I've Got a Girl Crush: Parents' Responses to Stories About Sexuality in Children's Television

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Jennie Elizabeth McAndrew, B.A.

Graduate Program in Communication

The Ohio State University

2020

Thesis Committee:

James Alex Bonus, Adviser

Emily Moyer-Gusé

Copyright by

Jennie Elizabeth McAndrew

2020

Abstract

An experiment examined how third- and first-person perceptions influence parental mediation of stories about LGBTQ+ characters. Parents ($N = 702$) watched a children's show wherein a young girl is revealed to have a crush on another girl. Results indicated that many parents misidentified the girl's romantic interest as a boy (rather than another girl). Although third- and first-person perceptual gaps emerged with regard to parents' perception that this content would either be threatening or valuable for their own (vs. other) children, these gaps had minimal influence on parental mediation intentions. Instead, parents who harbored negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people rated the show as more threatening and less valuable (for all children) relative to a control episode, which enhanced their support for oppositional mediation (i.e., censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation) and diminished their support for positive active mediation.

Vita

2014.....Gahanna Lincoln High School

2018.....B.A. Communication, The Ohio State University

2018 to present.....Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Communication,
The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Communication

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Vita.....	ii
List of Tables.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Literature.....	3
The Current Study.....	9
Method.....	13
Results.....	17
Discussion.....	25
References.....	33
Appendix A: Tables.....	41
Appendix B: Figures.....	47

List of Tables

Table 1. Correlation Matrix.....	42
Table 2. Detailed Descriptions of all Measures.....	43
Table 3. Effects of Condition on Parental Mediation Intentions.....	44
Table 4. Effects of Condition on Perceptions of Threat and Value.....	45
Table 5. Regression Models Predicting Mediation Behaviors.....	46

List of Figures

Figure 1. Moderation Mediation Model for Oppositional Mediation.....	48
Figure 2. Moderation Mediation Model for Positive Active Mediation.....	49

Introduction

The acclaimed PBS cartoon *Arthur* gained national attention in 2019 when a recurring character, Mr. Ratburn, married another male character on the show. This unambiguous display of same-sex romance in a show aimed at 4- to -8-year-old children produced mixed responses among parents. Online comments ranged from disgust (e.g., “They are subjecting children to this immoral garbage!”) to adulation (e.g., “This show is a classic [. . .] it taught me many important life lessons...”), and reflected sharp disagreement about the appropriateness of this material for young children (i.e., some rated the episode for ages 2+, whereas others rated it 18+; Commonsense Media, 2019). The state of Alabama refused to air the episode (Frank, 2019). Of course, a multitude of children’s shows have incorporated queer characters in recent years, both implicitly (e.g., *The Legend of Korra*) and explicitly (e.g., *Adventure Time*). However, this depiction of Mr. Ratburn was notable for its presence in a widely popular educational cartoon targeted to children as young as preschoolers.

Undoubtedly, these types of pro-tolerance messages are created with laudable intentions. For example, the creators of *Arthur* made it clear that this episode was intended to reflect the reality of some family structures in contemporary society (Wong, 2019). However, the success of these stories is largely contingent on parents allowing their children to view them and—to the extent necessary—helping their children make sense of them. Yet, existing research suggests that parents are reticent to discuss sexuality with their children (El-Shaieb and Wurtele, 2009), and they are unlikely to expose their children to material that they believe might be inappropriate or harmful to their development (Lee, 2013). If parents restrict this material, then these messages might be incapable of producing meaningful improvements in viewers’ attitudes. Moreover, if

parents use this material to reinforce prejudicial ideas, these messages might impact viewers in ways that are antithetical to the intentions of their creators. The current project draws on research examining parental mediation and the third-person effect to examine why parents might choose to limit their children's access to media depictions of queer characters, or why they might discuss this content in ways that contradicts underlying pro-tolerance messages.

Parents' Hesitations about Sex and Sexuality

Parents often struggle to discuss sex and sexuality, including topics like genital differences, menstruation, sexually transmitted infections, and dating (El-Shaieb & Wurtele, 2009). These hesitations occur because parents often feel uncomfortable broaching these topics, and they sometimes lack the relevant knowledge to do so effectively (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, & Collins, 2008). Although most parents feel these discussions are important, many believe that their children are not ready to have them, and parents are often uncertain if they can adequately address the questions their children might raise (Wilson et al., 2010). Issues regarding sexual orientation appear especially contentious. El-Shaieb and Wurtele (2009) asked parents to rank how effective they would be discussing fifteen sex education topics with their children. Sexual orientation was ranked thirteenth—ahead of only masturbation and nocturnal emissions—and parents believed these discussions should not occur until their children are at least ten years old. Similar results have been identified across different ethnic groups in the United States (Kenney & Wurtele, 2013).

As a result of these issues, parents often desire help initiating these conversations with their children. In one qualitative study, parents reported that one of the best ways they could facilitate these conversations was simply by spending time together and hoping their children would naturally disclose their questions and concerns (Wilson et al., 2010). This same study indicated that parents occasionally turn to television for assistance, both because it offers educational resources (e.g., *The Discovery Channel*) and because parents find that watching programs together helps to create informal moments where children's questions can naturally

arise in conversation (see also Afifi et al., 2008). Additionally, researchers have recommended that parents utilize television in their discussions (Malacane & Beckmeyer, 2016; Milton, 1996) because children are often exposed to sexual content on television (Rideout, 2007) and sometimes use this material to initiate conversations about sex (Collins et al., 2003). Children are also more receptive to discussions of sex when their parents approach the subject informally (Afifi et al., 2008). Accordingly, children's entertainment television could be used as a tool to introduce sex-related topics in ways that might interest children, especially if this material provides age-appropriate examples that parents could reinforce in conversation.

Parental Mediation of Children's Television Exposure

Parental mediation refers to how parents manage or supervise their children's media exposure (Collier et al., 2016). Generally, research has identified two broad categories of mediation behaviors: active and restrictive. Active mediation occurs when parents engage their children in conversation about media depictions. Depending on parents' view of the subject matter in question, these discussions can be positive (e.g., endorsing or praising a depiction), negative (e.g., criticizing or arguing with a depiction), or neutral (e.g., explaining a depiction; Collier et al., 2016; Nathanson, 2001). Restrictive mediation occurs when parents enforce parameters on their children's media consumption, either by managing how long they can engage with a particular type of content or by banning their exposure to certain content outright (Nathanson, 2001). Some scholars have also investigated parents' support for media censorship because these attitudes reflect restrictive intentions, albeit on a broader social scale (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002; Nathanson et al., 2002).

Recently, a longitudinal study by Beyens, Valkeburg, and Piotrowski (2019) found that

parental mediation efforts generally increase across early childhood (i.e., ages 3-6), peak around age 8, and decline through middle childhood (i.e., ages 9-10). Although this same study found that positive active mediation is the most common type of mediation strategy that parents employ, restrictive and negative active mediation efforts become more common in middle childhood. The authors hypothesize that these shifts occur because children begin to lose interest in educational content as they grow older, and they become more interested in potentially harmful content (e.g., violent media).

Generally, parents' use of active mediation is associated with positive child outcomes, such as better comprehension of educational media (Strouse, O'Doherty, & Troseth, 2013) and reduced aggression in response to violent media (Nathanson, 2001). However, desirable outcomes are rather clearly defined in these contexts (e.g., learning is good; aggression is bad). Considering the topic sexual orientation, desirable outcomes are less obvious. Indeed, some parents might believe these messages need to be amplified as a way to promote tolerance and acceptance for people in the LGBTQ+ community. Yet, other parents might believe these depictions need to be censored, restricted, or criticized as a way to ensure that their children do not mimic them (e.g., by pursuing same-sex relationships or by feeling positively toward LGBTQ+ individuals). This division of viewpoints is not present in less contentious topic areas (e.g., media violence), which means that parental mediation efforts might operate in fundamentally new and currently unexplored ways in this context. Research on the third-person effect offers a useful lens through which to examine these issues.

