Visibility on Television: The Battle Between Heteronormativity and Queer Characters

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The Battle Between Heteronormativity and Queer Characters

Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science
Lynn University

By

Chulani Colastica Levenstone

2006
THESIS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

VISIBILITY ON TELEVISION:
THE BATTLE BETWEEN HETERONORMATIVITY AND QUEER CHARACTERS

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Chapter 1:

This thesis includes an introductory visual aid (DVD) to accompany the explanation of queer invisibility on television. The DVD uses clips, still photos and interviews from both professionals in the media and in the gay community to solidify these claims and argues that even though queer\textsuperscript{1} visibility has increased throughout history both socially and on television, there is still a need to increase visibility of queers and (especially queer minorities) through the medium of television.

The narration includes:

- Television's impact on society
- Gay subtexts which were used to hide gay visibility in cinema
- A brief history of the gay rights movement and first gay images on television
- Gay images in past popular shows and current ones
- Analysis of why gay images are important on television
- Final conclusion of gay visibility on television

This video encourages the reader to draw his or her own conclusion regarding queer visibility based on the information provided in the video and throughout this paper. It is imperative that no matter what conclusion the reader draws the essence of what the author attempted to carry out should undoubtedly resonate with the reader and make him or her more aware of the issues of queer visibility. Please watch the DVD before continuing on to Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{1} "Queer is now often used as an umbrella adjective or noun for those whose sexual orientation and/or gender identity do not fit societal norms." (BMC, 2004) (For the duration of this paper the term queer will now be incorporated to describe and summarize GLBT persons.)
Chapter 2: Strides in GLBT movement to affect visibility on television

The gay rights movement is an innovative and organized nonviolent movement that considers itself a community striving to secure civil rights and equality for its members by attempting to foster a relationship with other heterosexual groups who are open minded while maintaining a relationship with its own members as well.

As Stewart, Smith, and Denton point out in (Persuasion and Social Movements) a social movement can propagate its self through a nonviolent process. The authors write, “Social movements use the communication process of persuasion to present their case. That is they use verbal and nonverbal symbols to affect audience perceptions and to bring about changes in thinking, feeling and/or acting.” (Stewart et al, 2001) Kenneth Burke reiterates, in A Rhetoric of Motives, he writes “Rhetoric is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.” (1969) Therefore the gay rights movement can be considered a symbolic presence of more verbal, legal action and a strong force for advocacy of equality in society.

The GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) defines the gay rights movement as a movement for equality through verbal discourse and legal action and explains, “Our movement must be more than a collective noun. It must also be an action. Even the most vibrant, vital community can, over time, settle into a status quo. A movement cannot. And the success of our movement
is measured not only in the hearts and minds we change, the allies we engage and the civil rights we secure, but in the strength of our collective commitment to the pursuit of enduring social, political and legal change that moves us ever closer to true equality." (GLAAD, 2005) The history and inception of the gay rights movement can be traced to after World War II, when large gay communities formed in America's big cities as a result of war-time population migrations and gay persons who developed a stronger sense of group identity.

As Kenneth Burke explains, identity is a process that is fundamental to being human and to communicating. He contends that "the need to identify rises out of division; humans are born and exist as biologically separate beings and therefore seek to identify through communication, in order to overcome separateness." (Burke, 1969) In the 1940's, Alfred Kinsey's research created the foundation for changing American attitudes about sex and encouraging discussion of non-marital, oral and anal sex. As the sexual revolution gained steam, homosexual practices and identity did not seem as "perverted" as they had before (What led to Stonewall Riots?, 1999) and the gay community began to step out of the bedrooms and into society. This step was both liberating and difficult not only for many homosexuals but other sexual orientations that were not believed to be heterosexual. Society needed a shake up of awareness to these new lifestyles and that pivotal moment came in 1969.

As stated before, the gay rights movement is a nonviolent movement, however, on June 27, 1969 the Stonewall riots\(^2\) led gays and lesbians to

\(^2\)The Stonewall riots comprised of a group of GLBT persons rebelling for the first time against homophobic police officers. It happened on June 27, 1969 at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York.
advocate for equality and also create awareness of the existence of non-
heterosexuals; people that were associated by the term “others”. Becoming
“others” presented the idea and curiosity of a different sexual orientation and this
terminology proved rewarding for GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and
Transgender) people.

In addition to the Stonewall riots and demonstrations that followed, the
rebirth of old organizations and the establishment of a variety of fresh grassroots
organizations brought new visibility to the movement and led to more queer
exposure in the media. “Visibility is of course, necessary for equality. It is part of
the trajectory of any movement for inclusion and social change. We come to
know ourselves and to be known by others through the images and stories of
popular culture. There is nothing worse than to live in a society in which the
traces of your own existence have been erased or squeezed into a narrow and
humiliating set of stereotypes.” (Walters, 2001) The idea of administering
education on queer lifestyle is crucial to the heterosexual masses tolerable
acceptance of this social minority group. New knowledge of sexual orientations
allows society to be a composition of those lifestyles and gives way for the queer
community to be relatively expressive, liberal and in some instances tolerable in
otherwise conservative settings.

Today, the movement is still as progressive as it was 56 years ago but
moreover it has become a political catalyst for GLBT legal equality. John M.
Broder writes, “The gay rights movement, like other battles through history over
individual rights, has made progress in fits and starts, in the culture and in the
courts, in legislatures and in families. And like most political movements, it has always been riven with dissent on strategy and tactics, on questions of how far and how fast the movement can push without provoking backlash." (2004) Since the Stonewall riots backlash has been at a minimum and the gay rights movement is now more non-violent than rebellious holding sit-ins and peace marches. Some of the most recognizable initiatives of the movement have revolved around AIDS activism which has spanned over 22 years.

Although AIDS was first deemed 'the gay plague, AIDS and GLBT activists helped to change that perception. Organizations like ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), associated its tactics for rights with nonviolent civil disobedience, and made an invaluable contribution to saving people's lives in the face of governmental and societal indifference.

In more recent times the gay rights movement can be associated with the legalizing of gay marriage in the U.S., which seems to be one of the main objectives of the movement as activists fight to obtain the legal protections of civil marriage for same-sex families. While this issue has been a concern of the movement since the early 1970s, the issue was quiet until the early 1990's, when the Supreme Court of Hawaii issued a decision that would have granted same-sex marriage licenses but was subsequently nullified by a federal constitutional amendment giving the state legislature the right to define marriage.

As Hawaii was considered a threat for same-sex marriage, the U.S. Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act or DOMA, which defines marriage between a man and a woman under federal law. Under DOMA the government
does not recognize civil unions or gay marriage even if they are legal by a state. For example a same-sex couple couldn't file joint federal income taxes even if they filed state income taxes together. However, in 2003 the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that marriage laws prohibiting same-sex couples from having legal statuses and rights violated the state Constitution's equal protection clause. Now activists in many other states are chiming in to attempt approval for same sex marriages in their state as this is seen as a final peak in the gay rights movement.

