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## Modern family and Family guy: representation and relevancy among Twitter fans

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*University of Iowa*

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*Modern Family* and *Family Guy*:  
Representation and Relevancy Among Twitter Fans

by  
James Carviou

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy  
degree in Mass Communications  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2017

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor Venise Berry  
Professor Tim Havens

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy  
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## ABSTRACT

From a critical perspective, this study interrogates issues of representation and relevance among Twitter fans. Sitcoms are a satirical reflection of everyday life. Studying audience response on Twitter can offer insight into the connection between a television show as a text and its responding fans. There has been a variation in engagement when it comes to television viewership. Some viewers are no longer passively watching their favorite shows. They are engaged on social media offering comments and questioning what they see and hear. This comes at a time when television has evolved with a renaissance of programming and technology, but still covets rating success and the ability to cultivate captive audiences.

This research applies textual and discourse analysis in an examination of three episodes each from *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* while linking direct commentary in response on Twitter. Specifically, representations of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality are explored. The findings indicate an active audience that is supportive of both of sitcoms and an extension of their enjoyment beyond the texts themselves into personal, communal and societal experiences.

Each text was analyzed based the context of the episode in connection with the discourse of the corresponding tweets. Tweets were singled out based on their context in connection with the defined categories of inquiry; masculinity, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality. The findings indicate that the nature of parody/satire itself prompted cultural exchanges of discourse on Twitter in specific areas of personal, communal and societal relevance. More specifically, personal relevance meant an intimate connection between the person tweeting about the text

and the context of the text itself. Communal was more about shared experiences between members of the Twitter fandom and societal was defined by projected comments beyond the isolated nature of the shared community on Twitter.

The result is a negotiation of audience members with the text as it unfolds in front of them. There is a range of commentary from acceptance to disgust. This study reveals the rich data that is available in response to popular sitcoms. It investigates how an audience negotiates and rationalizes hegemonic forces at work alongside progressive modes of representation. The result is not a monolithic response to the text. Instead, this work revealed a more complex level of responses given the polysemic nature of the audience (Fiske, 2010).

Negotiation works as a constant cyclical process between the producers, the text itself and the audience's interpretation. Popular sitcoms like *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* were shown in this study to exist upon an important base of fan support because of the predictability of the existing narratives. Whether audience members chose to love, hate or compromise for each text, as demonstrated by their tweets, there was active participation including their choice in viewership and activity on Twitter.

Participation occurred at multiple levels. It began with their choice to view the text in the first place. Followed by their negotiation concerning how to engage with the text, and third, their resulting reaction to the text on Twitter. This study examines that participatory experience during the spring 2013 television season. This in-depth analysis found that over a 24 hour period the tweets surrounding each episode included personal, communal and societal relevance for Twitter fans, especially when it came to issues of masculinity, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and class.

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Television audiences play a role in shaping the nature of the content they enjoy. The depth and nature of how this negotiation of creation and viewership unfolds is often up for debate in television scholarship. And as television viewership has evolved, so has the engagement between the audience and the apparatus. The advent of social media has vastly assisted this, as the viewer has demanded to be more engaged and thus synergized with the text.

Given the existence of an active participatory audience on social media that is readily uninhibited by the infringement of the research process; this presented the ideal setting for a study that analyzed activity surrounding televisual fandom on social media. Naturally, the sitcom presents a space of convenience for this type of research as it is a generally predictable and isolated narrative from week to week. This research then sought to interrogate the community surrounding two contemporary popular texts.

By examining tweets associated within a 24-hour period of the initial airing of either *Modern Family* or *Family Guy* from the 2012/2013 season, it was evident the relevance the audience was associated with the text during their process of serving as active viewers of original content. Datasets of tweets were collected and analyzed in associated with the specific content of each episode.

Further, the audience demonstrated an affiliation that spanned personal, communal and societal relevance. This also was found to cross the boundary lines of negotiation with the content as audience members provided commentary associated with representations of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study interrogates the intersection between a televisual text and the corresponding Twitter discourse, specifically it explores the notion of relevance as it relates to issues of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality. With so much choice in today's media landscape, the selection of media content and the decision to directly engage is significant. So, through an examination of two media texts this study will map the relevant landscape of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality in two popular television representations and explain how those representations gain relevance with public response on Twitter.

Social media, like Twitter, continues to expand its relevance because of direct dissemination and the ability to instantly respond and share. The power in Twitter can also be found in what a community chooses to retweet. For some, Twitter is bridging a gap in the ideological construction of mediated experience.

This study will flesh out various elements of media representation, paying close attention to how they are consumed by Twitter fans. It analyzes two components of media communication. First, there is the common stereotypes and themes found in these two popular entertainment shows, *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* and, second, the relevant interactions and comments of a responding Twitter community.

My interest in pursuing television's influence on an audience involves defining numerous societal issues that stem from my direct experience working with high school and college-aged boys over the years. As I learned about their struggles with acceptance and overall identity formation, the acceptable archetype often came from popular TV shows and included a limited depiction of the hyper-masculine, white, heterosexual male. This archetype is often tied to

problematic issues such as masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Given the impact of various archetypes today, it is imperative to investigate the presence of such issues in media texts particularly as it relates to social discourse.

Past scholarship has indicated that the media plays a direct role in highlighting and reinforcing dominant ideologies when it comes to masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality in program production and audience reception. For example, John Fiske in *Television Culture* (2011) argues that mediated messages can become powerful with repetition and intertextuality. In other words, when certain messages are repeated over and over again and perpetuated everywhere those messages may be unconsciously accepted.

“Unconscious intertextuality involves textual materials of many kinds (plots, themes, kinds of characters, and so on) that become common currency, pervading cultures and finding their way into new texts without the creator’s knowledge” (Berger, 2014, p. 27).

This investigation will examine through Twitter discourse the kinds of normalization that take place regarding repetitive and intertextual television depictions of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Ultimately, the goal is to use social media to effectively explore representation and the corresponding elements of identification among Twitter fans.

By contextualizing and critically engaging the ways that the media construct meaning, scholars have explored the media’s role in perpetuating specific social inequities. For example, Richard Johnson has noted:

“Judgments like these cannot be made on the basis of the analysis of production conditions or texts alone; they can best be answered once we have traced a social form right through the circuit of its transformations and made some attempt to place it within the whole context of relations of hegemony within society” (1987, p.72).

When discussing the impact of societal ideology or hegemony, Hall (1982) explains that, “...reality could no longer be viewed as simply a given set of facts; it was the result of a particular way of constructing reality” (p. 336). In other words, through these mediated constructions, the audience has the opportunity to negotiate the text. Essentially, social media can be effective communication outlets for promoting and/or challenging hegemony and the various ideologies tied to a text and this data will be lucrative in understanding that process.

The audience has been explored within fan studies proving the existence of the fan, non-fan, and anti-fan elements (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007). This synergistic relationship between fans and a text is tied to the process of connecting with popular media in some way. The fan is often seen as largely celebratory and rarely critical of the text. The non-fan usually passively consumes the text and does not have an opinion one way or another. The anti-fan not only consumes the text, but he or she is often quite knowledgeable and their position concerning the text is usually negative. This is the audience that ultimately forms an interpretive community.

“Nobody regards these fun activities as a magical cure for the social ills of post-industrial capitalism. They are no substitution for meaningful change, but they can be successful to build popular support for such change, to challenge the power of the culture industry to construct the common sense of a mass society.”

(Jenkins, 1992, p. 104).

Exploring interpretive community, media relevancy and the connection between representations of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality in viewer responses offers a pathway to a much deeper analysis. Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg suggests that privacy is no longer a social norm (Van Djick, 2013). His message can lay the groundwork for conducting audience studies in order to excavate the greater meaning of media messages in mainstream society.

The two televised texts that have been selected for analysis in this study are *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*. They are both prominent family sitcoms. This study examines selected episodes from the Spring 2013 season. Each show presents a satire of the all-American family. *Modern Family* is a thirty-minute comedy that includes two generations of family and neighbors. *Family Guy* is an adult cartoon, a parody of the American dream. Both shows offer images of family in modern American society that encapsulate the evolution of television programming as a rhetorical force.

The fact that social media offer a change in the model of audience interaction today is undisputable. Television shows like *The Walking Dead* are racking up an average of 19 million viewers a week, many using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram to connect (Royers,

2013). Fan activity for *The Walking Dead* varies from cryptic messages on Facebook and blog posts to supportive responses on YouTube and even Instagram.

Twitter was chosen in this study because it is possibly the most influential social media site for instant engagement. Twitter has carved out a crucial space for engagement with an instant connection to these shows. In some ways it has reinvented the purpose of appointment television through a “be the first to see it” mentality. Appointment television is synonymous with advertising revenue and ratings success. In the early days of television, if someone wanted to see a specific show, they had to make sure they were home in time to watch it. The networks controlled scheduling and the audience rearranged their daily lives to include favorite programs. Viewing pleasure was correlated with ratings success and advertising dollars. The revenue model for television shifted with DVRs and the Internet. The audience no longer needs to watch a show when it first aired.

However, through Twitter, appointment television has come to include the enjoyment of watching the show in real time and sharing that experience with fellow fans. Fans sharing their responses on social media is called participatory culture. In Fiske’s book *Understanding Popular Culture* (2010), he outlines a process he calls “popular discrimination.” This process includes relevance, semiotic productivity, and the flexibility of the mode of consumption. He defines “popular discrimination” as the content on television becoming widely popular for a particular demographic because the audience chooses certain texts over others.

Jenkins (2006) laid out an extensive body of work that examines the many ways that media consumers engage with the text, even going beyond the text itself. According to Jenkins, the public not only consumes the text, they interact with it and some revise elements by creating their own text. This is the process of “participatory culture” and it is cultivated through media

interaction and community building. Participatory culture encourages the public's engagement with the text and fosters a shared experience between all those associated.

“The world is built up in the consciousness of the individual by conversations with significant others (such as [teachers,] parents, [and] ‘peers’). The world is maintained as subjective reality by the same sort of conversation, be it with the same or with new significant others (such as spouses, friends or other associates). If such a conversation is disrupted (the spouse dies, the friends disappear, or one comes to leave one's original social milieu), the world begins to totter ... In other words, the subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation.” (Berger, 1967, p. 17).

Finally, satire is at work in *Modern Family* and parody is at work in *Family Guy*. Satire uses irony to critique human behavior and ideology. Gray (2008) defines parody as “the mockery of form, rules, and conventions of other forms of art.” The purpose of satire and parody is to entertain the audience as well as encourage them to reflect on the messages and images through humor. Gray explains:

“Humor and comedy, then, often present instances when what is on-screen is illogical, nonsensical, and surreal, yet the message being conveyed is wholly logical, sensible, and

intimately concerned with reality. Arguably the clearest examples of such humor are satire and parody.” (p. 118).

The interrogation of audience interactions will be key to this research, highlighting issues of satire and parody within participatory culture. Twitter creates a vortex of discourse that emerges surrounding specific texts. This study sheds light on the phenomenon of live-tweeting during two popular television shows and interrogates the relevance of that discourse in connection with the representations of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality in America. Therefore, the following research questions will be examined:

RQ1: How are masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality represented on *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* and what are the common themes, patterns, and hegemonic ideologies negotiated among Twitter fans in relation to these representations?

RQ2: In what way does the notion of personal, communal, and societal relevancy connect with the Twitter discourse concerning these representations?

RQ3: How are the concepts of satire, parody, and breaking the fourth wall negotiated among Twitter fans for each program?

RQ4: Are there other important and interesting issues surrounding fandom, representation, and relevance connected to *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*?

### *Conclusion*

In closing, media consumption is not a passive practice. As media texts reflect contemporary personal, cultural, social and political climates, audiences work to negotiate meaning through their consumption, acceptance, and rejection. This research is significant

because communication is not inherent within the text itself, but it is relevant to the interpretive community that surrounds it. Personal, communal and societal relevance enables fans to bond at various levels with the text. This study aims to flesh out the discourse surrounding the selected representations in order to better understand the contemporary landscape of social media and fandom.

## CHAPTER TWO: REPRESENTATION AND RELEVANCY

### Representation

It is important to analyze media representation based on the limitations found in television roles. Many scholars have tackled this area of media studies sometimes called the politics of representation. One of the most notable scholars in this area is John Fiske (1992, 2010, 2011). His work captured the nature of representation and the complicated ways that texts are being interpreted by polysemic audiences.

Fiske noted that the goal of popular culture is to attract advertisers. Since there is a distinct economy of media, it has always been necessary to account for the bottom line and that involves media products. For example, television shows are produced and paid for. They not only sell commodities, but representations and ideas as well. This process results in a negotiation process, as noted by Fiske (2010), where the audience comes away from the text with multi-faceted responses relating to their own meaning-making. Their responses can be directly connected with the text or they may also have roots within their own lived experiences that influence perceptions of the world around them.

The research on media representation is extensive (Atwood, 2012; Talbot, 2007; Banaji, 2010; Yanes & Carter, 2012;). Studies have examined media representation in news media (Chermak, Bailey & Brown, 2013; Leiva & Bright, 2015; Devotta, Wilton & Yiannakoulis, 2013; Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012), on television (Macey, Ryan & Springer, 2014; Lapostolle, Montois & others, 2013; Alsultany, 2012), in film (Griffin, 2014; Lacey, 1998), in sports media (Tulle, 2016; Bruce, 2015; McKay & Johnson, 2008), magazines (Basnyat & Chang, 2014), and digital media use (Popa & Gavrilu, 2015).

One of the canonical pieces is Stuart Hall's book, *Representation* (1997). In this text, Hall argues that representation and meaning are critical to any study of culture.

“Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things. (p. 15)

He goes on to explain two systems of representation. The first system involves conceptual maps where people, ideas, objects and events are presented in a chain of communication. The second system includes societal signs that operate through language and, ultimately, enable meaning.

The media has the ability to embrace or ignore the diversity of subjects that represent mainstream society. There will always be an ideological struggle within mediated representations that goes beyond the norm because of economic necessity in today's mediated landscape. To generate enough viewers to produce a successful television show, the program has to remain on the air longer and move into syndication later. In other words, the necessity for diverse mediated representation is not a must because the industry is focused on the largest common denominator and guided by the bottom dollar.

The audience exercises popular discrimination in their ability to understand contemporary representations. They have the ability to pick and choose what parts of mediated representations they accept and reject, and also what parts they choose to identify with or counter in relation to their own identities and assumptions/expectations considering the identities of others.

Fiske (2010) asserts that “culture is a living, active process: it can be developed only from within, it cannot be imposed from without or above” (p. 19). Our culture offers a complex negotiation of constructed images and ideas that are referenced through mediated representations. This means the media’s attempt to keep up with societal norms in order to garner wide audiences and sell commercial products is a problematic one.

### *Relevancy in Representation*

Analyzing representation in media, involves relevance to contextualize what is valued by the audience at that specific moment in time. Not only are goods sold and normalized through the media, but images and ideas as well. The value of such products is extended further through the individual and collective meanings held by audiences. The cultivation of such value has been exemplified through the explosion of Internet interaction and the emergence of online interpretive communities.

The theoretical framework of relevancy helps to explain the role of media products in the development and reinforcement of meaning making. The meaning-making process through media often relates to representation and the relevancy of that representation to the audience. According to Cohen (1991), relevancy involves the negotiation of an audience’s interpretation of mainstream media, specifically in the conceptualization of their own individual and collective identities. Cohen draws on influential audience studies like Morley’s (1980) study of white working class families and their choices in watching television.

Cohen also discusses the power of relevancy based on the interpretation and negotiation of specific discourses. Discourse, he suggests, offers the ability to provide direct responses to a

media text drawing upon the actual lived meaning that is inherent within the text and the embodied relevance to the individual or group that is consuming the text.

Fiske (1988) believes that relevance impacts not only the perceptions of an audience, but the structure of those perceptions too.

“The viewer makes meanings and pleasures from television that are relevant to his or her social allegiances at the moment of viewing; the criteria for relevance precedes the viewing moment...The moment of semiosis is when social allegiances and disruptive practices are personified and held in relative stability on a point with relevance.” (Fiske, p. 247)

According to Fiske (2010), this is the result of a complex negotiation of lived experiences and perceptions taken in the moment of viewing a specific televisual text. It can result in a moment of disruption or reinforcement as a televisual text connects with or contradicts the existing norms of the viewers. This is where relevance to the viewers becomes a negotiation of meaning. Cohen (1991) leans on the work of Fiske when it comes to the relevancy of audience discourse and he goes on to relate identity to relevance in media texts.

In his research Cohen has found that “spectators draw upon interesting, competing, and sometimes contradictory discourses in the construction of meaning” (p. 444). In other words, not all responses can be generalized, because each response to a media text usually possesses its own validity. Media texts foster meaning through polysemy. This means the audience is afforded the ability to discern their own response to the text regardless of the original intended meaning. In

Cohen's argument viewers recognize the process by which media interaction may be analyzed for relevant moments of meaning and this is where the inherent power of relevance comes in. The audience derives a connection to the text, and they then further foster their own identity through a relationship/negotiation with that same text.

There are other explicit discussions in research on relevancy (Ang, 1985; Berry & Shelton, 1999; Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Radway, 1984; Dor, 2003). Newspaper headlines are designed to optimize the relevance of a story according to Dor (2003). Dor's study found that readers scan headlines, and a successful headline will have relevance for readers with appropriate knowledge. Berry and Shelton (1999) examined music videos and audience interpretation. Using focus groups, they found that the key to audience interpretation is clarity and consistency. They identified levels of interpretation determined by relevance. Participants could discuss a relevant connection that they were able to make between musical lyrics, visual images and personal, social or cultural experience (p.146-147).

My analysis speaks to the relevancy of the moment when the audience member is turned into a truly active fan. This analysis aims to examine various media representations concerning masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality as they connect with an audience's use of social media, particularly Twitter.

### *Conclusion*

Media audiences represent a variation of engagement with the text. The polysemic nature of media (Fiske, 2011) is associated with how audiences interpret and participate in the meaning-making process. Fans have the ability to both deconstruct and support a text at the same time. Understanding the relevance of a media text in relation to the audience can help researchers

determine the possible impact. Since media fandom/viewership fluctuates over time, it is necessary to interrogate the audience's relationship with the text at specific moments in time.

## CHAPTER THREE: MASCULINITY, RACE/ETHNICITY, CLASS, AND SEXUALITY

“Only political action really takes account of all the effects of domination that are exerted through the objective complicity between the structures embodied in both women and men, and the structures of the major institutions through which not only the masculine order but the whole social order is enacted and reproduced...”

(Bourdieu, 1998, p. 117).

Contemporary academic discourse surrounding issues related to masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality perpetuates the need to further examine established theoretical frameworks. Interrogating representation requires the ability to not only flesh out the intended message of the producer of the text, but also to identify the variation of ways the audience essentially connects with that text. It is necessary to examine the text itself for meaning and also explore audience responses to that text. The current research study examines audience response using one of the most popular social media sites in contemporary society – Twitter.

There are foundational works in critical cultural media studies that provide a platform for dissection and further theorization. The crux of this study is couched within the politics of representation as each text relates to contemporary discourses surrounding popular social norms. Thus, this particular chapter provides the road to critical discussions surrounding social media and television as they pertain to the construction of media representations and the dominant force of participatory culture.

## *Masculinity*

Masculinity is portrayed throughout the media as a fantasy of ideals that represents both the dominant position and also a subordinate position concerning men. These ideals are reinforced through the actions of media characters often furthering the acceptability of the dominant patriarchal position in society. Hegemonic masculinity is the main framework of masculinity as defined by Connell (1987). According to Connell (1987), "...the cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men. Indeed, the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite superficially fantasy figures..." (p. 184).

Building on Connell (1987), this study draws upon research that has further problematized the notion of masculinity ("what it means to be a man") and the ideal of agency in society between men and other men, as well as between men and women. The cultural struggle for "concrete" male identity in society will be interrogated through the lens of hegemonic masculinity acknowledging that a negotiation often takes place.

There is a core "masculine ideal" that is conveniently portrayed in many televised representations of men. This means masculinity is not just simply a "top-down" patriarchal force, but a constant ideological struggle as the expectations of men in society continue to change over time. Cornwall and Lindisfarane (1994) said, "historians and anthropologists have shown that there is no one pattern of masculinity found everywhere. Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct masculinity differently" (p. 46).

Trujillo (1991) offers five categories for understanding the existence of hegemonic masculinity: (1) physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality (p.15). These categories are important because

they negotiate systems of power providing access to those that have obtained the above identity attributes. Trujillo's (1991) work is a clear indication of how hegemonic masculinity can operate through the lens of reinforcing the continued the role of patriarchy in mainstream society.

Masculinity is a socially constructed ideal that can be represented in many forms. It is fluidly conceptualized depending on the identity of the subject and the perceptions of those around them, often based on social norms and stereotypes.

“Hegemonic masculinity refers to the social ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that, operating on the terrain of ‘common sense’ and conventional morality, defines ‘what it means to be a man’” (Hanke, 1990, p. 232).

Connell's (1987) theory on “hegemonic masculinity” starts the conversation by considering how men are positioned as patriarchal figures in society and throughout history. But, in his later work, Connell (1995) articulates the existence of several masculinities all being constantly negotiated amongst one another. He explains the realities surrounding masculine identities of various racial/ethnic groups, along with LGBT masculinities. Connell (1995) points out, “gay masculinity is the most conspicuous, but it's not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy” (p. 79).

### *Race/Ethnicity*

Racial representations have played an important role throughout the history of television with the emergence of various stereotypical characters. There is notable research concerning

racial representations of socially constructed ideals in the media (Gray, 1995; Torres, 1998; Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Larson, 2006; Bell & Jackson, 2013). Conceptualizing race/ethnicity as a social representation instead of a biological definition has allowed for scholars to discuss why certain ideals are upheld and others repressed.

Butler (1990) argues for more equality in performativity through her critical scholarship, while McRobbie (2005) suggests that Butler is interpreting performativity as a “reiteration” of ideals. More specifically McRobbie believes that Butler’s attention to certain works suggests a performance of one’s idealized outlook concerning the representation of what it means to be a man or a woman, what it means to be white, African American, Latino, Asian, gay or straight, and so on. She argues that this is why stereotypes are so problematic.

Men on television and film are still mainly white, middle-class, and heterosexual. There has been a shift in efforts to diversify character representation with an increase in gay male characters and several ensemble casts that feature African American, Latino, and Asian men. Yet, minority men are not as widely represented as their white counterparts.

Stereotypes also heavily populate the media representation of minorities through the presentation of iconography that is relatable to a broad audience. It is important, even in an environment with “progressive” representation, that as academics there is a call to explain the existence and potential problems of such stereotypes in the media.

“Righteous dismissal does not make the stereotypes go away, and tends to prevent us from understanding just what stereotypes are, how they function, ideologically and aesthetically, and why they are so resilient in the face of our rejection of them” (Dyer, 1984, p. 27).

