THIS FAR, BUT NO FURTHER:
QUESTIONING THE
"BROMANCE" TROPE IN
CONTEMPORARY FILM AND
TELEVISION

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ABSTRACT

In traditionally male-oriented genres of contemporary film and television, the *bromance* is a relationship that outwardly suggests an acceptance of homosexuality, but is instead actually dependent upon both men being heterosexual; the closeness between these male characters is played for laughs, and no one seriously considers the possibility that the relationship may become romantic. This problem is compounded by the recent popularity of queerbaiting audiences, both within the actual narratives and by those working behind the scenes. I use post-structuralist textual analysis and interviews, as well as the practice of seeing queerly, to examine how bromance relationships are constructed and represented onscreen in the Buddy Cop, Science Fiction and Fantasy, and Superhero genres, and the effects of those representations on society. Media creators have the power to affect cultural change, but only if they stop using the idea that someone might be gay as a punchline.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Shelley Joffe Weinstein, for supporting me in

every possible way throughout this entire process. I would, literally, not be here without you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Common Law*

In 2011, I remember sitting in my living room and watching television, when a promo for a new USA network series started to play. Preceded by a few seconds of two men bickering, the commercial really starts with another character asking the two men, now sitting across from her, "Is this your first time in couples' therapy?" ("Common Law Trailer"). The scene switches as another character laments: "I don't get it, you guys used to be so good together. What happened?" ("Common Law Trailer"). It's obvious that the two men in question are partners. However, fifteen seconds into the promo (and just long enough for the viewer to come to the wrong conclusion), the commercial quickly establishes that the two men are detectives: they are partners—but not *partners*—who have been sent to couples' counseling. The tagline for the series sums it up: "It's like marriage. Only with bullets" ("Common Law – USA Network"); and I remember thinking: *They're not even* trying *to be subtle anymore*.

Popular films and television series that feature close relationships between two male characters are nothing new, and neither is the idea of comparing such close pairings to romantic couples. What was interesting—and frustrating—about *Common Law*, was that its premise in no way extended beyond that idea. It started and ended with the fact that these two heterosexual men were ordered to attend couples' counseling together, and in doing so, it crystallized a problem I'd been growing increasingly aware of but had not yet articulated to myself: not only does the entertainment industry—particularly the "buddy cop" and other traditionally male-oriented genres—want to profit from portraying the *idea* of queer relationships without actually *portraying* queer relationships, but the fact that these relationships are never actually queer continuously turns the idea that they *could* be into a punch line.

Therefore, the issue that I will be exploring in my thesis is that of the oft-repeated representation of the homosocial relationship—or bromance—in popular film and television. This is a relationship that outwardly suggests an acceptance of homosexuality, but is instead actually dependent upon both men being heterosexual. In each of these relationships, the closeness between the male characters is played for laughs, and no one seriously considers the possibility that the relationship may become romantic. In spite of this, these relationships are often put forward as examples of queer representation.

In using homosexuality as a punch line and actively avoiding turning homoerotic subtext into actual text (while exploiting it at the same time), film and television creators reveal a passive homophobia present and continuously perpetuated in the entertainment industry. It is true that this homophobia is now cloaked in good-natured camaraderie, rather than ignorance and hatred, which some might see as a step forward. However, the thinly veiled fear and disgust masquerading as humour prevents (and actively works against) a true acceptance of homosexuality in popular culture.

1.2. Theoretical Lenses

The theoretical framework that I will use to investigate the homosocial relationship relates to Gender Studies, which "examines how notions of gender structure our reality" ("Theoretical Frameworks"). Specifically, I will be using Gender Studies as influenced by postmodernism which argues that "gender is not a fixed category, but rather a social construction" ("Theoretical Frameworks"). Theorists like Judith Butler have argued that gender is performative, writing that "when the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine

a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler 6). Scholars have used this and other theories to examine the historical functions of these constructions, and the meaning attributed to them ("Theoretical Frameworks").

While many gender theorists focus on women and femininity as constructs, the topic I have chosen necessitates that my focus be on men and masculinity. Men's Studies is a relatively new area of research that evolved out of feminism and Women's Studies. Men's Studies examines "the internal subjective experience of men", and attempts to critically examine and "situate that experience in the context of the social construction of masculinities" (Brod 164). While some might protest the idea of studying the historical man, suggesting that history itself is the story of men, Men's Studies asserts that it is important to separate *man* from *human*: "in contrast to this patriarchal paradigm in which men are seen as generically and normatively human, the study of masculinities sees men as specifically gendered beings" (166). The establishment and evolution of Men's Studies has "altered long-standing assumptions about the inherent characteristics of men and women and also about the very division of people into the categories of 'men' and 'women.' The traditional sexes are now seen as cultural groupings rather than as facts of nature based on a static division between two different kinds of people" (Gardiner 35). This new area of study includes theorists who have made claims similar and in opposition to my own that I will utilize in my thesis.

Although the characters I will be looking at are canonically heterosexual, Queer Studies also offers an appropriate lens through which to examine this topic. Queer Studies "emphasizes the constructedness, plurality and ambivalence of sexual identities. This makes heterosexuality one identity among others" (Brooker 212). The meaning of "queer" has changed over time. Where it was first used as a derogatory term for homosexuals, it has since been reclaimed by the

LGBTQIA community and no longer has its previous negative connotations: "'to queer' is to estrange or defamiliarize identities, texts and attitudes that are taken for granted and assumed to have fixed meanings" (212). Both Gender and Queer Studies aim to divorce heterosexuality and men from the idea of normality. Both areas of research include a focus on sexuality, and they often take from each other in an attempt to understand how they intersect.

