The study of queer representation emerged as something of a niche interest in the 1970s, licensed and inspired by feminist criticism and the burgeoning gay liberation movement. Now, a rough half-century later, it has developed into a field in its own right, filling hundreds of books and dedicated journals. Debates about queer representation have also flourished beyond the academy, in magazines, in documentaries and online. What unites all these discussions is the shared assumption that representation matters. This is the notion that representations have implications for social life – that images and narratives, both fiction and non-fiction, offer the stories, symbols and myths through which we form a common culture, including what it means and how it feels to inhabit a sexed, gendered and sexually coded body.

The common account is that, until recently, queer representation was characterised by invisibility, which itself reflected silence, phobia, shame and the closet, reinforcing the marginality and negativity of queer experience. But this is only part of the story. This chapter provides an introduction to three contexts in which, for those who could detect them, queer sexualities appeared quite visibly in modern Western European and Anglophone representation. The first of these, nineteenth-century sexology, offered elaborate descriptions of persons we would today recognise as queer. Many of the most enduring characteristics of modern representations of queerness can be traced back to this historical moment. The second context, studio-era Hollywood from the 1920s to the 1960s, furnished those nineteenth-century ideas with an aural, visual and narrative language that vividly brought queerness to life, projected it onto the cinema screen and distributed it widely. In spite of the taboos and industrial prohibitions against the representation of ‘sex perversion’ during this period, Classical Hollywood, a chief myth manufacturer of the twentieth century, forged enduring stereotypes. These two ‘pre-visibility’ moments have been especially powerful influences not only on Western representations of queer sexualities, but across the globe. In the current ‘post-closet’ age of increased and diversified queer visibility, in which media production and consumption is dispersed, segmented and often transnational, the legacies of these earlier moments are nonetheless apparent. The closing section of this chapter provides some observations on contemporary representations of queer sexualities and concludes by reflecting on the question: where are we, now that we are so prolifically represented?
Sexual minorities have not always easily found their desires and cultures portrayed in mainstream media culture, or have found them characterised in partial, insufficient or negative ways. Studies of queer representation have hence been invested in the so-called ‘politics of representation’. The politics of representation is an approach concerned with the ideological meanings of images and their material effects. It recognises that contests over images have been a key site through which minorities struggle for a presence in social and cultural life. Richard Dyer, a pioneering figure in queer media studies, famously wrote that ‘how we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them [and] such seeing comes from representation’ (1993: 1).

Pre-history: the scientific invention of modern queerness

Although conventional wisdom suggests that queers were invisible in northern/Western media until recent decades, queer sexualities have in fact been a tremendous site of studious inquiry and anxious fascination in Anglo-European cultures throughout industrial modernity, especially since biomedicine first turned its attention to human sexuality in the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century witnessed accelerating efforts among medical and legal fraternities to displace the church as the official authority on the sexual behaviour of populations. Practices that once fell into the category of ‘sin’, such as sodomy, masturbation and cross-dressing, were increasingly defined as crimes or as inherited or acquired physical or mental abnormalities (Foucault, 1978). Sexual abnormalities were increasingly understood as congenital to the essence of a person – ‘implanted’ in the body. Under the lens of medicine, biology, psychiatry and the emerging social sciences of anthropology, criminology, sociology and later clinical psychoanalysis, human desires and intimate physical practices were commingled with ideas about character and physiognomy. These ‘sexual sciences’ scrutinised bodies and behaviours fastidiously: they imagined that objective knowledge could be obtained through forensic examination, and that universal standards of sexual functioning could be discerned through comparative, statistical population studies that categorised difference among bodies and measured distributive norms (Race, 2015).

In biomedicine and sexology, queer sexualities were a central obsession, although they had other names, such as ‘perversion’, ‘degeneration’, ‘hysteria’, ‘fetishism’, ‘masochism’ and ‘sadism’. Michel Foucault’s The History of Sexuality (1976; English translation 1978) describes the birth of ‘an entire sub-race’ of person-types that included intriguing proto-queer categories like the hysterical woman and the masturbating child, ‘zoophiles, zo-erasts, auto-monosexualists, gynecomasts’, ‘precocious little girls, ambiguous schoolboys, dubious servants and educators, cruel of maniacal husbands, solitary collectors, ramblers with bizarre impulses’ (Foucault, 1978: 40). What unified these myriad deviations was their divergence from procreative heterosexuality, the healthy sexual standard and emerging ‘statistical norm’. The history of modern queer representation thus begins with this oppositional model: heterosexuality as the norm and queer sexualities as physical and psychological aberrations.

