

Closeted Channels: Trends of Sexual-Minority Characters on Primetime Television

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Introduction

Broadcast television wields a tremendous amount of power in America. The amount of time that an average American sits in front of a screen is staggering. For 2013, Nielsen reported that Americans watch an average of 34 hours of live TV a week and an additional 3 to 4 hours of streamed or home-recorded programming. The average time that an American youth spends in school is 900 hours a year; the average time that an American youth spends in front of television screen a year is 1200 hours. As young adults develop their ideas about cultural and social norms, they turn to television, whose implicit and explicit messages eventually become internalized after so many hours of exposure.

Weststrate and McLean point to mainstream, popular narrative as a tool that young adults use to develop their own personal narratives. Those who can find their voice identify with a position of cultural power. But if individuals are unable to match their voice or identify with the mainstream narrative, then those individuals would be silenced. Their voice is absent from the public, which makes it difficult for them to develop their own voices or to have others understand these marginalized voices. Weststrate and McLean report on the absence of homosexual voices in the mainstream in their report *The Rise and Fall of Gay*, reasoning that “personal disclosure is critical in this model of narrative identity development because it can facilitate the development of a coherent narrative identity. Conversely, when one's voice is given limited air-time, or is silenced, the opportunities for personal identity development may be limited”. They found that because homosexual narratives were in opposition to

the mainstream narrative, they were left off of television. The only time that homosexual stories were able to find their way onto television was when they fit within the stereotypes and roles that were expected of them.

Steven Capsuto wrote in his book *Alternate Channels* about his time volunteering with the Gay & Lesbian Peer Counseling of Philadelphia in 1987. He recounts that “many of the phone-in clients were gay or bisexual teenagers who had internalized so much of society’s prejudice that they were contemplating suicide. ‘What do you think gay people are like?’, we would ask them. Their invariable response: ‘I only know what I see on TV’” .At that time images of homosexuality linked to AIDS were the prevalent homosexual narratives in network dramas. A common theme was to show homosexuals languishing with AIDS in hospital rooms. The concept of the “innocent victim” was developed to describe heterosexual individuals who contracted AIDS from transfusions, which subvertly described homosexuals as “guilty” or deserving of the disease. The mainstream narrative was accusatory and unsympathetic to homosexuals.

Gay author and activist Allen Young echoed Capsuto’s recollection in his article “Out of the Closets, Into the Streets”. On his own childhood and sexual development, Young remarked “[In the 1950s, I was] overwhelmed with a sense of my abnormality; I had no idea there were millions of other teenagers going through the very same thing. Everywhere, in the newspapers and magazines, on radio and TV, in the movies, there wasn’t the slightest affirmation of homosexuality”.

Capsuto argues that developing his own homosexual identity in the 1950s and 1960s was different from those of people growing up gay in the 1980s and 1990s. Weststrate and McLean point to a strong division between these two generations of sexual minorities that is caused by the development of the media and technology as well as several cultural and political factors. Youths who are struggling with developing their identities no longer have polarizing events like the Stonewall Riots of 1969. These were major events that homosexuals could rally behind. It unified the community under. Instead, younger groups report that their self-defining events come from personal memories and that a variety of those self-defining events come together to form the identity.

But for both the young and the old groups, media and television played an important role in informing their development. Prior to the Stonewall Riots, homosexuals were often forced to live secret lives. During the McCarthy hearings, homosexuals were listed with communists and anarchists as potential threats to America. A report from Under Secretary of State James Webb in 1950 had stated, "It is generally believed that those who engage in overt acts of perversion lack the emotional stability of normal persons" (Edsall). Homosexuals were publicly humiliated, physically harassed, fired, jailed, or institutionalized in mental hospitals.

When homosexuality was absent from television, homosexual viewers were forced to translate heterosexual storylines into something they could relate to. Alternatively, homosexual viewers would have to read homosexuality onto sexually indistinct characters. In her book *Ransacking the Closet*, lesbian humorist Yvonne

Zipter remarked that “there simply were no lesbians on TV. Therefore, we had to make them up: Betty and Wilma, Lucy and Ethel, Alice from *The Brady Bunch*. Obviously, judging from the above cast of characters, we were a desperate people” . Homosexuals needed to find their voice wherever they could in order to inform their personal narrative.

Following the Stonewall Riots, homosexuality pushed its way onto network television. The 1970s provided a few positive instances of homosexuality on television and included the first central gay character in the quirky hit series *Soap*. But that was overwhelmed by negative portrayals. In the fall television season of 1974, only six prime-time shows portrayed homosexual characters. Every one of those depictions showed a homosexual character as a rapist, child molester, or murderer.

One of those shows is “Flowers of Evil”, a controversial episode of NBC’s *Police Woman*. The program featured three lesbians who robbed and murdered elderly victims. The episode was based on a real case; in fact, the first draft was written by the lead investigator on that case. When the gay community and budding task forces lashed out against the depictions of murderous lesbians, NBC tried to defend itself and argued that “we also have shows where the criminals are straight” (Harris). The issue with *Police Woman*, however, wasn’t that it portrayed lesbian criminals. The issue was that it portrayed lesbians as criminals in the absence of positive lesbian portrayals. After the fallout from the show, networks started to be more mindful of gay activist groups and began consulting activist groups while writing gay plotlines.

The current homosexual narrative on television is much broader and more diverse than ever before. Television producers like Shonda Rhimes (*Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal*) and Ryan Murphy (*Glee*, *The Normal Heart*) have developed shows on major networks with clear agendas to increase homosexual representation. Rhimes was asked about the number of gay characters on her programs, which she also writes, and she responded “because I believe that everyone should get to see themselves reflected on TV” (Silverstein). However, many programs that include homosexual narratives and plotlines still fall short in their attempt to reflect the homosexual community. Remnants of the stereotypically feminine gay men of the 1980s and the lipstick lesbians of the 1990s are still echoed in current television.

This paper analyzes current trends and themes in homosexual character development by examining three primary programs. These programs are *Glee*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Modern Family*. The programs feature lead homosexual characters, are on major broadcast networks, have high ratings in the key 18-49 demographic, and have received recognition for quality of their content. These characteristics are important to this study for a few reasons. Appearances on major broadcast networks indicate that the program is widely available to Americans. While Showtime made strides with *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word*, fewer people have access to premium networks. Since this study is examining what messages are subject for internalization by the general public, programs on broadcast networks are the focus. Additionally, these programs are successful on broadcast networks. They have all had at least five seasons and are already in syndication.

Additional programs were examined as well to supplement these primary shows. *Orange is the New Black* and *The New Normal* both feature lead homosexual characters and offer different messages and plots than the primary shows. *Orange is the New Black* was not on broadcast television, so aspects of the show unique to premium networks (like greater permissions towards sex and nudity) were not compared. However other aspects, such as race, class, sexual identity, gender identity, and relationship roles of characters were used. *The New Normal* did air on broadcast but lasted only one season, and so its narratives were not a rich enough text for this study. However, it still was able to contribute in terms of character choices and development.

Chapter 1: Homosexuality in the 1980s - Exception, Provocation, and AIDS

Introduction

Homosexuality in the 1980s was the very definition of queer: it was an oddity, a rare exception to the rule, and ultimately some strange defect that should be reacted to with shame and embarrassment. Homosexual characters were often the subject of episodes of popular shows, but their appearance on primetime was for the purpose of scrutiny. The main characters would be introduced to a gay character, then would judge and discuss the homosexual lifestyle. The dialogue wasn't entirely negative; usually a more liberal character would defend homosexuality to his or her conservative friends. But no progress would ever be made. Instead of acceptance or understanding, tolerance would be begrudgingly offered as a consolation prize.

Representation was very limited. White, privileged, gay men were chosen to speak on behalf of all of homosexuality. These men were further assigned to roles stereotypically associated with homosexuality. Hairdressers, tailors, and interior designers often were gay men whose purpose was to provide limp-wristed humor. They did little to impact or advance the story, and their inclusion felt forced. One of the first programs to include a gay lead was *Love, Sidney*, which aired on NBC for two seasons from 1981 to 1983. The title character, Sidney, was a gay man who has a single mother and her daughter move in with him in Manhattan. The series was a continuation of a television movie called *Sidney Shorr: A Girl's Best Friend*. While Sidney was the leading role, however, his sexuality was left on the sidelines. His

homosexuality was mentioned briefly in the pilot episode, but was absent from the remainder of the series.

Gay characters in the 1980s were seen as an exception, a provocation, or as a vessel for AIDS. As an exception, their “otherness” was examined. Lines were drawn between gay characters and straight characters, with little room for similarities to bridge the two. In this depiction, straight characters provided commentary on the homosexual lifestyle from afar. Occasionally, a gay character would do something so impactful that straight characters felt they had no choice but to engage them. As a provocation, gay characters were aggressors who threatened America’s morality and family structure. These were often recurring characters whom the main characters had to confront time and time again. Finally, the mid-decade ushered AIDS into the forefront of discussion where gay characters were the culprits responsible for spreading the disease to the heterosexual “innocent victims”.

The Fight for Representation and “Gay Power, Gay Politics”

Homosexuals were prepared to fight for their right to be properly represented by the 1980s. In the early 1970s, organizations like the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) and the Gay Men Task Force (GMTF) were formed as non-profit, pro-LGBT organizations. They frequently gave their input to television studios regarding their programs and representation of homosexuals, solicited or not. By 1980, these organizations and similar ones forming throughout the country had figured out that the major route for homosexual representation was through the government. Despite

Reagan's ultra-conservative cabinet taking office after the 1980 presidential election, many liberal cities were electing mayors who attributed their election to securing the swing vote provided by the homosexual community. The Democratic National Convention in 1980 was evidence for the emergence of homosexual activism in politics. The convention featured seventy-seven openly gay or lesbian delegates, compared to only four present at the 1976 convention (*Nightline*). Gay activists contributed heavily to gay political action committees. Impressed with the impact that homosexuals were having on the political landscape, CBS sent a documentary crew to interview and film homosexual involvement in San Francisco after the 1979 mayoral election.

CBS's presence could not have been more poorly timed. Around the same time, Dan White received lenient sentencing after assassinating Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man to serve public office in California, and Mayor George Moscone. White was sentenced with voluntary manslaughter instead of the first-degree murder charges that many thought he deserved. White was also a former police officer, which weakened the already-tenuous relationship between homosexuals and police officers in San Francisco. Peaceful protests turned into riots, and the police responded to the violence with more violence. Police aggressively attacked rioting and non-rioting homosexuals on the streets of the Castro. All of this informed CBS as they edited together their documentary, "Gay Power, Gay Politics".

"Gay Power, Gay Politics" did not focus strictly on the political activism of homosexuals in California. Instead, it discredited the political movements by

comparing them with images of gay sexual activity. A press release from CBS prior to its release stated that the documentary “demonstrates how gays are attacking traditional values and frightening homosexuals” (*Emergence of Homosexual Power Chronicled in CBS Reports*). Homosexual activists, political meetings, and organizations were edited together with images of Gay Pride parades featuring naked men, with images from a club that offered sadomasochistic sexual encounters to gay patrons, and interviews with children who had witnessed public homosexual sex.

The program caused the NGTF to leap into action, and file a complaint with the National News Council, which found that CBS had violated journalistic ethics and provided misleading information (*Emergence of Homosexual Power Chronicled in CBS Reports*). Despite these findings however, “Gay Politics, Gay Power” set the tone for the 1980s. Homosexuals would be slandered against to use to promote a conservative agenda, and activist groups would be forced to step up to defend homosexuality.

Homosexuality as Exception

Sexual-minority characters were defined in the 1980s by what made them different from heterosexual characters. Chiefly it's sexuality that separates the two groups, but other things were pointed out to drive the groups apart. *Cheers*, which ran nearly the entire decade and enjoyed a top ten ranking during 8 of its 11 seasons, discussed a gay character in its first season. In “The Boys in the Bar”, the conservative Norm scoffs to the group about a few new men who ordered “light beers”. Norm

boasts about his ability to “spot a gay a mile away”, listing characteristics like clothing and speech and differing characteristics. Homosexuals were the Other, and television would not let them forget it.

In “The Boys in the Bar”, Sam concurrently deals with a old friend of his from college who has recently come out of the closet. Sam reflected on his time with his friend, and recalled his friend’s sexual conquests. By the end of the episode, Sam has come to terms with his friend’s choice. However, the tone of the episode leans heavily on the notion that it was Sam’s friend’s “choice” to be gay. Sam could no longer see his friend the same way as before he came out, as though knowing that his friend changed sexuality had changed other aspects of his life as well. Even though this plot line was more accepting of homosexuality than Norm’s, Sam still made it clear that homosexuals were different from heterosexuals, which prevented Sam from maintaining the same level of friendship he used to have.

In another sitcom *Kate and Allie*, the eponymous characters share an apartment together in New York. The two are both straight but lie to their landlady about being gay in order to have lower rent, not unlike the popular 1970s comedy *Three’s Company*. The landlady happens also to be a lesbian, and takes the couple under her wing to help them come out. The episode follows Kate and Allie’s attempt to conceal their heterosexuality and serves as a good reversal of closeted behavior. However, the depictions of homosexuality are rooted in stereotype. The show only reinforces the idea that there is a clear distinction between the heterosexual and homosexual community. By the end of the episode, Kate and Allie confess and are forgiven by

their landlady. Despite her potential to be a recurring character, the landlady is never seen again.

