

OUT OF NEVERLAND AND INTO A WEDDING BAND:
The Peter Pan Fantasy and its Influence on the Abandonment of Single Life
in the Television Series *Queer As Folk*

By
Brady Robert Littlefield

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways that people who are in relationships are portrayed as superior to characters who are single within the television series *Queer As Folk*. In the Showtime series, characters do not become adults until they enter into committed relationships. No matter how old, wise, sexually promiscuous or professionally accomplished characters are, they are still considered by their peers to be children if romantic relationships are absent from their lives. This process of maturing and entering into relationships is explored using Fisher's narrative paradigm of rhetorical criticism.

The mere presence of a relationship in a character's life indicates other traits about that character such as that the character is mature, stable, family-oriented and satisfied. In contrast to the glorified imagery of coupled life remains the single character who is selfish, immature, sexually promiscuous and irresponsible. Amid a variety of distinct personalities, the characters share an accepted view of what it means to mature. In order to mature, characters must be in committed relationships. Brian, the only character to reject this ideology, receives increasingly harsh criticism from his friends as the series progresses and everyone else *grows up*. During this process, Brian takes on the role of Peter Pan and attempts to remain young. This understanding of Brian as Peter is explored through Bormann's fantasy analysis.

The message that *Queer As Folk* sends to audiences is not, as Michael contends in the opening monologue of the series, that gay life is "all about sex" (*Queer As Folk*, 1.1), but that committed relationships are paramount. This fictitious media representation dispels the notion that gay life glorifies being single and revolves around meaningless sexual encounters, endless partying and an abundance of drug and alcohol use.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the childhood story of Peter Pan, Peter takes Wendy from the "real world" into his world of make-believe, Neverland. There, they live among the lost boys. With Peter acting as their leader, the group of rascallions engages in mischievous activities in the absence of adults. In Neverland, time stands still, so youth is forever preserved. Ultimately, Wendy must return to "reality" and leave Peter and the boys behind. When Peter next visits Wendy, he notices that years have passed and she has grown up, while he is still a boy.

In the story of Peter Pan, maturity – or "growing up" – is measured by aging. Peter remains immature because he does not age, no matter how much actual time passes. In the "real world," there are a variety of ways that maturing is measured. Some of the moments in life considered to be rites of passage from adolescence into adulthood include attaining a driver's license, becoming a legal adult at age eighteen, finishing formal education, entering the workplace and losing one's virginity. In Showtime's television series *Queer As Folk*, characters are not viewed as adults until they enter into committed relationships. No matter how old, wise, sexually promiscuous or professionally accomplished the characters are, they are still considered by their peers to be children if committed relationships are absent from their lives. The mere presence of a relationship in a character's life indicates other traits about that character such as that the character is mature, stable, family-oriented and satisfied; whereas, a single character lives a more dangerous, unfulfilling and lonely life.

This textual analysis examines the positioning of people in relationships compared to single people in the television series *Queer As Folk*. I contend that

discourse from the series reinforces the argument that characters who are in relationships are portrayed as superior to single characters.

Queer As Folk is rhetorical

The television series *Queer As Folk*, I argue, is worthy of study from a rhetorical perspective for a variety of reasons. First, Loeb (1990) contends that television programs in general are rhetorical because they reflect culturally-based assumptions and notions.

She states:

Television programs present an image of a socially constructed reality that appears objective but is based on the social values and ideas held by a particular culture or subculture as true (Campbell, 1982). The ability to present, shape, and support a particular view of reality, a subjective view that is both value-based and constructed, makes television inherently rhetorical (p. 249).

The situations presented through television do not necessarily mirror reality, but rather, present a particular viewpoint that exists within society at-large. These viewpoints are essentially arguments that create meanings and interpretations of reality and are thus inherently rhetorical.

Another way that queer television programs in particular are rhetorical is through their representations of a group of people outside of the dominant group in society. In a heteronormative culture, homosexuals are 'otherized,' that is, they are viewed in contrast to the dominant sexuality of heterosexuality. Because a queer television series explores 'the others,' it is rhetorical. Reed (2005) argues that television is the most apt medium for which viewers can learn about 'the others' and expand on their notions of otherized groups of people.

Mitchell (2005) examines how *Will & Grace* was able to utilize this otherizing process. In particular, *Will & Grace* was able to "create an effective rhetorical stance [that represented] the Other while also appearing to a broad audience" (p. 1053). Like *Will & Grace*, *Queer As Folk* advances gay culture onto audiences comprised of more groups of people besides homosexuals. Yet, unlike *Will & Grace*, *Queer As Folk* extends messages from an almost strictly homosexual community as opposed to an equally representational assortment of gay and straight characters. In this way, *Queer As Folk* takes a more authentic examination of 'the others.'

Because of the program's groundbreaking status for introducing sexuality into the lives of gay characters, a topic that will be discussed at length in later chapters, the series is considered rhetorical for its contribution of making a new form of sexual expression present in media. As Lövgren & Andersson (2003) contend, "the discourse of *Queer As Folk* is presenting an alternative world view, a way of seeing or knowing the world through language. There is an idea that if something is not in language, it does not exist at all" (p. 3).

Finally, I argue that the act of viewing *Queer As Folk* is in itself a rhetorical phenomena worthy of further exploration in order to decipher messages that emerge and how those messages affect the individual and society as a whole. Fraser (2006) states that "*Queer As Folk* as a form of poetic world-making, that is, capable of producing perspectives, and thus of helping to shape our understandings of society and culture" (p. 164).

Preview

Chapter 2 reconstructs the context from which *Queer As Folk* emerged and briefly examines the history of queer content in media. Additionally, the significance of conducting the study using the series *Queer As Folk* is provided. This section also familiarizes readers with essential information that is necessary to understand the arguments of this criticism if they have never viewed the television series. Chapter 3 reviews the literature of previous academic studies that is relevant to this criticism. This scholarship includes studies of queer content in both film and television. Chapter 4 provides an account of the method used to conduct this study. Chapter 5 outlines the Peter Pan fantasy, a paradigm created by Bormann, that is present in *Queer As Folk* and how anti-relationship discourse comes from characters who refuse to grow up. Chapter 6 uncovers the various ways that characters who are in relationships are depicted as superior to their single counterparts. This section uses Fisher's narrative to combine the Peter Pan fantasy of single life and the glorified coupled life. This analysis extends beyond an individual level, but also has societal significance. That is, when characters enter committed relationships, they are depicted as fulfilling their social responsibility. Chapter 7 examines the effects that these findings have, assigning particular significance to the argument that gay life generally promotes single life and promiscuity. *Queer As Folk* presents society as endorsing individuals committing to relational partners and links this process to a part of growing up.

Chapter 2: Homosexuality in Media: A Reconstruction of Context

A history leading to the Folk

Before analyzing *Queer As Folk*, it is necessary to understand the cultural environment regarding gay content that existed in television at the time the show premiered. The review of the history of gay content on television, as opposed to other forms of media, is necessary because television "is really leading the way for America to talk about gay and lesbian issues," states Scott Seomin, entertainment media director for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (Campbell, 2001, p. 13).

Despite that only "a few seasons ago you couldn't swing a small yappy dog without hitting a regular or recurring gay character" on television (Jones, 2002, p. 50), homosexuality is still a relatively new segment of popular culture. The first time the term "homosexual" was heard on television was during a 1954 talk show, where it was immediately proceeded with the words, "and the problems they present" ("Gay-Per-View TV," 2003). Until the late 1960s, Hart (2000) declares, homosexuals were in the "nonrecognition stage" of television, where being gay was not mentioned or visible in any way. The 1967 CBS documentary "The Homosexuals" was first to show the different faces of gay men in America that included a sailor, truck driver and female impersonator. The second stage for homosexuals was "ridicule." The stereotype of the effeminate gay man became prevalent on talk shows and terms like fag, homo and fairy emerged. From 1968-1974, the limp-wristed, high-pitched speaker became the dominant image for gay men. Not until the late 1970s was a positive image of a gay men present on television. Shows like *Barney Miller*, *The Nancy Walker Show* and *Alice* were early programs that treated homosexuality without a negative stigma.

In the 1980s, as AIDS became a pre-eminent threat to Americans and was linked politically to homosexuality, television episodes of several shows including *Designing Women*, *21 Jump Street*, *The Equalizer*, *Leg Work* and *Mr. Belvedere* incorporated the AIDS stereotype. The 1990s continued this stereotype with shows like *Beverly Hills 90210*. But as more heterosexual people became infected with AIDS and the relationship between homosexuals and the disease dwindled, gay men were more widely received on television in positive roles. Known as the "gay 90s," many shows tried to incorporate a 'token' gay character or have one episode of the series include gay subject matter. *Ellen* then brought the first gay, leading female role to television and opened the door for gay characters to be present on other shows like *Will & Grace*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Spin City* and *ER* (Campbell, 2001). In 1998, *Will & Grace* premiered with both leading and supporting gay men present. *Will & Grace* commercialized gay chic, although much of that legwork had already been done on cable shows like *Sex and the City* and *The Real World* which had both portrayed gay characters and friendships with gay people as trendy and cool ("Gay-Per-View TV," 2003). In 2003, which is referred to as "the year of Gay TV" ("Gay-Per-View TV," 2003), nine primetime series displayed gay content. Three years later, MTV Networks have launched Logo, a channel devoted to exclusively gay material. The channel is aimed at the "significant audience looking for depictions of gay life that go beyond *Will & Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*" (Salamon, 2005).

When *Queer As Folk* debuted in 2000, it offered the gay community what they wanted and expected *Will & Grace* to give them, a dramatic examination of gay life (Holleran, 2001). *Queer As Folk* advanced the depictions of gay characters by giving them sexuality, which earlier gay programs like *Ellen* and *Will & Grace* did not ("Gay-

Per-View TV," 2003). Nothing like *Queer As Folk* had ever appeared on American television. The British version of *Queer As Folk*, however, received most of the acclaim for its groundbreaking portrayals and achievements. First aired in 1998, *Queer As Folk* was a seven-hour miniseries set in Manchester (Bawden, 2000; Gilbert, 2000; GLAADnotes, 2000). Russell T. Davies' original version of the series, described as both shocking and graphic, was lost in American culture, and was not seen in the United States with the exception of a few isolated film festivals ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005; Tucker, 1999; Zahed, 2000). American co-creators Lipman and Cowen followed the British template, changed the setting to Pittsburgh and struck a deal with Showtime to produce the US version of *Queer As Folk*.

Queer As Folk is purposefully set in Pittsburgh because of the city's strong working-class tradition and the fact that there is not an overwhelming gay community there in either population or community support (Garron, 2000). "We felt it was very important that it take place in a typical middle-American city like Pittsburgh. We want it to be more about the people who live right next door," declares Lipman (Kilday, 2000, p. 62). In order to achieve this effect, the creators made this deliberate decision to not have the series set in New York City or San Francisco (Holleran, 2001).

Showtime had a significant role in the production of *Queer As Folk*. Since Lipman and Cowen wanted to keep *Queer As Folk* as blatant, graphic and realistic as its British predecessor ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005), the product would be too risky for network television or basic cable (Fraser, 2006). HBO made an offer to the producers to make *Queer As Folk* into a movie, but Showtime gave a better option (Bawden, 2000). Showtime had already produced several gay-related projects, including

the 1998 miniseries *More Tales of the City*, which made the network more credible in its commitment to gay content (Frutkin, 2000). Further, Showtime proposed to make *Queer As Folk* into a full series and ordered 22 episodes upon signing with the producers. Daly (2000) asserts that Showtime gained the same edge and publicity with *Queer As Folk* as HBO did with *Sex and the City* and *The Sopranos*. For the duration of the series, *Queer As Folk* was the highest rated program on Showtime (Farrell, 2006).

Showtime also acted as an essential tool in limiting the guaranteed opposition to the creation of the series. "The religious right can't make a credible case against a show that's on pay TV late at night," stated Wayne Besen, a spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign. "Plus a lot of religious conservatives don't get Showtime – or at least don't acknowledge that they subscribe to a network that advertises 'No Limits'" (Kilday, 2001, p. 66). Holleran (2001) agrees that the series being on Showtime makes it harder for children to view since it is not included in basic cable and it aired late at night on Sunday – a school night, which also helps the show avoid criticism from the religious right.

The minds behind the Folk

There are multiple creators of the messages evoked in *Queer As Folk* since no one individual has the ability to produce a television series from concept to completion. The creators of this series are composed of a group that includes members from both the production and artistic sectors. Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman, co-creators, co-executive producers and primary writers for the series, are perhaps the chief architects of *Queer As Folk* (Zahed, 2000). Along with Cowen and Lipman are producers Sheila

Hockin and Tony Jonas who can also be considered as creators, although their involvement is more with the production of the series as opposed to the creative construction and framing of messages. Since much of the artistic construction of at least the first season of *Queer As Folk* was heavily modeled after the British version of the series (Bawden, 2000; Gilbert, 2000; Kilday, 2000; Zahed, 2000), British originator Russell T. Davies must also be credited as a creator of messages. Additionally, the directors of episodes have the creative liberty to present words and images in ways that they find persuasive and meaningful, also making them significant in the formation of messages. Russell Mulcahy, John L'Ecuyer, David Wellington and John Greyson are among the most frequent directors of *Queer As Folk* (Bawden; 2000).

It is useful to examine the birth of *Queer As Folk* from the perspective of its creators in order to help audiences understand their intended effects. Executive producer Ron Cowen declares that when the British version debuted and was considered "the best show you'd never see on American television, we knew we had to make it" ("Saying Goodbye to Queer As Folk," 2005). One condition Cowen and Lipman established with Showtime, the channel that airs *Queer As Folk*, was that if they were going to adapt the British version, it could not be "watered down" in its explicitness. Showtime agreed, and Mark Zakarin, Showtime's executive vice president of original programming, testifies that *Queer As Folk* is, "Every bit as bold and frank and real as its English prototype" (Kilday, 2000, p. 62). So much like its precursor in the respect, that producer Sheila Hockin recalls that, "We couldn't believe we were making it in the first place, to be honest" ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005).

The frankness and no-holds-barred approach of the show wasn't the only aspect of *Queer As Folk* that drew attention, the title itself garnered discussion. Daniel Lipman remembers there being taboo around the show from its birth over the use of the word 'queer' ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005). People were frightened and intrigued by its inclusion in the title of the series. Lipman attests that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* could only be named such because *Queer As Folk* existed first and dealt with the brunt of the controversy around the use of the word.

Cowen and Lipman insist that the show is not meant to be a window into the gay community or offer a "realistic" view of gay life (Moore, 2000). "We hope it's a very honest portrayal of a specific group of gay people," asserts Cowen (Kilday, 2001, p. 66). One of the most crucial ways that the co-creators of the US version of *Queer As Folk* chose make the characters more honest was by depicting them as sexual beings, not as clowns or eunuchs as past representations have done (Moore, 2000). While the show has drawn much criticism for depicting the lives of a hypersexualized group of gay men, (Gilbert, 2000; Jubera, 2000; Kilday, 2001; "Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005), Lipman reminds critics that the show only portrays a subset of the gay population and quips, "If you don't like the reflection, don't blame it on the mirror" ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005).

Voices of the Folk

While the creators of messages are the producers, writers and directors of *Queer As Folk*, the speakers of the messages are the fictional characters of the series. Each character represents distinguishable qualities and the messages of each character vary

accordingly. In general, *Queer As Folk* follows the lives of a group of four gay friends, Michael, Brian, Emmett and Ted. Justin, one of Brian's many sexual conquests, asserts himself into Brian's life and attaches himself to the group. Lindsay is raising her son, Gus, with longtime partner, Melanie. Debbie, Michael's eagerly supportive mother, runs the diner in the gay strip of Pittsburgh where the characters often socialize.

Michael Novotny, played by Hal Sparks, acts as the show's narrator and guide. He is described as the "semicute boy next door" who talks about sex substantially more than he engages in it (Moore, 2000). Michael sacrifices for his friends, who are the most important part of his life (Gilbert 2000). Closeted at work, Michael, along with the rest of his friends, is obsessed with youth and beauty (Hensley 2000b).

Gale Harold plays the role of Brian Kinney, a character that Harold describes as being "the ultimate antihero" (Hensley, 2000a). Executive producer Daniel Lipman describes Brian as "A gay man [who is] very sexual, very masculine, not the kind of gay character people are used to seeing. If he were a straight male character fucking every woman in sight, he'd be a hero" (Rowe, 2002, p. 36). Brian is defined as "shamelessly promiscuous pretty boy who'd be the equivalent of Kim Cattrall's Samantha on *Sex and the City*" (Gilbert, 2000, p. F1). Indeed, Brian is a narcissist who moves through men quickly, who is terrified of aging and who has no interest in settling down. Brian is the most attractive and most successful professionally among the group of friends (Moore, 2000).

Peter Paige plays the role of Emmett Honeycutt, the most effeminate character of the group of friends. Paige declares that Emmett hates himself less than any other character on the show (Hensley, 2000b) and is not self-loathing, as many effeminate gay

representations in media have been (Rowe, 2001). Emmett's explains how his orientation shines and directs his attitude and behavior on life when he states, "I'd rather my flame burn bright, than be some puny little pilot light" (Moore, 2000).

Ted Schmidt, played by Scott Lowell, is perhaps the gloomiest character in the group (Moore, 2000). Ted is responsible and reliable, but he chases after men who are not good for him or his self-conscience (Hensley, 2000b). Ted is the oldest of Michael's friends and by cultural standards is the least attractive. Ted receives the least amount of attention from other men which clarifies why he is often depressed.

Justin Taylor, Brian's one-night-stand played by Randy Harrison, begins the show as a 17 year-old senior in high school (Moore, 2000). Obsessed with Brian, Justin is fixated with his own developing sexuality (Gilbert, 2000). Justin "seems to represent the idealistic youth in search of true love that so many gay, lesbians, and yes, straights could identify with" (Meers, 2002, p. 34). At the time that the first season aired, Justin was the youngest openly gay character on television and he had the largest impact out of all of the characters on gay youth for representing their demographic ("Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005).

Lindsay Peterson and Melanie Marcus, played by Thea Gill and Michelle Clunie, represent the committed relationship in *Queer As Folk*. Together for several years, Lindsay and Melanie are raising their son Gus who was fathered by Brian through the means of artificial insemination (Moore, 2000). Lindsay, raised by conservative Christians, and Melanie, a devout Jew, act, at least initially, as a sense of stability as they are surrounded by sexually promiscuous single men.

Sharon Gless, perhaps the only recognizable face when *Queer As Folk* originally aired, plays the role of Debbie Novotny. Debbie has “enough gusto and wisdom to give the entire membership of PFLAG a run for its money” (Gilbert, 2000, p. F1). While running the Liberty Diner, Debbie never fails to vocally interject her opinions and advice onto Michael and his friends. She acts as a “den mother to the gay crowd Michael’s a part of” (Moore, 2000). Her humorous quips, brassy attitude, polarized opinions and complete acceptance of her son’s sexuality make Debbie a part of nearly every storyline on the show.

Messages of the Folk

These eight characters deliver the messages created by Lipman, Cowen, Davies and their production colleagues. The messages and themes themselves cover a vast number of topics including friendship, relationships, emphasis of sex, youth and beauty, and a realistic portrayal of a subset of the gay community.

The element of *Queer As Folk* that received the most media attention is the presence of sex and nudity in the series. The first line spoken in the pilot episode is voice over narration from Michael who states, “The thing you need to know is it’s all about sex. . . Men think about sex every 28 seconds. Of course, that’s straight men. With gay men, it’s every nine” (Jubera, 2000, p. 1L). *Queer As Folk* is deliberately sexual (Moore, 2000) and as Michelle Clunie explains, it could not be a gradual warming up to the idea of gay characters having sex. “We had to bust in at the beginning,” to establish their portrayals as legitimate characters (“Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*,” 2005). Since it was the first time that gay sex had been portrayed on American television, it had to be

strong and definitive, even shocking (Jubera, 2000). The producers and the cast knew that this abrupt introduction to gay sex would make waves, but the creators did not desexualize the gay community in order to protect judgmental viewers (Gilbert, 2000). “I knew it was going to be controversial, I knew it was time for a series like this to be done, and I knew that I wanted to be a part of it” declares Sharon Gless (Frutkin, 2000, p. Y06). In response to the criticism that *Queer As Folk* received for being too overtly sexual, executive producer Ron Cowen answers:

We have seen so little of ourselves portrayed in a sexualized manner. How many movies have we seen with straight couples making love? We don't even think about it anymore. . . We have the right to see ourselves as sexual beings, and straight people should see us as sexual beings as well (Kilday, 2001, p. 68).

Furthermore, a disclaimer aired on Showtime before each episode reminding the audience that the characters represent only a portion of the gay community, not the entire gay community (Vilanch, 2001).

While sex may be the factor that attracted audiences to tune in, the characters and relationships formed play at least an equally important role on the series. Peter Paige explains that audiences “came for the queer, but they stayed for the folk” (“Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*,” 2005). The characters may seek out sex, but the strongest emotional bonds on the show are between the friends (Gilbert, 2000). “This group of characters leads gay-affirming lives that center on their close friendships with one another” (Farrell, 2006, p. 197). Paige again summarizes that season one of the show introduced audiences to gay characters and their world. Season two gave audiences a look at how the group had progressed and changed. Season three is about helping each other grow, whether it be growing together or growing apart (Rowe, 2003b).

Another prominent message emitted from *Queer As Folk* is that all people in their basic form are human. The phrase “queer as folk” is an old English expression meaning “there’s nothing stranger than people” (“Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*,” 2005). Messages showing how characters can be different, surprising or even ‘strange’ demonstrate to audiences that the orientation of the character does not define the character. “What I think the show portrays is flawed, human, fully sexualized gay people,” explains Peter Paige (Rowe, 2001, p. 56). While the goal of the creators is not to produce a show that promotes the message, “We are just like you,” the theme of recognizing difference, but acknowledging similarities does emerge. “*Queer As Folk* is a celebration of this world in its varied forms. As audiences learn of our differences, they will also discover the similarities that make us human” (GLAADnotes, 2000, p. 8).

