

AN EVOLVING MINORITY IN THE MEDIA: THE IMPACT OF
GAY AND LESBIAN REPRESENTATIONS ON AUDIENCES
OF PRIMETIME NETWORK AND CABLE TELEVISION

THESIS

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by

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DEDICATION

For children growing up in the 21st century, especially Lanning and Travis, who will inevitably see various representations of characters through ever-changing technologies.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

American children of the 21st Century are growing up in a world of high-speed computers and cellular phones. These children do not know life without quick-cooking microwaves, Internet access, or electronic locks, windows and alarms in vehicles. Most have not experienced segregated schools, water fountains, and bathrooms that once separated minorities from the majority. They also do not know a television-free world.

Barnouw and O'Conner (1983) express that television is significant to American life. According to the Television Bureau of Advertising, Inc. (2004), 98.2 % of all homes have at least one television set and the television set is turned on each day for an average of approximately eight hours. Because television is a widely used method of mass media, the implications of the shows on today are important to examine for a number of reasons, all having to do with the potential effects television could have on viewers. First, as George Gerbner's cultivation theory indicates, television can powerfully impact society and cultures. "According to Cultivation Theory, television is the most powerful storyteller in the culture, one that continually repeats the myths and ideologies, the facts and patterns of relationships that define and legitimize the social order" (Brown, 2002, p.44). The fictional reality that television provides its audiences, if watched regularly, can be categorized as an "enculturation" agent that influences viewers' perceptions of social reality (Gross, 2001, p.6).

Television and other media depictions can especially be influential when viewers have not had actual experiences with certain groups of people, such as minorities. If a viewer lacks other sources of information, he or she will most likely accept even the most erroneous and offensive information about a particular event or group (Gross, 2001). The viewer, without having any of his or her own personal interactions with the group, relies on the media depictions to gain knowledge and formulate opinions based on the media representations. For example, Graves (1999) studied the representations of different racial groups on television and their effects on audiences. She describes how television watching is likened to a vicarious experience, especially if the television characters are unfamiliar to the viewer. Therefore, if a viewer is exposed to a minority he or she has no real-world knowledge about, that viewer is likely to attribute the flawed representation as a basis for understanding that minority or group.

Secondly, television representations should be examined in the context of social cognition theory. Because Gerbner's cultivation theory views television as a socializing agent, this theory has been criticized for not placing television in an overall cultural context. Viewers, as active agents, should also be examined based upon their social backgrounds. Thus, different viewers might have different insights as to what they are seeing on television. Contemporary social cognition theory merges the idea that media images can be extremely powerful with sociology's social learning theory (Belcher, Hardin, Hardin, & McCullick, 2003). This theory takes cultivation theory one step further, from attitudes and ideologies, to behavior.

In the context of social cognition theory, television viewers are active participants. They witness the behaviors of others via the medium and may begin to

either model behaviors of those they identify with or use the information to fill in knowledge gaps. If television produces characters that omit information or build only one-dimensional characters, audience members who might associate with the character might not have characters with which to identify. If an audience member learns social cues and behaviors based upon this character, he or she might learn negative behaviors, internalize stereotypes, or even become self-loathing. The different audiences could affect the interpretations of the characters they see as well, using the symbols and cues either positively or negatively for themselves, in association with the real world.

Children of today are probably too young to remember the earliest representations on television that included the African American minority, portrayed in a negative manner. Ely (1991) described the live blackface act of Freeman Gosden (Amos) and Charles Correll (Andy) in *Amos 'n' Andy* that was reinvented in 1951 as a black-cast television program. This show was highly criticized and eventually taken off the air by the NAACP for portraying blacks in a racist manner (Ely, 1991). Programs that included African American characters often used harsh negative stereotypes, such as the laughable, comedic Negro, the unthreatening, agreeable Uncle Tom character, or the inferior, contented servant, to downplay their presence in the real world and make them more acceptable to the dominant culture (Bogle, 2001). Audiences might not realize that although some improvements have occurred in African American representations over the years, some of the same stereotypes can be seen in more modern times. A typecast from the 1950s reappeared in the 1980s, for example, with the mammy-like character in *Gimme a Break* (Dates, 1990).

Although gradual, minorities of all kinds (whether based on gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion) eventually appear in the mass media. Mass media contribute in bringing minorities out of the shadows and into the consciousness of society. While racial/ethnic diversity has somewhat improved, the quality and quantity of minority characters are still lacking (Brand, Mastro, & Greenberg, 2002). The media producers, mainly composed of heterosexual white males, who are creating the characters, can be seen as attempting to make sense of a minority group, creating an image of the minority group that is palatable to the dominant culture, or underscoring perceived differences to perpetuate misperceptions of the group (Barlow & Dates, 1990; Bogle, 2001). Ultimately, how character representations on television are constructed could either foster negative, stereotypical ideologies about certain groups or promote positive visibility.

A minority that is not based upon religion, ethnic background, or skin color is becoming more visible and evolving through the mass media. The other minority, based distinctly on sexual orientation, can be seen today in the mass media almost daily. This observable minority is known to some as homosexuals and to others as gay men and lesbians. Gay and lesbian issues, such as court cases, morality and religion, and whether or not this minority should be afforded marriage rights or equal rights, currently riddle both newspapers and television news.

Back in the 1950s, audiences could have witnessed a handful of gay characters on various television shows (Gross, 1999). Today, television viewers may or may not notice the large shift in characterizations and roles afforded to gay and lesbian characters that has taken place. In the late 1990s, television began offering audiences lead, recurring

roles that included gay and lesbian characters. Both network and cable television offer viewers an option to watch gay and lesbian characters; however, what are the potential ramifications of these sprouting images? To answer that question, primetime television needs to be closely examined for the gay and lesbian characters it offers to audiences.

Young people of the 21st century are growing up with a choice to view images that previous generations never or rarely ever encountered (Gross, 2001). Because today's audience members might one day not remember what it was like *not* to have gay and lesbian characters on television, the constructions of the characters being developed for the masses need to be scrutinized, documented, and explored for potential effects.

Sexual Politics – Gays and Lesbians as a Minority

At birth, a baby is labeled as male or female. The first question concerning a newborn baby is often, "Is it a boy or a girl?" According to Gross (2001), the response to that one question dictates the color a baby wears and how others interact with the newborn, thus socially constructing gender roles. Regardless of the baby being a boy or a girl, babies are assumed to be heterosexual unless they disclose otherwise later in life. From birth forward, each gay and lesbian person is immersed in a heterosexual world and will have to struggle against that norm for the rest of his or her life (Gross, 2001). This heterosexual norm places gays and lesbians in the awkward position of "other" and can often lead to self-loathing and negative feelings and attitudes, propelled by the majority.

Being gay or lesbian has historically been a negative classification, that of a minority and a person with a problem. As late as 1974, the American Psychiatric Association still included homosexuality as a medical disease and psychological disorder (Andrzejewski, 2000). The gay and lesbian, already distant from the majority called

heterosexual, could have an even harder position in society. Based upon gender (all lesbians) and ethnicity (such as being African American, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American), gay and lesbian people could be members of multiple minority groups. Therefore, unless one is a gay, white male, the other gay and lesbian individuals are even further removed from the culturally dominant, heterosexual white male.

Accounting for the number of gays and lesbians in the United States is a difficult undertaking. While the United States Census does not specifically ask about sexual orientation or gender identity, the 1990 and 2000 Census included an “unmarried partner” classification (Dang & Frazer, 2005). Although this data includes information regarding unmarried partners that are male and female, male and male, and female and female, it only includes those who share a household. Some gays and lesbians are unwilling to document their homosexuality, some do not get an adequate chance to participate in research studies, and oftentimes the reported numbers vary widely depending on who is doing the research (Chasin, 2000). Because current research has supported the findings, the 1948 Kinsey Institute study, which concluded that the ratio of heterosexuals to homosexuals is approximately 10:1, is often still cited today (Burnett, 2000).

In the early 1950s and 1960s, gay and lesbian political activities were practically invisible. In the 1970s, the heteronormative culture began being challenged through gay rights protests and banding together for various causes. In the 1980s, gay and lesbian subcultures were being established throughout different towns and cities, and social networks of gays and lesbians continued being built through the 1990s. “For the generation coming of age in the 1980s and after, a feeling of cultural change was in the air – the degraded status of homosexuals and the rightness of homophobia could no longer be taken for granted” (Seidman, 2002, p. 125). Since the early 1990s, gay and

lesbians have attempted to “reclaimed” the term “queer”. This term began as a derogatory reference to homosexuals, but according to Queer theory, the term now refers to gays and lesbians living multifaceted, flexible, and unrestrained lives against homophobia: hatred, ignorance, and fear (Grace, et al., 2004).

While racial minorities can usually be identified, although skin color is sometimes not a definite determinant, the gay and lesbian minority can often easily be invisible to the public. Gays and lesbians, with only their sexual orientation differentiating them from heterosexual individuals, sometimes choose to “pass” in society and blend into the heterosexual dominant culture. In the near future, however, as gay and lesbian characters in the media begin appearing more prominently, perhaps this reality will fade and the following statement will have to be modified: “Gay men and lesbians represent perhaps one of the most invisible groups in society... Thus, the media represent a world in which everyone is assumed to be heterosexual” (Levina, Waldo, & Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 742).

Minorities in the Media

Because within the last decade more and more gay and lesbian minority characters have evolved into the mainstream media, an examination of these characterizations is not only timely, it is necessary. The growing visibility of the gay and lesbian characters should be examined similarly to other minorities as their television introduction to the masses began to take shape.

Documentation on some minority representations on television, such as Asians and Native Americans, is sometimes difficult to obtain. This is most likely correlated to the lack of Asian and Native American characters shown on television. While network television does not include an abundance of primetime shows with primary gay and

lesbian characters, more are currently on television today than in years past.

Furthermore, cable television is beginning to offer alternatives to network television, including even more gay and lesbian characters. Because these characters are being propagated on both network and cable television for viewers everywhere, it is important to document the characterization constructions of today. Many times qualitative research can be found regarding gay and lesbian characters in mainstream media, including television and film. However, published quantitative analyses of gay and lesbian characters are extremely limited.

Unfortunately, one of the issues with media, even today, is that all minorities are still extremely underrepresented in mainstream media, thus limiting and devaluing their existence. The mass media either continue to exclude or position women and minorities in menial, stereotypical roles (Bufkin, Eschholz, & Long, 2002). Because these portrayals potentially play a part in constructing society's views about a minority, these representations have the potential to propagate negative associations with minorities, such as sexism and racism. Content analyses of films in 1996 proves that although women and ethnic minorities have made some strides in representations compared to earlier studies, they are still significantly underrepresented as lead characters. Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and other minorities are rarely in lead roles. Of the characters that do appear, their roles continue to be consistent with traditional stereotypes (Bufkin, Eschholz, & Long, 2002; Greenberg & Mastro, 2000).

Racial minorities have had a slow and challenging indoctrination into the mainstream via media. Clark (1969) explains an evolutionary process of minority portrayals on television. He identifies four sequential stages that the minority portrayals

will inevitably experience. In the first stage, identified as a stage without recognition, the group is absent from the media altogether. Neglecting to portray the minority group in the media symbolically annihilates the group by rejecting, disregarding, and trivializing the minority (Merskin, 1998).

Once the group begins to appear in the media, the next stage of ridicule is entered. In this stage, the group is portrayed as a humorous object that the majority can laugh at and feel superior to in comparison. Once the group moves in to the third stage, the representation and regulation stage, the group members are portrayed in roles such as police officers and criminals, on both sides of the law, reemphasizing societal norms and proper positions of minorities within those norms. The final stage has the group entering into one of respect where the members are shown in rich and diverse range of roles, both positive and negative, that more closely resemble the group members in real life (Clark, 1969; Brand, Greenberg, & Mastro, 2002).

Historically, as minorities are brought “out” into the mainstream via the media, they are first dehumanized (or ridiculed and characterized by grave differences). Based upon ethnicity or religion, minorities such as African Americans and Jews are first characterized as those who spread diseases, sexually molest children, engage in immoral and animalistic sexual behavior, and are selfish (Wolfson, 1991). These dehumanizing descriptions mirror how the heterosexual majority began characterizing gays and lesbians in the media. “And by the 1970s, there was a world of television, movies, and news media that had a very clear message: homosexuals are child molesters, predators, and gender and sexual deviants” (Seidman, 2002, p. 123).

Stereotypes are often developed so the majority can quickly classify minorities into groups, make sense of their own identity, and see where all the groups fit into society's model (Sollis, 2000). Media stereotypes develop for minority groups over time, and once they develop, they tend to remain in place. Some of these characterizations can today be seen over and over again. These include such portrayals as the Latino lover, the black, overweight mammy and idiotic, yet submissive sambo, the scheming Asian male and geisha woman, and the lazy Native American who is often tied to mysterious religions (Brand, Greenberg, & Mastro, 2002). Defined stereotypes might be developing for gay and lesbian characters as they emerge on television, similar to the ones that are already firmly in place for the ethnic minorities.

Beyond the stereotypes, other similarities of gays and lesbians and ethnic minorities could emerge. For instance, the civil rights movement helped push the networks towards airing series that featured African Americans. Often a show would be called an "...accommodationist program, where the skin color of the lead characters was the only difference between this program and others on the air" (Dates, 1990, p. 266.) Perhaps some of the television shows that include gay and lesbian characters are still following certain guidelines that dilute the characters to underscore heterosexism as the norm, while merely including gay and lesbian characters for purpose. Those who create the stereotypes can be seen as crafting characters that will assist viewers with making sense of a minority or as creating characters that will ultimately dispel unspoken fears. Regardless of the intent of the constructed images, once the representations are established and shown over and over again in the media, they can potentially influence audiences. Bogle (2001) notes that primetime network series were successful in altering

perceptions and attitudes by making African Americans a familiar weekly presence in American living rooms.

Study Objectives

Although an abundance of quantitative research about gays and lesbians in the media has not been done to date, some authors and researchers have begun to document what they see taking place with regards to gay and lesbian characters. This study will attempt to quantitatively define the gay and lesbian characters currently available on primetime television. The differences, if any, between characters that appear on network and cable television will also be identified and discussed. The information gathered regarding the gay and lesbian characters will contribute to the literature that currently exists regarding minorities portrayed in the media.

While examining current representations of gays and lesbians, it is important to remember that although the mainstream media could be emphasizing the dominant culture, different audiences can assign different meanings to characters based upon their own perspectives and societal position (Linne, 2003). This study will delve into the potential effects of gay and lesbian characterizations on audience members, whether heterosexual, gay, or lesbian, and point out any differences between what these different audiences think about the available characters. It will also illuminate how two different audiences receive and reflect on the gay and lesbian characters offered by network and cable television. The comparison between the different groups of viewers will add to the understanding of how self-identified gays and lesbians and heterosexual audiences' attitudes and behaviors are similar or different when viewing the available television representations.

Organization of Thesis

The thesis that follows is organized into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the minority that will be studied, the gay and lesbian minority on television. It also gives a brief background regarding gays and lesbians as a minority and an overview about how minorities typically emerge and evolve on television.

Chapter two provides a literary basis regarding research that has been done by other scholars and authors to date. This chapter also delves into the two theories, cultivation theory and social cognition theory, which are the theoretical foundations that will be used when discussing the different influences the gay and lesbian television representations can potentially have on audiences. Chapter two also presents the hypotheses that are critical to any surfacing conclusions regarding gay and lesbian characters today.

