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**Twenty Years After *Ellen*: How Far
Has Queer Television Come**
Bachelor's Diploma Thesis

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*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.*

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Introduction

While the world around us is becoming global, words “global citizen” have become a connotation, and the fight for human rights progresses, people and nations are still divided by issues that we have been dealing with for centuries. No level of globalisation can make a human being truly stop seeing the world divided between “us” and “the others”. The recent European refugee crisis, widely discussed in 2015 especially, the treatment of eastern immigrants by European countries, and the changes in immigration policies of the United States in 2017 and 2018 prove this.

Some might consider these to be examples that the human society is stagnating, that we take a step back for every step we take forward. But these views only look at the social developments from a short-term perspective. A long-term perspective takes into account the fact that Europe used to be a war-ridden continent, and while nowadays it definitely does not follow pacifist ideals, it has obviously made progress in these matters. Yet social progress, while smaller, can still be observed in periods of time shorter than centuries, and it can be well demonstrated on one particular example. To this thesis, this example is how has portrayal of lesbian, gay, and bisexual characters on American television series changed in the past three decades. While the focus is on lesbian, gay, and bisexual characters only (word “queer” and acronym “LGBQ” will be used as umbrella terms), gender minorities will be mentioned, but not discussed in detail, as they would require their own thesis.

The first half of the thesis explains reasons behind the chosen topic and its significance, then sums up the treatment of LGBQ characters on television shows in the 1990s. The second half looks at ten selected television series from 2017 and 2018 to be able to examine changes that took place since the 1990s. Considering the fact that in the last century, people belonging to sexual minorities could still be prosecuted in the

United States, any positive developments and simply the visibility of LGBTQ people on television can be considered to be a demonstration of the possible improvement of public's attitude towards minorities.

Film and television provide today, together with social media, arguably the most influential, formative platforms that there are available. Traditionally, they have been used as means to react to politics in various ways. For example, in 1963, the long-running British science-fiction series *Doctor Who* introduced its main villains, called "the Daleks" as an allegory to the World War II Nazism – one of the most obvious examples of this association was that the Daleks saluted like Nazis and sought to "exterminate" every other race in the universe (Masters). In the 2000s, the Daleks are still an important part of the show's tradition, and while they might no longer be associated with the Nazis, they still represent the hatred and aggression of groups that consider themselves superior to others. On the other end, there's the 1979 film musical *Hair*, which tells the story of draft evasion and enlisting to the Vietnam War, and through that story and the film's musical numbers, it creates what is now considered an "iconic representation of the 1960s" (Edney 26). These are two examples from two different countries, of two different genres and two different formats, yet like many other works of their kind, they both react to important cultural and political events.

This tradition continues today, and it is not only drama, but comedy as well that often highlights current cultural and political developments. After the election of Donald Trump in 2016, television series like the comedy *One Day at a Time* decided to address changes in the attitude towards immigrant people of colour that followed the election. In the series' first episode of its second season, Alex, a teenage boy of Cuban descent, gets into a fight after a classmate tells him to "go back to Mexico" (11:56). The fact that his sister, Elena, on the other hand, does not have a similar experience, is

addressed in the episode as well. She argues that the overall situation of latinx immigrants in the country is not as bad as her family thinks, because she herself has not dealt with situations similar to what her brother had faced. Her family then explains to her that is because of her complexion to which she, shocked, replies with “Am I passing?” (19:05), as she is surprised to learn that other people generally do not see her as a person of colour. (“The Turn”)

Similarly, the police sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* deals with racial profiling in its fourth season, episode 16. In the episode, the African-American precinct sergeant Terry Jeffords is looking for his daughter’s lost blanket in the street when a policeman from a different precinct arrests him “for being black” (6:16), as one of the supporting characters later summarises the event. (“Moo Moo”)

Most of these examples were American, as the main focus of this thesis lies on the United States. This is because this country can serve as a convenient model of social evolution, which is due to the following reasons: The nations on the American continents developed differently than most of the African, Asian, or European nations. The usual cultural development of these parts of the world was disrupted by the arrival of Europeans, which resulted in a cultural homogenisation which in the United States is often called the melting pot. This expression is sometimes replaced with such as a “salad bowl”, as that seems to better describe a phenomenon during which various cultures mix together yet retain some of their individual characteristics. However, whichever expression is used, the fact remains that the United States form a country that is largely inhabited by immigrants and their descendants, that is by people from vastly different cultural backgrounds.

Another result of the colonial history of the United States is the consequence of the fact that the colonisers were of European descent and regarded any other people as

inferior. This led to a social division as well as to a division before the law – racial segregation in the US ended only a little more than five decades ago (“Racial Segregation”). Despite this, the country is now on the same level as many other nations in the Western world.

Countries as diverse as the USA also inevitable face challenges in protecting individual’s right to practice religion of their choice, which is the case for the USA maybe more than for any other nation. That is due to the fact that the United States are a highly religious and a highly Christian country: in 2017, the Public Religion Research Institute’s (PRRI) published findings which say that “religiously unaffiliated” people make up only 24% of the American public, and only 6% of the public belongs to “non-Christians religious groups”. The rest belongs to Christian denominations. (Cox and Jones)

Furthermore, the United States are a country that values broad personal freedom. Probably most controversial and widely discussed evidence of this is the Second Amendment, which protects the right of people to bear arms. However, there are many others, perhaps lesser known, examples suggesting this. Some of these are those that illustrate the difference between a typical European approach to free speech and that of the United States. The first example is the fact many European countries made it a punishable offence to deny Holocaust (Kahn). In the United States, by contrast, such a law would be unconstitutional, as it would be in conflict with the First Amendment protecting, among others, free speech. Similarly, in spring 2018, three YouTube personalities and far-right activists were denied entry to the United Kingdom because they were “not conducive to the public good”, according to the British Home Office (Mezzofiore), while on the other end, in the early 2000s, the media’s attention was attracted to two teenage girls from California who formed a band called “Prussian Blue”

and performed at Neo-Nazism events shouting phrases like “white survival”. Easily found on the internet, there is a picture of the two girls posing in white t-shirts with a smiling yellow emoji that has the moustache and fringe commonly associated with Adolf Hitler. (Elsworth)

The cultural diversity, religion, and individual freedom are the cornerstones of American society that create clashes, which raise questions about where does one person’s freedom end and another’s begin. The weight of this is perhaps best illustrated on the 2012 case of a baker in Colorado, who refused to bake a wedding cake for a same sex couple. On one side of this case was humiliation of the two men who were refused service, on the other the right of the baker to run his business according to his religious beliefs, which are protected by the First Amendment. The feud concluded after six years with the Supreme Court ruling in favour of the baker. (Liptak)

Religion is regarded as the foremost factor that is slowing down the progress in granting LGBTQ+ people equal rights. It follows that in a country with a high percentage of religious public, clashes between religion and sexuality, or gender, are more common than in prevalently atheist nations. In the United States, therefore, any changes that extend the rights of one side must be carefully thought through so that they do not infringe upon the rights of the other side. Yet, even in such a divided culture, progress can be made.

To better understand the context of the LGBTQ+ representation on American television, it is also useful to keep in mind what are perhaps the main issues that the community struggles with. The whole LGBTQ+ community has been fighting for recognition and winning this fight in many areas. One of the fundamental steps forward is the fact that the acronym LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) is now a widely recognised and accepted term. Moreover, to be inclusive, it is often extended to

LGBTQ+ to include Q for queer or questioning, and + for a range of other sexualities and gender non-conforming identities. It is the public recognition that allows better visibility in the media. This very recognition is essential, but the fight that for many is the most significant is the right for partners of the same gender to be married. This was difficult to achieve, as sodomy laws were still in effect in the late 20th century. These laws mostly concerned gay people and were used largely to justify discrimination. This changed with the 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* decision, which concluded that if sodomy laws are to be in place, they must – just as all laws – apply to all people, and if they are intended to be used against gay people only, they must be struck down (“Why Sodomy Laws Matter”). Finally, same-sex marriage became legally recognised in all 50 states in 2015 (“Same-Sex Marriage”). The important thing to consider here is again the case of the Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Human Rights Commission, because much like the baker was not obligated to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding ceremony, a church official could not be forced to officiate it. This way, individual rights are preserved.

The facts discussed in this chapter show that the United States can be used as a model of cultural changes that can happen in a relatively short period of time even in a highly divided society. Because of its history, the country was forced to undergo important cultural changes in a fraction of the time that most other societies had, while also being more divided by religion and by the needs and wants of an individual than are many other nations. For these reasons, this thesis uses the United States as an example of possible societal development.