One of the more controversial themes that *Queer As Folk* has brought into the spotlight is the extent of realism the series actually reflects of the gay community. While the storylines and the lifestyles of the characters on *Queer As Folk* represent only a small subset of the gay population, the representation of that subset, on television, is considered groundbreaking, regardless of its accuracy. “Nothing on TV’s queer frontier approaches the frankness and intensity of Showtime’s *Queer As Folk*” (Gilbert, 2000, p. F1). The significance of the series exists, if for no other reason, than to the fact that *Queer As Folk* was the first series to dramatically portray gay life. Lipman explains, “This is probably the first time in history that gay people will actually get a chance to see their lives portrayed truthfully on television with no restrictions and no censorship” (Hensley, 2000b, p. 46). Homosexuals are not represented as clowns (Daly, 2000), but are represented in honest, unashamed ways (Gilbert, 2000). Honest portrayals are

significant, not just to make the show more credible, but for the implications the show has on its audiences. “It’s a positive step. The more honest portrayals we get, not just with gay issues, but for all people, the more it helps further understanding” (Rohan & Padawer, 2000, p. Y7). Lipman explains how the series experienced a backlash from the gay community after viewing some aspects of gay life on *Queer As Folk* that were negative such as excessive drug use and risky sexual activity. He asserts that gay-produced gay content has typically been the vision of gay culture that the gay community wants the straight community to view, which is rarely an honest portrayal of gay life (Hensley, 2000).

Aside from being sexual and realistic, on a basic level, *Queer As Folk* can be reduced to simple messages inferred out of day-to-day activities. *Queer As Folk* is the first series to have a majority of its characters be gay (Gilbert, 2000) and the plot revolves around the lives of those characters and how they interact with family and friends in everyday settings like eating dinner or shopping (Farrell, 2006; Hensley, 2000).

Despite all of these messages that critics and scholars derive from viewing *Queer As Folk*, executive producer Ron Cowen argues that, “It really is the story of boys becoming men. You don’t turn into a man overnight. It’s a process that occurs over several years, and that is the trajectory of the show” (Rowe, 2003a, p. 49). During this process, the negative undercurrent of the overemphasis of youth and beauty in gay culture do take shape (Zahed, 2000).

The significance of Queer As Folk

The messages of *Queer As Folk* are significant from a cultural perspective for several reasons. First, the series is regarded as groundbreaking. *Queer As Folk* opened doors that can never be closed because it was the first series to portray the gay community on a serious level ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005). Scott Lowell adds that the series allowed for the honest portrayal of gay people, a perspective that had not fully materialized until *Queer As Folk* premiered. " *Queer As Folk* cannot be compared to anything that has come before it, for there has never been anything quite like it" (Rohan & Padawer, 2000, p. Y7). Hal Sparks describes how the program upped the ante on cable with what was acceptable to air and what issues could be discussed ("Star Defends Showtime's *Queer As Folk*," 2005). Peter Paige declares that what he wants the show to be remembered for is being the first television series to give gay characters sex lives ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005).

In addition to being a groundbreaking series, *Queer As Folk* is significant for maintaining a gay presence and representation on television. Scott Seomin, the entertainment media director of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation states, "Everybody wants to see themselves depicted on television and in film. When things are not depicted in a realistic fashion, it could make the audience feel subhuman and not whole" (Rohan & Padawer, 2000, p. Y7). In this respect, *Queer As Folk* is important to connect gay people who live in areas that do not have visible gay channels of communication to the larger gay community ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005). Rosie O'Donnell attests to the importance of not only providing a presence of gay representation on television, but the larger necessity of feeling a sense of belonging in the

media and on television. Showtime, in this respect, was the first network to air a series that proclaimed that it was a worthwhile investment to portray the lives of gay characters, both artistically and financially.

Another reason why *Queer As Folk* is worthy of further discussion is its role in producing additional gay content in the media. Peter Paige declares that the visibility of *Queer As Folk* is so substantial that "there is no reference to gay anything in society at large that doesn't include some reference to *Queer As Folk*," (Rowe, 2003b, p. 41).

Michelle Clunie links the success and progress that *Queer As Folk* created to a "female version" of the series, Showtime's *The L-word* which debuted in 2004 ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005). Cast members of *Queer As Folk* are confident that something like *Queer As Folk* will emerge regarding gay visibility in the media since homosexuality played such a crucial role in the 2004 presidential election and received perhaps more media attention than ever before regarding political implications for candidates (Crook, 2005).

A final explanation why *Queer As Folk* is worth subsequent attention is that it demystifies several aspects or connotations of gay culture. Randy Harrison explains how the repetitiveness of the sex eventually makes it bland, and viewers no longer feel like it is taboo to be watching examples of gay sex ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005). The character of Vic, Michael's uncle who lives with Debbie, is also instrumental in breaking down the stereotypes associated with gay characters with HIV/AIDS. Vic is important to the show because he portrays a person who does have HIV, but who still lives life. Vic promotes a message that HIV does not translate to death (Rowe, 2003b).

Audiences: They came for the Queer, but they stayed for the Folk

The audiences of *Queer As Folk* are vast and encompass several different types of people. While the gay audience is the desired target, straight audiences have tuned in as well, though the show is not meant to be watched by everyone. "*Queer As Folk* is not for everybody. But it's a breakthrough. It takes everything we've seen before on television about youngish urban singles and makes us see it through new eyes. In that was it is, queerly enough, about everybody" (Jubera, 2000, p. 1L).

On a show where the creators, producers, directors, writers and three actors are openly gay, it is no surprise that the gay audience is the primary audience for *Queer As Folk* (Rowe, 2001). This series connects to gay audiences in ways that no other television show does or has (Kilday, 2000). The gay community is split however, in their reactions to the depictions of gay life. While some argue that the series is aimed at adults (Gilbert, 2000), younger gay audiences tend to enjoy the show more than the older audiences (Rowe, 2003). This is in-part due to the presence of the character of Justin, who is the youngest portrayal of a gay character on television. Gale Harole describes the 17 year-old boys watching *Queer As Folk*, declaring, "They're going to say, 'That's me, right there!' That, to me, is freedom: being able to say, 'This is my life,' and it's about fucking time somebody showed it the way that it is" (Hensley, 2000, p. 51).

Although the gay audience was guaranteed to tune in, at least at first, everyone involved with the production of *Queer As Folk* was shocked with the straight audiences that emerged ("Saying Goodbye to *Queer As Folk*," 2005). One reason straight viewers kept returning to the show is that "[they] come into the show with a lot less baggage – they don't get as offended as some gay people who do not see themselves represented in

this subset of the gay community" (Rowe, 2003, p. 49). Bruce Vilanch (2001) concurs with this finding; he states, "A lot of people don't like *QAF*. They're mostly gay. Straight people I know are fascinated by all the forbidden fruit" (p. 47).

With gay and straight audiences present, "networks have realized that America can handle the idea of a gay leading character" (Campbell, 2001, p. 13). This combination of audiences is difficult to maintain in the United States when viewing gay content, which explains why so few shows with gay characters and content exist (Holleran, 2001). Specific portions of the straight population have clung onto *Queer As Folk*. "[*Queer As Folk*] has developed a big following among both gay and straight viewers – especially college students and women (Campbell, 2001, p. 13). Randy Harrison declares that the groups who are most vocal to him regarding the show are middle-aged women and teenage girls (Meers, 2002).

Keeping this understanding of the various environments that produced *Queer As Folk* in mind, it is now useful to review the academic scholarship relating to queer media, specifically in film and television.

Chapter 3: A Review of Literature

Scholars of communication widely have studied gay characters and content in visual mass media. Three primary divisions of this scholarship will be reviewed: first, the emergence of queer content in mass media, and then more specifically, queer studies in both film and television.

Queer Studies has been the primary division of academia that has raised awareness regarding gay material in media. In his chapter, "Queer Theory," from Hill and Gibson's book, *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*, Doty (2000) describes how queer studies has eased into various forms of mass communication. He states that queer studies centers its advocacy for all genders not encompassed by heterosexuality and not limited to homosexuality. The goal of queer theory, Doty declares, is to examine and blur the lines between sexual and gender categories. The increase in queer studies reflects the increased gay presence in media. Buford (2005), in his article, "The Gay Market Goes Mainstream," examines the attention that gay markets have demanded over the past few decades. He notes that there are more channels now than ever before to reach gay audiences. What used to be contained to strictly a few print sources has expanded to film, premium cable, basic cable and primetime network television. In their article, "Gay Characters in Conventional Spaces: *Will & Grace* and the Situation Comedy Genre," Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) add that these forms of media have allowed for the greatest visibility of gay and lesbian characters ever in American media.

While some mainstream press outlets have declared that this heightened visibility translates to increased societal acceptance towards homosexuality (Svetkey, 2000), most scholars argue to the contrary. Shugart (2003b), in her article, "Reinventing Privilege:

The New (Gay) Man in Contemporary Popular Media," examines the strategies that media successfully have used to make homosexuality appeal to mainstream audiences. One source of this manifestation has been through glamorizing the gay man, straight woman relationship. Most visible in the television series *Will & Grace*, Shugart also identifies several films that represent this relationship including *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Object of My Affection* and *The Next Best Thing*. Shugart declares that this combination of gay man, straight woman, has become 'normalized' in American culture because it reinforces heteronormativity. In this relationship, the gay man typically displays heterosexual traits and is often situated against a supporting gay character who is more effeminate. This reinforces the subject's masculinity and allows him to pass to audiences as heterosexual, even when the message is repeated that he is gay.

Communication scholars have identified the use of gay stereotypes as another common technique used by the media to make homosexuality appealing to audiences. In his article, "Bodies, Movements and Desires: Lesbian/Gay Subjectivity and the Stereotype," Cover (2004) identifies two primary gay male stereotypes. One is the popular, Caucasian, buff, intelligent male who is also wealthy. These characteristics alone are attributed to straight men in a heteronormative culture, making it easier for this representation to *pass* in the straight world. The other image is that of the overtly effeminate, physically small male whose life solely revolves around his sexual orientation. When pitted against each other, just as Shugart emphasized, the first image is interpreted as straight, and the second is gay.

Another repeated stereotype that expands across multiple media is the virgin/slut dichotomy among gay youth. This label is identical to the virgin/vamp dichotomy that

feminist scholars use when critiquing media representations of women. In his article, "Gay Youths as 'Whorified Virgins'," Amico (2005) describes how television shows like *Queer As Folk* and *The L-word* show "whorified youth" going to clubs, hooking up in public with strangers and surfing the internet to find their next sexual conquest. These perceptions, Amico contends, solidify the equation of gay youth and sex. Many gay youth fear comparisons to these labels and images from the media and have abandoned their 'slut' labels and embrace the 'virgin' title. Media have acknowledged this reversion and now presents gay youth as either a virgin or a slut.

While this thesis focuses specifically on the medium of television, an examination of an area of scholarship that looks at homosexuality in film is useful in order to understand how queer content in film eased into television portrayals of homosexuality. Initially, film was considered to be a powerful and influential medium when discussing sexuality. Hirsch (1984), in his chapter, "Midnight Cowboy" from Atkins' book *Sexuality in the Movies*, argues that film can raise consciousness among its audience, particularly in discourse surrounding sexuality. Hirsch uses the film *Midnight Cowboy* as a case study and views the impacts of sexual liberation on film and the extent to which it carries over into real life. He states that the film "can't help raising the consciousness of its audience, and at the same time it's a picture that needs its own consciousness raised" (202). Similarly, Phillips (1984), in his chapter, "The Boys on the Bandwagon: Homosexuality in the Movies," from Atkins' book, *Sexuality in the Movies*, writes that there was serious concern among moviemakers and producers surrounding the audience reactions to films that focused on homosexuality. Their work depicts the concern in early Hollywood that

portraying a character as gay would make audiences believe that *they* would actually become gay based on the images and portrayals they viewed on screen.

A frequent theme in film with gay characters is the experiences characters face through coming out. In his article, "Edge of Seventeen: Melodramatic Coming-Out in New Queer Adolescence Films," Padva (2004) looks at coming out stories in several recent queer adolescent films. It is noticed that heterosexuality is pushed onto all of the children from an early age. It forces youth to hide alternative forms of sexuality or try to bury their feelings. One trend that these films have called attention to is the heterosexualization process in adolescence. These movies are showing how gay characters break through those barriers that would otherwise force them to suppress their sexuality. Padva notes that it is important for film and television to present images of gay youth, because it may be the first exposure to non-heteronormative subject matter.

Another area of communication scholarship criticizes depictions of gay characters in film as watered-down and not gay at all. Jenkins (2005), in her article, "'Potential Lesbians at Two O'Clock': The Heterosexualization of Lesbianism in the Recent Teen Film," examines the presence of lesbians in teenage films. She notes that there is a current trend in society that lesbian sex is appealing and attractive. Therefore several markets are trying to use this image and fantasy to sell their products, including film. Jenkins illustrates that within all of the teen films with lesbian characters that she views, all of the women are also attracted to men. Jenkins considers this to be a "watered-down" lesbian who is playing on the straight male fantasy. She believes that to audiences, only the "attractive" image of lesbians is acceptable and worth watching. Both television and film promote this "luscious lesbian" image, while any signs of masculine female behavior

remain hidden. The unfortunate message this sends to audiences is that it is more important to portray a lesbian to attract straight men than it is to accurately portray a gay woman.

A final exploration to homosexuality and film involves the actual process of viewing a film with queer content or characters in public. In her article, "Lesbian Sex at the (Straight) Cineplex," Morris (2001) reflects on her youth, remembering moments where her fellow audience members openly mock, insult or sometimes have violent outbursts at the sight of same-sex romantic interactions and the horror that those experiences had on her. She views the interaction between audience members as extremely personal, for she believes that how the audience reacts to gay characters is similar to how the audience would react to her. Therefore, there is a certain amount of apprehension in witnessing the introduction of gay characters in film for gay audience members. Morris contends that fear of these negative experiences has created a line of films and theaters that tend to attract predominantly gay audiences. This trend attempts to bring back the enjoyable theater-going experience for gay audience members. Another more common result of dealing with this fear is the stay-at-home event. This is a way of escaping public scrutiny and shame regarding queer material. Group watching of gay-themed television shows like *Queer As Folk* have become popular gathering places where gay people view gay subject matter and discuss it away from mass audiences.

These trends and techniques of gay content and representation from film have transcended into the medium of television. Becker (2006), in his article, "Gay-Themed Television and the Slumpy Class: The Affordable, Multicultural Politics of the Gay Nineties," offers an explanation of why gay content has become so prevalent in the

television medium. He notes that there was a general decrease in television ratings on network television. Marketers turned their efforts towards uncovering niche markets. Becker examines the niche market that promoted and encouraged gay subject matter on television. He calls this group the "SLUMPY class" (Socially-Liberal, Urban-Minded Professional). These are college educated people who were in school during the Clinton Administration who were persuaded with centrist politics. It was a class that wanted social equality, but still believed in materialism. The SLUMPY class embraced gay equality because its only promotion was a message of acceptance. This was a way for the group to be hip and promote the bohemian values they embraced in college. It satisfied their need to be intellectual and trendy at the same time. Through the acceptance and viewership of this group, gay content found a home on network television.

Walters (1998), in her article, "The Gay Next Door (Now in Prime Time)," examines the integration of television with gay content. While she uses *Melrose Place* and *Roseanne* as her case studies, Walters also makes several conclusions based on the "token" gay episode that many shows chose to include in their series. A route that several series, including *Northern Exposure*, *Friends* and *Roseanne*, have taken in order to include gay content, is portraying gay weddings. Each of these episodes, she argues, belittles homosexuality and portrays it as inferior to heterosexuality. For example, rarely is there a kiss performed at the gay weddings. The ceremonies contain no sexual implications whatsoever. Rather than viewed as an emotional and important day, the events are viewed as whimsical and lacking structure. Furthermore, when one member of the relationship gets cold feet, it is a heterosexual character that offers support, comfort and advice to the "troubled" homosexual. These scenarios present the heterosexual as

omniscient when it comes to family, commitment and children. Homosexuals are seen as "childlike, immature, unformed [versions] of heterosexuals" (pp. 4).

In their article, "Invisibility, Homophobia and Heterosexism: Lesbians, Gays and the Media," Fejes and Petrich (1993) expand on the criticism that heterosexuality is viewed as superior to homosexuality on television. One example of this preference that the authors note is that gay characters on television tend to live in a straight world. Rarely, if ever, are gays seen in their comfort zone where they can be who they truly are in a community that accepts them. Furthermore, network television does not present images of homosexuals as full characters with sexuality, friends and problems in the same way that straight characters are portrayed. A number of scholars (Amico, 2005; Fouts & Inch, 2005, Meyer, 2003; Walters, 1998) have maintained that many gay characters are represented and identified only by their orientation, which is nearly never the case for a straight character. Fejes and Petrich declare that one reason why these observations matter is that heavy television viewers regard the representations of gays on television as accurate portrayals of gays in the world.

Despite the increase in gay material on television, the percentage is still not proportional to the incidence of homosexuality. In their article, "Homosexuality in TV Situation Comedies: Characters and Verbal Comments," Fouts and Inch (2005) examined 22 situation comedies and found that only 2% of characters were gay. Of the gay characters, all were male between 20-35 years of age. Also, the lack of a young gay character in situation comedies prevents adolescents or young adults from identifying or modeling the behavior of a gay character similar to themselves. The authors also recognize the dangers that accompany the lack of a gay female character on television.

With this framework regarding gay material in the media, an examination of the scholarship written on individual television shows follows. The television shows that have received the major focus from academic scholars within the field of communications are *Ellen*, *Will & Grace*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer As Folk*. Before examining scholarship for each of these series, a review of literature pertaining to television shows with a lesser degree of gay content and criticism will be reviewed: *Dawson's Creek*, *Six Feet Under*, and the larger category of soap operas.

Meyer (2003), in her article, "'It's me. I'm it.': Defining Adolescent Sexual Identity through Relational Dialectics in Dawson's Creek," notes that *Dawson's Creek* is significant to the discussion of gay characters since the series introduced a gay teenager. Meyer believes this is important because children or adolescents who are around the age of the character onscreen may be more inclined to model or repeat the behavior that they view, particularly with regards to storylines regarding the coming out process. These accounts focus on the everyday struggles of keeping true orientation repressed and hidden and generally consume the lives of the characters who are preparing to declare themselves as gay for the first time.

Not all gay characters on television have a coming out and declare themselves as openly gay. In his article, "Telepistemology of the Closet; or, the Queer Politics of Six Feet Under," Chambers (2003) examines the implications of being a closeted gay character, as seen on the series *Six Feet Under*. Chambers asserts that heteronormativity creates a closet from which gay people must decide to remain or come out. It is assumed that *you* are straight unless *you* come out. This heteronormativity is invisible, but accepted within culture. There are two options for people inside the closet, they can

either suppress their true identity or they can just not contradict what people assume about them.

Unlike every other series previously discussed, Harrington (2003), in her article, "Homosexuality on *All My Children*: Transforming the Daytime Landscape," describes the presence of homosexual content that is not on during primetime. Harrington notes that it has been quite difficult to introduce homosexuality into daytime television since the medium heavily relies on achieving the perfect heterosexual relationship. In addition to genre restrictions, network constraints and skepticism from the viewing audience have also thwarted the presence of homosexuality on daytime television. There have been only a handful of gay characters on soap operas, despite the longevity of the programs. In general, Harrington notes that most characters declaring themselves as gay remain in vital plotlines far less than do their heterosexual counterparts.

Of the series that have received the most media attention for their gay characters and content, *Ellen* is widely considered the archetype case that scholars study. Ellen Degeneres has been the subject of several case studies since she was the first openly gay leading character, male or female, on television. Shugart (2003a), in her article, "Performing Ambiguity: The Passing of Ellen Degeneres," examines the ways that Degeneres performed to pass as a heterosexual woman before she officially came out. She contends that Ellen's performance constructs a lesbian identity even while she is appearing to be straight. Shugart identifies three rhetorical strategies used by Ellen. First is conjecture or disidentification from the suspected group. Early in the series, Ellen dated men and spoke frequently about dreaming of men. In every instance regarding dating, the events ended in disaster. In this way, Ellen was not seen as rejecting

heterosexuality, but just not succeeding as it. The second strategy is deflection. Ellen was not seen as either homosexual or heterosexual. If anything, she is visually seen as asexual based on her appearance and personality. The final rhetorical device is juxtaposition. Ellen places herself in contrast to the extreme forms of heterosexuality¹, therefore, when she fails, she is not considered to have failed the orientation, just as her not being able to fit into an extreme.

What makes Ellen a subject that is more timely and newsworthy to study is that her character, Ellen Morgan, came out around the same time that Degeneres herself declared that she is gay. A few primary scholars have examined Ellen's coming out process (Dow, 2001; Herman, 2005; Reed, 2005). In her article, "Ellen, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility," Dow (2001) discusses both the discourse used by Ellen Degeneres when she came out on her television show and in real life and the gay identity that she established in doing so. She contends that Ellen's coming out was a confession of sorts. Wanting to be completely honest, she decided to come out. Ellen did not make it a gay issue, but a truth issue. Dow refers to this as a combination of the liberation narrative and the authenticity narrative. Dow provides three main reasons why Ellen's experience is important to study. First, she brings the visibility of a leading gay character. Second, she emphasized that coming out matters most to personal relationships, not in building support for a cause. This showed that she was not a threat. Finally, her depoliticizing the issue didn't attempt to change people, it only sought acceptance.

¹ In one episode, Ellen tried to find a male date in two different heterosexual scenes. First, she went line dancing in a cowboy hat, jeans, boots and a oversized belt buckle. Later, she overly-applied her makeup and hair and wore a revealing shirt. Both images of Ellen drew laughter from the audience, since neither is representational of who Ellen is.

