

Ganson Freaks Talk Back

Appendix: Methods

Although I am a sociologist by training (and, having gone into the family business, a second-generation one at that), and although this project and the research from which it arises are sociological in nature, *Freaks Talk Back* intentionally does not present its evidence according to strict academic conventions. This appendix, therefore, provides the methodological details necessary to understand and evaluate more fully the conclusions drawn from my research—what sort of data I used, how I got to them, why I did what I did, and the limitations on the information I collected.

The research design is based on a tripartite model of cultural study that, while still not widely applied, is now acknowledged as fundamental: in order to get a strong grasp of a cultural phenomenon, it is necessary to simultaneously study its production (the activities through which it is created), its thematic, narrative, visual, or textual content (what is being said in and through it), and its reception (how those encountering it use and interpret it).¹ I set out, therefore, to find out as much as I could about the way talk shows are put together; the patterns of content they contain, and the way they are understood by those viewing them. Given the book's narrower topic of sex and gender nonconformity, I was particularly interested in what was said through shows with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender topics, how those involved in the production of them behaved and thought, and how audiences saw these particular kinds of shows. What follows is a rundown of my data-collection process and, where appropriate, details of some of the findings that were not included in the body of the book.

Production

I took a three-pronged approach to data-collection-on-talk show production: interviews with production staff, interviews with guests, and participant-observation at talk show tapings. Recruitment of production-staff interviewees was, revealingly, quite difficult; interviews were refused roughly four times as often as they were accepted. Producers still in the industry, in particular, were wary; executive producers were worried about public relations at a time when talk shows were under widely

publicized attack, and lower-level producers were worried about their jobs in an industry with very high turnover. Although I made a first pass by sending letters requesting interviews to executive producers on all the national, daytime, topic-oriented talk shows (which yielded only one cooperative response), my strategy for recruitment was mostly to rely on personal contacts, and to let things snowball from there. With a few early leads from a range of people in my own social and professional networks, and with what I can only describe as fairly dogged persistence, I scored a first round of interviews with producers; those interview subjects passed me on to others. After a total of twenty interviews with current and former producers at all levels (executive producers, supervising producers, producers, associate producers), as well as hosts and staff in research and public relations, I was satisfied that I had reached saturation, as stories, descriptions, and answers began to repeat.

Both staff and guest interviews were loosely structured. I covered the same territory in each interview, but also allowed participants to take the conversations in their own directions. Together, these interviews covered work and guest experiences on just about every national, topic-driven talk show (and a number of local talk shows, which I have not listed): *Bertice Berry*, *Richard Bey*, *Carnie*, *Donahue*, *Gordon Elliott*, *Gabrielle*, *Mo Gaffney*, *Geraldo*, *Jenny Jones*, *Ricki Lake*, *Leeza*, *Oprah*, *The Other Side*, *Charles Perez*, *Maurry Povich*, *Jane Pratt*, *Sally Jessy Raphael*, *Joan Rivers*, *Rolonda*, *Jerry Springer*, *Tempestt*, *Mark Walberg*, *Jane Whitney*, and *Montel Williams*. A sample interview schedule and a list of interview subjects follows this discussion.

The interviews certainly provided me with a good deal of information about how producers do and think about their work, but I also wanted to see it in action. Since access to production meetings and other behind-the-scenes activity was restricted, I attended tapings of most of the New York City-area talk shows (and sat in the control room with producers during one other taping) over the course of the 1995-96 season. The object here was both to witness key pieces of the production process as they were taking place (especially the management of the audience and the guests), and to experience the role of audience member from the inside. I treated the tapings as an anthropologist treats the ethnographic encounter with cultural ritual, taking extensive, detailed field notes for later analysis. A list of the programs attended follows this discussion.

Finally, I wanted to understand where guests fit into the production system, how they negotiated their way through it—not just any guests, of course, but lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual guests in particular. These interview subjects were initially recruited through a variety of methods: personal contacts, postings on computer bulletin boards (this was especially fruitful for interviews of transgender and bisexual activist guests), newspaper advertisements (in local lesbian and gay newspapers in the South and Midwest, for instance), and organizational contacts (the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation, Renaissance Education Association, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S., American Educational Gender Information Service). Again, from here I depended on the “snowball

method,” as participants sent me to others they knew who had appeared on talk shows. A sample interview schedule and list of the forty-four interviews follows this discussion.

