Professor Xavier is a Gay Traitor! An Antiassimilationist Framework for Interpreting Ideology, Power and Statecraft

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Abstract: Ideology is an integral component in the reproduction of power. Integral to this central tenet of statecraft is the regulation of identity and proscribed methods of social engagement—positive portrayals of "good citizenry" and delegitimized representations of those challenging hegemony. Through an Althusserian and linguistic analysis, positioning the X-Men movie franchise as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), one can examine the lives of mutants portrayed in the text as indicative of preferred methods of state-legitimized sociopolitical interaction. This metaphorical and textual analysis is used to discuss the lived realities of queer persons resisting hegemony, and is located in the bodies and performances of those who resist assimilation and homonormativity and who challenge reformist LGBT organizations seeking rights for non-heterosexuals through further entanglement with the state. I explore the world of mutants and queers with the following question in mind: How can one utilize a queerly theoretical analytical lens while maintaining a discernable distance from reformism, homonormativity, and assimilationist reductionism? Both the fictional world of the X-Men and the lived queer reality reflect the state's efforts to dictate the borders of citizenry, the expression of grievance, and the performance of deviance, difference and stigma. Whereas the mutant narrative reflects statist ideals of a neoliberal, "politically correct" politics of integration, this agenda conceals an insidious denial of queer identity through the coerced conformity of "deviant" bodies. This discourse will be discussed through a variety of locales, including the performativity of gender and sexuality, the narrative of racial deviance, and the discussion of "passing."

Keywords: ideology, Althusser (Louis), X-Men, assimilation, homonormativity, identity, cultural theory, queer theory

1. Introduction

Ideology is an integral component in the reproduction of state power. Integral to this central tenet of statecraft is the regulation of human identities and proscribed methods of social engagement through both positive portrayals of "good citizenry" and delegitimized representation of those challenging state hegemony (i.e., rejectionists).[1] Through an Althusserian analysis, positioning the X-Men movie franchise as a component of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), one can examine the cinematic themes presented in the lives of mutants as indicative of preferred methods of social interaction legitimized by the state. This metaphorical analysis, grounded in a collection of Hollywood artifacts, can be used to discuss the lived realities of queer persons resisting similar hegemonic forces.

The struggle of such rejectionist queers mirrors discourses developed through the X-Men franchise in both descriptive and symbolic manner. Both the fictional world of the X-Men and the lived realities of queer persons reflect the state's efforts to dictate the borders of citizenry, the methods through which the governed can express grievance, and the performance of deviance, difference and stigma. Whereas the

mutant narrative is intentionally crafted to reflect statist ideals contained within a neoliberal, politically correct politics of integration, this agenda conceals an insidious denial of queer identity through the coerced conformity of "deviant" bodies.

The focus of the proceeding discussion is the X-Men film franchise generally, but it will fall most closely on the 2006 film *The Last Stand*. In developing this analysis, I will discuss examples from the larger franchise in order to demonstrate metanarratives and multi-film patterns. Furthermore, while the films are often discussed chronologically according to release date, these dates do not reflect the timeline of the story itself. For example, *X-Men First Class* profiles the pre-X-Men days of mutants but was released in 2011, five years after *The Last Stand*, which is meant to act as a final showdown of sorts.

This exploration aims to inform feminist and queer analyses of film through linking them not only to a Marxist understanding of ideology but also to a uniquely queer reading of identity, physical embodiment, and assimilation. In this manner, the argument begins from an intersectional feminist perspective as seen in the foundational works of theorists such as the Combahee River Collective (1983), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Cherríe Moraga (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Patricia Hill Collins (1991), bell hooks (1991, 2000a, 2000b), as well as more contemporary works such as those included in the *Sister Species* collection (Kemmerer 2011), which extends intersectionality outwards to confront oppressive hierarchies based in species. Therefore, while my analysis borrows heavily from a Marxist tradition, it is grounded in an acknowledged intersectionality—drawn from feminist and queer theory—that is often absent in class-based readings of the socialist tradition.

This analytic position has benefited greatly from queer theory's analysis of citizenship and exclusion (for example, Bell and Binnie 2000; Gamson and Moon 2004; Halberstam 2005; Sears 2005; Puar 2007; Decena 2008; Harr and Kane 2008). My discussion begins close to the site where intersectional and Black feminist scholarship concludes, namely at a critique of the liberalist project for its failure to account for a variety of experiences. Therefore, is it essential to acknowledge and pay tribute to these foundational thinkers who paved the way for contemporary critical reflection focused upon liberal, reform-based projects, and to continue to expand intersectionality to the realm of ideological construction and the economic forces that shape its deployment. Lastly, in discussing metatheory, especially that which deals with a series of films with evolving characters and settings, it is important to remember that while themes are discussed in general terms, a great deal of *internal* diversity exists as well in these narratives. Characters develop and change their understandings of self and other as conditions evolve and, in this sense, one character can represent both an assimilationist and an antiassimilationist position throughout the franchise's films. The X-Men political taxonomy extends beyond the simplistic liberal-conservative, radical-reformist dichotomies, and instead offers both intergroup and extragroup disagreements. The political positions of the "good" mutants and "bad" mutants exhibit dissimilar political points from within their own communities. To be a mutant is an inherently intersectional identity, as one still possesses other identifiers such as race, class, nationality, ability, and sex. The X-Men embody this intersectionality in complementary and sometimes competing occurrences. Therefore, while character communities are discussed for the purpose of brevity as often representing homogeneous positions, these identities are in fact far from stable and often shift over time.

2. Establishing a Method for Interpreting "Ideology"

In establishing a firm foundation to understand, analyze and critique the ideology of a cultural artifact, it becomes important to ground this in a theoretical tradition. While the proceeding framing via Althusser connects the analysis with a Marxist critical theory, my framework also draws extensively from feminist

and queer theory perspectives on identity and ideology. It begins from a position critical to exclusionary, marginalizing representative bodies that masquerade as liberatory. For example—though this point is further elaborated later—nongovernmental organizations based in liberalist bureaucracies, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), often present themselves as the voice of the marginalized, but in practice fail to speak for large disenfranchised populations. Sociologist Catherine Harnois (2005) argues that those "self-identifying feminists" that advocate for women but fail to account for other intersectional identity markers such as race may serve to aid their marginalization while attempting to mediate it. According to Harnois, feminist perspectives that fail to account for such intersectionalities limit the utility of their advocacy for those marginalized.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2002) repeats similar calls for feminist inclusivity based in politics of intersectionality in her critiques calling for the integration of issues of ability. Her work is particularly instructive as it deals with the physicality of the body and its relation to larger issues of identity. She speaks of feminist theory's "pervasive will-to-normalize the nonstandard body" (2002, 12) and argues that liberalism, and especially liberal feminism, "emphasizes sameness, choice, and autonomy" (16), an observation that reinforces the premise of the proceeding discussion of ideological regulation in terms of identity and assimilation. Furthermore, Garland-Thomson reports that binary identity formation is actualized through the body, an assertion that will recur throughout my analysis of the physicality of the X-Men. As she writes, "although binary identities are conferred from outside through social relations, these identities are nevertheless inscribed on the body" (19), and thus the political classifications of liberal, radical, assimilationist, and insurrectionary are not only abstract labels to describe praxis but also act as "inscriptions" upon queer bodies.

Finally, in establishing grounded theory derived from feminist thought, one can look towards instances of duality between objects as sites of contradiction. In her discussion of feminist theory of film, Judith Mayne (1985) writes of this propensity for exposing contradictions:

> I will argue that the most interesting and challenging work on women and film—interesting in the ways it asks us to think about the cinema and about images within and through culture, and challenging in the distinct perspectives it brings to feminist work as a whole—addresses the central problem of contradiction. In film terms, this means, for example, a simultaneous fascination with and contempt for the Hollywood cinema. In broader terms, it means an understanding of patriarchy as oppressive and as vulnerable. (1985, 83)

Therefore, it remains possible to speak of X-Men (and ideology in general) as simultaneously assimilationist and antiassimilationist, revolutionary and reformist, rigid and malleable. Certainly in some instances X-Men appear more stable than other sites of analysis; however, this is not to contend that the film series or the media mechanisms that produce it are a stable monolith, but rather to argue that one can examine the films at a defined time and place, in a sense, to understand them in a momentary suspension from the temporality that ticks on.