Why Representation Matters

Human beings are naturally social. We crave to belong, to have other people accept us as a part of their social group. Over and over again in our lifetimes we prove that being perceived as different is unwanted – we see this in schools, in bullying, where children pick on other children because there is something about them that makes them different. A “high school clique” is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “a narrow *exclusive* circle or group of persons, especially: one held together by common interests, views, or purposes” (“Clique”), and “exclusive” is the key word here, it signifies that such a group excludes anything or any person that does not conform to the group’s norms. University clubs function for the same purpose, as do political parties, and even to a certain level professions. Our identities are formed based on which communities we belong in.

As we grow older, we form a clearer understanding of the groups that we identify with and those that surround us. As children, we might not have such a clear understanding of these groups, but we nonetheless are aware that they exist, and we notice when we do not conform to their rules. One of these groups is formed by gay men and women, who in particular can later, in adulthood, report feeling “different” during childhood, whether that is something as telling as “not being interested in boys” or something small such as feeling “more masculine” than the other girls for lesbian women, and noticing “other boys’ bodies” or not getting involved in physical fights for gay men (Bell 148). The fact that adults are still able to recall feeling “different” in their childhood points to how relevant this experience was to them.

As an individual’s identity form, apart from a group to belong in, a role model is needed as well, that is a person or an idea that a person could imitate – as imitation is one of the primary learning methods of a child. This role model is often a parent or a

sibling, and as we get older, we can turn to more complicated ways of choosing a role model for ourselves. This can happen when a child is rebelling against their parents, or when a person decides that there is no longer anybody that they would admire among their close relatives. Then the role model can become a friend or a celebrity who is perceived as successful by the imitator. The role model can even be completely fictional. They can be a character in a book, a graphic novel, or a television series. The important thing is that this character possesses traits that the imitator finds desirable. One of the attractions of fictional role models is that they are only an idea, and therefore do not adhere to the rules of reality. This means that they are less likely to disappoint their imitator by exhibiting flaws. Flaws that would inevitably manifest in a real person. A role model, whether real or fictional, substitutes a teacher in a certain way, and because of this must exhibit personality or skills that the imitator would like to have, but since it is easier to connect with someone we have something in common with, the role model may as well be chosen based on the traits that they already share with the imitator. This means that a queer person is likely to choose a role model who is queer as well.

An individual's identity then develops through identifying with a group and imitating a chosen model of behaviour. To be able to choose the group and the model, there must be a sufficient amount of information on a possible group and model available to an individual. The person whose identity is being formed must be able to compare their knowledge of themselves to the knowledge of the particular group to see whether they fit its norms, only then they can make a decision of whether or not they belong to this group. A series of studies conducted in the 1980s agrees that people who later self-identify as gay go through a "developmental stage in which" they "consider what they know about gayness to see if the label is congruent with what they know

about themselves”, and it follows that when the information that they are provided with is “inaccurate and stigmatizing” or “they are aware only of a limited number of features of gay life, they may have difficulty in this process of identification” (Lipkin).

Television can provide the information, the group, and the role model at once. A person sees someone on the television and evaluates them in a similar way that they would evaluate people in real life. They look for clues to decide whether the character reminds them of something that they know, for traits to evaluate whether the character is likeable, and also for information on how different the character is from them. To a queer person, who perhaps knows that there is something different about them but has not yet understood what exactly that is, seeing a queer character on their favourite television series may be essential – especially if they do not know anybody queer in real life. They see that this character shares the traits that they do not understand about themselves and compare them. Seeing how this character identifies, can then help them put their feelings into words and thus understand themselves better. And if they find this character likeable, it may be easier for them to accept themselves for who they are.

However, that does not mean that all queer characters need to be likeable, they can just as well be a spiteful antagonist. As television is a source of information, representation needs to be diverse first and foremost. If people are to learn about the LGBTQ+ community from television, television needs to depict that the community comes in all shapes and sizes. This means that the characters should be heroes as well as villains, and some should not stand out while others should be stereotypical examples of their community. For example, there is nothing wrong about a male gay character being effeminate, because some are and identify as such, but a lack of masculine gay characters can further confuse people who are questioning their sexuality. Simply: if a boy has never seen a typically masculine gay man, he might get the idea they do not

exist - therefore, he can be either effeminate, or heterosexual, otherwise there is something wrong with him. In moderation, stereotypes can be used positively and even sought after. While some people find that they fit into those figurative boxes naturally, other people may choose to adjust their behaviour to be able to fit into them as well. Obvious stereotypes can serve as a sign to the rest of the community saying “Hey, I’m here, I’m like you”. Or, as Richard Dyer explains stereotypes:

Stereotypes can be both a complex and a formative mode of representation. We are accustomed to thinking of them as simple, repetitive, boring and prejudiced group images which, should they supposedly be about ourselves, we angrily reject. We mistake their simplicity of formal means (a few broadly drawn, instantly identifiable signs endlessly repeated) and evident ideological purpose (to keep/put out-groups in their place) for a simplicity of connotation and actual ideological effect. (Dyer 116-117)

Apart from role models, television provides people with social groups as well. It does this in two ways: through escapism, and through fan base. Escapism is defined as a “habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine” (“Escapism”), and while it is dangerous when overused, can provide a temporary feeling of belonging. People often care about their favourite fictional characters in a similar, albeit less intensive, way they care about their loved ones. We are happy when they are successful and cry at their deaths. To a queer person without any real-life connections in the community, relating to a set of fictional characters can be better than no connections at all. Yet more importantly, a successful television series creates a fan base present on social media, where like-minded people meet. This can be especially important in small towns, where the LGBTQ+

communities are virtually invisible and where online interactions can be the only interactions with the rest of the community that are possible.

But visibility and representation on television is not significant only because of what it can provide to queer people themselves. It also affects non-LGBTQ+ people, as it can change their views and opinions of the community. The fact that television can change people's minds has been strengthened in the recent years with the popularity of television and streaming services and their connection to social media, but it is hardly a new phenomenon. According to David Eisenbach's book *Gay Power*, when in 1971 sitcom *All in the Family* added a masculine gay character, a former football player, "years of protests and speeches by liberation activists could not have promoted the idea that gays could be tough and masculine as much as that thirty-minute TV show" (143). Even the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) founded in New York in the late 1960s already then understood how far-reaching television is. Members of the GAA made appearances on talk shows, where they participated in debates, one of which was with Aesthetic Realists, who follow a philosophy that believes that gay people can be converted "to heterosexuality" (Eisenbach 151).

This means that representation is as much for the public, as it is for the represented minorities. People who only rarely, or even never have, come into a direct contact with the LGBTQ+ community have their image of the community created for them by the media. Just like queer people gather possible information about themselves, the other viewers gather information about queer people from television. And the information that they get can possibly change how they perceive the community. It can make it easier for a son to come out to his parents, and it can also help the parents accept their son.

While most of this applies to television as well as film, representation can still be more influential over television series. That is because of a one significant difference between the film and series format, which is their length. For example, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* with its 112 episodes so far totals approximately 39 hours (“Brooklyn”). The ten episodes of the first season of the *Game of Thrones* equal nearly ten hours of television (Benioff and Weiss). Its length gives a television show a better chance of developing a bond between its characters and audience than the average film ever could have, and it is this bond that allows characters’ storylines to resonate with viewers. And as one of the sources cited by Eisenbach put it: “Television has shaped more thoughts and made more objects, people and ideas household words than any other medium in man’s history.” (166)

Representation in the 1990s and Stereotypes

Television representation had to be fought for and evolved. The 1990s can be considered a turning point in the representation of the LGBTQ+ community. During those ten years, it became more common to see gay regular characters on television, and it became less likely for a show with a gay lead to be cancelled.

Two examples of this are *Ellen* and *Will & Grace*. Both shows featured a gay lead, yet *Ellen* was cancelled after five seasons, while *Will & Grace* continued to run for eight (and was even renewed in 2017). The reason for the different treatments of the shows is, unsurprisingly, the difference in how the sexuality of their characters was treated and, more importantly, the fact that Ellen DeGeneres, who played the show's lead, herself came out only several days before her character did.

Both the coming out of the character and of the actress caused controversy and was at the centre of attention at the time. The actress came out on the cover of the 1997 April issue of TIME Magazine, which had a photograph of her and words "Yep, I'm Gay" written over it (Rothman). After this, her coming out became the topic of magazines' headlines and television commentary ("Oprah"). She appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, where she discussed her coming out with guests in the audience who disagreed with her choice to make her personal life public ("Ellen . . . on Oprah"). Long before this happened, she was a guest at interviews where she talked about her sitcom and made suggestive jokes such as that the character Ellen Morgan is in fact "Lebanese" ("Ellen . . . on O'Donnell Show"). The sitcom too gave hints, such as when Ellen Morgan wanted to confess to something, paused, and then seriously announced that she is "left-handed" ("Ellen . . . on Oprah"). Finally, the episode centred around the character's coming out was called "The Puppy Episode" and was watched by "estimated 42 million viewers" ("History"). Ellen Morgan was the first lead character

on mainstream television to come out (“Ellen Celebrates”). The sitcom was then criticised for becoming a “gay sitcom”, the ratings dropped drastically, and the fifth season was the show’s last (Waldowski). Oprah Winfrey made a guest appearance in the episode, and the same night it aired, Winfrey hosted her show with DeGeneres as a guest. These two events caused both of the celebrities to receive hate mail and in DeGeneres’ case even death threats (“Oprah”). For her coming out, among others, Ellen DeGeneres received the medal of freedom from Barack Obama in 2016 (Rhodan).