Chapter three includes information detailing the methodology used in completing the study. This chapter explains how the content analysis of the characters was developed, who the coders were, and how audiences were divided for analysis. It also provides a summary of the questions on the coding sheet that participants were to answer.

Chapter four communicates the findings of the content analysis and experiment. These results are discussed through a statistical analysis of the information gathered throughout the project. Tables and graphs are used to illustrate the findings so the reader is provided a visual representation of the aggregated outcomes and different scenarios. The findings are discussed in terms of the hypotheses that inspired this study.

The final chapter provides a brief summary of the overall study. The conclusions from the findings are discussed at length in this chapter. The weaknesses of the study are described and suggestions for additional research are offered.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Without the regular contact provided by personal experience, there is an information gap about ‘the Other.’ Although what we learn in school and from family and peers contributes to filling this gap, the most common source of information, misinformation, distortion, and stereotypes are entertainment media.

– Holtzman, 2004, p. 109

Cultivating through Television

Someone who watches television regularly might say, “There are so many more gays and lesbians in the world today. In fact, gay people are everywhere.” If this claim is based merely upon the fact that they watch more television programs that include gay and lesbian characters, cultivation theory is at work. The underlying basis for this theory is that people who view television heavily think differently about their social reality based upon what they see on television. Cultivation theorists imply that television promotes a conventional world view that replicates and disseminates the interests of societal and political elites and attempts to preserve the status quo (Nacos, 2002). If this is the case, the characters that are now appearing “everywhere” must be analyzed to disentangle what types of characters are being pushed into the mainstream. Further, it is important to note that although the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) commends cable and reality television for including gay and lesbian characters, the number of gay characters in scripted shows is at its lowest since 1996 (Macias, 2004).

The theory of cultivation was developed when television in the United States included three broadcast networks and a handful of public and educational channels. However, with the advent of cable networks, satellite television, VCRs, DVRs, the Internet, and other means of watching programming, audience share is often divided. According to Gerbner, et al. (2002), "...there is little evidence that proliferation of channels has led to any substantially greater diversity of content" (p. 61). However, the content on both network and cable television should be viewed separately to see what stations are promoting or demoting, which characters, and in what ways.

When the media begin to portray minority groups, various audience reactions take place, and the media become avenues for educating viewers. Some perceive the minority depictions as a negative representation of the subculture, while others believe television is empowering. In the latter case, minorities join their American creators, enjoying seeing even the inaccurate visibility "... as a welcomed acknowledgement of worth, place, and identity" (Smith, 1996, p. 380). Sometimes the desire to identify with one's own culture is so overwhelming that even the most faulty representations seem more attractive than none at all (Linne, 2003). A rise in television portrayals allows minority groups to reduce the minority status in their minds and perceive strength, whether actual or imagined, through numbers. The portrayed minorities also begin to feel more confident as a community as lines of mass communication are opened up (Singer, 1973).

Although some minorities might welcome the representations, others might disapprove of the characters developed to represent them to the masses. Ross (1997) studied focus groups to explore how black audiences interpreted representations of themselves on British television. The results suggested that black audiences are disturbed

by the stereotypical constructions of minority identities. The derogatory portrayals of reality were attributed to the white writers' lack of knowledge about black communities, a disregard for black culture, and inherently racist assumptions about black people. The images were said to affect self-esteem in blacks and affect white audiences who, without first-hand knowledge of blacks, believe the offensive representations to be true.

Similar effects and critiques may be further unveiled when the gay and lesbian minorities are asked to contemplate their constructed representations. Not only do the representations seem to affect a group's internal identity, the portrayals also seem to offer information to the audiences upon which the group could ultimately be judged. A group of gay men were asked to discuss the significance they believed the media depictions detailing their lifestyles and relationships had on audiences. The gay men who participated said they wanted to see images that reflected gay men as regular people. The interviewees explained that they strongly disliked the media's attempts to reduce their existence to a caricature that was usually simplified and often flamboyantly stereotyped (Kama, 2002). These stereotypes, through the cultivation process, have potential to negatively shape audiences' perceptions of gay men that truly exist in the world.

Television uses consistent messages to convey particular concepts and often shows audiences how they should react to particular situations (Shrum, 2002). In the social cognitive theory of mass communication, audience members are active participants with media. "People gain understanding of causal relationships and expand their knowledge by operating symbolically on the wealth of information derived from personal and vicarious experiences" (Bandura, 2002, p. 123). However, television and other media depictions are often influential when viewers have had limited or no experiences

with a minority group. The constructed messages from media, usually full of half truths and stereotypes, contribute to socialization of how people see others with either acceptance or bias (Holtzman, 2004). When viewing the media is the only experience, the media are allowed to introduce the minority group for the first time.

Because gay and lesbian characters have had considerably more negative than positive representations over the past forty years, the introduction could be damaging to audiences, leaving lasting consequences (Linne, 2003). The viewer, without having any personal interactions with the group, relies on the depictions to gain knowledge and formulate opinions based on the media's representations. As previously mentioned, Graves (1999) studied the representations of different racial groups on television and their effects on audiences. Inclusion of a social group offers viewers constructed characteristics to be associated with each group (Graves, 1999). Therefore, if a viewer is exposed to a minority he or she has no real-world knowledge about, that viewer is likely to use the representation as a basis for understanding that minority or group.

Sometimes audiences do not use characters in the media to learn about other groups of people. Instead, these audiences use characters to learn about themselves. In order to make sense of their own lives, these audience members are attempting to find characters with which they can identify. Kivel & Kleiber (2000) qualitatively examined leisure and media consumption of self-identified gays and lesbians in high schools. The results suggest that the gay and lesbian students used media as a way to understand the world and themselves by attempting to identify with certain characters in television shows. The few images of gays and lesbians they were able to view were said to help

them internalize that they were gay or lesbian; however, the limited identification did not propel them into being publicly gay or lesbian.

Appealing to the Masses (read Majority)

The media have an interesting role when introducing minority groups to the masses. In order to appeal to the largest audiences, mass media attempt to introduce the minority while trying to maintain the appeal of the majority. Evidence shows that mainstream representations of gays and lesbians are often diluted for mass consumption (Dates, 1990; Gross, 2001). Kite and LaMar (1998) examined the attitudes of heterosexuals to gay men and lesbian women. The results of their study indicate that men, the culturally dominant gender, held more negative attitudes than women regarding homosexuals, especially towards gay men. Nevid (1983) exposed one hundred thirty-three self-reported heterosexual college students to depictions of homosexual sexuality. A pre-test, post-test analysis revealed that males exposed to gay males in sexual encounters led to increased anti-homosexual attitudes. The findings suggested that males may be more apt than females to perceive homosexuals as a threat. When there is a sense of homosexual threat, heightened negative attitudes are used as a defense mechanism (Nevid, 1983).

As the gay and lesbian minority emerges into the mainstream, a brief review of the earlier representations is necessary to put the potential cultivating and social learning theories into perspective. Hart (2004) suggests that television history includes numerous instances of heterosexuals making derogatory comments and cruel jokes about gay men that contribute to an inferior social position of gay men to heterosexual men and women. On primetime television, the then rare gay and lesbian characterizations available for

audiences date back to the 1950s; however, many more representations are available today.

Fejes and Petrich (1993) identified the unwritten broadcast network rules about how gays and lesbians are represented in the mainstream media. These rules were followed during the first television representations and are still often followed on mainstream television shows. One of the rules is that gays and lesbians are rarely shown as members of a larger homosexual community. These characters are usually placed in a predominantly heterosexual realm (Fejes & Petrich, 1993). Viewers might get the impression that gays and lesbians are always alone in their societal differences. These types of depictions emphatically place gays and lesbians in the “other” position. Beyond the media representations, gays and lesbians usually have strong ties and relationships with one another. Gay and lesbian communities and friends are often intimately intertwined; however, this aspect is usually negated in mainstream media.

Two other rules that have historically been used are that gay characters that do appear on networks are secondary or irregular characters with homosexuality being a problem to be solved within the episode (Fejes & Petrich, 1993). These two traditional rules have only recently been broken.

Initial Representations, a Brief History

In December of 1963, the nation’s leading newspaper, the *New York Times*, put gay people on the front page in an article called, “Growth of Overt Homosexuality in City Provokes Wide Concern” (Gross, 2001). The article began with views from religious, medical, political, and legal sources and the only actual quotes from gay people came at

the end of the article. According to Gross (2001), most of the articles that came out of this period focused entirely on gay men and dismissed the lesbian population altogether.

Many authors (Adam, 1987; D'Emilio, 1983; Johnson & Keith, 2001; Walzer, 2002, et al.) attribute the Stonewall Riots, or the Stonewall Rebellion, as the first public indicator of the civil rights struggle among gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people. Media attention focused on gay activism on June 27, 1969, when police raided the Greenwich Village gay bar called the Stonewall Inn. The bar was selling liquor to homosexuals, and under state law, that was illegal. After years of having their bars raided and being harassed and arrested on charges of indecency, the patrons fought with bricks, beer bottles, and physical strength that night and several nights after (Walzer, 2002). During these riots, homosexuals demanded respect and visibility in both the media and in society. Some heterosexuals did not realize the triumph felt by this minority group. "The Ward and June Cleavers of America, although possibly disconcerted by the news reports, were nestled in their homes, snug and secure in their heterosexuality, oblivious to the show waves emanating from Greenwich Village" (Johnson & Keith, 2001, p.10). Thousands joined the gay and lesbian movement in the 1970s, and a growing sense of community began to develop, permitting the youth of the times to be privy to information about the newly noticeable minority (Gross, 2001).

Homosexuality was not completely absent from television prior to Stonewall. According to Gross (2001), in April of 1954 in Los Angeles, the show *Confidential File* included an interview of a gay man. This man used an alias of Curtis White and had his face blurred for anonymity. He was interviewed only after the host spoke with authorities on homosexuality, consisting of a psychiatrist and police officer, who

neutralized the perceived homosexual threat to society. After the program aired, White was recognized by his boss. His real name was Dale Olson, and he was quickly fired from his job. In New York, an acknowledged gay man first appeared on television in 1958. His identity was concealed with a hood and he, too, was spoken to only after an interview with an authoritative challenger, an antigay psychiatrist (Gross, 2001).

A documentary that aired on CBS in March 1967, entitled *The Homosexual*, contained harmful stereotypes about gay men, including promiscuity, a miserable and shameful disposition, and an inherent notion that being gay was an illness (Alwood, 1996). Homosexuality, however, was not a subject that many freely discussed. In fact, some popular media figures were gay and lesbian. They were not willing to publicly announce their sexuality, though, for fear of losing their jobs or reputations. *Queer in America* (Signorile, 1994) discusses the men and women in high profile jobs who were either forced into the closet or exposed. The “liberal media,” as it has been termed, or at least the people who were in charge of it, might not have always been as liberal as some audiences might think.

For example, Sheila James Kuehl, a 1940s radio star turned television star on *The Penny Williams Show*, was a closeted lesbian until she became California’s first openly gay senator in the 20th century. Dick Sergeant (whom many audiences fondly knew as the husband on *Bewitched* from 1969 to 1972) had to live with his unspoken homosexuality and silent acceptance by those he loved. *Queer in American* (Signorile, 1994) delved deeply into the silence, and oftentimes discrimination, actors, actresses, writers, producers, and politicians were subjected to throughout the years simply because of their sexual orientation.

During the cultural change of the 1960s, openness about sexuality in American society, previously repressed, bubbled to the surface. Hollywood, however, remained rigid in its depictions of gay and lesbian characters. “Hollywood studios avoided the risk of being denied a code seal by steering clear of depictions of sympathetic or happy homosexuals (the code was superseded in 1968 by the MPAA ‘alphabet soup’ rating system still in effect today)” (Gross & Woods, 1999, p. 292). However, even though the code was relaxed after 1968, happy homosexual characters were still not seen in this era’s television shows or films.

The Celluloid Closet (Russo, 1981) provided examples of how gays and lesbians throughout the early decades of filmmaking and into the early late seventies were invisible, extremely vague, or negatively portrayed. When gays and lesbians would overtly appear, they were cast as thieves, killers, and other horrible villains, with a punishment of either being killed or converted to heterosexism at the conclusion. “Just think of the line-up – the butch dyke and the camp queen, the lesbian vampire and the drastic queer, the predatory schoolmistress and the neurotic fag, ridicule and disgust packed into those images is unmistakable” (Dryer, 1997, p. 298). In the 1970s and 1980s, Hollywood films were acknowledging the reality of gays and lesbians; however, they were continuously being represented as pathetic and helpless or as social, moral and physical threats to heterosexuals (Seidman, 2002).

Because such negative depictions were rampant in the media, gays and lesbians, in the 60s and 70s, began taking matters into their own hands. They did this by writing and producing queer radio shows. These shows existed mainly on community radio stations, were voluntarily produced, and operated with very limited funding. *Friends* was

one of the first gay-oriented radio programs in the United States, beginning in 1960 on Georgetown University's campus station. It was the longest-running gay program on the radio, lasting from 1960 to 1982 (Signorile, 1994).

All in the Family aired a compassionate view of a gay man in February 1971, called "Judging Books by Covers," before the show had gained popularity (Gross, 2001). In this episode that received little attention, Archie Bunker discovers that his football player pal is gay. Of course, his being gay was the problem at hand. In later episodes, Bunker was also made to face a cross-dresser and a lesbian and comes to terms (or not) with their sexual orientations.

Other 1970s television shows such as *Maude*, *Barney Miller*, *M*A*S*H*, *Baretta*, *Kojak*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Phyllis*, *Medical Center*, *Mary Hartman*, *the Bob Newhart Show*, and *Family* began allowing gay and lesbian characters to appear too (Signorile, 1994). These characters had some of the unwritten rules in common. They were never recurring and always secondary, and their homosexuality was always the problem to be solved within the episode.

In 1972, on an ABC made-for-television movie called *That Certain Summer*, two gay characters actually touched each other on the shoulders, and at the end, they didn't die. This was a breakthrough in a television portrayal of gay men (Gross, 2001). In 1978, two more made-for-television movies were aired. These two TV movies recounted actual life experiences of a gay man and a lesbian, leaving out the "non-gay or lesbian authorities on gay and lesbian issues" and portraying these experiences from a new perspective.

With Reagan in the White House in the 1980s, right-winged conservatism controlled America, and gay activism was at first quickly and quietly subdued (Gross & Woods, 1999). The Moral Majority's campaign against sex and violence on television dominated the times (Moritz, 1999). Fortunately for gays and lesbians in the San Francisco area, the longest-running cable access queer television program, *Electric City*, made its debut in 1984 (Johnson & Keith, 2001). The long-standing show confronted controversial issues and promoted events in the gay and lesbian community. *Electric City* survived the vicious 80s during a time when gays and lesbians probably needed media support.

When television chose to deal with gay people in the 1980s, the shows often came from the viewpoint of the straight person, serving as a substitute for the mainstream audience, struggling with anguish to accept the homosexual in his or her life that had this horrible problem (Gross, 2001). The problem-focus on homosexual characters fit well in the genre of made-for-television movies. Interestingly, the problem to be solved was never about the gay character struggling to achieve self-acceptance.

Some of the first continuing gay male characters began showing up in the late 1970s and early 80s on shows such as *Love, Sydney, Soap*, and *Dynasty*; however, these characters were sometimes too subtle for the mainstream audiences to understand, or they went from being gay to straight and then back to gay again repetitively.