Extant Research on the Third-Person Effect

The third-person effect refers to the idea that people tend to perceive media as more

influential on others than on themselves or those close to them (Perloff, 2009). In other words, media exposure is thought to have its greatest effect not “on ‘me’ or ‘you,’ but on ‘them’ — the third persons” (Davison, 1983). This logical fallacy has been documented across a range of research contexts, including adults’ perceptions of exposure to pornography (Gunther, 1995) and advertising (Gunther & Thorson, 1992), as well as children’s and adolescents’ notions of who is impacted by depictions of smoking (Gunther, Bolt, Borzekowski, Liebhart, & Dillard, 2006; Henriksen & Flora, 1999). In part, the third-person effect results from the joint influence of self-serving biases (e.g., attributing one’s successes to internal causes and failures to external causes) and other-derogating biases (e.g., attributing others’ successes to external causes and failures to internal causes; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). Consequently, people tend to view themselves as immune to the negative influences of media because they are too resilient to be swayed by such material, whereas others are vulnerable because of their inherent naïveté.

Parents generally apply the same self-serving biases to their children as they do to themselves. For example, they believe that other children (relative to their own) will be more harmed by exposure to media violence (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002), teen dramas (Tsftati, Ribak, & Cohen, 2005), sexual media (Nathanson, Eveland, Park, & Paul, 2002), advertising (Meirick, Sims, Gilchrist, & Croucher, 2009), and cyberbullying (Ho, Lwin, Yee, Sng, & Chen, 2019). However, there is some indication that these patterns shift when examined with more desirable outcomes. Indeed, Meirick et al. (2009) found that third-person perceptions dissipated, and in some cases reversed, when parents were asked about children’s learning from educational media. Specifically, there were no differences in how much parents believed that their own children (relative to other children) would learn from this programming about basic academic subjects

(e.g., the alphabet; arithmetic), yet they believed that their own children would learn significantly more about advanced subjects (e.g., history; natural sciences). This latter result is described as a “first-person effect,” since it implies that parents are occasionally more willing to attribute positive outcomes of media exposure to their own children than they are to others.

A handful of studies have examined the influence of these perceptual gaps on parental mediation efforts (Hoffner & Buchanon, 2009; Nathanson et al., 2002; Tsfaty et al., 2005). However, conclusions from this work are often counterintuitive. For example, Ho et al. (2019) found that third-person perceptions about the harmful effects of cyberbullying positively predicted parents’ use of both active and restrictive mediation strategies with their own children, but negatively predicted parents’ support for anti-cyberbullying legislation. Relatedly, Hoffner and Buchanon (2002) found that parents’ third-person perceptions about the influence of media violence increased their tendency to mediate that material with their own children but decreased their support for regulating that material. It is unclear why parents’ fears about other children would lead them to mediate their own children’s exposure (i.e., active mediation) while reducing their support for interventions benefitting other children (i.e., censorship or regulation). This issue is compounded by the fact that other studies have arrived at contradictory conclusions, such that third-person perceptions sometimes have no effect (Meirick et al., 2009) or positive effects (Wilkinson et al., 2019) on censorship.

Such ambiguities likely stem, in part, from analytical differences across studies. Most have relied on the use of difference scores (e.g., parents’ ratings for their own children are subtracted from their ratings for other children), which are then used as predictors in regression equations (Ho et al., 2019; Hoffner & Buchanon, 2002). This approach is limited in what they

can reveal about the joint influence of two variables on a third outcome, given that it conflates the effects of both variables into one number (Edwards, 2001; 2002). More recently, scholars have utilized an alternative statistical technique called *polynomial regression with response surface analysis*, which is better suited to assess these relationships because it models them in three dimensions (Shanock et al., 2010). Despite these strengths, use of this technique remains rare in the literature (Wilkinson & Berry, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2019). A more common approach simultaneously enters parents' ratings of their own and other children in the same regression model (Nathanson et al., 2002; Tsfati et al., 2005). Although this approach can provide information about the relative impact of each variable, it is unable to model the influence of discrepancies between them. The current experiment sought to compare these three analytical approaches in order to provide clearer insights about the influence of third- and first-person perceptions on parents' mediation intentions of LGBTQ+ media.

The Current Study

Parents of children between the ages of 5 and 12 were randomly assigned to view one of two versions of the children's cartoon *Loud House*, a popular children's entertainment program. Parents in the *girl crush* condition watched a shortened version of a controversial episode aired in 2017, wherein a young girl expresses romantic interest in another girl (Anne, 2017). Conversely, parents in the *boy crush* condition watched a different version of the same episode, edited in such a way to imply that the girl's feelings are aimed at a boy. Afterward, parents were asked to indicate their support for four different mediation strategies: censorship (i.e., banning the episode), restrictive mediation (i.e., setting limits on their children's exposure), negative active mediation (i.e. criticizing the episode), and positive active mediation (i.e., praising the episode). They also rated the clip on how threatening they perceived it (e.g., communicating immoral messages) and how valuable they perceived it (e.g., fostering tolerance).

Predictions for mediation intentions. A wealth of research indicates that parents support banning or limiting children's access to media content that they perceive to be harmful or inappropriate (Ho et al., 2019; Nathanson et al., 2002). Additionally, parents use restrictive mediation and negative active mediation strategies to protect children from material that they believe to be dangerous (Beyens et al., 2019). Because parents feel that children are not ready for discussions about sexual orientation until ages 10 or 11 (El-Shaieb & Wurtele, 2009), it was expected that parents would believe that stories about same-sex romance are inappropriate for a children's show, and they would respond protectively. It was predicted,

H1: Parents in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition will report higher support for censorship **(a)**, higher support for restrictive mediation **(b)**, higher support for negative active

mediation **(c)**, and lower support for positive active mediation **(d)**.

Of course, these protective responses should not occur for all parents. In the U.S., there are stark political differences in attitudes about LGBTQ+ issues. For example, 75% of Americans who lean Democrat support same-sex marriage, whereas only 44% of those who lean Republican support it (Pew Research Center, 2019). These differing ideologies have implications for how people react to LGBTQ+ media. For example, Holiday et al. (2018) examined parents' perceptions of a family film featuring a transgender teenager and found that conservative parents were more likely than liberal parents to support censorship of the film and less likely to support active mediation of it. It is possible that these divergent responses are rooted in parents' fears about discussing this content with their children. For example, conservative parents are generally less comfortable initiating conversations about stigmatized identities (Baker, 2002). Additionally, research has shown that exposure to LGBTQ+ depictions sometimes elicits negative stereotypes (Miller & Lewallen, 2015) and negative emotions (Gillig & Murphy, 2016), especially among conservative viewers (Gillig et al., 2018). It was predicted,

H2: The effects in H1 will be stronger for parents with discouraging (vs. accepting) attitudes toward homosexuality.

It is also possible that parents' protective responses would differ based on the age of their children, given that mediation behaviors are more common for younger children (i.e., ages 5-8) than for older children (i.e. ages 9-12; Beyens et al., 2019). It was predicted,

H3: The effects in H1 will be stronger for parents with younger (vs. older) children.

Predictions for threat and value. Research on the third-person effect suggests that parents are less likely to believe that their own children (relative to others) are harmed by

exposure to damaging content. With regard to LGBTQ+ representations, it is possible that these beliefs might emerge from parents' (often mistaken) view that their children's social and political attitudes align with their own (Meeusen & Dohnt, 2015; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). Consequently, it is expected that parents with discouraging attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues would demonstrate a third-person perceptual gap regarding the potential threat that same-sex media depictions pose for children. Specifically, it was predicted:

H4: Parents with discouraging attitudes in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition will perceive higher threat **(a)**, and this effect will be more pronounced for other (vs. their own) children **(b)**.

