A Thematic analysis on LGBT+ Themes in *Master of None's Thanksgiving* and *Bojack Horseman's Hooray, Todd*

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Abstract

Representation is important to how we view the world surrounding us. Different media platforms have made it easier for people all over the world to access popular culture, such as music, films and television shows. LGBT+ representation is important for people of minorities to see themselves in the media, but also to educate and fight strong stereotypes. In my thesis I analyse two episodes from two American television shows, Bojack Horseman and Master of None. The research questions are as follows: How are LGBT+ individuals (and their coming out experiences) represented in *Master of None*'s episode *Thanksgiving* and *Bojack Horseman*'s episode *Hooray, Todd*? How are stereotypes of LGBT+ portrayed or challenged in these episodes? How is heteronormativity portrayed or challenged in these episodes? The material is two television show scripts that were accessed online.

I analyse the episodes using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Thematic analysis works the primary data through a six-phase method. The first phase includes familiarising with the data, and in the second phase initial codes are created from the data set. Phases 3, 4, and 5 include working with more narrow themes that are searched, reviewed and defined based on the initial codes. Thematic analysis works with variety of different data sets.

Both scripts portrayed representations of coming out and being an LGBT+ individual. I argue, that in both the episodes stereotypes of LGBT+ individuals were both endorsed and challenged. I argue that both scripts portray heteronormativity, but also how it is questioned by its LGBT+ characters.

Keywords: representation, heteronormativity, stereotypes, thematic analysis, close reading, LGBT+, American television shows

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1   Introduction

Representation matters. What we see and hear in popular culture and media is how we can learn more about ourselves and the world around us. How and in which way diversity and marginalized communities are represented in popular media is important. Media plays an important role in representation of gender, power, and race. Popular culture and social media have made it easier for people across the globe to see and access different representations and find communities to fit into. Even in remote locations, the use of electronics and media have made it possible for people identify with what they see online. Popular culture affects the surrounding world and shapes it. Thus, what is seen in popular culture, and in what light it is portrayed, is important. The more representation we see, the easier it is for people of various backgrounds to find their communities and as result their place in society and said communities and feel empowered.

Popular culture, or simply pop culture, can be seen as a variety of movies, television programmes and music. It is widely available and easy to consume, thus making it popular. Media refers to tools and ways in which information is shared between individuals. As media makes it easier for information to spread fast and to wide reach, it is closely linked with popular culture. Studies have found that popular culture has a big impact in forming and building sexual identities. Thompson (2006) argues that exposure of bisexuality in popular culture contributes to women being more flexible in sexual identity. Another study found that LGBT+ individuals used media, internet, and television during their coming out process (Bond, Hefner, and Drogos. 2009). A 2015 study found that there were negative representations and stereotypes of the LGBT+ community in popular media that affect the community, and as a result these stereotypes can even be seen as bullying of LGBT+ individuals (Comer, Bower, and Sparkman 2015).

 In this thesis I will refer to all sexual and gender identities and orientations under the umbrella term LGBT+ community. The LGBTQIA+ "stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (one's sexual or gender identity), intersex and asexual'' (The Center 2023). This is due to keeping the text clearer and the + symbol containing numerous sexual orientations and identities.

On television the amount of LGBT+ characters have been rising in numbers. *Modern Family* (2009-2020), one of the most popular comedies of the 2000s and 2010s, includes the gay

couple, Mitchell and Cameron. The first television show made straight to the streaming service Netflix, *Orange Is The New Black*, is filled with representations of various gender identities and sexual and romantic orientations. Prior to these shows, there had been LGBT+ characters and identities represented in other television shows, for example in *Will & Grace*, *Six Feet Under* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.*

In popular culture representations of LGBT+ individuals can be seen both as characters in movies and television shows as well as individuals from various fields and walks of life, such as actors, musicians, politicians and so on. From comedian and previous talk show host Ellen DeGeneres to actors such as Billy Porter, Elliot Page and Neil Patrick Harris, there is a chance to see LGBT+ representation not only as acted characters on television screens but as public figures themselves.

LGBT+ characters and their representation on television and film has previously been studied in queer studies, media and communication studies (Cook 2018), (queer) television studies (Monaghan 2021, Vanlee, Dhaenens, and Van Bauwel 2020), popular culture studies as well as studies of arts. Aside from being studied within various fields, various aspects of LGBT+ representation have been studied. Connolly studies how an LGBT+ activist group worked from 1969 to 1974 with the American film industry to advocate for change and fight against mis-representation on film (Connolly, 2018). Representations of LGBT+ characters (or lack thereof) in television shows and movies have also been studied in variety of different genres of movies and tv. Monaghan studies the teen series *Faking It* through the lens of post-gay politics, assimilating LGBT+ community into the mainstream (Monaghan 2018). Lovelock studies the representations of queer emotional suffering in the reality television show *Big Brother UK* (Lovelock 2017). Meyer studies the queer erasure in the movie *Black Panther*, arguing that the movie is both progressive for its representation of people of color, yet lacking in queer representation (Meyer 2020).

In this thesis I am studying LGBT+ representations in two Netflix shows: *Master of None* and *Bojack Horseman* using thematic analysis. I am interested in how LGBT+ individuals are portrayed and represented in television shows of the 2010s. This thesis aims to add knowledge and information to the gap in the field by looking at LGBT+ representations in two Netflix shows and focusing on scenes including a LGBT+ individual coming out to someone. As previously stated, LGBT+ representation has been studied previously in different fields. However, studies of both *Bojack Horseman* and *Master of None* together are

few, if not this thesis being the first one of both the shows together. Also, often studies focusing on LGBT+ issues focus on representation of one sexual or romantic orientation in one or multiple shows, and not as often focus on multiple representations of different sexual and romantic orientations. The material chosen consists of two individual episodes and focuses on the scenes including coming out as LGBT+ individuals. I am also interested in the scenes which include a coming out, a LGBT+ individual disclosing their sexual, romantic or gender identity. The thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How are LGBT+ individuals (and their coming out experiences) represented in *Master of None*'s episode *Thanksgiving* and *Bojack Horseman*'s episode *Hooray, Todd*?

2. How are stereotypes of LGBT+ portrayed or challenged in these episodes?

3.How is heteronormativity portrayed or challenged in these episodes?

Through thematic analysis I will look at how two LGBT+ characters, Todd Chavez from *Bojack Horseman* and Denise from *Master of None*, are represented and in what way their coming out experiences are portrayed and represented in their respective television episodes.

Many studies have found that there are still stereotypes and negative representations of LGBT+ community and individuals in popular culture and television (Waardenburg 2019, McLaughlin and Rodriguez 2017). When heterosexuality is enforced and considered the norm in society, the phenomenon is called heteronormativity. Studies on both reinforcing and challenging heteronormativity on popular television shows and movies have been done (Key 2015, Rahikainen 2014). I will analyze each of the episodes through thematic analysis to identify how stereotypes and heteronormativity is portrayed, and in turn challenged in the episodes. The shows were chosen based on personal interest and familiarity with them and because they offer sufficient material.

The thematic analysis used in this thesis is based on Braun and Clarke's 2006 work. Thematic analysis is extremely flexible, in terms of data size and research questions (Braun and Clarke 2017), which is why it was chosen for this thesis. Braun and Clarke's 2006's approach to qualitative thematic analysis is highly cited and most influential and popular (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). Braun and Clarke define themes as "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set'' (2006, 82). Braun and Clarke's method for thematic

analysis contains 6-steps, which will be discussed more in depth in the 4th section titled Method.

The thesis is structured as follows: I will first go over the history of LGBT+ representation with the focus on American television, as well as introduce key terms used in this thesis. I will introduce previous studies regarding the terms used in this thesis, as well as relevant studies regarding studies of television and LGBT+ representation on television. In section 3, Materials, I will introduce my data set of *Master the None* and *Bojack Horseman*, going over general facts about the shows as well as introduce central plot and characters. I will discuss the limitations and ethics of the thesis in this section as well. In section 4 titled Method I will introduce key methods used in this analysis, close reading, and thematic analysis. Section 5 is divided into 3 subsections, in which I will, using thematic analysis (introduced in section 4), analyse the data and acquire chosen themes from the data set. The chosen themes are studied under each subsection: representation, stereotypes, and heteronormativity. In each section I will study both episodes categorized by their thematic content. All results from the thematic analysis method will be discussed in section 6, titled Discussion. I will offer my ideas for further research as well as wrap up the thesis in section 7, Conclusions.

2   History of LGBT+ representation on television

In this section I will explain the key terms used in this thesis: heteronormativity and stereotypes. I will also discuss the history of LGBT+ representation on film and television. The focus of this history will be on the American television and film history, as both shows analyzed in this thesis have been published on an American streaming service Netflix, and both shows, *Bojack Horseman* and *Master of None*, are American tv shows.

2.1   Key terms

To begin to discuss the history of LGBT+ representation on television and film, I will discuss the start of the LGBT+ movement in the United States, as this thesis is focusing on the American context.

A term that I also refer to frequently in this thesis is the term "coming out''. Coming out (short for coming out of the closet) is term used metaphorically when a person of LGBT+ com- munity discloses their sexual identity or gender. The closet is a metaphor and being "in the closet'' or "inside the closet'', being private about orientation or identity. Thus, coming out of the closet refers to coming out of the private, disclosing their sexual or romantic orientation or gender identity. An LGBT+ person, who has not disclosed their orientation or identity is called being ''closeted'' or being in the closet''. There are multiple reasons for person to either come out of the closet or prefer to stay closeted, such as safety, pressure from family or outside world, media, to name a few. Herman (2005, 7) describes coming out of the closet: "This personal and political journey, from inside to out, often represented as the substitution of pride for shame, is emblematic of what it has meant both to have gay or lesbian identity, and to be a member of a lesbian and gay movement.''

Coming out of the closet can be a truly important and even life-changing event, for better or worse, in a queer person's life. I will now briefly discuss the history of the LGBT+ movement in the United States. In June of 1969, police raided a bar in Greenwich Village in New York, called the Stonewall Inn, which was known for being popular amongst the LGBT+ individuals (Blakemore 2020). As a result the patrons at the Stonewall Inn started throwing items and yelling at the police. Considered as one of the leaders and pioneers of LGBT+ rights movement, Marsha P. Johnson, a transwoman of color, was present at the riots. The events became known as the Stonewall riots, Stonewall, Stonewall uprising or Stonewall Rebellion, led to the start of the modern LGBT+ movement.

Since 1970 Pride parades have been celebrated. Started in the United States and fueled by Stonewall riots, LGBT+ individuals and activists gathered to commemorate the riots (Blakemore 2021). In Finland the first Pride was celebrated in 2000 and in 2018 the number of participants was around 100 000 (Helsinki Pride -Yhteisö ry 2022). The Pride parade does not only consist of the march, but it can have events leading up to the event, including workshops, volunteer activities and seminar or lectures.

In this thesis I will focus on the representations and stereotypes of two sexual and romantic attractions under the LGBT+ umbrella term: lesbians and asexuals. Lesbians are women who are attracted to other women, whether it be romantically, sexually or emotionally (The Center 2023). Asexual is used to describe a person that does not experience sexual attraction (ibid.)

I will now define the term representation. To put representation simply, it means using language to understand the world and describe the world to other people and to produce meanings using language. Considered by many as the most important name associated with the term representation, Stuart Hall writes on system of representation:

> it consists, not of individual concepts, but of different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them. For example, we use the principles of similarity and difference to establish relationships between concepts or to distinguish from one another. (1997, 17)

According to Hall, there are two systems of representation: conceptual maps and language (1997). Conceptual maps are "mental representations which we carry around in our heads'' (Hall 1997, 17). Conceptual maps can be created around physical items, such as people or material, like furniture, and abstract and non-physical concepts, such as love or freedom. Conceptual maps vary between individuals depending on their background and other factors; however, culture is often deemed as sharing of conceptual maps (Hall 1997). Hall explains, how by sharing similar conceptual maps it is possible to build social world and thus culture (ibid.).