Perhaps the most limiting aspect of this study came with these guest interviews. I was able to find people primarily because they were “networked,” affiliated with groups of one sort or another (which is how they wound up being recruited by talk shows, as well); these sorts of guests, activist or not, tend to be of relatively high educational attainment, and mostly middle-class. Their motivations for appearing on talk shows, though they varied, tended to be loosely educational. With the switch in talk show recruiting methods, however, and in the overall guest profile of more recent programming—that is, as the shows came to depend largely on people who call in on toll-free numbers—I recognized that these sorts of guests and motivations, while still common, were less and less typical. My considerable efforts to track down unaffiliated, nonactivist guests (through newspaper advertisements and a guest clearinghouse) were largely unsuccessful: only a handful of my interviews were with guests who went on the shows without objectives much broader than the excitement and affirmation of a television appearance. (Programs refused to release guest information, and guests are only rarely identified by their full names.)

The difficulty is unsurprising, since the guests who volunteer themselves are most often not affiliated with organizations or with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender communities, and are quite often geographically isolated—by definition hard to find. While this is a serious gap in data, filled in by secondary accounts and by the accounts of participants in Patricia Priest’s study,² it is one I have taken self-consciously into account in the writing.

Sample production-staff interview schedule

1. Talk show work history and current position.
2. Pressures and pleasures of the job.
 - a. What makes a good producer?
 - b. What is the relationship between the show and the corporate owners?
 - c. What do you know about the viewing audience? How does that affect your job?
3. Practicalities of producing a show.
 - a. What is a “good” show? Does a good show have to have conflict? Does a good show have to have audience participation? What is a “bad” show?
 - b. Where do show ideas come from? What makes a good talk show subject? How do you go from idea to implementation? Who decides whether an idea is pursued? Who has to pick up the ball and what do they have to do with it? How is the show structure shaped, and how tightly planned does it need to be?
 - c. How are guests recruited? How do you know if they’re for real? What makes a “good” guest and what makes a “bad” one? What do guests get for coming on the show? Why do you think they agree to participate?

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- d. How do you prepare the guests for their appearances?
- e. Do you use expert guests? Why or why not?
- f. What kind of research is done?
- g. What are you doing and thinking about during the taping? What are various producers and other staff doing during the taping?
- h. What factors most affect how well a particular show goes?
- i. How much editing is done?
- j. Does the fact that the viewing audience is predominantly female affect the way you produce shows? In what ways?
4. Is this "public service" television?
5. Producing shows on sex and gender deviance.
 - a. Are there any different considerations, or is producing these just like producing any show?
 - b. How do these shows compare in popularity to others?
 - c. How would you describe the ways these subjects have been treated? Are there any typical storylines? Audience questions that appear repeatedly? Any changes in the way these topics were treated over your years on the show?
 - d. Do you integrate gay men and lesbians into shows that aren't specifically about homosexuality? Why or why not? What about bisexuals? Transsexuals? Cross-dressers?
 - e. Do producers and/or the host have a common position on these kinds of issues? Are there any goals beyond doing an interesting show (e.g., promoting tolerance)?
 - f. Does the studio audience make any difference for what you can or can't do with these kinds of topics?
 - g. Are there any particular pressures or difficulties associated with doing these kinds of shows? Where are the pressures or difficulties from?
6. Stories of producing particular shows.
7. Current talk show scene in general.
 - a. What do you think of the newer breed of shows? In what ways are they different from and similar to the older ones?
 - b. What do you think of the recent criticisms of talk shows?
8. What do you think viewers are getting out of these talk shows?

Production-staff interview subjects

(Names in quotation marks indicate pseudonyms, given to participants who asked not to be identified.)

