we discern inconsistencies that complicate this simple divide. *Yes on 8* finds that the Constitution precludes marriage between two people of the same sex, and that the government must uphold this principle. Thus, here *Yes on 8* deployed Proposition 8 to push the government to intervene in the legal process that has legalized same-sex marriage. *No on 8*, here, argues *against* the government interfering, because de-legalizing same-sex marriage would be an infringement on the rights and private lives of homosexuals on the government's part.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, when it comes to guaranteed freedom in the classical, liberal sense, both campaigns want the government to stay away, but when it comes to fundamental social rights, the government needs to intervene to guarantee them for everyone. An active state influences the possibility of freedom and liberty for all and this plays a role in both conservative and democratic discourses. Since the first type of freedom infringes upon their opponents' second type of freedom, *Yes* and *No on 8* are fundamentally at conflict.

#### American Exceptionalism

Kazin and McCartin present a lengthy list of phenomena that account for America's uniqueness. Among other things, they mention the absence of an established church and the religious pluriformity that results from it, which will be discussed in the following paragraph, as well as the above discussed troubled tradition of resistance against authoritarian and centralist politics (Kazin & McCartin, 2006). These phenomena were thought to contribute to America's special, superior position in the world. The Puritan ideal of this exceptionalism, expressed in John Winthrop's poem *City Upon a Hill*, referred to America's exceptional position in the world, to which all other nations would look up. America was to be exemplary in its adherence to moral standards. This exceptionalism resonates in the awareness of Proposition 8's historical relevance on both campaigning sides, presented on their websites. California is known as a precursor in progressive matters: legalizing same-sex marriage could set the stage for the rest of the nation. But de-legalizing same-sex marriage could be a conservative, exemplary message to the rest of the world; since the conservative view sees homosexuality as immoral, de-legalization would be a moral example to European countries that have developed a same-sex marriage tradition.

According to David Biale, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and other authors, Americanism is, a 'dual phenomenon'. On the one side, they place the image of America as an emblem of liberty; a country where freedom, equality and diversity are celebrated. On the other side there is the awareness that in reality America also has a long history of oppression caused by the exclusion and marginalization of 'Others' who are believed to endanger the American identity. This image refers to America as a white man's republic, a nation that guards its borders to prevent any intruders that might literally and figuratively darken its composition

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<sup>35</sup> See *Lies*, in which the voiceover asks to keep the government out of our lives.



and heritage. Biale argues that these two conflicting stories are divided along racial differences. In my view religion, gender, and sexual orientation have had a similar role (Biale, 1998; Smith-Rosenberg, 2010).

This ambivalence of Americanism, as a concept that can both serve to include and to exclude groups, clearly comes to light in the Proposition 8 debate. Before going into that, I will discuss concepts of authority.

## 5.2 Belief in Authority

The *Yes on 8* campaign in several instances refers to the will of ‘common people’, which it pretends to voice. Examples are the people speaking in *Storm* as well as the Parker parents: they are ordinary citizens with extraordinary experiences that make them lay experts, with an authoritative voice. *No* also presents its stance as that of the ‘common man’, who is opposed by an exponent of bureaucracy and the establishment. On the other hand, the *No on 8* campaign also used the support of famous Hollywood Personas. *Proposition 8 - The Musical* features celebrities such as Jack Black, Neil Patrick Harris and Margareth Cho.<sup>36</sup> These celebrities embody a kind of authority that is also used in commercial advertising.<sup>37</sup> A different sort of authority figures are the representatives of teachers’ and nurses’ organisations, other ‘common people’ that get to speak in some of the *No on 8* videos. Moreover, *No on 8* both in videos and on its website refers to respected news sources such as ABC News.

The divide between common people and celebrities is quite obvious. Yet, it is not self-evident who can count as ‘common people’. As the *Yes on 8* campaign does not give a voice to homosexuals, the question arises whether they are thought to belong to this category. Interestingly, the *No on 8* videos, despite the pleas they make for giving same-sex couples the same rights as other ‘common people’, do not give them a voice either. Instead they let heterosexual people speak for them.