Another system of representation is language. Hall explains how language is required to construct meanings out of conceptual maps and to share and exchange meanings (1997). Hall elaborates that codes are correlations set up between conceptual systems and language so that when conceptual maps are used the code derives how the concept is represented in the language. For example, when thinking of the concept of car, the concept is represented in English with the letters c, a, and r. The mental image of a car may vary in detail between individuals, such as color, size or model of a car, but most mental images produced would be

a four-wheeled vehicle that is driven by a driver using a round wheel. Without language, it would not be possible to convey the meaning of the concept of car.

Conceptual maps and language together build the two systems of representation. People understand each other and build conceptual maps and shared meanings together via language. With a system of language, to construct meanings there needs to be sharing of meaning involved. This sharing can be done via various media, including spoken interaction, image or in online interaction. Representation on television is how something is presented to the audience. We can look at a television show on how they present gender, sexual minorities, or people of color. The more present something is in media and on television, the more common it becomes and seeing wide variety of representation is important for a multitude of reasons, for example to give people role models and inspiration and break down stereotypes.

Dhaenens argues that the representation of LGBT+ community and individuals on television is governed by heteronormativity (Dhaenens 2013). Heteronormativity refers to the ideology, that heterosexuality is the preferred sexuality and the normal sexuality. It assumes that people are heterosexual naturally as it is considered the norm and has more privileges. Heteronormativity can be harmful and exclude people. In a study on the television show *Glee*, Dhaenens argues, that heteronormativity on television reinforces heteronormativity and this can lead to LGBT+ representation as in hierarchal inferior position (Dhaenens 2013, 305).

Stereotypes refer to oversimplified image of a person, race, or of a thing, and are often harmful to the people the stereotypes are affecting. Thus, by default stereotypes can be considered to be negative, especially stereotypes of out-group members (Hilton and von Hippel 1996). Hilton and von Hippel refer to out-group as people who have other, less desired traits, as in-group members (Hilton and von Hippel 1996, 247). One of the biggest themes which has many stereotypes is regarding gender and gender roles. Stereotypes of gender can be associated with colors, clothes, children's toys, roles in society et cetera. Prentice and Carranza describe stereotypical characteristics as follows:

> Femine characteristics are: affectionate, cheerful, childlike, compassionate, does not use harsh language, eager to soothe hurt feelings, feminine, flatterable, gentle, gullible, loves children, loyal, sensitive to the needs of others, shy, soft-spoken, sympathetic, tender, understanding, warm, and yielding. Masculine characteristics are: acts as a leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, competitive, defends own beliefs, dominant, forceful, has leadership abilities, independent, individualistic, makes decisions easily, masculine, self-reliant, self-sufficient, strong-personality, willing to take a stand, and willing to take risks. (2002, 269-270)

As mentioned, stereotypes do not represent the true nature of gender. Stereotypes are tied to prejudice, perceptions of other and behavior (Hilton and von Hippel 1996). There have been multiple studies on gender stereotypes in real life situations. Powlishta's 2000 study revealed that adults engaged in using more stereotypes than children (Powlishta 2000, 279). Del Saz Rubio's 2018 study on British television commercials found that in many instances, women have stereotypically been shown in charge of housework and taking care of family, whereas men have been depicted in remunerated situations (Del Saz Rubio 2018, 211-212). A 2022 study on children's beliefs on gender stereotypes upon reading found that if children are exposed to counter-stereotypical traits in a book protagonist, their beliefs on stereotypes may change (Kneeskern and Reeder 2022, 1481). A 2016 study on Super Bowl commercials found that women's roles in the commercials, compared to the 1990s, have in the early 2000s diverted from traditional portrayal to more non-traditional activities (Hatzithomas, Boutsouki and Ziamou 2016, 901).

A common female stereotype is as Atkinson et al. write, focusing on appearance: "focus on appearance-based traits and activities such as long painted nails and makeup may at first seem to reproduce traditional negative stereotypes that reduce women to appearance.'' (2022, 7) A 2010 study on modest men found that these men, who did not portray stereotypically man-ly characteristics, received backlash (Moss-Racusin, Phelan and Rudman 2010, 147-148). The aforementioned studies are simply examples of fields where stereotypes can be found and analyzed. As Kneeskern and Reeder's 2022 study suggests, by using counter-stereotypical characteristics to portray a character can change pre-learned patterns and beliefs about people or gender. This is where seeing non-stereotypical content on media and popular culture is important.

However, gender stereotypes have also made their way into literature and television. Stereotypes of lesbians include being more masculine and assertive and being the bread-winner of the family (Farr and Degroult 2008). In *Master of None*, Denise's character as a lesbian, does fit into some of the stereotypes I introduce and discuss section 4. In terms of asexuality, it has been represented in an accurate manner on television. In a Netflix show Sex Education (2020 and ongoing), a show that follows a high school student Otis Milburn (Asa Butterfield) whose mother Jean (Gillian Anderson) works as a sex therapist. The show received a lot of positive feedback for its accurate and modern representation of asexuality for a scene that involved a high school student coming out as asexual and discussing that with

Gillian Anderson's character (Moore 2020, Kirichanskaya 2020). *Bojack Horseman* has also been positively received for the portrayal of Todd's asexuality.

2.2. History of queer representation on American television

In the previous section I have discussed heteronormativity, stereotypes and more generally coming out and representation. In this sub-section I will discuss the history of LGBT+ representation on American television and film.

Monteil argues that queer and trans people have been present in film as long as the medium has existed (2022). In early Hollywood, movies released from 1934 to 1968 were heavily censored due to the Motion Picture Production Code, more often known as the Hays Code (Lewis 2021). The code was set up to prohibit nudity, realistic violence, sexual persuasions, as well as rules around religion and morality (ibid.). Monteil states that after the era of heavy censorship and no queer representation there was a rise in popularity in the 1970s with queer representation, such as the 1975 The Rocky Horror Picture show directed by Jim Sharman (2022). The rise of LGBT+ films in the 1970s also came with problems including problematic and even offensive representations (Connolly 2018). In 1969, Stonewall riots, a groundbreaking event in the LGBT+ rights history in the United States and considered the start of the modern LGBT+ rights movement, helped the rise of LGBT+ activism (ibid.). Activist groups worked to change representation on film by hosting and attending demonstrations and protests (ibid.)

In terms of coming out television, plenty of scholars have studied the case of Ellen DeGeneres. In 1997, on an episode of sitcom *Ellen*, the titular TV character, played by Ellen DeGeneres, comes out as lesbian. Around the same time the episode aired, the actress publicly came out of the closet on the cover of TIME magazine (TIME 2023). According to Herman, the coming out episode of *Elle*n was one of the most talked-about episodes in the American tv history, as well as one of the most watched (2005, 9), and some networks banned showing the episode, whilst other parts of the United States celebrated the episode (ibid.)

Scholars have studied Ellen DeGeneres' coming out from both the perspective of the played character in the sitcom *Ellen*, as well as the actual coming out of the actress themselves. Celebrities' coming outs have been studied. Celebrities coming out to the public have been studied, such as basketball player Jason Collins (Billings et al. 2015), actor Colton Haynes (Brennan 2018) and coming out on the video platform YouTube has been studied by

Mustonen (2017), Lovelock (2017) and Garcia-Rabines, Fernandez-Fernandez and Rozas-Urrunaga (2022).

Since 2019, the number of LGBT+ characters on US television has steadily grown (Gardner 2022, The Guardian 2019). According to statistics by GLAAD (short for Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) in 2021 to 2022 out of 775 series 11.9 percent of the characters were LGBT+ community representation, which set the record for the highest number from previous years (Gardner 2022). Television shows with heavy focus on LGBT+ matters and representation include, for example, Ryan Murphy's *Pose* (2018-2021), David Collins' *Queer Eye* (2003-2007) and Ilene Chaiken's *The L Word* (2004-2009). I have picked the three afore-mentioned shows to highlight as I believe they have all been groundbreaking and pioneering in their work to represent LGBT+ individuals on television.

The L Word ran between 2004 to 2009, and received a spin-off series in 2019 called The L Word: Generation Q. The fictional show's premise is following a group of lesbian and bi-sexual women living in Los Angeles and their lives. Being the first ensemble cast of characters with such sexualities, The L Word was pioneering in the rise of the LGBT+ representation on television screens.

Queer Eye is a reality show that ran originally from 2003 to 2007, and the reboot show with the same premise started on Netflix in 2018 and is still ongoing in 2023 when this thesis was published. The show's premise is a group of 5 gay men, the Fab Five, spending a week togeher with and individual to help improve their lifestyle, style, living and other aspects of life. The Fab Five roles include being experts on fashion, culture, (interior) design, grooming and food and wine. The show had multiple international adaptations, including Finland, Germany, Norway, Brazil and the United Kingdom. The original reboot, the US version, got a special season called *Queer Eye: We're in Japan!* in 2019, which was the same premise, but set in Japan, making it the show's first adaptation in Asia.

Ryan Murphy's *Pose*, which focuses on diverse characters of LGBT+ community representation, especially amongst the African American and Latino communities, is set in New York in the 1980s and 1990s with the height of AIDS outbreak and the ballroom culture. The show ran for 3 seasons between 2018 to 2021. During and after its run *Pose* managed to break records: number of transgender actors cast in 2017 (Holloway 2017), Billy Porter's win for Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series as the first openly gay black man, actress Michaela Jaé Rodriguez being nominated as the first transgender

person for the Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series. Ryan Murphy's impact outside *Pose* on his other works is also notable. Works with LGBT+ representation in Murphy's répertoire include musical drama *Glee* (2009-2015) and *The Assassination of Gianni Versace* (2018). The three television shows mentioned have been impactful to the LGBT+ representation on television screen, not only on-screen but behind-the-scenes as well, such as with *Pose*.

In 2005, an American television channel dedicated to targeting LGBT+ audiences and programming LGBT+ centered content, Logo TV, was created (Aslinger 2009). The channel broadcast variety of different genres. The channel has created its own original shows, but also broadcasts shows originally created for other channels. In terms of Logo using its wide catalog of movies to, Aslinger states: "Repurposing these films for contemporary audiences allows for a re-definition of the history of gay and lesbian media by resurrecting texts and broadcasting films that have been largely forgotten." (2009, 114)

Along television, the representation of queer characters on the big screen and in movies has also grown in recent decades. In 2017, Barry Jenkins' movie *Moonlight* won the Oscar for "Best Picture'', becoming the first LGBT+ focused movie to win the price (O'Hara 2017, Gilmer 2017). Prior to *Moonlight'*s historic win, movies with LGBT+ themes had been nominated for the Best Picture category, including *Call Me By Your Name* (2017), *The Favourite* (2018), Black Swan (2010), to name a few. Movies based on celebrities and real people and biographical movies based on their lives have also been created, including *Rocketman* (2019) based on musician Elton John's life, *Bohemian Rhapsod*y (2018) on rock band Queen's lead singer Freddie Mercury and *Imitation Game* (2014) on the life of Alan Turing, computer scientist and mathematician whose work has influenced computer science significantly and *Milk* (2008) on politician and LGBT+ activist Harvey Milk's life, *The Danish Girl* (2015) which is loosely based on Danish painter Lili Elbe's life as a transwoman. Completely fictional works have also reached success, including *Love, Simon* (2018), *The Handmaiden* (2017) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005).

There have also been characters, whose sexuality hasn't explicitly been stated, or they haven't had an "coming out'' scene or episode. In some cases, a character's sexuality as LGBT+ is revealed after show's run or by the show's creators, without there being any coming out in the television shows themselves. Such characters include Xena from *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), where active online fanbase of the show together with the show's production

depicted Xena as LGBT+, despite there never being an official coming out in the show (Maris 2016). In these cases, where a character's sexuality is not explicitly stated, the actors own interpretations of the character's sexuality can come into play. The fandom, the fans of a particular person, series, musical group, also make their own interpretations of their favorite characters, such as with *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001). Another case of the fandom and an actor's opinion came to play importance with a popular character from a television show Supernatural. In the show's final episode in 2020, when one of the show's most popular characters, Castiel, confessed his love to Dean, one of the main characters. The interaction left some fans wondering if this was a confession of romantic love or platonic love, which had to be later confirmed by one of the actors as indeed a confirmation of love for a same-sex couple (Hardikar 2022).