After *Ellen* came *Will & Grace*, a different matter entirely. Two of its regular characters were openly gay men, and one of them was even one of the show’s leads – a lawyer with his name in the title of the series. Jack McFarland was the effeminate gay with love for theatre, a struggling actor (“Jake McFarland”), while Will Truman was the slightly more masculine one – a lawyer who can sometimes appear distant. Even Will “performed plays” (“Will Truman”) when he was a child, which can be attributed to the stereotype of gay men being fond of theatre. While the show focused on Grace’s heterosexual relationships, Will and Jack’s remained undeveloped and they did not get regular boyfriends. *Will & Grace* also kept away from physical intimacy between characters of the same gender and open discussion of politics. This way, the show went on to win an Emmy in 2000 and ran from 1998 to 2006. (Waldowski)

One of the other notable shows with queer representation was of course *Friends*, a sitcom that ran for ten seasons. Already its very first episode dealt with Ross coping with the loss of his wife Carol to another person, a woman named Susan. This is something that is often joked about in the series, especially the fact that Ross did not notice that his wife was a lesbian, which could at first seem to belittle the female relationship and Carol’s sexuality, but *Friends* is a sitcom and even the death of Ross and Monica’s grandmother was scripted to be laughed at. Carol is revealed to be

pregnant at the beginning of the first season, her partner and she become one of the series' regulars and they raise the child together with Ross. Carol and Susan are characters that, beside their sexuality, do not stand out, they are not particularly masculine or feminine. They do not have intimate scenes together either, what they do have is a wedding later in the series' second season. This wedding, however, remains without a kiss that would typically be present in a scene portraying a wedding of a heterosexual couple. (Crane and Kauffman)

These three iconic series show that perhaps the most serious issue with queer characters on television in the 1990s was no longer whether or not they are gay, but how is their sexuality portrayed. The storyline of the two women who shared the first kiss on a primetime television series ended not long after the kiss happened, this was a show called *L. A. Law* and the episode aired in 1991. The soap opera *Melrose Place* featured a gay man who, unlike his straight counterparts, was not to be intimately touched in his scenes, even though he had been in relationships. Then there was *Roseanne*, which was to air a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" titled episode featuring a kiss between two women. Before the episode aired, sponsors of the ABC started pulling out, which means the ABC was to lose money in ad-revenue, and the network consequently asked the kiss to be edited out or the episode cancelled. That did not happen, the episode aired as planned and turned out to be a success in the eye of the critics. Interestingly, *Roseanne* also featured one of the few bisexual characters on television at the time, a woman named Nancy Bartlett. (Waldowski)

While in the 1990s, where diversity was scarce, the main concern was simply if queer characters existed and whether their sexuality was a valid part of their storylines, nowadays one of the important aspects of representation is also the presence or lack of stereotypes. This concerns mainly the common notion that lesbian women are naturally

more masculine than heterosexual women, and gay men are more effeminate than straight men.

These stereotypes come from the idea that there is nothing more gender non-conforming than being attracted to the same gender. Typically, masculine is to be attracted to the feminine, which means that people attracted to the masculine must have feminine traits, and vice versa. In the 19th century, Karl Ulrichs attributed homosexuality to an idea that a person attracted to their own gender possesses the soul of the opposite gender (Hall 20). The positive side of this logic is the notion that same-sex attraction is something innate, but the rest is, of course, inherently flawed.

Perhaps the most famous example of the “gay effeminacy” is Oscar Wilde. To the conservative Victorian public, his “eccentric dress, effeminate manner, and haughty demeanor, all held up as important signifiers of his unnatural sexuality and the threat he posed to ‘normal’, middle-class values” (Hall 33). The notable part of Oscar Wilde’s persona is that he was a playwright, and as was already demonstrated by the example of Jack and Will from *Will & Grace*, love for theatre is something that is still part of a typical homosexual identity. Being effeminate is strongly connected to aesthetics, to art. Cohen and Dyer describe “artistic sensitivity” as “a compensation for having been born or made queer”, to them, being gay came with the ability to appreciate “high culture” (Dyer 20).

Toni Lester talks about lectures where they would ask the audience to create a list of feminine and masculine traits. The list headed “real women” would include traits like “passive, weak, deferential, soft-spoken, emotional, and nurturing . . . a high-pitched voice, long hair, and a lean but not overly muscular build” and objects such as “colorful clothing, nail polish, makeup, and ornamentation such as earrings and bracelets”. While “real men” were associated with being “aggressive, decisive, rational,

domineering, and strong”, have a “a deep voice, tall height, and a muscular build . . . short ‘no fuss’ hair and lack of extensive ornaments like earrings”. (3)

The masculine stereotypes apply to lesbian women, mainly those who identify as “butch”. Gilmartin explains what “butch” means using an example of a Chicana lesbian born in 1934 called Virginia. It especially applies to the traditional role of men as pursuers and women as the ones being wooed. Virginia, who at one point in her life embraced the role of a butch lesbian, would be rejected by the community for pursuing other butch lesbians, because at that time “a butch would never get involved with another butch” (170). Gilmartin uses John Nestle’s explanation that a gay woman wearing men’s clothes was creating an image that would indicate to other women that she could take “erotic responsibility” (167). It is mainly through this passive-active dynamic of same-sex relationships that femme-butch women and top-bottom gay men “paralleled dominant culture ideas about the proper roles of men and women” (Lester 13). This was natural in the 20th century, where traditional gender roles were still largely insisted on, and may not be as common today, but the stereotype of the active male and passive female remains, just like being attracted to the same gender gives people the label of someone with traits of the opposite gender.

Statistics on LGBTQ+ Characters on Television

Character description and storylines are not the only thing that can be used to illustrate the changes in queer representation on television, a brief quantitative analysis is also useful and accessible. For this purpose, GLAAD's (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) annual *Where We Are on TV* reports estimate number of LGBTQ+ character on television. Unfortunately the first available report is from the 2007/2008 season, but even this is sufficient for the purpose of this thesis. This report found that "1.1 % of all series regular characters" on "broadcast television schedule" that season would be LGBTQ+. The data came from "87 scripted comedies and dramas" that were "announced to air" during that season and on these shows, 7 out of 650 regular or supporting character were to be LGBTQ+ along with additional 13 "semi-regular recurring characters". Out of the counted LGBTQ+ characters, 2 (out of 20) were to be transgender, 3 people of colour (1 African American, 2 Latinxs), 14 gay men, 2 lesbian women, 2 bisexual people (1 woman, 1 man).

On the other hand, mainstream cable programming had 40 regular and "17 semi-regular recurring characters" within 21 scripted television series. Out of these 57 characters, 1 was transgender, 1 "male cross-dresser", 17 people of colour (8 "people of African Descent", 5 "Asian Pacific Islanders", 3 Latinxs, 1 "multi racial" person), 25 gay men, 19 lesbian women, and 11 bisexual people (6 men, 5 women).

What these statistics show is a prevalence of white characters and of characters with a single gender attraction (as opposed to bisexual characters). However, the most notable ratio is that of bisexual women to bisexual men – this sexuality is virtually equally divided between the two genders.

GLAAD report from the 2017/2018 season shows vastly different numbers. The number of LGBTQ+ regulars on "broadcast scripted primetime programming" was 58

out of the total of 901 characters (6.4%), 28 recurring characters were counted. Out of these, 40 are gay men, 21 lesbian women, 22 characters are bisexual+ (16 women, 6 men). While the majority (53, or 62%) of the LGBTQ+ characters is white, there are 17 African American characters, 8 Latinxs, 3 Asian Pacific Islanders and 3 multiracial characters.

On cable television, 103 regulars and 70 recurring characters were counted, the overall number of characters counted on cable television is not given. Out of these, 72 are gay men, 47 lesbian women, 48 characters bisexual+ (38 women, 10 men), 1 character is asexual. 110 (or 64%) is white, 18 are African Americans, 16 Latinxs, 6 Asian Pacific Islanders, and 20 “multiracial or” of “other race”.

A comparison of these two television seasons say that in the past decade, the number of LGBTQ+ regulars on broadcast networks rose from 1.1% to 6.4%, while the percentage of white LGBTQ+ characters decreased from 85% to 62%. For the cable networks, the number of queer regular and recurring characters rose from 57 to 103 (percentage is not provided), and the percentage of white characters decreased from 70% to 64%. Notably, while in the 2007/2008 season report the number of bisexual women and men was equally divided, this season bisexual women outnumber men almost three times on broadcast and almost four times on cable television. There is also a first regular asexual character on television this season.