NBC's *St. Elsewhere* was quite critical of homosexuals. In the episode "Release", resident surgeon Doctor Mark Craig is visited by an old friend Bob Overland from college. Dr. Craig's initial joy turns into abject horror when he discovers the reason for his friend's appearance to get a sex-change operation. As soon as Doctor Craig finds out that Bob is there for transsexual surgery he goes on a warpath to stop the surgery from happening. He talks to other doctors, Bob's wife, and eventually confronts Bob himself. Many characters supported Bob's decision. but Doctor Craig remains unconvinced and unsupportive through the very end of the episode. The language in the episode is especially critical. Doctor Craig tells Bob that he is going to "destroy himself". Craig tells Bob's wife that "it's not right" and that he will "get him the best psychiatrist". Doctor Craig accuses Bob of betrayal and after learning that Bob had been dealing with these issues even back when they were roommates, Craig says "every look, every sentence now has a different meaning". The episode ends with Craig talking with two other doctors about the issue and Craig stating that there needs to be a "return to the more traditional male-female roles". The other two doctors laugh it off, and no one learns any big moral lesson about acceptance or tolerance. The resolution instead was simply to bottle up the disapproval and disdain.

St. Elsewhere featured a lesbian guest character as Dr. Chris Holt later in the series. Dr. Holt becomes fast friends with series regular Dr. Annie Cavanero. The

original plan for the two was to explore what would happen if Cavanero were to fall for Dr. Holt. But Cynthia Sikes, who played Cavanero on the show, refused to act in that subplot. Dr. Holt simply comes out as a lesbian, and Cavanero instead responds with “what you do is perverted. Sex between two women is unnatural...I was taught women shouldn’t have those feelings and if you do it’s wrong. It’s just wrong”. While Cavanero issues an apology later in the episode, Dr. Holt disappeared from the show after the episode.

Sometimes characters on television weren’t satisfied with just rejecting homosexual characters; they wanted to “fix” them. The early decade brought an episode of *Archie Bunker’s Place* where Archie tries to set up gay waiter Fred with a woman. The episode is titled “Archie Fixes Fred Up”, which has the dual meaning of Fred being paired with a date and the more troubling denotation of Fred possessing a problem in need a being fixed. The attitude and the language reflect *Cheers*’s position that homosexuality is a choice; a logical progression means that if it’s a choice, the character can simply choose again. *Hotel* also featured a storyline where a concerned hotel patron sets his son up with a female prostitute in order to fix his homosexuality, and *Dynasty* lead Blake Carrington told his often-homosexual son repeatedly to “straighten up”.

Homosexuality as Provocation

Cop shows were popular areas for homosexual characters. *Hill Street Blues* had two through the lesbian cop, Kate McBride, and gay informant, Eddie Gregg. Kate

was a recurring character until she came out as a lesbian after she was accused of harassing a female officer. She appeared briefly for two more episodes but her storylines never developed her any further. Eddie was a much more common character, who was outwardly gay from the start. Eddie became a police informant while working as a male prostitute, and his connection with the department grew stronger after he sought their help in catching the murderer of his ex-lover. However, Eddie's characterization wasn't the most positive: he was a poor, shifty prostitute, eventually dying of AIDS. *L.A. Law* had a few episodes that featured homosexual characters as well. *Cagney & Lacey* was a different situation. This buddy drama had two women fighting the system as partners. Their connection was one of friendship and was imbued with strong feminist vibes that presented the characters as strong and capable officers instead of sex objects or damsels-in-distress. But the producers feared that the lead characters implied too much homosexuality to have gay-themed scripts. *Cagney & Lacey* was shown on CBS, which had become notorious for cutting shows that received low ratings despite praise from critics. The show had an "image problem", which *TV Guide* summed up with "we perceived them [Cagney and Lacey] as dykes" (Swertlow).

When shows have recurring gay characters, the main characters have a chance to interact and develop alongside the constant interaction with homosexuals. The popular show *Dynasty* featured the (sometimes) homosexual Steven Carrington, son of main character Blake Carrington. Steven's homosexuality has to be clarified because even though he comes out as gay, he had several relationships with women, including

a marriage to his stepmother's niece. Despite his continuous appearance on the show, Steven didn't live up to the potential of being one of the first gay main characters on television.

The producers of *Dynasty* always wanted Steven to be a strong gay character. Despite his relationships with women, he was never seen as bisexual. Rather, he was just a gay character who sometimes sleeps with women. In 1984, when Steven remained in his marriage with Sammy Jo, the producers assured that "Steven Carrington has not gone straight. He was, is, and always will be gay" (Shister). However, Steven didn't serve as the role model of homosexuality that he was intended to be. Despite early assertions to be proud of his sexuality to his anti-gay father, Steven was simply too passive in regards to his homosexuality. He found himself in several relationships with women, not because they capable of manipulating a gay man to fall in love with them, but because Steven didn't have the development and strength of a gay character to refuse such relationships. He was described as too "bland to sustain viewers' attentions" (Tropiano) and felt very much like a cookie-cutter straight character who just happened to be gay.

By the end of the show's run, Steven's relationship with Luke finally appeared to be providing the gay storyline the show always wanted. But the end of the season found the pair at a wedding in the fictional land of Moldavia, and after terrorists burst in to attack the groom, Luke was one of the only casualties. Steven's heterosexual interests had the fortune of living on. Steven's journey as a character eventually ended in a good spot, going "from tortured closet case, to 'cured' heterosexual husband, and

finally to a vague approximation of gay and proud” (Walter). Steven never became the well-rounded character he could have been though, and Tropiano attributes Steven’s anemic personality to pressure from the religious right and activist groups.

One of the few recurring gay characters who was well developed came from NBC’s sitcom *Sara*. Dennis is a likable gay attorney, who admittedly possesses the stereotyped love for clothing and fashion. But what makes Dennis an interesting character is that unlike Steven, Dennis was a recurring gay character who was always attracted to men, and never seen dating women. Dennis never had the chance to pursue a relationship with any men though. The show was unfortunately aired opposite *Dynasty*, which was the most popular show at the time. *Sara* ran for only six months before being canceled, but was rerun by NBC later in the decade during primetime.

Homosexuality and the AIDS Epidemic

After its discovery in 1983, AIDS was used in television as the “gay disease”. One of the first shows to address the disease was *St. Elsewhere*, which featured a politician who checks in and has AIDS. The politician attempts to defend his heterosexuality, but later reveals that he had recently had sexual encounters with men. Medical dramas were the prime platform for showing AIDS, since hospitals were where homosexual men would be wheeled in before they languished and died of the disease. *Trapper John, M.D.* brought in an ex-boyfriend to series regular Nurse Libby. The boyfriend is now gay and suffering with AIDS. The doctors discuss homosexuality and AIDS until the boyfriend passes away at the end of the episode.

These types of episodes were typically seen as “message” scripts, which ended with morals like “be nice to people with AIDS” and “protect yourself from AIDS”. Medical shows were able to organically provide information about the contraction of AIDS, such as the importance of condoms during sex and that AIDS can’t be contracted simply by touching someone who has it.

AIDS was launched into the news circuit however when a young boy from Kokomo, Indiana was found with the disease. Ryan White was expelled from his school after teachers and students refused to be around him for fear of contracting AIDS. A hemophiliac, Ryan got the disease after a blood transfusion. The disease was further legitimized to the world after heterosexual Hollywood star Rock Hudson publicly admitted he had AIDS. Suddenly, AIDS was no longer just a “gay disease”, and TV shows started to have non-homosexual characters with AIDS.

Hotel’s episode “Scapegoats” features a homophobic bartender named Frank who ironically contracts AIDS. Suddenly he has to deal with suspicions from his wife that he’s sleeping with other men, and his son assumes that his father is an IV drug user. Frank, who is also a hemophiliac, discovers he contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion in the end. Hemophilia and AIDS were so closely related that *21 Jump Street* ran an episode entitled “The Big Disease with the Little Name” where a high school student contracts AIDS. The student claims that he contracted the disease from a contaminated blood transfusion, but reveals his homosexuality in the end when the team discovers that the boy is not a hemophiliac.

The realization that AIDS was not restricted to homosexuals had the backlash of shifting blame onto homosexuals for giving the disease to heterosexuals. Homosexuals were threatened by heterosexuals who accused them of bringing the disease, saying things like “you’re gonna die of AIDS like Rock Hudson” and “We’re gonna kill you fags ‘cause you’ve made us have to worry about AIDS” (Capsuto). Homosexuals were vilified, and AIDS was seen as their weapon of choice. In a two-part episode of *L.A. Law*, Christopher Appleton, a gay man with AIDS, is accused of killing his partner. Christopher claims that the murder was a mercy-killing, since he didn’t want his partner to suffer from the disease. However, since Christopher was the one who gave his partner AIDS, the show suggested that he was guilty of the murder either way.

Midnight Caller took that concept even further in its infamous episode “After it Happened”. Mark was a scorned bisexual man who decided to purposefully infect his ex-lover Tina with AIDS. At the end of the original script, Tina was supposed to shoot and kill Mark, as a revenge for infecting her with AIDS. However, the script was leaked, and AIDS activists and gay activists immediately protested the show. Activists feared that viewers would interpret the show as supporting Tina for taking action against those who might spread AIDS and would promote vigilante violence against those living with AIDS. Production was halted on two occasions as picketers surrounded the studio where the show was being filmed. Eventually the producers conceded on a few points, and Mark was no longer killed by Tina. The show aired despite continual protests. The problem with all of the shows with aligned

homosexuality and AIDS with negative labels like murderer was an indication that those responsible for the show were more interested in exploiting audience's interest in AIDS instead of informing them.

The only show to focus on a positive presentation of AIDS was *Designing Women*. The episode "Killing All the Right People" was taken from a comment overheard by show creator Linda Bloodworth-Thomason in a hospital's AIDS wing. The Sugarbaker Firm was approached to design the funeral for Kendall, a gay man dying of AIDS. The episode also focused on Mary Jo, who is the only parent in the PTA who is in support of the distribution of condoms with the high schoolers to prevent the spread of AIDS. Prior to the episode, a common theme in television was to present heterosexuals with AIDS as "innocent victims". The problem was the implication that non-heterosexuals were then somehow non-innocent, and deserving of the disease. The episode criticized those who saw AIDS as a just punishment, and Kendall shares with the Sugarbaker sisters the discrimination he faced in the hospital when he received his treatment.

Restricted Representation

Beyond the issue of misinformation portrayed in "Gay Power, Gay Politics", the documentary focused entirely on white, privileged gay men. There was little to no representation of color, and viewers who were both gay and black would be unable to see any reflection of themselves on television. *Sanford and Son* was an almost entirely black ensemble, but its only gay characters were white. The end of the 1980s however

brought two pieces that, although not on primetime, were able to show homosexuality in the African American community.

The first was a two-part, made-for-TV movie called *The Women of Brewster Place*. The movie was produced by and starred Oprah Winfrey, and featured a lesbian couple. Set in 1960s, the piece touched on the struggles of black women during the civil rights movement. An especially poignant moment comes from the discussion between the show's lesbian couple about acceptance and diversity. Lorraine laments that she's accepted her homosexuality, but that no one sees that "it doesn't make me different from anybody else in this world". Her partner Tee replies that "it makes you damn different. As long as they own the whole damn world, it's them and us, and that spells different". This was the major issue that black homosexuals faced. There were lines drawn between blacks and whites, and lines drawn between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Belonging to two minorities meant exposing yourself to racism from the homosexual community and homophobia from the heterosexual community.

This was explored in more depth by Marlon Riggs's documentary *Tongues Untied*, about gay, black men who feel that they are unable to express themselves. Riggs used the piece to discuss his own sexuality as a gay, black man and his loss of friends to AIDS. The piece was very frank in its depiction of gay sexuality however, which to the accusation of PBS of showing "pornographic images". Despite the fact that very few PBS affiliates ran the program, and even fewer ran an unedited version, conservatives used the piece as support for defunding public broadcasting.

Conclusion

As a whole, representation of homosexuality was one of experimentation. Shows that depicted homosexuality rarely did it more than once. Episodes about homosexuality were often at the beginning of the series, which indicates that it was most likely just an attempt on the writers' part to toe the line, and see how far they could push the show. Homosexuality was merely used as controversy for controversy's sake.

In the mid 1980's Showtime decided to start producing their own original content. One show they picked up was a show called *Brothers*, which featured a few gay leads. The show was very revolutionary for the time, but was stuck on premium cable where it got little attention. It was clear that Showtime's ability to push the envelope came from its lack of dependence on advertisers and sponsors. The major broadcast networks struggled in the 1980s to push homosexual content because of backlash from advertisers and religious organizations.

Chapter 2: Gay Sexuality and Gay Politics in the 1990s

Introduction

The 1990's brought great progress to homosexual representation. Homosexual characters emerged from their one-off roles as gay stereotypes into more fully developed recurring characters. Nearly fifty networks in the 1990s had a homosexual or bisexual character on a show with a recurring role, which was over twice as many recurring homosexual roles as all previous decades combined. Homosexual characters shared the television spotlight with a greater number of notable and influential gay celebrities. Ranging from athletes such as Greg Louganis and musicians such as Melissa Etheridge, openly homosexual celebrities brought attention to gay issues and fueled gay politics.

