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Cultivation in an On-Demand Era: Television Consumption, Explicit and Implicit Attitudes toward Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals

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CULTIVATION IN AN ON-DEMAND ERA: TELEVISION CONSUMPTION, EXPLICIT
AND IMPLICIT ATTITUDES TOWARD LESBIAN, GAY,
AND BISEXUAL INDIVIDUALS

by

Jasmine M. LaBine

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Jasmine M. LaBine, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2016

Past research in media effects suggests that the media we consume influences our daily lives. More specifically, Cultivation Theory suggests that television collectively contributes to our worldviews. In this study, cultivation was applied at both macro- and micro-levels. Macrolevel cultivation, or traditional cultivation, involves analysis of television as a collective medium and the way that it affects attitudes. Micro-level cultivation refers to the idea that certain types of programs influence specific attitudes.

Attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals were analyzed in relation to a number of variables. Few statistically significant results were found relating demographics and general television consumption to homonegative attitudes. However, results did indicate a negative relationship between consumption of television programs depicting LGB characters and attitudes toward LGB people.

Homonegative attitudes were measured not only explicitly using the Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS), but also implicitly using the Sexuality Implicit Association Test. Results indicated a significant, positive relationship between these two measures, indicating support for these measures. Thus, the Hawthorne effects are often anticipated with explicit measures were not strongly exhibited with this sample.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When asked by a viewer why so many of her television shows contained lesbian and gay storylines, popular television writer, producer, and creator, Shonda Rhimes (*Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal*) said, "because I believe everyone should get to see themselves reflected on TV. EVERYONE" (France, 2014, n.p.). Decisions such as these made by television moguls such as Rhimes have initiated a conversation about equal representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender characters on television, calling attention to a demand for such characters that television viewers might not have otherwise recognized. However, the presence of these characters on television is still relatively new, and their representation is arguably flawed.

Representation of homosexuality in the media: A brief history

Prior to 1968, when film producers were operating under the Hollywood Motion Picture Production Code, overt homosexuality was virtually invisible in media (Ghosh, 2011). While some allusions were made to gay characters, these allusions were minimal at best. After many revisions to the Code, including allowance of "responsible" portrayals of drug use, prostitution, and interracial sexual relationships in 1956. The Hollywood Motion Picture Production Code was scrapped in its entirety and replaced with a rating system based on suitability for age groups (Ghosh, 2011). This rating system was the basis for the rating systems for television and film that we know today.

Following the implementation of these new rating systems, overt presence of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) characters was still somewhat limited for decades. The next era of

importance in regard to representation of LGB individuals in the media involved media portrayals of the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s. The media pronouncements of prevalence of AIDS diagnoses in gay men vilified them, as the private, sexual experiences of LGB individuals were being portrayed as a threat to public health (Moritz, 1996). While news outlets and entertainment television alike contributed to the perception of gay men as villains in regard to the spread of HIV and AIDS, a few notable dramatic television series depicted gay men as victims in the later years of the AIDS epidemic (Moritz, 1996).

Throughout the 1990s, popular American entertainment television shows such as *Will & Grace* (Kohan & Mutchnick, 1998), *Dawson's Creek* (Williamson, 1998), and *Queer as Folk* (Cowen & Lipman, 2000) began a process that has now been dubbed by researchers as the normalization of homosexuality on television (Jenner, 2014; Peters, 2011). In this context, the term “normalization” refers to the phenomenon that presence of gay characters in popular television is no longer unique, and therefore, prompts very little public response, regardless of valence (Jenner, 2014). Since the 1990s, closer attention has been paid to contextual portrayals of gay and lesbian characters, as well as the volume and frequency of gay characters in popular television shows and the status of these characters in terms of lead or recurring roles (GLAAD, 2015; Penney, 2015). Today, gay, lesbian, and transgender characters are depicted in popular television series of all genres, from comedies such as *Modern Family* (Levitan & Lloyd, 2009), *Glee* (Brennan, Falchuck, & Murph, 2009), and *The Millers* (Garcia, 2013), to dramas such as *Downton Abbey* (Fellowes, 2010), *Grey's Anatomy* (Rhimes, 2005), *Empire* (Daniels & Strong, 2015), and *Scandal* (Rhimes, 2013).

According to the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)'s annual *Where We Are on TV* (2015) report, four percent of series regulars on scripted, primetime

broadcast television shows were lesbian, gay, or bisexual in the start of the 2015 season, up from 3.9% during the 2014-2015 television season, and 3.3% in 2013. Of this 4%, GLAAD (2015) counted 33% of these characters being lesbian, 47% gay, with 35 new lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) characters in primetime television being introduced since the previous television season. Also remarkable among GLAAD's findings was that primetime cable television series included eighty-four LGB characters, which is substantially more than the previous season's sixty-four LGB characters. Additionally, for the first year, GLAAD conducted this same analysis on original streaming television shows produced by Amazon, Hulu, and Netflix. Of the twenty-three shows presented via these networks between June 1, 2015 and May 31, 2016, GLAAD identified forty-three lesbian, gay, and bisexual regular characters with an additional sixteen recurring characters.

Media influence on perceptions of LGB individuals

While this apparent normalization of homosexuality and bisexuality in the media does not prompt massive public opposition, past research on media effects suggests that media consumed has the ability to influence attitudes toward issues portrayed, general behavior, and even the way that we view reality (Fisch, 2009). With this logic, even the most inaccurate information conveyed through media has the ability to influence thoughts, attitudes, and behavior.

The influence of public opinion on legal rights of LGB individuals

In democratic countries in which lawmakers are popularly elected, citizens have the power to directly influence the rights of others. For this reason, perceptions of particular communities, in this case, the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community, have potential to greatly influence the everyday lives of members of such communities. Rights that legally privileged

individuals take for granted such as eligibility for government benefits and protections, rights to make decisions regarding the care of loved ones, and the rights to parent and adopt children are directly influenced by the recognition of a family by law (Herek, 2006; Infanti, 2014).

Because policy decisions are made regarding such recognition by popularly elected officials, the concept of perceptions of LGB individuals by the general population becomes increasingly salient, further positioning entertainment media as a critically influential source in formulating public opinion. Past research has indicated a positive correlation between quantified television consumption and likelihood of voting in public elections (Livingston & Markham, 2008). Additionally, research has been conducted evaluating relationships between entertainment television consumption and evaluations of candidates particularly related to late-night comedy (Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2004). Following the 2008 Presidential Election, Communication scholars analyzed sources of political information and access to those sources and argued that political information needs to be conveyed through more diverse sources, possibly including entertainment television (Holbert & Geidner, 2009).

The influence of public opinion on well-being of LGB individuals

Beyond legal benefits and protections, legal recognition of same-sex relationships has been shown to positively influence the physical and emotional well-being of individuals in legally recognized relationships (Riggle, Rotosky, & Horne, 2010). Unfortunately, effects on well-being of the LGB community are most evident when negative repercussions of mistreatment of LGB folks occur. Specifically looking at youths and adolescents, bullying of individuals perceived to be LGB is a real threat that continues to grow as victims are targeted not only on the playground or in school hallways (O'Malley Olsen, Kann, Vivolo Kantor, Kinchen, & McManus, 2014), but online as well (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Hemphill, Tollit,

Kotevski, & Heerde, 2015; Ybarra, Mitchell, Palmer, & Reisner, 2015). Robinson and Espelage (2011) found that youths who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning are at greater risk of victimization by peers, which all too often leads to self-harm, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and suicide (Liu & Mustanski, 2010; King, Semlyen, Tai, Killaspy, Osborn, Popelyuk, & Nazareth, 2008).