Dyer's (1984) discussion of stereotypes remains relevant today in that he provides a solid model for analyzing character representations and identifying negative and positive media constructions. In his analysis of gay stereotypes as they are presented in film, Dyer draws upon the work of Klapp (1962) who identifies the way people organize information according to role, individual, type and member.

“...stereotypes refer to things outside one's social world, whereas social types refer to things with which one is familiar; stereotypes tend to be conceived as functionless or dysfunction (or, if functional, serving prejudice and conflict mainly), whereas social types serve the structure of society at many points”

(Klapp, 1962, p. 16).

Klapp establishes a framework for how stereotyping is a naturally occurring phenomenon because of the way people effectively store and classify information in their brain. The work of Klapp (1962) influenced much of the early research that examined the existence of stereotypes in the media alongside the collective interpretations of the audience.

### *Class*

How class is negotiated on television has been examined by numerous scholars including: (Lewis & Jhally, 1992; Gray, 2006; Wood & Skeggs, 2011; Press, 1991; Holtzman, Sharpe & Gardner, 2014). Jonathan Gray has done extensive work in this area by highlighting the engagement of the audience with the text, juxtaposed alongside the text itself fleshing out the

negotiation of class by an audience as it relates to the construction of the encoded text (2006). *The Cosby Show* (1984-92) has been widely studied as an example of how class has been negotiated for the African-American audience. The show featured an upper middle-class African-American family living the American dream. According to Lewis and Jhally (1992), in reality, this show was not relevant for many African-Americans during the 1980's who were living in poverty, yet it was found to ease racial tensions among affluent white viewers. They found that the representations promoted were not a reality for many African-Americans because the show sent the message that racism was dead and no longer an important issue in American society.

Power cannot justifiably be measured as a solely top down event, especially since representations are often not uniform. In fact, some scholarship has indicated that class, status and power are negotiated in the media similarly (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Pascoe, 2007; Gutsche, Carviou, & Arif, 2012; Curran, 2002). For example, studies have examined a number of texts where complex men of power and influence have been white, middle-upper class, heterosexuals (Kimmel, 2005). Economics related to this kind of representation populates the television programming environment (Malin, 2010).

Representations of class matter and it is important to understand how those representations are negotiated by various audiences. A good example is the oppositional, unrelenting, one-dimensionality of traditional masculinity usually presented by beer commercials (Strate 1992). In other words, how cultural practices of consumption are marketed for men versus women tend to support ideological meanings inherent in the products and, therefore can influence their own identities in comparison with others (Milestone & Meyer 2012). So, *Sports*

*Illustrated* magazine can offer a narrow terrain of representation to the sports enthusiast and promote misogyny all in one (Davis 1997).

The response to a call for expanded representation surrounding race, gender and sexuality has been connected with the goals of commodification and linked to capitalism (Gray, 1995; Gauntlett, 2002; Becker, 2006). In other words, to increase consumption and raise the potential for advertising revenue through ratings success meant more diverse characters had to be included. However, primary representations still consist of upper-class white men in positions of power such as bosses, business professionals, fathers, husbands, doctors, and superheroes surrounded by others. Twitchell and Rose (2006) suggest that televised sports, along with entertainment media opened up a broader terrain for mass consumption.

“A middle-class man of whatever color or religion can choose between rough-tough machismo or aching sensibility. Any man—whatever ethnic or racial background—who can afford it can mix and match masculine identities according to whim and situation” (p. 237).

Men and women end up spending large amounts of money in an effort to preserve a certain class position in society often dictated by mediated representations. McRobbie’s research (2005) explored magazines specifically targeting class, status, and power in relation to how a person looks. She noticed that images of men and women are drastically retouched to the point of creating the “imagined perfect being” while completely masking the person that was

originally photographed. These reinvented images suggest the active reconstruction of one's outer appearance as a limited expression of one's overall personality.

This means, representation can limit the identifying characteristics of class, status, and power by too often promoting over exaggerated, inaccurate, and unrealistic images and ideas based on normalized standards of mainstream society. Media depictions of class can also influence behavior according to Kendall (2005). Kendall discusses how the poor and working class are too often ignored in the media while the middle and upper class tend to be overly emphasized.

“With regard to the portrayal of class in the media, all of this means that we are not receiving ‘raw’ information or ‘mere’ entertainment that accurately reflects the realities of life in different classes; in fact, audiences are receiving formulaic products that have been previously sanitized and schematized so that readers and viewers do not have time to think for themselves or deal with the underlying problems of our society” (p. 6).

### *Sexuality*

The negativity surrounding sex on television has dissipated to a large extent today. Sexuality in the media is evolving into its own specific canon of scholarship. In early television programs, there was an overt representation of heterosexuality that was even censored in many ways according to FCC standards. For example, Lucy and Ricky slept in the same bed in the

original pilot for *I Love Lucy* (“Pilot,” E 0, S 1, 1951) but when the show was picked up by CBS the couple was portrayed as sleeping in separate beds (“The Girl Wants to go to the Nightclub,” E1, S1, Oct 15<sup>th</sup>, 1951). Later, when Lucille Ball got pregnant in real life and they decided to bring it to the series, it was met with controversy from the FCC (Greene, 2008). Gradually, the televisual landscape has evolved to include more intimate situations between heterosexual couples and recently for gay couples.

The research area of sexuality has been well-mapped within feminist scholarship (Kimmel, 1987a;1987b; McRobbie, 2005; Feasey, 2008; Milestone & Meyer, 2012; Grammel, 1999). Specific research areas of sexuality include: counseling strategies (Ballam & Granello, 2011), video games (Shaw, 2012; Lancaster, 2004), news media (Castaneda & Campbell, 2006), sexual behavior (Albury, 2013; Vitellone, 2002), social media (DeRidder & Van Bauwel, 2015), shopping and security (Bhattacharyya, 2011), television programming (Meyer, 2015; McIntosh, 2014), sexual orientation (Diamond, 2005; Hamilton, 2007; Pullen, 2012, 2010), films (Willis, 2008; Gabriel, 2009), sports (Daniels & Wartena, 2011; Daniels, 2009, 2012), violence (Shelby & Hatch, 2014; Mercer & Perkins, 2014), celebrity (Streeter, 2012), beauty (Rich & Cash, 1993), sexual empowerment (Halliwell, Malson & Tichner, 2011), and finally, sex workers (Coy, Wakeling & Garner, 2011; Curtis, 2012; Hallgrimsdottir, Phillips & others, 2008; Pajnik, 2010).

It is important to note that sexuality or representations of sexual orientation are different than representations of gender identity. The two are not the same and scholars have distinctly classified them as separate. Connell (1995) suggests a three-fold system to examine the construction of gender. She believes the complexity is like a fabric that has become interwoven into a quilt of power, production, and cathexis. Power relations too often involve men as dominant beings with other men and women as subordinates. Production has historically divided

gender roles in terms of positioning in the labor force versus reproduction and family (falling back to a division between men and women). Cathexis is the negotiation of sexual desire or sexuality.

Critical theorists like Foucault, 1978; Gagnon & Simon; 1973; Rubin, 1984; Scott, 1986; Butler, 1990; Stryker, 2008 have mapped out the trajectory of gender leading to specific conceptualizations and pointing towards normalized social constructions in society. According to Judith Butler (1990) there is a pattern in all this.

“In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction” (p.188).

There has been an extensive amount of research conducted on the social construction of gender, (Epstein, 1987; McRobbie, 2005; Gauntlett, 2008; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2005; Silverman, 1992; Sedgwick, 1985; Halberstam, 1998; Wiegman, 2002; Dyer, 1984; Jeffords, 1993; Bordo, 2000; Malin, 2010; Pascoe, 2007; Cheryan, Plaut & others, 2013; & Pompper, 2010). For example, in his book, *The Gendered Society*, Kimmel (2001) argues that, “the social institutions of our world — workplace, family, school, politics — are also gendered institutions, sites where the dominant definitions are reinforced and reproduced, and where ‘deviants’ are

disciplined” (p. 16). He is concerned that institutions like the media can reproduce gender relations between women and men, especially the gender order of hierarchy and power. Kimmel believes that male dominance must be included in an examination of perceived gender differences between men and women.

Additionally, the representation of sexuality relating to the LGBT community has been promoted by organizations like The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). This organization advocates for equal and fair representation that highlights the diversity of identities in the LGBT community alongside heterosexual characters in film and television. Ron Becker’s (2006) body of work on the LGBT community covers the negotiation for representation and male intimacy on television. One example is the bromance with the conscious existence of policing between male characters when it comes to their relationships.

Fisher, Hill and others (2007) studied the presence of behaviors and verbal messages related to the sexuality of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. They argue that sexual issues related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual characters has been ignored for the most part in mediated constructions. Their research found that sexual minorities are rare and when they do exist they are usually without power. In this same vein, in *Up From Invisibility*, Gross (2012) writes:

“Also, by their very existence sexual and political minorities constitute a presumed threat to the natural (sexual and/or) political order of things, and thus we are always seen as controversial by the mass media. Being defined as controversial invariably limits the ways lesbians and gay men – or political and religious “deviants”- are depicted in the media on the rare

occasions when they do appear. It also shapes the effects of such depictions on the images held by society at large and by members of these minority groups” (p. 13).

While sexuality has found a place in contemporary television with LGBT characters as supporting cast members or in the periphery of the narrative, a few shows with lead LGBT characters as the core cast have achieved the ability to garner high enough ratings to be successful on primetime. *Modern Family* has managed to include two gay male characters (Mitch and Cam) against a backdrop of heteronormativity and sometimes perpetuating gay stereotypes. As a matter of fact, this is one of the few sitcoms on primetime where the narrative involves being reminded of a character’s gay identity every week.

### *Conclusion*

Today contemporary representations are being recognized as more dynamic and diverse from a myriad of different perspectives. The media has the ability to embrace or ignore the diversity of representations as they reflect mainstream society. There will always be an ideological struggle for mediated representations that go beyond the norm. But this struggle is tied to the economic necessity in today’s mediated landscape. Television shows must generate enough viewers in order to be successful and remain on the air into syndication. While a few may view the necessity for diverse mediated representation as a must, unfortunately, they stand in a utopian position amongst an industry focused on the bottom dollar.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SITCOMS: SATIRE AND PARODY

The sitcom has a longstanding history as a main source of entertainment and comedic relief in American popular culture. This dates back to the early days of radio in the 1920's with shows like *Sam and Henry* (1926-27) and *Amos & Andy* (1928-43). Family shows were prominent including: *Blondie* (1939-50), *The Aldrich Family* (1939-53), and *The Life of Riley* (1944-51). Sitcoms have continued to be popular well into the emergence of television as a primary medium for information and entertainment today.

*The Goldbergs* (1949-55), was one of the first family sitcoms that spawned great success during the transition from radio to television. This show was a huge accomplishment for creator, Gertrude Berg who made significant contributions to women's roles in television as the writer, producer, and star of the show (see Smith, Jr., 2007). Berg would be followed by other notable women in family television like Lucille Ball, Mary Tyler Moore, Donna Reed, Roseanne Barr, and Patricia Heaton.

According to Morreale (2003), "these 'Hollywood' television sitcoms, featuring assimilated rather than ethnic working-class families, borrowed from the screwball comedies of film" (p. 2-3). Therefore, the long history of humor embedded within the fabric of contemporary American culture has been an important avenue for balancing out images in society. The sitcom has always provided an outlet for entertainment, information and escape, especially during turbulent times on a local, national and international scale.

What needs to be further acknowledged is the negotiation of images and ideas in television representations. The brilliance of representing characters on television that the audience may feel an emotional connection with means those characters can influence the

purchasing decisions of an audience. Even minority roles on television, today, take on a position of buying power to increase the capital gains in consumer America. This consumption maintains a constantly negotiated position among elements of representation. Therefore, it may seem like television is being progressive, but the reality is that progressive representation is still rooted in capitalism.

Television scholars, therefore, must question the relevance of progressive representation on television as it relates to the backdrop of a social construction toward normalcy and alongside an acknowledged existence of patriarchy. It's not necessarily the existence of a new/different image on television that changes societal views, instead, the viewer has the ability to interpret and extrapolate textual meaning. The viewer's conscious support of a text, actually breathes life into its existence and furthers the popularity of that text. This support is connected to consumption and ratings, and tied to the meaning-making process.

When a media text is popular and celebrated across multiple platforms, this leads the present-day audience to engage in wide variety of ways. The current social media landscape allows for audience to connect with specific media 24/7. For example, there may not be a new episode this week of say *Modern Family* (2009-), but they can watch a rerun or talk about the experience through participatory culture.

Television relies on commonly defined genres to maintain its success with the mainstream public. Over time genres have had to evolve to hold the attention of the viewing public. Sometimes this has meant deviating from a known form (comedy, drama, horror, and so on) to create hybrid versions.

The family genre in television has evolved. A common representation of the American family sitcom provides a utopian ideal of American life. For example, *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-

63) is a classic representation of the ideals of family life in American society during that period. In the Twenty-First century, television sitcoms have led the call to return America to a society that fully embraces “traditional family values” (Baughman, 2007). The sitcom, in this case, becomes representative of a particular brand of American family associated directly with traditional political discourse that resonates with the public. Weight (2005) in his dissertation on ritual and resonance in situation comedies discussed the changing structure of sitcom families over generations. Early family sitcoms followed the traditional patriarchal structure of father, mother and children.

Today, the family structure is much broader. Family can mean extended family, the work family, or even friends who bond like family. While the early iterations of televisual narratives of family don’t necessarily relate to contemporary representations they are part of an audience’s historic knowledge system. Current family sitcoms work to usurp the collective memory of successful, yet limited depictions of family, in order to stay within the trends of popular culture and brand the show with some authenticity.

Social capital is maintained in the sphere of the collective memory (Neiger, Meyers, & Zandberg, 2011). Based on the collective memory surrounding these television shows, fans are able to draw upon the previous narrative structure that defines the genre as a launching point for new and original content. In other words, there is a strong representation that they have seen before combined with the authenticity that comes from revamping such historical structures.

Satire and parody work most effectively when the audience possesses the memory of the original text. Sitcoms like *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* are able to hold a huge appeal with large audiences because they recount familiarity for many members of the audience based on previous knowledge of the traditional family structure. The original text is what usually

cultivates the meaning in the first place. *Modern Family* is a good example of satire in action. In order to clearly engage with the content of the show, it is important that the viewer have a firm understanding of traditional patriarchy and mainstream hegemony. The audience's understanding and interpretation then hinges on the nature of their viewership.

Seth MacFarlane, the creator of *Family Guy*, maintains that the content of the show is parody. But the audience, especially fans, exercise the ability to define representations of parody in different ways. In other words, the text may not be read as parody when the audience has no understanding of the original iteration of the narrative. Instead, remarks that are homophobic, racist, or sexist are more likely to be read as legitimate and credible.

So, when it comes to sitcoms such as *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*, the satirical and parodic context relies on the audiences' collective knowledge of longstanding and contemporary historical, political, social and cultural norms employed around the family sitcom. Additionally, the use of popular events and ideas are then cued by nuanced references embedded in the text of the show. This historic connection can present a problem for the audience member that does not have the social capital to reach back to the former text and instead embraces the representation as an original.

Television showrunners/writers/producers work within the strong boundaries of the sitcom genre and build on that structure through contemporary intercession. The show may attempt to shed light on what was unrealistic in previous generic representations, but the audience comes to the text with a certain background and understanding. For the most part, the audience has just as much free will as the creator of the show when it comes to meaning-making.

Over time the audience becomes accustomed to specific frames of narrative storytelling. The genius of media production is to modify the genre to keep it fresh and continually in flux.

For example, the family sitcom even in its earlier history has made changes from the all American family on *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-63) to the single-parent family on *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-68) to the mixed family on *The Brady Bunch* (1969-74) to the African-American family on *The Cosby Show* (1984-92) to the work family on *Cheers* (1982-1993), and friendship family on *Friends* (1994-2004). So, the criteria for the family sitcom has evolved over time to keep the audience engaged.

“For the most part, sitcoms such as *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best* (1954-60), *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-63), and *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-66) came to represent the sitcom genre of the 1950’s. These shows presented reassuring images of economically secure families with small problems, all easily resolvable within their thirty-minute time-slot”

(Morreale, 2003, p. 5).

Sitcoms have vastly changed over time, yet the narrative that is presented still reflects the economic status and thirty-minute time slot Morrele explains (2003). Shows that found a core audience in the 50’s would not necessarily find that same audience today. Today’s audience searches for more relevant topics and issues within current television programming causing the popularity of certain shows to ebb and flow.

“By the 1970s, the networks began to rely more heavily on audience demographics as the key to a program’s success.

Total number of viewers mattered less than who was watching when. Young adults in their late teens and early twenties were more desirable than rural, older viewers who watched more television” (Morreale, 2003, p. 151).

As the landscape for entertainment evolved into an increased focus on a younger demographic, there was a chance to embark on uncharted sitcom territory. *Three’s Company* (1976-84) is a good example of this shift in programming that targeted a more youthful audience. This approach has largely been the focus of all the networks and even many cable and satellite programs. For instance, the CW has branded itself as a primetime network that features programming aimed primarily at a young audience. The type of advertising and product placement featured on CW shows serve as direct proof of the relationship between the network, advertisers, and the young audience.

Jonathan Gray’s (2006) analysis of *The Simpsons* in his book, *Watching the Simpsons: Television, Parody, and Intertextuality*, distinctly highlights the engagement present between the audience and the text. Filtered through the intertextuality in the series, Gray explains that the audience engages with *The Simpsons* through its ability to build on pop culture and current events while maintaining an existence of immortality. Unfortunately, live-action sitcoms face the unavoidable future of characters aging out of the family. While animation provides the opportunity for characters to never age with the added flexibility of flashbacks or glimpses into the future.

Parody has been an effective component of the sitcom. According to Gray (2006), parody extends the engagement of the viewer with the text by working within the framework of their contemporary knowledge base. Someone without the knowledge base of references made in the show can still enjoy the text although they may read it in a different way.

The satirical process involves the original structure of the genre, tweaked and allowing for reflexive humor about the direct topic. For example, the popular Friday night sitcom in 90's, *Step By Step* (1991-98) was received quite well because it resonated with its predecessor *The Brady Bunch* (1969-74). As a show about working class individuals living in Wisconsin and raising a family, there was the opportunity to go beyond the original set up of *The Brady Bunch* and delve into deeper issues associated with blended families while still keeping the original structure in tact.

“What these instances indicate most clearly is that an account of genre is necessary to understand how audiences and industries make sense of these generically mixed and parodic programs, and thus we cannot simply apply the rubric of the ‘postmodern’ to deny the show’s generic markers and subsequent cultural circulation through genre categories” (Mittell, 2004, p. 194-195).

Situation comedies with a satirical or parodic framework often incorporate stereotypical characters in order to connect with larger audiences. Such stereotypes resonate through ideologies that are generalizable to society. Where it becomes problematic is in terms of how the representation perpetuates the reinforcement of stigmas and stereotypes among certain groups. It

is important here to acknowledge the role that the text plays and will always play in the meaning-making process for viewers.

In this case, it is possible for the text to have, “offered oppositional ideas, depicted oppression and struggle, and reflected a critical consciousness that stops just short of political mobilization” (Hamamoto, 1989, p. 2). This is not to say that today’s sitcoms should be a complete reversal of the traditional norms in contemporary American society. However, they could work to reflect the new norms providing a base for critical discussion and advancing new thought surrounding the role of representation in everyday life.

### *Conclusion*

Sitcoms have historically had a close relationship in the evolution of television programming, as well as the changing nature of messages and images in the mainstream. The narratives implanted within sitcoms have represented dominant, oft-accepted, ideologies, but also sometimes contest those ideals through diverse representation of identities. Changes in representation have not been rampant given that the sitcom world is dependent the utilization of convenient stereotypes to succeed.

Parody and satire are meant to disrupt the original familiar text, and take us to a new plain of irony or critique of the intended meaning behind the nature of representation being featured in the text. The greater consciousness of how problematic certain stereotypes are can be weighed against the representation or lack there of concerning minority identity in sitcoms. One of the more prolific interventions in this genre has been the realization of the power associated with distinct identities. Despite certain groups being absent or marginalized on television, this

rich canon of research draws attention to a consciousness surrounding our diverse society and encourages a movement toward equality and the democratic process.

A careful understanding of parody and satire is significant in this analysis that interrogates the world of popular televised sitcoms. The process of producing such texts against the backdrop of audience interpretation involves an exercise in cognitive processing that often goes beyond the intentions of the producers and resides in the meaning-making processes of members of the audience. As this chapter points out, several scholarly pursuits have involved an interrogation of the meaning/relevance surrounding parody and satire.

## CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES, FANDOM AND TWITTER

“The emergence of social media in the middle of 2000s created opportunities to study social and cultural processes and dynamics in new ways. For the first time, we can follow the imaginations, opinions, ideas, and feelings of hundreds of millions of people” (Manovich, 2012, p. 2).

Social media has come to be an important phenomenon in the world of media studies. Much of the early research examines specifics about technology, itself (Van Dijck, 2013; Carviou, 2014). This has ranged from studies that focus specifically toward online communities (Jenkins 2006) to the intricacies of identity, and representation of the online self (Ley, 2007). Social media fosters a haven of interactivity that is not moderated closely enough and represents the freest form of speech dissemination currently available to mankind. There is a certain level of prominence that elevates the value of discourse as it is posted on various social media sites, particularly relating to positions of power and celebrity.

To a large extent, social media sites are documented/archived participatory cultures. Participants are not sanctioned by consciously acknowledging that their practices may be studied. Facebook and Twitter allow users to respond instantly to anything that is happening in their everyday lives ranging from where they ate their last meal, their insight on the situation in Iraq or who just got voted off of *American Idol* (2002-16). Users have also been known to “air their dirty laundry” on various social media sites. The user freely chooses to disclose whatever

they want others to know. This autonomy makes social media sites a good fit for conducting social and cultural research.

“Digital media raise a variety of issues as we try to understand them, their place in our lives, and their consequences for our personhood and relationships with others. When they are new, technologies affect how we see the world, our relationships, and our selves. They lead to social and cultural reorganization and reflection” (Baym, 2010, p. 2).

The imminent dilemma is that computer-mediated communication has evolved from online communities and chat rooms to live as daily interfaces with the rest of the world. They are published for everyone to see. Essentially, the public becomes synergized utilizing social media in order to determine cultural relevance. As a matter of fact, social media has allowed immediate participation in things that were once isolated like; television viewing, sporting events, client relationships, and even hobbies/interests.

### *Interpretive Communities*

Interpretive communities are an essential part of a media audience. This community is key to the direct interpretation of the media texts by the audience. Interpretive communities take on many forms, from direct response/engagement with the texts to the creation of new texts that are inspired by the original in the form of fan fiction. Several studies have examined the nature

of interpretive community sharing and how it plays a role in the meaning-making process derived from the original text.