In chapter 4 we touched upon two important sources of authority: the Constitution (and its accompanying Bill of Rights) and religion. These are two of the most frequently cited documents in debates on how to behave and how to rule the Nation. The Constitution, which Gebhardt describes as a “Great normative document of the National Canon” and a “Charter of Democracy”, reflects the ideas of the founders of the American Nation (Gebhardt, 1993, 166). It has been the guiding political source for more than two centuries; the founders’ thoughts and ideas are still seen as greatly knowledgeable and understanding of the Nation’s needs in terms of governance and protection of individuals. Since the 1850’s, political and social conflicts have been waged within the terms of the Constitution and although it is often used as an absolute truth, its texts are quite open to interpretation and its contents malleable to fit the needs of an argument. Both Democrats and Republicans nowadays refer to the Constitution to

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<sup>36</sup> Other videos, presented on the *No on 8* website, feature only celebrities speaking about the consequences of the Proposition and urging the people to vote No.

<sup>37</sup> *Yes on 8*’s use of the White House in combination with biased representatives of organizations, here again relevant, has already been discussed in chapter 4.

make their point. It can be framed in such a way that it works on either side of an argument.<sup>38</sup> Gebhart deploys the term ‘Cultural Constitutionalism’ to address a habit, often used in social and political situations, to react to questions of motive with the Constitution “... as symbol of the nation’s consciousness” and an irrefutable source (1993, 169).

The *No on 8* campaign quite heavily leans on the U.S. and Californian Constitutions. It is on the basis of these authoritative texts, notably the principle of equal rights, that they claim that same-sex marriage should be legalized. The *No on 8* campaign thus relies on the truth discourse of the American Constitution and its authority; it relies on its instrumental, flexible use to “promote the people’s welfare in the present and future” (Gebhardt, 1993, 167). *No on 8* interprets marriage as a fundamental, constitutional right, which should be guaranteed for everyone.

Yet, *Yes on 8* also relies on the Constitution, but on a different section, which deals with the freedom of religion. I will address this in a following paragraph, after I have addressed the general use of religion in the Proposition 8 campaigns.

### Civil Religion

What plays an important part in the Exceptionalism of the American nation is the concept of ‘civil religion’. Phillip E. Hammond defines this concept as expressing a covenant with God through certain symbols, beliefs and rituals that relate to the past, present and future of a people and a nation (Bellah & Hammond, 1980). God, regardless of exact religious beliefs, is the ultimate sovereign and thus ultimately the Nation answers to him. Civil religion gives the people of a nation a transcendent sense of collectivity. Robert Bellah has applied this term to the American situation in his famous *Civil Religion in America*, arguing that American civil religion knows two versions: one focuses on the legitimating of the state and nation building, the other is critical of the state and challenges power structures. An example of the latter is Martin Luther King Jr, who at the same time exemplifies one of the symbols out of which American Civil Religion exists. As Hammond suggests in *Varieties of Civil Religion*, in American society civil religion resides mostly in the educational and legal systems, something that is outstandingly consistent with Proposition 8; the effect on schools is a key issue in the debate. Although Hammond probably refers to prayer in school and the uttering of the Pledge of Allegiance; Civil Religious ideas here also fuses with the actual education (Bellah, 1967; Bellah & Hammond, 1980).

Civil Religion is a ‘non-sectarian’, public religious dimension to the political realm, specifically focused on transcending differences between denominations and religions. Nevertheless a significant role is reserved for biblical notions. Cynthia Toolin, analyzing presidential inaugurations, names the two most important themes, ‘American Destiny under God’ and ‘International Example’. She labels American civil religion as ‘self-congratulatory’, regarding the nation as an example for the rest of the world (Toolin, 1983).