The changes that gay activism had on the political landscape were unprecedented. President Clinton was one of the first presidents to appoint openly homosexual administrators, and he implemented "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", allowing closeted homosexuals to serve in the military. This policy was seen as quite progressive when it was institute. It provided an opportunity for homosexuals to enlist without being turned away based on their sexual orientation. But in practice, it merely reinforced closeting of homosexuals.

The rapidly changing cultural opinions and presence of homosexuality was met with resistance and fear. Harvey Fierstein, a notable actor and playwright, confessed the difficulties he was facing with developing gay content. Fierstein reported that

“what bothers the networks - and we won't mention names - is not the gay sex. They love the sex jokes. It's the gay politics.” (Stuart).

The decade was wrought with successes in representation that ushered in a wave of imitators and utter disasters that became cautionary tales. The quantity of homosexual representation had increased dramatically, but representation was still limited - particularly when representation was brought into the bedroom. Sexual displays and affectionate embraces were restricted and scrutinized. Advertisers held powerful reins over the networks, and the moral panic that naturally followed a homosexual caress regulated the representation that networks could permit. The only moments of homosexual affection were created as a ploy to gather attention and boost ratings. This phenomenon became named the “Lesbian Kiss” episodes, because the only sexual act that was shown would be the kiss between a lesbian and a questioning or curious straight woman.

The progress, however limited, was groundbreaking and paved the road for more revolutionary content to come. The appearance of sexual minorities became not only more frequent but also more diverse. Lesbians became far more frequent, and racial depictions of homosexual African-American, Latino, and even Asian characters would make appearances in shows. Gay characters were permitted to date, maintain long-term relationships, and in some cases even marry on television. Homosexual characters were no longer found in only niche program but enjoyed success in the top rated programs on television. And Capsuto notes that “where earlier shows had required that an antagonist spout anti-gay rhetoric which others could rebut, 1990s

characters' sexual orientation was often just there, without comment". The popular programs of the 1980s like *Cheers* and *St. Elsewhere*, which had relatively liberal viewers, had characters who commented negatively on the homosexual lifestyle in Norm and Dr. Craig, respectively. The 1990s allowed homosexual characters to enjoy screen-time free of criticism. *Seinfeld*, which could be heralded as the greatest comedy to come out of the decade, spoke for America when Jerry and George would repeat "not that there's anything wrong with that". Passive homophobia was common for George. In regards to a new jacket that Jerry buys, George says "Can I say something to you? And I say this with a staunch history of heterosexuality - it's fabulous". George couldn't even compliment his friend without qualifying it. In a later episode, George becomes traumatized after receiving a massage from a man, and says "what if it feels good? I don't want it to feel good".

Lesbian Kiss Episodes and Restrictive Sexuality

The 1990s could be described as a decade of experimentation on television. Television shows pushed boundaries of what was considered appropriate, especially with on-screen sexual displays of affection both heterosexual and homosexual. Many family interest groups like the American Family Association (AFA) called out against the displays, but these shows quickly became so popular that networks were able to ignore the backlash. When *L.A. Law* aired "He's A Crowd" in 1991, one of the first episodes on television to feature two women kissing, the AFA called for advertisers to back out and for viewers to boycott the show. But producer Patricia Green defended

against the boycotts stating "there are probably twenty-five million gay people out there, all of whom have friends and relatives and loved ones. That is so many more people than those [...] who are liable to be offended. To us, the advertiser saying 'we lose business' is irrelevant; it's a perception, not a fact" (Capsuto). The American public was becoming more entertained by, if not more accepting of, controversial content.

NYPD Blue was a popular show that too was quite controversial for its levels of nudity. The first episode wasn't aired by many of ABC's small town affiliates due to concerns about its content. But once the program started to receive positive ratings from the cities where it aired, the show was picked up by all of ABC's carriers. The AFA continued its attack, calling the show "soft-core porn". But by the end of the first season, *NYPD Blue* was a Top 20 Hit. The Parents Television Council (PTC) was founded by Bren Bozell, who claims that *NYPD Blue* was the influence for him to create his censorship advocacy group. The PTC petitioned the FCC to fine *NYPD Blue* throughout the show's 12-year run, but all of the fines were eventually overturned. *NYPD Blue*'s experimentation with more graphic content turned out to be quite successful, but despite its display of "adult sexual nudity", *NYPD Blue* kept a firm distance from homosexuality. The show stuck to the same reservations that many other programs in the 90s had regarding homosexual sex - it could be talked about, referred to, and implied, but it was not to be shown.

There was a vast difference in the display of heterosexual affection and homosexual affection. Heterosexual sex was shown with character's backsides fully

revealed, where homosexuals were generally not even permitted to kiss. But what's most troubling is the context of these sexual encounters. A man and a woman might meet at bar in a drama and engage in casual sex or two flirty co-workers from a sitcom might find themselves in bed together one night. But there were multiple cases of homosexuals who were in committed relationship who weren't allowed so much as a kiss.

The “Lesbian Kiss” episodes can only be described then a capitalization of homosexual affection. Because homosexual affection was largely absent, these episodes were simply controversial attempts to boost ratings. The first of the "lesbian kiss episodes" was *L.A. Law*, in an episode entitled "He's a Crowd". Abby Perkins kisses fellow attorney C.J. Lamb at the end of the episode. Even though this event is considered to be the first of the "lesbian kiss episodes", neither character is described as being a lesbian - Abby is a heterosexual, and C.J. described her sexuality as "flexible".

This episode not only impacted the frequency of lesbian kisses but also diminished the power of groups like the AFA and the PTC. Two years prior to *L.A. Law*'s breakthrough, ABC aired a breakthrough of its own on the show *thirtysomething*. It was the tail end of the 1980s, and the scene depicted two gay men who lay in bed together post-coital to share a cigarette. The two were bare-chested but no displays of affection were present, not even a kiss on the cheek. Critics described the representation as “tasteful”, “somewhat tame”, and “delicately handled” (Mahoney; Roush). But advertisers pulled out after the show aired, costing ABC

nearly \$1.5 million in revenue. *thirtysomething* became a cautionary tale for programs that wanted to experiment with homosexual sexual affection. *L.A. Law* was comparatively unapologetic about its depiction. “He’s a Crowd” did cause many advertisers to pull out from the episode. NBC, however, received plenty of support amidst the criticism, and all of the controversy only increased discussion and interest in the episode. The kiss was mentioned in nearly every story about *L.A. Law* following the event, and other shows quickly decided to follow suit and feature their own “lesbian kiss episode”.

Despite some good intentions, Michelle Greene, who played Abby Perkins, confirmed in an interview that the kiss was merely a ratings ploy, and that the show had no intention of continuing any sort of relationship between Abby and C.J. The two characters hinted at the possibility of a relationship in the wake of the kiss, but Abby was written off at the end of the season, and C.J. eventually started a relationship with a male attorney. Other “lesbian kiss episodes”, appearing in shows like *Picket Fences*, *Roseanne*, and *Sex and the City*, all had a habit of falling within sweeps week.

Sweeps week is a crucial time for programs to attract viewers, because broadcasters use viewership numbers to set advertising rates until the next sweeps week in three months. In order to inflate their show's numbers, it quickly became common practice for shows to feature gimmicky and unusual episode in order to boost their shows ratings. These types of episodes were referred to as “very special episodes”, which is when main characters address a single, contemporary issue that was typically quite controversial. These “very special episodes” typically were

promoted as unique and different, so the viewer would know that the topics featured in this episode wouldn't continue on. In almost all cases of "lesbian kiss episodes" the lesbian character who instigated the kiss with the heterosexual main character was written out. The shows approached the topic of female homosexuality but quickly departed back to its usual fare.

The lesbian kiss featured in *Roseanne* was particularly interesting. In addition to the normal boost of ratings a controversial episode like this would receive, the program decided to also leak to the press a bogus story about ABC pulling the episode before it aired. With the *thirtysomething* debacle fresh in its mind, the show reported that they would have lost \$1 million in advertisements if the show airs. This public-relations game turned into a great success for the show, making the episode the highest rated show for the week and the fourth highest for the series' season.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer had its own lesbian kiss between Willow and Tara. The kiss between Willow and Tara was also notable because it marked the end of the "Lesbian Kiss" episodes. Prior to their kiss, imitators of *L.A. Law* made a point of making their lesbian kiss a "very special episode". But show creator Joss Whedon asserted that the program would never have a "very special episode". Whedon was concerned with the nature of these episodes and their habit to solve complex and controversial problems in just one hour-long program. Willow and Tara's kiss was not advertised as something unique or uncommon, instead it was just "a simple kiss. A quiet, simple moment. Two lovers kissing. Just like lovers do" (Tropiano). By not making a spectacle of the event, Whedon was able to present Willow and Tara's

homosexual relationship as deserving the same respect and normalcy as a heterosexual relationship. But even *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reported resistance in its depiction of a lesbian relationship between main characters Willow and Tara. Writer and producer Marti Noxon told NPR that “you can show girls kissing once, but you can't show them kissing twice [...] because the second time, it means that they liked it”.

The Gay Wedding

In 1996, President Clinton signed the “Defense of Marriage Act” (DOMA), which legally defined marriage as between a man and a woman. The law was part of fulfillment of Clinton’s 1996 campaign promises, but the liberal Clinton defended it saying that it was an attempt to prevent the reactionary Congress from attempting to make a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. However, Clinton eventually overturned his support and in 2007 publicly announced that he no longer supported the bill. The bill was influenced by the panic that arose from the increased presence of homosexuals and homosexual relationships in society.

Homosexuality and marriage had never been closely related. During the sexual revolution that spanned the 1960s and 1970s, even many homosexuals rejected the idea of marriage. Filmmaker John Waters remarked of the era that “the good things about being gay were you didn’t have to get married and you didn’t have to go into the army” (Wockner). Marriage was synonymous with commitment and family, neither of which was common amongst homosexuals in the mid-century. But by the 1990s, as homosexuality became more accepted, activists called for greater rights like marriage.

In the 1970s and 1980s, homosexual marriage on television wasn't discussed.

Homosexual men who were looking to get married often found themselves opposite women on the altar. Steven of *Dynasty* and Matt of *Melrose Place* were both gay men who were denied a gay wedding and instead married off to women.

But by the early 1990s, gay marriage was on the table for scrutiny. The popular *Golden Girls* had always been friendly to gay characters. The show was originally written with a gay male cook in the house, and in an early episode in 1988 Blanche's brother, Clayton, comes out and she is forced to come to terms with his homosexuality. By 1991, Clayton returns to the show to confess to Blanche that he's getting married to his long-time boyfriend. Blanche is initially furious, worried that a gay wedding would be embarrassing both for her brother and for herself. But the program ends on a note common to episodes that featured gay marriages in the 1990s: that characters can be supportive of homosexual nuptials even if they don't completely understand it.

Homosexual marriages appeared on the sidelines of several other shows in the early 1990s. In Fox's sitcom *Roc*, the title character's father, Andrew, has to struggle with his brother Russell's decision to get married to another man. What makes the acceptance even more difficult is the fact that the African American Russell is planning to marry a white man, making the marriage both homosexual and interracial. In *Dear John*, womanizer Kirk discovers that his ex-wife is now remarried to another woman, spawning jokes at his expense. In *Seinfeld*, Elaine gets stuck on a subway bus on her way to be "best man" at a lesbian wedding. The common theme in all these

episodes is that they focused on the controversy surrounding the homosexual wedding and the main character's reaction to the wedding. It's reminiscent of main characters and their reaction to the coming-out tales of guest characters in the 1980s.

Northern Exposure's notable breakthrough was a gay marriage that wasn't surrounded on the controversy of homosexual marriage. Beyond the conservative main character Maurice's grumblings that the gay marriage was making a "mockery of the covenant of marriage", the show followed and focused on the preparations of the wedding instead of complaints surrounding it. This episode approached homosexual weddings in a similar way that *Buffy* would in early 2000's to lesbian kisses: that the act between homosexuals should be seen as normal instead of scrutinized for its novelty.

The episode also marked the shift for homosexual marriage to reach the main stage of primetime television. In late 1995 and early 1996 brought gay marriages in the forefront of popular shows *Roseanne* and *Friends* respectively. *Roseanne* is charged with designing the gay marriage between her friend Leon and his fiancé, Scott, in "December Bride". The episode jokes about the wedding, since *Roseanne* makes the assumption that two gay grooms would like a wedding with pink flamingos and a Liza Minnelli impersonator. Even the vows poke some fun, with Scott swearing that "I love you in a way that is mystical, eternal, and illegal in twenty states". In *Friends*, Ross comes to terms with his ex-wife's decision to marry her life partner. Even though Ross struggles with the idea, he supports them in lieu of the brides' parents' oppositions. The episode, much like the show, set about portraying the

wedding in far more realistic and serious terms than *Roseanne* attempted. The episode was also refused by many stations, after it was branded as unfit by the Traditional Values Coalition.