Barbie Zelizer (2007) has identified journalists as establishing interpretive communities surrounding news events. Her work sets the tone to reinforce the idea that social media, in general, can create interpretive communities surrounding discussions, topics, reactions, etc. By default, social media participants often use these platforms to present their perspectives about news events, entertainment, lived experiences, occupations, etc. Platforms can represent a singular (individual) view or a broader (collective) communal or societal view. This is where discussions on social media are interesting. The engagement that emerges through this new phenomenon becomes extremely relevant to the outcomes of lived experience. Perceived norms and realities can establish outcomes that did not necessarily exist before.

Pippa Norris (2002) articulates the nature of “bridging and bonding” that occurs within online communities. She suggests that people online share common opinions and knowledge with one another and connect through centralized information. As mentioned before, interpretive communities surrounding popular media texts have the ability to impact this meaning-making process. The audience, therefore, can extend the meaning of any text and give it greater life than its original existence.

Since Twitter by definition shapes interpretive communities, it serves the purpose of allowing an audience to engage with each other as they share their reading of the text. The Twitter discourse sets the stage for how a genre is shared and negotiated. There have been several varied methodological approaches to studying the televisual audiences as interpretive communities (See Ang, 1982; Fiske, 2010; Gillespie, 1995; Jenkins, 1992, 2006b).

However, there are major gaps in this process. Some studies involve targeting specific

fans of a television show and then measuring for potential media effects related to content from a laboratory setting, participant observation or fieldwork, etc. The televisual audience is much more complex. This approach can lead to inconclusive findings whether it be a quantitative study conducted in a laboratory (Bandura, Ross, D., & Ross, S.1963) or an ethnography of television viewing in the home (Kottak, 2016; Pace & Hinote, 2015; Strangelove, 2016; Hutchinson, 2015) because the environment is changed.

Programs maintain their popularity through the fandom of an active audience and sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter serve as platforms for shared interpretation. For example, Twitter has shown strong live content/instant reactions to media texts like: award shows (Thelwall, Buckley, & Paltoglou, 2011), sporting events (O’Leary, 2015), reality shows (Tully & Tuwei, 2016), political events (Jungherr, Schoen, & Jürgens; 2016), etc .

The goal of this dissertation is to present research that was as close to being ecologically valid as possible. So, this work fleshes out the Twitter discourse without disrupting how the phenomenon unfolds. Even ethnography in its rarest form is problematic in what it accomplishes. The mere connection of a researcher in the process can impact that process, so it is helpful when the text is respectively free of interrogation by outsiders.

Jenkins (1992) integrated himself within fan communities in order to study them, but also to become a part of them. His research offered him privileged status into a guarded and closed fan base. Through ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews, Jenkins (1992) observed that fan communities serve as a way to build social capital amongst their members. It is important to note that his participation had to have some influence on the findings.

There are still popular physical fan spaces. Comic-Con in San Diego, California is a perfect example that started out small, but has now skyrocketed into the consciousness of

popular culture. *Star Trek* fans attended conventions in the early years and then stayed in contact through traditional forms of communication such as the telephone and postal mail. Today, this connection has evolved from fans coordinating physical meet ups at conventions to fans instantly connecting online or through social media, often while participating in the viewing experience.

Since the Internet has emerged as a prominent element of daily life in mainstream society, researchers are flocking to the new medium in order to examine links between communication and technology. The Internet has spawned many endeavors examining the social and cultural meanings of online communities, chat rooms and video games. The social capital (Putnam, 2000) gained from these experiences has been evidenced through the exchange of information on these sites.

“All that we have is the evidence that’s left behind of the practice—the text: “the material reality allows for the recovery of critical interrogation of discursive politics in an ‘empirical’ form; are neither scientific data nor historical documents but are, literally forensic evidence” (Hartley, 1992, p. 29).

So, this dissertation traces the intersection of how fans view television and respond on social media. It provides a gateway for engaging new discussions about the meaning of content. Social media has proven to be a forum of cultivation for audience response. Therefore, this discussion begins by acknowledging the synergistic tie that now exists between people and technology. The inspiration for this study, in part, involves the discourse on social media and the

reaction to televisual content, specifically in connection with contemporary discussions about masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality in mainstream society.

Previous research in this realm has chronicled the nature of discourse that corresponds with contemporary social, cultural and political norms (Fairclough, 2003; Papacharissi, 2012; Marwick & Boyd; 2011a; 2011b). Daily interactions/responses to news and entertainment media are also a regular affair negotiated across the wide landscape of social media. As a prominent communication tool social media has literally infiltrated almost every area of lived experience today, from what someone is eating for dinner to one's sex life.

### *Fandom*

There is a dearth of scholarship surrounding fandom that chronicles the intricacies of audience participation with media texts (Duffet, 2013). The rich interactions that have taken place between media texts and fans go beyond the structure of production and consumption. Through the lens of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), fans have the privileged position of being able to take part in the meaning-making process.

“Fandom’s very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture. Yet, fandom also provides a space in which fans may articulate their specific concerns about sexuality, gender, racism, colonialism, militarism, and forced conformity. These themes regularly surface with fan discussions and fan artworks. Fandom contains both negative and positive forms of empowerment” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 283).

Fans come in all shapes and sizes. According to Gray (2007), the devout fan has fetishes that embody every detail remotely related to the text. There is the casual fan that engages with the text, but probably couldn't answer intricate details. Then, there is the non-fan that consumes the text, but really has no sentiment about it one-way or the other. Lastly, there is the anti-fan. This particular fan has extensive knowledge about the text and it fuels negative opinions. Devout and anti-fans are the two most passionate groups. They both consume the text thoroughly and then share how much they love or hate it. Both provide ground for strong exchanges of discourse within fan communities based on opposite opinions toward a particular text.

Researchers are finding that the formation of communal fan clubs through Twitter have a tendency to emerge from ad-hoc publics (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). These publics use shared hashtags to foster communal engagements, some fleeting and others lasting for longer periods. Carviou and Blasiola (2013) argue that these communities surround particularly spurious events sometimes and serve as a launching point for media fan activity. For example, as the blackout commenced during the Super Bowl, the #lightsout ad-hoc community emerged with references to figures that penetrated mainstream popular culture. There was an outpouring of information instead of an outcry over the sudden darkness. The mere fact that experienced audience members (Twitter users) knew immediately where to go and how to engage in discourse demonstrates the obvious versatility of the Twitter community.

Fan practices have emerged as a cultural phenomenon, and for many, a way of life. There has been a large canon of research examining television fans over the years. Studies range anywhere from analyzing letter writing (Ang, 1985) to actually sitting in people's homes and observing their television viewing habits (Lull, 1980; Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner & Warth,

2013). Much of the work in this area has indicated that there is indeed a link between the text and audience. Yet, the interpretation of the meaning of a text can vary.

Today, thanks to technology, television fans have the free will to watch whatever and whenever they want to watch it. *Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, DVR, and Tivo* have aided in the extension of choice for today's media consumer. That includes streaming which also occurs on individual network websites. In recent years, with the dawn of media convergence, television fandom has evolved from water cooler conversations to cult followings developed on multiple platforms. Fans have the distinct authority to not just enjoy the media text, but also to produce their own extension of the text via through fan fiction, viral videos, mash-ups, etc.

Jenkins (1992, 2006a, 2006b) has championed the changing landscape of media that is associated as "convergence culture." He says we are a society that demands to participate with their media. In this participatory culture, the audience can be content creators and consumers at the same time. They have the ability to create their own meaning from the text through their extension of the original narrative based on the context recognized. Therefore, fandom is a fluid, non-linear experience that can include both passive and active behavior.

Fan practices are also negotiated and received within public space. As avid media consumers in a global economy, it is necessary to acknowledge that media infiltrates people's everyday lives and plays a role in their conceptualization of reality. Social media is a large part of everyday social interaction, and it offers eminent opportunities to individuals that are hoping to connect with the world around them. Television fandom has evolved for well over 60 years now. The engagement of fans with television has changed over time, but the existence of close-knit interpretive communities has not.

## *Social Media -Twitter*

When Mark Zuckerberg introduced the world of *Facebook* in 2004 to the public, social networks were still developing. Prior to Facebook's launch, there was also *MySpace*, a limited personalized youth-oriented social network, and a number of online communities and instant chat rooms were just getting started. Yet, there was nothing close to the standardized communication and shared network availability like Twitter. At first, users tried to figure out the utility of these sites, while programmers also worked to find ways to keep users engaged. Zuckerberg's story is about the ability of one programmer to take all the elements that people enjoy about online sites and bring them together while, at the same time eliminating the facets that consumers loathed about those sites.

Twitter came into public consciousness in 2006 as the social media industry started to take traction, soon be followed by the launch of YouTube. Twitter users are active members in a participatory culture. Schmidt (2013) defines communication within a personal public space as:

1. Being selected and displayed according to criteria of personal relevance, rather than following journalistic news factors.
2. Being addressed to an audience which consists of network ties made explicit, rather than being broadcast to a dispersed, unknown mass audience.
3. Being conducted mainly in a controversial and complex mode, rather than in the one-way mode of "publishing" (p.4).

In other words, Twitter is a unique space for the free exchange of discourse. It could even be argued that it represents the public sphere praised by Habermas (1989) many years ago. Twitter fosters free public exchanges of information that are even stronger than many other

contemporary examples of social media. Tweets are widely circulated through public discourse. The Twitter interface is designed for the promotion of one's position, so privacy over a posting is not necessary and there is no need to hide it within a closed social network.

Twitter offers the opportunity for interpretive communities to build and share topics, ideas, anxieties and commitments. The site even serves as a news distribution platform. Today, major news stories appear instantly on Twitter before *CNN*, *Fox News*, *ABC News*, *MSNBC*, *CBS News* or *NBC News* can report them. With major national and world events breaking on Twitter, the site is not only a source of relevant information, but also a credible and reliable site. Schmidt suggests that the communicative structure that unfolds instantaneously on Twitter is all about social action.

“We can identify them along three analytical dimensions that structure communicative space online—thus framing situated social action within these spaces, without determining it: technological features and affordances; social and textual relations; and shared rules” (2013, p. 4).

Twitter also offers the opportunity for its members to quickly learn and utilize the interface. By following other Twitter accounts that relate to topics of interest, fans can easily join or create their own interpretive communities revolving around personal interests and public spectrums.

“The citizen is alone, but not lonely or isolated. The citizen is connected, and operates in a mode and with political language determined by him or her. Operating from a civically private environment, the citizen enters the public spectrum by negotiating aspects of his/her privacy as necessary, depending on urgency and relevance of particular situations” (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 132).

Papacharissi (2010) believes that Twitter research allows for the documentation and analysis of responses to a myriad of happenings including entertainment news, political uprisings and social movements. For example, Studies show that Twitter accounts have covered the Super Bowl blackout (Blasiola & Carviou, 2013), various natural disasters (Bruns, Burgess, Crawford, & Shaw, 2012; Mendoza, Poblette, & Castillo, 2010), political unrest (Gaffney, 2010; Lotann, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, & Pearce, & boyd, 2011; Tonkin, Pfieffer, & Tourte, 2012) and the recent Black Lives Matter protests (Friedersdorf, 2015).

Gaffney and Pushmann explain, “Arguably, Twitter’s strength lies in the ability to gain interesting insights from short and often highly context-bound messages, yet these are also difficult to interpret and carry a range of meanings for different stakeholders” (2013, p. 65). In short, the stakeholders that use the site as a prominent communication tool serve as facilitators of its social capital. Therefore, discourse that freely surfaces through Twitter is intended to connect to a wide audience.

Some celebrities have actually gotten themselves in trouble on Twitter when they failed to understand the complex viewpoints of the audience. For example, in 2014, Rupert Murdoch tweeted that people should not have problems with the fact that the stars are white in the biblical

movie *Exodus* (2014) because Egyptians are white, film director Spike Lee was sued for tweeting the wrong address when he thought it belonged to George Zimmerman after Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin, and was found not guilty by the court (2013), Donald Trump in 2012 tweeted that the concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive, and Charlie Sheen (2016) asked people to weigh in on this question- would you rather smell farts or smell like farts?

Specifically, Twitter allows for a direct interaction between individuals without interpersonal ties. They communicate with one another as part of a public spectrum. Each site allows individuals to voice their opinions by latching on to common hashtags and following other popular Twitter users. As the communal process Twitter conversations can spur up and fade away just as quickly.

### *Conclusion*

Television fandom has evolved since the limited Nielson ratings when viewers of network television worked within the structure as voluntary participating households. This was the original process of viewership and buying power that dictated the politics of representation on television. Since this process failed to capture open audience participation, a new way of studying audiences is allowing for social media fan communities to open up the communication processes. Through social media, there is room for a variation of responses to any text and the limited ratings numbers can be advanced with established fan communities online and in-person. In this way, social media has created an interactive forum for audience studies that did not previously exist.

## CHAPTER SIX: METHODOLOGY

“Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community, which configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research art”.

(Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 23)

This dissertation is an analysis between the intersection of two popular television texts and direct audience response via social media. The purpose is to understand the engagement of fans through Twitter as it relates to the relevance of issues such as masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality. This research presents an in-depth look at the participatory relationships fans create with televisual texts and the significance of identifying with that text through relevant discourse on Twitter. The study fleshes out how Twitter audiences participate in the meaning-making process connecting to representations in *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*.

This chapter highlights the inter-workings of textual and discourse analysis. It also includes a discussion of influential studies that have been conducted on television audiences and social media leading up this period. Textual and discourse analysis make up the framework for the data collection in this study. This is an examination of audience practices through publicly shared tweets related to dominate discourses surrounding selected social issues.

Denzin & Lincoln (1998, p. 20) define a two-fold approach to why qualitative research is viable. First, it is a commitment to some version of a naturalistic, interpretive approach to subject matter. Second, it is an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism. Qualitative approaches tend to focus on the lived experience of publics by gauging the process of data

collection and analysis on individual and collective responses. Qualitative research can capture the complexities of perceptions from media consumers and expose the process as it takes place in everyday lives. The focus is on lived personal experiences that can also become part of a collective, interpretive community. Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand the meaning-making process behind mediated experience.

Ethical control is necessary by the researcher to maintain the accuracy of interpretations and protect the integrity of the perceptions of the population studied. Qualitative methods present an important lens into the production of texts and the interactions that unfold, especially with the intersection of media, culture, and society. Key elements of qualitative methods lies within the examination of images, language, ideology, themes and patterns.

The ability to discern and accurately capture the nature of their subjects is important for a researcher. Understanding the details of an environment studied, and the inherent biases are also crucial. While this dissertation does not attempt to interrogate the individual lives of research subjects themselves, it does aim to examine their interactions with a specific text as part of an interpretive community. Human subjects research sometimes involves the handicap of infringing on the ecological validity of the subject's lived experiences. Even the most carefully constructed laboratory settings or ethnographic experiences can lack ecological validity. This is, in part, the result of the mere presence of the researcher during the study. By using freely available public Twitter data, there is no direct interaction between the researcher and the research subjects, so validity remains in tact.

The originally produced text possesses it's own messages as it was created and disseminated. This means each episode of the chosen sitcoms went through mounds of bureaucracy and gatekeeping to finally make it on the air. The audience on social media is then

given the opportunity to interact and react to the text. Since their response through social media is not edited or coerced, Twitter fans have full authority over their final perspectives.

This study first analyzed each of the six texts by dissecting the intricacies of the narrative and then connecting relevant elements of representation to Twitter responses. The findings from selected texts and the corresponding Twitter discourse reveal the nature of fan practices as they relate to issues of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality. The analysis fleshes out specific themes and patterns both in the text itself and also through an examination of the discursive practices within the interpretive community.

Drawing from a rich foundation of qualitative research, the incorporation of textual and discourse analysis provides the framework to delve into the specifics of participatory culture in social media. Over the course of six months, tweets were collected for the second half of *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* seasons. During the Spring 2013, fan oriented tweets were selected, sorted and analyzed based on personal, communal and societal relevancy.

Like the popular comic book saying in reference to Spiderman: “With great power, comes great responsibility.” The qualitative researcher has a tremendous amount of power over how the study is designed, the subjects they choose to include or not include, and the setting where the study is carried out. Therefore, every decision made by the researcher must be backed up with a rationale that considers the position of power in negotiation with the position of the subjects. It is the researchers goal to make sure this study is significant to the time in which the data was collected and the reflections of the specific interpretive Twitter community.

### *Ontology/Epistemology*

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998) epistemology is how researchers evaluate their understanding of reality. It involves generating knowledge from the social world. Ontology reflects a certain view of the social world (Mason, 1996). Mason offers an example for ontology: “What is the nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social reality, which I wish to investigate?” And another for epistemology: “What might represent knowledge or evidence of the entities or social reality which I wish to investigate?” (p. 13). The researcher’s understanding of reality and knowledge comes as they examine their overall consciousness of the world, and also their ability to transfer that consciousness to an academic audience through critique and explanation.

The researcher must be cognizant of his or her assessments, and how they connect to the wider interpretive community. Therefore, much of qualitative research is dictated by the scholar’s conceptualized understanding of participant knowledge and reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The burden lies on the researcher to be very detailed in explanations concerning how their study has been carried out, and the steps they have taken to uphold the integrity of their work.

My position on ontology and epistemology is that they represent a privileged vantage point to the researcher. They provide a lens into the experience, along with his or her engagement of the population studied. Descriptions/explanations are based on the perceived understanding of knowledge gleaned from the research. According to Hoijer (2008) ontology involves the taken for granted assumptions of social reality. Therefore, the researcher must protect the value of their position by extensively explaining the research process and the specific details associated with the analysis. Their position determines the subjects they choose and the overall execution of the research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998):

“The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways” (p. 23).

So, the core structure of this dissertation examines the link presented through televisual representations and reactionary tweets. A standard way of conducting qualitative research involves looking at specific data and drawing out the dominant voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study interrogates Twitter comments from the fans of *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*, specifically, as the discourse relates to the shared participatory culture across this interpretive Twitter community. Mahrt and Scharkow published an article in 2013 that sheds light on this kind of research process:

"Focusing on the social sciences, advantages and opportunities include the fact that digital media data are often a by-product of the everyday behavior of users, ensuring a certain degree of ecological validity (Mehl & Gill, 2010). Such behavior can be studied through the traces it automatically left, providing a means to study human behavior without having to observe or record human subjects first" (p. 24).

In this study, the assessment of *Family Guy* and *Modern Family* was based on the discourse analysis of tweets corresponding to a textual analysis of selected episodes during the Spring 2013 broadcast season. Using Nielsen ratings, the researcher chose two popular television

shows where representations are constantly being re-affirmed or deconstructed (Connell, 1995). The surrounding Twitter data was analyzed and organized into specific examples of relevance concerning masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

Several studies have investigated the significance of popular representations on television through chosen programming or case studies (Fiske, 2011; Hatfield, 2010; Lindgren & Lelievre, 2009). Newcomb suggested that case studies provide a good opportunity to analyze power (2011). It's one thing to identify the dominant meaning constructed in a text as a reflection of social and cultural norms, and another to gage the direction of the audience's response to that specific text.

Using the framework for conducting a case study offered by Eisenhardt (1989), this dissertation directly focuses on language, images, patterns, themes, and contexts. The approach allows for a fixed analysis that digs deep at the core of a specific sitcom phenomenon. This, particular, research approach focuses on the audience reaction to a television product through the use of social media (Murthy, 2013).

### *Discourse Analysis and Textual Analysis*

Data collection involved reading tweets through DiscoverText from January 2013-May 2013. Using DiscoverText, I collected Twitter data from selected first-run (new to the audience) episodes of *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*. This allowed for the opportunity to monitor on a weekly basis the level of engagement fans had with each show through their tweets. Twitter proved an effective apparatus for monitoring and collecting popular opinion and interpretation.

By applying both discourse analysis of the individual tweets and isolating issues in specific episodes of each show through textual analysis, this study offers an interesting look at

the interactive meaning-making process. Three episodes of *Modern Family* and three episodes of *Family Guy* were isolated for analysis based on issues of representation surrounding masculinity, racial/ethnic identity, class, and sexuality that arose through the audience uptake on Twitter. After each episode, I analyzed the tweets focusing on personal, communal, and societal relevancy for those episodes within a 24-hour cycle of the original airdate.

### Structure for Analysis

1. Masculinity (Specific associations to men or male behavior). This involved specifically separating tweets based on their connection to masculinity in the sense that they would commonly defined as traits or stereotypes associated with men.
2. Race/Ethnicity (visuals or language related to skin color, and/or origin). Tweets were isolated in association with any references specifically made surrounding race/ethnicity, stereotypes associated with racial/ethnic identity or potentially discriminatory references surrounding racial/ethnic identity.
3. Class (economic issues, occupation, class position, or anything that indicates class status or position). Tweets were separated based on the economic associations made or references to education in general. This included stereotypes related to television representations linked to dominant lower and middle-class concerns.
4. Sexuality (sexism, comments referencing sexuality or visual displays of sexual activity). These tweets were separated as they connected with sexual activity. This was defined on a spectrum surrounding sexual action, sexual orientation, and discrimination in various forms surrounding body representation.

## Categories of Tweets

1. Personal relevance (comment is connected to the participant in an individual or personal way). More specifically, tweets that were a self-reflection of personal identity largely fell in the category of personal relevance.
2. Communal relevance (comment is connected to the participant through shared community knowledge and/or significance). Tweets representing a larger connection to the fan community were isolated in accordance to the level of fandom and the overall connection to the community as a whole.
3. Societal relevance (comment is connected to the participant from a broader link to society). These tweets went beyond the basic notion of the text to a broader context related to societal implications. This meant that the context of society encompassed a greater impact on the show taking it beyond the isolation of the core fan community.

In sum, this analysis enabled the researcher to investigate the Twitter engagement of the audience with *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*, examine whether there is resistance or reinforcement of the various representations featured in each show, and assess fan practices like celebrity branding or the accumulation of social capital.

The study builds on the scholarship of Fairclough (1995) as it aims to understand the “systematic links between texts, discourse practices, and sociocultural practices” (p. 17). In keeping with previous discourse analysis research, discourse is defined as the Twitter responses within that interpretive community (Fairclough, 1995; Wood & Kroger, 2000). This analysis encompasses spoken or written language use, as well as, social practice including (1) social

identities (2) social relations and (3) systems of knowledge and belief corresponding respectively to identities, relationships and representations (Fairclough, 1995).

“We cannot specify ahead of time that the discourse we look at will be of a particular kind, because the features we are interested in are matters of orientation rather than essence” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p.67).

An important aspect of discourse analysis is to always keep in mind that it's not just about the present responses being analyzed, it is also about what is absent. For this reason, the examination of Twitter discourse for each episode goes beyond the tweets that were analyzed to interrogate how the comments fit against a backdrop of personal, communal, and social relevancy. In other words, each popular television show represents a selected text that resonates with a wide audience and the discourse expressed through Twitter involves the direct engagement of that audience with that text.

On the other hand, textual analysis involves carefully dissecting the meaning housed within the text itself (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002). Critical media scholarship highlights the role of media texts in participating in the meaning-making process by identifying key themes that are present (McKee, 2003). “The task of the analyst is to bring out the whole range of possible meanings, not least the ‘hidden’ message of the text” (Larsen, 1993, p. 122).