1.3. Research Questions

My research questions are as follows: Can the idea of the homosocial relationship (or bromance) in traditionally male-oriented genres of popular film and television help with the acceptance of homosexuality in our culture? What is preventing these genres from featuring relationships that are actually homosexual, rather than homoerotic?

1.4. Essential Vocabulary

1.4.1. "Bromance"

While I will continue to reference the homosocial relationship, it is also important to acknowledge the more fashionable term now used in the common vernacular. The word "bromance"—which conflates the words "brother" and "romance"—is thought to have been coined by *Skateboard* magazine editor David Carnie in the 1990s, but gained popularity in the early twenty-first century with the release of comedies such as *The 40-Year-Old-Virgin* (2005) and 2009's *I Love You, Man* (DeAngelis 1). The official definition of the term is simply "a close but non-sexual relationship between two men" ("bromance"); however, that definition alone makes it seem as though the term can be applied to most friendships between men, which is not the case. A key characteristic of a bromance is that the two men involved must share an emotional intimacy (arguably, in lieu of physical intimacy) that differentiates their relationship from the friendships that each man may have with others.

1.4.2. "Queerbaiting"

The idea of "queerbaiting" is central to my work, and will be explored in-depth in chapters two and five. Although this expression has been assigned to a number of different practices, I am engaging with the newer definition of the term—one which describes a strategy in which film and television creators attempt to attract viewers by presenting the idea that a queer relationship might develop, or is developing, between two heretofore heterosexual, same-sex characters. This presentation may include a variety of tactics, including "hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism", but is always immediately followed by a comedic—but definitive—denial that encourages the audience to laugh at the thought of the idea ever becoming a reality (Fathallah 491). As Judith Fathallah writes, "Denial and mockery reinstate a heteronormative narrative that poses no danger of offending mainstream viewers at the expense of queer eyes" (491).

The popularization of this use of the term is very recent, and I believe its growing prominence is a direct response to the growth of actual LGBTQIA representation in film and television. As we move further and further into an age where positive representations are not only possible, but expected, we are also more and more able to recognize the injustice when those representations appear to be implied, but are then laughed at and withheld.

1.5. Film and Television

When comparing two different mediums, such as film and television, one might assume that there would be a need to clearly define the parameters in which each operate and how those parameters have resulted in distinct methods of storytelling. However, those distinctions are no longer as apparent as they once were. It is true that films used to tell stories that were much more contained than the stories television told—a natural result of filmmaking being a prolonged-yet-isolated process compared to the ongoing nature of television production: "[films] have a

contained narrative arc that enforces conclusion, while television series are able to play out ongoing relationship negotiation and evolution" (Lotz 155).

However, the invention and popularization of cinematic universes, as well as the influx of orders for limited series on streaming platforms and specialty cable channels in recent years have resulted in opportunities for each medium to tell the types of stories made popular by the other; Marvel's *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) was the culmination of over ten years of storytelling told across twenty-two films, while each season of BBC's *Sherlock* consists of only three 90-minute episodes. It should be noted that none of the films or television series that I have chosen as my case studies exists within a vacuum; whether it is due to serialization, the presence of sequels or spin-offs, or the existence of a wider universe to provide context, each of my case studies has had the opportunity to tell an ongoing story.

1.6. Traditionally Male-Oriented Genres

Although the bromance is featured in many different genres—especially in comedies—it was important to me that my focus remain on genres that have traditionally been directed towards men. There is a correlation between the presence of a popular homosocial pairing onscreen and the absence of actual queer representation, and that is most noticeable in these genres. I hypothesize that this is related to lingering cultural perceptions of what it means to be gay—and, more specifically, what it means to be a gay man.

In his book, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, Vito Russo writes, "The popular definition of gayness is rooted in sexism. Weakness in men rather than strength in women has consistently been seen as the connection between sex role behaviour and [sexuality]" (4-5). By focusing on representations of queerness (or homosociality in lieu of queerness) in genres that are traditionally aimed at men, I hope to force an acknowledgement and a re-

examination of the persisting faulty assumptions that I believe still underlie societal perceptions of gay men and masculinity, in an effort to finally move past them once and for all.

I am choosing to focus my research specifically on three traditionally male-oriented genres: the "Buddy Cop", Science Fiction and Fantasy, and Superhero genres. While it is true that there are other genres of popular film and television that are traditionally male-oriented—Westerns, gangster movies, and depictions of war, to name a few—the genres I have chosen are more prolific in our current culture, and especially relevant to my arguments.

1.6.1. Buddy Cop

According to Vincenzo Bavaro, police and crime procedural is "possibly the most masculine of all television genres, having an emphasis on physical action, the public sphere, and professional roles" (71). Bavaro identifies the traditional function of its simple formula, "crime/pursuit/capture … as a mechanism of social control, asserting not only the paternal care (and sanctioned violence) of the State but also the inescapability and powerlessness of the criminal" (71). Robert Grimminck traces the evolution of the "maverick cop" genre back to "that most macho of genres, the Western", noting that the stories were, in essence, updates that moved the action to more urban settings and replaced "horse stunts … with car chases" (26).