Not all representation is good representation. Such harmful representations may include playing into stereotypes. One of the most successful sitcoms of all time, *Friends*, has been critiqued for a harmful representation of LGBT+ individuals, including Chandler's father being a drag queen, which Chandler is ashamed of and lacks understanding of his father's choices. In the same show, one of the main characters, Ross, divorces his wife as she is lesbian and starts a relationship with other woman. Ross treats his ex-wife Carol and her wife Susan in a mean and not-understanding manner (Sandell 1998).

More harmful representation is in the popular teen drama *Pretty Little Liars*. The show includes the popular trope "bury your gays'', which is "a same-gender romantic couple, one of the lovers must die or otherwise be destroyed by the end of the story'' (Hulan 2017, 17). Peters' 2016 study on teen television shows found, that "closeted white, affluent, male teens, as well as affluent, white and fair-skinned racialized female teens'' were more common representation of LGBT+ youth on teenager marketed television shows (Peters 2016, 500). Sandercock's 2015 study on transgender representation found that even with a wide pool of sexual and gender minorities, the television show *Glee* relies heavily on stereotypes (Sandercock 2015). Marwick, Gray and Ananny's study on the same show found, that *Glee* supported LGBT issues and acted as guidelines for appropriate sexual behavior (Marwick, Gray, and Ananny 2014).

This thesis aims to look at how *Bojack Horseman* and *Master of None* include representation in their episodes. I am also looking at how stereotypes are endorsed or challenged in the shows as well as how heteronormativity is portrayed or challenged. In this section I have

discussed the history of LGBT+ representation on American television and film and given examples of television shows that have impacted the LGBT+ representation on television. I have also discussed the issue of stereotyping LGBT+ characters by the "bury your gay'' trope and the ambiguity of characters' sexuality that can lead to fans coming up with their own opinions or post-release comments from the production. In the following section I will introduce my material.

3 Materials

In this section I introduce my data and primary material for the thesis. The data collection method, which was based on the 6-phase thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke's 2006 study, will be introduced in the next section.

This study analyses two individual episodes from two different television shows. A television show, or tv show for short, is a program broadcasted by television or a streaming plat- form online. In this thesis I consider shows produced to online networks as television shows, even if they were not produced to television to begin with. Typically, there are also advertisements for companies and brands in midst of different shows. Depending on the channel used, the content of the tv shows may differ from cartoons (Nickelodeon) to news (BBC, CNN) to reality tv (TLC, RealityXtra) or mixes of all of these (MTV3). Alongside traditional physical television there are also online streaming platforms, such as Netflix, HBO Max, Disney+, and Amazon Prime, which allow viewers to watch shows on their own time. These streaming platforms also cater to different audiences and contain different contents to appeal to varying viewer bases, such as Crunchyroll that provides a large variety of cartoon and anime, and WOW Presents that provides LGBT+ content.

Bednarek writes, how there are differences between television series and web series (2018). Web-series refers to series that are produced by not television networks but by online providers, such as Netflix (ibid.). In this thesis I use the two terms, television and web series, as synonymous to each other, because despite the material being a web series on Netflix, the content is similar to a television series, with advertisements being the missing factor and the shows not being broadcasted on television screens by networks. According to Bednarek, a major difference between television and web series, however, is their use of language (2018, 7). Swear words and words considered taboo are more common in web series, as they are often censored on broadcasted television shows (ibid.). Bednarek elaborates, how dialogue on television is character or narrator speech, and between two or more speakers (ibid.). Screen directions, or as I refer to them as parenthesis, are information not said or stated in the television show, but they are information about the location or time or how a character is dressed (ibid.)

The material for this thesis comes from two tv shows: *Master of None* and *Bojack Horse-man*. Both shows were published straight to online streaming service Netflix between 2014-2021.

Both chosen episodes include scenes of coming out as an LGBT+ individual, which is why they were chosen as the data for analysis. Out of the two shows, one (*Bojack Horseman*) is animated, however as the thesis focuses on the written scripts, the format in which the television shows have been filmed or animated is not relevant to the analysis. The scripts used for analysis in this thesis were found in online sources. The script for *Master of None* was formatted with dialogue with characters names and parenthesis. The script for *Bojack Horseman* is a consecutive list of dialogue without parenthesis or names of characters for dialogue. For the purpose and clarity of this thesis and analysis, relevant parts of the script used in the analysis were rewritten by me in a form with the speakers name in front of their said line. The episodes were viewed in 2022 and 2023 to check accuracy of internet found scripts.

The original script for *Bojack Horseman'*s *Hooray, Todd:*

> You are just the guy I need. You know the actress Courtney Portnoy?
> I think so. She portrayed the formerly portly consort in The Seaport Resort? Courtly roles like the formerly portly consort are Courtney Portnoy's forte, but she's got a new action movie that's supposed to change her image: Ms. Taken. You know Mr. Taken from the Taken movies?
> This is his niece. Nice!
> (Transcript DB 2023)

Rewritten script for clarity:

> Princess Carolyn: It's Todd!
> Todd: It's me!
> Princess Carolyn: You are just the guy I need. You know the actress Court- ney Portnoy?
> Todd: I think so. She portrayed the formerly portly consort in *The Seaport Resort*?
> Princess Carolyn: Courtly roles like the formerly portly consort are Court- ney Portnoy's forte, but she's got a new action movie that's supposed to change her image: *Ms. Taken.* You know Mr. Taken from the *Taken* movies? This is his niece.
> Todd: Nice!

(Appendix 1, 3)

The two shows were chosen as primary sources due to personal interest and enjoyment of the shows and familiarity with the shows' contents. When deciding on the topic of this thesis, I was interested in the themes present in my research questions and LGBT+ themes. As I was familiar with the shows prior to this thesis, I chose them as the material because both qualified for the aforementioned criteria of LGBT+ themes related to the research questions. The shows do not show much similar qualities, despite being categorized on Netflix under the

search word "witty'', as seen as in Table 1. In this case the category of "witty'' refers to shows and movies using smart and quick humor or wit. There are other television shows under the category of witty on Netflix, including *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) *Arrested Development* (2003-2019), *The Good Place* (2016-2020), *Archer* (2009 and ongoing) and *Big Mouth* (2017 and ongoing), even movies such as *Don't Look Up* (2021) and *Shrek* (2001). Under the category of "witty'' there are both animated and acted films and tv shows, which is why I do not believe it is relevant to the analysis which way the television shows were formatted. I also do not think the category of witty is enough to guarantee being a data source for this analysis, because the aforementioned shows do not all include LGBT+ representation, at least in as major part as it plays in the chosen data set.

Table 1

Information on the material including length of episode, language, number of words in the script, Netflix search words and where the script was accessed at.

Show title	Length of episode	Number of words in script	Language	Search words on Netflix	Scripts accessed at
Master of None	34 minutes	6722	English	Witty, Emotional, Drama Comedy	Scriptslug
Bojack Horseman	26 minutes	4686	English	Witty, Adult Animation, Celebrities, Sitcoms	TranscriptDB

In sections 3.1. and 3.2. I will introduce the chosen episodes more in detail. In section 3.3. I discuss limitations and ethics of the study.

3.1 Master of None

Master of None aired first time in 2015 on a streaming platform Netflix created by Aziz Ansari and Alan Yang (Internet Movie Database 2023). The plot revolves around Dev Shav (played by Aziz Ansari), a 30 year old actor living in New York. The episodes follow his and his friends lives in New York, navigating love, friendship, sex, and other various topics. The

show also includes Dev's friends' and love interests, for example Dev's friend Denise (played by Lena Waithe), and African American lesbian; Rachel (played by Noël Wells), Dev's romantic interest in the first season of the show; Arnold (played by Eric Wareheim), Dev's friend. The first season of Master of None follows Dev's growing relationship with Rachel, eventually ending with the two breaking up. The second season starts with Dev visiting Italy. The third season, titled *Master of None Presents: Moments in Love* that follows Denise's life around divorce, marriage and love.

The show received its second season in 2017 and third season in 2021. The show has been nominated for multiple awards and has been awarded with both Emmy and Golden Globe awards, including an Emmy for "Outstanding Writing For A Comedy Series'' in 2017 and a

Golden Globe for "Best Performance By An Actor In A Television Series - Musical Or Comedy'' in 2018 for the writer and actor Aziz Ansari (Los Angeles Times 2023). The show has received critical acclaim and has been praised for its humor and diversity in the cast and crew.

This thesis will focus on the 8th episode of the show's second season, titled Thanksgiving. The episode was initially released together with the rest of the second season in 2017. Thanksgiving was awarded an Emmy award for the writers Ansari and Waithe, making Waithe the first black woman to win the award for comedy series writing (Butler 2017). Despite Waithe contributing to the writing of the episode and the episode being loosely based on Waithe's own experiences and life, in this thesis I am simply focusing and analyzing the representations of the characters in the television show, not the individuals behind as actors and writers. In 2018 an article was published online involving sexual harassment by Aziz Ansari. Although I condemn all sexual harassment, in this thesis I am not also taking into account the actors' and creators' personal lives and actions.

Thanksgiving takes place during multiple years, following events during the Thanksgiving holiday from 1991 to 2017 in Dev's childhood friend Denise's family home. During the Thanksgiving dinners, Denise figures out her sexuality and comes out as lesbian, and how her family and close friend react to her coming out, as well as her partners she brings home for the holiday. The most notable scene for analysis in this thesis is Denise coming out as lesbian to her mother Catherine (played by Angela Bassett) in 2006 Thanksgiving. Throughout the years Catherine struggles to embrace Denise's sexuality, with time she grows more accepting. Denise brings two girlfriends, Michelle in 2015 and Nikki in 2016, for visit during

Thanksgiving. Denise's family struggles to accept Michelle at first, but after disliking Nikki more, when Michelle and Denise have gotten back together for 2017 Thanksgiving the family members are happy to see them together again and accept Michelle. The episode follows Denise's Thanksgivings from her childhood to adulthood, and the changes regarding and figuring out her sexuality and relationship with her friends, family and most notably mother as well as is- sues of race.

Previously Master of None has been studied for its portrayal of South Asian and Asian American characters (Mehta 2020, Davé 2017) and topics such as intimacy (Oria 2021). With Ansari's sexual harassment allegations in 2018, studies regarding the case and the #MeToo movement have been published (Na 2019, Hindes and Fileborn 2019; Baker, Williams and Rodrigues 2020).

In this subsection I have introduced the show *Master of None* and the episode *Thanksgiving*. In the following sub-section, I introduce *Bojack Horsema*n as a television show and the episode Hooray, Todd. In subsection 3.3. I discuss the limitations and ethics of this thesis.

3.2   Bojack Horseman

Bojack Horseman (stylized as *BoJack Horseman*) is an American adult animation, first released on the streaming platform Netflix in 2014. The show ran for six seasons until 2020 and the show was created by Raphael Bob-Waksberg. Many of the show's characters are anthropomorphic characters, where there have been human attributes added to non-human things, such as animals. The titular character, Bojack, is an anthropomorphic horse, and other characters include anthropomorphic cat, owl, and dog, to name a few. Some of the characters remain completely human, including Todd Chavez and Diane Nguyen.

The story is set in a fictional city of Hollywood, and revolves around *Bojack Horsema*n (talking horse, voiced by Will Arnett), who starred in a popular television show sitcom *Horsin' Around* years ago and now washed-up, aims to do a comeback with an autobiography written by a ghostwriter Diane Nguyen (voiced by Allison Brie). Other characters in the show include Todd Chavez (voiced by Aaron Paul), who starts off as Bojack's freeloader roommate. Princess Carolyn (voiced by Amy Sedaris), Bojack's former agent, a hardworking and ambitious manager and agent in Hollywood, Mr. Peanutbutter (voice by Paul F. Tompkins), Bojack's former sitcom rival and Diane's ex-husband, Sarah Lynn (voiced by

Kristen Schaal). The story revolves around the lives of the characters, and how the titular character Bojack struggles with drugs, alcohol and addiction.

The show has been nominated for multiple awards and has been critically acclaimed. The show has been praised for taking risks, social commentary and handling heavy topics such as depression, sexual harassment, trauma and accountability (Gessner 2021, Chow 2020). Not only does Bojack struggle with drug and alcohol addiction and depression, but other characters as well, such as Diane who suffers from depression and goes through a divorce as the show progresses.