These weddings indicated a double standard that existed for homosexuals on television. During this time, kisses between homosexual women were appearing in the “Lesbian Kiss” episodes. The lesbian kisses were almost always given in the heat of a moment and between two uncommitted women. But when two committed gay partners took to the altar, a kiss was suddenly absent. Kisses were implied off-camera but none of act was actually shown. The problem here is that as soon as love is introduced into the equation, homosexual affection is no longer acceptable for television.

Ellen Opens Up

The positive instances of homosexuality in the 1990s were useful in presenting homosexuality in a natural light but were restrictive in their effectiveness because they were merely instances. The occasional side character could only do so much, because they were not the feature of the program. So when Ellen Morgan, main character of the sitcom *Ellen*, came out in 1997 it was nothing short of revolutionary. The program was written by Ellen DeGeneres, who played the title character. In the episode entitled “The Puppy Episode”, Ellen meets with an old friend, Richard, who works as a reporter. She is repulsed when Richard comes on to her, and she discusses it with

Richard's producer, Susan. Susan is a lesbian and tells Ellen that she might be gay as well.

The episode was presented in two parts, and throughout Ellen struggles with her potential homosexuality. She is initially reluctant and discusses her sexuality with her therapist. Ellen's complaint is that she isn't a lesbian, but she just wants to find someone that she "clicks with". However, she comes to realize that the person she's come closest to clicking with is Susan. Ellen confesses to Susan at the end of the first part that she is gay. This coming out was a milestone because Ellen was a main character but the second part of the episode was especially effective as well because it also dealt with the aftermath of coming out from the main character's perspective. Ellen still struggles with the new label and is reluctant to come out to her friends and family. Ellen discusses a dream with her therapist, in which she's walking through a grocery store and she receives "lesbian discounts" on items and her sexuality is announced to the store. The episode shows the types of things that homosexuals go through after they come out. She is concerned about being treated differently by people if they knew she was a lesbian. She is concerned that people will define her as a lesbian and treat her homosexuality as though it's her defining characteristic. She is concerned that the people she cares about won't support her.

The episode was the highest rated episode of *Ellen*, and won an Emmy for Outstanding Writing, a Peabody Award, and a GLAAD Media Award. The show was picked up for a fifth season, which made it the first season to star an openly gay character. Despite its critical success, the program was canceled after its fifth season

due to a drop in ratings. The last season focused on Ellen dealing with her homosexuality as she interacted with friends and family. The problem was that many critics felt the show was just becoming "too gay", now that it seemed to focus on Ellen's homosexuality. It excluded a large section of the population who couldn't relate, since the episodes dealt with issues that only applied to homosexuals. It is not surprising that the show struggled with balancing content that would appeal to both heterosexual and homosexual viewers. The final season felt a lot like the writers of the show were finally able to release all of their pent-up desire to write for a homosexual audience.

Conclusion

The end of the decade brought a lot of hope for the future of homosexual representation on television. After Showtime's somewhat successful run of *Brothers*, premium competitor HBO started producing some of its own original programming. Its first attempt was *Oz*, a drama set in Oswald Penitentiary. While the focus of the program was mostly on heterosexual characters, it did discuss homosexuality through the inclusion of the different gangs and groups in the prison. It also examined male rape, which would not have been allowed on network television.

Showtime's *Queer as Folk* also started to run at the end of the decade, which focused on the lives of gay men and women in Pittsburgh, PA. *Queer as Folk* was extremely successful, especially in Canada where it ran for additional seasons on the subsidiary Showcase. Like *Oz*, *Queer as Folk* was able to delve into much deeper and

more sexual problems that surrounded homosexuality. *Queer as Folk* eventually ended up on cable in an edited format on the gay-centric network LoGo.

The popularity of these niche programs on premium cable forced network cable to push the bar in order to compete. The increased competition caused networks to develop shows that were scandalous and attention-getting in order to bring in new audiences. Much in the way that “Lesbian Kiss” episodes were a ratings ploy in the 1990s, homosexual sexuality would be broadened and exploited in the 2000s to compete.

Chapter 3: Sexual Orientation and Sexual Fluidity **in *Grey's Anatomy* and *Orange is the New Black***

Introduction

The initial problem in discussing sexual orientation is a matter of definition; in many situations where sexual orientation is discussed, a theoretical definition is chosen in favor of an operational one. It is strange to think of sexual orientations as a result of processes, because sexual orientation is understood to be something a person is born with. The development of a sexual identity, however, is seen as a self-discovery. This view of sexual orientation can be overly simplistic though, and fails to take into account the impact that external forces have on sexual development.

Some of the most influential work on sexual orientation comes from Alfred Kinsey, who, beyond creating the Kinsey Reports, developed the Kinsey Scale. The Kinsey Scale ranges from 0 to 6, where 0 is exclusively heterosexual and 6 is exclusively homosexual. The idea is that most people fall between 0 and 6; relatively few people are thought to be exclusively heterosexual or exclusively homosexual. Kinsey also accepted an operational definition of homosexuality. Kinsey wrote “an individual may be assigned a position on this scale, for each period on his life” (Kinsey et al.). Instead of occupying only one number, a person’s number could potentially be in flux throughout his or her life.

When an operational definition is accepted, the idea that homosexual identity formation is a matter of discovery the underlying or “true” sexual orientation can be rejected. Sexual orientation might be seen as a continuous, interactive process between

a person and that person's social environment. This creates a contextual and fluid framework that mirrors Kinsey's assertion that sexual orientation changes as the individual does. The dichotomy of "homosexual" and "heterosexual" is insufficient and useful only for simplicity and convenience's sake.

What is left is a model that sees sexual orientations as flexible and multifaceted. Attraction to males and attraction to females are separated, but an individual might exist on a spectrum between the two, where the sexual attraction varies in degree and in intensity. Additionally, sexual orientation isn't defined only by sexual acts and partners but by an individual's behavior, fantasies, and emotional attachments (Garnets).

Within textual analyses of television shows, understanding how sexual orientation should be presented informs critiques of characters with non-heterosexual orientations. Especially in the case of sexual tokenism, non-heterosexual characters often are completely defined by their sexual orientation. Their actions and dialogue are driven by their sexual identity. To analyze them is to analyze the show's opinions and perspective on non-heterosexual orientation.

Television shows that abandon sexual tokenism provide more unique or nuanced characters. *Grey's Anatomy* and *Orange is the New Black* are excellent examples of programs that feature characters who eschew sexual stereotypes and instead focus on creating accurate representations of sexual orientation.

Female Homosexuality in Television

The “Lesbian Kiss” episodes of the 1990s were the first indication that female homosexuality’s relationship with television was going to be radically different from that of male homosexuality’s. Lesbian sexuality had an appeal to male viewers, which fueled the success of the “Lesbian Kiss” episodes. It is not surprising that these lesbian characters were also quite attractive by cultural standards. This contrasted with the inversion theory of homosexuality, which was the dominant theory up through the 20th century. (Meyer-Bahlburg).

Inversion theory builds from the idea that homosexuality is due to a biological “abnormality” through which homosexual men have more estrogen than heterosexual men, and homosexual women would have more testosterone than their heterosexual counterparts. This would mean that heterosexual women would be more feminine and homosexual women would be more masculine (Krafft-Ebing). This has since been thought incorrect, as studies have shown no indication of increased testosterone (Byne) or masculinity (Finlay & Scheltema) in homosexual women.

An optimist could defend the “Lesbian Kiss” episodes, stating that ignoring inversion theory was an indication of forward thinking, but perhaps more realistically lesbian characters of the 1990s were a product of male fantasy. They were what male writers felt that lesbians should be: attractive women who share an intimate moment, but don’t progress beyond that. Extended lesbian relationships were very uncommon, with *Buffy* featuring one of the first lesbian couples as main characters in 2001.

The early 2000s were encouraging for homosexual women on television. Willow and Tara of *Buffy* and Marissa and Alex of *The O.C.* were both promising lesbian couples on cable television. However, it was difficult for programs to maintain a lesbian relationship for more than a season; Tara was killed only a year after her and Willow's groundbreaking kiss, and Alex mysteriously disappeared, not to be spoken of again. The success of lesbian relationships, especially those between central characters, had always been temporary, and these shows were no exception. *Will & Grace* presented the eventually-bisexual Karen amidst its depictions of male homosexuality, and gave Karen and Grace their own lesbian kiss. Despite her strengths as a non-heterosexual character, Karen had her share of representational shortcomings. Her sexual relationships with women never went beyond commentary or innuendo, and they were always purely sexual. With the lack of intentions for an honest relationship with another woman, Karen really embodied "the heterosexual idea of a bisexual woman: attracted to women, but ultimately needing a man" (Warn).

Outside of cable showed more promise. Showtime, after the successful production of the gay-centric *Queer as Folk*, offered lesbians their own stage in their innovative show *The L Word*. *The L Word* highlighted a multitude of lesbian relationships, some successful and others tragic, with bisexuality, transsexuality, and even men identifying as lesbians as topics for discussion. Obviously as a premium network Showtime was not limited in the same ways that The WB and FOX were (which carried *Buffy* and *The O.C.* respectively). The show featured nudity and sex scenes, and its dialogue was just as raw, honest, and provocative.

Cable remained stagnant, however, with the lesbian voice all but absent. Beyond the occasional lesbian guest on shows like *Nip/Tuck* and *One Tree Hill*, there was no stage for lesbians to express themselves. *Grey's Anatomy* was one of the first shows to break this lull, through the blossoming of Callie Torres and Erica Hahn's relationship at the end of season 4 in 2009.

Grey's Anatomy and Sexual Identity Development

When *Grey's Anatomy* began broadcasting in 2005 it did not feature a single non-heterosexual character in the recurring cast. Its start was rather innocuous, appearing to be ABC's version of the popular program *E.R.*. The show played out like a standard soap opera-cum-serial drama, following the show's protagonist Meredith Grey's residency at the fictional Seattle Grace Hospital. Callie Torres was introduced as an orthopedic surgeon with a crush on her male colleague George O'Malley. Callie and George's relationship eventually fall apart through the combined affairs between Callie with co-worker Mark Sloan and George with intern Izzie Stevens. By the end of the third season, Callie's life is in shambles after her personal break-up with George and her professional demotion from Chief Resident at Seattle Grace.

The beginning of season 4 lays the groundwork for *Grey's Anatomy's* first shot at the development of sexual orientation. Callie befriends the new doctor Erica Hahn, and their friendship blossoms as both women are currently "swearing off men". Both Callie and Erica self-identify as heterosexual, but their relationship eventually turns romantic. Long nights working together puts the two of them in close contact, and

Callie quickly suspects Erica of romantic feelings for her. Callie is quick to prove her heterosexuality, and revives her on-and-off-again relationship with Mark.

Callie spends the season bouncing between fending off her co-workers' suspicions and presumptions about her sexuality and the growing relationship between her and Erica. When her friend Addison from LA visits Callie, Addison confronts Callie about her relationship with Erica. Callie laughs and a little too defensively corrects Addison, asserting multiple times that "I like penis, I mean, I'm a huge fan of penis. You've been living in Los Angeles for way too long". Later in the episode at a bar, Erica removes a hair from Callie's lips, which is met by speculative gazes by their other co-workers. Callie responds by dancing provocatively with Mark, careful to make sure that Erica sees.

Callie is forced to confront her relationship with Erica when Erica kisses her in front of Mark. Mark, aware of the sexual tension between Erica and Callie, half-jokingly proposes a threesome between them. Erica kisses Callie to show Mark that "you couldn't handle a threesome" with the two of them. The actualization of the continual tension between Callie is what convinces her that she may actually have some romantic interest in Erica after all. The tension builds until Callie initiates her own kiss with Erica at the end of the season, signifying the beginning of their relationship.

Sexual contact has been used before as catalyst and cause for sexual development. Callie could not be more reluctant to be in a relationship with Erica. Callie rejected flirtations and friendly contact but succumbed to Erica's kiss, which is

reminiscent of Jenny Schecter of *The L Word*. In the pilot of *The L Word*, Jenny is thrust into a world surrounded by beautiful women hanging on other beautiful women. Jenny spies two women swimming naked together and having sex in the neighbors pool, which was a surprising sight to a girl who had just moved to LA from the Midwest. When Marina kisses Jenny at a party, Jenny suddenly questions her sexuality. She talks with her boyfriend and Marina and convinces herself she's heterosexual. The only counter-argument that's ever given to her are the spontaneous and unexpected sexual encounters she has with Marina. Halfway through the season, it is enough for her to leave her boyfriend of three years for the first same-sex partner she's ever been with.

Callie's transition is similar. Her dialogue indicates that she could only ever consider being with a man, but her sexual encounters with Erica are enough to convince her otherwise. The major difference between Callie and Jenny is that Jenny's venture into homosexuality was sudden and did not stem from an initial and close relationship with another woman. Callie and Erica's relationship blossomed out of a close relationship, instead of being born purely out of sexual desire. A study conducted of self-identified lesbians and female bisexuals indicated that most relationships between women arise through close friendships prior to relationships, but that sexual desire is the driving force to initiating the relationship (Peplau, et al). Willow and Tara and Marissa and Alex were presented in the same way.