Parents with more accepting attitudes should view this content differently. Indeed, research shows that liberal viewers are generally less affected by LGBTQ+ media—in part because their attitudes about these groups are already positive—and they tend to experience more positive emotions as a result of exposure to it (e.g., hope; Gillig et al., 2018; Schiappa et al., 2005; Schiappa et al., 2006). Consequently, parents with accepting attitudes might view these messages as instructive for children about the importance of diversity and the virtues of tolerance. Because previous research has shown that parents are more likely to believe that their own children (relative to others) benefit from exposure to educational media (Meirick et al., 2009), it is expected that a first-person perceptual gap will emerge with regard to the value of this content for children. Specifically, it was predicted:

H5: Parents with accepting attitudes in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition will perceive higher value **(a)**, and this effect will be more pronounced for their own (vs. other) children **(b)**.

The influence of third- and first-person perceptions on parental mediation. Third-person perceptions of threat should primarily contribute to parents' support for censorship, since this protective solution applies at a broader social level (i.e., to other children). It was less clear whether to expect these perceptions to influence parents' support for other protective actions (i.e., restrictive mediation and negative active mediation), given that these solutions apply at the family level (i.e., to their own children). Consequently, the following hypothesis and research question were proposed for parents' in the *girl crush* condition:

H6: Parents' third-person perceptions of threat will increase their support for censorship.

RQ1: Will parents' third-person perceptions of threat influence their support for restrictive mediation or negative active mediation?

Conversely, parents who harbor first-person perceptions of value report higher benefits for their own children relative to other children. These beliefs should primarily guide their attitudes about positive active mediation, given that this response is employed to amplify desirable outcomes at the family level. The following prediction was offered for parents in the *girl crush* condition:

H7: Parents' first-person perceptions of value will increase their support for positive active mediation.

Method

Participants

Power analyses (using G*Power) indicated that a sample size of 788 was required to detect small effect sizes (ANOVA, 2 groups, $\alpha = .05$, 80% power). Recruitment was managed by the panel company Cloud Research, which crowdsourced 1000 participants from a variety of online opt-in panels. All participants were required to have at least one child between the ages of 5 and 12. However, 112 participants failed an attention check question embedded in the questionnaire, 39 participants indicated that they had technical difficulties watching their assigned video, and 147 participants indicated that they had previously seen the episode used in the study. Because the episode was edited for the boy crush condition in a way that modified the original ending of the program, prior exposure was expected to inhibit the effectiveness of the manipulation. Consequently, these exclusions resulted in a final sample of $N = 702$ parents (age $M = 37.66$ $SD = 7.80$; 67% female). Power analyses indicated that this sample was still sufficient to detect effects as small as $f = .106$.

On average, parents' children were 8.65 years old ($SD = 2.22$; 57.3% male with one non-binary participant). The majority of parents were White (80.5%), while the remainder were Black (13.5%), Hispanic (8.3%), Asian (3.3%) Native American (2.1%), or Pacific Islander (0.1%; participants could select more than one race or ethnicity). Most participants were married (63.4%), while the remainder were in a committed relationship (16.5%), single (11.5%), divorced (6.7%), widowed (1.1%), or preferred not to answer (0.7%). Most parents identified as straight (91.7%), but the remainder identified as bisexual (5.8%), gay (1.1%), lesbian (1.0%), or preferred not to answer (0.3%).

Stimuli

Stimuli were drawn from *Loud House*, a children's entertainment program on Nickelodeon that is appropriate for children aged 6+ (Commonsense Media, 2019). The specific episode used was "L is for Love", wherein the children of the Loud family receive a love letter at their home addressed to "L. Loud." Because all eleven children share the same initials, each sibling sets out to discover if the letter is intended for them. The children eliminate possibilities until they conclude that the letter is addressed to Luna, who subsequently reveals her romantic feelings for a person named Sam. Throughout the episode, Sam is depicted among a group of three characters in the same rock band, including two girls and one boy. The underlying assumption throughout the episode is that Sam is the boy in this group. Toward the end of the episode, Luna drops off a love letter in Sam's locker while the three members of the band approach, led by the boy. The final ten seconds of the episode depict the boy walking past the locker and one of the girls opening it instead. Parents in the *girl crush* condition watched this original version (edited down to a 5-minute video), whereas parents in the *boy crush* condition watched this same video with the final ten seconds removed. In other words, the girl crush video reveals Luna's crush to be a girl, whereas the boy crush video never reveals this information.

Procedure

Eligible participants identified by Cloud Research were notified by email that they could participate in the current study. Interested participants followed a link to a Qualtrics survey, which contained the consent document. After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to view one of the two videos. Afterward, they answered questions about their perceptions of the video, their mediation intentions, and demographics. For questions about

parents' children, parents with more than one child between the ages of 5 and 12 were asked to respond for the child whose birthday was coming up next. Participation took approximately 20 minutes, and parents received compensation in the amount that they agreed to on the platform through which they entered the study.

Measures

Except where noted, all measures were assessed using 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Correlations among all variables are depicted in Table 1.

Manipulation check. Parents identified Luna's romantic interest by selecting from one of two characters from the rock band. One character was male (i.e., Luna's implied romantic interest in the boy crush video) and the other was female (i.e., Luna's actual romantic interest in the girl crush video).

Parental mediation intentions. Parents responded to twelve items adapted from Nathanson et al. (2002) and Beyens et al. (2019). Complete items are available in Table 2. Three items assessed support for censorship ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.52$, $\alpha = .90$), three items assessed support for restrictive mediation ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.95$, $\alpha = .97$), three items assessed support for negative active mediation ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.33$, $\alpha = .94$), and three items assessed support for positive active mediation ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.73$, $\alpha = .92$).

Perceptions of threat and value. Parents responded to twelve items adapted from Nathanson et al. (2002). Complete items are available in Table 2. Three items assessed perceptions of threat for their own child ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.91$, $\alpha = .96$), three items assessed perceptions of threat for other children ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.91$, $\alpha = .96$), three items assessed perceptions of value for their own child ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.79$, $\alpha = .95$), and three items assessed

perceptions of value for other children ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.78$, $\alpha = .96$).

Attitude toward homosexuality. Participants were asked to align themselves a liberal position (i.e., homosexuality should be accepted by society) or a conservative position (i.e., homosexuality should be discouraged by society). This question has been validated in longitudinal survey research by Pew (2014) and it has been used in experimental research in both psychology (Shook & Fazio, 2009) and communication (Holiday et al., 2019). A majority of participants (64.7%) aligned with the liberal position.

Results

The dataset and syntax for all analyses is available at <https://tinyurl.com/yx5s625f>.

Manipulation Check

As expected, participants in the girl crush condition more often identified Luna's crush as the female (rather than male) character (60.3%), whereas participants in the boy crush condition more often identified Luna's crush as the male (rather than female) character (83.6%), $\chi^2(1, N = 702) = 142.39, p < .001$. However, 28.2% of parents answered the manipulation check incorrectly, and this mistake occurred more often in the girl crush condition (39.7%) relative to the boy crush condition (16.4%), $\chi^2(1, N = 702) = 47.01, p < .001$. Consequently, all subsequent analyses considered accurate recognition of the manipulation as an additional factor.

Parental Mediation Intentions

H1 predicted that parents in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition would be more supportive of censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation, whereas they would be less supportive of positive active mediation. H2 predicted that these effects would be stronger among parents with discouraging (vs. accepting) attitudes toward homosexuality. These hypotheses were simultaneously tested with a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). All four mediation strategies were included as outcome variables. Condition (i.e., boy vs. girl crush), attitude (i.e., accepting vs. discouraging), and recognition of the manipulation (i.e., incorrect vs. correct) were included as factors.