Previous studies on *Bojack Horseman* have been conducted on its heavy subject matters, such as depression and trauma (Riekki 2021, Barranco 2020). The other popular topic for study has been Todd's asexuality and its portrayal in the show. Asexuality refers to "a person who does not experience sexual attraction'' (Asexuality 2023). Many asexuals may experience romantic attraction, but do not desire sex or sexual actions. Asexuality is different from being celibate and abstaining from sex, as explained by The Asexual Visibility & Education Networks (AVEN): "Unlike celibacy, which is a choice to abstain from sexual activity, asexuality is an intrinsic part of who we are, just like other sexual orientations'' (2023). As with many other LGBT+ individuals, there is plenty of variation amongst asexual individuals.

The episode Hooray, Todd, that is the focus of this analysis, is the 3rd episode of the show's 4th season, aired in 2017. The episode focuses on Todd and his day in Hollywood as he is helping his friends and strangers and doing favors for others rather than focusing on himself. Todd helps Princess Carolyn, a manager in Hollywood, promote an actress' film by fake dating her. He looks for Mr. Peanutbutter's sunglasses and helps him in not telling Diane, Mr. Peanutbutter's wife, he went positive on his stance on fracking, which Diane was against, by distracting her. Todd goes his way to help Hollyhock, a visitor who wants to do a paternity test on Bojack's DNA, even when Todd and Bojack are not in the best of terms. Whilst having a heart to heart with Bojack, Todd comes out to him as asexual. At the end of the episode, Todd ends up going to an asexual meetup, which he has been planning on attending all day whilst running errands for his friends.

One of the aspects of Bojack Horseman that has been both studied and praised has been Todd's portrayal as an asexual. Marks (2017) and Tokheim (2018) have both studied the representation of asexuality in popular culture. Many scholars agree that asexuality is under-represented or mis-represented in media (Bravo 2022, Johnson 2019). There is a problem with

asexuality portrayal in popular culture. "In many cases the narrative constructed around asexuality—that it's a condition only of the "sick, dead, or lying"—is often the only representation of asexuality most viewers ever witness unless they intentionally seek out shows with asexual characters in them'' (Marks 2017, 5). Kurowicka writes on the asexual representation in *Bojack Horseman*:

> One of the most widely appreciated features of BoJack is the fact that asexual experience is not marginalised or relegated to one 'very special episode'. Instead, Todd is a central part of the cast before and after coming out as asexual, so he is allowed space to be a fully-fledged character who is not reduced to his sexuality. (2022, 251)

The fact that Todd's asexuality is a bigger than simply one episode in the character's development is great news in terms of asexuality representation. Lack of representation or misrepresentation may lead to prejudice, which can be a major issue that causes stress for asexual people (Zivony and Reggev 2022).

3.3 Limitations and ethics

The scope of the study is only two episodes. This choice was made to narrow down the scope of the study and manage a insightful thematic analysis of the themes presented in the material. The chosen episodes involve scenes of coming out as LGBT+ individual. However, both tv shows represent LGBT+ characters in other episodes. Thus, a limitation of the study is its small scope of data.

Despite the episodes having had personal importance (such as Lena Waithe basing *Thanksgiving* loosely on own experiences), the actors, writers, and crew of said television shows are not studied in this thesis, but the focus is simply on the written script and the characters acted/played on screen.

In 2018 allegations of sexual harassment against Aziz Ansari were published (Na 2019). I was not aware of these allegations prior to choosing to study *Master of None* as material for the thesis. I became aware of these allegations after having already started the writing process and decided to keep *Master of None* as a material for the analysis, despite condemning all sexual assault and harassment cases. As previously stated, I decided not to focus on actors or voice-actors of the episodes, as well as other production of the shows, and I focus only on the written script.

Both scripts for *Master of None* and *Bojack Horseman* were found online on accessible and free websites, *Bojack Horseman* in TranscriptDB (2023) and *Master of None* in Scriptslug (2023), which both were accessed in 2023. The episodes themselves are behind Netflix' paywall thus making them inaccessible to people without users on the platform. However, as I focused on the writ- ten script, I do not feel it is necessary to view the episodes to fully grasp the thesis.

In this section I have introduced my material, how I ended up choosing the material and how it was collected, general information and plot and characters of the show relevant to the episodes. I have discussed limitations and ethics regarding the thesis. In the following section I introduce my method, thematic analysis.

4   Method

This thesis uses Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis and close reading of the scripts of *Bojack Horseman's Hooray, Todd* and *Master of None's Thanksgiving*. In this section I explain my process with using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis and how I handled the primary data with the method.

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke define thematic analysis in their influential work as follows: "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'' (2006, 79). Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows for a data set to be studied through various themes, depending on personal interests and goals of the study. Thematic analysis is used to analyze repeated themes within the data, which can vary from scripts, interviews, diary entries, websites, blogs and even police or court reports (Brulé 2020). Because of the variety in data options as well as flexibility with various themes based on interest thematic analysis was chosen as the method. Thematic analysis is used to identify and analyze themes within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). In this case, themes identified by the method were used in the research questions: heteronormativity, stereotypes and how they are challenged. In this study, thematic analysis was used to analyze two episodes and focus on themes of LGBT+ representation, heteronormativity and stereotypes of LGBT+ individuals displayed in the script by the characters or by the parenthesis and screen directions. In the episodes many more themes could be derived and analyzed via this method, for example themes of trauma and depression in *Bojack Horseman*, or themes regarding race in *Master of None.*

Thematic analysis has been used to study television shows prior to this thesis. For example, in Riekki's 2021 study on themes such as depression and nihilism on Bojack Horseman thematic analysis was utilized. Rajan utilized Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to study television shows *The Big Bang Theory* and *Community* and the themes regarding autism and Asperger's (Rajan 2021). Matthews and Nairn's 2020 study used thematic analysis on a reality television show *Naked Attraction* and how the show was viewed by its New Zealander viewers (Matthews and Nairn 2020)

The thematic analysis method as introduced by Braun and Clarke contains 6 phases. I will introduce each of the phases and how they were used in this thesis. The phases are titled as follows: "1. familiarising yourself with your data, 2. generating initial codes, 3. searching for

themes, 4. reviewing themes, 5. defining and naming themes 6. producing the report'' (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87). Braun and Clarke refer to repeated patterns as themes, as seen in the phases mentioned before. Braun and Clarke define themes as "something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set'' (Braun and Clarke 2006, 91). In the following sections I will go over each phase individually and how I performed each phase in this thesis.

The first phase of thematic analysis is to familiarize with the data. The first phase is meant for the scholar to become immersed in the data, make notes and become familiar with all parts of the data. Braun and Clarke recommend reading the entire data at least once and they state, that "repeated reading'' is often required (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87). In this thesis, I was familiar with the episodes before starting the analysis. I read the scripts multiple times, and viewed the episodes on Netflix to make the scripts were accurate in their dialogue. I found the scripts of the episodes online, but I rewrote one for *Bojack Horseman* as the original one found online lacked information who spoke certain lines.

Phase 2, as Braun and Clarke put it, happens after reading and becoming familiar with the data. During the second phase, initial codes are produced from the data. During the first phase, it is good to think of possible ideas and interesting topics from the reading. The initial codes are features that interest the researcher and basic elements or data that can be analyzed regarding the content of the thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke express how systematically working through the data and paying attention to each data item equally, aspects of the data may appear (Braun and Clarke 2006, 89). As my data set was not that big, I was able to work manually on the scripts, making notes of all data parts I found interesting.

Initial codes very frequently picked up in the data were different in *Bojack Horseman* and in *Master of None.* Common codes I picked up in Thanksgiving had to do with heteronormative expectations, gender expression through clothing and issues with being gay. Issues of race were also a common code, however I chose not to develop those codes further into themes, as I wanted to focus more on the representation of LGBT+ and heteronormativity that were brought up. As I am not a person of color, I feel it is not my place to really discuss the questions and issues regarding race and people of color. Codes in *Bojack Horseman* were positive attributes being related to an asexual person, not feeling seen as an asexual and making jokes out of asexuality.

The following phase, phase 3, is coming up with broader themes and look for themes. The codes, that were created in phase 2, will be sorted into relevant themes with similar codes. Braun and Clarke recommend using visual aid for this phase, such as mind maps or tables. I worked on the themes based on the initial first codes I discovered in phase 2. I read through my initial codes and started grouping them into larger groups together under themes.

Codes and themes are different. Codes are more exact than themes, and they are found in certain parts of the data, for example I found codes as dialogue lines in the scripts. A code is one single idea and they are developed into themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). A theme is a combination of codes that is a common and recurring pattern or interesting observation from the data set (ibid.).

In phases 1 and 2 I worked on each of the scripts on their own, making notes and finding codes and each of the scripts with no regard to the other script. In phase 3, however, I decided to group the codes together to find out themes that were present in both data scripts. In both of the scripts, representations of sexual minorities, heteronormativity and using certain clothes, characteristics and words to describe sexual minority characters were discovered upon close reading of the codes.

Phase 4 follows after coming up with potential themes in the previous phase. In phase 4 the themes will be reviewed and refined. In the review part the candidate themes from the previous phase are studied and whether they create a coherent pattern. If this doesn't happen, the themes may be reworked or new themes created, and the review part is revisited. The second part of the phase 4 is refining. Braun and Clarke suggest that this part of the phase is used to "consider the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set, but also whether your candidate thematic map accurately reflects the meanings evident in the data set as a whole.'' (Braun and Clarke 2006, 91)

After I had grouped my codes (phase 2) into larger themes (phase 3), I revisited the themes in this phase and chose what to keep and what to delete. In previous phases in Master of None, I found multiple codes regarding race and being a person of color and I grouped all instances under the themes of "Race''. However, as I did not want to research questions regarding race, I deleted the theme and focused only on the other big themes that had more to do with my desired research questions.

Phase 5 is defining and naming the themes. Phases 3 to 5 are similar in terms of having to do with themes. In 2016, Braun, Clarke and Weate refer to the phases 3, 4, and 5 as "the core analytic work in TA'' (10). Braun, Clarke and Weate write, how each individual theme requires a detailed analysis (2016). Upon completing the previous 4 phases, I had come up with themes of "Stereotype of LGBT+ Individual'', "Heteronormativity'', and "Coming out as LGBT+''. Each of these category's subcategories could be derived, such as focusing on stereotypes of different sexualities as the content of the two episodes was different.

The final 6th phase is writing the report. Braun and Clarke note, that the write-up requires not only the data, but include examples and "our analytic narrative needs to go beyond description of the data, and make an argument in relation to your research question.'' (2006, 93) Phase 6 in this case is writing this thesis following all the previously mentioned 6 steps.
The analysis of this thesis was conducted by initially familiarizing myself with the content of the study by viewing the episodes and close reading the scripts. I also rewrote the script of *Bojack Horseman* for clarity and easier accessibility. After initial familiarization, in phase 2 I systematically read through my primary data looking for initial codes that were of my interest. Following, in the third phase, I sorted the codes into larger themes, similar codes under the same category themes. After coming up with few themes, I chose the main themes - heteronormativity, stereotypes and representations - that were of my interest to look further into. After choosing the themes, the scripts were analyzed again using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, TA, and close reading as method. The study is qualitative in nature.

When applying Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, I had my initial research questions in mind. The research questions for the thesis are as follows:

1. How are LGBT+ individuals (and their coming out experiences) represented in *Master of None's* episode Thanksgiving and *Bojack Horseman's* episode Hooray, Todd?
2. How are stereotypes of LGBT+ portrayed or challenged in these episodes?
3. How is heteronormativity portrayed or challenged in these episodes?

In each of the research questions I have highlighted the broader themes that I discovered in Braun and Clarke's six phases. In the first research question I look at how LGBT+ individuals' coming out is portrayed and represented in the data. I will also look at the themes of LGBT+ and coming out through a wider lens of studies and how these themes have been port- rayed previously in other forms of popular culture and media.

The second research question aims to answer how stereotypes are portrayed or challenged in these episodes. I will focus on gender stereotypes as well as LGBT+ stereotypes, especially those of lesbians and asexuals, which are the main sexual identities present in the data and where I found a lot of initial codes in the data. The stereotypical qualities which are looked for in the data are based on literature studies and psychology.