Though an encyclopaedic cast of sexual protagonists appeared in this literature, the emphasis on the gender of object choice introduced a very specific criterion for how to represent queer sexualities, bringing the homosexual/heterosexual binary to the centre of the modern system of sexual representation (see Sedgwick, 1985; 1990). ‘Object choice’ refers to the object – usually a person – upon which an individual’s libidinous energy is concentrated. In a model based on two sexes, defining sexuality in these terms reduces it to two core species of sexual human: the homosexual and the heterosexual, both primarily
categorised by the gender of their erotic investments. There is of course a third possible category in this paradigm, bisexuality, in whose case object choice crosses genders, but becomes harder to represent. Eve Sedgwick has marvelled at the ‘rather amazing fact’ that despite the many ways in which sexualities could be represented (according to ‘certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types . . . certain frequency . . . relations of age or power’), gender of object choice emerged as the defining logic around which modern sexuality is organised (Sedgwick, 1990: 8–9).

Although sexology varied in its stories of sexual abnormality, by far the dominant account was of inversion, the precursor to modern homosexuality. The concept of inversion infused representations of same-sex desire with the idea of reversed or dysfunctional gender. In Krafft-Ebing’s (1840–1902) work, for example, the sexuality of the invert was explained as a mysterious reversal of their inner ‘nature’ relative to the outward expression of gender.

The inversion model has had far-reaching consequences for the representation of queer sexualities, particularly homosexuality. As Mowlabocus argues in an earlier chapter of this volume, the homosexual’s ability to pass as an ‘ordinary’ heterosexual has long been a potent source of social anxiety. The inversion model appeared to solve this problem: inverts became recognisable because they allegedly exhibited the gender characteristics of the ‘soul’ trapped within them. In Sexual Inversion (1897), Havelock Ellis (1859–1939) classified the female invert on a scale of inversion (effectively, how homosexual she was) that corresponded with her ‘scale of masculinity’ (how gender-inverted she was). Female inverts supposedly exhibited physical signs of masculinity, such as a masculine-appearing larynx; masculine habits, such as smoking and wearing men’s clothing; and masculine dispositions, such as aggression and hypersexuality (Ellis, 1897: 154). Making homosexuality ‘visible on the body’ through some outward sign of gender dysfunction became the sine qua non of modern representations of homosexuality.

Although sexuality may not in fact be legible on the body, sexology borrowed from the visual signifying systems of gender (and also class and race) to fix the pervert in the visual field (see Somerville, 2000). In this anxious attempt to ‘read’ sexuality from the body, queers were viewed ‘as bodies that might well bear a hallmark that could, and must, be read’ (Edelman, 1994: 6). As we shall see, this strategy is echoed throughout the history of mass-mediated images of queers.

Sexology is only one among many discourses in which modern queer representation was ‘invented’. Beyond the scientific world there is a large literary, legal and subcultural pre-history to the representation of modern queerness that itself could fill numerous volumes. To take a single but much discussed example: Oscar Wilde’s nineteenth-century Decadent novel The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) offered coded representations of queerness, and was especially prescient about the development of the modern, Western, urban male homosexual type. Dorian Gray popularised the stereotypical link between art, decadence and male homosexuality and other associations including narcissism, drug addiction, the divided self and the figures of the dandy and the aesthete (Cohen, 1993).

Modern queer representation has numerous historical genealogies. However, nineteenth-century scientific discourses gave birth not only to some of the most defining characteristics of queer sexualities but to the modern idea of sexuality itself. The way we understand sexuality today – as a core, organic property of the individual; a function of identity implanted in the body – emerged at this time. In sexology, sexuality became an essential, morphological function of the body, something innate that determines an individual’s desires, disposition, moral character and social life trajectory. And, although the gender of object choice became the key indicator of a small, primary pool of modern sexual categories
to which a person could belong (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual), it co-existed alongside non-sexual qualities. As well as physical abnormalities (e.g. overdeveloped libido among prostitutes or impotence among masturbators), the representation of queers also involved intellectual and emotional qualities (e.g. heightened artistic sensibility in male invertes).