In addition to a classically Marxist dissection of ideology, critical theory—emanating chiefly from the work of Michel Foucault—adds to the discussion of ideological regulation and the regimentation of normativity and difference within an "archeology of knowledge." Foucault famously argued that the pitched battle between the normative and the deviant (the non-queer and the queer) is akin to a long warfare between ideological sociopolitical forces. These forces not only manage the taxonomy of identities and normativities (Foucault 1977, 1990) but also dictate the lived experience of bodies as they are biopolitically informed (Foucault 1980, 2007, 2010). What can be transposed from Foucault is thus not only the way in which

political structuring binds one's biopolitical self to that of capital ownership, but also how the disciplinary power of social institutions (e.g., schools, clinics, prisons) inscribes normativity through data collection, categorization, and generalized statistics. These contributions, located mainly in his *History of Sexuality* (1990) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977), serve to carve out the categorization of identity prior to the methods by which these labels are kept in place through violence and the threat of violence. Foucaultian discourse analysis (Wickham and Kendall 1998; Wooffitt 2005, 146–58) is thus an outgrowth of the wider critical discourse analysis (Kendall 2007; Van Dijk 2008a; Fairclough 2010) of Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas, and others, and while Foucault's work is more often applied to the realm of international politics (Buzan et al. 1997), the production and legitimation of identities through discourse (Hansen 2006; Van Dijk 2008b) has an even broader application.

Before proceeding, it is worth mentioning the borders and limitations inherent in the production of macro metatheory and structural-level analysis. If one is to discuss conflict in terms of structure, one runs the risk of saying nothing at all. As carefully historicized by sociologist Philip Abrams (1988), in declaring structures such as "the state" (or another similarly large structure such as "the economy," "ideology," "human nature," etc.) as one's object for analysis, the scholar falls somewhere between analytically tricky and outwardly dishonest:

> We have come to take the state for granted as an object of political analysis while remaining quite spectacularly unclear as to what the state is. We are variously urged to respect the state, or smash the state or study the state; but for want of clarity about the nature of the state such projects remain beset with difficulties. (Abrams
> 1988, 59)

The problem exists in the inability to secure unequivocal answers to a few key questions: "What are the boundaries of the state?"; "Where does civil society (the non-state) begin and end?"; "What is the role played by the state within a nexus of control?"; and so on. It is clear that an "academic-consensus" definition of structures of this size is absent, despite the fact that such a discursive task has been pursued by a range of scholars (some of whom Abrams discusses), including legal philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1962); sociologists such as Franz Oppenheimer ([1908] 1975), C. Wright Mills (1967), and Max Weber (1978); Marxists including V.I. Lenin ([1917] 1960), Antonio Gramsci (1971), Nicos Poulantzas (1974, 1975, 1978), and Ralph Miliband (2009); libertarian Murray Rothbard (1982, 2009); critical theorist Foucault (1991); feminist Catharine MacKinnon (1991); and contemporary international relations scholars such as I. William Zartman (1995) and Joel Migdal (2001). Of course this is only a representative sampling of such thinkers drawn from specific schools of thought. Similar works on statecraft have also emerged from thinkers ranging from fascist (Mussolini [1932] 2006; Schmitt 1995) to primitivist (Kaczynski 2010; Zerzan 1994). Despite centuries of thought, no consensus exists on how one can define, limit and diagram the state.

The modern state utilizes a variety of methods to defend capital accumulation in order to "reproduce the conditions of reproduction" in a classic Marxist manner. Such theoretical underpinnings emanate from an analysis of the state well developed within the leftist discourse. This includes the Marxist (e.g., Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Gramsci, Althusser, Guy Debord), neo-Marxist (e.g., Antonio Negri, David Harvey, James C. Scott, Ellen Meiksins Wood, Christian Marazzi, Michael Hardt), anarchist (e.g., Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman, Murray Bookchin, Noam Chomsky), and European critical-theorist and New Left (e.g., Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, Slavoj Žižek) literatures. Throughout the past century and a half, a range of scholars have made such discussions of the state's self-perpetuating

behaviors mundane and commonplace. Included in this dialectic milieu are those who argue not only that the state utilizes its largesse to maintain the methods of capital accumulation but also that capital serves to support, deploy and advance ideological interests of the ruling class.

The "text" to be discussed here is the sum total of the X-Men movies, taken as a complete series, yet with a particular focus on *The Last Stand*. If we are to understand literary text as the summation of symbols (both words and images) that transmit meaning and message (Lotman 1977), then a movie can also be viewed in a manner similar to that in which a themed analysis of discourse is performed on a traditional text. Within this logic, one can locate, isolate and analyze discursive tendencies within the *text* of the contemporary X-Men cinema series and to interrogate this discourse via a queer-theory lens. This will be accomplished not only through a close reading of the scripted dialogue between characters but also through examination of the text alongside the larger themes of the films such as *assimilation*, *passing*, *stigma* and *tolerance*. In this sense, methodologically, my inquiry operates via Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in that it is not bridled with "distinctive methodological principles" but instead focused on "the broader features of the production and consumption" (Wooffitt 2005, 138) of discourse. This investigative tradition seeks to "explore the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power relations within social structures ... [and how] discourse sustains and legitimizes social inequalities"; thus, it "begins with a clear political agenda" (Wooffitt 2005, 138). In this manner, I employ CDA alongside a critical queer-theory lens to examine the texts in question with a keen focus on the ways in which they function to support hegemonic, statist and pro-assimilation sociopolitical tendencies.

In attempting a critically informed discourse analysis of a film series, one is faced with the problem of establishing the confines of a discernable "text," as the nature of film inherently consists in more than the words on a page. While belaboring the reader with lengthy accounts of lighting, music and camera angles is not the aim of this investigation, by excising portions of verbatim script from the larger film I intend to identify key moments for the characters that point to their larger conflicts as seen throughout the film. In this manner, my inquiry seeks to draw out select portions of the text that speak to the ideological tendencies of the film franchise at large and to judge them through an established communicative methodology (Brummett 2007; Earnest 2007). Thus the focus is on the text's larger sociopolitical discourse and not on its idiosyncratic utterances. To once again borrow from Foucault (1982), such a discursive investigation can be predictive of the social interactions and knowledge construction described in the text. These Foucaultian "principles of classification" (1982, 22) are discursively formed around the ideologies they embody: neoliberalism, tolerance, postmodernism, etc. These discourses themselves are the products of preexistent categorical groupings, which in turn are part of normative (or counternormative) discourses of power and knowledge construction. Some scholars have argued that text in this manner is more indicative of meaning than associated action, but can be interpreted differently amongst socialized individuals. To disembody these texts from their discourse—to make them prediscursive, as Jacques Derrida would say—is to acknowledge that the text's authors may be absent (or clandestine), yet the messages are received and interpreted by the public at large. Thus language and text serve to encode meaning—often of a social or political nature—to an audience of receptors.

My subsequent analysis can be additionally situated within two investigative language-centric traditions, namely those of metaphor and discourse. The drawing out of symbolic and social narrative from superhero stories, comic books, and by extension comic-book movies is well documented (Brummett 2007; Dipaolo 2011; Earnest 2007; Gray and Kaklamanidou 2011; Irwin and Johnson 2010; Irwin, Housel, and Wisnewski 2009; Morris 2005; Shyminsky 2006). In the case of the films, this suggests that within one field of analysis one can examine both the underlying meaning attributed to otherwise named events (metaphor) and the

explicit dialogue and textual artifacts (discourse) produced by the writers, staged by the directors, and carried out by the actors themselves. The convergences of such narrative-driven comics have even increased in popularity in the decade following the attacks of 9/11:

> Since the tragedy of September 11th, 2001, the popularity of films featuring heroes in many forms has soared. Naturally comic-book heroes perfectly fit the need, and comic-book based films have set new box office records. The superhero has become a cultural icon again. But Hollywood is doing more with this opportunity than merely entertaining us. Some of the recent films carry philosophical messages that can illuminate our lives. In particular, the X-Men films address the philosophy of human nature in a way that we can appropriate. (Housel 2005, 75)

The use of metaphor in films is indicative of intentional yet clandestine nodes of sociopolitical interjection as well as moral and ethical pronouncements. In the case of X-Men, the sociopolitical environs relate to post-1950s divisive America, highlighted in conflicts surrounding race, ethnicity and sexuality (Dipaolo 2011; Earnest 2007; Gray and Kaklamanidou 2011; Shyminsky 2006). Despite this broad focus, a thematic shift occurred in the early part of the 2000s, as the comic-based product became a film franchise. This change in medium, and a newly established focus on a *gay* metaphor, represents a marked shift from the story's comic-book days, which tended to link the plight of mutants to anti-Semitism (Dipaolo 2011, 222). With the advent of the film series, the storytellers shifted the discourse away from the Jewish plight and towards the more contemporarily visible struggle of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) communities.