The final research question looks at how heteronormativity is portrayed in the episodes. As the focus, as visible in the first two research questions, is on the LGBT+ representation, I feel it is fair to say I will be looking at how heteronormativity is failed by Denise and Todd, the characters' whose coming outs I will study in this thesis. In phase 2 of looking for initial codes I came across many codes including heteronormativity and its failure by Denise and Todd.

As previously stated, Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis has been used by other scholars in various ways and on different forms of data. Thematic analysis has received some criticism. Nowell et al. argue, that there is not enough of literature regarding the topic (2017). There is also criticism whether thematic analysis is too broad due to its flexibility and that can lead to inconsistency and lack of coherence (ibid.). In their own work Braun and Clarke discuss how there might be problems using the method in case of too large of data, too small of a data or too diverse data (2006).

In this section I have discussed the method, thematic analysis, of this study and explained how each phase of Braun and Clarke's method works and how it was applied in this analysis. In the following section I go through my data with the results of the thematic analysis.

5 Analysis

In this section I go through my findings through the thematic analysis method. I will discuss both episodes together, grouped under the following sub-categories (representation, stereotypes and heteronormativity). The themes were created in phases 3 and 4 according to Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. I will discuss the findings of the analysis more in depth in section 6. Discussion. In the previous section I have explained that after Braun and Clarke's phases 1 and 2 I decided to apply the phases to the codes and themes created of each episode together. This is why they were grouped together under the same themes. The themes present in the research questions are representation, stereotypes, and heteronormativity. In this section the subcategories are titled under each theme, and I aim to answer the relevant research questions in each subcategory.

Representation in this case means the representation of LGBT+ individual and their coming out on a web series. Even though the episodes are behind payment on the Netflix website, I believe web series have an even greater opportunity at representing various aspects, including sexual identity, because they are not tied to any country's television network but are accessible worldwide at any time online. Stereotypes, simple beliefs or characteristics believed about and tied to a group, person, occupation, to name a few. Harmful and simple in their nature, portraying and representing characters with stereotypical traits is damaging to various affected groups. Heteronormativity considers heterosexuality and being cisgender (person's gender identity corresponds to the sex assigned at birth), which when portrayed excessively takes away from other forms of representation, and only manages to further emphasize heteronormativity's position in society.

In the upcoming subsections I use examples from the data scripts. For clarity, some of the screen directions have been left out, as I have regarded them not mandatory for the analysis and understanding of the scripts. Full scripts with all screen directions can be found as the appendices of the thesis and online. Even though I use the written scripts as the primary data, I have viewed the episodes and consider them as whole. In the analysis I occasionally make note of a character's clothing that is not described in the screen directions. I feel this as necessary for a more detailed analysis, as certain aspects have been left out from the online scripts.

5.1   Representation

Both *Bojack Horseman's Hooray, Todd* episode and *Master of None's Thanksgiving* episode have been acclaimed for accurate and important portrayal of LGBT+ individuals. Bojack Horseman's Todd represents asexuality, and Denise in Master of None is a lesbian.

In both episodes, there is a distinguished part in which a character comes out. In Thanksgiving, Denise says out loud that she is a lesbian, to both her childhood friend (example 1) and to her mother saying she is gay. Todd comes out to his friend Bojack saying he is asexual (example 5). I consider this, stating one's sexual or romantic attraction or orientation, as coming out. Herman states, that this is the traditional way of coming out, by saying without ambiguity one's gender or sexual orientation (2005, 17).

As Master of None's Thanksgiving episode focuses on Denise's life from childhood to adulthood, dealing with her sexuality, the representation is important, and the episode focuses heavily on representing lesbians on popular culture. Denise's first coming out is to her child-hood friend, Dev. By watching the show and the episode the viewer gets to know that Dev and Denise have stayed friends throughout years and Denise's sexuality has not affected their relationship. Denise comes out to Dev as follows:

> (1) TEEN DEV
> Oh, yeah, I know mixed Erica. She's cute.
> TEEN DENISE
> Nah, mixed Erica's fine as hell.
> TEEN DEV
> Okay...
> TEEN DENISE
> That's what I'm trying to say. Like... I like her. I have a crush on her.
> TEEN DEV
> Wait, are you trying to tell me that you're... you know?
> TEEN DENISE
> Lebanese.
> TEEN DEV
> What? You're from Lebanon?
> TEEN DENISE
> No. I just-- I don't know how to-- I'm not comfortable with the word, uh... Lesbian.

TEEN DEV

All right. So we'll say you're Lebanese. I mean, I always thought there was a good
chance. You're the only girl who wore Jordans to the Spring Fling. And you
got those Jasmine Guy posters up for years. I always felt like it wasn't about
her acting.

TEEN DENISE

And I have been dressing like Da Brat since preschool.

TEEN DEV

You gonna tell your mom?

TEEN DENISE

Being gay isn't exactly something black people love to talk about.

 (Appendix 2, 6)

Denise coming out to her friend goes smoothly and without issues. In the data, it is known
that Denise and Dev have stayed in contact and as friends even after her confession. Denise
explains how she doesn't feel comfortable with the word lesbian despite having a crush on a
girl. The word lesbian is mentioned in the script in total of three times, two out which are used
by Catherine, Denise's mother, in a derogatory and negative way. writes, how refusing to use
the word lesbian promotes heteronormativity. In contrast to coming out to Dev in her teens,
Denise's coming out to her mother does not go out as smoothly:

(2) DENISE

I'm gay.

[Catherine looks around the restaurant wondering if anyone heard her daughter.]

CATHERINE

You what?

DENISE

I'm gay.

[Denise can tell her mom's uncomfortable and a little embarrassed.]

DENISE
I've always been gay.

[Catherine is still at a loss for words.]

DENISE

But I'm still the same person. I'm still your daughter. Nothing's changed.

(Appendix 2, 10)

The screen directions show, even without seeing the episode, how Catherine is being uncomfortable with the topic. Denise claims she has not changed, but Catherine feels uncomfortable and embarrassed (example 2). Catherine also tells Denise not to tell others, however this is due to Denise's grandmother having trouble remembering things, and Denise would have come out constantly, and not as much due to there being malicious or homophobic intent be- hind her statement. The word lesbian is used by Catherine in 2015 and 2016 Thanksgivings towards Denise: "Look, you can be lesbian if you want to but when you come up in here, you gonna respect my house'' (22) and "You know what, I'm not in love with this whole lesbian thing. But I at least want my child to date a girl who got some sense. What happened to Michelle?'' (28). In the latter extract Catherine is addressing how she is still not fully comfortable with her daughter being a lesbian, but she does wish for her to date someone nice and smart.

It is important to note that despite representations of LGBT+ becoming more and more common and popular on popular culture, representations of LGBT+ and people of color are even more sparse. Upon learning that Denise is a lesbian, Catherine says: "I just-- I don't want life to be hard for you. It is hard enough being a black woman in this world. Now you want add something else to that?'' (15) As the writer of the thesis I am not a person of color myself so I cannot speak for the experiences people of color face in their daily life, however basing on previous studies of the topic I will aim to give an accurate explanation of the situation and how it is relevant to the representation in Master of None.

Levenstone uses the word double minority status and describes it as follows: "A double minority status establishes a person as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender while simultaneously holding the status of a non-white race. Some of these minorities within a minority group may include GLBT Hispanics, African-Americans or Asians'' (2006, 10). Denise's character is a woman of color and a lesbian, giving her the status of double minority. The reader is familiar with Denise being black due to the script and dialogue pointing it out as in the following example:

(3) **CATHERINE**

It's a group of people that have to work twice as hard in life to get half as far. And

>Denise, you a black woman, so you gonna have to work three times as hard.
>(Appendix 2, 2)

Denise also refers to being of person of colour and LGBT+ within one phrase:

>(4) **TEEN DENISE**
>Being gay isn't exactly something black people love to talk about. (Appendix 2, 6)

Representation of all different aspects of society is important. Portraying Denise not only as sexual minority but as a person of color as well, the representation gives more opportunities for accurate representation on popular culture.

In *Bojack Horseman* Todd comes out as asexual (example 5). The representation of asexuals on television has been low and when there has been representation, it has not been very good or accurate. Bojack Horseman and Todd coming out has been praised for inclusivity and accurate representation of different sexualities on television. Todd comes out to his friend Bojack:

>(5) Todd: It was shitty what you did with Emily, but, um... I think I'm... asexual.
>
>Bojack: A sexual what? Dynamo, deviant? Harassment lawsuit waiting to happen?
>Todd: No. Asexual, not sexual.
>Bojack: Ohh.
>
>Todd: I'm sure you think that's weird.
>Bojack: Are you kidding? That's amazing. Sometimes I wish I was asexual. Maybe then I wouldn't have *a* strain of herpes. (Appendix 1, 15)

The coming out is surrounded by Bojack making fun and light of the situation. However, the situation and coming out generally goes smoothly and without trouble. Bojack reacts to Todd coming out with acceptance and without judgement (Bravo 2022).

I discussed double minority using the example of Denise in Master of None. According to Tokheim's 2018 study, a problem with asexual representation is lack of diversity in most of the representation being white. It is hard to define Todd's race due to the lack of evidence in the script. In the television show, Todd's character is white-coded (being seen as white), however he's last name is Chavez, which could also be Latino coded. As there are not explicit codes in the script that define Todd as a minority of other than sexual minority, I do not consider him as double minority representation.

At the end of the episode Todd goes to an asexual meet-up. In the data script, not much info is given on this meet-up. However, Todd is looking forward and planning to go to the event:

> (6) Todd: I'm kind of busy today. I gotta pick up these glasses, and then tonight there was this meeting I wanted to go to. (Appendix 1, 3)

The fact that there is a meet-up to begin with, is a good representation that there are other asexual individuals in *the Bojack Horseman* fictional universe. Todd looking forward to the event is also showing that he wants to learn about his sexuality and meet others of the same sexual orientation.

In both Thanksgiving and Hooray, Todd two characters explicitly come out as LGBT+ in a traditional way. The reactions to their coming out vary, from making light of the situation (example 5), to being positive and understanding (examples 1 and 5), to feeling uncomfortable with the situation (example 2). Despite lacking understanding in the beginning, Catherine grows understanding and supportive, even expressing missing Denise's previous girlfriend.

In this section I have introduced the coming out events and the dialogue used in those situations in *Hooray, Todd* and *Thanksgiving.* I have also discussed the importance of representing Denise as a double minority character. When asexual representations are uncommon and misrepresented in media, Todd's asexuality plays an even more important part in the representation of asexuality on media. In the following section, I will discuss how these television episodes portray and challenge stereotypes.

5.2   Stereotypes

In this subsection I will discuss the second research question of the thesis, how stereotypes are handled and challenged in the episodes. According to a 2002 study, stereotypical feminine characteristics are shy, warm, feminine, childlike, and compassionate (Prentice and Carranza 2002). Other stereotypes associated with gender are: "[women] are generally viewed as more compassionate, expressive, honest, and better able to deal with constituents than men. Men are viewed as more competent, decisive, and stronger leaders, and possessing a greater ability to handle a crisis'' (Dolan 2014, 97). Masculine characteristics on the other hand are aggressive, leadership skills, independent and dominant (Prentice and Carranza 2002). As gender stereotypes also play into stereotypes regarding sexual orientations, it is important to discuss gender stereotypes in this context. There can be stereotypes about a variety of

different factors: age, gender, occupation or even hobbies. I will focus on the stereotypes of gender and of lesbians and asexuals. In terms of what aspects of stereotypes, I am looking at, I will look at clothing and looks and characteristics and attributes. There are other aspects of stereotypes, such as language use, that can be studied, however I opted to not study those in this thesis as I felt they did not add enough data when creating codes in the thematic analysis phase 2. Even though the visuals of the episodes are not the focus of this study, when analysing gender stereotypes, I have taken into account the script screen directions as well as some of the imagery of *Bojack Horseman* as a whole, because the script did not attach screen directions regarding clothing or gender expression.