Tragedies such as self-harm and suicide are often the results of mental health issues, which LGB folks are prone to experience as a consequence of their experiences in hostile environments (Figueiredo & Abreu, 2015; Hatzenbuehler, 2011). In a 2011 study of high school juniors in Oregon, Hatzenbuehler found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth were 20% more at risk of attempting suicide when they felt that they were not supported in their everyday environments. There are several factors that contribute to increased suicide risk among LGB individuals in comparison to heterosexual individuals. However, victimization through bullying and homophobia along with a lack of social support have been shown to directly contribute to depression and suicide attempts in the LGB community (King et al., 2008; Ploderl, Sellmeijer, Fartacek, C., Pichler, Fartacek, R., & Kralovek, 2014; Robinson & Espelage, 2012; Voelker, 2011).

If suicide and self-harm were the only threats to the lives of LGB people, legal regulations requiring harsher punishment of bullying perpetrators and psychological help for potential victims might encompass a great deal of the steps necessary for ending the attack on lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. However, death of LGB individuals is not always at the hands of the victim. Hate criminals, or criminals who commit crimes involving bias often target individuals of sexual minorities (Nolan, Haas, Turley, Stump, & LaValle, 2015). In 2013, 20.8% of hate crimes reported in the United States targeted victims based on sexual orientation (Federal

Bureau of Investigation, 2014). Hein and Scharer (2013) found that hate crimes are generally more violent than non-hate motivated crimes and tend to lead to more mental health consequences for the victim. While not all hate crimes lead to death, hate crimes have been shown to have a significantly negative impact on the psychological and emotional well-being of not only survivors, but other LGB members of communities where these crimes are committed (Bell & Perry, 2015). In fact, research shows that LGB adolescents living in neighborhoods with higher rates of hate crimes against sexual minorities are more likely to commit suicide than those who are not exposed to hate crimes against LGBT individuals (Duncan & Hatzenbuehler, 2014).

Television and attitudes toward LGB individuals

Because the emotional well-being of LGB individuals is influenced not only by the individuals themselves, but by outsiders to these sexual minority communities, it is important that efforts to address these issues are made at a broader level than simply helping LGB individuals to cope with their victimization. While education is said to be one of the most important steps in preventing bullying and hate crimes against LGBT teenagers (Roeck, 2008), beyond the classroom, it is difficult to provide this education that is necessary for people of all ages. One venue through which people of all ages and cultural backgrounds can be reached is entertainment, or more specifically, television.

According to Nielsen's (2015) report on technology use, 87% of all adults are reached by television each week, with the average adult using television 5.6 days each week. Collectively, adults spend an average of 36 hours and seven minutes per week watching television (Turrill & Enoch, 2015). Television consumption is said to account for more than half of leisure time for people age 15 and older (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). While there are certainly flaws in the sometimes stereotyped performance of LGB individuals on television, some would argue that the

mere presence of LGB characters on mainstream television is a step toward promoting empathy and understanding toward this community. Thus, television becomes an important platform in potentially influencing attitudes toward LGB individuals, whether through simple quantified representation or the more complex nature of carefully constructed character traits demonstrated by LGB characters. One might even assert that media officials have a social responsibility to thoughtfully analyze the effect that their products, in the form of broadcasts, might have on society (Dincer, B. & Dincer, C.; Gulyas, 2011; Ward, 2012). This responsibility has been made evident by the countless campaigns made by political organizations to censor certain types of content (Penney, 2015; Timmer, 2013; Wagner, 2014).

The struggle between censorship and free speech in America is an ongoing and inevitably endless source of debate that typically centers on the costs and benefits of both approaches to dealing with sensitive content (Kenyon, 2014; Steen-Johnsen & Enjolras), 2016. As earlier mentioned, in the context of perceptions of minorities, the costs of representing characters, groups, or issues in manners that might cause negative attitudes toward minorities in the interest of protecting free speech might involve the absence of rights or even threats to the well-being of people in minority groups, specifically those identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

With the demonstrated notion that media influences public opinion, and that public opinion has the potential to significantly alter the daily lives of any number of groups of people, media is posited as a very powerful tool in shaping our daily lives. This study seeks to address the relationship between current entertainment television consumption and perceptions of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. While this study could be conducted in application to any minority demographic, recent legal decisions regarding same-sex marriage (Cooper, 2015) as well as the complicated, emotional processes of identity construction and disclosure by LGB

individuals (Manning, 2015; Perrin-Wallqvist & Lindblom, 2015) necessitate further insight into perceptions of LGB individuals outside of the LGB community. Past research on the impact of emotional and physical violence against LGB individuals combined with research on opinion formation in response to media consumption illustrates that while television is generally deemed a leisure activity, its influence has serious consequences. Thus, the paradigm through which we view messages conveyed on television must shift from simple rest and relaxation to potential life and death.

Explicit and implicit measures of attitudes toward LGB individuals

Quantitative methods utilized in interpreting attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexuals can be categorized into two overall groups; explicit and implicit. Explicit measures, such as the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2011; Romero, Morera, & Wiebe, 2015), involve administration of scales that blatantly ask the participants for their opinions. In contrast, implicit measures generally involve administration of an Implicit Association Test, which involves analysis of subconscious associations between ideas (Nicolas & Skinner, 2012).

Implicit Association Tests (IAT), first tested by Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998), measure associations between two concepts with one attribute (i.e. positive/negative) that exist outside the realm of consciousness. The justification for implicit associations as the favorable methodology involves the idea that these responses are automatic and do not allow for thorough introspection, which tends to eliminate some of the Hawthorne Effect associated with more explicit measures (O'Shea, 2015).

Research involving implicit measures is somewhat controversial, with some researchers arguing against its validity. Some psychologists argue that results cannot be considered

universal, as cognitive processes such as cognitive control (Siegel, Dougherty, & Huber, 2012) and ability contamination (Wright & Meade, 2012). However, past research comparing explicit measures to implicit measures has supported its validity. While implicit measures have not necessarily yielded more valid results than explicit measures across the board, when the topic of the test was more sensitive in nature, such as those involving race, predictive validity of implicit measures greatly exceeded that of self-report explicit measures (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). IAT research has been particularly prominent in determining implicit prejudice toward minority groups involving race (Fabiola Garza & Gasquoine, 2013; Oswald, Mitchell, Blanton, Jaccard, & Tetlock, 2013). Such research has been conducted in fields such as healthcare (Krieger, Carney, Lancaster, Waterman, Kosheleva, & Banaji, 2010), politics (Nevid & McClelland, 2010), and law (Larson, 2010), indicating that the implications of IAT are widely accepted in a variety of social and professional contexts.