Like Dow, Reed (2005), in her article, "Ellen Degeneres: Public Lesbian Number One," uncovers the strategy and word choice used by both Ellen's, Degeneres and Morgan, use during their coming out processes. Reed uses John Hartley's *Uses of Television*, to explain the purpose of television as being an ideal forum where people can learn about others. Television "is teaching audiences about cultural distinction, the expansion of difference" (p. 29). Since Ellen would change television forever by becoming the first openly gay, lead female character, the process of coming out had to be carefully crafted. Reed argues that the word choice surrounding the coming out experience was crucial. Each word, "gay," "queer," "lesbian," "homosexual" had its own connotation, and Ellen used none of them. Rather, Ellen took a "nonstraight position" where she appeared to be neither gay nor straight. In this way, Ellen did not isolate either audience. Once Ellen came out, the landscape changed. She could no longer remain neutral or nonstraight. Her identification as a gay woman put her in contrast to the hegemonic, heterosexual structure. Reed implies that this confrontation ultimately led to the cancellation of the show by the end of the first season that showed Ellen as a gay woman.

In her article, "'I'm gay': Declarations, Desire, and Coming Out on Prime-Time Television," Herman (2005) examined Ellen's coming out story from the perspective of her character, Ellen Morgan. Herman starts his examination of Ellen from within the closet, which is viewed as a location where pride is shunned and shame moves to the forefront. In *Ellen*, Herman contends the lead character is regarded as asexual, so her transformation through the declaration of her homosexuality is less dramatic than it otherwise would have been. Ellen's coming out is similar to the coming out stories on

Queer As Folk in that her story is rooted in a history of shame. Her coming out story is about being truthful to her identity and maintaining her authenticity, not about a particular individual want or desire.

Unlike *Ellen*, the communication scholars have analyzed the series *Will & Grace* for its content instead of a coming-out story, namely since both gay characters on the show, Will and Jack, are declared gay from the show's inception. In her article, "*Will & Grace: Negotiating (Gay) Marriage on Prime-Time Television*," Quimby (2005) studies the relationship between a gay man and a straight woman. Quimby asserts that *Will & Grace* addresses women's dissatisfaction with traditional definitions of male/female relationships. The show introduces a nonconventional relationship that is not recognized in straight or gay culture. This friendship survives, Quimby argues, because there is no sexual interaction between them. Quimby also contends that the reason why *Will & Grace* is a commercial success is because their relationship is viewed as a heterosexual one, which depoliticizes the fact that Will is gay. Jack's ultra-flamboyance reinforces Will's reading as a straight man.

Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) add to this distinction between the two archetypes of gay men on *Will & Grace* and declare it as one example of how the show reinforces heterosexism. They argue that the show positions gayness next to masculinity. For example, the leading gay character, Will, is white, muscular, handsome, well-educated, professional and wealthy. From a marketing standpoint, his image and masculinity is no different to sell than that of a heterosexual man's. Jack, on the other hand, represents more feminine traits both physically and emotionally. When the two are situated next to each other, it is easy for the viewer to forget that Will is gay. Also,

Will's sparse appearances in sexual situations throughout the series pitted against Jack's frequent sexual encounters constantly reminds the audience that Jack is gay, while deemphasizing the fact that Will is. Battles and Hilton-Morrow also declare that the show's phasing out deliberate challenges to heteronormative behavior, depoliticizing of social issues and placing the characters in "familiar opposite-sex dyads" (p. 89) contribute to the reinforcement of heteronormativity.

Kanner (2003), in her article, "Can *Will & Grace* Be 'Queered'?" explores how queer theory is applied to a gay text. In *Will & Grace*, Kanner argues that Jack's behavior is so consistently shocking, that it has made gayness part of the norm and audiences are desensitized to it and disregard any serious implications from his words and deeds. Therefore, the gay content of the show is not "queer." Rather, the gay subtext comes from the character of Karen who is, she argues, the only queer presence on the show. Karen is seen as queer for her equally-plausible flirting attempts with Grace and Jack as well as her open comments about former lovers. Her loud, uncompromising attitudes toward sex and life allow for a queer subtext to come to the forefront of the show.

In her article, "Producing Containment: The Rhetorical Construction of Difference in *Will & Grace*," Mitchell (2005) stands apart from the previous scholars in their debate on whether *Will & Grace* is in contrast to heteronormativity. Mitchell contends that the show is thought to be successful in curbing the heterosexist notions of television, but at the same time, it also reinforces classist, racist and patriarchist values and behavior. Class-wise, Karen's power given to her through her acquisition of money leaves the working and lower classes nothing to be desired. Her viewing of Rosario as

merely an object testifies to how little she cares about equality. With regard to race, Rosario, a recurring character, is the only non-white presence on the show. The closest the show gets to represent other races is by making an occasional references or jokes at the expense of those races. Finally, the constant verbal battery about lesbians reasserts male power over women, even inside the gay community.

Unlike both *Ellen* and *Will & Grace*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* has been studied with more scrutiny on whether it is “accurately” portraying gay life since it is a reality show. Critics are divided on whether the show gives a positive or negative depiction of gay life. Several authors argue that the show is beneficial for helping curb the evolution of hegemonic masculinity (Clarkson, 2005; Hattersley, 2004; Morrish & O’Mara, 2004). Morrish and O’Mara (2004), in their article, "*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy: Confirming and Confounding Masculinity*," argue that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is not an assault on heterosexuality or sexuality, although it does have a hand in examining how each is presently defined. They contend that the "Fab 5" allow alternative forms of masculinity to surface through their performances of gay identity. Carson is seen as the most flamboyant of the five and most like the current media stereotype of gay men. The other four offer different expressions of what it means to be a gay man. At the end of each show, the five gay men reconstruct the straight man in a new, conventionally masculine way. Morrish and O’Mara contend that this diminishes the argument that gay men are removed from hegemonic masculinity. In the end, the gay men are able to make the subject more confident in his heterosexuality.

Clarkson (2005), in his article, "Contesting Masculinity's Makeover: *Queer Eye*, Consumer Masculinity, and "Straight-Acting" Gays," looks at the makeover process

performed in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. He contends that the makeover turns the straight man into a "hyperconsumer" who is a "better version" of a straight man. Part of this transformation includes the "Fab 5" forcing the subject to focus on physical beauty and ways to improve appearance. Clarkson credits *Queer Eye* as a contributing factor for evolving the hegemonic masculine standard to becoming more metrosexual. A consequence of this alteration is that men who fit the former image of what was masculine must respond to this change or risk being perceived as feminine. This process is worth mentioning because straight culture is moving away from what is traditionally masculine and closer to gay culture. In the past, gay culture would borrow from straight culture to try to appear more masculine or "straight-acting." Hattersley (2004) echoes the threat that *Queer Eye* poses to the traditionally masculine man in his article, "Will Success Spoil Gay Culture?" He asserts that there is less need now, more than ever before, for physical strength. The metrosexual perspective that *Queer Eye* helps to create and foster blurs the line in physical appearance between homosexuality and heterosexuality. In his article, "Eyes on the Guys: Gay Men's Turn on TV," Cohen (2003) concurs that despite the use of stereotype that the show uses, *Queer Eye* is necessary because it "[breaks] down the cultural wall of separation between gay and straight" (pp.6).

Ramsy and Santiago (2004), in their article, "The Conflation of Male Homosexuality and Femininity in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*," vehemently oppose the argument that *Queer Eye* is able to positively redefine hegemonic masculinity and move away from heteronormativity. Ramsy and Santiago argue that *Queer Eye* furthers the stereotype of defining homosexuality in opposition of masculinity in three ways: first,

the show neutralizes homosexuality; secondly, the "Fab 5" makes over men who are viewed in stark contrast to themselves; and finally, the show uses Carson as its major spokesman who is the most effeminate member of the group. The authors also contend that the show beefs up heteronormativity by removing the sex lives from its five main cast members.

In his article, "We're Here, We're Queer – and We're Better than You: The Representational Superiority of Gay Men to Heterosexuals on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*," Hart (2004) is perhaps loudest supporter of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and insists that the show is the most progressive television portrayal of gay life to date. One of his proofs for this belief is that there is constant reinforcement that gay men are superior to straight men. He contends that the goal of the program is not to turn people gay, but to educate heterosexuals about gay life and to show "real" examples of gay men who do not fit every gay stereotype. The series presents a spectrum of gay life, offering five distinct personalities and preferences. Hart offers several reasons why *Queer Eye* is the best representation of gays in the media. First, on the show, straight men are taught to appreciate forums which only gay men are said to take interest. Also, *Queer Eye* marks the first time on a reality show that gay people outnumber their straight counterparts. Finally, the "Fab 5" controls nearly all of the decisions that the straight man makes, illustrating that they hold the power and are able to use it effectively.

Other critics are split in their opinions regarding the show. In her article, "Questions for *Queer Eye*," Kanner (2004) declares that one unique aspect about *Queer Eye* is that the goal of the show is not to give a make-over, but a "make better." Gays are seen as superior to heterosexuals in the areas of hygiene, fashion, culture, interior design

and cooking. Where *Queer Eye* is progressive is that gay men are presented as they ‘truly’ are – that is, they are not promoting an agenda or trying to convert people to their ‘side.’ Yet, one of the many issues Kanner attacks is the need of the gay man to help or please the straight man. The only motivation for having five gay men on the show is to help the one straight man become better, reinforcing the stereotype that gay men are meant to serve, entertain and please. Also, *Queer Eye* presents gay men in a desexualized form, whereas the heterosexual man is trying to become ‘better’ to please his romantic partner, a woman.

Weiss (2005), in his article, "Constructing the queer 'I': Performativity, Citationality, and Desire in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*," avoids the question of whether *Queer Eye* is a positive depiction of gay life and studies the different ways the characters identify themselves as gay. Weiss first looks at how the "Fab 5" uses language to identify themselves as homosexual. The group uses several rhetorical devices to label themselves as gay. These include direct self-labeling, oblique self-reference, labeling objects or events as gay, implicit distinguishing and labeling other people as straight and thus implicating the speaker as gay. Weiss also views how each member performs his gender on the show, also implicating orientation. One tactic that is used is a linguistic encoding of the feminine gender. Carson is the member who uses this tool the most. Kyan, on the other hand, uses linguistic encoding of the masculine gender and Weiss identifies him as the most traditionally masculine using current cultural norms. This contrast provides the quintessential quality of the program, argues Weiss. Since Carson represents himself as feminine but desires masculine, he does not upset the gender matrix. It reinforces the cultural norm that you are ‘supposed’ to be attracted to your

opposite gender. Kyan, conversely, is masculine and also desires the masculine. While being more "culturally accepted" in his demeanor, he presents more of a direct threat to heteronormativity. Therefore, *Queer Eye* forces viewers to rethink the definition and categorization of gender.

The scholarship revolving around the series *Queer As Folk*, the subject of this manuscript, is the final area of examination. The included studies have been drawn from both the British and the US versions of *Queer As Folk*, (*QAF*). In their article, "Representation and Stereotypes in *Queer as Folk*," Lövgren and Andersson (2003) define that what separates *QAF* from other programs with gay characters is that *QAF* allows the audience to see where the stereotypes that are used form, whether it is in a gay club, a bedroom or in the workplace. *QAF* is able to use stereotypes, but still look at the people on the show as individuals as well. In this way, the show does not examine whether gay people are good or bad, but looks at how they have the same characteristics as all people. Another way the show distinguishes itself is that the producers and writers do not care about being accepted in terms of a mainstream audience. They do not cater to the safe side. On the contrary, *QAF* doesn't play it safe at all. Its sex scenes and discourse are graphic and continue to push the envelope with each episode.

While critics have argued that *QAF* plays on every negative stereotype of homosexuals, Lövgren and Andersson still believe that the show has made tremendous progress for the gay community. First, the show features gay characters in leading roles and a majority of the characters are gay – two traits which have never occurred before on television. Also, the show takes place in a gay setting. Gay characters do not have to live their world solely in the heterosexual style, but are seen as "more realistic" because

of the places they go together. Furthermore, the plot does not solely revolve around their orientations. In fact, they argue that viewers sometimes forget that the characters are gay. *QAF* also portrays several different ways of what it means to be out. There is no structure set up where either everyone knows the character is gay or no one does. Some people are out to everyone, some only to their friends, others to no one. Finally, the show otherizes heterosexuality. This “reverse ‘otherness’” has also never been evident on television.

Other scholars examine how *Queer As Folk* resolves fixed binaries (Johnson, 2004; Munt, 2000). In her article, "Boldly Queer: Gender Hybridity in *Queer as Folk*," Johnson (2004) examines the how the British version of *Queer As Folk* breaks boundaries by creating characters who are not pigeonholed into gender roles or assignments. She contends that most gay programs use binary opposition with gay characters, that is, there are the ultra-straight men, and the ultra-feminine. *Queer As Folk* uses some of these traits, but still advances queerness to new ground. Johnson primarily looks at the character Stuart (from the British version of *QAF*) in her conclusions. Stuart forms new sexual hybridity with his masculine tendencies combined with his feminine edge. When pursuing other men sexually, Stuart transforms from the masculine sex predator to the feminine sex object. Since he makes a conscious choice to go from one to the other, he is the active participant, and thus, the masculine tendencies are restored. The goal with this hybridity is to be removed from the stereotyped effeminate gay character without acting completely as a heterosexual. "Stuart plays these gendered roles, but he wears them like he wears his hair: stylized yet organic. His gender play is genuine, not simply manipulative" (p. 300).

Munt (2000), in her article, "Shame/Pride Dichotomies in *Queer As Folk*," uncovers the relationship between shame and pride and how it manifests itself in *Queer As Folk*. She contends that pride indicates "claiming a place in society – coming out in order to be entered in" (p. 533). Conversely, not claiming a gay identity carries a negative connotation of being in the closet, "the prison of shame" (p. 533). Gay and lesbian identity is built on the opposition of pride and shame. Munt also notes the excessive sex scenes present within *Queer As Folk*. She contributes these abundant scenes as a response to historical repression and shame. Munt emphasizes that shame is not only negative. For example, children/adolescents often identify through opposition. Therefore, shame is necessary in order to understand the true meaning of pride. Pride starts with shame.

One distinguishing characteristic that critics agree *QAF* emphasizes is its repeated emphasis and infatuation with sex (Holden, 2001; Holleran, 2001). In his article, "Brief History of a Media Taboo," Holleran (2001) uses the opening line of the American version of *Queer As Folk* to summarize the show: "The thing you need to know is that it's all about sex" (*Queer As Folk*, 1.1). This quality separates *QAF* from other television shows and films that have gay characters because very few productions are made for gay and straight audiences and include gay sex. The show has been described as what the gay community wanted *Will & Grace* to be: an exploration of all aspects of gay life. Holleran believes the inclusion of nudity on the show is a vital tool to accomplish this goal. It is key to legitimize the characters. A final argument that Holleran inserts is that all mainstream work portraying gay life was created to show how gay characters are the same as straight ones, or to emphasize that they are different. In other words, gay

characters are always being compared to straight characters, whereas the converse is rarely true.

In his article, "Gay Cinema: Still a World unto Itself," Holden (2001) interviews Michael Zam, a movie critic of *The Times*, who asserts that *QAF* is all about attractive men having fantastic sex. He says that that world exists in the gay community, but so do many other gay lifestyles. Zam's main criticism of *QAF* is that the program sensationalizes the day-to-day activities of gay life, despite the hardships that happen to the characters due to their sexual orientation.

A final study regarding *Queer As Folk* discusses how representations of gayness on *Queer As Folk* have somehow transformed real gay spaces. In their article, "*Queer as Folk: Producing the Real of Urban Space*," Skeggs, Tyrer and Binnie (2004) define gay space as any area that is considered safe, cool and trendy which also allows for the natural behavior of individuals to come through. These can include clubs, gay shops, restaurants, resorts or similar regions in a town. The authors contend that *QAF* made gayness trendy. This brought outside sources and markets into the gay world because they wanted to capitalize on its popularity. Corporate culture caused a dilution of gay culture and the actual 'gayness' of the space. These conclusions rely on the assumption that the program impacts audience opinions on gay spaces. On *QAF*, gay space is seen as a safe haven from homophobia and other threats to gay culture, a process the authors refer to as "territorialisation through sexuality." The authors conclude that this utopian representation of gay space on television does not accurately reflect gay space in reality.

This piece of criticism falls within the scope of several of the larger areas from which these previous works were created. *Queer As Folk* presents portrayals of

homosexual men and women through the medium of television. While *Queer As Folk* expands the topics that are explored relating to gay characters on television, such as discrimination in the workplace, gay adoption, and the sex lives of gay characters, the series also explores the familiar gay themes in media of coming out stories and AIDS plots. Finally, *Queer As Folk* confronts traditional gay stereotypes in media because there are more than one or two gay characters on the series. By presenting multiple independent gay personalities, *Queer As Folk* challenges audience abilities to place characters into the two opposing categories of the celibate, masculine professional and the promiscuous, flamboyant clown.

Chapter 4: Method

For this study, the television series *Queer As Folk*, which aired on Showtime from 2000-2005, is the artifact that is examined. Each of the 83 episodes was scrutinized, with additional emphasis placed on episodes from the first and last seasons. This extra viewing of the first season was necessary because the first season of a television series establishes character attributes and patterns of behavior. The first few episodes in particular inform audiences of details they need to know in order to actively engage in the program. A prime example is Michael's voiceover narration in the pilot episode which provides brief summaries about each character while the character is being introduced to the audience. Additional viewing of the last season was required since the final season of a television series leaves viewers with a resonant impression of individual characters and the show as a whole. Therefore, seasons one and five were viewed in their entirety twice.

While viewing episodes, all dialogue regarding relationships in general, single life, or a specific relationship was transcribed and act as the primary evidence for the conclusions made in this thesis. Behavior and nonverbal communication that also references relationships or single life were noted and provide supplemental support for discursive examples.

The series *Queer As Folk* was chosen for several reasons. First, academic scholarship regarding relationships and how they are compared to single life has solely been discussed in relation to heterosexual characters. One purpose of this thesis is to compare the ways that heterosexual relationships are represented to the ways that homosexual relationships are portrayed. A second reason why *Queer As Folk* was chosen was because of the significance of being the first show on television to give gay

characters sex lives. While shows like *Ellen* and *Will & Grace* paved the way for *Queer As Folk* to air in the United States, neither series portrayed an onscreen storyline of a sexually active homosexual. Therefore, *Queer As Folk* is a significant series in the progress and development of queer media and warrants further study. A final reason why *Queer As Folk* was chosen was to determine whether the series is, as Michael states in the first line of dialogue, "all about sex." As was discussed, substantial criticism from entertainment critics and scholars exists that labels *Queer As Folk* as hypersexualized. One way to determine the degree of truth of this criticism is to examine the importance placed on relationships in relation to single life. Subsequently, it is necessary to explore the different ways that discourse regarding the abundance of sexual activity manifests itself through characters who are in relationships and those who remain single.

Chapter 5: I Don't Want to Grow Up: Peter Pan and the Single Life

Before exploring the various ways that people in relationships are viewed to be superior to single characters, it is useful to distinguish the differences between being in a relationship and the single life.

Characters who are in relationships are identified as such by their discourse or by the discourse of their friends. Generally, people in relationships use terminology that separates themselves from single characters. One way that this is conveyed is through the use of identifying words when referring to themselves or their significant other. Some examples of these words are husband, wife, beau, boyfriend, girlfriend, partner, love and lover.

Representations of sexual activity provide another way that single people and couples are viewed differently. Characters who are in relationships have at least a degree of monogamy, while single characters have no obligation to have sex with another person more than once. While Michael and Ben represent the only relationship among main characters on the series that does not include infidelity, the fact that people in relationships have intercourse with each other more than once and single people frequently have one-night stands distinguishes the two categories of characters.

Also separating single life and being in a relationship is the level of responsibility. As single people, characters only have responsibility to themselves. They can party, drink, use drugs and have sex with whomever they want, whenever they want. In contrast, people in relationships still party, drink and occasionally use drugs. However, alcohol and drugs are consumed in moderation, when compared to single characters.

In *Queer As Folk*, Babylon is seen as a location that separates single and coupled life. A place with rampant drinking, recreational drug use and back-room promiscuity, Babylon is where characters go to find their next sexual conquest, not the place to go once they have already found someone with whom to share their life.

A final factor that divides people in relationships from single people is the level of maturation shown by people in relationships. The maturity factor, which will be further developed in the following chapter, is expressed through discourse that describes single characters as boys and coupled characters as men.

With this understanding of how characters in relationships are represented and identified as different from single characters in mind, it is now useful to review the theoretical basis that relationships will be scrutinized with: fantasy and metaphor.

Fantasy: A theoretical review

Ernest Bormann created fantasy theme analysis, which he later termed symbolic convergence theory, while studying small group communication. He sought a theory that would explain the connections people made in small groups between the speaker and audience while discussing a variety of common topics (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991).

Bormann found that through the sharing of a fantasy in discussion, there was a “meeting of the minds” among group members that allowed the participants to establish a common understanding that made sense of the situation at hand (Bormann 1982a).

Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) declare that Bormann’s fantasy theme analysis rests on two principles:

1. People use communication to create reality and people use symbols to explain what is happening around them

2. People share the symbols they create

Bormann (1982a) explains the series of events that occur during the chaining of the fantasy, or the process where the fantasy is shared. A fantasy theme, first must emerge for one of the participants. Bormann defines a fantasy theme as “a way for people to present or show to the group mind, a common experience and shape it into social knowledge” (p. 52). He notes that a fantasy theme can be slanted, that is, there are different ways to interpret the meaning. This allows for what he terms “mirror-image” fantasies where one person’s hero acts as another’s villain. After the fantasy has been created within the group, they show signs of “inside joke syndrome.” An inside joke, not necessarily humorous, is a trigger word, line of dialogue, image or reference to the already-established fantasy (Bormann, Kroll, Watters & McFarland, 1984). The inside joke allows for the fantasy type to develop. A fantasy type is a recurring story or theme in the group discourse. Once the fantasy type has cemented itself into group consciousness, a rhetorical vision is shared among group members. The rhetorical vision is “a unified putting-together of various shared scripts which provides a broader view of a culture’s social reality” (Bormann, 1982a, p. 52-53).

Bormann (1972) contends that in fantasy theme analysis, characters play out a situation removed from their immediate surroundings, or “here-and-now transactions,” therefore transcending the everyday experiences of life. There are several ways that a fantasy theme can emerge in a setting. Frequently, fantasy is used to make sense out of chaos or to restore order to confused circumstances (Bormann, 1982b; Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). On an individual level, fantasy can arise from a character’s psychological repression of an issue, which then draws all other characters into it.