According to McKee (2003), the complicated relationship between the researcher and the text when applying textual analysis is the important ability to discern the subject position of subcultural voices and their negotiated space within the mainstream. In his book on textual

analysis, McKee asserts that “a text is something that we make meaning from” (p. 4). The subject position, subcultural voices, and negotiated space are essential to this study because a textual analysis of *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* is linked to the meaning-making process.

“Texts are the material traces that are left of the  
practice of sense-making –the only empirical evidence  
we have of how other people make sense of the world”.

(McKee, 2003, p. 15)

So, textual analysis is not a simple linear endeavor where the researcher just evaluates the text. Instead it’s a complex vehicle for fleshing out the social and cultural meanings inherent in the original text, plus an investigation of how those meanings may be interpreted by the audience. Several studies have examined specific texts in connection to the formation of distinct subcultures (Hebdige, 1979; Irwin, 1962; Kitano, 1969; Morland, 1971; Turner, 1971; Cohen, 1972; Wotherspoon, 1991). Some research suggests that everyday reality can be defined through the existence of communicative texts (Smith, 1974, 1990; Atkinson & Coffey, 1997). Several scholars have noted the nature of direct participation with the text (Fiske, 2011, Jenkins, 2006). One of the major goals of textual analysis is to explain how the text is constructed for the audience against how the audience positions themselves in relation to that text.

According to Bakhtin (1986), “the text lives only by coming into context with another text (with context). Only at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue” (p. 162). Kracauer (1953) makes the following argument as to why textual analysis is significant.

“Most communications are not so much fixed entities as ambivalent challenges. They challenge the reader or analyst to absorb them and react to them. Only in approaching these wholes with his whole being will the analyst be able to both discover and determine their meaning—or one of their meanings—and thus help them to fulfill themselves” (p. 641).

McKee (2003) believes that there are important representations that need to be examined through textual analysis including: race/ethnicity, gender, class, age, nationality, sexuality, and physical ability. These representations are usually visual and ideological, especially as they are constructed and negotiated within mainstream society. In any study, it’s important to consider the role that image and ideology play within the structure of the phenomena being studied. This research, in particular, required a full examination of representative images and ideology within the text.

In Bennett and Woollacott’s (1987) study of film, “The text itself is an inconceivable object, for the text is never there except in forms in which it is also and always other than just itself, always-already humming with reading possibilities which derive from outside its covers” (p. 90-91). The authors discuss the apparent connection the audience members already have to the text even before seeing the film. This is intertextuality in action with the most obviously example of the heavy marketing efforts put forth by the film franchise. Therefore, this previous or additional exposure adds complexity.

Since the audience has the autonomy to engage with the text and make sense of it,

Bennett and Woollacott (1987) believe that, “Reading becomes a process by which the inter-textually organized reader meets the inter-textually organized text” (p. 56). They argue that the text itself becomes not the place where the business of culture is conducted, but rather the site around which a preeminently social affair based on the struggle for the production of meaning occurs (p. 59-60). Thus, any intertextual connections that the audience makes within the media texts often relate to contemporary society. In a natural and subconscious way they usually coincide with the social construction of dominant societal norms.

Social media allows people to either express themselves anonymously or include their identity. A person’s identity can be synonymous with why they are expressing themselves over social media. Some create a brand surrounding their particular identity; from YouTube stars to everyday folks tweeting their opinions provides a space to not only be heard, but also validated.

“By itself, and isolated in a bubble, as new and practical criticisms tried to do with the text, the utterance is completely meaningless, for we only know how to make sense of it through having read and experienced other utterances”. (Gray, 2006, p. 25)

Genre provides a structure in which the audience recalls through familiarization. Intertextuality includes genre analysis with genre loosely defined as the specific categorization of media texts allowing for classification and distribution of those texts such as; literary, film, music, or television. However, the genre is problematized like any other classification of media because not all texts are created equal. Genres, along with media texts, have evolved quite

expansively over time due to the audience's recognition of particular types of structures and an exhaustion or fatigue with the original mechanics of various genres. For example, Fish (1980a) and others suggest that genre demarcation can be a natural or forced construction within interpretive communities (Lindloff, 1988; et al. 1988; Gray, 2006, p. 32).

### *Conclusion*

The study of television programming as case studies can provide a rich opportunity to probe issues that pertain to representation in the media. A significant examination of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality goes beyond mere demographics. The overall goal of this dissertation is to directly address the nature of interpretive communities by interrogating the relevance of their Twitter responses to the televised representations they watch. The meaning embedded within a text should be shaped by personal, communal and societal relevance among the fan base.

More specifically, there is an urgency to analyze the themes that emerge among this active audience on Twitter as they directly participate with the text airing for the first time. Twitter responses offer a look at relevance among fans and serves as part of the flow of media (Williams, 2003). There is a kind of urgency to take action to tweet. This collective agency prompts members of the audience to respond immediately. Their response isn't necessarily contextually deep, but they are making an effort to engage with the text as it unfolds.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: *MODERN FAMILY*

“In plot A, Phil misinterprets something while providing comic relief with his failure to match the ideal of American masculinity. Claire acts stiff and uptight in contrast to her former wild youth, and their children resort to their usual ditziness and nerdiness. In the B plot, Mitch and Cam run around with their hair on fire frantically trying to fix something that one of them or Lily has caused, usually involving a squabble between the couple in which they both blame each other. And finally, in the C Plot, Jay is frustrated both by Manny’s failure to meet his testosterone-filled expectations of the typical American boy and by Gloria’s failures to understand basic American phrases or concepts. Gloria will also usually make reference to her stereotypical Colombian drug-slum past” (Jim Pagels, 2013)

*Modern Family* premiered on ABC on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 as part of a new Wednesday sitcom line-up. The show represented a re-introduction of the traditional family sitcom that had largely disappeared from primetime television over the course of several years. Sitcoms had been changing for some time with new explorations of the format for family including: work family, single parent family, and even friends as family.

From its inception until now *Modern Family* has done well garnering high Nielsen ratings, great critic reviews, and several Emmy’s. Award seasons became a sure bet for the hit

show. *Modern Family* moved back to the old familiar traditional American family. Despite the complicated nature of satire featured on the program, many of the stereotypes are much of the same old thing. Satire adds complexity based on the understanding and interpretation of the audience.

Shows like *Modern Family* have taken a unique approach to the sitcom called “breaking the fourth wall.” Single-camera confessionals by various characters work to make the characters seem more honest, much like the origins of reality television. “Breaking the fourth wall” tends to complicate the overall representation and reading of these characters. The structure of *Modern Family* involves an approach that harkens back to family sitcoms like *Malcom in the Middle* (2000-06) and *The Bernie Mac Show* (2001-06). The show typically flows like a conversation with the inclusion of reflections or flashbacks that culminate at the end. When characters speak directly to the camera it is possible that the nature of satire is changed. This kind of representation presents a more direct parasocial relationship between the audience and the characters. In other words, the fans are privileged to a more active role connecting them personally.

*Modern Family* typically covers a lot of territory in a single 22-minute episode including several main characters, supporting characters, and routine guest stars. The story is centered around three families. Each has their own house and storyline providing different points of interest. They also represent various class positions with Jay being the most successful (wealthy) of them all. This show deviates from the typical family sitcom that would feature a core nuclear group of people all living together. An example of this more blended approach on a slightly smaller scale was the hit family sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996-2005). There was

Raymond's wife and kids, his parent's and a variation of storylines with his brother Robert until he married, and began building his own family.

Built around three related families, *Modern Family* features one that represents the stereotype of the ideal family. This is Phil and Claire as the parents of three biological offspring, Luke, Alex and Haley. This family is all white. Jay's family represents the traditional patriarchal family with Jay, remarried to a much younger Colombian woman named Gloria. They are raising their shared son, and Gloria's (but not Jay's) biological son, Manny. The "other" is represented by the third family featuring two gay partners, Mitch and Cam, plus their adopted Vietnamese daughter, Lily. New to the fifth season was the addition of Jay and Gloria's son, Fulgencio Joe Pritchett. This made Jay the father with the oldest and the youngest kids in the show. Another important note, Jay is the biological father of both Claire and Mitch giving the three families a generational connection. Finally, Gloria and Manny also offer an ethnic representation of the "other" from their Colombian racial heritage.

This chapter examines three episodes of *Modern Family*: "Fulgencio," "The Best Man" and "My Hero." These episodes emerged in the analysis as particularly interesting concerning issues of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality among Twitter fans. Tweeting is encouraged during the show, so the related discourse communicated the relevance of responses as viewers worked to absorb the text and make their own meaning.

#### *"Fulgencio" (01/23/2013)*

Throughout the history of television, there are those pivotal episodes that involve proposals, marriage, birth and even death. The *Modern Family* writers chose to divide the birth of Gloria and Jay's new son into two different episodes. The first was an episode where the baby

was born as a surprise (E:12) (No originality there). The second episode (E:13), where this analysis is focused, covers the decision made about what to name the baby.

The episode was titled “Fulgencio” which is the name ultimately given to the baby. This name was a request by Gloria’s mother. After a scuffle, Jay concedes at the end, and accepts the name. This episode focused on the theme of fatherhood across all three families (Jay and Gloria, Mitch and Cam, Phil and Claire). It is designed as a satire of *The Godfather* movie. Drawing from a traditional hegemonic stereotype of masculinity, there is a question as to what fatherhood means during the entire episode. And, even in Mitch and Cam’s relationship there is a struggle to uphold the norms of fatherhood.

One of the most obviously traditional representations of masculinity is found in this “Fulgencio” episode. A traditional representation involving the patriarchal structure with the man as the head of the household. He is macho, strong, and aggressive holding power over women and children. Table 1 contains examples of how personal relevance was revealed by Twitter fans as they applied perspective to the characters, and the narrative of the show.

<b>TABLE 1</b> Episode Exemplars	“Fulgencio” and Personal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 hamwiss: Y'know when I have kids, I want to be a mix of my own dad and Phil from Modern Family. #beingafather #2 jenoeliac: Why can't my parents be more like Phil & Claire I can be Hayley & pretty we'll be like modern family & live happily ever after #3 DebrahAdedeji: Phil from modern family is my guy! He's amazing!!!! Lmaoooooo
Race	#1 sarrizky: @kanirasupono @reenfildzah My life's a romantic comedy series. Thank God I don't have a latin accent, or else it'll be Modern Family. XDDD #2 iGetBusyB: Phil from Modern Family is my homie #3 LovaticJAM: I'm worried about what the modern family watchers think about colombians...the show it's great but dude we're not like that

Class	#1 TheTinyBitch: The fact that Khloe Kardashian and I were watching Modern Family at the same time BEFORE she tweeted it, blows my mind #loveher #daymade #2 lizebete: @KhloeKardashian i can tell u have a good taste girl, cause i like Modern Family and TBBT, too. Greetings from Northern Europe, U rock.
Sexuality	#1 lamarr_LD_87: That chick from modern family has alien head..... :/ still would though #anythingwithapulse lol #2 @jinjuvictoria @eleven_tv Spanish accent because Gloria from Modern Family sound so hot. #3 kristallred: Kip fast forwards through Cam and Mitchell's part on Modern Family. #classichomophobe ðŸ˜,

The connection with Phil as a traditional representation of masculinity has been embraced by Twitter fans. He is seen by many as the true ideal of what it means to be a father in contemporary American society. Phil is the hero at the conclusion of the “Fulgencio” episode. He is celebrated for saving the day by working with his son to clear up all drama that has ensued between him, his children and the folks around them.

The episode featured a struggle between Colombian born Gloria, as the trophy wife of a rich, aging, older, white man, Jay, plus her mother and her sister, also from Colombia. Holding true to the convenient tropes, the show features racial/ethnic stereotypes about Colombians that concerned some members of the Twitter fan base. Khloe Kardashian tweets at the beginning of this episode. Her tweet spurred a number of retweets and class confirmations as fans showed their excitement in sharing the viewing experience with a celebrity. And sexually, this season presented Gloria as a pregnant woman producing a continued focus on her breasts after the birth of their newborn baby. Finally, the patriarchal existence of heteronormativity is an obvious response to Mitch and Cam’s relationship, in one example, a fan admits fast forwarding through their scenes.

Table 2 offers a look at more sample tweets. These show a communal bond among Twitter fans. It was obvious that this interpretive community feeds off of each others' tweets to secure their place among fellow fans of *Modern Family*.

<b>TABLE 2</b> Episode Exemplars	"Fulgencio" and Communal Relevance
Masculinity	<p>#1 ReillyRick: Hey @DannyZucker, that Godfather homage you did tonight on Modern Family was your best episode ever. Pure genius. #Emmy</p> <p>#2 tweetTV: I'm the cool dad. That's my thang. I'm hip, I surf the web, I text: LOL - laugh out loud, WTF- why the face - Phil (Modern Family)</p> <p>#3 renaesummers: Husband apoplectic over Modern Family godfather montage. Funniest bit yet. Brilliant.</p>
Race	<p>#1 egumeny: Think my wife and I are finally bailing on Modern Family. The racist caricatures just aren't doing it for us anymore.</p> <p>#2 javachik: Modern Family on in background while I unpack. Incredibly racist joke is the last straw. So over this show.</p> <p>#3 jenoeliac: Oh and a little Asian girl learns to swear &amp; her gay parents don't know what to do with life anymore DID I MENTION I LOVE MODERN FAMILY</p>
Class	<p>#1 dabookbandTITS: Modern family paying homage with the godfather ending they brought out the good bowl of doughnut holes on that one</p> <p>#2 hawleyjacob: The best thing about modern family is you only have to look at rich white people, nothing else.</p> <p>#3 #4 KhloeKardashian: Nothing like a little Modern Family to end your day</p>
Sexuality	<p>#1 Jhearn20: Another great episode of modern family and Sofia vergara is sexy as shit. I hope that's how you spell her name</p> <p>#2 MaryDombrowski1: There was a softball-lesbian reference in last nights Modern Family episode. WHERE DOES THE MADNESS END? #Stereotypes</p> <p>#3 whossaby: Modern family is on and so is Sofia Vergara's milf tits!</p>

Masculinity in the communal sense is relevant for fans in a couple of ways. One interesting note is how some fans specifically talk to community like the tweet that is directed

toward producer Danny Zuker and Phil’s character fits into the masculine tradition as cool, and funny. From a racial perspective a number of viewers were critical of this episode. Several acknowledged that they had had enough of the negative approach to racial/ethnic representations on the show. A few actually said that they will no longer watch the show. Concerning class, some fans felt the need to point out class differences related to their own experience. As a matter of fact one fan said he likes the show because he only has to look at rich, white people. Finally, sexism as a communal link is tied to sexually explicit tweets about lesbian references and Sofia Vergara’s breasts.

The Twitter comments in Table 3 show example links to societal relevance. Several hashtags (#DonPhil, #PhilFather, #godfather, #godfatherforever, etc.) were used to reinforce Phil’s patriarchal position as a representation of the godfather from the movie series. It became a meta reference to the popular canon *The Godfather* films, and many audience members connected to that broader reference.

<b>TABLE 3</b> Episode Exemplars	“Fulgencio” and Societal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 wpreston: Modern Family was great as always, but the Godfather II spoof at the end was OVER THE TOP. LOL. #2 CHRISMURRELL112: The godfather montage scene at the end of modern family was epic...funniest scene of the season!! #3 mseidelman: Hilarious "Modern Family" tonight... shame the funniest jokes won't be gotten by anyone who hasn't see "The Godfather"
Race	#1 iTristanVelez: the way Modern Family depicts Colombian women is hilarious and accurate. eh sort of. #2 cheloparra: @SofiaVergara @itsjuliebown Modern family is getting too bored, they are showing Colombians as rural Mexicans :( #3 kylegarchar: Rafi from The League as Haley's boyfriend in Modern Family is different and perfect.

Class	#1iaaaaano: If you don't watch modern family your life is not as good as it could be #2 ohjooy: Love Modern Family but what's the big deal with Eric Stonestreet and Sofia Vergara. Def. not awards worthy performances imo.. #3 UffArianax: Modern Family is so stupid. Why does my family like it?
Sexuality	#1 ErectEdwin: I strictly watch Modern Family for that hot Columbian goddess. Also the two funny gay guys. #2 steve22hunter: Love Modern Family...the writers are great...but dear writing team, a "Little Black Dress for Men"...it already exists and its called a suit

From a societal relevance perspective, the social construction of masculinity is a widespread mainstream conversation. The focus was still on the representation of ideal masculinity from a parody of *The Godfather: Part II* (1974) film. The “Fulgencio” episode was peppered with societal norms surrounding masculinity. Many of the racial tweets also reached beyond the show. One fan expressed concern about the problems with Colombians represented as rural Mexicans while another liked the inclusion of a new Greek character Rafi. Class issues tied the show to the good life, and discussed the lack of award winning performances. Finally, sex offensive female comments remained featuring Gloria and the two gay guys the writing team is called out based on a joke in the show.

The joke comes in preparation for the christening of Fulgencio, Cam and Mitch are trying to figure out what to wear. Lily makes the sarcastic comment to her two indecisive dads saying: “Today Ladies.” Mitch and Cam follow her remark by yearning for the creation of a little black dress for men, and the point is quickly addressed by a Twitter fan who says it is a suit.

*Best Men Episode (02/27/2013)*

This episode starts out with Cam and Mitch's friend Sal arriving late one night at their apartment to announce that she is getting married. She wants both of them to be her best men. Sal tells them that she is willing not go through with her nuptials in order to stand in solidarity with them, since at that time (when this episode originally aired) gay couples could not legally marry. Both vow to support her, and the wedding moves forward. As the episode unfolds, Cam and Mitch's relationship is featured as being stable against the backdrop of Sal and her fiancé. Sal is questioning whether or not marriage is for her. Ultimately, she and her fiancé cheat on each other, but they end up getting married anyway after Sal decides that settling down really won't be that bad.

There are three subplots featured in this episode. Manny's teacher calls Jay and Gloria into her office to discuss his obsession with the female body. They quickly realize that Manny is about to put the moves on the nanny that they hired to help take care of Joe. Phil escorts Luke to meet a girl for a date and he chats with the girl's mom while they are waiting. Phil is awkward around the woman and she thinks he is flirting so she suggests taking their relationship to the next level. Phil realizes his mistake and attempts to smooth things over failing miserably. Finally, Claire and her daughter, Haley, are going to spend time together bonding. On the way out they drop Alex off at a coffee shop for her band performance. When they decide to stay and watch Alex perform, Alex is obviously embarrassed by their behavior.

Table 4 shows examples of how personal relevance was presented in the audience's tweets based on specific connections to the text.

TABLE 4 Episode Exemplars	“The Best Men” and Personal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 griffinOSU: My dad is so similar to the dad from modern family #2 JulieMagallanes: I pray that when I have a son, he's as awesome as Luke on Modern Family #3 minustephen: Watching Modern Family reminds me what I'm looking for in a partner. #clairedunphy
Race	#1 scottgibby: It is scary how much Gloria's family from modern family reminds me of the crazy Puerto Ricans in my own family! ðŸ˜~, #2. ninagrand_: I want Lily from Modern Family to be my Asian daughter #4 kelseydiet_rich: I'm going to start talking like Gloria from Modern Family
Class	#1 TKagee: Wednesday night = Comedy Night: Modern Family and 2 Broke Girls. Assignment you will have to wait!!! #2 matt_mccomas: Writing a seminary paper on the cultural commentary and redemptive value of the show Modern Family. Ridiculous. :) #3 BelindaMountain: Not sure if it's possible for me to love a TV series family more than I love Modern Family. Always improves my life.
Sexuality	#1 CandieShiru: The only gay guys i can stand are these two idiots frm modern family..LMAO! #2 biso_Mlambo: Watching Modern Family With Mother.. And Cam And Mitchell's Relationship Is Pissing Her Off. LOL! #3 Blacq_Onyx: @ biso_Mlambo Your mom is homophobic? :(

Even though there are diverse characters embedded within the larger narrative of the show, patriarchy still remains central to its original framework. For example, there is the assumption that “boys will be boys” when Jay and Gloria think Luke is interested in porn. Luke also tends to be a favorite in this episode. Race was not as problematic as in the earlier episode. Several fans personally related to the ethnic differences of Gloria, Lily and Manny. Class was explained through actions as fans tweeted finding redemptive value in the show and how it

improves their lives. Finally, pornography and homophobia were the sexual focus of this episode. Phil walks into Luke’s room as Luke sheepishly closes his laptop. Phil assumes that Luke is looking at porn, but he is not. Instead, he is attempting to flirt with a girl online for the first time. Also, a very personal link shows that Mitch and Cam’s relationship is problematic for one fan’s mother and another fan responds that she is homophobic.

<b>TABLE 5</b> Episode Exemplars	“The Best Men” and Communal Relevance
Masculinity	<p>#1 OG_MelJ: Is it weird that I want a husband like Phil from Modern Family??</p> <p>#2 jimsmoriarty: @maggie_miranda but omg modern family is my life now tbh phil is my baby</p> <p>#3 Nolan_Gould: Check out a new Modern Family on tonight. See if you can spot my brother Phil.</p>
Race	<p>#1 its3lainaduhh: Lilly from Modern Family is the best thing to happen to this show. ðŸ˜¸, #BRBDying</p> <p>#2 TalkSoccer: I am getting a tad tired of images in "Modern Family". #LandonDonovanitis</p> <p>#3 iblameabisade: the little girl from modern family is so bitchy</p> <p>#4 cheloparra: @SofiaVergara @itsjulieb Bowen Sofia I do not like the mother and sister you have in modern family</p>
Class	<p>#1 dewalley_dehonk: "I never did catch what you do. Surprising I know, I'm usually pretty good at catching things off women in bars" -Clive Bixby, Modern Family</p> <p>#2 LMadziwa: Can't believe I missed Modern Family at home for #theflychix! don't get the hype about them.</p> <p>#3 jordiehaley: At least I have Modern Family and Friends</p>
Sexuality	<p>#1 itsmoszynski: "WHAT ARE YOU HIDING?!" "Porn!" Modern Family ðŸ˜¸, I laughed</p> <p>#2 johналbertklimp: RT @Kevidently: I'm increasingly bored with straight people calling Modern Family homophobic.</p> <p>#3 Its_Her_AayJay: @Thee_Nkay you remind me of that episode on Modern Family, where Jay n Cam go to the gym. And their asses touch.... #dead</p>

As a communal link, Phil is positioned by fans as the perfect husband, baby, and brother. Twitter responses resonate with the narrative of the show when they talk to each other about their connections. Racial tweets tended to be mixed, Lily is called a bitch and the best thing to happen to the show. Then one fan speaks directly to Sofia telling her she does not like her mother and sister. Class is represented with audience members identifying their own status through tweets that talk about women in bars, the importance of routines and *Modern Family* as the norm in their lives. In this episode, sexuality is negotiated providing a space for the marginalized identities of Mitch and Cam as non-heterosexuals and featuring the influence of pornography in a boy's life.

Table 6 offers examples of how societal relevance is embraced by Twitter fans.

