

DEVELOPING THE HARMLESS HOMO:
REPRESENTATIONS OF GAY MEN ON U.S. TELEVISION

by

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the 20th century, gay men have been portrayed in film and television through a variety of constructs aimed at addressing public anxieties around sexuality and making homosexuality less threatening to society. Extending current research around depictions of gay men in the media, we find that contemporary, 21st century representations both converge and diverge from previous representations, particularly around mannerisms and activity involvement. This research investigates four popular situational comedies, *Will & Grace*, *The New Normal*, *Modern Family*, and *Difficult People*, through a Qualitative Content Analysis using Queer Theory, Governmentality and Cultivation Theory in order to identify the specific ways gay men have been represented during the last ten years since the finale of *Will & Grace*.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last several decades, the representation of gay men on television in the United States has evolved to bring a more positive image to many homes. It has shifted from the overly flamboyant queen to a more sophisticated, “masculine” model of gay manhood (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Shugart, 2003). In contemporary television shows, such as *Will & Grace* (1998-2006) and *Modern Family* (2009-current), main characters include gay friends and, increasingly, couples working to create or maintain their lives and their families while balancing work, a personal life, and children.

Within these representations are instances that illustrate the change in heteronormativity as the defining factor of what constitutes all forms of masculinity. Heteronormativity is the idea that there are two distinct genders based on biological sex, with natural gender roles (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Berlant and Warner, 1998; Brown, 2012). This describes heterosexuality as peoples’ natural sexual identity, and labels other, more subversive sexualities as deviant and un-natural (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Berlant and Warner, 1998; Brown, 2012). Gay men, for example, have historically been viewed as inconsistent with masculinity and deserving of shame, and often positioned as women within popular media (Epstein and Friedman, 1995). While depictions of gay men on U.S. television have historically equated homosexuality with femininity, representations have progressed since the late 1990s to include more heteronormative gay characters.

As years have passed, the mannerism portrayed and activities of gay men in contemporary 21st century media have become situated around images that are seen as more positive, which are increasingly consistent with normative straight men (Epstein

and Friedman, 1995; Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002). For example, where earlier representations tended to portray gay men as exaggeratedly flamboyant, promiscuous, and generally irresponsible and carefree, contemporary depictions present gay men as responsible and productive members of society, with families, relationships, and complex lives. This, however, establishes a catch-22, as balance between masculine and feminine is required for the successful portrayal of gay men on television. These representations can be understood through Collins' (2000) concept of controlling images, or the constructed norms through which society, and individuals, define others and themselves. This this is important to the evolution and development of less threatening representations of gay masculinity because it maintains a sense of "otherness" that sustains distance and distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality. This distinction perpetuates the dominance of straight men in society.

This shift raises important questions. How are gay men and gay masculinity, in a broad context, constructed on television in the 21st century? Are gay men of color and those of lower socioeconomic status included in the gay community as it is portrayed on television? How do gender, race, class, and the capitalist market intersect in the construction of homosexuality on television? Below, I will investigate these questions to provide a greater understanding of the development of a version of gay masculinity that I call the "Harmless Homo," as well as the effects of this representation on the gay community.

The Harmless Homo illustrates the change in homosexuality from a threatening portrayal to something more socially acceptable, and, at times, even idealized. Through this representation, gay men are observed as a regular part of daily life in the U.S. This is

done through the balancing of gay masculinity with femininity in mannerisms and activities. This presents the gay community as more heteronormative, while maintaining distinction between gay and straight men and masculinity. The need to preserve this differentiation lies with the continuing dominance of straight society. By situating male homosexuality as feminine, even in part, gay men can be viewed as less intimidating and less powerful than their straight counterparts.

Drawing on queer theory, governmentality, and cultivation theory, I show how the portrayals of gay men on television have changed over the years. This involves the decreased illustration of gay men as threatening to heteronormativity, as it is understood in U.S. society. In this research, I focus on the representations found in the most recent seasons of the television shows *Will & Grace* (2005-2006), *The New Normal* (2012-2013), *Modern Family* (2015-2016) and *Difficult People* (2015) to locate ways in which these portrayals diverge and converge with previous representations of homosexuality. These comparisons illustrate the construction of gay men and masculinity, and their transition from threatening to harmless and situates the long-running Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Civil Rights Movement as moving from a fight for sexual liberation to a fight for equal rights and full social citizenship. To better understand this progression and the overall representations of gay men, we must first explore how gay men have historically been portrayed in film and television in the United States: as feminine and/or asexual individuals (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Shugart, 2003).

CHAPTER II

HISTORY

Gay men in the United States have been represented in cinema and television since the 1910s. The most common portrayal can be found in the character form of the “sissy,” which has become a lasting signifier of homosexuality (Epstein and Friedman, 1995). Characterized by effeminacy, the “sissy” is most noticeable by fluid and “swishy” body language and motion. This character form laid the foundation for the understanding that homosexuality in film is to be campy and used for comedic relief (Epstein and Friedman, 1995). This character type is identified in the film *The Celluloid Closet* (Epstein and Friedman, 1995) as making "everyone feel more womanly or manly by occupying the space in between." In other words, the “sissy” is depicted as being non-threatening to straight society by straddling both masculinity and femininity. Dyer (1990) identifies this as the “in-between male,” in which gay men are seen as a type of third sex, separate from male and female, incorporating both the masculine and feminine. Having gay men situated within representations such as the “sissy” and others, including the harmless homo, is important, because it allows the homosexual to appear non-, or at least less threatening at any given point in history. As social anxieties change, so too must the representations shown on television as a way to normalize the gay community. While the “sissy” was not the only representation of gay men, it became the more popular portrayal. With no identifiable sexuality, these characters were able to flourish in the late 19th and early 20th century (Epstein and Friedman, 1995).

During this time period, there was little to no regulation surrounding acceptable images to be portrayed in film. The 1910s and 1920s saw the ability for men to be more

open about sexuality, even when it was not popular or favorable (Epstein and Friedman, 1995). The 1930s to 1960, however, saw sexuality all but banned from film (artsreformation.com, 2006; Epstein and Friedman, 1995; Mondello, 2008). Beginning in 1930, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) developed a set of regulations referred to as the Hays Code. They were created in an attempt to control morality in U.S. film and covered areas that included crime, sex, nudity, dancing, and profanity (artsreformation.com, 2006; Epstein and Friedman, 1995; Mondello, 2008). By the 1960s, however, we see an emergence of representations of homosexuality depicted in film as something that is not talked about in real life (i.e., giving a behind-the-scenes look at the lives of individuals struggling with an “impure” sexuality) (Epstein and Friedman, 1995).

Films such as *Advise and Consent* (1962) and *The Detective* (1968) gave the public some of their first glimpses of what can be referred to as “organized gay life”. This is the creation of bars and other businesses that cater specifically to the gay community and locations in which members of the gay community congregate and socialize. Here, gay characters were widely depicted as unhappy, depressed, and suicidal (Epstein and Friedman, 1995; Wood, 2012). These depictions described homosexuality as unclean or filthy and as something to be ashamed of and hidden from the rest of society, again addressing public anxieties of the time (Epstein and Friedman, 1995). This construct of gay men is further illustrated in news-styled documentaries of the time, such as an episode of CBS Reports titled *The Homosexuals* (1967). Hosted by Mike Wallace, the report gave credence to the view of the gay community as generally seedy and immoral.

The early 1970s saw a turning point, if only temporary, for representations of gay men. Films such as *The Boys in the Band* (1970) allowed for a more positive image of gay men, by portraying characters as average people dealing with the overwhelming stress of navigating straight society and life as homosexuals. Through other movies of this time, such as *Cabaret* (1972), a greater attempt was made to portray gay characters as regular people, and homosexuality itself as a more average aspect of life (Epstein and Friedman, 1995). While these types of portrayals situate gay men in a more positive way, homosexuality continued to be viewed in the public often as something deserving of shame (Epstein and Friedman, 1995).

In this same period of the 1970s, the public sees an emergence of gay characters on television. Dryer (1990) explains that, while representations of gay men in film and television are linked, they have unique and differing representational histories. While a broader spectrum of sexuality is able to be presented on the silver screen, gay men on television are still shown during this time period to be feminine and either asexual or nonsexual.

This caricatured model of gay men makes their characters' presence on television less threatening and acceptable for TV broadcast. With the negative perception of gay men following the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969, television, which was able to reach viewers in their home and in the family setting, had to present an exaggerated image of gay men, devoid of displays of masculinity and sexuality. Altering the representations in the media allowed for a less threatening perception of gay men by the public. Creating a more docile, or harmless image of gay men can influence more people to watch television with LGBT characters, which assists in the commercialized

success of LGBT-themed television. George and Gordon in *Hot L Baltimore* (1975) and Jack in *Alice* (1976), for example, established gay men as either main or supporting characters that were often parodies of gay men in the real world (Wood, 2012).

Characters either took on a version of the “sissy,” used to increase the humor found within situational comedies (sitcoms), or were less effeminate and used as focal points for individual episodes (Rice, 2015). These portrayals of gay mannerisms contributed to the early growth of the Harmless Homo on television during the 1980s and 1990s.

In the 1980s, gay men in movies remained both victims and victimizers, continuing to lead unhappy lives. They shared with the world the idea that open homosexuality and sexual freedom came with costs (Epstein and Friedman, 1995). The debut of the film *Cruising* (1980) generated civil unrest. Civil rights groups protested and boycotted the film, due to graphic scenes of gay men being sexually victimized and murdered and for portraying the gay community as squalid and violent.

