



***We'll have a gay ol' time: transgressive sexuality
and sexual taboo in adult television animation***

By

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Thesis Presented for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in Film Studies

in the Faculty of Humanities
and the Centre for Film and Media Studies

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

February 2014

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Adam de Beer

February 2014

Abstract

This thesis develops an understanding of animation as transgression based on the work of Christopher Jenks. The research focuses on adult animation, specifically North American primetime television series, as manifestations of a social need to violate and thereby interrogate aspects of contemporary hetero-normative conformity in terms of identity and representation.

A thematic analysis of four animated television series, namely *Family Guy*, *Queer Duck*, *Drawn Together*, and *Rick & Steve*, focuses on the texts themselves and various metatexts that surround these series. The analysis focuses specifically on expressions and manifestations of gay sexuality and sexual taboos and how these are articulated within the animated diegesis.

The findings reveal the mutuality between the plasticity of animation, which lends itself to shaping physical representations of reality, and the complex social processes of non-violent cathartic ideological expressions that redefine sociopolitical boundaries. The argument contextualizes the changing face of sexuality and the limits of sexual taboo in terms of current contestations and acceptability and the relationship to animation. Contemporary animation both represents this social performance of transgression and is itself a transgressive product disrupting accepted conventions.

Key words:

Animation, Transgression, Identity, Gay, Taboo

Acknowledgements

*Melda suule verno Elentirmo,
Elen sila lumenn' omentielvo.*

I'd like to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Martin Botha, for allowing me an enormous amount of autonomy to pursue my flights of fancy, and my other supervisor, colleague and friend, Associate Professor Lesley Marx, whose support and input were invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.

Albert Einstein

It was a high council that I once heard given to a young person, 'Always do what you are afraid of.'

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A university is not, thank heavens, a place for vocational instruction, it has nothing to do with training for a working life and career, it is a place for education, something quite different.

Stephen Fry

The Gay [frohliche] Science [is practiced by] free spirits... curious to a vice, investigators to the point of cruelty, with uninhibited fingers for the unfathomable, with teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible... [who] may offend people who mistake the researcher's willingness to uncover and face the morally unacceptable for immorality.

Friedrich Nietzsche

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Are cartoons dirty?

"Wow! Cartoons are getting really dirty!" Kyle [Broflovski]¹ (Booker, 2006, p. 157)

[T]he early years of the twenty-first century [are] the richest time yet for adult-oriented animated programming (Booker, 2006, p. xii)

You'll have a gay old time run the closing lyrics for the opening credits title sequence of *The Flintstones* (Hanna-Barbera Productions, 1960-66). This iconic prime-time animation television series (see discussions by Booker 2006, Creeber 2008, Furniss 2007, and Weinstock 2008b) is the forerunner and ostensibly sets the stage for the potential of prime time, and arguable adult, animation (see Wells 1998, Wells 2002, and Wells in Creeber 2008). *The Flintstones* however ends its initial run in 1966 after a mere 6 years of broadcast, and the contemporary era of prime time animation only really debuts 23 years later with *The Simpsons* (Matt Groening, 1989 to present). The success (and longevity) of Matt Groening's series opens the doors for the accomplishments of many later animation productions that appear during and after the 1990s. But in this post *Simpson* surge we see a number of series that gain a reputation for pushing the boundaries too far and with each new series this arbitrary *line* of what is good or acceptable or tolerable is pushed further and further till finally primetime animation and adult animation become interchangeable terms and the status of animation as *only for children* debunked, as we shall see.

As this research will show, especially for adult animation, sex and sexuality predominantly define what is taboo, and ostensibly such issues become this *line* that is repeatedly transgressed and constantly being renegotiated. More specifically it is *sexual identity* that becomes the playground for articulating social taboos, and as many of the main characters in animation are male (and for that matter many professional animators as well), it is male heterosexual identity and specifically the transgression of such through homosexual references (or preferences) and characters, that define the topic of this research. For the most part, the abundance of homosexual characters, stereotypes and jokes are developed by writing teams for these programmes made up of a majority of

¹ *South Park*, episode title: Clubhouses, first broadcast Sept 23, 1998.

heterosexual male writers and animators. This reminds us of the previously quoted lyrics, and to phrase these as a statement; it is indeed a *gay old time* that contemporary animation is enjoying, but when one contextualizes this and considers who is constructing these homosexual and homosocial² storylines and characters, it becomes apparent that this gay visibility is not necessarily being driven by the homosexual (or more collectively the LGBTI³) community, but by a heterosexual, and for the most part male, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (or WASP) majority.

This research focuses on a much neglected aspect of research into animation, namely sex and sexuality related topics and more specifically, as the latter is a broad and diverse field, it considers the construction of the gay male identity in contemporary, adult animation, both how animation constructs such identities in the shows' characters themselves, but also how these representations are drawn from and reflect back into the social sphere.

It should be clear from the onset then that this research therefore eschews the more normative and generally accepted idea that animation is for children. Paul Wells, in his early and seminal text on animation theory, *Understanding Animation* (1998), implies that not only is this innocence a misconception, but that indeed it has impacted on the development of discussions that specifically wish to focus on other aspects of the nature of animation. Wells says, "[t]he idea that animation is an *innocent* medium, ostensibly for children, and largely dismissed in film histories, has done much to inhibit the proper discussion of issues concerning *representation* (italics in the original) (Wells, 1998, p. 187). This is a misconception that Booker explains was primarily due to the failure of early animation programs to draw large audiences during primetime, and the decline in the popularity of *The Flintstones* towards the end of its original run in the 1960s that gave rise to "a widespread perception in the television industry that animated programs could succeed *only* as children's fare on Saturday mornings (italics in original) (Booker, 2006, p. x).

The implications of Wells' statement are multi-layered however, as not only is he referring to how discussions of animation *per se* have been neglected from a historical and contextual discussion of the development of film, but the emphasis

² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) uses the term to depict close and intimate relationships between men that is distinguishable from homosexuality.

³ LGBTI is a collective acronym to encompass the broadest possible range of non-normative sexualities, namely Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and Intersex.

on film begs the question as to how this also applies to discussions of animation in television, or other non-filmic histories and research. Here is where this research will add to the body of knowledge by not only focusing on gender issues in animation, but also developing the television series perspective. More recently, in Glen Creeber's work *The Television Genre* (2008), Wells continues this train of thought in his discussion of specifically adult animation; "[a]s becomes clear, in many instances, the supposedly innocent language of animation is used for subversion and socially challenging effects (Wells, 2008a, p. 155). Again Wells highlights the presumed innocence of the medium, but here clearly articulates the potential of the medium to subvert and challenge ideological constructs. He is however writing for a text specifically focused on television and it is not clear from the statement whether any aspects of the televisual medium also play a part in this subversion and, if so, to what extent. Again, my research foregrounds both the issues of animation and television considering them both concurrently and separately, and will therefore nuance these previous conclusions.

The challenge Wells mentions becomes part of the transgressive process referred to earlier. It is too simple to merely believe that transgression happens within a formula of the mechanical evolution of the form. Jeffrey Weinstock, in *Taking South Park Seriously* (2008b), considers one of the many animation television series that are, as it were, ideological *spin-offs* that develop from the success of *The Simpsons*, namely the series of the title *South Park* (Trey Parker and Matt Stone, 1997 - present). His argument is that "...every television program – animated or otherwise – participates to varying extents in a particular generic tradition and simultaneously attempts to distinguish itself both within that tradition and from its contemporary competitors" (Weinstock, 2008a, p. 79). To transgress for Weinstock is to acknowledge and challenge the generic forms that shape a particular genre and the construction of such that has an inculcated precedent as far as form is concerned. By contrast Wells' above quotation suggests issues of style and content as additional transgressive means at the disposal of the techniques of animation. The complexity of how transgression takes place, what it means and why transgression is so often and clearly apparent in animation requires an understanding of not only the concept, but also the mechanism of transgression. This is vital to my research and is a term that is repeatedly drawn upon to define the movement and development of aspects of this research: thus transgression will be discussed in detail.

This research seeks to develop aspects of animation theory that have been raised previously, but to build and develop these arguments along more specific lines of inquiry, specifically issues of identity and representation and how these are articulated in television animation. Both Paul Wells and Maureen Furniss do consider representation in their important texts, respectively *Understanding Animation* (1998) and *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (2007)⁴, but, especially with regards this topic, these early works tend to broadly survey a plethora of issues that relate to animation so as to effectively document the diversity of the field rather than developing specific arguments into particularities of each individual topic. Furthermore in the case of Furniss' (ibid.) discussion, her interpretation of representation, especially for example on the topic of gender, is more focused on the representation of female animators in the workplace as opposed to the femininity or gender (or gendered-ness) of animated characters. Wells, in his research, refers to the "complex ways in which animation problematizes the representation of gender" (Wells, op cit., p. 187). The discussion of the representation of male homosexual (or gay) identity in this thesis is therefore a multifaceted task with additional layers of complexity added when framing this discussion within larger conversations about animation.

Firstly we need to consider the issue of animation as medium. Wells suggests "animation, as a form, subverts many of the orthodoxies of mainstream live-action cinema and, indeed, even operates in a more radical way than various kinds of counter-cinema have sought to do" (Wells, ibid., p. 222). For Wells it is animation itself (the technique(s), the process), that embodies something unique that as a form separates it from its primary opposite, namely the live action film. And even while some forms or techniques of animation tend to replicate what live action not only looks like but can visually portray, even in such circumstances there is still something *uncanny* that sets these visuals apart. Not only does animation by its very nature distance itself from live action, but, Wells' quote seems to suggest it does this in a way that not even abstract and other Surreal forms of live action cinema can do. Again Wells revisits this idea in Creeber's (2008) text and suggests that critical engagement with animation as research can be achieved by "[a]ddressing the particular 'language' of animation as a unique form of expression" (Wells, 2008b, p. 146). It is important to note here that throughout this research referenced material tends to focus on *film* or *cinema*

⁴ This is a 2nd edition. The text was originally published in 1998.

media⁵ in its description of this medium due in the main part to the discourse that till now has focused more on the filmic history of animation rather than the televisual. For the purposes of this research the semiotic and other theoretical implications for meaning in a particular type of media are automatically acknowledged as available in any other media, the disparities between such media not being the primary focus of this research. It is therefore assumed that representational issues of a cinema image show no significant variation in comparison with a representational issue of a television image. A gay man is still a gay man, no matter how big the screen.

Secondly, having allowed for the interdisciplinary application of conclusions between media, this research still primarily considers animation in its televisual context. While the semiotic implications may be transferrable, the reach of television as popular format for representing culture has distinct implications that need highlighting and discussion and do in fact impact on aspects of the reception of animation and, as such a discourse is lacking, does need to be specifically acknowledged. This lack of reference to television animation is to be expected as even writing in 2008 Wells comments that “comparatively little attention has been given to animation on television... often casting it as merely ‘The Saturday morning cartoon’”, while at the same time contending that “the very nature of the cartoon has changed” and furthermore that animation has “subverted or radicalized established television genres” (Wells, 2008b, p. 146). Wells both illustrates and aids the development of Weinstock’s contention by contemplating animation actually playing a part in the development of television that tries to distinguish itself from the competitor and develop the genre conventions. Wells does not elaborate on what of the cartoon’s nature has in fact changed, whether issues in production (such as aesthetics or techniques), or content, or in animation research (in terms of analysis or scope) and herein lies the potential for developing further research and lines of enquiry. What Wells’ comments do illustrate though is that only a short 10 years after publishing *Understanding Animation* this monocular perspective of animation solely as film has shifted to include television and more importantly how, in this type of media as well, the uniqueness of animation has had a deep-seated and perhaps sweeping effect on itself and its reception and understanding, on television genres, on television itself, and even on and in popular culture.

⁵ Media refers to the means of communication, such as cinema, television, or the internet, as opposed to medium, which refers to a vehicle or mode of transmitting a communication product, such as an animated cartoon. The medium of animation can therefore be broadcast on different media.

Thirdly it is important to consider how the specificities of the medium, namely animation, dilute or concentrate ideological aspects within a particular type of media, namely television. While this research focuses on representation of gay identities, it is representation within the parameters of the television animated character and narrative and as such what animation can do in this regard becomes a vital factor. Furniss (2007) highlights some of the issues at play, stating:

[s]ometimes, depictions reflect specific agendas, perhaps commercial (to sell a product) or political (to sell a belief)... Other times, the ways in which characters are depicted reflect 'naturalised' relationships within society (i.e. depictions that many people take for granted as being realistic) or relate to conventions established within a given practice (ibid., p. 231).

As I explain in more detail later in this thesis (see Chapter 4 regarding Transgression), there is the expectation of the effects of a genre or a medium that develop over time to become habitual and accepted. For this research this aspect is complex as this is true for both representation of homosexuals and homosexual culture in all media and mediums, as well as the expectations of what animation can, may or should depict. Furniss goes on to acknowledge that "[v]irtually all work has the potential to offend someone; however, some pieces are particularly volatile, stirring a great deal of controversy" (ibid.) or, to rephrase this idea in the vocabulary of this research, some pieces *transgress*. The interesting aspect of Furniss' statement is that it highlights exactly the problems of ideology; which pieces are volatile, how are they volatile, and who decides on why something will cause controversy? Who decides how controversial it will be, and what constitutes controversial *per se*? Furthermore there is the broader question of whether controversy is necessarily bad or wrong at *all*.

Wells' text proffers a similar idea while admitting that his views are only preliminary. For Wells:

animation self-evidently reaches large audiences, appeals to them, and has an effect, but the specificity of this effect needs further research, ...[Wells suggests] that audiences are reclaiming and revising the meanings of animated films with regard to their own gendered, ethnicised or sexual gaze, and that other kinds of critical

interpellation are achieved by addressing how postmodern⁶ reflexivity necessitates the viewer to engage with the text in a different way (Wells, 1998, p. 223)

Wells is clearly arguing for more detailed research of animation and its effects and more specifically, an interrogation of specific effects to tease out their meaning and implications, or what Wells refers to as the “discourses about misrepresentation” (ibid., p. 220). This research is premised on doing just that. Wells’ quote highlights the ideological implications that underpin and inform such research by considering how spectators are reflexively reclaiming meaning and interpretation from animation texts and thereby engaging in different ways with the medium. The focus of this research is to consider exactly those engagements with and interpretations of animation specifically though Wells’ gendered or sexual gaze; the latter is concerned with the possible or potential audience on the one hand, and the reclamation and revision of meaning by its producers, the animators themselves, on the other.

There are numerous fields or discourses that this research must therefore somehow encompass *inter alia* gender theory, identity theory, animation theory, social and cultural theory, media theory, television theory, to name only a few. In later chapters these will be highlighted, along with the more appropriate aspects of the theories that are most useful to the present argument, and how these theories are being used to develop the central thesis. Not unlike animation, which is itself an interdisciplinary practice, this research will draw on these discourses to create a particular theoretical lens to consider this line of investigation. The most important elements are identity, its representation, and animation and these are in turn all bound together by the concept of transgression. In his discussion of developing theories of film and the moving image, Wells highlights how “numerous theories have emerged” to tease meaning through their research of film “...but [that] few take account of the special circumstances created by animation and most particularly, do not take account of the *adult* response to animated films” (Wells, 1998, p. 225). While this research cannot claim to fully construct such accounts, it will definitely add to a developing body of research in this regard.

⁶ The postmodern is described variously: primarily in terms of characteristics of contemporary social life that include; cultural self-consciousness, heightened superficiality, consumerism, and skepticism towards meta-narratives (Gauntlett, 2002), as well as a body of theory about the production, maintenance and dissemination of knowledge (Stainton Rodgers & Stainton Rodgers, 2001) and see also (Woodward, 2002). I use the term as in the case of Gauntlett (2002).

This thesis begins with a discussion of the chosen methodological framework that is the foundation of the thinking behind my research perspective and, as it follows a social science perspective, will draw on the work of Bent Flyvbjerg (2001). To consider the important broader theoretical notions that underpin the thesis, namely transgression and identity, key texts by Chris Jenks (2003) and Richard Jenkins (2008) respectively, will be discussed. The chapters that follow will integrate issues of transgression, identity and representation, and animation, by linking them to key visual texts. Initial chapters will give an overview of research to date, primarily drawing on the series *Family Guy* (1999-2002, 2005-present, FOX), but including references to *South Park* (1997-present, Comedy Central), *The Simpsons* (1989-present, FOX) and earlier animation television series like *Ren & Stimpy* (1991-96, Nickleodeon) and *Beavis and Butthead* (1992-97, 2011-present, MTV). Subsequent chapters will cover *Drawn Together* (2004-07, Comedy Central), *Rick & Steve* (2007-09, Logo), and *Queer Duck* (2002-04, Showtime). As is clear from the selection, these series are all North American and from solely English speaking countries with mostly white characters and with a Western cultural context and perspective. This has been done consciously to simplify an already diverse and complex argument and is not meant to fully and comprehensively tackle all the issues that arise from the challenges facing research into both animation and television.

Booker, in his comprehensive survey of television animation, *Drawn to television: Primetime animation from the Flintstones to Family Guy*, raises the point of both the potential and pitfalls of and for television animation and helps to summarise this introduction

[A]nimated series have, especially in recent years, provided some of the most daring and innovative programming on American television. Perhaps for the very reason that animated programming is not always taken entirely seriously, programs such as *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Family Guy* have dealt with issues that might otherwise have been deemed too controversial for American commercial television (Booker, 2006, p. 185).

It is both that they are daring and dismissed, it is the innovation and the 'perhaps' that this research will delve into to consider possible explanations and implications. This research will consider the daring transgressions and take their effects and influences more seriously to consider the controversial within the

social context. The research will consider contemporary hyper-visibility of male homosexuality and what this suggests about the representation of homosexuality, homosexual masculinities and masculinity in general. Is this just more of post feminism's masculinities in crisis⁷? What are the homosexual identities that are being created and how are they created? Do they and does this process have a positive or a negative impact on homosexuality and a homosexual identity? And finally how do these examples of television animation allow for, facilitate or otherwise articulate homosexual representations and identities at this particular point in history?

⁷ John Beynon's text *Masculinities and Culture* (2002b) discusses the nature of the crisis in masculinities in depth, considering the evidence for it, the most commonly advanced reasons for such a crisis, and its historical context.

Chapter 2: Literature Survey

2.1 A wealth of words

It takes the sting out of something. When a joke is so blisteringly mean or racist or stupid or just completely insensitive, it's done with cartoon (*sic*), it doesn't hurt as bad⁸.

What exactly animation is and how to define it, are the two central questions to the study of animation. The difficulty arises from the animated product itself. So many things can be animated. So many different techniques and styles can be used to create an animation product. Animation can be discussed as both a craft and an art, and depending on the product as an industry as well. Animation can conform to so many different narrative structures and genres. Animation can be theorised in terms of its level of realism. And finally animation is to be found on so many different types of screens, in so many different locations, and used for so many different intended results, that it is ubiquitous. The latter, along with the protean nature of animation, is what prompts the simple question: what is animation? This chapter will focus on a literature review of animation and relate the discussion to the central questions of this thesis.

Presently, Paul Wells' *Understanding Animation* (1998) is arguably the most oft quoted text in animation discourse. The text gives a comprehensive introduction to all aspects of the animated film, including techniques that range from the traditional, hand-drawn/painted or crafted to 2D and 3D computer animation examples. What makes Wells' book so important to the study of animation is the emphasis on theorising animation, alongside the more usual historiographic approach to research found in this field. Case studies guide and shape the discussions in the text, with topics that range from narrative strategies, to representation, to examples of primary research on animation audiences, all of which are historically contextualized. Of similar importance for animation research is Maureen Furniss' *Art in Motion. Animation Aesthetics* (1998, revised in 2007) which covers many similar topics to Wells, but with a stronger focus on technical innovations and aspects of design in animation, and a historical focus on the content regulation of especially American animation and the impact of Disney. The text has a more historiographic approach than Wells and, while there are chapters on theory and theoretical issues, the stronger emphasis is on a

⁸ Actor Seth Green, who voices Chris in *Family Guy*. *Family Guy*, S05, *World Domination: The Family Guy Phenomenon* featurette.

catalogue of techniques and their historical importance. Other important texts are the two compilations edited by Alan Cholodenko, namely *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation* (1993) and *The Illusion of Life 2: More Essays on Animation* (2007). The former arguably the first such compilation of essays specifically focused on animation. The submissions are from a diverse range of perspectives that make for an interesting cross section of perspectives in the approach to the topic of animation, but without a clear focus other than perhaps the use of deconstruction as a tool for analysis. Also Jayne Pilling's *A Reader in Animation* (1997) is an early edited collection gathering a diverse group of papers to explore issues around a definition of animation.

As far as historiographic research is concerned the list is extremely long and diverse, and even a quick survey of English medium published books, focusing on more academic than popular and theoretical than visual content, illustrates the range and depth of the topics that animation research explores⁹. The largest topic within published texts on animation is on Disney, this is to be expected considering the important part the latter plays in popular culture. All aspects of Disney; the man, the films, the company, and the entertainment parks, are covered in great depth¹⁰.

Perhaps the most important book on Disney for animation research is Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas' *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* (1995), which, while also including a historical component, focuses on Disney as both an artistic and industrial endeavor, giving insight into the innovations that pushed Disney to the forefront of animation in the early 20th century, both in terms of its aesthetic and production practices. The success of Disney is clearly seen as largely due to the man who gave the company his name, Walt Disney, witnessed by the large number of biographies that consider the man and his intricate relationship to the company he established, with books like Kathy Merlock Jackson's *Walt Disney: A Bio-Bibliography* (1993), Bob Thomas' *Walt Disney: An American Original* (1994), Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan's *Deconstructing Disney* (2000), and more recently Neal Gabler's *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (2007), J. Michael Barrier's *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney* (2008), Whitney Stewart and Nancy Harrison's *Who Was Walt Disney?* (2009), Daniel Alef's *Walt Disney: The Man Behind the Mouse* (2009), and Timothy S. Susanin and Diane Disney Miller's *Walt before Mickey: Disney's Early Years, 1919-1928*

⁹ An exhaustive survey of animation texts is too large for this thesis and only relevant or seminal texts are mentioned.

¹⁰ Texts are listed chronologically by published date.

(2011). However, not only the man, but also a history of the company and its products is explored, for example Disney's television output in Bill Cotter's *The Wonderful World of Disney Television: A Complete History* (1997), or famous characters from the House of Mouse such as Pierre Lambert and Roy E. Disney's Mickey Mouse (1998) and well as famous and yet unsung individual heroes of the Disney production line and the company's artists, such as in John Kenworthy's *The Hand Behind the Mouse: An Intimate Biography of Ub Iwerks* (2001). For the most part authors tend to focus on the history and the historical impact of Disney, and the complex relationship to Walt Disney himself with such books as David Smith and Steven B. Clark's *Disney: The First 100 Years* (2003), S. B. Jeffery's *The History of Walt Disney Animation* (2011), Drayton R. Elliott's *Walt and the History of Disney Animation* (2011), and Chris Pallant's *Demystifying Disney: A History of Disney Feature Animation* (2011). Several titles take a critical look at the impact of the Disney aesthetic and ethics in such titles as Annalee R. Ward and Clifford Christians' *Mouse Morality: The Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film* (2002) and most recently Donald Crafton's *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (2012).

Generally, the majority of contemporary animation authors tend to focus on the historical and historiographic in their research, with a far smaller, though increasing, number of researchers who explore broader ideas and themes. It is interesting to note that Disney still impacts heavily on the general conception of animation as seen in the title of Leonard Maltin and Jerry Beck's *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons* (1987), where the history of animation is referenced to Disney and inferred as one and the same thing. Many contemporary authors would argue against this misconception as seen in the diversity of topics and titles below. Two of the most important animation texts from the historical perspective are arguably Charles Solomon's *Enchanted Drawings: The History of Animation* (1994) and Giannalberto Bendazzi's oft quoted *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (1995). As opposed to these all-embracing works and as the field of animation studies broadens, distinct histories are being documented to include more defined arenas of research. So while some authors try to capture a holistic picture of animation, such as Donald Heraldson's *Creators of life: A history of animation* (1975) or Stephen Cavalier and Sylvain Chomet's *The World History of Animation* (2011), more authors now also focus on more detailed cross sections, such as Norman M. Klein's *Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon* (1996) and J. Michael Barrier's *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its*

Golden Age (2003). Or explore histories of production houses and techniques such as Kevin S. Sandler's *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation* (1998), Vivien Halas, Paul Wells and Nick Park's *Halas & Batchelor Cartoons: An Animated History* (2007), and specific techniques from such practitioner greats as Ray Harryhausen and Tony Dalton's *A Century of Stop-Motion Animation: From Melies to Aardman* (2008). These comprehensive yet wide-ranging histories are balanced by more specific and focused research into individuals and individual films, especially from the early years of the development of animation, lauding many of the lesser known and unsung heroes of early animation. These include Shamus Culhane's *Talking Animals and Other People: The Autobiography of One of Animation's Legendary Figures* (1986), John Canemaker's *Felix: The Twisted Tale of the World's Most Famous Cat* (1991), Hugh Kenner's *Chuck Jones: A Flurry of Drawings, Portraits of American Genius* (1994), William Moritz's *Optical Poetry: The Life and Work of Oskar Fischinger* (2004), Floriane Place-Verghnes's *Tex Avery: A Unique Legacy* (2006), Richard Fleischer's *Out of the Inkwell: Max Fleischer and the Animation Revolution* (2011), David B. Levy, Bill Plympton and Terry Gilliam's *Independently Animated: Bill Plympton: The Life and Art of the King of Indie Animation* (2011), and Jeff Lenburg's *Tex Avery: Hollywood's Master of Screwball Cartoons* (2011). More recently such biographies have evoked the ghosts of animation past to enliven the debate on animation itself with texts such as Scott Bukatman's *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit* (2012).

The scope of this field is best emphasised by the number of cataloguing efforts that take place, attempting to list all film, and more recently television, animation that is produced throughout the world, using different groupings and foci. These include Jerry Beck and Will Friedwald's *Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies: A Complete Illustrated Guide to the Warner Bros. Cartoons* (1989), Hal Erickson's *Television Cartoon Shows: An Illustrated Encyclopedia, 1949 -2003* (2005), Chris Robinson's *Unsung Heroes of Animation* (2006), Jeff Lenburg and Chris Bailey's *The Encyclopedia of Animated Cartoons* (2008), Nichola Dobson's *Historical Dictionary of Animation and Cartoons* (2009), James Clarke's *Animated Films* (2010), and Graham Webb's *The Animated Film Encyclopedia: A Complete Guide to American Shorts, Features and Sequences 1900-1999* (2011).

Animation research is however not only focused on such collections and historical documentation and does consider other topics, such as less well known methods of animation as in Robert Russett and Cecile Starr's *Experimental Animation*

(1988), Michael Frierson and Frank Beaver's *Clay Animation: American Highlights 1908 to the Present* (1994), and Peter Lord's *Cracking Animation* (1999). Also other perspectives and relationships are documented and explored, considering different animation industries and aesthetics from further afield, in such titles as Helen McCarthy's *Animation in Asia and the Pacific* (2001), Paul Wells' *Animation and America* (2002), Clare Kitson's *Yuri Norstein and Tale of Tales: An Animator's Journey* (2005), Frederik L. Schodt's *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution* (2007), Clare Kitson's *British Animation: The Channel 4 Factor* (2009), Brigitte Koyama-Richard's *Japanese Animation: From Painted Scrolls to Pokemon* (2010), and Richard John Neupert's *French Animation History* (2011). And within these explorations is the desire to push the boundaries of what animation can engage with and how animation can be defined and used. So animation can become a social/cultural barometer as found in Esther Leslie's *American Animated Cartoons of the Vietnam Era: A Study of Social Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (2004); or animation can explore its place in the history of film, or its place in culture generally, such as in Chris Gehman and Steve Reinke's *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema* (2005), Suzanne Buchan's *Animated Worlds* (2007), Paul Wells, Johnny Hardstaff and Darryl Clifton's *Re-Imagining Animation: The Changing Face of the Moving Image* (2008), Paul Wells' *The Animated Bestiary: Animals, Cartoons, and Culture* (2009), Robin L. Murray and Joseph K Heumann's *That's All Folks?: Ecocritical Readings of American Animated Features* (2011), and as a final example Noell K. Wolfgram Evans' *Animators of Film and Television: Nineteen Artists, Writers, Producers and Others* (2011), where it becomes clear that an understanding of animation includes research into both film and television.

In more recent years the growing field of animation studies has incorporated a diversity of topics from other fields of social, cultural and media study, including: focused studies of gender and race issues, such as Amy M. Davis' *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* (2007) and Christopher P. Lehman's *The Colored Cartoon: Black Representation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954* (2007), and C. Richard King, Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo, and Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo's (2010) *Animating Difference: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Contemporary Films for Children*; a clear focus on specifically television animation and its various forms, such as Carol Stabile's *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture* (2003), M. Keith Booker's *Drawn to Television: Prime-Time Animation from The Flintstones to Family Guy* (2006),

Toni Johnson-Woods' *Blame Canada!: South Park and Contemporary Culture* (2007), and importantly Paul Wells' *Animation & America* (2002) that highlights the relationship between the cartoon and North American artistic and cultural achievement and how these animations reflect the social conditions under which they were made. And most recently topics that slowly move the discussion into the realm of sex and sexuality such as Helen McCarthy and Jonathan Clements' *The Erotic Anime Movie Guide* (1999), Karl F. Cohen *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* (2004), and Antonia Levi, Mark McHarry and Dru Pagliassotti's *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (2010).

The most recent addition to this growing library of writing on transgressive topics is Jayne Pilling's *Animating the Unconscious: Desire, Sexuality, and Animation* (2012). This book focuses specifically on sexuality in animation, with papers that attend to the manifestation of sexuality in animated productions, showing the relationship between animation praxis and the links to theory. Essentially this is a good example of the type of *Phronetic* research this thesis advocates (see the discussion later in Chapter 3), the compilation being a digest of animators' voices. This idea of cataloging detailed case studies follows on from Foucault's ideas of building a body of contextualized, specific experiences so as to shape and build the discipline and discourse. Some of the chapters included in the book are translations of important and interesting discussions on related topics, while some are strong theoretical articles, such as Ruth Hayes' *The Animated Body and its Material Nature* and Karen Beckman's *Mixing Memory and Desire: Animation, Documentary*. The majority of articles engage directly with the animators through interviews, to represent in their own words their approach to their own work and the animators' specific process to engage with sexuality in the animated form. In particular Ian Gouldstone's *Guy101* is a good example of documenting the process of representing queerness (arguably specifically gayness) in animation and the various approaches to documenting the process, i.e. draft script, script and discussion of the film and with the creator, clearly show the complex potentials of and for representation. It is interesting to note in Pilling's very helpful introduction, how often she returns to the work of Paul Wells to begin and shape her arguments.

The above progression has been chosen specifically to highlight the move towards the topic and focus of this thesis, and while it covers a wealth of options it is at best a very small sample of the entire field of animation. Also, it's important to

note that this selection is limited to academic, Western perspective, English medium publications, with a predominant focus on North American and, to some extent, British animation. European publications in other languages are not considered, neither are East Asian publications. This is done simply for the scope of this thesis, both in terms of its topic focus and limited space. The field of Japanimation or Anime studies alone mirrors in scope what is produced by researchers exploring Western animation (if in fact not an even larger arena of published work), and European and especially Eastern European animation is well documented and a broad and diverse study in its own right.

While the focus of this thesis is animation, the fact that animation is also artistically created mostly through the process of drawing, means that many of the concepts that relate to drawing and much of the research done in the field of drawing, and specifically about comic drawing and comics, can be related to this thesis. More general titles such as Robin Varnum and Christina Gibbons (2002) *The Language of Comics: Word and Image* and D.B. Dowd, Todd Hignite, Daniel Raeburn, and Gerald Early (2006) *Strips, Toons, and Bluesies: Essays in Comics and Culture* shape a general discussion that then leads into work that considers less mainstream animation such as Karl F. Cohen's (2004) *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* and specifically comics and cartoons that focus on queerness and sexuality such as Regan McClure's (1995) *Queer Sense of Humour: Collection of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Cartoons*, Gareth Schott's (2009) *From 'Ambiguously Gay Duos' to Homosexual Superheroes: The role of sexuality in comic book fandom*, and Graeme Owen's (2010) *The Representation of Sexuality and Gender in Mainstream Comics*.

The issue of representation is also central to this thesis and as such it is impossible to disregard Stuart Hall's 1997 seminal text *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. His discussion of representation frames the theory and concepts applicable to almost any visual medium, and later authors build on his work to frame ideas of representation more specifically in terms of sexuality such as James M. Saslow's (1999) *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts*, Jane D. Brown, Jeanne R. Steele, and Kim Walsh-Childers's (Eds) (2001) *Sexual Teens, Sexual Media: Investigating Media's Influence on Adolescent Sexuality*, Jane Arthurs's (2004) *Television and Sexuality*, and lately Beth Johnson's (2012) *Television, Sex and Society: Analyzing Contemporary Representations*.

In terms of televisual history and popular culture there are numerous authors who further explore sexuality on the screen from a number of other perspectives, though arguably always incorporating some aspect of representation, the most notable being Thomas Waugh who writes extensively on the subject including his 2006 text, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*. Other authors include Andrew Sarris and Parker Tyler (1993) *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies*, Stephen Tropiano (2002) *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV*, Ron Becker (2006) *Gay TV and Straight America*, Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (Eds) (2008) *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*, Thomas Peele (2011) *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film, and Television*, Christopher Reed (2011) *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas*, and more recently Christopher Pullen's (2012) *Gay Identity, New Storytelling and The Media*.

This research locates itself in the latter day arguments of representation within animation studies using the social, cultural and media study perspective as illustrated by the work of Davis, Stabile and Booker mentioned above. And while this thesis clearly promotes the gendered and Queered approach to the topic, it only obliquely shapes the threshold arguments and sets the stage for a broader and deeper discussion of the pornification¹¹ of media texts in general, and pornography¹² in animation and animated porn in particular.

¹¹ Pornification is the phenomenon where popular Western media culture adopts pornographic styles, gestures and aesthetics (Paasonen, Nikunen, & Saarenmaa, 2007).

¹² Pornography can be described juristically as any material in which the depiction of sex and sexuality is limited by legal statutes, or more commonly as any material which portrays sex in an explicit manner (see Stainton Rodgers & Stainton Rodgers, 2001 and Paasonen, Nikunen, & Saarenmaa, 2007).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Animation in the social sphere: why a social science perspective?

Phronetic social science... provide[s] concrete examples and detailed narratives of how power works and with what consequences... [its] task... is to clarify and deliberate about the problems and risks we face and to outline how things may be done differently, in full knowledge that we cannot find ultimate answers to these questions or even a single version of what the questions are (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 140).

As in all research, the key factor is the researcher's understanding of the production context... (Furniss, 2007, p. 11).

[To reclaim the status of animation beyond merely aesthetic credentials]...origins, reasons and causes, conditions and preconditions – become the crucial premises of enquiry... (Wells, 1998, p. 190).

Maureen Furniss, in promoting research into animation in her text *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (2007), encourages the contextualisation of the specific animation product in a broader context, for her, the most important being the conditions under which the production was undertaken. And, while Wells considers the construction of the animated body in the above quotation, his focus on exploring the roots and contexts of animation supports Furniss' view. For most animation research this context is that of the animation production process (see Buchan 2006, Finch 2004, Furniss 2007, Furniss 2008, Gehman & Reinke 2005, Noake 1988, Pilling 1997, Wells 1998, and Wells 2002 to name but a few) where the researcher places the animation within the temporal context of its production practice to uncover the origins of animation¹³ and in so doing attempt to define animation. To consider this context means placing the work within a particular social, cultural and temporal construct. The ubiquitous *Walt Disney*, as default exemplar of animation as far as the layman is concerned, is a good example. If a researcher wished to consider the portrayal and representation of

¹³ This is a focal point for much theoretical discussion of animation, where research into historically important animation films and programmes, production houses and even the artists themselves, form the basis for a discussion towards a definition of animation. The various sources of early production processes and aesthetics are interrogated to understand the ontology of the field from a diversity of perspectives (for a diversity of approaches to theory see for example Cholodenko 1991 and 2007, Darley 2007, Greenberg 2011, and Wells 2011).

women in Disney animation history, it would prove very difficult to compare Disney princesses using a 1930's Snow White¹⁴ vs. a 1980's Ariel¹⁵ without considering not only the artists who helped to create the characters within Disney (and who drew, painted and voiced them), but also the attitude of the Disney corporation towards women both as characters and in the workplace, and more broadly the cultural ideology and discourse that influenced such perceptions at these two distinct times in history¹⁶. This complexity should make it clear why to make such a comparison between an American and Japanese animation would add additional layers of complexity in order to draw a reasonable and balanced conclusion that could verifiably be supported by the researcher's information and analysis.

Furniss encourages textual analysis that "blends historical and theoretical analysis" (Furniss, 2007, p. 10) as a preferred methodology, with an emphasis on the historical context of the animation product, but considers the application of additional theoretical models to assist with the analysis. This preferred emphasis on both historical and production context is clear from Furniss' discussion as she laments how a-historical theoretical research can be by not taking into account aspects pertaining specifically to the production context, whilst still endorsing its usefulness in "understanding more about thought processes and the ways in which a society expresses itself" (ibid.). As this section will show, while the production context is important, it is the latter exploration into the expressions of society that is of interest to me and therefore the analysis filters the production aspects through more appropriate theoretical frameworks that will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. One perplexing point in Furniss' discussion though is her brief definition of textual analysis given as a method which "involves the interpretation of some aspect of an animated work *without* consideration of any factors outside the 'text'" (my emphasis) (ibid.). This seems to clearly contradict the very idea of textual analysis as a contextual process and goes against the majority of the content of her discussion to this point.

Other authors suggest more diverse methodologies to approach the researching of animation. Just a single example to illustrate this diversity would be the work of Brian Ott (2008) who searches for an alternative critical practice by eschewing both hermeneutical and deconstructionist methods and rather than pursuing

¹⁴ *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, 1937 dir/William Cottrell et al., Walt Disney

¹⁵ *The Little Mermaid*, 1989 dir/Ron Clements and John Musker, Walt Disney

¹⁶ Again, to name but two examples of publications that attempt to tackle such complex issues, in this case specifically to speak to preconceptions of the Disney brand and phenomenon see Bell, Hass, and Sells 1995, and Brode 2005.

textual meanings “go[es] in search of textual pleasures”, what he refers to as a theory of *media erotics* “examining postmodern textuality in terms of *significance* rather than *signification*” (Ott, 2008, p. 40). Ott asks *how South Park* arouses viewers, and develops the argument that it is predominantly through “transgressive pleasures: the abject¹⁷, the carnivalesque, the intertextual, the ironic, the liminal, and the depthless” (ibid.). Such departures from more mainstream perspectives for research in the field pave the way for more productive and inventive deliberations as this thesis hopes to espouse.

To research animation therefore is not only to consider the animation product as a text, but to place that text within a broader framework. And while early production processes may elaborate on a theory of animation and record the genesis of the field, the contemporary place of animation in society is equally important in our understanding of the field and the discourses that surround it. Also, as these texts are either films or television programs they become part of social and cultural contexts and the concomitant play of ideology and power and part of popular culture(s).

Alan McKee, discussing textual analysis in the cultural and media studies context says that

[i]f we want to understand the role that the media play in our lives and precisely how its messages participate in the cultural construction of our view of the world, then we have to understand what meanings audiences are making of television programs, of films, of newspapers, magazines, and radio programs – in short, of ‘texts’ (McKee, 2001).

McKee is elaborating on the relationship between media and text, and this is the view this research will take, namely that television programmes are individual texts. More importantly for textual analysis, McKee highlights the cultural context and the impact that these texts have on the meanings constructed not only of the texts, but of those things the texts represent and present to their audiences. These complex meaning connections lead to the choice of a social science approach to this research in tandem with the textual analysis, which, as the below discussion should prove, does not dismiss or displace the methodologies of the latter, but rather expand the possibilities for analysis by linking the text to

¹⁷ That which is expelled or excluded, from the Latin meaning literally, ‘thrown out’ (Julia Kristeva quoted in (Hall, 2013b, p. 248). Brian Ott suggests that “abjection arises from the transgression of social taboos or the crossing of culturally constructed boundaries” (Ott, 2008, p. 41).

the social and ideological, and therefore to issues of the ebb and flow of power relations in the social sphere.

3.2 Bent Flyvbjerg: an introduction

This research follows a social science approach to the exploration and examination of the topic and the reasoning behind this decision will be discussed in depth following the important text of Bent Flyvbjerg, titled *Making Social Science Matter*, with the intriguing and thought-provoking subtitle *Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again* (2001). Flyvbjerg's text, as hinted at by the title, is an extensive discussion plotting the course of his argument to explain exactly why social science has failed in the past and, based on his own research and conclusions, what type of approaches and methodologies are better suited, and for that matter what aims are more appropriate, for such research in the future. Flyvbjerg's argument not only plots the history of social science research and the reasons for a perceived decline in the potential and veracity of such research, but also the evolution of the field and related discourse. Flyvbjerg draws on related theoretical work to show why the decline has taken place and what, in his opinion, a researcher wishing to do social science research needs to consider and employ when making the choice to use such frameworks. It is interesting to note that his argument, while more generic to the entire field, is echoed in the sentiments of animation writers (predominantly the more descriptive work of Furniss, 2007 and Wells, 1998) who also champion research specifically into animation and the development of the latter's own discourse. Flyvbjerg's introductory chapters raise several questions around the nature of social science research and two primary challenges, relevant to this thesis, reveal themselves.

Firstly, unlike the natural sciences, in the social sciences there is no epistemic framework that can generalize the formulation of theories or predict from one context to the next, a staple indicator of *truth* in the results of scientific research, as Flyvbjerg points out "prediction is the criterion which most clearly helps us distinguish between natural and social sciences" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 39). Likewise McKee tells us that textual analysis is at best an "educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations" with no "single, 'correct' interpretation of any text... [and] large numbers of possible interpretations, some of which will be more likely than others in particular circumstances" (McKee, 2001). He goes on to explain how the concept of an accurate reality is fallacious as every description

of reality is just another version of reality and the not *the* reality. Flyvbjerg goes on to show that prediction is the one thing social science research cannot do, based on the complexity of interrelated factors and conditions that seemingly chaotically play a part in the final result of any social interaction or the interpretation thereof. So this research's results and analysis are particular only to this research and will not necessarily be generalisable to any other, even similar, context. How this is useful then, is explained later in this section.

Secondly, Flyvbjerg discusses the ontology of the field and its related discourse and how changes or trends in the development of social science are "not paradigm shifts but rather style changes... it is not a case of evolution but more of fashion" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 30). Flyvbjerg's comments suggest an air of whimsy as far as the development of the discourse is concerned and a lack of rigid and clearly defined progression and phases, and that the development of theory or theories is based on personal tastes and serendipity.

For this research then, the methodological parameters are specifically chosen to suit that which is being researched, i.e. the content of television shows, but also the issues that the research wishes to emphasise and focus on, namely the social implications of the television shows as well as the fact that they are animated, the latter a stylistic or aesthetic, or even an ideological issue. Animation research to date follows any number of methodological frameworks, with each new author selecting a single or combination of the various possible methodologies available to the researcher of texts, be they film, television or other moving media. Animation research methodology is therefore not bound by any historic preference in the discourse of animation research or theory.

3.2.1 Flyvbjerg explained

Flyvbjerg goes on to elaborate on Hubert Dreyfus' *Ideal Theory* (of scientific or epistemic research) derived from the work of Socrates, and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who both argue that this scientific model can't work for social science as "context is of central importance" (ibid., pp. 39-40). Flyvbjerg, quoting Dreyfus, identifies

a fundamental paradox for social and political science: a social science theory of the kind which imitates the natural sciences, that is, a theory which makes possible explanation and prediction, requires that the concrete context of everyday human activity be excluded, but this

very exclusion of context makes explanation and prediction impossible (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 40).

Dreyfus is suggesting that context is vital to the social sciences and therefore vital to such research and can never be scientific or epistemic. Again there are similarities to textual analysis where the latter insists on an overt discussion of context to make meaning from the text. McKee suggests "you can do nothing with a text until you establish its context" and that "[t]his context... is what ties down the interpretations of a text. If you put a text into a completely different context, where it is interpreted alongside different texts, then it will likely be interpreted in a completely different way" (McKee, 2001). To be *scientific*, or to construct epistemic models of knowledge and research, one must develop theories that can be imposed on the data. By contrast *social science* must let the data, i.e. including the context, impose itself on the research to develop knowledge. Following from this argument and based on Dreyfus' model that derives much of its argument from an understanding of the human learning process, Flyvbjerg proposes that social science research needs to move away from "rule-based, context-independent to experience-based, situational behavior" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 22) as its focus and as its potential data. For Flyvbjerg

what is needed in order to transcend the insufficient rational perspective [of only epistemic analysis] is explicit integration of those properties characteristic of the higher levels in the learning process which can supplement and take over from analysis and rationality. These properties include context, judgment, practice, trial and error, experience, common sense, intuition, and bodily sensation (ibid., p. 23).