It is evident to see that the issues of social identity, equality, legality and recognition still exists in the gay rights movement and continual discourse is vital, for it is here where the GLBT community, as a minority, gathers strength in the movement for civil liberties and freedoms enjoyed by the majority; the biggest freedom being to be able to have an open sexual identity in society.

Since GLBT identity, is a stronghold value of GLBT persons, their efforts for change lay in using this identity as a building block for solidarity and trying to create working relationships with other oppressed communities that share the same loss of identification, as opposed to the movement holding a stance as the constant opposition to oppressive institutions.

Today, the majority of Americans not only increasingly favor the notion of equality for gay men and lesbians, but trends in public opinion toward gay and lesbian equality have liberalized on nearly every major issue over time. (Yang, 1999) John Locke agrees and argues in his book, *The Second Treatise of Government* that, "all human beings have the same natural right to both (self-)
ownership and freedom" (1980) the freedom Locke speaks about is what has allowed visibility and representations of GLBT to trickle through various avenues of society and media including television portrayals.

GLBT Visibility in the Media

Representations of the GLBT community and its members have diminutively flourished on the television screen and have been instrumental in providing some representations of GLBT lifestyles. However, according to GLAAD Entertainment Media Director Damon Romine, these portrayals, even though fruitful, are still not accurate. He stated that network TV would be “gayer” in the 2005-2006 television seasons but still not representative of the nation’s diversity in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation. (Romine, 2005) “When GLAAD released its 10th annual survey about the state of gay characters on network television, it showed that less than 2 percent of all network characters are gay or lesbian. Of the 16 characters, 13 are gay men and three are lesbians. In addition, 13 are white, while the remaining three are African American, Latino and Asian American.” (Moylan, 2005)

When adding in recurring roles, the total rises to 16 out of the 710 regular roles on prime-time series. That's up from the 11 GLAAD counted in 2004, but still below the number that accurately reflects the GLBT population existing within society which has been estimated, since the Kinsey report in 1948, to be comprised of at least 10% of the population. That figure has been played with and a more accurate count, according to the Family Research Institute, could
place the percentage somewhere between 2%-10% even though an exact number is difficult to ascertain and gay couples are only counted as samples.

In addition to GLAAD, the website Tr!o Plus reported that GLBT and minority characters are not fairly represented stating, "More Americans (43%) feel that Gays and Lesbians are the target of the bulk of jokes on television with jokes about Blacks (13%) coming in at a distant second. Only 12% of those surveyed felt that jokes are spread out evenly among ethnicity and sexuality."

(2003) In The American Prospect, Joshua Gamson quotes Ed Morales of The Nation saying, "although Latinos make up 11 percent of the country's population, they are represented by only 2 characters on network programs." The same thing can be heard from Asian-American activists, organizations for the disabled, Native-American groups (2000), as well as, other underrepresented and misrepresented groups such as women, the elderly and the poor.3

As of August 21, 2006 GLAAD once again released a new study for the 2006-2007 television season and the number of gay characters on television is discouraging. The study entitled Where Are We on TV? reported that there are only three returning gay characters on network television; one on ABC's Desperate Housewives, another on NBC's ER and a closeted character on NBC's The Office. There are six other gay characters as well being introduced in new shows in primetime network television but none that contains a leading role. The figures show that gay characters only make up 1.3% of all regular characters on television. This is lower than what was reported in the 2005-2006 season

which may be evidence for a trend in continuing invisibility of gay characters on television.

GLAAD analyzed 95 new and returning shows on networks such as ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX and new stations such as The CW and MyNetworkTV. Of the 679 lead or supporting characters on those shows, there are eight gay male characters and one lesbian. There are another five semi-regular gay or lesbian characters but no bisexual or transgendered characters are represented. President of GLAAD Neil Giuliano says, "When you look at prime time's dismal lack of GLBT characters combined with the continuing under representation of people of color, gay and straight alike it's clear that the broadcast networks have a long way to go before they accurately reflect the diversity of their audience and our society." (Hernandez, 2006) GLAAD has only just started reporting on race and gender of queer characters but the organization has been producing this study for the past eleven years. This study is produced annually and it proves beneficial especially for this paper as a backing to the idea that there still exists a problem with queer characters finding a leading place on television.

In a democratic culture, such as the United States, it seems only fair to expect the mass media take responsibility and reflect society's demographics. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was once quoted saying, "Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal." The above statistics do not demonstrate Kennedy's philosophical statement. A vital call is needed for more exposure of sexualities especially those who rank on a lower sexual and racial
scale. Persons of these standings are known to possess a double minority status.

A double minority status establishes a person as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender while simultaneously holding the status of a non-white race. Some of these minorities within a minority group may include GLBT Hispanics, African-Americans or Asians. The rollercoaster of gains and losses of prior and current characters make it obvious, according to the report, that there remains a lack, on the part of media, to visually represent queer folk through the medium of television.

In her article, "TV's diverse characters help Americans accept gays," Deb Price claims, "heartening research reveals that hit TV shows also can be fabulously educational... Simply becoming acquainted with gay male characters reduces prejudice... The more TV brings the world's fascinating diversity out of the closet and onto the small screen, the less viewers fear being themselves or rubbing shoulders with people who are different." (2006) The article also referenced research conducted by Edward Schiappa (2004) who claims that the more the variety of gay characters on television, especially males, the more people's original stereotypes become undone.

In general, minority groups mobilize and gather strength from a shared commonality. Ultimately, then, a queer cultural integration of minorities on television appears to be the best place as the queer community has come a long way in its quest for visibility and social progress in society. GLBT persons have
managed to garner some of that visibility, but in 2006 "some" is not nearly good enough as the previous statistics have shown.

Today too, the queer African-American and Hispanic communities continue to fight for civil liberties enjoyed by the majority of people who tend to hold hegemonic\(^4\) and heteronormative\(^5\) powers. These two tools of control are used to maintain their status as minority groups and therefore limiting progress especially in the arena of advancing queer visibility. By educating and becoming more aware of the lack of queer representation and the resistance and non-resistance to heteronormative practices on television this thesis serves as a starting point for further discourse on the issue of representation and proper visibility both on and off the screen.

\(^4\) The preeminent influence, as of a state, region, or group, over another or others

\(^5\) Those punitive rules (social, family, and legal) that force us to conform to hegemonic, and heterosexual standards for identity. The term is a short version of "normative heterosexuality."
Chapter 3: The Importance of using television for visibility

In most business industries women and minorities still have underrepresented positions leaving the typical white male in the dominant role of having power. The same control of representational power is said to also exist in the entertainment industry where the underrepresented categories of race, age, gender and sexual orientation of minorities can be found both behind and in front of the camera. (Burandt & Brian, 1998) Using the vehicle of television as opposed to other media, as a portal, Suzanne Walters solidifies the idea that images, mixed in with sound, can become a powerful weapon for understanding and acceptance of queer folk if visibility is to remain intact and the removal of stereotypes is to begin. (2001).