While television portrayals were less predatory, the characters were presented as more subordinate, docile, or harmless. The made-for-TV movie *Sidney Shorr: A Girls Best Friend* (1981) and its subsequent television spinoff *Love, Sidney* (1981) depicted the 50-year-old, moderately wealthy, gay man living in New York City with a younger woman, Laurie, and her daughter. While Sidney is never actually outed, it becomes clear early in the film that he is not interested in women. A situation arises in which Sidney attempts to explain to Laurie that he is gay, which he does by insisting that he is not interested in her while glancing at a photo of a man. He explains that his “friend” has passed away, and Laurie quickly figures everything out.

Throughout the rest of the film, Sidney is not shown dating or even flirting with another man. While Sidney's mannerisms are moderately masculine (i.e., he is not flamboyant), he is portrayed more as a caregiver or parental figure to Laurie and her daughter, which provides a more effeminate perception of Sidney. Examples of this can be found in scenes where Sidney is shown staying up all night worrying about Laurie when she stays out too late. Ultimately, without Sidney insinuating that he is gay, viewers might perceive him as a down-to-earth straight man who is sexually disinterested in women. This version of gay masculinity reinforces the non-sexuality of gay men, and remains fairly common throughout the 1980s (Rice, 2015).

By the 1990s, we begin to see a greater shift in the representations of gay men, as well as the larger LGBT community. Popular television shows, including *L.A. Law* (1991), *Rosanne* (1995), and *Friends* (1996) introduced LGBT supporting characters who have on-screen kiss scenes or same-sex marriage or commitment ceremonies. This is important for the LGBT community; while lesbians and gay men had previously been shown in such scenes in movies, they had not been in prime time television programming (Rice, 2015).

The '90s also witnessed a character come out about their homosexuality without shame. The character Ellen Morgan (Ellen DeGeneres) on *Ellen* (1994-1998) came out in “The Puppy Episode.” This occurred in conjunction with DeGeneres' own public coming out (Rice, 2015). The event was groundbreaking and provided her with wide-ranging support from the LGBT community (Rice, 2015).

The following year, NBC debuted *Will & Grace* (1998) as the first television program to depict two openly gay main characters in positive roles. Will Truman and

Jack McFarland provide television viewers with examples of gay masculinity that came to be widely accepted during the eight seasons it aired (1998-2006) (Burrows, 1998). Will is portrayed as a highly educated and successful lawyer, while Jack is a flamboyantly expressive and socially adept actor/entertainer who never has a job and is heavily concerned with being perceived as youthful. While each have their own styles, both are concerned with the current fashions within those styles. Both are presented as upper-middle class (although Jack rarely has a source of income), white, and single. Both characters are also open and outspoken about their sexuality. While *Will & Grace* was at the height of its popularity, there was an emergence of LGBT-centered reality programming that sought to infuse straight men with gay style. The development of this type of programming is important to the construction of the Harmless Homo because it helped to construct the image of gay men as skilled specialists in areas of consumer culture.

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (2003-2007) did exactly that by playing on the commonly held images of both gay and straight men. *Queer Eye* consisted of five gay men who were presented as experts in all things related to style, fashion, interior design, personal grooming, and culture (IMDb, 2016; Miller, 2005; Hart, 2004). In each episode, the “Fab Five” performed a makeover of another man (usually straight) with the goal of making the subject more appealing to others for the purposes of dating or to help him better entice his spouse (IMDb, 2016; Miller, 2005; Hart, 2004). This has historical significance, and is crucial to the development of the Harmless Homo because it is the first time viewers see gay men positioned as superior to straight men, and who straight

men rely on to guide them through the world style, culture and personal relationships (Miller, 2005; Hart, 2004).

In addition to extending the representation of social acceptance to homosexuality, it created consumers out of not only the subject of each episode, but also the viewers (Miller, 2005; Hart, 2004). By playing into the commonly held belief that gay men are experts at style and culture, along with the fact that the makeovers were done on straight men who were often depicted as unconcerned with their appearance, rather than women, various products such as fashion and personal grooming items could be successfully marketed to both gay and straight men. The marketing of style and culture to men is important to the development of the Harmless Homo because it creates an emerging market through which businesses can accumulate capital under the guise of style and personal hygiene. This further enforces the creation of controlling images that presents gay men as experts or specialists in these areas.

The current study follows from this point in television history. The representations of gay men are explored throughout the final season of *Will & Grace* (2005-2006), as well as the most recent season of *The New Normal* (2012-2013), *Modern Family* (2015-2016) and *Difficult People* (2015). These newer representations depict gay men as more fully actualized men, rather than an in-between sex, such as that describe in *The Celluloid Closet* (Epstein and Friedman, 1995; Dyer, 1990). In other words, contemporary representations present gay men as cisgender (identifying and expressing their gender in connection with their biological sex) with complex lives and emotions (Aultman, 2014; Dyer, 1990; Epstein and Friedman, 1995; Lennon and Mistler, 2014). In

order to investigate this, a greater understanding is needed of the theoretical perspectives and concepts used, which will be discussed in the next section.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within U.S. society, heteronormativity and heterosexism act as the basis for the development of definitions of gender and sexuality; television and other forms of popular media reinforce these conceptions (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Diamond, 2005; Hart, 2000; Levina, Waldo, and Fitzgerald, 2000). Here, heterosexism refers to the idea that society devalues and stigmatizes any behavior or identity that is labelled non-heterosexual and hence non-normative or deviant (Levina, Waldo, and Fitzgerald, 2000). The images presented through television can be seen as being fed by and feeding the perceptions already held by the public. In other words, the media is able to take the perceptions and beliefs held by, and about gay men and present them as an exaggerated reflection of society (Gerbner, 1998; Harmon, 2001; Hughes, 1980). As these perceptions and beliefs change, so do the representations found on television. This can account for the popular representations of gender, race and class revolving around the gay community. As Han (2007) argues, in order to effectively increase visibility and acceptance, representations of the gay community must work to maintain the status quo around race and socioeconomic class, which often means gay men are portrayed as white and affluent.

While there is a plethora of research regarding the process of institutional constructions of homosexuality, there is much less work investigating how perceptions of gender, race, and class have converged to alter the representations of gay men in and through television. Contemporary depictions of gay men attempt to create a representation of gay masculinity that balances the overly flamboyant queen with the

more masculine gay man (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002). Characters are portrayed as respectable and educated men who achieve balance through their mannerisms and activities. I call this representation the Harmless Homo.

The Harmless Homo is itself a version of gay masculinity that allows for greater assimilation into heteronormative society. The Harmless Homo not only teaches gay men how to perform their homosexuality in a more heteronormative way, it also educates the general public on gay life and lifestyles. In this sense, the Harmless Homo can be seen as an aspect or extension of homonormativity. In its contemporary form, homonormativity is the assimilation of LGBT culture and identity with heterosexual ideals and norms rooted in neoliberalism and the free-market economy (Brown, 2009, 2012; Bryant, 2008). These representations of gay men, however, are just as problematic as they are helpful to the gay community. The use of controlling images, even positive in portrayal, do not provide a reflection of reality, but rather to make various forms of social injustice seem natural and an “inevitable part of everyday life” (Collins, 2000, p. 69).

The larger gay community in the United States is diverse, involving people of all races and ethnic backgrounds and from all areas of society. However, this is not reflected on television (Harris, 2006; Kessler, 2007; Reitman, 2006). Color-blindness is widely practiced in these representations. Gay men of color are underrepresented. When they are portrayed, the content is often lacking any significance, thereby ignoring any social struggles or institutional racism that these individuals might experience as people of color (Harris, 2006; Reitman, 2006). Gay men of color are treated in either a sexualized way or, as any other gay men, equal to the white characters. The same can be said for people of lower socioeconomic class, given that the characters are most often presented as

affluent (Hettinger and Vandello, 2014). This creates an illusion of equality and acceptance through a homogenous version of the LGBT community, which is situated within pre-existing racial boundaries and the market economy (Hettinger and Vandello, 2014).

By presenting more positive portrayals of gay men on television, thereby easing the entrance of gay masculinity and lifestyles into public life, the construct of “metrosexuality” developed. Metrosexuality is a form of masculinity that is characterized by vanity and self-obsession, particularly around clothing and grooming (Hall and Gough, 2011). With its emergence, a new market niche has opened for both straight and gay men around style, fashion, personal grooming, and culture (Harmon, 2001; Hettinger and Vandello, 2014). Under this construct, gay men are expected to be experts in these areas, and straight men are encouraged to acknowledge gay men as such (Harmon, 2001; Hart, 2004; Hettinger and Vandello, 2014). As gay culture and style has become appropriated and commodified, profits can now be generated in various areas across gay/straight boundaries. For example, a wider array of fashion and personal grooming products are being marketed specifically towards men (Nielsen, 2015). By presenting such a homogenous depiction of the gay community, these products can be marketed to both gay and straight viewers without alienating either.