For Flyvbjerg this emphasis on the everyday and of human activity also has its drawbacks as it is always someone else's evaluation of a social situation that becomes the data, referred to by Bourdieu as a "second-degree explanation" and Dreyfus as a "second-order" of explanation (ibid., p. 44). As Flyvbjerg explains any attempt at a context-free definition of a social interaction, will "not necessarily accord with the pragmatic way an action is defined by the actors in a concrete social situation" (ibid., p. 42). This suggests that researching any text that is created for an audience requires knowledge of both the creator *and* the audience, and more so, the context of the creator and the context of the audience, i.e. in the case of the former the workplace (Furniss' 'production

context', 2007, pg. 10 & 11) and the latter the socio-cultural sphere, including culture, cultural references, meta-textual texts and representation through other media and importantly the definitions by *these* actors, i.e. their impressions. As is obvious, this context that researchers refer to and suggest as a vital aspect of the understanding and analysis of issues from a social science perspective very quickly multiply becoming almost impossible to fully integrate and discuss *all* aspects of any one situation. For social science research however, this is not the intention. Unlike *scientific* research, generalisability is not the objective, but rather an understanding of (at least part of) the factors that play a part in the particular focus of the research and how this integrates into a broader context and understanding of the practice.

Furthermore Flyvbjerg considers the conditions that play a part in all interactions and actions in society as neither necessarily physical nor psychological facts but rather "patterns of behavior... characterized by expert exercise of tacit skills" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 45). Whether knowingly or otherwise, each individual in the process of creating and viewing the text is the expert as far as their interpretation of such is concerned and their understanding of and interaction with the text becomes a discernable pattern of action and reaction. Whether their interpretation is correct or not, is not relevant to such research, but rather the fact that such an interpretation exists is interesting to the research to uncover the issue of why this should be.

Flyvbjerg suggests a further problem for social science research in that "background conditions change... [due to such conditions not being facts, and] context-dependent interpretations, even those social sciences which build up on second-order evaluations are incomplete and unstable" (ibid.). Even if the voice of the audience is used, the results are no more epistemologically sound than the impressions of the researcher. As such this approach is therefore essentially *hermeneutic*, taking the perspective that "social reality is... socially constructed, rather than being rooted in objective fact [and therefore]... that interpretation should be given more standing than explanation and description" (Gray, 2004, p. 23) as well as phenomenological, "revisit[ing] our immediate experience of [phenomena] in order that new meanings may emerge... hence, phenomenology becomes an exploration, via personal experience, of prevailing cultural understandings... [seeking] to find the internal logic of the subject" (ibid.). The animated series as text, the animation producer's expression of the reasoning behind the animated text, and the impressions of the researcher become the

phenomena interpreted and described to understand their internal logic and social and cultural impact.

Flyvbjerg also considers the impact of power in the social sphere and how research must take cognizance of and develop mechanisms to interrogate it. Flyvbjerg contrasts and discusses the very different traditions of Jürgen Habermas' *discourse ethics*, and Michel Foucault's *power analytics* (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 88), acknowledging that Foucault's *power analytics* are, in his thesis, more appropriate to this type of research. He highlights Foucault's "emphasis on marginality and domination [making] his thinking sensitive to difference, diversity, and the politics of identity, something which today is crucial for understanding power and affecting social and political change" (ibid., p. 104). Foucault's marginalities include sexualities and the concomitant issues of identities that must negotiate space in the social sphere. This in turn automatically highlights the issues of power and politics at play within the social context and how individuals and groups must jostle and jockey for position and status. Hence for Foucault "resistance, struggle, and conflict, in contrast to consensus [the Habermas model], are... the most solid basis for the practice of freedom" (ibid., p. 102). Foucault contends that freedom comes at a price and that freedom requires struggle. The freedom of identity and of a sexual identity therefore can do no less than resist or struggle to create a space within the social sphere.

Flyvbjerg suggests that in "strong democracies, distrust and criticism of authoritative action are omnipresent. Moral outrage is continuous" (ibid., p. 109) because he believes that authoritative bodies will invariably infringe on someone else's beliefs and identity in the pursuit of their own, what Furniss refers to as the *key players* (Furniss, 2007, p. 199) in institutional regulation of the content of especially television programmes on a variety of different broadcast channels and platforms. The choice of American television series is therefore also a conscious consideration as it is within Western democracies, so-called *strong democracies*, where we see both authoritative action, but also criticism and reaction to an imposed *status quo*. For Flyvbjerg "democracy guarantees only the existence of a public, not public consensus [Habermas's contention]. A strong democracy guarantees [therefore] the existence of conflict [Foucault's contention]" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 109).

Foucault, in the introduction to the first volume of his seminal work on sexuality, *The History of Sexuality* (1990)¹⁸ explicates his concept of power such “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 117). For Foucault the emphasis is therefore on the details of such cases, the “little question [of] how?” that is important and which forms the bedrock of Foucault’s own work and his genealogy of *power analytics* (ibid., p. 118). The answers to this question help to build the latter’s discourse and it is in fact the construction of discourses themselves that “transfer and produce power... reinforce power, but they also subvert and conceal it, make it fragile and contribute to obstructing power” (ibid., p. 124).

3.2.2 Methodological focus

My research therefore chooses to focus on the voices of the animators and my engagement with the texts and meta-texts to generate an analysis. Audience research and the relevant data are not considered, simply because, as Alan McKee suggests in *A beginner’s guide to textual analysis* (2001), it is simply too expensive and time consuming and inevitably data is skewed by either the choice of data set, list of questions, or what the audience thinks the researcher wants to hear. The views of the audience are however both bane and boon to the researcher. McKee goes on to suggest that the above are common problems of audience research, and that “what you actually discover in your research is that audience members draw from publicly available knowledges (*sic*) in order to make sense of texts. It is in part as a way of recovering those publicly available knowledges that textual analysis works” (McKee, 2001). Flyvbjerg, quoting Foucault, states “textual analysis needs to be disciplined by analysis of practices... The context of practices disciplines interpretation” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 115), or as McKee suggests “[i]f we want to understand the world we live in, then we have to understand how people are *making sense of that world*” (*italics in original*) (ibid.). So while someone wanting to understand the frequency or content of the expressions of the audience regarding a text might find the responses repetitive and representative only of the general status quo, a researcher interested in uncovering the deeper implications of such expressions and the subtextual and ideological aspects, would do well to explore the web of meanings they may entail.

¹⁸ *The History of Sexuality* was first published in French in 1976 and in English in 1978.

3.3 Phronetic Research

Flyvbjerg has however created an unstable foundation for social science research showing whimsy in its direction and insecurity in its interpretation when predicated on and against the epistemological model of research, the latter best promoted by the natural sciences and which have inculcated notions of the evidencing of truth and fact in society in general; unpredictable feelings and actions don't count, predictable facts do.

Having established that social science research cannot operate in an epistemic framework, Flyvbjerg sets out to explore a framework that is more suitable and returns to the work of Aristotle. Flyvbjerg revisits the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*¹⁹ briefly outlining the relationship between the different forms of knowledge as elaborated by Aristotle:

Phronesis goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know how (*techne*) and involves judgements and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor. ...*phronesis* is commonly involved in social practice, and... therefore attempts to reduce social science and theory either to *episteme* or *techne*... are misguided (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 2).

Flyvberg attempts in his thesis to reintroduce *phronesis* as an additional concept to describe different forms of knowledge and highlight related possible methods of research such an understanding might engender. He postulates this phronetic way of thinking as "that activity by which instrumental rationality is balanced by value-rationality" (ibid., p. 4); rather than a focus on epistemic or technical knowledge, there is a focus on phronetic, or value laden, knowledge. The voice of the individual uttered through the text²⁰ on different levels, previously considered too erratic and not useful for epistemic research becomes an important fund for phronetic research, appreciated as a source of knowledge, not generalizable, but specific to the context.

The objective of Flyvbjerg's thesis is to restore social science to its position of "a practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and... contributing to social and

¹⁹ "...variously translated as prudence or practical wisdom" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 2).

²⁰ Contemporary definitions of a 'text' from a media perspective, incorporate a wide diversity of written, visual, spoken, and other forms.

political praxis” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 4). For Flyvbjerg the core of *phronesis* is directly related to what he believes is the objective of all social science research; namely a contribution to reflexive aspects of social research in terms of analysis and the discussion of principles and concerns (ibid., p. 3). Following on from Aristotle, Flyvbjerg elaborates on how *phronesis* is concerned with “the analysis of values... as a point of departure for action” (ibid., p. 57) as well as being concerned conduct which, “has its sphere in particular circumstances” (ibid., p. 58). Phronetic research therefore not only must contextualize a situation, but must also consider the particular actions of the individuals involved. It is not necessarily the thing that is being analysed, but the value of the thing for a particular social context. *Phronesis* is therefore “about value judgment... [it] operates via a practical rationality based on judgment and experience... [where] the particular and the situationally-dependent are emphasized over the universal” (ibid.). Phronetic research is not about finding or generating universal answers to particular questions, but rather documenting and reflecting on particular contexts and building up a body of knowledge that reflects the totality of a particular environment or circumstance. While there can be no absolute facts in such research as choices are made in the process of research that influence the research and the process itself, there can be a discipline to ensure validity within the confines of the research itself.

3.3.1 Cases in Phronetic Research

Flyvbjerg also makes the point that “...in the study of human affairs, there exists only context-dependent knowledge...” (ibid., p. 71) and as such, in accord with Aristotle, “saw a decisive role for cases and context in the understanding of human behavior” (ibid., p. 70). This research therefore also follows the case study methodology employed by most social science research using specific television series as the cases in point. It is because the goal of social science research is not to find generic and transferrable answers but rather to develop the diversity of voices for any particular observed phenomenon that Flyvbjerg considers the case study invaluable. For him “the closeness of the case study to real-life situations and its multiple wealth of details [is] important... [also] for the development of a nuanced view of reality” (ibid., p. 72). Within the field of television animation there is a surplus of series across a multitude of platforms and channels from which to choose to develop this research. As such, the choices made are themselves an interesting aspect of the research and these cases and these choices will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. For

this section, it is important to understand the underlying conceptions and reasons for particular choices made for social science case study research.

Flyvbjerg suggests the atypical case as the best option as typical cases are often not the richest in information. Atypical cases

often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied... [and] it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 78).

Typical, in this case, could be read as the layman's understanding of animation or the television series (or both, as proposed in this research). Typical in the case of the former would be animation aimed at children (an assumption that was highlighted and disputed in the introduction), and the latter as your average television comedy series (the most prevalent being the situation comedy or 'sitcom') constructed within the now standardized genre format for characters, narrative structure and plot construction. By contrast the atypical become the more interesting examples; either in the case of the former, animation that is not necessarily for children, aimed at an adult audience with an accessibility to children in the audience, or indeed a series created for an adult audience only; or in the case of the latter, sitcoms that are not sitcoms, sitcoms that reinvent or subvert the format, or sitcoms that studiously follow the genre format in order to comment or critique on such format or the medium which uses the format, e.g. as animation, as television series, or both. Flyvbjerg implies in the above quote that such atypical cases are interesting precisely because of the causes behind and the consequences of such decisions, but also that an in-depth discussion of a few cases that strongly and clearly authenticate the dynamics of the thesis is more appropriate for social science research. An epistemic approach to research that favours the quantitative is disregarded in favour of a phronetic approach that favours the qualitative, though deliberated and contextualized. As Flyvbjerg states in support of the development of a social science methodology "...a discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and that a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one" (ibid., p. 87).

3.3.2 Phronetic Questions

Flyvbjerg's proposed social science methodology therefore focuses on an analysis of the participants and what they produce within a particular social context and with the associated play of power relations. The focus is on considering the underlying reasons that drive particular actions or reactions by looking at what is produced through either performances, encriptions or utterances, or as Flyvbjerg states

The principle objective for social science with a phronetic approach is to carry out analysis and interpretations of the status of values and interests in society aimed at social commentary and social action, i.e. praxis (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 60).

Contextualising the value-rationalities is therefore paramount and requires developing the discussion of the socially and historically conditioned context. Three primary value-rational questions emerge, namely: *Where are we going?*, *Is this desirable?*, and *What should be done about it?* (ibid., p. 130). These parallel McKee's suggestion that "[t]here is no way that we can attempt to understand how a text might be interpreted without first asking, Interpreted by whom, and in what context?". These questions are all linked to the issues of power framed by the questions: *Who gains and who loses? And by which mechanisms?* (ibid., p. 131). Using these questions, the idea is for the phronetic researcher to "get close to reality... [and] emphasize little things" or focus on the minutiae of the daily practices within the context of the participants and field of interest (ibid., pp. 132-134). The interconnectedness of the phenomena is emphasized and "the researcher then attempts to understand the roles played by the practices studied in the total system of relations" (ibid.). McKee reiterates this concept of a system stating that the more you know about the context of the text, not only as far as the rest of the text is concerned, but also the genre and wider public context within which the text circulates "the more likely you are to produce reasonable interpretations of a text" (McKee, 2001). What Flyvbjerg proposes seems an insurmountable enterprise were it not for his own qualification that no researcher is "experienced enough and wise enough to give complete answers to the four²¹ (*sic*) questions" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 61), but rather that the "partial answers" the phronetic researcher attempts should be "input to the

²¹ It is clear from this discussion that there are in fact five questions the researcher needs to ask. Flyvbjerg develops his questions and offers additional questions to focus the research. These additional questions have been incorporated in the discussion, but the quotation from Flyvbjerg's text has been kept verbatim.

ongoing social dialogue about the problems and risks we face and how things may be done differently" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 61).

3.4 Difficult choices: selecting animation case studies

Following from Flyvbjerg's definition of atypical cases, examples of such for television animation were chosen for this thesis because they "activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied" (ibid., p. 78). To both simplify and develop the thesis and related arguments however, the decision was taken to begin with a more accessible and documented example of an adult animation television series before moving to less prominent examples, in effect moving from more mainstream animated television to more marginal and less well known examples. It becomes a natural choice to choose those animation series that are in conflict with the status quo, or that have in some way caused exactly the moral outrage that Flyvbjerg refers to, either actual outrage of a morally objectionable nature due to content that is illegal or socially/culturally problematic, or perceived as outrageous, though without any clear indicator as to what taboo has been transgressed, whilst still being seen as transgressive by particular groups. These become the *atypical* cases that Flyvbjerg promotes as the best sites for research.

As a starting point Seth MacFarlane's *Family Guy* (1999-2002, 2005 – present, Fox) was chosen. This series comprises 11 aired seasons, but only nine seasons were available on digital videodisc (DVD) during the writing of this thesis. For consistency only the DVD versions of the series were used as data and in the analysis, comprising 139 episodes (averaging 22 episodes per season and 24 minutes running time each), along with the additional DVD titles *Family Guy Presents*, *Stewie Griffin: The Untold Story* (released in 2005), *Seth MacFarlane's Calvalcade of Cartoon Comedy* (2008), and the parody episodes of the Star Wars® trilogy *Family Guy: Blue Harvest* (2007), *Family Guy: Something, Something, Something Dark Side* (2009) and *Family Guy: It's a Trap* (2011)²².

I decided not to analyse and discuss equally memorable series, and arguably predecessors to *Family Guy*, such as *The Simpsons* (1989-present, FOX), *Ren & Stimpy* (1991-1996, Nickleodeon), *Beavis and Butthead* (1992-1997, 2011-

²² These episodes are published to DVD as separate episodes outside of the different seasons, but their official episode numbers still follow in chronological order and they serve in most cases as double episode season finales.

present, MTV), and *South Park* (1997-present, Comedy Central), as large bodies of work already exist on these series and aspects of gender and sexuality are well documented in academic literature and on fan sites and websites on the internet. Likewise similar series that are spinoffs of *Family Guy*, such as Seth MacFarlane's *American Dad* (2005-present, FOX) and *The Cleveland Show* (2009-2013, FOX), and Matt Groening's²³ *Futurama* (1999-2003, FOX, and 2008-2013, Comedy Central), were also not included. All of these series share a similar aesthetic and style as far as the animation is concerned and similar approaches to humour and the manner in which they engage with social issues. It should be noted that these are worthwhile series for future study, but for the sake of brevity and focus, and since *Family Guy* is illustrative of this group (or in Flyvbjerg's nomenclature typical of this atypical case), it was considered adequate to represent the larger trend.

To move the analysis beyond the mainstream and arguably beyond simply the hetero-normative²⁴, three further series are included in this analysis. Firstly the research considers Mike Reiss and Xeth Feinberg's *Queer Duck* (2002-2004, Showtime), originally available on Icebox.com, a web television platform, but later broadcast by the American cable television channel Showtime for a single season. This series featured only 20 episodes (averaging 3 minutes each) using Flash[®] animation, and a full-length feature released on DVD titled *Queer Duck: the Movie* (2006, Paramount Entertainment). Secondly, the research reflects on Dave Jeser and Matt Silverstein's *Drawn Together* (2004-2007, Comedy Central), the most mainstream of these alternative animations, and broadcast on a mainstream channel, Comedy Central. Though more mainstream, unlike *Family Guy*, *Drawn Together* had a limited run of three seasons before being cancelled. Nonetheless it does still have a very strong fan base on the internet. The series was broadcast on [adult swim]²⁵ a late night cable television network bundled with Cartoon Network and airing only after 9pm, essentially after primetime²⁶. This late night scheduling is due to the [adult swim] line up universally considered to me fairly unorthodox in terms of animation and quite risqué and

²³ The creator and writer of *The Simpsons*.

²⁴ Michael Warner popularises the term in the introduction to a special section of *Social Text* (Warner, 1991) and Samuel A. Chambers describes the heteronormative as "the expectations, demands, and constraints produced when heterosexuality is taken as normative within a society" (Chambers, 2003).

²⁵ This format of writing the name of the channel as the logo is linked to the branding of the channel.

²⁶ This is essentially an American broadcast television concept that has now become universal. Primetime is that period during the daily broadcast schedule considered the best for reaching the maximum number of audience members, between at its earliest, 7pm and at its latest 11pm all nights of the week. An ideal demographic of the potential audience for this time slot shapes ideas about the expected viewership, which in turn shapes the type of programme broadcast. These choices therefore have a subtle impact on the what is broadcast, and the content thereof.

often bizarre and surreal in terms of what is on offer. For the purposes of analysis only DVD versions of the seasons and episodes were considered (comprising 36 episodes and averaging 22 minutes per episode). The final *Drawn Together* movie *The Drawn Together Movie – the movie* (released in 2010), is included in the discussion. Finally, Q. Allan Brocka's *Rick & Steve* (2007-2009, Logo) is a Canadian-American stop-motion animated sitcom that debuted on the LGBTI focused Logo Network. It was the "first full-length animated series on commercial television that satirized (*sic*) all aspects of gay life" (Grippi, 2007) according to Advocate magazine. It comprised only two seasons (consisting of 14 episodes, averaging 22 minutes per episode) and included openly gay actors and members of the crew. The choice of series was also fortuitous as they form a neat "slice" out of the "noughties". When viewed chronologically *Queer Duck* is broadcast early in the 2000's (2002-2004), followed by *Drawn Together* (2004-2007), and then by *Rick & Steve* (2007-2009). *Family Guy* obviously breaks this trend as a (still) long running series. It could be argued however that with nine of its 14 years of broadcast between 2000 and 2009, *Family Guy* is as much a product of the "noughties" as the other series.

Family Guy and *Drawn Together* are ostensibly hetero-normative series which include representations of gay characters, and reflect on gay themes and issues, though they do represent different ends of the mainstream continuum, the former a long standing primetime series, the latter a successful, though short lived, late night series. *Drawn Together* is therefore a useful case to transition to the more niche market television series and less mainstream examples regarding content, especially apropos storylines, characters, themes and overall sensibilities as far as a potential audience is concerned. *Queer Duck* and *Rick & Steve* both move outside of the mainstream into marginalized narrative spaces using niche broadcasting channels, following the concept of localization²⁷ in the postmodern media landscape. Both the series were aimed specifically at homosexual audiences using recognisable LGBTI broadcast networks or media platforms. Due to this latter fact and to the series casts of majority gay and lesbian characters, the focus of the analysis is more on how these characters and storylines are portrayed, rather than a process of identifying the intermittent occurrences within the text.

²⁷ Localization is considered the reaction to globalization, where the proliferation of media (social and broadcast) not only extends the reach of media in terms of the size of its audience, but at the same time can focus and specialise its offerings to suit smaller niche groups within the larger audience.

Beyond this particular difference due to the nature of the narrative setting, the analysis follows the same process for all the series. All episodes were documented highlighting the scenes and sequences with gay or lesbian characters, characterizations, insinuations, and verbal and sight jokes and gags, as well as any representations of the sex act, either hetero- or homosexual, but with a focus on *taboo* as the title of this thesis suggests. Included in the documentation was the representation of sex and sexuality-related topics and issues, including plot points and storylines related to the narrative. All episodes were watched on one further occasion to document the commentary track (where such was available), and comments of the relevant member of the production team, either animator, producer or voice over artists, were collected.

3.5 Conclusion

For the purposes of an analysis of the representation of identity, additional contextual information was used to inform the discussion, including research into the creators (mostly producers and writers) and actors for the series, and the larger socio-historical context in which the texts were created, using online media and popular press. As will be shown in this thesis, the creators mentioned are considered the most significant in the creation of a character or in the decision-making process in terms of where the series or character is headed. Fortunately these are the same individuals used to represent an animation production company, and what they produce, in commentary tracks and interviews. While it would have been preferable and more appropriate for input directly from the animators, their presence does not predominate in commentaries and discussions, and in-depth considerations in their own voices are seldom documented, especially for the more current and controversial series²⁸. Animators as directors of individual episodes though are heard in articles and commentaries and where possible their voices have been included. It should be noted that here again, there is vast potential for future research to capture these individuals' impressions.

A thematic analysis was carried out of all the collected data to consider the creator (the animator, performer, producer, director or writer) of the material within the related discourse. The material itself was also considered in terms of

²⁸ This is less true for early animators and producers especially of the larger production houses. As the Literature Review in Chapter 2 has shown, the historiographic bent of most animation research favours documenting precisely these "lost" voices of the animators, at whatever level of the production hierarchy.

the socio-ideological aspects of the texts and the relationship of these to the larger themes of the thesis, namely identity, gayness, animation and transgression. The various texts were also compared and contrasted with each other to further integrate the different case study results. Overall a *phronetic* approach was taken in terms of analysing the data, namely considering not only the participants (the animators, producers and designers) but also what they produce (the television series), placed within the social context and considering the associated power relationships. The final analysis attempts to answer the questions, based on Flyvbjerg's value-rational questions: Where is animation going in terms of representation of male homosexuality? Is this desirable in terms of its potential impact on the social sphere? What can animation (productions and producers) do about it? Who gains and who loses in this process of representation? And, by what means and to what purpose?

As this thesis is focused on animation it's important to remember how animation plays a part in this process of analysis and interpretation. Wells (1998) reminds us that

the distinctive language of animation raises some important questions which are as much about the unique parameters of expression available to the animator as they are about socio-political issues. The conventional methods by which such issues are addressed will always be further complicated by the use of animation which, almost by definition, transforms the codes and conditions by which traditional or dominant modes of representation are considered (ibid., p. 187).

It is not only the expressions of the artists and the creators, the animators, of the television shows that are important, nor the impressions of the researcher, about simply the social, cultural or ideological impact of such series, but importantly that they are *animation* series and this uniqueness of these expressions in their animated form are the *most* important consideration in the analysis. While conventional methodologies and theories, applicable to many other forms of text and media, are being applied, it is their particularity as animated expressions and how this transmutes the consideration of the suggested modes of representation that are important and how these impact on not only the process of interpretation but their interpretation of representation *per se*.

And finally, a note on myself as the researcher, as the latter in any thematic analysis also becomes a mediating force in the process of analysis. I am an ardent fan of animation in general, the chosen texts in particular, and an openly gay man. And while this clearly biases me in terms of the chosen topic and themes, I have endeavored to remain as objective as possible in terms of the analysis regarding the proposed effects of such animation on the social sphere. Clearly some of the observations are a personal interpretation of the behaviours being studied, but the choice of hermeneutic approach as a philosophical framework specifically accommodates this trend and allows for subjective responses to be taken into consideration. Following from the lengthy discussion on the theoretical framework above it should be clear that my place within this research and the interaction with the data has been considered fastidiously.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

4.1 Animation: subversion or transgression?

Transgression is truly a key idea for our time. Society is created by constraints and boundaries, but as our culture is increasingly subject to uncertainty and flux we find it more and more difficult to determine where those boundaries – whether physical, sexual, natural or moral – lie²⁹.

Ontological discussions of animation more often than not make mention of its inherent quality of subversion, or subversive elements in its design, narrative, characterisations, or themes (see Tueth (2003) below, and Pilling 1997, Stabile & Harrison 2003, Johnson-Woods 2007, Wells 1998, Wells 2002, Wells 2008c to name only a few). An initial reading of a dictionary definition of the verb 'to subvert' defines this as to overthrow, overturn an established or existing practice, belief, or rule, to undermine, corrupt or pervert (O.E.D., 2012) something. Ostensibly, to subvert is to do something negative to a thing or destroy it and destroy the very rules that govern the thing. While 'to transgress' is defined as going beyond the bounds or limits prescribed by a law or command, to trespass, offend or sin (O.E.D., 2012), but not necessarily to do away with the very thing that it violates. While subversion as a concept inherently destroys that which it questions, transgression by comparison moves beyond the experience and incorporates it and its violation. This chapter deliberates on the choice of subversion as the appropriate description for animation and argues rather for the concept of transgression. I begin this chapter therefore begins with this deliberation and sets up the argument for transgression, before moving on to a discussion of the concept itself. This is followed with a brief history highlighting appropriate examples of transgressive television animation. Finally the chapter concludes with a discussion of the adult animation series this thesis uses as case studies.

4.1.1 Arguing subversion

Michael Tueth's chapter in Stabile and Harrison's *Prime Time Animation* (2003) titled *Back to the drawing board: the family in animated television comedy* (Tueth, 2003) is an appropriate example of thinking on the topic of prime time

²⁹ Peter Hamilton, the series editor for Chris Jenks' (2003) *Transgression*.

animation and the ubiquitous use of “the subversive” to describe it. Tueth discusses the establishment of the TV sitcom formula and how it migrated into similar televisual forms for animation shows, and while the focus of his chapter is on how appropriate the sitcom format and animation are to each other, and how the latent subversive aspects of both lead to a complementary and productive merging of the two forms, my discussion focuses rather on the conceptual use of the term subversion and its meaning as regularly employed in the discussion.

Drawing on an historical argument, Tueth shows how a television audience over time has come to expect, especially from the sitcom format, “some presentation of alternative viewpoints and more-or-less direct challenges to the prevailing values and social norms” (Tueth, 2003, p. 133). Tueth explains how the representation of the American family in the American sitcom has changed significantly over the years evolving “from the depiction of normative family life, even with less-than-traditional arrangements, to families that were problematic if not indeed dysfunctional, all of this explored in the codes of realism and naturalism” (ibid., p. 139), these latter codes meant “to persuade the viewer that the televised depiction of domestic and work settings reflect[s] the human situation” (ibid., p. 135). Tueth goes on to assert that it is only “when animation invaded television, however, [that] the discourse of television comedy was finally free to pursue a more *subversive* function” (my emphasis) (ibid., p. 139). Tueth repeats this idea in his discussion building on Kelner’s construct of television as an “emancipatory popular culture” (ibid., p. 134). He says

The ‘cartoon’ format that eventually arrived on television in the 1990s liberated the domestic sitcom from the straightjacket of visual naturalism... by combining the normative with the deviant aspects of family life in a *subversive* discourse... arriving at the *subversive* view of family life provided by animation (author’s emphasis) (ibid., p. 135).

Whilst Tueth’s argument is limited by his use of and reference to primarily “cartoons” (a distinct form or style of animation), the argument does extend to other styles of abstracted³⁰ animation. His argument suggests that the expectation on the part of the audience of both animation and sitcoms is to challenge the norm, to contest the boundaries or limits contemporary society

³⁰ Maureen Furniss describes abstraction as “the use of pure form” (Furniss, 2007, pg. 5). It is one end of a continuum, with mimesis at the opposite end of this scale, that defines the essential difference between animation and live-action.

imposes on itself. The process is however not finite, but ongoing, a contestation continually in flux as the boundary is forged and re-forged, a conceptual limitation that is never manifest or final before the next iteration restarts the process. However, the codes of production (especially for live action sitcoms) suggest that these representations are in fact real life, setting up a template of a social sphere that can be copied by the audience and appropriated into their reality. The sitcom therefore shapes reality as much as it reflects a view of what reality is or should be. When the expectations of the form and the codes of its presentation merge, as they do in adult animation series based on the sitcom format, even styled as abstracted cartoon, it can be supposed that similar issues of shaping reality apply to the animated sitcom as well.

In support of his argument, Tueth draws on the work of Darrell Hamamoto³¹ and Ella Taylor³², the former's discussion of the situation comedy, illuminating how this format more than any other popular art form, "has offered oppositional ideas, depicted oppression and struggle, and reflected a critical consciousness that stops just short of political mobilization" (Hamamoto in Tueth, 2003, p. 134), the latter proposing that "television celebrates the ordinary: and by doing so it suggests that certain versions of family life are normal and others deviant, strange or (by extension) nonexistent" (Taylor in *ibid.*, pp. 134-135) or that certain versions of the social construct are 'normative' as referred to earlier and normalizes the social construct over time. Tueth highlights how prime time animation, such as *The Simpsons* in the early 1990s, had not only "given television comedy the appropriate mode in which a subversive view of family life could be presented" (author's emphasis) (*ibid.*, p. 140), but by following this with similar comedies, such as *The Family Guy* in 1999 and many others subsequently which have all used the same popular sitcom formula "in the space of nine years, the innovative had become formulaic" (*ibid.*). This suggests that these series, whilst initially challenging the norm, recreate the norm as time goes by and even though Tueth describes these animations as subversive to start with, they very soon become the every day.

Clearly however, these animation series are still challenging aspects of society, as can be seen from the strong negative reactions³³ to much of their content and

³¹ Hamamoto, D. Y. (1989). *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology*. New York, US: Prager.

³² Taylor, E. (1989). *Prime Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America*. Los Angeles, US: University of California Press.

³³ These reactions are best illustrated by the comments on *Family Guy* forums, such as *Family Guy Forum* on www.tv.com, the *Family Guy Discussion* on www.familyguyfans.com, the various *Family*

storylines even decades after their premier on television, and clearly they still follow the same or similar formulas in the content and construction of their narratives and character situations, indeed in some cases they conform more and more to the generic standard over time (see below). Subversion would suggest that these types of animations should play themselves out as they annihilate themselves by undermining their own existence, and clearly this is not the case, as some kind of change takes place within the audience that sustains and even builds on a fan base. Clearly subversion is not what's happening. So subversion might describe the original introduction of the concept of an animation show (or indeed any new and novel television series), it doesn't describe what happens after this initial social response, or necessarily describe what takes its place.

These points highlight two applications of the word "subversion" and are not necessarily in conflict. The first is that Taylor's above discussion suggests representation on television can normalise what the audience considers as normal thereby subversively changing society. The second is found in Hamamoto's above suggestion that sitcoms continually try to (re-) establish what normal can and should be, by subverting ideas and views held about society and social constructs, actively interrogating and overturning a system of inculcated beliefs or understandings. Tueth is therefore suggesting that animated sitcoms, while initially "deviant" or subversive, over time come to be seen as "normative". Conceptually I agree with this evolutionary perspective pertaining to the challenging and changing of ideas within the social sphere the problematic concept here is the choice of the words subversive and subversion to describe the effect of the animated sitcom within the social sphere.

Subversion is also used, from the scholarly perspective, as synonymous to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnival or the carnivalesque (see below discussion) and here the discussion of Jenks (to follow) will show how transgression is a more appropriate moniker than subversion and better describes the presence of elements of carnivalesque in society. Tueth uses subversion and transgression interchangeably, as if they mean the same thing, and is drawing on the work of Robert Stam³⁴ and Umberto Eco³⁵ to support the argument of subversion. Conceptually though, Eco is appropriate for the subversion argument as Tueth

Guy threads on www.sitcomsonline.com, and Family Guy, Biggest complaints on www.tvtropes.org to name only a few. Also on the commentary track for S05E01 PTV it is rumoured that an official of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) said to the *Family Guy* production team, "We're tired of you infecting people with your smut. This is an epidemic and it must be contained".

³⁴ Stam, R. (1989). *Subversive Pleasures*. Baltimore, US: John Hopkins University Press.

³⁵ Eco, U. (1984). *Carnival!* (T. A. Sebeok, Ed.). Berling, GER: Walter de Gruyter.

also uses the former's description of carnival as a counter model within society and an "oppositional culture of the oppressed, a counter model of cultural production and desire... a symbolic, anticipatory overthrow of oppressive social structures" (Tueth, 2003, p. 141). This overthrow would seem to support the point that Tueth is attempting to make of animation as something subversive. Tueth finally proclaims animation as "television's version of the carnivalesque... *The Simpsons* and other successful animated domestic comedies have been able to explore darker, subversive aspects of family life thanks mainly to the possibilities of the cartoon aesthetic" (ibid.) erroneously conflating subversion, transgression and carnival with an ontological argument of television primetime animation. It should be noted that while this thesis ultimately agrees with the notion of television as a form of the carnivalesque, and animation as at its zenith, the discussion clearly demonstrates that the form is not subversive, but transgressive.

4.1.2 Arguing transgression

Transgression is not the same as disorder; it opens up chaos and reminds us of the necessity of order (Jenks, 2003, p. 7).

As transgression is so integral to my argument, it's important to understand what transgression is, how it emerges in social texts and contexts, and what it could mean as an expression of the social structures it seeks to address. It is by addressing transgressive aspects of animated television that this thesis will attempt to consider the impact of such television shows on the social sphere. In this section on transgression I therefore draw heavily on the work of Chris Jenks and his important contribution to elaborate this concept, his book aptly titled *Transgression* (2003).

Jenks' simple definition for transgression describes not only the phenomenon, but also its application as analytical tool. For Jenks transgression breaks rules and goes beyond accepted boundaries, it ignores limitations, but more than this it heralds those same rules and boundaries and indeed celebrates them by virtue of raising their profile (ibid., p. 2). Whether the transgression is positive or negative (and transgression as a concept tends to be seen in a negative light), the very act of engaging with the rule or law promotes said law. As such, transgression, as implied by Jenks' work, becomes a useful tool in social contexts and the analysis of social theories. To this end Jenks argues that transgressive behavior is an important part of any limitation, that such behaviour "does not

deny limits or boundaries, rather it exceeds them and thus completes them... transgression is a component of the rule" (Jenks, 2003, p. 7). Transgression therefore plays an important part in the dynamic nature of cultural reproduction by preventing stagnation in that it breaks the rule, but also "ensures stability by reaffirming the rule" (ibid.).

Jenks' discussion throughout his work focuses on the importance of transgression as a contemporary barometer of the social zeitgeist and highlights how this "sensitive vector" (ibid., p. 2) is mediated via the social and the cultural through the application of taboos³⁶, conventions, cultural restraints and legal strictures. He does however warn that while the latter clearly index the phenomenon "the roots of this particular problematic are to be found in more fundamental mindsets, be they moral or logical which inform both cultures and societies themselves" (ibid., p. 8) highlighting the ideological and power issues that we see in the discussion of this section. Following from this logic, I assume that television programmes also reflect aspects of the application of transgression within the social sphere, and that here too can be found the links to particular moral and ethical problems of society. These subtleties, or what Jenks' refers to as the nature of the supposed risk to society a transgression encapsulates, and the way in which the transgression is articulated and responded or reacted to, can enlighten a researcher regarding the moral and social interactions of a society. Thus transgression has a diagnostic role and is a "touchstone of social relations" (ibid., p. 33). What transgressions are enacted and how these develop and are exhibited can answer questions about the social sphere.

In this thesis this complex nature of transgression will highlight both these positive and negative aspects of the process of transgression itself with the emphasis on identity and representation. These two concepts, which form the analytical framework, are also covered (see Chapter 5) and integrated with the broader issue of transgression. The theoretical framework for this thesis is further complicated by the inclusion of animation, as issues of identity and representation need to be further developed alongside similar issues in the latter's discourse.

³⁶ Taboos are something avoided or prohibited by social custom, or as described by Jenks, "[t]aboos, are then, not external impositions, they are a response to a self-protective inner urge" (Jenks, 2003, p. 95).

4.2 Contextualising transgression?

Jenks explores the evolution of the concept of transgression through the literary works of a number of other authors such as Sigmund Freud, Georges Bataille, and Mikhail Bakhtin. This section is not a sustained critique of any one of these authors, a project far beyond the scope of this thesis, but highlights some of the salient points that develop Jenks' argument.

Jenks focuses on the cultural aspects of Freud's discussion of transgression and uses Freud's work to establish a social context for the act of transgression and how aspects of death and renewal in Freud's discussion mirror Jenks' assertion that transgression is both a denial and affirmation of the act. From the work of Freud, Jenks concludes that

what is forbidden, what is beyond the boundary, what is potentially unclean carries with it a propulsion to desire in equal measure. The banned fuels and magnetizes the lust, and the condemned object, place, person or course of action takes on a mesmeric eroticism (Jenks, 2003, p. 45).

With Freud's characteristic sexual perspective, the social sphere is held together by the tension between the forbidden, the desire for the very same and the knowledge of various social and legal constraints. The latter are set in place by the external forces of social condemnation and internal forces of desire and repulsion. For Freud the very nature of the social construct exists because elements are repressed. This would seem to contradict Jenks' fundamental argument of the centrality of transgression to the contemporary social sphere as transgression is by its very nature an exhibition. Freud's view places repression at the centre of his arguments for the functioning of polite society, while Jenks promotes transgression as the stabilising factor through the acting out of the transgressive act, the performance against or of the repression. It is thus the violation of the prohibition and not simply the knowledge thereof that realises the potential of the transgressive act. Freud's theory acknowledges the potential for transgression whilst denying any need for action to be taken, while Jenks' requires the act to balance out social extremes. Jenks' states simply "[t]ransgression confirms limits, it shows a consciousness of limits not their absence" (ibid., p. 95). Jenks at this stage is however building his case for the

centrality of transgression and merely employs Freud to focus on aspects of his own theory.

Jenks goes on to deliberate on how crudeness, when used as transgression, transects the social sphere and concepts within society, crudeness being the “transgressive act [that] can take us to these places without obeying the niceties of manner, politeness or style” (Jenks, 2003, p. 89). Transgression is here a double act, the crudeness contained in both the topic or content of the discussion and the style of the discussion itself, in this instance the use of language and choice of vocabulary. Transgression therefore functions on both levels, both the content and the performance of the act transgress. Jenks highlights Bataille’s notion of the necessity for transgression when he says that “evil is not transgression, it is transgression condemned” (Bataille³⁷ in *ibid.*, p. 92) implying that to deny the act of transgression is to do a greater disservice to the social context than the degree of disruption of the act itself. The argument Jenks is trying to make is how indispensable the act of transgression is to social interactions, and rather than something out of the ordinary and problematic to a healthy society, is in fact essential to it. For Jenks transgression is fundamentally part of the postmodern worldview, a process of searching for limits to break, so that the limit itself “becomes the transgression of limit. The nothingness of infinity is held in check through the singular experience of transgression” (*ibid.*, p. 90). Jenks’ argument focuses on transgression as the epitome of contemporary existential crisis, the final act of searching for meaning is to search everywhere with little or no regard for what is found and how it is found as far as acceptable social norms are concerned, to consider all that is taboo and find meaning in it. Indeed it is the relationship between the taboo and transgression that for Jenks is “a dynamic component in the process of cultural reproduction... the essential relation between taboo and transgression makes sensible... the stasis and determinacy of social structure and ...the innovation and agency inherent in the practice of social action” (*ibid.*, p. 95). Cultural reproduction is predominantly shaped through the boundaries or limitations set by society, both the legal prescript and the social norm shape our contemporary and future social interactions. The unacceptable becomes repressed as taboo and it is these margins and extremes of acceptability that transgression explores in order to understand the choices society makes and to question those choices. Jenks is reiterating his view here of the balancing act that is transgression in the social sphere.

³⁷ Bataille, G. (2001). *Eroticism*. London, UK: Penguin.

4.3 Transgression, the evolution of Carnival

For some animation theory authors³⁸ the Bakhtinian notion of carnival fulfills a transgressive role and Jenks goes on to discuss Bakhtin³⁹'s concept of carnival in depth. Especially from the perspective of an analytical tool to understanding the cultural context in the postmodern era, Jenks states

[w]ith the increasing politicization of cultural knowledge; with the increasing attention being paid to popular cultural forms, primitive, low-life, vulgar and marginalized cultural practice; and with the postmodern disassembly of traditional forms of cultural analysis, 'carnival' has come to provide a new metaphor and a new style for reading the social (Jenks, 2003, p. 164).

It is for Jenks especially with the rise of popular cultural forms (and for this thesis both television series and animation would be so considered), that carnival becomes a useful framework to consider social actions. In the above quotation popular culture is unfairly and perhaps unfortunately automatically linked to the primitive and vulgar, not necessarily the case, while highlighting the lack of clearly defined methods of enquiry into these popular phenomena in the postmodern era. Thus carnival becomes a useful lens and, as we shall see below from Jenks' discussion, transgression becomes an equally useful evolution of the concept. Carnival is not only a spectacle to be witnessed, but an event to be lived, that becomes all embracing. For the duration of carnival, "there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws" (Bakhtin in *ibid.*, p. 174), illustrating the potential connections to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* and Flyvbjerg's proposed phronetic research, the lived experience related to larger constructs of individual, community and, even further, ideology and power.

Bakhtin's discussion of carnival could be equally applicable to animation in particular and television programmes in general in contemporary viewership, where the spectator suspends disbelief and accepts the physics of the world, animated or otherwise, to be fully and deeply immersed in the experience of the narrative. The comparison is flawed however due to the very fact that television is a spectacle to be watched, rather than an event to be lived, and as such this

³⁸ See Lindvall, T. R. & Melton, J. M. *Towards a post-modern animated discourse, Bakhtin, intertextuality and the cartoon carnival* in J. Pilling (2007).

³⁹ Bakhtin, M. (2009). *Rabelais and his world*. Indiana, US: Indiana University Press.

comparison is unacceptable to those for whom the representation of carnival in a text cannot compare with the lived experience of the act. Wills⁴⁰, quoted in Jenks, sees the carnivalesque that is acknowledged in specifically novels as problematic, as he muses “[s]urely they [the critics] can’t really confuse reading a good book with the experience of carnival grounded in the collective activity of the people? What seems to be lacking in textual carnival is any link with a genuine social force” (Wills in Jenks, 2003, p. 167). It is this link between the textual carnival and social force that Jenks goes on to elaborate and develop in his argument for transgression. As opposed to its progenitor the carnivalesque, which is a lived experience, transgression can be experienced via the act as well as the text with the full implication of its potential as a social force.

For Jenks the carnival reproduces and parallels dominant social orders through parody with a “calculated inversion of existing social forms and cultural configurations...” (ibid., p. 162) and is the perfect postmodern device because it is “style unrestricted, method without parameter or rigour, decentred identity and a continuously broken chain of signifiers” (ibid., p. 164). Brian Ott quotes John Fiske⁴¹ noting, “elements of the carnivalesque style are common to some televisual genres”, and highlights cartoons that “frequently invert ‘normal’ relationships” as a staple of the carnival. The pleasure in the carnivalesque comes from “escaping from the rules and conventions that are the agents of social control” (Fiske in Ott, 2008, p. 44). The intertextual nature of animation, and how it inverts relationships and overturns social rules, clearly relates to this definition especially with the complex web of meaning that is skillfully imbricated into layers of significance for different audiences of different ages and levels of historical, animation and pop cultural knowledge, and the inherent complexity that the animated image brings to the interpretation of issues of representation. Ott (2008) offers *South Park* as a paramount example of an easily recognised instance of transgressive television animation, not only due to the escapism, inversion and intertextuality noted above, but more so to how it enlists the participation of its viewers in an act of transgression, the mere watching of the show means that viewers “transgress the boundaries of social acceptability” (ibid., p. 42). The spirit of carnival is therefore still alive and well, but made manifest through different modes of engagement with this social disposition.

⁴⁰ Wills, C. (1989). *Upsetting the public: carnival, hysteria and women's texts*. In K. A. Hirschkop (Ed.), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

⁴¹ Fiske, J. (1987). *Television Culture*. London, UK: Methuen.