1.6.2. Science Fiction and Fantasy

In the second edition of their *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, John Clute and Peter Nicholls write that science fiction and fantasy were traditionally "defined and long-dominated by men" (424). However, while it is true that prior to the 1960s few science fiction pieces "consciously investigated sexual questions", in this particular genre, "what is implied is often as important as what is openly put forward" (1088). Rebecca Feasey elaborates on this when she points out that "because telefantasy is not confined to either naturalistic or realistic conventions,

this genre is in a position to offer alternative representations of sexuality and gender" (56), and cites Wendy Pearson's more overt assertion that the genre is "ideal for the examination of alternative sexualities" (qtd. in Feasey 58).

1.6.3. Superhero

Jeffrey Brown writes that the superhero genre presents "a very narrow definition of masculinity within a narrative designed to foster viewer identification" (40). With very little variation, superhero origin stories usually "revolve around the symbolic transition of the main male character from 98-pound weakling to he-man" (37). Significantly, Lee Easton suggests that, in the superhero genre, "queer moments are necessarily produced because the superhero narrative requires the representation of multiple forms of male homosociality" ("Sharing a Quick" 151). Easton goes on to further lament that "regulating the zone where male heterosexuality and acceptable homosociality meets male homosexuality has been a central preoccupation of the superhero genre since its inception" ("Rogers and Stark" 326).

1.7. Case Studies

Rather than focusing on one case study, or one per genre, this thesis will feature three case studies from each of the three genres being highlighted. In this way, I hope to not only cover the fullness of my topic, but also to sufficiently emphasize how widespread particular patterns involving these relationships have become. In an effort to remain focused on contemporary culture, I have limited my case studies to films and television series that have either premiered or have still been airing first-run episodes in the ten years prior to when I began writing this thesis in 2018.

Buddy Cop #1: *Hawaii Five-0* (CBS)

This television series premiered in 2010, and is a reboot of the *Hawaii Five-O* series that ran from 1968 to 1980. In the original version, Jack Lord played Steve McGarrett, the leader of a special state police task force whose members—including a young detective named Danny Williams, played by James MacArthur—were all subordinate to him (both as the lead actor and as the main character). The reboot does away with what was a significant age difference between the two characters, which—combined with Steve making Danny his work partner in the first episode—puts them on more equal footing. Their relationship can be contentious at times, and their "cargument" scenes (scenes where they bicker in the car while one is driving) have become a staple of the pairing[1] (Hinckley).

Buddy Cop #2: *Sherlock* (BBC)

A Sherlock Holmes for the 21st century, *Sherlock* re-imagines the Victorian detective and his companion in the modern era. When former army doctor John Watson needs an affordable place to live in London, he is introduced to Sherlock Holmes, the world's only "consulting detective" ("A Study in Pink"). Premiering in 2010, Sherlock (not "Holmes", in a nod to current cultural practices) is presented as a self-defined sociopath with a definite distaste for the people around him—John being the notable exception.

Buddy Cop #3: *Sherlock Holmes* (Warner Bros. Pictures)

A steampunk-ish Sherlock Holmes set in the Victorian era, this adaptation includes a slightly more traditional take on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous characters. However, it is also noticeably geared towards garnering mass audience approval, as this series splits its focus equally between the cerebral and the more action-oriented and spectacular elements of its stories.

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[1] I will be using the term "pairing" when referencing the two men in each of these relationships—rather than the word "couple", which has a stronger association with romance—because I want to acknowledge their canonical heterosexuality even as I refer to them as a single unit.

The relationship between Holmes and Watson is the main focus of each of the two films released thus far (*Sherlock Holmes* 2009; *Sherlock Holmes: Game of Shadows* 2011), and was the main feature highlighted in the publicity leading up to each film's release (Mueller 175).

Science Fiction and Fantasy #1: *Stargate: Atlantis* (The Sci Fi Channel)

A spin-off of the television series *Stargate: SG-1* (which was itself a spin-off of the movie *Stargate*), *Stargate: Atlantis* (2004-2009) starts off with an expedition of soldiers and scientists embarking on what they believe could be a one-way trip to the Pegasus galaxy, in search of the lost city of Atlantis and the advanced technology it may contain. After his commanding officer is killed by the Wraith (a race of vampiric aliens who feed on humans' life force), disgraced-but-heroic John Sheppard finds himself in charge of the military contingent of the expedition. He becomes fast friends with Rodney McKay, the misanthropic head of the science division, and together with their other teammates they set out to explore Atlantis and the Pegasus galaxy, and to stop the Wraith.

Science Fiction and Fantasy #2: *Star Trek* (Paramount Pictures)

A reboot of *Star Trek: The Original Series* that takes place before it began, the newest *Star Trek* trilogy (*Star Trek* 2009; *Star Trek Into Darkness* 2011; *Star Trek Beyond* 2016) preserves the established canon by introducing an alternate timeline that is caused by accidental time travel. This incident triggers an immediate confrontation that results in the destruction of Kirk's father's ship (as well as the death of his father) as Kirk is being born. The ripple effect creates a variety of changes, and yet, in spite of their different circumstances the original crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise still finds itself back on board as members of Starfleet. The close relationship and long history that the original Kirk and Spock shared achieves a mythic status, as

their counterparts are told repeatedly that they are meant to be friends and that their friendship will "define [them] both" (*Star Trek*).