LGBQ Characters of 2017/2018

This chapter focuses on ten selected series premiering in the 2017/2018 television season. Their comparison, together with information gathered in the previous chapters, will serve as a demonstration of the changes and developments that took places during those nearly thirty years.

As this thesis examines television representation on the grounds that it is a substantial factor in determining people's views of themselves and of others, the selected shows were chosen based on their popularity. They are the ten most popular television series with LGBQ characters according to IMDb, regardless of their genre or network. To determine the popularity of a series, data were taken from the IMDbPro website, which ranks television series based on the interests of visitors to the page. IMDb will not reveal the exact equation it uses for the ranking (presumably to avoid deliberate manipulation with the data by the users), but it is largely based on "who and what people are looking at on IMDb" ("FAQ"). The rankings are updated weekly and data from ten weeks following the premiere of a series were used to determine how it fared on average compared to the other series, and out of the most successful ones, ten with regular LGBQ characters were chosen for the purpose of the thesis. Naturally, quantitatively ranking popularity of television shows is more complex than gathering data from a single website, which is why the purpose of the selected shows is to be only a sample of modern popular television.

These ten shows all feature LGBQ characters: they all either state they identify as such, or they have or used to have a partner of the same gender. Series with characters only speculated to be LGBQ were not included. The shows are: *Mindhunter*, *Godless*, *Star Trek: Discovery*, *Insatiable*, *The Terror*, *The Deuce*, *Black Lightning*, *The Orville*, *Runaways*, and *9-1-1*.

The series will be introduced to provide context for the queer characters, who will then be described. The focus will be mainly on the character's appearance, mannerism, personality, and whether or not they are shown being physically intimate with a partner, as well as whether their relationships/sexualities are discussed in any way, in contrast to how explicitly depicted are sexual/romantic lives of the other characters. In addition, anything that may set the characters apart will be included as well as whether they adhere to stereotypes.

Mindhunter

Mindhunter (Penhall) is a criminal series about two FBI agents working on profiling serial killers in the 1970s. Their work revolutionises methods of finding and convicting criminals, because it for the first time uses psychology and asks about their motifs. The series contains graphic violence, the acts committed by the serial killers are often both described verbally and shown on photographs from the crime scenes. It is not as graphic when it comes to sexuality. It contains some explicit scenes of one of the lead characters having sex with his girlfriend, but there are few of these compared to the scenes containing graphic violence. Moreover, no other characters are in sexually explicit scenes, even if both of the other regular characters (the other agent and Wendy Carr, subject of this thesis) have partners.

Doctor Wendy Carr is a psychology professor and researcher at a university in Boston and appears in eight out of the series' ten episodes. She is introduced in episode three. She is at her university, when the two agents come to seek her opinion on whether their research is "valuable from an academic standpoint" (6:57). Carr is intrigued and asks them to "imagine what it takes to bludgeon someone to death. The lust for control, the feeling of arousal . . . How could you possibly get that from an ordinary police report." (7:50). She is professional, she does not hesitate to correct people who

mistakenly call her “ma’am” to address her as “Doctor Carr” (ep. 8; 28:41), and respects orders of her superiors even if they are in conflict with her opinions. Her professionalism can make her appear cold, which is highlighted by the way she talks about their research – the idea of violently killing someone does not seem to appal her as much as it fascinates her. She shakes hands with the two agents and even asks about their personal lives, but only out of necessary politeness, and she herself jokingly describes the act as “adopting a facade of caring” (ep. 3; 3:55).

Another important aspect of Wendy Carr’s character is that she is a critical thinker, this shows not only in her approach to their research, but also specifically in a scene where she is interviewing a potential new member of their team. He says he is religious and believes in right and wrong, to which Carr replies “binary thinking could hamstring you, when it comes to critical assessment of our subjects” (ep. 8; 28:16).

Her sexuality is suggested often throughout the series and confirmed in episode six. The other characters ask about her family, discuss whether or not she is married, and assume she is not. In the sixth episode, the viewers first meet her girlfriend. She also works at the university and seems to think that Wendy should reject the offer of a full-time job with the FBI, as it would mean hiding her life – that is the fact that Wendy is a lesbian (ep. 6; 21:05). Wendy, on the other hand, argues that she already has to be hiding a part of her identity in Boston, because the fact that she works for the FBI would reflect badly on her girlfriend, therefore none of their colleagues must know (21:30). In the episode, she is twice asked whether she is married or has children, to which she both times replies with a courtly “no” to avoid further discussion on the topic. The two women also share a passionate kiss and later sit on a couch with their hands touching (21:00).

When it comes to appearance, Wendy Carr keeps it professional just like the other aspects of her life. Her hair is conservatively smooth and straight, reaching to her chin. She wears mainly shirts and trousers or appropriately long skirts. While her appearance is professionally feminine, her assertive and reserved behaviour can be considered masculine, but not to a point of being butch. Her personal life is not the focus of the series, but nonetheless the number of times her marital status is brought up and the fact the series makes it clear that she has to keep her relationship a secret at her job suggest that the writers' intention was to depict what life of lesbian women was like in the 1970s, not to keep her romantic life hidden from the viewers.

Godless

Godless (Frank) is a western drama series consisting of seven episodes and has several lead characters with intertwining storylines. It deals with brutality, rape, and violence on children, and contains some nudity, but not explicitly graphic sexual scenes. The storyline centres around small western town where the majority of the male population died in a mining tragedy. The town is now ran by the women, who are trying to make the best out of their situation, which includes a mine that can still be made profitable. There are two characters to focus on, one is Mary Agnes McNue, the other her lover Callie Dunne.

Mary Agnes can be considered butch and is introduced as such. In her first scene, she is seen cleaning a gun and wearing her late husband's male clothes, including his hat. Her hair is long, but tied in a simple ponytail, which makes it barely visible and adds to her masculine appearance (ep. 1; 20:10). She then wears male clothing in most of her scenes. To add to her typically masculine demeanour, she slouches, uses crude language, and is assertive and dominant. When the women of the town are negotiating a

deal on the mine, she is the one to speak up and demand a deal that is profitable and fair to them, while the other women passively accept the deal that is being offered, as the other side promises to bring “real men” to their town (ep. 2; 20:58). While being traditionally masculine most of the time, she still is depicted as maternal and often takes care of the children of the town, protects them and makes sure they are fed. She is also just – towards the end of the series she is dividing the population of the town to groups depending on whether they will be the ones to fight and protect the town, or they should hide, and even if it visibly causes her pain, she assigns Callie to the defensive group.

Callie Dunne is a former prostitute and is on multiple occasions said to be the richest person of the town. She is a teacher and resembles the traditionally proper women of the time. She wears her hair neatly done, wears dresses and behaves in a ladylike manner most of the time, but not always. In the second episode, she calmly tells one of the visiting businessmen: “I’d always been a whore, I just sort of fell into teaching after Magdalena’s closed”, which shows how unapologetic she is about her past. The other residents of the town seem to respect her and do not bring it up.

Callie and Mary Agnes talk about their future together, share a kiss and say that they love each other. The couple does not seem to be trying to keep their relationship a secret and there are scenes where the disagreement of their neighbours is shown, but the show does not dwell on that and treats the relationship like any other romance – it has its ups and down, and their fights are a result of misunderstandings that they then resolve, they talk about how they first met and how Callie learnt Mary Agnes’ scent and everything about her, and one of the scenes shows Callie wrapped in a blanket on the doorstep of Mary Agnes’ house in the morning after a night they spent together. While the series is not explicitly sexual, it is very explicit about the romantic involvement of the two women.

Black Lightning

Black Lightning (Akil) is a superhero show based on the DC comic books. It follows the story of the African American superhero nicknamed Black Lightning and his family. The majority of the series' regular characters are African American, and the show uses this advantage to address racial issues. As the series is targeted at young audiences, it contains a limited amount of graphic violence and no graphic sexual scenes, but physical intimacy is suggested and leads up to (characters are shown in their underwear and would talk about sex, but there is no complete nudity or other sexually graphic scenes).

Annissa Pierce is the daughter of the lead character and early on in the series discovers her own superpower, then takes on the nickname "Thunder". Annissa has a strong moral compass and believes it is her duty to use her powers to protect other people. She is introduced in the beginning of the first episode in a scene where she is arguing with her father, because she was arrested at a demonstration that he did not allow her to go to (2:20). She is also a medical student and teaches in the school where her father works as a principal. The viewers are often reminded that she is a diligent student and always does the right thing – her sister even nicknamed her "Harriet Tubman" (ep. 1; 7:15), after the African American abolitionist and activist, and her then girlfriend calls her "Miss Black Lives Matter" once (ep. 3; 27:40). She is also brave, to the point of being impulsive, and dives headfirst into a dangerous situation if it means doing what is right or finding out the truth.