Several theoretical perspectives and key concepts, which describe how the homosexuality has been constructed by, and for, society, are relevant to this research. These include queer theory, governmentality, and cultivation theory, gender as it is represented through institutional spaces, and the use of whitewashing on U.S. television. Also important is an understanding of how the capitalist economy (i.e., a market system

based off supply and demand) has commodified homosexuality, making it available for consumption. Which has paved the way for the creation of metrosexuality and popular gay culture as a commodity or object of trade (Hennessey, 1995). These key perspectives generate a greater understanding of how heteronormativity and heterosexism influence the relationship between our construction of reality and the media (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes and Sasson, 1992).

Queer Theory

Queer theory is helpful in exploring the connection between homosexuality and heterosexuality by positioning heterosexuality as the “official” sexuality that other, subversive sexualities deviate from (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Namaste, 1994). A constructionist view of queer theory argues that a decentered subject whose understanding of and identity around gender and sexuality is formed through sociocultural influences (Kates, 1999). Queer theory explores how the sexual identity and gender expression are developed, in part, through media representations. In turn, the media establishes homosexuality as a contrast from heterosexuality (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Namaste, 1994; Shugart, 2003).

Research exploring the heteronormative nature of homosexuality utilizes queer theory to not only understand how homosexuality emerges, but also how homosexuality functions to reinforce heteronormativity (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Namaste, 1994; Shugart, 2003). Namaste (1994) explains that “queer theory explores the ways in which homosexual subjectivity is at once produced and excluded within culture” (220). This is punctuated through the development of metrosexuality and the process of commodifying gay culture for consumption by straight society. Namaste (1994) also

identifies heterosexuality and homosexuality as being produced side-by-side. In other words, without the construction of the homosexual label as a divergence from heterosexuality, society would have no way of constructing a coherent understanding of sexuality and its various forms (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Namaste, 1994; Shugart, 2003).

Queer theory is important to the construction of the Harmless Homo, because it allows us to explore and make sense of the images of sexuality that are presented to viewers through television programming. Queer theory explains that gay men are presented in a particular way in order to create and reinforce a societal understanding of homosexuality, heterosexuality and masculinity. Historically, representations placed greater focus on the differences between gay and straight men, in an attempt to distance gay men from heteronormative culture. Contemporary representations (since the late 1990s) have focused more on presenting their similarities as a way to increase perceptions of social citizenship.

Governmentality

Following from queer theory, governmentality helps to illustrate why the representations of gay men are constructed around images and understandings of gender expression, race, and class. Governmentality argues that institutions, such as mass media and television, produce knowledge that works to manage the population and maximize productivity (Foucault, 1991). Governmentality suggests that collective social norms work to exert power and control over the various members of society. The media is used as a tool to not only teach individuals how to regulate and manage others (collectively), but also themselves (individually) (Foucault, 1991).

Governmentality can ultimately be seen as a resource for governing culture; it works within queer theory to reinforce heteronormativity. Foucault (1991) argues that, in order to allow gay men to earn social citizenship, they must first be taught how to interact with straight society. A means to achieve this are the images presented through television programming. MacLeod and Durrheim (2002) note that Foucault's conception of governmentality is an explanation for forms of domination that work outside any individual or group. MacLeod and Durrheim (2002) argue that sexuality is used as a key focus that links governmentality and the broader arena of feminism. In relation to citizenship, Nolan (2006, p. 231) presents it as "a performative outcome of the field of government, since it is this field that determines both the extent to which particular subjects are included in and/or excluded from the polity, and their varying capacity to act in ways that will affect (or resist) change within it." In other words, with no center of power, it is society as a whole (government, the public, institutions, etc.) that constructs our perceptions of reality and change that occurs within society (MacLeod and Durrheim, 2002; Nolan, 2006).

The theory of governmentality is important for the development of the Harmless Homo. Through this theory, and similar to queer theory, it is argued that media representations of gay men are structured in such a way as to create and reinforce a particular image (MacLeod and Durrheim, 2002; Nolan, 2006). This representation can be viewed as more "mainstream" or heteronormative, which, following from queer theory, allows the Harmless Homo to be successful as a portrayal of the gay community, and can allow for easier access into straight society for some. Additionally, by situating gay men within neoliberal governmentality, in which subjects are produced with a

marketized understanding of reality, portrayals found on television can instruct members of the gay community how to become citizens through the market economy (Brown, 2012). While understanding the types of representations of gay men that are offered to society is important to the development of the Harmless Homo, it is also important to understand how these are depicted to, accepted and internalized by viewers.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory suggests that television presents images that come to be seen as consistent with the real world and are internalized by the viewer as such (Gerbner, 1998). These images, however, are often inaccurately constructed perceptions of reality (Gerbner, 1998; Harmon, 2001; Hughes, 1980). Gerbner (1998) argues that as socialization has moved out of the private realm of the family and into the public realm of mass media, television has been used as a tool through which to perpetuate carefully constructed ideals and perceptions of society and its various groups.

Cultivation theory is important to understanding many images presented through television as they relate to aspects of social life, such as sexuality, race, and class. These carefully engineered images, are seen as "realistic," or at least more consistent with the structure of the real world (Gerbner, 1998; Harmon, 2001; Hughes, 1980). As these portrayals are repeatedly presented to viewers, individuals internalize and reproduce the mannerisms, behaviors, and actions presented through television programming (Gerbner, 1998; Harmon, 2001; Hughes, 1980). This leads to the development of social norms relating to the representations set forth by television programming, similar to the processes of governmentality.

Constructed images of gay men perpetuated through the Harmless Homo, as illustrated through queer theory, governmentality and cultivation theory, create and recreate conceptions of reality surrounding the gay community (Harmon, 2001; Hughes, 1980; MacLeod and Durrheim, 2002; Nolan, 2006). These perceptions relate to society's experience of reality concerning the gay community and what it means to be a gay man in contemporary U.S. society. This, in turn, leads to normalization and public reinforcement of this particular construction of gay masculinity, and can be interpreted by the public as a push for social citizenship, regardless of the accuracy of such a perception. Each theory identified here contributes to a greater understanding of media portrayals of gay men, developing and presenting a more normative version of gay masculinity.

The current manifestation of the LGBT civil rights movement has allowed the public to witness battles for equal rights in the areas of marriage, employment, housing, education, and public accommodations, particularly around bathroom access for transgender people. With increasing attention and controversy around these portrayals of gay men, television is altering its representation of them from the feminized queen to the more heteronormative gay man (Avila-Saavedra, 2009). I call this current incarnation “the Harmless Homo.”

This version of gay masculinity positions gay men as balanced between masculinity and femininity through mannerisms and activity engagement that allows the characters to become increasingly heteronormative, while maintaining a sense of “otherness” around the gay male community. This is consistent with the heterosexual dominance found in queer theory (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Namaste, 1994; Shugart, 2003). By displaying these images through television, cultivation theory

explains that the images are able to be presented as a reflection of reality (Gerbner, 1998; Harmon, 2001; Hughes, 1980). As a result, there is increased potential for the behaviors found on television to be emulated (Gerbner, 1998; Harmon, 2001; Hughes, 1980).

Governmentality can then explain how the representations of gay men on television are used as a tool to inform both gay and straight communities the various ways gay men can successfully perform masculinity (MacLeod and Durrheim, 2002; Nolan, 2006). With an understanding of the theoretical perspectives being use here, the variables that contribute to these images, including gender, race and class, can now be discussed.

Institutional Representations of Gender and the Harmless Homo

Mass media, particularly television, is one of the core institutions in the social construction of reality. It provides a mediated relationship to social phenomena which many people cannot know first-hand, such as the lives of gay men (Levina, Waldo, and Fitzgerald, 2000; Milkie, 2002; Namaste, 1994). While gay men are often defined through their perceived masculinity or femininity, television is a useful tool in constructing controlling images of both (Collins, 2000; Milkie, 2002). This allows viewers to incorporate gay men, specifically their lifestyles and personalities, as part of their conception and experience of reality (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Gamson et al., 1992). In other words, the images of gay men found on television are seen by viewers as the reality of gay life in the United States (Gamson et al., 1992; Hennessey, 1995; Kates, 1999; Hart, 2000).

As a result of heterosexism (Levina, Waldo, and Fitzgerald, 2000), representations of gay men are often equated with femininity. Therefore, homosexuality is presented in opposition to masculinity (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Diamond,

2005; Hart, 2000; Levina, Waldo, and Fitzgerald, 2000; Milkie, 2002). This concept is referred to as gender inversion. “The commonly held belief that homosexuals are oppositely gendered; a gay man is considered more feminine than a straight man and vice versa with a lesbian in contrast to a straight woman” (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002, p. 90).

Throughout the 20th century, the dominant expression of male homosexuality involves “campy” mannerisms. “Camp” is defined by Susan Sontag (1964) as a style rooted in artifice and theatrics that derives meaning from particular contexts, such as the concepts of “gayface” and the “gay accent.” These are popularly understood as both facial structures and expressions and speech patterns, which are used by the general society, as well as others in the gay community, to identify a man's sexuality as gay, even if that perception is false (Thorpe, 2014). For example, “gayface” can be found in various dramatic and theatrical expressions, such as that of surprise or sadness (e.g., pouting used for flirting). “Gayface” can also be found in an individual’s biological facial structures (e.g., soft, smooth skin, few pores or wrinkles, high cheek bones, etc.). The gay accent, on the other hand, can be found in the mechanics of the way an individual speaks. This includes speaking with proper enunciation, elongated vowels, the use of hard T, K, and S sounds, lisping, and speaking lazily (Thorpe, 2014). These performances of camp in gay culture have social implications as they work to structure a perception of reality that some people, both gay and straight, may not have any other exposure to (Sontag, 1964; Thorpe, 2014).