Contrary to H1, the multivariate effect of condition was not significant, $F(4,691) = 2.21, p = .066, \eta_p^2 = .01$. However, there was a three-way multivariate interaction between condition, attitude, and recognition of the manipulation, $F(4,691) = 4.82, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$, which was

probed by splitting the file by recognition of the manipulation. Results indicated that the two-way multivariate interaction between condition and attitude was only significant among participants who answered the manipulation check correctly, $F(4, 497) = 10.53, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .028$, and this two-way univariate interaction was significant across all four outcomes: censorship $F(1,500) = 11.22, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$, restrictive mediation $F(1,500) = 23.65, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$, negative active mediation $F(1,500) = 36.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$, and positive active mediation $F(1,500) = 11.85, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Consistent with H2, parents with discouraging attitudes were more supportive of censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition, and they were less supportive of positive active mediation in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition. These differences did not emerge among parents who answered the manipulation check incorrectly or among parents with accepting attitudes.

The moderating role of age. H3 predicted that the effects of H1 would be stronger for parents of younger (vs. older) children. This hypothesis was assessed using Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro (Model 3 with 5,000 bootstrap simulations). A separate analysis was conducted for each mediation strategy. In each case, condition (i.e., boy vs. girl crush) was the predictor, child age was entered as the first moderator, and recognition of the manipulation (i.e., incorrect vs. correct) was entered as the second moderator. Contrary to H3, no interactions emerged significant in any analysis, and child age never predicted any outcome.

Perceptions of Threat

H4 predicted a third-person effect: parents with discouraging attitudes would perceive higher threat in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition, and this effect would be more pronounced for other (vs. their own) children. This hypothesis was assessed using a repeated-measures ANOVA.

Child (i.e., own vs. other) was a within-subjects factor. Condition (i.e., boy vs. girl crush), attitude (i.e., accepting vs. discouraging), and recognition of the manipulation (i.e., incorrect vs. correct) were between-subjects factors.

Contrary to H4, there were no interactions among child, condition, and attitude (nor any interactions with recognition of the manipulation). However, there was a significant interaction between child and attitude, $F(1,694) = 6.29, p = .012, \eta_p^2 = .01$, such that parents with accepting attitudes perceived more threat for other children ($M = 2.12, SE = .10$) relative to their own children ($M = 2.00, SE = .10$), $p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Parents with discouraging attitudes perceived equivalent threat for their own children ($M = 3.65, SE = .13$) and other children ($M = 3.55, SE = .13$), and they perceived more threat than parents with accepting attitudes for both their own and other children (p 's $< .001$).

Additionally, there was an interaction between condition, attitude, and recognition of the manipulation check, $F(1,694) = 14.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$. This interaction was further probed by splitting the file by recognition of the manipulation, which revealed that the two-way interaction between condition and attitude was only significant among participants who answered the manipulation check correctly, $F(1,500) = 13.04, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$. As reported in Table 4, parents with discouraging attitudes perceived higher overall threat in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition. These differences did not emerge among parents who answered the manipulation check incorrectly or among parents with accepting attitudes.

Perceptions of Value

H5 predicted a first-person effect: parents with accepting attitudes would perceive higher value in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition, and this effect would be more pronounced for their

own (vs. other) children. This hypothesis was assessed using a repeated-measures ANOVA. Child (i.e., own vs. other) was a within-subjects factor. Condition (i.e., boy vs. girl crush), attitude (i.e., accepting vs. discouraging), and recognition of the manipulation (i.e., incorrect vs. correct) were between-subjects factors.

Contrary to H5, there were no interactions among child, condition, and attitude (nor any interactions with recognition of the manipulation). However, there was a significant effect of child, $F(1,694) = 4.89, p = .027, \eta_p^2 = .01$, such that parents perceived more value for their own children ($M = 4.70, SE = .08$) relative to other children ($M = 4.60, SE = .08$).

There was an additional interaction between condition, attitude, and recognition of the manipulation check, $F(1,694) = 6.12, p = .014, \eta_p^2 = .01$. This interaction was further probed by splitting the file by recognition of the manipulation, which revealed that the two-way interaction between condition and attitude was significant among participants who answered the manipulation check correctly, $F(1,500) = 17.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$. As reported in Table 4, parents with discouraging attitudes perceived less overall value in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition. These differences did not emerge among parents who answered the manipulation check incorrectly or among parents with accepting attitudes.

Regression Analyses

H6, H7, and RQ1 formulated predictions about the influence of third- and first-person perceptions on parental mediation intentions. Support for these predictions would be obtained if discrepancies between parents' perceptions of their own (vs. other) children were predictive of their mediation intentions. Prior research has modeled these discrepancies in two different ways: linear regression (using difference scores) and polynomial regression (using quadratic

coefficients). However, a third approach ignores these discrepancies and instead models the influence of one rating (e.g., other children) while controlling for the other (e.g., own children). All three of these strategies were utilized to see which approach modeled the data best. Because these predictions centered on the girl crush video, these analyses were only conducted on parents in the girl crush condition who answered the manipulation check correctly ($N = 214$).

Difference score approach. Difference scores were calculated by subtracting parents' ratings for other children from their ratings for their own child separately for both threat ($M = -.03$, $SD = .95$) and value ($M = .05$, $SD = .73$). Negative scores reflected parents who rated threat/value higher for other children relative to their own children (i.e., third-person effects), whereas positive scores reflected parents who rated threat/value higher for their own children relative to other children (i.e., first-person effects).

Hierarchical regression models were constructed for each mediation strategy. Step 1 included demographics (i.e., parent age, parent gender, child age, child gender, and attitude toward homosexuality). Step 2 included the difference scores for threat and value. As shown in Table 5, these difference scores never explained a significant amount of additional variance in any of the models tested. Only parents' attitudes emerged a significant predictor, such that discouraging (vs. accepting) parents were more supportive of censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation, whereas they were less supportive of positive active mediation.

Polynomial regression approach. Shanock et al. (2010) recommend the polynomial regression approach only if enough discrepancies exist in the data to warrant the procedure. Parents' responses were categorized as discrepant if their score on one predictor variable (e.g., perceptions of threat for their own children) was half a standard deviation above or below the

score for the other predictor variable (e.g., perceptions of threat for other children). Polynomial regression is warranted when at least 10% of respondents are categorized as discrepant using this procedure (Shanock et al., 2010). With regard to threat, only 8.88% of participants were categorized as discrepant, and polynomial regression was not pursued. With regard to value, 10.28% of participants were categorized as discrepant, and polynomial regression was pursued.

Following procedures outlined in Shanock et al. (2010), the values of each predictor were centered around the midpoint of their respective scales (by subtracting 4 from each score), and three new variables were created: (a) the square of the first predictor (i.e., perceptions of value for own child), (b) the product of the two predictors (i.e., perceptions of value for own and other children), and (c) the square of the second predictor (i.e., perceptions of value for other children). A polynomial regression model was constructed with positive active mediation as the outcome. Step 1 included the same demographic variables as the previous analyses. Because Edwards (2002) recommend testing a nested first-order linear model in conjunction with a second-order quadratic model (see also Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010), Step 2 included the two centered predictors (i.e., perceptions of value for own and other children), and Step 3 included the polynomial variables (i.e., the product of the two predictors and their squared terms).

Results indicated that the variables entered in Step 2 explained a significant amount of additional variance (R^2 -change = .44, $p < .001$), with both variables emerging as positive predictors (own child $B = .32$, $p = .008$; other children $B = .46$, $p < .001$). However, the polynomial coefficients on Step 3 did not explain a significant amount of additional variance, and further investigation was not pursued.