Nancy Alspaugh (March 15, 1996), executive producer, *Leeza*
 "Martin Calder" (March 12, 1996), television talk show producer
 "Bob Danforth" (January 3, 1996), television production-company publicity director

"Rachel Davidson" (October 20, 1995), television talk show producer
 "Carl Davis" (June 3, 1996), television research-company executive

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Burt Dubrow (July 10, 1996), executive vice president for programming, Multi-media Entertainment
 Steven Goldstein (February 6, 1996), former television talk show producer, *Oprah*, *Jerry Springer*, *Montel Williams*
 "Brian Jordan" (August 28, 1995), television talk show producer
 "Mike Kappas" (October 2, 1996), former television talk show producer
 "Lynn Malone" (August 18, 1995), former television talk show producer
 "Sarah Merrick" (January 3, 1996), television talk show producer, *Leeza*; former producer, *Maury Povich*
 "Janice Morrison" (June 13, 1996), television company research director
 TJ Persia (January 5, 1996), former audience booker and coordinator, *Montel Williams*, *Mo'Gaffney*, *Marilu*
 "Lawrence Randall" (January 5, 1996), former television talk show producer
 "David Roth" (November 30, 1995), television talk show producer
 Jerry Springer (June 28, 1996), television talk show host
 "Randy Tanner" (January 2, 1996), former television production-company vice president
 Jason Walker (March 29, 1996), producer, *Leeza*
 Jane Whitney (May 30, 1996), former television talk show host
 "Jennifer Williams" (September 7, 1995), former television talk show producer

Tapings

Richard Bey (May 9, 1996)
 Donahue (February 15, 1996)
 Geraldo (April 11, 1996)
 Gordon Elliott (May 22, 1996)
 Ricki Lake (November 16, 1995)
 Maury Povich (April 22, 1995; October 13, 1995; March 28, 1996)
 Sally Jessy Raphael (February 1, 1996)
 Rolonda (March 7, 1996)

Sample guest interview schedule

1. General background: age, work, education.
2. Do you watch talk shows?
3. The story of talk show appearance(s): recruitment, producers' pitch, motivation, preinterview, preparation, taping-day arrival, prepping by show staff, preshow activities, activities during commercial breaks.
4. Impressions of host, audience, other guests.
5. Whom did you imagine you were speaking to (the studio audience, people like you at home, straight people, etc.)?
6. Was the show what you wanted it to be? What you expected it to be?

7. How did you come across, do you think, compared to the way you see your life outside of the show?
8. Would you do it again?

Guest interview subjects

(Names in quotation marks indicate pseudonyms, given to participants who asked not to be identified.)

Ezra Alvarez (December 15, 1995), *Ricki Lake*
 Johnny Bonck (December 27, 1995), *Donahue*
 Aaron Caramanis (January 18, 1996), *Ricki Lake*
 "Sheri Carter" (November 11, 1995), *Gordon Elliott, Mark Walberg*
 Cheryl Ann Costa (November 19, 1995), *Charles Perez*
 Remy David (November 19, 1995), *Sally Jessy Raphael, Rolonda Leeza*
 Eve Diana (March 19, 1996), *Donahue*
 Terri Flamer (December 31, 1995), *Bertice Berry*
 "Kitt Fraser" (November 19, 1995), *Rolonda Leeza*
 Marjorie Garber (March 14, 1996), *Geraldo, Oprah, Maury Povich, Jane Pratt, Sally Jessy Raphael, Jane Whitney*
 Angela Gardner (November 18, 1995), *Donahue, Morton Downey, Jr., Charles Perez, Shirley (Canada)*
 James Green (December 29, 1995), *Geraldo, Charles Perez*
 Jacob Hale (January 6, 1996), *Gabrielle*
 David Harrison (December 22, 1995), *Donahue, Joan Rivers*
 Lisa Heft (December 27, 1995), *Donahue*
 Eric Jackson (March 7, 1996), *Carmen Jovet (Puerto Rico)*
 Hildene Jacobson (June 6, 1996), aspiring talk show guest
 Jordy Jones (December 27, 1995), *The Other Side*
 Lani Ka'ahumanu (December 22, 1995), *Bertice Berry, Donahue, Leeza, Shirley (Canada)*
 "Barry Long" (November 11, 1995), *Mark Walberg*
 Danielle McClintock (December 27, 1995), *Bertice Berry*
 Eric Marcus (February 16, 1996), *Donahue, Geraldo, Oprah, Sally Jessy Raphael*
 Jill Nagle (December 23, 1995), *Maury Povich, Jane Whitney*
 "Melissa Nieman" (February 18, 1996), *Geraldo*
 Ann Northrop (January 19, 1996), *Donahue, Geraldo, Rolonda Leeza, Shirley (Canada), Jane Whitney*
 Robyn Ochs (November 21, 1996), *Donahue, Mo Gaffney, Maury Povich, Rolonda Leeza, Shirley (Canada), Jane Whitney*
 Laura Perez (December 28, 1995), *Jane Whitney, Face to Face (Spanish language)*
 Cynthia Phillips (June 17, 1996), *Geraldo, Jenny Jones, Sally Jessy Raphael, Joan Rivers, Jerry Springer, Montel Williams*
 Linda Phillips (June 17, 1996), *Geraldo, Jenny Jones, Sally Jessy Raphael, Joan Rivers, Jerry Springer, Montel Williams*