The script for Thanksgiving provides screen directions of Denise's clothing, as shown in the following situations:

> (7) a. [Two kids, around age 8, run in. It's KID DEV and KID DENISE. Denise is dressed femininely and conservatively.] (Appendix 2, 1)
>
> b. [Denise has the dress on, she looks at herself in the mirror. She makes a disgusted face.]
>
> PRE-TEEN DENISE
>
> Man, this is some bullshit. (Appendix 2, 3)

In example 7b. Denise ends up wearing overalls and sneakers in favor of wearing the dress her mother has chosen for her. In a 2011 study it was found that lesbian stereotypes include: standing out due to odd behavior, feeling like the opposite gender, crossdresses, is confused, doesn't like going out in public, takes risks and was abused in the past (Boysen et al. 2011, 339). However, one could argue that due to Denise choosing to wear more "boyish'' and casual clothing instead of a frilly dress, she is endorsing the stereotype of a lesbian by crossdressing. Examples 7a and 7b take place in 1991 and 1995 respectively. The 4-year time difference with Denise choosing to dress more in her own style is important to show her shifting away from the stereotypical feminine way to dress and figuring out herself. This is also a way for the audience to follow Denise's journey with gender expression and coming out, as she does in the 1999 Thanksgiving scene.

Considering these above-mentioned characteristics, I would argue Denise does not fit the traditional stereotype of a woman. After this dress incident, Denise keeps on wearing not traditionally feminine clothing. Around age 16, Denise is described as wearing "baggy clothes, Tommy Hilfiger, FUBU'' (8).

Throughout the years, Thanksgiving episode shows how Denise family grows in their support for her and her relationships with other women, as well as acceptance of her looks and gender expression. In 2017, Denise's mother discusses with Denise's girlfriend Michelle:

> (8) CATHERINE
> like that outfit you got Denise.
> MICHELLE
> Yeah, um, it's nice to mix it up so she's not always wearing sweatpants and a hat that says "Ratch.''
> CATHERINE
> Yeah, well... I remember when she was in the eighth grade, she wore a John Starks Knicks jersey to school the whole year. Then she spilled gravy all over it and she still wore it for another month. I had to sneak up in her room and take it to give it to the Goodwill.
> MICHELLE
> Ooh. Well, that's good to know. I might just have to spill some gravy on that "Ratch" hat.
>
> [They laugh.]
>
> CATHERINE
>
> I know that's right. (Appendix 2, 27)

Despite making fun of Denise's way of dressing, Michelle and Catherine have accepted Denise as she and her style are, stereotypically female or not. A common lesbian stereotype is the butch character with "masculine haircuts, body posturing, and clothing.'' (Farr and Degroult 2008, 429)

Scholars who have studied stereotypes agree, that stereotypes should be challenged (Zivony and Reggev 2022; Johnson 2019; Hilton and von Hippel 1996). Many scholars have also argued that even though they are still prevalent, there is a change in the 21st century with how and what is being represented (Marks 2017).

I would argue that in Master of None, the way Denise's family reacts to her coming out and her outfits, which have challenged the stereotypical female clothing, are reflective of how times have changed and there are more options for representation. I would also argue that Denise's coming out and lesbian representation on television is working towards to breaking the gender stereotypes and stereotypes surrounding the LGBT+ individuals in the 21st century.

While LGBT+ representation and stereotypes have been the focus of studies, compared to the number of studies on other sexual orientations, asexuality has been less studied. This could be

a result from the lack of asexuality representation in media and popular culture in general, meaning there is fewer primary data to study. Stereotypes for asexual people were listed as: less social and outgoing, less extroverted and conscientious (Zivony and Reggev 2022, 18-19). Based on Zivony and Reggev's stereotypes of asexual people, I would argue that *Bojack Horseman's* asexual character Todd Chavez is a great example of challenging these stereotypes.

The episode revolves around Todd being extremely helpful to others and going his way to help others, even if he feels slightly uncomfortable doing so. Todd is described in Hooray, Todd as follows:

> (9) a**. Flutist:** His name is Todd Chavez. [...] And he's the most giving man the world has ever known. (Appendix 1, 1)
>
> b. **Flutist:** He is always helping others. You know, sometimes when that triangle part is coming up, I find myself hoping he won't show up. No man should be asked to give that much. He is truly the best of all of — (Appendix 1, 2)
>
> c. **Bojack:** Don't say that. You do so much for everybody. All you ever asked for was a roof over your head and the occasional s'more in a baguette. (Appendix 1, 15)

Using positive attributes and calling Todd "the most giving man the world has ever known'' in example 9a contrasts with the stereotype of asexuals being non-social. Todd is seemingly known by many people, and he is associated with positive reactions and qualities. In example 9b, Todd is described as "the best of all'', the description going even as far as stating no one should be asked to do as much as he does or work as hard. In example 9c Bojack describes Todd as doing a lot for everyone and being humble, as he does not ask for much in return.

Regarding Todd's gender expression, he is wearing a red hoodie (Appendix 1, 11), and he goes by the pronoun "he'', as seen in examples 9a and 9b. A problem with asexual stereotyping and portrayal in popular media, according to Tokheim's 2018 study, is the representation usually being of white descent and thus lack of diversity (Tokheim 2018, 29). There are no statements in the data script regarding race, but Todd's last name being Chavez suggests the character might be viewed as Latin-based. I did not deem gender expression as an important factor in asexual stereotypes as gender expression for lesbian stereotypes, where being more masculine was considered a characteristic of being butch.

Todd is described as generally liked and sociable character, which according to Zivony and Reggey's 2022 study is against the stereotype of asexuals being less extroverted and less social. Johnson states, that asexuals are associated with terms such as repressed, cold, wrong,

and unloving (2019). Kurowicka elaborates, that asexuality is often associated with unproductivity and immaturity (2022, 249). From the data examples of immaturity and naivety were collected:

> (10) a. Todd: Whoa! Oh, hey, guys. I was eating a taco earlier and I got salsa on my shirt. I went to clean it off, but then when I put my hands in the automatic dryer I forgot I was still holding the taco. I got my hands all greasy, so I couldn't open the doorknob for an hour. What you guys talking about? (Appedix 1,2)
>
> b. Todd: I never know if I can handle anything. That's what makes my life so exciting. (Appendix 1, 3)
>
> c. Todd: Ah, okay. [panting] Hey, look at me! I'm dancing. The time is now! Don't miss out!
>
> Diane: Okay, Todd, that's some good dancing, but I've got work to do and you've been dancing for... 55 minutes?! (Appendix 1, 9)

In example 10a Todd describes in detail a situation that happened to him with eating a taco and cleaning it off, which paints him in an incompetent light, making him appear more childish and immature. Example 10b Todd states that he does not know if he can handle anything which he considers making life exiting. Even though it is not explicitly stated in the script, Todd's character is an adult. He is friends with people who have jobs and are working, he goes on dates and attends events like an adult person would do. I would argue not knowing how capable one shows immaturity, as well as naivety of one's own skills. In example 10c, Diane states that Todd has been dancing for 55 minutes. The context for why he was dancing was to distract Diane but distracting one could be done in other ways that would not be considered as immature as dancing.

In this section I have introduced common stereotypes regarding LGBT+ members, especially stereotypes of lesbians and asexuals, as they are relevant to the data. In the following section I will discuss the final theme of thesis, heteronormativity.

5.3   Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is a concept that regards heterosexuality as the dominant sexual or romantic orientation and cisgender as the dominant gender in society. When an individual does not fit into the dominant gender or sexual or romantic orientation, they can be considered to have failed heteronormativity. Herz and Johansson state that heteronormativity can be "used to describe a body of lifestyle norms as well as how people tend to reproduce distinct and complementary genders (man and woman)'' (2015, 1011). Previous studies have been

conducted on heteronormativity in society as well as in popular culture. Thorfinnsdottir and Strandgaard Jensen's 2017 study on Danish television shows found that most sexuality representations were to enforce the idea of heteronormativity, and failing to do so in a hetero-normative way was considered as comical. Thorfinnsdottir and Strandgaard Jensen state that whenever "characters appear on screen, they are inevitably performing their gender'' (Thorsfinnsdottir and Strandgaard 2017, 405). Thus, not performing according to one's gender could be considered challenging heteronormativity.

In both Thanksgiving and Hooray, Todd, both characters appear to be content with their assigned sex at birth and are cisgendered. Despite Denise choosing to wear traditionally non-feminine clothing, the character is cisgendered woman. However, both characters come out as members of the LGBT+ community, Denise as a lesbian and Todd as asexual. These coming out representations are discussed more in depth in section 5.1. Representation. Neither character is thus heterosexual, and represent the opposite, or failure, of heteronormativity. It needs to be noted that despite asexuality being under the LGBT+ umbrella term and the defining characteristic of the sexuality being not being sexually attracted, they can be romantically attracted and be in relationships. In *Hooray, Todd*, Todd does discuss previous heterosexual relationships with his friend Bojack:

> (11) a. Bojack: Look what I do to people I'm supposed to care about. I had sex with the one person I've ever seen you be in love with.
> Todd: I guess they're not gonna put you in the best friends hall of fame, but I don't know that I loved her. I don't think I'm allowed to be in love.(Appendix 1, 15)

> b. Bojack: That's great. So if you're not mad about Emily--
> Todd: It wasn't just Emily, BoJack, and I don't know if I'm ready for us to be friends again yet. (Appendix 1, 15)

From the example I assume Todd's previous relationship being heterosexual based on the name Emily, which is traditionally a name used by women (example 11b). In example 11a, Todd states that he does not think he is allowed to be in love. According to Vares, "for many romantic-identified asexuals, the happy family was desired and also a possibility with respect to a partnered (usually non-sexual) relationship, potentially with children.''(2022, 776) Todd has dated before, and despite not showing interest in dating the actress Courney Portnoy for publicity (example 12a), even forgetting to meet up with her (example 12b and example 12c) due to being busy doing other tasks.

> (12) a. Todd: I'm kind of busy today. I gotta pick up these glasses, and then tonight there was this meeting I wanted to go to. (Appendix 1, 3)

b. Princess Carolyn: So, I see lots of pictures of you at the fashion show, but none of you with Courtney.

Todd: Oh, crap! [grunting, panting] Hi. (Appendix 1, 14)

c. Todd: 1:00? I gotta go meet my fake girlfriend! (Appendix 1, 7)

Vares further elaborates:

> By locating singleness as something to fear, it is positioned as threatening to the amorous/romantic couple imperative underpinning heteronormativity (and increasingly homonormativity) and the happy family. In this construction, friends, family and other relationships cannot provide the 'real' happiness that comes from a sexual and/or amorous partnered relationship. (2022, 777)

According to Vares for many asexuals non-sexual relationships are desired, and in heteronormative context friendships are not as valid in proving happiness, than can only be accessed via romantic and sexual relationships (Vares 2022, 777). Todd prioritizes friendships over relationships, as in examples 12b and 12c, where he has forgotten to go on a fake date in order to help his friends. He is also looking forward to trying something new and meeting new people (potential friends or non-sexual relationship) by going to a asexual meet-up, which he refers to as the "meeting'' in example 12a.

Todd discusses the status of their friendship with his previous roommate and friend, Bojack, after they have not talked in a year:

> (13) Todd: It wasn't just Emily, BoJack, and I don't know if I'm ready for us to be friends again yet. Bojack: Oh. Okay.
>
> Todd: But we can be more than not-friends.
> Bojack: You know, for an asexual, more than not-friends is probably as good as it gets, right? Todd: I'm not really at a place yet where I want to joke about it. (Appendix 1, 15-16)

In example 13, Bojack jokes about asexuality, but is quickly told by Todd he is not comfortable with joking about the topic yet. Todd seems to value their relationship enough to try and fix things, and he even sets boundaries of telling Bojack to not make jokes of his sexuality.

In Thanksgiving, Denise expresses not wanting to have a heterosexual relationship with a man:

> (14) DENISE
> But you ain't got to worry about me and pregnancy.
>
> CATHERINE

You got saved. You done come to the Lord.

DENISE

No. I don't know why you keep asking me that. I'm not... gonna get pregnant because...I don't like having sex with men.
CATHERINE

Have you tried it?

DENISE

No.

CATHERINE

Then how do you know you don't like it?