Science Fiction and Fantasy #3: *Merlin* (BBC)

A twist on the traditional story of King Arthur (that begins while he is still a prince), *Merlin* (2008-2012) re-imagines the titular famous wizard as Arthur's contemporary and manservant. In a Camelot where magic is banned, Merlin must hide his abilities from everyone. When a magical creature tells him that Arthur is his destiny and that they are two sides of the same coin ("The Dragon's Call"; "The Mark of Nimueh"), Merlin devotes himself and his magic to keeping Arthur safe from Camelot's enemies—even though the law against magic means he will be killed if he is caught.

Superhero #1: *X-Men: First Class* (Twentieth Century Fox)

In the first *X-Men* film trilogy (*X-Men* 2000; *X2: X-Men United* 2003; *X-Men: The Last Stand* 2006), the close, absolute friendship between Charles Xavier (AKA Professor X) and Erik Lehnsherr (AKA Magneto) is established early on; the shared history between the two men is palpable in their scenes together. *X-Men: First Class* (2011) tells the story of how they met, and how their ideological differences eventually forced them to part ways in spite of their devotion to one another. Their beliefs are fueled by their respective pasts: Charles' optimistic belief in humanity's eventual acceptance of mutants is borne out of a sheltered affluence and a mutant ability that brought him joy. Erik's pessimism is an understandable result of being a Holocaust survivor, whose powers manifested in a concentration camp—and are therefore inextricably linked to that trauma. Often compared to Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, Charles advocates for peaceful resolutions and mutant equality, while Erik resolves to be the hunter instead of the hunted next time—if history should repeat itself—and fights for mutant superiority.

Superhero #2: *Marvel's Daredevil* (Netflix)

Premiering on Netflix in 2015, *Daredevil* tells the story of Matt Murdock, a blind, Catholic lawyer by day, and an acrobatic, violent vigilante by night. Matt's heroism began at a young age when he saved an elderly man from being run over by a truck, only to be blinded by the leaking chemicals that the truck had been carrying. Due to comic book science, the chemicals that blinded him also enhanced his other senses to such a degree that he is sometimes able to pass as a seeing man ("Blindsided"). Franklin "Foggy" Nelson is Matt's best friend and former college roommate, and the first season begins with the two opening a law practice together in Hell's Kitchen. Foggy remains ignorant of Matt's double life for most of the first season, and throughout the series Matt repeatedly tries to push him away in an effort to protect him from the powerful enemies Daredevil has made. The series is technically considered a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but as there has been no crossover between the films and television series thus far, I am considering it a separate entity for the purposes of my thesis.

Superhero #3: The Marvel Cinematic Universe (Marvel Studios)

Since the premiere of the first *Iron Man* film in 2008, this series has expanded at an exponential rate. The reason I consider it a single case study is that I will only be concentrating on the journey of one relationship, that of Steve Rogers (AKA Captain America) and Tony Stark (AKA Iron Man). The only successful—voluntary—recipient of the Super Soldier Serum, Steve Rogers fought against Hydra (the Nazi's science division) during WWII. After he crashes an enemy plane into icy water in order to save the world, the serum in his body saves him from dying and preserves him in ice until he is found and defrosted seventy years later. Shortly after he is revived, aliens attack New York and he becomes the leader of the newly-formed Avengers.

A self-proclaimed "genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist" (*The Avengers*), Tony Stark's life as a weapons' designer and manufacturer is changed when he is kidnapped by terrorists in Afghanistan, and becomes the victim of one of his own bombs. He rescues himself, and, realizing that his weapons are getting into enemy hands, he vows to stop making them and to destroy all of the ones that have been sold illegally. In order to do this, he builds a flying suit of armor, and is soon dubbed Iron Man by the press. When aliens attack New York, he is asked to join the fight, where he meets Steve Rogers, and becomes an Avenger. In examining this pairing, it will be important to make references to their history in the Marvel comics, as it is that history that filmmakers worked with when deciding how to portray these characters in the films.

1.8. Chapter Summation: The Shape of Things to Come

The chapters that immediately follow this introduction will lay out the literature that I reviewed prior to and throughout the writing process, as well as the research methods that I utilized over the course of my thesis work. In chapter four I will examine the myriad of issues that surround, impact, and are in turn impacted by, the bromance relationship in the context of how romantic relationships are most often depicted onscreen, and how enduring and pervasive cultural perceptions of gender have resulted in the entrenchment of specific biases within our social fabric.

Chapter five will begin with an exploration of what it means to *see queerly*, a "multi-faceted spectatorial position" (Kohnen 219) that celebrates the queer potential in popular entertainment. I will then discuss the problematic-yet-prevalent response to those who see queerly, the growing practice of creators purposefully queerbaiting their audiences. Chapter six will discuss the roles that female characters are reduced to when they are placed in proximity to a bromance relationship, and consider the idea that changing the role of the love interest may serve

to elevate everyone involved. Chapter seven will survey some more recent developments and

their effect on my arguments before concluding my research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of my literature review is twofold: First, I will be examining the literature

that inspired and surrounds my topic, and how I originally positioned my research in relation to

existing discussions on the bromance and homosocial relationships, as well as on queer

representation. Second, I will survey a newer collection of research that specifically addresses

queerbaiting, and the position my research will now hold within it.