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"Russell Pierce" (December 21, 1995), *Jane Pratt*
 Isabelle Richards (February 9, 1996), *Ricki Lake, Oprah, Sally Jessy Raphael, Rolonda, Jerry Springer, Montel Williams*
 JoAnn Roberts (November 18, 1995), *Donahue*
 Cole Roland (December 21, 1995), *Jane Whitney*
 Michelangelo Signorile (February 9, 1996), *Geraldo, Leeza, Ricki Lake*
 Bruce Spencer (June 25, 1996), *Donahue*
 Stafford (December 27, 1995), *Geraldo*
 Cianna Stewart (February 10, 1996), *Montel Williams*
 Susan Stryker (October 6, 1995), *Gabrielle, The Other Side*
 Donald Suggs (July 20, 1995), *Ricki Lake*
 Michael Szymanski (January 4, 1996), *Donahue, Gabrielle, Mo Gaffney, Leeza*
 Harry Taylor (December 13, 1995), *Tempestt*
 "Ashley Tillis" (July 15, 1996), *Richard Bey, Sally Jessy Raphael*
 Miss Understood (March 3, 1996), *Richard Bey, Gordon Elliott, Geraldo, Rolonda, Mark Walberg, Tempestt*
 Penelope Williams (June 12, 1996), *Gordon Elliott, Geraldo, Mark Walberg*

Content

In order to get a clear sense of patterns in talk shows with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender content, I turned to both transcripts and videos. With the assistance of interview subjects, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation, and my own VCR, I collected as many videotapes on these subjects as I could get my hands on. The 106 hours of programming include *Bertice Berry, Richard Bey, Danny Bonaduce, Carrie, Donahue, Gordon Elliott, Gabrielle, Geraldo, Jenny Jones, Ricki Lake, Leeza, Marilu, Oprah, The Other Side, Charles Perez, Maury Povich, Jane Pratt, Sally Jessy Raphael, Joan Rivers, Rolonda, Jerry Springer, Tempestt, Mark Walberg, Jane Whitney*, and *Montel Williams*.

At the same time, using the three services that sell talk show transcripts (Burrelle's, Journal Graphics, and SOS), I acquired all of the available transcripts from the years 1984–86 (a small bunch, totaling 8) and 1994–95 (a total of 147) in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender topics and guests were central; occasionally, when an interview subject would mention it, I also ordered transcripts from other years. Not all programs participate in transcription services, but the sample of over 160 transcripts includes *Bertice Berry, Donahue, Geraldo, Jenny Jones, Oprah, Maury Povich, Susan Powter, Dennis Prager, Sally Jessy Raphael, Rolonda, Jerry Springer, Jane Whitney*, and *Montel Williams*. Each transcription company has a different method of searching—one can search full text, the others only show titles and summaries—but each searched using the words *gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, drag queen, homosexual, transvestite, sex change*, and *cross-dresser*. I collected not only shows in which sex and gender nonconformity were explicit topics, but also pro-

grams in which they constituted a significant secondary conversation; since only one service could search full texts, I excluded these mixed shows from the cleanest, most formal sample to be coded and analyzed (which totaled 128 transcripts), but used these shows to build my interpretive discussion.