Fantasy can also be a coping mechanism to prevent succumbing to failure. It can “[provide] a sense of meaning and significance for the individual and helps protect him [or her] from the pressures of natural calamity and social disaster” (Bormann, 1972, p. 400).

Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) identify three steps to conduct fantasy theme analysis or symbolic convergence theory.

1. Discover communication patterns of fantasizing
2. Consider elements of the fantasy
3. Explain why the fantasy works for people who share in it

Fantasy through metaphor

A primary metaphor in the Peter Pan fantasy that emerges in *Queer As Folk* is the character of Brian acting as Peter. This combination of metaphor and fantasy theme analysis is possible because the overarching analogy or archetypal metaphor is what holds the fantasy together (Aleman, 2005). Brian's battle against aging and attempts to preserve his youth make him a Peter Pan figure in *Queer As Folk*, both to his friends on the series and from a critical perspective as a viewer. A review of the foundation of criticism using metaphor provides insight into an examinations of the implications of Brian as Peter Pan.

Criticism using metaphor is rooted in the works of classical rhetoricians. Michael Osborn (1967) declares that Cicero used what he called "transferred words" to convey meanings, while Quintillian used metaphoric words to invoke imagery outside from the natural meaning of words, and even Aristotle gave instructions regarding times when the

use of metaphor is appropriate. Osborn defines the modern metaphor as the process of giving a name that belongs to something else on the grounds of analogy.

Osborn asserts that for centuries the metaphor was classified under the canon of style and used mainly a linguistic tool. Hermann Stelzner (1965) added that upon naming the metaphor, broader applicability is to be expected. In other words, criticism through metaphor is comprised of both the metaphor and the significance or meaning of the metaphor. Steven Perry (1983) uses this approach in outlining his case study of the use of Hitler's infestation metaphor when discussing the Jewish population. He argues that Hitler spoke of Jews in subhuman ways, such as a disease-causing microbe, an internal parasite, and a poison that was wreaking havoc on the nation. The implication that Hitler applied to the metaphor was complete extermination. If the problem is subhuman, there was no concern for emotion or care for Jewish people, any solution would be acceptable if it destroyed the disease-spreading agent. In studying this example, Stelzner (1965) emphasized that the implications of the metaphor cannot be minimized. However, in order for a metaphor to be successful in conveying the intended meaning to the audience, it must receive enough explanation in the artifact being examined. Stelzner stresses that the strength of the metaphor depends the importance given in the broader discussion of the art.

Brian Kinney as Peter Pan: Exploring the fantasy

Keeping this understanding of criticism through metaphor in mind, the discussion of Brian Kinney as Peter Pan can be resumed. Two main arguments must be examined here: first, that Brian Kinney is equated with Peter Pan in the series in a way that is

understood by other characters; and secondly, the implications of this comparison.

Brian's status as Peter Pan makes him the anti-relationship. Brian's discourse glorifying single life in *Queer As Folk* reveals that anti-relationship characters are immature, selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, seek their own pleasure, reject commitments and want their friends to remain single and childish as well.

On several occasions in the series, characters refer to Brian as Peter Pan or simply Peter after commenting on him not wanting to grow up. For example, while Ben and Brian are at the gym, Brian pokes fun at Ben for settling down and living a calmer life, free of back rooms and multiple sexual partners and promoting what the straight world considers to be a proper lifestyle. Ben describes his transformation as "simply a part of growing up." He then informs Brian that he "can't be Peter Pan forever" (*Queer As Folk*, 5.5).

Inside Babylon, Brian's new-aged Neverland, Brian is surrounded by the same activities each night: loud music, nudity, go-go boys, dancing, prolific drug and alcohol use and incalculable amounts of sex. There is no indication of the passing of time inside the walls of Babylon. This allows Brian, and others, to live as if they can stay young forever.

This understanding of Brian as Peter Pan has two main implications to the series. First, viewing Brian as Peter Pan helps the audience understand his motivations. At times, Brian appears as a cold figure, even rude and unsympathetic to his best friends. His matter-of-fact attitude and cruel briskness repel some of his friends, particularly Melanie and Emmett. In defending Brian to Melanie, Lindsay declares:

Lindsay: I understand it, him...that he does exactly what he wants, no excuses no apologies. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.2).

Lindsay states that Brian's lifestyle is straightforward. He acts with his own best interest in mind and will not apologize for looking out for himself. In defending Brian again, she adds:

Lindsay: Well he's honest, he tells the truth and he doesn't pretend. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.5)

Brian's actions are never indirect or vague. He does not humor his friends or fail to give them honest answers to their questions and dilemmas, even if they are hurt by it. Brian has the independence to do what he wants, when he wants to and not have to resolve the consequences if they do not concern him. When considering these characteristics with Brian viewed as Peter Pan, they do not appear to be as abrasive as they otherwise would. He does not act in these ways for his own amusement, but rather seeks to freeze the status quo for himself and the people in his life. Brian acts out in ways that prevent change in his world. To Brian, his behavior does not have consequences because there is no planning for future events; he lives in the now.

For example, Brian is reluctant to take out a health insurance policy for Gus because to him, there is no need to plan for Gus's future. If there is an emergency, Brian simply can afford to pay the costs; it is unnecessary to take out a policy because Brian will always be there (*Queer As Folk*, 1.3).

The other major interpretation of viewing the metaphor of Brian as Peter Pan is that Brian draws his friends into the Peter Pan fantasy. As has been previously discussed, Brian is incredibly persuasive and has the most clout within his group of friends. His professional success, sex appeal and intelligence make him a figure sought out for advice

by all of his friends and colleagues. Brian uses this power to pressure his friends to abandon their relationships and stay young with him forever. Before examining how this fantasy takes shape, it is useful to review how fantasy theme analysis or symbolic convergence theory is used as rhetorical criticism.

Applying Peter Pan to Queer As Folk

Just as Peter Pan tries to keep Wendy in Neverland, Brian attempts to keep his friends in his fantasy world of Babylon and the single life. In order to understand how Brian represents Peter Pan, it is necessary to first explore the chaining of the fantasy among other characters on the series. Chaining happens when other characters acknowledge the presence of Brian as comparable to Peter Pan. Ben's quotation referring to Brian as Peter Pan is one example of the chaining out of the fantasy. Similarly, Lindsay also is drawn into the fantasy. When Lindsay and Brian are in the hospital the night Gus is born, they discuss the effects that a child will have in their lives:

Lindsay: Who would have thought, you and me, parents?
 Brian: It's pretty scary boys and girls. Think it's too late to return it?
 Lindsay: We could try. I guess this means we're finally grown ups.
 Brian: Don't say that Wendy, we'll never grow up.
 Lindsay: Don't be scared... (*Queer As Folk*, 1.1)

When referencing Lindsay as Wendy, Brian is drawing her into his fantasy. This dialogue from the pilot episode is mirrored in the final season when Lindsay and Melanie decide to move to Canada. As they prepare to leave, Brian describes how much he will miss her and Gus:

Lindsay: Keeping us here isn't going to make up for lost opportunities.

Brian: Well I want another chance, I want him to know who I am.
 Lindsay: He will.
 Brian: I don't want him to forget me.
 Lindsay: He won't, we'll make sure of that.
 Brian: He's not the only one I'm going to be losing. I don't want you to go Wendy.
 Lindsay: I have to Peter. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.12)

This exchange, directly mirroring the conversation between Peter Pan and Wendy as Wendy returns to the real world and leaves Peter in Neverland, again names Brian as Peter and Lindsay as Wendy, showing the development of the fantasy as inside jokes or trigger words are used as representative of the theory on which the fantasy is based.

Accompanying the naming --Brian as Peter-- also transfers Peter's powers to Brian. Peter's most notorious qualities include his ability to fly and his inability to age. Both of these powers are successfully conveyed in the character of Brian. For example, when Brian and Michael are standing on the balcony at the hospital the night that Gus is born, Brian entertains the idea of flying away:

Brian: There is always one solution.
 [Brian steps onto the ledge]
 I could end it all right now.
 Michael: Oh that'd be dramatic, just like ER, birth and death in the same episode. Get Down!
 Brian: No you'll have to come and get me.
 Michael: I'm serious, stop clowning.
 Brian: Or I'll jump!
 [Michael gets on the ledge, Brian holds onto him]
 Come on Mikey, let's fly, like in all those comic books. I'm superman. I'll show you the world.
 (*Queer As Folk*, 1.1)

While Brian refers to himself as a superhero, the power that he emphasizes is flying, which fills the mold created within the Peter Pan metaphor and fantasy. The other defining characteristic of Peter Pan, that he does not age, is also representative in Brian.

As was identified, Brian is obsessed with youth and beauty. Brian rejects relationships and the idea of settling down because they mark maturing. He is so obsessed with youth that he even declares that the existence of his son is problematic for him because each day that Gus gets bigger and grows up, Brian ages as well.

In addition to characters filling the roles of the Peter Pan fantasy, the settings line up as well. Pittsburgh's Babylon becomes Neverland, a world where time stands still and pleasure is maximized, perhaps with "magic fairy dust," a term used to describe crystal methamphetamines or ecstasy. When Emmett brings George to Babylon for the first time, which is also the first time George has experienced club culture, George is left aghast at how surreal Babylon is. He proclaims:

George: It's like a dream, I can't believe what I've been missing!
 (*Queer As Folk*, 2.10)

George's description of Babylon as being dreamlike fulfills the objective description of Neverland as being unreal, unbelievable and only possible in a dream. Furthermore, Michael and Brian depict Babylon as a place where time stands still. Like George, their description makes Babylon seem like it can only exist in a dream:

Michael: You know what amazes me?
 Brian: What dear?
 Michael: Outside a child is born, a man dies, a couple gets married.
 Brian: The ever-changing kaleidoscope of life.
 Michael: In here, nothing changes. Everything's the same, the same
 hot guys, same thumpa thumpa, same shaved chests.
 Brian: And what a comfort it is to know. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.1).

Even when Michael does not frequent Babylon as regularly as he used to since he and Ben become a couple, Michael is still able to relate to the appeal that Babylon has and

once had on him. In the series finale, when Babylon is in ruins after the explosion, Michael and Brian discuss how Babylon helped define who they are:

Michael: This is where it all began.
 Brian: And ended.
 Michael: But it's who we are. It's what made us.
 Brian: Didn't you say that it's all a cheap illusion and that outside life goes on, but in here, nothing ever changes?
 Michael: I did say that, yes. But that was before I understood that some things aren't meant to change. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.13)

Michael's withdrawal from a previous criticism of Babylon fulfills Brian's purpose as Peter Pan, namely, to freeze the status quo.

Through the preceding examples depicting how the Peter Pan fantasy is intact in *Queer As Folk*, the implications of the fantasy can be explored. Brian's influence over his friends, particularly Michael, regarding relationships and not wanting to grow up is best examined using the fantasy. When Brian is responsible for David and Michael not becoming partners, Debbie and Brian discuss the impacts of Brian's behavior:

Debbie: He had a chance with David, but you had to fuck it up.
 Brian: He wasn't having any fun.
 Debbie: He's had enough fun. You've all had enough fun. It's time for him to be a man. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.11)

Brian, fulfilling the role of Peter, is content that he and Michael remain boys and have fun together in their make-believe world of Neverland. Debbie, recognizing the negative patterns in their behavior, is quick to call Brian on his influence over Michael. Implicit in Debbie's discourse is the argument that Brian and Michael need to grow up. David expands on this need at the King of Babylon contest by expressing his concern with the value placed on youth and beauty at the event:

David: The problem with this contest is that it exposes the single most tragic flaw with gay culture.

Brian: It exposes a lot more than that Doc.

David: And that is our almost pathological obsession with youth, beauty and smooth muscular bodies.

Brian: I know, what a shame.

David: And until we break free of our stunted adolescence and our superficial values, we'll always be boys and never men.

Brian: God is that all?

Michael: I happen to find what David is saying to be profoundly insightful.

Brian: I find it to be profoundly full of shit. An opinion put forth as truth by a bunch of hypocritical, jealous, guilt-ridden, self-loathing, middle-aged, sexually-frustrated, pseudo-intellectual fags who wish they were straight. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.20).

David is the first character to explicitly connect the focus on youth and beauty with the inability to grow up and mature. Since David is nearly a decade older than Michael and Brian, he provides a more mature perspective of life and he explains how he is able to search for more meaningful aspects of life. Unwilling to compromise his character, Brian staunchly defends his value of youth and beauty. His answer to David implies that people who are not young and beautiful do not value youth and beauty because they do not have those qualities to offer others. Since Brian has both of those qualities, he wants to showcase them and preserve them for as long as he can.

When Babylon is closed, Brian considers purchasing it to ensure that his world is preserved. He speaks with Ted while justifying his decision to buy the club:

Brian: I want it.

Ted: Oh you want it. What for?

Brian: I have to keep the boys off the street at night. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.1).

"The boys," in maintaining the Peter Pan fantasy, refers to the *lost* boys that Peter Pan rescues and lives with in Neverland. Prior to this moment, Brian was only a participant

in life at Babylon. When he buys the club, Brian becomes the primary name that is associated with Babylon, just as Peter Pan is the name directly associated with Neverland.

As more of Brian's friends, including Michael, settle down and leave Neverland, Brian is left alone in a world that once fostered all of his friends' worlds. Confused and saddened by this, Brian confronts Michael:

Brian: When did you change?
 Michael: What?
 Brian: When did you become this pious, sanctimonious,
 judgmental twit?
 Michael: The point is not when did I change, the point is why
 haven't you? When are you going to stop being some over-
 the-hill club boy and grow up? (*Queer As Folk*, 5.2)

Michael's remarks criticize Brian in the same way that David's did in the first season. Michael has reached a point in his life where partying, random sexual encounters and consuming extreme amount of drugs and alcohol no longer satisfy him. Instead, he prefers to live in a house with his partner and foster son. Brian, unable to accept his best friend's apparent maturing, is left with the same feelings as those experienced by Peter when Wendy returns to the real world. He appears to realize that everyone around him is moving on, but he is standing still.

In efforts to get Michael to return to Neverland, Brian hosts a superhero themed party at Babylon. Brian describes to Justin the need for the event to go flawlessly in order to convince Michael to return to his former lifestyle and join in Brian's routine festivities:

Justin: It looks pretty good.
 Brian: Pretty good's not good enough. When Michael sees it I want him to lose his mind and his breath and his bladder control.
 Justin: And then what? Come running back to Babylon where he belongs? It ain't going to happen. He's happy where he is.
 Brian: Gay men cannot live on tulip beds and speed bumps alone. Sooner or later the Serengeti will call and he'll pace restlessly in his cage, howling at the moon, and then he'll break free from suburbia and return to the jungle where he belongs. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.4)

Brian's reasoning explains how Michael will be willing to return to his former behavior – having fun and enjoying single life with Brian—once he gets a glimpse of this special-themed night at Babylon, a paradise. Brian describes how, deep inside, Michael's instincts will recognize the need for him to be in a setting like Babylon. Brian considers these feelings to be only a phase of Michael's life and that they will no longer be subdued when Michael is not in a relationship. Once he becomes bored with domestic life, he will return to life at Babylon. This behavior acts as a deterrent against living in relationships.

In order to understand how Brian maintains his single lifestyle and imposes his beliefs onto the lives of his friends, it is necessary to examine the personality and habits of Brian Kinney.

The ultimate anti-relationship: Brian Kinney

Unquestionably, a majority of the discourse against commitment, relationships and love comes from the Brian Kinney character. Brian glorifies single life and attempts to keep all of his friends locked into single life as well. Brian epitomizes each previously defined staple of single life. For example, in season one when Michael tells Brian that he

has a responsibility to get rid of Justin who is following them around after losing his virginity to Brian, Brian replies:

Brian: You know I'm getting a little sick of people telling me what's my responsibility. If Lindsay and Melanie want to go off and have a kid, that's their responsibility. If what's-his-name, Justin, wants to go out and pick up guys while he's still in high school, that's his responsibility. My responsibility is to myself. I don't owe anybody a goddamn thing. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.2).

Brian's refusal to take responsibility for anything that does not directly involve him is characteristic of single life. Since he does not commit himself to a relationship, he does not have to be responsible for anyone else, including his son. Not only does Brian solely take responsibility for himself, he advises others to follow his lead. When a vulnerable Justin tells Brian how much he needs him in his life, Brian states:

Justin: I need you.
 Brian: You're the only one you need and you're the only one you've got. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.5)

Brian's reasoning about responsibility is rooted in independence. Having no ties to look after other people means Brian is able to maintain the freedom to do as he pleases. When Lindsay encourages Brian to become more involved in the larger gay community of Pittsburgh, Brian rejects her suggestion:

Lindsay: We need to take care of each other.
 Brian: I don't need to take care of anyone, and I don't need anyone to take care of me. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.6)

This exchange not only clarifies Brian's desire to distance himself from helping others, but also his wanting to be left alone. Brian is self-sufficient and seems to dread the time when that changes. Until it does, he only takes full responsibility for himself. This

mantra rubs off on Justin after several years as Justin accepts Brian's advice that the only person you have to be responsible for is yourself. In the series finale, when Justin goes to New York to pursue an art career instead of staying with Brian, he applies this advice to his own life. Brian and Lindsay discuss this decision:

Brian: He's a selfish prick, thinks only of himself.
 Lindsay: You taught him well. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.13)

Brian's character is the contrast to relationships. Brian is the anti-relationship because he is selfish, irresponsible, seeks his own pleasure, rejects commitment and is sexually promiscuous. The glorified example that Brian set as an independent, self-sufficient single man acted as a model for Justin to follow. Justin's choice to fulfill his professional ambitions and personal talent instead of marrying the man with whom he had always been in love illustrates the influence that Brian has over his friends.

Not only does Brian not take responsibility for anything that does not involve his own actions, but he does not enter a relationship or believe in love. Brian's hedonistic life revolves solely around pleasure, not commitment, as both Michael and Brian explain to Justin after Justin has sex with Brian for the first time:

Michael: The thing about Brian is, he's not your boyfriend. He doesn't do boyfriends (*Queer As Folk*, 1.2)
 Brian: Justin, I've had you. What happened last night was for fun. You wanted me and I wanted you, that's all it was. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.2)

Initially, to Brian, Justin was nothing more than a one-night stand. While the connection meant more to Justin, who proclaimed his love for Brian from the beginning, to Brian, it was nothing but sex. When answering Justin's claim that he loves Brian, Brian replies:

Brian: I don't believe in love. I believe in fucking. It's honest, it's efficient. You get in and out with a maximum of pleasure and a minimum of bullshit. Love is something that straight people tell themselves they're in so they can get laid. And then they end up hurting each other because it was all based on lies to begin with. If that's what you want, then go and find yourself a pretty little girl and get married.
(*Queer As Folk*, 1.2)

As Justin refuses to give up on being in a relationship with Brian and the two see each other more frequently, Justin begins to believe that he can change Brian. Brian, reveling in his bachelor status, bluntly turns Justin away:

Brian: Look I told you. I'm not your lover, I'm not your partner. I'm not even your friend. You're not anything to me.
(*Queer As Folk*, 1.5)

This statement crushes Justin and he is left confused at how sex can mean nothing to Brian. Having just lost his virginity, Justin wonders how Brian, the man to whom he feels closer than anyone else in his life, can dismiss him so effortlessly after he had changed his life forever.

Brian, although eager to distance himself from Justin, finds himself spending more and more nights with him. While Brian believes that the relationship between the two is strictly sexual and for fun, Justin knows that there is more to it. When Justin attempts to define their relationship, Brian answers:

Brian: How many times do I have to tell you, we're not a couple. Michael and David are a couple. Lindsay and Melanie are a couple. Ted and what's-his-name are a couple.
Justin: Yeah, so what are we Brian?
Brian: I don't know about you, but I'm single.
(*Queer As Folk*, 1.20)

Brian fervently rejects Justin's attempt to classify their relationship in the same way that other couples do. Yet after Justin is bashed at the end of season one, Brian becomes instantly closer to him. Regardless of the true meaning of this change in behavior, whether out of guilty conscience or true feelings, the two grow together. Yet even when Justin moves into Brian's loft, Brian's sexual behavior does not change. When Justin walks in on Brian having sex with another man, he discusses his frustrations with

Michael:

Michael: What did he do now?
 Justin: Nothing.
 Michael: Cut the shit. I know that face, that's the Brian-Kinney-just-fucked-me face.
 Justin: Yeah, except it wasn't me that he was fucking, it was some other guy. I come home he's on the fucking couch.
 Michael: Another hurricane off the coast of Florida, another earthquake in Peru, so what else is new?
 Justin: I guess I just thought that now that we're together...
 Michael: Things would be different? Brian is never going to change, you know that. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.6)

It is this conversation with Michael that motivates Justin to initiate dialogue with Brian regarding their arrangement. In this discussion, Justin and Brian create a set of rules that define what is acceptable and unacceptable sexual activity with other men:

Justin: Why am I here?
 Brian: One night your mommy and daddy wanted to make a baby.
 Justin: You know what I mean. Is it just because you feel guilty about what happened? Answer me. Answer me. If I hadn't gotten bashed in the head, would I even be here? . . . What do you want?
 Brian: You [are] right. The reason I took you in was because you took a bat to the head. But it's not the reason I want you to stay. But don't get the idea that we're some married couple because we're not. We're not like fucking straight people. We're not like your parents. And we're not a pair of dykes marching down the aisle in matching Vera Wang's. We're queers and if we're together it's because we want to be, not

because there's locks on our doors. So if I'm out late, just assume I'm doing exactly what I want to be doing, I'm fucking. And when I come home, I'll also be doing exactly what I want to do, coming home to you.

Justin: Ok, I want some things too. You can fuck whoever you want, as long as it's not twice. Same for me. And no names or numbers exchanged. And no matter where you are, no matter what you're doing, you always come home, by 2.

Brian: 4.