Annissa has a girlfriend at first, but they break up in the third episode. In the second episode, she is shown in bed with the girl, they are both nearly naked and are discussing their relationship, the girlfriend even states that their "sex" was good (16:00).

Her sexuality is accepted by her parents (who casually talk about Annissa's girlfriend and joke about not remembering her name, 18:00), the word "lesbian" is used explicitly, but rarely, and there is generally no indication that people would have a problem with that side of Annissa's character. The first few episodes focus on her romantic life, after that the focus shifts to that of her sister, and then their parents. Annissa has long hair and wears elegant and feminine clothing, she is a typical superhero – kind, clever, and strong-willed, but regarding her sexuality, the only trait pointing to the stereotypically masculine lesbian women is her ambition, which can also be considered a "superhero trait", and that is expected from the genre.

Runaways

Runaways (Savage and Schwartz) is a Marvel superhero show consisting of ten episodes in its first season. It tells a story of a group of high-schoolers who know each other through their parents, some of them have superpowers or control objects that give them powers. Their parents are also the villains of the series. The series is targeted at teenagers and therefore contains no graphic scenes. *Runaways* has two queer characters – Karolina Dean and Nico Minoru, two of the show's leading characters.

Karolina Dean is a daughter of the series' main villainous duo. Her mother runs a church that Karolina is devoted to. She is upbeat, kind, and gullible, and one of the last people to accept that their parents are evil. Her hair is long and blond, and others often comment on her beauty. Her appearance changes over the season to reflect her development from "the perfect church-girl", as she herself says (ep. 6; 20:00), to a girl rebelling against her parents – she starts with neatly styled blond waves and in elegant sweaters and white trousers, and ends the season with hair tied in a messy ponytail and wearing plain jeans and a denim jacket.

Karolina is discovering her attraction to the same sex in her storyline with Nico. At first, one of the show's male leads is interested in her, but she does not react to his advances and treats him as one of her platonic friends instead. This is made clear in the eighth episode, when one of the other girls tells Karolina: "you don't want to be alone with him, because he kissed you, and you don't like him, you like Nico", which makes Karolina visibly uncomfortable, and she does not deny anything.

Nico Minoru is Asian American and is portrayed as the opposite to Karolina. She is sceptical and the rebel of the group, wears dark clothing and heavy distinct make up, her style can be described as gothic (dark hair, mainly black clothes with old-fashioned features and black eye and lip make up). Her sister passed away recently, and her family is healing from that loss. Her parents and she do not get along at first but begin to bond in the second half of the season. She is the love interest of one of the boys and reciprocates his feelings at first, but their relationship goes back to platonic as Nico develops feelings for Karolina towards the end of the series.

Nico and Karolina's relationship develops from the first episode as their personalities evolve in parallel. They address this in the sixth episode, where they talk about Nico being the rebel who is now finally bonding with her mother, while Karolina is the opposite (20:00). Romantic feelings are limited to Karolina's side at first. Their romance starts innocently, with Karolina's eyes often lingering on Nico. Her feelings for the girl become clearer when she walks in on Nico kissing a boy, and sighs disappointedly when she is left alone again. In episode nine, Karolina kisses her and Nico reciprocates the kiss (32:00). They share another kiss in episode 10 and fall asleep hugging each other.

The two girls' sexualities are not labelled in the show and their relationship is treated casually as one of series' romances. However, it is not developed further than to

a kiss, and while the series is not overtly explicit, two teenagers of the opposite genders explicitly said to have had sex - they are shown undressing each other and later talk about what happened between them, but nothing graphic is shown.

Star Trek: Discovery

Star Trek: Discovery (Bryan and Kurtzman) is a part of the Star Trek series franchise and has fifteen episodes so far. It follows the journey of the spaceship Discovery and mainly of one of its crewmembers, a convicted mutineer, who is the lead of the show. The main story arc of the first season is built around the invention of a so called “spore drive”, which allows the ship to travel farther and faster than had been previously possible, and its test runs. The series contains some limited nudity (e. g. a naked woman’s back is shown, but not her front) and violence. It even shows a blurry memory of rape, but otherwise stays away from graphic sexual scenes. The two queer characters are Paul Stamets and his partner Hugh Culber.

Paul Stamets is the lead scientist on the ship and appears in most of the episodes. He is first seen in the third episode, in a scene where he interacts with the lead character and is noticeably hostile towards her. He questions the fact that she “was assigned” to his team (19:10), and later, when she tells him that the reason Stamets was told to expect her to be a Vulcan (a fictional race of the Star Trek universe) is that she was raised among the them without being one, he sternly replies: “My uncle Everett plays in a Beatles cover band, it hardly makes him John Lennon” (19:43). Stamets may seem arrogant and even distant at first, but he is shown to have a softer side during a videocall with one of his friends, who is a scientist on another ship that also works on the spore drive. Stamets keeps jokingly saying that he hates him, whenever the other man makes it clear that his research has advanced farther than Stamet’s. Most of Stamet’s actions

are propelled by his dedication to “find truth” (27:35). He clearly expresses disagreement with the captain’s intentions to use Stamet’s work “not for truth . . . but for war” (28:17). When it is discovered that they need a human being to connect to the spore drive and serve as its navigation, Stamets physically plugs himself into the system without knowing the possible consequences of that act. He survives and goes on to serve as an important plot device to the series, as his connection with the spore drive allows him to have information that the other characters cannot have. There is nothing particular about Stamets’ appearance. His clothing cannot be considered a part of his character, as all of the people on the ship wear uniforms.

Hugh Culber is the main doctor on the ship, and appears to be multiracial (as opposed to being simply white, as most characters still are). His character is built around his profession and his relationship with Stamets, he does not have many traits outside of those that directly relate to these two facts. Culber almost exclusively appears in scenes in the med bay or with his partner. He is set to do good and protect living creatures, which is set by his job, and cares deeply about his partner. Culber is killed in episode 12.

Paul and Hugh use the term “partner” for each other, which suggests that their relationship is serious. They are in an intimately domestic scene together in episode five, where they are brushing their teeth and Hugh is checking Paul’s health after he was connected to the spore drive. Hugh is worried, which Paul finds irritating and tells him to “stop doctoring” to which Hugh replies: “one tends to worry when they’re doomed to love a brilliant but reckless maniac who’s willing to risk his life for glory” (44:00). In episode seven, Paul lovingly describes how Hugh and he first met. It happened in a café, where Hugh “sat right next to” him “and he’s been there ever since” (24:52). The most intimate scenes they have are in episode nine, they say “I love you”

and “I love you, too” (22:00) when Paul is in an imminent danger, and later share a long kiss after the danger has been averted (42:42). There is not much physical contact between them before this episode, one of them sometimes places his hand on the other man’s shoulder at most. After Hugh dies, Paul’s consciousness gets temporarily trapped in the “mycelial network” (a network on which the spore drive functions, can be described as a different dimension), where he talks to Hugh. They share a heartfelt scene in which Paul regrets he did not tell Hugh he loved him enough, and Hugh argues that Paul showed him. The scene ends after Hugh says “I believe in you, Paul, I love you,” they kiss, Hugh adds “open your eyes”, and Paul wakes up. (ep. 12; 31:41)

Their relationship was different than the other romantic relationships of the show. While the other couples had scenes before or after sex, the most that Paul and Hugh got was a kiss. However, they were also the only relationship of the series that does not end with the two people splitting up. While the other couples separated willingly, Paul and Hugh’s romance ended with death, and even after this happened, they viewers saw them exchange their final farewells in the mycelial network.

Insatiable

Insatiable (Gussis) is a dark comedy series about southern suburban life. Its lead is a shallow high school girl, who used to be overweight, but lost weight after an incident that caused her to be put on a liquid diet. In this series, joking about anything, including child molestation and brutal murder, is allowed. The series depicts violence, but tends to hint that characters are nude under a blanket instead of actually showing nudity. The series includes queer characters Bob Armstrong, Bob Barnard, and Nonnie.

Nonnie is the leading character’s best friend. She starts off as a trope of the gay person in love with her best friend, who does not reciprocate her feelings, and is used

mainly for comedy. She is jealous when the girl develops feelings for a man, multiple times suggests they “make out” (ep. 2; 29:26) and then turns it into a joke. When she is helping her best friend pick out a bra, she states that to evaluate one she would “have to see it on” (ep. 3; 0:30). Then over the course of the series, she slowly realises that the girl is self-centred and never cared about their relationship as much as Nonnie. She explores her sexuality in the meantime, and this leads her to starting a relationship with a girl in episode seven.