Methodologically, in order to draw out such a metaphor-based analysis, one must seek patterns of both *consistency* and *systematicity* (Brummett 2007, 7). The mutant/queer bifurcated analysis passes both of these benchmarks, as the metaphor is consistently and evenly applicable throughout the entire movie series, and although it is not the focus of the analysis contained herein, scholars have argued that this theme continues throughout the text-based (i.e., comic-book) X-Men manifestations as well (Dipaolo 2011, 219–47; Earnest 2007; Shyminsky 2006). In his discussion of themes of (homo)sexuality in the X-Men series, William Earnest states:

> Substitute the word "homosexual" or its equivalents for "mutant"… in virtually every scene wherein the merits of mutancy are being debated—and the lines work just as well (a telltale sign that a metaphor is nearby). For example, making the substitution in the following observation by Jean Grey produces a seamless result for modeling the plight of gays and lesbians who face discrimination: "Mutants who have come forward and revealed themselves publicly have been met with fear, hostility, even violence. What is it the mutant community has to *hide* I wonder that marked them afraid to identify themselves?" Retorts [conservative, antimutant Senator] Kelly…. He then concludes to thunderous applause and a standing ovation as he shouts, "I think the American people deserve the right to decide whether they want their children to be in school with mutants—to be *taught* by mutants!" At the line, diligent students of 20th-century American history ought to pick up their ears, for it evokes the rhetoric of anti-gay crusader Anita Bryant … California's Proposition 6 … Estes Kefauver and Frederick Wertham of the 1950s witch-hunts … and Jesse Helms thrown in to round out the specific demands of the gay subtext. (2007, 221–22)

The above discussion, tracing the similarities between the fictional Senator Kelly and the regrettable reality of former Senators Helms and Kefauver, is thoroughly positioned in the literature. In the X-Men films, the gay/mutant metaphorical subtext is so apparent that not only has it been noted by critical observers but has also been widely discussed in mainstream venues. In one example, Zach Stenz, a writer

for *X-Men First Class*, wrote the following in an online post in June 2011:

> I helped write the movie, and can tell you the gay rights/post-holocaust Jewish-identity/civil rights allegory stuff was put in there on purpose. Joss Wheldon designed the whole Cure's storyline in the comic books specifically as a gay allegory, and Bryan Singer wove his own feelings of outsiderdom as a gay man into the movie series. The whole "Have you ever tried NOT being a mutant" coming out scene in *X2* [released in 2003] is even particularly subtle, while it is effective. (quoted in Brown 2011)

This open interjection of a gay metaphorical storyline may be in part due to the openly nonheterosexual identities of the screenwriters (Dan Harris, Michael Dougherty) actors (Ian McKellen, Alan Cumming) and director (Bryan Singer), though the creation of a proassimilationist narrative is certainly not necessitated upon a gay narrator. The nonhetero crew has not escaped the eye of conservative, antigay organizations, as seen in the Gay Christian Movement Watch's article, "The Real Gay Agenda Is on Your TV and Movie Screens" (Shofarsound 2011). Director and cowriter Bryan Singer, a gay Jewish adoptee, has noted his intersectional identity and its influence on his work within X-Men in numerous settings. In an interview with the BBC, Singer was asked if his "identities as a Jew living in America and as a gay man" lead to a "homosexuality/homophobia subtext." In response, the director states:

> Well, yeah. That is also a very relevant analogy because where certain races, even a Jewish boy or a Jewish girl, will be born into a Jewish family, or a Jewish community sometimes, or an African American or whatever minority in any given area, a gay kid doesn't discover he or she is gay until around puberty. And their parents aren't gay necessarily, and their classmates aren't, and they feel truly alone in the world and have to find, sometimes never find, a way to live. (Singer 2003)

This feeling of being alone and the resulting desire for a community of acceptance may have wide-reaching implications for Singer's construction of the X-Men cinematic narrative. The metaphors that he adopts (mutancy as homosexuality, mutant naming as coming out) are recurrent throughout and likely represent the director's generalizable perspective, his interpretation of reality. In his discussion of identifying "key" metaphors in discourse, rhetorician Robert Ivie (2005) writes:

> Given the assumption that metaphors are routinely elaborated into motivating perspectives, it stands to reason that vestiges of these generating images will regularly appear in speeches (or texts) as the speaker's favorite vehicles.... The pattern of vehicles revealed in a corpus of discourse, then, leads directly back to master metaphors, which are more often than not … essential terms [for the speaker]. (2005, 319)

Hence, the metaphors constructed, chosen and repeated by Singer (as well as by the other writers) can be seen as the director's "motivating perspectives," indicative of his "master metaphors"; in this case, one's desire to coexist within a liberal, tolerant metropolis.

3. X-Men, News Corp, and Ideological State Apparatuses

The scale of the X-Men franchise is vast and constitutes "the best-selling American comic book of the past 25 years [and] … one of the highest grossing film franchises of all time" (Shyminsky 2006, 387). In eleven years (2000–2011), the X-Men franchise produced five full-length movies, which collectively grossed nearly $933 million in the first four months of each film's screening. With such earning figures in mind, the films are worthy of investigative inquiry "solely on the basis of their enormous popularity and potential for widespread influence" (Earnest 2007, 220) and, as such, the nature of the films' relationship to their

parent company is also relevant. The series is produced by 20th Century Fox Film Corporation, directly owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, or News Corp. A multinational media conglomerate, News Corp is the second largest revenue-producing media company in the world, which has publicly inserted itself into US electoral politics through financial support for both the Republican Governors Association and the Chamber of Commerce's campaign to help the Republican Party regain control of the Congress (Smith 2010).

The subsequent argument seeks to demonstrate that the neoliberal nation-state has a vested predilection for assimilation, that is, a preference for sameness exhibited amongst the populace as a manner of managing dissent. This *preference* for assimilation can be plainly identified as a component of state ideology. The relationship between X-Men and News Corp serves to wed the films to the capitalist interests of the corporation, just as ideology serves to develop and propagate a set of values and preferences for the recipients of its messaging. Consequently, if it is possible to establish that a corporation has sociopolitical agendas, then that corporation's cultural products can be expected to be reflective of those agendas. As a premier multinational, News Corp is linked to the state, and, in a classic Marxist manner, the corporation must therefore "reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce" (Althusser 1970, 2). This means that News Corp must produce cultural artifacts that serve to not only ensure the corporation's economic survival but also reflect and legitimize its methods of production. This process of ideological reproduction occurs at both the cultural and political levels, as cultural narratives of power inform political ideology. Thus, the neoliberal state capitalism that empowers News Corp transnationally is integral in sustaining assimilationist statecraft and ideology, as it is simultaneously predicated upon the state's support and integrally tied to reproducing the statist discourse regarding appropriate methods of performance and engagement.

Within the analysis I am proposing, the Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) of the X-Men/News Corp nexus can be said to hold at least four functions, namely:

1. discourage divergent identity formation;
2. encourage assimilation and neoliberal tolerance;
3. encourage the redress of grievance through legalistic channels that do not challenge state authority; and
4. discourage, delegitimize and defame movements towards political rejectionism and methods of social protest that challenge state authority.

The ideological influence of News Corp as a component in the furtherance of normative state capitalism depends on the construction of a citizenry of consumers.

While an Althusserian reading of X-Men films is the methodological basis for my inquiry, the reader must be cautioned about the limiting nature of this form of analysis and its failure to account for divergence. While the analysis presumes that ISAs create products that mirror the values of their capital stakeholders, this does not mean that these films are simply mouthpieces for neoliberalism. Corporate interests are not stable values and neither are the products or methods of the ISA. While the ISA maintains a system of thought no more stable than that of its critics, its framework is bordered by a broad ethic that is stoic and difficult to penetrate. This is not to claim that News Corp or other institutions have an easily intelligible ideology, but they certainly exhibit—politically, socially and economically—an ethic that, if transgressed, marks the product as othered, radical, or otherwise outside of a normative discourse. The poststructuralist tradition demonstrates the fluidity and malleability of the means and forms of ideological replication. Cultural artifacts do not mirror these capital interests but they do serve to either fall within their broad politics or be marked as outsider.

The model citizen, molded by the intentionality of neoliberal statecraft, is dependent on two key features, both of which can be examined in the X-Men saga. Firstly, the good citizen wields a disciplined body that exhibits a normative identity (i.e., sex, gender, sexuality, etc.), while the bad citizen exhibits an identity of difference—of a stigmatized, non-passing, non-normative other. Secondly, challenges made at the sociopolitical level must be regulated and channeled through legalistic reformist means, with the goal of producing a uniformly assimilated populace and presented within the neoliberal framework of tolerance.