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<sup>38</sup> History has exemplified this in several other cases; most poignantly the slavery debates in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Civil Religion can largely explain the religious focus in the Proposition 8 debates, as it explains the religious dimension to any major political and social issue in the United States. Despite its nonsectarian character, Van Elteren states that Protestant religion is an integral part of the American identity (Van Elteren, 2006). This Protestant hegemony also explains the emphasis on biblical themes. Although Catholicism was the largest denomination since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>39</sup>, it was seen as un-American and degenerating the American identity. Until after WWII, this division between denominations was the most important divisive factor. Only after the second world war, and especially in the 1980's, did this shift to a division between conservative and liberal believers. This has resulted in remarkable alliances between Evangelical Protestants, Catholics and other conservatives as opposed to a coalition of liberal Protestants and Catholics. This shift toward a political division instead of a denominational division can be seen especially with issues of sexuality, family, education and foreign policy. (Goldberg, 2004, 70, Van Elteren, 51, and Allitt, xiii). Because of this divide, ideas on what is truly American could also be divided under conservatism or liberalism, both sides influenced by religious values that had a strong pull in either category. This division has, among other things, influenced how "religious ideas led some Americans to welcome the feminist and gay liberation movements while others condemned them." (Allitt, 2003, xv) The last chapter of Allitt's *Religion in America since 1945: a History* deals with issues such as homosexuality and feminism in relation to religion. That chapter presents a historical background for the social and political ethos surrounding same-sex marriage in California in 2008.

Allitt describes, how religious conservatives tried to re-Christianize a society that had become too secular for their taste (Allitt, 2003). Although he does not mention it, this has brought about the concept of the culture wars: a term reintroduced by Hunter in the 1990's to address the polarization on 'hot-button' issues such as abortion, school prayer and homosexuality (Hunter, 1991). But even dominant secular ideologies that have a foundational influence on hegemonic power structures related to marriage, sexuality and family are often nevertheless historically channeled through religion; thus they are not easily separated completely from religion (Wadsworth, 2010).

In the case of the campaigns for and against Proposition 8, this is mostly present on the *Yes on 8* side. It promotes values that are both explicitly and implicitly religious, and promotes the implementation of these values in the law even though they are religious. References to sin and to what is morally right, as discussed in the previous chapter, are quite obviously religious references. Using religious discourses to oppose same-sex marriage, the *Yes on 8* side consequently uses their religion or the bible as authority; based on what they believe is the truth about sexuality, to be found in the bible, they want to prevent a political change.

By deploying religious discourses, *Yes on 8* places these values higher than the foundational, political values of the relationship between church and state. They appeal to the freedom part of the First Amendment; the freedom of religion that they argue will be infringed upon when they are forced to accept the legality of same-sex marriage despite their beliefs. *No on 8* refers to freedom *from* religion; they urge voters to say no to churches taking over

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<sup>39</sup> As a result of the ramification of Protestantism.

government.<sup>40</sup> According to the Constitution, religion should be freely exercised, and specific religious establishments should be neither advanced nor inhibited by government. This ‘No establishment’-clause of the First Amendment, and the consequent separation of church and state, is one of *No on 8*’s main arguments against Proposition 8. Because their opponents use religious arguments and funding from religious organisations to campaign, *No on 8* relies on this secular American Ideal that, despite the role religion had played during the settlement, plays a very strong part in the American identity, and in what is deemed true Americanism. In line with this they use, probably consciously, the negative image of Mormons; their attempted established religion clearly opposes this idea. In this opposition between *Yes* and *No on 8* resonates the opposition between a Puritan vision of the Nation with its theocratic ideal, and a Baptist vision of the state as inherently evil, in spite of the fact that many religious denominations including Baptists fought together in a coalition against same-sex marriage.

Moreover, unaddressed by the *Yes* campaign is the fact that there are religious groupings and denominations that do support same-sex marriage, based on their interpretation of scripture and creed.<sup>41</sup> By claiming the religious standpoint, *Yes on 8* infringes upon the freedom of these denominations to accept, within their religious values as well as openly, homosexuality and same-sex marriage. And Proposition 8 would more directly deprive these denominations from the right to perform same-sex marriages; something that already happened in several instances<sup>42</sup> (Alpert, 2000). Anti-gay law and public policy are in effect based on an illegitimate preference for one type of religious position over another” (Sands, 2000, 71). *Yes on 8* thus refers to discourses on freedom of religion in their campaign against same-sex marriage, but incompletely so. Freedom from religion directly relates to the separation of church and state, yet the values the *Yes* campaign deploys on homosexuality are quite explicitly religious, especially when they discuss the sinfulness of homosexual behaviour.