Callie and Erica begin their relationship and are successful until they discuss their sexual identities. After an implied sexual encounter, Erica professes her sexuality

to Callie, that “I am so gay for you”. Despite her willingness to enter into a relationship with Erica, Callie is unwilling to adopt the label of gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Unsurprisingly, a confused Callie finds herself in the arms of Mark, desperate to figure out her sexuality. Callie returns to Erica prepared to accept that she’s not heterosexual, and Erica forgives Callie for her infidelity. Callie’s struggle with labels again mirrors a similar struggle that Jenny has. After Marina and Jenny split apart, Jenny confesses her recent relationship to an old friend from college. Jenny’s friend asks her if she’s gay now but Jenny dismisses both the labels of lesbian and bisexual.

Only a few episodes later, Erica gets into a car and drives away, apparently hired by another hospital. Her sudden disappearance was unusual for a few reasons. First, there was no “goodbye” episode, which usually accompanies the departure of a main character in a show. Erica’s exit was hasty and felt unplanned. Secondly, it felt very out-of-character for her. She had completely forgiven Callie for sleeping with Mark, then quickly takes back her forgiveness. Her relationship prior with Callie had been described as natural and organic but suddenly fell apart in a single moment of suspiciously-delayed anger.

Brooke Smith, the actress who played Erica on the show, said in an interview that all she was told was “they couldn’t write for my character any more”. Sources close to the show then said that Erica’s departure was due to a decision passed down by ABC executives. Smith said that she had been warned that “sometimes networks get cold feet with gay relationships”, but thought that it wouldn’t happen with her

character. The relationship most likely was able to start in the first place because Erica and Callie were both heterosexual characters. Two heterosexual female characters who become close and share the occasional, ratings-boost kiss probably were acceptable and even encouraged by network executives. Had Callie and Erica both been openly homosexual or bisexual in season 4, there may have been more pressure from the network to “de-gay” the show after the first kiss between Callie and Erica.

But ABC did not get rid of only Erica. Also departing in season 5 was character Sadie Harris, played by Melissa George. Sadie was introduced in season 4, and during Melissa's negotiations, she said that her character was meant to have an "open mind toward homosexuality". However, Harris never progressed any further than a slight flirtation during an episode with Callie. So when Harris's storyline was toned down and deleted, it certainly seemed like it was part of a push by ABC to "de-gay" the show. *Grey's Anatomy* wasn't the only show on ABC affected. *Ugly Betty* lost transsexual character Alexis Meade around the same time that Sadie and Erica were cut.

Grey's Anatomy's relationship with homosexuality was already rocky in 2008, and claims that executives were attempting to “de-gay” the show certainly did not help. The show was just getting over an event referred to as “Isaiah-gate”, in which actor Isaiah Washington referred to fellow actor T.R. Knight as a “faggot”. Following the event, Knight came out publicly and Washington was let go. As an isolated event, Washington's removal appeared to present a “zero-tolerance” policy for actions or words that might be considered anti-gay on the set of *Grey's Anatomy*. However, in

conjunction with the push to “de-gay” the show in 2008 Washington’s release felt more like a reaction to bad press than an actual stand against homophobia.

Callie’s homosexual plots weren’t over however, as the end of the season marked the arrival of new doctor Arizona Robbins, an outed lesbian. Callie and Arizona experience the same plot lines that Callie went through with Erica: friendship turned relationship. However, Arizona’s outed and confident identity put pressure on both Callie and *Grey’s Anatomy* to decide once and for all their position on the expression of female homosexuality.

Arizona and Callie and the Importance of Sexual Labels

Arizona was the first character to outwardly define herself as a lesbian, as Callie, Erica, and Sadie’s sexual identity were all better described as “flexible”. A definitively, unapologetically homosexual character is very different from a character who is merely "flexible". A "flexible" character can be easily changed, and can revert back to heterosexuality at the pressure of critics, audiences, advertisers, and networks. *Grey's Anatomy* truly was "de-gay" at the loss of Erica and Sadie, because at that point Callie's only romantic option was the open relationship with Sloan, regardless of how she may have been sexually inclined. A character like Callie gave the impression that the show was trying to stay on the fence about issues of homosexuality. Like Callie, the show was merely experimenting with issues of homosexuality but not actually committing to any specific labels. But by introducing a character like Arizona who is decisively homosexual *Grey's Anatomy* took a firmer stance on who it wants its

characters to be. At the time of her introduction, Arizona was also the only main cast lesbian character on primetime television.

Shonda Rhimes, the creator of *Grey's Anatomy*, addressed her insistence on having homosexual characters. In an interview, Rhimes stated that "I believe that everyone should get to see themselves reflected on TV. Everyone" (Silverstein). Rhimes, an African-American, went on to compare the struggles of homosexuality to the struggles of African-Americans in the 1960s. While *Grey's Anatomy* doesn't address that relationship, *The L Word* tackled it through Bette, a half-black lesbian, and Yolanda, an African-American lesbian.

Arizona addresses Callie's fear of labels when Callie makes it clear that she's interested in a relationship with Arizona. Arizona calls Callie a "newborn", which here is equitable to sexual flexibility. Arizona knows about Callie's sexual history and fears that Callie isn't capable of making a stance and committing to the label of homosexuality. Callie seems to take this as a challenge, and the character grows as she pursues Arizona until Arizona concedes to a relationship. It is also at this point that Callie comes out to her father. Callie had kept her relationship with Erica a secret from her father, more evidence that Callie's relationship with Erica was an expression of flexibility instead of an expression of her true sexuality. Callie's coming out was crucial - it is at this point where *Grey's Anatomy* finally gets its second lesbian character.

The avoidance of labels can be traced to some extent to the ambiguity of lesbian sex, especially relative to heterosexual or gay sex. Much like sexual

orientation, what defines sex is ambiguous. In Lethoso, an area of Southern Africa, it is common for women who are married to men to have a woman with whom they engage in sexual activities. This relationship between the women is recognized by others and they engage in sexual activities ranging from kissing to oral sex. However, when researchers questioned these women, they did not consider themselves to be homosexual, nor did they consider what they do to be sex. They reported that “you cannot have sex unless someone has a penis” (Kendall). In cultures where “penile penetration is viewed as the gold standard of sexuality” (Peplau, et al.), lesbian sex is essentially invalidated. Since sexual acts are intrinsically associated with sexual identity and sexual orientation, accepting and embracing the label of lesbian or a bisexual woman means taking a stand about the validity and equality of female intercourse.

White Washed Lesbians and Orange is the New Black

The L Word and *Grey's Anatomy* have done tremendous things for homosexuality and representation. However, one of the major issues that happens is despite the sheer quantity of homosexual women that appear across many shows the diversity is disappointingly low. Michele Aaron argues in her book *New Queer Cinema*, that by “making the lesbian protagonists privileged white folk (or near-white folk) [...] the women are neither representative nor realistic”. It is television, so some suspension of disbelief should be expected, but it becomes quite clear the types of lesbians that have received attention and screen time. Aaron’s qualification of “near-

white” characters in important; after all, Bette from *L Word* is half-black and Callie is Hispanic. But the diversity goes only so far as the color of their skin. Their specific culture and heritage is never brought up or made relevant to their stories. The characters often could function if they were replaced by white women. Furthermore, lesbian characters on television rarely have to deal with issues of money. Of course all of the characters on *Grey’s Anatomy* are doctors, but *The L Word*’s interpretation of diversity includes professional athlete, eventually-successful hairstylist to the stars, and gallery manager. This collection is hardly representable. They again receive a free pass though because television is largely dominated by people with money. And the representation of gay men falls into the same category. Cameron and Mitchell of *Modern Family* and David and Bryan of *The New Normal* have sleek modern houses to accompany their modern lifestyles. And despite the fact that Kurt’s father works as a mechanic, Kurt of *Glee* still finds the money somehow to have the latest and greatest in fashion to show off at school.

This is just one of the ways that *Orange is the New Black* creates a new level of representation that is absent from standard television. *Orange is the New Black* is much like *The L Word* in that it is only available through a premium service, which perhaps gives it greater opportunity to push boundaries. Piper, the lead character of *Orange is the New Black*, is certainly the definition of privileged and white, but she is juxtaposed against characters who are black or poor or both. Despite the fact that all of the women in the prison are there because they are criminals, *Orange is the New Black* does a great job of pushing aside stereotypes associated with poverty or minorities and

prison. Each episode flashes back to the points that got a different character into prison. Just like its characters' sexualities, *Orange is the New Black* shows that its characters' backgrounds and histories are also complex. The show even directly refers to queer theory. Piper struggles with her sexuality when she discovers that her one-time girlfriend is imprisoned with her, presenting her with a sexual temptation despite her attempts to stay connected with her male fiancé on the outside. When discussing it with another inmate, the inmate says "she's worried that she'll turn gay again", which Piper responds to with "you don't turn gay, you fall somewhere on a spectrum, like a Kinsey scale".

The show acknowledges the differences that are associated with different cultures. The Hispanic and African-American communities in the prison feature less instances of homosexuality than the characters, because of a need to be accepted by members of their own race and culture. These concerns echoes concerns made in during the civil rights era, where African-American homosexuals had to face homophobia from the African-American community and racism from the homosexual community, which was efficaciously predominantly white. However, it doesn't abandon ethnic homosexuals, instead it recognizes their own unique struggles.

Recognizing the Impact of Inversion Theory

Inversion theory is clearly based on falsehoods, and yet its falsifications have affected impressions and opinions towards homosexuality. Homosexual characters on television are often still rooted in inversion theory, where butches and queens are the

go-to for homosexual comic relief. Most of the shows that have great homosexual characters abandon inversion theory to create characters that are not solely defined by their sexuality. Clearly this is a great step forward from where homosexual representation used to be but it still has its problems, mainly that there are butches and queens, and that ignoring that section of homosexuality in the name of representation is self-defeating.

One of the best current examples is Bryan from *The New Normal*. Bryan loves fashion, Bryan is concerned about decorating the house for their child, and Bryan even speaks in a relatively higher register. One of the most common criticisms of the show is that the characters felt very stereotypical and false. Unfortunately, the show was created by Ryan Murphy, who has had great success in his depiction of homosexual characters in other shows like *Glee*, *American Horror Story*, and even in *Nip/Tuck*. So why would Ryan Murphy stoop to using stereotypes after making successful gay characters? In an interview regarding the show Murphy says that Bryan and David from the show are based off himself and his partner David. It is not a coincidence that Bryan is spelled with a “y” instead of an “i”, and that he works as show runner for a program that features singing. In his private life, it is incredibly likely that Ryan Murphy is much like Bryan. To reduce Bryan to a stereotype means to accuse Ryan Murphy of being a stereotype himself.

Orange is the New Black recognizes that and provides a wide array of homosexual characters from the femme and sporty lesbians of Piper and Alex to the butch lesbians of Nicky and Carrie “Big Boo” Black. But it addresses inversion theory

as well to ensure that viewers recognize that masculine lesbians aren't masculine due to imbalances in hormones or genetics. The show uses Sam Healy, an older, homophobic guard, as a foil to the lesbians. His views on female homosexuality are revealed to be outdated and wrong. Any viewer would determine that Healy's perspective is not the right one. So when Healy makes comments that support inversion theory like "lesbians can be very dangerous, it's the testosterone", *Orange is the New Black* is providing a defeasible argument against inversion theory.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s, female homosexuality has stood apart from male homosexuality in its representation. From "Lesbian Kiss Episodes" to lesbian marriages, female homosexuality has been marked through both its sexual acts to its sexual flexibility. This freedom and this increase in representation, however, have come with a cost: a fear of being defined and limited in their sexual identity.

Because of this, women on television are represented to be far more confused about their sexual identity than their male counterparts. Older representations of homosexuality in women depicted women who were more absolute and definitive in their choices and they were often punished for that choice, too. Fear of labels has become a double-edged sword of homosexual women in television. On one side, rejecting sexual labels can give an impression of lack of commitment to homosexuality and homosexual relationships, or the feeling that women shouldn't commit to homosexuality because like Karen they ultimately need a man in their lives.

On the other side, it lets viewers who are confused about their own sexuality know that other women are going through the same things that they are. It provides plots and storylines to experiment and progress in the same way that real people progress and develop their identities. The questioning of sexual identities can be a way for studios to back out of homosexual storylines if they feel too much pressure, but it can also be an acknowledgement that sexual orientation is an ever-flowing and changing spectrum. Either way, it increases the diversity and representation that women have on television, which is the right direction to take.

Chapter 4: Gender Identification and Masculine and Feminine Gays in *Glee*

Introduction

The earliest forms of representation of homosexuality aligned gender identification with sexual orientation in such a way that sexual orientation dictated gender and gender dictated sexual orientation. Because heterosexual relationships were generally seen as the norm, homosexual relationships were forcibly examined according to the same parameters. Homosexual men were consequently viewed and treated more like women, and homosexual women were viewed and treated like men. This is where the stereotypes arise: the flaming queen, who works as a hair stylist or interior decorator, would be paired with the burly bulldyke, who felt more comfortable in a biker bar or construction site.