When examining which medium proves more beneficial for visibility, television is more concentrated, minimizing millions into several, or even few channels; the main channels that are watched by millions namely, ABC, NBC and CBS. A counter argument that is often used for television visibility is the internet. However, that in itself is a weapon against visibility as too many voices get trafficked and lost among the millions of websites available. Thus, this study will focus on queer representations on television

"The vast majority of Americans continue to rely on broadcast and cable television as their primary source of information". (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2004). With at least 98% of the population or an estimated 280 million of US households owning one or more television sets there is no surprise to television’s popularity. "No other source of information, including
newspapers, radio and the internet, comes close to the power of
television...television combines the compelling images, music and dramatic
narrative of the movies, with the personal immediacy of talk radio.” (American
Progress Action Fund, 2005)

Television then is a very involving or “cool” medium. The screen is made up of millions of minute points of light that the human eye puts together to construct images. The human brain must work very hard while watching television to make all of the images coherent. In this way, television involves one deeply with whatever is taking place on the screen. (Mcluhan, Fiore, 2000)

“Television presents to its attentive audience a certain image of the world, providing a framework for what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in society, and also sends out implicit and explicit messages of what the world is like.” (Beasley, 1997) This is one reason why it is so important to activate the use of television as an educator and a social mover towards change

Television with its accessibility to millions of people would have the greater chance of communicating information and programming about gay social issues through already heavily watched television shows. “Television is a means of communicating, which implies that there must be creation, perception, and processing. Its popularity has led to the “information as commodity mentality” prevalent in modern America and around the world in a post-literate global village with an international visual language.” (McConell, 1993) By using visuals, television can be used as an advocate and show social groups who are not so visible in order to shape ideas, create discourse and potential acceptance among
the masses. This acceptance can be geared to everything from fears of persons living with HIV/AIDS to members of the transsexual community.

Television provides insight into popular culture, public opinion and changing cultural values. (Gruber et al, 2003) Prominent authors such as Suzanne Walters (All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America, 2001)\(^6\), Vito Russo (The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies, 1985\(^7\)) and Larry Gross (Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America, 2001)\(^8\) provided a more historical view of representation on television. This research adds to Walters, Russo and Gross’s already existing literature on queer representation and provides the reader with a newer perspective on the importance of queer visibility and the need for resistance to heteronormative tendencies via media representation in the form of sitcoms and dramas on prime time and cable television.

Patrick Kylo-Hart calls the phrase media representation “the ways that members of various social groups are differently presented in mass media offerings, which in turn influence the ways audience members of those media offerings perceive and respond to members of the groups presented.” (2000) In American pop culture, media tends to cultivate knowledge of the “real world” for its audience. This representation according to Larry Gross is a form of symbolic annihilation, where the powerful suppress the powerless and keep them there by exercising and marginalizing nonrepresentational characters on television. (1994)

\(^6\) All the Rage presents a readable and engaging overview of gay and lesbian cultural visibility in recent years, with emphasis on the growing representation in television. The book takes a middle-of-the-road view that cultural visibility, while good, does not necessarily imply progress in achieving political rights.

\(^7\) The Celluloid Closet presents the history of gays and lesbians in cinema, from negative to positive reflections of gay characters and the troubles of actors and actresses.

\(^8\) In Up from Invisibility media expert Larry Gross argues that while positive representations of gays and lesbians are a cautious step in the right direction the entertainment and news media betray a lingering inability to break free from prescribed limitations in order to embrace the complex reality of gay identity.
Kylo-Hart states, the “phenomenon of symbolic annihilation, therefore, pertains to the historical non-representation or under representation of specific groups by the media and/or to the trivialization of those groups when and if they infrequently appear as a result of decisions by the powers-that-be at media outlets regarding what sorts of groups will and will not be represented in American media offerings and how they will be represented.” (2000) Queer representations then become both important for queer folk, who need to see themselves in the media and heterosexuals, who may depend on media for information on the queer lifestyle.

Another way to look at the importance of television as a cultivator of ideologies towards a social group is through cultivation theorists and the study of culture. “Cultivation theorists are best known for their study of television and viewers and in particular for a focus on the topic of violence. However, some studies have also considered other mass media from this perspective, and have dealt with topics such as gender roles, age groups, ethnic groups and political attitudes.” (Chandler, 1995, Dominick, 1990) Henry A. Giroux explains the importance of culture theories, “…many cultural theorists acknowledge the primacy of culture’s role as an educational site where identities are being continually transformed, power, is enacted, and learning assumes a political dynamic as it becomes not only the condition for the acquisition of agency but also the sphere for imagining oppositional social change.” (2004)

The sphere allotted to the television screen has the potential to open a democratic transformation in society and cause changes in attitudes and
behaviors. Television's sole purpose is not to recreate what already exists in society. Television formulates its own reality creating perceptions that audiences may be drawn to and relate to. Denis McQuail in *Mass Communication Theory* writes about cultivation analysis, “In this theory of media effect, television provides many people with a consistent and near-total symbolic environment that supplies norms for conduct and beliefs about a world in itself.” (2000) Symbols are used to reach audiences, to create ideologies and to bring about change. In other words, symbols become the transmitter that influence and provide communication to the masses.

David Blakesley writes, “First, our symbols allow us to generalize beyond our individual experiences. What one human discovers can be shared with others, and then expanded upon, through symbolic representation. Second, our use of symbols allows our experiences to be replicable, because others, using similar methods, can reproduce our experiences, testing whether our conclusions are valid. Finally and perhaps most strongly emphasized in Burke's writings, our symbols can be used by "demagogic spellbinders" to deceive us.

Symbolic codes can be used to manipulate people, and through these codes, humans can be "filled with fantastic hatreds for alien populations they know about mainly by hearsay, or with all sorts of unsettling new expectations, most of which could not possibly turn out as promised" (Burke, 1966) What viewers then see on the screen, created by writers, directors et cetera are a series of codes which they must decipher to comprehend the actions taking place. “Our basic orientation to communication remains grounded, at the deepest
roots of our thinking, in the idea of transmission: communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people" (Carey, 1988) As humans it is in our nature to relate to these symbols whether they are verbal or nonverbal, (Stewart, et al 2001, Burke, 1969) therefore the frequent use and function of television and symbols can be associated with the media-centric theory that describes the mass media “as a primary mover towards social change”. (The University of Texas at Austin) To keep queer visibility stable in the public eye media’s role becomes primary.

Kylo-Hart references Clark (1969) on the criteria of how media representations of social groups are understood. Clark claims that the stages can be broken down into four phases: non-recognition, ridicule, regulation, and finally respect. In the non-recognition stage the groups are not visible in the media leaving viewers to perhaps believe that these groups do not even exist. Once the groups do emerge on television they experience ridicule often through stereotyping, such as on Amos and Andy\(^9\) or J.J. from Good Times\(^10\), according to Kylo-Hart. In the third stage the social members are stepped up in their roles and they become protectors of the existing social order such as policemen or lawyers, and in the final stage both positive and negative roles are given where the groups may not be considered as threatening to society.