Although both Alpert and Sands thus argue against that, religious freedom should also be used in favour of same-sex marriage. In the debate on same-sex marriage, the concept of freedom seems to clash. Conservative religionists claim that their religious freedom is infringed upon by granting more freedom to sexual ‘Others’, others that they do not accept as behaving morally and see as un-American. Their private lives, they believe, are influenced by political changes regarding these others. The concept of freedom for the *Yes on 8* side, therefore, relates to these private aspects of life and these supposedly private issues become key in a debate about what Americanism entails (Berlant, 2009). Sexual freedom, on the other hand, for opponents of Proposition 8, should extend to the freedom to marry someone, irrespective of their sex or gender. This freedom is, as sexuality becomes a concept like religion, in fact the same as religious freedom. *Yes on 8* and *No on 8* thus both use the concept of freedom to further their cause, but since the one freedom is seen to infringe upon the other, and vice

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<sup>40</sup> See *Home Invasion*

<sup>41</sup> See for instance [www.gaysandthegospel.com](http://www.gaysandthegospel.com); a website for Latter Day Saints and other Christians dedicated to the rights, marriages and families of Lesbians and Gays.

<sup>42</sup> “The society of Friends, Episcopal Priests, Reform and Reconstructionist Rabbis, Buddhist priests, and ministers of the United church of Christ, Lutheran, and Unitarian Universalist traditions have all performed ceremonies of commitment for gay men and lesbians” (Sands, 2000, 125).

versa, these interpretations of freedom are in conflict. Here, the politics of religion and the politics of sexuality intersect (Sands, 2000a).

There is, moreover a tension between the concepts of freedom, privacy and equality; if private issues become public and essential to Americanism, this infringes upon freedom. Privacy also means freedom, the freedom to live a private life the way an individual desires. For the *No* side, this loss of privacy leads to a loss of freedom and a loss of equality. For the *Yes* side it leads to more freedom of religion; equality is irrelevant in their argument.

### **5.3 Identity and social values**

Janice Radway, in 1998, dismissed “the notion of [...] a concomitant national identity” (Kazin & McCartin, 2006, 11); America is by no means the only but possibly one of the most extreme examples of the fact that a national identity is a contested, and conflicted ideology. Nowadays especially, America consists of so many ethnicities, races, sexualities and religions, that a shared and specific American identity is hard if not impossible to claim. The American identity, as far as it can be claimed to exist, needs to be based on shared values or beliefs; either economical, social, political or religious. Many of these have been discussed earlier. “By 1849, the rhetoric of the American identity was a [web of ideologies]: Individualism and social progress, politics, and economics...” combined with religious aspects (Bercovitch, 1980, 35-36). Sacvan Bercovitch tellingly states that the “American identity was built on the rejection of limits” (Bercovitch, 1980, 37). Manifest Destiny, liberty, unlimited freedom, unlimited social mobility, unlimited wealth; these ideas go hand in hand with the American identity and American Exceptionalism. According to Joseph Flibbert, the interplay and occasional contention between idealism and materialism in American life is the most vital factor in the formation of the American identity (Flibbert, 1980).

In many instances where Americanism and the American identity are discussed, the two central terms in this chapter are either related to multiculturalism and ethnic differences referring to the possible or impossible and desirable or undesirable Americanization of ethnic ‘others’ within the United States, or in relation to Americanization outside of the United States. The latter falls beyond the scope of this thesis, but the idea of ‘others’ has its significance in relation to the concept of same-sex marriage.

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, ‘others’ play a significant role in the shaping of Americanism and its ideals. Americanism is connected to the process of –forced- assimilation of immigrants that came to America and entailed the hope for an eventually shared political identity at the cost of ethnic differences and cultural heritage, known as Americanisation. This exclusionary ideal conflicts with democratic ideals of diversity and freedom (Van Elteren, 2006).