Nonnie is torn between a heterosexual and a homosexual identity. Apart from liking her best friend, she also makes it clear that she finds one of their male friends attractive, they share a very passionate kiss in episode five and then attempt to date, which fails over Nonnie’s feelings for her best friend: “I just don’t think I’m into girls. But I do think I might be into Patty. Oh my God, you must hate me,” she tells him (ep. 6; 25:50). Right after this conversation, she meets a girl, tells her about her situation, and the girl gives Nonnie her number. She also tells her that if she were Patty, she would “be all in”, and then leaves (28:00). This leaves Nonnie ever more confused, but she goes on a date with the girl while insisting that they should not call it “a date” (ep. 7; 12:15). Resolving her problems with Patty and letting go of her helps Nonnie use the word “date” and even start calling the girl “babe” (13:00). However, Nonnie expresses she is still unsure about being “gay” (19:00). Later in the episode, the girl kisses her, and Nonnie afterwards tells her father that the girl is her “girlfriend” (30:00). She is then in a relationship with the girl for the rest of the series. It is never stated if she chose to identify as gay, and after episode seven, the topic is not brought up again.

Bob Armstrong is one of the show’s two leads. He is a successful lawyer who used to be a beauty pageant coach to young girls. His career in the field ended when one of the girls’ mother falsely accused him of molesting her daughter, because she wanted

to take revenge on him for losing a pageant. He has a wife whom he calls his “soulmate” (ep. 3; 30:55). Bob Armstrong is portrayed as a stereotypical gay man – his soft, high-pitched voice, his love for all things beautiful (“skinny is magic,” he often says to Patty), the fact that he can effortlessly demonstrate a pageant walk in stilettos and proudly states “I’m a lady’s size 14” (ep. 3; 17:20), and his former profession all point to his exaggerated effeminacy. Moreover, he shows apparent interest in one of their neighbours, Bob Barnard.

Bob Barnard is, together with his family (a wife and a daughter), much more successful than Armstrong, which is something that stirs up envy in Armstrong and his wife. His physical attractiveness is often commented on, he seems to be fond of taking his shirt off for no actual reason in inappropriate situations, and does not refrain from flaunting his success to daunt Armstrong. Barnard is a closeted gay until episode 10.

Armstrong and Barnard start off as rivals and then proceed to date in episode 9. While Barnard flaunts his superiority, other people notice it as well – when they order drinks, they are handed cups marked “Hot Bob” and “Other Bob” (ep. 4; 2:55). Armstrong reacts with constantly using nicknames when referring to Barnard, but while these nicknames are always said angrily, they are rarely truly insulting and range from “Bob Baywatch-body Barnard” (ep. 1; 13:00) to “Bob Back-Door Man Barnard” (ep. 6; 6:20). Armstrong always peaks to look at topless Barnard while pretending to look away.

Barnard confesses his love for Armstrong after they engage in a physical fight in episode eight resulting in them kissing for quite a long time, after which Armstrong panics and leaves. Nonetheless, they start an affair which people soon find out about. Episode’s ten opening scene is the couple waking up in bed together. Barnard keeps convincing Armstrong that he is gay, but Armstrong refuses to accept that and becomes

sensitive to the topic. When his wife imitates his typical walk and gesturing, without actually stating she thinks he is gay, Armstrong is hurt and tells her “when you say I’m gay, I feel like you don’t say I’m not gay” (ep. 9; 18:32). In episode twelve, Barnard, Armstrong, and Armstrong’s wife have sex together, after which Armstrong expects them function in a committed polyamorous relationship. His wishes are unfulfilled when he finds out that this was never what Barnard wanted.

Barnard and Armstrong view of their similar sexualities is vastly different, which is best demonstrated on this conversation:

Armstrong: “It didn’t even occur to me that I was bisexual.”

Barnard: “Gay.”

Armstrong: “I’m pretty sure gay men don’t like having sex with women, which I do.”

Barnard: “I do too. They’re soft, they’re like pillows filled with marshmallows.”

Armstrong: “So you’re bisexual.”

Barnard: “No, that’s not how I identify. I’m gay, emotionally. And I’m pretty sure you are too.” (ep. 10; 20:00)

In *Insatiable*, Armstrong, Barnards, and Nonnie’s storyline all include issues surrounding bisexuality. Nonnie feels conflicted, because she seems to be attracted to men, and also to her female best friend. The fact that she expresses attraction towards a man and is for such a long time uncertain about whether she is gay might mean she is bisexual, yet nobody on the show ever considers that to be an option. Armstrong deals with other people claiming they understand his sexuality better than he does and assuming that the fact that he is effeminate and attracted to men means that he is homosexual. And Barnard does not even seem to consider whether he might be bisexual because he likes “having sex with women”, he identifies as gay because his romantic

focus is on men. All of these examples point to the trope of “bisexual erasure”, the tendency to erase or ignore bisexuality. However, no matter what their sexualities are, no other character in the series expresses issues with them experiencing same-sex attraction. The aim of their storylines is for them to understand and accept themselves.

The Orville

The Orville (MacFarlane) is a comedy-drama mimicking, among others, the Star Trek franchise. It consists of 12 episodes so far and follows the adventures of the spaceship Orville and its crewmembers. The series often references sex and, as it is a comedy, jokes about it, but does not show nudity. Most of the series is set to a light, often whimsical tone. The queer character of the series is not human and would not be considered “queer” by other members of his species, but nonetheless the human culture would most likely label him as homosexual.

Bortus is a member of the “Moclan” species. Moclans are stout, humanoid-like beings with brown skin and distinctive ridges on their heads. They are also all male - “a Moclan female is born roughly every 75 years” (ep. 2; 42:00). They date and form romantic and sexual partnerships like humans do, and they can only do this with the same sex. They are not intersex or hermaphrodites as we traditionally understand the terms, rather they are simply what human culture sees as male. They have deep voices, are referred to by male pronouns, portrayed by male actors, and their idea of a piece of information that would make them appeal to others is to reveal how many enemies they crushed in battle (aggressivity is considered to be a masculine trait).

Bortus lives on the ship with his partner, who only appears in a handful of scenes. Bortus is in all of the episodes, but often makes only a short appearance. The characteristic that probably sets him apart the most is his lack of understanding the

humour of his crewmates. When he is first introduced in the beginning of the first episode, the ship's captain jokes about the Moclans not having to argue about the position of toilet seats, to which Bortus calmly replies that Moclans only urinate once a year, and when the captain says that he has to go multiple times a night, Bortus matter-of-factly concludes "that is unfortunate". In the beginning of the twelfth episode, however, the viewers learn that Bortus does have his own sense of humour and of fun even, when the captain visits him. Bortus and his partner play a Moclan game called "Latchkum" with the captain. They throw around a wooden egg, and when the captain hesitates and wonders what the goal of the game is, a dagger emerges from the egg and pierces his hand. Bortus and his partner excitedly exclaim "Latchkum!" and inform the captain that he has won.

The couple has a child together and resembles a typical dynamic of a heterosexual marriage. While Bortus works, his partner takes care of their baby, and is not happy with the fact that Bortus often leaves them alone. "I am your mate and I have needs," his partner informs him in the beginning of the fourth episode, and then complains that Bortus works too much. In episode nine, his partner asks if Bortus will eat dinner with them, but Bortus has to work again. To this, his partner sighs that it will be only him and the baby again. Bortus later asks one of his crewmates why do people have children if that results in the partners arguing all the time.

While Bortus and his partner are not shown engaging in any kind of physical intimacy, *The Orville* features an episode with another example of same-sex attraction, which is the result of alien chemicals affecting the, otherwise heterosexually behaving, captain of the ship and visiting aliens. No characters question their changed behaviour, and the captain is even in what appears to be a post-coital scene with his love interest – the captain walks from his bathroom to his bedroom covered only in a bathrobe, while

the other man is naked on the bed (ep. 9). But in the same episode and under the influence of the same chemical, one of the other human regular character has sex with an alien whose body consists entirely of virtually shapeless jelly, which slightly decreases the significance of suggested sex between two men, as it suggest that these chemically induced attractions serve to the series as jokes.

The Terror

The Terror (Kajganich) is a horror series about the British Royal Navy ships Erebus and Terror. The ships get stuck in ice and their crews must survive winter and protect themselves against the attacks of a creature resembling a giant bear. It is worth noting that given the story of the series, the vast majority of its characters is male. The series contains graphic violence, but depicts no sexual scenes and very little bare skin. The queer character of the series is Cornelius Hickey.

Hickey's sexuality is only discussed regarding his past relationship with one of the other men on the ship. In the third episode, Hickey and his ex-lover talk, and the man says that Hickey's "tastes are no rule for" his own, to which Hickey replies "is that why I've seen more of your postern than your face this winter, Billy?" (23:20). As the series is set in 1847, which was before homosexuality began to be considered a part of an individual's identity (Hall 32), whether or not Hickey would actually identify as gay in the modern times is unclear. He was on a ship with no women, and considering his sociopathic behaviour, it is possible he saw Billy as an object of sexual gratification.