The assumption of queer invisibility is based then on what Clark states, that the way social groups are treated on television would create a reflection of these characters in the minds of viewers to their existence in real life; minority

\(^9\) Amos and Andy was a television series in the 1950’s that had one of the first primarily black casts. The show was criticized for its offensive portrayals of African-Americans and after pressure from the NAACP was cancelled by CBS in 1953.

\(^10\) Good Times aired on television in the 1970’s and centered around a black family struggling to survive in a South Side ghetto in Chicago.
representational characters of “real life” have consequences and repercussions of what people can obtain and are delimited to in society.

Television and Queer Visibility

"Television has become the key source of information about the world, creating and maintaining a common set of values and perspectives among its viewers." (Gross, 2001) In this way, then, content and programming become essential and herein lays the problem. "While the frequency of GLBT characters is more frequent and less terrifying", author Steve Capsuto says, "Ongoing sexual minority roles are fewer and less varied than just a couple of years ago." (Lawver, 2002) Capsuto is not incorrect in this observation.

To those individuals who grew up during the 1950s - 1970s, today's television may seem to feature a wealth of positive queer roles, but it still fails to be sufficiently representative of the queer percentage in the population. The media, for the most part, also tend to narrowly define most queers as white, heterosexual and middle class. (Lawver, 2002, Sender, 1998) In the series Queer as Folk on the Showtime Network the entire cast is white with hardly any incorporation of an African-American or Latino characters during the series run. It's counter-part, however, the newly Noah's Arc on the Logo Network breaks that mold by presenting an all African-American cast.

Another perfect example of what could be called hegemonic and heteronormative practices can be viewed in the departed NBC network television show Will and Grace which was one of the few remaining “gay themed” programs
on prime time network in 2006\textsuperscript{11} that seemed to appeal to both heterosexuals
and homosexuals. Danielle Mitchell, however, calls the show “the new
homophobia on TV” arguing that the program works to enforce hegemonic social
relations of inequity in a broader sense. (2005) In other words \textit{Will and Grace}
tends to conform to the mainstream conservative ideology in American society
demonstrating the unequivocal lack of queer representation that is so
desperately needed and further showing a current division between race and
sexual identity especially in the form of comedy.\textsuperscript{12}

Even though the sentiments expressed by Mitchell are plausible one
should not forget the great contribution and accomplishments \textit{Will and Grace} has
provided to understanding the queer lifestyle. After comedienne and actress
Ellen DeGeneres’s show\textsuperscript{13} went off the air it seemed visibility of queer characters
would be dormant. \textit{Will and Grace} changed that, becoming a cultural
phenomenon winning numerous Emmy awards and constantly being in top ten
according to the Nielsen ratings for prime time television.

“Because television images cross all international borders, they become
more easily understood by almost everyone. Words are easily forgotten, but
pictures stay in our minds... If you have seen the picture, you remember it not
only because it is a highly emotional image, but because you have thought about
the image in your mind with words. Words and pictures become one powerfully
effective communicative medium inside your own mind.” (Lester, 2006) It is

\textsuperscript{11} There are other queer themed shows but on cable television such as Showtime’s \textit{The L Word}, Bravo’s \textit{Queer Eye for the Straight Guy} and \textit{Crumbs}, \textit{It’s All Relative} and \textit{the Book of Daniel}, which were cancelled on prime time television.

\textsuperscript{12} In Composition Studies, Heteronormativity, and Popular Culture, Thomas Peale of Boise State University gives examples of heteronormative practices used in \textit{Will and Grace}.

\textsuperscript{13} Ellen was a television sitcom on the air from 1994 until 1998. Ellen made television history outing both herself and her character in one of the show’s highest rated episodes. After that same episodes ratings started to decline and the show was cancelled in 1998.
important to see how dominant and influential images, especially those of persons that deviate from the heterosexual norm, can be helpful in trying to understand a different style of living as in *Will and Grace*, *Queer as Folk* and *Noah’s Arc*.

Imagery may become the most practical way of educating and ultimately assisting to raise the visibility of queer male double minorities. John Sculley, the former CEO of Apple Computers says, "We live in a visually intensive society, look at the most common medium for visual expression - television. Programs can be watched from direct broadcast, from cable and fiber optics, from satellites, from VCRs and from laser disks. On some television sets you can even watch more than one program at a time. In a television commercial for Kodak's Photo CD technology in which still images can be viewed on the screen by a CD disk player, the announcer reports that "Pictures have never been so powerful." (Lester, 2006) By visually attributing the characteristics of characters with imagery on the screen the power of exposure to double queer minorities becomes more imbedded in the minds of viewers.

This presents a recurring problem because although past and current images existed much of the characters were downplayed and reduced to supporting roles on television. If the images play such an immediate role to viewer's perceptions then there is a responsibility to place these characters in the best light possible and not behind a black curtain. "The message that this double standard sends to people is that although it is acceptable to acknowledge the existence of gay people, their lives should be hidden away. This reduces these
characters to token gay characters whose existence, while intended to reveal the "progressive" sensibilities of the TV networks that produce the programs, ultimately send an implicit message to television viewers, both gay and straight, that although gay people exist, their interests, their loves, their fears and joys, indeed their entire lives should be hidden from view." (Gribble)

There is no other medium that proves more useful to depict this need for visual substance other than the television screen. Although television frequently gets a bad wrap it is still a fast medium capable of reaching millions of people in a short period of time and has the potential of delivering decent information free of hegemonic and heteronormative ideologies through balanced visibility. "Perhaps the most fundamental dilemma is one of freedom versus constraint in an institution whose own ideology places a value on originality and freedom, yet whose organizational setting requires relatively strict control." (McQuail, 2000) However when the networks are controlled and run by predominately white males and 'profited by advertisers achieving ultimate visibility may seem disheartening.

American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, however, disagrees and finds hope by stating, "If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place." It is by provoking more thought and inciting discourse, that double queer characters stand a chance of continued visibility on television.
Chapter 4: Analysis of *Will and Grace, Queer as Folk, and Noah’s Arc*

This chapter seeks to analyze television portrayals of queer male characters in *Will and Grace, Queer as Folk, and Noah’s Arc*. As opposed to queer female characters, male characters are specifically used because they better reject society’s strong heteronormative makeup. The threat to defend anything but the privileged identity of a patriarchal masculine figure is of particular interest to the researcher. Thus to better understand queer males representation on television, the researcher used characters from the above-mentioned series to discover whether these characters help explain and represent queer lifestyle and behavior in society to both heterosexuals and queers.

After watching all the episodes of the above-listed series the researcher extracted various scenes and episodes from each show which poignantly describe and reiterate the resistance or non-resistance to heteronormative traits and how they are incorporated or excluded from the series to either delimit or enhance queer visibility. This analysis will also help to reveal other variables such as content and framework of the representations on the shows.

To carry out this analysis the researcher will use Croteau and Morgan’s (1989) guidelines for accurate portrayals of queer characters with HIV on television. Although their method is directed towards these types of representations it may also to be applied to representation of queer characters without HIV. In their findings characters must: 1) Be carefully scrutinized for unintended homophobic messages or insulations. This means that verbal
derogatory innuendo against the queer lifestyle exist with characters and is shown on television in a way that is suggestive and insulting to queers in society.