Carol Smith-Rosenberg, in her preface to *This Violent Empire, The birth of an American National Identity*, states that “to fear and dehumanize ‘Others’, to ruthlessly hunt them down, is truly American.” (Smith-Rosenberg, 2010, x) Through negation, ‘others’ help define what Americans are, or in fact are not; ‘others’ are everything that Americans should not, or do not

wish to be. They establish the boundaries of what falls within and outside of the category ‘real Americans’. These ‘others’ however, constantly threaten to cross these boundaries and penetrate and pollute Americans’ sense of identity (Smith-Rosenberg, 2010). At the same time, the ideology of the American identity and the exclusion of others creates a sense of belonging for those who do fit the bill.

Like ‘othering’, the idea of what was un-American helped shape the ideology of what was American. During the cold war for instance, Americanism was the antithesis of communism. And as exemplified in the previous paragraph, in the 1830’s Catholics were the un-Americans as opposed to truly American Protestants. African slaves were un-American during the colonial periods, and still African-Americans, despite their label, as well as other ‘non-whites’ or racial and ethnic others are often stigmatized as un-American. Now, not only through the debate on same-sex marriage in California, but in several other debates concerning homosexuality, homosexuals are the un-American ‘others’. Their sexuality and partner choice makes them different from the norm, makes them deviant, and therefore they do not deserve certain rights. This ‘othering’ is based on the heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy, making sexuality a crucial aspect of identity that divides people into two separate, socially constructed categories where the one is American and the other is not.

The campaign analyses in the first three chapters offer significant issues in relation to this un-Americanism. Not only that of the un-Americanness of racial others, but also a comparison between the un-Americanness of homosexuals in the *Yes* campaign versus the un-Americanness of Mormons, evoked by their negative representation in the *Yes* campaign. Mormons, originally for an established state church, which they attempted to form in Utah in the 1840’s, as well as with their ideas on polygamy, have also been stigmatized as an un-American religious group. Nevertheless, as avid patriots and with a very ‘pro-family’ attitude, in this debate they come out as the Americans as opposed to un-American homosexuals. Although the *No* campaign hints toward an acceptance of differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals, they do not accept this stigmatization as un-American or in this case, un-Californian: “We’re all Californians. We’re all equal.”<sup>43</sup>

Besides ‘others’, to the American identity, there are other factors that shape the content of the ideology of the American identity. Arthur Mann states that “To the eighteenth-century founders, an American was a bundle of rights, freely chosen” (Mann, 1979, 56). Their ideas for a new society were based on enlightenment-born ideals: liberty, equality and fraternity. They proclaimed that Americans were born free and should remain free, helped by the institutions that they themselves would create to guarantee the survival of these values. (Kazin & McCartin, 2006; Mann, 1979). Moreover, the enlightenment had helped shape the ideal that “All Americans are already at one” (Biale, 1998). This at oneness is, among other things, created through civil religious symbols such as the Pledge of Allegiance, and commitment to the Constitution.

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<sup>43</sup> *Mac VS. PC, Family.*

In *Immigration and Ethnicity in the Post-Industrial World*, excerpts of David Hollinger's work deal with racial diversity and multiculturalism and in it he discusses the 'Ideology of the nation'. This national ideology promises to "provide the benefits of citizenship irrespective of any ascribed or asserted ancestral affiliations" (Hollinger, 1998). This translates into the idea that individuals should be as free as possible from consequences of constructed social distinctions such as race and ethnicity, that are visited upon them by others or by society; social distinctions that construct a person's identity. Thus this ideology of the nation implies that nobody will be excluded, and despite differences, everybody will have the same benefits of citizenship, thus the same rights. 'Othering', in this ideology, does not occur, at least not to the extent that it would have legal or judicial consequences. But the question is whether sexual distinctions are a part of these social distinctions.