By looking back to this historical moment we can see that ideas about queer sexualities were produced in the same gestures of elaboration as they were represented. In other words, what sexology presented as an explanatory process – describing and categorising abnormalities that supposedly already existed – was actually a constitutive one. That representation does things to sexuality, including ‘inventing’ it (and therefore, potentially, reinventing it), has been a key motivating idea in queer media studies, lending further weight to the assertion that representation matters. In sexology’s descriptions of the sexual, human representation comes to matter quite literally: sexology’s capacity to make authoritative claims about the meaning of different varieties of human flesh imbued the matter of bodies with meanings that then fixed those bodies in hierarchical relations of medical, biological and juridical difference to other bodies in what have become enduring social, moral and political relations of inequality. The anxious cultural imperative to read the signs of sexual difference from anatomical and psychological characteristics and behaviours – to locate the sexual other in the visual field – became the defining logic underwriting twentieth-century representations of queers.

**Screening the unspeakable**

Much like the idea that sexuality was repressed during Victorian times, the conventional wisdom is that queers were absent from or invisible in Classical Hollywood. In fact, queer sexualities were represented prolifically from the early days of silent film, albeit in coded forms. During the Studio Era, when American film production and distribution was dominated by five major studios (MGM, Paramount, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox and RKO), cinema was the foremost Western entertainment system and Hollywood was its dominant player. Its products appealed across gender, age and, to some extent, race, class and national divisions. Throughout the twentieth century, Hollywood emerged as the most significant cultural institution for representing queer sexualities.

Long before activists and academics declared that ‘representation matters’, film industry insiders and government regulators recognised that mass-consumed images could shape social attitudes. This was the principal assumption underpinning the establishment of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) Code. The Code set guidelines for a system of content self-regulation among the major studios from 1930 to 1968 that sought to protect social and moral norms surrounding sexual and intimate life. Its extensive catalogue of injunctions included scenes of lustful kissing, seduction, rape, adultery, white slavery, miscegenation, childhood sexuality and nudity. As for the portrayal of queerness, there was zero tolerance: ‘Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden.’ And yet, filmmakers found covert ways to include a bounty of queer images.

The prevailing means through which queerness materialised on screen were connotation and implication: iconographies, character-types and narrative subtexts that hinted at the presence of queer characters and desires without ever openly acknowledging that they existed. Film noir in its early cycles of the 1930s and 1940s, for example, was an especially capacious genre for the coded representation of sex perversion (see Dyer, 1977; 1993). These films expressed insecurities in American culture around shifting gender roles, the
post-war ‘crisis of the housewife’ and backlashes against the New Woman. Proximate to the breakdown in the romantic heterosexual couple were all manner of sex perverts, especially queer victims and villains, albeit represented in oblique and veiled ways.

Male noir villains often appeared within a luxury milieu (antiques, rich interiors, high culture) and acted in a gentlemanly manner, echoing the association of male homosexuality with aesthetes and aristocrats in Decadent literature. Their traits included bitchy wit, fastidious grooming and dress, art connoisseurship, jewellery and perfume (see Figure 9.1). This iconography was not necessarily identifiable as sexual per se, for it was forbidden to represent sex perversion explicitly. Queerness had to be indicated in other ways, through ‘gestures, expressions, stances, clothing, and even environments that bespeak gayness’, showing audiences what the ‘person’s person alone does not show’ (Dyer, 1993: 19). Hollywood queers were also frequently villains, recalling the inverts of Victorian sexology – sterile, predatory and unnatural.

Certain queer stereotypes came to dominate in Hollywood representation. By the 1920s the ‘pansy’ had emerged as the mainstay of coded cinematic images of male homosexuality. The pansy was ‘a flowery, fussy, effeminate soul given to limp wrists and mincing steps’ (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006: 24), associated with ‘feminine professions’ like fashion design, hairdressing and floristry. The pansy reinforced the alleged femininity of male homosexuality, strengthening the gender-inversion model of representing queer sexualities.

Likewise, female queers in film noir were often distinguishable through ‘manly’ styles of dress, shortish hair, an aggressive ‘hard’ voice and macho styles of comportment (Dyer, 1993: 58). Implied lesbian relationships were often associated with tyranny and violence,

Figure 9.1 The Pansy: Peter Lorre as noir villain Joel Cairo in The Maltese Falcon (1941).
servitude and working-class femininities. Sometimes these figures were explicitly ‘man haters’ or expressed suffragette or proto-second-wave feminist attitudes. In most cases, sexology’s inversion model applied: homosexualities were made visible through legible signifiers of gender dysfunction.