2) Be accurate, caring, and affirmative. Characters should not tend to represent a stereotypical atmosphere of the queer lifestyle. If representation exists it should be presented in a way that does not place queer characters in a deviant light but in atmosphere that reiterates positive representations. 3) Be encompassing of information about the full range of choices available in gay male life and in homosexual expression. Characters should not be limited or subjected to any type of single queer representation. Representation in the form of physical interaction, sexuality and queer lifestyle should positively represent and not hinder the free flow of information regarding queer lifestyle.

These guidelines disperse a generalization for surveying content. The researcher shall incorporate all three guidelines to show how this analytical process can lead to the revelation of whether the shows carry resistance or non-resistance to the heterosexual lifestyle. Through these variables the reader will be able to clearly differentiate, identify and understand how queer and heterosexual sexualities are in constant representational conflict as well as what type of discourse needs to be implemented to further penetrate the struggle for more visibility on primetime network television.

4.1 Will and Grace

*Will and Grace* began its run on the *NBC* network on September 21, 1998. In its eight year run on primetime television the series has won at least eighty three Emmy Awards including one for best outstanding series and has also
managed to receive Golden Globes and People’s Choice Awards just to name a few. The main characters are Will and Grace who, although they had a past romantic boyfriend/girlfriend relationship, are now best friends.

Will is a prominent gay lawyer while Grace is an interior designer and heterosexual. Their relationship of being less than lovers, but sharing a special bond, balances the show’s wit and comedy. In addition to lead characters, supporting characters Jack and Karen add a touch of “gayness” to the show. A struggling actor, Jack is Will’s best friend and flamboyant to Will’s moreover heterosexual demeanor. Karen, whose character can be considered bi-sexual, is Grace’s lazy, wealthy, alcoholic and sometimes recreational drug-using assistant at her design firm.

**Carefully scrutinized for unintended homophobic messages or insulations**

In season three episode ten of *Will and Grace* entitled *Coffee and Commitment* which aired on January 4, 2001 the concept of homosexuality is switched for heterosexual values when a commitment vow being read by Will and Grace for a same-sex couple (Larry and Joe) is actually replaced by Will and Grace repeating the vows to each other. This symbolic act not only downplays the bonding of marriage between two males but unknowingly sends a message that male to male love commitment is still intimidating. As far as any form of commitment and desire between a man and a man in the final scenes of this episode is concerned, that is scripted out, and commitment between a man and a woman is reinforced.
The scene opens with Will coming home carrying both his and Grace's dry-cleaning. Previous episodes usually rely on Will as the provider to all his friends because of his status as a lawyer. Will though, expects payment this time around from Grace for her share of the costs, but she says she will pay him later.

That evening, after dinner with Larry and Joe, (Larry and Joe are seated on one side and Will and Grace on the other) Grace insists that both she and Will pay the bill. But she passes the tab to Will and tells him to put it on his visa, reminding him that they need more frequent flier miles. When Will reluctantly opens his wallet to pay, Grace then takes some dollars from his wallet for the coat check. She also reminds him to leave the waiter a big tip, since he was the only man at the table who looked at her chest all night long.

It is clear to see how Grace has taken advantage of Will and how that would make anyone annoyed. Therefore these two characters have not obtained separate statuses but more of a partnership disguised to be that of a heterosexual relationship without any sex. The problem is that Grace expects Will to always take care of her and the means with which she exploits him are never really addressed.

To show how sick and tired he is with Grace's attitude, Will refuses to let her sign the card that he attaches to the commitment gift to Larry and Joe, which then leads to an argument between Will and Grace. Karen, in an excellent evaluation of the actual tension between the two, says, “Just climb on top of each other and get it over with already.”
Just before the start of the ceremony Grace is persistent as to why Will won't let her sign the card, finally Will declares, "Because I don't want a wife." Grace replies, "What are you talking about? Wife? And don't you walk away from me while I'm talking to you!" It is during the actual commitment ceremony between Larry and Joe that their argument is resolved. Grace simply denies to Will that their relationship is anything like a marriage; however, all evidence of that begs to differ as well as evidence of hegemonic and heteronormative antics.

As the ceremony progresses on, Jack ends up not reading what Larry and Joe have asked him to read, but instead reads the words to Tina Turner's "What's Love Got to do With it?", until the minister cuts him off. Joe's sister, who has also been asked to do a reading, shows so much anguish because she hasn't found a man, but yet her brother has, that she can't even finish her reading.

Will then reveals how mad he really is that Larry and Joe are committing to each other and how he seems to be always trapped in a heterosexual marriage to Grace. Instead of Will liberating himself from Grace, as he had begun to do earlier in the show, Will exchanges vows of commitment with Grace.

Finally, it is time for Will and Grace to read a passage for Larry and Joe. Through reading the passage together, they discover that the words are more a reflection of their relationship than Larry and Joe's. The passage says that they are complete within themselves, in complete contradiction to everything that has come before. After the reading is final, Will and Grace continue to interrupt the ceremony. Will says, "I love you, you know that, right, don't you?" to Grace. She
replies, “I do, and you know I love you, right?” And Will says, “I do,” and they kiss on the lips and hug. The audience claps, and Grace thanks them for coming.

Thus, Will’s resistance to the hegemonic regime of the heterosexual norm ends with him submitting completely to the expectation that he enter a heterosexual partnership by way of saying “I do” when reading the vows. Furthermore, since Will and Grace exchange vows during the commitment ceremony, Will and Grace effectively replace the homosexual commitment ceremony with a heterosexual version of the same thing.

In actuality now Will and Grace have committed, and all of Will’s previous claims remain untouched and binding showing that there is non-resistance to heterosexuality and resistance to queer commitment because at no point is the commitment between Larry and Joe central to the action or even finalized. In other words, there is no celebration of the two men’s love, but rather a reiteration of heterosexual values and a confirmation of homophobic conservative heteronormative mainstreaming that continued in other episodes throughout the seasons.

For example, in season eight Will has a relationship with a Canadian named James who he wants to marry but cannot because of James and his Canadian citizenship. James then marries Grace to obtain a green card to be with Will, but after the introduction of James and his marriage storyline to Will via race, he was scripted out of the show as he turned out to be a compulsive

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14 See the “You Tripped” Episode: Will and Grace Season 8
15 See the “Definition of Marriage” Episode: Will and Grace Season 8
liar. Will annuls the marriage, is single once again, and becomes Grace’s crutch, dealing with her heterosexual issues.

The reluctance to the queering of the show however is brought out in its complicity with heterosexual norms in the finale, which should have dealt more with the separation of queer characters to heterosexual characters. Once again the nuclear heterosexual family is represented, only this time Will and his partner have a son, and Grace and her husband have a daughter. We never see Will and Grace actually together but the idea of the two having children that represent each of them is the most interesting display of heteronormativity suggesting the continuing hegemonic cycle of pairing males with females and producing offspring.