In line with this ideology of the nation, America would be a positively diverse nation combining people with different ancestral affiliations, different races and ethnicities, and additionally different religions and sexualities. And it is indeed so. The campaign material for Proposition 8 shows diversity in several ways. Although gay people are on both sides represented as 'others' diversity, in a positive sense, is used by both *Yes on 8* and *No on 8* demonstrating that 'cultural diversity' can be used by both conservatives and progressives. They rely on diversity with different interpretations of the concept however. Nevertheless, they both rely on familiar discourses of American diversity. America as a racially and ethnically diverse nation is clearly recognized by the *Yes* side, while *No* neglects racial and ethnic diversity in their fight for the inclusion of sexual others in a diverse American identity.

Where *No* thus presents an ethnocentric image of the American identity, *Yes* presents a heteronormative discourse on identity, already discussed in chapter 4. Marriage rights for homosexuals in this discourse are special rights, because they are not normative rights. As Lauren Berlant argues, people generally perceive the world through a heteronormative discourse: everything around us is focused on, or promotes, heterosexuality as the normative sexuality. And this norm remains culturally dominant. (Berlant, 2009) In Countryman's words, "Heterocentrism is key to our sexual morality", and this is why especially the Religious Right wants to protect that norm. Now that this very American norm is challenged by sexual diversity and rights for sexual minorities, it brings conflict between already mentioned values such as freedom and equality (Countryman, 2000, 176).

This heteronormativity also brings forth Berlant's heterofamilial citizenship norm, referring to the ideal notion of a patriarchal nuclear family that has been so present in American life since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Berlant, 2009). This model is in fact quite young: its origins can indeed be located in the nineteenth century, but it is projected back onto early Christianity as located in an idealized past where it is projected to be natural and God-given (Juschka, 2001). 'Family Values' are moreover deployed as part of the American Dream. They have thus been ingrained in ideas of the American family as one of the oldest, religious, moral, and pure traditions (Sands, 2000a). Sands wonders why values, and specifically 'Family Values', automatically imply a Conservative view on sexuality and a dedication to the defence of marriage. According to her, the idea of the traditional family, as well as moral values concerning

sexuality and deviance “have been able to flourish because of Civil Religion.” (Sands, 2000b, 12). Civil religious symbols are “[...]more and more co-opted by ultraconservatives” (Bellah & Hammond, 1980, xiv) and consequently ‘Family Values’ have been fervently spread by the Religious Right (Hunt, 2000, 162).

Connecting Family Values to the ‘American Dream’, according to Sands, conveys the hope of ending the Great Society that the social movements of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had established (Alpert, 2000). In the fantasy of the American Dream, to be American would mean to be free from restricting identities and structures. Deploying Family Values and setting homosexuals in opposition to them, thus places homosexuals outside of the American identity, and outside of this Dream (Berlant, 2009). Family and marriage are, actually on both sides of the Proposition 8 debate but especially on the *Yes* side, automatically and insurmountably interlinked. *Yes on 8* presents marriage as a sacred institution, a bond for life that helps the creation of a family including children; a nuclear family. The traditional family as an icon of goodness and a beacon of religious values is, in the *Yes on 8* campaign, through ‘Family values’ deployed as common sense, as something that cannot be deputed (Jakobsen, 2000). The Religious Right uses this as a legitimating discourse for anti-liberal campaigns, of which *Yes* is exemplary. Moreover, although historically Christianity’s main ideological concept has long been celibacy, the Religious Right’s contemporary use of ‘Family values’ in political issues such as same-sex marriage reasserts Christianity as the defining discourse of the nation (Jakobsen, 2000).

Together with the reliance on ‘Family Values’, the focus on children can be explained through history. The first chapter referred to several anti-gay campaigns, most notably the Briggs initiative and Anita Bryant’s ‘Save Our Children’ campaign. Both of these were based on the innocence of children and the fear that they could be influenced to become homosexual; a fear that the *Yes* campaign shares. Moreover, a shared implicit thought in these campaigns is the idea that children should not know about homosexuality, because they will then learn to accept it as morally right. They should only be taught about marriage the way it is traditionally supposed to be: heterosexual (Rutledge, 1992).