<b>TABLE 6</b> Episode Exemplars	“The Best Men” and Societal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 "A man who doesn't spend time with his family can never be a real man." RT @MikeAmmo: AWESOME sequence on Modern Family #2 BrandonLamb11: Can't believe I'm only realizing now that Phil from Modern Family is in Dawn of the Dead #bestzombiemovie
Race	#1 wolfgang266: The saddest part about the sibling Colombian fight in modern family, its on point Lmbo. #2 SeFijaOnline: Big Wednesday for Latinos on TV: New "Modern Family," "Guys with Kids," "SVU," "Chicago Fire," "Suburgatory" and... <a href="http://t.co/LNha1qBOBX">http://t.co/LNha1qBOBX</a>
Class	#1 abirkinn: the simple life, Unwinding with some Modern Family and the Big Bang Theory lalalala #2 FlyingPigsc0: Modern Family is sponsored by Kia. But in the Series they never drive Kia. Only Audi & Toyota. LOL.
Sexuality	#1 annaefarris7: I love all the awkward pedophilic references in Modern Family. #2 tredrunk: Who would u motorboat? Sofia vergara from modern family, or Deanna Troy from star trek TNG... Deanna troy's been on my motorboat hitlist 4ev

The tweet that “A man who doesn’t spend time with his family is not a real man” comes directly from Phil on the show. As an ideal father figure, Phil is key to the expectations of modern fatherhood. Several racial tweets offered broad references to the representation of Latino characters on television on Wednesday nights along with the potential reality of native Columbians not understanding various situations in America. One interesting example of a class issue involved a sample tweet about the discrepancy between cars in ads during the show and the actual cars driven in the show by certain characters. Again, sexuality was a mixed bag including pedophile jokes and the question of who motorboat Sophia Vergara or Deanna Troy in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-94). Motor boat is an obvious metaphor for sex as the tweet ends with “Deanna Troy’s been on my motorboat.”

“My Hero” (5/8/2013)

This episode starts out with Luke trying to decide which person in his family he should choose as his hero so that he can write about them in an essay assignment for school. Luke becomes distraught trying to figure out how to break it to Phil that he has decided to write the essay about his mom, Claire. This leads Luke to excessively binge eat from the snack stand, and act out at Manny. Ultimately, Luke decides to write his essay about the entire family because together they are his heroes. One subplot involves Mitch and Cam who run into Mitch’s ex-boyfriend, Teddy. Teddy invites them to a charity event at the roller rink and it turns out that Mitch’s ex is still involved with Mitch’s family, knowing this Cam gets jealous.

Meanwhile, Jay wants his daughter, Claire, to work for him. This would be huge because all season Claire has said that she would like to be more than a stay-at-home housewife. Claire worked one day for one of Phil’s competitors and quit because he was sexist. She also

successfully flipped a house with Cam. When she fills in at the snack stand where she worked in high school, Claire imagines what it would be like to work for her dad. By the end of the episode she is actually considering his offer. In another subplot, Phil attempts to teach Gloria how to ice skate. When he touches her body inappropriately he is corrected by Claire on where his hands should be. Ultimately, they get through the lesson. But also, at the roller rink, Haley helps Alex build her confidence around boys by teaching her how to flirt or more specifically, teaching her how to build a boy's ego.

In this particular episode of *Modern Family*, Lily is feisty about her lack of affection for Cam and Mitch's friend, Sal. Her disregard is apparent and rather futile as she directly makes it evident that she does not like Sal. There was also reaction by the Twitter audience as they tended to side with Sal who is played by the popular actress, Elizabeth Banks. Throughout this season Lily's narrative is especially resonate of an annoying and defiant toddler that does not necessarily play well with the audience. Her personality on the show is noticeably different than the children of straight parents.

Personal relevance examples like those found in Table 7 were prominent.

<b>TABLE 7</b> Episode Exemplars	"My Hero" and Personal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 KellyPSchultz: My family is Modern Family to a T. #exceptimAlex #2 Abbydergyderg: If I was male I would be Phil from Modern Family.... #3 idropthehammer: I want to be like Phil Dunphy from modern family when I'm a father #classact
Race	#1 beekysoler: watching Gloria from Modern Family yell at her sister is like looking at my mom on TV #spanishpeopleprobs # 2 thermhere: They need to kill Lily off on Modern Family. #3 OurDailyBears: Talking about a child. ---> RT @thermhere.

Class	#1 Ickle_Bitch: Modern family does have me chuckling over my computer like a hunch back in FAS.. Hahaha coworkers already think im weird. Today topped it. #2 kpeezo1991: I'd feel pretty accomplished if someday my kid dresses like Manny from Modern Family. #3 Emenemilie: My math teacher likes Modern Family. My faith is restored in his normalcy. #FavoriteShow
Sexuality	#1 Stephan_Cloete: I've got a thing for Claire Dunphy on Modern Family."Ek ook!!! :  #2 LaulEmerson: I love you Gloria from modern family, you so hot

Again, Phil, the traditional father comes out on top as many fans support his character in their tweets. Even one female fan suggests that she would be Phil if she were a man. Racially for this episode, there was a focus on hateful tweets expressed against Lily, the Vietnamese adopted daughter of Mitch and Cam. She obviously has a smart mouth and a number of fans tweeted that she was the worst actor on the show, one even suggesting that she should be killed off.

Concerning class, fans tended to relate the show to their experience with co-workers or even a teacher. Claire Dunphy and Gloria received a number of tweets concerning their desirability.

Communal relevance was strong during this episode. Twitter fans expressed their emotional connections with the show and each other.

<b>TABLE 8</b> Episode Exemplars	“My Hero” and Communal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 KYSchmidt: RT @Nolan_Gould: Luke is at his best when he is bad! Watch him wreak havoc tonight on a new Modern Family. #2 LChristianOOoOO: The sentimental message given at the end of each episode of Modern Family really help a guy think about how thankful he should be. #3 lauren_brynn: This modern family episode is actually emotional tonight.
Race	#1 amandaa_klein: Lilly on modern family makes me pee my pants of laughter

	<p>#2 ElizabethSerina: The little Asian girl in Modern Family is the cutest damn thing I've ever seen.</p> <p>#3 JoeyRichter: The girl who plays Lily in Modern Family is honestly stealing the entire show this season.</p>
Class	<p>#1 Zsop: Watching Modern Family with the fam &gt;&gt; #GoodToBeHome</p> <p>#2 m0cked: I could watch Saturday night live and modern family all day.</p> <p>#3 Gennaimb: Watching modern family in the union and laughing by myself....people think I'm crazy. I think ill stop now...#favoriteshow</p>
Sexuality	<p>#1 wadelorimer: Modern family can get very inappropriate</p> <p>#2 Rowland5Paul: Would u get with phil on modern family? @Sarah_Hyland</p> <p>#3 gabiruiz6: eehhmm.. Queres ver comica?? A mi me gusta Modern Family! (funny gay men?)</p>

Luke carried the major plot in this episode so many of the masculinity tweets related to his antics. He represents the typical heterosexual boy. This storyline included a sentimental side of masculinity so many Twitter fans shared their reaction. In this episode, Lily’s role was seen as more positive. Several fans tweeted that she was cute and she was stealing the show. Class was tied to a variety of everyday norms like watching the show with family or in the student union and laughing by themselves. The sexual nature of this particular episode was subtle, but one fan noted that the show can get inappropriate and another focus on the funny gay men.

In Table 9, societal relevance examples present a significant connection to other television shows and even ad campaigns.

<b>TABLE 9</b> Episode Exemplars	“My Hero” and Societal Relevance
Masculinity	<p>#1 AndresDelt: Ilove how Ed O'neil was the ultimate 80s man in Married W Children...and now hes the ultimate grandad on Modern Family #MarriedWChildren</p> <p>#2 danielyoung: I like to think that Breaking Bad ends with Walt going into a witness relocation program, and that's why Al</p>

	Bundy is in Modern Family. #3 "@johnathanluke7: Phil from Modern Family is the best character in all sitcoms"
Race	#1 LoveEnergies: This little white girl looks like that sassy asian girl on Modern Family, awwww #2 az_amiral: No, i don't want to meet muslim singles nearby, i just want to watch modern family #3 sjt94: Modern family is freakyy awsum! Gloria's accent has me laughing my ass off XDD hahahah
Class	#1 AnnaIKDO: Here's our #ikea version of the Dunphys #kitchen from #modernfamily: <a href="http://t.co/P9dbGuEw3a">http://t.co/P9dbGuEw3a</a> #2 angelaordway: Great staging ideas from the set of Modern Family and CAR Champions of Home Campaign!! <a href="http://t.co/9NUyXRJDZW">http://t.co/9NUyXRJDZW</a> #3 KoonieDave: I'm confused. Ariel Winter, the girl who plays Alex Dunphy on Modern Family is 14 right? Why is there a sub reddit dedicated to her family? ffs.
Sexuality	#1 Jake_N_Bakes: The second you notice that the mom in Modern Family is the hot chick from Happy Gilmore... ðŸ˜ƒ±ðŸ˜ƒ±ðŸ˜ƒ±ðŸ˜ƒ±ðŸ˜ƒ± #MindBlown #2 meJFong: @RobLowe do you like the modern family episode where Mitchell talks about you being his first crush #younglust

Many of the societal issues that were tweeted included the relevance of other television shows like *Married to Children* (1987-97), *Breaking Bad* (2008-13) and *Happy Gilmore* (1996). Concerning race, Lily's sass is admired in relation to a white child actress, and Muslim singles dating is ripped. The issue of class had a number of interesting tweets surrounding products like IKEA furniture, the CAR Champions of Home campaign and sub-reddit sites. Again, a large part of societal relevance involves the association fans make with elements outside of the show and for the area of sexuality example tweets mentioned Mitch's crush on Rob Lowe, and Claire was identified as one of the hot chicks from *Happy Gilmore*.

## *Conclusion*

*Modern Family* hit airwaves amid critical raves riding the buzz to the top of the Nielsen ratings and Emmy world. However, character representation in *Modern Family* among critics and TV fans online is considered, for the most part, stagnated. Character roles did not move far from the stereotypes of macho fathers, stereotypical “others,” sexy wives, and funny homosexuals. Unfortunately, stereotypical representations are highlighted throughout the show and it seems the traditional role of a father figure was more prominent and more accepted by Twitter fans.

There was a mix of compliments and complaints about the racial/ethnic characterizations. Class issues tended to confirm for fans the normalcy of each family in the sitcom. The women of the show, especially Gloria and Claire, were constantly placed in positions of sexual objectivity. The most interesting result is that some tweets offered praise for Mitch and Cam’s characters, while other tweets were laced with homophobia.

*Modern Family* came into being as a sitcom in response to a call for the return to the traditional family sitcom on network television. The network, ABC, owned by the Disney corporation needed to once again extend its marketability to families. In response to the changing narrative of family in the mainstream, the show could not rely on the traditional tropes of family life featured on earlier sitcoms. The one difference is the addition of a gay family featured within the core narrative offering a new space for authenticity and originality.

In these findings, the Twitter audience demonstrated their desire to engage with certain storylines and characters on *Modern Family*. They found relevance with the nature of how masculinity, race, class, and sexuality were portrayed. The audience celebrated some characters and loathed others, participated in critiques of the narrative, and supported the satire.

Personal relevance often meant fans taking personal ownership of the characters and storylines. Communal relevance was usually tied to self-reflection related to a shared experience. Societal relevance linked the show to a much broader entertainment space outside of the show's programming niche.

Finally, Phil is celebrated consistently as the masculine ideal and audience responded accordingly. He not only represents conventional ideals of masculinity, but it could be argued that he has evolved into a more likable version of the male buffoon that has historically been featured on family sitcoms.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: *FAMILY GUY*

“Where to begin? Peter Griffin is everything I would never want in a father. He is insensitive, violent, sexually overzealous, and insanely idiotic. He constantly makes fun of his son Chris, ignores Baby Stewie, and I’m pretty sure he just hates his teenage daughter Meg. And as if going through puberty isn’t embarrassing enough, with Peter as your father, you very well might have unresolved Daddy issues for the rest of your god-awful life.”

(Harmon, 2014)

The following chapter examines how representations of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality in *Family Guy* are perceived by Twitter fans. As the practice of television viewing has changed over time, so has the exchange of discourse surrounding televised texts. This chapter seeks to analyze the negotiation that takes place among fans when viewing a first-run episode of *Family Guy*. It will also present an analysis of the show’s relevance as a text that Twitter fans incorporate into their daily lives. The discourse is significant as it relates to the main interpretations and meanings reported by fans on Twitter in relation to the parodic sitcom.

*Family Guy* has a unique structure because it not only falls under the definition of parody but it is also created in cartoon form. Parody is complicated because it rests ultimately within the understanding and interpretation of viewers. Plus, it relies upon the writers who construct specific images and ideas to spoof, make fun of or exaggerate reality. The creator, Seth

MacFarlane has gone on the record to defend the content of the show as merely parody and nothing more (Solomon, 2009). He has been sued on several occasions for taking material out of published media and including it in parody form on this show. Some cases MacFarlane and Fox won, and a couple cases he settled. (Gerstenberger, 2014; Mellor, 2016).

On June 23, 2016, *Family Guy* was listed in *The Sydney Morning Herald* as the third best comedy of all time just behind *Fawlty Towers* (1975-79) at second and *The Simpsons* (1989-) at number one (Pobjie, 2016). *Family Guy* succeeds in drawing a large number of viewers each week during FOX's "Animation Domination" programming block on Sunday nights (Nielsen, 2012). Many fans make an effort to watch the show when it first airs and tweet about it. This is significant, because like *Modern Family*, the program has the ability to hold a captive audience despite DVR, streaming, and syndication. The show literally can be accessed 24 hours a day for viewing and has remained in syndication since its inception.

*Family Guy* is a good example of an adult cartoon that manages to garner the sweet spot for advertisers targeting 18 to 35 year-old men. It should also be noted that a larger population of men than women are vocal about their affinity toward *Family Guy* according to Nielsen statistics (Guthrie, 2011; Consoli, 2013). This show represents the traditional narrative of the American family, allocating space for white male heterosexual patriarchy to thrive. It is clear that the division of family in this show also reinforces ideas of male dominance. Unfortunately, this is not contested as parody because representations are usually presented more for affirmation and less for critique.

Classified as an adult animated sitcom, the history of the show confirms a complicated relationship with Fox involving cancellation and negotiation deals over the period of several years until it was officially solidified as a 'mainstay'. Because of the show's mass appeal on

Adult Swim in reruns, it has, ultimately, become a prominent program in American popular culture as well. The extremely vocal fans of *Family Guy* have given the show its top position in pop culture, and allowed it to remain on network television all these years.

However, *Family Guy* has not gotten by without controversy. The show sometimes subverts original material with a positive presence in mainstream popular culture and turns that material into something vile and disgusting. As mentioned earlier, several major lawsuits have been leveled against it, despite the protective notions of parody and free speech (Ricke, 2012). It is interesting that a show can be so popular and, yet, so offensive. *Family Guy* also embraces many traditionally held stereotypes of subordinate groups in society or in this case, anyone that is not white, straight, male, and middle-class.

The core male character is Peter Griffin is a blue-collar worker, husband, friend, and father. Peter is reminiscent of the longstanding male buffoon character on television. Seth MacFarlane recently declared that his inspiration for the show came from the 70's hit sitcom, *All in the Family* (Galanes, 2015). Once you know that, it is easy to see elements of Archie Bunker infused directly into the character of Peter Griffin.

Lois is Peter's wife and the mother to their children. Her role on the show is, largely, catering to Peter's every need whether sexual or domestic. She always works tirelessly to please her husband, children, and their talking dog, Brian. Her authority in the household is similar to the position held by Edith Bunker in the *All in the Family* (1971-79) series. She is submissive to the needs of everyone, and symbolic of the "happy homemaker" stereotype.

The family dog is Brian, and Brian has the ability to speak. As a matter of fact, he is usually the voice of intellectual reason on the show. In typical family sitcom format, Lois would step in and restore order after her husband has run amuck. Instead, Brian typically steps in to

assist in restoring the equilibrium. It should also be noted that in the season following this study, Brian's character was killed and fans complained so much that MacFarlane brought Brian back during a Christmas episode using a time machine (Raferty, 2014).

Stewie is the youngest in the family. He has an ambiguous identity because he does not verbally communicate with the family, but he does openly communicate with the audience in his own narrative style. Stewie's communication with the family is through synchronized baby talk while the audience actually hears what he is saying. Stewie is often mocking the rest of the family. In a 2009 *Playboy Magazine* interview, MacFarlane announced that Stewie is gay even though it seems ridiculous to identify sexuality in a baby one-year-old, but that is the nature of parody. And *Family Guy* is an over-the-top, exaggerated parody.

"But we decided it's better to keep it vague, which makes more sense because he's a 1-year-old. Ultimately, Stewie will be gay or a very unhappy repressed heterosexual. It also explains why he's so hellbent on killing [his mother, Lois] and taking over the world: He has a lot of aggression, which comes from confusion and uncertainty about his orientation" (Seth MacFarlane, 2009).

Chris is the dimwitted oldest son. He doesn't always have a major role in the narrative of the show, and it could be argued that he is written as more of a buffoon than Peter. The mishaps that often happen in connection with Chris's character surround his lack of common sense. Yet, Chris does have a big imagination. There are several examples where his imagination takes him beyond the banality of everyday life. For example, Chris is a rebellious teen who is stalked by an

evil monkey, avoids a pedophile admirer, and persistently navigates a physical attraction to his mother.

Meg, the daughter, is vastly more intelligent than others in the family. She is usually the center of Peter's ridicule. Her character is worked into the narrative in a way that is also reminiscent of the daughter on *All in the Family*. There are many examples in the show where Meg brings opposing arguments to the table articulating sound viewpoints. Yet, she does not always demonstrate the best judgment. It's the classic book-smart, not street-smart type of character. She is, therefore, the center of much of the ridicule on the show and the butt of many of the jokes. Unfortunately, both Meg and Lois often face pointed moments of ridicule that serve to reinforce stereotypes surrounding their femininity.

Quagmire is one of Peter's best friends on the show. He is basically the epitome of a sexist, and he is also extremely promiscuous. Many episodes involve Quagmire hooking up with prostitutes or participating in orgies. He idolizes himself as the ultimate chick magnet. If there is a definition of the extreme masculine ideal in cartoon form, it would be Quagmire. He is successful in almost everything he does, especially when using his power over women for sex.

There is an ongoing bromance in the show between Peter and his good friends. Joe is a cop confined to a wheelchair. Things don't always go so well for Joe, and he is the butt of many jokes. His disability is apparent, so he represents a disabled person on the show in a very obvious way, but the character is mainly a stereotype. Cleveland is Peter's African American friend. Cleveland does not appear frequently in the ninth, tenth and eleventh seasons because he is in his own spin-off, *The Cleveland Show* (2009-2013). Many of the attributes that are written into Cleveland's character are problematic stereotypes too.

The parody nature of *Family Guy* did not seem to have the kind of impact expected among Twitter fans. People do not necessarily have to exercise great cognitive capabilities when watching the show because the basic elements of the narrative for *Family Guy* remain comfortable and familiar. Because of the nature of parody, *Family Guy* also has the ability to be reflexive in its representation. The show pushes the envelope getting away with offensive storylines and characters that shows like *Modern Family* could not get away with.

*Family Guy* as a parody claims to deconstruct the previous traditions of the American family, yet the show upholds the traditions associated with the stay-at-home housewife and the male breadwinner. Peter as the patriarch of his family is also, by default, leader among his friends. While the show is centered around the Griffin family, it is really Peter who has the agency to do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, the rest of the family and his friends basically revolve around his world. Only periodically is this plot structure disrupted in the series. As an animated sitcom that relies on tired tropes and stereotypes, *Family Guy* continues to present the masculine ideal in a neat package.

This chapter analyzes tweets from three selected episodes of the show providing evidence as to how Twitter fans relate to the characters and storylines. The show is important to this study because it is not only the most popular show that men watch across age, race, and ethnicity, according to Nielsen (2012), but it also represents a longstanding primetime icon in popular culture. From a large selection of tweets, these three episodes were isolated to concentrate on the Twitter responses connected to issues such as masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

The collection of Twitter data for *Family Guy* deviated slightly from the initial data with *Modern Family*. All the datasets for *Modern Family* focused specifically on isolated key words and the data based off those key words, while the *Family Guy* data included the isolation of the

specific hashtag: #familyguy. Data collection occurred differently because upon first analyzing data from initial episodes it was obvious that a large volume of tweets were not associated with the text. The key words “modern” and “family” were an outlier so it was highly unlikely that a member of that Twitter community would be using both key words in a tweet. In other words, after several data scrapes it was obvious that the *Modern Family* audience was not very active in using #modernfamily but the *Family Guy* audience seemed to prefer the utilization of the #familyguy hashtag in connection with the text. This particular dataset was, therefore, collected based on the key words “family” and “guy.”

*Turban Cowboy (03/17/2013)*

This episode starts with Peter and his buddies having a couple of drinks at The Drunken Clam. They come to the conclusion their lives are boring and they need some excitement. The three of them decide to go skydiving. After his first jump Peter says he hasn't felt a rush like that since he won a marathon. Peter's flashback montage is of him mowing down runners with his car in order to win the marathon. This episode aired a few weeks before the bombing at the Boston marathon. He eventually takes things to the extreme and continues to jump out of planes until he is injured.

In the hospital, Peter befriends Mahmoud, a Muslim. He starts hanging out with Mahmoud and adopts some common Muslim traditions and practices. He points out his ability to catch on to Muslim norms, but it is only a reflection of his ability to grasp common stereotypes about Muslims. It turns out that Mahmoud is actually the head of a terrorist sleeper cell in Quahog and part of a plan to blow up a bridge in the city. They enlist Peter as the driver of the

van with the explosives, stating that he will have no problem getting on the bridge because of the color of his skin.

Peter tells Joe, his friend who is a police officer, about the group and agrees to work with the police on a sting operation. When the terrorists discover that Peter is wearing a wire they speed up the plan. Ultimately, Peter is rescued, the bridge does not blow up, and the terrorists end up in jail. This episode uses every stereotype about Muslims since 9/11, plays into many traditional sexist biases, and reaffirms negative stigmas about diversity.

Table 10 below shows the bond of personal relevance to this episode as declared by Twitter fans.