Especially in the animated television series this thesis considers, the narrative and production style remains firmly grounded in the existing social forms of reality and representation, though complicated on numerous levels through the use of different techniques of animation and what animation can bring through its materiality to the context, such as cartoon physics and impossible mutations. The selected animation format, namely adult animation or cartoons, remains ostensibly recognisable, the characters identifiable as human, though transformed through the use of animation, and environments to which we as the audience can easily relate being realistic in depiction. Much like carnival, the characters of these shows, though recognizable, "are no longer who they are, and the masquerade becomes the basis for interaction. Transformed identity is conveyed through mask and costume, and the revelation of true self is disallowed" (Jenks, 2003, p. 162). The animated characters become the avatar of the projected spectator or the perceived average person, the masks behind which the audience can hide to revel in the transgression that is mimicking the act of carnival. Wells' theoretical work on animation also notes the "regenerative aspects of Bakhtin's conception of 'carnival'" and how, "[during] carnival, fixed social roles were abandoned in favor of a more fluid conception of identity" in (Wells, 1998, p. 210). The extension of Jenks' argument is that animation takes the place of carnival as the substitute form thereof in contemporary, postmodern society, and while this particular argument is not the focus of this thesis, the development of an understanding of the particular transgressive issues assist in developing it.

Furthermore Jenks suggests that carnival as symbol of transgressing is now essentially defunct⁴² and "has transmogrified into a concept signifying resistance, disorder and methodological irresponsibility in contemporary cultural studies" (Jenks, 2003, p. 160), clearly contradicting the ideas of Bataille and Freud that shape Jenks' argument. For Jenks therefore contemporary carnivalesque embodies some of the aspects of transgression, but rather as a destabilizing force without the conceptual checks and balances that he prefers to believe is the case of transgression. And while the act of carnival itself was a way of both allowing an outlet for transgressions, usually only enacted as thought, whilst still containing those predictable acts considered shocking and offensive, it is an aspect of society that could never fully be expunged, because "to ban carnival is to release the spectre of transgression upon the full span of everyday life, to render it invisible, to pathologise it and, perhaps worst of all, to add to the

⁴² Jenks refers to "the deceased carnival" (Jenks, 2003, p. 169).

piquancy of such excess now covert" (ibid., p. 166), the *evil* that Bataille refers to earlier as transgression condemned. Jenks suggests that the original concept of carnival was essentially to ensure a balanced society, an interpretation more closely linked to the contemporary concept of transgression, and as the concept of carnival presumes a disruptive force in society, transgression is suggested as the preferred concept.

Historically, it becomes clear that some form of transgression as experienced by a society in the form of traditional carnivals is essential for society's wellbeing and ensures that problematic issues do not become desirable precisely because they are undesirable. Again, for this thesis, television and animation take on the original role of carnival to act as an outlet⁴³. Such media become the venue for the "licensed mayhem" that carnival allowed in the rude, the shocking and the offensive (Jenks, 2003, p. 166). While Jenks does refer directly to the "death of carnival", both as the end of an era and the death of the act itself as a conceptual mechanism for social analysis, he does declare that such "symbolic inversion" that was part and parcel of the carnival has not in fact ceased but "has gone underground, or re-emerged, or been sublimated, or re-formed or perhaps it is just what we, as human beings, do" (ibid., p. 171) and that whatever form these inversions may take "they are all ways of approaching the human disposition to transgress and mechanisms for celebrating elemental chaos despite the amnesia induced through modernity's quest for order" (ibid.).

This thesis will show how animation is one such instance of a mechanism where this elemental chaos of the contemporary social order can be overtly challenging to such an order by directly engaging with issues through the rude and crude in both content and presentation⁴⁴ and essentially become an important balance. Jenks eloquently sums up this chaos of conflict and highlights his conception of the place of transgression in this process. For Jenks the relationship between what he terms "high and low orders" (ibid., p. 173) is antagonistic. These terms echo similar concepts of the sacred and profane, upper and lower class, high culture versus low culture, etc. but always set up as an antagonistic dichotomy struggling both to be recognized as well as for supremacy. Their interrelatedness

⁴³ Jenks suggests that carnival has "become resurrected as the carnivalesque in new loci... the spatial has replaced the temporal; cyclical festivities have transmogrified into places of fun and naughtiness. We no longer anticipate the joys of carnival, we go to places where its manifestations can be routinely guaranteed" (Jenks, 2003, p. 169), such as festivals, large scale events, and television.

⁴⁴ Tueth notes that what would "tend to offend viewers if presented in graphic realism... [in] their very exaggeration in animation... become ludicrous and beyond offense" (Tueth, 2003, p. 142).

is however locked into this struggle as invariably one defines and exists because of the other. Jenks concludes that

power, fear and intimidation are clear components of this complex relation, yet this is transformed, symbolically, into a desire, a fascination... an eroticization... and finally a way of letting-off-steam (and think here of the carnival's drunkenness, debauchery, overeating, defecating, belching and farting). The transition from one order to the other is transgression (Jenks, 2003, p. 173).

Transgression is therefore important to disrupt the potentially harmful aspects of social conflict by allowing an interaction between the undesired with the desired through a process or act that moves the participant from one state to the next. Transgression is therefore always to *transgress*, to move from one state to another, it is not a static and stagnant place or moment, but the progress from one such state to another. It's important to note here Jenks' examples of such transgressions, i.e. defecating, belching and farting, not only do they represent the abject but they read as a list of standard components of many animation series including adult animation.

Transgression is the act of flouting rules and celebrating in that process, of turning a mirror on society and acknowledging all the parts that make up society in graphic detail, even those topics and aspects commonly eschewed by polite society; it is to question rules and regulations, both formal and informal, to re-think and re-define what these rules are and how they work within society. And while generally seen as something problematic and damaging, ultimately transgression positively re-shapes society by creating an opportunity for controlled conflict, catharsis and contemplation. As Ott suggests, "unlike other disruptive pleasures, abjection and carnival do not destroy the social. Rather, they challenge its naturalization through a series of boundary crossings... the abject and carnivalesque reorder signs" (Ott, 2008, p. 51).

4.4 A brief history of transgressive animation

You remember Lenny Bruce? Lenny Bruce said in one of his lectures one time, 'the laws of obscenity and that kind of thing, can never be constant because what we consider moral keeps shifting, shifting,

shifting'... and the stuff he got accused of doing that was obscene, you hear those jokes on The Tonight Show now⁴⁵.

To illustrate transgression in the context of animation and the spaces it makes available, I now move on to a historical discussion of some of the more prominent examples of animation series that are transgressive in nature. It is important to bear in mind what Richard Dyer says about the place of television in the history of the representation of transgressive identities, and not only from the perspective of animation, but especially with reference to sexualities. Dyer notes "cinema has probably been more significant as a central definer of sexualities than any other cultural institution in our century, including television, where the representation of sexuality has been severely restricted" (Dyer, 2002, p. 29). An initial criticism of this statement would be that Dyer's work focused predominantly on cinema as opposed to television, and that there is therefore a clear bias in this assumption, though the context of his writing is important. This second edition of his seminal *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*, published in 2002, is an anthology that looks back over two decades of publications, and this particular quotation was originally penned in 1983, well in advance of arguably the golden years of television sitcom, the 1980's, and the liberation of gay and lesbian characters, both in terms of numbers and diversity in films and television, in the 1990's, and the same for specifically animation, beginning in the early 2000's.

Contemporary transgressive animation owes its present status to a distinct historical development, with these historical junctions owing a great deal to the particular socio-historical context of the period in which these animations are produced. A brief history of primetime television animation will highlight these changes and show the relationship of this evolution. In light of the abundance of potential examples, only key moments in the television animation timeline have been referred to and as such this is not an exhaustive list. Also, as the thesis focuses on the evolution and discussion of mainly North American series, the focus is only on this market. The emphasis is on those television series, some primetime favourites and some less well known, which most academic writers agree represent the important moments in the evolution of television animation and more specifically what constitutes animation acceptable or not to primetime broadcasting.

⁴⁵ Frank Sinatra. Jr. to Seth MacFarlane during the commentary track for *Brian Sings and Swings*, Family Guy, S05E06, #4ACX21.

The “We’ll have a gay ol’ time” reference in the title of this thesis is a clear allusion to the main title theme song from *The Flintstones* (ABC, 1960-66). This series is arguably the “first ‘prime-time’ cartoon” (Wells, 2008c, p. 148) that drew heavily on the sitcom format established by *The Honeymooners* (CBS, 1955-56). It is therefore the pre-eminent example of not only animation that finds its way into the primetime slot on broadcast television, but also of animated sitcoms, a model which is inherited and incorporated into many of its successors, such as the ubiquitous *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989 to present), as well as *King of the Hill* (Fox, 1997 to 2010) and, of course one of the central texts for this thesis, *Family Guy* (Fox, 1999 to 2002, 2005 to present). Weinstock (2008a, p. 80) reminds us that after the last episode of the original broadcast of *The Flintstones* in 1966, animation all but disappears from primetime for 23 years, until the premier of *The Simpsons* in 1989. Weinstock also suggests that *The Flintstones* “functioned as a form of ‘sketch TV’ that ‘transgressed and broadened the boundaries of what TV animation⁴⁶ could do’” (Weinstock, 2008a, p. 81). While made in the 1960’s, the socio-cultural context of the stories is niched in the 1950’s in terms of home and work life, and gender structures. The setting in the prehistoric era therefore creates an interesting comment on the social repression of the 1950’s from a 1960’s perspective, though this was not necessarily an intention of the animators. As animation, *The Flintstones* was pushing the boundaries of style and technique, as well as diversifying the channels available for its distribution, but from the perspective of this thesis, some of the more interesting transgressions would be the homosocial constructions of the relationships in the narrative and especially between the “buddies” Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble. Like *Sesame Street*’s (The Jim Henson Company, 1969 to present) Ernie and Bert, contemporary Queer theory has reinterpreted these moments of male bonding from homosocial to homosexual, and while there is no real justification for the latter, it does show the potential of animation to create an interpretive space to suggest different kinds of transgressions.

Booker (2006, p. x) attributes the sitcom structure of the animation television series to the nature of North American television in the early years of its introduction and the covert acquisition of this preferred format by any new

⁴⁶ Although it falls outside the limitations of this thesis, another important animation work to mention as an early representative of transgressive animation is Ralph Bakshi’s *Fritz the Cat* (1975). Wells describes Bakshi as “the legendary maker of the first recognized ‘X’-rated feature cartoon” (Wells, 2008c, p. 148) and he and his work are clear examples that transgression is not limited to television animation. More recently *Ralph Bakshi’s Spicy City* (1997) has again “provided an indication that beliefs are indeed changing” (Furniss, 2007, p. 225) in terms of televisual representation of sex and sexuality. A brief history of x-rated filmic animation is quoted in Capino (2004).

contributor. Booker suggests that the family sitcom was a “staple of American television from the very beginning”, and this is why so many later animated shows after *The Flintstones*, and later again after the success of *The Simpsons*, follow this format. The initial season of *The Simpsons* is unique in that it is highly creative in both its approach to the style of television animation and to the content of the shows in terms of the narrative. The animation however soon settles into a specific style and design that loses some of its more filmic approach, especially with regards shot type and the construction of sequences, and the more televisual approach becomes characteristic of the series, reminiscent of the television sitcoms it reproduces. The general approach however to content and characters that question and comment on aspects of the social sphere still remains consistent in its approach to challenging society norms⁴⁷. O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2012, pg. 241) note that *The Simpsons* was in fact originally “considered too shocking to be broadcast on British television” though gradually they become less shocking. It is this transgressive aspect of *The Simpsons* that then opens the doors for other series to challenge boundaries even further, the best example and best-known being *South Park* (Comedy Central, 1997 to present).

Wells, in discussing specifically television animation, refers to *South Park* as having “radicaliz[ed] subject matter for television broadcast” (Wells, 2008c, p. 149) with what Booker (2006, p. xi) refers to as a departure from the family sitcom format. While it retains the basic sitcom idea of narratives surrounding a particular family in a particular setting with recognizable daily situations at the heart of each episode, the idea of the family construct shifts from the traditional “nuclear” family of the 1950s to not only multiple families and their stories, but to dysfunctional families, and even to different interpretations of family, such as the family of four friends who are the protagonists of the series, and the groups that you construct or belong to in the postmodern world. This series also highlights the importance of cable television as a home for animated programming, because Booker explains

the brash, intentionally outrageous style and subject matter of *South Park*, which would almost certainly not have been allowed on network television in 1997 when the series premiered, established cable as an

⁴⁷ The catalogue of academic papers, books, websites, fan sites and other electronic sources regarding *The Simpsons* is vast, as to be expected after a successful run of over 25 years of programming, as are the number of concomitant debates both within academia and within public discourse, and therefore a full and detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.

important site for groundbreaking animated programming (Booker, 2006, p. xi).

In his argument Booker suggests that not only is cable at the time the only possible outlet for such animation, but that due to the success of series like it, but mainly directly because of the success of *South Park*, cable television⁴⁸ is established as the best option for such transgressive animation (ibid., p. xii). Booker also suggests that *South Park*'s pivotal role in the evolution of transgressive television animation is how it

changed a number of fundamental audience expectations concerning animated programming... [and] paved the way for a new generation of daring, often risqué animated programming... many of these programs seem almost specifically designed to try to outdo *South Park*... series, which often seem to present outrageous material just for the sake of being outrageous (Booker, 2006, p. xii).

While *South Park* stands out as a premier example of primetime and transgressive animation, primarily due to its almost universal recognition and to the level of outrage it received (and still receives) for most of its content, it is noted by Weinstock that this success is related to "previous programming [which] opened particular spaces for *South Park* to colonize" (Weinstock, 2008a, p. 88). Some of these lesser known titles (such as *Ren & Stimpy*) that shape this space, are placed in chronological and historical context below. It should however also be noted that many of the later series owe their existence to the groundwork laid by the outrageousness of *South Park*, as Booker suggests. So while *The Flintstones* and *The Simpsons* laid the groundwork for animation on television, and opened the space for transgression in terms of design and format, *South Park*, arguably lays the foundation for transgression in television animation and declaring and embracing controversy, and specifically established and sanctioned transgression during primetime broadcast.

Some of the other less globally recognized, though equally as influential, animation series⁴⁹ as far as the early move to transgression is concerned, include

⁴⁸ Cable television is a subscription based distribution network for televisual programming and requires a physical link, usually a co-axial cable as opposed to an antenna, and decoder box to the transmitted source. This is a more expensive and more controllable public broadcast system.

⁴⁹ It is important here to mention *Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation* mentioned by both Weinstock (2008a, p. 83) and Furniss (2007, p. 225). This San Diego company and their

Ren & Stimpy (Nickleodeon, 1991 to 1996), *Beavis and Butthead* (MTv, 1993 to 1997, 2011), *The Critic* (ABC, 1994-95), and *Mission Hill* (Warner Brothers, 1999-2000). *Ren & Stimpy* is another series considered a form of "sketch TV" which "gleefully transgressed established animation conventions and thereby both altered and extended the medium's possibilities" (Weinstock, 2008a, p. 83). *Ren & Stimpy* is seen as a direct ancestor to *South Park*, the latter having explicitly gleaned the former's "exuberant pursuit of grossness and vulgarity" (ibid.). Weinstock specifically refers to this series as "transgressing all limits of propriety and taste" including "(years before *South Park's* Mr Hanky) a living fart named Stinky" (Weinstock, 2008a, p. 83). *Beavis and Butthead* is an equally colourful series, pushing the boundaries of acceptable television animation especially in terms of language that tended to focus on sex and sexuality. The two main characters often hurled verbal abuse at each other with derogatory terms such as 'asswipe', 'assmunch' and 'butt burglar' (ibid., p. 88 and Furniss, 2007, p. 203). In *The Critic*, an episode titled "Miserable" (broadcast February 16, 1994) spoofs *Misery* (1990) (the film adaptation of the Stephen King novel), "in an episode with clear undertones of sadomasochism and bondage" (Booker, 2006, p. 105). And finally *Mission Hill* is a series in which the characters, the residents of the Mission Hill district, include two gay residents, a couple who figure prominently in the show (ibid., p. 112). Their relationship, according to Booker, is never treated as "bizarre or preposterous" (ibid.). These shows represent the various and different areas of the social sphere with which animation attempts to engage, whether it's pushing the boundaries of good taste as far as storylines, characters and visuals are concerned, or in reconfiguring permissible language or taking a progressive stance in terms of acceptable relationships and their representation.

After this initial burst of transgressive activity in the 1990's, the "noughties" (the decade 2000 to 2009) according to Wells (2008c, p. 151) take a "more anti-establishment approach to adult animation" especially in Britain, and Furniss (2007:225) highlights some of these animations aimed specifically at an adult audience such as Joanna Quinn's *Body Beautiful* (1990), *Crapston Villas* (created by Sarah Ann Kennedy, 1995, 1998), *Pond Life* (created by Candy Guard, 1996, 2000), and *Bob and Margaret* (1998 to 2001). Equally in North America, animated series like *South Park* had demonstrated "the rich possibilities offered by adult-oriented, cartoon bawdiness" (Booker, 2006, p. 166) and in September 2001 Cartoon Network establishes the [adult swim] (Cartoon Network, 2001 to

festival helped to launch a number of transgressive series that later achieved success, giving a platform for exposure to then unknown pilot episodes and untried novel ideas.

present) late-night programming block which becomes a crucial venue for airing “risqué, adult-oriented comedy programs and animé-inflected and often ultra-violent action programs” (ibid.). [adult swim] ultimately becomes extremely successful and for Wells (2008a, p. 155) “proof of the attraction of animated programming to mature audiences worldwide”. Series like *Harvey Birdman* (Williams Street, 2001 to 2007) move beyond merely rude jokes and bad language to include reflections on identity in society. In the pilot episode *Bannon Custody Battle* (originally broadcast in December 2000) there is a strong suggestion that the lead characters of Dr Quest and Bannon are involved in a longtime homosexual liaison (Booker, 2006, p. 171). Likewise *Robot Chicken* (2005 to present) according to Wells (2008a, p. 155), “exploit[s] the surreal and subversive opportunities afforded by the freedoms of the animated form, [to] speak directly to the more taboo aspects of adult culture” including storylines that represent bestiality, paedophilia, and many other sexual and social taboos, all the while mocking the media, religion and politics.

While this is only a small selection of examples, the diversity of potential for transgression is clear, and more interesting is the incremental spirit of this ongoing boundary contestation. While the early animated series, such as *The Simpsons*, merely challenges general social norms of what it means to be a family, showing disfunctions in the relationship between parents and siblings, later episodes and later series, such as *South Park*, continue in this tradition, but go further to challenge the very structure of family and *inter alia* the nature of character and social identity *per se*. With the establishment of outlets for discussing taboo subjects, such as [adult swim], the simple (though arguably still ultimately repellent) abject humour of series like *Ren & Stimpy* comes of age and becomes more pronounced, focusing more on creating a platform for social commentary by highlighting the taboo and pushing it to its illogical conclusion, such as is often the case with the sketches in *Robot Chicken*. The point that Wells makes is that animation lends itself to pushing the boundaries of what is possible and this in turn creates the opportunity for executing even the most bizarre and sordid images that the animator or writer can envision. Transgression is then that social function that drives this contestation ever forward.

4.5 Contextualizing transgressive animation

The four selected series are examples of transgressive animation and take their place in the historical progression discussed above. Before moving on to a more

detailed analysis of the content of these series (see Chapter 6), this section briefly contextualizes the series historically and socio-politically, illustrating the interrelated aspects that all play a part in establishing them as transgressive.

4.5.1 Family Guy

Pawtucket Patriot Beer Spirit: Geez, what's with you and the gay jokes?"⁵⁰

Family Guy is a dense example in terms of a discussion of transgressions and identity, as there is not only no single version of an episode, but the episodes themselves are layered with jokes and visual puns of a sexual and transgressive nature. As Seth McFarlane states in the *Family Guy* commentaries on several occasions⁵¹, there are multiple versions of the episodes, namely; a primetime FOX or Cartoon Network version, an [adult swim] version and then the DVD release version. These different versions make a thorough analysis of the series highly complex as in some cases the original broadcast versions essentially no longer exist, having been replaced by the final DVD version. Whilst it is possible that bootleg versions recorded during the original broadcast may have been made, these were for obvious reasons not available for this analysis. The difference between the versions is also interesting in that the primetime broadcast version was the most excised both for duration as well as for censorship issues⁵². The [adult swim] version is, according to Seth McFarlane, a version that included some of the censored content they were only allowed to show during late night viewing, as [adult swim] is a more adults only animation segment, and was content that MacFarlane specifically wanted broadcast. The DVD version, not bound by such strict issues of duration or censorship by corporate structures, contains all the footage that was cut, even additional deleted scenes that never made it to the final show due to creative decisions from the series producers themselves⁵³.

The analysis is based on the DVD versions and is therefore less of an indication of the censorship structures that represent the narrow viewpoints of corporate

⁵⁰ *Family Guy*, S01E03, #1ACX03, *Mind over murder*

⁵¹ Seth MacFarlane mentions this fact at least once during the commentary of every boxed set from Season 1 till Season 9, the latter the last season considered for this analysis.

⁵² Both Seth MacFarlane and David Goodman regularly highlight the scenes, lines or jokes that were cut or censored during the commentary tracks, and in some cases also give the different versions of the lines suggested during the writing process.

⁵³ These scenes are either restored to the episode in their original intended position in the sequence, or included in "Deleted Scenes" sections on the final DVD for each box set. It is not made clear in the commentaries why this differentiation takes place.

executives, but rather more of an indication of the specific voices of the producers and what this says both about the producers, their use of animation, and the representations of characters from the producers' perspectives. Whilst the latter is no more generalizable than the opinion of the corporate censors, the wide spread acceptance of the series and its inclusion into main stream popular culture suggests that the general themes, ideas and ideologies resonate with a wider audience⁵⁴ and the success of the series suggests that this is appreciated. Indeed it is primarily due to a small, online fan base, according to Seth Macfarlane⁵⁵, that the television series owes its continued existence, having been cancelled at least twice in its history, but brought back to the television screen through the fans concerted e-mail and online efforts. It is only after the first three series were packaged as a DVD and released that the fan base burgeoned and along with that the support to re-instate the show, which finally happened when Series 4 was aired in 2005. The show has continued an unbroken record since then.

Also, while the show employs an entire staff of writers⁵⁶, Seth Macfarlane is arguably the brains behind the series. In 1995, while studying animation, MacFarlane conceived his student thesis titled *The Life of Larry*. This idea evolved into *Larry and Steve*⁵⁷ comprised of the duo of a middle-aged man and his intelligent dog, they would later become the central characters of Peter Griffin and Brian in *Family Guy* (Lenburg, 2006, p. 221). *Family Guy* has its own spinoff and related series from the same producer(s), respectively *The Cleveland Show* and *American Dad*. Both are still created and produced by Seth Macfarlane, but have their own distinct premises and structures that differentiate them from the original series. Very often the series share characters and sketches for comedic effect, but these series, and their interrelatedness, are not covered in this research.

The basic premise of *Family Guy* follows the sitcom structure (dubbed the AniCom by Nichola Dobson, *forthcoming*) and follows similar structures established by television formats as early as *The Honeymooners* (CBS, 1955 to 1956) and *I love Lucy* (CBS, 1951 to 1957) from 1950's American television.

⁵⁴ The official *Family Guy* website www.fox.com/familyguy/community indicates the series has over 48 million fans.

⁵⁵ *Family Guy*, S05, *World Domination: The Family Guy phenomenon featurette*.

⁵⁶ In its 13 year run this has included, amongst others, Chris Sheridan, Danny Smith, Gary Janetti, Ricky Blitt, Neil Goldman, Garrett Donovan, Matt Weitzman, Mike Barker, Steve Callaghan, Matt Weitzman, Alex Borstein, and Seth MacFarlane himself.

⁵⁷ This short was broadcast in 1997 as one of Cartoon Network's *World Premiere Toons* (Lenburg, 2006).

This choice of format is interesting in terms of animation as Seth Macfarlane indicates in a 'Making of...' episode, that he eschews the particular abilities of animation (i.e. metamorphosis⁵⁸) and prefers the realism of talking heads and characters that predominantly follow the physics of the real world. This is a clear contradiction of Wells' assertion of the plastic nature of animation⁵⁹.

While *Family Guy* is not necessarily as mainstream as other forms of animation, e.g. Disney animation, it is shown during watershed times as primetime animation and as such is accessible to a larger audience than other animation time slots, e.g. [adult swim]. For the sake of developing this thesis, it is the most mainstream of the series that will be considered and therefore the starting point for this analysis.

4.5.2 Queer Duck

Lance: I've slept with seven men in my life.

Queer Duck: And you call yourself a homosexual? Puh-leez!⁶⁰

Mike Reiss and Xeth Feinberg are the creators of the series *Queer Duck* (1999 to 2004). Reiss wrote all the episodes for the initial internet and later television series as well as writing the DVD release *Queer Duck: The Movie* (2006), while Feinberg provided the character design and directed all the animation for the various productions. Reiss is no stranger to animation having won four Emmy Awards[®] for his work on *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989 to present), independently producing *Hard Drinkin' Lincoln* (2000) along with Xeth Feinberg, and co-creating *The Critic* (ABC, 1994-1995) (Greater Talent Network, 2013). David B. Levy, in his blog, *Animondays* (Levy, 2011), refers to Xeth Feinberg as a "key player" of the "first internet media businesses" in the early 2000's providing content for the new digital platforms. Feinberg was an independent animator and cartoonist with a background in digital animation who had been developing the potential for Macromedia Flash[®] animation on the internet. Feinberg's company MishMashMedia, founded in 1997, becomes the animation production house for *Queer Duck*. Feinberg notes that *Queer Duck* "became the most popular series on Icebox [now defunct] with some 50,000 viewers logging on the first day it posted

⁵⁸ For Wells (1998, p. 15) one of the intrinsic elements to animation is "the primacy of the image, and its ability to *metamorphose* into a completely different image".

⁵⁹ Wells (1998, p. 22) discusses Sergei Eisenstein's condition of *plasmaticness* as something, "resisting being fixed and stable". The plastic nature of animation relates to this idea of instability in shape and form of the characters and environments that allows for metamorphosis and the transgression of reality.

⁶⁰ *Queer Duck*, S01E03, *Oh, Christ!*

[in October, 2000]" (Feinberg, 2001). A year later, Feinberg comments "like a truly flaming phoenix, *Queer Duck* has miraculously risen from the internet junk heap to find a new and bigger audience [on broadcast television]" (Feinberg, 2002), unlike many other online series that had simply vanished along with so many start up internet companies at the time.

Originally produced as 5 webisodes in Flash[®] Animation for Icebox.com in 2000, the series was picked up by Showtime online (SHO.com) in 2002 and 15 additional commissioned episodes added as a supporting feature for the series *Queer as Folk (US)* (Showtime, 2000 to 2005) (Feinberg, 2002). Although not the first cartoon to include gay characters on American broadcast channels⁶¹, *Queer Duck* did become the first broadcast animated series to have homosexuality as its main theme. Reiss acknowledges in a 2006 interview that *Queer Duck* is "the thing I'm most excited about in my entire life", adding that he didn't like the way gay people were treated in comedy, saying, "[representations of] gay people are nothing besides their gayness. So I created a cartoon that was pro-gay and featured gay animals" (Teller, 2006). In an interview the previous year Feinberg had also commented on the portrayal of the characters in the full-length film saying, "it's not just a movie about gay cartoon characters, it's a cartoon where some of the main characters are gay. It's actually a pretty complicated story" (Aaron, 2005). Feinberg also remarks on the aesthetics of the series, noting "no one will confuse the animation in *Queer Duck* with *Fantasia*... but it does a good job of bringing the flamboyant characters and fabulous story to life with zest and personal style" (Feinberg, 2002). Daynah Burnett, in a review of the DVD release of the film (Burnett, 2006), is less enthusiastic about the characters and the focus of the narrative. While Burnett admits the gay characters aren't offensive *per se*, the general impression is that they are obvious and boring stereotypes, and for a film "interested in delivering an envelope-pushing gay parody" rather delivers commentary veiled as humour that is "more sophomoric than progressive".

⁶¹ The accolade for "first" gay character is difficult to pin down. The following list is of shows that include gay or lesbian or LGBTi identified characters. *The Simpsons* is the earliest American broadcast animated television show that includes gay characters, but while officially beginning broadcast in 1989, the most obviously gay character of Waylon Smithers never openly identifies as gay, even though the innuendoes are a continuing running gag throughout the series. The earliest innuendo however is made in the first season episode (E08) *The Telltale Head* (in 1990). *South Park* (beginning broadcast in 1997) is a more obvious choice as the character of Big Gay Al already appears acting openly gay in episode 4 of the first season (in 1997). The more obvious (closeted) Mr. Garrison only comes out as openly gay in the season four episode (E11) titled *4th Grade* (in 2000). There is an upsurge of animated series containing gay characters that begin broadcasting in 1999, with *Mission Hill*, *Futurama*, and *Family Guy*, the latter including the obviously gay, but confused Stewie. *Queer Duck* premieres on television in 2002. Subsequently *The Venture Bros.* is broadcast in 2003, *Drawn Together* premieres in 2004, *American Dad!* in 2005, *Code Monkeys* and *Rick & Steve* in 2007, *The Cleveland Show* and *Archer* in 2009, *Good Vides* and *Allen Gregory* in 2011, and most recently *Brickleberry* in 2012.

Burnett refers to the DVD featurette "Getting the Right Homosexual" and how Reiss maintains (it is claimed) everyone working on the film production was heterosexual, with the exception of Jim J. Bullock (who voiced the titular Queer Duck), "because backers insisted".

4.5.3 Drawn Together

Captain Hero: Dude, you are so gay.

Xandir: You know something, these jokes you make can be so hurtful.⁶²

Dave Jeser and Matt Silverstein are the creators of what they themselves refer to as the "crappy idea" and "nonsense show" (Aitken, 2009) called *Drawn Together* (2004 to 2007, Comedy Central). A third writer, Jordan Young (previously an animator on *The Simpsons*) makes up the other key creative partner for this television series. Matt Silverstein suggests in the *Drawn Together: Creator's Confessional* Youtube clip (ibid.) that the premise for the show resulted from a fit of pique whilst reading through bad screenplays and television pilot ideas. In this moment the "world's first animated reality series" (Comedy Partners, 2013) was born.

Drawn Together is premised on a reality series format, most obviously the *Big Brother* concept, where the housemates are typecasts of eight different cartoon styles instead of live action participants. The opening sequence voice over tells us each week that these clearly mismatched characters "from all over the animated universe" live together "in front of a million cameras", along with the advertising campaign teasers that tell us that this is "...what happens when eight cartoon characters stop being polite and start getting real" (Comedy Partners, 2013). The 8 characters are clear amalgams of visual characteristics that represent distinct styles of animation. Princess Clara is a Disney-like princess, but clearly deeply bigoted, Wooldoor Sockbat, based on a children's animation cartoon not unlike *Spongebob Squarepants* is slightly insane and disturbingly irritating, Foxy Love is a mystery-solving musician and is hypersexually feminized, Toot Braunstein is a black and white 1920's Betty Boop lookalike who has got fat, Ling Ling is an Asian trading card battle monster, Spanky Ham is a crude and rude internet download, while Xandir is based on videogame adventure characters, and Captain Hero is clearly a Marvel Comics® type superhero.

⁶² *Drawn Together*, S01E03, *Gay Bash*

The series is clearly not appropriate for a child audience and as with so many controversial animation series there is a broad spectrum of diverse reactions to the content and characters. However, while the offensiveness of the series is acknowledged, generally the fan base appreciates the show for this precise reason. In forums on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) as recently as 2012, discussion threads titled simply "More Cruder (*sic*) Than South Park?"⁶³ are posted to initiate discussion around precisely this question. Responses are varied, but include comments such as these from *SethTaspia*⁶⁴ "This show is great because it is offensive for no reason. I love this show people are too sensitive" and from *One176*⁶⁵ "I agree. [T]his show is awful.....ly good... Its just dirty funny fun, a truly guilty pleasure, and thats (*sic*) alright in my book".

As with *Family Guy* there are also numerous versions of each episode for all the series. The analysis for this thesis focuses on the more complete DVD versions, but different versions have also originally aired during *Comedy Central's* late night schedule, as well as *Comedy Central's Secret Stash*, the latter a late Saturday night, early Sunday morning programming slot where previously censored episodes of different series are broadcast with some expunged words and imagery retained. The DVD versions are in fact released as uncensored box sets using "uncensored" in both the labeling and marketing. Dave Jeser tells of their surprise when the series went to DVD and why, even though the DVD versions are uncensored, they still retain some images that are pixilated or include black bars over sensitive portions. They had never thought that they might go to DVD and therefore for the first season "never actually drew the genitals underneath the blurs" (Goldman, 2006 , p. 2). When they compiled the box sets they had to remove the blurs and sent the episodes back to *Rough Draft Studios*⁶⁶ to draw in penises, vaginas and nipples. Subsequently with the later seasons two and three, Dave explains "there [are] scenes that we've written, and sent over to Korea, which we've never even shown the network or standards, because we knew it wouldn't make it on the air... there were scenes that were created just for that [the DVD] medium, which will hopefully be really, really gross and funny" (ibid.). As with *Family Guy* there are clearly different versions of the story for different audiences, though unlike *Family Guy* the producers of

⁶³ *Takedi21* Posted Tue Feb 21 2012 (IMDb, 2013).

⁶⁴ Posted Sat Feb 7 2009 (IMDb, 2013).

⁶⁵ Posted Fri Apr 17 2009 (IMDb, 2013).

⁶⁶ *Rough Draft Studios, Inc.* is an animation production studio based in Glendale, California, United States, with its sister studio *Rough Draft Korea* located in Seoul, South Korea. (<http://www.roughdraftstudios.com>)

Drawn Together only belatedly realized the potential of the DVD market for accessibility to their original more risqué jokes and imagery.

With fewer characters and a limited cast, and with a finite run, as opposed to the still developing and ongoing *Family Guy*, in *Drawn Together* there are only two main characters that are distinctly transgressive in terms of this research, one clearly defined as gay, namely Xandir, the other a more complex and problematic hetero-normative character in the form of Captain Hero. It should be noted though that in the nature of the series all the characters at some stage or other transgress sexual and other socially acceptable boundaries, whether in terms of manners, language, race, religious tolerance, or simply overturning politically correct perspectives. While all of the latter are valuable insights into the general transgressive nature of the series, this research focuses predominantly on the sexual issues and more specifically those of a male homosexual nature. The discussion of characters will therefore focus on a description of Xandir and Captain Hero and the episodes that deal specifically with gay issues.

4.5.4 Rick and Steve

Rick: We spent nine hours dancing to Techno music and looking for sex? We're such gay men⁶⁷.

Rick & Steve: The Happiest Gay Couple in All the World (Cuppa Coffee Studio, 2007 to 2009, dir/Q. Allan Brocka) is an American-Canadian co-production and stop-motion animated sitcom, created and directed by, and starring Q. Allan Brocka⁶⁸. Much like Seth MacFarlane of *Family Guy* (FOX, 1999 to 2003, and 2005 to present) it is clear that Brocka is the creative centre for the production. As the voice actor Peter Paige (who plays the character Steve Ball) irreverently admits in an interview for the second season DVD compilation⁶⁹, "Alan Brocka is funny... it's so clearly his voice and his show... It's kind of like I let Allen shove his hand up my arse and just talk for me, sort of like that". The original idea was also a short

⁶⁷ Rick & Steve, S01E01, *Guess who's coming for quiche?*

⁶⁸ The bulk of Brocka's film and television work is oriented towards a gay audience, but does include less obviously gay oriented content, such as the documentaries *Vivid Valley* (originally *Porno Valley*) (World of Wonder, 2004) and *Camp Michael Jackson* (World of Wonder, 2005). Arguably his best known films are the *Eating Out* franchise produced by Ariztical Entertainment, beginning with *Eating Out* (2004), which went on to win several awards, including Best Feature at the 2004 San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, and four sequels of which only *Eating Out: Drama Camp* (2011) and *Eating Out: The Open Weekend* (2011) saw Brocka return and take on the various roles of either director, co-writer, or producer. Brocka also directed *Boy Culture* (Boy Culture LLC, 2006), a feature-length film, which has gone on to win numerous awards at various international film festivals, including Best Writing at OUTfest 2006.

⁶⁹ Rick & Steve, S02 Extras, *Cast Interviews*

film produced by Brocka as a student production in 1999 for a video compilation of *Spike & Mike's Sick & Twisted Festival of Animation, Volume Seven*. The re-worked professional series later debuted on the LGBTI focused *The Logo* cable network in 2007⁷⁰. As the latter network is a channel specifically marketed to an adult gay and lesbian audience, the issue of censorship is less apparent and Brocka doesn't mention in interviews or articles that scenes or lines were ever cut from the broadcast version. The version for this analysis is again the packaged DVD which includes all the footage. The character design resembles Lego® and Playmobil® though the puppets themselves are actually sculpted resin and plastic models made to represent the latter.

The series is set in the imaginary West Lahunga Beach and revolves around the titular gay couple, Rick and Steve, and their friends and acquaintances that make up this "little queer community"⁷¹. For every episode, similar to *South Park* (Comedy Central, 1997 to present), there is an opening warning that reads,

The following program contains graphic language, violence, and puppet-on-puppet sex. It has no role models and does not represent the opinions of the entire LGBT (sic) puppet community... yet. This show should only be viewed by legally and emotionally mature adults.

The show therefore frames itself as both provocative and raunchy, as well as a series with a sociopolitical agenda of promoting the very aspects warned against and becoming a role model in itself. As an animation series it is not unlike *South Park* (Comedy Central, 1997 to present) and *Family Guy* (Fox, 1999 to 2003, 2005 to present) in terms of humour and approach, though the obvious difference is the focus on the gay and lesbian community and its issues. Although the series flagrantly disregards all things politically correct as far as the LGBTI community is concerned, it still shows compassion for all its alternative lifestyle characters, or as Gina Bellafante (2007) describes it in the headline to an article in the *New York Times*, "Animation That Prizes, and Mocks, Gay Values".

One of the main contextual differences for this series is that Brocka and many of the voice actors are themselves either openly gay, lesbian or in some way linked to Queer culture, vehemently pro-LGBTI, or at the very least a prominent and outspoken LGBTI ally. Peter Paige (Steve Ball), Wilson Cruz (Evan Martinez), Alan

⁷⁰ The show premiered in the same year (2007) on the Canadian Teletoon's late-night programming block called "The Detour", and debuted in the United Kingdom on E4 in 2008 and in 2010 in France.

⁷¹ See Appendix B: Musical number lyrics for the title sequence lyrics.

Cumming (Chuck Masters), and Robert Gant (Mayor Mayer) are all openly gay actors, playing alongside the likes of Margaret Cho (Condi Ling) who is a stalwart advocate for the LGBTI community, and Miss Coco Peru (who plays Mother Morally Superior, one of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence), real name Clinton Leupp, a well known American drag performer. It is unclear if Will Matthews (who plays the lead role of Rick Brocka, Jr.) is in fact gay or straight. At the very least he's an ally to the LGBTI cause. In 2008 he posts on a shared blog "twomatts" (Matthews, 2008), saying,

As we pick up the pieces of our hearts, broken by the passage of Proposition 8 in California, let's turn our eyes to West Lahunga Beach – a land where not only is gay marriage real, it's hilarious... The most important thing you need to know about this show is that I voice Rick.

As the characters are all obviously gay or lesbian, the focus in this analysis is less on the particular traits that highlight individual characters deemed other, but rather to consider the trends that stereotype such characters in general.

In the interviews packaged with both DVD series compilations, the voice actors unanimously agree with the representation of a queer lifestyle and the approach that Brocka has taken in the series, in terms of characters, situations and the general attitude to the topic. And while this is expected from promotional material for a show in which they have participated, it is highly unlikely, having received the scripts prior to joining the cast, that they would have contributed to something with which they did not ideologically agree. Robert Gant refers to the series as "our very own irreverent, not holding back, no holds barred, animated take on society, our community"⁷², while Wilson Cruz admits he recognizes Rick and Steve's relationship, saying "that's very real, it's based in reality, I think all the relationships are based in reality, they're just heightened for your entertainment"⁷³. Being a comedy, this heightened sense of reality is embodied primarily in the humour which the actors all comment on as either inappropriate, yet hilarious⁷⁴, offensive⁷⁵, or daring and brave⁷⁶, but always in a very positive light. Alan Cumming admits that on reading the script, while he was taken aback, he still "quite like[s] offensive things, so I jumped on board" and "was pleasantly surprised *Logo* would be doing something this kind of offensive and edgy and kind

⁷² Rick & Steve, S02 Extras, *Cast Interviews*

⁷³ Rick & Steve, S02 Extras, *Cast Interviews*

⁷⁴ Rick & Steve, S01: Extras, *Interviews: Peter Page*

⁷⁵ Rick & Steve, S01: Extras, *Interviews: Alan Cumming*

⁷⁶ Rick & Steve, S01: Extras, *Interviews: Wilson Cruz*

of provocative”⁷⁷. Wilson Cruz highlights the uniqueness of the series saying “it was like nothing I’d ever read or seen before... we’ve never really heard our own community talk about these issues in this way... the secrets are out”⁷⁸, and Margaret Cho underscores this point, stressing how important it is “to expand on gay life... to see other ways that people live... to have different visions of what we live like, what we do and how we are, this show really satisfies that” and that the way it is written “so smart, so funny and so edgy and so real”, for Margaret means that “people will really respond to it”⁷⁹. The drag performer Coco Peru says, “I love the show, I love that it’s so wrong, it’s my kind of humour and I love that it goes to those places you hope the show will go”⁸⁰. Alan Cumming, whose character Chuck is one of the more obnoxious gay stereotypes, old and bald, wheel-chair bound and living with AIDs, is the first to note specifically how politically incorrect the series is and finds it refreshing that after being bludgeoned with political correct speak, the series isn’t precious about certain topics. In spite of the darkness of the comedy he believes it healthy to make light and engage with some of the topics it does, and that people will welcome the show, and even though the comedy is “sort of brutal and edgy and nasty” that even a heterosexual audience “will feel kind of relieved that gay people are... mocking themselves and... being as biting and self mocking as other people”. He says eloquently “I think in a way to gain people’s respect you have to show that you’re comfortable enough with yourself to be able to mock yourself and be able to understand what other people think of you”⁸¹.

The animation technique for this series, namely stop motion puppetry, places limits on the animators in terms of the actions and movements of the characters and their embodied emotions and responses. Unlike “drawn” animation, where the possibilities are endless and limited mostly to the drawing abilities of the animator, for stop motion the puppet being animated is a physical object, defined (for the most part) by physical laws, or the limits of what the puppet maker has constructed. As mentioned earlier the puppets look not unlike Lego® and Playmobil® models and share the limitations of movement of these original designs. The gestures therefore of the legs and arms are very limited and the shape of the body is static, which means that the squash and stretch ability found in most animation as an expression of the personality of the character is unavailable. The facial expressions are also limited depending on what variations

⁷⁷ Rick & Steve, S01: Extras, *Interviews*

⁷⁸ Rick & Steve, S01: Extras, *Interviews*

⁷⁹ Rick & Steve, S01: Extras, *Interviews*

⁸⁰ Rick & Steve, S02 Extras, *Cast Interviews*

⁸¹ Rick & Steve, S01: Extras, *Interviews*

are offered to the animator by the design and fabrication of the puppet. In animation films like *Tim Burton's The Nightmare before Christmas* (Buena Vista Picture, 1993, dir/Henry Selick), the puppet construction crew would create replacement heads for each variation of a facial expression, or separate eyelid sections to allow the animators to make the puppets blink. Each of these pieces would have to be replaced one frame at a time during the animation process to achieve the desired effect, and in the case of the different faces that make up each of the letter shapes for speech, an entire second crew would be needed to track, document, and synchronise even the simplest of spoken sentences. In more recent films like *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* (Warner Brothers, 2005, dir/Tim Burton), innovations in armature allow for a skull-like internal structure inside the flexible plastic head that can be moved via screws and gears to shape sections of the face to achieve the same effect. For *Rick and Steve* the eyes and mouth were in fact added digitally in after effects making the animation process slightly quicker and less difficult, but limited in terms of expression to suit the design aesthetic. These limitations however mean that other techniques, both visual and audio, need to be employed to represent gayness. Stereotypical postures and movement are no longer available to the animator, so context, such as environment and surroundings, and imagery and symbols become important.

4.6 Transgression and censorship

No chocolate milk? Then what the hell have I been sucking on?⁸²

With the rise in transgressive animation and animation that lingers on the very margins of acceptability, there is the expected reaction from regulatory bodies and other key players in the field of televisual and broadcast animation, such as “advertisers, syndicators, networks, government regulators, local community members, [and] special interest groups” (Furniss, 2007, pp. 199-200) to name but a few. The focus of these groups, especially in the case of animation, is on the latter’s acceptability as youth entertainment, and animation’s “assumed children’s audience”⁸³ (Wells, 2008c, p. 153), something that Furniss explains has “been the subject of public scrutiny throughout the 20th century” as far back as the 1920’s and early 1930’s when “debates arose concerning comic books”

⁸² Drawn Together, S03E04, *Unrestrainable trainable*

⁸³ So, for example when *The Simpsons* was originally broadcast on BBC and Sky television channels in the United Kingdom, it was intended for a younger audience, including children, and therefore a “significant number of more ‘adult’ moments [were] edited out of British broadcasts of the show” (Donnelly, 2008, p. 157).