In relation to the Harmless Homo, these aspects of camp are important because they work as readily identifiable qualities and characteristics that indicate inclusion in the

LGBT community. The three theoretical perspectives used here help to explain the representations as working to maintain separation between the public perceptions of gay and straight men. These perceptions, being taught through television, can lead to internalization and perpetuation through the creation of social norms. The outcome of this is the maintenance of the status quo around gender inequality in society. Moving forward, this can have a parallel effect in regards to race and communities of color within the gay community.

Whitewashing Television

Whitewashing can be understood as the removal, or “washing,” of racial politics (Reitman, 2006). In relation to television programming in the U.S., this is done through carefully constructed images and representations that encourage and enforce the invisibility of racial groups (Harris, 2006; Kessler, 2007; Reitman, 2006). Within the larger and more diverse LGBT community, this can be illustrated in the idea of the “gay community,” without any distinctions or discussions around race. This provides the opportunity for race to be overlooked and a form of cultural color-blindness to develop (Harris, 2006; Reitman, 2006). In turn, racial minorities have become underrepresented, particularly within the gay community, as it is presented on television.

Being gay in the U.S. has come to mean being white and well-to-do; racial minorities are often represented for the benefit or fulfilling the fantasies of wealthy, gay, white men (Han, 2007). As Han (2007) argues, “the illusion of normalcy requires active maintenance of racial boundaries” (p. 54). In order to “normalize” the gay community and develop the Harmless Homo, the white majority in the gay community must reflect the ideals and values of the larger society. This illustrates queer theory as it reinforces

heterosexuality as dominant within U.S. culture (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Han, 2007; Namaste, 1994). In the larger society, men of color are seen as generally straight and are often placed in direct opposition to the gay community simply for being other than white (Han, 2007). This reflects cultivation theory and governmentality in the sense that these representations work to influence perceptions of the gay community by illustrating to viewers what the gay community primarily looks like and how various groups in the community are to be treated.

When gay men of color are represented on television, they are often met with a separate set of images and stipulations than their white counterparts (Han, 2007). For example, both gay Asian and black men, as Han (2007) and Fung (1999) argue, are more likely than their white counterparts to be portrayed as sexual fantasies for gay white men. While there are exceptions to these patterns, white men are more likely to view black men as dominating and hypersexual, Asian men are often constructed as submissive and undersexed (Fung, 1999; Han, 2007). A contemporary example is the character of Calvin Owens from ABC's *Greek* (2007-2011). He is presented as a masculine, athletic, gay man, who is black and is presented as combating sexual tension between himself and his white, gay college roommate. For Asian characters, we find examples such as the character of Mipanko on *Will & Grace* (season 3, 2000) who is situated as Jack's (one of two gay main characters) boyfriend. Mipanko first appears wearing a kimono, with very little physical contact between him and Jack, aside from holding on to Jack's arm. Additionally, during the threat of a break in, Mipanko looks to Jack for protection.

These types of racial representations are important for the development of the Harmless Homo because, along with gendered images, it works to structure a particular,

homogenizing representation of gay men as primarily white. Cultivation theory suggests the shows can influence viewers to believe that the gay community is primarily white. This can encourage color-blindness in the sense that nearly all aspects of race associated with the gay community are not important. This presents the gay community as an unified entity organized around the single aspect of sexual identity, rather than multiple diverse groups that make up a multifaceted community with many important foci. One consistent characteristic of the gay community found throughout this research is the perception of affluence and style.

Metrosexuality and the Commodification of Homosexuality

The commodification of masculinity in Western society through the 1980s and 1990s resulted in the development of the metrosexual, a form of heterosexual masculinity that is narcissistic and increasingly feminine (Hall and Gough, 2011). It is characterized by well-dressed and well-groomed men, who are sensitive yet masculine (Hall and Gough, 2011). With the rise of reality television, programming such as *Queer Eye* can be seen as a marketing strategy geared towards both gay and straight men. In the years since, men in general, and gay men in particular, have been viewed as an emerging market for producers. This has only increased over time (Kates, 1999; Miller, 2005). According to the 2015 LGBT Consumer Report released by Nielsen (2015), there was more spending in many areas by LGBT households than by non-LGBT households. These areas include, but are not limited to, art, entertainment (music, TV, and film), books, men's toiletries, and fresheners and deodorizers, with spending indices between 127 and 172 (Nielsen, 2015). To present these indices, researchers used a base of 100 to represent the assumed index for non-LGBT households. When an index for LGBT households is above 100,

they are spending more than their straight counterparts. When the figure is under 100, they are spending less. In other words, with indices between 119 and 148, Nielsen (2015) has shown members of the LGBT community are outspending their straight counterparts by 19 to 48%.

From a theoretical perspective, these reports show the capitalist market and the commodity form itself (i.e., style, fashion, etc.) can be viewed as consistent with, yet distant from, heteronormativity (Miller, 2005). With straight men engaging in metrosexual practices, homosexuality becomes more heteronormative, because these more feminine qualities are no longer seen as exclusively gay. At the same time, various aspects of gay mannerisms, such as the gay accent and gayface, maintain identity within the gay community and distance from the straight community.

The metrosexual is important for our understanding of the Harmless Homo, because it works to illustrate ways through which gay men individually and the gay community as a whole, are able to align the dominant gay styles and behaviors with straight society and culture (Edwards, 2003; Hall and Gough, 2011; McCormack, 2010). The more acceptable it is for straight men to practice their masculinity in a more feminized way, the more acceptable it will be for gay men. Metrosexuality is also important, because it illustrates how the capitalist market is able to appropriate gay culture for consumption by both gay and straight consumers.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

Using Margrit Schreier's methodology, a qualitative content analysis was conducted involving a discourse analysis, in which a constructivist view of homosexuality on television was taken (Schreier, 2012). This analysis allows for a greater understanding of how television is used to create and re-create perceptions of reality within and around the gay community (Schreier, 2012; Foucault, 1972). Analyzing the four programs selected provides a ten year timespan through which to view any evolutions or progressions in the representations of gay men during each show's most recent season. Additionally, by focusing on sitcoms a greater understanding can be developed around the uses of sexuality-identifying features of camp, such as "gayface", the gay accents and "gay posture". The television shows examined were sitcoms and included the eighth season of *Will & Grace* (NBC, 2005-2006, 24 episodes), the first season of *The New Normal* (NBC, 2012-2013, 22 episodes), the seventh season of *Modern Family* (ABC, 2015-2016, 22 episodes), and the first season of *Difficult People* (Hulu.com, 2015, eight-episode pilot season), for a total of 76 episodes.

After reviewing 20 other shows, both sitcoms and dramas that have LGBT main characters, I found that these four shows are representative of programs that are LGBT focused while still available to the widest audience. This was done by selecting sitcoms featuring gay male main characters on Netflix and Hulu, then identifying those that also aired on broadcast television. Of these 20, *Modern Family*, and *The New Normal* were found to have higher ratings than the others, and were chosen for inclusion in the study (IMDb.com, 2016; RottenTomatoes.com, 2016). *Difficult People* was chosen because it

is also a sitcom that can be found on Hulu, and does not require a cable or satellite subscription to gain access to the show, such as *Queer as Folk*.

Will & Grace, *The New Normal*, and *Modern Family* were all aired on major television networks (NBC and ABC), which allowed people to watch from a local broadcast station, without a cable or satellite subscription. *Difficult People*, on the other hand, is presented on a premium video streaming service (Hulu). This was selected as a source due to the growing popularity this type of platform, which includes Hulu and Netflix (Luckerson, 2014; Magid, 2013; O'Neill, 2015). In recent years, the U.S. has seen increasing numbers of people turning to “zero TV,” which are methods of viewing television programming without broadcast, cable, or satellite television (Luckerson, 2014; Magid, 2013; O'Neill, 2015). Instead, videos, television and movies are streamed from a computer, handheld device, or set-top box device (e.g., Apple TV, Roku, Chromecast, Amazon Fire TV).

Today, an increasing number of households and individuals have access to an internet connection (File and Ryan, 2014; Luckerson, 2014; Magid, 2013; O'Neill, 2015; Smith, 2015). In the United States in 2013, 74.4% of households had access to internet, and in 2014 and 2015, nearly two-thirds of the U.S. used smartphones with data service. Of smartphone users, 10% reported having no broadband access at home (File and Ryan, 2014; Luckerson, 2014; Magid, 2013; Smith, 2015). This has made streaming services such as Hulu and Netflix popular sources of television and movies (Luckerson, 2014; Magid, 2013; O'Neill, 2015). Subscriptions start at \$7.99 per month for unlimited viewing of movies and television shows, with no contract (hulu.com, 2016; netflix.com, 2016). This allows users to cancel at any time without the risk of discontinuance fees or a

notice of collection (hulu.com, 2016). Hulu not only produces original programming, such as *Difficult People*, it also streams current seasons of shows from both cable and broadcast stations, including ABC's *Modern Family* (hulu.com, 2016).

The ratings of each program analyzed in this study provide insight into the perceived popularity of each show. These were obtained from the websites Rotten Tomatoes and the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), which are independent TV and film rating sites that allow both critical and viewer ratings. These are important as other streaming programs (e.g., Hulu, iTunes) use these ratings to add to the description of media they sell and/or stream. With the popularity of these sites, the construction of the Harmless Homo can reach a broader audience as members of the public may browse these sites for new shows to watch. This then allows potential viewers to explore how these shows were received by other observers prior to viewing.