There were, however, representations that complicated the inversion model, particularly from the 1950s onwards. The publication of the Kinsey reports, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1938) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), suggested that homosexual experiences were far more prevalent than had been imagined. The implication of this – that human sexuality was a potentially more fluid continuum of desires, fantasies and behaviours rather than a straightforward homo/hetero binary – had unnerving implications for the representation of homosexuality on screen. For example, the ‘femme’, a feminine-acting woman who makes a lesbian object choice, became a figure of potent sexual anxiety during the Cold War (Corber, 2011). Unlike the butch, the femme was a particular kind of cultural menace because of her ability to pass as a ‘normal’ woman; her homosexuality was not legible through the signs of gender inversion. Cold War culture’s unease and fascination with the femme is evident in *All About Eve* (1950, dir: Joseph L. Mankiewicz), in which Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter) is able to perform conventional femininity, masking a (lesbian) butchness that only reveals itself at certain moments in the film. *All About Eve* registers queer panic through the trope of imitation: Eve’s usurpation of the theatrical fame of Margo Channing (Bette Davis) is a kind of pathological copying, ‘a perverse form of reproduction’ (Corber, 2011: 38; see Figure 9.2).

Sedgwick (1990) has traced the long history of the unspeakability of homosexuality as a means of representing queerness through silences, unspoken implications and literal absences. The representation of queerness through connotation in Code-era cinema reflects the functioning of the modern closet of queer desire more broadly. A good example is the

![Figure 9.2](image-url)
insinuation of queer desire in characters that remained literally off screen. In Rebecca (1940, dir: Alfred Hitchcock), for example, the eponymous first wife haunts the film in physical traces and recollections that evoke her monstrous, unnatural sexuality. We discover that Rebecca was childless and an adulterer who ‘despised all men’, was wild and boisterous, and possibly had an affair with her maid, Mrs Danvers, a Gothic working-class butch ‘dyke type’ (see Figure 9.3). This is quite the catalogue of queer horrors: inversion, misandry, monstrosity, haunting, non-marital sex, excessive and unnatural (that is, non-reproductive) female sexuality; and yet, abiding by Production Code rules, sex perversion is never explicitly named.

For feminist and queer film critics, the most objectionable of Classic Hollywood’s tendencies was its long history of signifying queer desire via the iconography of horror and murder, powerfully yoking queer sexualities to psychopathology, violence and monstrosity (see Wood 1995; 2002). Films featuring vampires had frequent undertones of lesbian and bisexual powers of seduction. Violent or psychotic characters often invoked androgyny or disorders of gender.

Hitchcock did perhaps more than any other director to strengthen this cinematic correlation between queer sexualities and homicidal psychopathy. Psycho’s (1960, dir: Alfred Hitchcock) Norman Bates (see Figure 9.4) infamously brought together transvestism and psychosis under the aegis of a pathological, melancholic over-identification with the mother: a pop-Freudian sexual disorder is revealed to be the source of the film’s terrifying violence against women. The young murderers of Rope (1948, dir: Alfred Hitchcock), meanwhile, are a coded study in same-sex love and the perverse, violent implications of homosexual neurosis (Wood, 1995: 208).

First-wave feminist and queer-media scholars tended to view Hollywood’s archive of negative images as queerphobic stereotypes that reinforced perceptions of queerness as
pathological, criminal and abject. On the deplorable fate of queer sexualities, film endings were inevitably resolved: desire among men was melancholic, fleeting or would end violently; the sexually excessive femme fatale or inverted woman is frequently killed or kills herself. As figures of pity, ridicule or villainy, queers tended to be disposable; as Tom Waugh writes, they 'drop off like flies, with clockwork predictability, at the service of dramatic expediency and the sexual anxiety of the dominant culture' (2000: 19).

However, these same images have also been a source of pleasure, excitement and identification for some viewers. Historically, queer audiences have had to activate creative forms of identification and interpretation, including the re-appropriation of themes, characters, narratives and biographies, in ways that read between or beyond the lines of preferred heteronormative meanings or search for reparative meanings in unhappy resolutions. For example, the female vampire is monstrous, but, like the femme fatale, she is beguiling ‘precisely’, as Barbara Creed argues, because she threatens ‘to undermine the formal and highly symbolic relations of men and women essential to the continuation of patriarchal society’ (1993: 60). Although the pansy is a potentially misogynist and homophobic figure, he has also been celebrated as an acknowledgment that homosexuality existed and as an alternative to the monolithic construction of normative masculinity as ‘straight-acting’. Many of the most grotesque queer stereotypes have enjoyed an afterlife well into the era of visibility in affectionate and camp reincarnations that have sought to reframe ‘negative images’ for their critical and pleasurable meanings (Hanson, 1999).
The era of queer visibility