While explicit and implicit measures undoubtedly measure different phenomena in regard to public opinion, both measures are valuable in terms of understanding public opinion. In order to further test validity of implicit measures as well as to understand whether the measured effects are subconscious or conscious, both implicit and explicit measures will be utilized.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Since Aristotelean times, rhetoricians have sought to understand the influences that society and messages have on attitudes and perceptions. Marketing specialists thrive on data explaining how they can better reach their consumers. Entertainment moguls depend on market research to better fulfill the desires of their clientele (Carrillat, D'Astous, & Christianis, 2014; Hung, 2014). Politicians build campaigns based on the needs of their potential constituents and their responses to political speeches and advertising (Lees-Marshment, 2015; Pich, Armannsdottir, & Dean). Beyond these pragmatic and somewhat capitalist applications of persuasive analysis, many scholars seek to understand the roles that media plays in shaping our everyday lives through messages conveyed.

While media were once understood as a means of relaying information and entertaining the masses, today we understand media to be a force of attitude formation that is as unifying as it is divisive (An, Paine, McNiel, Rask, Holder, Jourdan, & Varan, 2014; Kim, Lee, & Macias, 2014; Wegmann, 2013). With or without consciousness, viewers of television programming are at least somewhat changed by each moment of television consumed. These changes may be as inconsequential as the audience's mood or a curiosity provoked, or as imperative as the way that one views the world. With this power to shape society's opinions regarding not only important social issues, but the opinions that they have toward one another, the seriousness with which we analyze or media becomes much more urgent (Jeong, Cho, & Hwang, 2012).

In understanding media as a powerful source of attitude change, the issue of perceptions of minorities comes into question. In the wake of the repeal of the former Defense of Marriage Act and the great increase of representation of LGB characters on television, analysis of the media's role in attitude formation regarding LGB characters and homosexuality becomes increasingly important (Auchmuty, 2014). First, terminology involving LGB research and attitudes will be explained. Second, past research on indicators of attitudes toward LGB individuals will be presented, with emphasis on religion and other demographic factors. Next, literature regarding media effects on attitude formation toward minorities, including sexual minorities, will be presented. Finally, hypotheses will be proposed through the lens of Cultivation Theory and analysis of modern television consumption in the digital age.

Explaining attitudes toward LGB individuals

Terminology used to describe attitudes toward homosexuality has varied over the years, with two terms commonly used to describe degrees of negative attitudes toward LGB individuals in general. These terms include the colloquial (but also sometimes misleading) term, homophobia, as well as the academic term, homonegativity (Grey, Robinson, Coleman, & Bockting, 2013). In addition, two terms are commonly used to express favoritism or preference toward heterosexuality as the social norm: heterosexism and heteronormativity.

While the Latin roots of homophobia imply fear of homosexuality, the term is broadly used to describe negative, antagonistic attitudes toward LGB people (Slootmaekckers & Lievens, 2014). According to Smith, Oades and McCarthy (2012), use of the term homophobia once inferred that homosexuality was an illness or a sin, causing others to fear the "disease" of or association to homosexuality. They described that in the 1970s, Weinberg (1972) argued that the conceptual idea of homosexuality was not a result of a flawed condition on the part of

homosexuals, but a social construction of the belief that homosexuality was something to be feared or to cause disgust (Smith, Oades, & McCarthy, 2012). Members of the psychological community have challenged the use of the term homophobia, arguing that the term is inaccurate. In fact, analysis into negative attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality implies that these attitudes are not rooted in fear, but in prejudice (Schiffman & Delucia-Waack, 2006).

Homonegativity, on the other hand, refers to negative perceptions of LGB individuals and homosexuality as a whole and the actions caused by those perceptions (Morrison & Morrison, 2011). It is important to note that these actions can be directed at any person regardless of sexual orientation but can be caused by the belief that one is homosexual (Romero, Morera, & Wiebe, 2015).

A great deal of research, especially in the field of psychology, relates to internalized homophobia and homosexuality as part of identity negotiation for LGB individuals (Mclaren 2015; Morandini, Blasczynski, Ross, Costa, & Dar-Nimrod, 2015; Solomon, Mcabee, Asberg, & Mcgee, 2015; Theodore et al., 2013). While understanding internalized attitudes toward LGB individuals on the part of LGB individuals themselves is certainly valuable the identity negotiation involved in the homosexual experience is incredibly complex and in many ways distinct from the experiences of individuals who have not experienced this process of identity negotiation (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2011). In order to eliminate any of these complex psychological variables and focus solely on outsider opinion formation, the scope of this study focuses primarily on attitude formation for those who do not personally identify as LGB.

Contributing factors to attitudes toward LGB individuals

As with any polarizing issue, the derivatives of human attitudes toward homosexuality and LGB individuals are far too complex to attribute to one single contributing factor per person.

Hans, Kersey, and Kimberly (2012) conducted a survey for which students in a university lecture class were first divided based on their level of favorability and tolerance toward homosexuality, and then asked open-ended questions regarding the factors to which they attributed those feelings. Qualitative responses were coded for prevalent themes, and results indicated several contributing demographic factors to attitudes toward homosexuality.

Additionally, and perhaps relatedly, 42% of those favoring same-sex relationships referenced strong beliefs in equality and social justice. In contrast, those who identified as only tolerant of homosexuality frequently cited parental beliefs and religion, which was the most frequently referenced attribute for those with unfavorable attitudes (78%) and tolerant attitudes (51%), indicating that trust in authority for moral guidance, whether parental or spiritual, has great potential to influence these attitudes (Hans et al, 2012).

Finally, perceived origin of sexual orientation was a commonly referenced theme across the board, with more tolerant or favoring individuals perceiving sexuality as an innate human quality, and the less tolerant, protesting individuals perceiving it as a conscious choice (Hans et al., 2012). While attitudes regarding origin of sexual orientation can derive from any number of sources, religion certainly plays an important role in this distinction.

Other demographic influences on attitudes toward LGB individuals

Beyond religion, other demographic factors such as race, gender, and age have been shown to predict attitudes toward same-sex relationships. Guittar & Pals (2014) conducted bivariate and interactive analyses to evaluate trends in interaction effects between religion, gender, age, and voting preference in regard to the dependent variable of attitudes toward homosexuality. Results indicated that while bivariate connections between individual demographic factors and attitudes were evident, some of these relationships could be better

explained by interaction effects between multiple demographic factors, especially in situations where those factors are often connected, such as with race and religion.

Gender and attitudes toward LGB individuals

In terms of gender, religiosity was shown to have a slightly greater effect on women's attitudes toward LGB individuals than men's (Guittar & Pals, 2014). In regard to target of homonegativity, gay men are more likely targets of negative attitudes than are lesbian women (Morrison, & Morrison, 2011). One important influence of attitudes toward LGB individuals related to gender of the attitude holder is personal value of masculinity. In a culture where boys are socialized to be tough, athletic, patriarchal men, gay men are often viewed as effeminate or, at the very least, behaving in ways that contradict socially constructed ideals of masculine behavior (Barlow, 2008; Miller & Lewallen, 2015; Nagel, 2010). Masculinity plays perhaps the largest role in attitude formation regarding LGB individuals when behaviors exhibited are atypical to one's perceived norms for gender performance, especially in men. Regardless of the gender of the identity performer, if one performs identity atypically to the perceived norms of gender, they are more likely to be perceived as gay (Meaney & Rye, 2010).