(Furniss, 2007, p. 200). These debates lead to the publication of Frederic Wertham's infamous book, *The Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), in which the author "alleged that comic books were destroying the morality of American youth" (ibid.) with comics incorporating topics thought, at the time, to be in bad taste. Similar accusations are now leveled at animation.

The contemporary areas of concern for most broadcasting standards bodies are depictions of violence, sexual content, the issue of replication, offensive language, and suitability for family viewing (Furniss, 2007, p. 201) all clearly the playground of contemporary adult animation, or described by Wells (Wells, 2008c, p. 153) as the "anarchy" of the cartoon. Such vigilance had previously resulted in cinema release animation being re-edited for television broadcast to excise "any contentious race representation, sexually provocative movement, scenes of excessive drinking or smoking, or unorthodox behavior that might encourage imitation"⁸⁴ (ibid.). It is important to note that all the series mentioned above have at some time or another and in many different ways challenged institutional guidelines of acceptability and tested the "arbitrariness" of such standards and practices guidelines (ibid.). External factors however add to the complexity of this argument as the digital nature of the production process allows for many different versions of a production to exist. Numerous factors, including changing censorship regulations and attitudes towards the content or context of a series or a particular episode in a series, and even production and broadcast requirements means that different versions exist between the broadcast, broadcast channels, and home entertainment versions (Furniss, 2007, p. 11).

Richard A. Blum and Richard D. Lindhem make an important note on censorship in general and differentiate between taste and control, Furniss quotes these authors saying that "taste affects the regulation of the content of programs... control concerns access – the issue of who is able to view any given material" (in Furniss, 2007, p. 199). Most censorship attempts to both regulate the content as well as control who can see the material, the simplest solution being "to eliminate those programs or program elements that might be deemed undesirable or offensive" (ibid.). This strict and global censure seems merely to ensure the control aspect of censorship, as regulatory bodies cannot control the tastes of the

⁸⁴ *South Park* was specifically problematic when first broadcast and represented a "threat to children... in that it was about young children, looked like a cartoon for young children, yet dealt with adult and controversial themes such as sex,... murder and suicide. Material clearly for an older audience" (Donnelly, 2008, p. 157).

animator who produces the animation, and it is the existence of the latter and Wells' suggested inherent transgressive nature of animation that leads to these experiments in good taste. To illustrate this point, Furniss explains that much of the appeal of *Ren & Stimpy*, "was the outrageousness and sometimes the raunchiness of the two characters and their activities" (ibid., p. 202), transgression was therefore the calling card of the series and precisely what drew in the audience. But at some point these identifiable peculiarities would go simply too far, with some of the episodes dropped from the line-up by regulatory bodies, usually the network representatives, which included such offences as farting, references to bugging, or slow motion violence, all deemed unacceptable for the extremity of their transgression. Furniss also quotes Gabor Csupo, one of the founders of Klatsky Csupo Productions that produced the first 61 episodes of *The Simpsons*, who relates an occasion where Fox executives banned an episode because an artist has included a silhouette of a naked female statue in the background of a sequence. The executives are quoted by Csupo as saying "What are you trying to do? Sneak in pornography?" (Furniss, 2007, p. 202). Control may have excised the offending episodes, but the tastes of the animators still inspired them to attempt to portray the content they wished to advance and subsequent series have returned to some of these topics without the same censure being imposed on them, the interaction of taste and control having shifted the boundary. The above illustrate that taste does play an equally central role in the censure of animation, as it is the animators themselves who shape the tone of the content, in favour of the expectations of the broadcast climate, rather than an outside regulatory body imposing their standards.

Susan Sontag describes the goal of the author (of specifically pornographic imagery), as "to advance one step further in the dialectic of outrage. He (sic) seeks to make his work repulsive, obscure, inaccessible; in short, to give what is, or seems to be, *not wanted*" (Sontag, 1982, p. 92). *Queer Duck*, *Drawn Together*, and *Rick & Steve* are not by definition pornography, nor are the more risqué sequences that reference the sex act, but they do exemplify the outrageous as far as a conventional definition of animation is concerned. *Family Guy* less so, though still a contentious series in its own right. It is difficult to deny that some of the content, both in terms of characterizations and narrative, could indeed be considered repulsive to some, and in terms of the characters and actions they represent, could indeed be obscure and inaccessible. The question that is more interesting is whether they do indeed give us something that is "not wanted".

The controversies that surround these series include staunch factions that represent both sides of the arguments. Invariably the disputes focus on how unsuitable the series are as animation, but this misunderstanding is mainly due to the misconception of animation as a genre and the misinterpretation of the place of animation as entertainment in society. As previously mentioned, animation for the layperson is or should be “children friendly” but this is simply not the case. And while numerous religious and conservative groups regularly condemn episodes and themes for such animation series, there is an equally large group of fans who obsessively and passionately defend the series for precisely those topics and representations that are found wanting by the opposing side. The internet fan bases for these series are extensive, and an in-depth discussion of such fandoms is outside the scope of this research, but a few choice examples of comments from especially *Drawn Together* conversation boards illustrate the range and diversity of the response to such series. More detailed critiques, rather than simple repudiations of the series follow the style of *Asimovpunch*⁸⁵ tetchy, but still favourable perspective,

The only reason I am on this board is to counter the love of this show. The offensive route only works in small doses - when you are constantly pulling out all of stops just for the sake of being edgy and completely nonsensically putrid, then the comedy no longer presses on through... It's offensive for the sake of being offensive, but there's no underlying meaning under it all - it's just mind-numbing to watch.

More often though the responses are short and to the point, such as the unenthusiastic comment, “It left a bad taste in my mouth”⁸⁶, or the more enthusiastic, and more frequently positive response, “[I] find the best moments to be when they've gone too far”⁸⁷. While the controversial sparks debate, it is the controversy that seems to satisfy the viewer the most, and particularly those viewers whose viewpoints, tastes or sense of humour match those of the series.

Again it is difficult to deny that these series don't all approach a number of social polemics in ways specifically designed to antagonize and offend. The broad range of provocations include issues concerning race, gender, sex, age, religion, politics, social norms, social ills, and more importantly to this thesis, sexuality,

⁸⁵ Posted Friday, 11 April 2008, “AWFUL, just AWFUL” (IMDb, 2013).

⁸⁶ Cookiecrumb444, Posted Monday, 28 Nov 2011, “Episodes where they've gone too far” (IMDb, 2013).

⁸⁷ Teenasung, Posted Sunday, 1 Jan 2012, “Episodes where they've gone too far” (IMDb, 2013).

the latter a topic usually at worst ignored or at best obscured or downplayed in animation. In these series sexuality is regularly broached as a topic for discussion, a practice for experimentation, and a target for ridicule. Aberrant behavior, in the form of sexual perversity, is rampant throughout the series, mostly implied, but always blatantly clear, with sex seldom constructed as solely a hetero-normative act. Characters regularly create gender confusion, wearing clothes or displaying mannerisms of the opposite sex, and in these guises go on to have sex with others in these assumed roles. This gender confusion is a visual manifestation that animation, as a plastic art, is most suited for. All aspects of sex and sexuality and all topics become the playground of the animators in these series: masturbation, coprophilia, necrophilia, paedophilia, sibling and intergenerational incest, and often references to and imagery of genitalia, faeces, urine and other bodily fluids.

4.7 Conclusion

Animation enables these erstwhile sitcoms to become more surreal and subversive, prioritizing fantastical and onerous interpretations of everyday life, offering an ironic critique of the foibles and assumptions of middle-America (Wells, 2008c, p. 148).

Wells (Wells, 2008a, p. 155) suggests that it is inevitable for sex, violence, and references to drug culture to be the playground for contemporary adult animation, due in no small part to the postmodern condition and the animators' own internalized frames of reference. Historically it is Tex Avery⁸⁸ according to Wells (1998, p. 140) who "radicalized the cartoon by suggesting implicitly and explicitly that the cartoon could be a medium for adult audiences" and furthermore that "adults required a more knowing, *self-conscious* approach, which would engage with more mature themes". For Wells the latter includes "a direct engagement with sexual feelings and sexual identity" (ibid.). For Wells then Avery's sense of cartoon comedy is directed at, amongst other goals, articulating "unspeakable desires" (ibid., p. 141) aspiring to prioritise what Avery termed "primal motives" and achieve this by "exploiting and exaggerating *psychological, emotional* and *physical* taboos (ibid.). But more important for Wells (2008a, p. 155) is that the humour in animation is found in the incongruity between intended meaning and the way the animation alters and repositions these

⁸⁸ During the Golden Age of Hollywood animation, approximately from the 1920's till the 1960's, and more specifically during that period dominated by Hanna-Barbera and Tex Avery, approximately 1940 to 1958.

meanings, or in the vernacular of this thesis, how animators transgress through the visual imagery of characters and situations, and in constructing the narrative and plot. Donnelly also suggests that a major attraction of such animation, and with specific reference to *The Simpsons* and *South Park* is that such animations “allow a kind of regression to childhood for their adult viewers” (Donnelly, 2008, p. 158). Wells’ above quotation draws our attention again to the slippage between the concepts of subversion and transgression, but equally highlights the re-interpretive nature of animation and how it recycles the social sphere to comment on and critique by drawing on the transgressive nature of animation. This critique is however neither articulate nor necessarily academic, neither unbiased nor unequivocal, as it takes the form of the unfettered and uncontrolled voice of a child-like vernacular, as in the chaos of carnival, finding emancipation from adult rules and regulations and reveling in the opportunity to shock and disrupt without any real consequence.

Chapter 5: Analytical framework

5.1 Identity and Representation

Wooldoor Sockbat: We are gathered here today to give these two queens special rights.

Princess Clara: If gays get married the institution of marriage will be destroyed. Societies will crumble. Rivers will run with blood. Nazis will once again ride on dinosaurs.⁸⁹

The above exchange between an archetypal yet bigoted Disney princess and a whacky children's cartoon parody underscores the complexity of representation and the associations with identity that blur the distinction between the two concepts. In this chapter the discussion outlines these theoretical concepts, before moving on to apply them more closely to issues of homosexuality and gayness. Likewise sexuality (homosexual, heterosexual, etc.) and biological sex (male, female, etc.) are equally as inseparable and as such requires a reflection on masculinities. This chapter will also briefly engage and locate the above in relation to the notions of gender and Queerness.

5.2 Identity

Identification matters because it is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively (Jenkins, 2008, p. 13).

Jenkins' work begins with a reflection on the long history of the concept of identity and its historical, cultural and temporal specificity, each period in history focusing on specific issues, terms and themes that are specific to a culture, society or epoch. Jenkins (*ibid.*, p. 31) argues that the contemporary resurgence of the concept is primarily due to globalisation, the increase in population numbers, and the technological advances that have made exposure of and information about different identities available to those various and diverse populations making accessible "more experiences and elective identities... on offer today than ever before" (*ibid.*, p. 32). This present concern for Jenkins "reflect[s] the uncertainty produced by dramatic changes: reorientations of work, gender and family, class and status mobility, migration, medical and

⁸⁹ Drawn Together, S02E2, Foxy vs. the Board of Education

technological innovations, the redrawing of political borders, [and] the intrusive reality of global media" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 31). Jenkins highlights the inevitability of such a reaction to dramatic social flux by stating simply that "[c]hange... is arguably the norm in human experience" (ibid.) and while this platitude is perhaps true, it is not necessarily helpful in defining and negotiating identity.

For Jenkins identity is a process, i.e. *identification*, and not a 'thing'. He says "it is not something that one can *have*, or not; it is something that one *does*" (ibid., p. 5). For Jenkins the locus of this process is in people as they "make and do"⁹⁰ identity" (ibid., p. 9) participating in an open-ended process of categorising and classifying their identity for their own reasons and purposes. A central issue for Jenkins is that emotion clearly plays a large part in the classification process that is identification, to identify therefore is never neutral and both socially and interactionally hierarchical with what he terms "scales of preference" (ibid. p. 6). Because emotion is involved, identification is neither inevitable nor natural, and has to be "*made to matter*" (emphasis in the original) (ibid.) and for Jenkins this is done through such mechanisms as symbols and ritual experiences.

Jenkins' discussion of identity shifts between both the individual and group, and more significantly how identification is invariably linked to a group identify. Group identities are therefore considered by Jenkins to be the most powerful form of identification, especially "to mobilize people" (ibid., p. 8) whilst at the same time being difficult to define. While Jenkins does define a group as "a human collectivity the members of which recognize its existence and their membership of it" (ibid., p. 7) the difficulty comes in that "there are no implications of homogeneity or definite boundaries" (ibid., p. 9) the latter being fluid and dependent on a large number of diverse factors that influence the situation in which such groupings occur. While the latter might suggest that groups are in effect definitively indeterminable they are not imaginary, but "experientially real in every day life" (ibid.).

These complex issues of identification, its fluidity and performativity, its relationship simultaneously to individual and group, and its emotional mutability, highlight the process of identification as both battlefield and arena to promote and establish demarcated descriptions that illustrate discrete clusters. Furthermore these encounters are not indifferent to social and other contextual

⁹⁰ To 'do' identity is comparable to 'perform' identity.

controls and pressures, and while difficult to define, are still classifications that we use to define ourselves, and our place within society.

5.2.1 Understanding Identification

Jenkins divides the experiential world of humans into three distinct 'orders', namely; *The individual order* made up of embodied individuals and what-goes-on-in-their-heads, *The interaction order* constituted in relationships between individuals, in what-goes-on-between-people, and *The institutional order*, pattern and organization, of establish-ways-of-doing-things (Jenkins, 2008, p. 39). These three orders become important categories for analysis into the phenomenon of identification (and by implication representation). As Jenkins maintains one's own identity construction is an ongoing process and a "simultaneous synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (ibid., p. 40) with the latter inclusive of such things as televisual images and representations. The interaction between these orders is vividly illustrated in Jenkins' discussion when, "what people think about us is no less significant than what we think about ourselves. It is not enough simply to assert an identity; that assertion must also be validated, or not, by those with whom we have dealings. *Identity is never unilateral*" (italics in original) (ibid., p. 42). Identity simply does not exist in a vacuum and is constituted both within the individual and in the interactions with other individuals and groups, hence identity is intrinsically part of the social sphere, reliant on not only the individual's understanding of ideas and concepts within such a sphere, but also in relation to others' understandings of those same concepts and their reaction and response. As Jenkins states, "[i]dentification... has consequences" (ibid., p. 43).

A further distinction Jenkins draws is between *nominal identity* and *virtual identity* between respectively "the name and the experience of an identity" (ibid., p. 44). For Jenkins "the same nominal identity produces very different virtual identifications and very different experiences" (ibid., p. 100). So, whilst the nominal (the name) can stay the same, what it means to be that named thing or identity can be different. Here aspects of the polysemic nature of language are apparent and even brief histories of the evolution of words show how this can be the case⁹¹.

⁹¹ Appropriate to this thesis would be the word *gay*. The original dictionary meaning of the late Victorian and early 20th century was "happy", but through iteration became a word to describe homosexuality with the rise of homosexual liberation struggles of the 1960's and 1970's. Yet now, with the proliferation of identities that are non-hetero-normative and at the same time uncomfortable

5.2.2 Identity and Power

The issue of power is equally as important to a discussion of Identity as to that of Representation (as seen in the discussion of Dyer below) as both are strategic concepts, the negotiation of such is related to factors in the environment, the environment itself, and has consequences. Jenkins describes a number of binary oppositions that an identity must negotiate, as well as the concept of repertoires of intentionality, the latter being those deliberate, calculated and premeditated actions of an individual or group in relation to an expected outcome. Within the social sphere, Jenkins explains, space is shared by both the individual and the group, and as such any action can be understood as either intended or unintended with “a necessary connection... between *domination and resistance* and identification” (italics in original) (Jenkins, 2008, p. 46). Choosing an identity and representing such an identity is therefore a calculated process of negotiation for an effect with both expected and unexpected results that directly impact on the individual and his/her relationships to other individuals, and within his/her own group and other groups. Jenkins summarises

Identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations. Identification is something over which struggles take place and *with* which strategems are advanced... and at stake is the classification of populations as well [as] the classification of individuals (ibid., p. 45).

This idea of classification is echoed in Dyer’s concept of *naming*. For Dyer, “having a word for oneself and one’s group, making a politics out of what that word should be, draws attention to and also reproduces one’s marginality, confirms one’s place outside of power and thus outside of the mechanisms of change” (Dyer, 2002, p. 9). Dyer’s take on the classification process is a negative one, especially regarding the term ‘gay’. For Dyer such classification inherently marginalises through the process of naming and promoting oneself or the group through a process of differentiating yourself with a label. The issue of the perceived power of such an act is however pertinent and illustrates Jenkins’ idea of ideological struggles at play in the classification process. Jenkins’ idea here chimes well with Dyer’s notion that representation of an identity is linked to rights and that those rights can be and are disputed within society. Jenkins’ use of the word *strategems* though, suggests a clearly organized plan of action to develop

with being labeled gay, this moniker has taken on additional and other meanings than simply to reference the homosexual male.

specific agendas, and while this may be true in some cases, it is not necessarily the case within the social sphere in general. The idea that this is a struggle also highlights the ongoing and open-ended nature of the development of aspects of the social sphere and the inherent potential for politicisation of aspects of identity and representation.

Drawing on the work of Goffman⁹², Jenkins raises further matters of identity that are important in this discussion, especially as it turns towards animation, and those are Goffman's concepts of embodiment and spatiality of interaction and the performance nature of identity interactions. For Goffman "interaction is cooperative, organized, ordered, rule-governed. However, it occurs in a world of negotiation and transaction" (Goffman in Jenkins, 2008, p. 91), furthermore this *interaction order* is "the face-to-face domain of dealings between embodied individuals. Remote dealings... are not excluded... but the emphasis is on the physicality of co-presence" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 91). All interactions that develop and shape identity are therefore not only related to the physical environment, i.e. spatiality, but also embodied within the individual and the actions of the individual, what Jenkins refers to as the "performative aspects of identity" (ibid., p. 42) where "one must be able satisfactorily to perform [identity], to actualize it" (ibid., p. 123). This embodiment can be seen as both something physical, as well as something psychological. And while Jenkins suggests that Goffman's work emphasises interaction between real people, physically present, "remote dealings" are not excluded, which opens the door for the suggestion of televisual and other visual forms of long distance and distanced interactions with some form of technological intermediary, e.g. such as a television, film or computer screen which allows for a physical, though displaced, presence. In terms of animation, this idea will be further developed later in this chapter, to include the displacement of the physical into the avatar of the animated character.

The discussion so far has identified concepts that seem static and bounded. The above would suggest that after a certain amount of negotiation within the individual and between the individual and various groups, an identity can be defined. This stasis is a misconception. Jenkins states that "while identification may be connected to motivation and behavior, the connection is not straightforward or predictable" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 6) and reminds us that "identities [are] somewhat fluid, situationally contingent, and the perpetual subject and object of negotiation" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 44) therefore never static

⁹² Goffman, E. (1969). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday life*. London, UK: Allen Lane.

and never final. Identities are “to be found and negotiated at their *boundaries*, in the encounter between internal and external... identity is constructed in transactions at and across the boundary” (ibid.). And as we have seen in the discussion on transgression (Chapter 4), the boundary is exactly that contested moment where the process of transgression is also said to be taking place. The implication would be that all identity formation is in essence a transgression. The interaction between the individual, the group(s), and the internal and external aspects of embodiment of all of these, all this chaos is the transgression that is the creation of an identity, in whatever context that may be applied either to the group or the individual.

5.2.3 Masculine identities

For this thesis and an understanding of transgressive sexuality and specifically male homosexual identities and sexualities, it is important to first locate these in the broader field of masculinities. Contrary to the stereotyping of the gay man that is found in the social sphere and in most mass media representations, there is a spectrum of identification from which the gay man can construct their identity and sexuality. The stereotype of the gay man as feminised or simply the performance of the feminine in the masculine body, while still prevalent, is highly reductive and not representative of any real social situation.

Beynon (2002a) discusses the construction of masculinities through socialisation⁹³, considering both an historical as well as anthropological approach suggesting “masculinity cannot be treated ahistorically... [and] must be placed in a historical context and examined in the light of social, economic, political and cultural circumstances” (Beynon, 2002a, p. 59) such as in the case of this thesis. Beynon suggests that masculinity is in fact quite fragile, “forcing men into displaying and proving it”, the outcome of which being that the feminine is suppressed (ibid., p. 57). For Richard Dyer, masculinity in media is an “impossible fiction” shaped for women (and arguably by men), and often depicted as flawless, whereas in reality this “false skin” hides deep insecurities (Dyer in Beynon, 2002a, p. 66). And in his own words, for Dyer (2002, p. 38) masculinities, and specifically ‘macho’ “is the conscious deployment of *signs* of masculinity”. Importantly Beynon considers the mediation of masculinities through representations in film and their analysis, or what he terms “mediated masculinity” or “cinematic man” (Beynon, 2002a, p. 64) as “highly crafted,

⁹³ For research into the identification of “typical male roles” see Brannon (1976), Pleck and Thompson (1987), Moore and Gillette (1990), and Ian Harris (1995) all in Beynon (2002, p. 58).

alluring and accessible role models for boys and young men”, but “visually crafted, carefully packaged and frequently idealized” in form. Beynon stresses how these mediated representations more often have a greater impact on the men who consume the media, than their own real life role models that surround them, due in no small part to the notion that screen images are generally, “far more exciting and seductive” (ibid.), especially true of the bright colours and simplified graphic style of television animation.

The manner in which masculinities in general, and Queered and homosexual masculinities in particular, are represented in animated series are more overt examples of this ‘visual crafting’ process, as much more explicit emphasis is placed on designing the look and feel of a character through his clothes, speech, stance and movement. The problem is not with such overt focus on designing a character, but rather on what the choices in such a design say about the designer and the reasoning behind those choices. The reasons why an actor chooses to play a character in a particular way, is no different from the reasons why an animator would design the actions and look of his character. However, subtleties in the performance of live action may merely be unconscious or subconscious acts, whereas in animation, no such accidental insertions can exist. This then places a heavy burden on the nature of such representations by the animators in view of the popularity of such entertainment.

5.2.4 Gay identities

Thomas Waugh’s *The Third Body: Patterns in the construction of the subject in gay male narrative film* (1998) suggests at the very least two manifestations of a homosexual identity onto which the gay man can project himself, the ephebe (the mythical Ganymede) or the Herculean (the mythical Hercules). The former is the classical adolescent youth, considered a safe homosexual construct on which to project the desires of the gay subject without prejudicing the outward reflection of the self to an unaccepting community, the latter however, the muscled he-man, a traditionally homosocial and not homosexual construct, becomes the trend in the post Stonewall era.

Waugh’s article is premised on the idea of the director (or more generally the author in the case of other texts) projecting the self into the narrative. For Waugh the ‘third body’ is a very specific construction of the ‘gay subject’ inserting themselves into the narrative and how this then constructs the homosexual identity, both of the ‘gay subject’ as producer/director as well as for the ‘gay

subject' as spectator. And while this is not the focus of this thesis, the concept of transferring the creator's identity into his creative work is useful when considering the animator and their process of animating a character discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Also Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* (1987) is a seminal text documenting the covert and overt presence of homosexuals and their depiction in specifically mainstream film, detailing a broad spectrum of identities. From camp queen to butch straight acting male homosexual, the performance of a mediated gay identity is diverse, but still predicated on a (transgressed) masculinity.

5.3 Representation

Representation is the production of meaning (through language)
(Hall, 2013a, p. 2).

Stuart Hall's seminal discussion of the "cultural turn" in the social sciences emphasizes the importance of meaning. In his influential book, titled simply *Representation* (2013), the definition of culture focuses on the latter as a "set of practices" that generate meaning (*italics in the original*) (Hall, 2013c, p. xviii), and following the social constructionist approach⁹⁴, that meaning is constructed by and within a culture, rather than simply inherently present (*ibid.*, p. xxi). It is social practices that produce meanings that we describe as culture, or ascribe to a culture, by producing, and therefore exchanging, meaning through a diversity of elements. The latter can include any aspect of the written, the spoken, the visual, or the aural, but the importance is not so much in what they are as in what function they perform in the process of constructing and transmitting meaning. It is clear then that representation is linked to what we know, knowledge, and through these outward displays is linked to who we are, identity, and hence the very close relationship between identity and representation's central focus is on language and on the role of language in this process of constructing meaning, but for the sake of this thesis, the extension to the concept of language⁹⁵ as a representational system using signs and symbols (Hall, 2013c, p. xvii) also includes images.

⁹⁴ Contrary to the *intentional* approach to representation where "words mean what the author intends they should mean" (Hall, 2013a, p. 10), the constructivist or constructionist approach contends that society constructs meaning using representational systems, such as language.

⁹⁵ "Any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning is, from this point of view, 'a language'" (Hall, 2013a, p. 5).

For Hall, “meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part” (ibid., p. xix), so that “feelings, attachments and emotions as well as concepts and ideas” (ibid.) are involved in every instance of these interactions, and to such an extent as to “organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects” (ibid.). The seemingly indeterminate notion of meaning therefore has a significant practical impact on the social sphere. Every action, display, or utterance made by an individual or group, irrespective of the medium, not only conveys an articulated thought or concept, but also an understanding of that individual or group *vis-à-vis* the topic being conveyed. As an example, creating an animated television comedy about an average family becomes an instance of produced meaning that will exchange such meaning with the audience that watches it. Meaning is shaped by both the creators and the consumers of the show, as both groups imbue meanings with their own ideological constructs, as well as bringing their own emotional frameworks to their interpretation of the content. These interactions will shape an understanding of a larger context, such as the world in which we live, and ultimately influence how we relate to the content and how we conduct ourselves when faced with similar characters or events in the social sphere. An animated television comedy about an average family therefore, along with the obvious meaning in the narrative plot points and character development, also shapes other broader social concerns, such as what we understand as an average family, what is socially acceptable as being “funny”, what is appropriate for television viewing and viewers in terms of content or style, or what animation as a technique or genre can, should, or may represent. Ultimately meaning will set, “rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed” (ibid., p. xx) and such conventions are, according to Hall, “unconsciously internalize[d] (*sic*)” (Hall, 2013a, p. 8) through a representational system where the “*meaning* depends not on the material quality of the sign, but on its *symbolic function*” (italics in original) (ibid., p. 11). What the sign itself looks like is less important than how that specific representation shapes our understanding. As Hall points out, and a point that is particularly important in terms of this thesis, this ordering of the social sphere will influence or impact upon, amongst other things, “the construction of identity and the marking of difference” (Hall, 2013c, p. xx).

Stuart Hall’s work on representation is an obvious and logical theoretical framework for a social semiotic research methodology as proposed by Flyvbjerg

and mentioned earlier (see Chapter 3) as it incorporates both a semiotic approach⁹⁶, what Hall refers to as the *poetics* or the *how* of representation, with a more discursive approach to representation, its *politics*, concerned with the *effects and consequences* of representation, linked to “the historical specificity of a particular form or ‘regime’ of representation⁹⁷” (ibid., p. xxii), considering both *what* is represented and *how* it is represented. Hall states that representation can only be properly analysed through, “the actual concrete forms which meaning assumes” (ibid., p. xxv) and such material forms in which “meaning is circulated” (such as in the case of this thesis the animated television show alongside all the meta-texts and documented interactions in which it circulates), but while the forms may themselves be concrete, the analysis is invariably interpretative and “deeply inscribed in relations of power” (ibid., p. xxv) from Foucault’s perspective. These issues of power in representation then give rise to the issues of representing difference, and essentialising difference through amongst other aspects, stereotyping (ibid., p. xxiv) which I focus on in more detail below.

Importantly though, with regards to Foucault, meaning is constructed not only within a specific set of rules and regulations that shape knowledge (a discourse), but also within a specific historical context, Hall’s “historical specificity”. A discourse therefore governs, “the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall, 2013a, p. 29). Anyone producing meaning is therefore doing so within this framework of the discourse, particular to a cultural and historical context, and never independent of this framework. The meaning produced is therefore also a reflection of this framework and discourse. An individual producing meaning within the discourse does so by identifying and subjecting themselves to the discourse, and in so doing subjecting to the power and knowledge constructs of the discourse (ibid., p. 40). As an appropriate example Hall reflects on ‘the homosexual’ and describes the latter

“as a specific kind of social subject, [who] was *produced*, and could only make its (*sic*) appearance, with the moral, legal, medical and psychiatric discourses, practices and institutional apparatuses of the late nineteenth century, with their particular theories of sexual perversity” (italics in original) (Hall, 2013a, p. 31).

⁹⁶ For Hall the semiotic approach infers “since all cultural objects convey meaning, and all cultural practices depend on meaning, they must make use of signs; and in so far as they do, they must work like language works” (Hall, 2013a, p. 21).

⁹⁷ Hall notes that Foucault’s work on discourse, “was more historically grounded, more attentive to historical specificities” (ibid., p. 28.)

Within later historical contexts, and arguably within different cultural spheres, the meaning of this particular social subject changes, as does the attitude towards 'the homosexual', based on the shifting meanings associated with this discourse, and as a reflection of society and the unstable nature of social and cultural norms. Contemporary culture therefore produces a very different idea of 'the homosexual' based on the changing morals within society, and the changing legal, medical, and psychiatric notions of homosexuality in particular and sexuality in general. It is as Hall proclaims, the "discourse [which] manages and produces 'the homosexual'" (Hall, 2013b, p. 249).

5.3.1 Stereotyping

Stereotypes are... highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy (Lippmann in Dyer, 2002, p. 11).

According to Richard Dyer in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (2002), Walter Lippmann coined the term 'stereotype' emphasizing in his description both the necessity for and ideological implications of the concept (ibid.). For Lippmann a stereotype is not neutral and amongst other things "is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights" (Lippmann in ibid.). The implications are both sociological and aesthetic, that is "how stereotypes function in social thought" in the case of the former, and "how stereotypes function in fictions" (ibid.) in the case of the latter. The relationship between how people think of stereotypes and how these might be applied within everyday social interactions, versus how stereotypes manifest themselves in media representations, or fictions, unpins this research.

Stereotyping is a process, influenced by history and power relations, whereby individuals make sense of society by defining and ascribing to individuals and groups generalizations, patterns and types (ibid., p. 12). Such a process carries with it what Dyer refers to as "an implicit narrative", shaped by the history and politics mentioned, that are the emotional baggage of the stereotype (Dyer, 2002, p. 15). For Dyer the primary issue is that of power, namely *apropos* who controls and defines stereotypes, "what interests they serve" (ibid., p. 12), and in whose interests these distinctions are maintained (ibid., p. 17).

In his discussion of stereotyping⁹⁸, and specifically racial stereotyping, Hall notes how 'difference', "engages feelings, attitudes and emotions... [and] mobilizes fears and anxieties" (Hall, 2013b, p. 216) that are at the heart of why 'difference' is such a significant aspect of representation. Hall also highlights the necessity for difference to create meaning by quoting De Saussure's concept of relational meaning (ibid., p. 224), where we understand what something is by what we know it is not, and also Bakhtin's argument that meaning can only be established through a dialogue with the 'other' and is therefore "fundamentally *dialogic*" (italics in original) (ibid., p. 225). This gives rise to a way of identifying through significant differences, or binary forms of representation as polarized extremes (ibid., p. 219). 'Difference' and 'otherness' are therefore necessary for the production of meaning in general, and also for identities particularly, but significantly for a "subjective sense of the self as a sexed subject", Hall points out that they are therefore, "threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression" (ibid., p. 228). Halls' Chapter 4 in *The Spectacle of the 'Other'* focuses specifically on the racial other, but the discussion is equally relevant to notions of the sexual other, and has been applied in the latter context.

The significance of these polarized extremes is found in stereotyping. These 'regimes of representation' (ibid., p. 237) in popular forms become so common that "cartoonists, illustrators and caricaturists could summon up a whole gallery of... 'types' with a few, simple, essentialized strokes of the pen". In the case of homosexuality, and following on from Hall, this would be termed a 'sexualized regime of representation' (ibid.). Hall refers to Richard Dyer on the problem of the reductionist and naturalizing effects of stereotyping, importantly how the "simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics" are exaggerated and simplified to become the natural traits of that person (ibid., p. 247) naturalizing and fixing only those clearly obvious differences. In his discussion of non-white caricatures and race issues in animation productions, Wells suggests that these, "include the temptation of excessive physicality, [and] over-determined sexuality and sexual practice" (Wells, 1998, p. 217). Stereotypes can also function as an interesting indicator of the relationship between a society and problematic issues of identity as "the degree of rigidity and

⁹⁸ A 'stereotype' is meaning "reduced to a few essentials, fixed... by a few, simplified characteristics" where individuals are "reduced to the signifiers of their... difference" (Hall, 2013b, p. 237). As opposed to 'types' which is "any simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characterization in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or 'development' is kept to a minimum" (Dyer quoted in ibid., p. 247).

shrillness of a stereotype indicates the degree to which it is an enforced representation" (Dyer, 2002, p. 16).

Stereotyping becomes part of the discourse of a representation in that it creates clearly defined boundaries maintaining social and symbolic order through its "fixed, clear-cut, unalterable" (Dyer in (Hall, 2013b, p. 248) categorizations of types of people. It symbolically fixes boundaries through *closure* and *exclusion* (ibid.) by defining something, closing it, and excluding everything that does not belong to or within that definition. Stereotyping therefore becomes "a key element in [the] exercise of symbolic violence" (ibid., p. 249) as that which is excluded invariably draws negative connotations to itself, as abjected. The excluded, by the very nature of binary representations, automatically frames the included, the unacceptable constructs the acceptable, and in so doing a relationship of power inadvertently establishes hierarchies. The maintenance of boundaries is according to Dyer the chief concern of stereotyping not only "map[ping] out the boundaries of acceptable and legitimate behavior, [but] also insist[ing] on boundaries exactly at those points where in reality there are none" (Dyer, 2002, p. 16). Stereotypes therefore make "visible the invisible... [and] make fast, firm and separate what is in reality fluid" (ibid.). The problem of a stereotype, Dyer suggests, is that it is supposed that it reflects some generally accepted truth about a social grouping, whereas in fact it is the stereotype that shapes our ideas of the group. Stereotypes therefore "express particular definitions of reality, with concomitant evaluations, which in turn relate to the disposition of power within society" (ibid., p. 14). Stereotyping transforms the practice of representation and therefore sexual representations, like racial representations, "become a critical arena of contestation and struggle" (Hall, 2013b, p. 246).

5.4 De-constructing Queer

Alexander Doty (2000) in *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* gives a detailed discussion on this concept of Queer⁹⁹ and its many meanings. He reminds us that Queer is not merely a synonym for gay or lesbian (Doty, 2000, p. 7), but more crucially describes "those complex circumstances in texts, spectators, and production that resists easy categorization, but that definitely escape or defy the hetero-normative" (ibid.). For Doty therefore gay and lesbian

⁹⁹ see also Butler 1999, Peach 2005, Sedgwick 2008 (first published in 1990), and various works by Judith J. Halberstam and David M. Halperin to name only a few important texts and authors within Queer studies.

narratives are ostensibly Queer, but the concept also accommodates any narrative that subverts commonly accepted assumptions about societies and cultures, though perhaps more focused on issues relating to gender. Kuzniar (2000, pg. 1) notes that “‘New Queer Cinema’ designates a swell of self-aware and openly sexualized gay, lesbian, and bisexual filmmaking from the early to mid-nineties”, suggesting the author has fallen into the trap of conflating Queer and gay and lesbian, but does represent a voice from the enthusiastic early days of the emergence of what would ultimately become a genre. Kuzniar (2000) does however go on to discuss the applications of the term Queer and how this

marks an eccentricity common to gays, lesbians, bi-and transsexuals, a common protest against the hegemony and legitimacy of the normal. It challenges the institution of heteronormativity with its regulatory strictures (ibid., p. 6).

Whilst similar to Doty’s conceptualization which allows for a broad application to almost all texts, opening them up for a reading that is in itself non-mainstream (though that which is discussed may well be mainstream), Kuzniar’s Queer is a performance that structures itself as overtly other and as a form of protest. This other is what Wood (2004, pg. 111) refers to as

that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with... in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself.

Kuzniar’s othering places the performer outside of the mainstream and therefore a spectacle, positioning themselves to symbolize the rejected other, those parts of society that cannot be annihilated or rendered safe through assimilation as it bears very little potential to be a replica of the parent culture. This latter interpretation however falls again into the trap of essentializing identities, and condemning these identities to a mainstream and stereotyped codification for gay/lesbian (read femme/butch) for which the term Queer is meant to provide “an acceptable alternative” (Kuzniar, 2000, p. 6). Doty, articulating another misrepresentation of the depiction of gay/lesbians, highlights how Queerness can be expressed in “ways other than by nude bodies in contact, kissing, or direct verbal indicators” (Doty, 2000, p. 5) a codification that he maintains demonizes

not only sex in general, but the sexually predatory nature of the homosexual sub-culture and the related unnatural acts¹⁰⁰.

A further complication to the construction of identity is the concept of gender and its impact on the concept. Giddens (2001) states that cultural and media products “embody traditional attitudes towards gender and towards the sorts of aims and ambitions girls and boys are expected to have” (ibid., p. 109) and that “gender inequalities result because men and women are socialized into different roles” (ibid., p. 108). When we then turn to a discussion of visual media, and specifically film, we must consider Laura Mulvey’s (2004) discussion of Visual Pleasure and specifically identification with the image, as “it is an image that constitutes the matrix of imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification” (ibid., p. 840). Mulvey suggests that it is the image that does much of the socialization in terms of gender and predominantly through identifying with the screen object. Linking to Jenkins’ earlier discussion, it is therefore also through the recognition of the identities on the screen that society constructs an understanding of itself, the groups and individuals within society, and not just the real persons who make up our social network. Part of the individual’s understanding of their identity is to come to understand their physicality and sexuality. As societies move deeper in the postmodern and become more “visual” in terms of learning about themselves¹⁰¹ and therefore representation becomes more image based, the nature of the projection of gender becomes an important factor, especially for the homosexual¹⁰². To construct identities on screen, to represent identities and specifically gay identities, there must be an understanding of how to combine “the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters... without breaking narrative verisimilitude” (ibid., p. 842), ideas central to Mulvey’s discussion of ‘the gaze’. So initially there must be a reference for the audience to which they can align themselves and identify themselves as voyeurs, i.e. what is the perspective from which I must view this representation, a comfort zone to understand the context of the representation. Furthermore an identity needs to be constructed in a way for the male gaze to objectify the male object, because, as Mulvey states “the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like” (Mulvey,

¹⁰⁰ One could add to Doty’s list the issue of cross dressing or transvestism, which is part of the ‘eccentricity’ to which Kuzniar refers, but is only a subsection of the subculture itself and not a wide ranging gay/lesbian performance.

¹⁰¹ Consider how media has come to dominate the interface between the individual and knowledge, e.g. the world wide web, web pages, blogs, games, television, DVDs, etc.

¹⁰² On this point it’s important to note that representations of homosexuality in media and specifically entertainment media are not a new thing in itself, for example as discussed by Chris Packard in *Queer Cowboys* (2005), which considers written depictions of the nature of the homosocial and homosexual in 19th century American literature.

2004, p. 842). While this may hold true for heterosexual masculinities, homosexual masculinities already have their objectified object, namely the male body.

Judith Butler (1999) discusses the politics of gender and how the performance of gender is the result of an internalized identity. Butler's discussion considers three dependent components of corporeality, namely "anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance" (ibid., p. 175). In the case of straight acting homosexuals therefore the anatomical sex is male, the gender identity masculine and the gender performance masculine as well. For effeminate gay men, the anatomical sex is still male, the gender identity is feminine and the gender performance can be either masculine or feminine. If, as Butler states, the body becomes the surface on which society projects a construction of gender, then the body, and more specifically the identified sexuality of that body, will play a role in creating a gendered identity to reflect back into society. Butler's discussion of the unstable nature of identity in general and gender identity in particular brings these notions into focus.

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts (italics in original)* (ibid., p. 179).

Gender is therefore a socio-temporal enactment that changes with the ebb and flow of various factors in society. The identities on screen and how they are portrayed are interpretations that represent notions of and attitudes towards homosexuality, whilst at the same time acting as vehicle to foreground various aspects of their depiction within society.

5.5 Constructing Gay

How a group is represented... in cultural forms... [has] to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens (Dyer, 2002, p. 1).

Animation has the capability of rendering the body in a way which blurs traditional notions of gender, species and indigenous identity... It

is in this sense that animation as a *form* is acknowledged as having a potentially radical vocabulary (Wells , 1998, p. 188).

This section begins with two quotations that clearly show the complexity of representation in and for this discussion. The first above is from the seminal text of Richard Dyer *The Matter of Images* (2002) that collects his essays on gay and lesbian representation in media spanning three decades, beginning in 1979 through 1991 and with an introduction that revisits and reassesses his work 20 years later. The second excerpt is from Paul Wells *Understanding Animation* (1998) and talks about representation from the animation perspective.

Drawing on these two quotations, we may take it that representation is about content, the individual or group(s) being represented; ideology, how such representation gives meaning to, for or about the individual or group(s); and the complex issue of form, how the individual or group is represented, and furthermore how animation essentially changes this meaning yet again. As Dyer so succinctly states

The complexity of representation lies then in its embeddedness in cultural forms, its unequal but not monolithic relations of production and reception, its tense and unfinished, unfinishable relation to the reality to which it refers and which it affects. It also lies, finally, in its comprehensiveness (Dyer, 2002, p. 4).

For Dyer representation is a vital and integral element in cultural reproduction encapsulating complex issues not least being the diversity of methods and modes of such reproduction. The close connection between the concepts of representation and identity can be seen by comparing Dyer's comments on representation to Jenkins' description of identity as "our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 18) and furthermore his definition of identification as "the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively" (ibid., p. 13). Identity and representation are therefore closely linked and importantly defined by both the individual and the group and influenced both by internal and external factors.

For this thesis the focus is on reproduction of such identities and representations through the media and specifically television and animation, but the human factor cannot be wholly ignored as media is produced by members of the very culture its media and television wishes to represent. As such Dyer reminds us not only of the power of all cultural content, how we are seen to be treated and therefore treat others (Dyer, 2002, p. 1), but also of the complexity of such representations through the multifarious and polysemic nature of texts themselves as they “always and necessarily [entail] the use of the codes and conventions of the available cultural forms of presentation” and “do not have single determinate meanings” (ibid., p. 2). The analysis of such images “always needs to see how any given instance is embedded in a network of other instances” (ibid.). From an analytical perspective the point Dyer makes is important as a reading of a text is influenced by what the reader brings to the text, both in available contexts and personal engagements with and knowledge of texts and the socio-cultural context in general. The reader is shaped to read the text¹⁰³ and as such Dyer suggests we are restricted “by both the viewing and the reading codes to which we have access” and “by what representations there are for us to view and read” (ibid.). For Dyer the issue of power and control is foremost in representation and the dissemination of cultural ideals, he says “we must not leave the matter of power out of account any more than the matter of representation itself” (ibid., p. 4) as for him, such control is heavily weighted in favour of “the rich, the white, the male, the heterosexual” (ibid., p. 2). Dyer’s argument is not unbiased. He is clearly in favour of greater and more encompassing levels of gay and lesbian representation in what he firmly believes is a repressed and repressive environment for such depictions.

Another important aspect of Dyer’s argument is that while he admits that representations are not reality, but merely constructed reflections of a reality and that reality can only be apprehended through textual representations that inherently reflect diverse and disparate discourses and ideologies, such construction can therefore never be unmediated. More importantly however, while one can see reality only through representation, for Dyer “it does not follow that one does not see reality at all. Partial... vision of something is not no vision of it whatsoever” (ibid., p. 3). The latter highlights the interesting opportunity texts offer to consider aspects of the creation of such a reality and how such representations impact on the social and cultural context. Whilst the codes of

¹⁰³ Stuart Hall’s (1981) *Theory of Preferred Reading* suggests a reader takes up a position in relation to a text, as either a preferred reading, a negotiated reading, or an alternative/oppositional reading of the text.

such reality construction set limits for what humans can project in a representation of reality, for Dyer “reality is always more extensive and complicated than any system of representation can possibly comprehend” (Dyer, 2002, p. 3) and that representations therefore “have real consequences for real people... in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society” (ibid.). It is especially these negative delimitations that will have negative consequences for the individual or group being represented. Dyer states, “there are signs of gayness, a repertoire of gestures, expressions, stances, clothing, and even environments... that bespeak gayness” (ibid., p. 19), but these are culturally constructed to make overt that which is not inherently an obvious part of a person’s appearance, namely their sexuality. However, this is not to say that aspects of this overtness have not been co-opted by the homosexual culture precisely to make it more visible through these ‘typifications’¹⁰⁴.