In 1953, CBS began broadcasting *Private Secretary*. In a season one episode called “Suspicion”, the main character, Susie, meets an effeminate male secretary who gave up on his dream to be an interior designer because he “bruises easily” and “when you have to hang drapes, you’ve got to climb ladders”. Television certainly did not have any openly homosexual characters in 1953, but this character was “every cartoonist’s vision of the male homosexual” (Capsuto). This view aligned with inversion theory, which was the accepted theory regarding homosexuality up through the 20th century (Meyer-Bahlburg). These depictions are often rooted in stereotypes and because of that current television dramas have eschewed these portrayals for more well-rounded and deeper character representations. But the feminine gay and

masculine lesbian are still fair game for the more irreverent comedies of today's cable, such as *South Park*, *Archer*, and *Family Guy*.

Transgenders and transsexuals have historically received the least frequent and least positive attention of sexual minorities. Christine Jorgensen, who was the first widely known transsexual in America, was on television before any openly gay character was. She frequented talk shows as a guest to speak about her revolutionary procedure. Television had not yet developed policies for showing this new surgical phenomenon, but since then there have been far fewer instances of transsexuality on television. Transsexuality was even considered a mental illness until 2012, when the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) removed gender identity disorder from its pages for the more specific "gender dysphoria".

It is important to examine gender identification because a deeper understanding aids in representation of homosexuals, as well as giving greater consideration and airtime to the often-neglected transcommunity. Because gender identification is not expressly specified on television, a character's gender identification will be analyzed here through the character's personal identifications or voice, the character's choice in fashion and physical representation, and the gender identification of those with whom they are in relationships.

Voice as Gender

A character's voice is simply what that character says about him or herself. This is a character's personal identification that is expressed through their dialogue

and actions. In this instance, the actual tone of a character's voice is something to take note of. In stereotypical fashion, feminine gays and masculine lesbians have distinct voices. *Family Guy*'s recurring homosexual character Bruce has a slight lisp and softness to his voice, and in an episode where main character Meg gets a sex change and dates another masculine woman, both voices are deep and gruff. *Glee*'s primary gay character Kurt Hummel's voice may be slightly higher than his fellow classmates, but what really sets apart his voice is his singing range. In the Glee Club, Kurt is initially the only countertenor, one of the highest voice ranges for a male singer. The range hits notes that are typically reserved for women, and it can be very difficult to determine that a countertenor is a male without actually seeing him. Phillippe Jaroussky, one of the more popular modern countertenors, told NPR in an interview that there's an "element of repulsion" that many feel when they hear a man sing like a woman (Huizenga).

Kurt fights against gender stereotypes in an early episode of the show when he refuses to let Glee Club instructor Will Schuester automatically give fellow member Rachel the solo female part in *Wicked*'s "Defying Gravity". Kurt's father supports Kurt after saying "you sing like a girl, in a good way", and persuades Will to let him audition. The song choice is fitting, since the episode follows Kurt as he struggles to defy the pressures on him to not try for a woman's part. He purposefully messes up his audition after he finds out his father had been receiving threatening phone calls telling him that Kurt's a "fag".

Throughout the show Kurt pushes the Glee club to abandon gender norms when assigning songs. In the first season, Will has the Glee Club split into boys and girls and compete. Kurt tries to join the women immediately but is sent back over to the men's side. Later, Kurt gives the women secret help, letting them know "even though I've been paired with the boys, my allegiance still lies with you ladies". In the second season when Will tries to make another boys and girls competition, Kurt persuades him to stipulate that the women have to sing traditional male songs and that the men have to sing female songs.

Kurt also spends most of his time grouped with the female characters. Whether he's shopping with Mercedes or scheming with Rachel, he refers to himself as an "honorary woman". It is not difficult to place Kurt as a very feminine gay character. Kurt is basically a pair of heels away from being a transgender. Despite being an "honorary woman", Kurt does self-identify as a man, which is evident in his discussions about gender with the show's only transgender, a biological boy who goes by the moniker Unique.

Unique, whose birth name is Wade, transfers to McKinley High School and joins the Glee Club in season 4. Unique is a transgender who prefers the pronoun "she" and being called her chosen name that she feels reflects her individualism. She appears towards the end of season 3 as part of a competing Glee Club but befriends Kurt because she looks up to him. Unique tells Kurt that she's admired his ability to embrace who he is and that he has given her confidence to do the same. However, due to pressures from her current Glee Coach, Unique still presents masculinely and goes

by Wade. Kurt sends Unique a pair of heels as a good-luck gesture for her upcoming performance but thinks better of it when he realizes that it could destroy her reputation. Kurt warns her that despite his flamboyant designer clothes, even *he* has never gone on stage dressed as a woman. Unique replies with “that’s because you identify as a man. I thought you of all people would understand.”

Unique makes her identified gender very clear to the Glee Club at McKinley once she joins and Will introduces her as “Wade” and refers to her as “he”. Unique is wearing women’s clothing in the majority of her appearances, complete with wig and heels. She insists on being treated like a woman, which includes the use of the women’s bathroom and competing on the women’s team in boys vs. girls competitions. Her gender is also addressed when fellow Glee member Ryder refers to Unique as a “dude” and uses the “he” pronoun to refer to her. Ryder struggles throughout the episode to come to terms with Unique’s gender. The Club pushes him to use feminine pronouns, and he is eventually able to accept her identification despite his inability to understand it.

Fashion as Gender

Kurt’s obsession with fashion is made very clear from the first moment he appears in the show. In the pilot episode, Kurt is seen with the jocks by the dumpsters. They push him around, preparing to throw him into the dumpsters. This stereotypical display of high school bullying is made unique by Kurt’s protest not against being tossed into the dumpster, but by being tossed into the dumpster while wearing his

Marc Jacobs designer jacket and bag. Since it is his first appearance to the audience, this could be interpreted as a bit of character development, alluding to Kurt's homosexuality through his concern of fashion over his own physical well-being. But this bit repeats itself a few times in the first season despite Kurt's homosexuality already being apparent. His obsession with fashion isn't just an indicator of his sexual orientation. It is a large part of who he is.

Fashion is fully intertwined with Kurt's homosexuality. When Kurt comes out to his father Burt in episode 4 of the first season, Burt isn't surprised. Burt tells Kurt that he knew when Kurt was three and asked for a "sensible pair of heels" for his birthday. The measure of Kurt's homosexuality was his fixation with feminine footwear. The costume designer for Glee, Lou Eyrich, stated that Kurt is her favorite character to design for. In an interview with the *Seattle Time*, Eyrich mentions that "he never, ever repeats and you get to push yourself creatively. He's the perfect doll to dress because he'll try on anything" (Glassman). The feminine attribution of a "doll" to Kurt aside, Kurt's refusal to repeat outfits is a stereotypical feminine trait. Eyrich further describes Kurt's fashion sense as "quietly flashy, dapper dandyism" in an interview with the Costume Designers' Guild. It is unclear what exactly what "dapper dandyism" means, but it certainly sounds like the furthest thing from masculinity.

Kurt's choices in clothing are often borderline cross-dressing, including items like tight, form-fitting pants and shirts whose lengths are reminiscent of short dresses. When Will has the Glee Club do an assignment featuring Lady Gaga, Kurt is all too excited to dress up in the bizarre, androgynous style of one of his idols. Kurt pushes

the other boys, especially the conservative Finn, to wear outlandish clothing to mirror Gaga's style.

For Unique, clothing is extremely symbolic. The gift of a pair of heels is what persuaded her to present herself femininely for the first time in public. Prior to the gift, Unique wore men's clothes and performed as a man. She struggles when she gets to McKinley, however. The ever-derisive Sue Sylvester is quick to show her dislike of Unique, calling her a "Pre-Op Precious". Unique experiences bullying from the athletes about her feminine presentation as well. She confesses to Finn that she wants to feel welcome in the girls' locker room and wear dresses around school, but doesn't know how to get others to respect her decisions.

Once Unique's parents discover the bullying, she is forbidden from wearing a dress to school and is removed from the school's musical where she played the part of Rizzo in *Grease*. The removal of her feminine clothing completely changes Unique's demeanor; she no longer has the energy she once had and feels like she is no longer a part of the women or the men. Finally, her friend Marley persuades her to perform again in feminine clothing, which gives Unique the confidence to stand up to her parents. Unique's identity is deeply connected to her clothing because it allows her to express her gender.

Relationships as Gender

In 2007, Janna et al. conducted research identifying the occurrences of traditional masculinity and femininity on primetime network television in their article

“From Sex to Sexuality: Exposing the Heterosexual Script on Primetime Television.”

Janna et al. measured their study using 22 codes representing different traditional masculine and feminine viewpoints of sexuality and sex. Kurt and his boyfriend Blaine appear on opposite ends of the gender spectrum in their relationship in the show.

Kurt exhibits many of traditionally feminine traits and Blaine exhibits many of the traditionally masculine traits. Episodes “I am Unicorn” and “The First Time” in season 3 of *Glee* portray Kurt’s approach to sex and sexuality especially well. In “I Am Unicorn”, Kurt tries out for the lead role of the school’s musical. He runs into issues however, when the co-directors are concerned about giving him the lead role since they fear that Kurt isn’t masculine enough. Kurt is determined to show off his “pure masculine power”, as he calls it, so he enlists the help of Rachel to audition a scene with him. Kurt chooses a scene from *Romeo & Juliet* where Romeo and Juliet have just finished having sex. Janna et al. identify “sex as masculinity” as the most prevalent of the masculine traits in primetime television. Kurt is associating frequency and prowess of sex with masculinity, but unfortunately the co-directors and Rachel can’t take him seriously. They see him as “too much of a lady” and “a little delicate”. When Kurt confesses his troubles to his masculine father, Burt, he tells Kurt that “you’re gay; you’re really gay. You sing like Diana Ross, and you dress like you own a magical chocolate factory”. Burt encourages him to accept who he is, but it is interesting that Burt equates extreme homosexuality with femininity. It doesn’t seem like a surprising or outlandish claim, but it has important implications. If flamboyant

queens and the feminine gays are *really* gay, presumably then a more masculine gay man is somehow *less* gay than his queen counterpart. This is certainly more outlandish, but there's support for this in other texts beyond *Glee*. Many shows feature gay characters expressing concerns about being "too gay".

In "The First Time", Kurt and Blaine are both concerned with the pace of their sexual relationships particularly because Blaine has been told that his lack of experience with sex is affecting his performance as Tony in the school's production of *West Side Story*. Kurt is open with Blaine about his feelings and emotions regarding sex but his expression is used as a way to let Blaine know of Kurt's expectations. Instead of acting on his own feelings, Kurt expects Blaine to initiate. Janna et al. illustrates "men as sexual initiators" as a traditionally masculine trait, one that Kurt doesn't possess. But what's especially interesting is that Kurt expects Blaine to express these masculine traits. Another feminine trait that Janna et al. illustrates is that "women use passive and alluring strategies to win men's affections".

The character Sebastian Smythe is introduced as a new singer at Blaine's old school. Sebastian is openly gay and flirts with Blaine, not unnoticed by Kurt. So when Sebastian invites Blaine and Kurt to go to a gay bar with him, Kurt accepts despite Blaine mentioning, "it doesn't sound like us". Having earlier lamented that he's afraid that Blaine finds him "boring, sexually", Kurt goes to the bar to show Blaine that he's fun and exciting. Kurt dances with Blaine, being sure to be close to Blaine in order to keep him away from Sebastian. Finally, Kurt exhibits another one of Janna's feminine traits, "women set sexual limits". After the night at the bar, Blaine initiates sex with

Kurt. Kurt pushes him away, however, and tells him that he doesn't want to have sex with Blaine when he's drunk. Blaine and Kurt don't have sex until Kurt gives him the go-ahead at the end of episode. But even then Kurt says that they should go back to Blaine's house despite Kurt's house also being empty and unoccupied. Finally, while not pertaining to any specific trait outlined by Janna, Kurt and Blaine exhibit the feminine and masculine traits in other parts of the episode. At the bar, Blaine drinks beer while Kurt drinks a mixed drink through a straw garnished with cherries. And towards the end of episode, Kurt tells Blaine that "I'm still just a silly romantic", which is commonly associated with the feminine gender.

Unique pursues a reluctant Ryder by pretending to be a girl named Katie online. Unique uses pictures of a young, white, blond girl to attract Ryder, who quickly becomes enamored with the online persona. However, when Unique confesses to him that she's been the one who's been talking to him online, Ryder tells her that he never wants to see her again. They make up by the end of the episode, but their friendship remains shaky. It is not surprising that Ryder and Unique did not work as a couple. Ryder is very conservative character, and struggled more than any of the other Glee Club members with accepting Unique's choice to be seen as a woman.

It is not surprising, however, that the pairing of Kurt and Blaine or Unique and Ryder happens between characters who represent feminine/masculine pairs. A study conducting in Sweden and Australia compared the gender roles of relationships between homosexuals in either country (Ross). In Sweden, where homosexuality is more accepting, a large variance in gender roles exists within homosexual couples.

However, in the relatively conservative Australia, homosexual couples also tended to fall along feminine/masculine pairs. The reason given for this difference was that in an environment where heterosexual relationships are presented as the normal and accepted relationship standard, even homosexual relationships would have a tendency to mirror them. *Glee* takes place in Lima, OH, and the local community is presented repeatedly as conservative. The sexual minorities at the school experience merciless bullying and struggle to be accepted. Comparatively, *The L Word* takes place in liberal West Hollywood. The relationships seen there have a greater tendency to break gender roles. Shane, the most masculine of the central lesbian characters, is seen in relationships with both masculine and feminine women.