DENISE

It's just something I know. (Appendix 2, 9)

In example 14, Denise not wanting to have a heterosexual relationship is her failing to perform heteronormativity. As heteronormativity is the norm, Catherine assumes that Denise is heterosexual.

(15) a. JOYCE
Well, get used to it. 'Cause one of these days she gone bring home one of her little girlfriends.

[Catherine cringes at the thought.]

CATHERINE

Oh, Lord. Oh Lord! Well, I just hope she don't bring home no white girl, 'cause I don't want to see no Jennifer Anistons up in here. (Appendix 2, 12)

b. CATHERINE
You know what, I'm not in love with this whole lesbian thing. But I at least want my child to date a girl who got some sense. What happened to Michelle? (Appendix 2, 25)

Dhaenens writes that "gay men and women acting in gender-appropriate ways are less of a threat to the heterosexual matrix'' (2013, 311). Dhaenens elaborates, that by having family and friends suggest to the LGBT+ character to take an "identity that does not unsettle the heterosexual matrix'' (2013, 311), can be done in order for them to not have trouble or be harassed. Denise's mother Catherine wants her daughter to date someone sensible (example 15a), and wants her to date a person of color and not "no white girl'' (example 15b). These reasons could stem from Catherine wanting the best for her daughter, even though Catherine is not thrilled about her daughter being LGBT+, and for her to not have trouble regarding race

and being a person of color, as Catherine elaborates on biracial dating: "Child, anytime these folks see a black man coming up in the world, making himself enough money to get himself a white woman, they try to frame him.'' (Appendix 2, 5)

I would argue that by simply having representation of LGBT+ characters, that do not fit the heteronormative mold, is challenging heteronormativity. Rahikainen argues, that heteronormativity on American television can be challenged, and has been challenged by shows such as Happy Days (2014, 20). Other television shows, such as Glee (Dhaenens 2013) and *the L Word or Queer Eye* (Levenstone 2006). In this section I have analysed the three main themes I derived using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. In the following section I will answer all three research questions in the light of the analysis.

6 Discussion

In this section I discuss the results of the thesis based on the analysis done in the previous section. Prior to writing this thesis I was already familiar with the contents of Master of None and Bojack Horseman and with the characters of Todd and Denise. I have conducted analysis based on close reading of the chosen episode scripts and thematic analysis based on my interest and the dialogue provided by the scripts.

In the analysis I wanted to answer the research question of how LGBT+ individuals (and their coming out experiences) are represented in Master of None's episode *Thanksgiving* and Bojack Horseman's episode *Hooray, Todd*? Upon thematic analysis of the data, coming out experiences and LGBT+ individuals' sexualities were represented in the data. In one of the data sets, sexuality was also represented together with being a person of color, which according to Levenstone is considered being double minority (2006).

My second research question aimed to answer how stereotypes are portrayed and challenged in these episodes. In both cases, stereotypes were both reinforces and challenged. In Bo- jack Horseman, asexuality was challenged by portraying Todd as social and helpful. In this study I found, that based on the characteristics of stereotypes of asexuals and lesbians in psychology studies and literature studies, stereotypes were both heavily challenged as well as played into. Denise's clothing signifies a butch character, a common lesbian stereotype. On the other hand, stereotypically described as cold and unfriendly, Todd is shown to be extreme- ly helpful and social, even to a point where it is not helpful to himself.

My last research question looked at how heteronormativity was portrayed and challenged in the episodes. Both Denise and Todd "fail'' to perform heteronormativity. Denise show's no interest in wanting to be romantically or sexually active with men, and has no prior experience. Todd has dated in the past in a assumably only heterosexual relationship, but as a member of the LGBT+ community and asexual he fails to perform heterosexuality. In the episodes, we see different reactions from other characters to this failed heteronormativity. Catherine, Denise's mother, is shocked and upset, but through time grows to become more accepting of her daughter's new sexual identity. Todd comes out to an old friend, who does joke about it, but overall is happy for him in his newfound identity. We see Todd going into a meeting for other asexuals and being happily accepted there, giving him the support in his failed heteronormativity.

A limitation I encountered during the writing process was that the data set for this thesis is very narrow. To broaden the scope of the thesis and to be able to make potential comparisons and similarities, a broader scope of data needs to be gathered. As I have previously mentioned, the number of television shows and movies with LGBT+ themes is growing and there is more to option to choose where to focus. One could study television shows of one genre, or how animation television shows portray these themes. This thesis was focusing on American television, and a comparison between American to other nationalities' television shows could show interesting results on how coming out is represented based on the country's culture. I was drawn to my data set, as I was familiar with the content prior to writing this thesis and I felt the representation of LGBT+ issues positive to my personal experience. A survey study on people of different backgrounds on their thoughts on representation could also give idea to how different cultures view certain representations.

Scholars agree, that representation of the LGBT+ community is heading towards better and more well-rounded representation, instead of being the laughing stock or portrayed solely as bullied characters on television. Both Bojack Horseman or Master of None have been praised as television shows, as well as been praised for their representation of queer identities. Lesbian representation has been studied more, which could be the effect of such shows such as The L Word or Ellen, asexuality remains less studied. There is way less representation of asexuality on media, and in the past its portrayal has been negative and painted all asexuals as cold and unfriendly. I do think the representation of LGBT+ community and asexuality especially, is moving forward, with popular shows such as Sex Education and *Bojack Horseman* painting the sexuality in a more accurate and realistic light.

Upon conducting thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's 2006 model and its six phases, I note that my data was a bit too narrow, but the method worked well for this kind of thesis. In the following and final section I conclude my thoughts and review how I used thematic analysis in this thesis.

7   Conclusions

In this thesis I have studied two television shows and one episode from each show through the lens of thematic analysis, paying attention to the themes of representation of coming out as LGBT+ and representations of lesbians and asexuals, stereotypes, and heteronormativity. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was used as the main and method for the thesis due to its flexibility and its suitability for this type of analysis.

Utilizing Braun and Clarke's 6 phase method, I first familiarized myself with the contents of the data by close reading. I created initial narrow codes out of the data and categorized them into broader themes. I reviewed the themes and edited them to fit my research questions. Upon working on phases 3 to 5, some themes were deleted as they did not fit the research questions and themes, I ended up working with the names were worked into more suitable and more fitting ones. The last phase of the thematic analysis has been writing this report.

I do agree with scholars that there is both good and bad representation. Not only is representation getting better, I believe there are changes in how heteronormativity is situated in society. As more laws including transgender rights and same-sex marriage have gone through, there is more opportunities for people to explore and perform their preferred sexual orientations or gender identities. Using gender neutral terms, such as partner, chairperson, police officer or first-year student, the terms are no longer, whether subconsciously or not, tied to a certain gender or orientation.

Even though I believe things and representations are changing for the better in terms of LGBT+ community, there remain cultures and countries that view this diversity as more of problem and issue than as the positive diversity it is. This study has only been a brief look at the LGBT+ representation on two series and more work is needed to ensure accurate representations of all sexual and gender expressions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Script for Bojack Horseman

The script for Bojack Horseman can [be found here](#).

Appendix 2: Script for Master of None

The script for Master of None [can be found here.](#)

Appendix 3: Finnish Summary

Monipuolinen representaatio on tärkeää. Medialla ja populaarikulttuurilla on suuri merkitys siinä, millaisena ympäröivän maailman koemme ja näemme. Populaarikulttuurin sekä sosiaalisen median myötä ihmisillä on mahdollista kohdata erilaisia yhteisöjä sekä representaatioita ympäri maailmaa. Se, mitä ja miten meille esitetään erilaisten kanavien kautta, muokkaa suhtautumistamme erilaisiin asioihin, kuten seksuaalisuuteen ja vallankäyttöön.

Populaarikulttuurilla tarkoitetaan suurelle yleisölle tuotettua kulttuuria ja viihdettä, esimerkiksi elokuvia, televisiosarjoja sekä musiikkia. Erilaiset mediakanavat, kuten sosiaalinen media, edesauttavat populaarikulttuurin leviämistä. Tutkimuksissa on löydetty populaarikulttuurin vaikuttavan vahvasti seksuaalisuuteen sekä seksuaalivähemmistöjen representaatioon (Thompson 2006, Comer, Bower ja Sparkman 2015).

Tutkimuksessani selvitin, miten televisiosarjoissa Bojack Horseman ja Master of None erilaiset seksuaalivähemmistöt esitettiin, sekä miten sarjojen jaksoissa esiintyi stereotyyppejä ja heteronormatiivisuutta. Tutkimuksen teoria perustui Virginia Braunin ja Victoria Clarken (2006) temaattiseen analyysiin (Thematic analysis, TA). Tutkimuksessani käytin termiä HLBT+ (homo, lesbo, biseksuaali, transsukupuolinen) kattamaan kaikki eri seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöt. Tutkimuskysymykset olivat seuraavat:

1. Miten HLBT+ yksilöt esitettiin televisiojaksoissa Hooray, Todd (Bojack Horseman) ja Thanksgiving (Master of None)?

2. Miten HLBT+ stereotyyppejä haastettiin, mutta toisaalta myös edesauttoivat ja vahvistivat stereotyyppien syntyä?

3. Miten heteronormatiivisuutta esitettiin ja haastettiin jaksoissa?

Tutkimuksen keskeisiä käsitteitä ovat stereotyypit, heteronormatiivisuus sekä representaatio. Representaation määrittely pohjautuu pitkälti Stuart Hallin työhön (1997). Hallin mukaan representaatio tarkoittaa merkitysten luomista käyttäen kieltä (1997). Representaatiossa on kaksi järjestelmää: mentaaliset representaatiot (mental representations) sekä yhteinen kieli

(language) (1997). Kielen avulla pystymme selittämään ja jakamaan mentaalisia representaatioitamme, jotka ovat usein kulttuurisesti jaettuja. Toisin sanoen samaan kulttuuriin kuuluminen tarkoittaa että jaamme vastaavia mentaalisia representaatioita.

Heteronormatiivisuudella tarkoitetaan oletusta, että heteroseksuaalisuus on yhteiskunnassa normi. Heteronormatiivisuus voi olla ongelmallista sillä se voi asettaa eri seksuaalisuudet arvojärjestykseen ja jopa sysätä syrjään seksuaalivähemmistöjen edustajia (Dhaenens 2013). Stereotyypillä tarkoitetaan hyvin yksinkertaistettua kuvausta jostain ilmiöstä, asiasta tai ihmisryhmästä. Stereotypiat voivat liittyä niin etnisyyteen, sukupuoleen kuin seksuaalisuuteen. Tyypillisiä stereotypioita sukupuolesta onkin esimerkiksi se, että naiset ovat helliä ja rakastavat lapsia, ja miehillä on johtajakykyä ja kunnianhimoa (Prentice ja Carranza 2002).

Yhdysvalloissa HLBT+ elokuvat ja muu sisältö lähtivät nousuun 1970-luvulla, kun tiukka sensuuri poistettiin käytöstä ja New Yorkin osavaltiossa tapahtuneet Stonewallin mellakat aloittivat modernin seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen oikeuksien ajamisen. Tutkijat pitävät näyttelijä ja koomikko Ellen DeGeneresin tuloa kaapista sitcom-ohjelmassa Ellen vuonna 1997 uranuurtajana HLBT+ representaatiolle televisiossa (Herman 2005). Lähivuosina sekä elokuvissa että televisiossa HLBT+ henkilöhahmojen määrä on ollut vakaassa kasvussa.

Tutkimuksessani tutkin kahta yhdysvaltalaista televisio-ohjelmaa ja yhtä jaksoa molemmista sarjoista. Molemmat sarjat ovat saatavilla Netflix -suoratoistopalvelussa maksumuurin takana. Käsikirjoitukset olivat kuitenkin vapaasti saatavilla verkossa. Käytän tutkimuksessa termiä televisiosarja käsitellessäni aineistoa, mutta oikeasti ne ovat verkkosarjoja (web series), jotka eroavat perinteisistä televisio-ohjelmista muun muassa puuttuvilla mainoksilla sekä kielellä, joka sisältää rajumpaa kieltä ja esimerkiksi kirosanoja (Bednarek 2018)

Aziz Ansarin ja Alan Yangin Master of None (2015-2021) on palkittu sarja, joka sijoittuu Yhdysvaltojen New Yorkiin ja seuraa Devin (Aziz Ansari) ja tämän ystävien elämää, parisuhteita sekä ystävyyssuhteita kaupungissa. Devin ystäväpiiriin kuuluu muun muassa Lena Waithen esittämä Denise, joka on lesbo. Valitsemani jakso, Thanksgiving, on sarjan toisen tuotantokauden 8. jakso. Jakson tapahtumat sijoittuvat usealle vuodelle, mutta tapahtumapaikkana toimii aina Denisen lapsuuskoti kiitospäivän aikaan. Denise tulee ulos kaapista lesbona ystävälleen sekä perheelleen, joista erityisesti Denisen äiti ei ole mielissään. Ajan myötä Denisen äidin suhtautuminen kuitenkin muuttuu myötämielisemmäksi.