Hickey is barely noticeable in the first two episodes but becomes essential to the show as it progresses. He convinces some of the other men to leave the rest of their companions and take their supplies, which they finally do in the eighth episode. Even before that, Hickey does not hesitate to commit multiple murders and frame other

people to advance his plans. After his group leaves, the men resort to cannibalism under Hickey's command. He even kills his ex-lover, Billy, when Billy becomes ill with scurvy (ep. 9; 14:14), forces one of the other men to carve up his flesh, and eats him. In the last episode of the series, Hickey is killed trying to control the mysterious creature (33:00). Shortly before that, it is revealed that instead of simply signing up for the voyage like the other men did, he killed a man called Cornelius Hickey and took his name and place on the ship (26:00). After this confession, he is standing on a boat that had been pulled across the desert by the other men and maniacally shouts: "Bugger Victoria! We're here! Bugger Nelson! Bugger Jesus! Bugger Joseph and Mary!"

The Deuce

The Deuce (Pelecanos and Simon) is set in the 1970s and depicts the sex-trade industry and development of the pornographic industry in Manhattan. Two of its regular characters are twin brothers, who own a bar and a brothel, others are mainly prostitutes and pimps. The series focuses on the relationship between these groups. Needless to say, the series is explicit and graphic. The bartender in one of the leading character's bar is called Paul Hendrickson, and he is queer.

Paul originally worked in a gay bar called "Penny Lane", which the lead character comes to own in the second episode and rebuilds. He wears tight shirts, smokes (which was the norm at the time and is the norm in the series), and seems to try to stay away from trouble. Whenever a conflict arises at the bar, he stands idly by and observes – like when a strange man bursts into the bar and demands to be paid, while nobody is aware of who he is (ep. 3; 10:00). Later in the episode it is revealed that Paul knew the man but claims "it happened so fast" that he "didn't have a chance to say anything" (16:30). When watching the previous scene again, it appears that there was

more than enough time for Paul to step in. This suggests he is passive, which is a trait stereotypically associated with effeminacy.

In the fourth episode, he is shown eating dinner in a restaurant with his boyfriend. The man is wearing a shirt, vest, and a tie and expresses worry about his “colleagues” seeing them together, Paul assures him that they are “just two guys having dinner” and that “it’s New York” and “nobody cares” (5:50). In episode five, Paul starts seeing another man and tells him about his discontent with the fact that his boyfriend is closeted. They discuss that being openly gay is easier for Paul, given what his job is, while his boyfriend’s job “pays” Paul’s rent but makes it harder to come out (36:40). In the same episode, Paul brings a strange man home, states that his boyfriend does not mind, and when the boyfriend walks in on them, the three men start kissing and presumably have sex after the scene cuts (42:30).

Paul’s new interest appears in the series again and the two are shown having sex (the camera takes up the upper halves of their bodies only and the scene is dimly lit), then lying naked in an embrace and talking (20:39).

9-1-1

9-1-1 (Brad) is ten episodes long and follows the lives of members of a fire brigade, a policewoman and a 9-1-1 phone operator. It contains no nudity. The two queer characters are Michael Grant and Henrietta Wilson.

Michael Grant is African American and a husband of the policewoman that the show focuses on. In the first episode, while their family is having breakfast, Michael tells their two children that he is gay (22:20). He does this because his sexuality caused tension in their marriage and the children noticed it. Then for the rest of the series, his wife is working on accepting him, while Michael tries to make it clear that he loves her and their children and tries to be understanding of his wife contempt for him. In the

second episode during a couple counselling session, his wife tells him that if he is willing to live a celibate life, so is she, but Michael confesses to her that he has “met someone” (30:21).

His boyfriend makes an appearance in episode three, but only for a few seconds, and in episode 10 Michael is taking their children to meet him, to which his wife previously agreed (11:00). He is still wearing his wedding ring in this episode, and throughout the season calls his wife “baby”. It is obvious that he values keeping their family together while being open about his relationship with a man, which is further demonstrated when he tells his wife: “We’re on our way to being better people, more authentic people. And that journey, well, it isn’t free.” (ep. 10; 12:30).

The series focuses on his wife, not on him, which means that while he is a series regular, he does not have enough scenes to have his character developed beyond what he is to his family. Neither does he have more than one short scene with his boyfriend or any intimate scenes. His clothing and mannerism are fairly regular and do not point either to effeminacy or exaggerated masculinity. However, his wife’s close friend and a self-identified lesbian Henrietta is a different case.

Henrietta Wilson is an African American woman with a wife and an adoptive son. Her appearance can be described as butch. She wears plaid shirts, jeans, and has her hair shaved short, close to the scalp. She also wears a wedding ring. Henrietta is a member of the fire brigade that the series focuses on and her masculinity is highlighted by the fact that she is the only woman on their team. She also insists that people never call her Henrietta but use “Hen” (ep. 5; 38:30), which is the name’s more masculine appearing pet form.

Other than her masculinity, her most notable traits are her intelligence and compassion. Already in the first episode, she is the one pointing the team to facts that

they otherwise might have missed – when they are called to an apartment where an infant’s cries are heard from a wall, she is the one to say that a mother might have flushed a new-born baby down the toilet, which would mean the baby would be stuck in the pipes in the wall (12:28); she is also the one to realise that if anybody on the upper floors flushes a toilet, the baby drowns (14:00), after which she runs up the stairs to instruct the residents not to flush. Then later, when they are called to a case of a woman being strangled by a giant snake and the only way to save the woman seems to be to kill the snake, Henrietta wants to find another way and tells them “it’s a snake, it’s doing what nature intended for it to do.” (27:59).

Henrietta’s storyline centres around her family and starts in episode five, where her wife first appears (26:50) together with their son. Even before that, in the beginning of the episode, she is having drinks with a friend and explicitly mentions her “wife” to her. After the drinks, Henrietta goes to a prison to visit her ex-girlfriend, who is revealed to be their son’s mother. When she is later sitting in a park with her wife as they watch their son play, she tells her about her visit to the prison. The only physical contact they have is hand-holding.

In episode eight, Henrietta’s ex-girlfriend calls her to inform her that she had been released from prison and to ask her to come over (21:53). Henrietta then visits her in one of the last scenes of the episode. The last seconds of the episode switch between the scene with Henrietta and her ex-girlfriend, and a scene with another couple, as both couples are about to have sex. Importantly, the other couple is heterosexual and the scene cuts right after the man takes off his shirt, while the two women are seen kissing and caressing each other in their underwear only.

Henrietta then spends the following three episodes trying to convince her wife to come back to her after she found out about Henrietta’s infidelity. Their feud is further

complicated by Henrietta's ex-girlfriend, who is suing them for the custody of their son and uses the infidelity as a reason the couple's home is not a suitable environment for a child. Her wife and their son come home at the end of the last episode, while the feud with Henrietta's ex-girlfriend remains unresolved.

While both Henrietta and Michael clearly have troubled marriages, the series does not give the impression that this is in anyway connected to their sexuality. Henrietta's same-sex marriage is valid just as Michael's opposite-sex one. She is mentioning her wife throughout the series and nobody questions their partnership. Michael's story, on the other hand, portrays genuine efforts of a family to stay together without pretending its members are something they are not. It is also worth noting that the show's focus is on the hardships of relationships – one of these is a man dating a significantly older woman, another a man who is rejected by his girlfriend when he proposes.

Comparison of the Series

The first thing to note about the ten analysed series is that only one of the LGBTQ characters is an antagonist, which is the case for *The Terror's* Cornelius Hickey, who commits murders, is a cannibal, and unreservedly uses the other characters to achieve his own goals. All of the other analysed characters can be either considered neutral (e.g. the *Insatiable's* Bob Barnard and Bob Armstrong, who each have certain negative characteristics, but are not the antagonists of the show, or the protagonist (such as Karolina and Nico on the *Runaways*).

Then there is the question of whether the characters share a striking resemblance, or they are diverse. This question must be looked at from different angles. The first is their racial diversity: There is 16 analysed characters. Out of these, one is from a science-fiction show and is a member of a whole different species (Bortus on

Star: Trek Discovery), which means he will be disregarded. Out of the remaining 15, 10 are white. Only 3 are Black (9-1-1's Henrietta and Michael, and *Black Lightning*'s Anissa), 1 appears to be multiracial (*Star Trek Discovery*'s Hugh), and 1 of Asian descent (Nico on the *Runaways*).

Then there are the clothes they choose to wear. 2 women adopted a butch style of clothing (*Godless*' Mary Agnes and 9-1-1's Henrietta), *Insatiable*'s Nonnie wears clothing that makes her a tomboy, but not to a point of being butch, and Nico from the *Runaways* has her own distinctive, gothic style. The remaining characters wear conforming clothes that is typical of their gender without being overly masculine or feminine; Paul (from *Star Trek: Discovery*) and Hugh, Cornelius, and Bortus wear uniforms.