Control variable approach. Hierarchical regression models were constructed for each

mediation strategy. Step 1 included same demographic variables as the previous analyses. Step 2 included four variables: perceptions of threat for own and other children, and perceptions of value for own and other children. As shown in Table 5, Step 2 explained a significant amount of additional variance in all four models tested. Specifically, perceptions of threat for own and other children were positively associated with support for censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation, whereas perceptions of value for own and other children were positively associated with positive active mediation.

Summary. Two analytical approaches are capable of modeling the influence of perceptual gaps on parents' mediation intentions: the difference score approach and the polynomial regression approach. However, no significant results emerged in these analyses, and H6 and H7 were not supported. In other words, third- and first-person perceptual gaps did not influence parents' mediation intentions. Rather, significant results were only obtained using the control variable approach. Specifically, parents' perceptions of threat for their own and other children independently predicted their support for censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation. Similarly, their perceptions of value for their own and other children independently predicted their support for positive active mediation.

Post-hoc Moderated Mediation Analyses

The previous ANOVA results indicated consistent effects of experimental condition across all outcomes, and these effects did not vary across children (i.e., own vs. other). Similarly, the previous regression results indicated consistent effects of parents' ratings of their own and other children on their mediation intentions, and discrepancies between these ratings were minimal. In order to provide a more succinct summary of these findings, post-hoc moderated

mediation models were constructed. Three new variables were calculated: parents' *perception of overall threat* was calculated by averaging together their perceptions of threat for own and other children ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.85$, Spearman-Brown = .93), parents' *perception of overall value* was calculated by averaging together their perceptions of value for own and other children ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.72$, Spearman-Brown = .93), and parents' support for *oppositional mediation* was calculated by averaging together their support for censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.65$, $\alpha = .93$).

Moderated mediation was subsequently assessed using Hayes' (2018) Process macro (Model 7 with 5,000 bootstrap simulations). Two separate analyses were conducted: one with support for oppositional mediation as the outcome, and one with support for positive active mediation as the outcome. In both cases, condition (i.e., boy vs. girl crush) was entered as the predictor, and attitude toward homosexuality (i.e., accepting vs. discouraging) was entered as the moderator. For oppositional mediation, perception of overall threat was the mediator. For positive active mediation, perception of overall value was the mediator. These analyses were only conducted on participants who answered the manipulation check correctly ($N = 504$).

Results from these analyses are depicted in Figures 1 and 2. In both cases, the index of moderated mediation was significant. Specifically, discouraging parents perceived more threat in the girl (vs. boy) crush clip, which increased their support for oppositional mediation. Similarly, discouraging parents perceived less value in the girl (vs. boy) crush clip, which reduced their support for positive active mediation.

Discussion

The current study examined how third- and first-person perceptions influence parental mediation of stories about LGBTQ+ characters in children's television. Parents of children aged 5-12 watched a video from a controversial *Loud House* episode in which a young girl named Luna expresses romantic interest in another girl. For comparison purposes, another group of parents watched a different version of this same video, edited to imply that Luna's romantic feelings were directed toward a boy. Afterward, parents answered questions about their perceptions of the video and their intended mediation behaviors in response to it.

A manipulation check indicated that the videos functioned as expected, with parents more often identifying Luna's romantic interest as a girl in the girl crush condition and as a boy in the boy crush condition. However, more parents misidentified Luna's romantic interest in the girl crush condition (39.7%) than in the boy crush condition (16.4%). This finding is particularly interesting because the video used in the girl crush condition provided an accurate representation of the plot of the original episode, whereas the video used in the boy crush condition was edited to remove a brief controversial segment (i.e., the reveal of Luna's actual crush at the very end). This result might be a function of attention. Because the reveal occurred during a brief 10 seconds at the conclusion of the episode, it is possible that some parents simply missed this information. However, it is also possible that this result occurred because parents deliberately misinterpreted or misremembered the story. Although prior has found that exposure to counter-stereotypical depictions can reduce stereotypes held by children (Gocłowska & Crisp, 2012), young adults (Ramasubramanian, 2011), and adults (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2014), pre-existing stereotypes sometimes override these effects and cause viewers to misremember counter-

stereotypes in stereotypical ways. For example, children who watched a television clip featuring a female doctor and male nurse later misidentified the doctor as male and the nurse as female (Drabman et al., 1981; see also Durkin, 1985; Frawley, 2008). Similarly, adults exposed to news coverage about crime often misremember White offenders as Black and Black victims as White (Oliver & Fonash, 2002). The current results indicate that similar errors occur when parents view counter-stereotypical depictions in children's television. However, in order for this material to foster more tolerant attitudes (Wong, 2019), viewers must accurately recognize the nature of these depictions. If nearly one-third of audiences fail to do so, these messages are unlikely to have their intended effects.

Given these errors, all analyses considered parents' recognition of the manipulation as an additional factor. Results indicated that accurate recognition played a pivotal role in shaping parents' responses. For example, it was predicted that parents in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition would be more supportive of censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation, and they would be less supportive of positive active mediation. It was also predicted that these effects would be more pronounced among parents with discouraging (vs. accepting) attitudes toward homosexuality, and among parents of younger (vs. older) children. These predictions were supported for parents with discouraging attitudes and who responded accurately to the manipulation check. However, children's age did not moderate these effects.

On the one hand, these findings are consistent with Holiday et al. (2018), who found that parents with conservative (vs. liberal) ideologies were more likely to support censorship of a film featuring a transgender teenager. By the same token, these findings conflict with Holiday et al.'s (2018) finding that parents with younger (vs. older) children were more likely to support active

mediation of this material. It is possible that this latter inconsistency is a function of the age categories examined across studies. Whereas the current study examined parents with children ages 5-12, Holiday et al. (2018) examined parents with children ages 12-18. However, this inconsistency might also be a function of the content examined in the current study, which centered on romance and dating. In general, these topics are rare in children's television (Signorielli & Bienvenour, 2015), and parents do not intend to discuss either of these topics until their children are at least 10 years old (El-Shaieb & Wurtele, 2009). Although Beyens et al. (2018) found that certain parental mediation strategies become more prevalent in middle childhood, their research largely dealt with violent or educational content. Parents are generally more willing to address these topics at younger ages (Kirkorian et al., 2008; Kirsh, 2005; Rasmussen, 2014), and such material is far more prevalent in children's television (Glascok, 2013; Wilson et al., 2002). Future research should consider examining developmental shifts in mediation intentions for multiple types of content in order to clarify these differences.

Drawing on existing research on third- and first-person perceptions (Ho et al., 2019; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002; Meirick et al., 2009; Nathanson et al., 2002; Wilkinson et al., 2019), it was predicted that parents with discouraging attitudes would perceive higher threat in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition, and this effect would be more pronounced for other (vs. their own) children. Similarly, it was predicted that parents with accepting attitudes would perceive higher value in the girl (vs. boy) crush condition, and this effect would be more pronounced for their own (vs. other) children. Although perceptual gaps did emerge, these effects were not unique to the video used in the girl crush condition, and they were not moderated by political beliefs in the expected ways. With regard to threat, parents with accepting (vs. discouraging) attitudes

perceived more threat for other children relative to their own, and this effect occurred regardless of the video they watched. With regard to value, parents perceived higher value for their own (vs. other) children regardless of condition or political attitudes. The fact that perceptual gaps emerged across both conditions suggests that parents' responses were grounded in their reactions to dating and romance (in general) rather than their reactions to sexual orientation (in particular).

However, it is also important to emphasize that perceptual gaps in the current study were relatively small, amounting to about one-tenth of a point on a 7-point scale. Prior research has documented larger effects for other topics. For example, Hoffner and Buchanan (2002) identified a third-person perceptual gap of seven-tenths of a point on a 5-point scale (for violent content), and Meirick et al. (2009) identified a third-person perceptual gap of nearly one point on a 7-point scale (for materialistic content). Although a recent study has documented larger gaps for LGBTQ+ depictions (e.g., one point on a 7-point scale; Wilkinson et al., 2019), this study did not ask participants to compare their own and other children; instead, participants compared their childhood self with children today. Consequently, it might be that perceptual gaps for this particular topic are exacerbated when outgroups are compared to the self (e.g., in the past or present), whereas these gaps are attenuated when outgroups are compared to ingroups (e.g., friends and family). Future research should systematically examine how the relative size of perceptual gaps differs depending on the groups or individuals in question.