Throughout the 80s, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) and conservative groups challenged freedom of expression and other civil liberties of gays and lesbians. As AIDS emerged as a threat to America and the world during this decade, the most common representation of gay men on television linked them with HIV and

AIDS and socially constructed this plague as attached to gays (Hart, 2004). Until the AIDS crisis was seen as a disease that was not contained in the homosexual realm and could ultimately affect the heterosexual world, funding and attention to the disease was scarce (Wolfson, 1991). The media could not ignore the disease, nor could the press ignore gays and lesbians rallying to speak out for national support. As gays and lesbians began appearing in newspapers and on the nightly news, other gays and lesbians could begin identifying the determination harnessed in these exposed communities.

Advertising and Increased Visibility

In the early 1990s, gay and lesbian representations were cultivated and changed. Perhaps the growth can be attributed to advertisers beginning to recognize the purchasing power gays and lesbians. The buying power of the gay and lesbian market has been estimated at anywhere between \$35 billion and \$450 billion (Johnson & Keith, 2001). With the potential monetary power gays and lesbians seemed to have, advertisers began to look more closely at them.

The mainstream media began to comply, targeting gay and lesbian audiences. Even the once issue-oriented gay press, thriving on solidarity and political movements, became more of a marketing vehicle, targeting gay people as consumers rather than as a people with a common community (Andriote, 2001).

As advertisers began looking at how to reach the gay and lesbian communities, now seen as a commodity, more regular gay and lesbian characters began appearing in the mainstream. The reaction to the advertising push parallels how many gays and lesbians might view the mainstream media. Burnett (2000) examined gay and lesbian attitudes towards advertising. The survey results suggested that gays and lesbians do not

like or trust advertising unless it is relevant or encouragingly targeted at them. The findings further suggest that gays and lesbians see advertising as promulgating heterosexual lifestyles and values, thus they find it useless. These heterosexual lifestyles and values go far beyond just advertising when looking at the bigger picture of television as entertainment.

The Construction of Modern Gay and Lesbian Characters

In mainstream media representations, homosexual characters are placed in a constructed world that is based upon heterosexual standards and ideologies (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002). In the 21st Century, there are gay and lesbian characters afforded recurring roles and even lead roles on television. Unfortunately, while the increased number of recurring characters at first glance might seem like an advancement of gays and lesbians into the mainstream media, upon closer observation, a distinguishable characteristic of these gay and lesbian portrayals is that they have been neutered by conventions (Fejes and Petrich, 1993). In other words, gay and lesbian sex and desire are absent from these representations.

Some network shows have been criticized for emphasizing heterosexual relationships and dismissing gay and lesbian relationships. According to Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002), shows such as *Will and Grace* place the issue of gayness in harmless, well-known popular culture standards and focus on heterosexual interpersonal relationships rather than a character's larger association with society as a whole. Gay passion is invisible so that the heterosexuals' fears and repulsion are lessened. Without sex, the gay character will most likely not offend the audience. De-sexing homosexuals

might reaffirm the attitude that gays and lesbians can be loved and appreciated only if they are silent about their sexuality and not too explicit living their lives (Keller, 1998).

A parallel can be drawn with an early television show called *A Man Called Hawk*. This show represented a strong, well-rounded African American lead character with a powerful foundation in his heritage. He, too, was “neutered by convention” in that he was good looking, but had no romantic life and was denied any sexuality (Dates, 1990). Erotic desire for the gay and lesbian character is left out, but desexualizing a minority characterized by sexual orientation is a misrepresentation. “Apparently, for program executives progress means constructing images of lesbians and gays that are not threatening to heterosexuals by erasing any sign of lesbian and gay sexuality” (Gross, 2001, p. 87). The predominant belief is that only after heterosexual fears are reduced can the media show more diverse and multifaceted gay and lesbian characters.

Dispelling these fears is not an easy task, and the heterosexual majority seems to determine when the fear has been diffused. *Ellen*, for example, had a lesbian main character, but the sitcom was geared toward the comfort of the heterosexual American mainstream (Dow, 2001). Once Ellen Morgan and the actress who played her, Ellen Degeneres, came out, the show attempted to give Ellen a dating life and surface romantic encounters. The show was canceled the next season and put into syndication.

Additional television shows from the 1990s offered gay male characters and some lesbian characters various personalities and roles on both daytime and primetime, though not without continuing to slice some dimensions of the characters (Hart, 2004). In the book, *Up from Invisibility*, Gross (2001) chronicles some of the milestone television shows from this era. For example, in February 1991, NBC’s *L.A. Law* showed two

female attorneys engage in the first lesbian kiss on network television; however, one character was classified as bi-sexual and the other disappeared from the show the next season. On *thirtysomething*, two men are shown in bed, presumably after having sex; however, they are not shown kissing or touching one another.

On the show *Roseanne* (1988-1997) heterosexual fears are dispelled when the main character is kissed by another woman, and by her reactions, the audience knows Roseanne is disgusted by it. On this same show, a gay male character (played by Martin Mull) and bi-sexual character (played by Sandra Bernhard) became continuing characters. Martin Mull's character has a wedding ceremony. When the ceremony finishes, there is no on-camera kiss between he and his partner. Another wedding ceremony occurred on the popular *Friends* show. Two lesbians vowed "for better or for worse, until death do us part," but the kiss to seal that commitment was not shown either.

Melrose Place, a popular show of the 1990s, included a well-rounded gay male character; however, in the final episode, when the character is supposed to kiss another man, the camera cuts away for the actual kiss, focusing on a straight man's reaction, looking through the blinds at the two men in utter surprise and confusion (Gross, 2001).

Some other shows, such as *Party of Five*, *Ally McBeal*, *Picket fences*, and *Spin City* also included gay or lesbian characters or scenes.

In the late 1990s, another tactic to present gay men in a heterosexually acceptable way emerged, and a relationship between heterosexuals and homosexuals developed on screen. Dreisinger (2000) examined the gay male and straight female relationships that became a popular alternative for heterosexual relationships. The gay male, straight woman relationship could be seen on Hollywood films and on television.

“Gay friends seem to have become the trendy accessory for straight women in media today” (Dreisinger, 2000, p. 3). The gay male is idealized as caring, loving, sensitive, understanding, and fully aware of things such as fashion and relationships. The only thing that is lacking in these relationships is sex. Sex is insignificant in these emotional relationships between the gay man and straight woman. Because of this insignificance, the heterosexual men can be confident watching the depictions, knowing that women will not totally replace them with gay men.

In 1998, NBC introduced *Will & Grace* along with primetime television’s first gay lead character, Will Truman, and his overtly flamboyant gay friend, Jack (Hart, 2004). The characters of Will and Grace often leave audiences wondering if they will end up together in a romantic relationship. This modern, award-winning show does not focus on homosexuality as a problem, but the characters and their relationships do fit nicely into the heterosexual realm.

The recurring gay and lesbian roles that do not always focus on homosexuality as a problem could be an attempt by networks to gain advertising dollars while minimizing the improvement of gay and lesbian status in society. This technique has been seen in the past with other minorities as well. An example can be drawn between current television shows that include gay and lesbian characters and one from the past with African American cast members. *The Cosby Show* (1984-1994) placed the American majority’s conceptions of family, wealth, and status into a show that just happens to have black characters as the main focus. This show minimized and obscured African American viewpoints, cultural differences, and lived identities (Smith, 1996).

Programs that on the surface seem to be targeted at a certain audience must be examined closely, because although the shows might include a minority character, after the layers are peeled away, it might really only reiterate the dominant cultural ideologies again and again (Gerbner, et al., 2002). By placing gay and lesbian characters into shows where the viewpoints, differences and identities are made irrelevant, writers and producers are able to keep large audiences as consumers. Ciasullo (2001) argued that the mainstream lesbian is sexualized and desexualized, creating a lesbian palatable for mainstream viewers. The lesbian character is attractive and feminine, an object of sexuality for the heterosexual male. Yet she is at the same time de-homosexualized, because the female-to-female desire is repressed on screen. Non-feminine lesbians, with only a few villain-like exceptions, are virtually invisible in media representations (Ciasullo, 2001). Thus, the same image that encompasses lesbianism in this culture's imagination, the non-femme or butch, is absent from representation in mainstream media.

A different analysis of six prime-time television portrayals of flirtation between a heterosexual woman and a lesbian or bisexual woman from 1986-1994 revealed the non-threatening representations fostered to both the heterosexual and homosexual audience. Findings suggested that the heterosexual woman's encounter with lesbian flirtation occurred within a familiar environment, became the source of the heterosexual woman's problem, led to the heterosexual woman's reaffirmation of her heterosexuality, and was never allowed to develop into a romance (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 1995). By placing the lesbian or bisexual character as an unlikely person to "get the girl," heterosexual audiences can watch without compromising their presupposed well being.

In order to dispel some of the negative reactions to gay and lesbian characters in the mass media, producers began attempting to inject the characters in a gentle manner. Nelson (1985) examined five movies that entered the mainstream in 1982 that use a dichotomy of differences and similarities to assimilate gays and lesbians into the dominant heterosexual audience. Before lesbians and gays can gain the heterosexual population's acceptance, they must be shown to have a commonality with that population. Mainstream gay and lesbian characters today are placed into comedies and dramas where they are often not allowed to have relationships, but they are portrayed as sympathetic members of society as a whole.

Frank Oz's film *In and Out* (Paramount 1997), starring Kevin Kline, is another example of mainstreaming gay male characters so that marketing the film will not exclude the heterosexual audience. *In and Out* actually perpetuates stereotypes, such as swishing hips, limp wrists, and the idea that all gay men love certain music and art, rather than diminishing them as intended (Keller, 1998). The movie appealed to both heterosexual and homosexual audiences.

A television media genre based on heterosexual romance, the daytime soap opera, has had some difficulty in attempting to incorporate gay and lesbian characters. Harrington (2003) explored the risks and challenges of representing homosexuals on soap operas via textual analysis and interviews. Although typically ahead of primetime in portraying potentially controversial social issues, homosexuality has been the exception. Daytime soaps have featured gay or lesbian characters in substantive roles only four times, not counting the current storyline of *All My Children* (Harrington, 2003).

The reason most gay or lesbian characters are unable to remain longstanding characters on soap operas is because not many love interests exist (Gross, 2001). The heterosexual background for soaps leaves gay and lesbian characters in a world full of opposite-sex love interests and very few same-sex love interests, if any. Therefore, like the traditional television shows, lesbian and gay plotlines remained focused on the problem with being gay and lesbian, and the characters were usually short lived.

However, *All My Children* is beginning to shatter the traditional characterization of gays and lesbians appearing on soap operas. Bianca, a lesbian character, has a well-rounded depiction. Apart from not showing explicitly sexual scenes between women, Bianca is allowed to have relationships, she has been associated with a lesbian community, and she has also been a long-standing character on the show (Harrington, 2003). This new development in representation seems to be giving life to a lesbian character that can be seen on network television on a daily basis.

However, perhaps the most real representations of gays and lesbians, ones that break all the rules, including allowing gays and lesbians to be sexual individuals, might be too much for network television. Cable television is taking gay and lesbian media representations beyond the networks. HBO and Showtime are beginning to include gay and lesbian characters into their original series, offering a closer look as to what gays and lesbians might experience during their journey through life.

Cable: A New Construction of Characters

The Showtime series, *Queer as Folk*, has an entirely gay character cast, except for the occasional heterosexual. This show portrays a realm where everyone is assumed gay or lesbian unless otherwise explained. Ironically, the show's premise is exactly opposite

to most television. As Chambers (2003) notes, the majority of television operates in an invisible heteronormative manner, much like society, in that audiences typically assume characters are straight, and they usually are straight. The biggest breakthrough for the show is that it integrates explicit sex into the drama (Holleran, 2001). Although a show like this will most likely not make it to mainstream media anytime soon, cable television makes such shows possible. Because *Queer as Folk* is on cable, the audiences might be smaller and more targeted. The representations might not be intended for the masses at all. The viewing is not only limited because cable is expensive and the content is graphic, but the program does not air until late on Sunday nights.

The HBO original series, *Six Feet Under*, includes two recurring gay characters. David Fisher and Keith Charles maintain an on again, off again romantic relationship. Charles, an African American gay police officer, has been portrayed as strong and confident. David, who appears to be the more stable in most circumstances, is only beginning to be comfortable with his sexuality and being “out” of the closet. *Six Feet Under*, while not focusing specifically on the gay couple, with its many scenes occurring in one episode, puts these characters within a heteronormative world. The message this show communicates about gay men living in a straight world is that it is hard to exert sexual identity when it is not the norm, and it is easy to not contradict people who just assume one is straight (Chambers, 2003).

The L Word, another Showtime drama that began in 2004, features a cast of almost all lesbian characters. These characters also break the rules of network broadcast. The community is apparent, the characters are recurring and central to each plotline, and they are shown having sexual experiences. Unfortunately, even *The L Word*, as

groundbreaking as it might on the surface appear, is void of any overtly masculine women who could repulse the potential heterosexual audience.

Bravo's reality series called *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* provides representations of five gay men, each with a special talent that he will use to help a straight guy gain knowledge about food, fashion, grooming, decorating, and culture. This show has ignited criticism in that the entire show is based upon a long-standing stereotype that gay men possess a natural flair that most straight men lack. However, Hart (2004) believes that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* places the gay characters in a superior position and implicitly prompts audiences to realize that all gay men have different personalities and strengths, much like straight men do.

Television might be becoming more fragmented with the options of network television, cable television and pay cable television stations.

If the first era of television was one of heterogeneous audiences united in watching common programs on few channels, we are now well into the era of multichannel programming aimed at ever narrower demographic audience slices (Gross, 2001, p. 9).

Although this trend might dwindle as network and cable lines begin to blur, currently, diverse audiences can be subjected to gay and lesbian characters either by choice or by chance. How those characters are constructed and viewed by audiences could either assist or hinder the visible gay and lesbian movement that has been ongoing for more than a half a century.

Hypotheses

Audience members play an active role when watching television. They must first decide if they want to watch a particular show. They then must choose to either watch

network television or purchase cable television, including movie channels, if they deem a show is worth the monetary value. Then, the audience member can either watch a show passively or watch actively, getting involved with the characters portrayed. When a show is watched, and characters are examined, the audience member can learn from these characters (sometimes incorrectly), gain a sense of how the world is (also sometimes filled with inaccuracies), or identify with (or resent) the characterizations that are portrayed.

This study will examine the television shows that include gay and lesbian characters to attempt to explain what portrayals audiences are getting and what they are doing with them. The hypotheses that drive this study are the following:

- H1: White men still dominate on both network and cable television as gay characters. Lesbian characters and gay characters of color are still extremely rare.
- H2: The majority of network primetime television representations play the gay and lesbian characters in non-threatening roles, de-sexualized and living in a predominately heterosexual world.
- H3: The primetime cable depictions of gays and lesbians are more multi-faceted and include more civil and social rights issues that gay and lesbians face in the real world than network television.
- H4: Audiences of different sexual orientations will have different opinions about the characters that are available both on network and cable television.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A Constructed Week of Primetime Gay and Lesbian Characters

In order to focus on the primetime gay and lesbian characters on television, a constructed week of television shows that included gay and lesbian recurring characters was recorded with a digital video recorder (DVR). For a two-week period in August 2004, each show identified by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's (GLAAD's) weekly guide to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender (LGBT) characters on television (<http://www.glaad.org/eye/index.php>) was recorded. Two of the shows listed on the GLAAD website, *Degrassi: The Next Generation* and *Real World*, were not utilized in the study because the episodes that were recorded did not include a gay or lesbian character. *ER*, which includes a recurring lesbian character, and was also identified by the website, was not recorded because the show was not aired during the sample two-week period from which the constructed week was recorded.