The final season of *Will & Grace* (2005-2006) received 8.7 million viewers, with a Rotten Tomatoes (2016) average audience rating of 87%, and an IMDb (2016) viewer rating of 7.2/10. The 2015-2016 season of *Modern Family* has had 9.46 million viewers, with a 90% average audience rating from Rotten Tomatoes (2016), and an IMDb (2016) rating of 8.6/10. *Difficult People's* (2015) first season found a 76% average audience rating from Rotten Tomatoes (2016) and 6.4/10 rating from IMDb (2016). The number of viewers for *Difficult People* was not available during this research. *The New Normal* (2012-2013) had lower rating in all areas, with up to approximately 6.9 million viewers, a 6.8/10 IMDb (2016) rating and a 57% audience rating from Rotten Tomatoes (2016). This show was kept as a selection due to its accessibility on a broadcast television station, and because the number of viewers and IMDb ratings were relatively close to the other

shows. This suggests that, although the program was not as widely admired compared to the other shows, it still received a large viewer base.

Another aspect of importance to the selection process were the characters themselves. Two gay, male characters from each show were selected for inclusion in the study, for a total of eight characters. From *Will & Grace*, there is Will, a lawyer living in Manhattan, and Jack, Will's other best friend. On *The New Normal*, there is the couple David, an obstetrician, and Brian, a television producer, who live in Los Angeles, California. *Modern Family* introduces viewers to Cameron and Mitchell, a couple also living in Los Angeles. Cameron is a flamboyant and campy high school football coach, while Mitchell is portrayed as an often uptight lawyer. Finally, in *Difficult People* we meet Billy, a comedian, and Matthew, an aspiring actor, as well as coworkers at a diner in New York City. Once the shows were selected and the characters identified, the investigation began with the construction of the coding frame using Margrit Schreier's method for qualitative content analysis (2012). This was established from the research questions as expressed in the introduction, particularly: How are gay men and gay masculinity, in a generally broad context, constructed on television?

Using Schreier's method (2012), coding was done as both concept-driven (deductively), using insider knowledge of the gay community, the shows investigated, and previously conducted research, and data-driven (inductively) during the initial coding process and pilot (test) phase of the study. The initial coding process was conducted using the seventh season of *Will & Grace* (2004-2005) and the sixth season of *Modern Family* (2014-2015). *The New Normal* and *Difficult People* were not used during the initial coding process, because they each only consisted of one season. The goal of this

was to initiate coding from previous seasons rather than the seasons under investigation, in order to maximize the sample size.

In the initial process, five episodes each from *Will & Grace* (2004-2005) and *Modern Family* (2014-2015) were chosen from a random sample using every fifth episode. This was done to provide enough content to begin constructing the coding frame, per Schreier's (2012) method for qualitative content analysis. Selected were episodes 1, 6, 11, 16, and 21 from each series. During this phase, the initial main categories, subcategories and themes were constructed (Schreier, 2012). During the pilot phase of the coding process, three episodes each from the current seasons of *Will & Grace* (2005-2006), *The New Normal* (2012-2013), and *Modern Family* (2015-2016) were selected through a random sample of every eighth episode (episodes 1, 9, and 17 from each series). From here, coding was reviewed and revised to ensure all topics were relative to the shows being investigated and to include emerging themes (Schreier, 2012).

The main categories (dimensions) which were the focus of analysis included representations of mannerisms and activities from the gay characters within the shows. Here, I argue that mannerisms and activities are the primary and most inconspicuous ways through which individuals are able to identify others as gay through publicly held beliefs, often involving perceptions of camp (Kite and Deaux, 1987; Sontag, 1964; Thorpe, 2014). Subcategories were then constructed as masculine and feminine, since gay masculinity, as noted in the literature review, has historically been constructed around gender inversion (Battles and Hilton-Morrow, 2002; Kite and Deaux, 1987). These subcategories refer to mannerisms and activities that have social understandings of being either masculine or feminine. For example, masculine mannerisms include having a deep

and rough voice, being physically messy, or being aggressive. On the other hand, feminine mannerisms include greater expression in body language, language and speech, having a focus on interpersonal relationships, and being sensitive or having sympathy or empathy for others.

These subcategories were then broken down into descriptive themes. For mannerisms, themes included body language, speech (technical mechanics), language (content), attitudes and affections, personal style (dress and grooming habits), and code switching (mannerisms changing between masculine and feminine). Here, “body language” refers to the fluidity or rigidity of movement (e.g., swaying of hips), the level of physicality with other characters (hugging, holding hands or arm, etc.), speaking expressively with hands, having a limp wrist, and the use of “gayface”. Additionally, speech refers to the mechanics of the way the characters speak, such as the pitch and smoothness of their voice, whining, and the use of the gay accent. “Language” refers to the disposition of the content of what is being said by the characters. “Attitudes and affections” refers to a given character’s stances, inclinations (the character’s urge to act or feel a particular way), and temper and overall disposition (the inherent temperament or nature of the character). For example, in *Will & Grace*, Jack is seen as an overall happy, passionate and artistic person who is also often driven by self-interest. Code switching is also important in coding for this study because, as Goffman (1959) might argue through his concept of dramaturgy, in which an individual’s mannerisms are viewed through the lens of a theatrical performance. In these instances, the person (or character) analyzes the mannerisms of the people around him, and adapts his own mannerisms to be more

consistent with the group. For “activities,” themes identified included sports, consumerism, career, cooking and hobbies (see Appendix I for full outline of coding).

The main analysis was performed on 76 episodes from the four series discussed above. To do this, the coding spreadsheet was printed, and instances were tallied for each show and character under investigation (Schreier, 2012). Detailed notes were taken for each show in order to better track new emerging themes and instances. Through this process, I noted a characteristic known as the “bromosexual”, found in *Modern Family*, which was added to the theme “code switching.” Bromosexual is understood here as code switching from a state of generally feminine mannerisms to a state of hyper masculinity, occurring around particular groups of people, such as a fraternity, or during certain activities, such as a sports game. This will be discussed in greater detail in the findings and discussion section of this paper. Other emerging themes found in relation to code switching included stereotypical representations of “southern hospitality” and “Black youth”. Another emerging theme was the activity of cooking.

A code for cooking was added during the pilot phase when testing *The New Normal*. This was selected as a theme because cooking and food culture in general is often gendered, and the ways in which characters engage in cooking can be seen as an indicator of masculinity (Cairns, Johnston and Bauman, 2010; Szabo, 2014). For example, a gay man can be seen as more masculine when grilling or cooking with meats (Cairns, Johnston and Bauman, 2010; Szabo, 2014). All emerging themes found throughout the remainder of this study were added as notes and tallied at the end of the analysis. This was done in order to maintain consistency in the coding throughout the

study. Once emerging themes were added to the coding, the process was repeated until all themes were coded for each show.

Through the investigation, instances were tallied in two ways: per episode and per occurrence, which are noted in the coding scheme. Themes and instances that were tallied per episode were ones that had high consistency throughout the entirety of the episode, and involved emotion, body language, education, and speech. Other aspects of mannerisms that were less consistent, including facial expressions, language, attitude, and code switching, as well as all activities, and were tallied per occurrence in order to track their frequency. Other aspects such as housing, and relationship and family status were noted to account for the socioeconomic class, and the home or personal life of the characters being portrayed. This is important because it provides greater detail of the Harmless Homo as a particular model of representations of gay masculinity.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Representations on television can be seen by viewers as reflections of reality that may then be emulated by the public (Gerbner, 1998; Harmon, 2001; Hughes, 1980). In light of this, the portrayals of gay men can be manipulated to provide a version of gay masculinity that is more consistent with heteronormativity in both inclusion and exclusion. While enough separation can be maintained between heterosexuality and homosexuality to ensure continuing dominance of heterosexuals, the social status of white, middle-class gay men is simultaneously lifted. The rise in status could provide this representative portion of the gay community with increased opportunities, particularly in regards to income (i.e., opportunities for higher paying jobs), teaching both gay and straight viewers what it is to be gay, while increasing the overall number of viewers. This construction involves taking the sting out of the old "queen" and creating a more socially harmless version of gay masculinity.

While situating gay men as less threatening can be seen as having a positive overall effect on the reception of gay communities by straight society, it also neglects gay people of color and lower socioeconomic classes through a lack of quality visibility. The controlling images themselves, however, are able to teach gay and straight audiences about the daily lifestyles of gay men, including their mannerisms, activities, and style around fashion and grooming habits, as the application of governmentality and cultivation theory helps to illuminate.

For straight men, these representations can reinforce heteronormative dominance in society by situating gay men as the "other" through institutionally constructed

controlling images. While these images may be seen by some as being more positive, they still further homogenize the gay community, particularly around ideals of camp, various activities (e.g., following celebrity gossip), and style. For gay men, particularly younger ones, these characters teach them how to function in society as a gay man. This can include appropriate behaviors, speech patterns, body language, styles, and more.