While society has constructed very clear, stereotypical ideals for what it means to be masculine, scholars and psychologists recognize that the lines between performed genders are not quite as rigid as is often portrayed or perceived, but rather a fluid process that is constantly in flux and unique to the individual (Minshew, 2015). Despite this understanding of gender, it is important to understand that most young males are socialized in a culture that features heteronormative and patriarchal values. These values tend to lead young males to fear being identified as non-masculine by societal standards. Part of these feelings of perceived masculinity are drawn from heterosexuality. This continuum of masculinity was described by Kroeper,

Sanchez, and Himmelstein (2014) as precarious manhood, a process that involves boys and men labeling themselves and each other as having various degrees of masculinity. While precarious manhood implies that one can behave in ways that will help them to be perceived with higher degrees of masculinity, it is also understood that not all men will achieve manhood, and that gay men will almost never do so. A great deal of research has been conducted investigating the self-presentation measures taken by men to defend their masculinity, and in turn, their heterosexuality. This self-presentation might involve bullying LGB people (Hall & LaFrance, 2012), exerting dominance (Mata, Ghavami, & Wittig, 2010), and exhibition of hyper-sexuality or sexual objectification (Elder et al., 2013). With this research suggesting that men are more likely to possess negative attitudes toward LGB individuals as a result of socialized ideals of masculinity, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Male participants will exhibit higher degrees of homonegativity through a) implicit and b) explicit associations than will women or those identifying as non-binary gender.

Race and attitudes toward LGB individuals

Past research in the Mexican American community indicated that heterosexual Mexican men are at least slightly more likely than heterosexual Mexican women to hold negative feelings against lesbian women and gay men (Romero, Morera, & Wiebe, 2015). These results imply that differences in attitudes according to gender might be moderated by race, especially in minority communities.

Regarding race, Guittar and Pals (2014) indicated that those representing racial minorities such as Black and Hispanic participants generally indicated more negative attitudes than did white participants. While black participants had the most negative attitudes toward LGB individuals among the races studied, race was shown to be less of an indicator of attitudes when

controlled for religiosity, as religiosity had a stronger effect on attitudes (Guittar & Pals, 2014). In a 2007 study on homonegative attitudes exhibited by Professional School Counselors, Black counselors indicated significantly lower levels of homonegativity based on the Modern Homonegativity Scale than did White counselors (Satcher and Leggett, 2007), perhaps indicating a sort of empathy as members of minority groups. However, past research has also indicated that LGBT people of color have had uniquely difficult experiences with coming out and being accepted by members of the black community (Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014) leading to great levels of internalized homonegativity (Quinn et al., 2015). One study on media use and attitudes toward homosexuality found Black participants to be the least accepting of homosexuality of all participating races (Calzo & Ward, 2009). With these conflicting results in past research, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: How does participant race influence implicit attitudes toward LGB individuals?

Independent of demographic factors, personal experience may also be considered an important factor in attitude formation. Hans et al. (2012) indicated that 70% of people with favorable attitudes toward lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual individuals (LGB) attributed their attitudes to personal interactions with LGB people, comprising the most frequently mentioned attribution for favorable attitudes toward LGB individuals. That is, individuals who had experience with interacting with LGB individuals, whether family, friend, or acquaintance, were more likely to favor a homosexual lifestyle (Hans et al., 2012). This finding indicates that relationships or at least interaction experiences provide a more human face to sexual minorities, allowing for empathy toward the struggles faced by LGB individuals.

Framing minorities

In considering the associations one makes between personal experiences with LGB individuals and their perceptions toward them, it is worthwhile to note that these experiences might not involve direct contact with the individuals. For example, exposure to LGB characters on television or in film through narrative programming may also lead to these empathic associations. While the idea of fostering empathy through media is certainly hopeful in that individuals who might not regularly engage with LGB individuals have greater opportunities for these empathic experiences, using television as a frame of reference for a community might be problematic. Despite the best of intentions, it is not uncommon for minority communities who are represented on television to be presented with stereotypical qualities that are not necessarily reflective of authentic members of those communities.

One theoretical framework through which media effects on perceptions of minorities is commonly studied is Framing Theory. Framing Theory is rooted in the idea that individuals unconsciously or subconsciously develop cognitive schemas that help to organize thoughts in a manner that allows for more efficient identification and interpretation of information (Goffman, 1974). With this foundation, framing can be understood as a process through which information is organized based upon the stressing of certain aspects of a message along with the de-emphasis of other aspects.

In relation to minorities such as the LGB community, a common theme in framing research is the creation and reinforcement of stereotypes (Everbach, 2014; Lawless, 2014; Mercurio & Filak, 2010; Price Schultz & Achtenhagen, 2013; Xiufang, 2012). By directing attention to particular features of certain groups and not to other groups of people, “the explicit and implicit messages conveyed by the mass media supply audience members with sets of

attributes to be associated with different groups” (Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2013, p. 298). Whether the information about or attributes of a particular cultural group are accurate or inaccurate, the process of cognitively distinguishing one group from others is often subconscious, as credibility of an information source seems to have little to no bearing on its contribution to our perceptions of culture.

Media effects on attitudes toward LGB individuals

While research indicates that there are a multitude of predictors for attitudes toward LGB individuals, some research has indicated that media consumption plays a role in attitude formation. Beyond framing, Lee and Hicks (2011) found that those who consider television their primary form of entertainment were more likely to have positive attitudes toward same-sex marriage. Calzo and Ward (2009) researched connections between broad media use and attitudes of acceptance toward LGB people. Rather than focusing on directed exposure to LGB characters, as this study proposes, Calzo and Ward (2009) sought to identify connections between homonegativity and overall media consumption due to the rising trend of LGB characters being portrayed in mainstream television. Results indicated that women were significantly more likely to have positive attitudes toward LGB characters than men, and White participants were the most likely to have accepting attitudes of the races participating. While results were unclear connecting general media “diet” (pg. 289) and attitudes, genre of media portrayal was shown to influence attitudes. Despite the typical impression that music videos contain sexual stereotypes, music videos were shown to have the most positive relationship with attitudes toward homosexuality.

Despite the somewhat limited research directly linking media consumption to homonegativity or homophobia, research indicates a positive relationship between relational

experience with LGB individuals and attitudes toward homosexuality (Barth, Overby, & Huffmon, 2009). Additionally, research in media effects suggests that media plays a large role in influencing attitudes on social issues. Bond and Compton (2015) showed a positive relationship between exposure to openly-gay characters on television and attitudes toward equality for LGB individuals. Relatedly, Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2006) found that individuals who frequently watched *Will & Grace*, a television program prominently depicting gay characters, had lower levels of sexual prejudice.