4. Passing, Performance and Stigma: The Case of Raven Darkholme

Queer identity is not inherently linked to nonheterosexual acts. One can be a man who has sex with men and be outside of the queer identity, just as a man who engages in sexual acts with a female-bodied person can embody a queer personhood. Judith Halberstam, in her explanation of a working definition of queer, writes that "'queer' refers to non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (2005, 6). Providing additional complication to identity construction, "incongruences" can readily exist between one's sex (genitalia, chromosomes) and one's gender (performed masculinity/femininity) (Butler 1993, 75; Fausto-Sterling 2000, 3), additionally complicating the taxonomic nomenclature of the sexualized, sexed, gendered self. The body is not a space of normative, uncontested truth, but a social and political construction (Butler 1990; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Halberstam 2005) situated not only around vulnerability but also within desire (Butler 2004, 20, 26), as demonstrated via sexualized performance. Thus, a key component of queerness is performance (Butler 1990) and the embodiment of a sexualized, gendered, sexed identity. This performance can indicate identity as well as legitimize individuals within a sphere of inclusion. For example, William Leap (1996), in his work documenting gay men's English, argues that the intercommunity linguistics he has surveyed regiment gay male performance, erase difference, and outwardly signal identity. In this way, a gay male can interact with "passing," choosing to fit within a gay linguistic regime (i.e., being out) or conceal this performance (i.e., performing to pass).

When examining the discourse of assimilation and passing in the case of the X-Men, one can view the character of Raven Darkholme/Mystique, the blue-skinned, yellow-eyed, red-haired shape shifter whose "natural" body is covered in reptilian scales and raised markings.

Figure 1. Mystique in her "natural" blue form.

As Mystique can adopt the appearance of whomever she wishes as a feature of her mutation, her personhood becomes an interesting site for the discussion of embodiment and passing (Earnest 2007, 216). Throughout this analysis, I am primarily concerned with the outward presentation of self, projected by Mystique, as a public performance for the benefit of the observer, what Erving Goffman terms the "front" and defines as "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (1959, 22). Goffman explains that "fronts" are "created not selected" (1959, 28), which can be seen in the case of Mystique, as she is not creating a standard of beauty (when performing whiteness) but instead adopts its dominant manifestation, that of a white-skinned, long-blond-haired, ample-breasted female-bodied person. This culturally constructed, purposively performed presentation of self is an "adaptive technique" of "covering" (Goffman 1963) as a strategy for passing.

Those unable to pass easily are ostracized, as happens with individuals bearing physically present marks of mutation. In the opening of *The Last Stand*, Warren Worthington III (later known as Angel/Archangel) can be seen hiding in the bathroom trying to cut off his angelic wings. The scene is tinged with themes of shame and embarrassment as Warren's father bangs on the bathroom door and forcefully enters to find his son crying, covered in blood, and apologizing for his mutation in a manner resembling the admission of bulimia, self-mutilation, or a "deviant" sexual practice.

Figure 2. Young Archangel's back can be seen in the reflection of a bathroom mirror as he hides his crying face from his father who says to him, "Oh God. Not you," while the boy apologizes and sobs.

When Angel's father looks upon his son with disgust, he is performing an act of Foucaultian disciplinary power, whereby the bodily gaze of examination acts as a mode of taxonomizing difference and establishing normalcy (and thus also abnormality):

> The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them…. In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification…. It is the examination which, by combining hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgment, assures the great disciplinary functions of … classification. (Foucault 1977, 184, 187, 192)

Thus for mutants like Mystique and Angel, the mere *gaze* upon their abnormality functions as an instrument of disciplinary power wherein hierarchies are created. Similar to the racial hierarchy (racism) that places white above all else, or the sexuality hierarchy (heterosexism) that places heterosexuality above all else, in the world of the X-Men nonmutant is superior to all mutantkind.

Mystique's performed whiteness (as opposed to her "natural" blueness) within the collective of other mutants does not serve to deny her othered status vis-à-vis (nonmutant) humans but rather to *cover* her stigmatized self so as to assimilate within a body politic, not attempting to *pass* as nonstigmatized. In this way, Mystique's performance interacts with that of an HRC constituent who performs a proscribed embodiment not in an attempt to *pass* for heterosexual but in order to downplay (cover) their non-normative self. This performance is situated in ruling-class identifications; thus the homonormative (Warner 1999; Duggan 2003; Halberstam 2005; Griffin 2007) embodied ideal of the HRC can be said to be a *homo*sexual, white-skinned, male-bodied/gendered (i.e., cisgendered), professional-class American. This reliance on a *homo*sexual yet performatively normative subject is the cornerstone of the homonormative: the existence of a nonhetero subject whose difference serves to uphold neoliberal tolerance by aligning with the institutions of marriage, monogamy, citizenship, and the binaries of male/female, gay/straight, etc. This performative bias is the basis of the commonly levied critique of the HRC—in which the organization is accused of excluding (amongst others) people of color, poor and working-class persons, transgendered persons, and persons with otherwise *deviant*, non-normative sexual or gender performances (i.e., queers, noncisgendered persons). Mystique's attempts at covering mirror struggles embodied in the lives of transgendered persons, because for many transfolk *visibility* is failure. The point at which a transgendered person attracts the "transgender gaze"—the point at which they are acknowledged to be trans—is the precise moment when their performance has failed (Halberstam 2005, 78).

For those existing in dominant venues where gender and heteronormativity are enforced through violence and the threat of violence, this "gaze" may amount to "danger and exposure" (Halberstam 2005, 78). For Mystique and mutants negotiating a space within the public sphere, acknowledgment of their difference is, in a sense, failure. In his discussion of metaphorical gayness in X-Men, Earnest writes:

> Because mutation is a pressing social issue in the X-Men's world, the disclosure of one's "mutancy" is not to be taken lightly. After all, it's a condition that is misunderstood and feared by the general population. Mutants who go public risk everything from being rejected by family to political and social marginalization to physical violence. (2007, 215)

Mystique's interactions with themes of passing and constructs of normative beauty stand in stark contrast to her antiassimilationist allies as the X-Men saga progresses.

In *The Last Stand*, we are introduced to a community of antiassimilationist, rejectionist mutants led by Magneto and Mystique. These mutants bear the physicality of stigmatized deviance in a number of ways, both racially and subculturally. While archvillain Magneto is attempting to recruit for his Brotherhood of Evil Mutants (BOEM) from the ranks of the Morlocks—a subterranean dwelling community of mutants unable or unwilling to pass for nonmutant—a prominent Morlock named Callisto approaches him and asks, "You're so proud of being a mutant, where's your mark?"

Figure 3. Magneto recruiting for the BOEM from the Morlocks, an antiassimilationist, deviant mutant milieu.

Figure 4. Callisto (played by Dania Ramirez). Note her nonwhiteness, facial piercing (labret), facial tattoo, chest tattoo, and black, all-leather clothing. She also has a third tattoo on her left arm, not visible in this image.

This accusatory interjection implies that Magneto is less of a "proud mutant" than Callisto, who is self-marked with tattoos and piercing to indicate her nonconformist otherness. These mutants choose to live outside of society, in nomadic camps, engaging in acts of criminality as well as counterstate violence. Additionally, the more visible members of this rejectionist camp are often marked by the stigma of nonwhiteness (Ilea 2009, 180) as well as other deviant characteristics such as facial tattooing, piercings, and dark clothing often made from animal skins.

Figure 5. Arclight (left), Callisto (center), and Psylocke (right): three members of the Morlocks/BOEM, all nonwhite and dressed in a black, leather-heavy, semi-gothic style.

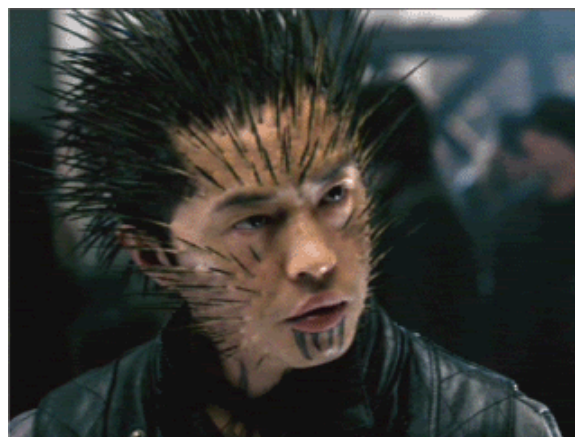*Figure 6*. Spike (played by Lance Gibson), a nonwhite, tattooed BO

Figure 7. Quill (played by Ken Leung), a nonwhite, tattooed, leather-wearing BOEM member.