<b>TABLE 10</b> Episode Exemplars	“Turban Cowboy” and Personal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 Adri216: Had a nightmare I got dinner plate sized tattoos of Peter griffin on one thigh and Brian on the other #relief #familyguy #2shankha06: Is it just me or anybody else want to be more like Stewie Griffin? #FamilyGuy #3 FatlumLushi: Have to love Peter Griffin ðŸ˜~ #familyguy <a href="http://t.co/KfF74oyucg">http://t.co/KfF74oyucg</a>
Race	#1 y0_thuglyfe: @Tommy_Breezy. Watching family Guy my nigggggaaaa #2 brettsmithUK: If I was fabrice muamba, that moment I woke up from being dead my first words would definitely have been."BLACK JESUS!!!" #3 che_dora: we now go live to asian reporter Trisha Takanawa. #familyguy #hahaha #4 Nic_Ferraro: My wife is with child and about to give birth and I am with burrito and about to do the same #familyguy #awesome
Class	#1 Beth_Workman: Spotted Peter Griffin in Tesco in Newport tonight buying white bread ðŸŹ #FamilyGuy #StarSpotted #2 Sena_Morts: Absolutely weird that I'm cutting my nails as I start to watch the #FamilyGuy ep that has the Cash For Nails skit. Lool #3 KatherineV34: I can tell the old ladies sitting next to me don't appreciate what I'm choosing to watch #getoverit #familyguy

Sexuality	#1 ToxicINjecti0n: Why do women have boobsâ€? So you got sum thing to look at while your talking to emâ€#familyguy #2 iChristellee: You. Me. Sex #FamilyGuy #Genieus #3 _Linsanity22: I don't think y'all understand how much I love Family Guy, sexist, racist and all.
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The personal relevance reflected here works within the themes of this particular episode. Peter takes central stage in this narrative with racial and ethnic dialogue prominent. The show offers negative stereotypes about people from Islamic countries. There are jokes that range from men with long toenails to the bevy of attractive women at their disposal. From the personal perspective of race, this particular episode included fans tweeting about the n-word, a token Asian journalist, and “Black Jesus.”

Stewie Griffin is one of the most favored characters on *Family Guy* even though he does not have any dialogue with the adult characters. Stewie’s character is written as enduring, emotionally and cognitively intelligent. Issues of class tend to lean toward normalcy as Twitter fans talk about Peter buying white bread, selling finger nails for cash and jokes about *Family Guy’s* low-brow status. Sexuality issues involve humor about women’s boobs and the sexist treatment of Peter’s daughter, Meg.

Table 11 shows examples of communal relevance among Twitter fans.

<b>TABLE 11</b> Episode Exemplars	“Turban Cowboy” and Communal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 quipped: @SethMacFarlane you should know, my husband and I quote #familyguy star wars when watch real Star Wars. Our priorities are straight. #2 omega_TheEnd:Joe: I killed you!! Quagmire : I choke myself out every day you basterd! LMAO! #familyguy smh while lol #3 KamiKaazi: Anytime someone cracks a suck milk from my nipple joke, I automatically think of Peter feeding Stewie LOL just LOL #FamilyGuy
Race/Ethnicity	#1 sexy_elizabethha: Watching Family Guy . Stewie dat

	<p>Nigga  #2 Sarabickett: "9 o clock Nigel. Peters converting to Islam and I'm pumped" @CoenCobb #familyguy #hesobsessed  #3 drqasw: @lydiamaroon FOR THAT IRAQI LOBSTER.THE SONG LYRICS...#familyGuy</p>
Class	<p>#1 AngelicaElyse: Who needs drugs, when you can go shoppingðŸ‘€ #familyguy  #2 Lsu_guy95: Guess wat, there is a new toll in the hallway. Ten bucks! #FamilyGuy</p>
Sexuality	<p>#1 TheNewF80: Lois: its like our two privates had a handshake after a successful business meeting in a swamp. #familyguy  #2 eric_glassman: "You know what's good for getting wine out of a shirt, sex with another man" ðŸ˜~, #familyguy  #3 ambspocklington: the abuse Meg gets in Family Guy is so funny, but so sexist.</p>

Traditional issues of masculinity play a primary role in the communal relevance of this episode. The bulk of the narrative was shored up on the side of traditional manhood and Islamic extremism. The audience picked up on this right away and reacted with excitement concerning jokes about explosions and women in submissive roles. Race and ethnicity was obviously an issue as the Islamic community was portrayed negatively and mocked. There was no real deconstruction concerning this type of representation being absurd or unorthodox among fans, instead, it was accepted.

Tweets highlighted other instances of racist remarks involving the use of the n-word. As a parody of the traditional American white family sitcom, I found this to be a disjointed use of the n-word. As a working class family, this show already positions itself against the backdrop of conservative ideals of the nuclear American family. Class issues resonated with the audience through notions of shopping and tolls. Finally, sexuality was a touchy issue in this episode. Homosexuality is forbidden in the Quran but is one of the freedoms afforded in America that terrorist groups seek to eradicate or punish in the name of Allah. The reference to gay men

during the episode made it obvious that the Islamic group of men were policing their own sexuality so it was not assumed that they were queer.

Societal relevance in Turban cowboy was obvious in that terrorism is a primary concern in American society today.

TABLE 12 Episode Exemplars	“Turban Cowboy” and Societal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 JackChadders98: Lois! Whereee is my redbull?'-Love Peter #FamilyGuy #2 "It seems today that all we see, is #violence on movies and #sex on TV." -#FamilyGuy writer said this in 1999. Nothing changes ever since.
Race	#1 AM6ITIOUS: Cine: "Niggas be like" come over and watch a movie!! <a href="http://t.co/EMKc0ijk70">http://t.co/EMKc0ijk70</a> #funny #true #familyguy #hilarious #guys #girls #2 rainbow_beauty: Family guy is so hilariously racist and ignorant.
Class	#1 Ryan_Reinig123: This plan is so smart it's retarded #familyguy #2 bas_kpr: And know I will remember you as a big fart. Goodbye big fart. #familyguy hahaha #3 Twatfacetommy: When you fart and turn the radio on to cover the smell #FamilyGuy
Sexuality	#1 jayleyperson_: The dog that had sex with that whore is clearly the real life brian from family guy... #2 TylaMae10: Louis: Peter are you...gay? Peter: GUILTYYYYYYYY :) #FamilyGuy #3 EvLSnoopY: "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno - Providing background noise for intercourse since 1992" Gotta love Family Guy! #FamilyGuy

The tweets above demonstrate societal relevance within the show. Instead of being critical many tweets celebrated the negative behavior of Stewie, Peter, and Brian. Traditional masculinity within this episode had a strong Twitter response. Fans tweeted about drinking malt liquor, as well as the amount of violence and sex on television. The racial/ethnic discussion

suggested that fans clearly acknowledged the bigger picture concerning this depiction of Islam. Not all Americans that are decedents from Muslim countries are terrorists, but they are often lumped in with the same designation of overgeneralized stereotypes. Given the class position that is predominately featured in this episode fart jokes and the n-word were acceptable. Finally, the stereotypical nature of the storyline is considered fair game, especially when it come to sex as a number of fans connected a real news story about a woman having sex with a dog to references in the show.

#### *Total Recall Episode (04/28/2013)*

This episode starts out where Peter is feeling under the weather. He has a deep voice as a result of his ailments. Lois is turned on by his deep voice, so they have “amazing” sex. When Peter gets better Lois is no longer turned on because his voice has returned back to normal. Peter tries to get sick on purpose, so that he can have “amazing” sex again. As a result, he ends up in the hospital unable to bowl in a big tournament. Lois is asked to take his place with the guys. She is not only good at bowling, but she also fits in well with his friends.

Meanwhile, Stewie sets out to find his stuffed bear, Rupert, which has been recalled by the factory because the eyes can choke babies. Brian joins him on the adventure and they take a factory tour slipping off from the group to find the room where the defective bears are being destroyed. Stewie ends up on the conveyor belt trying to save Rupert, and as he is about to fall into the furnace, Brian figures out how to stop the belt. Later at home, Stewie is excited about having Rupert back until the eye pops out into Stewie’s mouth and he chokes.

When Peter gets back to normal health, the guys still enjoy Lois’s company, and Peter becomes jealous. This leads him to ask Lois not to hang out with them anymore. Peter explains:

“I have my friends and you have your groceries and those gross pink razors in the shower.” This episode provides some context about *Family Guy*’s limited gender roles in marriage and friendships. Peter does not want his guy time infringed upon by Lois. He feels that Lois’s place is at home as the housewife. He should have the freedom to spend time away from home with his friends. In some ways this episode is reflexive of how gender relations are played out through the entire series. Lois is the happy housewife, while Peter is the breadwinner with the freedom, achieved through patriarchy, to come and go as he pleases. He is free from household responsibility putting Lois in charge of childrearing and running the Griffin home.

The “Total Recall” episode shakes up traditional masculinity for a while because in Peter’s absence Lois becomes one of the guys. The guys realize she is actually fun to hang out with for a “woman.” When Peter calls her behavior into question, out of his own jealousy, Lois surrenders to her social limits. For the main narrative of the show to continue to work, this separation of genders is necessary. In other words, the privilege obtained by the men on the show must be acknowledged and maintained.

This means *Family Guy* may not be popular because it is new and original, but rather because it is old and familiar. As demonstrated through their responses on Twitter, viewing does not require a high-level of engagement or a major cognitive connection. As a matter of fact, some fans indicate that they like the fact that the show does not make them think. Table 13 below offers some examples.

<b>TABLE 13</b> Episode Exemplars	“Total Recall” and Personal Relevance
Masculinity	#1DanielleSB33: I'm making you a cock outta doooe! Haa #2 OddFutureJames: @effyeahjustin are you going to fart in your daughters face too? #FamilyGuy #3 effyeahjustin: When I become a parent I'm going to own a Cosby Sweater for all those serious parenting moments. #FamilyGuy

	#4 BottsBreeze: Nice tattoos, Meg. Did you get your butt hair braided too? #FamilyGuy
Race	#1 THATBOY_ARTIST: ima cool nigga but mess with one of my chicks and i use my raser blade beek to rip yo fckin eyes out lol #FAMILYGUY #2 CorinnesTweets: I've got my nan watching family guy with me she's cracking up my nans a G â□¤ #3 GueraaBabyy: Family guy is the shit, lmaoo if Peter was real he would be my niggaaa x) #4 twinkle_lf: "What do you do on the weekends?" "Black guys" #stewie #familyguy
Class	#1 kaydien1: #Home already yamming #Pizza and watching #FamilyGuy #2 xStaceyAnne: I love the retarded horse #familyguy #3 _nintenbro: im too eh-stupid to make up my own mind. -- #FamilyGuy
Sexuality	#1 OhSnapItsZoe: "Name a popular fruit." "Clay Aiken." ðŸ˜, #familyguy #2 Murph_Kid: Peter just got raped by a bull lmbo #FamilyGuy ðŸ˜, ðŸ˜, #3 EGGROLL: "THIS IS STUPID I WANNA TALK ABOUT VAGINAS" #FamilyGuy

The personal relevance for “Total Recall” is wrapped up in images of retarded horses, popular fruits, the n-word, and fart jokes. Under masculinity, fans basically offered a series of what seemed like childish tweets involving butt hair and cock jokes. There was a lot of negative commentary in the tweets surrounding African Americans. This ranged from the use of the n-word to actually making a joke about doing black men on the weekends. From the perspective of class relevance, a number of fans referred to themselves as lazy, stupid and admitted that they didn’t want to think. Finally, the issue of sexuality also included extreme tweets such as jokes about gay men with stereotypes of casual sex and elitist attitudes. Tweets also brought up the notion of bestiality with jokes about Peter being raped by a bull.

In Table 14, the Twitter audience continued to reflect on these gags from a communal perspective.

<b>TABLE 14</b> Episode Exemplars	“Total Recall” and Communal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 alexidburgos: "Common Joe, you can get a desk job... You... You can be a desk." #familyguy #2 Mizzcacerz: Bryan Is Hilarious ..... Family Guy. ASVP_Osweugo: Bryan be mad emotional on family guy <<< #3 airjayden_23: Awhh.. Stewie is crying on Family Guy...ðŸ˜ˆ #4 HardKnocks301: Yea you!! Not you, but you!! Lois get back in th house! #stewie #yousuck #familyguy <a href="http://t.co/4DvLg28Al">http://t.co/4DvLg28Al</a>
Race	#1 brandooo27: Omg she's reall!!!! Hahahah #consuela #familyguy #maid #hilarious <a href="http://t.co/9OA3BYPIGS">http://t.co/9OA3BYPIGS</a> #2 LikeIsNas: Peter is black. #familyguy #3 T_ReLLW: ðŸ˜ˆ Why Meg always sending niggas Hair ????? #FamilyGuy #4 RealestrapperJR: She's got a big beautiful Jewish nose #familyguy
Class	#1 jadenglandx: 'you know how you always wanted a real diamond engagement ring!' 'omg peter' 'i bought a horse!!!' hahaha #familyguy #2 dassy2224: Watching family guy the right way to spend Sunday #familyguy #foreveralone
Sexuality	#1 NathanMCFC3: Cause Brent can't fit in the glory hole and that's why we all like Brent! Hahahah #familyGuy #2 RealNakedWomen: Femdom and Their Toys 2 porn pics #3 Eliahegift: I'm a breeding bull LOL I love #familyguy #4 101Shaq: Watching #FamilyGuy....peter just got fucked by a bull, poor guy #5 HighAssLesbian: Meg grew some balls lmao #FamilyGuy

The attention from fans seemed to fall on Brian and Stewie in this episode because their storyline was somewhat emotional. Fans noted that Stewie cried about the loss of his stuffed bear, and Brian got upset. Another theme of this episode involved the masculine identity being threatened. That threat creates fear as one fan tweets “Lois get back in the house” referring to her stereotypical position as a mother/wife. Race did not factor as much into this episode except for

the lack of racial/ethnic diversity overall. A few racial/ethnic tweets referenced hair, skin color, or Consuela, a Latina maid. Concerning class, enjoyment for many fans seems to stem from the shows reinforcement or celebration of mediocrity. And, sexually, the episode brings out blatantly sexual terms like balls, porn pics, and Peter’s sexual encounter with a bull.

A broader look at societal relevance shows how fans connect this show to the bigger world outside.

TABLE 15 Episode Exemplars	“Total Recall” and Societal Relevance
Masculinity	<p>#1 #2 ninsta2700: Nono Peter, you can't have sex with the Lois she's a slut! #familyguy ã~ðÿ~,ðÿ~□</p> <p>#2 adammwilson: Family guy tells the truth. Lol i love it when they get on meg. #familyguy #lmao</p> <p>#2 Poetic_Secrets: I'm Still Tripping On The Fact That No One Is Tripping That Brian Is A Talking Dog. #FamilyGuy</p>
Race	<p>#1 KimothyHallways: "hold on louis this is some serious parenting, let me go put on my cosby sweater" #PeterGriffin #FamilyGuy #DialMegForMurder</p> <p>#2 EducatedChic98: When Peter discovers he has black ancestry <a href="http://t.co/0hXwInFqi5">http://t.co/0hXwInFqi5</a> #GetGlue #familyguy</p> <p>#3 BriBell14: "It's a rare African bird called none of your business." Lmfao. #FamilyGuy</p>
Class	<p>#1 shelbkm: "Hello" "Hello" "Is this the guy" "I'm a guy" "Do you have my drugs" "What are drugs" ðÿ~,ðÿ~, #familyguy</p> <p>#2 mike_sherwood: Kerosine is fuel, red bull is fuel, kerosine is red bull #familyguy</p> <p>#3 Ahmed_Ryder17: @SethMacFarlane Saw a real life #FamilyGuy moment yesterday. #BirdEatsKFC <a href="http://t.co/mGyfwLl2qS">http://t.co/mGyfwLl2qS</a></p>
Sexuality	<p>#1 MsChocolaTeesh: Lois: Peter .. Are you gay? :: Peter: *high pitched* GUILTYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY #FamilyGuy ðÿ~,</p> <p>#2 BombsawayBob: "You're as Excited as a Porcupine meeting a Pineapple"-Lois Griffin to Peter, after he asks if they can have sex a second time. #FamilyGuy</p> <p>#3 402sodope: This bitch said "Don't worry about getting me pregnant, i'm already pregnant" #FamilyGuy</p>

From the perspective of societal relevance, the greater message of masculinity in this episode was how Lois submitting to patriarchy by agreeing to accept her position as a housewife and stop hanging out with Peter's friends. This patriarchy becomes a societal issues when one fan labels Lois a slut and another admits to enjoying meg's degradation. Fans recognize the offensive nature of jokes on the show, but they also accept them. Racist rhetoric and actions demonstrate normalcy as fans link tweets to *The Cosby Show* and black ancestry. The class perspective within this working class family show brings about tweets related to drugs and Red Bull. Finally, as a community, fans commented on jokes about Peter being gay and Lois having sex with Peter more than once.

*The Giggity Wife Episode (01/27/2013)*

"The Giggity Wife," opens with Peter, Joe and Quagmire at The Drunken Clam. Joe has a confiscated ID from a student at Harvard. The guys decide to use the ID to venture to Harvard and eat in the cafeteria for free. This episode features several racist, sexist, and homophobic experiences. While on the Harvard campus the fellas venture out to a bar and decide to get wasted. They drink excessively and don't remember how they got back home the next morning.

Quagmire soon discovers that he has married a prostitute, Charmice, during his drunken stupor. He decides to give the marriage a chance even though he has no intention of ever having sex with her again. His plan does not go well, so he needs to get rid of her, and pretends that he's gay. At first Charmice believes him and agrees to the divorce, but when she catches Quagmire watching straight porn she tells him she will only sign the papers if she can watch him have sex with another man.

Somehow Quagmire convinces Peter to be his accomplice in this charade. They get together for dinner, and plan to have sex afterward in front of Charmice. However, before it happens Charmice stops them. She tells Quagmire that she knows he is not gay, and will sign the papers. This episode of *Family Guy* took the covenant of the bromance to a whole other level with Peter’s agreement to have gay sex with his best guy friend. It is a test of the boundaries set up by “guy code.” Even as parody it actually crosses the line into a clearly uncomfortable realm when they prepare to carry out the rouse. At the end we find out that the whole family has been watching the situation evolve with an open computer camera.

Table 16 below offers some examples of Twitter fan responses with personal relevance.

<b>TABLE 16</b> Episode Exemplars	“The Giggity Wife” and Personal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 BROOOOOSEIDON: This episode of family guy is hitting me in the feelings #2 edwinabarnett11: Family guy has me weak. Like Stewie get it together man. ðŸ˜˜,ðŸ˜˜ #3 beimeupscotty: Sonnnn Family Guy be havin' me WEEAAAAAKKKKKKK AS FUCKK!!!
Race	#1 Uh__Oh: niggas was on family guy cryin n shit #2 NativeAndInked: This episode of family guy is to touching yo nigga finna cry #3 _xHisFirstLady: Watchin family guy this nigga stewie gay as'f
Class	#1 jordbarney95: Family guy stoned > #2 glopez_o: Family guy is the highlight of my night most nights..... #loser #sad #3 uRLoneLiStoneR: Tipsy and sleepy while I'M watchin Family Guy, got my Jack and a Pepsi at the same Damn time!!
Sexuality	#1 purplemoney_: Everybody watching catfish but Me" family guy it got gay niggas on there not me #2 MikeLuckas: how many "The joke is that it's offensive" jokes can you make before you start being just offensive? #familyguy #3 MegustanJordans: First they get shitted on in a family guy episode now catfish ðŸ˜˜³

This show focuses on the negative aspects of homosexuality positioning itself largely within the traditions patriarchy. Many Twitter fans are obviously uncomfortable with the possibility of Quagmire having gay sex with Peter. They tweeted a large number of references to weakness and feelings. They are tied to the bromance but this decision is challenged solidify their manhood. Racially, the n-word is used by fans liberally during this episode. Class relevance continues to reflect the show’s integration into their everyday lives. Fans discuss watching when stoned and even when they are sad. Because of the focus on homosexuality, this particular episode brought to the forefront in several tweets was the element of catfish a discussion on people lying about their sexual identity like Peter and Quagmire did.

Communal relevance becomes important as the fans share their lives and interests with each other through Twitter.

<b>TABLE 17</b> Episode Exemplars	“The Giggity Wife” and Communal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 So_Legendary_: Bro family guy sooo fucking funny. #2 DevanMiles: I cant watch it unless its sports, family guy or american dad. #3 RipMalle: Family Guy is not for kids at all
Race	#1 Asvpxjefe: Barack Obama on family guy. He finally famous #2 MaggDaddy: They got Obezy looking like a fool on family guy #3 InSenzitive: Why they hoe obama like that on family guy #4 MostHatedTho: Mad ad they got Obama on family guy in a cowboy suit singing sum bullshit petty asL
Class	#1 sbfiend_TGOD: HARVARD OUT _SOME OF MY FOLLOWERS REMIND ME OF FAMILY GUY. #2 Young_Ju_Man: Family Guy is watched by dumb funny_ cool folks.
Sexuality	#1 ShakeoffTweeted: Family Guy is a nasty show! #2 ThatKid_Bryce: This is the grossest episode of

	<p>Family Guy lhh  #3 OhYeahIts_Trey: Meg from family guy look good on the low and she got a sexy voice &gt;&gt;&gt;</p>
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In this episode Quagmire gets drunk, sleeps with a prostitute, marries her, then pretends to be gay to secure an annulment. The text itself refers to conventional stereotypes of gay men, and within the tweets there was direct reinforcement of biased notions concerning what it means to be gay versus a real man. From the perspective of race, this episode featured a characterization of President Barack Obama that got lots of traction on Twitter. Specifically, many in the audience thought the president singing in a cowboy suit was wrong. There was a specific contrast between the elitism of Harvard University and mediocrity of common folk when it came to class. This contrast was noticed by fans. Finally, the episode also offered sexist and homophobic banter that brought out tweets about Meg’s deep sexy voice, and called the fact that Quagmire almost had sex with Peter “nasty” and “gross.”

Table 18 offers examples of how Twitter fans of *Family Guy* interpreted the episode in relation to societal relevance.

<b>TABLE 18</b> Episode Exemplars	“The Giggity Wife” and Societal Relevance
Masculinity	#1 Hlebbz1:") Haha how dumb is Peter Griffin ? #FamilyGuy #2 WTangoFoxtrot_: Hmm #AmericanDad is so much better than #FamilyGuy but that's still not saying much #3 mahamabd95: Peter proves there is a little bit of good in everyone. Except that president guy from the hunger games,he was pretty bad... #thg #familyguy
Race	#1 damnJAYfly12: I don't get what was the point for family guy to put Obama as a black Elvis in a gold suit singing and shit lol #2 Kiccz: Hilariously racist. "@iCallHoesOut: family guy racist af bruh" #3 RoHotMopFilms: "It's kinda weird that 80's White clothes could pass for 90's Black clothes." - Family Guy

	<a href="http://t.co/OKOcK4ez">http://t.co/OKOcK4ez</a>
Class	<p>#1 JamesParon: New episode of Family Guy tonight, and they go to Harvard! You couldn't pay me to study</p> <p>#2 AceTheTrapGawd: I should be watching South Park instead of Family Guy more upscale.</p> <p>#3 SheSayNoZayStay: Bridgeport forever losing. First Family Guy, then being ranked top 10 dirtiest city in America, &amp; now on Catfish.</p>
Sexuality	<p>#1 donashiamonet: lmao both of them! RT @_j0hndoe: This queer needs to pull his skirt down *goes back to family guy *</p> <p>#2 MMC_Ralph: This faggot shiid is wild. *Flips 2 family guy*</p> <p>#3 mattyf32: I hate the family guy episodes that try to be deep and emotional, where are the boob jokes?</p>

The larger societal narrative here involved Peter agreeing to have sex with his friend Quagmire to help him get an annulment. Many fans called him dumb, but some saw how big his heart was and appreciated the fact that he was willing to go the extra mile to help a friend. The Twitter audience in this episode reflected on other shows like *American Dad* and the *Hunger Games*. From the perspective of race, the audience offered critiques concerning a spoof where President Barack Obama is dressed as Elvis, a singing cowboy character. Some fans thought this image was racist, but others laughed and joined in with the ridicule. In other words, even though they understand the racist nature of the narrative most are essentially in on the joke so it is acceptable. Distinct comparisons are made to the upper-class life of Harvard University students and Bridgeport, Connecticut where they have been ranked among the 10 dirtiest cities in America. Sexuality in this episode is conflicting as you have two straight men about the have gay sex. Many fans were very uncomfortable with the movement away from the normal structure of gender and sexuality.