**Accurate, caring, and affirmative**

It can be determined that *Will and Grace* does not seek to push the envelope on queer issues and it unknowingly shows a softer side of homophobia by submitting to the heterosexual lifestyle more so than creating a queerer world. The show does, however try not to omit queer issues, covering such topics as gay parenting, difficulties coming out and sexual orientation discrimination.

As *Will and Grace* is a comedy series, comedy acted as a way to change an individual or the society perceptions of queers using laughter. The lightness, the comedic angle, and interest to what happens to the characters in *Will and Grace*, proved helpful to achieve that goal seeing that it was constantly in the Nielsen ratings’ top ten every week for a period of time.

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16 See "Grace Expectations" Episode Will and Grace Season 8
Encompassing of information about the full range of choices available in gay male life and in homosexual expression

Though at times there is resistance to queering the show wholeheartedly, *Will and Grace* appears to be tamer, more enticing and perhaps tolerating to some closed minded heterosexual audiences, who would be curious to discover queer actions, the queer world and queer lifestyle. Luckily, Will and Grace provided an antidote to incorporating all aspects of curiosity and attempts to express representation and social issues through Will, Grace, Karen and Jack individually.

Each character in *Will and Grace* delivers a make up of certain categories of people who exist in society. The show gives both variations of sexualities (bisexual, heterosexual and queer) and social classes (wealthy, middle and poor) in their representation. Through these available representations the audience can observe how interaction occurs and what the results encompass this interaction.

### 4.2 Queer as Folk

Cable television embraced homosexuality with the December 1, 2000 premiere of *Queer as Folk (U.S)*. This five-year-run drama focused on a group of gay friends living in Pennsylvania. It focused on their lives, relationships, careers, loves, trials, tribulations and ambitions as gay men. The show also took on various issues which were important and still are important such as HIV, gay
When the show first appeared many felt that the show was more focused on explicit sexual portrayals than on issue since it was hipped up for an American audience as opposed to its sister show Queer as Folk (U.K. of the same name) which originally aired in Europe. The show also had two lesbian characters whose presence was usually consistent in each episode.

The characters included, Brian, a successful, advertising executive with a very high sex drive; Ted, an accountant who tends to have low self esteem, Emmett, who like Jack of Will and Grace, is flamboyant, and works odd jobs; Justin, a high-school student turned graphic artist, who comes out of the closet and forms a relationship with Brian; Lindsey, an art teacher, her partner Melanie an attorney; Brian’s childhood best friend Michael and his partner Ben who is a history professor and HIV positive (Michael is not). The series has won seven awards and been nominated twenty times by other foundations but has never received either Emmy or Golden Globe nominations.

Carefully scrutinized for unintended homophobic messages or insulations

In opposition to comedy, the drama Queer as Folk refutes traditional family values and traits by showing Michael and Ben and Lindsey and Melanie as married gay parents raising children as well as rejection to queer stereotypes and hegemonic tendencies. Unlike Will and Grace, Queer as Folk tends to resist the ideology of heteronormative behaviors and homophobia while attempting to
stand firm in queering and maintaining that queer image with its characters throughout the series.

A good example is that where an ensemble cast such as this could be portrayed as deviant or as comedic relief the show does just the opposite by showing powerful, strong, and alive queer characters. The series does more than maintain the queer world which it has constructed: it becomes a battlefield for advocacy especially in terms of politics, representation and queerness.

This resistance to a “straight world” and not putting up with derogatory rhetoric against queers is most prevalent in the main character, Brian whose behavior almost makes him the political hero and vehicle of anti hetero normative thinking. In one episode Brian and Lindsey are walking down the street with their son Gus who Lindsey had through artificial insemination with Brian. In the same instance, across the street, a car dealer gazes through the window and views what he assumes is a heterosexual couple with a baby.

Brian kisses Lindsey and heads over to the car dealership to look at new cars. Because of what the car dealer sees he tries to convince a customer to buy another car other than what he wants. In the process he makes heteronormative remarks comparing the cars to queers and what heterosexual men should drive. Brian is disgusted by what he hears and asks to take one of the cars for a test drive to which he drives and smashes through the car dealership proving a “real man” can be gay and still drive a good car.
Accurate, caring, and affirmative

In Episodes 12-15 of the first season, *Queer as Folk* dealt with a really fine storyline involving non-heterosexual confirmation and affirmation to a queer status. The accuracies and portrayals show that there are some movements in society that attempt therapeutic reparative conversions such as Love in Action (LIA) and Evergreen International who are determined to maintain the heterosexual norm and reverse queer behavior.

When a really handsome guy asks Emmett to attend a gay conversion church group called “See the Light” Emmett is resistant at first but then after questioning his lifestyle decided to proceed anyway. Ted and Michael don’t agree and suggest “See the Light” isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. The group really downplays the queer lifestyle as they reiterate to Emmett the many negative stereotypes associated with queer life such as relentless sexual escapades and endless idle chatter over pop culture and fashion.

Emmett continues to attend the meetings and eventually goes on a date with a “former” lesbian named Heather. While walking on the street Emmett and Heather see Mel and Ted. There is a brief confrontation between the four when Heather is introduced and she suggests a double date. Emmett informs her that Ted and Mel aren’t a couple to which Heather replies, “I thought you looked normal when I saw you hugging.” Mel affirms to her that she is indeed normal being “a leso” and wonders what possessed Emmett to go through with this conversion of becoming straight. Heather replies and says, “See the light is helping us build a healthy heterosexual relationship.” Mel gets seriously outraged.
by Heather's comments and declares "You're setting back the gay rights movement about 50 years."

Emmett and Heather, however, continue dating and eventually attempt heterosexual sex. The two agree to use heterosexual decoys to be aroused, but on screen that does not happen. Heather imagines a voluptuous woman while Emmett, a muscled jock. The two complete the sexual act but it is obvious that they are uncomfortable with what has just occurred.

The next day Ted and Michael visit Emmett at "See the Light" and Ted delivers an emotional last plea, telling Emmett that God created everyone in his image, he doesn't make mistakes and that if God is love and he doesn't make mistakes, then Emmett is exactly the way God wanted him to be, the way he intended him to be. Ted concludes and says, "...that goes for every faggot and that God loves us love all." The speech works, Heather and Emmett are thrown out of the group, after they reveal they each rather be with the same sexes.

Instead of making Emmett a complete new heterosexual Queer as Folk resisted that lifestyle and sent a strong message that homosexuality should not be subject to heterosexual transformation. It also managed to show how Emmett's friends love and compassion outweighed the group's hegemonic influence.

Another way Queer as Folk inadvertently resists the heterosexual lifestyle but has fun with it at the same time is with the content of sex acts throughout the series. Although critics may pose an argument that the sexual acts performed confirm society's beliefs that this is all queerness is reduced to, nothing but acts
of sex between men, *Queer as Folk* does the opposite. In fact, by portraying explicit sex acts the show can get much more of its political content introduced and viewed. As the audience is left looking at a sexually addicted queer person, sexual discourse continues and presto *Queer as Folk* has made its point that it does not have to hide these sexual acts by ascribing to the ideology that these acts are considered inappropriate.