With my research assistant, I developed a set of coding categories with which to conduct an analysis of the content of the transcribed programs. The narrower sample of programs (that is, the shows where a *title or summary* indicated a sex- or gender-nonconformity topic) were coded along the following dimensions:

1. The *type of sex or gender topic or population* under consideration, as defined by the show's title and summary, checked against the guest composition (e.g., gay drag, lesbianism, male-to-female transsexualism, heterosexual cross-dressing, etc.).
2. The *program format*, as defined by the show's title and summary, checked against the transcript as a whole. Categories: family conflict; male-female relationship troubles; same-sex relationship troubles; mixed same-sex and opposite-sex relationship troubles; political issue; makeovers; pageants; displays, contests, or performances; secrets revealed; sexual nonmonogamy; testimonials; other.
3. The primary, secondary, and tertiary *narrative themes or discussion frames*. This, the most subjective of the measures, refers to the main terms of discussion—what is at issue in the program. Themes or frames were ranked according to their centrality to the discussion as a whole, indicated by the length of discussion of its core issues. *Boundary frames*: telling the difference (versus claim that there is none) between "real" man or woman and transsexual; telling the difference between straight and gay, lesbian, or bisexual; telling the difference between gay/lesbian and bisexual. *Causal frames*: choice versus biology as the cause of homosexuality; choice versus biology as the cause of transgender status. *Morality frames*: the morality or immorality of gender change; the morality or immorality of homosexuality. *Sexual fidelity frame*: monogamy versus promiscuity or nonmonogamy. *Honesty frame*: truthfulness versus telling lies. *Therapeutic frame*: acceptance or self-acceptance versus "living a lie." *Political frame*: group or individual rights, claims, or grievances. *Gender display frame*: exhibition of guests before and after gender transition. *Status of gay identity frame*: fixity or reality versus fluidity or impermanence of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender status. *Tolerance frame*: tolerance versus intolerance of differences.
4. Level of *audience participation* (low, moderate, high) as measured by number of comments made by distinct audience members and/or number of sentences in comments.
5. *Guest composition*, based on guests' self-descriptions of their own identities (e.g., heterosexual woman, nontranssexual lesbian, bisexual male expert, heterosexual transsexual woman, etc.).

After coding, we investigated general frequency distributions (the proportion of bisexual topics, for instance, in comparison to homosexual ones) and various relation-

ships within the sample: how narrative themes are distributed among different types of program formats (for example, the proportion of family-conflict shows that emphasize therapeutic themes, compared to the same theme in testimonial-style programming); how program types and the population focus interact (for instance, the percentage of bisexuality-focused shows that are about sexual fidelity, compared to that same issue on lesbian-focused programs); how narrative frames and population focus interact (the relative prominence of causal themes, for example, in gay-focused and transsexual-focused programs), and so on.

I have been cautious about using the results of this content analysis to draw much more than broad outlines of talk show content, for three reasons. First, the sample has some limitations: since many more shows were produced in the mid-1990s, it is heavily weighted toward the 1994–95 period, a period of competition and sensationalism; since not all shows are transcribed, it is necessarily incomplete; it is relatively small. Second, although one other study provides something close,³ there is no solid basis for comparison to the general universe of TV talk show content. My sample gives a picture of this particular subset of show topics, but not of the overlap between gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender shows and their heterosexually themed counterparts. Finally, numerically based content analysis simply has built-in limitations. The coding scheme must obviously be invented, which means that the researchers' interpretations of what constitutes a relevant, sensible category are unavoidably already part of the research design; this is less the case for the least interesting things being measured (e.g., guest composition), and more the case for the most interesting aspects (e.g., narrative themes). Counting up aspects of cultural content, moreover, does not give nearly enough information about the *meanings* that inhere in cultural texts. For these reasons, with the coded content analysis as a backdrop, I have relied much more heavily on the patterns revealed by close readings of the collected transcripts and videos. Nonetheless, some of the key results of the coding, presented below, may interest readers.