Typifications are “the product of social, political, practical and textual determinations” (ibid.) which, while helpful as a shorthand to understand an individual or group, problematically conflate elements, such as gender and sexuality, where one is then considered to be characteristic of the other (ibid., p. 23). This draws attention to how society unintentionally appreciates a particular element, in the case of this research, sexuality in terms of human behavior. The main result of such conflations is that these isolated and augmented characteristics then remain the most prominent in any interaction, essentially reducing the individual or group to that characteristic. In the case of male homosexuals, the sexuality and sexual aspects of the individuals become the defining features of and for the entire group. Dyer points out that this has both advantages and disadvantages. In the case of the former, the high profile of their sexuality means that representations are clear and open about who is being portrayed, but in the case of the latter, the reduction to a simply single characteristic is unnecessarily reductive (ibid., p. 24). Dyer though makes it clear that, “any gay type will inflect and articulate other traditions of representation in the culture as a whole... gay types are always caught up in the total web of the system of cultural meanings” (ibid., p. 28).

¹⁰⁴ Typifications are “visually recognizable images and self-presentations” (Dyer, 2002, p. 21) and “as a mode of representation, [it is] immediate and economical... a quick visual type allows the text to concern itself straightforwardly with (homo)sexuality, not within the formulae of revelation and discovery” (ibid., p. 22).

For Dyer the limitations of representations are especially problematic for identifying with a group or individual as they never wholly encompass all aspects of the group or individual in such a way that there is a substantial sense of belonging or recognition, they do however enable “one to try to change the circumstances of that socially constructed grouping” (Dyer, 2002, p. 3). For Dyer “representation is the organization of the perception of these [differences] into comprehensibility, a comprehensibility that is always frail, coded, in other words, human” (ibid., p. 4) and it is inevitably in this very human world (as Jenkins describes it) that the construction of identity and representation must take place, for Jenkins states it is “the field upon which the individual and the collective meet and meld” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 38).

5.6 Queering animation: sexual identity and animation

Sexuality remains one of the demonic forces in human consciousness – pushing us at intervals close to taboo and dangerous desires¹⁰⁵.

Stewie: Why can't you just hang out with guys? Live with someone of your own sex. Just do what you would do with women, but with your buddy. Why don't guys just do that?

Brian: They do. It's called being gay.

Stewie: Oh that's what gay is? Oh yeah, I could totally get into that!¹⁰⁶

Already in *Understanding Animation* (1998) Wells comments on gendered and queered performances in animation, observing the general social trend at the time of the evolution of feminist and related gender and sexual ideological critiques that aimed to create and adopt texts to redefine “historically determined, socially restrictive, definitions of sex and sexuality” (ibid., p. 206). Wells quotes Moe Meyer's view that such restrictive, mostly Queer, sexualities threaten and deny a social identity by refusing specifically a sexually defined identity, which as seen above (in stereotypes) “must also include the denial of the difference upon which such identities [are] founded” in (ibid.). For Wells this fluidity of representation and identity is in fact seen in the form of animation itself, notably the ability of animation to ignore the requirements of reality and distort characters and outlines, especially those that are meant to stand for

¹⁰⁵ Susan Sontag (1982, p. 103)

¹⁰⁶ Family Guy, S06E07, #5ACX2, *Chick Cancer*

recognizably human characters. Wells states “both the physical and ideological boundaries of the anthropomorphized body as it exists in the cartoon are perpetually in a state of transition, refusing a consistent identity” (Wells, 1998, p. 206). Animation permits flux in visual representation that is consistent with the notion of construction of identity itself. Animation becomes a literal embodiment of theories of identity, ego in a constant state of flux, visualized through the employed technique of the animation. Importantly though Wells reminds us that this visual flux is linked to an ideological flux as well, as lacking a final form, any associated identities also remain in the same state of instability. Wells develop this argument to include related issues of gender. Wells highlights the fact that this flux then blurs aspects of masculinity and femininity and more importantly for this discussion the ambivalence in “received notion[s] of what constitutes the conditions of homosexuality and heterosexuality” (ibid.). The fundamentally inconstant form that is animation suggests a space for the constant play of identity, both of the individual and the group.

The notion of recasting or reframing roles and identities in animation is not new and Paul Wells (1998) highlights an historically important animation by Tex Avery, namely *Red Hot Riding Hood* (MGM, 1943) where Avery redefines the notion of power in his characters so as to give the characters the freedom to pursue their motives and desires, “pay[ing] no attention to social etiquette, cultural norms, or prevailing hierarchies of influence and effect” (ibid., p. 146). Wells also gives the examples of *Minnie the Moocher* (Fleischer Studios, 1932) and *Betty Boop’s Snow White* (Fleischer Studios, 1933): in the latter Betty Boop is drawn into the “dark, mysterious underworld, characterized by transgressive behavior and taboo imagery” (Wells, 1998, p. 217). Such early examples illustrate animation less fettered by mores and morals in the early years of the Hays Code¹⁰⁷ era, where deviations from social norms in terms of ‘desires’ were consciously eschewed. At the same time such an early marriage between ideology and technique suggests the natural affinity and suitability between the two.

Animation can do this because, as Wells argues in *Animation Genre and Authorship* (2002), it lends itself to questioning reality. Wells frames animation as a Modernist art and how it “illuminate[s]’ a supposedly-known or taken-for-granted world, from a different perspective” (Wells, 2006, p. 33) and thereby “reveals itself to be a credible mediator of the relationship between perception

¹⁰⁷ The Motion Picture Production Code was a set of industry guidelines that governed the production of most United States motion pictures released by major studios from 1930 to 1968.

(how something is seen), interpretation (how something is understood), and creativity (how something is re-engaged with as the material of expression)" (Wells, 2002, p. 38). Animation therefore offers the opportunity to construct and reconstruct representations of identities to emphasize different aspects of the construction and the interpretation thereof. Its creative and plastic nature grants the opportunity for endless variations and flexibility in such representations that engage with and draw attention to the construction itself.

Sam Abel extends these notions of the animator, the animator's body, and the fluidity of identities in his discussion of Bugs Bunny in *The Rabbit in Drag: Camp and Gender Construction in the American Animated Cartoon* (Abel, 1995, p. 184). Abel refers to the 'camp' artist who works "at the edges of the believable", the medium of animation offering "the greatest opportunity for the precision necessary for this tightrope walk" (ibid.). Abel is specifically referring here to the performance of 'camp', the masculine parading as the feminine, and not necessarily the sexuality of the animator *per se*, but clearly linking the performance to the versatility of the medium. In his review of the series *Rick & Steve*, Scott Cranin comments that it is, "[b]rilliantly subversive, surprisingly dirty and with more insight than one would expect from plastic puppets... it seems plastic toys can say and do the wildest things that humans wouldn't even dream of" (Cranin, 2007) an observation that Peter Paige, who plays the character Steve in the series, reiterates in a behind-the-scenes interview, "It's amazing what you can get away with in animation... imagine if they did that on a regular sitcom... you can put some things on the table and talk about them openly and frankly"¹⁰⁸.

So while Bugs Bunny is performing overtly feminine, it is always clear that this is a male character performing female (Abel, 1995, p. 194). By contrast Warner's *The Goofy Gophers*, are "overtly gay, a pair of cloned old-school elegant queens" (ibid., p. 197) who, while camp, according to Abel "are simply a stereotype of 'typical' homosexual behavior... engender[ing] a certain minimal type of camp, but it is a camp without content or substance... buy[ing] into stereotypes rather than critiquing them" (ibid.). In a footnote Abel states, "when the gophers are discussed at all in the critical literature, which is rare, the gayness of the gophers is either ignored or dodged. Lenburg mentions them only in a caption to an illustration, where he calls them '...these pesky cartoon aristocrats', using a typical Noel Coward-ish ploy of labeling effeminacy as elegance" (ibid., p. 202).

¹⁰⁸ Rick & Steve, S01: Extras, Interviews

5.6.1 Animated sexuality: contestation and critique

For Abel, animation is the most apposite site for popular and popularly acceptable destabilizations of social norms, such as gender and sexuality, due to animation's abstract nature, ostensibly distancing it from 'reality', and the impression that it is an "insignificant form"¹⁰⁹ (Abel, 1995, p. 184). The more commercial animations are in fact a double abstraction, being both a visual narrative (either film or television), i.e. a story distilled from reality, as well as a created diegetic space, in the case of cartoons a 'drawing' that "of necessity, simplifies reality, both visually and psychologically" (ibid., pp. 184-185). Abel is however quick to note the impact of such fictional animated characters and their representations, contrary to the notion of its insignificance, and how these "both reflect and influence social norms, including gender norms... [and] reflect the standards of gender construction in (American) society" (ibid., p. 184). The significance of Abel's discussion is how the 'camp' performances, of Bugs Bunny and others, are to a large extent a "critique and subversion of those (sic) norms" (ibid.), where camp does not so much express what is natural, but rather "draws attention to the artifices attendant on the construction of images of what is natural" (Dyer, 2002, p. 40), self-consciously playing with and exaggerating alternative sexualities that recognize their "problematic relationship to the conventional conflation of sexuality and gender" (ibid.). So the output of major studios is useful to study social and cultural constructions of gender and sexuality as they distil social norms through the creative work of the animators. Abel's argument also maintains that it is only in the Warner cartoons that such social norms are consistently identified and subverted, especially in the performance of Bugs Bunny and his "subversion of traditional gender roles, and the high-camp brilliance with which he executes his gender subversion" (Abel, 1995, p. 184).

Comedy, especially and perhaps unfortunately as ridicule, is central to the play of especially gender in animation. The "instability of [the animated] form" (Wells, 1998, p. 208), lends itself to the creation of comic moments, and most often the "blurring of gender distinctions, offer[s] the opportunity for humour but also for subversive appropriation" (ibid., p. 206). Dyer asserts that more often than not comedy explodes the myths of male sexuality precisely by "raising a laugh" (Dyer, 2002, p. 89). And while such role-playing of gender in animation may function as a positive role model, such transgressions remain "within an almost exclusively male context. Only male characters have the power of transgression,

¹⁰⁹ Abel's reference here is specifically to the animated cartoon.

and in wielding that power they appropriate both male and female identities” (Abel, 1995, p. 191).

Sam Abel’s discussion of this construction of ‘camp’ in animated cartoons, especially those by Warner Brothers and in particular the character of Bugs Bunny, illustrates some of these ideas of the construction of identities and the process of representation in animation, it also broaches some aspects of the temporal specificity of such representations. The persistent presence of masculinity as the norm in most early animation, and arguably still in most Disney animation, Abel argues, is due to the ratio of predominantly male to female animators in the studio system (Abel, 1995, p. 185). Thus in the early years of the animation industry Disney, and later other larger studios, define the gender norm for the rest of the cartoon world “both because of the dominance of Disney in the cartoon market and in the popular imagination, and because of the proximity of Disney’s gender norm to that of society at large” (ibid.) mimicking “western gender ideals of masculine dominance and feminine submission” (ibid.). Masculinity is the assumed form of animated anthropomorphised characters, a female character is always specifically constructed as female, through dress, mannerisms, voice, or “by a gender-specific role in relation to a child or male partner” (ibid., p. 189). In the absence of such a construction, the character is by default, male. Gender is therefore assumed based on the role the character plays in any onscreen relationship.

Dyer also notes that comedy within a sex or sexual context

consistently plays on ambivalences surrounding male sexuality... [it] is an area of expression that is licensed to explore aspects of life that are difficult, contradictory and distressing... comedy can get away with making fun of things ... [and is] fertile terrain for considering images of sexuality (Dyer, 2002, p. 92).

This combination of animation as a technique that lends itself to exploring transgressive topics through its perceived immaturity and plasticity, and the irreverent space that is comedy for contemplating similar transgressions, clarifies the penchant for animation to lend itself to articulating problematic and challenging topics as comedy. But Dyer also asserts, that while animated comedy may overtly ridicule masculine sexuality, covertly “it still ends up asserting as natural the prevalent social definition of that sexuality” (ibid., p. 95).

5.7 Identity and Representation in Animation

Animation is therefore the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames¹¹⁰.

Animation is basically an art of 'metaphor' and is perfect for all kinds of role-play to show different perspectives and ideas about the culture we live in¹¹¹.

McLaren's above comment raises both phenomenological and ontological issues on the subject of animation, drawing the emphasis away from what it *is*, namely the physical drawing or filmic frame, to the process of bringing the frame to fruition, and more than this, how this process of what McLaren describes as manipulation, is a complex and covert performance, difficult to define in concrete terms and likened to more enigmatic practices, such as the creation of art. At the same time Wells' comment highlights how versatile animation can be to broach different social viewpoints. While McLaren is speaking as an animator and film maker, and the assumption is that these *invisible interstices* referred to are the actions of the animator in performing the act of animation, namely the drawing of the frame, the inking of the cell, or the minute movements of the stop-motion puppet, I would include in the latter the unspoken and usually undocumented processes of thought, the choices the animator makes and more so the deeply entrenched ideological and socio-political frameworks that unconsciously influence these same decisions. The *interstices* therefore include the manipulation of these invisible aspects of creation that influence the animator. The different *perspectives* that Wells therefore refers to become more complex to identify, as they include not only the explicit choices of the animator, but also his or her veiled ideologies. So while these quotes could be read as simply what the animator must *do* between and before the frame is finalized, I would go further to include what they *think*, the ideas and personal themes, and the messages the animator either overtly or covertly encodes into the final artwork or frame.

This is of especial importance to animation where the entire diegesis is constructed, as all aspects of the final frame of animation could then be influenced in some way by these more covert considerations in the process of creation. Wells explains that animation relies on the

¹¹⁰ Norman McLaren quoted in Furniss (2007, p. 5).

¹¹¹ Barry Purves quoted in Wells (2006, p. 33).

artificial construction of visual performance and events, and is wholly made through the self-conscious appropriation and assimilation of both live-action and fine-art principles by the animators themselves. They are responsible for every aspect of what is necessarily a highly detailed process of *creating* a world (emphasis in original)(Wells, 2002, p. 26).

Again, while Wells is clearly focusing on design and other artistic choices (such as the construction of the characters and environments and the character's performance in terms of movement), as well as how filmic techniques are employed in the production of animation (such as blocking and lighting), the artificiality of the construction and this self-conscious appropriation of principles must include unconscious ideological and other social philosophies that can and should also be discernable in the final *tableau*, and again that while some of these choices may be overt, some may well be more veiled and hidden, even to the animator themselves.

This impact of the artificiality of animation is best explained with the concept of *enunciation*. While academics may not agree on a definition of animation, audiences can agree when what they are viewing *is* animation. There is something idiosyncratic and distinguishing about animation that literally "announces" itself as animation, implying artifice and illusion and "the presence of a creator" (Wells, 2006, p. 107) and since these elements of the fantastic extend into all aspects of the diegesis (all aspects of the characters, their movement, and the locations), including the narrative construction, Furniss (2007, p. 157) proposes that the audience accepts animation's constructed-ness more easily. In his discussion of genre and authorship in animation, Wells (2002) extends the notion of *enunciation* to include the animation character as phenomenological encounter. I will quote Wells at length as his discussion raises some important issues for this thesis and the research methodology that has been employed. Wells states that animation announces itself as a different kind of phenomenon

[which] challenges the viewer to both recognize that this is 'animation', and therefore different from live-action film-making, and to invest in engaging with animated phenomena as constructs which may relate directly to the terms and conditions of human experience,

but equally may offer more complex mediations on socio-cultural and aesthetic epistemologies (Wells, 2002, p. 11).

So while *enunciation* makes accepting the constructed-ness of animation easier, it highlights that animation is different and that this very difference comes from its construction. This constructed-ness compels the viewer to interrogate what is being constructed, this would include what it represents or portrays, and that this too therefore needs to be understood differently. Wells continues

[a]nimation intrinsically interrogates the phenomenon it represents and offers new and alternative perspectives and knowledge to its audiences (ibid.).

Animation therefore lends itself to probing real life phenomena because it can engage overtly with contentious and other issues, expressly due to the distancing effect its constructed-ness has on the viewer. On a covert level however, the potential impact of the creator or animator involved in all these processes of constructing the diegetic space, implies that there may be more layers of analysis as far as the complex mediations Wells refers to.

While Wells' discussion in *Animation Genre and Authorship* (2002) clearly frames the animator as an author, the reality in any form of large scale, large budget production process is that multiple players have an influence on the final product. Disney is the oft quoted example of production line animation where their full length features "to some extent bear the imprint of the many people who contributed to them" (Furniss, 2007, p. 65), the dominant roles being "the positions of producer, director and animator" (ibid., p. 64). Wells in fact draws our attention to the typology of authorship as described by Dyer, which can include individual, multiple, collective, and corporate variations of animation authorship (Dyer in Wells, 2002, p. 22).

For animation then production of the final product means the creation of a wholly constructed diegesis (with the input of possibly multiple opinions depending on the working situation), requiring both a physical material process of creation, as well as a mental socio-ideological process of encoding, of both conscious and unconscious ideas of design and influences from the social sphere, in order to bring the final frame of animation to fruition. This very constructed-ness announces itself providing a more accessible platform to discuss more

contentious issues, whilst also focusing attention on the nature of its constructed-ness and thereby requiring a deeper engagement with the content of the animation.

The significant result of this, as far as this research is concerned, is that there is a meaningful relationship between the animator and what he or she animates, and more interestingly that “the link between animated figure and animator... remains a significant consideration” (Furniss, 2007, p. 70) especially in the study of understanding what the animator is bringing to life in the frame on an unconscious level in terms of representation. Q. Allan Brocka describes how animators “are all basically actors too, because they’re creating the way a character moves... [what] the director has to do here is take the performance of an animator, the performance of a voice actor and put them together in a way that really marries them to one character”¹¹². This relationship is concretely witnessed in the seemingly simple practice of animators acting out the movements and facial reactions of their characters in mirrors and usually to the voice over artist’s dialogue track. Simply put, the animator uses him or herself as the model for the performance, and while physical features can reasonably be held to migrate into the constructed performance, such as a characteristic gesture or facial tick, the potential for ideological particularities to do the same is perhaps less considered or imagined. While the more formal definition of this action of self-figuration suggests this concept requires “some reference to the artist of the film, either by depicting him or her at work or... the convention of showing the artist’s hand”, Furniss (ibid., p. 69) mentions Donald Crafton’s suggestion that self-figuration “continues to occur on a much more subtle level” (ibid.). An obvious extension of this argument is the one I give above, that physical similarities can creep into the performance or even the shape and form of the character and therefore be considered figurations of the animator’s self, but following on from the above discussion I would suggest that an even more subtle level could by implication include the *metaphoric* artist’s hand, that is the ideology and thinking of the artist that then would also figure in the final art work. The conventions of animation practice however, delimit such self-figurations and shape the issues that surround specifically characters, stories, and their representation.

This notion of the animator’s body and the body of the animated character is referred to by Wells as, “a form constantly in flux, always subject to

¹¹² Rick & Steve, S02 Extras, Making the (Rock) Band, Step by step by step

redetermination and reconstruction" (Wells, 1998, p. 213), and Wells returns to this topic again in *Animation Genre and Authorship* (2002, p. 25) stressing that animation is intrinsically visual and therefore the somatic performance of the animated character is of significant importance. Wells again repeats this assertion in *The Fundamentals of Animation* (2006) where he positions acting at the core of affecting animation and promotes a concentration on "body language and physical gesture as tools of expression" (ibid., p. 33). It is however not mere physicality that is important in an animated performance as Wells mentions the need for animated characters that have "an unambiguous, stronger and clearer personality than a live action or even a picture story script" (referring to Roche in Wells, 2002, p. 23). A character's reinterpretation into an animated form is not only primarily visual, but also predominantly based on exaggerated bodily actions and facial expressions. The logic of such iconicity links to Scott McCloud's discussion on comics and his contention that "iconic images – those that are simplified to bare meaning... allow the viewer to identify with a character to a greater extent than realistically rendered images" and that such designs are therefore more representative of the universal person rather than the particular individual (quoted in Furniss, 2007, p. 66). This concentration on exaggeration and simplification is the root of the problem of stereotyping. Referring to Julianne Burton-Carvajal's work on the body in Disney animation, Wells notes how the animation codes of abstraction blur the boundary between the masculine and the feminine, such imagery, following on from Burton-Carvajal argument, identify "the collapse of socio-sexual certainty". Where especially male and female, masculinity and femininity "become almost arbitrary constructions and performances" (Wells, 1998, p. 207) with such abstracted bodies facilitating "a number of readings that place gender orthodoxies in crisis" (ibid., pp. 213-214). The body and the gender of that body become a 'costume', "the physical materiality of the body (in the cartoon) operates in the same way as any representation of clothing or accessory" (ibid., p. 214).

These physical performances are however bound by some of the long standing conventions of the craft. Personality animation, or animation that "delineat[es] individual characters through the development of movement and voice" (Furniss, 2007, p. 68) does so specifically to increase the levels of identification, and therefore loyalty, of the viewer to the character (ibid.) by abbreviating and condensing attributes usually generalized from the social sphere and popular culture. This is found more often in commercial animation where "there is a strong tendency to depict 'types' that conform to some popular formula of the

past or are recognizable from some other context" (Furniss, 2007, p. 67)¹¹³. This is done precisely to attract and retain the audience through a familiar character trait, or an easy to accept type. If we link this idea to Jules Engel's comment that "animators actually tend to err on the side of 'over-animating'" (quoted in Furniss, 2007, p. 79) then the question arises as to at what stage does an easily identifiable personality or type become a stereotype, and further more when does such a stereotype take on a negative quality? Here again the self-figuration concept plays an important part as Furniss refers to an anecdote of Don Graham, who "stressed animators should interpret actions by identifying with the mindset of the character being depicted" (Furniss, 2007, p. 79). While Furniss is commenting on this as the reason for artists to act out the movements of their characters, or to literally get into character, it does illustrate how the physicality and mentality of the animator can find purchase in the representation of the final character. Not only will the bodily performance of the animator be echoed, but also the psychological and emotional relationship to the character on the part of the animator. For Wells how the body is represented "constitutes the basic vocabulary by which particular aspects of masculinity and femininity may be expressed" (Wells, 1998, p. 205), where masculinity and femininity are defined as a set of signifiers and gender "performed".

To return to Norman McLaren, he refers to movement in animation, specifically in stop-motion animation in his notes on pixilation, as "a caricature type of movement" and that movement comments on character and situation "by creating hyper-natural exaggerations and distortions of the normal behavior" (quoted in Furniss, 2007, p. 161). McLaren is referring to a specific form of animation and an overt desire on the part of the animator to set out to distort, but even the less aggressive exaggerations of drawn or other animation forms can conceivably distort representations. In a discussion of the early history of cartoon animation, Wells comments that caricature "was merely a convention of cartooning, and did not carry with it overt political agendas" (Wells, 1998, p. 146) and while this may be true historically, I would argue that ideological agendas are far more prevalent and pressing in contemporary animation and that all caricature in current modern animation clearly does have some agenda, whether political, social, overt or covert. For Wells the animator must, through their consideration of a performance, "facilitate the physical signifiers which illustrate and prompt emotions" (Wells, 2002, p. 24), or put simply, find the actions that best represent the character or emotion the animator is trying to convey in the

¹¹³ Another mode of 'typification' as referred to earlier.

shortest time and the most accessible way. In a more craft oriented perspective in his *Fundamentals of Animation* Wells reiterates this advice that the animator should try to capture the essence of the character and “build a specific vocabulary of movement for [the character], so that the ‘meaning’ in the acting will be clear and distinctive” (Wells, 2006, p. 33). This advice does follow the conventions of the form, but essentialising a character gives rise to the stereotype which would suggest that this is then the basic problem for the animator in the design and performance of an animation character, that it inherently stereotypes for the sake of design and technical expediency with inadvertent repercussions for the performance of sexuality and gendered sexual (and obviously other) representations.

5.8 Conclusion

What is significant is how sexuality is symbolized, how these devices evoke a sense of what sexuality is like, how they contribute to a particular definition of sexuality (Dyer, 2002, p. 90).

Beynon makes the point that contemporary western masculinity is often assumed as the universal norm (Beynon, 2002a, p. 62), heterosexuality specifically being what Dyer considers an invisible social reality (Dyer, 2002, p. 118), its dominance unquestioned by those it benefits. Dyer notes how it is the work of Michel Foucault that has been most influential in promoting the idea of sexuality being the “most open to the exercise of power relations in modern society” (ibid., p. 25), we are controlled, according to Foucault “through the regulation of [the intimate character of] our bodies in [a] regime of sexuality” (ibid.). And for Mulvey, this dominant patriarchal order (Mulvey, 2004, p. 838) has remained unchallenged in its coding of identities, especially sexual and erotic identities, into mainstream media. Dyer suggests that the symbols and narratives of the latter have become “so routine that they feel almost natural... and by their seeming so obvious and inevitable, we can lose sight of the fact that what they are actually representing is a particular sense of male sexuality, with its own history and social form” (Dyer, 2002, p. 89). In so far as this media construction is concerned, for Dyer we are always looking at the world through the perspective of male heterosexuality, even “when not looking at male sexuality, we are looking at the world within its terms of reference” (ibid.) and made to see things “through a particular sexual sensibility” (Dyer, 2002, p. 95). And while this might not necessarily seem harmful, when constructing identities this often requires framing

what is *not* part of an identity, so masculine identities can be constructed through the lens of for example homophobia. The antithesis of the masculine is its opposite, namely the feminine, a binary opposite with no opportunity for a nuanced or shaded substitution. Dyer (*ibid.*, p. 118) also makes the point that it is when heterosexuality is contested that it moves from this privileged, covert and private place into the public arena and furthermore that it is only in understanding that there are different models of heterosexuality that sexuality can be redefined, both in thought and in experience, and the sexual order changed (*ibid.*, p. 121).

The more removed animation is from representations of the real world, the more its texts are subject to the kind of fissure which locates gender in a contradictory and ambiguous way. (Wells, 1998, p. 215).

From the above it is clear that body language and physical gesture are important tools of expression in animation, specifically for character, and are drawn from the somatic performances of the animator, at the very least encoding generically recognizable action in the animation, and in more pronounced cases, encoding individually recognizable traits. But this encoding can be both physical and metaphorical, in the case of the latter, encoding both impartialities and preconceptions, the biases and bigotries, of the animator. Wells suggests that animation in all its forms “creates a distinctive relationship between its creator, its aesthetic self-consciousness, and the discourse it provokes” (Wells, 2002, p. 11) highlighting this complex relationship between the role-playing of the animator to develop the animated work, the animator’s design of the character and performance within craft conventions, and how these link to broader considerations for the animator regarding their intentions of and for the final animation. Wells’ discussion focuses on the language of animation and who is creating this discourse, namely the animators themselves, but other voices also take part in this inquiry, such as the academic perspective of which this thesis is a part. The latter focuses on the relationship of the creator to his or her work and the implications of the *unconscious* on the discourse.

Chapter 6: Analysis

Programs such as *Family Guy* and *American Dad* clearly draw much of their energy from venturing into unexplored territory, attracting audiences with the promise of transgressive content never before seen on network television, animated or otherwise (Booker, 2006, p. 157).

Identity and Representation are difficult concepts to prize apart, with identity ostensibly about who I am and how I and others define me, and representation about how that identity is presented, what is used to show such an identity, and what that process of presenting an identity is saying about both myself and others who portray me in that fashion.

The animated television series selected for this analysis share many similarities predominantly in that they all include representations of transgressive gay identities in mainstream animation television. Essentially this means they all continue a recognizable tradition of prime time television in terms of content, narrative, structure and iconography that can be traced back to the earliest example, namely *The Flintstones*, and all build on the gains made by so many previous series to push the boundaries of acceptable animation, acceptable television and more specifically acceptable primetime television animation.

This thesis focuses on transgression and specifically transgressive sexualities and sexual taboo, with an emphasis on gay (male homosexual) identities. This narrow focus is necessary as other transgressive themes are suggested by this title and diverse examples permeate the series (see Chapter 4), but these are outside the scope of this research. Episodes that particularly engage with homosexual issues have been chosen to initiate the analysis and discussion. Where issues within the episodes resonate with long standing themes in the series, these are developed with additional examples from other episodes. And while the general theme regarding the construction of gay characters and identities is the primary consideration, this cannot be explained effectively without also considering some of the other normative male identities delivered by the series.

To develop the themes for this thesis, this analysis has already contextualised the series within the broader social sphere with regards the specificities of their production (see Chapters 3 and 4). The analysis now moves on to engage with and apply the concepts of identity and representation discussed previously (see

Chapter 5) using a few key episodes from each series to establish the inherent trends in terms of these concepts. The chapter then considers how animation uniquely expresses gay identities within the television format considering themes comparatively across all the series. I then move on to consider the impact of the above on the discourse of animation and of sexuality, and conclude in the next chapter by answering the phronetic research questions proposed by Flyvbjerg (see Chapter 3).

6.1 You may now kiss the... uh... guy who receives¹¹⁴

Brian (*singing*): I bet money, you'll marry a honey, who's pretty and funny, and her name will be Ted.

Stewie: Oh, gay jokes?

Brian: Hey, I work with what you give me.¹¹⁵

Family Guy and the subject of representation of sexuality is discussed in detail in Dhaenens and Van Bauwel's (2012) article *Queer Resistances in the Adult Animated Sitcom*. Their article is a cultural studies perspective of the topic, considering queer characters and themes, the discourse of heteronormativity in popular culture and contemporary adult animation sitcom, and how the latter discourse is subverted through pastiche and parody. My discussion builds on this argument by adding the specificities of animation and considering these representations from the performance and design perspectives.

6.1.1 Episodes and Issues

The first episode I discuss, *You may now kiss the... uh... guy who receives*, is from the fourth season and reflects on issues of gay marriage, introducing several new gay identified characters, including Jasper, Brian's cousin¹¹⁶, and the second episode *Family Gay*, that reimagines Peter Griffen as a gay man.

Jasper: Those earrings are delicious, total kitsch, like an Andy Warhol wet dream¹¹⁷.

Jasper's introduction in *You may now kiss the... uh... guy who receives*¹¹⁸ illustrates the predominantly stereotypical presentation that comprises most

¹¹⁴ *Family Guy*, S05E12, #4ACX28

¹¹⁵ *Family Guy*, S03E19, #3ACX13, *Road to Europe*

¹¹⁶ Along with Jasper's Filipino boyfriend and friends who join them for their wedding service.

¹¹⁷ *Family Guy*, S05E12, #4ACX28, *You may now kiss the... um... guy who receives*

representations of gay identity in the series. Firstly, there are the clothes; the stereotypical earring, a vest top, a pair of torn off jeans, ostentatious shoes, and an elaborate hairstyle, secondly there is the voice; usually high pitched and sibilant in some way, and thirdly there are the mannerisms and general behavior; Jasper speaks in a bitchy vernacular, his walk is always mincing and he uses his hands flamboyantly. All of these, and usually a combination, become a visual shorthand to signify a gay character, and specifically an overtly gay character.

Jasper is introduced to the audience as outrageous, gossipy and sex obsessed. He details his flight home to Brian, talking in an effeminate voice with effeminate gestures, he says (to Brian) "5 hours on my money makers... in a committed relationship and sitting across from a gaggle of sailors on shore leave. Temptation. Oh, I'm terrible. Greek on me, but enough about me and last week" and his fast paced patter never lets up when he is on the screen. Stewie, in an interesting about-face in the proximity of such a clearly gay character, challenges this stereotype with an equally stereotypical, conservative heterosexual affront, "You think it's clever talking like that, using words like fabulous, delicious and wet? What's next, a workout and a romp around a crowded room whilst the music goes umm tss, um tss, um tss". With Stewie's onomatopoeic mimicry of thumping techno music, the camera pulls back to reveal Jasper and Ricardo dancing to the beat. These stereotypes of enjoying techno music, talking with a lisp and making outrageous comments are repeated time and time again throughout the series.

It is only when Jasper announces that he is getting married that his sexuality becomes an issue, especially for Lois, and splits the lead characters into different factions to move the narrative to a more contentious place and for the characters to take on the various voices representing different aspects of the gay marriage argument. Brian is clearly happy for his cousin. Stewie uses the fact that men can now marry to make a cutting remark about Meg never being able to find a partner (a running gag in the series), and Peter and Lois take up opposing sides of the argument. Uncharacteristically it is Peter who seems less offended and worried about this turn of events. Peter is repeatedly seen to mock rather than assist gay characters, though, while he does very often make offensive, stereotypical statements about gays, he is also seen to champion their cause. So on the one hand we have the Peter who says to Lois "Lois, I'm just warning you if this movie turns me gay I'm gonna start bringing gay guys home. And I don't mean the classy maybe-they-are maybe-they're-not gay guys, I mean the big

¹¹⁸ Family Guy, S05E12, #4ACX28

Oh-my-god here-they-come-floating-around-making-noise gay guys, not the fix-up-your-house gay guys"¹¹⁹, and on the other Peter who tries to set up his gay work colleague, John, with Derek, who claims not to be gay. John thanks Peter for trying, to which Peter responds "Hey, we'll get 'em"¹²⁰. It is Lois, with her strict upbringing among the Quahog elite, who takes umbrage. This manifests in her concern over having the wedding in their back garden. This aversion is further confirmed by comments from various other characters; from Quagmire "Gay marriage? Two halves can't make a whole with a hole", the stereotypical Christian view is presented by Chris's response "But Brian the bible says gay marriage is an abomination", and the oddest response is that of Herbert the Pervert who chases Brian away from his house at gunpoint calling him a pervert. At this point in the narrative Brian is canvassing Quahog for the necessary signatories to overturn Mayor West's decision to ban gay marriage. It is only when Lois watches a clearly biased instructional video called *When you've got a gay*, which advocates shooting and killing gays because they're aliens, that she realizes how wrong she has been.

The usual gay gags are liberally sprinkled around the episode, driving the comedy and to some extent do shape or confirm the individual attitudes to the central theme. Peter is seemingly interested when he asks Jasper, "[W]hen you're in the shower at the 'Y' is that like supermarket sweeps or is there some kind of etiquette?". By contrast, Stewie continues his passive aggressive stance. Commenting on the sexual antics of Jasper and his fiancé, he says "Hey MacButt the Crime Dog. I heard you and your little chew toy getting it on". Brian demonstrates his impartiality by revealing the lengths he'll go to in trying to get signatures on his petition as he admits he "...did a few things in West Quahog I'm not proud of". At this point the comedy utilises the usual play on incongruity, the expectations of the audience are not confirmed as clearly nothing of a sexual nature has taken place. The scene cuts away to Brian merely watching *Sex and the City* with two gay guys¹²¹. We know the latter are gay because the animators employ the visual signifiers of long hair, the fact that they sit crossed legged and wear open shirts, and that the room they sit in is decorated in a subdued and tasteful colour scheme. Mr Pewterschmitt, Lois's bigoted father makes an allusion to the feminist movement and female liberation where his response to the idea of gay marriage is, "Next thing they'll want the vote". The latter's antagonism to

¹¹⁹ Family Guy, S06E07, #5ACX2, *Chick Cancer*

¹²⁰ Family Guy, S03E01, #2ACX17, *The Thin White Line (Pt 1)*

¹²¹ The *Sex and the City* equals gay gag is used repeatedly throughout the series.

any slur that may sully his masculinity is clear in the following dialogue from *Model misbehavior*¹²².

Peter: You'll need some big strapping men on your boat.

Mr Pewterschmidt: Are you calling me gay?

Peter: No, no, I just thought you'd need some extra seamen on your poopdeck.

In this instance Peter is simply trying to ingratiate himself to Mr Pewterschmidt so as to get onto the latter's yacht crew. Needless to say his *double entendre* elicits a strong reaction and Mr Pewterschmidt floors Peter with a punch. The twist in the story is that Mayor West's bill is just a distraction to draw attention away from his overspending of the budget.

Peter's reactions and antics clearly signify a more open approach to the idea of gay marriage and the gay lifestyle in general. He responds to Lois's fears by saying, "So what, they're gay? It's not like we're gonna have a gay sex orgy in the living room...", at which point he pauses, clearly contemplating the idea. Also, while visiting gay characters in the West Quahog Gay district, Peter makes a dubious brownie joke that is clearly sexual in nature, with specific reference to gay sex, "They pack so much fudge into these... there are nuts lodged in there?". Peter is clearly relishing his brownie and the writer's the opportunity to once again disgust their audience.

The banter of the characters is clearly echoed in the banter between the writers and voice over artists as heard in the commentary tracks for the DVD versions of the episodes, with sexual innuendo frequent and overt. Seth Green (the voice of Chris) says *apropos* nothing in particular "I dated Justin [Timberlake] for a couple of years, mainly because I was turned on by his hackey sack skills, if you get my meaning... he could hack a sack like no other boy I'd met". The commentators indicate a number of scenes and lines that were cut by the network. Originally Peter's line about the gay orgy was meant to be "We're not gonna drill glory holes in the living room" and Seth MacFarlane observes the irony of this censoring request, that "To have sex is okay, to watch people having sex is not" in this case specifically gay sex. Peter's dubious fudge line was clearly hugely humorous to the writers who had expanded the joke. An indistinguishable voice on the commentary track, though most likely Seth MacFarlane, mentions several

¹²² Family Guy, S04E10, #4ACX13

additions to the line, namely "...nuts around the rim, good rim job, the cream spurting out around my mouth", to which Seth Green ad libs "Oh my god, I'm coming, coming... with you next time you're buying these". Even in the process of recording the commentary track the sexual innuendo continues. Also the final wedding scene had originally apparently included Jasper in a wedding dress, but that was "vetoed for the suit". Seth MacFarlane mentions that the episode was meant to have a blatantly political stance and as expected this elicited a great deal of comment from the fans. It is interesting to note that David Goodman mentions that many of the lines for the episode come from another story idea, where Stewie comes out of the closet, which was never made, followed by an unidentifiably voice that refers to that episode as "Stewie's evolution from mean bitch to queer". Seth MacFarlane is clear in his own take on the gay and gay marriage issues when he states quite emphatically "If you deny the gays the right to marry, you're a Nazi!". Jasper in fact laments at the start of the episode, "all I ever wanted was to get married to a skinny Filipino boy and make a home together, isn't that the American dream?" suturing the aims of individuals to a mythical dream of what life could or should be like.

Herbert: This whole place is a giant mind fuck¹²³.

The aptly titled episode *Family Gay*¹²⁴ follows the exploits of Peter as a homosexual, after signing up to a drug-testing program. The doctor's reasoning for the drug test frames one of the central arguments used in the homosexual lifestyle debate, as the Doctor says he wants to prove "that homosexuality is genetic and not a matter of choice or environment". At first Peter is horrified and refuses to join the program, but quickly acquiesces when offered \$125. Lois' reaction later in the episode to Peter perhaps remaining gay indefinitely, frames another aspect of homosexuality in society, namely that you're "treated differently". Before the final act she accepts Peter the way he is, clearly indicating another of the themes the episode is trying to convey. Lois, and a group of other regular characters, attempt to rescue Peter from a 'straight camp' that Peter has been sent to in an attempt to turn him heterosexual. She says "I mean, a person's sexual identity is no more a choice than the colour of his skin. This is who you are, I can't change you. And it would be wrong for me to try". In the commentary track an anonymous voice states that this episode was the

¹²³ Family Guy, S08E12, #6ACX12, *Family Gay*

¹²⁴ Family Guy, S08E12, #6ACX12

team's "salute to gays". Seth MacFarlane admits that as a writing team "[w]e went for every cheap gay joke. We were like a bunch of 4th graders."

The visual interpretation of this episode is most interesting as far as the performance of sexuality is concerned. In the commentary track this was a clear objective, one anonymous voice saying, "every scene ends with a performance of gayness", and another that they had decided that "Peter [was] going to be in a new outfit [for every scene]. We had fun gaying it up in this episode" and that they wanted "...lots of mincing prancing characters. There were limp wrists represented from every continent on the globe". This representation of gayness is therefore overtly considered from the start and manifests in the animation itself in a number of ways. Whereas characters in animation series usually wear exactly the same outfit during the majority of an episode or indeed series, with only occasional costume changes for specific occasions or dramatic effect, in this episode Peter as a gay character changes costume and hairstyle in almost every scene going through 12 costume changes in an episode that lasts a little over 20 minutes. The clothing itself is highly flamboyant both in terms of colour, e.g. a lavender scarf for the introduction of gay Peter, combinations of loud colours and far less conservative design than other straight characters, including sleeveless vests and turned up collars, boots with tights, necklaces and earrings. Each new outfit is paired with a different, stylish and sometimes elaborate hairstyle. And of course the aforementioned performances themselves are elaborate stereotypes of gayness. As gay Peter enters the Griffin household for the first time, he sashays into the living room with a giggle, sits with his legs and hands crossed and in a high-pitched and effeminate voice admits to being gay. When asked by Lois, he sings the answer "Guilty.....", holding the word as an elongated, ringing note for an uncomfortably long period of time.

Amongst other things Peter's conversation has also changed. Coming to breakfast the next morning his favourite topic of discussion is television, and not necessary high-brow examples of the format. He can now cook, having never made a meal for the family at any other time, barring barbeques. He makes delicious muffins which convinces Lois that they shouldn't be too hasty in wanting him to reverse the effects of the drug. Of course this is only after it is discovered that Peter has used a secret ingredient in his muffins "Spugizikom". Lois is horrified, but it turns out to be nothing more than a sugar substitute from the Czech Republic. Lois changes her mind again later when she realizes that, while she likes the new caring, sensitive Peter, he's no longer interested in having sex

with her. He admires her figure and the new negligee he has bought for her, but without the sexual interest (and action) Lois craves. When Lois points out that they're married, Peter responds with "Tony Randall was married. Rock Hudson was married. Ronald Reagan was married" which references some supposed fake marriages for the sake of covering up the partner's true sexuality and sets up a flashback to Ronald Reagan and Mikael Gorbachov discussing a missile pact between the United States and Soviet Russia which descends into sexual innuendo. Their infantile snickering is finally curtailed when a reporter asks, with a bland and bored face, "are you finished with the butt fucking puns?"

Peter supposedly becomes the perfect father, the writer's indicating in the commentary track that this was overtly considered. Another anonymous voice on the track says, "He's a better dad as a gay guy, because he's a little more sensitive". In this regard he is seen helping Chris to understand his maths homework by using a song about Brent and glory holes, finishing his helpful song with "...because Brent can't fit in the glory hole and that's why we all like Brent". Earlier however at the breakfast table a confused Chris had asked "Dad, now you're gay, I don't have to have sex with you, do I?" to which Peter responds "Not unless you want to".

Peter's relationship to his circle of friends also changes when he is shown to be attracted to Quagmire. After an introduction to his usual bar table and drinking circle we see Peter drinking a Pomtini (we are told basically a Pomegranate Martini), reading a style magazine and quoting celebrity news items, and humming as he brings the drink to his mouth. During the conversation, Peter tries to console Quagmire by telling him that he'll be there for him. Peter is being flirtatious, leaning in close and making eyes at Quagmire. Joe and Cleveland decide to leave Peter and Quagmire alone, and after a moment's hesitation Quagmire says "Okay, if we're gonna do this, we're doing it my way" once again illustrating the dubious credentials of Quagmire's supposed hyper-heterosexuality.

Finally Peter can't live the lie of his marriage to Lois any more and comes home with Scott. He claims that he's found his soul-mate and announces "I'm here, I'm queer, but don't get used to it because I'm leaving you". He and Scott embrace, Scott raising his foot whilst they hug coyly. The next few scenes show Peter and Scott's life, with multiple changes of clothes, stylish interiors to their home and several random uses of the word 'gay' and 'penis'. Over a candle-lit

dinner they lovingly announce their tenderness for each other by confessing they're "so gay" for each other. After a kiss Peter asks Scott, "penis for your thoughts?" Interrupted by the doorbell whilst reading, Peter mutters "oh for the love of penis". This latter moment is interesting as during the series Peter is shown to be illiterate and almost incapable of reading. Here, as gay Peter, he sits legs folded on a couch wearing reading glasses and enjoying the novel *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews, whilst listening to soothing music.

It is against these images of idyllic gayness that we see Stewie and Brian's interaction. There is the initial and awkward breakfast table scene where Peter announces that some of the milk in the fridge is in fact horse semen. While all the other family members gasp in horror, the scene cuts to Stewie's reaction. At first he is shocked, he is already eating his cereal and his mouth is full. He hesitates, but then continues to chew, slowly, as if savoring the possibility that he may indeed be eating horse semen. Later in the episode when gay Peter comes down to breakfast for the first time, it is Stewie who mutters "homosexuality is wrong" and is reprimanded by Brian. It is also Stewie who later angrily states "Ever read the bible? Leviticus 18:22...", to which Brian responds, bewildered and surprised by Stewie's reaction, "You're judgementally quoting bible verses?" And finally it is in fact Stewie's plan to send gay Peter to a 'straight camp where he is supposed to be reprogrammed straight.