Justin: 3. One more thing. You don't kiss anyone else on the mouth but me. [they kiss] (*Queer As Folk*, 2.6)

Even though this exchange implies that the two are a couple, Brian is quick to identify that this is not a conventional relationship and it is not monogamous. Brian is unable to completely commit to Justin, even after he moderately acknowledges that he cares about him. When Brian is not able to tell Justin that he loves him, Justin leaves Brian for Ethan, a romantic musician. Debbie and Michael discuss Justin's decision and have conflicting opinions of his behavior:

Debbie: If you ask me, Justin did the right thing. Hopefully this Ethan kid will appreciate him.

Michael: Brian appreciated him, he did everything for him.

Debbie: Everything but love him. But then he can't love anybody, not even you. (*Queer As Folk*, 3.1)

Debbie draws attention to Brian's inability to love and commit to people from whom he has feelings. While this quotation regarding his inability to love refers to Justin, Debbie recognizes a pattern in Brian's behavior. Michael, unable to understand his own unresolved feelings for Brian, is less able to identify this characteristic of Brian's personality.

Later in the season, when Justin breaks up with Ethan for cheating on him, Brian and Justin get back together and adopt the same set of rules for their relationship that they

had previously established. When Justin walks in on Brian after Brian has had sex with a random man, the man asks Brian who Justin is:

Man: Who's he?
 Brian: Oh, that's a difficult question to answer given the limitations of the language, the conventionality of most people's thinking. Let's just say he's the guy I fuck more than once. (*Queer As Folk*, 3.9)

Even after Brian somewhat commits to a relationship with Justin – twice, he is reluctant to formally classify their arrangement as such. Later, when Hunter attempts to come onto Brian, Brian finally admits that what he and Justin have is reminiscent of a relationship.

Michael: He already has a boyfriend.
 Hunter: You do?
 Brian: In a non-defined, non-conventional way, yeah.
 (*Queer As Folk*, 3.13)

Brian's clarification informs Hunter that what he and Justin have, while technically termed a relationship, is different from that of his foster parents, Michael and Ben, have. Thus, even while in a functioning relationship, Brian still maintains his cemented priorities of putting himself first, not being monogamous and engaging in an abundance of partying, alcohol and drug use.

In addition to Brian's rejection of relationships in his own life, he also exerts his opinions onto his friends when they enter relationships. Brian discourages every prominent relationship on the series including those between Michael and David, Michael and Ben, Emmett and Ted and even Lindsay and Melanie. When Brian tries to prevent Michael from going on a date with David, Michael asks him:

Michael: Have you ever been on a real date?
 Brian: Once. I ended up fucking the waiter. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.5)

Brian's quip attempts to keep Michael at bay since Michael is obsessed with Brian at the time. Michael idolizes the figure that Brian is: content with his life, attractive, confident and successful. The fact that Brian is able to represent all of these qualities combined with the absence of real dating sends the message that dating is unnecessary.

When Lindsay proposes to Melanie, Melanie at first turns her down. Lindsay turns to Brian for consolation and they discuss Melanie's decision:

Lindsay: Mel turned me down.
 Brian: Ha ha.
 Lindsay: Ah, it's nice to see you laughing, finally, asshole.
 Brian: You finally proposed to her and she blew you off. How come?
 Lindsay: For reasons I'm sure you'd appreciate. I don't think a meaningless, heterosexual ritual would prove our love and it wouldn't be legal anyway.
 Brian: Well, you can't argue with that.
 Lindsay: Hey, I was on the debate team, I can argue anything.
 Brian: I think for once I agree with Melanie. Fuck weddings. Fuck rituals. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.2)

Even when Lindsay is hurting from the rejection of her partner, Brian does not compromise his stark rejection of relationships or, in this case, marriage. Later, after Melanie reconsiders and decides to marry Lindsay, Brian makes a toast to the couple:

Brian: To the happy couple: may you come to your senses before it's too late. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.5)

When everyone else congratulates Lindsay and Melanie, Brian insists on rejecting their choice to share their lives together as a couple.

In addition to Brian's rejection of relationships is his aligning with Babylon and loft-living instead of transitioning to the quiet home lives of his friends. Since Babylon epitomizes single life with its emphasis on sex and partying, couples are rarely shown

visiting the establishment. Conversely, Brian is in attendance nearly every night, even when he and Justin have their arrangement. When Babylon closes, Brian buys the building and company to ensure that the lifestyle he supports and participates in can live on. He explains to Ted:

Brian: And what would be practical Theodore? To get married and move to the suburbs? To become a home-loving, child-raising, God-fearing, imitation heterosexual? Ha ha. And for what? So that I can become another dead soul going to the mall and dropping my kids off at school and having barbeques in the back yard? No. That's their death, not mine. I'm a cocksucker. I'm queer. And to anyone who takes pity or offense, I say judge yourself. This is where I live. This is who I am. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.1)

Brian openly mocks the decisions of Michael and Ben and Melanie and Lindsay to live in houses away from Liberty Avenue. He associates quiet, family life with heterosexuality. To him, moving into a house means abandoning his life and all of the principles he has built up since coming out. Babylon represents the eternal flame of gay life. As long as there is a location removed from heterosexual living and approval, gay life can continue. Conversely, moving into a home and the absence of Babylon means the end of queer living.

When Michael is informed of Brian's decision to buy Babylon, he views the investment as a missed opportunity. At the diner, the friends break the news to Michael:

Michael: I thought Babylon went belly-up.
 Emmett: You mean you didn't know? Tell him Teddy.
 Brian: I resuscitated it. I put my mouth on it and blew.
 Michael: So that's how you spent your disposable income? You should have bought a house.
 Brian: Some of us queers prefer dancing and fucking to kiddies and picket fences. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.2)

This exchange between Michael and Brian illustrates how the two are growing apart based on their priorities. While Brian maintains his glorification of single life and the need to party, Michael's views have shifted since the birth of his daughter and after becoming Hunter's foster parent. Brian's disdain for Michael's change in values is evident, and he defends the staples of single life, even when he is with Justin.

Perhaps Brian's strongest motivation to reject love, relationships and marriage is his desire to remain young and beautiful. Throughout the series, each character battles with the pains of growing older, but Brian fights aging more than anyone. When Gus is born and Michael congratulates Brian at the hospital, Brian focuses his attention on growing older instead of the joys of having a child:

Michael: It's kinda weird you having a kid. Still it's exciting isn't it?
 Brian: What, having some wrinkled little time clock ticking away, reminding you that you're getting older by the minute, by the second.? (*Queer As Folk*, 1.1)

Brian refers to Gus as a unit of measurement. To Brian, each day that Gus ages and matures, he does too, and it terrifies him.

Knowing how much Brian dreads getting older, his friends decide to throw him a "deathday" party on his 30th birthday. Since Brian considers 30 to be a milestone in life, he believes that his life is over (*Queer As Folk*, 1.22). Lindsay tries to extinguish his negative emotions surrounding aging by portraying maturing as a positive life process.

She tells him:

Lindsay: I want wrinkles. I want to have grey hair. I want Gus to make me a grandmother. I want to grow old with Melanie.
 Brian: Do you want me to puke right here? I don't want grey hair and wrinkles. I don't want to be a grandfather. And I definitely don't want to grow old with Melanie, or anyone else. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.22)

Despite Lindsay's best efforts, she is unable to convince Brian that aging is not the end of his world.

In addition to focusing on his youth, Brian also places equal importance on his beauty. On his 30th birthday, when he nearly passes out from hanging himself by the rafters of his apartment while masturbating, a practice he refers to as "scarfing," Michael cuts him down to remind him that he will always be the man that he is:

Michael: You will always be young and you will always be beautiful. You're Brian Kinney for fuck's sake! (*Queer As Folk*, 1.22)

When Brian is diagnosed with cancer, he chooses to keep it a secret from his family and friends. When Justin finds out and tells Michael, Brian is furious and kicks him out of his loft. Justin turns to Michael for advice:

Justin: He fucking kicked me out, he said he didn't want to see me again.
 Michael: More like he doesn't want you to see him. You read the Kinney operating manual. He thinks that now that he's sick that he's no longer perfect, that you won't love him anymore, that you're going to leave him.
 Justin: That's crazy, even for him.
 Michael: Not if you put all your eggs in one basket, so to speak. When being young, being beautiful, being Brian Kinney is what it's all about, take that away he figures, what's he got? (*Queer As Folk*, 4.9)

Brian's hasty reaction to Justin is based on his personal feelings that he has lost one of the characteristics that define who he is: his beauty. Being in a committed relationship means that he will get older and that he will lose his perfect features.

In season five, Brian provides his own account of why he believes he is unable to commit to a relationship. He tells Ted:

Brian: My mother was a frigid bitch. My father was an abusive drunk. They had a hateful marriage, which is probably why I am unwilling or unable to form a long-term, committed relationship of my own. The fact that I drink like a fish, abuse drugs and have more-or-less redefined promiscuity doesn't help much. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.8)

While this is not a surprising revelation since each of these factors has been identified previously in the series, Brian compiling them into one statement provides the most comprehensive reasoning as to why he refuses to enter relationships on the series.

The creators of *Queer As Folk* made the character of Brian Kinney to represent a certain perception, the anti-relationship. Brian's lifestyle highlights the glories of single life including sex with many partners, freedom from responsibility and late-night partying every night. He makes every effort to prevent himself from aging and from being perceived by others as growing older. One way that society and the world around him view maturing is the presence of being in a committed relationship. Societal standards determine that after reaching a certain age, it is time to settle down with a partner. As Brian's peers begin to succumb to this standard, he makes every effort to resist it and persuade them to fight this norm as well. In these actions, Brian takes on the role of Peter Pan, a character who never wants to grow up. The character of Peter Pan not only explains Brian's motivations in emitting anti-relationship discourse, it also tries to draw his friends into a larger Peter Pan fantasy. In this fantasy, they frequent Babylon, their version of Neverland, where time stands still. As Brian attempts to maintain life in its present state, his friends mature and seek coupled life. Despite their feelings, Brian does not relinquish his efforts to draw them back to Babylon where he remains.

Chapter 6: Escaping Neverland: The Benefits of Committed Relationships

While Brian refuses to grow up, his friends mature and embrace aging. As characters enter relationships, the discourse and actions on *Queer As Folk* reinforce the notion that being in a relationship is better than being single through a variety of ways. This chapter focuses on the ways that people in relationships are represented as being superior to characters not in relationships in the series *Queer As Folk*.

Two primary communication scholars have examined the positioning of television characters who are in relationships compared to their single character counterparts (Loeb, 1990; di Mattia, 2004). Both authors conclude that individuals who are in relationships are in some way superior to single characters. Loeb (1990) examines this phenomena within the television show *thirtysomething*. Loeb contends that unmarried characters are positioned as children, while married characters adopt traits of parents. Within the parent-child relationship, parents are viewed as dominant and in control, while children are submissive. This finding is particularly evident within the realm of self-disclosure. Parents have limited self-disclosure to children regarding their behavior; whereas children must consistently disclose their behavior and justify their actions. Loeb also finds that this trend of valuing relationships over single life is present in televisual elements of the program. Unmarried characters are frequently viewed further away so they appear smaller, their images are less focused and softer. Subsequently, unmarried characters are shot from the top, as if they are looking up at an authority figure; while married characters are viewed from the bottom, looking down on their inferior correspondents.

Di Mattia (2004) explores singles life being portrayed as incomplete and unfulfilling in the television show *Sex and the City*. Di Mattia contends that while the show is about strong, powerful single women, there is active engagement in the romantic fantasy. Even though Carrie is successful, she feels incomplete without a male companion. Di Mattia examines the two masculine archetypes that are present in each of Carrie's relationships. These archetypes include the seducer who is passionate, sexual and spontaneous against the strong, sensitive rescuer who is emotionally accessible and stable. While each relationship is evaluated based on these principles, the underlying assumption is that without one or both of these male figures in her life, Carrie is incomplete.

A review of criticism using narrative

Walter Fisher created the narrative paradigm, basing it on his compilation of rhetorical criticism that revealed messages through what he determined constituted narrative. Fisher (1984) defines narrations as a “theory of symbolic actions-words and/or deeds that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, and interpret them” (p.2). He classifies the narrative paradigm as a combination of two forms of rhetoric: the argumentative (persuasive) and the literary (aesthetic). Karyn and Donald Rybacki (1991) add that like fantasy, the narrative paradigm focuses on humans as “symbols users who create dramas as a way of explaining and interpreting their world [through] symbolic action in the words and deeds of characters that provide order and meaning for an audience” (p. 108). Fisher (1984) established five components that the narrative proposes.

1. Humans are storytellers
2. The mode of decision-making and communication is ‘good reasons,’ which varies by scenario
3. ‘Good reasons’ are determined by history, biography, culture and character
4. Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings – whether experiences are consistent with prior knowledge and understanding
5. The world is a set of stories which must be rationalized to live ‘the good life’

Scholars have structured narrative rhetorical theory in varying ways. Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) created three elements of the narrative: narrative the tale, narrative discourse and narrative rationality. “Narrative the tale” is composed of the story content or plot within the setting. “Narrative discourse, the telling” is how the story is told and through what mediums the audience receives it. “Narrative rationality” is the ability of the story to act as a guide to behavior and belief. Together these three strands determine the strategy of the narrative and measure its effectiveness.

Deming (1985) applies the narrative theory to television and established five facets to the narrative: the real author, implied author, discourse, implied audience and real audience. On a television series, Deming clarifies that directors, writers and producers fill the position of real author. The implied author follows the camera’s point of view. Discourse is used to tell the story, but is not limited to words. Rather, discourse includes verbal and nonverbal communication, characters, setting, form, style, time, space and sound. The implied audience is the audience on screen who hears or deciphers messages, whereas the actual audience is the viewer who watches the television program. Fisher (1984) notes that several of these concepts are similar to structures of Bormann’s fantasy theme analysis. However, unlike their role in fantasy criticism, in narrative, each element “translates into dramatic stories constituting the fabric of social reality for those

who compose them. They are, thus, 'rhetorical fictions,' constructions of fact and faith having persuasive force, rather than fantasies (Fisher, 1980)" (p.7).

William Lewis (1987) identifies the two components that compose the framework of a narrative as myths and anecdotes. Myths, states Lewis, are societal explanations of why the world is the way it is and why people behave the ways they do. A myth is the larger image that a text presents, while the anecdotes are the "quick stories, jokes, or incidents that are the verbal counterpart" to the myth.

Fisher (1985) discusses the purpose of the narrative paradigm as being to understand and evaluate communication and determine whether or not an instance of discourse provides an accurate and desirable guide to thought and action in the world based on the decision calculus the characters use. Fisher sets up a two-pronged criteria for evaluating this process, using the standards of probability and fidelity; that is, whether the decisions are accurate for what the most likely option would be for that character and if the decision reflects the true nature of the character's disposition. If the judgment of the character does not fulfill either the probability or fidelity standard, the audience can reject the narrative and it will fail.

Several factors separate narrative from other rhetorical criticism methods. Fisher (1984) argues that the narrative context is the best way to reason, determine meaning and understand culture, character, history and context. Furthermore, he asserts that there is a sense of universality to the narrative since narratives can be communicated between cultures and they hold meaning regardless of time and place. More specifically to rhetorical criticism, Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) contend that the narrative can affirm new ideas and images and seek acceptance for them or reaffirm existing societal notions.

Applying metaphor within the narrative paradigm

It is natural for the metaphor and narrative methodologies to be combined while examining an artifact. The terminology of the narrative provides a "master metaphor [which] sets the plot of human experience and the others the subplots" (Fisher 1984, p. 6). Furthermore, narratives describe humans as beings who use symbols and create messages for those symbols as a way of explaining the world around them (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). Thus, the use of metaphor criticism, which creates a central analogy and assigns meaning and significance to that analogy, inside the larger framework of the narrative is a natural synthesis of methodologies in rhetorical criticism. In this study, the metaphor of Brian as Peter Pan provides the framework for exploring the implications of not growing up. For Brian, not growing up means he has no family, no responsibility to anyone but himself and he stays young and beautiful forever. As his friends age, the idolization of Brian and his lifestyle ends and instead of aspiring to be more like Brian, they begin to strive for achieving the antithesis of Brian's lifestyle. This chapter focuses on the dominant narrative in *Queer As Folk* that glorifies relationships and examines the different ways that being in relationships is superior to single life.

Findings

After viewing all 83 episodes of *Queer As Folk*, the argument that characters who are in relationships are portrayed as superior to those who are single has overwhelmingly emerged and manifests itself in twelve primary ways. These expressions surface through the telling of a narrative. As was explored in the previous chapter, single characters are seen as selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, seeking their own pleasure and refusing to

grow up. Conversely, characters in relationships are represented as mature. They are happier than single characters because single life is lonely, and, in relationships, characters know they are loved; this allows them to have more intimacy in their lives than single characters. Further, single life poses risks and dangers that coupled characters do not have to face. This safety comes to characters in relationships, in part, because they have homes and families which also allows them to live meaningful lives. With more meaning also brings more responsibilities for characters in relationships, making them more able to withstand the instability of a crisis. This stability grants couples societal approval and acceptance for growing up and fulfilling their social roles within the community.

In short, the twelve primary ways that relationships are conveyed as superior to single life are:

1. People in relationships are more mature
2. People in relationships are happy
3. Single life is lonely and unsatisfying
4. People in relationships have someone to share life with
5. People in relationships know they are loved
6. People in relationships are more intimate than single people
7. Single life is sexually dangerous
8. People in relationships have a home
9. People in relationships can have a family
10. People in relationships have lives with meaning
11. People in relationships are stronger and more stable than single people
12. People in relationships receive societal approval and acceptance

Several examples of each way that this argument materializes will be provided and analyzed. Within each manifestation, the provided examples will be presented in chronological order as they occurred on the series.

enough to accept. David, nearly ten years older than Michael, desires a mature relationship, so he rejects Michael's proposal. While discussing their breakup, Debbie and Brian have conflicting opinions. Debbie yells:

Debbie: He had a chance with David, but you had to fuck it up.
 Brian: He wasn't having any fun.
 Debbie: He's had enough fun. You've all had enough fun. It's time for him to be a man. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.11)

Debbie's remarks imply that Michael's absence from being in a committed relationship means that he is not yet a man, but still a boy. Further, she states that it is time that he settle down and remove himself from the immense partying that he and Brian engage in as single men.

Later, when Brian pushes Michael away from him and towards David,³ Michael accepts his mother's revelation. While accepting David's offer, Michael comments:

Michael: I want to take you up on your offer, and live together. I want to give it a shot.
 David: I'm not a consolation prize.
 Michael: I know that. You're first prize.
 David: You're sure?
 Michael: I'm 30. It's time I settled down and took on some responsibility. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.11)

In explaining his decision, Michael cites the need to grow up and take more responsibility in his life. This is Michael's first committed relationship which marks his maturation through his willingness to take a step that he has never before been comfortable in making: living together with his partner.

Emmett and Ted later enter their own committed, partner relationship. When facing criticism of their relationship from Brian, Emmett and Ted defend their commitment to each other. While in the diner, Emmett shoots back at Brian:

³ At Michael's surprise birthday party.

Emmett: You're just jealous because we have what you don't.
 Brian: Anal warts?
 Ted: A loving, mature relationship. (*Queer As Folk*, 3.2)

In answering Brian, Ted is sure to highlight the fact that the arrangement between he and Emmett is more than just casual dating, but a commitment that not everyone is able to achieve.

During the final season, Michael and Ben appear to continually mature by moving to a residential neighborhood, becoming Hunter's foster parents and spending significant time and energy with Jenny Rebecca. At their housewarming party when they move off of Liberty Avenue, Michael invites his neighbors and friends Eli and Monty and also Brian and Justin. Eli and Monty, who have adopted children and have a home, discuss Babylon, the club that Brian has recently purchased, with the rest of the group:

Monty: Babylon, we haven't been there in years.
 Brian: Well you two should come by as my personal guests.
 Eli: I hardly think Babylon suits our lifestyle.
 Michael: Can I get anybody anything?
 Brian: Which lifestyle is that, Monte?
 Monty: I'm Monty.
 Brian: Which lifestyle is that, Monte?
 Monty: These days we prefer to spend quiet time at home with our kids.
 Eli: Rather than in a room full of drugged up Peter Pans.
 Brian: You know, so many couples I speak to these days feel that way. That's why I'm starting monogamous Mondays.
 Ben: Brian's a real kidder.
 Eli: I hardly think the kind of promiscuous behavior that Babylon promotes is a laughing matter.
 Brian: Oh come on fellas, don't tell me that after, how many did you say, ten years together, you haven't had a little extramarital ass?
 Justin: Brian.
 Eli: Actually, we never have. It's called being in a mature, loving relationship.
 Brian: That's called being dead. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.4)

This conversation identifies several key arguments between the lifestyle of Brian and that of the rest of the room. While Brian defends his business and single life, Eli and Monty illustrate that those times are in their past. While they did have their share of experiences at clubs as young, single men, they argue that such hollow encounters are no longer satisfying. Instead, raising children, having a home and a monogamous partner are all that is desirable. This discourse resonates with Justin who decides to leave Brian that evening for not being able to meet those very needs.

Unable to understand Michael and Ben's reasoning, Brian questions Ben while the two are at the gym. The two discuss why Ben continues to work out to look good for Michael. Ben defends his relationship with Michael as a part of growing up and maturing to having greater needs and desires.

- Brian: You know, I thought one of the benefits of marriage, besides getting to have sex with the same person for the rest of your natural born life, is being able to let yourself go.
- Ben: I'm sure you'll be pleased to know Michael and I still enjoy looking good for each other.
- Brian: You still look?
- Ben: Not everyone regards marriage and monogamy as a death sentence. For some of us, they're simply a part of growing up.
- Brian: You mean giving up. Surrendering to the straight world's conception of what it means to be a man.
- Ben: Can't be Peter Pan forever.
- Brian: You can try.
- Ben: These days, I prefer spending time in a family room rather than a back room. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.5)

Ben's acceptance of his and Michael's maturing is not only upheld here, but Ben also articulates that being in a committed relationship does not indicate the ending of sexual drive, attraction and intimacy.