**Encompassing of information about the full range of choices available in gay male life and in homosexual expression**

One may argue that *Queer as Folk* is allowed more freedom on cable television to portray its representations of queer life. In comparison, *Will and Grace* which has a larger viewership because it is on network television is not as representative of queer culture. This is unfortunate because accurate representations provide a vital asset to encourage acceptance of queer people on their own terms rather than ascribing to an ideology that encourages conforming to mainstream conservatism and “normalizing” the queer characters to appear more like heterosexuals.

In addition, *Queer as Folk* tends to show a laundry list of important issues in queer life such as homophobia as in the events of Season Five when a homophobe releases a bomb in a gay nightclub killing four people. They also tackle young people having HIV and what impact it has on their lives. The show itself is not all gloom and doom as it offers many positive representations of the queer lifestyle such as close community bonds and activism for equality. Each
character portrayal in *Queer as Folk* lends a tidbit of representation to queer folk who exist in society. The struggles of these characters are not far off from the struggles currently happening to queer members of society. Here is where *Queer as Folk* gets representation right: It does not sugarcoat or try to hide queer lifestyle but merely suggests this lifestyle exist and that undermining its portrayals would be as Melanie suggests, setting the gay rights movement backwards.

**4.3 Noah’s Arc**

On the heels of *Queer as Folk*’s departure the all gay network called *Logo*, which was launched June 28, 2005 aired the series *Noah’s Arc* which made its debut on October 19, 2005. Following the same premise of *Queer as Folk*, but with an all black cast, the series follows the lives of four gay friends in Los Angeles. It deals with their lives, loves, careers, perseverance and wit.

Noah, the main character for whom the show is named is a struggling screenwriter dating a supposedly “straight” guy named Wade; Alex is an HIV/AIDS counselor/educator while his boyfriend Trey is an anesthesiologist; Ricky owns his own clothing store and is just as promiscuous as Brian in *Queer as Folk*; finally Chance is a professor married to his partner Eddie who has a daughter. The show has already aired nine episodes in its first season and starts its second season in August 2006.
Carefully scrutinized for unintended homophobic messages or insulations

In *Queer as Folk* and *Will and Grace* the differentiation of character portrayals is clear. However, in Noah’s Arc the picture is clearer. The most intriguing storyline the show offers deals with the “push and pull factor” of a heterosexual and queer lifestyle happening between Noah and Wade. *Noah’s Arc* does not blatantly show homophobia, however, the fear of a queer lifestyle is suggested through Wade’s refusal to accept himself and conform to Noah.

Noah and Wade usually hang out together at a coffee house to write, and the supposedly-straight Wade flirts with Noah mercilessly. Wade even goes so far as telling Noah that he finds him “sexually enticing,” but adds that for anything to happen between them there would have to be a woman involved.

Consequently, Noah and Wade’s first sexual encounter begins as a threesome with a model Wade knows, but the girl is kicked out by the end of the scene. As the series progresses, Wade proves to be the perfect boyfriend as he is now dating Noah. He is sensitive, successful, attentive, as well as a monumental risk, someone who dips his foot in the pool but may never dive in.

In the first episode, Noah is reluctant to introduce Wade to his queer friends when they run into each other on the beach, because he still thinks Wade is 100% straight and Noah is somewhat ashamed of his pals’ flamboyance demeanor. Likewise, in a future episode Wade tries to get Noah to turn his flame down to a candlelight when he’s about to meet Wade’s heterosexual friends.

In the second episode, Noah brings Wade to brunch with his friends and Wade’s ignorance and unknowledgeable thoughts about queer culture makes for
some awkward moments. Noah and Wade work to try and establish a consensus between their sexualities but tension develops as they try to emerge from their shell and integrate into each other's lives.

Wade eventually warms up to the idea that he is gay and that moment of acceptance comes when Noah is presenting a pitch to Paramount Pictures and the producers feel the ending does not have that "wow" factor. Noah is accustomed of having at least one of his characters gay, but earlier when writing the script, Wade felt that the studio would not go for that idea as they would prefer to stick to the mainstream.

In an attempt to win over the producers, after they are not sure about the original plot ending, Wade makes the characters gay, the studio is thrilled with the idea and the pitch is sold. It is so ironic that more of this does not happen in Hollywood. But what is even more ironic is that Wade becomes comfortable enough to realize who he is and recognize his feelings towards Noah. Through Noah, Wade accepts himself and so do Wade's straight friends.

Wade is probably the best example of the show’s ability to draw complex characters to show how heterosexuality and queerness rival. He’s butch and insists he isn’t gay, yet he is drawn to Noah and is attracted to him. Even after Noah and Wade have sex for the first time he shyly admits that he liked it, but is scared, Noah also admits he is scared. This is typical for anyone gradually "coming out" and the writers handle Wade’s sexuality carefully by showing how accepting and tolerable his straight friends are once he does exit the closet.
Accurate, caring, and affirmative

These double queer minority characters bring an urban experience to television showcasing that queer African-Americans can find a place on the screen. The show not only adds a combination of comedy with drama but seriousness about African-American heritage, queer African-American stereotypes and religion.

The show’s storylines and experiences shared between the characters do not exhibit any sense of conforming neither to similarities of Caucasian queers such as in Queer as Folk or heterosexual heteronormativity as in Will and Grace. Instead, the show deals mostly with interpersonal situations that the characters are placed in while existing in a society where they are otherwise not spoken about or shown in.

They are very successful, smart and don’t over exert the sexual aspects of their characters; something that Queer as Folk has been criticized for when it first aired and perhaps a fundamental reason why the show was not received well by heterosexuals who would think the sexual content was “pushing the limit”. Noah’s Arc adds just enough content but not as much to further insinuate African-Americans are promiscuous. Instead the series does well to educate and breakdown issues of blackness. For example, in one episode, Chance explores his hip-hop side showing that within the black community variations of queerness can be placed into sub categories such as a “thug” or “homeboy”.
Encompassing of information about the full range of choices available in gay male life and in homosexual expression

The writer of *Noah’s Arc*, is Patrik-Ian Polk who as a gay African-American man knows what his audience would most care about and should be educated about which is that: 1) The idea of homosexuality versus heterosexuality shouldn’t be over exerted. 2) Queer African-Americans can be portrayed not as stereotypical characters but as characters who are not drug-dealers, sex addicts or deviant closeted queers. 3) The simplicity of the show works well to convey the issues prevalent in the minority community while being entertaining and 4) The show is not provocative however it is groundbreaking and therefore deserves more attention since it is the first show to feature an all queer cast of African-American characters. The only criticism of the show is that since it is a diversified series, more cultural character integration such as the portrayal of Latinos would only help to push the show’s audience base. It would also make the show a stand out to its counterparts in the area of increased representation.
Discussion

As the reader may have observed the chronological order of the appearance of the shows starting with *Will and Grace* helped add fire to the visibility train of queer representations on television that led to *Queer as Folk* and currently *Noah's Arc* being shown. The trend that each time a show either "wraps" up as a series or is cancelled by the network is reciprocal; something else new and exciting usually comes along.