Perceived Mannerisms and Activities of Gay Men

After examining the data, I have found a number of portrayals of gay men. While some of the characters are presented within the dyad of individual characters being primarily masculine or feminine (Brian and David), others are presented as engaging in activities that are oppositely gendered from the character's mannerisms (Will and Jack). Others still are shown residing in-between, with both masculine and feminine mannerisms and activities present in each character (Cameron and Mitchell). Within all of these classifications, there is code switching that occurs periodically to show that these are not static, unchanging qualities. While one character may be primarily masculine in both mannerisms and activities, code switching can still occur to show instances in which the character is represented differently.

Code switching occurs under a variety of situations as the primary character interacts with other characters throughout the course of an episode or season. In these instances, the character alters their performance to better fit in with a group or to add emphasis to a particular situation. More commonly presented were characters altering their performance to a more masculine or feminine state, usually for other men, either gay or straight.

While this simple, masculine/feminine code switching was more common, the most interesting and most related to camp was Cameron's code switching “problem” identified in the fourth episode of *Modern Family*. In this episode, Cameron is presented in series of scenes in which he is interacting with various groups of people in extremely stereotypical ways (Levitan, 2016). First, Cameron is seen interacting with a college fraternity. This is, as Mitchell explains it, Cameron’s inner “bromosexual”, which is where Cameron rapidly alters his mannerisms from his normal self to a “bro” mentality (Levitan, 2016). Then, Cameron is presented hosting a group of “southern ladies” to have tea and gossip, and, finally, a group of younger Black individuals screaming and yelling during a movie (Levitan, 2016). In each scene, he is portrayed using a variety of mannerisms that differ from those he typically exhibits, which is done in order to fit in more with the group he is interacting with. Mitchell explains it as a “pathological need to be liked,” to which Cameron agrees (Levitan, 2016).

The various types of mannerisms work together to further identify masculinity and sexuality among men. The variables identified here consist of body language, speech (mechanical), language (content), and attitudes and affections. These are of interest because they are all qualities that can be quickly observed and recognized when interacting with others (Sontag, 1964; Thorpe, 2014). These displays of mannerisms can inform gay viewers of the various ways in which masculinity can be successfully performed for gay men, however inaccurate these perceptions might be. At the same time, straight viewers are gaining an understanding of gay men through the perpetuation of controlling images, such as those surrounding the use of camp among gay men. As a result, the dominance of heterosexuals and heteronormativity are maintained. In addition

to these, code switching was also included because it is visible to viewers of the television shows, and it still provides the same lesson to gay men regarding proper social behavior, and how to switch between their “true” self and a constructed self.

The data show that, while every character investigated does present a combination of masculinity and femininity within their mannerisms, these are performed at varying degrees. For Will, David, and Billy, masculine or somewhat masculine characteristics are dominant. While all eight characters were portrayed in every episode in a feminine manner around body language and speech, Will, David, and Billy were observed in almost as many episodes as masculine in those areas. Providing a greater balance in regard to two areas (body language and speech) that can be used as identifiers of homosexuality. In addition to this, their feminine performances were also seen as less dramatic compared to the other characters.

The remaining five characters had significantly more feminine performances of body language and speech than masculine or hypermasculine performances. At the same time, the characters’ use of language differed, sometimes significantly, from their body language and speech. Where Will, David, and Billy are presented with more masculine traits in body language and speech than the other characters, their language often tended to be more feminine, relative to their speech mechanics. This was notable because it illustrates the varying levels of camp employed in their representations. For example, Cameron’s personality was presented as flamboyantly campy, with overly theatrical use of gayface, the gay accent, and body language. Mitchell on the other hand, is seen with what could be described as a more realistic style of camp. This includes the less dramatic, but still habitual use of the gay accent, gayface, and body language. In addition to these

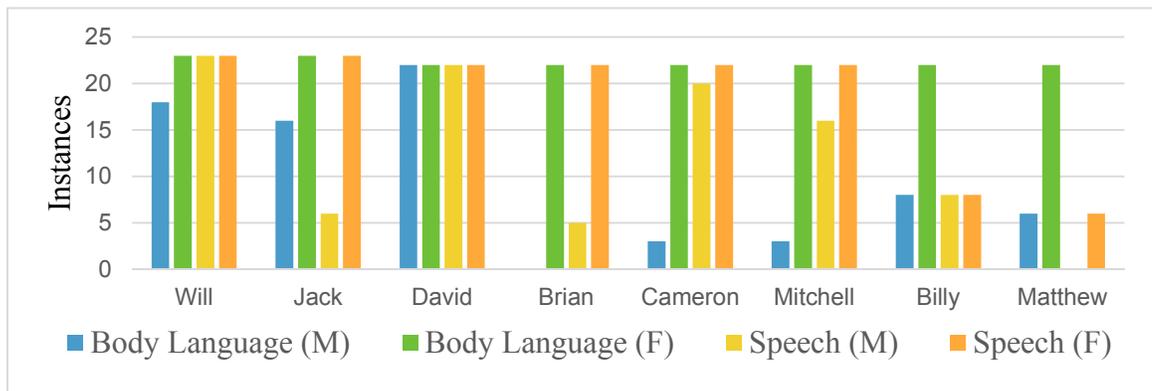


Figure I: Mannerisms

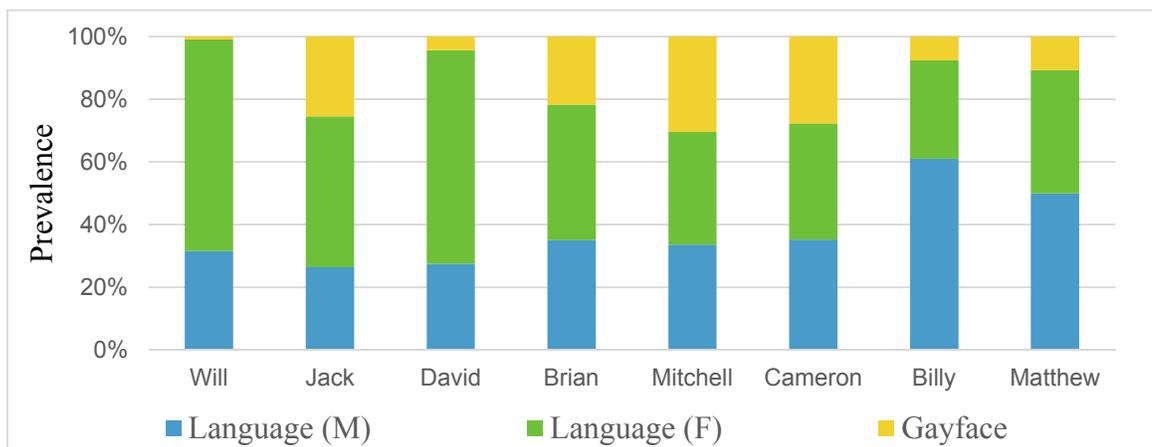


Figure II: Mannerisms Continued

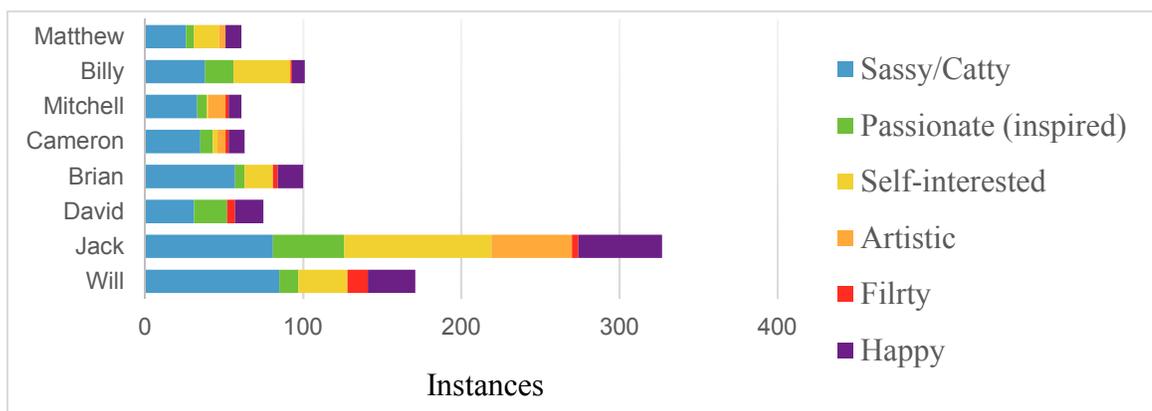


Figure III: Attitudes and Affections

mannerisms working to identify masculinity and sexuality, they also work to identify when a gay character is acting "too gay" (i.e., excessively campy). A similar example can be seen in *Difficult People*, in which both characters present these characteristics to varying degrees. Billy is depicted as much more toned-down compared to Matthew, whose performance is reminiscent of Jack's. Jack's performance is much more dramatic than his counterpart, Will. Other mannerisms important to this research were attitudes and affections.

All characters were overwhelmingly presented as catty or sassy compared to all other characteristics under this theme. Passionate (inspired and motivated), self-interested, and happy were also common attitudes and affections found among many of the characters, with about half of all characters per theme. While all of these characteristics can be used to identify an individual as included in the LGBT community, social norms simultaneously set limits to their use.