It is at straight camp that several gay characters join gay Peter, including Performance Guy. As part of their re-education regime, gay Peter and the other campers are made to beat up another obviously camp man. Tony, the camp counselor, introduces the camp man as Harry the Homosexual, who like so many of the other gay characters is coded through his clothing and behaviour. He has short stylish hair, and is wearing a tight pink vest, torn short-short jeans and shoes with no socks. When he speaks he uses over-exaggerated hand gestures and bottom wagging. Tony wants all the gay men to beat up Harry for being gay. He tells them to grab a bat and "get to it". They all comply and chase Harry off screen. The following actions all take place off screen and we see only Tony's reactions and hear the relevant sound effects. Initially Tony rebukes the gays for using the bats incorrectly "No, don't use the bats like that... no, don't use them like that either... Just put 'em down and use your fists, no, no, not like that..." referencing several sexual practices of the gay community and leaving the visuals up to the audience's imagination.

In the final scene, after being released from Straight Camp, Peter prances into Scott's arms and they kiss. Scott surprises gay Peter with a welcome home 11-way. Nine men walk out of their bedroom wearing only Jockey Y-fronts, all of them limp-wristed and mincing. Peter is so happy he squeaks "I feel like a kid in a candy store having sex with a bunch of gay guys". It is during this orgy scene, again off screen, that Peter finally returns to normal when the gay gene drug wears off. Naturally he is horrified by where he finds himself and flees their flat and life together, naked, remembering only to rush back into the flat to take the balloons Scott had so thoughtfully bought to celebrate Peter's return home. As the family Griffin sit around the breakfast table the next morning, Meg verbalizes what they are all thinking, "so we're just like never going to talk about this again?"

The general attitude to homosexuality for this episode is clearly expressed in the commentary, first by Danny Smith who jokingly admits that "there's not one of us who'll admit to being a homosexual", and later Richard Appel who, in a likewise jocular fashion kids, "I've done some experimenting, but it was in college so it was okay". Comments also specifically highlight the representation of the characters for this episode with Mark Henteman making the statement "There's something very human about this characterization of Peter as a gay guy", and an anonymous voice, referring to Peter and Scott's kiss, identifies how overt were some of the choices in the animation of the characters, he says "Just those two steps Scott takes, he has to lift his hands in the gay way".

6.1.2 Analysing Themes

Generally homosexuality has a high profile throughout *Family Guy*, a series that ostensibly represents a hetero-normative social construct, with constant mentions and references to actual homosexual acts or desires, or allusions to gay stereotypes, whether performed by the central supposedly *straight* main characters, or by secondary and/or overtly gay characters. This indeterminate sexual preference of the main characters is a constant in the series, with married men wanting male company, sexual and otherwise, or characters wearing drag or playing a different gender¹²⁵, the most obvious manifestation being the relationship between Brian and Stewie, an interesting example of constructing a part homoerotic, part homosexual and generally problematic relationship between a human child and an anthropomorphized dog.

¹²⁵ All the lead characters that are clearly gendered as male and masculine at some stage wear a wig and dress, either as an essential part of the narrative or in a flashback.

Essentially there are in fact only two characters identified and definitively constructed as overtly gay, namely Performance Guy¹²⁶ and Mr Weed¹²⁷. Mr Weed is quite open, forward and vocal about his sexual preferences objectifying what he considers good-looking men, such a Guillermo¹²⁸, who later becomes his partner, and even Joe Swanson, who he refers to as “a very attractive paraplegic”. While Mr Weed only appears 3 times in the first 3 seasons, he does appear with his partner, but is ultimately killed off. By contrast Performance Guy is a long-standing character, though initially framed as a more sinister paedophilic character working in an exotic entertainment shop¹²⁹. These traits disappear with his next appearance and most of these types of joke move into the ambit of Herbert the Pervert’s character. From this point on Performance Guy usually appears in some superficial leadership role, such as the chair of a PTA meeting, prissily and campily describing the local school pamphlet content¹³⁰, or leading a class on CPR¹³¹, or even as a priest holding holy communion¹³². While Performance Guy is named once (Bruce, in *No Chris left behind*¹³³) he is never named again and his anonymity is clearly preferred as this lack of a name is referenced in the commentaries¹³⁴. Performance Guy’s sexuality is never really in doubt as illustrated in one of the documentaries on the making of *Family Guy*, *Inside the Recording Booth*, which shows Mike Henry voicing Performance Guy with his hands on hips and all mincing as he vocalizes the character.

Performance Guy’s moustache can be seen as an important addition to the visual shorthand the animators employ for gay characterization, as also seen in *McStroke*¹³⁵ where Peter grows a moustache which immediately brings him to the attention of other gay identified characters. Another visual trope is the feminization of a character to denote gayness. In the *Road to the multiverse*¹³⁶ when Brian and Stewie stumble into the Disney universe, all the various characters from *Family Guy* take on recognizable visual characteristics typical of the Disney style of drawing. Performance Guy is noticeable absent till the end of

¹²⁶ Also named Bruce in *No Chris left behind* (Family Guy, S07E03, #5ACX11). Though this name is never used again and even the writers refer to the character as Performance Guy.

¹²⁷ Named in some earlier episodes as Mr Weeland.

¹²⁸ Family Guy, S01E05, #1ACX05, *A hero sits next door*

¹²⁹ Family Guy, S01E04, #1ACX04, *Chitty Chitty Death Bang*

¹³⁰ Family Guy, S04E11, #4ACX14, *Peter’s got Woods*

¹³¹ Family Guy, S04E05, #4ACX08, *The Cleveland-Loretta Quagmire*

¹³² Family Guy, S07E02, #5ACX10, *Boys do cry*

¹³³ Family Guy, S07E03, #5ACX11

¹³⁴ Family Guy, S04E05, #4ACX08, *The Cleveland-Loretta Quagmire*

¹³⁵ Family Guy, S07E10, #5ACX19, *McStroke*

¹³⁶ Family Guy, S09E08, #7ACX6

the sequence where he appears as Tinkerbell, to sprinkle pixie dust and end the sequence.

While male on male entanglements are rife throughout the series, Stewie's sexuality is the most complex. Stewie's effeminacy is apparent through his mewling voice, exaggerated gestures and erudite language and repartee, refinement and education being conflated with homosexual tendencies. Aspersions to his sexuality already appear early in the series. He almost declares his homosexuality during a *faux* interview in *Fifteen minutes of shame*¹³⁷, saying "My god, wouldn't it be wonderful if I turned out to be a homosexual?" Stewie is regularly seen playing with dolls¹³⁸, or reacting to scenes of a sexual nature in ways that bring his own sexuality into question. In *Jerome is the new black*¹³⁹ he is taken by Jerome, Peter's new African-American friend and previous sexual partner of Lois.

Stewie's penchant for drag is regularly touted, from a first appearance as Corporal Maxwell Klinger in a M*A*S*H parody in the episode *Fifteen minutes of shame*¹⁴⁰, to regularly reappearing in the title sequences for the *Road To...* episodes¹⁴¹ in a multitude of female disguises, always the partner to Brian's masculine or macho character, even kissing Brian in a pose that re-creates the famous V-J Day kiss on Times Square in 1945. Stewie appears as both young girls with pigtails at the top of a cheerleading pyramid¹⁴², or as old maid in a face mask with curlers in her hair berating young love¹⁴³. Stewie's cross-dressing is often justified by fulfilling a necessary plot point. In *Emission Impossible*¹⁴⁴ Stewie wears lipstick to mark Peter's shirt collar, but ends up eyeing himself in the mirror and calling himself a "dirty flirt". In the episode *Boys do cry*¹⁴⁵ Stewie has been disguised as a girl in order to slip past the pursuing police. Asks how he's holding up, Stewie responds, looking rather slatternly, "Um, I feel right Brian. I feel right", before winning a Little Miss Texas competition and being revealed as "one of those queer-o-sexuals".

Stewie's physical sexuality represents a diverse palette of tastes and perversions, made more distasteful by their relationship to his physical attributes of being a

¹³⁷ Family Guy, S02E05, #2ACX08

¹³⁸ Family Guy, S09E04, #6ACX18, *Stewroids*

¹³⁹ Family Guy, S09E14, #7ACX08

¹⁴⁰ Family Guy, S02E05, #2ACX08

¹⁴¹ Family Guy, S02E06, #2ACX12, *Road to Rhode Island* and S08E07, #6ACX08, *Road to Germany*

¹⁴² Family Guy, S03E13, #3ACX06, *Peter Griffin: husband, father... brother?*

¹⁴³ Family Guy, S04E02, #4ACX02, *Fast times at Buddy Cianci Jr. High*

¹⁴⁴ Family Guy, S03E10, #3ACX01

¹⁴⁵ Family Guy, S07E02, #5ACX10

child. Most often his sexual arousal is due to interactions with girls, but his sexual exploits include: paedophilia¹⁴⁶; being sexually aroused by the objects around him, such as a swimming pool jet in *He's too sexy for his fat*¹⁴⁷, a greased up flag pole in *Death lives*¹⁴⁸, or sticking a whole banana in his mouth¹⁴⁹; animals, he attempts to torture Kermit the frog by dry humping Miss Piggy and comments on his own depravity, "Oh God, look at me, I'm having sex with a pig"¹⁵⁰; excrement, offering to clean Mr Pewterschmidt in *Peterotica*¹⁵¹, or to poop in Brian's mouth¹⁵², and in the most sexual example, after being flung into another's baby's pram he is shocked to discover that he's turned on by the smell of a dirty diaper¹⁵³; and finally violence. In one particular episode¹⁵⁴ Stewie fantasizes about being burnt with a cigarette butt by Lois, and proclaims that he feels alive after being brutalized by her. Stewie has an epiphanic moments and realizes he "might be one of those people who gets a jolly out of being hit". It is only when he taunts Lois yelling at her to "Slap me across the face like a bitch... violate me with a wine bottle..." that he realizes he really does have a problem.

It is Stewie's relationship to Brian that is the most complex and both endearing and disturbing, as their relationship has undertones of paedophilia and overtones of matrimonial discord. Their sexual and emotional tension comes to a head in *The Tan Aquatic with Steve Zissou*¹⁵⁵ in which they share, what the commentary track refers to as, "the first prime time money shot". After a bad sunburn Brian is interrupted squirting "lotion" onto Stewie's face. The shot is framed most suggestively.

While regularly finding comfort in each other's intellectual company¹⁵⁶, Brian and Stewie spend a great deal of time abusing each other physically and emotionally. Stewie finds it funny making Brian out to be gay¹⁵⁷, and Brian is happy to spit on Stewie if asked to do so. And while much of this abuse is seemingly uncalled for, on several occasions Stewie requests such¹⁵⁸. In several instances the writer's

¹⁴⁶ Family Guy, #4ACX05 & 06 & 07, Stewie Griffin: The Untold Story

¹⁴⁷ Family Guy, S02E10, #2ACX10

¹⁴⁸ Family Guy, S03E06, #2ACX21

¹⁴⁹ Family Guy, S09E01, #6ACX14, *Fox-Y Lady*

¹⁵⁰ Family Guy, S03E02, #2ACX20, *Brian Does Hollywood (Pt 2)*

¹⁵¹ Family Guy, S05E11, #4ACX27

¹⁵² Family Guy, S08E04, #6ACX06, *Long John Peter*

¹⁵³ Family Guy, S03E07, #2ACX18, *Lethal Weapons*

¹⁵⁴ Family Guy, S06E10, #5ACX05, *Peter's Two Dads*

¹⁵⁵ Family Guy, S06E11, #5ACX06

¹⁵⁶ Family Guy, S07E07, #5ACX15, *Believe it or not, Joe's walking on air*

Danny Smith, director of the episode says, "A lot of people in America aren't sure of Stewie's sexuality, he doesn't know. He's into Brian. He needs him. It's an intellectual thing."

¹⁵⁷ Family Guy, S04E11, #4ACX14, *Peter's got Woods*

¹⁵⁸ Family Guy, S06E03, #4ACX33, *Hell comes to Quahog*

indicate in the commentary track¹⁵⁹ that the development of this relationship becomes more and more disconcerting even for the creative team with several ideas being cut before even making it into the script. By season eight, overt sexuality between the two is driven by Stewie. In *Love Blacktually*¹⁶⁰ Stewie proclaims “You’ll be a wonderful lover Brian”, then sticks his finger seductively in Brian’s mouth and licks it after Brian leaves. The sexual innuendo is intense.

6.2 I’m gay as a goose

There are three episodes^{161 & 162} of *Queer Duck* that specifically focus on issues particularly ascribed to the gay community. For this series it is particularly difficult to settle on exceptional cases as the series defines itself as wholly gay, meant to be a complete representation of the entirety of a gay lifestyle.

6.2.1 Episodes and Issues

In *Queer as fowl*¹⁶³ the issues of illness-related death, and the frequency of such deaths within the gay community, and the response and reaction of the community to death, are central to the episode. *Queer Duck* treats the funeral of a friend, Misha Possum, like “a gay mixer”, much to Openly Gator’s shock and distress. *Queer Duck*’s attitude however is epitomized by his retort, “Everything’s a gay mixer. Desert Storm was a gay mixer”. *Queer Duck* is not the only character to made off-colour remarks, Bi-polar Bear is equally guilty and comments as he looks into the open coffin, “He’s wearing less makeup than usual”. The funeral is a somber affair and several aspects of the event are considered by *Queer Duck* to be hypocritical and contrary to the character and personality of the deceased. The reasons for his supposed coldness become obvious. *Queer Duck* biting and bitterly states that he’s, “been to more of these things than I can stand”, before reminding everyone that Possum was a “condom hating, intravenous drug user with a Haitian boyfriend” who only knew the poetry of the ABBA lyrics, and would clearly have hated the melancholy pomp and pretention of the present service. “Urgh”, *Queer Duck* chides, “looks like a convent in here. Two hundred Marys all dressed in black”. *Queer Duck* commands Bi-polar Bear to “pound the organ honey”, to which Bi-polar Bear responds with

¹⁵⁹ Family Guy, S07E07, #5ACX15, *Believe it or not, Joe’s walking on air*

¹⁶⁰ Family Guy, S08S05, #6ACX03

¹⁶¹ *Queer Duck*, S01E01, *I’m coming out* and S01E20, *Mardi Foie Gras*

¹⁶² Each episode of *Queer Duck* opens with the title sequence followed by *Queer Duck* popping on to the screen and delivering a one-liner before the opening scene. The one-liners are all common quotations, usually disparaging, that make reference to homosexuality.

¹⁶³ *Queer Duck*, S01E08, *Queer as fowl*

his habitual *double entendre*, “You bet your boody, but first I’ll play some music”. Even though Queer Duck succeeds in livening up the party and creating a disco in the church, more in line with his interpretation of what the deceased would have preferred, it is he who slips away and sits quietly on the church steps with a photo of his friend, sighing, whilst the others party on. This is a singular moment, as it is the only occasion that Queer Duck drops the mask of merriment to show a deeper and more tender and truly emotional aspect of his character. The style of the narrative, contrary to the usual glibness and flippancy of the characters and their dialogue, engages with a more distressing and dark quality of gay life highlighting the plight and situation of gay men as they struggle with more universal aspects of their human experience. It is also the only such dark moment where the writer does not detract from the impact by resorting to a distracting comic gag.

*The gay road to Morocco*¹⁶⁴ is a musical fantasy that pays homage to not only musicals themselves, but also to the era of black and white films, the stars of that period, and to iconic gay destinations. The lyrics are sung from the backs of camels and are directly related to the images of the narrative¹⁶⁵. The episode is in black and white and features cameos from famous actors of the period, such as Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, who refer to Queer Duck and Openly Gator as “Siegfried and Roy at the Mirage”. Morocco is depicted as an exotic and cheap flesh market, and the friends, including B-polar Bear and Oscar Wildcat, are expectantly excited, that is until Queer Duck and Openly Gator are surrounded by burly, bearded, and bare-chested Arab henchmen. At this point they naturally assume that they’re done for. Contrary to their preconceived assumptions the henchmen merely announce the arrival of the “queer vizier, Abu Ben Dover”, who turns out to be Cary Grant. When a confused Queer Duck asks him if he’s gay, he answers, “I’ve been known to smoke the occasional pickle”. The song and episode end with one of Openly Gator’s unfortunate verbal *faux pas*, rhyming “rock” with the hastily improvised “cock... tails”. The final credit sequence is in colour, and it becomes apparent that the imagery was designed in colour and that there is an abundant use of pink in the design of the characters; the camel’s eyelids are pink, the burly Arab henchmen’s clothing is all shades of pink, and Cary Grant’s fez is also pink. While the episode doesn’t really deal with any important issues that affect a gay lifestyle, it is a joyous celebration of a bygone and distinctly

¹⁶⁴ Queer Duck, S01E11, *The gay road to Morocco*

¹⁶⁵ The full lyrics for this and other musical number are given in Appendix B: Musical number lyrics.

camp era that for many Queer theorists is rife with homosexual tension¹⁶⁶. The narrative fulfills a fantasy for gay men and their supposed affinity with the musical and that period of filmic history. By and large it does however again frame the gay characters as only interested in cheap sexual encounters, and more generally as superficial and vacuous. The characterisations either render all unfamiliar characters as gay, or at least sexually attractive to gay men.

In *Bi-Polar Bear and the glorious hole*¹⁶⁷ the entire narrative is focused on sex and sexual encounters and is devised stylistically as a fairy tale, with a narrator who both sings and speaks the narration at various points. The story opens with the narrator singing about gays and how they live, "Deep in the heart of Castro Street where people live life with flair, there's Queer Duck and Gator and all the rest and best of all Bi-polar Bear. Bi-polar Bear. Bi-polar Bear. He's lazy and crazy and queer". Unlike the other episodes, this plot centers around a secondary character, namely Bi-polar Bear (rather than the titular Queer Duck) and his heightened libido. Bi-polar Bear goes to sponge off Oscar Wildcat, and in trying to enter the latter's home, gets stuck in the door, his head inside, his buttocks outside, his arms pinned to his side. "Hey Oscar, I'm stuck in your hole", laments Bi-polar Bear, to which the closeted and elderly Oscar Wildcat hisses, "A little louder please, I don't think all the neighbours heard you". This unfortunate incident is chanced upon by Queer Duck and Openly Gator, who comment on Bi-polar Bear's slutty nature, illustrated through this overt display they assume is a premeditated invitation for sex. However, this knowledge doesn't stop the pair from collecting condoms from the local rubber tree, a tree that bears condoms as fruit, to partake of this sexual opportunity. As Queer Duck suggests, "I usually like to have a little challenge... still it seems a shame to waste". The situation raises some complicated issues. Bi-polar Bear's predicament is ignored for what it is, and seen rather as a blatant sexual invitation. Both Queer Duck and Openly Gator, who are in a relationship, decide it's acceptable to have sex with someone else outside of their relationship (Queer Duck has made it previously clear that he is not really the monogamous type), they ignore the fact that Bi-polar Bear is also a friend, one with whom they seem to have no problem sharing sexual intimacy, and further that Bi-polar Bear may in fact be in distress. While none of the above is necessarily problematic as variations of sexual relationships can be varied and diverse, it sets up a particular context of lax sexual mores, the easiness of sex

¹⁶⁶ See for example Alexander Doty's *Flaming Classics. Queering the film canon* (2000).

¹⁶⁷ Queer Duck, S01E18

within the gay community, and the lack of consequences that follow from the sex act in terms of health and emotional welfare.

While the sex act is never shown, Bi-polar Bear's reaction is enough to know that it is taking place. Off-screen sound effects of twisting rubber are followed by a "toing" and a fairy glissando, and Bi-polar Bear yelling, "Oh yeah, ride 'em cowboy", seemingly unfazed by what is tantamount to a rape scene. The narrator tells us that by the evening word had spread, "throughout the animal kingdom of a most accommodating bottom and Bi-polar Bear didn't mind one bit". Queuing up to have sex with Bi-polar Bear are a chipmunk, an owl with a bow tie, a moose in purple shorts, a squirrel in a black vest, a tortoise wearing green shades, and a white rabbit with a moustache. While initially shocked, or so it seems from his reaction, Bi-polar Bear finally tells the audience, "All in all this is a pretty typical weekend for me", and the narrator finishes off the episode singing, "Bi-polar Bear, Bi-polar Bear, everybody loves his rear", reducing the character to an orifice.

6.2.2 Analysing Themes

The central characters in *Queer Duck* are all different gay male stereotypes. Queer Duck (real name Adam Seymour Duckstein) is introduced as a male nurse, gossiping campily in a lisping voice to an unknown acquaintance over the phone¹⁶⁸. His menagerie of friends is no less formulaic. Already in the first episode¹⁶⁹ we are introduced to his *entourage*: Oscar Wilde Cat, a pretentious elderly queen, always drinking and still living with his mother; Bi-polar Bear, a burly leather-queen with obvious earring who's always making bad jokes; and Openly Gator, Queer Duck's highly strung and sensitive boyfriend (real name Stephen Arlow Gator) who looks and sounds like the Tony Award® winning actor and playwright Harvey Fierstein (himself a high profile openly gay LGBTI activist).

Queer Duck's gayness is emphasized through his exaggerated actions. Generally he is overly dramatic, fainting theatrically when required¹⁷⁰, and using overly flamboyant hand and arm movements. Queer Duck habitually talks with wildly flailing arms¹⁷¹, and indeed each episode ends with Queer Duck running across the screen flapping his arms in an over-the-top manner during the closing credit sequence. Queer Duck's dialogue is liberally sprinkled with equally trite

¹⁶⁸ Queer Duck, S01E01, *I'm coming out*

¹⁶⁹ Queer Duck, S01E01, *I'm coming out*

¹⁷⁰ Queer Duck, S01E03, *Oh, Christ!*

¹⁷¹ Queer Duck, S01E06, *The gayest place on earth*

meaningless utterances, such as his characteristic “Oh my gay stars”¹⁷². Gay characters that make up background crowds are usually trendy and trim with fashionable clothing, manicured hair, and sculpted bodies¹⁷³, though some have more natural figures.

Everything that surrounds these characters is either feminized or stereotypical gay. Gay bars, such as The Glory Hole¹⁷⁴, has décor all in 1980s bright neon greens and pinks, and even mundane objects such as Queer Duck’s camping tent¹⁷⁵ is pink, has scalloped edging, and is monogramed. While there is visual coherent in the colour and design palate, there is less cohesion amongst the characters in supporting each other. Queer Duck’s friends regularly abandon him to his problems. In one such instance Queer Duck is so inebriated that he falls off a balcony of a shared holiday flat and into a crowd of people¹⁷⁶. After a brief hesitation, his friends, who are all present on the balcony at the time and witness to his accident, decide to read his diary for which his partner has made a duplicate key. Outside of his friendship circle, every good-looking male (anthropomorphized animal) Queer Duck meets is a potential relationship, usually with an emphasis on a sexual encounter, rather than an emotional one. While sex is never directly depicted, the sex act is referenced on numerous occasions with specific emphasis on oral and anal sex innuendoes. Queer Duck almost consistently shifts abruptly to a more feminized depiction in the face of a possible sexual encounter, the latter a recurring motif in the representation of Queer Duck’s character.

Sexual encounters are high on the agenda of a gay man. When told they “suck” as radio hosts, Queer Duck is quick to retort, “yes, well that pretty much describes our leisure time”¹⁷⁷, and at the suggestion of attending a gay rodeo, Oscar Wildcat is horrified, “three days of bucking and branding and hog tying”, to which Bi-polar Bear responds wickedly, “And that was just in the steam room”¹⁷⁸. These sexual references become more pornographic as even everyday acts can take on a sexual tone. While visiting his parents and stuffing the Thanks Giving turkey, Queer Duck mutters a parody of the hackneyed monologues often heard in gay porn, “Oh yeah, you know you love it. Oh yeah, you want some more?”

¹⁷² Queer Duck, S01E02, *Fiddler on the Roofie*

¹⁷³ Queer Duck, S01E06, *The gayest place on earth*

¹⁷⁴ Queer Duck, S01E04, *Queer Doc!*

¹⁷⁵ Queer Duck, S01E14, *A gay outing*

¹⁷⁶ Queer Duck, S01E20, *Mardi Foie Gras*

¹⁷⁷ Queer Duck, S01E15, *Radio Head*

¹⁷⁸ Queer Duck, S01E09, *Wedding Bell Blues*

Yeah, sure you do. Oh yeah, you like that stuffin'. Oh yeah, you take that stuffin'."¹⁷⁹.

As with visual representations, the language used by the gay characters has a particular flavor and style that is stereotypically gay. Much of their dialogue involves the *double entendre* with distinct sexual overtones, though in many cases it is less subtle, with references to oral sex a regular occurrence throughout the series. Much of the context that frames the gay characters relies on stereotypes of not only the nature of being gay, but also on the presumed sub-cultural lifestyle. So Queer Duck is a fan of Barbara Streisand owning all her movies¹⁸⁰, waiting in line for tickets to her show¹⁸¹, referring to her as a god in a marching song¹⁸², or watching 56 hours of *Yentl* bonus footage¹⁸³. Other musical icons are also referred to in the series, such as a cut out figure of Liberace that acts as the barometer for how gay you need to be to go on a fun-fare ride¹⁸⁴, or how Queer Duck and his friends dress up as the Village People in the episode *Santa Claus is coming... out*¹⁸⁵. Openly Gator is seen attending a psychiatry session solely for the regular supply of Xanax, and promptly invites everyone to "get drunk"¹⁸⁶. While characters regularly admit to taking drugs and being heavily under the influence of a mix of drugs and alcohol¹⁸⁷.

The most commonly shared characteristic of all the gay characters are their extreme emotional swings and outbursts, their bitchiness, usually illustrated through their barbed witticisms they direct at each other and almost every other character, and their use of feminine pronouns and names when speaking to each other within their friendship circle. While mostly directly at individuals, this shared bitchiness is also directed at the gay community itself. When Oscar Wildcat, as a camp Dr. Frankenstein, creates his monster from the parts of different gay icons¹⁸⁸, he looks on in horror at this creation, "Dear god, is it possible to be too gay?" The monster is suddenly effeminate, saying of the operating theatre in which he was created, "this place is so blah. I smell IKEA". The monster is the gay stereotype.

¹⁷⁹ Queer Duck, S01E17, *Homo for the holidays*

¹⁸⁰ Queer Duck, S01E02, *Fiddler on the Roofie*

¹⁸¹ Queer Duck, S01E05, *B.S. I love you*

¹⁸² Queer Duck, S01E14, *A gay outing*

¹⁸³ Queer Duck, S01E16, *Tales of the City Morgue*

¹⁸⁴ Queer Duck, S01E06, *The gayest place on earth*

¹⁸⁵ Queer Duck, S01E19

¹⁸⁶ Queer Duck S01E12, *Quack Doctor*

¹⁸⁷ Queer Duck, S01E14, *A gay outing*

¹⁸⁸ Queer Duck, S01E16, *Tales of the City Morgue*

In the title sequence of every episode, when “he’s homosexual” is sung in the lyrics, the image reveals Queer Duck in bed with Openly Gator, while the word “perverse” is linked to an image of Queer Duck playing with the idea of inserting a thermometer up a Zebra’s bum. The backgrounds to several scenes in the title sequence are either shades of pink or made up of a wallpaper of pink triangles, the internationally recognized symbol of homosexual liberation, or more correctly historically, homosexual oppression¹⁸⁹.

Ultimately this overt homosexuality and over the top sexuality is heteronormalized in the final episode *Mardi Foie Gras*¹⁹⁰, when Queer Duck ends up in bed with a woman. Queer Duck has apparently over indulged and wakes up in bed with what he assumes is a drag queen. When he looks under the covers, he discovers his mistake. He is horrified, “Oh, I’ve been deflowered” he wails, and the woman tries to placate him, “Calm down, sugar”, she rasps, her choice of sobriquet suggesting that she may indeed be a prostitute. Queer Duck responds after a moment with, “Look, I’m gay, but I’m still a man. I got to know. How was I?”. The woman is noncommittal, “I don’t know, you were okay I guess”, but it is enough for Queer Duck to look triumphant and fist the air. This fluidity of Queer Duck’s sexual identity is returned to again the *Queer Duck: The Movie* (2006) when he marries a woman just because they are such good friends and then consummates the marriage when an elixir transforms him into a straight, butch version of himself.

6.3 Is there anybody out there who didn’t think this would go gay?¹⁹¹

There are four episodes of *Drawn Together* that deal specifically with issues central to the experience of homosexuality and which will be considered in more detail. In the first season Xandir, who is obviously homosexual to everyone except himself, is helped to come out by the housemates in *Gay Bash*¹⁹². In the second season there are two episodes that focus on homosexuality, the first considers closeted homosexuality and homosexual tendencies in *Xandir and Tim*

¹⁸⁹ The pink triangle, also called the *Rosa Winkel* in German, was the symbol used to identify homosexual men held in concentration camps during World War II. During the 1970’s the gay liberation movement chose the pink triangle as a popular symbol for gay rights, identity and pride. In the 1980’s ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) chose to use the triangle to signify an active fight against intolerance (Oswald, 2004).

¹⁹⁰ Queer Duck, S01E20, *Mardi Foie Gras*

¹⁹¹ Foxy Love in *Drawn Together*, S03E07, *Lost in Parking Space Pt 1*

¹⁹² *Drawn Together*, S01E03

sitting in a tree¹⁹³ and focuses on the relationship between Xandir and Hero, and the second considers the possible ramifications of coming out to one's parents in *A very special Drawn Together afterschool special*¹⁹⁴ where Xandir and the housemates role-play the turning point in a young gay man's life. And in the final season three the episode with the longest title *Wooldoor Sockbat's giggle-wiggle funny tickle non-traditional progressive multicultural roundtable!*¹⁹⁵ explores the idea of the impact of the media on the construction of identities and the influence it may have on people in general.

6.3.1 Episodes and Issues

Xandir: Now that I'm gay I have no purpose. I wish I were dead¹⁹⁶.

The episode *Gay Bash*¹⁹⁷ begins with the housemates trying to prove to Xandir that he is in fact gay. Firstly they set up a board game, The Acme Gay Test, that requires Wooldoor Sockbat function as a lie detector measuring Xandir's responses by placing a hand on Xandir's posterior, and secondly with a Rorschach Test where Xandir's responses to the cards flashed at him are a list of synonyms for the penis. The first card shows a rooster that he refers to as a "cock", a picture of Willy Nelson as "willy", a politically incorrect silhouette of a "Chinaman" as "wang", etc. The list includes the vulgar colloquialisms Woody, wood, pecker, blue veined custard chucker, one eyed wiggling Welshman, and finally pink helmeted milk shooting man banana plunging into the hole of an ass, all accurate descriptions of what the images portray, but combined in the most explicitly sexual way possible. And herein lies a stereotype, that the sex act and the focus on the penis as an object of sexual desire, is the central focus in defining gay sexuality.

When Xandir finally recognizes his potential homosexuality, though as yet does not fully accept it, his housemates throw him the house party to which the title of the episode refers. Foxy Love joyously proclaims that "everything the light touches is gay" and the scene parodies the opening sequence of Disney's *The Lion King* (1994, dir/Rob Minkoff and Roger Allers) in visuals and soundtrack. Both the perceived and once again stereotypical frivolity and flamboyance of a gay lifestyle is represented in the party scene itself. The usual good-looking men

¹⁹³ Drawn Together, S02E11

¹⁹⁴ Drawn Together, S02E13

¹⁹⁵ Drawn Together, S03E02

¹⁹⁶ Drawn Together, S01E03, *Gay Bash*

¹⁹⁷ Drawn Together, S01E03

abound, wearing uniforms with bead necklaces and earrings, with gelled hair, dancing leather dudes, naked jocks and transvestites, all shapes and body types fat and thin, and surrounded by pulsating bright colours, balloons and gay flags. For Xandir the process of coming to terms with his own homosexual identity is highlighted by a gay Snaggle Puss' simple request that Xandir join him and a gay Elmer Fudd on the dance floor. Xandir confesses he can't dance, but when pressed admits to having a "special move". Xandir had presented this move, a jump and spin with a special sound effect, earlier to his housemates who had simply ridiculed him, now his new gay friends not only think it's hot, they immediately copy him and the fad spreads amongst the other gay men on the dance floor. Snaggle Puss remarks on seeing this that Xandir "is one of us now". At this point the narrative switches to the confessional with Xandir saying to camera "finally I could be who I really was... a gay Xandir". This event solidifies Xandir's identification process and illustrates how important it is to belong to a group or community in order to construct an identity, but also how important it is to learn to accept the identity and community. It is through unequivocal acceptance of Xandir's unique affectations by the group that he feels safe and accepted.

The narrative returns to sex as the defining factor of gayness immediately after the confessional. Elmer Fudd proclaims that he really likes Xandir and while soliciting his silence says, "I'm going to release your throbbing member from it's leather prison". Elmer Fudd dips out of shot and Xandir's face confirms he's enjoying the sensation. This reference to oral sex confirms the 'sex equals sexuality' stereotype for the male homosexual identity, as well as illustrating how gay sex is more often moved off screen, as opposed to straight sex that more often than not is allowed to be portrayed on screen. It should be noted that this oral sex act happens in the middle of a busy dance floor suggesting a lack of inhibitions about sex, flagrant disregard for social mores, or that public sex is not a taboo act, certainly for gay men. These sexual innuendoes are further developed through scenes such as Xandir unscrewing the doorknob on Wooldoor Sockbat's posterior and rummaging about in his bottom to pull out a magic lamp, and later suggestively rubbing the same lamp saying coyly, "I hope I'm doing this correctly".

However positive the initial first steps to accepting his homosexuality, Xandir's road to acceptance has to deal with rejection in a number of guises. Xandir's first coming out situation is over the phone to his girlfriend. Even though she is a

damsel in distress and clearly at that moment in desperate need of being saved, she denounces Xandir's new found sexual liberation saying, "What, you're gay?", and while Xandir wants to assure her that he's still on a never-ending quest to save her, she retorts, "The hell you are. I do not want to be saved by no limp-wristed, fart catching, rough ranging, fairy boy. So you can just fly your flesh rocket to chocolate land for all I care. Goodbye Xandir P. Whifflebottom". This rejection from someone that he has been so devoted to and so focused on saving for so long is a cruel blow and Xandir proceeds to try to kill himself, though he admits that this "could take a while" as a game character he does after all have more than one life to give up. A parallel and contrasting storyline in this episode sees Hero dealing with similar sexuality issues, but clearly in denial. The juxtaposition is not emphasized, but the comparison is interesting to note. The first mention of Hero's potential polymorphous perversity is highlighted by a clandestine and most likely homosexual encounter with another Captain Hero look-a-like from his home planet. Contrary to the ease with which Xandir seems to come to accept his sexuality, Hero struggles to admit to, at the very least, a bi-curious experimentation, and so begins what becomes an ongoing and constant negation throughout the series of his own possible gay tendencies.

By contrast the appearance of the genie from the aforementioned fondled lamp offers up a counter argument to Xandir's loss of purpose as the above quote suggests. When Xandir is offered his one wish he wants nothing less than "not to be gay", and an infuriated genie rejoins, "that is without a doubt the single most offensive wish anyone has ever made... you can shove that wish up your gay-hating mangina" and moments later offers "lots of gay reasons to live", such as "the ballet, crepes and snurd nurgling for dollars". It transpires that the genie is also gay, his earring, neat beard, high eyebrows and eye make-up now an obvious give away. He realizes that Xandir is "whiney, and self-hating and most likely bipolar... exactly my type" and instantly the two fall in love, the genie inviting Xandir to "come into my lamp... and I do mean that as a double entendre". This happiness is short lived as Slashgrab, Xandir's game play Nemesis, steals the lamp for no reason and leaves Xandir lamenting, "Nooooo, I loved him, he was my everything". The final act to illustrate Xandir's new found identity is for him to utter his memorable line, now suitably altered to, "I'm on a never-ending quest to save my boyfriend".

Xandir: Oh Tim, last night was so special. I mean, I've had a lot of gay sex in my life, a lot of gay sex, I mean a lot, a lot, a lotta gay sex,

I've had looooooots, lots of gay sex, huge, huge amounts of lots... but last night was the first time I've ever made love¹⁹⁸.

In *Xandir and Tim sitting in a tree*¹⁹⁹ the confused and confusing relationship between Xandir and Hero finally comes to a head during the second season of the show when Hero creates a gay alter ego to explore his possible homosexuality in the form of a bespectacled Tim Thomason. Even though initially unwilling to participate in what Xandir can only assume is another of Hero's insane ventures, he soon realizes that Hero's objective is to explore his homosexual tendencies and, as Xandir seemingly also has feelings for Hero, he decides to take part. One of their first real shared moments is whilst boating on the lake. Whilst mocking Hero, Tim Thomason stands in the small boat, loses his balance and falls into the water. He pulls Xandir in after him and they start to kiss. The image re-frames and the water plants that frame the shot resemble a phallic object, a water reed, penetrating a person's behind, two rounded clumps of leaves. Xandir mutters breathlessly "it unsnaps in the front". The latter, along with the pink parasol that Xandir carries, frames him as a feminine participant in this seduction scene.

The complexity of Captain Hero's emotional condition is illustrated by how quickly he can slip between his two personalities, easily moving from someone who misses Xandir so much and exiting frame as Tim Thomason muttering, "I wish I could quit you", to immediately re-entering frame as Hero, threatening Xandir with death if he should try to meet up with Tim Thomason. Tim ostensibly is speaking about himself in the third person when he says to Xandir, "Captain Hero is not ready to accept who I am. If anyone, you can understand that, can't you?" Xandir has to admit that he does and that, "sometimes it's just easier to stay in the closet". This elaborate subterfuge of Hero's multiple personalities is humourously exposed when Tim Thomason is seen blowing kisses to Xandir at his bedroom window and when the latter turns back to his bed, Hero is already in his, oblivious and apparently asleep, albeit with an erection clearly visible under the sheets from his recent encounter with Xandir as Tim.

As their relationship deepens, the sexual antics between the two increase. In one scene Xandir entices Tim Tomason with an invitation to "go somewhere a little more private... perhaps a dark secluded bedroom", Xandir looks smoulderingly into Tim's eyes, "where nothing can find us, nothing but passion". They run off

¹⁹⁸ Drawn Together, S02E11, *Xandir and Tim sitting in a tree*

¹⁹⁹ Drawn Together, S02E11, *Xandir and Tim sitting in a tree*

together hand in hand, and finding a room in the house, drop into each other's arms in silhouette and out of frame, with a strong implication that sexual intercourse is taking place. The thin line between the heterosexual and homosexual sides of Hero is made clear as he muses his misgivings about what Xandir and Tim are up to, to a sky lit by fireworks. After a brief pause his face repeatedly and rhythmically slams against the window and the audience is aware that Xandir is indeed having sex with Tim even whilst Hero is absorbed in thought. Hero's cluelessness is emphasized during his next confessional as he takes a seat on a hemorrhoid cushion and states, "something was amiss. Xandir was acting strange. Tim Thomason was awfully quiet, and I noticed that I was getting fucked in the arse a lot more than usual".

In the end Xandir is begged by Tim Thomason to kill Captain Hero, but a mistaken identity means that it is in fact Tim who loses his life. As he lies dying Tim says to Xandir, "[I] just wanted to see if I was, you now... It turns out I wasn't. You know it's Captain Hero, not Captain Homo", to which, after all the antics and sweet words of passion, all Xandir can answer is, "whatever" as he walks away thankful that the charade is now over.

Xandir: I'm not broken²⁰⁰.

In *A very special Drawn Together Afterschool special*²⁰¹ the prospect of telling his parents of his homosexuality has Xandir deeply worried about an upcoming visit home and attracts a round of vicious jibes from his housemates. They all decide to role-play the situation, initially with Toot Braunstein playing Xandir's mother, and Captain Hero playing Xandir's father. When Xandir comes out to them they bray like donkeys saying, "Uh... Duh". Xandir is upset at being mocked and after Captain Hero pretends to comfort him with the words, "Oh come on buddy, you know we all hate you", they all laugh and throw various objects and foodstuff at him. Xandir rushes out of the kitchen yelling, "you guys are such arseholes, and not the good kind". The housemates feel remorse and do in fact decide to help him out. This time around however Toot takes the role of Xandir's father, Hero his mother, Princess Clara a hick girlfriend the parents try and foist on him, Spanky Ham is a pimp who helps him out when he's kicked out of home, Foxy Love is the hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold that befriends him and teaches him the ways of prostitution to survive, and Ling-Ling becomes a Japanese sex client.

²⁰⁰ Drawn Together, S02E13, *A very special Drawn Together afterschool special*

²⁰¹ Drawn Together, S02E13, *A very special Drawn Together afterschool special*

Initially Xandir's pseudo-parents refuse to acknowledge his admission and invite an old school friend, MaryLou (actually Princess Clara) to throw herself at Xandir to change his mind. Xandir is angered by their dogged disbelief and states firmly "I'm gay and this [attempt at encouraging an attraction with MaryLou] isn't going to change that" before being thrown out of the house. The narrative then shifts focus and follows the parents through their journey of self-discovery that leads to some disturbing sex scenes between Toot and Hero, as Xandir's emotionally distant and estranged parents, and also between Toot and Clara, respectively in their roles as father and son's childhood ex-sweetheart. Whilst Toot and Hero have sex, Toot makes her own admission about their waning sex life, "You wanna know why I don't touch you? Because every time I look at you I see his eyes. His gay, gay eyes". This bedroom confession has Captain Hero ripping off his clothes to reveal skimpy underwear, with suspenders, stockings and copious bows before they throw themselves into energetic love-making.

After numerous twists and turns the episode ends on a shootout and Toot, as Xandir's father, lies dying. Toot's final dialogue makes a mockery of clichéd deathbed apologies, as well as of metaphors for several stereotypes of homosexuality, both of lifestyle and related to the sex act.

Toot: Xandir, I'm so sorry... I must say this. You're my son. I'm proud of you. No matter how many sausages you smoke, no matter how many fudge holes you poke, no matter how many times you dress up as Princess Leia, you'll always be my son. My gay son. No matter how many beer bottles you shove up your arse, or potatoes, or light bulbs, or whatever you people shove up there, I accept you for who you are. My son. My gay son. My sausage smoking, fudgehole poking, light bulb sticking in, snerd nurgling son.

Xandir's reaction is equally melodramatic saying, "That's all I ever wanted to hear. Thanks dad". Toot breathes her last with a final word, "Gay". The irony of this long and complicated charade is that when Xandir does in fact go to his parents they respond simply as Toot and Hero did initially, braying like donkeys and saying "Uh, Duh", indicating they had known all along.

It is interesting that for this particular episode the storyline is framed as a play within a play. After the usual title sequence and the initial scenes, a second title

appears, namely *Secrets in the closet: A very special Drawn Together*, before continuing with the new characters in their new roles. And likewise at the end of the episode, all the characters, alive and dead, appear as if on a stage, take hands and take a bow, before an actual theatre curtain closes on them. These theatrical elements underscore the performance aspect of the story, highlighting that indeed it is a fantasy and a narrative construction. This device is used only this one time throughout the entire series.

Xandir: Come on me if you want to live!

Wooldoor Sockbat: I think you mean come with you.

Xandir: Why? What did I say?²⁰²

On one of the few occasions an episode centers on Wooldoor Sockbat, the episode *Wooldoor Sockbat's Giggle-Wiggle Funny Tickle Non traditional progressive Multicultural Roundtable!*²⁰³ focuses on his desire to create a children's show. The episode begins with a seemingly harmless sequence of children laughing and singing together while the housemates record the performance, but quickly develops into a *Terminator* (Orion Pictures, 1984, dir./James Cameron) parody, with Hero befriending the Arnold Schwarzenegger caricature and Xandir portraying the time travelling hero sent back to protect Wooldoor. The episode combines a commentary on the influence of the media on shaping identity and the farcical assumption that Wooldoor's children's show will turn the entire world homosexual. It is Princess Clara who crashes the recording, loudly protesting, "What in the name of one-dimensional characters and predictable reactions is going on here?" After being told that Wooldoor wants to promote acceptance and tolerance through his show, Princess Clara is horrified. She continues, "Why, that's a breeding ground for homosexuality. Millions of kids watch public access teevee, if you put this on it will turn them all gayer than a magician". Foxy Love attempts to placate Clara by reminding her, "a teevee show can't make you gay". Even Xandir, who has returned from the gay future that he explicitly explains in the narrative is a result of Wooldoor's show, when asked by Wooldoor if he thinks his show will turn children gay, thinks "probably not". This admission is then contradicted by the closing sequence of the episode that shows same sex couples of children from all over the world watching his show and becoming intimate with each other; two Eskimo girls kiss, a Chinese

²⁰² Drawn Together, S03E02, *Wooldoor Sockbat's giggle-wiggle funny tickle non-traditional progressive multicultural roundtable!*

²⁰³ Drawn Together, S03E02, *Wooldoor Sockbat's giggle-wiggle funny tickle non-traditional progressive multicultural roundtable!*

boy takes his shirt off and is coyly and playfully slapped by his friend, and a French boy carries his mate into a playhouse and throws out their soiled diapers. The gay future is, from Xandir's perspective, "so beautiful, [with] semen everywhere".