Conclusion

The line between Kurt and Unique's gender identity can feel thin at times. Kurt feels like he's a pair of heels away from being transgender himself. However, the difference between homosexual and transgender in representation is huge. When Unique was added to main cast in the fourth season of *Glee*, she became the only transgender character on scripted broadcast or cable television, according to GLAAD (Kane). Homosexual representation enjoyed an all-time high at the time with 3.9% of characters on television identifying as homosexual (Kane). *Glee* show creator Ryan Murphy has always been a proponent for transgendered characters, with *Nip/Tuck* being one of the earliest shows on cable to have a recurring transgender character. But

transgender characters still face attack and scrutiny on a level that homosexual characters have seemed to rise above.

Bill O'Reilly, a conservative political commentator and television/radio host, criticized *Glee*'s inclusion of a transgender character. O'Reilly stated that shows like *Glee* glamourize transgenderism and transsexuality, and called characters like Unique "dopey". Alex Newell, who plays Unique on *Glee*, replied "when it is something this poignant and such a big part of the society, you can't call kids dopey because this is something that they're actually going through, this is what they feel on the inside, there's nothing dopey about it" (Durey). However, Unique remains the only transgender character on broadcast, and representation of the trans-community suffers because of it. The ongoing theme of misunderstanding that surrounds Unique in *Glee* reflects the lack of understanding that exists about transgenders and transsexuals.

The only recurring transsexual character to be added to television since Unique is Sophia on Netflix's *Orange is the New Black*. Sophia is a post-op male-to-female transsexual, and like Unique faces extreme prejudice from her environment. The guards at the prison make crude remarks about her surgery, saying "her pole's a hole now" and calling it a "cyborg pussy". Even more interesting is the opinion of the female warden, who remarks, "why would anyone want to give up being a man? It is like winning the lottery and giving the ticket back". *Glee* and *Orange is the New Black* use characters like this to show the judgments that transsexuals face, but without greater representation to provide more positive examples of transsexuality, neither show alone is capable of having an impact on its audience.

Chapter 5: *Modern Family* and Homosexual Family Roles

Introduction

In the 1990s and 1980s, gay sexuality was left off-screen. Because celibacy was a requirement for admittance into television, homosexual characters were rarely seen in relationships. As networks slowly became more comfortable with the display of homosexual affection, homosexual couples became more prevalent. However, children were rarely seen with homosexual parents. A common opinion held by psychologists prior to 1973 was that homosexuals were capable of passing their sexuality on to others. This theory was referred to as contagion theory (Levitt & Klassen, 1974). It proposed that homosexuality could be caused by exposure to homosexuals. This was used as an argument against homosexual adoption or foster care.

By the 1990s, more support came out for homosexual adoption. The *American Psychologist* published an article stated that “research on the sexual orientation of children of lesbian mothers does not confirm the 'contagion' assumption inherent in so many court decisions” (Falk). The American Psychological Association (APA) became more involved with homosexual parents and pushed for a male couple to adopt a boy through artificial insemination in 1992 (Cameron). Furthermore, in the case of *Bottoms vs. Bottoms* in 1993 the APA joined the National Association of Social Workers to support the case that homosexuals could be fit parents. Despite the fact that the court ruled against custody for the homosexual mother, APA’s official support was monumental.

Despite the support that homosexuals parents were getting in 1990s, children were absent in the lives of homosexual couples on television. In the depictions of gay weddings in *Northern Exposure* and *Roseanne*, no mention of children or plans for families were discussed. In *Friends*, Ross's ex-wife has a lesbian partner and raises a child with her, but the son was conceived during her time with Ross. It was the product of a heterosexual relationship instead of a commitment made in a homosexual one.

Recently, homosexual parents are quite popular on television. The end of *Will and Grace* brought Will together with his long-time boyfriend to raise a son. *Grey's Anatomy's* Callie and Arizona raise a child together, and *Glee's* star Rachel is raised by two loving dads. Comedies like *Arrested Development* and *American Dad* featured gay partners seeking out surrogates. However, many of these shows do little beyond just include homosexual parenting. Rachel's dads are mentioned rarely and seem to have little impact on her storylines. The fact that one is African American and the other is Jewish seems more an attempt at humor than at diversity. Will and his partner, Vince, don't start raising their child until the end of the series.

In 2009, ABC developed its breakout comedy *Modern Family* which features homosexual partners Cameron and Mitchell and their adopted daughter, Lily, from Vietnam. Mitchell and Cameron's first plotline followed their presentation of baby Lily to her new home and new family. The show is obviously family-focused, and gives a fresh perspective of homosexual couples. Now that parental responsibility has been added to the relationship, new roles begin to form.

Traditional Family Structure and Heteronormativity

Gender identities in homosexual men on TV become more complex when those men are in homosexual relationships than when they are depicted alone. The pressures of heteronormativity place gay men with feminine traits opposite men with masculine traits, creating the semblance of a heterosexual relationship.

Heteronormativity occurs when networks try to define homosexual relationships in heterosexual terms. This sort of practice becomes common when the relationship exists in an environment that places heightened pressure and importance on heterosexual relationships.

The cross-cultural study in Sweden and Australia regarding homosexual roles in conservative environments (Ross) is relevant here as well. *Modern Family's* Mitchell and Cameron have both grown up in very conservative environments. Mitchell's father, Jay, is also a main character and it's clear what patriarchal Jay's effect has been on Mitchell and his sister Claire. Mitchell and Claire are both easily stressed, quick to judge, and highly repressed characters. Even though Mitchell has come out to his father, in the earlier seasons Jay is still uncomfortable with anything that Mitchell or Cameron do that remind him of their homosexuality. Cameron reminds Mitchell that he wouldn't "kiss me in front of your dad for 6 years" in "ClosetCon '13". In "Moon Landing" Jay exhibits homophobic around Cameron when they go to the rec center to play racquetball. Jay talks about it to Gloria, saying, "I have been avoiding this day like the plague. I mean, part of going to the gym is the

locker room atmosphere. And if I'm there with a gay guy, it's just not going to be the same. For me it's a locker room; for him it's a showroom."

Cameron's background is also conservative. Cameron grew up on a farm in Missouri, and both his sister and mother are very supportive of his sexuality. His father and grandmother, however, are less supportive. In "the Last Walt", Cameron's father, Merle, comes to visit and has dinner with Mitchell and Jay. Merle and Jay have never cared for each other in the past, so neither one is particularly excited when they meet. Jay reveals that he doesn't like how Merle treats Mitchell like the wife in the relationship. Merle buys watches for Mitchell and Cameron, but Cameron's is larger and more masculine while Mitchell's is smaller and feminine. Jay confronts Merle after the two spend the night bragging about their respective sons' masculine feats. Merle accuses Jay of the same thing that Jay hates about Merle: "sometimes I think you treat Cameron like he's the woman in his relationship". The two talk and attempt to reconcile their dispute as well as their personal issues with homosexuality. Jay reasons that "it's not like it was in our day [...] They're both equal, neither is the wife", which Merle responds to with "it makes me feel a tiny bit better to think that the person he's [Cameron's] spending the rest of his life with is a tiny bit a woman". While Merle at least attempts to come to terms with homosexuality, Cameron's grandmother isn't supportive at all. When Cameron and Mitchell visit Cameron's family in "ClosetCon '13", Cameron tells Mitchell to "straighten up" around his grandmother. Cameron's grandmother doesn't know they're gay, and when they come out to her at the end of the episode, her reply is "now I know why God sent this

tornado”. Later, Cameron tells the camera that he thinks she’s made progress when she tells him she’ll attend Cameron and Mitchell’s wedding, but Mitchell reminds him that she said she’d be there “standing outside with sign”.

Because both Cameron and Mitchell have conservative backgrounds it would seem that their relationship would reflect some level of heteronormativity. And to an extent it does: Cameron is certainly the more motherly figure while Mitchell serves as the breadwinner. In “Up All Night” Cameron refers to himself as a “mother bear” when he’s taking care of Lily. But neither Cameron nor Mitchell is resigned to those roles, and both of them continually grapple with their gender roles in the show.

Cameron acts like a motherly character to Lily but balks at the idea of being called a “mom” by others. In “Mother’s Day”, Mitchell surprises Cameron with breakfast in bed. While Mitchell doesn’t tell Cameron that he’s doing it because it’s Mother’s Day, Cameron quickly finds out and is insulted that Mitchell would try to treat him like a “mom”. Cameron accuses him: “You think of me as Lily’s mother, like I’m your wife, like I’m a woman”. Flashbacks indicate that Mitchell had said things in the past like “Ms. Pritchett loves to shop”, “the wife’s not going to like this”, or “she is in a mood” in reference to Cameron. All of these things were said to other people in a facetious manner but show that Mitchell attempts to heteronormalize their relationship to other people. Cameron tells the camera that “it’s a bit of a sensitive issue for me. There’s nothing gays hate more than being treated like women”.

The issue is exacerbated when the two of them attempt to hang out with some other heterosexual couples who are also celebrating Mother’s Day. Cameron is told

that “you’re an honorary Mom” and is forced to take pictures and sit with the other moms. Mitchell tries to comfort Cameron at the end by explaining that “we’re just a new type of family. They don’t have the right type of vocabulary for us yet. They need one of us to be the mom”. Again, Mitchell’s defense is essentially an attempt to excuse heteronormativity. Mitchell also tells Cameron that “if I had to pick, of the two of us, I’d say that you are slightly ‘mom-er’”, which makes Cameron even more upset. The two resolve their argument when Mitchell gives him a card saying that he defines a mother not by gender but by being “warm”, “nurturing”, and “compassionate”, which is what everyone sees in Cameron. “It doesn’t make you any less of a man”, Mitchell tells him.

The desire to “be a man” is something that both Cameron and Mitchell try to seek out in their parental roles. In the episode “The Old Wagon”, Mitchell and Cameron both decide to build a playhouse for Lily in the backyard. Mitchell is excited and is confident in his ability to use tools, but Cameron recalls several moments of DIY renovation when Mitchell was less than capable. Cameron surreptitiously invites the technically skilled Jay over to help, and warns him that “this is particularly important for Mitchell, he wants to feel like a regular Joe, like you or I”. Even though Cameron takes the more feminine role as a parent, when it comes to physical labor Mitchell is less competent, which he feels emasculates him. Cameron explains, “there are few areas that define us men, like sports and construction. Mitchell just wants to feel like he’s part of the man club”.

Mitchell struggles with the construction project while Jay and Cameron try to assign him meaningless tasks to distract him from using any power tools. Jay and Cameron continue to discuss Mitchell after he accidentally builds himself into the playhouse without a way out. Jay tells Cameron that Mitchell doesn't need to excel at construction to be manly, that instead "law school, a great career, providing for his family, that's manly, too, in a classical sense". Of course, Cameron takes offense to manliness being defined by the parental role of breadwinner and insists, "I think it also takes a big man to quit his career and raise a child". Jay begrudgingly offers that "you're a man too, Cameron", because, like Mitchell, Cameron also needs reassurance of his manliness.

At the same time, Mitchell is concerned that Cameron is the only one who gets to be caring and comforting to Lily. Because Cameron is so soft and nurturing all the time, Mitchell feels like the role of disciplinarian has to fall on him. In "Up All Night", Mitchell attempts to "Ferberize" Lily so that no one goes to comfort her when she wakes up in the middle of the night crying. Cameron struggles with hearing Lily and cry and Mitchell needs to physically restrain him to prevent him from going to her. In the morning Mitchell approaches Cameron about it, saying, "Lily can't grow up with one huggy, happy, cuddly dad and one frowny, lesson-teachy dad, because guess which one she's going to have walk her down the aisle". The two of them discuss their roles and decide to split the discipline between the two of them and that they'll both walk her down the aisle when the time comes.

Cameron and Mitchell both want to be masculine and nurturing, and their attempt to reconcile the two can be difficult. When Lily's first word to them is "Mommy", the two of them become greatly concerned that they're unable to fill that nurturing role. They had been frequently inviting Lily's female Asian pediatrician over to their house because they felt that Lily would benefit from growing up around someone who looked more like her. But when the pediatrician is holding her, Lily blurts out the word "Mommy" which Cameron claims is "every gay father's worst nightmare". Mitchell and Cameron fuss over it, and Cameron blames himself. He tells the pediatrician "I quit my job so that I could stay home and be with her, but maybe it's not enough. Maybe we're not providing her with the feminine energy she needs". The two of them resolve the issue when they discover that one of the dolls that they had bought for Lily makes the sound "mommy" whenever it is squeezed.

Mitchell and Cameron continually fight against their roles, but always end up being depicted from a perspective of heteronormativity. At the end of the day, Mitchell is still the breadwinner and Cameron is still the stay-at-home dad. When Mitchell quits his job in "Truth Be Told", Cameron gets a job while Mitchell stays at home with Lily. Quickly, the two become miserable. They solve their problem by admitting that Mitchell just likes having a career and Cameron likes to stay home and take care of Lily. Cameron finds himself at home again and Mitchell finds another job.