Cultivation theory

In addition to the previously mentioned indicators, one theoretical framework in the field of media effects through which formation is studied in regard to media effects is Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1967). Cultivation Theory proposes that mass media influence, or cultivate, the opinions and viewpoints and individuals regarding their surrounding environments (Luther, Lepre, & Clark, 2012). The concept of cultivation was first introduced by Gerbner (1967) and later tested in subsequent studies with a research throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, primarily in the domain of violence on television (Gerbner, 1969, 1970, 1973). According to Gerbner (1973), Cultivation analysis “begins with the insights of the study of institutions and the message systems they produce, and goes on to investigate the contributions that these systems and their symbolic functions make to the cultivation of assumptions about life and the world” (p. 567). In later research, Gerbner (1998) noted that cultivation is not unidirectional (television to audience), but “part of a continual, dynamic, ongoing process of interaction among messages and contexts” (p. 182). That is, one media message or context does not singlehandedly alter an audience member’s belief system the instant that the message is consumed, but instead contributes to an ongoing process through which other messages and contexts are also

contributing, which ultimately leads to a more salient impact on one's beliefs about the social world.

Traditional cultivation research, including research conducted by Gerbner himself, can be categorized as macro-level cultivation research (Potter, 2014). That is, traditional research involved analysis of broad or general media consumption as it related to attitudes or beliefs. However, more recent studies involving Cultivation Theory would be categorized as micro-level, as they involve the influence of specific or genres of television programs or films and influence on potential attitudes or even actions (Brewer & Ley, 2010; Bumsun & Seongjung, 2010; Dahlstrom & Scheufele, 2010; Lee & Niederdeppe, 2011; Mutz & Nir, 2010; Niederdeppe, Fowler, Goldstein, & Pribble, 2010; Osman, 2010). For example, Chung (2014) found that heavy watchers of medical dramas such as *ER*, *Chicago Hope*, and *Grey's Anatomy* were more likely than lighter watchers to underestimate the gravity of chronic illness such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. In a longitudinal study, Beullens (2011) found that more news viewing was linked to lower likelihood of reckless driving by adolescents, and viewing of action movies led to higher likelihood of adolescent risk taking while driving. Martins and Jensen (2014) found that exposure to popular television programs depicting teen motherhood such as *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant* actually led to an increased tendency to believe that teen moms have an enviable quality of life. These perceptions were especially likely with teens who believed reality television to be actually realistic.

Cultivation theory and attitudes toward LGB individuals and homosexuality

Past published research explicitly applying Cultivation Theory to attitudes toward homosexuality and LGB individuals themselves has been very limited. One exception is Kris, Rossman, and Frueh (2007), who identified micro-level cultivation effects of television shows

The L Word and *Sex and the City* on German viewers' perceptions of homosexuality, indicating a positive relationship between exposure to these programs and attitudes toward homosexuality. Calzo & Ward (2009), true to traditional macro-level Cultivation Theory tested cultivation effects without explicitly mentioning the theory by name. In this study, general media use through television, magazines, and movies was analyzed, indicating that greater media use increased accepting attitudes toward homosexuality in men and more religious participants. This finding was interesting due to past research that identified these two groups as less likely to have accepting attitudes.

One aspect of LGB relationships that is sometimes discussed in relation to television is the portrayal of gender roles. In heterosexual relationships, men are typically portrayed as dominant, and women submissive. In one content analysis, Holz Ivory, Gibson, and Ivory (2009) found that LGB relationships are often portrayed as having these same gendered roles, with one partner exhibiting dominant, masculine behaviors, while the other's behavior is more aligned with socially constructed notions of femininity and passiveness or submissiveness. While Cultivation Theory was not directly tested, the authors argued that the next important step in this research field would be to identify whether or not these portrayals were leading to false perceptions of gendered roles within same-sex relationships.

Despite limited research linking Cultivation Theory to attitudes toward homosexuality and LGB individuals, research has been conducted linking Cultivation Theory to attitudes toward other minority groups. For example, in terms of race, heavy consumers of television news are more likely to have negative attitudes toward African Americans, perhaps due to the likelihood of African Americans being portrayed on the news as criminals (Northrup, 2010). Additionally, television advertising viewership has been linked to greater perceived affluence of the general

Chinese population (Kara & Xiao, 2009), indicating that consumption of advertisements over time can lead to stereotypical impressions of racial or ethnic groups. In regard to immigrants, minimal representation of immigrants aside from negative representation is believed to have led to negative attitudes toward immigrants and immigration as a whole (Igartua, Barrios, & Ortega, 2012).

Parasocial interaction hypothesis: An alternate approach

Despite the volume of so-called micro-level studies conducted in Cultivation Theory, not all researchers agree that this narrow focus truly aligns with the core tenets of the theory (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). One colloquial framework that is related to Cultivation Theory in regard to the effects that media has on attitudes is the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis. Introduced by Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes (2005) in response to Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, the Parasocial Interaction Hypothesis (PIH), implies that the intimacy with which one relates to characters portrayed by media is akin to that of live social partners (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005). The PIH has already been studied in relation to attitudes toward homosexuality through an early study by the hypothesis's incepting researchers relating experience with the popular television program, *Will and Grace* to positive attitudes toward LGB individuals (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006).

Generally speaking, PIH research involves measuring exposure to one or two very specific programs with a certain theme in content or characters, and correlates that measure with another measure regarding related beliefs or attitudes. In this respect, PIH research is even more focused than much of the micro-level Cultivation Theory research that has been conducted. However, in the spirit of PIH, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: General television exposure will be negatively related to a) explicit and b) implicit homonegativity.

H3: Past consumption of television programs depicting LGB characters or themes will be negatively related to a) explicit and b) implicit homonegativity.

H4: Past consumption of television programs depicting LGB characters or themes will moderate the relationship between gender and implicit attitudes toward homosexuality.

H5: Past consumption of television programs depicting LGB characters or themes will moderate the relationship between race and implicit attitudes toward LGB individuals.

Cultivation, parasocial interaction, and mode of consumption

When Gerbner and his team first began developing operational measures for Cultivation Theory, television was chosen as the most ideal medium through which to test the theory due to the “organically composed total world of interrelated stories” portrayed by television at the time (Gerbner, 1967). Through this paradigm, the stories and messages conveyed through both entertainment and news programming were influenced by society, and in turn, influenced society themselves, creating a cycle of mutual affectation between reality and television.

Until recent development of streaming networks such as Netflix and Hulu, television viewing options were limited to broadcast television through either prime time or syndication, recording episodes through DVR systems, or watching DVDs or VHS tapes of series. Aside from the occasional marathon of rerun episodes, television viewership was somewhat synchronized by time of broadcast. Thus, a vast majority of Cultivation Theory research involving to television has been conducted in regard to broadcast television (Gross & Aday, 2003). Today, with on demand options offered from cable networks as well as online streaming services, television consumption is becoming much less synchronized (Burroughs & Rugg, 2014). Countless options

are made available to viewers at minimal monthly fees, so while in the past, programming options were limited by time and decisions made by television networks, streaming services allow viewers access to a vast library of options at the click of a mouse (Matrix, 2014).