An underlying running gag for the episode builds is based on the above opening quote which has obvious sexual and homosexual overtones. The initial quote is later followed by Xandir again making a Freudian slip with, "Waldoor, come on my back... Wait, what did I say?" And later, during a frantic chase scene when the tables are turned and it is Waldoor who must save Xandir, the former cries, "Quick Xandir, snarf my cavernous bunghole you snerdnurgling Jew". Xandir is surprised and asks, "Don't you mean hold on?" to which the now expected response from Waldoor is, "Why? What did I say?" The starkness of the sexual connotation intensifies with each successive delivery and is in part linked to the issue of censorship that is elaborated on in an earlier in the episode. It is Captain Hero who, when drinking to freedom of speech takes the idea too far, even for his startled housemates, as he rips his pants off in a crowded bar and showing his penis, repeatedly uses the word "fuck" as a verb, adjective and adverb to celebrate this new found freedom. His body language also leaves little to the imagination.

Xandir and Captain Hero are still regularly referenced as gay or confused. Captain Hero is the sound technician and boom swinger on the television set and chips a nail because the boom is simply too heavy. A quick cutaway shows he has highly decorated acrylic nails. And for the first and only time in the series, we are introduced to one of Xandir's long-term relationships as Ferdinand offers a confession regarding his time with Xandir. Ferdinand is clearly identified as gay, sitting cross-legged, wearing a pink jersey draped over his shoulders, with a trendy purple shirt, and tight slacks. His grey hair is fashionably coifed, with a pencil moustache, neat beard, and earring. He speaks with a slight lisp. Ferdinand responds to being chastised by Xandir for not giving him compliments or noticing when he dressed nicely, by observing, "I noticed. I just didn't say anything. It's a no win situation with him. If I say he looks nice, he says, 'what you didn't liked it before?'"

It is the manly bromance of the Terminator and Captain Hero that serves up the best example of gender bending in the episode. Initially both characters bond because they both admit to liking to "fuck the vagina", but later it becomes

apparent that perhaps there is more than mutual respect between the two manly men. During a gunfight the Terminator is offended when Captain Hero questions whether in fact the former was being truthful about liking women. The Terminator shoves Hero against a wall, "Dude, how dare you suggest I don't like the vagina", but in such close proximity their anger dissolves into a sexy look and a shared moment. After fighting together and finally coming face to face with Wooldoor, the Terminator's execution target, it is Hero who takes the latter's face in his hands and says, "My absolute best thing about vagina. It brought me closer... to you...". The terminator struggles against his programming to "terminate... the wall around my heart" and they finally kiss. Princess Clara is on hand to witness their love and can only respond with, "You've got to be shitting me". When next the Terminator appears he is now the singing robo-biker on Wooldoor's show, dressed all in leather with a cap, a large belt buckle, chaps and a pink thong. Visually he has clearly transitioned from heterosexual to homosexual character. This distinctly hetero-normative stereotype, specifically created in the gay future and sent back to protect heterosexuals from the gay future, ultimately falls in love with another man and becomes gay himself.

6.3.2 Analysing themes

Although there are only the eight main characters, there are numerous extras and crowd scenes where homosexual characters are clearly visually stereotyped, such as wearing leather, French berets, with moustaches and earrings, sharp features and elaborate hairstyles. Even at a gay wedding, as seen in *Foxy vs. the Board of Education*²⁰⁴, guests are a range of types, from cute with muscular and well toned bodies, wearing thongs or with their shirts tied up, to an obvious drag queen crying into a handkerchief.

Wandering through shops, such as *Bed, Bath & Bonanza*, gay-looking couples shopping for towels have neatly coiffed hair, wear earrings and tight shirts, and have slim, shapely waists²⁰⁵. What makes these stereotypical elements confusing is that similar visual tropes are ascribed to ostensibly heterosexual characters. These elements of well-built physiques, nice hair and well trimmed facial hair are what define all of the eligible bachelors who attempt to find true love with Princess Clara in *Clara's Dirty Little Secret*²⁰⁶ a parody of another reality television show format, namely *The Bachelor* (2002, ABC). Here the bachelors are all good-

²⁰⁴ Drawn Together, S02E02, *Foxy vs. the Board of Education*

²⁰⁵ Drawn Together, S03E02, *Wooldoor Sockbat's giggle-wiggle funny tickle non-traditional progressive multicultural roundtable!*

²⁰⁶ Drawn Together, S01E02

looking guys, with nice hair, different shades of skin, and well built. Such clear cut demarcations of sexuality and sexual preference however are quickly transgressed when two of the rejected bachelors, seated in the same limo and each lamenting being rebuffed by Princess Clara to a voyeuristic confessional camera, notice each other as if for the first time, and immediately kiss. "Make me feel good" croons the first man. He opens his shirt to reveal rippling muscles and the second man starts kissing them. The slippage of visual identifiers for sexuality between the different sexualities makes unambiguous representations of gayness or straightness complex and perverse. In this scene both men are sad for their loss of a woman and seek physical intimacy to mend their broken hearts, clearly heterosexually oriented, even if it is with another man, bi-curious at the very least. From a representation perspective, visual elements used to define masculinity include additional layers of code to show homo- or heterosexuality, these codes are however regularly overturned for the sake of a comedic moment or twist in the narrative.

Xandir P. Whifflebottom is the most clearly defined gay character both using and ignoring some of the more obvious stereotypical traits for gay men used by the series. While he clearly has a very masculine and defined physique, one that goes well with his video game adventurer animation type, his facial features are more beautifully feminine than ruggedly handsome and indeed in the DVD movie there is a clear difference in how the animators draw his face, emphasizing the eyes and eyeliner with darker and stronger lines in the latter than in the former. From the very first Xandir loudly proclaims that he's "on a neverending quest to save my girlfriend"²⁰⁷, but it soon becomes clear that in fact he's gay, not least illustrated when faced with Toot's heaving bosom which from Xandir's point of view is deeply disgusting²⁰⁸. For the entire show Xandir effectively has only two unambiguously gay relationships, and these are only obliquely referred to via one-liner jokes and quick cutaways to flashbacks or moments in the confessional booth. We also only see Xandir engaging in a homosexual sex act once during the entire run and this only just off screen, when he and Tim Thomason decide to take their relationship to a physical level²⁰⁹ whereas his brief heterosexual encounter with Toot, tossing her "a mercy fuck"²¹⁰ is vividly portrayed on screen, to the horror of a watching Jesus who vomits on the bedroom window.

²⁰⁷ Drawn Together, S01E01, *Hot Tub*

²⁰⁸ Drawn Together, S01E03, *Gay Bash*

²⁰⁹ Drawn Together, S02E11, *Xandir and Tim sitting in a tree*

²¹⁰ Drawn Together, S02E10, *The tale of two cows*

Xandir is referred to in the opening credits voice-over as, “a totally gay videogame adventurer”²¹¹ and generally Xandir’s sexuality is represented through numerous stereotypical, popularly conceived mannerisms and physical and psychological attributes. The main technique is to feminize Xandir, so during the course of the show it is revealed that he enjoys more feminine attributed pastimes such as knitting, sewing, reading romance novels, basket weaving, and attending ice skating shows. His body language regularly announces this effeminacy, with his limp wrists²¹², his elegant posture, always standing in ballet positions, weeping dramatically into his upraised hand²¹³, or indeed speaking to his hand, “Strong Xandir” he repeats in the confessional²¹⁴, sitting cross-legged²¹⁵, or playing with the hair of other housemates, both male²¹⁶ and female²¹⁷. When crying Xandir’s face is smeared with mascara and he often hugs a pillow for comfort²¹⁸. On several occasions he has his toenails painted, accompanied by both female²¹⁹ and male housemates²²⁰. Xandir effeminacy isn’t helped by his manner of speaking, with exclamations like “Fabbo, now I can jump with a spin”²²¹, or “Let’s open a hair salon”²²².

Xandir’s clothes and accessories highlight this feminine trend. He has hair that is permanently styled and coiffed, wears a thong and very little else, generally he is always skimpily dressed irrespective the situation, and as seen already in the first episode, has nipple rings²²³. Xandir’s skimpily outfit remains skimpily throughout the series (he regularly only packs a jockstrap or thong when packing his suitcase²²⁴), adapting slightly to different special situations, such as a night out at a nightclub²²⁵, or with top hat and gloves with a longer jacket for his own wedding²²⁶. Even naked and in the shower, Xandier still has a pink money purse²²⁷ on his person. Even though he’s gay and represented using feminine characteristics, he’s still objectified for his masculine physique, his only

²¹¹ Xandir’s introduction from the voiceover for the opening sequence of *Drawn Together*.

²¹² *Drawn Together*, S02E11, *Xandir and Tim sitting in a tree*

²¹³ *Drawn Together*, S01E01, *Hot Tub*

²¹⁴ *Drawn Together*, S01E03, *Gay Bash*

²¹⁵ *Drawn Together*, S01E02, *Clara’s dirty little secret*

²¹⁶ *Drawn Together*, S01E05, *The other cousin*

²¹⁷ *Drawn Together*, S01E02, *Clara’s dirty little secret*

²¹⁸ *Drawn Together*, S01E06, *Dirty Pranking number 2*

²¹⁹ *Drawn Together*, S02E01, *The one wherein there is a twist Pt. 2*

²²⁰ *Drawn Together*, S03E05, *N.R.A. y Ray*

²²¹ *Drawn Together*, S01E03, *Gay Bash*

²²² *Drawn Together*, S02E03, *Little Orphan Hero*

²²³ Both *Drawn Together*, S01E01, *Hot Tub* and S01E04, *Requiem for a reality show*

²²⁴ *Drawn Together*, S01E06, *Dirty Pranking number 2*

²²⁵ *Drawn Together*, S02E05, *Clum Babies*

²²⁶ *Drawn Together*, S02E02, *Foxy vs. the Board of Education*

²²⁷ *Drawn Together*, S02E12, *The Lemons Aids walk*

competition in the house being Captain Hero whose angular features are not as gym-toned.

On the few occasions Xandir does change his outfit, it's more often than not to don woman's clothes. The examples of Xandir doing drag are diverse and in *Xandir and Tim sitting in a tree*²²⁸ we discover that he sleeps with his hair in pink curlers, wearing a face mask with cucumbers on his eyes, and wearing a granny night gown. Even when disguised as a schoolgirl in uniform and with an Alice band and wig²²⁹, he still modifies the outfit to show off his muscular midriff. In one of the more transgressive cross-dressing moments Xandir pole dances for Princess Clara's father in Foxy Love's night club²³⁰. Xandir wears pink thigh-high boots, elbow gloves and thong with nipple caps and lipstick, and Clara's father mistakes him for a woman, even thought there is still a clear masculine bulge in his underwear.

While regularly portrayed as strong and brave, Xandir is also seen to faint, ladylike, into Captain Hero's arms, shriek like a girl when a S.W.A.T. team descends on the house²³¹, or even hide behind Captain Hero when Bambi and his herd attack in *N.R.A. y Ray*²³². Part of the feminizing process includes intellectualizing and emotionalizing Xandir's character. In the case of the former he is the only character we see reading, as opposed to watching television or reading and writing a diary, as he subscribes to numerous magazines including *Cosmopolitan*²³³, *Tiger Beat*²³⁴, *Dude'z Health*, and *Ex-Box Muncher*. As Jack Plotnick noted earlier, Xandir is really just a big child and this aspect of his character is illustrated best when Captain Hero promises to take Xandir to the zoo²³⁵ and the latter gets so excited he jumps around and house dressing up in a giraffe costume ostensibly infantilizing his character.

It is almost expected that the writers will exploit his character and focus on the most obvious taboo, namely gay sex. So we see the aftermath of gerbiling as a rabbit entices a gerbil out of an oblivious Xandir's backside²³⁶, or Xandir

²²⁸ Drawn Together, S02E11

²²⁹ Drawn Together, S02E08, *Terms of endearment*

²³⁰ Drawn Together, S02E16, *Ghostesses in the slot machine*

²³¹ Drawn Together, S02E08, *Terms of endearment*

²³² Drawn Together, S03E05, *N.R.A. y Ray*

²³³ Drawn Together, S01E01, *Hot Tub*

²³⁴ Drawn Together, S01E04, *Requiem for a reality show*

²³⁵ Drawn Together, S01E06, *Dirty Pranking number 2*

²³⁶ Drawn Together, S01E04, *Requiem for a reality show*

illustrating his lack of gag reflex by swallowing his sword²³⁷, or showing off to another gaming character (Scorpion from *Mortal Combat*) that his “special move is the reach around” by gesticulating with his hand, masturbating an imaginary partner from behind and aggressively thrusting his pelvis²³⁸. The subtler allusions to sex are equally abundant with Xandir polishing his sword suggestively²³⁹, or looking deflated when he’s not allowed to give Jeff Proust oral sex, even though the latter has unzipped his beach shorts and is on display. Xandir is almost desperate to give in to Jeff Proust’s request, but Foxy Love will hear none of it claiming ironically, they “don’t need to be exploited and humiliated like this anymore”, but obviously Xandir is actually happy to oblige in this instance²⁴⁰, or hoping and enticing strangers to take advantage of him while he’s unconscious²⁴¹.

Simple events are often sexualized when linked to homosexual acts. So a mockery of a Jewish wedding includes stamping hard on packets of mayonnaise which then spurts everywhere onto the guests at Xandir and Spanky’s wedding, including onto Foxy Love’s breasts and even directly into Toot Braunstein’s mouth. And whilst performing a song Xandir sits astride a mechanical animated pink rocket ship while colourful balloons and a rainbow drop onto stage. The rocket finally sprays glitter on the gayest section of the audience²⁴² reminiscent of the mayonnaise splatter from the wedding sequence.

Xandir’s crotch is often the focus of his image on screen, one of the earliest introductory shots to his character is with his bulging thong²⁴³ in the foreground, and in a later episode, a gay Elmer Fudd and Snaggle Puss objectify Xandir’s good looks, Snaggle Puss commenting, “Heavens to mergatroid, you’re fabulous”, while Elmer Fudd ogles his “rear end”²⁴⁴. Whilst Xandir is virile and experienced in gay sex, he is at the same oblivious to various aspects of heterosexual sex, including womanly parts. This is another predominant stereotype of the gay man who is ignorant of the female body or is simply disinterested.

Xandir is regularly heckled with epithets such as “Dungeons and douche bags, Gaystation two”²⁴⁵, “Gaydar”²⁴⁶, “Queer, Cocksucker”²⁴⁷, or simply “Homo”²⁴⁸, to

²³⁷ This ability is referred to first in *Drawn Together*, S01E03, *Gay Bash* and again in S01E04, *Requiem for a reality show*. The imagery is even part of the title sequence for the 1st and 2nd season.

²³⁸ *Drawn Together*, S02E01, *The one wherein there is a twist Pt. 2*

²³⁹ *Drawn Together*, S02E01, *The one wherein there is a twist Pt. 2*

²⁴⁰ *Drawn Together*, S02E01, *The one wherein there is a twist Pt. 2*

²⁴¹ *Drawn Together*, S03E08, *Lost in parking space Pt. 2*

²⁴² *Drawn Together*, S03E14, *The musical elimination special Pt. 2 – The musical elimination special*

²⁴³ *Drawn Together*, S01E01, *Hot Tub*

²⁴⁴ *Drawn Together*, S01E03, *Gay Bash*

²⁴⁵ *Drawn Together*, S01E01, *Hot Tub*

the extent that in Ling-Lings's pseudo language, "homosexual" is translated as Xandir²⁴⁹ in the subtitles. There is an ongoing focus on Xandir as homosexual, repeatedly being identified with his sexuality irrespective his role or position at the time, and while others in the household may do far more that could be identified as being homosexual, when this is clearly out of character for them and when they aren't themselves overtly identified and represented as gay, they do not as a rule get called out on it. It is mostly Spanky Ham who regularly contributes cutting comments via his obnoxious jokes, much to the amusement of Captain Hero and ultimately, and perhaps not unexpectedly, the label of gay becomes a derogatory insult, with again Spanky Ham finding ways of working it into the conversation.

As of the 3rd season, starting with the episode *Greeks and freaks*²⁵⁰ the opening credit sequence is changed and it's interesting to note how each character is now portrayed in those few seconds of available screen time to present the whole person. The mannerisms now become the character and are the short hand used in the introduction sequence. In the case of Xandir he now pops out of a closet, his whole character based on a trope of coming out as gay. Likewise in the highlights episodes, it is interesting to note what the creators of the show lift out as highlights for the series. Even though it's a parody of a clip show, the clips themselves are chosen by the writers and as such are indicative of their preferences for most memorable or most funny moment during the season. We see scenes from previous episodes such as Wooldoor Sockbat being seduced by Captain Hero, "Captain Hero, I want you inside me" he purrs, or Xandir being chloroformed in order to be raped by Captain Hero, or Toot eyeing Xandir's buttocks, or Xandir being killed by Scorpion, or the anal sex parody with the pink train ramming into the tunnel, Captain Hero being spanked, Xandir as the pole dancer for the King, Wooldoor Sockbat sniffing and touching a penis in the confessional booth, lesbian kisses, Spanky Ham's erection, gay kisses, and Xandir and Tim Thomason (the gay alter ego of Captain Hero) in the row boat, the latter sub-titled as "viewer's choice – most romantic moment"²⁵¹.

As if the above isn't confused enough, there are several even more perversely puzzling and disturbing images and sequences that frame Xandir's character. The

²⁴⁶ Drawn Together, S02E14, *Alzheimers that ends well*

²⁴⁷ Drawn Together, S03E07, *Lost in parking space Pt. 1*

²⁴⁸ Drawn Together, S03E07, *Lost in parking space Pt. 1* and S02E02, *Foxy vs. the Board of Education*

²⁴⁹ Drawn Together, S03E13, *Charlotte's web of lies*

²⁵⁰ Drawn Together, S03E01, *Greeks and freaks*

²⁵¹ Drawn Together, S02E15, *The Drawn Together Clip Show*

end title sequence of *Super Nanny*²⁵² has as a background image the face of Xandir being bashed by Captain Hero's fist, repeatedly. This image lasts for the entire duration of the end credits, with Xandir missing teeth and bleary eyed. His eyes slowly turn from white to pink to red as the bashing continues. There is no real justification for the image or its use at the end of this episode. And while we do see the genitals of various characters at different times during the series, it is only Xandir's penis that is revealed to us in a full shot²⁵³ when Captain Hero rips off his loincloth to reveal that Xandir is shaved, wears a cock ring, and is circumcised with a Prince Albert piercing. One final puzzling and complex scene best illustrating the polymorphous perversity of the series, entails a complicated *ménage a trois* involving Xandir²⁵⁴. Captain Hero opens a car boot, sees something and pukes. The realtor standing next to him pushes him aside and recognizes her husband Stanley. We assume foul play and that she has witnessed a body, however we cut to her point of view and Stanley quite nonchalantly says "Sorry Barbara, I need someone who makes me feel passion, not just some desperate middle aged hag". Stanley is spooning Xandir, both covered in Captain Hero's vomit. Stanley asks if Barbara wants to join them and she acquiesces with "Oh Stanley, this is the best I deserve" joining them in the trunk of the car. Xandir is here merely a bystander to the sexual desires of another couple and plays no active role in the exchange.

6.4 I can't believe we're not queer enough for San Francisco²⁵⁵.

Rick: We all need bigots in our lives to make us feel better about our own prejudices²⁵⁶.

6.4.1 Episodes and Issues

*Swallowing Pride*²⁵⁷ is an important episode in the second season of the series that specifically focuses on a reflexive view of the gay community. As the above quote from the previous episode teases, every community has its fair share of bigots and bigotry precisely necessary to highlight biases and prejudgments. Rick and Steve, along with Dana, Kirsten, Chuck and Evan, decide to visit San Francisco for Gay Pride, that for Chuck smells like "...butt grease", that Rick

²⁵² Drawn Together, S02E07, *Super Nanny*

²⁵³ Drawn Together, S02E09, *Captain Girl*

²⁵⁴ Drawn Together, S03E01, *Greeks and freaks*

²⁵⁵ Rick in Rick & Steve, S02E05, *Swallowing Pride*

²⁵⁶ Rick & Steve, S02E06, *House of Race Cards*

²⁵⁷ Rick & Steve, S02E05

experiences as “all so alternative”, and where Evan refers to the gays and lesbians as, “super mega homos”. The episode begins with the friends discussing their trip and in the process their own assumptions of stereotypes come into play. When Kirsten asks what the boys will be doing for Gay Pride, Dana responds in a derogatory tone, “They’re men, they’ll be boozing, drugging, bare-backing and doing whatever it takes to set gay rights back ten years”, to which Rick responds, unfazed, “Don’t’ forget \$9 hotdogs and portapotty hookups”, and Steve adds that the men are easy, accepting and playing into the same stereotype. Such stereotyping is however not limited to gay men, as Dana proceeds to describe her take on lesbians, as “women [who] are smart and political”, to which Kirsten adds, “and hairy”.

On their arrival in San Francisco Steve carries Kirsten and Dana’s baby off the plane and is immediately hit upon by a platinum blonde and his partner, look-a-likes both wearing the ubiquitous t-shirts with clearly defined abs and styled hair. The blonde offers Steve his number “in case you want someone else to call you daddy”. Steve is pleased with the attention, but taken aback. In the streets lesbians walk around topless with nipple rings, mohawks and shaved heads, while men kiss and fondle openly in the street. Kirsten remarks, “they look so proud”. Shop signage offers diverse options to the gay tourist including a shop called “Tit for Tat”, a tattoo shop that “paint[s] taints”, and artsy gay films play alongside foreign titles in the Castro district cinemas.

At the opening ceremony to the Gay Pride march itself, Mayor Screwsom’s speech is a laughable attempt at political correctness that illustrates a number of key points the episode makes. In the introduction to his speech, which runs for the entire duration of the episode and which is never finished, the mayor attempts to be absolutely inclusive of all the different members of the gay community, he welcomes the crowd,

Thank you all for coming out to our San Francisco, Lesbian, Gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, gender queer... polyamorous, non-questioning, gender-neutral, androgynous... two spirit, pan-sexual, bi-curious, abstinent-curious, gayel, sworn virgins, leather-loving... pantric, passive-aggressive... cross-dressing, homosensual, asexual, homophilic, infantalist... sexually unmotivated, differently-identified, spiritually sexual... handy-capable sexuals, bnp-

ers, dicol-dramatists... ruffled, half-coupled, chubby chasers, and last but not least...

The introduction sentence is left unfinished and the diversity of acceptable sexual identity descriptions illustrates the complexity of representations and identities that members of the gay community can subscribe to.

Stereotyping of gays and lesbians and the gay lifestyle is at the centre of the plot for the episode, and the inciting incident is Evan's response to an angry, lisping protester who is denouncing Pride for selling out to big brand alcohol, cigarette labels and corporate sponsorship. Evan is swept up in the civil disobedience and yells, "Yeah, come on fags, let's show those rich arseholes". The crowd of "fags" is stunned to silence and the same protestor retorts, "you can't say that... Not the F-bomb". Evan naively responds, "Fag?" which elicits more shocked responses. Evan however continues, "But I am a fag, it's okay if I call myself one". The argument that ensues raises the issue of how certain words, such as 'fag', have a history of violence against the gay community having been used as derogatory slurs to "oppress, degrade and demoralize" gays and lesbians, and more importantly that such words are used by bigots. As an alternative, the protestor offers Evan the word "queer". "Isn't queer derogatory too?" asks Evan, to which the protestor replies, "Yes, but we took that word back". The idea of taking a word back, amounts to the re-appropriation of the meanings of words, and by taking them back, any negative connotation is made null and void. So both 'fag' and 'queer' were once derogatory, but when the gay community takes back the word queer, it becomes a more positive statement of otherness. The term 'gay' however, according to a straight person in the crowd, can't be used by "yous guys... [because] we straight people took that one back... gay once meant happy, then yous guys took it and turned it into homosexual, then we took it back and now it means retarded". This inane dialogue ends with the protestor rebuking the straight guy, "You can't say homosexual, that's derogatory and we haven't taken it back yet". The comedy in the sequence is highlighted by not only the process of name calling, and the shifting connotative meanings associated with the tags, but also how child-like the process is and how easy it is to accept, reject and redefine the labels being applied. To no longer fear a label, or the negative impact of a label, is as easy as "taking it back".

The various stereotypes play off against each other. On the one hand Rick and Steve and friends represent a stereotype that Mother Morally Superior and her

San Francisco cohorts refuse to ascribe to and feel misrepresents the gay community. Rick and Steve are in fact too conservative and too much framed by hetero-normative conventions (for e.g. monogamy, child-rearing, and marriage), to be truly gay. On the other hand the San Francisco crowd is lead by Mother Morally Superior one of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a renowned group of men who dress up like nuns, but wear outrageous variations of nun-like clothing and extravagant make up. Being men, this is obviously also a drag performance that specifically challenges religious connotations and conventions. Mother Morally Superior wears elaborate make up, large drop earrings, a broad nun's wimple, a chaste black and white nun's habit, but with fishnet down the front, and wears a male symbol necklace. Her sidekick Flexie is mostly naked except for a tight pair of briefs and rainbow coloured suspenders. He has a beard and earrings, and half of him is painted blue. Of the radical lesbians who attack Dana and Kirsten for being lesbian clichés the one has pink hair and stubble, while her partner goes shirtless with black tape on her nipples, green hair stubble on her shaven head, green eye brows, and with multiple face piercings. She also wears leather with studs. Contrary to what her name suggests, Mother Morally Superior is anything but, when she asks Steve is he's "up for some polyamory in the radical fairy tent". When Rick intervenes stating that they're monogomous, Mother responds, "How vomitous... monogomy is a heterosexist convention", and her sidekick Flexie finishes off with, "You self hating queers". One of the radical lesbians mocks the group, looking at Dana says, "seriously, a mullet, could you be any more cliché. Next thing you'll say you work in construction", which of course for Dana is the case. The San Francisco crowd purposely set out to avoid and renounce any resemblance to the heterosexual culture they explicitly abhor, which is principally why they feel offended by Rick and his friends who accept many aspects of hetero-normative cultural constructs, merely substituting different sex combinations with same sex combinations.

After a bitchy tete-a-tete with the crowd where it becomes clear that Rick and his friends precisely fulfill all the clichés for being gay, but a hetero-normatively framed gay, which includes being affluent, having a domestic partner, being in a closed relationship and enjoying "Project Runway", Mother fumes, "You're total clichés, you don't represent us at all". The same radical lesbian adds, "You are a detriment to the queer movement", and Flexie bawls, "I'm not a stereotype, I'm not femme or straight acting or manly or womanly... I am not a stereotype", at which point his head explodes. The second radical lesbian ends the tirade by telling Rick and friends they're not welcome in San Francisco, and finishes with

what she obviously considers is the ultimate insult by calling them all “breeders”. The San Franciscans then chase Rick and friends through the streets of San Francisco to stop them from perpetuating stereotypes and misrepresenting “us”.

The friends end up in a bar in the straight underbelly of San Francisco, where one patron admits, “the straight folk here welcome rejected stereotypical gays with open arms”, and when raided by Gestapo types attempt to “act gay, but not stereotypically gay”. The scene inverts the historical reality of the subterfuge and clandestine lifestyle that is the hallmark of the status of gay communities throughout history. The friends finally meet Bruce Bandersnatch, the oldest homosexual in the world. Much to Steve’s horror, Bruce is only 33 years old, though visually he looks geriatric. Bruce is dressed in a flouncy, paisley shirt, has gelled, white hair, and wears copious rings. He looks not unlike Liberace. It is discovered that Bruce has been banished because of his lisp, lavish gait and “impeccable taste for exquisite furniture and sodomy” as he was deemed too stereotypical. It is Rick who mulls this over saying, “I thought San Francisco was the city of total acceptance”. In his final moment, endeavoring to blow up San Francisco, Bruce laments “[we] were once regarded as radical and brave, now we’re called caricatures, they say we make gays look bad”, while the radical lesbians look on shouting, “Stop trying to homo-normalize us”, and pointing at Bruce, “it’s him, that dreadful gay stereotype from the olden days”. Mother hisses, “Your lisping offends me”. As always it is the simple Steve who sums up the situation,

we’re all stereotypes... don’t you see, stereotypes can be good, way back in the early gay history days, the 90’s, that’s how we found each other, by hankies in our back pockets, or the way we talked, or the one who liked Eurasure. Stereotypes brought us together and made San Francisco a beacon of hope for gays everywhere. If you wanna be different that’s cool, but I want to be a semi-monogomous gym queen with a life partner and lesbian co-parents, because that’s who I am... I may be a cliché, but at least I’m being myself with the people I love... and look around, you’ve become clichés too. But that’s okay because that’s what brings you together. Just don’t forget that San Francisco is about accepting all of us, even the one’s you’re ashamed of.

In a revealing moment Mother responds to Steve’s words by admitting, “I wanna sleep with the same person twice! There I said it”.

6.4.2 Analysing Themes

The series focuses on a number of gay and lesbian characters who are all, as Ginia Bellafante (2007) astutely observes, "coupled". There are three main couples, the first being the titular Rick Brocka, Jr. and Steve Ball. Rick is a needy and often self-deprecating 30 year old Filipino American genius who belongs to gay Men-Zuh, while Steve is a 33 year old Caucasian real estate broker and gym bunny, who is not only not very bright, but also fixates on his appearance and libido, often desiring a more exciting sex life than that which Rick can offer him. Richard Smith in a review article of the first season of the series, erroneously focuses on Rick and Steve's "[endless] bickering and bitching", describing them as an "unhappy but happy couple... two loving and hating, whining and dick-dining queens" (Smith, 2008). This stereotype misses the mark, as they are no more in conflict than any other couple seen in the show or on primetime television in general, and indeed their relationship is a very solid and happy one, as are all of the couples in the series, despite their relationship ups and downs and probably due specifically to how they face their problems head on in order to resolve them. The second couple is Rick and Steve's lesbian friends Kirsten Kellogg and Dana Bernstein. Kirsten is 28 and Rick's lipstick lesbian best friend from college, she is also the manager of Chick Sticks, a sex toy store. Dana, her partner, is a 32 year old bull dyke and a project manager for Habitat for Humanity. She is deeply cynical, pessimistic and a misandrist, especially disliking Steve for his masculine ways. In spite of these issues, Dana and Kirsten are still very interested in sharing parenting responsibilities, including conception and carrying the baby to term, with Rick and Steve. The third and final odd couple is the elderly and outspoken, wheelchair bound Chuck Masters, who needs a basket of pills in response to his HIV positive status, and his superficial, club and drug-addicted, trendy Mexican twink boyfriend Evan Martinez. Chuck laments at one stage of the latter, "where's the Evan who cared about sex and drugs and club music and most of all himself"²⁵⁸, centering on the stereotype of self-obsession on the part of all young and virile gay men.

The diversity of characters is further represented by the rest of the cast that includes self proclaimed fag hags like Condoleezza "Condi" Ling, although she prefers to call herself an "alternative lifestyle companion"²⁵⁹, gay uncles like Rick's Uncle Bakla, lesbian parents Ebony and Ivory, even butcher lesbians such as Dana's ex-girlfriend Michaela, drag queens like Felatia, Dylan Rambrick, a

²⁵⁸ Rick & Steve, S02E01, *Labor Days*

²⁵⁹ Rick&Steve, S01E04, *It's raining pussy*

female-to-male transsexual leather stud porn star, gay nerds like Franz Nerdlinger, and probably the most improbable and politically (in)correct character parody, a bodiless, mute, blind, Latina lesbian in a wheelchair.

The gay male characters are always snappily dressed with the latest fashion or accessory, and with hair that is always on display, coiffed and gelled to perfection. Rick's ex-boyfriend Hunter for example, a self confessed Rice Queen²⁶⁰, while straight acting, wears the ubiquitous knotted pink jersey draped over his shoulders²⁶¹, as opposed to Rick's flamboyantly gay Uncle Bacla, who has a long fringe, a thin moustache, glasses, a pony tail and eye lashes, and wears a loud shirt with colourful traditional motifs²⁶². Lesbians by contrast, depending on their orientation, frequently dress more militaristically and simplistically, for the most part eschewing all things feminine, as portrayed by the lesbian parents Ebony and Ivory²⁶³. Kirsten is a definite exception to the rule in her pink dress with flower motif. It is only Ebony's eyelashes and Ivory's lipstick that differentiate them from the male characters, as they both wear jeans and vests, the body shapes of all characters, male or female, being indistinguishable. Ebony does however wear jewelry in the form of a set of yellow pearls around her neck. While Kirsten, the lipstick lesbian, does in fact wear lipstick and has eyelashes, Dana is only clearly represented as lesbian because she wears a tight t-shirt that displays her breasts. Lesbians are mostly depicted as all having short hair, with no makeup, and wearing overalls²⁶⁴. For the most part the quality of the voice is what frames the gender of the character with male actors voicing male characters and female actors voicing female characters.

While general depictions of the gay community tend to include representations of a diverse variety of gay and lesbian types, such as leather lesbians with their leather slaves, men dressed as cowboys, bull dykes, fag hags, gay nerds, and drags, as seen in the opening title sequence and often in crowd scenes for the chorus of songs²⁶⁵, the general representation of gay men however suggests that shirts are optional, whereas abdominal muscles are essential. Whether buff and shirtless wearing only jeans in a steam room²⁶⁶, or buff and shirtless at an onboard Seaman's Ball²⁶⁷, or the more obvious place to be buff and shirtless (and

²⁶⁰ A gay man attracted to oriental men and oriental-looking men.

²⁶¹ Rick & Steve, S01E05, *Save our Seamen*

²⁶² Rick & Steve, S02E06, *House of Race Cards*

²⁶³ Rick & Steve, S02E04, *Death of a Lesbian Bed*

²⁶⁴ Rick & Steve, S01E03, *Damn Straights*

²⁶⁵ Rick & Steve, S02E01, *Labor Days*

²⁶⁶ Rick & Steve, S02E06, *House of Race Cards*

²⁶⁷ Rick & Steve, S01E05, *Save our Seamen*

showering), namely at the gym²⁶⁸, this is the most oft used stereotype to denote a gay man, half naked and on the hunt for a sexual partner. Some of these more obvious examples of queer cultural stereotypes are at the same time linked to more conventional social constructions such as the family, redefining the concept of family by placing the different couples and groups in family oriented activities, such as family shuffleboard aboard a gay cruise ship, of the unexpected family drag show, or the focus on feminism amongst lesbian such as an invitation to vagina appreciation seminars, or mommy bootcamp specials, all offered by the cruise liner Cruisey Cruises²⁶⁹. This sea bound vacation is in fact referred to as a family holiday by the three couples when they decide to take part in it.

In a slanging match between Rick and Steve, the former insults the latter by saying, "I can be just as butch and thick-headed as you", to which Steve retorts, "well, I can be just as snobby and prissy as you"²⁷⁰, stereotyping their representative roles of the more masculine and the more feminine partners in the couple, but linking masculinity to a lack of intelligence and femininity with a sense of patronizing arrogance. Even the queer characters label and stereotype themselves. It is the heterosexual characters who tend to overtly negatively stereotype. Even ancillary characters offer throw away lines of dialogue that are offensive, such as a bus driver-come-tour guide leading a historical tour of West Lahunga Beach, who refers to "the historic fudge packing district"²⁷¹ whilst narrating their route.

One of the simplest and most obvious aesthetic devices, not only to isolate and identify West Lahunga Beach as a unique and happy place, but also to separate and contrast it to East Lahunga Beach and the non-homosexual community, is to use bright colours. In the title sequence we already see that a permanent rainbow²⁷² hangs over West Lahunga Beach, showering it in colour and vibrance. The colour design overall is richly flamboyant with highly saturated hues used throughout. Crowd scenes and public places are especially festooned with bright colours and an abundance of gay flags. This colour infused shorthand for the queer community contrasts distinctly from East Lahunga Beach and the dull and drab "filthy breeders" who live there, that according to Condi Ling, we're "supposed to hate"²⁷³.

²⁶⁸ Rick & Steve, S01E01, *Guess who's coming for quiche?*

²⁶⁹ Rick & Steve, S01E05, *Save our Seamen*

²⁷⁰ Rick & Steve, S01E02, *Bush Baby*

²⁷¹ Rick & Steve, S02E04, *Death of a Lesbian Bed*

²⁷² Rick & Steve, S01E01, *Guess who's coming for quiche?*

²⁷³ Rick & Steve, S02E07, *The Only Straight in the Village*

This ideological chasm between the sexualities is represented in the distinctly different interpretations of the environment, on the one hand the gay lifestyle, bright and colourful, and on the other, the straight lifestyle, sad and grey. As Evan departs West Lahunga Beach in search of free drugs, not only does the bus driver announce as they enter East Lahunga that the passengers should “depart now or stifle your creativity”²⁷⁴, but that they should also set their watches back five minutes. Wilson Cruz, who voices Evan, mentions this as his funniest and favourite scene²⁷⁵. This distinction between the two environments is further highlighted as the scene pays homage to Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (Universal Pictures, 1993) and a small child, dressed in red, runs through the grey heterosexual landscape. Even the pharmacist who dispenses Evan’s drugs comments on the state of the heterosexual world as, “a sick and dangerous place” offering him a stick, “to protect yourself from gay bashers”²⁷⁶. The pharmacist speaks with a strong German accent building on the earlier Holocaust related images that together highlight ideas of oppression. Evan collapses from the stress and a blonde “dude” is wrongfully accused. The pharmacist reproaches him loudly, “you bashed him, you queer basher... let’s respect our queer neighbours and show them that the East Lahunga Beach is straight but by no means narrow”. The angry mob go after the accused with torches, chanting, “smear the queer basher”²⁷⁷. This foray into the heterosexual world, while exhibiting positive attitudes towards homosexuality, is still dangerous and dark, with ominous overtones of oppression and subjugation and rampant distrust. It is only when Evan returns from the free clinic to West Lahunga that colour returns, with music playing, the ever present rainbow framing this gay haven where gay couples walk openly, gay flags are displayed with pride, and there is always a gym nearby.

Issues of gender and sexuality are important in the series, and while the series does dichotomize hetero- and homosexual identities, simplistic binary opposites in terms of gender and sexuality are highlighted as fallacious. The simplicity of the design of the characters for the series allows for play into ideas of sexual~, sexuality~ and gender fluidity. Such complex renderings of physical sexuality are confusing even for the characters. On one occasion Steve attempts to sort out the confusion, and offers up, “I think I figured it out... you’re a woman who wants a

²⁷⁴ Rick & Steve, S01E03, *Damn Straights*

²⁷⁵ Rick & Steve, S02, *Cast Interviews*

²⁷⁶ Rick & Steve, S01E03, *Damn Straights*

²⁷⁷ Rick & Steve, S01E03, *Damn Straights*

penis”, to which Dylan responds “I’m not a woman who wants a penis, I’m a man who has a vagina”²⁷⁸. And then there are characters such as Michaela, Dana’s ex-girlfriend from ten years previously, a giant of a woman who stands head and shoulders above the rest, her most striking feature is her deep masculine voice. In trying to win back Dana, she constantly belittles her and Kirsten’s relationship referring to Kirsten as “he”²⁷⁹, artfully and deviously misusing gendered pronouns to provoke.

This idea of sexual identity as a construction is further illustrated in the series by the myths that circulate in the homosexual socio-cultural spheres that are depicted. These story situations reflect on the “nature vs. nurture” debate that permeates religious and legal arguments on the ontology of homosexuality, arguing the point of whether such constructions are intrinsic to the individual, or imprinted from some external influences.

Depicting the gay lifestyle centres on an obsession with the body and sex. The majority of the gay male characters obsess about their looks and their libido, with the exception of Rick. It is the club crazy Evan who sums up this fetish, “I think I’d be really hot with a different face and a different body... No-one will care what my face looks like if I have a shredded torso”²⁸⁰, highlighting the stereotypical shallowness usually associated with the gay lifestyle. Whether an attractive doctor in a hospital, wearing a training t-shirt under a lab coat²⁸¹, or boys in tiny bikinis at the beach, sporting well defined abdominal muscles²⁸², or even background action at a gym with guys showering in full frontal nudity, soap suds strategically placed²⁸³, the emphasis within the community is always on the body and on the display of the body.

The infatuation with the pursuit of sex is again illustrated by Evan, who in *Hormonally Yours*²⁸⁴ wants some of Rick’s 100% organic steroids, and when Rick admits that all they do is “make you super horny and really aggressive”, Evan is quick to shrill, “oh my stars, gimme gimme gimme!” again demonstrating the stereotype of the hyper-sexed gay man. While pornographic sex, as implied by the fake episode warning, is not actually portrayed, there are constant references and illusions to the act itself. Chuck and Evan kiss each other passionately, much

²⁷⁸ Rick & Steve, S02E02, *More Wicked*

²⁷⁹ Rick & Steve, S01E04, *It’s raining pussy*

²⁸⁰ Rick & Steve, Season 1: Extras, Digisode *Change me*

²⁸¹ Rick & Steve, S01E04, *It’s raining pussy*

²⁸² Rick & Steve, S01E06, *Hormonally Yours*

²⁸³ Rick & Steve, S01E04, *It’s raining pussy*

²⁸⁴ Rick & Steve, S01E06, *Hormonally Yours*

to Steve's dismay, in a public steam-room²⁸⁵. As Steve watches, a third person, a stranger, arrives and joins them. Later in the scene we return to the trio and the stranger now has his face in Chuck's lap. The episodes will often end with Rick and Steve rolling around on top of each other whispering or shouting their pet names for each other²⁸⁶, namely Piggy and Daddy. Lesbian sex tends to end with Dana shouting, "pop off, pop off, pop off"²⁸⁷ before shuddering and sighing. In one microscopic view of the sex act, anthropomorphized sperm of Rick and Steve discuss where they are. When the Rick sperm comments, "I think on your stomach, or mine", Steve responds, "just how it's supposed to be", having previously had terrible dreams of being inside Dana's ovaries²⁸⁸ and impregnating her.

Sexual perversity is often alluded to as part of the gay lifestyle, with leather bedecked couples walking in the street in full domination gear. The only real onscreen simulation of the sex act is a heterosexual encounter between Chuck and a woman he meets in a bar, Fannie²⁸⁹. Allusions are also made to films that depict sexual depravity, such as *A Clockwork Orange* (Warner Bros, 1971, dir/Stanley Kubrick) when Evan is put through aversion therapy²⁹⁰. Evan is shown images of a shirtless man and in spite of the fact that he receives an electrical shock every time he chooses to view the image of the man, he decides to "ride the current", so strong is his preference to see this image. The sequence suggests the extent of discomfort that especially gay men are willing to endure, and the levels of depravity they're willing to descend to, for the sake of fulfilling their lust.

6.5 Conclusions

6.5.1 Boundaries

Identification, whether individual or collective, is always symbolically constructed (Jenkins, 2008, p. 144).

If transgression is the movement across a boundary, and identities are formed by defining boundaries, then any identity, though specifically collective identity, requires there be some definition of the "criteria for membership... everything beyond which does not belong" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 102). Setting boundaries is

²⁸⁵ Rick & Steve, S02E06, *House of Race Cards*

²⁸⁶ Rick & Steve, S01E03, *Damn Straights*

²⁸⁷ Rick & Steve, S02E06, *House of Race Cards*

²⁸⁸ Rick & Steve, S02E07, *The Only Straight in the Village*

²⁸⁹ Rick & Steve, S02E03, *Mom Fight*

²⁹⁰ Rick & Steve, S02E03, *Mom Fight*

paramount, irrespective how ambiguous or artificial those boundaries may seem. It is in the process of describing and setting boundaries that we are in fact saying something as much about ourselves as about others. For Jenkins “similarity and difference are always functions of a point of view... similarity and difference reflect each other across a shared boundary. At the boundary, we discover what we are in what we are not, and *vice versa*” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 102). The boundary becomes a moment of description that looks and reflects both inwards and outwards. While the participants try to describe a boundary, they are inadvertently also describing themselves and their own relationship to that boundary. Following the logic of this thesis, this process of definition is in itself a process of transgression, moving across and exploring the boundary simultaneous to describing and defining a particular moment of that process.

The very process of establishing and defining boundaries is what shapes the boundary, or identity, and the maintenance of the boundary becomes an equally important aspect of its description. The latter would suggest that while the process of identity tries to stabilize a boundary and thereby define it, the natural (if such a thing exists) status of a boundary is to remain at all times fluid and in flux. The boundary is therefore a transient and ephemeral social construct that in fact does not exist, bringing it more in line with the transitory nature of the process of transgression as suggested earlier. And if, as Jenkins remarks, “interaction across the boundary is the *sine qua non* of... identity”, then identity is indeed an assiduous dialectical process (Jenkins, 2008, p. 123) and again we return to the idea of identity as a matter of process and specifically “boundary processes rather than boundaries” (*italics in original*) (Jenkins, 2008, p. 127).