## *Conclusion*

The function of parody in *Family Guy* enables Seth MacFarlane to get away with a narrative that is very stereotypical, sexist, and offensive. As evidenced through the audience response on Twitter some reconcile the problematic content with their enjoyment of the text in order to continue to watch it. The show largely relies on the nostalgia of intertextuality allowing it to insert current events as part of the animated storyline.

Animation and parody gives *Family Guy* the space to increase the level of insensitivity and ridicule. It is a space that would not be accepted on a live-action sitcom like *Modern Family*. The audience seemed to enjoy the moments of ridicule and even engaged in tweets that were racist, sexist, and homophobic themselves. In some ways, audiences played on Twitter mimicking the ability to be like Peter and the boys.

## CHAPTER NINE: DISSCUSSION

“Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things. (Hall, 1997, p. 15)

Television and social media are blending together, and creating a synergistic relationship that serves to extend audience practices. Social media has evolved from a selective communicative platform, reserved more or less for younger users, to an expected communication platform that extends to all demographics. This relationship has created a new space for viewers to share their experiences with each other, connect with creators of the text, and interact with members of the media industry as well. This is a space that offers a broad landscape for audience studies beyond traditional models. Specifically, the examination of online communities, and the more instant and unfiltered responses to the text.

This study operates within that new space as an analysis of how two popular network television sitcoms link to their Twitter fans. The aim was to examine these sitcoms and social media because that connection has not had the same attention as other genres like dramas and news. A number of studies have emerged surrounding Twitter responses to TV dramas (Dmochowski, Bezdek, Abelson, Johnson, Schumacher, & Parra, 2014), reality TV shows (Tully & Tuwei, 2016; Bruns, 2011), and several concerning TV news (Kumpel, Karnowski & Keyling,

2015; Bruns & Burgess, 2012; Jahng & Littau, 2015), but there has been a gap in the scholarship when it comes to the Twitter discourse surrounding TV sitcoms.

This dissertation is significant look at sitcom media content offering more about the ideology of the text and less about the physicality of the device. The goal of this study was to begin an interrogation of the relationship that is developing between two prominent forms of media, sitcoms and Twitter, as both play an interesting role in the everyday lives of viewers. Twitter was selected because as a social media site it offers a more public presence than any other. Also, I was lucky to find open availability as I collected the large Twitter datasets for this study. That ability has increasingly become more difficult and costly to access.

Cohen (1991) has argued in his research for the importance of analyzing the media because of its impact on the viewing audience. The theoretical framework of media relevancy among Twitter fans enables me to explore social media as part of the communication process as it evolves and changes. The answers to the following research questions will be explained in the discussion below.

RQ1: How are masculinity, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality represented on *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* and what are the common themes, patterns, and hegemonic ideologies appearing among Twitter fans in relation to these representations?

RQ2: In what way does the notion of personal, communal, and societal relevancy connect with the Twitter discourse concerning representations?

RQ3: How are the concepts of satire, parody, and breaking the fourth wall negotiated among Twitter fans?

RQ4: Are there other important and interesting issues surrounding fandom, representation, and relevance connected to *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*?

*Common themes and patterns concerning representation of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality for Modern Family and Family Guy.*

### *Masculinity*

This study revealed that there are specific themes and patterns within the primary representations presented by *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* and, for the most part, these themes were recognized and often tweeted by Twitter fans. One example is the notion of patriarchy presented through gender stereotypes in both shows. While each show has the opportunity to deconstruct gender absolutes presenting diverse masculine identities, hegemonic masculinity tends to be absolute, and it is often presented not as a negotiation but as a necessary identity.

Masculinity has been a constructed ideal associated with American family sitcoms for some time, particularly narrow representations of the male buffoon. Today there are more diverse male identities (Fiske, 2011), but unfortunately, that variation of masculinities is usually overshadowed by the prominence of the traditional male patriarchal stereotype.

What masculine representations in *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* promote when it comes to masculinity is the need to fit into the norm. So, even though both sitcoms offer a range of male representations, the traditional patriarchal male image reigns supreme. For example, *Modern Family* includes Mitch and Cam, a gay couple, a unique and interesting twist. Yet, it is Phil, the traditional father figure and Jay, the stereotypical, wealthy buffoon married to a younger woman who most Twitter fans embrace. The same problem exists in *Family Guy* as Peter, a blue collar worker, husband, father, and a male buffoon is the center of the *Family Guy* universe. Chris, the oldest son is not very smart, Quagmire one of Peter's best friends is an insensitive

playboy, and other friends, Joe, a disabled policeman or Cleveland, an African-American family man are not developed with major roles. It is Stewie, the gay baby, and Brian the talking male dog who are given more substantial roles.

Among many Twitter fans support remains with traditional male representations. A number of the audience members expressed a connection with Phil as a good father figure on *Modern Family*. Jay represented a more-evolved male buffoon, and the audience showed a more lukewarm response to his character on the show. Mitch and Cam were promoted as different or “other.” As early as 1995, Connell pointed out that, “gay masculinity is the most conspicuous, but it’s not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy” (p. 79).

Although animated, *Family Guy* also offered this same problematic in masculine representation with images that were even more extreme. One key difference concerning the two shows was the negativity of Twitter responses. As a parody, *Family Guy* presented more offensive content. The unique comfort level may have come from the fact that it is an animated show. Some fans felt it was acceptable to offer tweets that were just as offensive as the show like overt sexual jokes and racial slurs.

For the three episodes studied, representations of unhealthy masculine identities actually encompassed much of the discourse among *Family Guy* Twitter fans. They recognized the nature of these diverse, thematic masculinities, and understood that the storyline was purposely over the top. So for example, the ridiculous suggestion that baby Stewie is gay or the fact that the most intelligent mind in the show is Brian, the talking, family dog became acceptable components of the show.

According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity works as an ideological negotiation that is able to thrive in a patriarchal, capitalistic society. The examination of these two sitcoms linked to Twitter responses helps us understand how that negotiation takes place. Findings surprisingly suggest that the celebratory notion of viewers as an active audience is complex. Even though interpretive audiences have the free will to decide, it is possible that there remains a guiding principle of acceptance and support that makes up the nature of fandom.

### *Race/Ethnicity*

Representations of race in *Modern Family* include: Lily, the Vietnamese child of the gay couple Mitch and Cam, plus Gloria, Jay's young Colombian wife, along with Gloria's sister, mother, and son. The main racial/ethnic representation in *Family Guy* was seen in the stereotypical episode about Muslims as terrorists.

Despite the power of satire/parody both shows failed to deconstruct stereotypes and biases, instead, encouraging the audience to accept problematic societal norms. Gloria is not only sexualized, but her ethnic background is consistently made fun of. Even when there were a number of Twitter fans in the *Modern Family* audience who tweeted about their frustrations with the portrayal of Colombians on the show, most chose to endure the stereotypes. Only a few vowed to stop watching the show.

*Family Guy* did not feature any main characters this season that would be considered as racial/ethnic minorities. Yet, there were still convenient jokes that relied on stereotypes concerning racial/ethnic minorities. Particularly the episode "Turban Cowboy" which brought abundant stereotypes of people from the Middle East. The episode presented depictions of

foreign men with long toenails, foreign women treated as slaves, and the exposure of a Muslim terrorist sleeper cell.

Neither sitcom offers the audience a true critical discourse when it comes to representation of race or ethnicity. For the most part, viewers are primed to engage in the same type of behavior/discourse that is depicted on the show. And, despite the recognition by some members of the audience that this content may be problematic, most still watched. When the audience can recognize the problems, but continues to support the show anyway it is difficult to challenge that program. Based on the ratings process there is no separation between people who watch and love the show versus people who watch and hate it. Both groups are watching.

### *Class*

Not only do both sitcoms continue to shore up patriarchy, they also strengthen the narrative of white privilege. Television for many Americans is a form of escape from lived reality. *Modern Family* represents a picturesque version of the upper middle class family in America. The three families on the show are representative of typical white America, and reflect that specific class position. In other words, the show benefits from the ideological class structure often associated with white privilege. In fact, there were a few classed critiques leveled by Twitter fans about the nature of representation and its relationship to viewer taste.

*Family Guy* reflects a lower class family. Some might stereotype them as not highly educated, “white trash.” The fan’s response to this type of low-brow engagement has been discussed by Silas Ezell (2016). Since viewers tend to be younger they are more likely to have a lower income and be less educated. Ezell suggests that this allows Peter to make sexist, racist, or

even homophobic jokes and still gain some resonance with the tropes as they are understood and accepted by the less politically correct audience.

It is interesting that these two sitcoms represent different class positions, yet they are both widely popular among similar audiences. According to Nielsen (2012), predominantly white males 18-35 years old are the key demographic. The extreme language and topics presented by the parodic text in *Family Guy* tended to produce tweets using more broken language, slang and offensive slurs, while the *Modern Family* audience often tweeted in more complete sentences with less negativity.

Both groups expressed class in their tweets as it related to their daily routine, their happiness, and even some elements of escapism. These two shows are popular among young men so masculine identity could be less stable and that could bring about a need to connect with more comfortable, hegemonic or patriarchal roles. Today, there is a feeling of loss among white people, especially straight, white men because they see themselves as continually challenged by other groups. A Harvard and Tufts (Norton & Sommers, 2011) study found that white people believe that they are losing when others are gaining. Progress according to these respondents is linked to inequality at their expense.

### *Sexuality*

The old adage of sex sells readily relates to both sitcoms whether it is subtle innuendo or straight-forward sexual content. The reality of Gloria's large breasts makes its way into the narrative of *Modern Family* on a regular basis. Unfortunately, as a hypersexualized, Latina female Gloria's role confirms the patriarchal norms that exist.

While the sex lives of the adults on *Modern Family* are primarily left to innuendo and some discussion, couples are often shown to be affectionate with one another. The only hyper-focus when it comes to sexuality is in Jay's sex life with his young, trophy wife Gloria. There are a few storylines that play on the flirting and sexual banter between Claire and Phil. And, although there is a continual recognition of Mitch and Cam's sexual orientation, the narrative is rarely from a positive sexual perspective. As a matter of fact, the showrunners have been criticized for the lack of physical intimacy between Mitch and Cam in the series (Hudson, 2010; Rosenberg, 2010; Blankenship, 2011; Pierce, 2014).

Twitter fans of *Modern Family* made numerous tweets that included misogynistic remarks toward the female characters on the show. In particular, most remarks were made about Gloria's boobs or the fantasy of sex with one of the Dunphy daughters or Claire. Themes from these three episodes studied leaned more on the side of misogyny rather than uplifting the ideals of partnership, women, and the LGBT community. The Twitter discourse, in response to each episode, tended to accept that degrading dialogue despite its sexist and homophobic nature. A number of tweets about Gloria called for more boob jokes, and Mitch and Cam's gay relationship was seen as a problem.

*Family Guy* was much more sexually explicit than *Modern Family*. The characters openly engaged in sexual activity, and there were also sexual gags at the expense of members of the LGBT community, mostly gay men. Gay men were usually positioned within a space of ridicule. For example, in the "Total Recall" episode where Peter talks about taking Lois to see *Shakespeare in the Park*, the park happens to be a place where gay men are having sex in the wooded areas.

Sex and homosexuality was also a prominent theme in “Giggity Wife,” where Quagmire pretends to be gay to get out of his marriage to a prostitute. This results in a situation that almost led up to two straight men having anal sex. Twitter fans actually repeated the negative language, plus made over the top homophobic jokes during this show. They ridiculed Meg about her appearance and praised Lois for accepting her role as Peter’s sex object. The narrative of the show seemed to condition a supportive response, rather than a progressive critique of such issues.

When these kinds of sitcoms shore up patriarchy under a privileged structure for straight white men they leave plenty of space for sexist banter concerning women and gays. It is also easier to diminish the LGBT community to a joke when none of the characters are openly written as LGBT themselves or when the LGBT characters are constantly mocked.

Both texts featured Twitter responses that were sexist and homophobic. Many tweets objectified women and demonized gay men. Unfortunately, it is this reflection of accepted discursive practices within mainstream society that makes it important to note that there was more acceptance than critique amongst the Twitter audience. On this public forum fans readily shared their thoughts concerning both shows including negative and stereotypical comments that tended to normalized the content of each show.

*Impact of personal, communal, and societal relevance in Twitter discourse based on Modern Family and Family Guy representations.*

This research found that personal, communal, and societal relevance offered a strong, complex connection between members of the audience and individual characters/storylines

featured on both *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*. In many cases that relevance was tied to some notion of reality. For example, members of the *Family Guy* audience submitted tweets that were often offensive in direct relation to the offensive nature of the episode. For *Modern Family* the relevance seemed to have more of a connection to personal identity and self-reflection. The overall argument here is that the *Modern Family* audience appeared to have a more intimate connection with the characters and the narrative of the show, while the *Family Guy* audience displayed a more integral connection to the characters and the narratives. This does not mean that the audience for one text received more pleasure or disgust from the text than the other. Quite the opposite, the complexity of engagement occurred at different levels of personal interaction.

For the most part, both *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* demonstrated resonance with the audience through their discourse on Twitter. This analysis revealed individual connections with the text, reflections about the text/narrative itself from a communal perspective, and implications for the greater impact of the text based on societal relevance. These findings suggest that both sitcoms offer narratives that go beyond casual viewing as they connect with the everyday lives of Twitter fans. It is also important to note that sometimes the levels of relevance were specific to the “place and time” when these shows were popular.

Through relevance, this study demonstrates that media content can influence audience members. Fandom goes beyond the simple “I love/like this.” Many of these Twitter fans were engaged with the text as active viewers. Some found relevance in the text, while others used it as a platform for escape. The richness of their responses varied because of these different connections. Fans seemed to be willing to share more on Twitter if they took great pleasure in the text or wanted to further express disgust in it. Additionally, mediocre responses were plentiful too such as, “I love or like this show,” but they included little to no context, and

therefore did not serve as the basis for this research. The meaning provided from the tweets analyzed focused on a rich connection between the text and Twitter fans.

### *Personal Relevance*

For personal relevance, both sitcoms connected with viewers in distinct ways. Twitter fans discussed ideals of family, identity, and relationships more often in *Modern Family*. Phil's character as a father figure was especially relevant to many in the audience. Some wanted a father like Phil, some wanted to be just like Phil, and one fan wanted to marry a man like Phil. There were also fans that expressed personal racial and sexual concerns, a few to the extent of vowing not to watch the show any longer.

The personal connection for the *Family Guy* audience was not as emotional. Maybe because of the animated nature of the show, Twitter fans did not seem to take this show as seriously. Instead, these findings suggest that many supported and accepted the misogynistic and racist notions presented. There was a clear difference in personal relevance for Twitter fans of the live-action, family sitcom, *Modern Family* versus the animated, family sitcom *Family Guy* even though both are fictional narratives.

It is important to note that personal relevance among fans proved important when the decision was made to kill Brian in *Family Guy*. Based on the outcry from upset Twitter fans, MacFarlane eventually brought Brian back. Unfortunately, these same fans fail to be as vocal in response to the continual racist, sexist, and homophobic material in the show. When examining personal relevancy fans did not pay as much attention to the broad base of ideas in the show. They were more focused on how the show related to their individual lives often ignoring the fact that many representations were based on negative stereotypes.

### *Communal Relevance*

Communal relevance was important within the Twitter discourse when it came to the narrative and characters of the show. Fans tweeted to fellow fans about relevant storylines, quoted various characters from the episodes, and even offered community comments. Both shows demonstrated significant communal engagement. The tweets surrounding *Modern Family* tended to be more uplifting and celebratory of family, whereas the *Family Guy* tweets more often included offensive quotes or racist/sexist jokes. For both shows, the audience seemed to be more accepting of the oppressive, patriarchal behaviors rather than working to critique them.

For communal relevancy fans worked on fitting into the group. They tweeted about specific dialogue and scenes in the show, sharing their experience with others in the interpretive community. Twitter fans understood and identified with various problematic elements from the texts. For example, tweets included the n-word, as well as curse words, acts like getting stoned or drinking Jack and Pepsi were tweeted, and some were even excited by the racist and sexist jokes.

### *Societal Relevance*

Finally, fans sometimes went in a different direction away from the show itself linking other examples of pop culture. As the major component of societal relevance they showed interest and concern with broad connections outside of the text. Societal relevance extends the text bringing greater social implications. The audience's response drew away from personal reflection and from communal cohesion to embrace larger features borrowed from pop culture. For example, when *Modern Family*, uses the plot of *The Godfather* in the "Fulgencio" episode, the audience responded with extreme enthusiasm. They loved the fact that the narrative was part of a bigger mainstream experience. There are also examples of the *Family Guy* audience

participating in this broader process as well when the Brian's character was compared to a real news story about a woman having sex with a dog or the mention of pop culture icons like *The Cosby Show*, Clay Aiken and *Star Wars*.

Both audiences from, *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*, showed an interest in societal relevance. In *Modern Family*, Twitter fans not only latched on to *The Godfather* theme, they were also energized and upset by the roles of the Latino and gay characters. *Family Guy* tweets demonstrated societal relevance involving comments about the extent of violence, sexism, racism, and ignorance in the shows narratives, but, at the same time, they seem to delight in the crazy that is *Family Guy*.

*The influence of satire, parody, animation, and breaking the fourth wall as negotiated among Twitter fans in Modern Family and Family Guy?*

“Humor and comedy, then, often present instances when what is on-screen is illogical, nonsensical, and surreal, yet the message being conveyed is wholly logical, sensible, and intimately concerned with reality. Arguably the clearest examples of such humor are satire and parody.”

(Gray, 2008, p.118).

It is clear that both *Modern Family* is set up s a satire of the American family life and *Family Guy* is setup as a parody. *Modern Family* represents normal attributes for traditional success in American life while *Family Guy* represents a more skewed notion and a simpler existence. *Family Guy* is not only a parody, but it is also an animated show. Parody, according to

Gray (2006), has the ability to extend the engagement of the viewer with the text by working within the framework of their contemporary knowledge base. In other words, someone without the knowledge base would not understand many of the references made in the show. That doesn't mean they won't enjoy it, but they may read it in a different way.

The satirical elements of *Modern Family* seem less reliant on ridicule and jokes than *Family Guy*. Maybe this is because the substance of the human narrative in *Modern Family* takes on a more serious nature over the animated narrative in *Family Guy*. For *Modern Family* Twitter fans offered both support and disdain for various issues. For example, many supported the traditional role of Phil as father because Phil obviously loves his family, but others were upset by the racist caricatures concerning Colombians, along with the sexist jokes about Sophia Vergara and the gay couple.

Therefore, for *Modern Family* it is interesting to note that while some Twitter fans were supportive, others shared conscientious tweets that were critical of the show. On the other hand, for Twitter fans for *Family Guy* nothing seemed over the line. Most Twitter fans showed support for the negative and offensive representations in the show. One fan explained in a tweet that he loved *Family Guy*, racism, sexism, and all.

Stereotypes work well within the realm of satire and parody because they are commonly understood. It could be argued that the success of both sitcoms relies on the acceptable nature of representing stereotypes for various groups in society. The Twitter discourse for both *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* demonstrated the acceptance of many convenient stereotypes and problematic themes.

One thing to note, in relation to satire and parody is that *Family Guy* seems to exist in a space that was created for an immature audience. These findings suggest that Twitter fans

understand and accept the extreme world created by Seth MacFarlane, so they are able to rationalize the negative and offensive behavior. As mentioned earlier, what MacFarlane gets away with in *Family Guy* would not be tolerated in a live-action sitcom like *Modern Family*. The parody endures also because of the world of make believe that is associated with animation.

The audience reaction on Twitter for both sitcoms illustrates that these narratives have the potential to influence viewer perspectives and responses. Each episode has the ability to normalize or change behavior, yet it seems that Twitter fans are mainly guided into a process of acceptance and consent.

### *Breaking the Fourth Wall*

A unique element on *Modern Family* that should be discussed involves “breaking the fourth” wall. This involves a character from the show directly speaking to the televisual audience. Viewers have come to enjoy this experience when watching *Modern Family* each week. Through isolated character confessionals on camera, *Modern Family* embeds certain messages as part of the larger narrative in each episode. Because of the ability to “break the fourth” wall so seamlessly, Twitter fans are allowed to feel like they are part of the narrative and it may help them to develop an even closer connection with the characters, and the storyline.

When Auer and Davis (1991) analyzed the relationship of the audience against the existence of “breaking the fourth wall” in popular television shows, they explained that this approach offered a stronger connection between the audience and the text dating back to popular theatre in the 1920’s. Today, it has become a very effective way to construct a fictional narrative that shares an impactful connection with the audience. During the confessional scenes, the fans are made to feel as though the character is actually communicating with them. This connection is

often emotional, and may result in a deeper relationship between the audience and the characters that calls for some practice of critique. Phil's or Jay's ability to be humble and sensitive during a confessional scene may actually strike a chord with the audience and create a more serious response from Twitter fans.

*Other important and interesting issues surrounding fandom, representation, and relevance connected to Modern Family and Family Guy?*

#### *Passive Tweets*

This study found that social media is gaining traction among the televisual audience. Twitter has exploded following its launch in 2006, but it is important to note that many of those tweets are still fairly passive. Even though examples of these kinds of tweets were not included in the tables, passive tweets from fans watching *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* were plentiful. For example, these are the tweets where fans said that they “love the show” or “watch the show all the time” or “really like a specific character.” Since these tweets offered only general information, they were not considered significant to the issues studied; masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

Of course, passive viewing is common with television audiences. It doesn't necessarily involve the type of focused viewing that would lead to a substantive connection or engagement with the text. However, the fact that a fan would take the time to send even a passive tweet versus another fan that just sits and watches the program is still an indication of some level of relevant interaction. As discussed earlier, many Twitter fans did establish a personal, communal,

and social relevance to the text as they actively tweeted about what they were interested in or excited about.

When applying Gray's (2008) categorical classification of fan types (Fan, Non-Fan and Anti-Fan), it was clear in this analysis that Twitter fans expressed both passive and passionate ties to *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*. While both fan bases exhibited enthusiastic responses that seemed to suggest a close connection with the narrative of the show, as well as the main characters, there were also some Twitter responses, especially for *Modern Family*, that seriously critiqued racial and sexual stereotypes that crossed the line.