The story of the coming-out of queer representation is another complex narrative too long and meandering to enumerate here in detail (see Gross, 2001), but we can identify some key developments. The 'rise to visibility' is neither a straightforward narrative of progress, nor does it apply evenly across different constituencies of queers. Moreover, with increased visibility comes the potential for enhanced surveillance, and trends in contemporary representation tend to favour what have been called 'homonormative' visions of queer sexualities and lives, perhaps at the expense of other, potentially queerer, possibilities.

The Code began to wane in the 1960s and was amended in 1961 so that certain sexual aberrations could be openly acknowledged but had to be handled with discretion. Films could be open about homosexuals, but narratives tended to depict them as cases of pity and self-loathing. In *The Children's Hour* (1961, dir: William Wyler), *The Killing of Sister George* (1968, dir: Robert Aldrich) and *The Boys in the Band* (1970, dir: William Friedkin), for example, same-sex desires and queer characters were central to the plot, but were portrayed as a 'social problem'.

Influential waves of scholarship from the 1970s onwards, including Dyer's *Gays and Film* (1977) and Vitto Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* (1981), charged mainstream cinema with a history of homophobia, calling for 'greater accuracy' in the representation of lesbians and gays. These emerged alongside 1970s affirmation politics, which sought to replace shame with pride and a demand for positive images to replace the history of negative ones. The positive-images agenda has since become a criterion informing the entire cultural enterprise of producing and consuming images of queers: Are they positive or negative? Are they accurate representations or stereotypes? The term 'positive images', as Dyer explains, implies presence, positivity and accuracy: 'thereness, insisting on the fact of our existence; goodness, asserting our worth and that of our life-styles; and realness, showing what we were in fact like' (1990: 274–275). 'Thereness' and 'goodness', however, are often at odds with 'realness' because shame, turmoil and marginalisation are still part of many queer lives. Moreover, 'positive images' has tended to translate to representations of white gay men and lesbians. Queers of colour, trans* and intersex people, kink and BDSM communities, bisexuals and polyamorists remained excluded from mainstream representation.

It was during the 1990s that positive images of queers really began to proliferate in Western popular culture. The 1980s had witnessed a backlash accompanying the sex panics associated with HIV/AIDS. And yet, paradoxically, HIV/AIDS ushered in new waves of queer visibility, especially in terms of images of gay men. Increasingly during the 1990s, uncloseted gay male characters began appearing in box-office hits such as *Philadelphia* (1993, dir: Jonathan Demme) and *The Birdcage* (1996, dir: Mike Nichols), and Hollywood manufactured the gay man/straight woman 'buddy' sub-genre of romantic comedy in films like *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997, dir: P.J. Hogan; see Figure 9.5) and *The Object of My Affection* (1998, dir: Nicholas Hytner). The 1990s also saw the emergence of the 'New Queer Cinema', an underground movement that drew energy from queer politics, theory and activism, and which offered alternatives to mainstream gay and lesbian representation (see Rich, 1992). In popular film and TV, however, the post-AIDS rebranding of queerness was dominated by simplistically envisioned, positive images of 'the good gay man' and 'the good lesbian parent'. These dignified queers distracted audiences from the threat of bisexual fluidity (e.g. *Basic Instinct*, 1992, dir: Paul Verhoeven), the hedonism and promiscuity of gay male subcultures (e.g. *Cruising* 1980, dir: William Friedkin), HIV/AIDS and the gender trouble posed by trans identities, butch lesbians and drag queens (*Boys Don’t Cry*, 1999,
Across mainstream entertainment cultures in the 1990s, queerness became something of a fashionable pop-culture trend; however, it was circumscribed, commercially manufactured and dominated by friendly, white, gay men.