2.1. The Basis of Inspiration

This thesis owes a lot to two influential texts that can be placed within Queer Theory,

despite the fact that both were written prior to the emergence of Queer Theory as an official field

of study. Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, published first in

1981 (with a revised edition published in 1987), is a chronological history of gay representation

in film (with some references to representation in television as well) that explores the potential

reasons behind a strikingly similar pattern of problematic portrayals. The second text, Eve

Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, was first

published in 1985 (with an updated edition published in 1992) and is a foundational text on the

homosocial relationship—from which the bromance is derived—and how that type of

relationship connects to homosexuality.

2.1.1. Vito Russo and the Unfortunate History of Queer Representation

Although the characters I will be using as case studies in this thesis are canonically

heterosexual, my central argument still directly relates to the need for more (and more positive)

representations of gay characters in traditionally male-oriented genres of film and television, and

so Russo's history of the problems inherent in how Hollywood has represented such characters in

the past is incredibly relevant to my work. The crux of Russo's argument is that the way

homosexuality has been perceived in film (and television) has always been "in terms of what is or is not masculine" (V. Russo 4). Russo identifies and highlights the pervasive (yet incorrect) belief in society that all romantic and/or sexual relationships contain a gender-role dichotomy (even when the relationship involves two people of the same gender), and that "men are never attracted to each other as masculine equals" (63). If being attracted to the masculine is seen as a feminine characteristic (as it has historically been seen to be), and—as Russo also takes pains to point out—there is a ubiquitous connection in society between "feminine behavior and inferiority", this then explains why gay men have historically been perceived as both feminine and inferior (17). As Russo writes, "Homosexuality is seen as a threat to the supremacy of men over women and an abdication of the power conferred on men as a birthright" (297).

In discussing the history of queer representation in film, Russo also highlights the influential role that film has had in society:

> War had brought men together in the buddy system, closer than they had ever been before. The all-male environment of the armed services forced to the surface a confusion about the inherent sexuality between men who preferred each other's company … The fear that these chaste male relationships might in any way be labeled as odd or queer was very real, and the movies assured that no hint of perversion would be introduced into such bonding. (68)

This excerpt also brings to light another issue that is key to both Russo's book and my own work, that of "homosexual panic", or the heterosexual fear that one might associate with, or be mistaken for, a gay man.

The idea of gay panic is of particular importance to my thesis because I will argue that it is that panic that is being expressed in our current popular culture and preventing a more

complete acceptance of homosexuality in popular film and television. Russo goes directly to the heart of the issue, in keeping with his focus on masculinity, when he writes that homosexual panic is rooted "in the fact that anyone might be gay. Straight men aren't threatened by a flamboyant [gay man] because they know they aren't like that; they're threatened by a guy who's just like they are who turns out to be queer" (297). This connects back to the (incorrect) theory that men are never attracted to the masculinity of other men, and creates the assumption that masculinity is incompatible with homosexuality—that masculine gay men are unnatural.

It is difficult to summarize the myriad of issues that led Russo to infamously conclude the first edition of his book with the assertion, "There never have been lesbians or gay men in Hollywood films. Only homosexuals" (245). The stereotyped, damaging, and otherwise one-dimensional characters that typified what the early-, mid-, and even late-twentieth century could expect from queer representation onscreen were harmful—and even dangerous—because they created incorrect and/or incomplete ideas of what it meant to be LGBTQ. This not only had the potential to hurt queer audiences, it also endangered efforts at wider social acceptance; representation is important, after all, because film has the ability to influence the cultural zeitgeist—to reassure, and to teach. Elaborating on his initial conclusion in the revised edition of his book, Russo explains that his exaggeration—as he calls it—was meant to point out that Hollywood films "have perpetuated a lazy, stereotyped idea of homosexuals in the place of realistic characters who happen to be gay. Homosexuals are a compendium of media-created stereotypes. Gays are a diverse group of real people. … In Hollywood films, therefore, homosexuals have not been people; they have been a dramatic device used to shock and sell" (248).

One of my aims with this thesis is to extend Russo's work into the modern era. Western society has made significant advancements in the way it perceives LGBTQ individuals in the thirty years since the revised edition of *The Celluloid Closet* was published, but as Russo died in 1990 (Holden, "Vito Russo"), he is not available to chronicle those advancements and how they are (or are not) reflected in contemporary film and television. I will be examining my chosen case studies, in part, through the lens of Russo's work, in order to determine if (and to what degree) his arguments are still valid criticisms of how homosexuality is perceived—and how LGBTQ individuals are represented—onscreen.

2.1.2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and the Homosocial Relationship

In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick examines the different types of relationships that men have with other men, and how those relationships then affect the relationships that men form with women. Using the term *homosocial* to describe "social bonds between persons of the same sex", Sedgwick points out that the word is "obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual', and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'" (1). Sedgwick begins her book by positing that there is an unbroken continuum between homosocial and homosexual relationships, and that this continuum's "visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (1-2). Sedgwick focuses her work on men because she concludes that women do not experience the same discontinuity between homosocial and homosexual relationships that men do: "the diacritical opposition between the 'homosocial' and the 'homosexual' seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men" (2).

This connects Sedgwick to a number of issues I will be discussing in my work, the sum of which suggests that—while there is no doubt that both gay men and lesbians are marginalized,

and that both experience prejudice and harassment due to their orientations—there is a difference in how relationships between gay men are perceived in society, as opposed to those between gay women. Both Russo and Sedgwick place the blame for this on unsubstantiated assumptions about gender roles, with Sedgwick writing that "the stereotypical effect of the male-male sexual liaison was to reduce perceived masculinity, rather than to redouble it" (206).