With the relative novelty of streaming services, research on so-called “binge watching” is still limited aside from technological and marketing research. Research in the field of psychology is beginning to appear, with data indicating that binge-watching yields greater satisfaction than “appointment watching” for many television programs (Pena, 2015). Additional questions have been explored in regard to “fandom”, or the degree to which audiences become engrossed in the television they consume, indicating that the current culture of binge-watching has increased these effects (Jenner, 2015).

In regard to parasocial contact, Montes De Oca (2015) found that stronger feelings of parasocial contact were linked to binge watched television than broadcast television. This conclusion was justified by the idea that long term, back-to-back viewing of episodes intensifies the feelings of contact between the viewer and the characters portrayed, strengthening the attachment. Similarly, Wheeler (2015) found feelings of attachment anxiety to be positively related to binge-watching over appointment-viewing, indicating stronger parasocial relationships.

Despite efforts made by cable and satellite providers to provide hundreds of channel options to their consumers, little compares to the immense opportunities provided by streaming services as channel surfing is replaced by binge-watching, especially in young adults and teenagers (Matrix, 2014). While long-term effects of changes of mode of television consumption may not be testable until farther down the road, the nature of these on-demand options in relation to past programmed consumption through broadcast television suggests that the mode through

which one primarily consumes television programming might alter the ways in which they are influenced by the television. Thus, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: How does primary mode of television consumption interact with cultivation effects in regard to a) implicit and b) explicit attitudes toward LGB individuals?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Procedure

Using a survey methodology combined with administration of the Implicit Association Test, this study will take place in a lab consisting of no more than four participants at any given time. A within-subjects experimental design will be used. Participants will be asked to attend a laboratory session, where they will first be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their television viewing habits, followed by the administration of an Implicit Association Test. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the content presented, participants will be warned of such content and reminded that they are allowed to withdraw at any time.

Participants

A total of 106 participants responded to the online questionnaire, with 105 participants providing complete data. Of these participants, 42 identified as male, 61 identified as female, one person identified as transgender, and one person responded that they did not identify with binary gender. In regard to sexual orientation, 42 participants were heterosexual comprising 95% of the sample, and a total of eight people responded as either homosexual, bisexual, or other. Regarding race, 73 participants were white, 23 African American, 5 Hispanic, and 2 Asian.

In regard to gender, the sample was predominantly female-identifying with 57.5%. To test H1a, that those identifying as male would exhibit higher levels of explicit homonegativity than would those identifying as female, an independent samples t-test was performed. Results

indicated that those who identified as male ($M = 3.603$, $SD = .684$) exhibited higher degrees of homonegativity than did those identifying as female ($M = 3.400$, $SD = .762$), $t(101) = 1.38$, $p = .755$, $d = 0.275$. The mean difference of 0.203 had a BCa 95% CI [-0.088, 0.494]. Thus, H1a was not supported.

Measures

In comparing explicit and implicit measures, it is important to note that these values are interpreted differently. With the explicit measure of the Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS), the computed variable is based on the mean response to twelve Likert-style questions regarding agreement with stereotypically negative perceptions of LGB folks, where 1 = *Strongly Disagree* and 7 = *Strongly Agree*. Thus, higher MHS scores constitute greater agreement with these negative statements, meaning that higher MHS scores can be interpreted as more negative. On the other hand, the output of the Implicit Association Test, presented as a D value, measures latency of association between a target response (in this case, gay or straight) and attributes (positive or negative). Stronger latency can be exhibited by distance from 0 in terms of score. Additionally, stronger latency is perceived as weaker association. Thus, the distance from the D value speaks to the level of association between target response and target attribute. Like MHS, higher IAT scores can be interpreted as stronger associations between negative attributes and the target response, which is homosexuality. While no hypotheses were proposed predicting a relationship between explicit and implicit measures, it is worthwhile to note that the two were positively correlated, $r(96) = .34$, $p = .001$.

Explicit measure: Modern homonegativity scale

To test explicit measures of attitudes toward LGB individuals, Morrison & Morrison's (2003) Modern Homonegativity Scale will be applied. Developed in line with scales involving modern racism and sexism, this scale was constructed over time and eventually narrowed to thirteen items. Example items include, "Gay men and lesbians do not have all the rights that they need," and "gay men and lesbians have become too confrontational in their demand for equal rights". In line with Satcher & Leggett (2007), one measure will be reworded in order to reflect the setting of the study, as the scale was developed in Canada. Rather than, "In today's tough economic times, Canadians' tax dollars shouldn't be used to support gay and lesbian organizations," "Canadians'" will be replaced by "Americans".

Implicit associations toward LGB individuals

Following this questionnaire, the Implicit Association Test, originally developed by Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998) for homosexuality will be administered. Participants are asked to position their fingers on two separate keys (typically one on the left, one on the right) and are presented with images and text relating to sexuality. With each image, the participant is asked to stroke the key that corresponds with the position of the term on the screen (i.e. gay or straight) that correctly corresponds to the presented term or image. See Figure 1 for example:

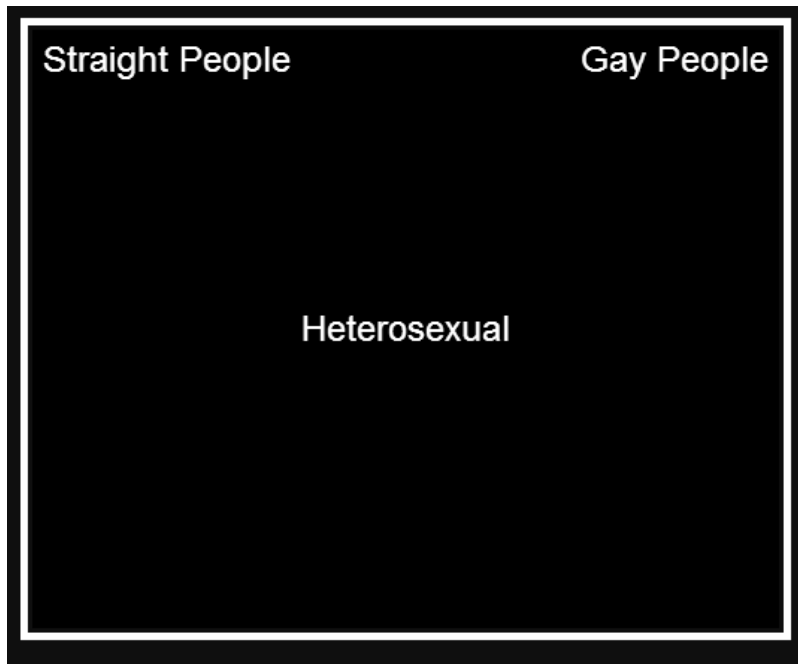


Figure 1 Implicit Association Test Sample Question

Television program viewership

To ascertain each participant's television program viewership, participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of a list of prominent television programs that are offered currently via cable and primetime as well as popular streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu. Programs listed will include those involving LGB or bisexual characters as well as those that do not involve LGB characters in order to test for macro-level and micro-level cultivation effects. This list was compiled by relating top television programs provided by various services according to TV Guide (2016) as well as GLAAD's Where We Are on TV Reports for 2013-2016. Television programs that identified as having lead or recurring characters who were openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual in the past three years of GLAAD data were marked as LGB

programs. For each program, participants were asked to rank their viewership on a 5-point Likert style scale, with responses ranging from “never watched” to “watch regularly”.