Approximately 15-20 minutes of the twelve shows that included recurring gay and lesbian characters were recorded onto two tapes. The television shows on tape one were: *Will & Grace*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Big Brother 5*, *Two & 1/2 Men*, *Reno 911!*, *Graham Norton Effect*, and *L Word*. Fifteen characters were coded on tape one. (One recurring character on the *L Word* did not appear in the recorded segment at length enough to code. This character was omitted from the study.) The television

shows included on tape two were: *Half & Half*, *Amish in the City*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Six Feet Under*, and *Queer as Folk*. There were 11 characters coded on tape two.

Six tapes and one DVD were made for each tape of primetime television shows so that viewers could watch the tapes at their own pace, either by themselves or with other coders. A brief synopsis of each show recorded, taken directly from each show's website, is attached as Appendix A.

The Coders (Viewers)

Thirty heterosexual and 30 homosexual (gay or lesbian) viewers were specifically sought out to watch each tape for a diverse perspective and to experimentally determine any differences in how questions were answered. Once willing participants agreed to code, they were randomly assigned to watch one of the two tapes. Each coder received verbal and written instructions on how to complete the coding sheets. Fifteen gay and lesbian coders and 15 heterosexual coders watched tape one, while 15 gay or lesbian coders and 15 heterosexual coders watched tape two. There were a total of 60 coders. After the coding was complete, each participant was debriefed about the study and was given the opportunity to provide feedback.

Coding Sheets

Two coding sheet packets were developed, one for each tape. The unit of analysis for the content analysis was the gay and lesbian character or characters in each show. Each gay or lesbian character to be coded was identified on the coding sheets with a picture, a name, and the name of the television show. One entire coding sheet existed for each of the recurring characters on a given program; therefore, if a show included five gay male characters, one entire coding sheet for each character was to be answered. The

coding sheet was developed and then provided to a focus group of two gay men and two lesbians for comments, suggestions, and any additional questions they wanted to see asked about television portrayals of gays and lesbians.

Each character was coded for approximate age, gender, and ethnicity. Another question asked coders to circle any of the activities that the characters engaged in. It also included questions regarding with whom the character interacts and what types of activities the character participated in. If a coder was familiar with the show, he or she was instructed to use knowledge about the show to answer the questions and use the recorded program as a refresher. However, if the viewer had not seen the shows, the brief clips were what the coder had to use in order to answer the questions. Eight bipolar adjectives were also included for each character on a semantic differential scale. These bipolar adjectives were: feminine/masculine, funny/serious, unattractive/attractive, stereotypical/non-stereotypical, submissive/aggressive, boring/interesting, irrational/rational, and unrealistic/realistic.

Three open-ended questions were then asked about each character to determine if the coder believed the character was realistic, if the character provoked any feelings or attitudes, and if the character was seen as someone the coder might befriend. After the coder answered all of the questions about the characters, some general information was gathered regarding the viewer. These questions included gender, sexual orientation, and general television watching habits. Two final open-ended questions were then asked to see if the coder found commonalities or differences among the shows and if they believed the representations could affect audiences in a positive or negative way. The two

different coding sheets that were provided to the viewers were lengthy documents. An example of the coding sheet is attached as Appendix B.

Analysis

A content analysis was chosen as the best method for quantitatively defining the gay and lesbian characters available on primetime television. Both non-parametric and parametric statistics were used. Unless the question was open-ended, the response was recorded using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Statistics regarding a character's gender, race, age, interactions, and activities were calculated using frequencies. These questions were randomly selected to check coder reliability. Reliability among the coders, calculated using Holsti's formula, ranged from 100% to 79%.

The answers to the semantic differential character construction question, the question regarding realism, the question involving feelings, beliefs, or values, and the question about befriending the character were aggregated based upon the sexual orientation of the viewers for any differences in perception. Two groups were established, one being the heterosexual group and the other the homosexual (or gay and lesbian) group. These results were analyzed more as an experiment than a content analysis by comparing independent-sample *t* tests in order to determine whether or not sexual orientation affects how audiences view gay and lesbian characterizations.

Three open-ended questions appeared on the coding sheets for each character that asked the viewer to explain why he or she felt the character was or was not realistic, which or why, if any, feelings, beliefs, or values were provoked, and why the viewer would or would not befriend the character. These questions were designed to reveal

unanticipated viewpoints and personal beliefs about the representations and were analyzed qualitatively. Similar themes in the written answers, again separated by heterosexual viewers and homosexual (gay or lesbian) viewers, were identified to reveal the differences, if any, of how gay and lesbian audiences and heterosexual audiences perceive the available primetime representations.

The two final questions were also in an open-ended format. One question asked if the viewer found any commonalities or differences in the characters that were shown from show to show. The other question asked the viewer to voice his or her opinion regarding whether the gay or lesbian characters portrayed on television affect audiences in a positive or negative manner. These answers were analyzed qualitatively by identifying common subjects in the written responses. The answers were then aggregated for discussion.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Participants

The 60 participants in this study were segregated into two categories. They were either self-identified as heterosexual, or straight, or they were self-identified as homosexual, or gay or lesbian. Because this study required a purposive sample, the participants were not randomly selected. Therefore, it is important to reveal the descriptive, demographic information collected regarding those individuals who agreed to participate in this study. (*Table 1* provides a comprehensive, side-by-side profile regarding the coder demographics.) Participant information, along with all of the quantitative data gathered from this study, was aggregated in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program.

Straight (Heterosexual) Viewers

The straight viewer group included 30 people. Of these respondents, the majority were female viewers. Most of the respondents said that they had cable television. Very few of the viewers did not subscribe to cable. Conversely, only a small percentage of the straight viewers paid extra to receive the Showtime movie channel. Another movie channel, HBO, was purchased in addition to cable by 38.2% of the straight viewers.

The straight viewers' ages varied. The largest age group of viewers ranged from 18 to 25 years old. The smallest number of straight viewers was included in the age group between 26 and 33 years old. Approximately the same number of straight viewers

fell into the 34 to 41 years old, 42 to 50 years old, and 52 years old and older age categories.

The majority of straight viewers stated that they watch only one to three hours of television a day. The most television that the straight audience said they watched was four to six hours a day. This group was composed of only 9.5% of the viewers. Almost 7% of the viewers stated that they never watched television. See *Table 1*.

Gay and Lesbian (Homosexual) Viewers

There were 30 people in the gay and lesbian viewer group. In this group, the majority of the viewers were female. Of the gay and lesbian viewers, most said they had cable television. The gay and lesbian respondents overwhelmingly also stated that they purchased Showtime and HBO.

The ages of these viewers varied from the straight viewers. The largest number of participants ranged from 34 to 41 years old. Another large group of participants was 26 to 33 years old. The smallest groups of gay and lesbian viewers were 18 to 25 years old, 42 to 51 years old, and 52 years and older.

Only one gay and lesbian viewer said he or she never watched television. Most of them said they watched about one to three hours of television a day. The rest of the coders indicated that they watched four to six hours of television per day. See *Table 1*.

Table 1: Study Viewer Demographics

	Straight	Gay/Lesbian
Sex		
Male	36.2%	31.3%
Female	63.8%	68.7%
Cable		
Yes	96.2%	89.5%
No	3.8%	10.5%
Showtime		
Yes	7.7%	71.5%
No	92.3%	28.5%
HBO		
Yes	38.2%	63.8%
No	61.8%	36.2%
Age		
18-25 Years	36.7%	2.8%
26-33 Years	7.7%	37.9%
34-41 Years	21.0%	52.6%
42-51 Years	19.2%	2.8%
52 + Years	15.4%	3.8%
TV Viewing		
Never Watches	6.7%	2.8%
Watches 1-3 hours/day	83.8%	66.7%
Watches 4-6 hours/day	9.5%	30.5%

Note. All percentages in each category are shown. Each category (per audience) totals 100%.

Who's Watching What

The coders were asked to identify which shows, if any, they watched at least twice a month. This question was designed to see which audience members regularly watched the television shows that incorporate gay and lesbian characters. The list of television shows the participants were asked to choose from included all of the primetime television shows recorded for this study.

Of all of the shows, only five of them were watched by more than 10% of the straight viewers at least twice a month. The network shows watched by straight viewers were *Will & Grace* (44.6%) and *Two & 1/2 Men* (18.2%). The straight viewers also watched the following cable television shows: *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (37.9%), *Nip/Tuck* (30.3%), and *Reno 911* (23.6%). Only 2.8% of the straight viewers said they watched the shows that appear on the movie channels.

The majority of gay and lesbian viewers stated that they watched *Will & Grace* at least twice a month (73.3%). However, that was the only network show these viewers watched regularly. Almost the same percentage of gay and lesbian respondents (71.5%) said they watched *Queer as Folk*. The *L Word* was watched by a majority of the gay and lesbian respondents (54.4%), and *Six Feet Under* was watched by 42.8% of these viewers. The cable shows that the gay and lesbian viewers indicated they watched more than twice a month were *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (48.5%), *Nip/Tuck* (23.1%), *Graham Norton Effect* (17.2%), and *Reno 911!* (11.3%). None of the gay and lesbian viewers indicated that they watched any of the other cable television shows regularly.

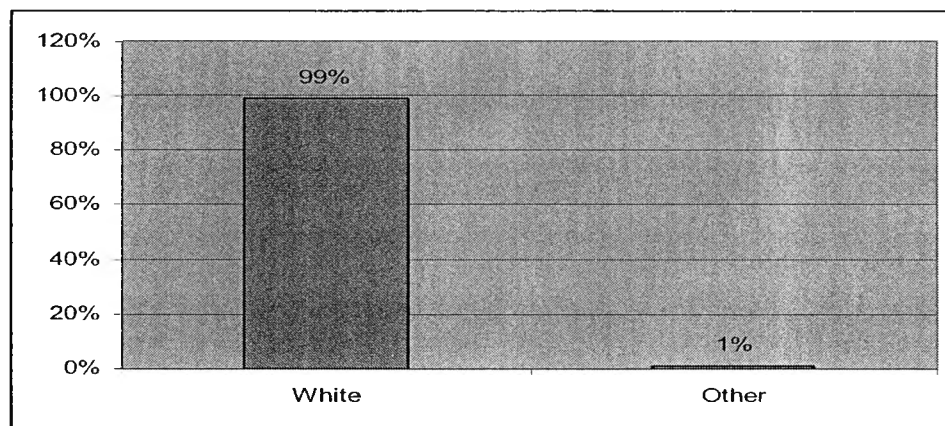
Gay and Lesbian Characters – Who's on Primetime

The first hypothesis driving this study suggested that white men dominate as characters on primetime television and that lesbians, and characters of color, are less

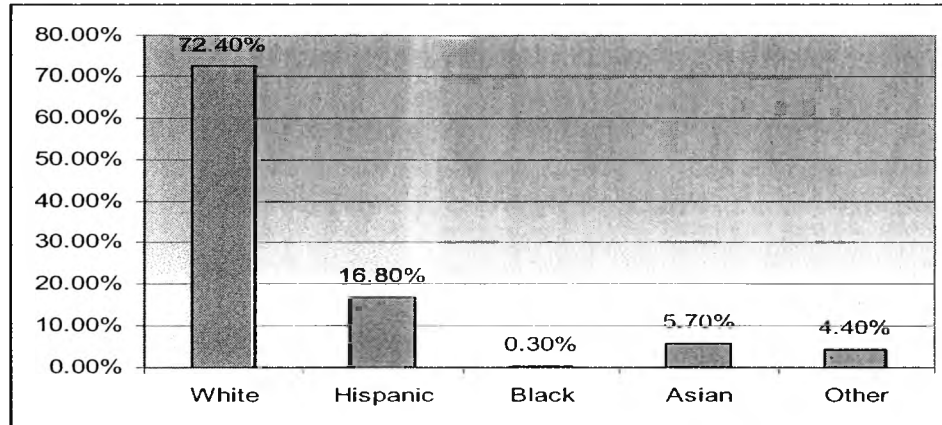
frequent. According to the respondents, most of the characters viewed were male and only a few of the characters were female. By using the descriptive frequency statistics, the races of the characters were calculated as a percentage. The coders believed that of all the gay and lesbian characters, 81.7% of the characters were white, 7.9% were Hispanic, 4% were African American, 2.3% were Asian, and 3.8% were “other.” Of the male characters (69.2% of all characters), the majority was considered to be white. Therefore, the first hypothesis is supported. *Figures 1-3* provide a breakdown of the gay and lesbian character demographics.

Figure 1: Race of Gay and Lesbian Characters on Primetime

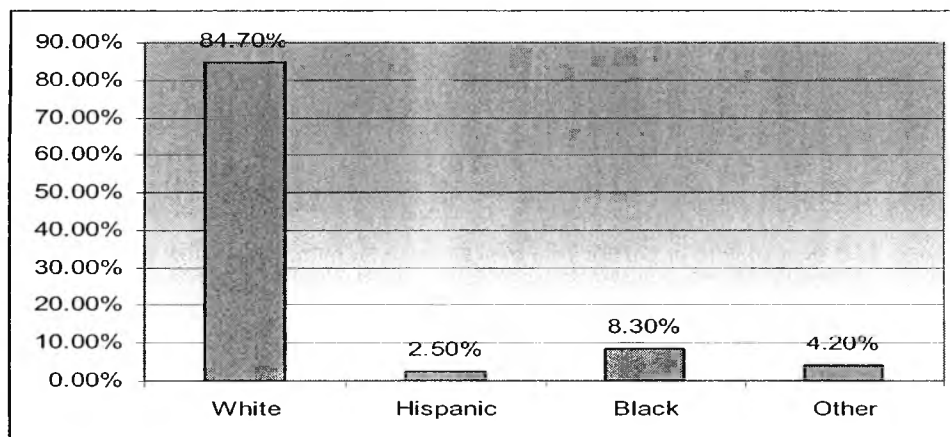
Network Television



Cable Television



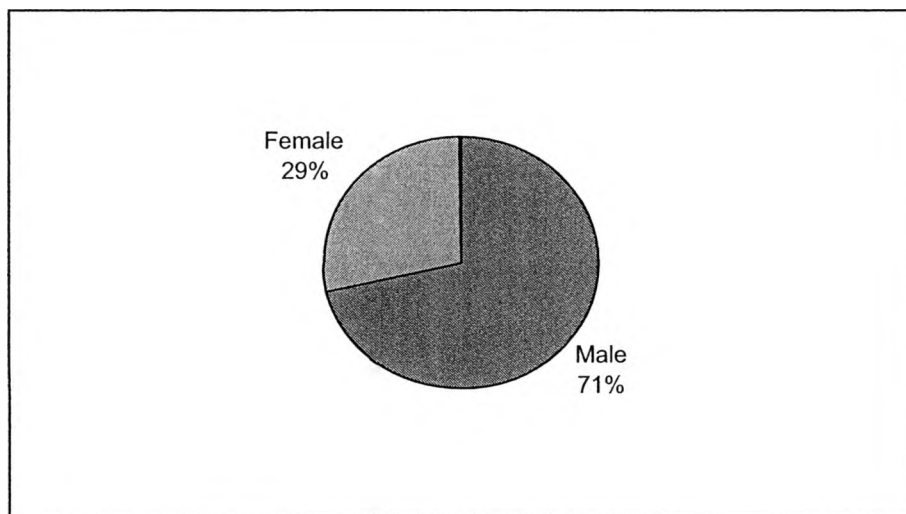
Movie Channels



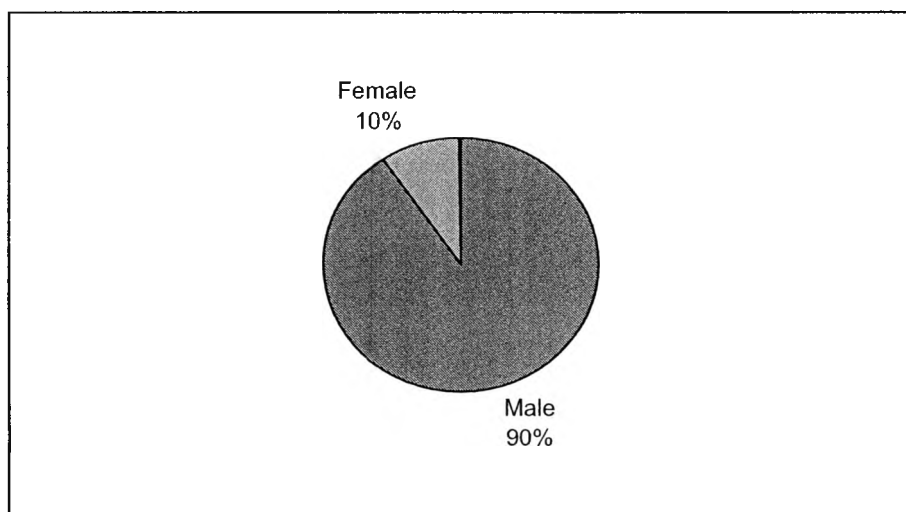
Note: Race frequencies have been segregated by network, cable, and movie channel television stations to illustrate the vast differences between the type of television and the characters available for viewing on those stations.