General frequency distributions

Guests		
Heterosexual	44%	(N = 521)
Gay or lesbian	22%	(N = 255)
Bisexual	12%	(N = 138)
Transsexual	10%	(N = 111)
Cross-dresser	7%	(N = 77)
Expert	5%	(N = 52)
Topics		
Homosexual topics	43%	(N = 55)
Transsexual topics	23%	(N = 30)
Bisexual topics	18%	(N = 23)
Mixed topics	8%	(N = 10)
Cross-dressing topics	7%	(N = 9)

Formats		
Guest testimonials	23%	(N = 31)
Relationship troubles	19%	(N = 24)
Political issues	19%	(N = 24)
Family conflict	17%	(N = 22)
Displays	7%	(N = 9)
Violence	7%	(N = 9)
Nonmonogamy	4%	(N = 5)
Primary themes		
Political themes	18%	(N = 21)
Morality themes	17%	(N = 20)
Therapeutic themes	12%	(N = 15)
Boundary themes	11%	(N = 14)
Honesty themes	10%	(N = 13)
Sexual fidelity themes	7%	(N = 9)
Identity status themes	5%	(N = 6)
Tolerance themes	5%	(N = 6)
Distributions in interaction		
Common formats of lesbian, gay male, and homosexual programs		
Political issues	56%	(N = 16)
Family conflict	17%	(N = 5)
Relationship troubles	14%	(N = 4)
Guest testimonials	10%	(N = 3)
Common formats of transsexual and cross-dresser programs		
Family conflict	27%	(N = 11)
Testimonials	23%	(N = 9)
Display/performance	21%	(N = 8)
Relationship troubles	13%	(N = 5)
Violence/crime	13%	(N = 5)
Common formats for bisexual programs		
Testimonials	40%	(N = 9)
Relationship troubles	30%	(N = 7)
Nonmonogamy	17%	(N = 4)
Common themes on lesbian, gay male, and homosexual programs		
Political	21%	(N = 28)
Morality	20%	(N = 24)
Tolerance	14%	(N = 17)
Therapeutic	13%	(N = 16)
Causes of homosexuality	12%	(N = 15)
Common themes on bisexual programs		
Morality	21%	(N = 11)
Sexual fidelity	19%	(N = 10)

Audiences

With my participation and observation at talk show tapings, I had a good deal of information about studio-audience behaviors and responses. I wanted, however, something more: data about the ways viewing audiences watch and interpret talk shows in general, and talk shows on sex and gender nonconformity in particular. To get at these, I organized thirteen discussion groups, with seventy-nine people grouped according to various dimensions. Discussions, which included between four and eight participants and lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours each, were taped and transcribed. In addition to nine discussions with heterosexually identified viewers (a total of forty-seven participants), I conducted three discussions with gay men and lesbians (a total of twenty participants) and met with a local transgender group, Manhattan Gender Network, for a less formal discussion (a total of twelve participants).

The baseline requirement for participation was regular talk show viewing, defined as watching once a week or more. With the exception of one group (the Manhattan Gender Network discussion), the discussions were organized and run according to a standard focus-group model.⁴ Enlisted over the phone by professional focus-group recruiters using a screening questionnaire, potential participants were asked questions about age, family income, educational background, employment status, marital status, children, occupation, self-categorization of occupation (as professional/managerial, technical, blue-collar, or other), spouse's occupation, racial background, gender, and talk show-viewing regularity. Heterosexually identified viewers were also asked four questions that indicate attitudes toward homosexuality: whether they agree or disagree that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle, that gay men and lesbians are unjustly denied civil rights, that homosexuals should be allowed to marry, and that they themselves feel comfortable in the presence of lesbians, gay men, or bisexuals. All of these participants were paid at the end of the meeting.