These claims of tradition and morality fortify *Yes*’s heteronormative discourse on marriage and the family. The division of marriage between traditional marriage and same-sex marriage creates a discourse that values traditional marriage higher than other marriages. Similar to the miscegenation laws, that had matured after the civil wars and created the division between marriage and interracial marriage (Pascoe, 2009), it refers to a clear division between marriage and a special kind of marriage; these marriage discourses are thus based on individual distinctions and otherness. This brings us back to the image of America as a site of oppression: marginalizing homosexuals and excluding them from a fundamental civil right because they are not truly American conflicts with America’s image as a beacon of democracy and freedom and liberty for all.



## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown, in three different categories, how discourses around political ideals, authority, identity and social values are often in conflict; both with each other and within themselves. This resonates in the debate around same-sex marriage. Ideals of Americanism in terms of politics are deployed by both sides of the debate, but because both sides generally adhere different political preferences and systems their outcome is different. Even their ideas of America as an example to the world do not match. And because the two sides appeal to different sources of authority on issues of government and law, here again they are in fact talking at cross instead of genuinely debating the issue. The concept of freedom the way it is deployed by *Yes* specifically, seems to be conflicting in itself. There are scholarly arguments that counter this however. On what is and is not part of an American identity, ideas on both sides simply collide, and they deem different social values as most important in this respect. Adding the sometimes extreme anti-gay attitude of the Religious Right, and the similarly extreme anti-church attitude of many LGBT activist organisations, it is not surprising that both sides continue to antagonize their opposition, preventing the possibility to find any reconciliation. Political conflicts such as the debate concerning same-sex marriage thus point toward the ever conflicting basic ideals of what America, as a nation, should radiate to the rest of the world.

## Conclusion

I started this thesis wondering what kind of image of America the people campaigning in favor of, and against Proposition 8, in California in 2008 had. More specifically, I wondered what kind of underlying assumptions, what kind of discourses lay beneath their ideals. Ultimately, my question was what the content of the campaign videos conveyed about the campaigners' ideas on gender, sexuality and religion in political issues, and how those ideas are related to the ideology of Americanism and the American identity.

In a sense, the answer can be brief. Political ideals, beliefs in authority and ideals on identity and social values that are in many cases as old as the nation itself influence the oppositional campaigns in a way that demonstrates how these ideas are in conflict, and conflicting in themselves. This explains why they inspire such oppositional advocacy, and why it seems like the debate is a never-ending talking at cross. Authoritative sources that are up to interpretation, as well as conflicting ideas of what Americanism should look like, forestall an easy solution to the continuing antagonism between Conservative Christians and LGBT rights activists.

A more substantive answer includes the analysis offered in chapter 2, 3 and 4. While both campaigns are informed by heteronormative discourses on the family as well as the nation, especially the *Yes on 8* side deploys them, with sometimes even a tendency toward heterosexism. Driven by the fear of a destabilization of these heteronormative family ideals, *Yes on 8* uses the image of a threat to inspire voters to approve a de-legalization of same-sex marriage. Through prominent themes such as children, schools, and explicitly heterosexual families, the campaign's main argument is that same-sex marriage will interfere with heterosexual people's lives, their freedom and their moral values. Accusing homosexuals of 'indoctrination', they argue that the *No on 8* side is merely pushing the gay agenda, and that same-sex marriage is an unnecessary addition to homosexual civil rights.

The heteronormativity on the *No on 8* side, although perhaps surprising, is not inexplicable. Ideas of the traditional, nuclear family have been socially ingrained through the American Dream as well as American civil religion. Nevertheless, it has mostly been embedded within Conservative ideals. The *Yes on 8* accusations are therefore countered by accusations of exorbitant traditionalism, religious bigotry, and Constitutional incorrectness. Debunking the lies spread by their opponents is the main theme in the *No on 8* campaign, together with a discourse of universal, fundamental rights and equality.