Figure 2: Sex of Gay and Lesbian Characters on Primetime

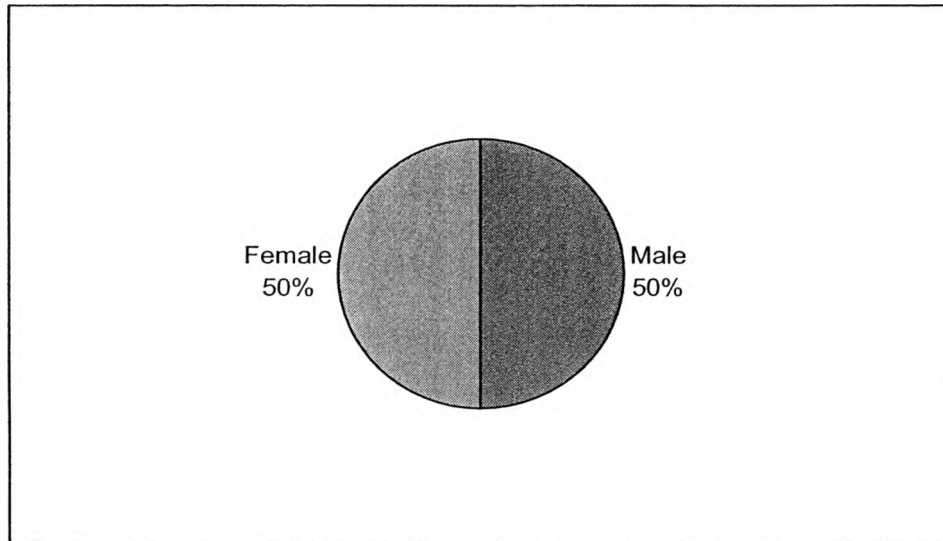
Network



Cable

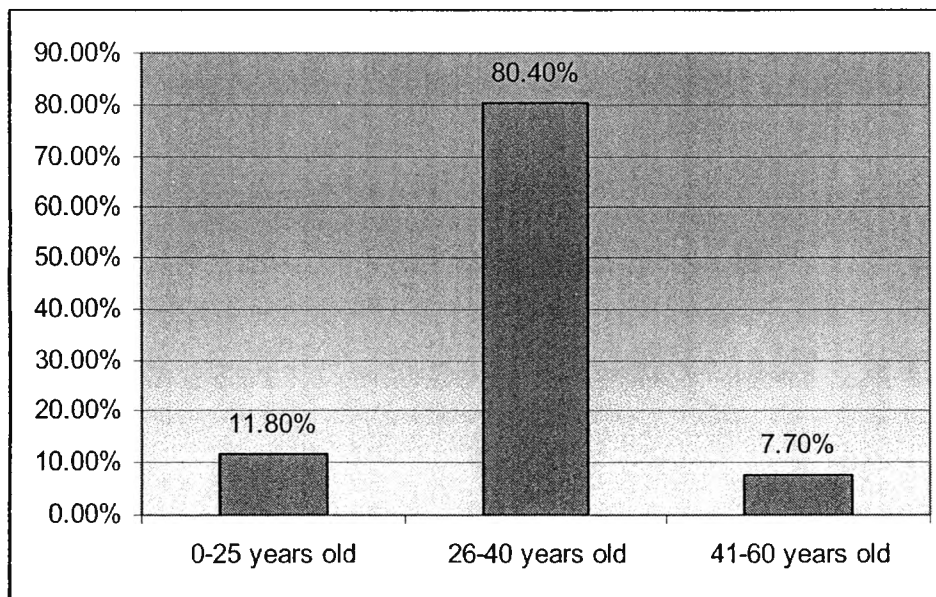


Movie Channels



Note: Sex frequencies have been segregated by network, cable, and movie channel television stations to illustrate the vast differences between the type of television and the characters available for viewing on those stations.

Figure 3: Age of Gay and Lesbian Characters on Primetime



Note. The characters' ages by network, cable, and movie channel are aggregated. The most significant segment for all stations is shown.

Network Television

The second hypothesis of this study suggests that primetime network television today portrays gay and lesbian characters in non-threatening roles, de-sexualized and living in a predominately heterosexual world. Frequencies were calculated to determine with whom the gay or lesbian characters primarily interacted and the predominant activities the gay and lesbian characters participated in, as noted by the coders. The network gay and lesbian characters were thought to have mainly interacted with heterosexual characters. See *Table 2*. As far as activities the gay and lesbian characters were involved in, the most noted activity on network television was confrontation. Being the subject of a joke was the next common activity for gay and lesbian characters on network television. The only other activities viewers perceived the characters engaging in more than 10% of the time were working, flirting with someone of the same sex, and being confused by his or her own sexuality. See *Table 3*.

Dating, talking about HIV, discussing same-sex marriage, kissing, and having sex were not rampant activities that occurred on network television shows that included gay and lesbian characters. Because there is not an exhaustive list of activities that could be categorized as distinctly heterosexual or homosexual, besides sexual activity, which is not typically explicit on network television, it would be irresponsible to say that the second hypothesis is completely supported.

The results do suggest, however, that the gay and lesbian characters are somewhat de-sexualized, because they are almost never seen dating or kissing and hardly ever seen flirting with someone of the same sex. They are sometimes even depicted as characters confused about their own sexual orientation. The gay and lesbian characters also mainly interact with heterosexuals on network television during primetime. Current events

dealing with equality that face gays and lesbians today are typically absent from network television, thus the gay and lesbian characters today continue to be placed in a predominantly heterosexual setting. Thus, the second hypothesis is partially supported.

Table 2. Interactions of Gay and Lesbian Characters on Primetime

	<u>Network</u>	<u>Cable</u>	<u>Movie Channel</u>
Heterosexual Interaction	62.9%	40.6%	-
Gay/Lesbian Interaction	-	32.4%	86.7%
Equal Amt. Hetero/homo Interaction	35.2%	27.0%	10.9%

Note. Only percentages of more than 10% are shown.

Table 3. Activities of Gay and Lesbian Characters on Primetime

	<u>Network</u>	<u>Cable</u>	<u>Movie Channel</u>
Confusion	62.9%	-	26.0%
Flirtation	13%	35.5%	43.0%
Dating	-	-	21.3%
Confrontation	83.0%	65.2%	53.4%
HIV Discussion	-	-	11.2%
Same-Sex Marriage Discussion	-	-	12.1%
Kissing	-	-	38.5%
Having Sex	-	-	37.9%
Being the Subject of a Joke	54.0%	24.9%	-
Working	18.0%	76.0%	34.0%

Note. Only percentages of more than 10 are shown.

Cable and Movie Channel Television

Another hypothesis driving this study focuses on primetime cable depictions of gays and lesbians (both on regular cable and movie channels) being more multi-faceted. Perhaps because they are not as bound by advertising revenue and sometimes have less rigid rules for portrayals, including the use of language and sexual explicitness (especially on the paid movie channels), primetime cable and movie channels show more civil and social rights issues that gay and lesbians face than can be seen on primetime network television. This hypothesis was only partially supported.

On primetime cable television, gay and lesbian characters were predominately (40.6%) thought to interact with heterosexuals. However, the gay and lesbian characters were also thought to interact with other gay characters (32.4%) and an equal number of homosexual and heterosexual characters (27%) on primetime cable. While this finding shows that gays and lesbians on primetime cable television interact with heterosexuals most of the time, there are other diverse situations that these characters find themselves in as well. On the movie channels, gay and lesbian characters interact with other gay and lesbian characters the majority of the time. See *Table 2*.

The most noted activity that gay and lesbian characters participated in on the primetime cable shows was working. The other leading activities were confrontation, flirting with someone of the same sex and being the subject of a joke. The movie channel shows that played during primetime by far had the gay and lesbian characters participating in the most activities, including some activities that could be viewed as controversial. Being the subject of a joke, something characters on network and cable television were subjected to, was the least noted activity of gay and lesbian characters on the movie channels. See *Table 3*.

Audience Differences

An independent-samples t test was calculated comparing the mean score of subjects who identified themselves as homosexual, or gay or lesbian with the mean score of subjects who identified themselves as heterosexual, or straight.

A significant difference in means was found between the gay and lesbian audience and the straight audience regarding characters' attractiveness versus unattractiveness ($t(773.770) = 5.156, p < .05$). The gay and lesbian audience believed that the characters were significantly more attractive than did the straight audience.

Additionally, a significant difference in means was found between the gay and lesbian audience and the straight audience regarding characters as irrational or rational ($t(771.476) = 3.807, p < .05$). In this instance, the gay and lesbian audience felt that the gay and lesbian characters were more rational than did the straight audience.

Interestingly, another significant variance occurred in means between the gay and lesbian audience and the straight audience when asked if they believed the characters were either real or unreal ($t(776) = 3.889, p < .05$). The results suggest that gay and lesbian audiences believe the gay and lesbian characters are more realistic than the straight audiences.

When asked if the gay or lesbian characters provoked any feelings, beliefs, or values, another significant finding emerged ($t(775) = -10.624, p < .05$). The gay and lesbian audience members responded mostly that the characters did provoke something within them, while the straight characters mainly said the characters did not provoke feelings, beliefs, or values.

A significant difference in means was also found between the gay and lesbian audience and the straight audience when asked whether or not the audience member

would consider befriending the character if he or she were a real person ($t(774) = -4.468$, $p < .05$). The gay and lesbian audience members said they would or would possibly befriend the character, while the straight audience members said they might possibly or would not befriend the gay or lesbian character if he or she were real.

Qualitatively, there were also some unmistakable differences in the open-ended answers based on sexual orientation. In regards to the question about whether or not the respondents believed the gay and lesbian representations, in their opinions, were positive or negative, the majority of the gay and lesbian viewers said the representations could be seen as both positive and negative. The majority of the straight respondents said that the representations would have neither a positive nor a negative influence on viewers.

The gay and lesbian viewers who believed that the gay and lesbian characters could have both a positive and negative affect on viewers believed that the network television shows were too heterosexual (or heteronormative) and often stereotypical, thus these shows were thought to have the potential to negatively impact audiences. The network television shows were thought to avoid gay and lesbian romances (although straight counterparts are often involved in on-screen romances) and character development was also said to be lacking. The paid cable shows, on the other hand, were thought to be more positive by gay and lesbian audiences. One viewer, speaking for gay and lesbian viewers, stated that cable shows “.... give us something to watch so that we can relate and identify as a community and as people, in general.” Another gay or lesbian respondent said he or she “.... felt that the cable shows are much more balanced and show these groups [of gay men and lesbians] as what they are – normal, just like everyone else in work and love.”

Some of the gay and lesbian viewers, although agreeing that the content of paid cable channels was more “in tune” with the gay community as a whole, chastised these shows for only including attractive young males and females and omitting physical diversity among gay and lesbian characters. One respondent voiced a hesitant opinion, riddled with both positive and negative possibilities, about gay and lesbian characterizations on television. This respondent stated the following:

My concern is that lacking the context and identity I possess, as a gay man, some audiences would be spoon-fed partial truths about homosexuality. Some may take just enough to support their bias about gays. Others may realize it's a cursory characterization of gay men and women at best. I guess it's a start. I'd like to see more depth. Perhaps that's coming in time, as with shows like *Six Feet Under*.... In general, I'm happy the media is making us a viable, noticed community. In my experience, gay acceptance both personally and from others is an incremental coming out. As with all things, timing, balance, and proportion usually govern long-term growth and change.

The majority of the straight audience seemed to think that television does not (or at least should not) affect audiences in any way. They used words like “neutral” and “not positive or negative” to describe their opinions of the representations and their potential impact on audiences. This group of respondents expressed that what really matters are the viewers' beliefs or preconceived notions of gays and lesbians prior to watching the characterizations of the gay and lesbians on television. In other words, the straight audience believed that if audience members already disagree with homosexuality, they will not react positively to either stereotypical or average representations of gay or lesbian characters. One respondent said, “I believe television comedy and drama is strictly for entertainment. People's ideas and beliefs about gays and lesbians are instilled by those people with whom they grow up and life experiences, not by what they seen on TV.” Another audience member stated emphatically that these shows “.... affect me in

no way.” A different viewer divulged disgust with the shows that included gay and lesbian characters by stating, “These shows were of such poor quality that I can’t imagine anyone being impacted in any way by them. Who would watch them long enough to be impacted?” This group also believed that gay and lesbian characters are becoming commonplace on television; therefore, the shock value of gay and lesbian characters has faded.

For a group that mostly believed that watching television would have no effect on audiences, a few respondents made it evident that shows with gay and lesbian characters might not be ideal for children to watch. One respondent said, “These shows are NOT for the younger audiences.” Another said, “I believe there is way too much violence and sex on TV and that children should not be subjected to this. They are too young to see ‘same-sex’ relationships.” One other participant brought a religious perspective into his or her answer stating that “TV shows and movies are saying that it is okay to be gay. The *Bible* (if you are religious) would prove that this is very wrong!”

In regards to the question of whether or not a character provokes any feeling, beliefs, or values for the viewer, another difference emerged between the gay and lesbian audience and the straight audience. First of all, many of the gay and lesbian viewers (43%) answered “yes,” the characters did provoke something in them. On the other hand, the majority of straight viewers (60%) answered “no,” the characters did not provoke anything in them as audience members. The question also asked the participants to explain their answer. The straight viewers did not provide much information and many did not explain why the characters did not provoke any feelings, beliefs, or values.