The heterosexual groups met at the offices of a focus-group firm, Field Work East, in Fort Lee, New Jersey; all of the participants were from surrounding New Jersey towns. Some of the groups were mixed (men and women, people from a range of educational, socioeconomic, and racial backgrounds, people with conservative attitudes toward homosexuality, and so forth), while others were grouped along particular dimensions (men, women with college education, people with conservative

attitudes toward homosexuality, and so on). The gay and lesbian groups met in an office space in Manhattan; all of the participants were from the New York City area. One group was mixed men and women, one gay men only, the third lesbians only. (Most of the lesbian and gay participants were highly educated. Thus I am reticent to draw firm conclusions about much more than the response of urban, educated lesbians and gay men.) Like the interviews, the discussions were loosely structured, with standard areas covered but room for the conversations to move where discussants wanted to take them. Details of the groups' compositions, along with a discussion protocol, follow.

Focus groups: heterosexually identified viewers

Participant overview. 24 men and 23 women; 18 aged 18–34, 16 aged 35–54, 13 aged 55 and over; 35 white, 8 African American, 4 Hispanic; 24 with high school education, 23 with some college or more; 27 with conservative attitudes toward homosexuality, 20 with liberal attitudes. Occupations: bartender, nurse, bus driver, computer operator, engineer, phone-company manager, security supervisor, home health aide, cafeteria worker, teacher's assistant, secretary, nurse's aide, truck driver, human resources director, paralegal, pie maker, medical assistant, interior decorator, caseworker, painter, stage setter, police officer, data-entry worker, filmmaker, several teachers, several homemakers, several salespeople, 2 bookkeepers, 2 security guards, and 2 Teamsters.

Group overview. Group 1: Men and women (mixed education, income, age, race, attitudes). Group 2: Men and women (mixed education, income, age, race, attitudes). Group 3: White men and women (mixed education, income, age, attitudes). Group 4: Women with high school education or less (mixed income, age, race, attitudes). Group 5: Women with some college education or more (mixed income, age, race, attitudes). Group 6: Conservative women (mixed education, income, age, race). Group 7: Men (mixed education, income, age, race, attitudes). Group 8: Conservative men (mixed education, income, age, race). Group 9: White men with some college education or more, higher income (mixed age, attitudes).

Focus groups: lesbian- and gay-identified viewers

Participant overview. 10 men and 10 women; 13 aged 18–34, 7 aged 35–54; 13 white, 2 African American, 2 Hispanic, 3 Asian American; 2 with high school education, 18 with some college or more. Occupations: bartender, filmmaker, cosmetician, photographer, special-events coordinator, network manager, stage manager, theatrical licenser, volunteer coordinator, artist, word processor, paramedic, restaurant manager, fund raiser, computer analyst, 2 students, and 2 administrative assistants.

Group overview. Group 1: Lesbians (mixed education, race, age, income). Group 2: Gay men, all college educated (mixed race, age, income). Group 3: Gay men and lesbians (mixed education, race, age, income).

Focus-group discussion guide

1. Talk show watching.
 - a. Why do you watch talk shows (learning, entertainment, etc.)?
 - b. How do you select a show to watch on any given day (by topic, by host, by convenience)?
 - c. What are your favorite shows? Are there shows you won't watch?
 - d. What are your favorite kinds of topics? Are there topics you won't watch?
2. Perspectives on talk shows.
 - a. Do you think the shows are for real?
 - b. Would you ever go on a talk show? Why or why not? What do you think of the people who go on them? Why do you think people go on the shows?
3. How would you categorize the types of shows out there? What are the different categories of show topics (e.g. news, current events, unusual lifestyles, parent-child conflict, relationship conflict, gossip, etc.)?
4. Sex and gender topics on talk shows.
 - a. What types of shows that deal with sexuality can you recall or have you noticed? Do any particular shows about sexuality stand out in your mind?
 - b. Do you like these kinds of shows? Why/why not?
 - c. Where do gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transsexuals fit most often in the topic types you've listed?
 - d. How would you characterize the ways homosexuality comes across on talk shows you've watched? Negatively? Positively? Accurately? What do you think of these portrayals?
 - e. How about bisexuals? Transsexuals? Cross-dressers?
 - f. Do you think watching talk shows has affected your attitudes toward homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, and so on? (For gay groups: Have talk shows played a role at all in how you understood being gay or lesbian?)