Soon after Michael and Ben moved into their house, the two walk down Liberty Avenue after leaving the diner. Michael reflects on all of the experiences that he has had over the years:

Ben: Liberty Avenue.
 Michael: In all it's glory.
 Ben: Miss it?
 Michael: It was my life for a long time. Everywhere I look I still see me. Walking down the street with Brian, hanging out with Emmett and Ted, cruising some hot guy, but I've moved on. So rather than missing what used to be, I look forward to what has yet to be. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.5)

Michael acknowledges that he had countless fun experiences with his friends while living on Liberty Avenue, but those times have passed. His priorities have changed since he has been in a relationship with Ben. The same things that made him happy as a single man no longer apply now that he has a partner, a child and a home. Being in a relationship has made him mature into a responsible adult.

Single characters, notably Brian, are considered immature for not wanting to settle down and have a serious relationship. His friends even consider him to be a emotionally inferior to Justin who is years younger than he is. The way that Brian is told to mature by his friends is to tell Justin that he loves him and then commit to a relationship with him. All of his friends, Michael and Ben, Emmett and Ted, Lindsay and Melanie, and Justin with Ethan, have matured and at least have been involved in a relationship. Because Brian hasn't, he is viewed as immature. In this way, all of Brian's friends possess the value society instills on growing up. At a certain point in life, people are *supposed* to grow up and commit to another person. Until Brian accepts relationships, society views him as immature.

People in relationships are happy

Perhaps the most identifiable way that people in relationships are seen as superior to single people is by portraying people in relationships as happy. This classification is not only positive, happy dialogue among couples, but it also includes discourse to and among single characters that if they were in a relationship, they would be happy, too.

When Michael and David return to Pittsburgh from their weekend at David's country home, David confronts Brian about how Brian keeps teasing Michael into believing that he cares about him. David contends that Michael thinks that he is happy because he still has his best friend, Brian, and is able to have a non-committed relationship with David at the same time. Brian tries to justify his friendship with Michael and declares:

Brian: He's my best friend since we were 14.
 David: That's 16 years of waiting. He's been waiting so long, he actually thinks he's happy. But you and I both know that he's never going to get what he really wants.
(Queer As Folk, 1.7)

David's words indicate that as long as Michael is between him and Brian, Michael will never be happy. Not only will Michael not have an actual relationship with David, but he will not fulfill his ultimate fantasy of having sex with Brian. David continues his discussion with Brian :

David: If you're really his best friend, give him a chance to be happy, to have a life, his own life. Let him go.
(Queer As Folk, 1.7)

David tries to appeal to Brian's sensibilities. He pleads with Brian to allow Michael to live his own life and escape Brian's shadow, a notion that Brian agrees is necessary.

When Brian takes drastic action and intentionally hurts Michael by telling one of his female coworkers, whom Michael had allowed to think that he was interested in dating – that he is gay, Michael is literally pushed into David's arms, and ultimately, his home.⁴

Michael and Emmett discuss Brian's actions which occurred at Michael's birthday party:

Michael: It's too late, he pushed too hard. And, now the game is over.
 Emmett: I know, and I'm sorry.
 Michael: Doesn't matter, I'm going to be too busy being happy, I won't even have time to think about him.
 Emmett: Who ever would have believed, you, a married lady?
 Michael: I prefer the term, domestic partner. I don't care what it's called as long as I have David. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.12)

Now that the transition from Brian to David occurred, Michael believes that he will finally be happy because he is in a relationship with the man whom he loves and who loves him. Later, Brian and Justin discuss Brian's actions. Brian asserts:

Brian: It was the only course of action.
 Justin: Yeah, but now he hates you.
 Brian: It's ok, as long as Mikey's happy. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.12)

While Brian's actions are difficult to comprehend, this passage implies that his motivation is not as hurtful as his behavior first indicated. He hurt Michael to prevent Michael from holding onto the dream that someday he and Brian would be a couple. He released him to David so that he might be happy. Thus, Brian indirectly states that alone, Michael is not happy, but with David he has the opportunity to have a happy life.

⁴ Brian decides that being with David is better for Michael than allowing Michael to continue lusting after him. Brian throws a surprise birthday party for Michael and invites Tracy, a woman whom Michael has allowed to believe he is interested in, to attend. When Tracy arrives, Brian announces that Michael is gay causing Tracy to run out of the loft hurt and upset. The event pulls Michael and David together while effectively pushing Michael apart from Brian.

Following this line of reason, Lindsay and Melanie proclaim that their happiness in life stems from their relationship. At Gus's first birthday party in the second season of the series, his mother makes an announcement to all of the guests regarding their status as a couple and as a family. Melanie declares:

Melanie: You know, I would just like to say what a thrill it is for Lindsay and me to be celebrating our beautiful son's very first birthday and how happy we are. How very happy that you're all here to share it with us. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.2)

Melanie's announcement is on behalf of herself and Lindsay and conveys how they are thankful to be with Gus. She is happy to be in a relationship and to share a child with the woman she loves. This passage also reinforces the previously made argument that shows people in relationships are able to have a family.

Like Emmett and Melanie when they experienced the discomfort and hurt of losing a valued relationship, Michael is miserable in season two after breaking up with Ben because he is unable to deal with Ben's HIV status. Knowing that he will not be able to get over Ben alone, his instant reaction is to meet another man. Michael makes a personal tape at a dating company, releases a personal ad on a website and gets set up on a blind date through his mother's friend Ida (*Queer As Folk*, 2.8). The message is clear: in order to achieve the same happiness that he had with Ben, Michael needs to find another relationship to enter into because single life does not offer the same opportunities.

One of these opportunities of coupled life is marriage. While gay marriage is illegal in the United States except in Massachusetts, commitment ceremonies are practiced and are represented on *Queer As Folk*. When Brian wins a trip for two to the

white party in Miami,⁵ he asks Justin to accompany him and miss out on Melanie and Lindsay's wedding. In trying to convince him to stay for the wedding, Debbie says:

Debbie: You wanna grow up and be another Brian Kinney, always running away from love and never towards it, then you go to Miami and you fuck your little twinkie brains out, but it's never going to make you happy. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.11)

Debbie explicitly tells Justin that the single life he is used to, partying and having an abundance of meaningless sex, will not make him happy. Rather, staying in Pittsburgh and witnessing the commitment ceremony between two people who love each other provides a better example for Justin to model.

The happiness that Debbie speaks of is the love that Lindsay and Melanie share, not the feelings that Brian has in his glorified single life. Emmett shares the same emotions for Ted as Lindsay and Melanie do for each other. When Emmett turns to Brian in desperation to try and help Ted when he is arrested for hiring a minor at his pornographic website,⁶ Emmett confesses that being in a relationship with Ted has made him happier than he has ever been:

Emmett: We also know that deep down, you care about us, even though you'd never admit it. Which is why...

Brian: I already told Ted that there's nothing...

Emmett: I know what you told him. I also know what you think of Teddy and me, that we're just a couple of silly queens setting up house, that it will never work. Well there was a time when I would have thought exactly the same thing, but miracle of miracles, I have never been happier in my entire life. And you want to know why? Because he gives me

⁵ The white party is an event that is proclaimed to be the social event of the year for gay men. The series of parties include several different white-themed parties. It is a time of extreme promiscuity, drinking and dancing.

⁶ Ted expands his pornographic website, the same site that launched Emmett into superstardom causing him to meet George, and hires many new actors and employees. One of his employees is revealed to be a minor who presented Ted with a fake driver's license. Ted is forced to shut down his operation and prohibited from working for another pornographic company.

love and respect. And now it is my turn to give him something back. (*Queer As Folk*, 3.7)

In this passage, Emmett identifies the elements of a relationship that make him happy that he had never received as a single person in the same way: love and respect. The fact that Emmett was willing to go to Brian for help attests to how much maintaining those feelings and the relationship means to Emmett.

Justin shares this sentiment in his relationship with Brian, even though Brian refuses to consider their arrangement as a relationship for most of the series. In the final season, when Justin leaves Brian for not being able to commit to a relationship and have a family, Brian aches from being away from Justin. In a drunken rage, Brian bursts into Michael and Ben's home late one night, intoxicated, and confronts Michael about implanting feelings of home and family into Justin. Brian screams:

Brian: Congratulations.
 Michael: For what?
 Brian: You won. To the spoiler goes the victory.
 Michael: I don't know what you're talking about.
 Brian: Of course you don't. No one plays dooey-eyed innocent better than you, although at 34 you're getting a little bit long in the tooth for short pants.
 Michael: Speaking of outgrowing your act, nothing's more pathetic, to use one of your favorite words, than an over-the-hill club boy.
 Brian: You infected him with your petty bourgeois, mediocre, conformist, assimilationist life. Thanks to you he's got visions, babies, weddings, white picket fences dancing in his blond little head.
 Michael: And you think I put them there?
 Brian: Before you and your husband tied the noose around your necks, he was perfectly happy. Now he's a defector, just like the rest of you.
 Michael: He was never perfectly happy. Waiting for years for you to say 'I love you, you're the only one I want.'
 Brian: That's not who I am.
 Michael: Don't we all know.
 Brian: Now, he's here in your house.

Michael: It's a home.
 Brian: It's a farce. It's a freak show.
 Michael: Call it what you want, I honestly don't care, but he didn't leave because I infected him, he left because of you. Who wouldn't? (*Queer As Folk*, 5.7)

In this exchange, Brian argues that Justin would not have started to want a house and a family had Michael and Ben not made such a statement about the importance of a committed relationship at their housewarming party. Michael answers that Justin has never been happy in the arrangement that he and Brian have had. Justin wants a monogamous relationship with the opportunity of having children and a home. These elements are necessary to Justin in order for him to be happy. Since Brian will not offer them to Justin, the two broke up.

After the bombing at Babylon in the final season,⁷ Brian changes his perspective on life. When he does not know whether Justin is alive or not, he realizes how much Justin means to him. After the two reconcile, Brian proposes to Justin, who rejects him. Determined to win him over, Brian decides to give up his loft and buy a country home like Justin mentioned he wanted once in passing. The following conversation between the two occurs as Brian unveils the home to Justin:

Brian: Wait 'til you see the tennis court and the pool and the stables.
 Justin: Stables? Who lives here?
 Brian: We do.
 Justin: What?
 Brian: I bought it.
 Justin: You bought this house?

⁷ At a charity event to raise money for the campaign against Proposition 14, a piece of state legislation that would severely impede gay rights in Pennsylvania, a bomb is planted at Babylon, the host of the event. Several people are killed from the bombing while dozens others are injured including Michael who nearly dies.

Brian: You said that your small, but charmless studio would have to do until your country manor came along. I hoped this would be all you've dreamed of.

Justin: And more. But I told you...

Brian: You won't marry me. Well who could blame you? I am, without doubt, the worst candidate for marriage alive. But conversely, that's also the reason that I'm the best candidate.

Justin: And how's that?

Brian: Because, as strongly as I was opposed to the idea, now that I'm behind it, I'm as fervently and passionately committed.

Justin: Aha. And what changed your mind.

Brian: I finally thought of one good reason to do it.

Justin: And what is that one good reason?

Brian: To prove to the person I love how much I love him. That I would give him anything, I would do anything, I would be anything to make him happy.

Justin: You're fucking unbelievable.

Brian: It's true, I am.

Justin: You bought this, you bought this palace?

Brian: It's for my prince. I'm also selling the loft and the club.

Justin: Without even knowing what my answer would be?

Brian: I'm taking a chance on love.

Justin: Then you mean it.

Brian: I've never meant anything more.

Justin: Ok.

Brian: Ok?

Justin: Let's do it.

Brian: Say it.

Justin: Yes.

Brian: Yes what?

Justin: Yes, yes I will marry you. I will marry you. What? Don't tell me you're already having second thoughts.

Brian: Not one. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.11)

All of the elements mentioned in this exchange relating to Justin's happiness are solely attained through a committed relationship. Brian is willing to sacrifice the staples of his single life, Babylon and his loft, in order to make Justin happy. Upon recognizing these sacrifices, Justin knows that Brian is willing to commit to him in their relationship.

The temporary emotion of happiness is visible at various times of every character's life. Only when characters are in relationships are they identified as appearing to be happy or proclaiming that they are happy.

Single life is lonely and unsatisfying

Positive traits of people who are in relationships are not the only illustrations that glorify couples. Several examples of negative portrayals of single life also contribute to this argument. For example, when Ted awakens from his coma in season one⁸, his distant mother is with him at the hospital. She confesses that she does not know her son, but she still loves him and is concerned about his well-being. She expresses her fears about him and states:

Mrs. Schmidt: More than anything, I worry that you're alone, that there's no one to look after you...I wish you had someone to love you. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.4)

Her major distress about Ted's life is not that he is gay nor in regard to the overdose of drugs that put him in a coma. Instead, she emphasizes the fact that he is alone. She contends that if he were in a relationship, he would not be lonely and make poor decisions that result in a drug overdose.

With a new perspective of life after his overdose, Ted lets go of his feelings for Michael and tries to convince him to not give up on David. He pleads for Michael to stay in a relationship with David, someone who cares about him. He states:

Ted: I know there's this part of us that thinks we don't deserve to be loved...so we fall in love with someone we know we can't have and we know will never love us, and we

⁸ Feeling rejected and alone, Ted accepts Blake's offer to go home with him. Ted agrees to use drugs and overdoses, leaving him in a coma that he wakes up from days later.

fantasize about the day when all of a sudden that he realizes, sees everything that he's been missing, and all of sudden our dreams come true – only, that day never comes and before you know it, it's your 40th birthday, your 50th birthday and you're still alone. Don't let that happen to you, Michael. Love someone for real. Someone who loves you. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.11)

Ted puts his own feelings for Michael on hold and advises Michael to accept love and a relationship so that he doesn't waste years of his life being alone waiting for another relationship that will never materialize. These years that Ted refers to are presumably the years he wasted waiting for Michael. Ted is later seen as so depressed and sad about being alone that he invites Blake, the man who gave him the drugs that caused his overdose, to move in with him (*Queer As Folk*, 1.19). Ted is so terrified of being alone that he is able to forgive the man who nearly killed him so that he can escape isolation.

The men on the show are not the only ones who experience these feelings of isolation. For instance, when Lindsay and Melanie hire Leda, Melanie's ex-girlfriend, to transform their attic into a studio, the three of them share a passionate and intimate night together. While Melanie and Lindsay know that it was a one-time event, Leda becomes too attached to the idea of the three of them being together. Hurt from their rejection, Leda explains the pains of being single:

Melanie: Linds and I, we're a couple and that means there's no room in our life or our bed for a third party, no matter how much we may care for her.

Leda: Being with you again, it was nice. It brought back a lot of memories.

Melanie: For me too.

Leda: And seeing you and Lindsay and how great you guys are together, I couldn't help wishing that somehow I could be a part of it. . . it's just, you know, sometimes it gets a little lonely. You're lucky Mel, you know that.
(*Queer As Folk*, 2.19)

Leda's remarks not only emphasize the jealousy that she feels as a single woman of the companionship that Lindsay and Melanie have, she also illustrates another example of how people involved in relationships are superior to their single counterparts in that Melanie is lucky for being in a relationship. Relationships are valued because it takes work and effort in order to make them work. Seeing Melanie and Lindsay celebrate eight years of being in a relationship made her jealous of that accomplishment.

Even when a sexual relationship is present and the feelings of physical loneliness are not present, the lack of relationship still leaves characters not in a committed relationship isolated. For example, when Emmett enters into an originally explicitly-sexual relationship with a professional football player,⁹ he believes that the relationship can remain just sexual. Yet, as the two grow closer together, Emmett starts to desire more from Drew, namely, the securities of being in a relationship. After being apart for a few weeks, Drew arrives at Emmett's to pick him up and take him to a hotel when Emmett confronts him on being unfulfilled just engaging in sex:

Drew: My game's been shit.
 Emmett: Talk to your coach.
 Drew: I can't sleep.
 Emmett: Take a Xanax.
 Drew: I'm drinking too much.
 Emmett: Buy more beer nuts.
 Drew: I miss you.
 Emmett: You do?
 Drew: Can we go to the motel?
 Emmett: Yeah. Uh, no. No, I can't go back there.
 Drew: I thought you love when I fuck you.
 Emmett: I do love when you fuck me, this isn't the Atkins diet, man can't live on meat alone. At least this man can't.
 (*Queer As Folk*, 4.12)

⁹ Working as an event planner, Emmett hosts an engagement party for professional football player Drew Boyd and his fiancé. After Drew makes fun of Emmett to his friends, Emmett tells him off and leaves the party. When Emmett goes to collect his check, Drew forces himself onto Emmett and they begin their sexual affair together.

This passage is not meant to convey that people in relationships cannot engage in sexual activity, but that having sex is unfulfilling in the absence of a relationship, which is more desirable and beneficial.

Another example of this is seen with Ted after he has plastic surgery.¹⁰ He and Melanie discuss how much more attention he has gotten from men and how much more sex he is having. Despite this heightened status, Ted indicates that there is more to be desired:

Melanie: What a lovely face it is too, must get lots of compliments.
 Ted: Been getting more than that, ha ha. To tell you the truth, something's missing.
 Melanie: Love, commitment?
 Ted: Yeah, something like that.
 Melanie: What you need's a husband.
 Ted: First I need a boyfriend. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.9)

Even after finally improving his physical nature, an issue that plagued Ted for all five seasons of *Queer As Folk*, Ted believes that partying and endless sex are not satisfying the void he felt plastic surgery would fill. Melanie suggests finding a husband, and Ted does not fight the suggestion. As these feelings continue to gain meaning to Ted, he decides to throw a birthday dinner for himself with all of his friends. He informs Emmett of the people attending:

Ted: I'm throwing myself a little celebration down at Tango.
 Emmett: Love that place.
 Ted: It's going to be you and Drew, Michael and Ben, Mel and Lindsay, Brian and Justin.
 Emmett: Aw, Teddy.
 Ted: What?
 Emmett: Well it's your birthday and you're the only one who's all alone. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.12)

¹⁰ At the beginning of season five, Ted decides to get plastic surgery to feel more confident in himself. While most of the procedures are minor, Ted is initially satisfied with the results and the recognition he receives from other men.

While Emmett is unknowingly jabbing an already emotionally wounded Ted, he instantly calls attention to Ted's worst fear: that everyone else has someone to love except him. For Ted, this is worse than the common scene where all of the friends are single and partying at Babylon. Now, everyone has the benefits and security of a relationship except him and his loneliness is stronger than ever before.

In closing, it is evident that single characters frequently comment on their desire to share in relationships. While the explanations for this longing range from wanting to have more intimacy, more sex, or just someone to talk to, it is apparent that single characters feel alone and hope to someday enter a relationship where those feelings cease.

People in relationships have someone to share life with

A supplemental argument to the previous example that single people are lonely is that people in relationships have a partner to share their lives. When David invites Michael to brunch with two elderly men in season one, the men share that they have just celebrated their 50th anniversary. Shocked by this accomplishment, Michael states:

Michael: I can't believe they've been together for so long.
 David: That's why I wanted you to meet them, to see that it's possible for two men to share a life together. It's what I'd like for us. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.10)

David's response explicitly informs Michael of his commitment to their relationship.

David admires his friends' accomplishment and hopes that he and Michael can reach the same milestone. At the brunch, the two men discuss the hardships of making a long-term relationship work. One of them mentions:

Elderly Man: No matter what the problems, the sacrifices, it's worth it. Having someone beside you to share your life, and you're there to share his. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.10)

This comparative analysis adds to the persuasiveness that relationships offer David and Michael. They are told that being in a committed relationship requires time and sacrifice and will not be easy. Despite these shortcomings, the benefits of being able to share life with someone else far outweighs the drawbacks.

It appears that only when characters lose their partners do they recognize the strengths and benefits of being in relationships. For example, when Melanie and Lindsay break up after Melanie has a one-night affair with another woman, Melanie realizes how wrong she was to give up on her relationship to have a night of meaningless sex.

Standing at Babylon with Emmett and Ted, Melanie confesses:

Melanie: I can't help it. I miss her. I thought we'd be together forever, that she'd be the one I kiss goodnight for the rest of my life. Now I live with my cousin Rita and kiss her goodnight, Christ. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.16)

Only when she loses Lindsay is Melanie able to understand how valuable her relationship was. Of all of the potential reasons to cite in missing Lindsay, the one she emphasizes is that she wants Lindsay to be the person she is with every day, the last person she sees each night and the first person she sees each morning.

Unlike the revelation that Melanie had after cheating on Lindsay and breaking up with her, Emmett had to face the same experience after George died. After George, Emmett's wealthy boyfriend, passes away in season two,¹¹ he leaves Emmett ten million

¹¹ George first saw Emmett performing on Ted's pornographic website. After a rocky first meeting, the two fell in love. George, considerably older than Emmett, had a heart attack as the two were embarking on their tour around the world and died.

dollars in his will. As Emmett is passing out gifts to all of his friends, he pauses before giving Ted his present and states:

Emmett: The one present I really wanted to get you I couldn't:
 someone wonderful to spend your life with.
 (*Queer As Folk*, 2.17)

Knowing of Ted's depression about being alone, Emmett acknowledges that he understands Ted's problem and would solve it if he had the ability. This quote also indicates that Emmett's present is designed to make Ted feel better by giving him something he wants, the only thing that will make Ted ultimately happy is a partner. Ted does not feel the same pain that Emmett and Melanie went through because he was not involved in a committed relationship initially, so he did not know the pains of losing one.

Later in the series, when Ted does enter a committed relationship with Emmett in season three, the two are dating and decide to move in together. Brian and Ted discuss the implications of the move:

Brian: What I feel is an overwhelming sense of disgust seeing two
 pathetic fags trying to turn themselves into something even
 more pathetic, two happily married heterosexuals.
Ted: It's got nothing to do with that. You know, it has to do with
 what us lower life forms generally refer to as love. Just
 because you can't comprehend that doesn't mean that the
 rest of us should be condemned to live out our lives in
 solitary confinement, our hearts banished to one of Jupiter's
 ice moons. (*Queer As Folk*, 3.4)

Despite Brian's criticism, Ted defends his relationship with Emmett. Ted describes the single life as painful and torturous, while living with his love, Emmett, defeats those pains.