Despite these unexpected results, there were certain findings that were unique to the girl crush video. Specifically, parents with discouraging attitudes reported more threat and less value (for all children) in response to it, and they perceived it as more threatening and less valuable than parents with accepting attitudes. These results are crucial to consider in light of the fact that

content creators intend for this material to foster tolerance (Wong, 2019). In the current study, parents who could benefit the most from exposure to this material reacted most negatively to it, and they desired to criticize and curb their children's access to it. Future research should examine ways to structure this material in ways that might be less offensive to these viewers while still fostering beneficial outcomes. Prior research suggests that the use of implicit themes and depictions (Um, 2016) and familiar conventions and tropes (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002) can help circumvent some of these negative responses.

Predictions were also formulated with regard to the impact of third- and first-person perceptual gaps on parents' intended mediation behaviors. Three different statistical approaches were used to examine the data: the difference score approach, the polynomial regression approach, and the control variable approach. There was minimal indication that perceptual gaps had a meaningful impact on any outcome. Indeed, only one significant predictor emerged in the regression models constructed using the difference score approach: parents' attitudes toward homosexuality. Specifically, parents with discouraging attitudes were more likely to support censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation, and they were less likely to support positive active mediation. Moreover, the discrepancy analyses recommended by the polynomial regression approach suggested that third- and first-person perceptions were relatively rare in the sample. This result echoes the aforementioned result that perceptual gaps—where they did emerge—were relatively small in size. The polynomial regression models also failed to explain additional variance in any outcome.

Instead, significant results only emerged in the regression models constructed using the control variable approach. Specifically, parents' perceptions of threat for their own child and

other children positively predicted their support for censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation, whereas their perceptions of value for their own child and other children positively predicted their support for positive active mediation. In other words, third- and first-person perceptual gaps did not influence parents' mediation intentions; instead, parents' perceptions of their own and other children independently influenced these outcomes. Prior studies where researchers have employed multiple analytic approaches have similarly found that the control variable approach sometimes models data better than the difference score approach (Meirick et al., 2009). Consequently, the current results underscore the need to utilize multiple analytical strategies to confirm which approach most accurately represents the data.

In an attempt to provide a parsimonious explanation of the study's findings, a post-hoc moderated mediation analysis was conducted. Given that consistent results emerged across parents' ratings of their own and other children, these scores were collapsed into separate measures of overall threat and overall value. Given that consistent results also emerged across parents' support for censorship, restrictive mediation, and negative active mediation, these scores were collapsed into a single measure of oppositional mediation. Two mediation models were constructed: one predicting oppositional mediation (via perceptions of overall threat), and one predicting positive active mediation (via perceptions of overall value). In summary, parents with discouraging (vs. accepting) attitudes perceived more threat and less value in the girl (vs. boy) crush video, which increased their support for oppositional mediation and decreased their support for positive active mediation.

There are three important limitations to consider. First, only one show was used to create the stimuli, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Although this approach enabled a

relatively clean experimental manipulation, it is possible that the structure of the show might have contributed to the documented effects. Indeed, because the reveal of Luna's crush occurred at the very end of the episode, there might have been an added element of shock that rattled certain viewers. Although similar narrative revelations characterize other children's programs (e.g., *The Legend of Korra*), it will be vital for future research to examine parents' responses to programs that feature more explicit representations across single episodes (e.g., Mr. Ratburn in *Arthur*) or entire series of episodes (e.g., Netflix's *The Dragon Prince*). It might be that these prolonged depictions are less shocking than relatively brief depictions. It also seems less likely that viewers would misinterpret or misremember the nature of these longer depictions, which could produce more potent effects across larger subsets of parents.

Second, the current study only examined parents' mediation intentions rather than their actual mediation behaviors. Although it is normative in the parental mediation literature to bypass measurements of behavior and instead focus on intentions or recall (Beyens et al., 2019; Hoffner et al., 2002; Nathanson, 2001), future research should assess parents' actual behaviors in both laboratory and naturalistic settings. Third, parents in the current study watched the video in total absence of their children, and children's responses were not examined. It seems possible that parents' responses might differ in situations where they have less time to thoughtfully consider their responses, or in situations where children initiate discussions or voluntarily express their own attitudes and beliefs. Consequently, future research should examine how parents and children interact while watching this material together in real time.

Despite these limitations, the current study offers new insights about how parents respond to representations of LGBTQ+ characters in children's television. Although these representations

are created to promote messages of tolerance and acceptance, parents' pre-existing attitudes can inhibit their ability to recognize the counter-stereotypical nature of these depictions. Moreover, parents who stand to benefit the most from exposure to this material actually exhibit the most negative responses to it. Specifically, they perceive it as more threatening and less valuable for all children, and they are most willing to censor it, to criticize it, and to use it as a platform to promote intolerance. These paradoxes are vital for researchers and content creators to consider.

References

- Afifi, T. D, Joseph, A., and Aldeis, D. (2008). Why can't we just talk about it? An observational study of parents' and adolescents' conversations about sex. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 23(6), 689-721.
- Anne, V. (2017, June 16). I Have a Lesbian Crush on This "Loud House" Storyline About Girls Having Crushes on Girls. Retrieved from: <https://www.autostraddle.com/i-have-a-lesbian-crush-on-this-loud-house-storyline-about-girls-having-crushes-on-girls-383008/>.
- Baker, G. A. (2002). People with epilepsy: what do they know and understand, and how does this contribute to their perceived level of stigma?. *Epilepsy & Behavior*, 3(6), 26-32.
- Battles, K. and Hilton-Morrow, W. (2002). Gay characters in conventional spaces: Will and Grace and the situation comedy genre. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 9(1), 87-105.
- Beyens, I., Valkenburg, P. M., and Piotrowski, J. T. (2019). Developmental trajectories of parental mediation across early and middle childhood. *Human Communication Research* 45, 226-250.
- Collier, K. M., Coyne, S. M., Rasmussen, E. E., Hawkins, A. J., Padilla-Walker, L. M., Erickson, S. E., and Memmott-Elisom, M. K. (2016). Does parental mediation of media influence child outcomes? A meta-analysis on media time, aggression, substance use, and sexual behavior. *Developmental Psychology* 52(5), 798-812.
- Collins, R. L., Elliott, M. N., Berry, S. H., Kanouse, D. E., and Hunter, S. B. (2003). Entertainment television as a healthy sex educator: the impact of condom-efficacy information in an episode of *Friends*. *Pediatrics* 112(5), 1115-1121.