The display of these subterranean communities is meant to highlight those mutants who choose to live apart from mainstream society. For the Morlocks and BOEM, this is both a result of antimutant discrimination in the society and an internalized pro-mutant pride that resists obfuscation and assimilation of difference. The vast majority of individuals featured in these rejectionist milieus are Latino, black and Asian.

Despite the fact that Mystique is integral in the recruitment and leadership of this stigmatized, marked faction of rejectionists, she is eventually expelled from it after she is accidently shot with a mutancy-neutralizing, weaponized "cure" during an escape attempt. It is in this scene that Magneto excommunicates her, turning his back on and telling the now human Mystique that she is "no longer one of us"; in other words, as a nonmutant, she can no longer be a part of the antiassimilationist movement for mutant liberation.

Figure 8. The effects of the mutant "cure" on Mystique.

By her mere physicality, and despite her own agency, she is now a member of the enemy class. Raven, formerly known as Mystique before losing her mutant powers, is shown later in the movie cooperating with state security forces and providing information as to the whereabouts of Magneto's operational base.

5. Mystique's Biopolitics: A Textual Analysis

Mystique's body is the site of the X-Men discourse concerning assimilation and the performance of difference. In her natural blue form, her body is inscribed with a (bio)politics of difference, an inherent rejection of passing. Since Mystique has the ability to effortlessly present herself in any form she desires, the choice to reject passing can therefore be understood as an ideological decision, representative of her alignment with the antiassimilationist milieu of Magneto. This performance of embodied difference can be seen in *First Class* in numerous scenes.

In one of the film's earliest sequences, we find X-Men leader Charles Xavier flirting with a woman named Amy in an English pub. He tells Amy that her bicolored eyes are a "sexy mutation." Amy then states, "Let's reclaim that word [mutant]. Mutant and proud!" (Vaughn 2011). This dialogue shows that the viewer is meant to understand society's default view of mutants as beings who are not proud of their identity but closeted (to borrow from the LGBT discourse). In the pub, Mystique appears in the background, annoyed and angry at Xavier's encouragement for Amy to be proud of her mutation. Mystique's frustration is based in Xavier's desires for the shape shifter to constantly hide her mutation in an effort to pass. In an attempt to interfere with the flirtation, Mystique then changes her eye color to imitate Amy's, which proves to be successful in derailing Xavier's advances. Upon leaving the pub, Xavier accuses Mystique of changing her eye color on purpose to thwart his flirting efforts. Mystique responds:

> Why would I do it on purpose? You know I can't control [the mutation] sometimes—if I'm stressed or I'm tired. Mutant and proud? [said in a mocking tone] Or is that only with pretty mutations, or invisible ones like yours? If you're a freak, you better hide. (Vaughn 2011)

Here Mystique appears angry at Xavier's ability to pass effortlessly and, moreover, at his ability to embody his mutant identity without the outsider status marking his body with a sign of deviance.

The tension between passing and one's naturally inscribed body leads Mystique to adopt a form of radicalized self-hating, best exhibited in her presentation of her sexuality. In First Class, Magneto is seen encouraging Mystique to present herself in her "true" (i.e., mutant) form, that is, her blue-skinned body, while, conversely, Hank McCoy (prior to earning his mutant identity as Beast) attempts to help Mystique permanently hide her naturally othered self by providing her with a vaccine that would conceal the outward representation of her mutation. In this discourse, Magneto would represent the rejectionist queer position (e.g., Bash Back!) and Beast, the assimilationist, pro-passing stance (e.g., HRC, GLAAD, GLSEN). While discussing the mutant cure developed by Beast, Mystique is seen counseling the young man as he appears embarrassed at his inability to hide his mutated, ape-like feet. While sitting by themselves, in a scene with tender, romantic overtones, Mystique and Beast discuss passing:

> Beast: I promised myself I'd find a cure ever since I was a little boy. You have no idea what I would give to feel...
> Beast & Mystique (simultaneously): Normal.
> Mystique: Charles has never understood. He's different but he's never had to hide. Hank, this serum you're making, it doesn't affect [mutant] abilities right? Just appearance? Normalizes it? Do you think it would work on me?
> (Magneto walks in)
> Magneto (to Mystique): By the way, if I looked like you, I wouldn't change a thing.
> (Vaughn 2011)

Later in the film, when Beast has finally produced the serum, he and Mystique revisit the issue of passing and of modifying their bodies in order to assimilate. When Beast enters Mystique's room, she is sitting by the vanity in her white, blond form, wearing a white robe. After Beast presents her with two serum-filled syringes, Mystique expresses a newly formed awareness that assimilation should not be a requirement for mutants.

> Mystique: Should we have to hide?
> Beast: You already do. You're hiding right now, as I have my whole life. I thought you don't want to feel like a freak all the time, I just want to look...
> Mystique: Normal.
> Beast: Yeah.
> (Beast picks up one of the syringes and prepares to inject himself)
> Mystique: Hank, don't! You're beautiful, Hank, everything you are. You're perfect. Look at all of us [mutants]... We are different but we shouldn't be trying to fit into society, society should aspire to be more like us. Mutant and proud.
> (Mystique shifts into her natural, blue form)
> Beast: It behooves me to tell you, but even if we save the world tomorrow, and mutants are accepted into society, my feet, your natural blue form will never be deemed beautiful.
> (Mystique shifts back into her white, blond form)
> Beast: You look beautiful now. We need this cure.
> (Vaughn 2011)

This discourse of naturalness and beauty continues for Mystique in a subsequent discussion with Magneto. In their scene, Magneto enters his room to find Mystique naked in his bed, wrapped in a blanket. Mystique appears in her post-shift, everyday passing form, that of a white-skinned blond woman.

Figure 9. Mystique in her "unnatural" performance of whiteness, lying in Magneto's bed.

Magneto rejects Mystique in her passing form and insists on her presenting herself as the "real Raven," discounting the white, blond version as inauthentic. When Mystique does comply, shifting back into her natural blue form, Magneto replies, "Perfection. You don't have to hide. Have you ever looked at a tiger and thought, You ought to cover it up? You're an exquisite creation, Raven, all your life the world has tried to tame you, now it's time for you to be free" (Vaughn 2011).

Figure 10. Mystique in her "natural" blue form, after Magneto's urging to reveal the "real Raven."

Magneto then sits on the bed and passionately kisses the young woman as the camera's gaze slowly pans her naked blue body from foot to head.

Thus the discourse on the mutant cure provides an interesting site for analysis, as well as a challenging example. While it would be facile and inaccurate to simply argue that those mutants who take a position in favor of the cure are neoliberal cowards, traitors to some invoked ideal of mutant purity, their inter-community conversations reflect the various tendencies to challenge, accept or accommodate recuperative strategies for dealing with outsiders. As oppression does not function in a singular manner, neither does resistance. The mutant community has mixed feelings about the cure, not only in terms of its assimilationist functions but also the meaning it has for their own identity. For Rogue, for example, this is based in a sincere desire to experience physical human contact, something she has been unable to do because her powers are activated with skin-to-skin contact with another. Her internal decision-making process is not political so much as it is personal. Other mutants, such as Magneto and Mystique, politicize this decision much more, yet to portray their analysis as radical and Rogue's as reformist would be simplistic. Rather, their decisions are mediated by different frameworks: the political versus the personal.

6. Is the State a Friend to Mutants? Are Revolutionary Queers a Friend of the State?

For Xavier's X-Men, the state is nearly always portrayed in a positive, legitimate light. The viewer is shown presidents, generals, CIA agents, sailors, diplomats, legislators, judges, cops; all are friends to Xavier's X-Men, all oppose Magneto. Xavier recruits for the CIA, and Beast becomes the Secretary of Mutant Affairs, a new executive-level cabinet position.

Figure 11. Young Xavier and Mystique appear as invited guest experts before members of the CIA, attempting to assist in Cold War strategic planning.

Figure 12. The exterior of the Department of Mutant Affairs, headed by Beast.

Figure 13. Beast standing in his office in the Department of Mutant Affairs.

Figure 14. Beast sitting next to the US president as they review a report from "homeland security" and discuss how to deal with the newly imprisoned Mystique, illustrating the role of Xavier-aligned mutants in aiding the state in the imprisoning of rejectionist mutants such as Mystique.