The audience composed of gay men and lesbians overwhelmingly included information when answering this question, especially when referring to the movie

channel shows. Their answers alluded to signs of identification with some of the gay and lesbian characters. *Table 4* includes some of the responses that can be classified as identification.

Table 4. Gay and Lesbian Responses – Identification with Characters

This character

- reinforces that it is okay to be who you are.
- seems really silly and out there – I hope they don't think we are all like him.
- makes me feel good.
- evokes feelings of wanting to do better and feel comfortable with who you are.
- makes me realize you can be who you are and be successful.
- makes me think about defining yourself and accepting who you are.
- makes me remember some of the fears I had.
- is reluctant and vulnerable, and all of that is very real to me.
- reminds me of myself at times.
- I can relate to the most out of any of the characters.

I have

- had the same life experience.
- struggled with some of the same issues.
- similar beliefs.
- been there.

I can

- identify with this character.
- identify with where he is at this time in his life. I've been in the positions he's been put in and have behaved similarly.
- relate to her and her concerns.

.... relate to this characters boyish ways and his belief in his friends and boyfriend.

.... relate at times. I feel sorry for him because he has low self-esteem.

He is

.... me.

.... my inner boring guy.

Note. This is not an exhaustive list of responses. Some responses have been condensed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Characters Available on Primetime Television

Possibly the most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that young white males dominate the television screen when homosexual characters are portrayed. The gay white male, only singularly removed from the heterosexual white male because of sexual orientation, is represented in the majority of the shows. Gay men of color and lesbians of all races are still rarely seen. More lesbians and people of color can be seen on cable and movie channels; however, the number of characters is still low. When people of color are cast as gay or lesbian characters (even on cable and movie channels) they are sometimes mistaken for white people, because of their light complexions. This idea is corroborated by some of the coders' answers regarding actors and actresses who are in reality a different ethnicity but were thought to be white.

The lack of diversity in race and gender of homosexual characters is not the only observable limitation to the characters seen on primetime television. Most of the gay and lesbian characters are also thought to be between 25 and 40 years old. Although this is a large age range, there are rarely any characters that are younger than their mid-twenties. Older gay and lesbian characters are practically non-existent. The implications of these representations could be significant for gay and lesbian audience members trying to find characters with which to identify. The narrow perspective of gay and lesbian characters

would not only suggest through television cultivation that homosexuals are typically white males between 25 and 40 years old, it would also imply that lesbians and homosexuals of different races are also not common. These character demographics are similar to those of straight characters on television.

Network Television

The results of this study suggest that although there are more gay and lesbian characters available for television audiences than there were a decade ago, many of the network character constructions are still constricted by unwritten rules. Fejes and Petrich (1993) identified that most gay and lesbian characters were surrounded by heterosexuals as opposed to being included in a larger homosexual community and that the homosexual characters' desires were repressed. While some of these rules can be witnessed on cable television, they are especially noticeable on network television shows that include gay and lesbian characters.

The results of this study identified two important factors illustrating that these unwritten rules are still followed today on network television. First, the gay and lesbian characters that were coded on network television are thought to interact mainly with heterosexual characters. Thus, they are not placed within a larger community of other gays and lesbians. These characters remain in the position of a minority surrounded by the majority. This might contribute to the fact that many gay and lesbian characters are not involved romantically with recurring characters. Gay and lesbian characters often do not exist on a show long enough for a serious romantic relationship to develop. If another homosexual character does exist, the two gay or lesbian characters are usually close friends, almost like siblings. That being said, the network gay and lesbian

characters have some of their most intimate relationships with heterosexuals. When the gay and lesbian characters are allowed to have same-sex relationships, even intimate ones, the romances develop more like friendships than romantic affairs or the audience is left to assemble the terms of their relationships for themselves.

According to the findings of this study, the gay and lesbian characters on network television are mostly seen in shows in which they are involved in confrontation, the subject of a joke, or confused about their sexuality. Perhaps characters are placed in these situations because the network television shows included in this study were either comedies or contrived reality situation television shows.

Some audience members might argue that because this study revealed that the most prominent activity that gay and lesbian characters participate in on network television is confrontation, the characters can be seen as threatening or defensive. However, the opposite is most likely true. The gay and lesbian characters, placed in these genres, offer the majority a non-threatening perspective of this minority. The confrontations the gay and lesbian characters get written into merely generate humorous situations in which audiences and the heterosexual characters on screen get to laugh at the gay or lesbian character's expense. The results of this study suggest that gay and lesbian characters are often the subject of a joke on network television. The use of confrontation in the comedy genre, including whether or not the gay or lesbian characters are more often laughing or laughed at, could be the subject of further research.

Network television has surpassed the stage of absence for the gay and lesbian minority. However, as Clark (1969) noted, the next stage for a minority entering the realm of television is ridicule. Network television can be seen as providing these

humorous recurring characters to ease the representations into the mainstream slowly, without intimidating or alienating mainstream audiences.

Cable Television

While some distinct differences can be seen between primetime network and cable television shows, the diversity of events that face gays and lesbians is not as apparent as one might guess. The most widely noted activity for the gay and lesbian characters on cable television is working. This could be considered an attempt at “normalizing” the gay and lesbian characters by placing them into productive roles in society, while simultaneously keeping them out of sexual relationships. Perhaps cable shows are placing gay and lesbian characters into what Clark (1969) called the “regulation” stage, the third stage in which minorities enter the television medium. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, in which all the characters are seen “working,” places the gay male characters in a precarious position, yet one of authority. On this “reality” show, each gay character, with his (what could be considered stereotypical) expertise, becomes a teacher who will improve a straight person’s life.

Another difference between cable gay and lesbian characters and network characters is that the characters on cable are surrounded by various other characters. Although the gay and lesbian characters are thought to mostly interact with heterosexual characters, some of the characters also interact with other homosexual characters and an equal number of both straight and gay and lesbian characters. The diversity of character interactions is an improvement from network television, expanding the gay and lesbian characters’ population beyond the heterosexual situations in which they are typically placed by the network norm.

While confrontation is also still a major activity for cable television gay and lesbian characters, the next most prominent activity for these characters is flirting with someone of the same sex. Perhaps this is because they are surrounded by more gay and lesbian counterparts. In this aspect, the cable characters' feeling for those of the same sex is not as repressed as those on network television. Unfortunately, the question of whether or not the flirtatious actions were reciprocated was not asked. Further research would probably indicate that the flirting was a one-way, comical gesture that is intended to provoke a laugh from the audience. These shows continue to shy away from portraying gay and lesbian characters in more intimate situations, such as dating or kissing someone of the same sex.

Movie Channel Television

The movie channel television shows by far include the most diverse gay and lesbian characters that participate in the most activities. Without many restrictions from advertisers, these shows not only often portray gay and lesbian characters within their own communities, they also sometimes show audiences more than what they might be comfortable with watching. This is not to imply that audiences are uncomfortable only with gay men and lesbians in situations that can be intense or sexually explicit; they might also be uncomfortable with heterosexuals in intense or sexually explicit situations as well. Unfortunately, comfort levels with sexually explicit materials, in general, were not evaluated through this study.

The movie channels seem to have shattered all of the unwritten rules about gay and lesbian characters and their portrayals as identified by Fejes and Petrich (1993). The characters are mainly surrounded by other homosexual characters, living within their own

community. Again, perhaps because they are on paid-for movie channels, their sexual desires, including overt same-sex intimacy, are not repressed. The characters are also seen in more discreet circumstances that imply intimacy, such as flirting, dating, and kissing.

Similar to network and cable television, confrontation is one of the most dominant activities that the gay and lesbian characters on movie channels participate in, according to the coders of this study. However, the three shows including gay and lesbian characters that were on the movie channels were all dramas. The confrontations are not typically included as humorous situations. Instead, they are more dramatic in nature. The fact that none of the characters were considered to be the subject of any jokes would support this position.

The gay and lesbian characters on movie channels also engage in discussions regarding issues such as same-sex marriage and HIV infections. Surprisingly, these conversations are still extremely limited, even though such issues have been rampant in the mainstream news in the 21st century. While HIV discussions have broadened in recent years beyond being thought only to affect gay men, same-sex marriage considerations are specifically linked to gay men and lesbians and are an ongoing civil rights debate. This debate is still not readily included in primetime representations that include gay or lesbian characters.

Audiences and Their Perceptions

The differences between the straight audience and the gay and lesbian audience require additional consideration. In Chapter IV, the findings explain the significant differences between the answers of these two groups. However, some of the similarities

are also important to note. The majority of both audiences believed that the gay and lesbian characters were either very feminine or somewhat feminine. This includes both the male and female characters. Most of the gay males are portrayed as effeminate. The women, although some might think they would be portrayed as manly, or “butch,” were also portrayed as very or somewhat feminine. This is perhaps television’s attempt at creating characters that are not threatening to the heterosexual majority, specifically men. They show the males as effeminate, so they are laughable or at least noticeably dissimilar from the typical masculine man. And they show the females as very attractive and feminine, playing off of the heterosexual male fantasy of seeing two beautiful women together, while downplaying any portrayal of a masculine female that might intimidate the majority. By using these representations, the gay and lesbian characters are more palatable to mainstream audiences.

The gay and lesbian audience also indicated that they believed that the gay and lesbian characters were more attractive than did those in the straight audience. Perhaps the gay and lesbian audience did not have inhibitions about deciding whether or not these characters were attractive. In fact, in many of the comments, these audience members would state that a character was “hot.” The straight respondents might have had more of a dilemma deciding to mark the gay and lesbian characters as attractive or unattractive, because while most said they were somewhat attractive, almost just as many marked the neutral column. Not many unattractive people appear on any television show, so the fact that these people were gay or lesbian characters could have stifled some of the respondents’ answers or pushed their comfort level on judging their appearances.

Another important discussion point is that most of the coders, no matter whether they were heterosexual or homosexual, believed that the gay and lesbian characters were either very stereotypical or somewhat stereotypical. Although there is typically some truth to stereotypes, they could potentially be harmful as they proliferate into the masses. While aggregating the data for this study, it was interesting to see how many people, both straight and gay and lesbian, thought that characters were stereotypical, but then said they knew someone similar to the character. Some of the responses to the open-ended questions even used stereotypes to answer the questions regarding if the character was real or not. The following answers came from the gay and lesbian audience: “Most gay men have impeccable taste in décor,” “Gay boys know hair and love to groom,” and “Gay men that cook are a dime a dozen.” The characters mainly marked as non-stereotypical were seen on the movie channel shows, *Queer as Folk*, *the L Word*, and *Six Feet Under*.

The fact that the audiences, especially the audience composed of straight viewers, did not admit to watching television at high rates limited the ability to derive any solid conclusions regarding what, if any, cultivation effects occurred from watching gay and lesbian television characters. Because the content is also important when discussing cultivation effects, it is important to note that some of the straight audience members were not familiar with many of the shows and some of the gay and lesbian audiences had never seen some of the shows available on primetime. Because this fact was brought out in this study, the results of this study spawn more questions regarding the uses and gratifications of media by both heterosexual audiences and gay and lesbian audiences, which would be interesting to pursue through future research.

Uses and gratification of media include both social and psychological aspects of audience members. Selection and the use of media is an active decision by an individual audience member who is trying to fulfill a need, "... often strengthening or weakening a connection with self, family, or society" (Ruben, 2002, p. 529). The fact that the majority of the gay and lesbian audiences are paying for the movie channels and watching the shows with gay and lesbian characters on them at least twice a month suggests that they are getting something from these shows. Considering that the heterosexual majority is not purchasing these channels and is not regularly watching the movie channel shows implies that perhaps these shows do not offer them anything perceived as valuable, whether that is entertainment, characters with which to identify, or simply information relevant to their lives. In addition, the gay and lesbian audiences believed that the gay and lesbian characters were primarily "somewhat interesting" or "very interesting," according to their coding responses.

All of the gay and lesbian respondents, except for one gay male, answered the open-ended questions included in this study. The straight audience, however, sporadically answered the questions, some saying that they could not answer a question because they were unfamiliar with the program. This suggests that the gay and lesbian audiences felt more comfortable discussing gay and lesbian characters, even if they were unfamiliar with the shows. Gay and lesbian audiences also most likely feel that they have an investment in how they are represented to the masses; therefore, they feel more compelled to voice their thoughts and opinions about the characters available for consumption.

In the context of social cognition theory, the audience members, as well as each program regularly watched, would need to be scrutinized more qualitatively to determine what behaviors are modeled and what type of behaviors are salient to the audience members. Because of the different groups of audiences and the specific characters with which they would most likely identify, relevant behaviors would probably be vehemently opposed. For example, straight viewers watching network gay and lesbian characters might have some preconceived thoughts validated that these characters should be the subject of a joke. They might then go to work where gay or lesbian jokes are told, further validating what they saw on television. They might then continue to tell jokes or make fun of gay and lesbian individuals. On the contrary, gay and lesbian audiences who see the same episode would probably identify with the gay or lesbian character. Perhaps these audiences would believe that it is okay to be the subject of a joke, especially if they continued to watch this program over and over again. On the other hand, an audience member may get defensive about this representation and become cynical toward heterosexuals. Case studies on individual audience members and their complex use of media intertwined with their social circles and environment would be important to determine if, or which, behaviors emerge from repetitive exposure to certain television programs.

Additional Considerations for Gay and Lesbian Characters

The gay and lesbian audience overwhelmingly believed that the gay and lesbian characters they watched were either somewhat realistic or very realistic. One might have thought that this audience would be more critical, stating that representations were not realistic or overly stereotyped. Because the gay and lesbian viewers claim that many of

the characters were presented in a realistic manner, the implications for the homosexual minority and their representations as a whole are astounding. The evolution to more realistic characters has begun to occur, and over time, possibly more and more realistic gay and lesbian characters will be available for wider audiences to view.

Perhaps someday soon the network shows will include gay and lesbian characters that incorporate some of what the movie channels offer: more well-rounded characters in both gender and ethnicity who are equally as capable of having romantic relationships as their straight counterparts. Even more so, some shows could offer gay and lesbian characters within their own communities, not always posited as the minority, but as part of a larger group.

Although gay and lesbian character development on television, especially network television, might be accomplished over the long term, the quicker the better for gay and lesbian viewers. Fortunately for gay and lesbian viewers there are shows on the movie channels, and apparently they are purchasing these channels in order to watch these shows. If these shows include the most “real” characters, as agreed upon by the gay and lesbian audience of this study, there could be some potential problems.

These movie channels cost extra per month in addition to a cable fee; therefore, it might be cost prohibitive for some of the gay men and lesbians who want to watch these shows to do so. In addition, there are only two shows on these movie channels that have more than two recurring, main characters on them in every episode, *Queer as Folk* and *the L Word*. These shows include sexuality as part of their weekly shows. Thus, some homosexual audiences (young, middle-aged, and old alike) might not want to watch such shows.

According to the findings of this study, heterosexual audiences are not watching the shows that are on movie channels that include gay and lesbian characters. So, although the gay and lesbian viewers believe these are the most “real” representations of gays and lesbians, the heterosexual audiences are not being exposed to them. The straight audiences might watch if they were on network television, eliminating some of the sexuality, while still allowing the characters to have some desire toward others of the same sex and including more gay and lesbian characters. On the other hand, they might not watch, and that could be the concern of the networks worried about advertising revenue. Additional research should be done regarding which audiences would or would not watch such shows on network television and what commercial sponsors would endorse such shows.