Raphael Bob-Waksbergin BoJack Horseman (2014-2020) on aikuisille suunnattu animaatiosarja, jonka useat henkilöhahmot ovat antropomorfisia, eli ihmisenkaltaisia eläimiä. Sarjan nimikkohahmo Bojack (ääninäyttelijä Will Arnett) on vanha televisiotähti, joka toivoo tekevänsä comebackin viihdealalle haamukirjoitetun omaelämäkerran myötä. Muita henkilöhahmoja ovat Bojackin haamukirjoittaja Diane Nguyen (ääninäyttelijä Allison Brie), Bojackin tavoin entinen televisiotähti ja Dianen ex-aviomies Mr. Peanutbutter (ääninäyttelijä Paul F. Tompkins) sekä Bojackin ystävä Todd Chavez (ääninäyttelijä Aaron Paul). Bojack Horseman on myös palkittu ja kiitelty erityisesti sen sisällöstä ja raskaiden aiheiden, kuten riippuvuuden ja masennuksen, käsittelystä (Riekki 2021, Barranco 2020). Tutkimuksen jakso on 4. kauden 3. jakso, Hooray, Todd, joka kertoo Toddin päivästä, kun hän auttaa ystäviään heidän eri askareissaan. Jakson lopussa Todd tulee ulos kaapista aseksuaalina ja saa lämpimän vastaanotan ystävältään sekä muilta aseksuaaleilta tapahtumassa.

Tutkimuksen materiaaliani toimivat edellä mainittujen televisiojaksojen käsikirjoitukset, jotka löytyvät verkosta. Litteroin käsikirjoitukset tarkistaakseni niiden pätevyyden jaksoihin Netflix -palvelimella. Tutkimukseen ei sisällytetty jaksojen visuaalisuutta, sillä kyseisellä temaattisella analyysillä se ei olisi toiminut ja kirjallisesta materiaalista saatiin toteutettua tarkempi ja yksityiskohtaisempi analyysi. Tutkimuskysymyksillä pyrin selvittämään, miten HLBT+ yksilöiden representaatio toteutuu kyseisissä jaksoissa. Todd Chavez Bojack Horsemanista on aseksuaali, joka tarkoittaa henkilöä joka ei koe seksuaalista vetovoimaa muihin ihmisiin (AVEN 2023). Denise Master of Nonesta on lesbo, joka tarkoittaa naishenkilöä joka on kiinnostunut romanttisesti tai seksuaalisesti muista naisista (The Center 2023).

Tutkimus pohjautui Braunin ja Clarken (2006) temaattiseen analyysiin, joka on kuusivaiheinen. Valitsin kyseisen teorian sillä se on hyvin joustava ja antaa paljon vapauksia tutkijalle. Aineiston valinta on myös joustava, ja aineistona voikin olla käsikirjoitusten lisäksi niin haastatteluja kuin verkkosivustoja. Tutkimusmetodin saama kritiikki koskee sen joustavuutta, joka voi johtaa ristiriitoihin ja epäselvyyteen analyysissä (Nowell et al. 2017) sekä aineiston valintaan, jos aineisto on joko liian laaja, pieni tai monipuolinen (Braun ja Clarke 2006). Braunin ja Clarken temaattisen analyysin kuusi vaihetta ovat seuraavat:

1. aineistoon tutustuminen (familiarising yourself with your data)

2. alustavien koodien luominen (generating initial codes)

3. teemojen etsintä (searching for themes)

4. teemojen arviointi (reviewing themes)

5. teemojen tarkentaminen ja nimeäminen (defining and naming themes)

6. raportin kirjoittaminen (producing the report)

Ensimmäisessä vaiheessa (familiarising yourself with data) tutustuin aineistoon lukemalla käsikirjoitukset tarkasti läpi. Lisäksi kirjoitin molemmat käsikirjoitukset puhtaaksi tutkimuksen liitteisiin. Toisessa vaiheessa loin aineistosta alustavia koodeja (generating initial codes). Alustavat koodit ovat Braunin ja Clarken mukaan tutkijaa itseään kiehtovia ideoita ja aiheita jotka esiintyvät aineistossa. Aineistoni ollessa verrattain pienikokoinen, kävin manuaalisesti läpi käsikirjoituksia merkiten ylös alustavia koodeja jotka kiinnittivät huomioni. Alustavia koodeja Master of Nonen Thanksgiving -jaksosta keräsin liittyen heteronormatiivisuuteen, sukupuoli-identiteettiin sekä etnisyyteen. Bojack Horsemanin Hooray, Todd -jaksosta keräämiäni alustavia koodeja olivat muun muassa aseksuaalisuuteen liitetyt positiiviset kuvailut sekä aseksuaalisuudesta vitsailu.

Vaiheet 3, 4, ja 5, liittyvät koodien luomiseen, muokkaamiseen ja nimeämiseen. Metodin kolmannessa vaiheessa kokosin samankaltaisia koodeja isompiin ryhmiin samankaltaisten teemojen alle. Alustavien koodien on tarkoitus olla laajoja, ja teemojen luominen rajaa tutkimuksen aihepiiriä ja tutkimuskysymyksiä. Neljännessä vaiheessa työstin edellisessä vaiheessa keräämiäni teemoja siten, että poistin tarpeettomat teemat ja rajasin teemoja entisestään. Esimerkiksi tässä vaiheessa jätin pois tutkimuksesta etnisyyteen liittyvät teemat, sillä ne eivät vastanneet tutkimuskysymykseeni.

Metodin 5. vaiheessa teemoja tarkennettiin entisestään ja niille annettiin lopulliset nimet. Lopulliset teemat, joihin päädyin, olivat HLBT+ yksilöä koskevat stereotyypit (Stereotype of LGBT+ Individual), heteronormatiivisuus (Heteronormativity) ja kaapista ulos tuleminen (Coming out as LGBT+). Viimeinen vaihe oli kirjoittaa raportti.

Temaattisen analyysin myötä molemmista käsikirjoituksista nousi esiin selkeästi tapahtuma, jossa henkilöhahmot tulivat kaapista, eli kertovat seksuaalisesta suuntautumisestaan julkisesti

tai yksityisille henkilöille. Koin nämä kohdat käsikirjoituksista tärkeäksi HLBT+ representaation kannalta, sillä ne edustavat perinteistä tapaa tulla ulos kaapista ja lähipiirin reaktiota, eivätkä jätä jaksojen katsojaa epävarmoiksi henkilöhahmojen seksuaalisesta suuntautumisesta. Vaikka jätin pois etnisyyteen liittyvät teemat temaattisen analyysin 4. vaiheessa, koin tärkeäksi Denisen henkilöhahmon edustavan kaksoisvähemmistöä, "double-minority'' (Levenstone 2006), hänen olleessaan sekä POC (person of color) että seksuaalivähemmistöön kuuluva.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että sekä Bojack Horsemanin Hooray, Todd, että Master of Nonen Thanksgiving haastavat HLBT+ yksilöihin liitettyä stereotyyppejä, mutta myös vahvistavat stereotyyppien pysyvyyttä käyttämällä stereotyyppisiä luonteenpiirteitä ja vaatetusta henkilöhahmoissa. Esimerkiksi Master of Nonen Denise rikkoi naissukupuolen stereotyyppiä käyttämällä perinteisesti epänaisellisia vaatteita, mutta häntä kuvaillaan miesmäiseksi lesboksi (butch), joka on yleinen stereotypia lesaboista (Farr ja Degroult 2008). Bojack Horsemanin Todd kuvattiin usein stereotyyppisen lapsellisena ja naivina aseksuaalina, mutta toisaalta aseksuaalien kylmää ja epäsosiaalista stereotypiaa rikkoi Toddin auttavaisuus ja muiden henkilöhahmojen kuvailevan häntä positiivisilla adjektiiveilla.

Heteronormatiivisuus oli esillä molemmissa käsikirjoituksissa, ja sitä myös aktiivisesti haastettiin. Denisen äiti, Catherine, olettaa Denisen olevan hetero, ja yllättyy tämän tullessa ulos kaapista ja täten haastaen heteronormatiivisuutta. Todd ei vaikuta olevan kiinnostunut tapailusta vaan keskittyy ystävyyssuhteisiinsa ja ystäviensä auttamiseen. Molemmat seksuaalivähemmistöihin kuuluvat henkilöhahmot myös rikkoivat heteronormatiivisuutta sillä, että he eivät edustaneet heteroseksuaalisuutta.

 Tutkimuksessa käytin Braunin ja Clarken (2006) kuusiportaista temaattista analyysia. Metodi oli sopiva valitsemalleni aineistolle. Ensi alkuun tutustuin tarkasti aineistooni, jonka jälkeen loin laajoja alustavia koodeja aineistosta löytämistäni mielenkiintoisista aiheista. Seuraavissa kolmessa vaiheessa työstin alustavat koodit tarkempiin ja enemmän rajattuihin teemoihin, ja entisestään rajasin, muokkasin ja arvioin kyseisiä teemoja. Luomieni teemojen myötä tutkin aineistossani lesbojen ja aseksuaalien representaatiota sekä näihin seksuaalivähemmistöihin kohdistuvia stereotypioita ja heteronormatiivisuutta, ja kuinka näitä haastettiin aineistossa.

Tutkimuksen heikkous on sen suppeus. Aineistona oli kahden yhdysvaltalaisen televisiojakson käsikirjoitukset, ja tutkimus keskittyi vain kirjallisiin käsikirjoituksiin, eikä jaksoihin kokonaisuudessaan multimodaalisesti. Laajemmalla aineistolla sekä

multimodaalisella lähestymistavalla tutkimuksesta voitaisiin saada laajempaa tietoa HLBT+ yksilöiden representaatiosta, stereotyypeistä sekä heteronormatiivisyydestä televisiosarjoissa.

Tutkijoiden mukaan HLBT+ yhteisön sekä edellä mainittujen teemojen representaatio on ottanut suuntaa realistiseen ja positiivisempaan pilkan tai haitallisten representaatioiden sijaan. Molempia televisiosarjoja, joita analysoin, on kehuttu niiden käsittelemistä aiheista ja HLBT+ yksilöiden representaatiosta. On kuitenkin selvää, että aseksuaalisuutta tutkitaan huomattavasti vähemmän muihin seksuaalivähemmistöihin verrattuna. Tämä voi johtua siitä, että aseksuaalisia hahmoja on televisiossa ja elokuvissa vielä huomattavasti vähemmän kuin muita seksuaalivähemmistöjen edustajia. Tässä tapauksessa pidän entistä tärkeämpänä sitä, että Bojack Horseman on onnistunut aseksuaalisen henkilöhahmon kuvauksessaan.

Olen vakuuttunut siitä, että HLBT+ representaatio populaarikulttuurissa kasvaa ja paranee laadultaan yhä enemmän tulevaisuudessa. Esimerkiksi useammat lait koskien saman sukupuolen avioliittoja sekä transihmisiä ovat päässeet käytäntöön, ja kielessä huomioidaan entistä tarkemmin sukupuolineutraalius. On kuitenkin muistettava, että on olemassa valtioita sekä yhteisöjä, jotka eivät koe vähemmistöjä sellaisena rikkautena, kuin ne ovat. Tutkimus on ollut vain pintaraapaisu kahden televisiosarjan käsikirjoituksiin ja entistä laajempaa tutkimusta tullaan tarvitsemaan ajankohtaisen seksuaalivähemmistöjen representaation takaamiseksi.