When camp or other qualities become excessive, the character performing the mannerisms is often met with ridicule by the other characters. An example for this can be found in the third episode of *Modern Family*, in which Cameron develops a crush on a straight man (Jace) who is a member of the fraternity renting out Cameron and Mitchell's upstairs apartment. In this episode, Cameron explains to Mitchell that he has a crush on Jace and held his hand while they were arm wrestling. As Cameron is telling Mitchell Jace's name, Mitchell insinuates that Cameron is using the gay accent too much when he says, "How many S's are in Jace? I count twelve," (Levitan, 2016). This informs viewers that while effeminate and flamboyant mannerisms are acceptable for gay men, using them in excess can lead to ridicule from others gay and straight. In *Difficult People*, Billy

often criticizes Matthew for being too flashy and flamboyant, especially when he is seen coming back from a shopping trip with their boss, Denise carrying bags of expensive clothing (Burns, 2015).

From a theoretical perspective, cultivation theory and governmentality can be applied to demonstrate these representations of mannerisms as being a means by which to control the gay community, primarily through self-governance. This is done by teaching individuals, through media representations, how to identify gay mannerisms, the limits for their expression and the appropriate response when those limits are exceeded, by either themselves or others. Additionally, queer theory can be used to illuminate mannerisms as an avenue through which "otherness" is maintained in the gay community, thereby sustaining the dominance of straight men. This is aided through the encouraged use of these behaviors from the characters themselves. Cultivation theory helps us understand that as these characters become more popular with the public in general, gay viewers would be more likely to assimilate to their now publicly expected mannerisms.

As some mannerisms presented by the characters can be viewed as masculine and heteronormative (e.g., having a deeper, more masculine voice or posture), other mannerisms are situated as more feminine in order to balance out the character's masculinity and to remind viewers that the given character is gay and therefore "different" from straight men. With the increasing number of heteronormative characteristics of gay men, such as being married and raising a family (which is a large signifier of masculinity), mannerisms that maintain "otherness" are required for balance.

While the mannerisms of gay characters are important to better understanding the type of gay masculinity being presented to viewers, the activities each character is

involved in provide a different perspective through which to view gay masculinity. Mannerisms provide an outward appearance for an individual's personality, while the activities they are involved in can show what the individual enjoys doing as well as what they are capable of doing, which reflect on a character's strength and skill level. Having greater skill in various physical activities can then be translated into a perception of more heteronormative masculinity within the character. In researching the four television shows, it became apparent that activity involvement is presented much less than the characters' mannerisms. The majority of episodes tended to focus on the social relationships between characters rather than activities, which included relational status and the portrayal of family. This is important since relationship status and the presences of children within committed same-sex relationships, such as marriages, is often viewed by the public as reserved for straight society (Han, 2007).

In *Will & Grace*, Jack is shown jumping from one infatuation to the next, without holding any long term intimate relationship. Will on the other hand, is seen in two important relationships throughout the eighth season. In episodes 10 and 14 through 16, Will is in a relationship with James, which is unsuccessful. In the final episode, Will is back together with Vince, his boyfriend from the seventh season. They are shown living together with a child. When activities were presented, they overwhelmingly included the characters' careers. This is significant because, while earlier television shows portrayed gay men taking on a more paternal role with children (such as Sydney from *Love, Sidney*), this episode was the first time a gay, male character was portrayed as either a biological or legal father.

Following this portrayal of LGBT family life, *The New Normal*, presented David and Brian in a committed relationship, and later married. Additionally, the season was focused on the couple expecting a child and building a relationship with their surrogate. In *Modern Family*, this is taken even further as Cameron and Mitchell are fully established in a family. Fans of the show see this from the first season when Cameron and Mitchell adopted their daughter, Lily, as a newborn, to the most recent season where Lily is around eight years old. The ways these characters are situated as committed family men is important to the integration of homosexuality into heteronormativity. With the portrayal of committed, same-sex relationships and families, queer theory is applied to aid in the understanding that in order to be accepted by society, minority groups must attempt to conform to the majority group in society (Han, 2007). *Difficult People*, on the other hand, breaks from this and situates the characters as mostly single and less interested in relationships.

Aside from relationship status and family life, activities tended to focus much more on the characters' careers. Nearly every episode either referenced the characters' careers or actually showed them at their place of employment. For example, while Jack actually has two jobs throughout the season, both are found within the entertainment industry. The first is as a talk show host and the second is as an actor on a TV police drama. Mitchell's career, on the other hand, was much more dynamic than the other characters. Mitchell went from being employed in the sixth season, to unemployed, employed again and finally starting his own practice, all within the seventh season. Cameron's career was the most interesting in relation to his portrayed mannerisms. While the character of Cameron presents himself as dramatically flamboyant and campy, he

works as a high school football coach. While engaging in his career, code switching occurs more frequently in the form of simple masculine/feminine dyad. In these instances, while Cameron is coaching (or even helping Mitchell coach), his voice tends to fluctuate between feminine when he is speaking with Mitchell or another family member, and hypermasculine when he is interactive with the players. In addition to careers, other activities the characters became involved in included cooking (mostly for the family or partner, which can be seen as a more feminine activity), and hosting or entertaining guests. These were performed, however, in very small quantities of less than ten instances per character, per episode.

From a theoretical perspective, queer theory can be applied and give insight into the idea the activity involvement of the characters is structured in a way that increases heteronormativity and provides greater balance around their personalities. For example, as Cameron is presented more often a flamboyant, his hypermasculine career works to balance his character, showing viewers that he is more than just a campy gay man. Also, through the application of governmentality and cultivation theory, the research and data might suggest these representations work to teach both gay and straight viewers what gay men can be capable of. This would also present to viewers the understanding that gay men tend to hold higher paying jobs. Although Cameron works as a high school football coach, and Billy and Matthew work as servers in a small café, all other characters (Will, Jack, Mitchell, David, and Brian) work in more prestigious and higher paying fields. Will and Mitchell are both lawyers, Jack and Brian are in the entertainment industry, and David is a doctor. The perception of prestige around careers provides sense of affluence

that lends itself to the characters' various fashion and decorating styles and personal grooming habits.

The Gay Consumer: Linking Gay Men, Metrosexuality and Consumerism

The characters' styles, as well as their living arrangements and career, indicate that gay men are known for style and wealth. Most characters are portrayed with either very high paying jobs or having the luxury of pursuing careers they are passionate about but are very difficult to get into. This, however, is not the only indication or illustration of affluence found in the gay characters. Although the activity of shopping did not have any significant involvement in the four seasons, grooming habits and clothing were very apparent. These can be significant indicators of affluence when viewing television shows.

In each of the four programs investigated, all of the characters, gay and straight alike, tended to be clean, well-groomed and well dressed. For the gay characters specifically, clothing tended to be louder and/or more expensive (i.e., designer or name brand). For example, of the few instances in which brand names for clothing were given, they were found within *The New Normal*, with mentions of Dolce & Gabbana (high-end fashion) and Wormley (high-end, luxury furniture). This can have the effect, as the Nielsen consumer report would suggest, of situating gay men as trendsetters. Since the rise of metrosexuality, gay men have increasingly been viewed as masters of style. As previously discussed, LGBT households also outspending their straight counterparts by 19 to 48% annually. Additionally, gay men are generally larger consumers of television and film.

By positioning popular gay television or film characters as consumers of specific products or having certain grooming and lifestyle habits, producers and distributors can

target real-world consumers through their favorite character, who they are more likely to emulate, as cultivation theory and governmentality illustrates. While these shows do not mention name brands of any particular product, with very few exceptions, all characters are presented throughout the majority of the episodes as being clean-cut and well dressed. Even though this does not present to viewers any specific brand to consume, it does show viewers the popular or appropriate ways to dress and groom themselves. With the perception of gay men as masters of style and grooming, along with the decreased stigma surrounding gay men (particularly from straight viewers of these television shows), straight men become targeted for this type of generalized marketing just the same as gay men. Through a queer theory perspective, I argue that the rise of metrosexuality has been inevitable.

If heterosexuality is to be dominant in society, then areas of gay culture, such as style and grooming habits, would need to be adopted or appropriated by straight men. When gay men are seen as “masters” or superior to straight men, through a queer theory perspective, adoption or appropriation of those things by straight men is required to maintain dominance. Through the lens of governmentality and cultivation theory, the representations found in this research suggest television representations have the ability to teach and encourage both gay and straight men to consume such products. In addition to personal, physical style, the living conditions of the characters, as well as the physical location, or city of residence, were also seen as an indicator of affluence. Living conditions refers primarily to housing, whether the character(s) rent or own, live in an apartment or house, and the physical state of their living environment. The environments in which the characters live are important because they can provide clues to the

character(s) ability to afford quality housing in areas that have a much higher cost of living compared to the national average.

In *The New Normal* and *Modern Family*, the characters reside in Los Angeles, California, which has a cost of living average that is 5% greater than the rest of California, and 42% more than the national average (areavibes.com, 2016). Housing, in particular is about 158% higher in relation to average cost, and rent is about 30% higher than the national average (areavibes.com, 2016). *Will & Grace* and *Difficult People* both take place in New York City, which also has a higher-than-average cost of living at 38% higher than the rest of New York and 68% greater than the national average. Housing cost in New York is 179% and rent is 34% above the national average (areavibes.com, 2016). Governmentality and cultivation theory illustrate that viewers of these shows could see these locations as the places and spaces in which gay men can be most successful, and therefore could be motivated to live there. Affluence and consumerism can also be found within each apartment or home in relation to décor.