Character Conventions

Throughout this study, similarities in gay and lesbian characters on primetime television emerged. By aggregating audience responses to characters and their perceptions of them, it would be negligent to avoid attempting to identify some of the characters that are available for mass consumption in the 21st century. Characterizations are definitely developing for gay and lesbian characters, just as they developed for other minorities like African Americans (sambo, Uncle Tom, and mammie) and Latinos (lovers and lazy, nonprofessional people). Following is an effort to provide an initial classification for some of the gay and lesbian characters with similar character conventions.

One of the gay and lesbian characterizations could be termed the *hetero-homo*. This is the character seen most on network television. He or she is surrounded mainly by

heterosexual characters. This character is not offensive to the straight world. He or she is an attractive professional who the audience finds somewhat egotistical, yet educated. This character leaves a question in the audience's mind as to whether or not he or she will ever fall for the straight counterpart because of their close, intimate, yet unromantic, relationship. This character is sometimes portrayed as confused about his or her sexuality, sometimes flip-flopping sexual preference. Will on *Will & Grace* and Judith on *Two & 1/2 Men* are examples of this type of character.

The other character seen most often is the *flamer* or *queen* gay man. This character is effeminate and often humorous. This character can be seen on most comedies that include a gay character. He is consumed with self-involvement. He is extremely shallow, selfish, and childish. He talks about having multiple partners, but all of them are superficial and the audience almost never sees him with these fellows. He is also characterized as a greedy and materialistic person who is ready to manipulate anyone who crosses his path to get what he wants. Jack on *Will & Grace* and Adam on *Half & Half* are characters that fit this convention.

The *fabulous fag* term could describe another type of gay character. This character exists to help straight people learn some of the stereotypical things that gay men are supposed to be experts in, such as cooking, hair, fashion, interior design, and culture. This character is often humorous. He is often surrounded by other *fabulous fags* with whom they can joke. These buddies bounce jokes off each other while making fun of straight people. The reason the *fabulous fag* is inoffensive to the mainstream is that his only goal is to help the straight character, confident in his or her heterosexuality, attract someone of the opposite sex. The *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* cast fits this

description and there are five of them adding to the gay and lesbian characters on television.

The *homo homemaker* is another characterization of both gay and lesbian characters. This character is consumed with being a motherly figure, a nesting type, or a homemaker and having a loving family. Tina on the *L Word*, Lindsay and Michael on *Queer as Folk*, and David on *Six Feet Under* fit this role. This character is constrained by nuclear family traits, such as being first loyal to his or her family, staying at home with children if there are any, and having a partner who plays a more domineering role.

Homo homemaker's partner could be called the *business betty*. He or she is a driven workaholic who tries to balance work with home, but work typically wins out. This gay or lesbian character thrives on professional success. This character is often thought of as playing a more masculine role; however, he or she is extremely attractive and people who come into contact with this character would never know his or her sexuality without knowing the sex of his or her partner. This characterization can be seen when watching Melanie on *Queer as Folk*, Keith on *Six Feet Under*, or Bette on the *L Word*.

Last, but not least, one more stereotypical gay or lesbian character could be called the *queer fatale*. This gay male or lesbian character is highly sexual and very promiscuous. He or she is lusted after in bars and social circles and is admired by his or her peers for being so aloof about casual sex and occasional drug use, all in the name of enjoyment. This character often is very stylish and extremely attractive. He or she is also full of him or herself and uses cynicism as a way to communicate with others. This

character is embodied in *Queer as Folk*'s character named Brian and Shane on the *L Word*.

While this list of characterizations is not exhaustive, it might be a good categorical place to start when viewing gay and lesbian characters. Currently, only a couple of these characters are seen on network television. However, if more diverse characters appear on network television in the near future, it will be interesting to see if they are based upon the constructs of the characterizations already being portrayed on paid television. It will also be interesting to see if the existing characters on the paid television stations advance over time or if they will remain stagnant or pigeonholed.

Only time will tell to what extent and how positively or negatively the gay and lesbian minority will be projected via the media in the upcoming years. One thing is for certain, this group is becoming more and more visible on television and in the news, regardless of how it is being portrayed. Children growing up today, if gay and lesbian representations continue, will probably not remember a time when gay and lesbians were absent from the television screen. The representations that permeate the airwaves can either advocate tolerance for or encourage discrimination against the gay and lesbian minority.

Limitations

Because the participants for this study were sought out as potential viewers, they were approached and asked to view a video that included gay and lesbian characters shown on primetime television. They were also warned in writing and verbally that some of the material could be graphic. Some potential viewers refused to participate in the study. Therefore, the information gathered could have been skewed by a straight

population of viewers who were more tolerant of gay and lesbian characters than an absolutely random sample of viewers might have been. Thus, more differences in audience perceptions could have developed between the gay and lesbian audience and the straight audience.

This study also included a constructed week of primetime television from a two-week period in August. Recording shows with gay and lesbian characters is like shooting a moving target. New shows that include gay and lesbian characters are cropping up each season. In order to adequately evaluate the gay and lesbian characters available on primetime, a longer sample period might be warranted, along with multiple episodes of each show. By using a more expansive sample, confusion regarding characters could be reduced. Also, showing the gay and lesbian characters in multiple situations would provide audiences with a broader look at the character, especially if they are not already familiar with the show.

Further Research

Documenting the representations of gay and lesbian characters as this minority evolves in the media is extremely important. Not only will the information gathered provide educational information for generations that did not know a time of television without gay and lesbian characters, in the long term, it will also provide an understanding of how gay men and lesbians are emerging into mainstream awareness. Documentation needs to be done periodically, because the available characters could potentially vanish as quickly as they mushroomed, or they could change and grow quite rapidly, making it imperative to capture certain eras.

More research on news coverage, both written and televised, should be a priority. Current events today include equal rights debates regarding this minority, including issues such as marriage, adoption, and acceptance in the workplace. It would be useful to see if the information is provided to audiences in an unbiased manner or if the news coverage is setting either a conservative or liberal agenda.

Information regarding attitudes of individuals toward the gay and lesbian population is also essential to collect. Because there are people who are passionately opposed to the gay and lesbian lifestyle and there are others who support it, studies should be done to find out where the majority of the population stands attitudinally. Analysis of this information is extremely important, especially for an accurate reflection on how media has played a role in the gay and lesbian movement and the perception of that movement within the gay and lesbian minority and beyond to the majority.

APPENDIX A

SYNOPSIS OF TELEVISION SHOWS IN STUDY

Will & Grace (NBC - Comedy)

* Now in its seventh season, the Emmy Award-winning comedy series has enjoyed both critical acclaim and ratings success as one of the centerpieces of NBC's "Must See TV" Thursday lineup. For the fourth season in a row, *Will & Grace* was the #2 comedy among adults 18-49, second only to *Friends*, and also continues to be network television's most upscale-skewing comedy series.

To date, *Will & Grace* has been nominated for 49 Emmys, 24 Golden Globes, fourteen SAG Awards and six People's Choice Awards. Among its 12 Emmy wins, the show won as Outstanding Comedy Series in 2000. In 2002 and 2003, it had more Emmy nominations than any other comedy series. Additionally, it's been nominated for an American Comedy Award, three GLAAD Media Awards and a Founders Award from the Viewers for Quality Television.

Original cast members and Emmy winners Eric McCormack, Debra Messing, Sean Hayes and Megan Mullally continue to star.

Emmy winners David Kohan and Max Mutchnick are the creators and executive producers. Alex Herschlag and Dave Flebotte serve as executive producers and showrunners. Multi-Emmy winner James Burrows (NBC's *Frasier* and *Friends*) is director and executive producer. *Will & Grace* is from KoMut Entertainment in association with NBC Universal Television Studio and Three Sisters Entertainment.

* Taken directly from http://www.nbc.com/Will_&_Grace/about/index.html on October 19, 2004.

***Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Bravo and occasionally NBC - Reality)**

* They call themselves the Fab Five. They are: An interior designer, a fashion stylist, a chef, a beauty guru and someone we like to call the "concierge of cool" — who is responsible for all things hip, including music and pop culture. All five are talented, they're gay and they're determined to clue in the cluttered, clumsy straight men of the world. With help from family and friends, the Fab Five treat each new guy as a head-to-toe project. Soon, the straight man is educated on everything from hair products to Prada and Feng Shui to foreign films. At the end of every fashion-packed, fun-filled lifestyle makeover, a freshly scrubbed, newly enlightened guy emerges — complete with that "new man" smell!

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy is a one-hour guide to "building a better straight man" — a "make better" series designed for guys who want to get the girl, the job or just the look. With the expertise and support of "The Fab 5" — Ted Allen, Kyan Douglas, Thom Felicia, Carson Kressley and Jai Rodriguez — the makeover unfolds with a playful deconstruction of the subject's current lifestyle and continues on as a savagely funny showcase for the hottest styles and trends in fashion, home design, grooming, food and wine, and culture. The show was recently awarded the 2004 Emmy Award for Outstanding Reality Program.

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy is produced by Scout Productions. The executive producers are David Collins, Michael Williams and David Metzler for Scout, and Frances Berwick, Amy Introcaso-Davis and Christian Barcellos for Bravo. The series was created by David Collins, a gay man, and developed by David Metzler, a straight man — a union of sensibilities that gives the show its depth, humor and edge.

* Taken directly from http://www.bravotv.com/Queer_Eye_for_the_Straight_Guy/About_Us/ on October 19, 2004.

***Big Brother 5* (CBS - Reality)**

* It's been one long, hot summer and one happy camper is going home with \$500,000 for having spent the bulk of their summer shacking up with a group of strangers and outmaneuvering all of them all summer long.

Let's look back at the way we were and how we got to where we are. Things got off to a fast start when the first twist of Project DNA: Do Not Assume--that Jennifer a.k.a. Nakomis and Michael (the man who would come to be known as Cowboy)--had the same father. Then, the game playing began in earnest when an alliance called the Four Horsemen hooked up and began to dominate game play. Jase and Scott played bully boy, knocking out Mike and generally pushing people around.

The girls, not willing to take this lying down, formed their own alliance cemented by the now infamous pinky swear that later proved to be the undoing of Adria and Natalie. But with Nakomis calling the shots, a group effort known as the six-finger plan went into effect in an effort rid the House of Jase. The expected calm from Jase's departure was short-lived as Adria and Natalie became the force that nobody wished to deal with and were turned out for their turncoat ways--again Nakomis was the architect of their demise.

As HouseGuests departed, alliances crumbled, and Diane, fearing a tight bond between Karen and Nakomis, conspired to get the portrait artist from New Jersey out the door. Then, Cowboy turned on his sister, and in the final betrayal Drew evicted his girlfriend, Diane.

* Taken directly from <http://www.cbs.com/primetime/bigbrother5/show/w12/tues01.shtml> on October 19, 2004.

***Two & ½ Men* (CBS – Comedy)**

* *Two & ½ Men* is a comedy about men, women, sex, dating, divorce, mothers, single parenthood, sibling relations, surrogate families, money and most importantly, love. In other words, it is a comedy about life--more specifically, the life of two brothers, a son/nephew and the many women who surround them all. Charlie Harper (Charlie Sheen) is a well-to-do bachelor with a house at the beach, a Mercedes in the garage and an easy way with women. His casual Malibu lifestyle is interrupted when his tightly wound brother, Alan (Jon Cryer), and Alan's son, Jake (Angus T. Jones), come to stay with him. Complicating matters further are Charlie's and Alan's narcissistic, emotionally toxic mother, Evelyn (Holland Taylor); Alan's deeply neurotic ex-wife, Judith (Marin Hinkle); Charlie's domineering, unapologetically blue-collar housekeeper, Berta

(Conchata Ferrell); and Rose (Melanie Lynskey), a brilliantly manipulative and vaguely crazy neighbor who had a brief fling with Charlie, is obsessed with him, and is determined to stay in his life by whatever means necessary. Despite the complexities of their lives and their own strained relationship, Charlie and Alan have one thing in common--they both love Jake and want what's best for him. As a result, they manage to create a little family unit that promises to make each one of them a better man.

* Taken directly from http://www.cbs.com/primetime/two_and_a_half_men/about.shtml on October 19, 2004.

Reno 911! (Comedy Central)

* From the folks that brought you *The State* and *Viva Variety!* are back for some law-enforcement mayhem. Meet the men and women of the Washoe County Sheriff's Department, led by Lt. Jim Dangle (Tom Lennon) -- a straight-and-narrow cop who might not be all that "straight" after all. Deputies include a former topless showgirl and a 5-foot-4 veritable crime-fightin' machine. On tonight's premiere episode, Lt. Dangle declares Reno a zero-tolerance town. Unfortunately, the entire population has heard the news and is obeying every rule.

* Taken directly from <http://www.tvtome.com/Reno911/> on October 19, 2004.

Graham Norton Effect (Comedy Central)

* Take an irreverent talk show host, add truckloads of celebrities, an unsuspecting studio audience and an Internet connection -- and you've got *The Graham Norton Effect*. Tune in to get your dose of gold lamé fun.

* Taken directly from http://www.comedycentral.com/tv_shows/grahamnortoneffect/ on October 19, 2004.

The L Word (Showtime)

* The Showtime Original Series, *The L Word*, is about a group of young women in Los Angeles, their lives, careers, and romantic relationships - both gay and straight.

Jenny Schecter (Mia Kirshner) is a gifted young writer of fiction who has just graduated from college and arrives in Los Angeles to begin her "adult life" with her

boyfriend - soon to be fiancé - Tim Haspel (Eric Mabius). Tim and Jenny reside in West Hollywood, next door to Bette Porter (Jennifer Beals) and her partner Tina Kennard (Laurel Holloman). Bette and Tina have been a couple for seven years and are trying to find the perfect sperm donor to help them start a family as they struggle with their relationship. Bette's and Tina's close network of friends includes Shane McCutcheon (Katherine Moennig), who is the resident heartthrob; Dana Fairbanks (Erin Daniels), a professional tennis player not yet out of the closet; bisexual journalist Alice Pieszecki (Leisha Hailey); and Bette's half-sister Kit Porter (Pam Grier), who is a musician and a recovering alcoholic. In the two-hour pilot, Jenny's plans for her future are shaken when Marina (Karina Lombard), a beautiful and compelling woman who owns a West Hollywood café, makes a pass at her at a party hosted by Bette and Tina. Amid denial and confusion, Jenny starts to question her sexual orientation and her love for Tim. Her attraction to Marina is powerful and ultimately irresistible. Meanwhile, Bette and Tina, stunned at how difficult it is to find a suitable sperm donor, attempt to seduce a handsome, young artist on the night that Tina is about to ovulate. The seduction attempt fails, but the encounter does serve to rekindle, at least momentarily, Bette's and Tina's passion for each other.

* Taken directly from <http://www.sho.com/site/lword/about.do> on October 19, 2004.

Half and Half (UPN)

* At the onset, twenty-something half-sisters Mona (Rachel True) and Dee Dee (Essence Atkins) had only one thing in common--their father. Growing up separately, these two virtual strangers suddenly became neighbors in the same San Francisco apartment building and experience the challenges of sisterhood for the first time. Now that they have grown closer, they realize that despite their different upbringings they share more similarities than they thought.