Other couples who consider moving in together witness the same kind of dilemma. When Vic and Rodney become a serious couple,¹² Vic entertains the idea of moving out of his house with Debbie and into a home with Rodney. Since Vic is HIV positive and nearly died prior to season one, he never thought he would have the opportunity to love another man again. This new love for Rodney prompts him to say:

Vic: I thought I was destined to spending the rest of my life dating my right hand. (*Queer As Folk*, 3.7)

Rodney's presence in Vic's life not only means that Vic can be intimate with another person, but also that he does not have to spend the rest of his life alone.

Clearly, an important motivation for being in a relationship is to have someone with whom to share life. *Queer As Folk* repeatedly sends the message the living for *yourself* is not enough; someone else has to witness the events and be a part of them in order for them to have worth.

People in relationships know they are loved

In discussions between couples or between a person in a relationship and a single person, characters frequently reinforce the fact that there is satisfaction in knowing that if they are in a relationship, then they are loved. After Michael's lifelong crush on Brian is reiterated to the audience enough to make it a common understanding, Debbie lectures Michael on the need for him to be free of Brian's spell. Debbie argues that Michael is holding onto Brian because Michael does not believe that he will find someone who will love him and share his life. She states:

¹² Rodney, an HIV-positive man like Vic, feels that he and Vic do not get enough time to themselves with Debbie constantly around at the house and his own roommates always being at his residence. He and Vic decide to get a place of their own, leaving Debbie in the house alone.

Debbie: I wish you wouldn't let him get to you. But he always does. That's why I keep hoping that you'll meet somebody. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.2)

Seeing Michael get upset over Brian's behavior time after time forces Debbie to give hope to Michael. Once Michael does join in a relationship with David, he becomes absorbed in the relationship to the extent that he rarely sees his friends and gives up nearly every aspect of his single life. Noticing this change, Brian and Lindsay converse about Michael's behavior. When Brian questions Michael's willingness to enter a relationship with David, Lindsay illustrates the desire to be loved:

Lindsay: You can't imagine why two people would want to be together, can you?
 Brian: The desire to fall asleep in front of Jay Leno and argue over whose turn it is to pick up the dry cleaning?
 Lindsay: It's called not wanting to be alone, knowing that you're loved. Apparently a lot of us need that, including Michael. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.7)

Lindsay, who is with Melanie at the time, implies that it is common and accepted to want to be in a relationship in order to feel loved. This passage also supports the previously discussed example of single people being lonely.

Emmett is able to identify Brian's role in preventing Michael's relationship. He encourages Michael to take David up on his offer to move in with him. When Emmett and Michael converse about Michael moving in with David, Emmett pre-empts Michael's apprehension about telling Brian. This argument reassures Michael that entering the relationship is worth the sacrifice of single life. He further asserts that growing apart from Brian is advantageous because he will have the security of knowing that he is with someone who loves him:

Emmett: Well I say that you deserve to be loved. And don't let any man, queen or Brian tell you otherwise.
(*Queer As Folk*, 1.10)

Years later, after Michael and Ben become an established couple, Ben draws attention to importance of knowing that he is loved. Near the end of the fourth season, as Michael, Ben, Hunter, Ted, Emmett and Brian to go Canada to enter the Liberty Ride, a bicycling race back to Pittsburgh, Ben proposes to Michael on the bus. As Ben proclaims his love for Michael, he professes the benefits of marriage, a committed relationship:

Ben: Michael Novotny, you are the man I have been looking for all my life. I am so very blessed to have found you, which is why I am asking you to do me the honor of accepting my hand in marriage. We're going to Toronto where gay marriage is not only accepted, it's legal. And like you said, that's what two people do when they love each other, right? (*Queer As Folk*, 4.13)

Ben argues that when people are in love and they know they love each other, marriage is the proper course of action to acknowledge that love. A wedding band is a sign of that love and commitment to each other that is visible to everyone. Thus, the mutuality of being in a relationship is perceived and considered to be a reason in itself for committing to a partner and leaving the single life behind.

People in relationships are more intimate than single people

People in relationships are able to become more intimate than single people because they are with the same person for an extended period of time and begin to trust each other more than can be achieved in a random, one-time encounter. Michael illustrates this argument to Brian in relation to his relationship with Ben:

Michael: The way he held me afterwards, I've never felt so close. I bet you don't find that kind of intimacy at the white party.
 Brian: Yeah, I guess not.
 Michael: All your one night stands can't compare with what I've got.
(Queer As Folk, 2.12)

For the first time since breaking up with David, Michael is able to feel a sense of intimacy, which he boldly brags to Brian.

Ted and Emmett experience the same kind of feeling after they have sex for the first time shortly after they start a relationship together. They discover that there are things about each other that they never knew, even though they have been friends for several years. Emmett states:

Emmett: You were magnificent.
 Ted: I was?
 Emmett: So gentle, so sensitive and yet so forceful. Who knew?
 Ted: Well, even though you are my best friend, there are some things only a lover can know.
 Emmett: Lover! How I love that word! *(Queer As Folk, 3.2)*

As a couple, Emmett and Ted are able to have a more intimate relationship than either of them experienced as a single man.

There is a dichotomy between sex and intimacy in a committed relationship. Single characters can, and do, have sex. Rarely, if ever, are those encounters described as being intimate. Conversely, couples also frequently have sex. The difference between the two types of sexual activity is that the couples achieve an intimate bond through their encounters. Not only are they sexually satisfied after their activity, but they are emotionally and psychologically satisfied as well knowing that they are with someone who cares for them.

Single life is sexually dangerous

The discussion about safe sex in this context goes beyond the use of a condom. There is a distinction between when characters engage in sex as single people and when they engage in sex as couples. For example, Brian having sex in the back room of Babylon is not equivalent to Melanie and Lindsay having sex in their home.

As single people, *Queer As Folk* presents more threats to sexually transmitted diseases than it does to people who are in relationships. For example, Michael recounts a story to Brian and Emmett about a man who he went home with who seemed to be perfect until he confessed to Michael that he had Brazilian beach parasites (*Queer As Folk*, 1.4).

Similarly, despite the fact that Ben is HIV positive, all of the HIV scares come to people who are single. Both Emmett and Ted's possible encounters with HIV happened when they were single, partying, drunk and/or high. Thus, the risks associated with unsafe sexual practices are the same qualities that are associated with single life. Conversely, Ben and Michael, who always engage in safe sex, rarely become intimate when they have been drinking and the two of them are never high together throughout the series. Therefore, even though there may be more implicit threat to Michael becoming HIV positive than any other character, he is not seen as even a potential candidate for acquiring HIV after his mother and friends accept his decision to date Ben early in the second season.

Another way that couples are seen as having less risky sexual behavior can be identified by examining the areas where couples have sex compared to the spaces where single characters engage in sex. When Michael moves in with David in the first season,

there is a shot of him and David making love in their home on the night that Michael moves in. This image is contrasted to Brian who is having sex in a dark alley outside of Babylon (*Queer As Folk*, 1.12). On another occasion, Emmett flaunts this quality that Michael has over Brian as the three of them discuss the long evening of sex between David and Michael.

Brian: I wonder why he was so turned on.
 Michael: Because I'm irresistible.
 Emmett: Because they're in love, and unlike you they don't have to prowl around the baths, they find everything they need right at home. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.18)

Even though Emmett is single at the time, his advocacy and backing of Michael and David's sexual behavior as preferable to Brian's is clear.

Having a monogamous relational partner means that the two are only having sex with each other. If neither of the sex partners has a sexually transmitted disease, there is a less significant threat to sexual health than a single person who has multiple sex partners. Since single characters on the show have multiple sex partners, there is more of a chance that they will acquire a sexually transmitted disease. Furthermore, the physical locations of the areas where people in relationships have sex is safer than the places where single people have sex, which is usually in public in the back room of a dance club or at an exclusive sex club.

People in relationships have a home

When *Queer As Folk* premiered, the only characters who lived in a house, excluding Debbie, were Melanie and Lindsay, who were also the only characters in a relationship. Their house is often referred to as a home, whereas the living quarters of the

bachelors are called apartments, lofts and dumps. When Michael arrives at Melanie and Lindsay's home for Gus's circumcision ceremony, he tells the audience in voiceover narration that:

Michael: It was really nice. The smell of bread baking and fresh flowers everywhere you look. Not like going to one of my friend's places with the smell of dirty laundry and stacks of porn tapes everywhere you look. Seeing them in their beautiful home with their new baby and their arms around each other, I wished for a moment that I too could be a lesbian. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.3)

Michael's declaration, while humorous, not only illustrates that the couple does not have just a space to live, but a home, it also conveys a note of jealousy because he finds their living situation desirable.

Michael is not the only character who has desire for a home instead of an apartment on Liberty Avenue. For example, when Ted and Emmett start seriously dating in the third season, they make the decision to move in together. After a disastrous attempt to move into Ted's apartment, the two decide to buy a house (*Queer As Folk*, 3.4). Before the two were in a relationship, neither would have individually moved into a house, but together, they felt it was time to make their own home.

Carl and Debbie face similar circumstances. As the only heterosexual couple present throughout the series to become a committed couple, they also decide live together. After Debbie finds it too difficult to leave the home she's lived in for more than 30 years, Carl compromises and states in regard to moving into her house:

Carl: Honey, it's like I said from the start, it's up to you. Wherever you are is home to me. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.1)

In the same episode, Michael and Ben decide to leave their apartment on Liberty Avenue and move into a house in a gay-friendly neighborhood in Pittsburgh where some of their friends live. He and Ben discuss the move:

- Michael: How soon could we see it? Like you said, we're on top of each other in the apartment, Hunter needs his own space, Jenny Rebecca is going to need her own room, a yard to play in.
- Ben: I thought you wanted to stay on Liberty Avenue.
- Michael: Maybe it's time for a change. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.1)

Michael, who has lived on Liberty Avenue for most of his adult life, decides that it is time to leave the popular gay strip and create a home with his partner and children. In the absence of his relationship with Ben, Michael would have not become Hunter's foster parent or have a custody claim to his daughter, JR. Therefore, his apartment would not be too crowded and there would be no incentive to have a yard or live in a house; he would continue to live on Liberty Avenue.

After witnessing all of these exchanges take place with couples moving into homes together, Justin begins to desire the same process to occur for himself and Brian. When Justin returns from Los Angeles in season five, his unconventional relationship with Brian resumes¹³ and Brian allows Justin to move back into his loft. After seeing how happy Michael and Ben are in their new home, Justin starts desiring having a house and family with Brian. When Brian continues to live like a bachelor and does not fulfill these needs of Justin, Justin expresses his frustration:

¹³ When Brian and Justin were in an unconventional relationship at the end of the fourth season when Brian was recovering from cancer. Between seasons four and five, Justin works on the movie version of *Rage* in Los Angeles, leaving behind his relationship with Brian. Upon Justin's return, their arrangement of not being able to kiss anyone else on the lips, never sleeping with the same man twice and always coming home by 3:00AM resumes.

Justin: You know, when I was in LA fucking around, it was fun and all, but when I came back here and you said the offer still stands and put my stuff in the drawer, I was hoping it meant we were finally going to be a real couple like Michael and Ben. One day we might have the things they have, a house maybe even a family. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.6)

Justin does not even consider the option of starting a family or buying a home without Brian. He associates home with a partner, distinct from a loft or apartment.

In summary, there are two technical ways that homes are represented as suited for couples and not for single people. First, the use of the word home indicates a couple lives there. In none of the residences where single people live is the word home used to legitimately describe the space; instead, terms like bachelor pad, apartment and loft are used. Secondly, the term home is reserved for actual houses where couples live. Lindsay and Melanie, Michael and David, Michael and Ben, Vic and Rodney, and Emmett and Ted all live in houses. Even Brian buys a house for himself and Justin when he is committed to Justin in the end. No single person, with the exception of Debbie in the rare instances when she does not have a roommate, either lives in a house or a place that can be called a home.

People in relationships can have a family

A common theme throughout *Queer As Folk* is that when characters are single, they have no responsibility to anyone but themselves. In contrast to this notion is the image of a couple. Each individual in a couple has responsibility to the other. This responsibility translates to other friends and ultimately to their children.

In the pilot episode, while Brian, Michael and Justin are partying at Babylon and in Brian's loft, Lindsay is giving birth to her and Brian's son in a hospital. A stark

contrast is instantly made between the three single men and the only couple on the show at the time as the focus shifts from Brian's loft to the hospital where Lindsay and Melanie give birth to their son Gus (*Queer As Folk*, 1.1).¹⁴ From the show's inception, a committed couple is seen as having the ability to start a family, while single characters are not.

The characters themselves are able to identify their relationship as being a vital factor of their ability to start a family. For example, after Brian prevents Gus's circumcision,¹⁵ an action that causes tension between Melanie and Lindsay since Melanie wanted the religious event to occur, Lindsay reassures Melanie of her commitment to her and to their family. Lindsay calms the friction by affirming that alone, she would not have been able to have Gus or raise him.

Lindsay: Even if [Brian] is the father, we're still the parents, you and me. Gus belongs to us. That's why we had him.
 Melanie: You had him. Aside from saying push and breathe, I really didn't have that much to do with it.
 Lindsay: You had everything to do with it. I never would have had him without you. Just remember that next time you're wondering what comes first. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.3)

Lindsay's consoling behavior implies that alone, or single, she would not have had the ability or opportunity to have her son and start a family.

Lindsay and Melanie argue that since they are both Gus's mothers, they belong together and should be raising him together. For instance, when Melanie moves out of

¹⁴ In the pilot episode, Brian and Michael go to Babylon to party. Brian meets Justin when he is walking on Liberty Avenue and the two go back to Brian's loft and Brian takes Justin's virginity. While they are having sex, Brian receives a phone call and is notified that Lindsay gave birth. Michael picks up Brian and Justin and the three of them go to the hospital.

¹⁵ Melanie and Lindsay invited Brian, Michael, Ted and Emmett to Gus's Bris, a Jewish circumcision ceremony. Not speaking Hebrew, none of the men knew what would happen at the event from reading the invitation. When he realizes what will happen to Gus, Michael informs Brian who rushes into the house and prevents the circumcision from happening, angering Melanie and her family.

the house after cheating on Lindsay,¹⁶ Lindsay allows a friend of hers, Guillaume, to rent a room. Later, Lindsay and Guillaume decide to get married so that he may stay in the country and not be deported. Upon hearing this announcement, Melanie confronts Lindsay and declares:

Melanie: I guarantee you that if I had been here –
 Lindsay: Well you're not, you're not here.
 Melanie: I wish I was. I miss you Linds.
 Lindsay: You're just saying that because of Guillaume.
 Melanie: No, I'm not. I miss you every minute of every day, and if I could miss you more than that, I would.
 Lindsay: You think I don't miss you?
 Melanie: Then why aren't I here, I mean, why aren't we raising our son together? It doesn't make sense. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.16)

In this discussion, while Lindsay and Melanie are trying to reconcile their relationship, Melanie uses Gus's presence as justification for being together; that there is something wrong or unnatural for only one of them to be raising Gus.

Two seasons later, as Lindsay has just re-entered the workforce, Melanie chooses to have a fertilization treatment so that they can have another child (*Queer As Folk*, 3.3). Melanie's decision comes when she and Lindsay are happy and together, not when they are going through one of their many fights or few separations throughout the course of the series. Since a sperm donor is necessary in order for Melanie to have a child, she could choose to get pregnant at any time. Yet, she chooses to have a child not when she is single, but when she and Lindsay are together. This illustrates that Melanie believes that a couple is more able to have a child and be a family than a single mother.

¹⁶ After feeling rejected from Lindsay, Melanie has a one-night affair with a woman whom both she and Lindsay met at an event celebrating the birth of one of their friend's child. Guilt-ridden, Melanie moves out of the house. Unable to handle the financial burden of living in a large house alone right after giving birth, Lindsay invites an old friend, Guillaume, to rent a room and help her with the chores.

The lesbian couple is not the only example of a couple being more apt to have a family than a single character. When Ben jealously fights with Michael over the success of *Rage*,¹⁷ Michael's comic book, Hunter, their foster child asks:

Hunter: What happens to me if you guys break up?
 Ben: Nobody's breaking up.
 Hunter: Just asking in case I need to make other
 arrangements. (*Queer As Folk*, 4.8)

Hunter's inquiry is not overly-cautious or humorous. Since he has been through several foster homes at such a young age, he knows that within the system, single-parent households are not considered to be the most desirable for children.¹⁸

Ben and Michael become aware of the legal advantages that they could receive, particularly in a custody battle, against a single parent. This is not only with Hunter's mother, but also with Melanie and Lindsay. When the women are plagued by personal problems and Lindsay's affair with a man, Melanie and Lindsay break up after Melanie gives birth to Jenny Rebecca, who is fathered by Michael.¹⁹ Michael and Ben, conversely, have never been closer and desperately want to start a family in their new home. When informing Melanie of his desire to have a more integral role in his daughter's life, Michael contends that he is able to provide better living conditions to raise their daughter than Melanie and states:

¹⁷ While Ben attempts to sell his second book to publishers and gets repeatedly rejected, Michael and Justin experience vast success with their comic book, *Rage*. At his store, Michael sells all of the copies they have in stock and informs Justin of the demand on back order that they have. Hearing of the demand of *Rage*, Ben, a college professor, becomes jealous of his partner who has no post-secondary education.

¹⁸ Hunter has lived in foster care before being placed with Michael and Ben. He ran away from his sexually abusive foster parents and survived by being a prostitute. Having been through the guardianship court system before, Hunter is cautious and conscious of Ben and Michael's relationship.

¹⁹ Lindsay becomes romantically and physically involved with her artistic idol whom she created an exhibit for at her gallery. While discussing the affair, the two decide that it would be best if Lindsay moved out after Melanie gave birth to Jenny Rebecca.

Michael: We had an agreement that I'd be a part of our daughter's life.
 Melanie: Which at no time included physical custody, that was never discussed.
 Michael: Because when we made it, you two were together, a couple, a family. Now all that's changed, now you're not.
 (*Queer As Folk*, 5.2)

Michael's argument asserts that he was willing to not have his daughter live with him since she would be raised with his close friends who were a loving couple. When the couple split, he believed that neither Lindsay or Melanie was suitable to raise JR alone. Instead, he and Ben provided a better alternative.

Michael reinforces this argument during the custody battle for JR between himself, Melanie and Lindsay. He and Ben proclaim:

Michael: I'm not going to let my daughter be raised by couple of single mothers
 Ben: When there's a loving, stable home with two fathers.
 (*Queer As Folk*, 5.2)

Later, when discussing the custody arrangement with Brian, Michael reasserts:

Michael: Right now the best thing for Jenny Rebecca is to be with Ben and me in a stable home, not being passed back and forth between two battling lesbians. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.2)

In both instances, Michael states that the best scenario for a child to be raised is in a home with two parents who love each other.

Not only is Michael adamant about the importance of being in a relationship in regard to family in his personal life, but he extends that opinion into his comic book as well. At his housewarming party,²⁰ Michael unveils that in the latest issue of *Rage*, *Rage* and *JT*, characters based on the lives of Brian and Justin, get married. This sparks a

²⁰ In season five, Michael and Ben move out of their apartment on Liberty Avenue and into a family-oriented neighborhood in Pittsburgh.

discussion with Michael and Ben's neighbors Eli and Monty about a "super family" that the two will start:

Ben: We also have another reason to celebrate tonight, Rage and JT are getting married.
 Eli: It's about time those two superheroes settle down.
 Monty: When do they start raising a super family?
 Michael: That's next. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.6)

Again, there is no mention of either Rage or JT having children or a family before they commit together in a relationship. This omission indicates that a couple in a relationship is suited for family, while a single individual is not.

The discourse in *Queer As Folk* indicates that not only are single people alone, without a relational partner for support, but they are also not suited or qualified to start a family. Family roles are better served through the existence of a committed relationship.

People in relationships have lives with meaning

A common message repeats throughout the series that the lives of people who are in relationships have more value compared to single people. One way that this message manifests itself is through discourse that indicates that being in a relationship means that the person is able to 'have a life.' Consequently, this dialogue implies that being in a relationship has more worth than not being in a relationship. One example of this kind of dialogue is found in a conversation between Debbie and Brian after Brian revealed to one of Michael's coworkers that Michael is gay. This hurtful action is what convinced Michael to abandon his dream of being with Brian and play out his relationship with David. Debbie states:

Debbie: [Michael's] trying to figure out why his best friend would betray him. Of course He doesn't realize that it's the best thing that could ever happen, that you did him a favor. That maybe now he can finally have a chance to have a life. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.11)

While acknowledging that Brian's actions may have been too drastic, Debbie expresses that she is able to look past the temporary hurt that Brian put her son through and realize that it was necessary in order for Michael to have his own life. This life that she believes he can have with David is more valuable than Michael's life as a single man who parties with Brian .

Melanie is able to relate to Debbie's notion that coupled life has more to offer a person than single life. After she cheated on Lindsay in season one, the woman who had sex with Melanie tells her to preserve her relationship with Lindsay. She states:

Woman: I hope you two take care of each other, you know, protect what you've got. You don't want to lose it.
(*Queer As Folk*, 1.13)

This woman, who temporarily broke up Lindsay and Melanie after they had been together for several years, identified that the relationship the two had was so valuable that she should not have threatened it.

Vic, who had recovered after nearly losing his life before the series began, did not think he would have another opportunity to share in a romantic relationship. When Vic and Rodney become a serious couple, they notice that Debbie keeps getting in their way when they want to be intimate. Vic discusses this problem with Michael who offers his uncle advice:

Michael: She helped you get your life back so that you could have a life. You're entitled to that uncle Vic. I'm sure she would be the first to say so. (*Queer As Folk*, 4.3)

While he was close to dying, Vic made a full recovery. He feels indebted to Debbie for being his aide and nursing him back to good health, which makes him tentative about telling her to give him more space. Michael reminds Vic that his life still has meaning and that he should move forward with Rodney in their relationship to get everything out of life that he can.