In *The New Normal*, Brian and David live in a large house in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California. The views of the house that are shown throughout the season include a large, open kitchen, a formal dining room, an office with luxury furniture, and a guest house. In *Modern Family*, Cameron and Mitchell own a house with two apartments. Throughout the show's seven seasons, it is explained that the couple originally rented their apartment and were given the option to buy their unit. At the end of the sixth season, Cameron and Mitchell have bought the upstairs unit, and now own the house. They continue to rent out the apartment as a bed and breakfast in the seventh season. This is very important because owning property is one of the keys to the perception of success in

the U.S. In this case, Cameron and Mitchell own not only their own home, but a rental property as well.

In *Will & Grace*, Will and Jack both live in Will's multi-room apartment in New York City. This high rise apartment includes a large, open living room with a separate lounge area for watching television, two bedrooms, and a smaller, open kitchen. While *Difficult People* also takes place in New York, within its first eight episodes, viewers do not get a solid idea of their living conditions. It is known that Billy lives in an apartment, however, there was no confirmation that Matthew does too. At the same time, they both work in a café as their primary source of income, while also pursuing more prestigious careers of comedy and acting.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Homosexuality has been presented a number of ways over the last hundred years (Epstein and Friedman, 1995). These representations have widely kept gay men situated as caricatures, while positioning their portrayals as mirror images of the real world. This has led to a construction of homosexuality that is increasingly heteronormative while maintaining aspects of mannerisms and activities, such as camp, that keep representations of gay men separated from those of straight men. These portrayals work to inform society of the culture and lifestyles of gay men.

While teaching gay and straight men about the gay community and ways of performing gay identity, the television programs investigated are also working to encourage consumer citizenship around men in general, gay and straight. This is done through the practice of metrosexuality, or the appropriation of gay culture for consumption by straight society. The heterosexual men who engage in metrosexuality are seen as narcissistic and increasingly feminine (Hall and Gough, 2011). While queer theory argues that the representations on television are created to maintain the dominance of straight people in society, I argue that metrosexuality appears as a common ground for gay and straight men. Governmentality argues that the role of the media is to teach members of society to be productive; in capitalism, productivity allows for and encourages consumerism. The connection between gay men and consumerism can be found, as previously discussed, in the concept and practices of metrosexuality. This is the commodification of gay culture and style for the purpose of capitalist profit (Hennessey, 1995).

Through this research, I also found differences in the representations of gay men between broadcast television networks, such as ABC and NBC, and premium sources such as Hulu and Netflix original programming. This is important because it shows that while broadcast television networks have followed a particular criterion for the portrayal of gay men, the criteria is not always used for premium sources, such as Hulu exclusive programming. These types of premium shows could have more leeway in regards to the portrayals the shows make, which could provide a different perspective from other sitcoms. With increases in the number of users of these types of services, the landscape of LGBT media representations could change dramatically. As of now, however, LGBT images are primarily dominated by white and affluent gay men, with gay men of color and men of lower socioeconomic classes being maintained in the background. In light of these conclusions, additional research questions and ideas have been established.

Further research should focus on a cultivation or reception study to identify how contemporary depictions of gay men are actually received by viewers. This would be helpful in understanding the real world effects of representations of gay men in relation to the lived experiences of both gay and straight men. Further research should also reach out from these media representations to better grasp the ways in which the Harmless Homo impact the mannerisms and activity interests of gay men outside of television or movies, such as gay men in sports, both players and fans.

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Appendix

	Will & Grace		The New Normal		Modern Family		Difficult People		
	Will	Jack	David	Brian	Mitch	Cameron	Billy	Matthew	
Mannerisms									
Body Language - per episode									
Rigid (M)	M	3	1	22	0	0	3	0	0
Non/Less Physical (M)		18	16	3	0	3	2	8	6
Fluid (F)	F	23	23	7	22	22	22	8	6
More Physical (F)		5	4	5	5	13	15	0	2
Limp wrist		7	18	2	22	22	22	8	6
Hands (speaking with)		23	23	2	22	22	22	8	6
"Gay Posture" *		23	23	22	22	22	22	8	6

* hand on hip, jutted hip, correct/exaggerated posture, leg out to side, cocked neck

Facial Features - per occurrence									
Gayface **		3	79	12	65	78	88	23	18

** pouting lips, theatrical expressions, soft/feminine facial features, high cheekbones, well groomed appearance, tweeted eyebrows, makeup

Speech - per episode									
Rough/Hoarse (M)	M	2	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
Lower pitch tones & vocals (M)		23	6	22	5	20	16	8	0
Smooth/Light (F)	F	23	23	22	22	22	22	8	6
Softer tones & vocals (F)		23	23	22	22	22	22	8	6
High pitch tones & vocals (F)		23	3	2	22	12	18	0	8
Whining (F)		4	3	3	4	7	5	0	0
Gay Accent ***		0	23	0	22	22	22	8	6

*** lisping, corct/exaggerated annunciation, hard T, K, S, D sounds, elongated vowels

Language - per occurrence									
Aggressive	M	15	11	32	43	44	63	41	27
Tough		14	11	40	42	12	14	41	27
Non-emotional		11	2	0	2	3	2	28	1
Insensitive		56	47	0	5	18	18	41	27
"Man up"		7	5	2	8	3	5	0	2
Screaming		5	3	2	2	0	5	0	0
racist (undertones)		0	0	0	1	1	2	26	0
Upset/angry		7	3	1	2	5	3	8	0
Sassy/Catty	F	85	81	31	57	33	35	38	26
Sensitive		28	6	64	21	15	20	25	12
Less aggressive		33	13	40	31	21	24	3	3
Fragile		5	0	12	2	4	10	0	1
"Lover, not a fighter"		57	21	27	4	8	10	2	6
Speaking in euphamisms		20	18	3	2	3	5	25	18
Apologetic		5	0	3	2	3	4	0	0
Flirty		13	4	5	5	2	2	2	0
Crying		0	0	3	3	3	2	0	0
Giggling		0	5	0	0	0	3	0	0
Choking up		0	1	3	3	0	3	0	0
Attitudes/Affections - per occurrence									
Passionate (inspired)		12	45	21	6	6	8	18	5
Self-interested		31	93	0	18	1	3	36	16
Artistic		0	51	0	0	11	5	0	4
Suspicious		2	3	0	0	3	2	0	0
Filrty		13	4	5	3	2	2	1	0
Upset/angry		5	2	3	3	2	4	7	2
Happy		30	53	18	16	8	10	8	10
Sad/depressed		2	0	2	2	1	1	0	2
Excited		13	32	7	5	2	15	6	1
Supportive/Sympathetic		5	4	20	22	2	4	*8	*6
Panicked		3	3	5	3	2	3	2	1
Intimidated		3	0	2	0	1	0	1	1
Concerned with finances		0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Concerned with supporting family		0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0

Worried	2	2	4	3	1	2	2	1
Stressed	5	2	3	5	2	1	4	1

* Only towards straight paired character

Code Switching - per occurrence								
"Bromosexual"	0	3	1	0	4	19	0	0
Country	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Black	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	5
Un/friendly	3	0	4	4	2	1	8	6
Simple M/F	3	5	3	4	23	8	2	1

Style - per episode								
"bargain"/low-end fashion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sloppy	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Dirty	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
High-end fashion	23	23	22	22	22	22	8	6
Clean	23	23	22	22	21	22	8	6
Well groomed	23	23	22	22	21	22	8	6

Living Conditions (perceptions of affluence)								
Upscale	23	23	22	22	22	22	0	0
Clean/Tidy	23	23	22	22	22	22	0	0
House	0	0	22	22	22	22	0	0
Apartment	23	23	0	0	22	22	8	0
High-end decorating	23	23	22	22	22	22	0	0
Luxury furniture	0	0	22	22	0	0	0	0
Rent	23	23	0	0	0	0	8	0
Own	0	0	22	22	22	22	0	0
Separate dining room	0	0	22	22	22	22	0	0
Separate living room and family room	23	23	22	22	0	0	0	0

Activities								
Sports								
Football	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Basketball	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Soccer	*0	*0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Throwing	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Catching	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Coaching (for hobby, little league)	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Golf	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Arm wrestling	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
* We know Jack is good at this sport from a previous season								
Consumerism								
Groceries	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Clothing and Accessories	1	2	2	4	0	0	0	6
Technology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Homes	0	0	0	0	*1	*1	0	0
Cars	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Homegoods	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
* Upstairs Apt.								
Career - per episode								
Running own business/pretice	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	0
Secretary/Assistant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coach	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	0
Lawyer	23	0	0	0	19	0	0	0
Entertainer	0	23	0	0	0	0	8	6
TV Producer	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0
Doctor	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	0
Currently jobless	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Server/Food Service	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	6
Cooking								
In the kitchen - supporting family health, for the family, for partner	2	0	3	3	1	3	0	0
In the Kitchen - as a treat/durring special occasions/to show off	0	0	*0	*0	1	2	0	0
Cooking for \$\$	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Outdoors/Grilling	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fruits/veg.	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Pasta	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
*They hire people								
Hobbies								
Homemaker	4	0	0	0	3	3	0	0
Dancing	0	1	0	0	2	3	0	0
Painting	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Farming	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gardening	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Host/entertaining	0	3	2	2	2	3	6	0
Singing	0	0	0	0	6	2	0	0

Farmers Market (going to)	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Music	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Relationship								
Single	18	23	0	0	0	0	7	6
Partnered	5	0	22	22	0	0	1	0
Married	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family (married/partnered w/ children)	1	0	22	22	22	22	0	0