One of Sedgwick's claims on this subject that is especially relevant to my work is her assertion regarding what is to blame for the homophobia that interrupts the continuity between homosocial and homosexual relationships for men: "It had for a long time been true … that the schism in the male-homosocial spectrum created by homophobia was a schism based on minimal difference. It was all the more virulently fortified for that" (201). Not only does this echo Russo's explanation for homosexual panic, it also suggests an acknowledgement that sexuality is entirely separate from constructed gender roles. If there is "minimal difference" between straight men and gay men, then masculinity cannot be an automatic factor in differentiating a homosexual man from one who is heterosexual.

Despite the fact that Sedgwick uses Victorian-era English literature as the focus for her theories on the homosocial relationship, her work can be (and has been) applied to a variety of media and other cultural works. Lee Easton makes references to her arguments in his discussion of superhero comics, highlighting and expanding on her observations:

> The homosexual closet emerged as a result of the need to discriminate between the allowable – and necessary – intense male bonds that men were required to maintain in order to prosper in patriarchal capitalist societies and the need to refuse any suggestion that these self-same bonds might indicate homosexuality …

But distinguishing between these different bonds was difficult; the signs of

homosexual masculinity hard to read. (Easton, "Rogers and Stark" 310)

This quotation creates another direct connection between Sedgwick and Russo, as it validates his

observations regarding the role of war in bringing men together. It was film (and later,

television) that provided assurances—however stereotypical—that bonding with a "buddy"

didn't mean one was gay.

All of this leads to further discussion of homosexual panic and homophobia, as—like

Russo—Sedgwick connects both to issues surrounding masculinity. In discussing her own

literature review on the topic of patriarchal structures, Sedgwick writes that these structures

suggest that "'obligatory heterosexuality' is built into male-dominated kinship systems, or that

homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions" (3). Sedgwick then cites

Gayle Rubin as she draws connections between homophobia and misogyny, asserting that the

same patriarchal systems that oppress women also work to oppress homosexuality, and

homosexuals (3).

The position I've placed myself in with regards to Sedgwick's research is one of

agreement. I believe that, in contrast to Russo, there is less of a need to confirm the continued

relevance of her theories, even though it has been over ten years since she passed away. This is

because Russo was writing about the evolution of a medium that has continued to evolve after he

died; whereas Sedgwick was writing about relationship patterns from a specific historical period

that she asserted were still present in her contemporary world:

For a man to be a man's man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred,

always-already-crossed line from being "interested in men". Those terms, those

congruencies are by now endemic and perhaps ineradicable in our culture. The

question of who is to be free to define, manipulate, and profit from the resultant

double bind is no less a site of struggle today than in the eighteenth century. (89-

90)

This does not mean that the continued significance of Sedgwick's work shouldn't be scrutinized,

only that I believe—due to Easton and others like him—that it has been, and is therefore not

something that I must take on in this thesis.

2.2. The Bromance

If *homosocial* is the umbrella term covering all types of—non-sexual—relationships

between men, a *bromance* is a specific subset of that type of bond. Elizabeth J. Chen writes that

popular culture "celebrates" the bromance, describing it as a relationship that "channels intimate

male friendship into narrow and well-defined boundaries" (242). Screenwriter Helen Jacey adds

that bromance films descend directly from what used to be called "buddy movies", but specifies

that "the bromance goes a step further in that it is predicated on notions of heterosexual men's

needs and desires for each other (on a non-sexual basis) and around the value of such friendships

to the protagonists" (239). In fact, Pamela Hill Nettleton asserts that part of the power—and a lot

of the appeal—of the bromance relationship in film and television lies in "the visible, palpable

yearning for connection between the characters" (130).

2.2.1. Bromantic Literature

There has been a lot written about the bromance relationship in film and television in the

past fifteen years, but most of it has focused on how those relationships appear within the

"buddy-cop" or the (aptly titled) "bromantic comedy" film genres, both of which are usually

marketed as comedies. There is also a small but significant collection of literature that focuses on

specific pairings (mainly Sherlock Holmes and John Watson) that are not considered part of the

comedic genre. However, little has been written, in general, about bromances that appear in other genres that are traditionally male-oriented—where the relationships are not the main focus of the particular film or television series in which they are featured. This has left an opening for my research.

In attempting to establish a list of common elements in a bromance, Kayley Thomas includes "back-and-forth banter, a love-hate relationship, codependency, masculine physicality and action, male camaraderie and loyalty, and potential homoeroticism" in her definition (38). Writing specifically of the buddy-cop genre, Carlen Lavigne notes that this genre's "pattern occurs in narratives that center on a closely bonded platonic relationship between two men who share professional and domestic intimacy, who form two halves of one powerhouse whole, but whose frequent looks and physical proximity must constantly struggle against their own romantic implications" (17).

Michael DeAngelis is more specific in setting parameters for what can be considered a bromance relationship, writing that a bromance "involves something that must happen (the demonstration of intimacy itself) on the condition that other things not happen (the avowal or expression of sexual desire between straight males)" (1). DeAngelis further highlights the origins of this contradiction when he points out that a "bromance may not be actively marketed to homosexual communities or audience sectors, but the phenomenon owes its emergence to its facility in appropriating the cultural codes of homosexuality" (11). The problem with this particular type of cultural appropriation is aptly articulated by Chen, who concludes that "only heterosexuals can have a bromance. The members cannot have any sexual involvement, and thereby maintain heteronormative hierarchies" (248). This paradox leads into a discussion of the problems inherent in the bromance relationship.