Recent history has provided the notion that activism against LGBT rights has often come in reaction to legislative proposals and actual changes expanding these rights, while more ancient history has suggested that it can be viewed as an attempt to maintain America's supposed exceptional position and exemplary role in the world. These exceptionalist ideals are both political and cultural; referring to preferred governance of the Nation as well as to religious and social values. But between the opposing sides of the same-sex marriage debate, as well as in the larger scheme of things, these are in conflict.

Within the political ideals, two different types of freedom can be infringed upon, depending on the outcome of Proposition 8. This causes a tension between the role of the government as interfering with, and the government as warranting rights and freedom. The campaign material has affirmed that ideas of what America should exemplify politically are fundamentally at conflict.

Similarly at conflict are beliefs of authority; while the *Yes on 8* side sees authority primarily vested in religion, *No on 8* locates authority primarily in the Constitution. The Constitution however can be interpreted quite differently, as exemplified by both *Yes on 8*'s and *No on 8*'s use of it. Here again, the notion of freedom causes conflict. In this case it is the freedom of religion as opposed to the freedom *from* religion that causes tension between groups that see their Constitutional freedom infringed upon when their opponents' freedom is guaranteed in the law on same-sex marriage. Although scholarly evidence has proven them wrong, the *Yes on 8* side does not see the possibility of the freedom of sexuality, or marital freedom, coexisting with the freedom of religion.

Complicating this is the notion of American civil religion. Because this religious dimension to the political realm is inextricably linked with American Exceptionalism, it has its influence on both sides of political debates. America's exceptionalist position presupposes moral superiority and the idea of America as an exemplary ideal of equality for every citizen, notions that clash in the same-sex marriage debate.

A final conflict arises with the ideology of the American identity: the opposing sides of the same-sex marriage debate collide on their interpretation of this ideal. The notion of the American identity as entailing a free citizen, endowed with fundamental liberties and rights, should provide all citizens with the right to marry. But labeling homosexuals as different, as 'others' based on their sinfulness and morally less worthy relationships, precludes them from this ideology. This prescribed status as un-American, or less American, in the eyes of *Yes on 8* supporters justifies the denial of a fundamental right. Although the ideology of the nation forecloses othering, the ideology of the American identity denies homosexuality as valid.

Both history and the material at the basis of this thesis suggest that Americanism is a flexible ideological framework. The content of the videos exemplifies how Christian Conservatism as well as social, liberal progressivism can be supported by ideological notions of the American ideal, pointing toward the fundamentally conflicting ideologies of Americanism and the American identity. The concepts used in the campaigns around Proposition 8 have different meanings and different degrees of relevance depending on which side deploys them.

The discourses deployed and surrounding the Proposition 8 campaigns have proven to be both universally common, and typically American. Testing them to ideologies of Americanism and the American identity, has resulted in approval as well as contradiction in historical ideals of what the nation and its people should look like. Through the discourses identified in opposing campaigns surrounding same-sex marriage, it has become apparent that America as a Nation, as well as the concept of Americanism, remain dual phenomena, not only divided along racial differences but also along differences in religion, gender and sexual orientation.

Many other issues can be addressed, such as the use of identity politics and strategic essentialism by the *No on 8 side*, discourses on victimization and suffering deployed by both sides, and the only briefly discussed issue of having, giving or being denied a voice. This thesis has only addressed some of the most prominent discourses, in an attempt to embed discourses that are most closely connected to the concept of marriage in the ideological frameworks of the nation as well as the people of the United States.

The campaigns around Proposition 8 have proven that the antagonistic attitudes of religious conservatives and gay rights activists toward each other have not diminished; anti-gay rhetoric remains countered with anti-religious rhetoric and vice versa. Given the historical importance attached to the issue by both sides, indeed it seems that both believe the outcome will seriously affect Americanism. Although Proposition 8 was for the *Yes on 8 side* about the definition of marriage and for the *No on 8 side* about fundamental equality for all, in fact, it seems to have been about fundamental political ideals and beliefs that these two opposing groups hold regarding *authority, identity* and *social values*. These three aspects, that are supposed to help present and maintain America's exceptionalism, are in fact not only mutually conflicting, but also conflicting in themselves; or at least they appear to be.

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