6.5.2 Identity and representation: different orders

In the conversations with artists and writers for the series it is clear that the construction of what it means to be gay is always considered overtly, homosexuality is consciously fashioned. The concept of hetero-normativity would suggest that the same is not true for the construction of heterosexuality, it is naturally assumed to be in place and unconsciously formed. However the supposedly heterosexual masculinities that are being transgressed, such as in the case of characters like Quagmire and Captain Hero, would suggest that male heterosexuality and its relationship to male homosexuality is as much a contemporary and conscious consideration in the construction of identity as male homosexuality itself. It should be clear that transgression is an impartial term, with enacted transgressions either positive or negative in effect. Also, as stated

earlier, and as should be clear from the analysis and discussion, the actual effect of representations may be in stark contrast to the intended effect. While commentary from the artists and writers themselves would illustrate worthy intentions, ultimately the results of animated representations may not be as laudable. What is included and what is excluded from the depiction and performance of the character, within a particular series, therefore suggests attitudes towards the characters being portrayed, and the requirements and limitations of the medium develop the visual and verbal shorthand that encourages the stereotype.

6.5.2.1 The Individual Order

In terms of the individual order, and how characters see themselves and their conscious construction of who they are, an analysis highlights a major difference between the various series. Generally *Family Guy*, *Queer Duck*, and *Drawn Together*, as created and drawn by ostensibly heterosexual artists and writers, tend to focus on the self-hatred, egocentricity, sexual infatuation, and general feelings of lack of worth and purpose found most often in popular culture representations of homosexuality. By contrast *Rick & Steve*, with gay writers, artists, and performers, promotes a more positive attitude to being gay and the experiences of living a gay lifestyle within the larger context of a hetero-normed society. The characters in the latter series also define themselves internally in a more positive light, at the very least deflecting negative attitudes towards sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular, or more enthusiastically actively countering such attitudes. The same applies to transgressed heterosexual characters, whose homosexual or other transgressive tendencies in no way stigmatise them within their social groups. By contrast to *Rick & Steve*, in the other series gay characters tend to resign themselves to the stereotyped constructions of their sexuality and take these constructions on board, acting out the stereotype.

6.5.2.2 The Interactional Order

For Jenkins the boundary is seen as “the dialectical synthesis of internal thesis and external antithesis: the identity is in important senses the boundary” (emphasis in the original) (2008, p. 142). Jenkins’ argument here further develops the case for identity existing as a process across a boundary or, as seen earlier, a transgression of some kind. And more importantly, this process of symbolization of the boundary is directly related to pressures placed upon the construction of the identity itself. As Jenkins states “[t]he more pressure there is on communities to change... the more vigorously boundaries will be symbolized.

Difference will be constructed and emphasized and we-ness asserted in opposition to *them*" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 138). During times of pressure from external or internal sources, it is not only the boundary that is contested, but also the symbolization of such a boundary that is challenged and therefore needs defending, strengthening both the difference to the external forces in terms of the *public face*, and sameness in terms of the *private face*. What makes the group identity different to an outside conception of the group is equally as important, in terms of consideration, as what makes the individual members the same within the group. As these considerations are predominantly formed within the group, it is predominantly within the *private mode* where "people [think] about and [symbolize] their community" (ibid., p. 137).

The interactional order shapes identity in terms of relationships with and between individuals and groups and there is no clear and sustained trend to unite the attitudes of the different series. *Family Guy* generally promotes an attitude of live-and-let-live, but still highlights the disparities within society in terms of sexuality through individual characters or storylines that harbour negative responses to gay characters or aspects of gay life. Seth MacFarlane is however, as noted earlier, a staunch supporter of equal rights for the LGBTI community and a commentator on the foibles of society and this impartiality is therefore to be expected. While *Queer Duck* is supposed to be a series that promotes a positive attitude towards homosexuality, both sexes tend to default to a stereotype; straight characters are all dumb, oblivious or vehemently negative towards the gay characters, while the gay characters themselves aren't really fully supportive of each other emotionally and tend to be superficially flamboyant. The social sphere is limited to gay characters and a focus on gay life which inadvertently automatically 'others' the narrative. The lack of depth for this series is most likely due to the lack of first hand experience of the reality of gay life on the part of the writer and artist. *Drawn Together* by contrast frames the potential for emotional support between the sexes, but generally it is the gay character that supports the others, while remaining open to ridicule for exactly this emotional vulnerability. Gays are shown to be easily influenced, have a herd mentality, and need to belong to a group in order to establish and practice a gay identity. Transgressive and questioning sexualities always revert to the hetero-normative by the end of the episode. *Rick & Steve* tends to focus inwards on the internal tensions within the gay community to highlight and ridicule these tensions both within the community as well as with other external communities. This allows for more focus on the tension between gays and lesbians, but

ultimately all homosexuals are depicted as supporting one another within a tightknit community. While it could be argued that the intention of all these series is to construct positive representations of gay characters, inadvertently the verbal and visual language is limited to existing structures that are inherently negative to non-conformist thinking and, when written, drawn, and voiced by heterosexual artists, homosexual characters are always designed as the 'other' irrespective how positive the artist may be towards the position and plight of the homosexual in society. When defined by someone outside of the group, e.g. when a heterosexual artist renders a homosexual character (an external definition), the representation reverts to a universe of existing meta-texts from popular culture that then informs the rendering. When designed by someone inside of the group, e.g. when a homosexual artist renders a homosexual character, the representation becomes more nuanced and more truthful. It could be argued that representations of transgressive heterosexualities therefore highlight how the heterosexual artist is holding up a mirror to constructions of their own sexual identities in contemporary culture.

6.5.2.3 The Institutional Order

The concept of the institutionalisation of identity is relevant to this discussion in that it describes both the potential for an institution to create identity for itself as well as how such institutions generate further identities for others. Jenkins defines an institution as "a pattern of behavior in any particular setting that has become established over time as 'the way things are done'" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 157) and that "collective identities are to be found... in the practices of the embodied individuals that generate or constitute them" (ibid.). While this is clearly an application of the idea of a group identity, there are practical implications for the creation of further identities, either of the individual within such a group, or for identities that may be created by the group, e.g. how advertising companies construct ideal families or how animation companies design and represent their characters. Within the institution such constructions of identity may become habitual to the extent that "choices are narrowed to a point where many courses of action or ways of doing things do not have to be chosen (or, indeed, rejected) at all" (ibid., p. 158) and "[s]ince we (sic) don't have to think and decide about every little aspect of our daily lives, space for 'deliberation and innovation' is opened up: there is no need for every situation to be perpetually encountered and defined anew (ibid.). For an application within the corporate environment the above may suggest a positive aspect to the creation of an identity, however within the creative sphere, the above suggest

something more disturbing. The fact that choices towards representations of identity become limited means that the complexity of the possible representations suffers the same fate, and representations could potentially descend into stereotypes. With the limitations that are set on film and television by their very broadcast nature, e.g. *inter alia* duration and timeslot, such stereotypes are already inherent in the design process for these mediums. To compound the creative process with institutionalised ideals for characters, i.e. stereotypes, the narratives run the risk of descending into hackneyed misconceptions of specific identities. And whilst the latter quote above seems to suggest a positive application for stereotypes, allowing time for “deliberation and innovation”, by no longer redefining and revisiting situations and encounters, the multifarious nature of such can’t be explored to its full potential, including unearthing latent innovations. Jenkins warns us that when patterns of behavior are shared, and a sense of such is communicated by and between all the participants, there is the beginning of institutionalisation (Jenkins, 2008, p. 158).

The institutional order, the way in which artists and writers portray, in this case, gays, suggests what structures are in place that shape these representations. Generally all the series feminise gay men and masculinise gay women, while at the same time tending to infantilise these characters. Homosexuality is represented through intellectualism and sophistication, placing sexual difference on a par with cognitive and cultural sophistication differences. In *Queer Duck* the gay male is represented as ostensibly superficial. *Drawn Together* frames homosexual openness in terms of sexuality and sexual desire as equal to personal liberation, and the evolution (and therefore liberation) of the heterosexual male aspires to similar sexual candidness, but is restricted by indoctrinated social mechanisms that rely on insults and denigration. For *Rick & Steve* a similar notion of this liberation is linked to ignoring and blurring boundaries that attempt to neatly package sexual identity, this blurring then multiplies the possibilities creating a broader range of sexual identities.

6.5.2.4 Nominal Identities

Nominal identity, the way a character is named or labeled, impacts on not only their own perception of self, but how other characters, and arguably the audience perceive the character. In all of the series the term ‘gay’ is often leveled as an insult and it is only in *Rick & Steve* that a sustained commentary on the act of naming and the notions that surround naming takes place. It is noteworthy that the series with mostly gay artists is the series that questions precisely the

practice of labeling as insult. At the same time what it means to be gay, the virtual identity or experience, is mostly consistently depicted. Whatever the label and however it is applied, the experience of homosexuality and the homosexual experience remain stable. When considering Hall's concept of the 'other' in terms of representation, it is obvious that identity is produced through a comparison between differences, or through a relational meaning. The example from *Family Guy* makes this point, where 'straight' Peter is visually and performatively substantially different from 'gay' Peter. To further illustrate these visual differences, even though Quagmire is enticed into having sex with 'gay' Peter, because his depiction doesn't change, our impression of him as hyper-heterosexual doesn't change either. The moment however that Quagmire acts effeminately, we assign a change in sexuality. In *Queer Duck* it is the intolerance and dogmatism of heterosexual characters that differentiates them from the gay characters, and in *Drawn Together* to affix 'gay' to any word automatically separates and by implication disparages whatever is so labeled.

6.5.3 What happens when it's animated?

[The audience] endorses the way in which animation has the capacity to abandon or resist outmoded notions of... performance... recognizing that animation has a different *aesthetic agenda*, [the viewer] implicitly supports the idea that the animated form can carry with it alternative *ideological imperatives* (Wells, 1998, p. 227).

How animation as a technique directly plays a part in representation and the construction of identity is a multi-layered discussion. While clearly abstracted through the process of drawing or sculpting and thereby becoming iconographic, the mode of realism, certainly in the case of the chosen series for my thesis, reflects a social construct that is comparable to our lived experience. We do, after all, recognise the spaces, places, people, and objects in each series, irrespective how they are drawn or molded, and for the most part, the plastic nature of animation is not fully exploited in these series, through for example transformation and metamorphosis. The analysis is therefore challenging as the denotative level of interpretation is both somehow real and not real at the same time; reflecting a very recognisable reality, but in a mode that is more art than reality. The connotative meaning, representing ideological and deeper structures, can be interpreted without necessarily interrogating that it is animation that is presenting such meaning as much of my discussion illustrates. The intricacy is in separating the interwoven layers of denotation to specifically focus on how the

animation, the style, the iconicity, the limitations of the style in terms of embodiment, spatiality and performance shape the connotative.

The styles of animation for these series differ considerably. *Family Guy*, *Drawn Together* and *Queer Duck* are all forms of limited animation²⁹¹. *Family Guy*, with a larger budget, is aesthetically different to *Drawn Together*, though both are ostensibly hand drawn 2D animation. By contrast *Queer Duck* uses Flash[®] as the animating platform, a simple computer based animation package. *Rick & Steve* is a stop motion animation using puppets, and therefore represents a very different style of animation, both in terms of design, production process, and concomitant restrictions on performance of the puppets.

With the above in mind it is important to note how the materiality of the animation style may shape representation through the limitations of the medium. 2D hand drawn animation is limited by the talent of the artist and the time constraints of the production of the artwork, but beyond these, is in truth boundless. The artists therefore can interpret the performance of the characters as infinite permutations. While the same is mostly true of computer generated animation, in the case of Flash[®] this particular animation software has built in limitations in terms of working methodology and inherent abilities of the software itself. Depending on the talent of the artist, these restrictions are surmountable, but in the context of online animation production, time limitations often overshadow any possibility for intricate visual aesthetic and kinetic development. For stop motion, a performance is limited by the very real restrictions of the physical puppet and limitations in the design necessitate limitations in the performance. The puppets in *Rick & Steve* were made to represent a specific toy, namely the Lego[®] 'man', and not only was the movement to be similar to the toy, but the physical design in fact necessitated it. However, in all cases there is an animator translating the performance of the character onto the screen, acting out actions, gestures and facial expressions that are performed, sometimes recorded, and watched and then either drawn frame by frame in the case of 2D animation, or manipulated frame by frame through the actions of a puppet in the case of stop motion.

²⁹¹ Limited animation is a contested term, but generally means animation that "utilizes cycles [of movement] or [is] devoid of movement [of characters] to a great extent" (Furniss, 2007, p. 133) and is associated mostly with television animation because animation production houses could "create animation quickly and at relatively low prices" (Furniss, 2007, p. 142).

As seen in the above analysis, in the case of drawn animation, representation of gays tends to revert to a stereotypical performance, in spite of the fact that there are no physical limitations of the medium that necessitate this. By contrast, a performance in stop motion is heavily distorted in terms of the possibilities of representation, due to the limitations on performance in the construction of the puppets. I would argue that certainly for these particular series, it is not so much in the technique of animation style as in the interpretation of the performance by the animator that we find the ideological limitations of the representation of sexuality. In this particular instance, where the animation style eschews those plastic modes that Wells (1998) considers are at the core of animation, we observe that it is not animation as technique that dilutes or concentrates ideological aspects, but rather the reach and impact of animation as medium, and the influence or control the artists (animators, writers, directors, etc.) have on the (re)presentation of the content.

Chapt 7: Conclusion

7.1 Where to draw the line?

[Animated] programs... can include material that a broader audience might consider gross, vulgar, and offensive. While this phenomenon sometimes allows animated programs to descend into sophomoric silliness, it also allows such programs to explore genuinely new territory (Booker, 2006, p. 186).

Booker is ostensibly proclaiming the transgressive nature of animation and highlighting important aspects of transgression; namely that it has both a positive and negative face, and that it offers a space to probe into unfamiliar, or at the very least unmapped, terrain. The offence that some might take against these ideological forays I would argue, is outweighed by the balancing act these perform within the social sphere, ultimately broadening and enlightening the social sphere though not without resistance. But, as Hall states, "adding positive images to the largely negative repertoire of the dominant regime of representation increases the diversity... but does not *necessarily* displace the negative" (italics in original) (Hall, 2013b, p. 264). The value of the representation is not merely permitting and making accessible images, but more important in what the image represent on an ideological level. Typically, all that is offensive is seen to transgress the alleged preferred choices of a collective audience, hence to transgress is to offend, but to go beyond the established and the normative is to explore new terrain and responses which in itself is not an offensive act. Hall notes that aspects and issues of society that are on the periphery are often symbolically centred (ibid., p. 226), what society attempts to expel and by doing so make immaterial, may in fact be significant to the core of society. Jenks' (2003) basic idea that underpins transgression suggests that this social mechanism must do exactly the opposite to play up and highlight the place within society of the problematic issue and to deny these undercurrents is to either create or augment a problem that may indeed not have existed in the first place.

This research has focused on transgression and specifically the nature of representations of gay identities in television animation taking note of Jenkins' (2008, p. 121) notion of signals, or symbols, that are culturally significant and used to construct identities and therefore act as mechanisms for representation.

Hall further notes that one of the striking features of the representation of gays more recently in the media has been the increase in the quantity, diversity and normalisation of these representations (Hall, 2013b, p. 267). Also if as Hall suggests what is visually produced is “only half the story, The other half – the deeper meaning – lies in *what is not being said, but is being fantasied, what is implied but cannot be shown*” (emphasis in original) (ibid., p. 252), then these representations are the tip of the iceberg, and suggest a larger socio-psychological shift at play.

7.2 Animation as mode

The complexity of animation within this discussion is highlighted in Paul Wells’ examination of representation in *Understanding Animation*.

Issues of representation are complicated, first, by the purpose of the representation, and second, by its expression²⁹² ...animation is unique in its address of the body and, as such, in its creation of the codes and conditions by which *masculinity* and *femininity* may be defined... Animation has the capability of rendering the body in a way which blurs traditional notions of gender, species and indigenous identity, further complicating debates concerning the primary political agendas of men and women, and enabling revisionist readings which use the ambivalence and ambiguity of the animated form to support the view that traditional orthodoxies in society itself must be necessarily challenged. It is in this sense that animation as a *form* is acknowledged as having a potentially radical vocabulary... (Wells, 1998, p. 188).

Wells is referring here to issues of content and form. The content of any representation has a purpose. Content is predominantly ideological in nature, witnessed in many other forms of media, where the simple requirement is for the producer of the representation to consider aspects of the *why* and *what for* of the representation of someone or something, and thereby the impact on the viewer. The form that content takes is an aesthetic decision that may or may not have strong ideological origins or implications, however, the expression of that form still has implications for the interpretation of the representation, both

²⁹² For Wells these comprise satirical mechanisms, design strategies and aesthetic purposes (1998, p. 188).

intentionally and unintentionally. Because of animation's singular ability to erase and re-inscribe the anthropomorphic body, the latter the locus of identity, for Wells this defines the ability of animation to revisit notions of normative sexual and gender identities and challenge them. This rests on Wells notion of the centrality of the body to animation and how bodies in animation "re-determine the physical orthodoxies of gender and species" (Wells, 1998, pp. 188-189). Wells argument relates to that of Jenkins who considers the human body "simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and differentiation, and a canvas upon which identification can play. Identification in isolation from embodiment is unimaginable" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 41). For Jenkins embodiment, the human body, is a site for the representation of identity and that indeed the two, body and identity, are inextricably linked. There can be no identification without embodiment.

From Wells perspective the mutability of the animated body is the nexus of discussion of the transgressive nature of identity in animation. In his discussion Wells is returning to Sergei Eisenstein's²⁹³ work considering the problem of addressing representation through the body in animation. For Eisenstein, animation as a form "enjoys engaging with the 'surface of the phenomenon'²⁹⁴ and resists the agendas of the historical source, the cultural position, and the acceptable limits of representing the subject" (Wells, 1998, p. 189). This resistance suggests the very transgression that Wells is promoting and frames animation as a form that is inherently transgressive, eschewing acceptable social agendas in the representation of the subject.

While this may be the case for some animation styles and formats, much of contemporary animation clearly originates from an ideological context enlisting all the elements of carnival that transgression incorporates. Jenks reminds us that carnival "becomes a bodily function and the celebration of carnival a bodily movement" (Jenks, 2003, p. 168). As identified in many of the chosen animation series, they include many direct and indirect references to such bodily movements utilizing the bad taste elements of carnival to break open contentious social situations and texts. Jenks discussion of carnival and transgression also suggests some of the malleable and artificial aspects of animation as artistic pursuit. Jenks suggests that during carnival, people and their actions can take on

²⁹³ It should be noted that Eisenstein's take on animation was as a form that also engaged only superficially with the content it was meant to represent, that is it didn't necessarily encounter or interact with any of the ideological aspects of what it was representing.

²⁹⁴ This notion is challenged by Furniss (2007), see earlier discussion in Chapter 4.

elements of the grotesque “[they] become characterized by distortions or striking incongruities in their appearance, shape or manner... [where] fantasy and the bizarre become mainstream” (Jenks, 2003, p. 163). And while for Jenks this transgression of reality makes the projected world “ludicrously eccentric, strange, ridiculous and absurd” (ibid.) it still maintains a logic and a clearly defined and related aesthetic. And finally like animation the carnival “transgresses the distinctions between humans and animals and between classes of men and their mannerisms” (ibid.). The former easily suggests the *penchant* for animation to anthropomorphise its characters and the latter could be read to include Wells’ suggested transgression between the performances of genders and identities. For Jenks then it is the body, whether the physical body, or a social or ideological body of knowledge, that during the carnival become interchangeable “[enabling] us to glissade from one to another – defecation, dissociation, deconstruction. We are enabled to flatulate, to move from the centre to the periphery, to break the relation between the signifier and the signified and choose another meaning” (ibid., p. 169).

7.3 Answering Phronetic Questions

This is so stupid. It’s like some retarded third grader wrote this²⁹⁵.

In this concluding discussion I return to the central questions that frame phronetic research as proposed by Flyvbjerg (See Chapter 3) and rephrased for this thesis, and I will answer each.

7.3.1 Where is animation going in terms of representations of male homosexuality?

The cynical response to this first question would be simply, “nowhere”. Certainly in the first decade of this century, broadly represented by the series discussed in this thesis, representations of male homosexuality tend to remain firmly fixed in hetero-normative stereotypes of a gay ‘other’; deriding, infantilising, and generally suppressing such characters, in spite of the heightened profile and arguably a more open socio-cultural attitude to sexuality in general and non-normative sexualities in particular. The Institutional Order holds such sway that the Individual Order presents an internal identity using the same terms and conditions as the Interactional Order’s projection of an external identity. Put

²⁹⁵ Spanky Ham in *Drawn Together*, S02E10, *Little Orphan Hero*

simply; animated homosexual characters describe themselves in the same way as heterosexual characters. This is obviously not problematic in itself, unless, as is often the case, the terms are inherently derogatory, disparaging, or dismissive. And as representation is a projection of nominal and virtual identities, this similarity in presentation by both homosexual and heterosexual artists suggests that real world social issues mandate a fundamental shift before the representational (and mediated) world can follow suit.

7.3.2 Is this desirable in terms of its potential impact on the social sphere?

An unequivocal response to this question is problematic as homosexuality is contested within society in general and ideological differences shape individual responses from different communities. Such differences mean that homosexuality cannot be indisputably defined as 'right' or 'wrong' depending on perspective. However, for an open, fair, and just society, it is safe to argue that any social inequality cannot be appropriate or beneficial to the emotional health of a community or society. A different perspective would relate this question to the issue of the ubiquity of animation. With the almost universal presence of animation on all platforms and media, and the perceived accessibility of the medium, it could be argued that animation has a significant impact on the social sphere in terms of presence alone and as such is a powerful vehicle for influencing attitudes and opinions. With such an impact it is important to note the value of the medium in distributing and inculcating social values and norms and the role it plays in shaping attitudes towards many diverse topics, not least sexuality. A more positive response to the previous question also develops a response to the present question. With the general trend that is shifting male homosexuality away from the margins of social acceptability (at least in terms of representation in the media), male heterosexuality now has the opportunity to interrogate itself in terms of identity, following similar trends that have reshaped the representation of race, gender, and sexuality respectively starting in the 1950's and continuing to date. It seems obvious that there could be a marriage between a dominant social debate and a dominant social media, and so animation becomes another playground for issues of identity. With an industry dominated by male artists, it follows that masculine identities would take centre stage.

7.3.3 What can animation productions and producers do about it?

Again a simple response would be for animation producers to raise the profile of gay and transgressive characters within a diversity of productions. However, as shown in this thesis, merely raising the profile isn't sufficient if the characters created merely perpetuate a potentially negative stereotype or are defined in terms that restrict such representations. It is precisely the transgressive nature of animation that offers the potential for re-writing social definitions of sexuality and it is the visual potential of the medium offers the impetus such reinterpretations.

7.3.4 Who gains and who loses in this process of representation? By what means and to what purpose?

Ultimately it is alternative and non-heteronormative identities, along with their respective groups within society, who lose in the present process of representation. While highlighting and promoting alternative lifestyles through heightened representation is positive, the negative undertone of these representations presents a weak argument in support of such identities and a strong argument to support disapproving denialists. Inadvertently it is the dominance of animation as medium that broadcasts these perceptions to such a wide audience providing fodder for both sides of the argument.

7.4 Discussing Discourse

It would be naïve to assume that animation cannot or does not play a part in influencing attitudes and opinions as much as any other modern media might. Its unique expressions and enunciation, and its omnipresence, create an immediately recognizable and considerable platform to prompt and persuade an audience. It stands to reason that whatever ideology plays out upon this stage must engage in larger frameworks of producing meaning and in a diversity of discourses. The implication is that both conscious and unconscious choices made during the process of animation; the choices of story and theme, the choices of design, all aspects of the animator's work, have an impact. In the case of this research, the impact is both on how animation is perceived (the discourse of animation) and how sexuality is perceived (the discourse of sexuality). In light of this, for both, the repertoires of intentionality (the deliberate, the calculated, the premeditated) are important points of departure on which to reflect. The sexualised regime of representation in animation, in spite of the affordances of the medium, is bound up in hetero-normative strictures that counter its inherent transgressive nature,

and contrary to the intentions of the artists, is less successful than anticipated in pushing the boundaries of sexuality in society.

7.5 Conclusion

Princess Clara: Well that's what you get for having a gay old time.²⁹⁶

Returning to Dyer, his discussion of representation not only considers who is represented, but also the mode of representation, the reception of the representation, but more importantly who creates such representations, either from members within the group or outside of the group, and finally the impact that such representations have on the rights of any group within the larger social sphere.

How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure it's citizens (Dyer, 2002, p. 1).

Dyer's quote illustrates the interplay between the private and public faces of group and individual identity, and the ideological control of its representation. For Dyer the latter shapes not only an individual's relationship to his or her identity, but also has implications for the psychological health of this relationship.

Chris Jenks seems to ask despairingly if "[transgression is] the hyperbolic announcement of identity and difference in a society where identity and difference are paramount yet difficult to achieve?" (Jenks, 2003, p. 3). The confusion of the postmodern is such that identity is an unstable and unattainable common ground for individuals and groups. For Jenks the politics of identity "has become a new currency with different, and increasingly minority groups claiming a right to speak and equivalence of significance" (ibid., p. 5). This splintering of the group identity impacts on notions of a shared individual identity, not least by

²⁹⁶ Drawn Together, S02E10, *The tale of two cows*

rewriting boundaries and limits, in the process creating limits on conduct that “carries with it an intense relationship with the desire to transgress that limit” (Jenks, 2003, p. 7). Any notional normative identity delimitation becomes the boundary for play of interpretations of not only that identity but the placement of the boundary itself. Jenks draws on Foucault to describe the nature of transgression.

Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses. The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable. But this relationship is considerably more complex: these elements are situated in an uncertain context, in certainties which are immediately upset so that thought is ineffectual as soon as it attempts to seize them (Foucault in *ibid.*, p. 90)

The fleeting and ephemeral nature of transgression, both as instance of performance, indefinable concept, and limitless boundary, is emphasized in Foucault’s discussion, as well as its inevitable evolution and pioneering quality.

Wells considers queer politics and the evolution of gay and lesbian ideological critique which, he states, “has sought to create and appropriate texts which reinforce the idea of redefining historically determined, socially restrictive, definitions of sex and sexuality” (Wells, 1998, p. 206). Drawing on Moe Meyer, Wells highlights how queer sexualities become performances that demolish the normative homo/hetero binary and thus challenge “bourgeois ideology” (Meyer in Wells, 1998, p. 206). The transgression of identity becomes the transgressive act. Maureen Furniss’ discussion of censorship in especially American television, proposes exactly the engagement with ideology that Eisenstein would suggest is not present in the animated form. Even though there is a greater range of social and cultural groups depicted in animated television shows, Furniss notes they are often “diluted or treated humorously to appeal to a mainstream audience” (Furniss, 2007, p. 230). Furniss specifically mentions the gay characters found in casts of such programmes as *“The Simpsons, South Park, The Ambiguously Gay*

Duo and Drawn Together" (Furniss, 2007, p. 231). The implication here is that even animated programmes have an inherent ideological aspect that has political implications through its distribution and exhibition and as such is a different form of transgression than the simplified frivolity of Eisenstein's description. Wells advocates that the supposed freedom of animation to do as it pleases in matters of representation is due to the juxtaposition of such animated spaces as both familiar and recognizable, while at the same time operating on other terms. Wells finds that "there is an understanding that animation constitutes a self-evidently non-live action space which is at once related to the real world but different enough to facilitate other kinds of projection" (Wells, 1998, p. 234), including projections of identities and representations of non-normative genders and sexualities. To a greater or lesser degree animation, through its "irony, style, intervention... [and] exploration" allows for transgression through "essentially as a new way of behaving, as a new basis for social relations, as a denial of conventional classificatory schema" (Jenks, 2003, p. 169).

7.6 Future Research

Research into representation in animation is not new (see as examples Abel 1995, Booker 2006, Brode 2005, Capino 2004, Dhaenens & Van Bauwel 2012, Donnelly 2008, Pilling 2012, Tueth 2003, Wells 1998, Wells 2002, and Wells 2008a) but detailed case studies of contemporary animation, and more specifically television animation is required. The focus of the above authors and of this thesis is on English language, North American animation series as there is already an established tradition of academic work into European and Eastern animation case studies that is well developed.

This thesis has shown that further research needs to be undertaken looking into: similar series in terms of stylistic and artistic limitations, either other series by the same artists and writers, or series that acknowledge these as their artistic source; longitudinal studies that track similar representation issues over longer time frames to develop research on the attitude changes that take place; research into individual characters within these series and how these representations change over time; and last, though arguably no less important, research that considers the impact of representation on the audience to create an additional vector to interrogate the data.

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Appendix A: Episode List

Family Guy Episode List

Season #1

- 1.1.1 Death has a shadow #1ACX01
- 1.2.2 I never met the dead man #1ACX02
- 1.3.3 Mind over murder #1ACX03
- 1.4.4 Chitty Chitty Death Bang #1ACX04
- 1.5.5 A hero sits next door #1ACX05
- 1.6.6 The son also draws #1ACX06
- 1.7.7 Brian: portrait of a dog #1ACX07
- 1.8.8 Peter, Peter caviar eater #1ACX08
- 1.9.9 Running mates #1ACX09
- 1.10.10 Holy Crap #1ACX11
- 1.11.11 If I'm dying I'm lying #1ACX12
- 1.12.12 Love they trophy #1ACX13
- 1.13.13 Death is a bitch #1ACX14
- 1.14.14 The king is dead #1ACX15

Season #2

- 2.1.15 Da Boom #2ACX06
- 2.2.16 Brian in Love #2ACX01
- 2.3.17 I am Peter, hear me roar #2ACX02
- 2.4.18 A Picture is worth a 1,000 bucks #2ACX07
- 2.5.19 Fifteen minutes of shame #2ACX08
- 2.6.20 Road to Rhode Island #2ACX12
- 2.7.21 Let's go to the hop #2ACX04
- 2.8.22 Dammit Janet! #2ACX09
- 2.9.23 There's something about Paulie #2ACX10
- 2.10.24 He's too sexy for his fat #2ACX10
- 2.11.25 E. Peterbus Unum #2ACX13
- 2.12.26 The story on page one #2ACX14
- 2.13.27 Wasted Talent #2ACX15
- 2.14.28 Fore Father #2ACX16
- 2.15.29 When you wish upon a Weinstein #2ACX05

Season #3

- 3.1.30 The Thin White Line (Pt 1) #2ACX17

- 3.2.31 Brian Does Hollywood (Pt 2) #2ACX20
- 3.3.32 Mr Griffin goes to Washington #2ACX11
- 3.4.33 One if by clam, two if by sea #2ACX19
- 3.5.34 And the weiner is... #2ACX22
- 3.6.35 Death lives #2ACX21
- 3.7.36 Lethal Weapons #2ACX18
- 3.8.37 The kiss seen around the world #3ACX02
- 3.9.38 Mr Saturday Knight #3ACX04
- 3.10.39 A fish out of water #3ACX05
- 3.11.40 Emission Impossible #3ACX01
- 3.12.41 To live and die in Dixie #3ACX09
- 3.13.42 Screwed the Pooch #3ACX08
- 3.14.43 Peter Griffin: husband, father... brother? #3ACX06
- 3.15.44 Ready, willing and disabled #3ACX07
- 3.16.45 A very special Family Guy freakin' Christmas #2ACX03
- 3.17.46 Brian Wallows and Peter Swallows #3ACX03
- 3.18.47 From method to madness #3ACX11
- 3.19.48 Stuck Together, torn Apart #3ACX10
- 3.20.49 Road to Europe #3ACX13
- 3.21.50 Family guy Viewer Mail #1 #3ACX12

Season #4

- 4.1.51 North by North Quahog #4ACX01
- 4.2.52 Fast times at Buddy Cianci Jr. High #4ACX02
- 4.3.53 Blind ambition #4ACX04
- 4.4.54 Don't make me over #4ACX03
- 4.5.55 The Cleveland-Loretta Quagmire #4ACX08
- 4.6.56 Petarded #4ACX09
- 4.7.57 Brian the bachelor #4ACX10
- 4.8.58 8 Simple rules for buying my teenage daughter #4ACX11
- 4.9.59 Breaking out is hard to do #4ACX12
- 4.10.60 Model misbehavior #4ACX13
- 4.11.61 Peter's got Woods #4ACX14
- 4.12.62 Perfect Castaway #4ACX15
- 4.13.63 Jungle love #4ACX16

Season #5

- 5.1.64 PTV #4ACX17

- 5.2.65 Brian goes back to college #4ACX18
- 5.3.66 The courtship of Stewie's father #4ACX19
- 5.4.67 The fat guy strangler #4ACX20
- 5.5.68 The father, the son and the Holy Fonz #4ACX22
- 5.6.69 Brian sings & swings #4ACX21
- 5.7.70 Patriot Games #4ACX25
- 5.8.71 I take thee Quagmire #4ACX23
- 5.9.72 Sibling Rivalry #4ACX24
- 5.10.73 Deep Throats #4ACX26
- 5.11.74 Peterotica #4ACX27
- 5.12.75 You may now kiss the... uh... guy who recieves #4ACX28
- 5.13.76 Petergeist #4ACX29
- 5.14.77 The Griffen Family History #4ACX30

Season #6

- 6.1.78 Stewie loves Lois #4ACX32
- 6.2.79 Mother Tucker #4ACX31
- 6.3.80 Hell comes to Quahog #4ACX33
- 6.4.81 Saving Private Brian #4ACX34
- 6.5.82 Whistle while your wife works #4ACX35
- 6.6.83 Prick up your ears #ACX
- 6.7.84 Chick Cancer #5ACX2
- 6.8.85 Barely Legal #5ACX03
- 6.9.86 Road to Rupert #5ACX04
- 6.10.87 Peter's Two Dads #5ACX05
- 6.11.88 The Tan Aquatic with Steve Zissou #5ACX06
- 6.12.89 Airport '07 #5ACX08
- 6.13.90 Bill and Peter's bogus journey #5ACX07

Season #7

- 7.1.91 No meals on wheels #5ACX09
- 7.2.92 Boys do cry #5ACX10
- 7.3.93 No Chris left behind #5ACX11
- 7.4.94 It takes a village idiot, and I married one #5ACX12
- 7.5.95 Meet the Quagmires #5ACX13
- 7.6.96 Movin' out (Brian's Song) #5ACX14
- 7.7.97 Believe it or not, Joe's walking on air #5ACX15
- 7.8.98 Stewie Kills Lois #5ACX17

- 7.9.99 Lois kills Stewie #5ACX18
- 7.10.100 McStroke #5ACX19
- 7.11.101 Padre de Familia #5ACX20
- 7.12.102 Peter's daughter #5ACX21

Season #8

- 8.01.103 Back to the Woods #6ACX02
- 8.02.104 Play it again, Brian #6ACX01
- 8.03.105 The former life of Brian #6ACX04
- 8.04.106 Long John Peter #6ACX06
- 8.05.107 Love Blacktually #6ACX03
- 8.06.108 I dream of Jesus #6ACX05
- 8.07.109 Road to Germany #6ACX08
- 8.08.110 Baby not on board #6ACX07
- 8.09.111 The man with 2 Brians #6ACX09
- 8.10.112 Tales of a 3rd grade nothing #6ACX10
- 8.11.113 Ocean's three and a half #6ACX11
- 8.12.114 Family Gay #6ACX12
- 8.13.115 The juice is loose #6ACX13

Season #9

- 9.01.116 Fox-Y Lady #6ACX14
- 9.02.117 Not all dogs go to heaven #6ACX17
- 9.03.118 Episode 420 #6ACX16
- 9.04.119 Stewroids #6ACX18
- 9.05.120 We love you Conrad #6ACX19
- 9.06.121 Three Kings #6ACX15
- 9.07.122 Peter's Progress #6ACX20
- 9.08.123 Road to the multiverse #7ACX6
- 9.09.124 Family Goy #7ACX1
- 9.10.125 Spies reminiscent of us #7ACX3
- 9.11.126 Brian's got a brand new bag #7ACX02
- 9.12.127 Hannah Banana #7ACX5
- 9.13.128 Quagmire's Baby #7ACX04
- 9.14.129 Jerome is the new black #7ACX08
- 9.15.130 Dog Gone #7ACX07

Family Guy Presents Stewie Griffin: The Untold Story All new, outrageous, uncensored! #4ACX05, #4ACX06, #4ACX07

Seth MacFarlane's Cavalcade of Cartoon Comedy Uncensored

Blue Harvest #5ACX16, #5ACX22

Something, something, something darkside #6ACX21, #6ACX22

Queer Duck Episode List

Season #1

- 1.1.1 I'm Coming Out
- 1.2.2 Fiddler on the Roofies
- 1.3.3 Oh Christ
- 1.4.4 Queer Doc
- 1.5.5 B.S. I Love You
- 1.6.6 The Gayest Place on Earth
- 1.7.7 Gym Neighbors
- 1.8.8 Queer as Fowl
- 1.9.9 Wedding Bell Blues
- 1.10.10 Ku Klux Klan and Ollie
- 1.11.11 The Gay Road to Morocco
- 1.12.12 Quack Doc
- 1.13.13 Oscar's Wild
- 1.14.14 A Gay Outing
- 1.15.15 Radio Head
- 1.16.16 Tales of the City Morgue
- 1.17.17 Homo for the Holidays
- 1.18.18 Bi Polar Bear and the Glorious Hole
- 1.19.19 Santa Claus is Coming Out
- 1.20.20 Mardi Foie Gras

Drawn Together Episode List

Season #1

- 1.1.1 Hot Tub
- 1.2.2 Clara's Dirty Little Secret
- 1.3.3 Gay Bash
- 1.4.4 Requiem for a Reality show
- 1.5.5 The other cousin
- 1.6.6 Dirty pranking Number 2
- 1.7.7 The one wherein there is a twist Pt 1

Season #2

- 2.1.8 The one wherein there is a twist Pt 2
- 2.2.9 Foxy vs. the Board of Education
- 2.3.10 Little Orphan Hero
- 2.4.11 Captain Hero's marriage pact
- 2.5.12 Clum Babies
- 2.6.13 Ghostesses in the Slot machine
- 2.7.14 Super Nanny
- 2.8.15 Terms of endearment
- 2.9.16 Captain Girl
- 2.10.17 The tale of two cows
- 2.11.18 Xandir and Tim sitting in a tree
- 2.12.19 The Lemons Aids walk
- 2.13.20 A very special Drawn Together Afterschool special
- 2.14.21 Alzheimers that ends well
- 2.15.22 The Drawn Together Clip show

Season #3

- 3.01.23 Greeks and freaks
- 3.02.24 Wooldoor Sockbat's Giggle-Wiggle Funny Tickle Non traditional progressive Multicultural Roundtable!
- 3.03.25 Spelling Applebees
- 3.04.26 Unrestrainable trainable
- 3.05.27 N.R.A. y Ray
- 3.06.28 Mexican't buy me love
- 3.07.29 Lost in Parking Space Pt 1
- 3.08.30 Lost in Parking Space Pt 2
- 3.09.31 Drawn Together Babies
- 3.10.32 Nipple Ring Ring goes to foster care
- 3.11.33 Foxy and the Gang Bang
- 3.12.34 Breakfast food killer
- 3.13.35 Charlotte's Web of lies
- 3.14.36 The musical elimination special Part 2 – The musical elimination special

The Drawn Together Movie – the movie

Rick and Steve Episode List

Season #1

- 1.1.1 Guess who's coming for quiche?
- 1.2.2 Bush Baby
- 1.3.3 Damn Straights
- 1.4.4 It's raining pussy
- 1.5.5 Save our Seamen
- 1.6.6 Hormonally Yours

Season #2

- 2.1.7 Labor Days
- 2.2.8 More Wickedder
- 2.3.9 Mom Fight
- 2.4.10 Death of a Lesbian Bed
- 2.5.11 Swallowing Pride
- 2.6.12 House of Race Cards
- 2.7.13 The Only Straight in the Village
- 2.8.14 Married Christmess

Appendix B: Musical number lyrics

Family Guy opening credits lyrics

Lois: It seems today that all you see is violence in movies and sex on t.v.

Peter: But where are those good old-fashioned values...

All: ...on which we used to rely? Lucky there's a family guy. Luckily there's a man who positively can do all the things that make us...

Stewie: Laugh and cry.

All: He's... a... family...guy!

Drawn Together (movie) closing credits lyrics

Take it up the arse metaphorically

Suck on a massive don allegorically

Slather spewing dung across a sweaty symbolic arse

And we can make this fuckhole a better world

When you grab yourself it's an opportunity

To scoop up the excrement and eat it yum, yum, yum

Thereby showing how you can jizz on a rotting cow

And make this fuckhole a better world

Just make a point with your vomit

Make a point with your unbridled mayhem

When you make a point to teach the boys and girls

That you can make a point by eating the putrescence

Make a point by vandalizing the innards

Make a point and make this fuckhole a better world

Gargle a glop of snot then swallow it metaphorically

Fondle a donkey's cock while feltching it allegorically

Beat off into a Christmas stocking mockingly

And make this fuckhole a better world

Make a point and make this fuckhole a better world

Drawn Together, Foxy vs. the Board of Education "Icescapades" lyrics (S02E02)

Get ready to fire the load,

Salty seamen in a submarine

Get ready to fire the load

Heads up on the poopdeck, we've got incoming male

Get ready to fire the load

We'll soon be sailing through a gloryhole
In the weather front
Penetration through the big brown eye
Of the weather front
Gotta fire the load (2x), Do it (8x)

Rick & Steve opening credits lyrics

You're welcome here in our little queer community
Whether or not you're hot or if you've got HIV
You may just find the love of your life
Your same sex husband, your same sex wife
There's Dana and Kirsten and Evan and Chuck
But all our lives just suck
Compared to Rick and Steve, Rick and Steve
Happy and gay like you wouldn't believe
Loving life
Hating girls
They're the happiest gay couple in all the world

Queer Duck opening credits lyrics

Queer Duck, he's intellectual
Queer Duck, he's homosexual
Please don't think that he's perverse
He's the patients' favorite male nurse
He's okay, he's just fey
Cause he's openly gay
He's a truly queer, queer duck, queer duck

Queer Duck opening credits one-liners (final line of lyrics)

"I'm gay as a goose" Queer Duck, S01E01, *I'm coming out* and S01E20, *Mardi Foie Gras*
"Like one in ten ducks, I'm gay" Queer Duck, S01E02, *Fiddler on the Roofie* and S01E19, *Santa Claus is coming... out*
"I'm a dirty birdy" Queer Duck, S01E03, *Oh, Christ!* and S01E15, *Radio Head*
"You can stuff me with bread crumbs" Queer Duck, S01E04, *Queer Doc!* and S01E13 *Oscars Wild!*
"Cluck me hard" Queer Duck, S01E05, *B.S. I love you* and S01E17, *Homo for the holidays*

"Cock-a-doodle-doo me" Queer Duck, S01E06, *The gayest place on earth* and S01E12, *Quack Doctor*, and S01E18, *BiPolar Bear and the glorious hole*
"In Mexico I'm El pato pato" Queer Duck, S01E07, *Gym neighbours*
"The last woman who laid me... was mum" Queer Duck, S01E08, *Queer of fowl*
"Give me a goose any day" Queer Duck, S01E09, *Wedding Bell Blues*
"I'm a peacock trapped in a duck's body" Queer Duck, S01E10, *Ku Klux Klan & Ollie*
"I'm queer as my \$3 bill" Queer Duck, S01E11, *The gay road to Morocco*
"Baste me" Queer Duck, S01E14, *A gay outing*
"I'm as gay as a Gah!... who wants a little head?" Queer Duck, S01E16, *Tales of the City Morgue*

Queer Duck, *The gay road to Morocco* lyrics (S01E11)

Queer Duck: We're on a gay trip to Morocco.
Openly Gator: A bastion of positive gayness.
Queer Duck: Get ready for some culture shocko.
Openly Gator: It's just a like a trip to Uranus.
Queer Duck: To my what? Oh, the planet.
Oscar Wildcat: The flesh is fresh in Marakesh, it makes you wants to holler.
Bi-polar Bear: The men are hot in old Rabat, and the date just costs a dollar.
Oscar Wildcat: a Dollar?
Bi-polar Bear: A Dollar.
Oscar Wildcat: Valhalla!
Queer Duck and Openly Gator: We're putting the Mo in Morocco.
Camel: Bazar's ain't bizarre, sexy head.
Openly Gator: We're just like the dirtiest cocko.
Queer Duck: We're a team.
Openly Gator: We're a scream.
Queer Duck: And we're dead.
Arab: Make way for the queer vizier, Abu Ben Dover.
Cary Grant: Hello Ladies.
Openly Gator: Cary Grant!
Queer Duck: You're gay?
Cary Grant: I've been known to smoke the occasional pickle.
Camel: We're here and we're queer in Morocco.
Queer Duck: We're teaching Morocco to rock.
Cary Grant: Let's all give a cheer for Morocco.

Openly Gator: Then let's all go out for some cock... cocktails, I was gonna say cocktails.

Queer Duck: Yeah right.