Like Vic to Rodney, Justin wants to become the closest he can to his love, Brian. When Justin informs Brian that his priorities have changed and he needs more out of their relationship, Brian reiterates the conditions that allows for him to be in a relationship. Justin demands commitment, family and home. Justin wants to be with someone who wants the same meaning out of life. They discuss their arrangement and where it is going:

Justin: I made some decisions.
 Brian: About what?
 Justin: My life.
 Brian: Ah.
 Justin: What I want –
 Brian: I thought you had already worked that out. You were going to live off your considerable Hollywood wealth and try your hand at being an artist.
 Justin: Why are you making fun of me?
 Brian: I'm not making fun. You're making me fucking nervous as hell, just tell me what you want, what you've decided so we can go to bed and fuck.
 Justin: You already know what I want, I've already told you.
 Brian: That's right you have. A husband, a family, a home – all the things that make life worth living.
 Justin: Would you fucking cut it out. Just stop it. And I know you can't give me those things.
 Brian: Not can't, can't implies that I am incapable. It's that I won't.
 Justin: I accept that. I suppose it's why I've always loved you.
 Brian: Oh, the untamable beast.
 Justin: But, to be a couple, both people have to want the same things to move in the same direction. If they can't or won't, they really have nowhere to go.
 Brian: Probably not.

Justin: Then why are we still doing this if we both know it's never going to work?
 Brian: Damned if I know. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.7)

The arrangement between Brian and Justin, not being monogamous, endless partying and living a luxurious life alone with no possibility of children, is no longer satisfactory for Justin. Justin desires a relationship that allows for growth in starting a family and having a home. While Brian is the love of Justin's life, his maturing has made him desire a relationship similar to Michael and Ben's and Lindsay and Melanie's.

The message that *Queer As Folk* emits regarding the times when life has meaning unquestionably lies in the times when characters are in relationships. Alone, no one has someone to share hopes, ambitions, goals, failures or even an exclusive bond. Only while sharing life with another do the actions and behavior in life hold value.

People in relationships are stronger and more stable than single people

Implicit within the argument that people in relationships are more stable and resilient to harm is the contention that single people are less able to resolve conflict and minimize negative consequences. For example, when a depressed Ted leaves Babylon, he invites Blake, a man he does not know, to accompany him home. Once at his apartment, Ted follows Blake's lead and takes a lethal dosage of drugs under Blake's suggestion (*Queer As Folk*, 1.3). Not wanting to spend another night alone as a single man, Ted engaged in risky behavior that nearly ended his life.

Michael and Brian, at the hospital looking in on a comatose Ted, discuss how Ted's act of desperation resulted in tragic results. Michael comments:

Michael: It could be us.
 Brian: No it could not be us, because we know better. We know not to believe pretty little blond boys who tell you that it's really good shit because that's what they all say. Ted didn't know that. And he didn't know that you only do drugs with your friends because they're the only ones who give a fuck about you. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.4)

Despite the fact that at the time, neither Brian nor Michael is in a relationship, Brian's comments on Ted's situation illustrate that as a single man, Ted was unable to resist temptation that caused him to go into a coma.

Later in the season when Blake and Ted enter an actual relationship, Ted convinces Blake to check himself into a rehabilitation center. The two discuss the reasons for going:

Ted: Look, I want you to know how happy, no, happy's not the right word, not happy, but grateful and relieved I am that you're doing this.
 Blake: Well it's for us, right?
 Ted: Right. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.22)

Blake's remarks that the purpose for entering rehab is for both of them demonstrates that for the purpose of saving the relationship, Blake is willing to confront his vices. Alone, he would have no need or motivation to change his behavior, but with Ted, it is a necessity to remain in a relationship.

Ted has further problems regarding his stability when he is arrested for hiring a minor at his pornographic website. He loses his company and has to pay a substantial fine leaving him broke, and unable to move into his dream house. Devastated, he turns to his partner Emmett for comfort:

Emmett: Listen, where I come from we had tornados all the time. They'd blow the roof off and destroy everything. We always looked at it as a chance to rebuild, you know, make

things better. So the business is gone, so the house it gone,
 so every cent you ever made –
 Ted: Yeah, I've got it.
 Emmett: The point is, it doesn't matter, we've still got each other,
 and together we're going to be just fine.
 (*Queer As Folk*, 3.7)

Emmett's consolation indicates that their relationship is the only significant factor in their lives. They can live without the luxuries of a house and a business. Together, they are able to overcome life's hardships.

Not only is a relational partner beneficial during rough emotional crises, but in legal issues as well. For instance, when Michael and Ben battle Hunter's mother in court for custody,²¹ she initially is rewarded sole custody by right of being the birthmother. After her breakdown in court when she finds out that Hunter is HIV positive, the judge reverses her decision and rewards Michael and Ben with custody. Because of their relationship and understanding of Hunter's situation, they are seen as superior guardians for Hunter.

Physical health matters also provide examples of how being in a relationship is more secure than life as a single person. Brian's cancer diagnosis and subsequent effort to hide the results from everyone in his life is one example. Justin, overhearing a message on Brian's phone regarding Brian's surgery, confronts Brian on his health. Embarrassed by his condition, Brian kicks Justin out of his loft and breaks up with him. Returning the next night, Justin informs Brian of his commitment to support him and that together, they can overcome the cancer:

²¹ Hunter informs Michael and Ben that his mother was the one who forced him into life as a child prostitute in order to contribute to their household income. After hearing this, Michael and Ben decide to fight for custody of Hunter against his mother.

Justin: You're not getting rid of me. Shit are you alright? Tell me you're alright?

Brian: I'm alright.

Justin: You're not alright.

Brian: Then what the hell are you asking me for?

Justin: So that I can tell you what a motherfucking piece of shit you are for not telling me. For shutting me out. For thinking that you can handle this on your own. And most of all for thinking that I would leave you, why would you think that? Because you had a ball removed? Because you're no longer perfect? Well believe me Mr. Kinney, that is the least of your imperfections, and if I wanted to leave you, I've had better reasons, plenty of them.

Brian: Maybe you should have.

Justin: Yeah maybe you're right, but I thought we had a commitment, and I plan to stand by it. Now why don't you get your ass back in bed you son-of-a-bitch and eat some fucking chicken soup. (*Queer As Folk*, 4.9)

Justin's passion to save Brian stems from his sense of being indebted to him after Justin was gravely bashed after the prom in the season one finale. Justin stresses that alone, Brian is not as strong as when he is with Justin.

Each of these examples involves a crisis of some sort. Whether it be emotional, legal or health related, the message that two people are more able to handle a crisis than one remains.

People in relationships receive societal approval and acceptance

Peers, friends and family of all characters speak frequently of either wanting to be in a relationship or encouraging others to enter into a relationship. This value on relationships is derived from the thought of relationships being representative as a signal of success. For example, when Michael considers moving in with David in season one, his friends and his mother do not even consider that there is a choice to be made. Emmett expresses to him:

Emmett: What's to decide? The man of your dreams wants you to move in with him! (*Queer As Folk*, 1.10)

Debbie echoes this emotion. When she's informed of David's invitation, she screams:

Debbie: He asked you?! [to move in] Oh Michael, that's wonderful!
 Michael: I didn't say yes.
 Debbie: Well what did you say?
 Michael: Well I said I'd think about it.
 Debbie: Well what's to think about?! (*Queer As Folk*, 1.10)

Emmett and Debbie's reactions to the news are filled with excitement because moving in with a partner signals that the relationship is serious and successful. Added to this feeling of success is a sense of belonging. Several times, the concept of being with a partner is natural because it is where one belongs. For example, Brian describes his harsh actions towards Michael²² as being worthwhile because Michael belongs to David. Brian states:

Brian: Thanks to my divine intervention, he's with the good doctor now, where he belongs. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.12)

David's response to Brian's behavior repeats the sense of belonging. David tells Michael:

David: Well one good thing came out of what Brian did, it made you realize that you belong here with me.
 (*Queer As Folk*, 1.12)

In addition to a sense of belonging, couples are often idolized for their ability to grow together. When David attends a dinner with Lindsay and Melanie, he sits in awe of the two of them as they prepare dinner. Watching them converse, he notices the intricacies of their relationship that can only have developed over time. He tells them:

David: You two are amazing.
 Melanie: We are?
 David: You're like synchronized swimmers the way you think together, move together – you even finish each other's sentences.

²² Brian informing Michael's coworker that he is gay.

Lindsay: I guess that's what happens after 6 years, you just become one.
 David: I'd like that for Michael and me. (*Queer As Folk*, 1.10)

David admires the relationship that Melanie and Lindsay have made with each other. His support for committed relationships and his longing to have one of his own clearly indicates that he values commitment far more than single life.

David's reflection mirrors society's emphasis on the need to be loyal to another person. When Melanie and Lindsay celebrate Gus's birthday, one child from the neighborhood asks the couple if they are married. Unable to explain to a young child why they are not allowed to be married, they consider how they will explain to their own child why they are not married:

Melanie: I realized that some day our kid is going to ask us that very same question [are you two married]. And when he does, I'm going to have to say no. Then he'd want to know why not, and then I'd have to tell him because straight people wouldn't let us. Only, that isn't the whole truth.
 Lindsay: Which is?
 Melanie: We wouldn't give ourselves permission.
 [Melanie gets down on one knee]
 If it's not too late to be romantic, Lindsay Peterson, will you marry me?
 Lindsay: Now you're proposing to me? Well, I'm going to have to think it over. Yes. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.2)

Melanie realizes that society considers it necessary for committed couples to be married. It is still somewhat taboo for two people to have children and live together but not be married. Even though the country will not acknowledge their marriage as legal, they believe it is important for their son to know that his mothers are married.

Lindsay, while breaking the news to her friends on her engagement to Melanie explains how she has always had the desire to be married:

Lindsay: I've had the same dream ever since I've been little: to fall in love, get married and have a baby. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.5)

Her statement reiterates the argument that people learn from an early age that marriage and family are desirable, much more so than single life. This dream is by no means exclusive to Lindsay. Lindsay shares this dream with Brian for Gus as he grows up. She tells him:

Lindsay: You know, one day in the not-too-distant future, we'll be watching him graduate from school. Then I imagine he'll meet a lovely young girl or boy, get married maybe, have grandchildren maybe.

Brian: Wow, you really know how to kill a moment don't you?

Lindsay: Don't worry, I'm sure you'll be the hottest, handsomest anti-grandpa ever. (*Queer As Folk*, 4.7)

What Lindsay wants for her son is to be able to share in the same type of relationship that she has with Melanie. From the moment that he is a toddler, she is already reinforcing the societal notion that being in a relationship is acceptable and preferable to single life.

Sometimes the societal acceptance of couples is not only present when external figures draw attention to it, but when a lifelong fantasy of having a partner is identified. For example, when Emmett receives gifts and letters from a secret admirer while working at Ted's pornographic website, he speaks with Debbie about who he wishes his admirer would be:

Emmett: I know who I'd like it to be. A Dashing young prince, too shy at first to relay he has a crush on me. Then he appears and whisks me off to his palace.

Debbie: Where you live happier ever after.

Emmett: I know, it's highly unrealistic. My friends would probably laugh if they heard me.

Debbie: Well what do they know about love honey? Most of them are too busy chasing their hardons to listen to their heart.

Emmett: Still, I have this dream for perfection, so I keep on looking, hoping against hope that I find it. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.8)

Emmett, a hopeless romantic, continues his search for his fairytale prince. Emmett believes in love, relationships and living with one man for the rest of his life. In no way does Emmett attempt to find happiness living as a single man. His comments, representative of messages instilled on him while growing up in Mississippi, clearly promote the idea that people are meant to join together in relationships.

After George reveals himself as Emmett's admirer, the two join into a meaningful relationship. Feeling left out of all of the relationships is Ted who sulks to Brian one night at Woody's, a bar on Liberty Avenue that the group of friends frequently visits:

- Ted: I mean, Michael's got Ben. You've got Justin. Even Emmett has George for Christ's sake. How come everybody's got someone except me?
- Brian: The reason you don't have a boyfriend is because you don't want one.
- Ted: I don't?
- Brian: If you had one, it would challenge the well-established opinion you have of yourself as a worthless sack of shit that nobody wants. Therefore, you go after guys you know will reject you and you stand around here and bitch like a high school girl, when in fact, you've gotten exactly what you want, mainly, nothing. (*Queer As Folk*, 2.14)

Despite Brian's accurate cynicism, Ted still feels left out and isolated from the group for being the only one not in a relationship. He senses that everyone around him is moving away from single life. He agrees that being in a relationship is superior to single life and feels that he is the least valued of his friends since he is the only one who is single.

Soon after Ted starts dating Tad, the man with whom he initially believes he will share his life with, Tad's behavior abruptly changes and becomes obsessive, controlling and paranoid about Ted. After literally throwing Tad out of his home, Ted reflects on what went wrong. He asks Emmett why he was unable to recognize Tad's problems:

Emmett: It's a classic case of borderline personality disorder.
Ted: How could have not seen it coming?
Emmett: Because you didn't want to. You wanted to be in love, who doesn't? So stop beating yourself up. (*Queer As Folk*, 5.13)

Emmett's answer indicates that Ted, along with everyone else, only wants to be in love so he was unable to identify the imperfections of Tad. Ted's desire to find a partner reflects the need that society promotes that makes anything less than coupled life inferior.

The reflections of society, as presented on *Queer As Folk*, indicate that people grow up wanting to be married and to share life together. This image is identical for both homosexual and heterosexual characters. When characters do not fulfill society's demands and expectations, they are seen as failures who must have something wrong with them for being unable to fit this mold.

Chapter 7: Bringing Neverland to Reality: An Evaluation of Effects

Before exploring the level of effectiveness of the application of narrative and metaphor on *Queer As Folk*, it is useful to briefly review how the two fit together. Unlike examining an individual character's motivations and behavior, this narrative centers around the series as a whole. In short, the myth of the narrative is that characters have an understanding that being in a committed relationship is superior to single life once they reach a certain stage in life. All discourse arguing contrary to this is viewed as immature and a desperate attempt to hold onto youth and beauty. The central metaphor, which also provides the shared fantasy, of Brian as Peter Pan, illustrates the ways that Brian's lifestyle is rejected through his friends' condemnation of single life.

The use of the narrative that characters who are in relationships appear to be superior to single characters is overwhelmingly prevalent throughout *Queer As Folk*. Characters in relationships frequently give thanks that they have someone to share life with and who support them emotionally. Conversely, single characters often desire to have the same benefits of starting a family, having a home and not always feeling as if they are alone in the world. The motivations behind the behavior of each character, excluding Brian, illustrate the need to be involved in a committed relationship: Justin leaves his arrangement with Brian to be in a *real* relationship with Ethan; after breaking up with Ben, Michael instantly returns to the dating scene, hoping to find the same kind of intimacy he shared with Ben; Ted is miserable as a single man and believes that only a relationship will make him happy; Emmett holds onto his childhood fantasy of finding his prince who will take him away and with whom he will live happily ever after. As each character enters a serious relationship, the appeal of single life wanes and Brian is

left as its only advocate. While Brian remains defiantly opposed to relationships, his once-powerful influence over his friends disappears and he is ostracized for criticizing their decisions to enter committed relationships. Brian is dismissed as being immature and emotionally vacant.

Within the narrative framework, the criticism of Brian and single life focuses itself through the manifestation of a common understanding, Peter Pan. The use of the metaphor of Brian as Peter Pan, I argue, is extremely effective. The repeated referrals to Brian as Peter directly establishes the metaphor framework. Further, when other characters like Michael, Lindsay and Ben accept roles in the Peter Pan story, they contribute quips or inside jokes that assist in the creation of the Peter Pan fantasy. Brian lives between the *real world* and his Neverland of Babylon where time stands still and he remains young and beautiful. These factors successfully construct the Peter Pan metaphor. In evaluating the metaphor, Stelzner (1965) contends that it is not only repeated presence of the metaphor, but the success also depends on there being enough application of the metaphor to cause substantial effects throughout the text. Throughout the series, Brian's persuasive lure of single life behavior progressively loses its appeal.

Initially, Brian, Michael, Emmett and Ted are all single gay men. With Brian calling the shots, they socialize at single "cruising" locations like Babylon and Woody's in order to find someone to take home for the night, with no inclination of ever seeing them after that. Eventually, these activities take their toll on Michael, Emmett, Ted and later Justin as well. Just as Wendy leaves Peter to return to the real world and grows up, so too do Brian's friends leave his fantasy by abandoning the single life and entering into the world of committed relationships. As time passes, trips to Woody's and Babylon

become more infrequent, the number of different sexual partners decreases and drugs and alcohol take second billing to raising children and spending quality time with families: the lost boys grow up. In this way, the metaphor directly affects Brian and all of his friends from the show's inception until its conclusion.

Discussion and implications

The discussion regarding the implications of the findings of this study involve both content-driven and methodological analysis. For content-driven analysis, the discussion will be broken into two main areas: first, what the results say about people in relationships compared to single people, and secondly, what the results imply about the series *Queer As Folk*.

The character portrayals present in *Queer As Folk* indicate that living as a single person is not enough: People are supposed to have a counterpart to grow old with. When not in relationships, characters are portrayed as failures – even when the relationships themselves were not happy or healthy. Single characters are also seen as if they are missing something. Alone they are incomplete, but together they are whole. That is, characters never feel fulfillment unless they are in relationships.

These findings are significant for several reasons. First, they represent a population which has not previously been explored regarding relationships portrayed in media. Both Loeb (1990) and di Mattia's (2004) articles describe the positioning of single characters to characters in relationships speak specifically to the heterosexual community. Thus, this research provides a foundation for heterosexual and homosexual relationships to be compared. While some elements of that comparison can be

commented on, such as the overall emphasis on being in relationships is just as present in the homosexual relationships on *Queer As Folk* as in the heterosexual relationships on *thirtysomething* and *Sex and the City*, direct comparison between gay and straight relationships in media is slightly outside the scope of this study.

Another reason why these representations of coupled characters are important involves what such portrayals articulate about queer life. A prominent stereotype of homosexuality in media is that gay lifestyle includes extreme promiscuity (Hart, 2000). In this way, gay life appears to be morally bankrupt and inferior – at least in personal values – compared to heterosexual life. This criticism was extended onto *Queer As Folk* due to the program's abundance of nudity and sexual situations. *Queer As Folk* answers this criticism in the way that characters value relationships. The series argues that gay life is, in fact, not all about sex, but all about relationships. Admittedly, characters do have sex often in the series, however, a substantial portion of that sex includes relational partners.

The exception here is Brian. Brian, who defies nearly every other stereotype of gay life and who is almost always portrayed as masculine, fulfills the notion that gay life includes an abundance of sex with multiple partners. The series accounts for Brian's exception to this rule. Due to his sexual behavior and his inability to commit to a relationship, Brian is considered by his friends to be Peter Pan: immature and desperate to hold onto his youth. By no means is Brian's behavior approved of, but instead, it is condemned and renounced. The message is clear: single life is not the goal to be reached. Rather, having a life that has meaning and value includes the presence of a committed relationship. In this way, representations of gay characters in relationships is similar to

representations of heterosexual relationships in media as per Loeb and di Mattia's studies of *thirtysomething* and *Sex and the City*.

Methodologically, it is necessary to review the research steps used to determine whether the conclusions would remain true should the methods be changed. For example, if any one season or episode was viewed by itself, would relationships always be portrayed as being better than single life? I argue that this would not always be true. Certainly, there are examples of relationships where both members are better off being single. Also, as the series progresses and characters age, the need and desire to be in relationships grows. Despite this increase in later seasons, the central argument is still present from the pilot episode throughout the first season. Therefore, it is necessary, I contend, to view the series in its entirety when commenting on the stance and positioning of relationships that *Queer As Folk* takes. In this way, quotations and actions may be interpreted in the full context of which they were presented.

Suggestions for future research

While this study was influenced by every episode of the five-seasons of *Queer As Folk*, there are isolated limitations to the study. First, although the lesbian couple of Lindsay and Melanie were frequently cited and referenced, they are the only lesbian couple on the series who are regular characters. Their storyline represents one example of a lesbian relationship over an extended period of time. Their relationship is only one in the range of lesbian relationships in media. Unquestionably, this study focused predominantly on male homosexual relationships. A similar study conducted on *The L*

Word could provide a comparable study for gay women for what this study was able to do for gay men.

Additionally, examining *Queer As Folk* only delves into television representations of gay relationships. Are similar themes found in films with gay characters? Certainly, *Queer As Folk* was groundbreaking in American culture for presenting gay characters who have sex lives. Now that this has been established and initiated into American popular culture, will network television be able to follow suit?

Similar questions exist even when the media is not included in the equation. Perhaps an interpersonal communications study is necessary to compare media representations of gay relationships to actual gay relationships. Even focus groups with gay couples could view selected scenes taken from *Queer As Folk* to determine whether the narrative is successful in the degrees of fidelity and coherence which are used to evaluate the strength of the narrative.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Unquestionably, *Queer As Folk* broke new ground for gay characters and content in television and other media. The presence of a diverse assortment of gay characters shatters past dichotomous stereotypes of who gay characters are supposed to be. Amid a variety of distinct personalities and character traits, the creators of the show present characters who share an accepted view of what it means to mature. In order to mature, characters must be in committed relationships.

Once in a relationship, a character is consequentially associated with other positive attributes. Being in a relationship indicates that a character is mature, responsible, family-oriented and concerned for the well-being of others. In contrast to the glorified imagery of coupled life remains the single character who is selfish, immature, promiscuous and irresponsible. This is a *shared* understanding among all characters. Brian, the only character to reject this ideology, receives increasingly harsh criticism from his friends as the series progresses and everyone else *grows up*. Brian's opposing lifestyle is dismissed by his friends as undesirable. To them, the benefits of having many sex partners and using an abundance of drugs and alcohol every night does not compare to having someone to share life with in a relationship. The message that *Queer As Folk* sends is in fact not that "It's all about sex" (*Queer As Folk*, 1.1), but that a committed relationship is what is preferred. Being in a relationship means characters must mature. As creator Ron Cowen declares, "It really is the story of boys becoming men. You don't turn into a man overnight. It's a process that occurs over several years, and that is the trajectory of the show" (Rowe, 2003a, p. 49).

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