Mona, a record-company executive, was raised by her single mother Phyllis (Telma Hopkins) to be an independent woman who does things in her own free-spirited and sometimes sardonic style. By contrast, younger sister Dee Dee grew up privileged in a two-parent home, attends law school, but still searches for her own identity out of the shadow of her overbearing mother, Big Dee Dee (Valarie Pettiford).

The two half-sisters have learned to lean on each other for support when it comes to relationships, career choices and how to handle their mothers. Meanwhile, Mona and her best friend and colleague Spencer (Chico Benymon) realized that they are more than just friends when they embraced in a passionate kiss last season. At work, Mona's assistant Adam Benet (Alec Mapa) also continues to spice things up at the record company with his humorous gossip.

* Taken directly from http://www.upn.com/shows/half_and_half/about.shtml on October 19, 2004.

***Amish in the City* (UPN)**

* *Amish in the City* aired during the summer of 2004 and chronicled how relationships develop and viewpoints collide in a house shared by young people from very different cultures, while also introducing viewers to the intensely personal Amish coming-of-age experience, called rumspringa (a Pennsylvania Dutch word loosely translated as "running wild"). During this religious rite of passage, young Amish men and women are allowed to leave their homes to explore the outside world until they decide whether or not they want to join the Amish church and be welcomed back into their families or stay in the outside world.

* Taken directly from http://www.upn.com/shows/amish_in_the_city/ on October 19, 2004.

***Nip/Tuck* (FX)**

* This drama is set in a south Florida plastic surgery center, McNamara-Troy, centering around the two doctors who own it. Sean McNamara (Dylan Walsh) is having problems at home, trying to keep his family together, trying to patch up the rocky road him and his wife Julia (Joely Richardson) are experiencing. On the other hand, sex-craved Christian Troy (Julian McMahon) uses his "charm" to bring in potential female candidates and conducts shady business deals, often for the love of money. While Sean takes his job seriously, he often has to fix Christian's mistakes.

During the first season, Sean and Christian got mixed up with Escobar Gallardo, a Colombian drug lord who forced the two to do free surgery whenever he wanted them to.

Sean's marriage with Julia began to wear thin, and Sean had an affair with a patient named Megan O'Hara. Julia went back to school, but it was interrupted by a miscarriage of a child Sean and Julia were trying to have. Christian learned he is the father of a baby with a woman named Gina, who he met at Sexaholics Anonymous. When the baby was born, we learn that the baby is African-American, and therefore not his. Julia questions Matt's paternity.

The second season begins with Sean and Christian both turning 40, and Christian playing father for Wilbur, who Gina is letting him take care of, until Wilbur's real father fights him for custody. Sean and Julia are quite happy together again until Christian's loneliness after Wilbur was taken away from him causes her to reveal that Matt is really his son. The secret ripples and eventually Sean finds out, causing a separation between Sean and Julia. He and Christian find a way to stay friends. A serial rapist named the Carver has been raping victims around Miami, and slices their face, and Sean makes a commitment to fixing their faces. Ava, a life coach for Sean and Julia, forms a sexual relationship with Matt, which is doomed from the beginning due to a wide age gap and Ava's screwed up son Adrian.

* Taken directly from <http://www.tvtome.com/tvtome/servlet/ShowMainServlet/showid-17095/> on October 19, 2004.

Six Feet Under (HBO)

* One marriage has come to a tragic end, another is beginning, and a third is on the rocks. At Fisher & Diaz, lives are in flux, as Nate, David, Ruth, Claire and Rico struggle to find their way.

Returning cast regulars on the show include Peter Krause, Michael C. Hall, Rachel Griffiths, Frances Conroy, Lauren Ambrose, Freddy Rodriguez, Mathew St. Patrick and James Cromwell. Guest stars appearing in the new season's 12 episodes include Mena Suvari (*American Beauty*), Ellen DeGeneres, Veronica Cartwright (*Just Married*) and Michelle Trachtenberg (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), as well as returning guest stars Kathy Bates, Joanna Cassidy, Patricia Clarkson (Emmy Award winner for Guest Actress in a Drama Series), Ben Foster, Richard Jenkins, Peter Macdissi, Justina Machado, Justin Theroux and Rainn Wilson.

Wrapping its third season last June, *Six Feet Under* was created by Alan Ball (winner of the Best Original Screenplay Oscar® for "American Beauty"). Using dramatic irony and dark, situational humor, the show approaches the subject of death through the eyes of the Fisher family, who own and operate Fisher & Diaz Funeral Home in Los Angeles.

The third season *Six Feet Under* continued to inspire critical raves, with the New York Times calling it "required viewing in the canon of pop culture," as well as "engrossing." The Los Angeles Times hailed the show as "heroically smart, tender and witty," and "great, great stuff," while New York Magazine observed, "There is no more surprising or satisfying series anywhere on television." In addition, the show received a Golden Globe® nomination this year for Best Television Series - Drama, while Frances Conroy won the Golden Globe® for Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series - Drama.

Returning directors this season include Miguel Arteta (*The Good Girl*), Dan Attias (HBO's *The Sopranos*), Alan Ball (Emmy® winner for Directing for a Drama Series), Michael Cuesta (*L.I.E.*), Michael Engler (HBO's *Sex and the City*), Nicole Holofcener (*Lovely & Amazing*), Dan Minahan (*Series 7: The Contenders*), Jeremy Podeswa (*The Five Senses*) and Alan Poul (one of the show's executive producers).

* Taken directly from <http://www.hbo.com/sixfeetunder/about/index.shtml> on October 19, 2004.

***Queer as Folk* (Showtime)**

* *Queer as Folk* is an innovative, provocative, and groundbreaking series (now going into its fifth season) that chronicles the friendships, careers, loves, trials, tribulations, and ambitions of a diverse group of gay men and lesbians living in Pittsburgh, PA. Blending strong drama with necessary charm and humor, *Queer as Folk* rivals any other show presented on television. It provides viewers with a graphic & intense (and sometimes controversial) view of several different issues such as love, relationships, sex, friendship, personal highs & lows, and life in the gay and lesbian community. With its mix of loveable characters, captivating story-lines, and undeniable

charm, *Queer as Folk* has, over the years, definitely evolved into the compelling and ever-so-popular show it was destined to be.

A major part of the show's high likeability most definitely lies in its highly talented cast of characters; the comedic, boy-next-door Michael (Hal Sparks) and his charming boyfriend Ben (Robert Gant), the undeniably sexy and promiscuous Brian (Gale Harold), flamboyant and undaunted Emmett (Peter Paige), modest Ted (Scott Lowell), a "two steps forward, two steps back" kind of guy, and the young, talented, romance-crazed Justin (Randy Harrison). Also adding the show's charm are its three resident ladies: Melanie (Michelle Clunie) & Lindsay (Thea Gill), a high-spirited and loveable lesbian couple raising a family together, and Debbie (Sharon Gless), Michael's ever-so-proud and delightful mother.

Queer as Folk's successful first season acted as an introduction to the lives and personalities of the characters we all have come to know and love. We were also introduced this season to such story-lines as the Brian & Justin love saga, Ted's first experimentations with drugs and the "dark side" of his sexuality, Melanie and Lindsay's struggles to support their family and raise their newborn child, Justin's struggles with life as a gay youth and coming to terms with himself, his family, and his sexuality (not to mention his true feelings for Brian), Michael's struggles with having relationships, and Emmett's random follies, such as his trying to become straight by joining a conversion therapy group. The show introduces a number of realistic topics, however, and explores various issues, such as HIV and AIDS, harassment and gay bashing (seen in the season finale, when Justin is beaten following his high school prom), resolving the pain from one's past, the dangers of drugs & substance abuse, and coming to terms with one's sexuality.

Season Two picks up from the tragedy which closed the first season, as Brian and Justin are still reeling from Justin's traumatic bashing. Lindsay and Melanie, meanwhile, make the decision to tie the knot, and Ted decides to quit his accounting career to take a job as an on-line adult entertainment baron, with Emmett as his main focus. Michael himself finds a quick change of pace as he becomes involved with the HIV positive Ben, a hunky college professor. Emmett, too, finds love in the arms of an older millionaire, and towards the end of the season, with Ted. The Brian & Justin love saga also continues

as they develop an intimate, yet open, relationship, at least until Justin's head is turned by a charming younger man named Ethan, who later steps in to provide Justin with the attention he doesn't seem to be getting from Brian.

Season Three sees the further development of these intricate and powerful storylines. Following Melanie and Lindsay's marriage, they soon begin to plan having a second child, with Michael as the father. Emmett and Ted's relationship blossoms, and falls just as quickly as Ted finds himself diving deep into a destructive drug addiction, and later ends up checking into rehab. Justin explores his relationship with Ethan even further, but eventually finds himself trying to win back the heart of Brian, who is wrapped up with his career in the meantime, doing advertising for a horrible, homophobic, mayoral candidate by the name of Stockwell, who he eventually turns on and risks everything he has to keep him out of office. Michael and Ben deal with their maturing and ever-changing relationship, and they eventually put themselves on the line to help a troubled gay youth by the name of Hunter, who they save from a certain path of hurt and destruction. The season closes with Brian and Justin coming to terms, finally, with their relationship, Michael taking extreme measures (leaving town, among them) to protect Hunter from his troubling family life, and Melanie & Lindsay enjoying their ever-blossoming family and successful second pregnancy.

We definitely saw *Queer as Folk* coming to age in its fourth season, with everything from Brian reconstructing his life after the devastation of the Stockwell case and his battle with testicular cancer, to Justin's dangerous encounter with the wild side and the maturation and strengthening of his and Brian's relationship. We saw a different side of Melanie and Lindsay's relationship as well, as Lindsay began experimenting with new facets of her sexuality, and we saw Ted come to terms with himself, as he made amends with the past and began to rebuild a new life. We saw everything from Michael and Ben's relationship hitting new heights to Emmett's flourishing individuality and Debbie's struggles with her brother's death and her finding new sources of happiness in her life, and we watched as everyone's personal struggles pulled them closer together. The season ended on a high, however, with the birth of Melanie & Lindsay's second child, Ben & Michael's marriage, Debbie's engagement to Carl Horvath, and Justin being offered a job in Hollywood to work on the film version of the & Michael's comic book,

"Rage". As always though, we were also treated to a few of the cliffhangers and twists and turns that *Queer As Folk* is known to provide: Like always, we are left wondering where Brian and Justin's relationship will be heading next, as Justin accepts his career offer in Hollywood, and we are left wondering as to what will happen with Melanie and Lindsay's relationship as they deal with the birth of their child and their issues with Lindsay's fidelity.

As the series moves into its fifth season, we are sure to see even more growth, change, and evolution in each of the characters, and in the show as a whole; we will see what happens as Ben and Michael deal with their new marriage, how Deb handles the preparation for her own wedding, Ted settling further into his new life, what will happen with each of our favorite couples, and, of course, even more of the drama and excitement we have come to love (and expect) from *Queer as Folk*.

* Taken directly from http://www.tvtome.com/QueerasFolk_US/ on October 19, 2004.

APPENDIX B

CODING SHEET EXAMPLE

The following information appeared on the first page of each coding packet:

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study! The information collected from you will be used to complete my Master's Thesis in Mass Communications. I realize this is a large time commitment for you, and I appreciate your willingness to fill out the attached information.

If you foresee that you will be unable to complete this study, please let me know. I have a limited number of copies of the tapes and DVDs, so I will need them back when you are finished or if you are unable to complete the study.

Below are the instructions. If you have any questions at any time regarding this project, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you would like a copy of the results, I will be happy to provide them to you when they are available. I anticipate having the thesis complete by March 2005.

Thanks again,
Whitney (512-XXX-XXXX)

Instructions:

- This project requires either a tape player or a DVD player.
- Please watch the tape provided. You should try and stop the tape after each show in order to keep the program fresh in your mind as you answer the questions enclosed. (The program changes are obvious even if you are unfamiliar with the show, and each show's name is provided for you in order in the packet you received.)

- Each character has two pages of questions about him or her (that is why the packet looks extremely long). Once you flip through the packet, you will see that the questions are repetitive but must be answered for each character.
- The characters' names and show titles are indicated at the top of each new character sheet, along with a picture of the character for easy identification.
- Please answer all nine (9) questions for each character after watching the clip. The last three (3) questions for each character ask for an explanation, but the answers do not need to be lengthy. Please just provide your immediate thoughts.
- At the very end of the packet, after all the characters have been coded, there are eight (8) questions about the viewer.
- Please remember that all of the answers gathered from this study are anonymous and **will not in any way** be associated with any specific viewer.

To complete the video and questions, please allow approximately an hour and a half. However, feel free to break up the scenes in any manner you feel reasonable.

Disclaimer: The scenes on these tapes were taken from a constructed two-week period. Some of the shows are rated R and should not be viewed by anyone less than 18 years of age. This tape contains adult content and, in some cases, sexual content.

The following information appeared for each character on the video:

Television Show Name Appeared Here Character's Name Name Appeared Here

Character's Photo



Please Circle one answer you believe best matches the question:

1) This character is a:

Man

Woman

2) This character appears to be:

Hispanic

Black

Other

Asian

White

3) This character's age range is probably:

0 – 25

26 – 40

41 – 60

61 – 80

4) This character mainly interacts with:

Other gay characters

Other lesbian characters

Heterosexual characters

An equal amount of both homosexual and heterosexual characters

5) Please circle all of the activities this character participated in, if any.

Expressing confusion about sexuality

Flirting with Someone of the Same Sex

Going on a Date with the Same Sex

Confronting another Character

Talking about HIV

Discussing Same Sex Marriage

Kissing

Having Sex

Being the Subject of a Joke

Working

Please read the adjectives below and mark an X where you believe the characterization of this character falls.

(If you cannot describe the character from the clip or previous episodes you might have seen, please place an X in the neutral, or center, position.)

6) This character was constructed as:

	very	somewhat	neutral	somewhat	very	
Feminine	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Masculine
Funny	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Serious
Unattractive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Attractive
Stereotypical	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Non-stereotypical
Submissive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Aggressive
Boring	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Interesting
Irrational	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Rational
Unrealistic	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Realistic

Please answer the following questions by circling your answer and briefly writing an explanation below. Feel free to use the back of this page if more space is needed.

7) Did you think this particular character was realistic? Yes Somewhat No

Please explain.

8) Overall, does this character provoke any feeling, beliefs, or values for you as an audience member?

Yes Some No

Please explain.

9) If this character were a real person, would he/she be someone you might befriend?

Yes Possibly No

Please explain.

The following information appeared on the last two pages of each coding packet:

Viewer Information

Please remember that all of the information on the questionnaire is completely anonymous.

Please circle the answer that most closely describes you.

1) I am: Male Female

2) If I had to classify my own sexual orientation, I would consider myself:

Heterosexual (Straight) Homosexual (Gay/Lesbian) Bi-sexual

3) I receive cable television: Yes No

If yes,

Do you get Showtime: Yes No

Do you get HBO: Yes No

4) My age is: 18-25 26-33 34-41 42-51 52-60

5) On average, I watch television:

Never 1-3 hours a day 4-6 hours a day More than 7 hours a day

Please circle as many of the shows listed below that you watch at least two (2) times a month, if any.

6) I watch the following television show(s) at least twice a month:

Six Feet Under (HBO)

Queer Eye for the
Straight Guy (Bravo)

Queer as Folk (Showtime)

Nip/Tuck (FX)

The L Word (Showtime)

Will & Grace (NBC & WB)

The Graham Norton Effect (Comedy Central)

Two ½ Men (CBS)

Half & Half (UPN)

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