- Commonsense Media. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.common sense media.org/>.
- Costa, P. A., Pereira, H., and Leal, I. (2015). "The contact hypothesis" and attitudes toward same-sex parenting. *Sex Res Soc Policy* 12, 125-136.
- Davison, W. P. (1983). The third-person effect in communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47, 1-15.
- Drabman, R. S., Robertson, S. J., Patterson, J. N., Jarvie, G. J., Hammer, D., and Cordua, G. (1981). *Sex Roles* 7(4), 379-389.
- Durkin, K. (1985). Television and sex-role acquisition: 3: counter-stereotyping. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 24, 211-222.
- Edwards, J. R. (2001). Ten difference score myths. *Organizational Research Methods* 4(3), 265-287.
- Edwards, J. R. (2002). Alternatives to difference scores: Polynomial regression and response surface methodology. *Advances in measurement and data analysis*, 350-400.
- El-Shaieb, M. and Wurtele, S. K. (2009). Parents' plans to discuss sexuality with their young children. *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 4, 103-115.
- Frank, A. (2019, May 21). Arthur's same-sex marriage episode didn't air in Alabama. Retrieved from: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/5/21/18634089/arthur-same-sex-marriage-episode-alabama-pbs>
- Frawley, T. J. (2008). Gender schema and prejudicial recall: how children misremember, fabricate, and distort gendered picture book information. *Journal of Research n Children Education* 22(3), 291-303.
- Gillig, T. K. and Murphy, S.T. (2016). Fostering support of LGBTQ youth? The effects of a gay

- adolescent media portrayal on young viewers. *International Journal of Communication* 10, 3828-3850.
- Gillig, T. K., Rosenthal, E. L., Murphy, S. T, and Folb, K. D. (2018). More than a media moment: the influence of televised storylines on viewers' attitudes toward transgender people and policies. *Sex Roles* 78, 515-527.
- Glascok, J. (2013). Prevalence and context of verbal aggression in children's television programming. *Communication Studies* 64(3).
- Gocłowska, M. A. and Crisp, R. J. (2012). On counter-stereotypes and creative cognition: when interventions for reducing prejudice can boost divergent thinking. *Think Skills and Creativity* 8, 72-79.
- Guilamo-Ramos, V., Jaccard, J., Dittus, P., and Collins, S. (2008). Parent-adolescent communication about sexual intercourse: an analysis of maternal reluctance to communicate. *Health Psychology* 27(6), 760-769.
- Gunther, A. C., Bolt, D., Borzekowski, D. L. G., Liebhart, J. L., and Dillard, J. P. (2006). Presumed influence on peer norms: how mass media indirectly affect adolescent smoking. *Journal of Communication* 56, 52-68.
- Gunther, A. C. and Thorson, E. (1992). Perceived persuasive effects of product commercials and public service announcements: third-person effects in new domains. *Communication Research* 19(5), 574-596.
- Henriksen, L. and Flora, J. A. (1999). Third-person perception and children: perceived impact of pro- and anti-smoking ads. *Communication Research* 26(6), 643-665.
- Ho, S. S., Lwin, M. O., Yee, A. Z. H., Sng, J. R. H., and Chen, L. (2019). Parents' responses to

- cyberbullying effects: how third-person perception influences support for legislation and parental mediation strategies. *Computers in Human Behavior* 92, 373-380.
- Hoffner, C. and Buchanan, M. (2002). Parents' responses to television violence: the third-person perception, parental mediation, and support for censorship. *Media Psychology* 4, 231-252.
- Holiday, S., Bond, B. J., and Rasmussen, E. E. (2018). Coming attractions: parental mediation responses to transgender and cisgender film trailer content targeting adolescents. *Sexuality & Culture* 22, 1154-1170.
- Kenney, M. C. and Wurtele, S. K. (2013). Latino parents' plans to communicate about sexuality with their children. *Journal of Health Communication* 18, 931-942.
- Kirkorian, H. L., Wartella, E. A., and Anderson, D. R. (2008). Media and young children's learning. *The Future of Children* 18(1), 39-61.
- Kirsh, S. J. (2005). Cartoon violence and aggression in youth. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 11, 547-557.
- Lee, E. M. (2013). Effects of a maternal sexuality education program for mothers of preschoolers. *Journal of Korean Academy of Nursing* 43(3), 370.
- Malacane, M. and Beckmeyer, J. J. (2016). A review of parent-based barriers to parent-adolescent communication about sex and sexuality: implications for sex and family educators. *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 11(1), 27-40.
- Meeusen, C. and Dhont, K. (2015). Parent-child similarity in common and specific components of prejudice: the role of ideological attitudes and political discussion. *European Journal of Personality* 29, 585-598.

- Meirick, P. C., Sims, J. D., Gilchrist, E. S., and Croucher, S. M. (2009). All the children are above average: parents' perceptions of education and materialism as media effects on their own and other children. *Mass Communication and Society* 12, 217-237.
- Miller, B. and Lewallen, J. (2015). The effects of portrayals of gay men on homonegativity and the attribution of gender-based descriptors. *Communication Studies* 66(3), 358-377.
- Milton, C. (1996). Television as a tool: talking with kids about TV. *The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation*, 2-17.
- Nathanson, A. I. (2001). Parent and child perspectives on the presence and meaning of parental television mediation. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 45(2), 201-220.
- Nathanson, A. I., Eveland, W. P. Jr., Park, H. and Paul, B. (2002). Perceived media influence and efficacy as predictors of caregivers' protective behaviors. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 46(3), 385-410.
- Oliver, M. B. and Fonash, D. (2002). Race and crime in the news: whites' identification and misidentification of violent and nonviolent criminal suspects. *Media Psychology* 4, 137-156.
- Pahlke, E., Bigler, R. S., and Suizzo, M. (2012). Relations between colorblind socialization and children's racial bias: evidence from European American mothers and their preschool children. *Child Development* 0(0), 1-16.
- Perloff, R. M. (2009). Mass media, social perception, and the third-person effect. *Social Perception*, 12, 252-268.
- Pew Research Center. (2019, May 14). Majority of public favors same-sex marriage, but divisions persist. Retrieved from: <https://www.people-press.org/2019/05/14/majority-of->

[public-favors-same-sex-marriage-but-divisions-persist/](#).

Pew Research Center. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org>.

Ramasubramanian, S. (2011). The impact of stereotypical versus counterstereotypical media exemplars on racial attitudes, casual attributions, and support for affirmative action. *Communication Research* 38(4), 497-516.

Rasmussen, E. E. (2014). Proactive vs. retroactive mediation: effects of mediation's timing on children's reactions to popular cartoon violence. *Human Communication Research* 40, 396-413.

Rideout, V. (2007). Parents, children, & media. *The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation*, 1-38.

Rucinski & Salmon. (1990). The 'other' as the vulnerable voter: a study of the third-person effect in the 1988 U.S. presidential campaign. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 2(4), 345-368.

Schiappa, E., Gregg, P. B., and Hewes, D. E. (2005). The parasocial contact hypothesis. *Communication Monographs* 72(1), 92-115.

Schiappa, E., Gregg, P. B., and Hewes, D. E. (2006). Can one TV show make a difference? *Will & Grace* and the parasocial contact hypothesis. *Journal of Homosexuality*.

Shanock, L. R., Baran, B. E., Gentry, W. A., Pattison, S. C., and Heggestad, E. D. (2010). Polynomial regression with response surface analysis: a powerful approach for examining moderation and overcoming limitations of difference scores. *J Bus Psychol* 25, 543-554.

Shook, N. J. and Fazio, R. H. (2009). Political ideology, exploration of novel stimuli, and attitude formation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

Signorielli, N. and Bienvenour, A. (2015). Sex in adolescent programming: a content analysis.

- Communication Research Reports* 32(4), 304-313.
- Strouse, G. A., O'Doherty, K. O., and Troseth, G. L. (2013). Effective coviewing: preschoolers' learning from video after a dialogic questioning intervention. *Development Psychology* 49(12), 2368-2382.
- Tsfati, Y., Ribak, R., and Cohen, J. (2005). *Rebelde Way* in Israel: parental perceptions of television influence and monitoring of children's social and media activities. *Mass Communication & Society* 8(1), 3-22.
- Um, N. (2016). Consumers' responses to implicit and explicit gay-themed advertising in gay vs. mainstream media. *Journal of Promotion Management* 22(3), 461-477.
- Venkatesh, V. and Goyal, S. (2010). Expectation disconfirmation and technology adoption: polynomial modeling and response surface analysis. *MIS Quarterly* 34(2), 281-303.
- Wilkinson, W. W., Berry, S. D., DuBar, L., and Garner, Z. (2019). Throwing shade at Cyrus: willingness to censor teen homosexuality in Disney's *Andi Mack*. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1-23.
- Wilkinson, W. W. and Berry, S. D. (2019) Together they are Troy and Chase: who supports demonetization of gay content on YouTube. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 1-11.
- Wilson, E. K., Dalberth, B. T., Koo, H. P., and Gard, J. C. (2010). Parents' perspectives on talking to preteenage children about sex. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 42(1), 56-63.
- Wilson, B. J., Smith, S. L., Potter, W. J., Kunkel, D., Linz, D., Colvin, C. M., and Donnerstein, E. (2002). Violence in children's television programming: assessing the risks. *Journal of Communication*, 5-35.