The pro-state bias is the main divisive rupture between the two mutant movements, those of Magneto's BOEM and Charles Xavier's X-Men. The tension between pro-state and rejectionist mutants is recurrent throughout the X-Men movie franchise. Magneto kidnaps a senator and the X-Men rescue him despite his antimutant policies, while other films show an attempted assassination of the US president under the direction of mutant rejectionists.

Figure 15. Nightcrawler, under the mind control of Magneto, attempts to assassinate the US president in the Oval Office

Figure 16. The knife left behind in Nightcrawler's failed assassination attempt.

In the 2011 film, a conflict arises between Xavier and Magneto as the latter tries to kill scores of soldiers. In other films, Magneto takes control of a medical lab, attempts a biological attack targeting the UN, and so on. Throughout these examples, Magneto is portrayed as a terrorist-like leader (Earnest 2007, 230) who recruits cells of violent nonstate actors in his attempts to lead a mutant war against humanity. Magneto is shown recruiting and inciting followers, carrying out terrorist-style attacks, and even issuing terrorist-style demands via audiovisual communications. Here one can clearly see the intentionality of the metaphorical messaging: assisting the state in its manufacturing of violence (e.g., Xavier's X-Men) is good, and, consequently, opposing normalization and acting outside the scope of a proscribed method of political engagement (e.g., BOEM, Morlocks, Hellfire Club) is bad.

Following the attempted assassination of the US president, the executive empowers an overzealous, antimutant colonel to launch an armed assault on Xavier's estate that houses and educates mutant youths. It is during this assault that the viewer witnesses a rare example of transgressive, antistatist violence when X-Men figurehead Wolverine kills scores of US military personnel in an attempt to defend the fleeing mutant students. In this four-minute scene, Wolverine stabs at least ten soldiers.

Figure 17. Wolverine stabs a US soldier through the chest in one of the few examples of X-Men acting counter to the state.

To provide a contrast, in *X-Men United* Wolverine, acting as a representative of Xavier's direct disciples, goes through much effort to prevent violence against the police in a confrontation, and in *First Class* Xavier battles Magneto in a heroic act that saves the lives of hundreds of seamen.

Throughout the comic-book, cartoon-based, and toy-related films outside of the X-Men franchise, the pattern is the same. In the Transformers series, the Autobots cooperate with the US government, and the villainous Decepticons kill people and destroy buildings. Batman is tasked directly by the Gotham mayor and police commissioner and signaled into action by a giant light operated by the police. In the Iron Man series, a global "defense contractor" uses his advanced weapons technology to arm US forces as well as to fight alongside them. G.I. Joe, produced since the 1960s, is a military faction within the state itself, whose enemy, known as Cobra, is a nonstate criminal-terrorist organization that takes hostages, attempts to seize power, and engages in criminal enterprise through a never-ending series of attacks. Throughout the genre, these examples are the norm. In the "good guy wins" narrative of Hollywood, the X-Men will always be a friend to cops, soldiers, and the average, everyday enforcers of state violence. One would not expect X-Men to be allowed to kill state security forces, even in self-defense, if they were to continue within the state's good rhetorical graces.

Such a delegitimized presentation of (mutant) rejectionists can also be transposed to the framing of queer rejectionist networks operating in the US through clandestine acts of social protest and occasional property destruction. Though insurrectionary queer networks in the US have not adopted tactics involving explosives and firearms (or mutant powers), highly visible segments of this population share an explicit ideological affinity with the likes of antistatists such as Magneto. Queer direct-action networks such as the now defunct Bash Back! have regularly produced propaganda involving images of firearms that thematically mirror those used by armed actors involved in bombing banks and other acts of revolutionary violence.

Figure 18. Advertisement for Bash Back!'s 2010 convergence in Denver, CO. Notice the handgun, brass knuckles, and the insurrectionist-style publication *Becoming Riot*.

Figure 19. Advertisement for 2008 Bash Back! action convergences coinciding with the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. The purpose of the convergence is "to facilitate radical Queer and Trans organizing against the
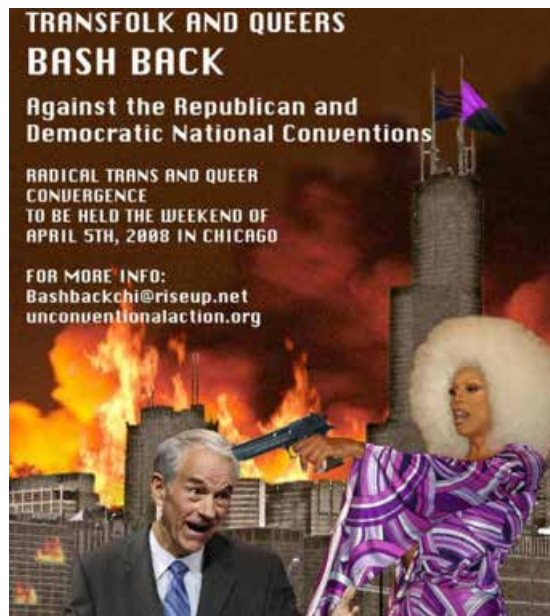

Figure 20. Advertisement for 2008 Bash Back! action convergences coinciding with the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. Pictured in the ad is drag queen Ru Paul shooting presidential candidate Ron Paul while the city burns in the background.

This affinity for retaliatory, defensive, and even preemptive violence is a performative act by such networks to intentionally craft politics and image. In the US, when opportunities have presented themselves, queer rejectionist insurrectionaries have photographed themselves armed with bats, clubs and hammers identifying them as proponents of armed self-defense and acts of property destruction.

Figure 21. A poster produced by an anonymous cell of Bash Back! to advertise the group's plan to attend the 2008 Pridefest in Milwaukee for the purpose of confronting the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement (NSM). The NSM had previously announced their intention to hold a march in opposition to Pride, which they claimed represented the "promotion of homosexuality in our community" (National Socialist Movement 2008).

In one example of these tactics becoming actualized, a Bash Back!-sponsored march coinciding with the 2009 anti-G20 demonstration in Pittsburgh involved masked individuals breaking numerous storefront windows with hammers. Since such attacks present little to no threat of personal injury, they exist as queerly theatrical displays of unsanctioned political violence—an articulation of Baudrillard's production of "spectacle" (2001).

These rejectionist queers, when viewed in comparison to Magneto's BOEM, create important points of congruence. For example, while both the HRC and rejectionist queers are in favor of equality for LGBT people, queer attacks targeting reformist organizations have been designed to highlight the failures of reform and to publicly critique them while advocating a liberationist discourse. For example, on 29 June 2011, a clandestine cell of insurrectionary queers attacked the HRC gift shop located in the upscale, gay-friendly neighborhood of Dupont Circle in northwest Washington, DC. The storefront was targeted with pink paint projectiles, and the word "Stonewall" was spray-painted on the sidewalk in front (Reese 2011). The following day, a communiqué was issued by the attackers, signed "The Right Honorable Wicked Stepmothers' Traveling, Drinking and Debating Society and Men's Auxiliary." In this communiqué, the attackers accused the HRC of wasting money and ignoring the plight of transgendered persons. The anonymous authors wrote:

> [The HRC gift shop] is a god awful monstrosity. We were in there yesterday and between wiping our genitals on the clothing and discovering that the snow globes wouldn't properly fit up our bums, we got to thinking: "This place would look great with a bit of shattered glass and splattered paint." So we strapped on our riot chaps, poured pink paint into light bulbs, grabbed hammers, and went party party party! all over that tacky testament to the transformation of radical queer liberation into consumer junk. (The Right Honorable 2011, 1–2)

The authors argue that the HRC has perverted the spirit of the queer liberation movement as established at the 1969 Stonewall riots and instead subverted these energies with faux support in the form of bourgeois consumerism, corporate entanglement, and a bloated salary for its executive director.[2]

The violence at the HRC store, though only targeting property, mirrors the intermovement tension

experienced in the X-Men saga—tension that has at times led rejectionist mutants to target fellow assimilationist mutants with violence. In this sense, both the anonymous HRC vandals and Magneto's forces have attacked their reformist "allies" and, as an effect, have drawn heavy criticism from state forces. In a familiar performance of spectacle, the HRC headquarters, also located in Washington, DC's Dupont Circle neighborhood, was attacked in a similar fashion on 10 October 2009. In this attack, paint was once again thrown onto the building, and graffiti reading "Quit leaving queers behind" was scrawled near the front entrance by a clandestine group calling itself Queers Against Assimilation (2011). In the corresponding communiqué, the critiquing authors write:

> The HRC is not a democratic or inclusive institution … [it] is run by a few wealthy elites who are in bed with corporate sponsors who proliferate militarism, heteronormativity and capitalist exploitation…. The Queer liberation movement has been misrepresented and co-opted by the HRC. The HRC marginalizes us into a limited struggle for aspiring homosexual elites to regain the privilege they they've lost and climb the social ladder towards becoming bourgeoisie…. Most of all we disagree that collective liberation will be granted by the state or its institutions like prisons, marriage, and the military. (Queers Against Assimilation 2011)

Here one can see the insurrectionary rejection of both identity politics and political reform, as well as the strategy of confronting homophobia by attempting to gain other forms of privilege. For the queers attacking the HRC, the victories of the fight against "Don't Ask Don't Tell" and gay marriage fall within the realm of assimilationist oppression and are thus not victories but challenges to be met.