Gay and lesbian characters populating the Hollywood and primetime landscape tended to be chastely single or in monogamous but sexually tepid relationships. Although queer characters became a staple of American dramas and situation comedies in shows such as *NYPD Blue* (1993–2005), *Chicago Hope* (1994–2000), *Roseanne* (1988–1997) and *Friends* (1994–2004), and were central protagonists in *Ellen* (1994–1998) and *Dawson’s Creek* (1998–2003), queer sex was rarely depicted. Advertisers, production executives and audiences remained cagey about queer sex, particularly on broadcast television, the medium widely fetishised as the ultimate conferrer of visibility. Queer characters on TV tended to be nestled within the narrative and stylistic contexts of aspirational bourgeois culture, high-end consumer lifestyle practices, cultural, financial and taste capital and the sexual dignity amassed through proximities to monogamy, family, whiteness and material acquisition (see Sender, 2003). More than 50 per cent of American TV’s queer characters in the 1990s were white (Becker, 2006: 180).

What has become increasingly clear is that the history of queer representation has a long and productive relationship with the commercial imperatives of media producers. Even as far back as 1920s Hollywood, films featuring mannish women and pansies alongside underworld violence and prostitution drew on a frisson of sexual transgression that titillated viewers. The more recent boom in queer representation was influenced by the mainstreaming of GLBTQ rights and multiculturalism; however, *commercial imperatives* have been a robust driving factor. In the highly competitive landscape of digital TV production in the new millennium, ‘edgy’ or ‘groundbreaking’ queer content has proven extremely marketable to both hip, educated audiences and the smaller but no less prized upscale lesbian and gay ‘pink’ market. Cable TV companies in particular have offered more detailed, explicit portrayals of queer life, partly because the aura of titillation and risqué sex that surrounds queer sexualities is highly marketable. So, while TV productions such as the iterations of *Queer as Folk* (1999; 2000–2005) presented by Channel 4 (UK) and Showtime (US) and Showtime’s *The L Word* (2004–2009) have broken new representational ground,
they have also cashed in on queerness as a commodity, part of a global market in queer aesthetics and storytelling.

This imbrication of queer representation and market forces reached its apotheosis in lifestyle makeover show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Bravo, 2003–2007), where queers are represented as ideal figures of neoliberal, consumer citizenship. The lifestyle specialists of *Queer Eye* are avatars of design, lifestyle and consumer knowledge and know-how. Their cultural and aesthetic knowledge is put to work in the self-fashioning of heterosexual men and the micro-management of heterosexual romance. Like their nineteenth-century and Classical Hollywood counterparts, the homosexuality of these figures is articulated through (and partially veiled by) an appreciation of aesthetic forms. The intersection of cultural capital and queerness makes these gays intelligible and a source of value in the world of neoliberal economics. However, queer desire is reduced to taste and style. In other words: no sex.

The production and reception of sexual difference in mainstream popular culture is one that now appears to swing, paradoxically, between moments of transgression and banal normality. Ron Becker calls this ambivalence ‘straight panic’. This, he explains, ‘describes what happens when heterosexual men and women, still insecure about the boundary between gay and straight, confront an increasingly accepted homosexuality’ (2006: 23). As a concept, straight panic helps to explain the mixed reception of images of queerness in contemporary popular culture. In this climate, images of homosexuality can be either or both scandalous sexual spectacles and mundane artefacts of commodity culture; both menacingly queer and practically normal at the same time.

These paradoxes of the current ‘post-closet’ moment of queer visibility are evident in the critical response to HBO’s recent series *Looking* (2014–2015) (see Figure 9.6). Rich Juzwiak (2014) wrote that ‘in *Looking*, gay men get to be boring on TV at last. They get to look for love in barely different ways than straight people’. Some consider this a progressive representation for its *un*remarkableness – its normality. On the other hand, Brian Lowder called *Looking* ‘a PSA for how the mainstream increasingly expects gayness to look – butch enough, politically apathetic, generally boring’. Here, mainstream images are potentially bland, abandoning diversity and the radical destabilisation of normative categories of sexuality that queer representation has the potential to pose.

![Figure 9.6](image-url)  
Richie (Raúl Castillo) and Patrick (Jonathan Groff) being ‘normal’ and ‘boring’ in *Looking*. 

101
If queer sexualities have consistently posed problems for representation, it seems as if the contemporary solution to those problems is the bourgeois marriage plot. The same-sex marriage movements that have swept through parts of the globe over the past decade reflect a trend that has been unfolding on popular screens for some time now: neoliberalism and marriage have offered comfortable space to assuage the anxieties surrounding queer representation. And yet, while certain queer sexualities now enjoy widespread, positive-image representation, others continue to remain marginal or subcultural – dangerous, anachronistic, unhappy pathologies or near-invisibilities.

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