Wong, C. M. (2019, May 22). 'Arthur' Creator Defends Gay Marriage Episode Following Backlash. Retrieved from: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/arthur-creator-gay-wedding-backlash_n_5ce583a2e4b0547bd1311a34

Appendix A: Tables

Table 1
Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Parent Age (1)	—													
Parent Gender (2)	-.15 ***	—												
Child Age (3)	.25 ***	-.15 ***	—											
Child Gender (4)	.02	-.01	.02	—										
Attitude Toward Homosexuality (5)	.13 ***	-.29 ***	.08 *	.03	—									
Threat to Own Child (6)	.03	-.06	-.07	.03	.39 ***	—								
Threat to Other Children (7)	-.01	-.05	-.08 *	.02	.33 ***	.88 ***	—							
Value for Own Child (8)	-.01	-.07	.09 *	-.06	-.29 ***	-.74 ***	-.71 ***	—						
Value for Other Children (9)	-.02	-.07	.09 *	-.06	-.28 ***	-.72 ***	-.70 ***	.87 ***	—					
Manipulation Check (10)	-.01	.13 ***	.02	.03	-.05	.03	.03	-.05	-.03	—				
Support for Censorship (11)	-.00	-.12 ***	-.04	.02	.38 ***	.70 ***	.68 ***	-.57 ***	-.57 ***	-.05	—			
Restrictive Mediation (12)	.04	-.06	-.08 *	.03	.37 ***	.79 ***	.76 ***	-.69 ***	-.66 ***	-.00	.82 ***	—		
Negative Active Mediation (13)	.04	-.07	-.06	.05	.41 ***	.79 ***	.77 ***	-.67 ***	-.66 ***	.00	.79 ***	.84 ***	—	
Positive Active Mediation (14)	.01	-.06	.01	-.06	-.23 ***	-.53 ***	-.53 ***	.69 ***	.69 ***	-.04	-.50 ***	-.57 ***	-.54 ***	—

Note. Gender was coded as male (0) and female (1). Attitudes were coded as accepting (0) and discouraging (1). * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 2
Detailed Description of all Measures

Perceptions of Threat and Value

Instructions: Rate your agreement with these statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) ...

Threat

- The video contains immoral messages that would negatively impact my child [other children].
- The video contains inappropriate content that would negatively impact my child [other children].
- The video contains bad role models that would negatively impact my child [other children].

Value

- The video contains moral messages that would positively impact my child [other children].
- The video contains good messages that would positively impact my child [other children].
- The video contains good role models that would positively impact my child [other children].

Parental Mediation Intentions

Instructions: Rate your agreement with these statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) ...

Support for Censorship

- This video should be banned from television.
- The show *Loud House* should be taken off the air.
- The writers or producers of this video should be punished.

Restrictive Mediation

- I would forbid my child from watching this video.
- I would forbid my child from watching this show (i.e., *Loud House*).
- I would turn off this show if my child was watching it.

Negative Active Mediation

- I would tell my child that the storyline in this video is morally wrong.
- I would tell my child that the storyline of this video is inappropriate.
- I would criticize the underlying message of this video in front of my child.

Positive Active Mediation

- I would discuss this video with my child to try and amplify its positive messages.
 - I would make sure my child recognized the positive role models in this video.
 - I would praise the underlying messages of this video in front of my child.
-

Table 3
Effects of Condition on Parental Mediation Intentions

	Boy Crush		Girl Crush	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Willingness to Censor				
<u>Incorrect MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	1.69	.24	1.66	.16
<i>Discouraging</i>	2.94	.32	2.77	.19
<u>Correct MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	1.55 _a	.10	1.55 _a	.11
<i>Discouraging</i>	2.24 _a	.14	3.31 _b	.17
Restrictive Mediation				
<u>Incorrect MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	1.86	.30	1.94	.20
<i>Discouraging</i>	3.19	.39	2.99	.24
<u>Correct MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	1.86 _a	.13	1.71 _a	.15
<i>Discouraging</i>	2.87 _a	.17	4.38 _b	.22
Negative Active Mediation				
<u>Incorrect MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	1.79	.29	1.90	.19
<i>Discouraging</i>	3.38	.37	2.90	.23
<u>Correct MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	1.78 _a	.11	1.73 _a	.13
<i>Discouraging</i>	2.77 _a	.15	4.53 _b	.19
Positive Active Mediation				
<u>Incorrect MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	5.68	.28	5.15	.18
<i>Discouraging</i>	5.02	.37	4.97	.22
<u>Correct MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	5.36 _a	.12	5.37 _a	.14
<i>Discouraging</i>	4.57 _a	.16	3.66 _b	.20

Note. MC = “manipulation check.” Subscripts are reported where a significant interaction emerged between condition and attitude toward homosexuality after splitting the file by accurate recognition of the manipulation. Subscripts differ where means differ across columns at $p < .05$.

Table 4

Effects of Condition on Perceptions of Threat and Value

	Boy Crush		Girl Crush	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Perceptions of Threat				
<u>Incorrect MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	1.79	.30	2.25	.19
<i>Discouraging</i>	3.72	.39	2.95	.24
<u>Correct MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	2.06 _a	.12	2.15 _a	.14
<i>Discouraging</i>	3.24 _a	.16	4.49 _b	.20
Perceptions of Value				
<u>Incorrect MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	5.40	.29	5.09	.19
<i>Discouraging</i>	4.45	.37	4.37	.23
<u>Correct MC</u>				
<i>Accepting</i>	5.09 _a	.12	5.18 _a	.13
<i>Discouraging</i>	4.40 _a	.16	3.21 _b	.20

Note. MC = “manipulation check.” Subscripts are reported where a significant interaction emerged between condition and attitudes toward homosexuality after splitting the file by accurate recognition of the manipulation. Subscripts differ where means differ across columns at $p < .05$.

Table 5
Regression Models Predicting Mediation Behaviors

	Censorship	Restrictive Mediation	Negative Active Mediation	Positive Active Mediation
	β	β	β	β
Step 1: Demographics				
Parent Age	-.10	-.03	-.08	.08
Parent Gender	.04	.09	.06	-.08
Child Age	-.09	-.10	-.07	-.01
Child Gender	.11	.01	.05	.01
Attitude toward Homosexuality	.48***	.58***	.63***	-.43***
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.25***	.33***	.39***	.17***
Step 2: Difference Approach				
Threat Difference Score	.04	.07	.03	-.10
Value Difference Score	.03	.03	.00	-.05
<i>R² Change</i>	.00	.01	.00	.01
Step 2: Control Approach				
Threat to Own	.45***	.52***	.40***	-.13
Threat to Others	.26**	.20*	.27***	.12
Value for Own	-.00	-.04	-.09	.29*
Value for Others	-.08	-.06	-.02	.48***
<i>R² Change</i>	.39***	.42***	.39***	.44***

Note. Gender was coded as male (0) and female (1). Attitudes were coded as accepting (0) and discouraging (1). * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Appendix B: Figures

Figure 1
Moderation Mediation Model for Oppositional Mediation

Note. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Figure 2
Moderation Mediation Model for Positive Active Mediation

Note. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.