7. The Mutant Cure and the Human Rights Campaign

The desire from some members of the mutant community to self-administer a "cure" can be read as an explicit metaphorical substitute for a desire to assimilate.

Figure 22. When Beast meets the mutant boy who provides the genetic code necessary for the "cure," his hand returns to its nonmutated state of whiteness.

As a fictitious news channel reports fictitious news in *The Last Stand*, the camera films Worthington Labs, makers of the cure, besieged by protestors with signs. The anchor states, "History will be made here today. For the first time, the so-called mutant cure will be available to the public. Now, reaction has run the gamut with mutants on both sides of the line. Some are desperate for this cure, while others are offended by the very idea of it" (Ratner 2006). Also in *The Last Stand*, upon receiving the news of the cure's release, Rogue bursts into the room with youthful excitement, prompting an uncharacteristically sharp response from Storm:

Storm: Who would want this cure? I mean what kind of coward would take it just to fit in?

Beast: Is it cowardice to save one's self from persecution? Not all of us can fit in so easily. You don't shed on the furniture.

Wolverine: Well, for all we know the government helped cook this up.

Beast [Secretary of Mutant Affairs]: I can assure you the government had nothing to do with this... I've been fighting for mutant rights since before you had claws...

(Rogue enters room out of breath, excited)

Rogue: Is it true? They can cure us?

Xavier: Yes, Rogue, it appears to be true.

Storm: No, professor. They can't cure us. You want to know why? Because there's nothing to cure. Nothing's wrong with you, or any of us [mutants], for that matter.

In this example, Rogue is an assimilationist seeking to hide her difference in exchange for acceptance and normalization by her oppressors. The scene displays also a transgressive act by Wolverine and a defensive response from a mutant representative of the highest echelons of state power and narrative construction, Beast.

This textual example fits well within a statist strategy for the dulling of difference and the concealing of identity. According to some legal scholars, the denial of rights to marginalized yet *passable* groups (such as nonheterosexuals and some mutants) can be a juridical strategy to urge assimilation—termed the "assimilationist bias in equal protection" within a legalistic discourse. In other words, "by withholding protection ... the judiciary is subtly encouraging [marginalized] groups ... to assimilate by changing or hiding their defining characteristics" (Yoshino 1999, 487). Thus, those seeking to *highlight* difference and otherwise showcase their "deviance" can be seen as resisting this (judicial) assimilation and forcing the state to alter itself or remain as a site of contest with the governed. In this way, those seeking to *pass* (or be cured) and display an increasingly normative performance of gendered sexuality (e.g., cisgender and heterosexual) may be encouraging statist efforts to integrate deviance via assimilation. This harkens back to the self-marked stigma displayed by members of the Morlocks and Magneto's BOEM.

Such personalized desire to mainstream oneself via assimilation—the promotion of this assimilationist bias—is mirrored in the agendas of mainstream "rights" groups such as HRC. In this sense, one can explain such tendencies as attempting to reduce difference. As with the mutant "cure," the key is what is shared by the normative and the divergent, and the aim is to highlight these features and to conceal those that run counter. This is repeated within the LGBT (meaning not queer) movement as well.

The aim of assimilationist groups was (and still is) to be accepted into, and to become one with, mainstream culture. Consequently, one of the primary tenets of assimilationist discourse and discursive practices is the belief in a common humanity to which both homosexuals and heterosexuals belong. And this commonality— the fact that we are all human beings despite differences in secondary characteristics such as the gender of our sexual object choices—is the basis ... [of] the assumption ... that tolerance can be achieved by making differences invisible, or at least secondary, in and through an essentialising, normalizing emphasis on sameness. (Sullivan 2003, 23)

The desire to focus on what is shared, and to conceal what is different, has been identified as a key component of the homonormative effort. This homonormative politics exists in direct conflict with the queer/rejectionist agenda that seeks to publicize difference and foster conflict with the forces of hegemonic, regimenting sexuality and gender. Thus the queer/rejectionist milieu is inherently opposed to the neoliberalism advocated as part of contemporary statecraft. Neoliberalism is linked to homonormativity in that they both seek to preserve "diversity" while failing to challenge inequitable power structures, as

identified in Johan Galtung's (1969) analysis of structural (or systemic) violence. This Galtungian structural violence is contained within the homonormative framework, as assimilationist forces attempt to carve out individualistic rights while retaining the systems that create inequity and divisiveness. This linkage between the neoliberal and the homonormative is explained as

> new neo-liberal sexual politics ... [what] might be termed the new homonormativity—it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a semobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (Duggan 2003 quoted in Halberstam 2005, 19)

Within the current analysis, the actualized representation of the homonormative desire in the world of the X-Men is the mutant cure. The suggestion of a mutant "cure," when viewed in contrast to racial struggles, becomes additionally explanatory. If one creates a loose comparison between the assimilationist views of Martin Luther King Jr. and the rejectionist views of the Black Panthers, one can position the mutant cure as akin to a pill that would "cure" being black (Earnest 2007, 230), something both King and the Panthers would have (obviously) opposed. This is perhaps why both Xavier's and Magneto's respective cohorts abhor the "cure," although Xavier appears more sympathetic to a mutant's right to choose it for themselves. Magneto, on the other hand, sees the cure as a state-crafted method of genocide, akin to Holocaust-era Nazism.

8. A Queered Theory of (Marxist-Feminist) Ideology

The postmodern queer theory's reexamination of ideological regulation (Warner 1999; Butler 2004; Duggan 2003; Halberstam 2005; Griffin 2007; Puar 2007) and normative maintenance has served to reinvigorate the aging discourse based in the Marxist (Marx and Engels 1846; Althusser 1970; Gramsci 1971) and neo-Marxist (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Hardt and Negri 2001) traditions. With this discursive maturity in mind, one can still gain great insight from reading ideology through the more orthodox Marxist lens. The process of ideological reproduction of authority, whereby systems of thought are maintained, discarded or proliferated, occurs at both the cultural and political levels, as cultural narratives of power inform political ideology. This "cultural industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2007) facilitates the standardized, uninterrupted reproduction of ruling-class ideology through the cultural realm. This leads to the articulation of state ideology via individualized cultural reproduction as "the mentality of the public, which allegedly and actually favors the system of the culture industry, is a part of the system, not an excuse for it" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2007, 96).

Antonio Gramsci (1971), in his writings on "cultural hegemony," draws on this tradition to argue that—despite the experience of diversity lived in the tolerant, pluralist, modern metropolis—a singular ruling-class ideology permeates culture and is thus integral in the shaping of all subsequent sociocultural systems of ideology. This singularity functions not as a monolith, but as textured, intertwined spheres of influence furthering a shared economic and social control agenda (Gramsci 1971, 257–58). Certainly diversity exists amongst the message generators of culture, but within the logic of the ISA any forces seen as challenges to state ideology will be marked as existing outside the products of a normative discourse. Consider, for example, the 2002 Michael Moore film *Bowling for Columbine,* which was distributed by United Artists, at the time owned by the private investment corporation Tracinda. Despite the film's linkages to these decidedly mainstream corporations, it was understood to be an "outsider," "activist" film and thus could be marked as other while financially profiting United Artists. The same could be said of the 2006 film *Fast Food*

Nation, based on a book of the same title. While this film was highly critical of the agribusiness industry, it was distributed by a mainstream company (Fox Searchlight Pictures) and understood as mobilizing critical commentary.