The third aspects of the characters to compare are their personalities. *Mindhunter*'s Wendy and *Black Lightning*'s Anissa are both mostly characterized by their intelligence. Wendy is a psychology professor, Anissa is a medical student. They are both strong-willed, but Wendy remains professionally distant where Anissa would be impulsive. Simply put, Wendy is an observer, whereas Anissa is a superhero. Another character depicted as one of the more intelligent characters of their series is Henrietta, who is otherwise different from Wendy – Henrietta is butch, has a family, and like Anissa's, her purpose is to help people. Similarly, Mary Agnes and Cornelius are both leaders, but apart from this, they are two entirely different characters set apart mainly by Cornelius' villainous role in his series. These are the only characters who share substantial similarities, other than that, the character's personalities differ across all of the shows.

Lastly, there is physical intimacy depicted or lacking on the series. To illustrate a point, it is useful to consider female and male characters separately. *Mindhunter*'s

Wendy Carr shares a kiss with her partner and nothing more, but the only couple who is physically intimate on the series is the lead character and his girlfriend. Mary Agnes and Callie Dunne from *Godless* also share a kiss and it is hinted that they have had sex, which is not shown with the series other couples either. Karolina and Nico from the *Runaways* kiss and nothing else, and in the show, there is one couple among the teenagers that has sex, but considering the target audience, nothing is shown on the screen. *9-1-1*'s Henrietta is shown about to have sex with a woman while they are both wearing only their underwear, which is less clothing than is worn by another couples who has sex in the same episode. *Black Lightning*'s Annissa is the only female character to openly talk about sex with her partner, and she as well is shown in bed with a woman wearing underwear only. *Insatiable*'s Nonnie only kisses her girlfriend, while many of the other characters are obviously shown before or after having sex. What these instances demonstrate is that while female couples are normally scripted to have scenes including some physical intimacy, this often stops with a kiss. Apart from *9-1-1*'s Henrietta and her ex-girlfriend, if there was a couple with less depicted physical intimacy than the other couples on the show had, it was the female couple.

When it comes to male couples, Paul and Hugh on *Star Trek: Discovery* kiss, but other than that rarely touch, while the others are again obviously shown before or after having sex. *The Terror*'s Cornelius has no intimate scenes at all, but neither do any of the other characters. And neither does *9-1-1*'s Michael, although that is attributed to the fact that he is not the focus of the show. *Insatiable*'s Bob Barnard and Bob Armstrong not only talk about sex, but wake up together in bed and are shown in a post-coital scene with Armstrong's wife. Paul from *The Deuce* is the only queer character depicted having sex, but this scene is badly lit and the men are only shown from their heads to the middle of their backs, while sex between heterosexual couples on the series often

shows everything but genitals. Bortus from *Star Trek: Discovery* has no scenes including physical intimacy at all, but that can be due to his alien race. On this series, a non-alien character experiencing same-sex attraction is shown after sex. These examples show that male couples are often those that have significantly less scenes including physical intimacy than others. This is especially obvious with the case of Paul from *The Deuce*. He is a part of the only queer couple shown having sex, but this is done on a series where sexual intercourse is blatantly displayed, and Paul's scene is considerably less graphic than scenes of the opposite-sex couples. *Insatiable*, where Armstrong and Barnard are treated equally as most of the other couples, is an exception to this rule.

Comparison of the female and the male couples demonstrates that female couples share significantly more physical contact on screen than males. For example, while all of the female couples shared at least a kiss, 3 of the male characters did not have any scenes including physical intimacy at all. And while several of the female characters were in scenes that suggested they either were about to have or already have had sex, the same cannot be said about the male characters. This is true for *The Deuce*'s Paul but can be disregarded considering how distinctively his scenes were treated in the context of the show. This leaves the only male couple treated in the same way as the female couples to be *Insatiable*'s Armstrong and Barnard.

Physical intimacy is not the only instance where queer men and queer women are treated unequally. *Insatiable* and GLAAD's recent report show bisexuality to be one of the issues as well. The significantly higher number of female bisexual characters than the number of male bisexual characters, and the character of Bob Armstrong, who was constantly told he was gay and not bisexual, point to how much "bisexual erasure" concerns men more than women.

The storylines of the queer characters were treated virtually in the same way as were the other couples of the series, with one exception. That is Paul and Hugh from *Star Trek: Discovery*, whose romance can be considered the show's main love story, even if the two were only supporting characters.

Conclusion

There is significant improvement in the treatment of queer characters' sexualities and relationships from the television series of the 1990s. It is probably not surprising that series with queer characters no longer face the threat of being cancelled over their character's sexualities, but what is a notable and important development is the portrayal of physical intimacy between queer couples. However, in this aspect, female couples are treated considerably better than the male couples. This may be due to popular culture's tendency to sexualise female romantic relationship, or perhaps because the public tends to feel more homophobic towards queer men. Whatever the reason, while there clearly is notable improvement in the treatment of queer physical intimacy on screen, these positive changes are not shared by men and women equally.

Different treatment of men and women is also visible regarding bisexuality. While there is a bigger number of bisexual characters overall, male bisexual characters are being erased in favour of their female counterparts. This is the only indisputably negative change observed in this thesis.

Another important change is in the number of queer characters. To put it simply, it is now fairly easy to find a television series that has at least one. The problematic part is that there usually is in fact only one regular character or two regular characters that are always in a relationship. Queer leads are still quite rare, but nonetheless much more common than they used to be.

These findings point to the fact that queer representation on American television has come a long way from the stereotypical theatre-loving gay men and series being cancelled over an actress and her character coming out as lesbian. While there naturally still are many aspects of representation to be improved, the positive developments overall are clear. Simply the fact that Ellen DeGeneres, the woman who lost her sitcom

after coming out as gay, now has a popular talk show and is an adored celebrity once again, points to how much more tolerant the American society has become.

Linked with the fact that this is in a country where religious people, people who are inclined to stand against sexual minorities, make up about 76% of the population, and also a country that less than twenty years ago considered sexual relations of two people of the same gender a sodomy in many of its parts, the personalities and storylines of lesbian, gay, and bisexual characters on American television are an exemplary proof of how radically and how quickly can people change their approach towards minorities. And while there still is a long way to go, people are clearly moving forward.

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Summary

The thesis examines how has portrayal of lesbian, gay, and bisexual fictional characters in American television series improved since the 1990s. It uses examples of popular series of that decade to illustrate issues concerning the treatment of these characters, and ten selected television series of the 2017/2018 season to examine whether these issues are still common or have been resolved. The thesis also uses a statistical report on the number of lesbian, gay, and bisexual characters from the 2007/2008 and 2017/2018 seasons to provide a quantitative analysis of the changes in representation of these characters over the given decade.

The first part of the thesis examines the United States as a model on which radical societal changes can be observed happening in a relatively short period of time. Attention is also given to the effect of television representation on the public, specifically how it affects an individual's development and general views on sexual minorities. The third chapter summarises representation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual character on American series in the 1990s. The first part of the thesis ends with a chapter on the quantitative analysis of these characters in the 2007/2008 and 2017/2018 seasons.

The second part of the thesis uses ten popular television series premiering in 2017 and 2018 to describe the current representation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual character on television. The examined changes are put in context with developments in the United States' approach to these minorities. The aim of the thesis is demonstrate improvement in representation on television, which, in context of the overall situation, is considered to be a sign of positive changes in attitude of the American public towards the sexual minorities.

Résumé

Tato práce zkoumá, jak se znázorňování fiktivních homosexuálních a bisexuálních postav v amerických seriálech zlepšilo od devadesátých let. Na příkladu populárních amerických seriálů z devadesátých let je popsána problematika týkající se těchto postav právě v devadesátých letech, poté práce popisuje deset vybraných seriálů z roků 2017 a 2018, na kterých je ukázáno, do jaké míry se tato problematika týká i seriálů dneška. Práce také zmiňuje statistické změny v počtu homosexuálních a bisexuálních postav od let 2007/2008 do let 2017/2018.

První část této práce se zabývá otázkou, zda je možné použít jedinou zemi, v tomto případě Spojené státy, jako obecný příklad značných a rychlých společenských změn. Také se soustředí na to, jaký má televize vliv na pohled veřejnosti na sexuální menšiny a jak ovlivňuje vývoj lidské osobnosti. Problematikou homosexuálních a bisexuálních postav v devadesátých letech se zabývá kapitola třetí. První část práce končí kapitolou o kvantitativní analýze těchto postav v obdobích 2007/2008 a 2017/2018.

Druhá část práce na příkladu deseti oblíbených seriálů z roků 2017 a 2018 popisuje současné znázorňování homosexuálních a bisexuálních postav v seriálech. Změny ve znázorňování těchto postav jsou dány do souvislosti s tím, jak se přístup Spojených států k sexuálním menšinám v poslední době vyvíjel. Tato práce má za cíl poukázat na pozitivní změny v zastoupení a znázorňování sexuálních menšin mezi postavami v seriálech, a tím ukázat na celkový pozitivní vývoj v přístupu americké veřejnosti k těmto menšinám.