2.2.2. The Problematic Aspects of the Bromance (Friends Without Benefits)

The last four years has seen the publication of several works that have commented on a growing awareness of the problems inherent in portraying a bromance relationship onscreen. Chen's discussion of the legal implications of the bromance relationship highlights the main issue:

> Bromances fit into the framework of homophobia as privilege and subordination because they rely fundamentally on heterosexuality as a guiding principle. Bromances are definitionally between two heterosexual men and asexual in character. They are a source of privilege because society gives a relationship legitimacy when it has this status; when given the bromance label, the relationship loses all potential for "gayness". (256-257)

Continuing in this vein, Murray Pomerance asserts that "to be bromantic is to *pretend* to an intimacy one has no intention of ever proving—and every intention of preventing oneself from proving … essentially, [it is] to be treated as exotic [by] an audience that would be signally unlikely to tolerate actuated homosexuality" (259). I believe that my position connects particularly well with Pomerance, and that there is space for my work alongside his due to our different approaches to this subject; while Pomerance focuses on the characters *within* the narrative, I intend to focus on the characters *as they have been placed* within the narrative. Instead of discussing why a character might be acting a certain way within the story, I'm interested in postulating why a character might have been made to act a certain way by the writer/director/producer/etc., and what that says about the culture of the industry.

2.3. Queerbaiting

In its current incarnation, *queerbaiting*—both as an accepted term and a recognized act—is a fairly recent phenomenon. Prior to the adaption of its current meaning, "queer baiting" was used to describe practices that were similar to race baiting, which is "the making of verbal attacks against members of a racial group … [or] the unfair use of statements about race to try to influence the actions or attitudes of a particular group of people" ("Race-baiting"; see also Harper 651). Some scholars theorize that *queerbaiting*, in its contemporary form, emerged "at some point surrounding 2010" (Bridges 119). However, I would suggest that if that is the case, its popularization did not happen for a few more years after that. According to Eve Ng, *queerbaiting* refers to "situations where those officially associated with a media text court viewers interested in LGBT narratives—or become aware of such viewers—and encourage their interest in the media text without the text ever definitively confirming the nonheterosexuality of the relevant characters" (1.2). This encouragement is delivered to fans via a variety of methods, both textual and paratextual.

2.3.1. Rising to the Bait (the Popular Response)

Many scholars see queerbaiting in a negative light, and Suzanne Scott highlights the main reason why:

> [T]he "bait" in queerbaiting implies *intent* on the part of the media producers, with homoerotic subtext or content overtly positioned to lure LGBT audiences and/or those fans who "see queerly". Once fans are "caught" (or, more to the point, counted and sold back to advertisers), the representational bait is revealed to be something other than it initially appeared, with homoerotic desire either sublimated or foreclosed entirely. (149)

That this practice is purposeful and premeditated speaks to there being a sense of callous indifference among media creators when it comes to issues such as the need for more—and more positive—LGBTQ representation. Scott cites several television series where queerbaiting practices have resulted in "toxic fan/producer relations", suggesting that the disingenuousness of queerbaiting, as well as the "hollow" efforts to placate audiences that protest, are the reason for this toxicity (150). Scott and many other scholars specifically reference the series *The 100* in their discussions[2] and in doing so establish firm connections between queerbaiting and the infamous trope that is lately referred to as "bury your gays" (Scott 150; Bridges 122; Ng 8.2-8.5; Waggoner 1886). Those connections tie these recent discussions directly back to Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet*, as it was he who first presented an analysis that showed the overwhelming pattern of LGBTQ characters dying horribly, over and over again, in popular film[3].

Elizabeth Bridges raises the point that, when it comes to relationships between female characters, queerbaiting "tends to run in different directions—mostly, in terms of *actually giving* the characters some scenes of physical affection, but making sure it never turns into anything long-term or meaningful or [that] contradicts the characters' previous heterosexuality" (123). This point is also in keeping with Russo, as he and several other researchers make note of the fact that "lesbian eroticism in the service of male sexuality has been a consistent theme in heterosexual fantasy" (V. Russo 6). The idea that there is a titillation factor involved in heterosexual audiences viewing images of lesbian relationships onscreen is also important because it implies that there would be a reverse—or opposite—reaction from those same

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[2] I have not included *The 100* among my case studies as that series featured a female/female pairing, while I am focusing on male/male pairings. That pairing was also canonically involved in a romantic (and sexual) relationship, while the pairings I am looking at are not.

[3] For the "Necrology", a compiled list of films featuring LGBTQ characters (and those characters' causes of death), please see V. Russo 347-349. While absolutely relevant to queerbaiting, this trope is not the focus of this thesis (although it will be referenced). For more information, please see: Liz Millward, Janice G. Dodd, and Irene Fubara-Manuel's *Killing Off the Lesbians: A Symbolic Annihilation on Film and Television* (McFarland & Company, 2017).

audiences upon viewing images of relationships between gay men. And, indeed, this is something that has been taken for granted in much of the research (Feasey 28; King 160; Battles and Hilton-Morrow 95; Forster 193, 211n7), and will be explored in the chapters that follow.