As stated in Chapter 3 the cancellation of *Ellen*, due to declining ratings, opinions of viewers and because Ellen Degeneres decided to both "out" herself in real life and her character Ellen Morgan on the series, made it seem as if perhaps queer visibility would be dormant. That as we have come to realize is not the case as three years later *Will and Grace* premiered on *NBC*. Now that *Will and Grace* is off the air it will be interesting to see if any network would put another queer show with queer main characters on television to keep visibility going.

Queer visibility although minimal and usually not in the forefront and available to everyone exists to the point of where characters can be now easily recognizable and pointed out. The problem, however, still exists that the queer content only shows remain solely on cable and not on prime time television; these include *The L Word*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and the new series *Dante's Cove*\(^\text{17}\). Media representations of queers and especially queer minorities on prime time television may act as a gay movement itself cultivating perceptions

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\(^\text{17}\) This program focuses on a group of attractive characters who live in an apartment complex on the beach called the Hotel Dante. The young residents are gay, lesbian, bi and straight, at a point in their lives when they are full of hopes and dreams, but also coming up against the harsh realities of daily survival. The group of friends investigates mysterious happenings that took place long ago in their apartment complex.
of queers and their lifestyles to heterosexual viewers who otherwise do not have the advantage of learning through first hand interaction. It may also break the influence of heterosexism and "whiteness" which are dominant ideologies in society.

Negative media images may only tend to weaken acceptability of queers and increase levels of homophobia defeating the whole purpose of television being a tool of learning. Let’s face the fact too that television acts as a link between media images and the political climate of society; politics, the news, and entertainment all go together. Therefore, television plays an intricate role in not only gathering support for social issues for queers but bringing them into the light.

The late Coretta Scott King said, “Freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation is surely a fundamental human right in any great democracy, as much as freedom from racial, religious, gender, or ethnic discrimination.” Although media representations of queers have increased more than ever before, even in medial roles, there are still many social issues and liberties that need improvement as well as discussion. Some of these include the acceptance of homosexuals in the military, gay adoptions, and same-sex marriage.

While media visibility of queers, minorities and the gay rights movement continues to weave its way both on the screen and in society in the next few years, the battle for equality, individuality and overall acceptance of queer folk on the screen and in the streets is far from over, "Ultimately, though, the directions the gay movement and television takes will depend not on checkbook activism
but on the kind of energy and commitment that people bring to work in their own communities. This may involve some nasty battles with more conservative gay elements and force the debate into the open, but the ultimate goal is victories that last, and that's worth the fight.” (Ireland, 1999) In this case as well, the media must handle queer representation adequately. Especially since sex is such a sensitive subject still, sexuality must be carefully handled in order not to confirm to heterosexual dominance. Plots, twists, jokes, stereotypes and derogatory remarks, should all be eradicated. Writers should also be wary of adding AIDS/HIV storylines exclusively to only queer males and instances where the outcome of events is only negative.
Conclusion

This paper and study discussed three major aspects of television and queer characters: 1) Television can assist in helping to move from cultural invisibility to cultural visibility through establishing the benefits queer representations offer to both the queer and heterosexual societies. Television is a powerful device and when used correctly to portray queer characters is able to help create perceptions, understand other types of subcultures and allow the audience to become aware of queer issues occurring in society.

2) Queer African-Americans and Hispanics usually tend to receive the brunt of misrepresentation and in some cases no representation at all on television. However, Noah’s Arc is changing that by showing a different culture that is usually not discussed namely queer African-Americans. The reason why this particular series is so groundbreaking is because in the African-American community sex between two black men is harder to comprehend because of the African-American make-up in society. The same is true for sex between Latino men but the reasoning behind that is more religious than societal. This is where Noah’s Arc has the potential to break another barrier by potentially adding in more diverse characters such as Latinos in order to bring more awareness and hopefully a perceptive thought to these two minority groups.

3) Television still has some kinks to work out in queer representation such as the “heterosexualizing” of queer characters existing in queer series.

Nonetheless, television shows send important messages and act as influential

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agents to people's outlook on life. It so important not to take away the identity of characters: if a series is about queer lifestyle then that should be the focus, not a battle between heterosexuals and queers. To do otherwise only represents characters in a stereotypical fashion which is not helpful in trying to bring audiences to care about the characters and eventually about queer folk in reality.

In *Will and Grace*, the chemistry between the two main characters was phenomenal and the portrayal of Will as Grace's best friend gave the impression that perhaps queer people were "ok" to hang around with, and that they did not pose a threat. In *Queer as Folk* five best friends showed a collage of the type of queer people that really exist in society. Even though the show pushed the limits by airing sexually explicit content and focusing on topics affecting queer folk in society ultimately the show generated even more discourse as it potentially lured audiences to view the show out of curiosity. *Noah's Arc* is now covering taboo issues of race and sexuality with its characters. These three shows offer enough information about queer lifestyle for those that are interested in watching and want to learn more. The series and characters not only show a humane side of queer life but ultimately make the statement that it is ok to be queer.

As humans we are compelled, according to society's set up, to feel a sense of belonging, to know where we came from and where we are going to, and to feel that there is a group we associate ourselves with, or are immediately categorized in, in order to be understood as an individual. In other words one's identity is crucial to one's acceptance. That type of identity has survived now for
many years and is so important especially for individuals who may still be "in the closet" or just discovering their sexuality.

Queer folk confirmed their identity in the Stonewall Riots because of their desire to recognize themselves and be recognized as persons who did not subscribe to hegemonic heteronormative ideals. Their act of non-confirming encouraged and inspired an ocean of similar people to come 'out of the closet' and stand by them. This is where the gay rights movement gained its drive and because of that, representations of queer folk are generally acceptable on television. The movement of queer folk for inclusion draws on their power of identity and non-conformities, not by solely opening doors of opportunities for themselves, but by opening doors of identity for others through character portrayals on television to form ties within a group of social peers.

The movement for visibility on television and regarding social issues continually reminds us what unity really is and what those people at Stonewall were fighting for. It's not about labels, it's not about preference, but about being a human being living free from scrutiny and discrimination, experiencing love and being able to express that love from in public, in front of the camera or television and not in the closet.

It is conclusive from the findings of this research that 1) Television did and will always play a role in the shaping of concepts, discourse and ideologies based on representations especially when it deals with the binary opposites of heterosexuality and queerness. 2) The GLBT movement has progressed in various avenues of television programming but restructuring of characters, plots
et cetera is essential in order to keep away misguided perceptions about queer lifestyle. 3) There is a need to appeal to more diverse characters especially in a society where a multi-cultural populace is at an all time high especially in America. And finally current queer programs such as Noah's Arc, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Dante's Cove and the L Word should resist the temptation to make their content hegemonic and their characters heteronormative, by downplaying the "straight lifestyle". These are queer themed series and as such must remain individuals and not conformists to another sexual class. If queers, a respect of their lifestyle and their issues, are ever to be taken seriously then the battle for visibility is far from over, it has just begun.
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