In practice, this measure seemed to be somewhat subjective. Thus, the pool of programs identified as having LGB characters was narrowed to just twenty programs known to have lead, recurring characters who were unambiguously gay. The five programs omitted were listed as those with only recurring characters who did not have significant roles in the programs.

Mode of television viewership

Finally, in regard to mode of television viewership, participants were asked a single open-ended question regarding the percentage of total time spent watching television that involved use of on-demand services such as streaming services and TV-on-DVD.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Gender and homonegativity

In regard to gender, the sample was predominantly female-identifying with 57.5%. To test H1a, that those identifying as male would exhibit higher levels of explicit homonegativity than would those identifying as female or of non-binary gender, a one-way ANOVA was performed. No significant results were found [$F(3, 101) = 1.26, p = .290$].

To test H1b, that those identifying as male would exhibit higher levels of implicit homonegativity than would those identifying as female or non-binary gender, an independent samples t-test was performed. No significant results were found [$F(3, 94) = .63, p = .600$].

Race and homonegativity

To test RQ1, how does participant race relate to implicit measures of homonegativity, a one-way ANOVA test was performed. Results were not significant [$F(4, 93) = 1.37, p = .250$].

Television exposure and homonegativity

The second hypothesis, that greater general TV exposure would be negatively related to explicit homonegativity, was intended to test for traditional cultivation effects, now sometimes referred to as macro-level cultivation. To test this hypothesis, a one-tailed correlation test was conducted. Results indicated that reported television consumption and explicit homonegativity were not strongly correlated, $r(103) = .09, p = .0177$. Thus, H2a could not be supported.

In regard to implicit homonegativity, a second one-tailed correlation test was performed to test H2b. Results indicated that reported television consumption and implicit homonegativity were not strongly correlated, $r(96) = .16, p = .061$. Thus, H2b could not be supported.

The third hypothesis, regarding exposure to programs depicting LGB characters and themes both implicit and explicit homonegativity, was designed to test what is now known as parasocial contact. To test H3a, that exposure to programs depicting LGB characters and themes would be negatively related to explicit homonegativity, a one-tailed correlation test was performed. Results indicated that exposure to programs depicting LGB characters and themes and explicit homonegativity were negatively correlated, $r(104) = -.18, p = .032$. Thus, H3a was supported.

To test H3a, that exposure to programs depicting LGB characters and themes would be negatively related to implicit homonegativity, a one-tailed correlation test was performed. Results indicated that exposure to programs depicting LGB characters and themes and implicit homonegativity were not strongly correlated, and results were insignificant, $r(96) = -.14, p = .184$. Due to lack of significance, H3a could not be supported.

Gender and race as moderators

H4a and H4b predicted gender would moderate the relationship between consumption of television programs depicting LGB characters and homonegativity. However, because no significant results indicated main effects for these variables, the moderation hypothesis was moot. This was also true for H5a and H5b, which predicted that race would moderate the relationship between consumption of LGB programs and homonegativity.

Mode of consumption and cultivation

Regarding primary mode of television consumption, participants were asked a single open-ended question regarding the percentage of time they typically spend consuming television through applications such as Netflix, Hulu, Crackle, TV on DVD, and cable network websites. The point of this question was not necessarily to focus specifically on streamed television, but on on-demand modes of consumption that are conducive to what is now known as “binge-watching” due to the viewer’s ability to resume and pause programming as they please. Results indicated that about two-thirds of time spent watching television by participants involved use of one of these applications ($M = 67.88$).

To test RQ2, correlations between homonegativity and binge watching percentage were calculated. Results were not significant, $r(104) = -.07, p < .246$. A second test was run correlating binge watching percentage and IAT scores, but results for this test were also insignificant, $r(104) = -.12, p < .129$. Thus, no significant results were found regarding mode of consumption in relation to binge watching percentage.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Modern television viewership

Despite the fact that few significant relationships were found between variables, the data collected for this study suggests that the way that we look at television and how it affects us is, in fact, changing. In terms of volume of television consumed, data indicated that participants watch television approximately ten hours per week on average. If participants watch approximately two hours per day, this is congruent with Nielsen's (2015) findings that the average adult watches television 5.6 days per week.

Beyond the hypotheses tested, results indicated that on-demand television was the most popular mode of consumption for this population, with a mode response of 100% to the question, "Of the time spent watching television, what percentage is spent using on-demand services...?" This response comprised 28% of the population. With participants responding that 67.8% of television consumed on average is consumed via on-demand services and applications, it is reasonable to assert that the breadth of programs that people are watching has expanded a great deal since the days of programmed television. With this in mind, the way that we look at cultivation effects and media effects in general will continue to evolve as more people steer away from programmed television in favor of these online services.

The socialization of cultivation

The binge-watching, on-demand phenomenon also presents issues in application of cultivation theory in regard to the expectation of socialization as part of the cultivation experience. Gerbner's (1967) development of cultivation theory was grounded in the idea that media effects were not instant and transactional, but part of a social, dynamic process that is ongoing and ever evolving. Appointment-watching as a mode of consumption was conducive to cultivation theory, because while obviously not all people watched every popular television program, the appointment-watching itself allowed for more synchronized watching of programs, leading to more conversations about shared experiences with television. Through this lens, cultivation is not only a theory of media effects, but of interpersonal communication.

One concept that has been studied linking interpersonal communication to binge watching is the concept of media migration (Shade, Kornfield, & Oliver, 2015). Media migration is the relatively new concept that media, particularly entertainment media, is not experienced solely through one medium, but through several alternating media. This can involve switching from watching a program on a streaming service such as Netflix to reading a book or an article about the program, for example. In terms of linking media migration to interpersonal communication, research suggests that with the culture of binge-watching, a common media migration occurs when program viewers watch a program, then interact in some way about that program on social media. This can be done through a post on one's personal page, through commenting on someone else's post about the program, or even following a social media account relating to the post. Thus, the link between social media and binge-watching may be an important factor to consider as cultivation research grows and evolves to match the current media climate.

Missing Variables

While lack of significant results might be attributed to a small sample size, it is possible that there truly was no cultivation effect. Due to the complexity of attitude formation regarding LGB issues and issues of homosexuality, it is possible that cultivation effects would be small if at all present. Additionally, the amount of control exhibited by television viewers who primarily use on-demand services suggests that it is more likely that programs are selected based on attitudes possessed by the viewer than that the programs create those attitudes.

The lack of statistical significance exhibited by the data are also likely attributed to missing variables. The complexity of sexuality and attitudes toward homosexuality and LGB individuals suggests that television and demographics cannot be the only factors that contribute to homonegativity. Likewise, media effects are incredibly nuanced, with countless theories overlapping one another in terms of application and interpretation of effects. In modern media, LGB issues are portrayed not only as surface-level exhibition of sexuality, but also as provocative content that causes audiences to consider issues of gender roles, heteronormativity, and more. These issues are so complex and in many ways, subjective, that while many researchers and LGB advocates argue that LGB individuals are underrepresented or misrepresented by way of stereotypes, other researchers go as far as to dub modern media as “homonormative” (Ng, 2013).