The cultural hegemony framework offered by Gramsci notes not only that ideology is coded as culture but also that it presents meaning as universally valid and uniformly applicable throughout (class) society, despite the fact that statecraft inherently provides disproportionate empowerment to the upper echelons of the existent hierarchy. Gramsci argues that social groupings must be organized to accommodate "the sphere of the economy [and] of production" (Gramsci and Buttigieg 2010, 342) and, thusly, the superstructure of ideological reproduction functions to create, transit and reify dogma that is beneficial to state and the accumulation of capital. Returning this to the queer subject, neo-Marxist theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write that systemic hegemony and its cultural manifestations function to recall a traditionalist ideal which in itself is fictitious and manufactured (2001, 148). The myth being perpetuated is that in some idealized past there existed a normatively sexed and gendered *good citizen*; one could call it a homonormative exemplary subject.

The regulatory power of the ideological discourse under examination relies on an understanding of the X-Men franchise as a culturally hegemonic product of the cultural industry of News Corp, which serves to reproduce the means of production, in this case an assimilated populace. News Corp is a political, communications, and cultural ISA and is therefore reproducing the ideological underpinnings of neoliberal statecraft. Althusser expands on this point, arguing for ISAs to necessarily reproduce not only their material conditions but the hegemonic ideologies that sustain their position (1970, 4–5). News Corp is thus a single (albeit hugely prominent) aspect of the three categories of ISAs in which it resides. Collectively, all of the ISAs serve to transmit, legitimize and sustain dominant, ruling-class ideology that ensures the continuation of state capitalism within a business-as-usual, normalized reality. Althusser argues that the ISAs, while appearing diverse, in effect function to reproduce a singular, dominant, ruling-class ideology.

The producers of the X-Men films were likely faced with difficult decisions about how to maintain a consistent ideological message while portraying dissident, antiassimilationist political perspectives through images often cloaked in sexy, dangerous and youthful overtones. In her discussion of the representation of 1960s racialism in the media, communication and film, Aniko Bodroghkozy discusses similar concerns:

> At the level of [media] production, how did television networks, executives, and producers respond to the challenges associated with the strategies for representing aspects of a youth revolt that were just too colorful and too dramatic to ignore, despite attendant threats posed by an entertainment medium trucking with oppositional politics? (2001, 4)

While no clear explanation emerges as to how and why a neoliberal multinational business such as the one that profits from the X-Men franchise would venture into the sale of a political message that is potentially oppositional to its existence, this may be a case of cooptation, wherein the media producer "co-opt[s] the language, slogans, dress, mannerisms and music of dissent" (Bodroghkozy 2001, 95). Such cooptation functions as a form of "revolutionary sell," which Bodroghkozy explains as an attempt to "disarm dissent while at the same time selling the product" (95). These manners of regulating and profiting from radical politics may constitute the chief motivating factor for the sale of such products, though in order to declare this as the case one must first explore the discourse as product and the capital linkages to these productions.

9. Conclusion: Faux Tolerance as a Mask for Systemic Cultural Violence

The state's reliance on mediated forms of protest and on manageable, stable, taxonomic identities maintains a normative reality that perpetuates "systemic violence" as described by Galtung (1969). While it remains outside the scope of this discussion to engage in a litany of manifestations of systemic violence targeting nonhetero, non-normatively gendered/sexed persons, one need only review legal codes (e.g., adoption laws, marriage laws, healthcare benefits, child custody, etc.) and the evidence of outright acts of murder to become aware of the systematized nature of the violence facing queers in the present day. Queer and trans citizens report discrimination in terms of employment, housing, and accessing healthcare, which is predicated upon a set of values that maintain a system of cultural violence definable as

> those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.... Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong. (Galtung 1990, 291)

This cultural violence normalizes, obscures and depoliticizes structural inequality and violence that facilitate subcultural murder and cause the elevated assault rates seen in queer and trans communities. Such inequity occurs through a variety of overt and clandestine channels. The self-labeling of the metropolis as a site of tolerant, multicultural liberalism makes it a difficult target to identify as a location of violence based on sexuality, gender or sex. Modern urban locales have constructed themselves as far removed from the rural, "backwards" locations of Ku Klux Klan rallies and lynchings of decades past. Despite this performativity of tolerance, our modern cities, towns and rural locales remain sites of invasive, systemic violence for many. The cultural, systemic and ideological violence (Žižek 2008, 10) of faux tolerance acts as the mask of neoliberalism, concealing the actualized violence against the non-normative while simultaneously presenting the status quo as one of tolerant peace (Žižek 1997).

The insurrectionary rejectionists of their day, the French Situationists of the 1950s and 60s, claimed that the function of the metropolis's design was to facilitate commerce and consumerism (Debord 1955, 1956; Kotanyi and Vaneigem [1961] 2006). If one accepts this as a stable position, then one is well suited to argue that the ideological function of the state is similar; namely, that the function of the state is to facilitate capitalism. The assimilationist, anti-insurrectionary tendencies of the state, as articulated through the Althusserian ISAs, are thus purposed to benefit the market. This incestuous cyclic relationship creates a feedback loop between the advocates of assimilation (e.g., News Corp and X-Men) and the mechanisms that aid in the entity's accumulation of capital. This brings one to the original assertion developed by Marx and retold by Althusser, namely capital's aim of "reproduc[ing] the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces" (Althusser 1970, 2).

To return to the presumptive underpinnings of this argument, power and ideology, as developed within the sphere of the mass media, have strict tenets and an inherently political agenda. The messages transmitted to the audience will reflect not only the internalized ideology of the message's creators but also the system that empowers them to be the creators of mass communication. In the case at hand, the statist allegiances of News Corp and its Fox subsidiaries reflect the state's desire to regulate deviant identities and methods of social protest. The state's desire for a socially normative yet visually pluralistic populace is integral in the maintenance of a neoliberal culture that superficially embraces tolerance while violently advancing systems of inequity, which empower some at the cost of delegitimizing others. The disciplining of queer bodies plays a central role in this process, as the nature of human sexuality is, in a sense, clandestine. Whereas race and

ethnicity are less able to be obscured from visual analysis, sexuality is subject to the "assimilationist bias" (Yoshino 1999) and, as such, an assimilated queer passing for straight fails to present an outward challenge to social hegemony.

If one is able to regiment the outward expression of identity, then the further containment of political strategy remains a central tenet of statecraft. While the disciplining of the body politic is often relegated to the private spheres of gender expression, sexualized performance, and so on, the delegitimizing of sociopolitical rejectionism is a public act of disciplinary power. This disciplinary power is enacted through violent repression of radical actors by the police and military, but, more insidiously, such tendencies are also discouraged through a villainous presentation by the mass media. The portrayal of Magneto's BOEM as a terrorist movement is intentional in the furtherance of the good protestor/bad protestor, good citizen/bad citizen dichotomy. Such framing fits into a larger statist narrative that plays reformist against revolutionary, integrationist against rejectionist, and those advocating assimilation against those fighting for liberation. This manner of statecraft targets legalistic, prointegration assimilationists who can be appeased by state-won victories—the passage of new legislation, the overturning of less progressive legislation—yet such achievements fall short of appeasing those interested in the revisioning of social relationships and power structures. The state will continue to delegitimize liberation-minded political rejectionists as long as it has a counterforce to present as the preferred alternative. In other words, until Charles Xavier stands atop his podium and *demands* mutant *liberation* and an end to the mutant/human binary, the state will continue to make piecemeal concessions of superficial appeasement while failing to challenge the hegemony that perpetuates cultural violence, systemic violence, and the lived experience of direct physical violence targeting those that resist assimilation.

Notes

1. "Statecraft" as a concept has a variety of definitions. Throughout this discussion, the concept is employed to account for the broad manifestations of governance, both domestic and international, and encompassing not only the regulation of institutions but also that of the economy, security forces, and interstate relations. A useful definition in this regard is offered by political theorist Jonathan H. Ping: "The concept of statecraft encapsulates and is dependent upon the state as an organizational entity. It explains the existence of the state and is often purported as the actions of the state.... The common contemporary interpretation of political economists holds [statecraft] to mean the action of a state. Such a definition could include domestic and international actions and include the development and implementation of policy" (2005, 13–14).

2. According to the HRC's website (www.hrc.org/the-hrc-story/corporate-partners/), as of 1 December 2011, the group's "national corporate partners" are: American Airlines, Citi, Microsoft, Nationwide Insurance & VPI Pet Insurance, Bank of America, Deloitte, Ernst & Young LLP, Lexus, Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, Prudential, Beaulieu Vineyard, BP, Caesars Entertainment, Chevron, Google, MGM Mirage, Nike, Chase, Cox Enterprises, Cunard, Dell, Goldman Sachs, IBM, Macy's, MetLife, Morgan Stanley, Orbitz, Paul Hastings, PwC, Replacements Ltd., Shell, Starbucks, TD Bank, and Tylenol PM.

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