### *Intertextuality*

Twitter fans understood that intertextuality was present and relevant in certain episodes of *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*. They caught on to a variety of products, information and outside programming that tied into each episode in various ways. In order to directly resonate with the audience the story and characters sometimes moved beyond expectations by drawing on mediated memories from pop culture.

The Twitter discourse affirmed the recognition and negotiation of such images and messages with links to the larger society. Fans showed that they could easily draw on pop culture commonalities that were reinserted into the main narrative including celebrity names, products and other media. Often these intertextual icons brought a strong response, even when it came to the more negative and unhealthy images or messages.

Since Twitter first came on the scene as a platform for celebrity branding and self-promotion it makes sense that the larger pop culture connection is central among Twitter fans. Within these interpretive communities, fans are able to share an experience or interact with a

favorite star. Ashton Kutcher made headlines when he told CNN he would beat them as the first Twitter account with one million followers and won (Fletcher, 2009). With celebrities serving as the early adopters of Twitter, the platform quickly grew nationally and internationally. People readily enjoy the ability to tweet with their favorite celebrities. When Khloe Kardashian tweeted before the “Fulgencio” episode of *Modern Family*, a number of fans welcomed her to the community, and expressed excitement that they could share the experience with her.

Retweeting gives the text an extended life as viewers are able to tweet, then respond to members of the community while they are watching the show in real time on screen. Tweeting and retweeting demonstrates how fans interact in the community, asking questions and making comments. As a matter of fact, the Khloe Kardashian tweet was retweeted over 1,000 times melding the Kardashian brand through this one tweet with the large contingent of *Modern Family* fans.

Other examples of celebrity interaction include: when Eric Stonestreet, who plays Cam on *Modern Family*, tweeted to fans about watching the show nude and when Nolan Gould, who plays Luke, also on *Modern Family*, tweeted for everyone to check him out in the latest episode of the show. These types of shameless promotions by celebrities can enhance their connection with fans. There is also encouragement for fans to tweet to the actors and showrunners of each show as part of their support of the show.

Another interesting celebrity note involves the success of a show like *Family Guy* and how it has led Seth MacFarlane to create spin-offs such as other sitcoms and movies, plus landed him a coveted hosting gig for the Oscars. Seth MacFarlane has become a brand all his own and each media text is an extension of that brand.

## *Parody and Satire*

Given the assumptions brought forth around the nature of parody and satire, this study has explored the way audiences make their own meaning from the text and share that meaning through tweets. Their tweets make inferences to the complexity of their readings as each text becomes resistant, complacent or even praise-worthy. The result is that there can never be one audience reading of any parodic/satirical representation. The nature of the genre is meant to deconstruct, while also upholding existing norms that reflect the mainstream. This is evident in the responses from members of the audience on Twitter. A conscious effort to both celebrate and take the text to task when it is problematic was noted.

Both *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* are in the position, through parody/satire, to be both subversive and hegemonic as fans negotiate, interpret, and engage in the text. This does not mean that the meaning-making process resides solely within the encapsulated texts. Fans are doing the work themselves by formulate meaning against their own lived experiences and understandings. Each response links with the interpretive community influencing the nature of fan practices that surround any given text.

For example, it was clear that Twitter fans had a great deal of adulation for both *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*, but they also had the ability to exercise criticism. Besides online fan communities and, of course Facebook, Twitter allows fans to openly express themselves. This is how Khloe Kardashian can use her fandom of *Modern Family* as PR for her brand simply tweeting about an upcoming episode.

Fans can engage in celebratory discourse, while also acknowledging the problems of the meaning associated with a representation. Responses from both shows challenge the notion that fan interactions are always positive or celebratory. Instead their discourse is a negotiation of

meaning coming from the text. *Modern Family* presented an antagonism between the celebration of a progressive text with members of the audience frustrated by the representation of racist and gay stereotypes. This antagonism was also found in the responses to *Family Guy*, but to a lesser degree. *Family Guy* was allowed to bend the rules more through the structure created by animation.

Drawing from Fiske (2010, 2011) and other's work in the realm of fan studies, there was a shift in the articulated interpretation of each text. This study examined the nuances of what some fan studies has failed to address by providing less substantive works focused on celebratory academic narratives surrounding a given text. Instead of relentless praise, the results of this work demonstrated there is indeed a constant negotiation happening between the viewers and the text.

While it may be relevant that viewer choice plays a role in the success or failure of a televisual text; that does not mean that choice is based solely on praise or admiration. Instead, there is a disruption that occurs between the text and meaning of the text. This disruption allows for viewers to exercise their free will. There were various levels of engagement and relevance in their responses to both *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*. Audience responses are polysemic, sometimes disrupting the normative meaning, but more often accepting it.

### *The Male Audience*

Both *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* were shown to have a high concentration of viewership, according to Nielsen (2012) ratings, for 18-35 year-old middle-class men. This was evidenced in the nature of the discourse expressed in the tweets, especially for *Family Guy*. It seems obvious that the narrative text of *Family Guy* works within the space of a parody for young, middle-class men. The jokes presented on *Family Guy* are often on the level of immature

humor that could easily be associated with boys and young men. For *Modern Family*, the jokes featured in the form of satire are more developed, and could arguably be called intellectual at times. That is to say it is interesting to question why these two shows have the same male audience.

Both shows are based on the traditions of patriarchy, and the notion that achieving success is the American dream. The Pritchard's and Dunphy's on *Modern Family* have achieved an upper-class lifestyle that is reserved to a small segment of the American population. The lifestyle enjoyed by the Griffin's on *Family Guy* resonates with the struggle in our current economy as lower-class Americans to attempt to keep up with the middle-class.

The common theme is that men watching these two shows are in the position of negotiating content that celebrates heterosexist behavior. The sexualized nature of the women featured on *Modern Family*, including the Dunphy daughters that now all grown up, demonstrates how women are positioned within a modern patriarchal environment. Similarly, *Family Guy* participates in the celebration of heterosexist behavior through its male character's obsession with idealized female bodies and a proliferation of homophobic jokes.

### *The Bromance*

The bromance is tied to a similar limited masculine ideal and it has become a prominent part of pop culture in America today. From films to TV shows, the bromance is a profitable enterprise that supports the traditional notion of masculinity. These contemporary representations of male relationships are able to cross the boundaries of general acquaintance, while they also guard against intimacy. In other words, these are closer male relationships where men get

together, and talk openly about their personal lives. However, a policing is necessary based on the idea that a relationship between two men that seems too close may be perceived as gay.

The most comprehensive text on this subject is C.J. Pascoe's *Dude You're a Fag*. Through ethnographic research, Pascoe unearths the nature of how masculinity is policed to shore up absolute ideals of masculinity. This involves heterosexual guys monitoring each other to making sure they do not cross the boundaries. This means, the bromance is a male connection that goes beyond the traditional definition of manhood, but still maintains a fine line when it comes to perceptions of homosexuality. This privilege to play with identity in film and television is typically afforded to straight white men.

As discussed earlier in this analysis, much of the relational interactions for Peter unfold between he and his male friends. This can be classified as the epitome of the bromance. Peter meets regularly with the guys at The Drunken Clam. He also goes on various adventures with his buddies. The guys maintain their relationship by doing "guy" things that define them as men. These actions continually shores up their identity and privilege.

#### *Phil v. Jay as Father Figures*

Throughout this research, there was evidence of a strong affinity toward the character of Phil on *Modern Family*. The tweets largely reinforce that feeling as members of the audience testified to having or being a father like Phil. From the perspective of the canon that has built masculinity studies alongside the evolved ideals of masculinity in American society, Phil represents where the ideal of masculinity sits today. He is at the top of the patriarchal spiral, yet displays some sensitivity and warmth. At the same time, Jay's character is resonate of the

traditional notions of masculinity that have long positioned the role of men in the American household as bold and in control. This is key in the American dream.

Phil is positioned in a pro-feminist society of equal partnership between a man and a woman while also striving to be the heroic husband/father figure. It's fine that he does not live up to this unrealistic expectation of being everyone's savior because the narrative always positions his heart in the right place. Phil is also more emotional than Jay and, as a result, the narrative of the show continually portrays him as vying for acceptance from Jay who openly rejects Phil.

The importance of this is that it means we have made some progress in understanding that men are not monolithic. Much like Archie Bunker and "Meathead" worked through a negotiation of differing male identities on *All in the Family*. Jay and Phil present two generations of white male privilege to the audience with all its flaws and insecurities. Jay is a dated ideal of masculinity achieving the all-American dream, yet his character must also empathize with the new realities of acceptance as society has changed around him. This includes the identity of his son who is a member of the LGBT community married to his partner Cam with an adopted child Lily. The television marriage coincided with the legality of gay marriage in the U.S.

Fans come to a position of idolizing Phil while acknowledging Jay's patriarchal position. Neither Jay nor Phil are ever presented as a monolith of masculinity, but that also resonates with how ideals of masculinity have evolved. They have been negotiated by the society that also embraces the meaning behind them.

## *Fan Studies*

Fan studies have been consistently celebratory in their engagement with the text and analysis of audience practices. Henry Jenkins (2006a, 2006b) championed this work with his articulation of participatory culture through media convergence. While convergence has brought fans together with various texts in a way no one could have ever imagined; there is also a space created for resistance to the text.

Where fans once wrote letters with little to no response, or attended big conventions, they now have the ability to instantly react and potentially get a response to their issues. Regardless of the response, their reaction can be published on social media for the world to see.

## *Conclusion*

*Family Guy* parodies the opening sequence of *Modern Family* at beginning of the “Total Recall” episode. The parody is done frame by frame featuring each familial group before each episode of *Modern Family* merging the success of both shows. This study argues that the popularity of these texts involves a complex interaction that includes: representations, fan relevance, satire or parody development, and intertextual conditions. With common knowledge of popular culture and social norms, members of the audience freely view each text, then exercise their privilege of free speech by openly tweeting their responses on Twitter.

## CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

“If anything, we can see that an individual text is capable of both inflections; often, progressive messages are smuggled into conservative texts, and vice versa. Close analysis of individual texts allows us to see how class, gender, race, the family and culture are presented in television sitcoms, often in complicated ways. When we watch sitcoms, we are watching ourselves; and when we deconstruct them, we become more aware of how we are constructed.” (Morreale, 2003, p. xix)

As television viewing has changed, so has the structure of the audience and their abilities/desires to interact with the text. This dissertation indicates that through social media many fans are encouraged to watch TV in real time as part of their daily routine and share that experience with others.

Representations of masculinity, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality were examined from a critical lens for two selected sitcoms *Modern Family* and *Family Guy*. Twitter as a re-imagined public sphere enhances Habermas’s (1989) original notion. Twitter is a democratic space where social capital can be built (Putnam, 2000) and where fans use their social capital to interact. Within the public sphere an interpretive community can extend it’s position an gain greater voice.

This study found that the relevancy of audience engagement on Twitter can be significant. Tweets are the reflection of an active audience. Fans clearly have a vested interest in

the content of the shows they love and hate. They express that interest by joining the Twitter community and live-tweeting during the episode. Once the episode is over the Twitter discourse ends pretty quickly. But, during the show fans are able to connect with the community and share comments about the new episode mixed with shared knowledge or “nerdiness” surrounding the text in real time (Blaisola & Carviou, 2013).

Shared knowledge means that cultural memories can resonate within interpretive communities, especially if what they know is commonplace (Neiger, Meyers, & Zandberg, 2011). These memories are part of what makes the narrative in each sitcom relevant. Twitter fans know the characters, the storyline, and the context of the show, so they feel comfortable interacting within their community of friends through Twitter.

What is interesting about collective memory is that it also works as part of the link to parody and satire. Based on the consciousness associated with an idea, situation, or character in these shows, parody and satire operate under that familiar construction where history is allowed to comfortably repeat itself. Unfortunately, as Twitter fans showed, collective memory can also include problematic stereotypes and negative stigmas that encourage little critique when effectively built into the narrative of the show. Such representations in collective memory tend to be less a product of negotiation and more a reinforcement of the limited representations presented.

Celebrities, actors and showrunners tweeting to the audience and vice versa allows for layers of instantaneous fan activity. Social media, therefore, provides layers of communication, not simply the Twitter base, but live-chats on Reddit, or a Facebook Live interactive opportunity. Social media also means enhanced engagements through second and even third screening interactivity with fan experience. Twitter represents the beginning of this enhanced engagement

with online communities extending into more public spaces and linking with other social media sites.

The findings of this study suggest that there are distinct issues surrounding the nature of representation in television sitcoms that should be addressed. The long canon of research on television programming reveals problems with representation across gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexual lines. As long as representation is designed through the economic goals of capitalism to reach a wide audience changes will be difficult.

Yet, the more segmented audiences made available through cable and satellite television may offer hope. More space is opened for diverse and non-traditional representations than ever before even though, those shows must still bring an economic profit. Since television is a business, so the people are watching important for the show to generate profits. If through advertising dollars and later syndication a show finds success, there is a good chance it will stay on the air for a long time regardless of problematic content.

“Nobody regards these fan activities as a magical cure for the social ills of post-industrial capitalism. They are no substitution for meaningful change, but they can be successful to build popular support for such change, to challenge the power of the culture industry to construct the common sense of a mass society, and to restore a much-needed to the struggle against subordination.”

(Jenkins, 1998, p. 104)

Despite the potential of social media to connect fans to unique products, this research shows that much of the same still exists concerning the content on the main broadcast networks.

Gray (2008) asserts that sitcoms are intended to mimic everyday life. If the Twitter discourse for *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* analyzed in this study, reinforce representations that rely on stereotypes and problematic racist and sexist ideology then an active audience does not mean what we thought it meant.

Members of the audience for each show were active in offering up their viewpoints and participating with the interpretive community, but they were not active in their critique of images and messages. These active television viewers of sitcoms demonstrated that there is a need to further explore the meaning-making process that unfolds each week.

The Twitter discourse for these network selected sitcoms was relevant from a personal, communal, and societal perspective. Some went beyond the passive tweet, loving or hating each episode to providing unedited commentary. There was evidence among Twitter fans that their support of a program is deeper than expected which warrants more study.

“*Modern Family*” is the only comedy in the category that feels like a throwback—even though, in terms of on-screen representation, it’s not without its revolutionary bent. It’s a testament to the rapid evolution of comedy that the seventh season of a previously groundbreaking comedy now feels like a dated relic.

(Saraiya, 2016)

The quote above came from a recent article titled “Comedy Takes Charge in the Golden Age of Television” published August 17, 2016 in *Variety*. It reconciles the current state of *Modern Family* in today’s satirical landscape. While *Modern Family* succeeded in including

some diverse representations of family on network sitcoms such as the gay couple, it was not seen as revolutionary. Instead, the show made only a soft narrative leap forward still relying on the traditional Dunphy family to center the narrative, and shore up previous traditions of patriarchal representation.

*Family Guy* relied on the nostalgia of a world where straight white men have traditionally been situated in positions of agency therefore lacking real progress too. As a male buffoon, Peter reinforces a dated representation of patriarchy under the animated structure of parody. Despite the suggestion from MacFarlane that the show is mocking offensive issues like pedophilia, terrorism, rape, abortion, disabilities, AIDS, and domestic violence (Nguyen, 2015), it seems most in the audience do not see the critique. Many instead offer support for those derogatory storylines.

According to Jenkins (1992, 2006a, 2006b), the convergence of media has brought about audience participation in a way that allows for new texts to immediately form, and become popular amongst the masses. A tweet, Facebook post, Instagram photo, and so on have the ability to connect an active and captivated public. This convergence has allowed for the melding of the worlds of media production.

Both *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* have been able to take advantage of the exploding social media phenomenon, making fans a very important part of the show's development. They specialize in affirming fan experience, encouraging support of the text through interpretive communities, and motivating fans to pay attention to other pertinent issues. For example, USA hosted a fan appreciation day for *Modern Family* in 2013. The campaign was called Make Our Family Yours (MOFY), and fans were encouraged to upload testimonials inspired by the series, as well as share favorite scenes and character lines. Their goal was to spotlight the fans and build

the community (TV by the Numbers, 2013). MacFarlane uses Twitter to move beyond his show. In one case he offers an explanation to his Twitter fans about the Trump phenomenon tweeting that President Trump has the blustery showmanship of a lying conman, and there are plenty of them in Hollywood (Drakeford, 2016).

“Digital media raise a variety of issues as we try to understand them, their place in our lives, and their consequences for our personhood and relationships with others. When they are new, technologies affect how we see the world, our relationships, and our selves. They lead to social and cultural reorganization and reflection.” (Baym, 2010, p. 2)

As a prominent communication tool social media has literally infiltrated almost every area of lived experience in mainstream society today, from what someone is eating for dinner and political views to entertainment connections and exploring sexual lives. As Hall (1982) explains, “...reality could no longer be viewed as simply a given set of facts; it was the result of a particular way of constructing reality” (p. 336).

Social media provides an outlet for participation expanding interpretive communities as they validate fan experience on a public platform. Gaffney and Pushmann suggest that: “Arguably, Twitter’s strength lies in the ability to gain interesting insights from short and often highly context-bound messages, yet these are also difficult to interpret and carry a range of meanings for different stakeholders” (2013, p. 65).

The social media response in this particular study was limited to Twitter with the examination of key words and hashtags. The focus was the interrogation of individual reactions to the selected first-run texts. It is interesting to note that in these sitcoms, there weren't generally intense story arcs that would relegate specific hashtags for the episode besides the official #modernfamily. The only explosion of hashtags was the response to the "Fulgencio" episode where the audience created a number of their own hashtags (#DonPhil, #PhilFather, #godfather, #godfatherforever) in relation to Phil's character as a parody of *The Godfather*. The *Family Guy* audience was active with the official #familyguy hashtag except for "The Giggity Wife" episode where the discursive reaction spread in association with the key words "family" and "guy."

Fans negotiate the existence of diverse portrayals of racial/ethnic identity, as well as gender, and sexual orientation. This research exposes the inconsistencies where many fan studies leave off. By using Twitter as the basis of data the study shows that instead of being overtly celebratory, fans do demonstrate through their tweets that they are not monolithically aligned in appreciation of every element of either text. Fans can also express critique and celebration in unison. As they negotiate their position for each narrative they provide viable information on the meaning-making process.

Therefore, Twitter affords fans the ability to openly participate in the process of negotiation as the text unfolds before them. They have the agency to remain fans of the text or even move along if they find themselves in disagreement with it. This study clearly demonstrated how that freedom is expressed on Twitter. Particularly, for those fans that vowed to not watch the text anymore. The complexity of their responses sheds light on how negotiation works.

Many television shows now invite participation on sites like Twitter and Facebook such as *The Walking Dead*, *The Voice*, and *Glee*. Also, with the release of Facebook Live during the summer of 2016, engagement is increasing through live video chats with the actors and directors featured on popular shows. Twitter and Facebook allow the fans to express their desire to bring back characters or change storylines instantly as mentioned earlier with Brian on *Family Guy*. And when John Oliver on his show, *Last Week Tonight*, asked fans to contact the FCC to complain about not adopting a net neutrality rule they crashed the servers. Finally, a number of television shows such as *Chuck*, *Friday Night Lights*, and *Roswell* have made it back from the ash pile because fans spoke up.

Television is evolving into a greater ideological entity than has ever been known before. As popular broadcast network shows like *Modern Family* and *Family Guy* continue to extend the level of engagement with the audience these shows will hopefully improve. The connection between actors, producers, and fans of both shows during the airing of the episode develops a holistic community.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

As with any study, there were several limitations. First, with the Twitter's API being so strict, there was difficulty getting the data from a reliable source, and exporting it in a timely manner while making sure that it covered exactly 24 hours of content. This meant that I did not have much down time in terms of delivering the data directly to my hard drive for analysis. In the future, it would be beneficial to have continual access to a program's Twitter feeds for better qualitative analysis. But with no funding for this project, I had to work with what was readily

available. For the future, grants could be used to buy datasets directly from Twitter for analysis. This was not an available option when I began the study.

This research and analysis focused on audience response by isolating just a few select episodes of both television shows. For a more complete textual analysis, more episodes could make this research more inclusive. Twitter captures a perspective that is raw and innovative when it comes to audience studies.

Methodologically, there are numerous advantages to conducting a study where the response is immediate. Throughout the course of this study the work involved 100% ecological validity because I did not pursue the responses beyond publicly available tweets. The analysis resides within what was readily posted and available. To take this work further careful planning in direct pursuit of the audience is necessary. In other words, analyzing these texts in connection with Twitter audience responses was valuable. But this was an exploratory analysis and it leaves room for future work that directly interrogates the process through more depth using interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic research.

It also became obvious that men and women viewers were forming parasocial relationships with various characters on these kinds of shows. This notion should be interrogated further through a direct survey or interview surrounding the interpersonal connections between fans, and the characters of their favorite shows. As the social media connection evolves between television programs and audiences it calls for a greater critical awareness of what is actually taking place within that interaction.

The emergence of social media sites has hyped the call for immediate gratification, so there is substantial evidence that fans are still watching their favorite shows when they air, both on cable and network television. This inclusion of additional social media sites, as well as more

television programs on cable and network services invite further exploration given the discursive fan universe.

Another area that would be interesting to examine is social media as related to the Nielsen ratings. Does social media influence Nielsen ratings in any way? How can Nielsen ratings be correlated with social media responses? Of course, not everyone watching is instantly tweeting. But, an analysis of Twitter is a selection of the audience much like the Nielsen ratings. The larger question is whether or not the social media audience can become as powerful as Nielsen in helping us understand the interests of audiences. These questions need to be explored in greater depth, particularly as audience practices continue to change.

There is a complex negotiation that takes place between production, text, and reception (D'Acci, 1994). This study sought to flesh out the connection between the text and audience responses. A further analysis could include a deeper examination of the social and cultural meanings realized behind the production of such texts. The producers take part in the practice of encoding text with cultural meanings (Hall, 2006) with the intention that a relatable audience will decode those meanings in the flow of the text (Williams, 1975).

And, of course, it should be acknowledged that when analyzing discourse at any level sometimes the researcher is unable to effectively explain the connection due to lack of important background information. This did occur in the case of several tweets that involved inside jokes or personal conversations between fans. Yet, typically, tweets intended for the masses usually offered identifiable context even for a researcher who was not familiar with their personal identity.

Finally, there has been some interest in using the literary concept of paratext to describe the impact of social media on traditional media like television (Stanitzek, 2005; Geraghty, 2015).

This would be an interesting future study as a paratext directly connects to the original text in a variety of ways. Paratext serves as an ancillary element surrounding the core text, in this case, it would be the media product or practice. Tweets serve as direct audience feedback and, ultimately, become paratexts to the actual media content. When the paratext is studied as part of the actual media content it can create a more holistic picture of the fan experience. This means that Twitter, as a public platform, to some extent can offer an audience the opportunity to become part of the performance it self.

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