Conclusion

Modern Family's tendency to present heteronormalized relationships hasn't damaged its popularity. It's won the primetime Emmy award for outstanding comedy series four years in a row and has received recognition from activist groups such as GLAAD and NAACP. It's currently ABC's most popular show. Considering the number of homosexual characters the show, *Modern Family*'s popularity is all the more impressive. Nathan Lane plays the recurring Pepper Saltzman, a flamboyant gay friend of Mitchell and Cameron who makes the couple look comparatively reserved. The show brought on a lesbian couple with a child for a play date with Lily that examined the similarities and differences between gay men and lesbians. And the other main characters get their own share of plotlines involving homosexuality. Phil is approached by a gay man and cluelessly leads him on, while Jay struggles with his own conservative tendencies while supporting his son.

For all its progress, the show still limits itself. Mitchell and Cameron rarely engage in any on-screen affection. The two are quick to shower each other with loving words, but an on-screen kiss is usually restricted to a peck on the cheek. In "The Kiss", Cameron confronts Mitchell's phobia of public affection, and the two finally share a kiss at the end. However, the kiss is in the background, while the focus of the scene is on a reconciliation between Claire and her father, Jay. Mitchell is constantly regulating Cameron's desire to flaunt his sexuality. In "The Bicycle Thief", Mitchell asks Cameron to change clothes and appear more masculine before going to a group daycare for Lily. A judgmental attitude always seems to be present; sometimes it's

Mitchell judging Cameron, and sometimes it's Mitchell perceiving judgment from others. Either way, their sexuality is always placed in check by societal or personal pressures.

Conclusion

Major Trends of Primetime Television

Through *Grey's Anatomy*, *Glee*, and *Modern Family*, four major trends emerge regarding presentation of homosexual characters. These themes include a tendency to align homosexuality with upper-middle class white individuals, a tendency to favor female sexual development stories over male sexual development stories, a tendency toward images of female homosexual affection over male homosexual affection, and a tendency toward feminine gendering of both male homosexuality and female homosexuality.

Over all three programs, homosexuality has is typically reserved for white or near-white characters. What I mean by “near-white” are characters who, although they might come from a non-white background, their race is not only incidental to their sexuality but also to their character to development as a whole. Changing the race on these characters would essentially be a physical change only - “near-white” is just tokenism within homosexual presentation. Additionally, homosexuals are almost exclusively affluent. This occurs even when it shouldn't make a lot of real-world sense. For example, in *Glee*, Kurt's father Burt works as a mechanic in Ohio, which shouldn't be a well-paying job. Despite this, their house is considerably nicer for what should be affordable on a mechanics salary, and the jobless Kurt is almost never seen without nice, designer clothing (that doesn't repeat throughout the episodes).

The problem with this is pretty clear - it is limiting homosexual narratives to those who would otherwise fit completely into the mainstream narrative. Its theme is

based on historical tendencies - portrayal of a character who both belongs to a racial community and the homosexual community has long been absent from broadcast television.

In the second trend, the self-discovery of sexuality is generally absent from males. Male characters are often presented as homosexual from the start. When male homosexuals are in relationships with women, or used to be in relationships with women, it's portrayed as closeted behavior. Each character feels in retrospect that they were always gay and didn't realize it or had ignored it due to social barriers or stigma. In *Modern Family*, Cameron and Mitchell discuss past relationships they had with women when they were still closeted. In these accounts, they detail how their latent homosexuality affected each relationship. At no point do they feel as though that was a correct relationship for them to be in.

In contrast, female homosexuality is more often presented along a spectrum. Many females identify past (or even current) attraction to males as legitimate, and consider their sexuality to have developed from heterosexual to homosexual. Both Brittany from *Glee* and Callie from *Grey's Anatomy* engage in relationships with men and women during the show, but neither self-identify as bisexual. Either way of representing could be correct, but it seems that latent homosexuality is reserved for male characters and fluid sexuality is reserved for female characters. It is an inconsistency, and this way of portraying male homosexuality tends to ignore or even deny Kinsey's conclusion that sexuality is a spectrum that individuals fluctuate within throughout their lives.

The third trend of female affection presence over male affection is reminiscent of the “lesbian kiss episodes” that were prevalent in the 1990s. On current television, both males and females are permitted to kiss, but the barriers for female homosexual affection are lower. For example, on *Modern Family* Mitchell and Cameron do not show affection on screen despite having been together for over 15 years. They give pecks to each on the cheek and frequently hug. However, kissing on the lips is very rare and quick. Affection is shown, however, between the heterosexual couples on the show. On *Glee*, male couple Kurt and Blaine are shown in passionate kisses. However, these characters have taken several seasons to develop their relationship, culminating in a proposal at the beginning of season 5. Brittany and Santana, however, are far more minor characters whose relationship is relatively undeveloped and occupies far less screen time or discussion. And yet, they are shown in bed together while Kurt and Blaine have only been implied to have shared a bed. Additionally, there are more instances of Brittany and Santana kissing than instances of Kurt and Blaine kissing.

In the fourth trend, male homosexual characters tend to exhibit far more feminine traits than their heterosexual counterparts. This isn’t especially surprising, and for the most part tends to no longer be reminiscent of the stereotyped gays that existed in early television. Feminine gay men tend to be more nuanced. However, female homosexuals on current television no longer exhibit the “bull dyke” stereotype that used to be associated with them. Currently a more accurate representation is the so-called “lipstick lesbian” (popularized on *Ellen* in 1997): female homosexuals who display almost exclusively feminine characteristics.

This trend seems appears to overcorrect for previous political incorrectness. And in either case, representations display heteronormativity. However, it's excluding the portions of lesbians who do identify with the male gender more than the female gender. Additionally, it seems to be a product of male interest, much like the "lesbian kiss episodes". Lesbians (and especially bisexuals) are presented as what could be seen as a man's view of what a lesbian should be: traditionally attractive and in relationships with other attractive women.

The Development of Niche Programming

One proposed solution to increasing television's representation of marginalized communities is to develop niche channels that can solely focus on those groups. In 2005, former MTV executive Matt Farber and Showtime launched Logo TV, the first advertiser-supported channel with LGBT-focused programming. The launch of this sort of niche programming was wonderfully timed; *Will & Grace* and *Queer as Folk* both ended in 2005. *Will & Grace* had been extremely successful at drawing in both straight and queer viewers, even despite having the work around the stringent restrictions of airing on a major broadcast network. If networks were willing to show Will sharing an quick, on-screen kiss with his platonic friend Jack or show Will adopting a son with his partner, Vince, then surely a channel dedicated to LGBT programming could expand on that and push the boundaries even further.

However, Logo TV was unable to meet those expectations. The channel's original programming was mostly filled with reality shows. The scripted programs

were often lackluster and unsuccessful, and the majority of them didn't last beyond its first season. Slowly, Logo TV drifted away from its initial purpose. Reruns of admittedly gay-friendly programs such as *Daria*, *Roseanne*, and *The Golden Girls* started to fill in the time slots. By 2012, Logo TV appeared to almost completely abandon their goal by announcing they would not be developing programming with any gay leads in the next year (Ciriaco). Instead their focus would be simply lifestyle-themed programming.

It seemed that Logo's switch had damaged their relationship with their original intended audience: young, urban gay men and women. However, while Logo's cable channel had been in decline, its online presence was growing. Inspired by the popular gay web-series *The Outs*, editorial director for LogoTV.com Charles Runette said, "we [LogoTV.com] should be doing that" (Nazemian). LogoTV.com picked up their own web series *Hunting Season* and *East Siders*. *Hunting Season* started as an independent film and was pitched originally to Logo to be turned into a show. Logo turned it down but LogoTV.com picked it up, creating a clear distinction in the directions in which the two media platforms wanted to go. Runette voiced that LogoTV.com goal was to "reach new audiences and to figure out new pathways for content on the Logo platforms. We're experimenting with web series because we feel like it is the future" (Nazemian).

Logo's shift towards online gay programming may very well be the future; after all, younger audiences are consuming more and more content online on their computer and phones. But in terms of increasing and expanding representation, niche

programming simply isn't sufficient. Niche channels like Logo or BET are great places for marginalized communities to feel like they have a channel they can call their own. It's a place that these communities can look to for honest and accurate portrayals and issues that directly affect their community. But it's important for television to do more than just help bring communities together - television should be working to bring different communities in contact with one another. Marginalized groups should be able to see their stories on major broadcast networks because it both exposes out-groups to marginalized stories as well as reinforces to the marginalized groups that they are (or should be) a part of the mainstream culture and narrative. Keeping these stories only on niche channels is really just another form of marginalization.

The Power of Programs with Agendas

Part of the reason that *Glee*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Modern Family* were chosen as focus pieces for this paper is they all have clear agendas. The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was overturned in the summer of 2013, and in the fall both the *Glee* and *Modern Family* season premieres announced that there would be a gay wedding. Whether these weddings were planned in advance or influenced by the DOMA ruling, agendas seem to be most effective television mirrors politics.

During the 2008 election, same-sex marriage was one of the topics for debate. At that time, Obama had come out and said that while he supported civil unions for same-sex couples and would work to repeal DOMA, he did not support same-sex

marriages. The majority of the American public was on-board with that opinion; a poll taken of registered voters by the Pew Research Group noted that 50% of Americans did not support gay marriage, with 39% in support and 11% unsure (*CNN.com*). Homosexuals on television were also absent at that time. *Glee* and *Modern Family* did not begin airing until 2009 and while Erica and Callie of *Grey's Anatomy* had kissed, Erica was written out in September of 2008 and Callie had returned to her heterosexual relationship with Mark. Over the next four years, *Glee* and *Modern Family* won multiple Emmys and were the top shows on FOX and ABC respectively. *Grey's Anatomy* grew in popularity as well and had returned to its presentation of homosexual storylines in having Callie and Arizona maintain a several-season relationship. By the time the 2012 election came along there were much different opinions regarding homosexual marriage. Now, polls indicated that 50% of Americans supported same-sex marriage, with 48% opposing it and 2% unsure (Gast, et al.).

The increase in popularity of shows with homosexual relationships is certainly not the only factor influencing the change in American opinion regarding same-sex marriage. But what's more important than the shift from majority opposing same-sex marriage to the majority in support was the major changes seen in those unsure or without an opinion. There was only a 4% drop in those opposing gay marriage, which isn't surprising considering religious opposition is a major factor. But there was a huge drop in the number of unsure people. People might not be willing to change their minds, but in 2012 Americans clearly felt better informed and more opinionated. Considering the average American's high diet of television viewing, programs like

Glee, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Modern Family* can certainly shoulder some of the responsibility for this polarizing change.

Now that these shows have shown that programs with agendas can still be popular with the public, it's to be expected that there will be an increase in agenda-driven programs in the mainstream narratives. However, there needs to be consideration regarding the subtlety of these agendas. *The New Normal* was very clearly agenda-driven but lacked the character design or plot to back it up. Like *Modern Family*, most of *The New Normal* episodes ended with a voice-over message that ties the different plot lines together. However, *The New Normal* fell into the same pit that the final season of *Ellen* ran into - the messages were about homosexuality but were directed at a homosexual audience. Having an overt message can exclude audiences. *Modern Family* does a great job of balancing messages that apply to both homosexual and heterosexual relationships. In doing so it's gained popularity with conservative viewers as well. 2012 Republican Candidate Mitt Romney admitted to enjoying the program (Parker) and *Modern Family* was given an award for Best Television Show by the Catholics in Media Association (Nededog).

The Future of Homosexual Programming

As agenda-driven programming is rising in popularity and efficacy, the final question lies with what the agenda will be. Same-sex marriages have been a major focus but with the appealing of DOMA and the increase in states allowing same-sex

marriage, marriage equality may no longer be an issue in the near future (at least in the eyes of the law). So what major issue is left to be resolved?

The major unspoken problem resonates through any show that features a gay character and has to be considered any time a program is being developed that wants to put homosexual characters in the forefront. How can we reconcile the fact that the differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals are both important and inconsequential? Programs such as *Glee*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Modern Family* struggle with this and there's no clear answer. Are the differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals inconsequential or important? Are they "just like us" or are they a group whose differences should be celebrated? Clearly, neither one of those is a full answer, but finding that line between acknowledging the different issues that are associated with that lifestyle while celebrating and joining in with the issues that are shared should be a step in the right direction.

However, what should be a goal is an increase in incidental homosexuality. Currently, homosexual characters on television almost approach each decision and obstacle from a "gay perspective". That is, the show implies that the character's choices stem largely from their sexuality. While *Modern Family* often tries to reinforce the idea that homosexual parents go through the same struggles as heterosexual parents, Cameron and Mitchell's choices in raising Lily are often rooted in their sexuality. The eventual goal would be to have a character whose sexuality could be omitted or edited from the program, and a substantial amount of the character remains. In the 1976 movie *The Man Who Fell to Earth* there is a character who is

gay, without much incident to the plot. The actor who played the main character, Buck Henry, asked the director Nicholas Roeg “Why is my character gay? Why am I playing a homosexual?” Roeg responded “Why not? There are homosexuals.” (Russo). If they want to retain progressive audiences, then that’s the mentality that television producers need to take when developing a program with homosexual characters.

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