As mentioned in the theoretical foundations chapter of this thesis, framing theory likely plays a large role in the way that television influences attitudes toward LGB individuals, especially due to the often-stereotypical representations of LGB characters on television (Bond, 2014; Cartei & Reby, 2012; Tu & Lee, 2014). As recent research on minorities on television has focused primarily on simple representation of these characters in hopes that minorities would

find characters on television with whom they could identify, the valence of these portrayals of LGB characters were not factored into the analyses conducted for this study. While discerning whether a character's portrayal is positive or negative would certainly be fruitful in terms of linking cultivation to framing and perhaps adding another layer to the variable of representation, developing an objective, methodical approach to identifying whether a character portrayal is positive or negative would be incredibly difficult.

Though the valence of these portrayals of LGB characters was not analyzed, data indicates a negative relationship between explicit homonegativity and consumption of programs depicting LGB characters. This means that exposure to these programs leads positive attitudes toward LGB people, indicates a micro-level cultivation effect as well as support for the parasocial interaction hypothesis. Whether the portrayals of LGB characters experienced by the participants were perceived as positive or negative, mere representation of these characters is somehow related to fewer homonegative attitudes. It is unclear whether the representations of LGB characters exhibited aligned with so-called positive, non-stereotypical views of the LGB community, but the parasocial interaction hypothesis suggests that this correlation could be a response to feelings of identification with or empathy toward these characters.

Modern homonegativity scale outcomes

One of the goals of this study was to compare explicit and implicit measures of homonegativity. A significant, positive relationship was found between the explicit measure of the Modern Homonegativity Scale and the implicit measure of the Sexuality Implicit Association Test, supporting the validity of both of these measures. This relationship suggests that despite potential Hawthorne Effects posed by explicit measures, the products of the Modern

Homonegativity Scale aligns with the subconscious measure produced by the Sexuality Implicit Association Test.

Concerning homonegativity, this data was somewhat hopeful in that the average homonegativity score was just below the midpoint at 3.47. Slightly surprising was that 29 of the 105 responding participants fell on the higher, more negative end of the homonegativity scale, meaning that over 27% of participants exhibited explicit negative attitudes toward the LGB community. Though not mathematically significant, this data contradicts the assumption that if representation of LGB characters and themes on television is growing, exposure to them is decreasing homonegativity.

Limitations and future research

As earlier mentioned small sample size is likely a strong explanation for the lack of ability to detect statistically significant findings. While a target sample of 100 participants was expected to yield significant results, a larger sample would likely be more diverse, and thus would have provided greater diversity in response. Additionally, due to the somewhat surprising level of homonegative participants, asking for participant age would have allowed for deeper analysis into the variables associated with homonegativity. Research suggests that younger people tend to be more accepting of the LGB community than older people, so age may be a missing variable that accounts for differences in homonegative attitudes (Moleiro, Pinto, & Freire, 2013). Additionally, because streamed television is a relatively new phenomenon, it is likely that the mode of television consumption varies considerably between younger and older individuals.

Regarding the second hypothesis analyzing hours of television consumed in relation to homonegativity, it is possible that the nature of the question affected results. Participants were

asked, “On an average week, how many hours of television did you watch?” and given the opportunity to enter any number. Responses ranged from 2 to 50 hours per week. Such a large range suggests that responses to this question may not have been as realistic as intended.

As television, in terms of variety and the way that it is consumed, is changing so drastically, conventional measures for cultivation effects may no longer be valid. Conventional television consumption questions in cultivation tests tend to ask about frequency. because multiple episodes are often consumed in one sitting when binge-watched, frequency may not have been the best unit of measure. Instead, asking about volume of consumption such as the amount of episodes one has watched or the percentage of a series watched may have been more applicable and therefore more fruitful.

Congruent with recent research, the idea that mass media as a collective entity is the sole variable in need of analysis for cultivation research is outdated. Instead, this growth and evolution of available genres warrants more genre-specific analysis (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). For almost every hypothesis and research question in this study, findings were not statistically significant. Despite this, a micro-level cultivation effect was still found to be statistically significant. Micro-level cultivation has been studied in relation to genres such as romantic films, tween programming, and crime shows among others (Gerding & Signorielli, 2014; Hernandez, 2012; Lee & Niederdeppe, 2011; Mancini, 2013). With LGBT film being recognized as its own genre even to the extent that it is presented as such on Netflix, further analysis into this so-called “genre” could provide greater understanding into its audience and their attitudes (Knolle, 2016).

Because traditional cultivation theory is rooted in the idea that long-term and heavy viewing of television leads to long-term effects, it is difficult to discern whether a cultivation effect should have been expected. While the representation of LGB characters on television is

certainly growing (GLAAD, 2015), these characters are still quite underrepresented. In fact, research indicates that portrayals of bullying against the LGBT community are still prominent on television (Paceley & Flynn, 2012). Such portrayals might evoke sympathy or even empathy toward the LGB community, but they might also empower homonegative people. With such limited opportunities for exposure to LGB characters and the apparent contradictory messages portrayed about the LGB community, a cultivation effect, whether micro- or macro-, could have been undetectable.

Data regarding modes of television consumption suggests that future research in cultivation effects is warranted, specifically focusing on this new trend in television viewership. Particularly interesting would be an experimental, between-subjects design comparing cultivation effects of one group who only appointment watches and one group who only binge watches. As earlier mentioned, one factor that warrants consideration in regard to future research in cultivation theory is the link between social media use and binge-watching as a way of understanding modern communication about television consumption.

Conclusion

Though the sample size, among other potential factors, inhibited this study from yielding a multitude of statistically significant results, it is clear that the phenomenon known as “binge watching” warrants further attention. Whether this new trend in television consumption plays any role in cultivation and attitude formation is still in question. However, the role that these services play in providing access to countless television programs poses an interesting question about the concept of cultivation itself. As the body of accessible programming continues to grow, viewers are able to be more selective in regard to the programs consumed. As the old saying

goes, which came first – the chicken or the egg? We are led to wonder whether attitudes are formed by the information consumed via media, or whether we choose our media programming based on previously held attitudes.

Whether attitudes are formed by media or otherwise, this study presents clear data that suggests homonegative feelings are more common among college students than was expected. Tying this into access to countless on-demand television programs through streaming websites, perhaps this level of selection allows people even more ability to ignore programs with themes that are not found agreeable by the viewer, as there are plenty of other programs to replace them. We no longer live in an age when watching the most popular television program currently being broadcast is heavily tied to social engagement. In an era where television producers such as Shonda Rhimes are working hard to make a difference by pushing the proverbial envelope with their programming, it is possible that television programs are losing some of their power of persuasion simply by being outnumbered.

While media was once considered a useful tool in promoting social issues, this weakness in power may lead to a decline in use of media as a persuasive device. In fact, if the paradigm has shifted from attitudes being formed by programs consumed to programs consumed being chosen based on existing attitudes, media has potential to become more divisive than persuasive. That is, genres may evolve to become so specific that they target people based on their belief systems as has been done with news agencies such as Fox News and MSNBC.

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