Queerbaiting is harmful not only for what it does to fan/creator interactions, but also what it does to the audience in general—especially those who identify as LGBTQ. Cassidy Sheehan draws a direct connection between queerbaiting and "the invalidation of queer identities", arguing that queerbaiting is always harmful, even if those behind the scenes have "good intentions" (qtd. in Brennan 191). Bridges is more specific in her criticisms of the practice, highlighting the queer erasure that is often the result of queerbaiting, as potentially LGBTQ characters are either sidelined or limited to subtextual expressions of their sexuality (116). In addition to the characters onscreen, queerbaiting also punishes queer audience members because they are repeatedly presented with the possibility of quality representation, only to have to face disappointment again and again—or worse, mockery (116). After all, in denying that a character is queer, the fact that they could be anything other than heterosexual is often turned into a punchline: "At best, queerbaiting sends these young viewers the message that heterosexual romance is the universal standard and that queer characters are only ever Others whose lives and loves are unworthy of full representation" (121). The general consensus among the literature on queerbaiting is that it is a practice full of negativity, with negative consequences. However, there are some who disagree.

2.3.2. Joseph Brennan and "Homoeroticism, Yay!"

Joseph Brennan is one scholar who has a very different view of queerbaiting. This is mainly because he seeks to connect queerbaiting (which he acknowledges has negative connotations) "with another fan term that describes similar phenomena, but which has positive

connotations, known as 'hoyay!'" (Brennan 190). According to Melanie E.S. Kohnen, who

Brennan often cites, the origins of the term "HoYay!" (short for "homoeroticism, yay!") trace

back to the fall of 2001: "Originally, HoYay! was conceived as a way of describing the strong, or

as most fans put it, undeniable, homoerotic aspect of the relationship between Clark Kent and his

best friend … Lex Luthor, as expressed by a number of longing looks and lasting touches

exchanged between them on screen" (Kohnen 210-211). Kohnen goes on to describe the term's

evolution from "a descriptive term for the longing looks and touches between Clark and Lex into

a desired way of seeing, a spectatorial position actively sought out by *Smallville* fans" (211).

Kohnen names this process of recognizing (and looking for) homoerotic subtext as "seeing

queerly"—a practice that will be explored further in chapter five (212).

HoYay! became and continued to be a popular term in fandom throughout the decade that

followed, and it quickly spread beyond the *Smallville* television series, entering the general

fannish lexicon. When the BBC's *Merlin* premiered in 2008, the term was almost instantly

applied to the interactions between the two main characters (Mitchell). In connecting

queerbaiting to HoYay!, Brennan suggests that rather than "being conceptualized in terms of the

'representational harm' caused by queerbait tactics, we should instead consider the queer

readings made possible by homosexual subtext", adding that doing so brings meaning to the term

that is more in line with "the 'poaching' spirit of media fandom" (190).

The position I have placed myself in with regards to Brennan is one of opposition, as I

reject the reasoning behind his conclusions. Brennan makes several assumptions in the process of

setting out his argument, the least of which is that fans need to be encouraged to see alternative

possibilities for romantic relationships between characters onscreen. A quick search of popular

fanfiction website *An Archive of Our Own* shows, for example, almost 300 stories have been

written featuring a romantic relationship between Tony Stark and Bruce Wayne[4]—characters who are from two completely separate franchises (A03, "Tony"). Fans do not need to be baited into imagining the romantic potential between two characters who have never had that type of relationship onscreen, they are perfectly capable of enabling themselves.

Putting aside the question of fan creativity, Brennan makes mention of a number of articles on queerbaiting published in the mainstream press, and notes how each article positions queerbaiting "as a problem to be solved" (194). In response to these articles, Brennan suggests that it would be "productive to recognize that similar 'tactics', described by terms such as 'hoyay', were once seen rather differently" (194). Pointing out how HoYay! celebrates the results of seeing queerly, Brennan proposes that, instead of condemning queerbaiting practices, that same sense of celebration "should be associated with all queer gestures in mainstream texts" (196).

The problem with transitioning from viewing certain practices as queerbaiting into celebrating them as HoYay! is that it would be going backwards. Although Brennan writes about the use of HoYay! in the present tense, the term is outdated and no longer a part of fandom's shared vernacular; fandom scholar Matt Hills confirms that HoYay! "belong[s] to older fan traditions" (qtd. in "Queerbaiting and Fandom"). The shift Brennan proposes has already occurred, but it was from HoYay! to queerbaiting, and not the other way around.

HoYay! was celebrated in the 1990s and 2000s because there were limits to how far media producers could go—particularly in male-oriented genres—and audiences were generally accepting of that fact (Ng 3.1-3.2). HoYay! was celebrated because its presence was viewed as a loophole in the rules of what could be put onscreen; viewers were gleeful over spotting moments

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[4] This phenomenon is not only associated with same-sex pairings, the same website features over 3000 stories that contain a romantic relationship between Bucky Barnes and Darcy Lewis, characters who—while from the same franchise—have never appeared in the same film, let alone the same scene (A03, "James").

of HoYay! because they couldn't expect more than that. The problem with re-embracing the celebratory aspect of HoYay! is that today's audiences *can* expect more than subtext-as-representation, and are no longer willing to settle. As Emma Nordin states, "we [now] live in a time and place where queer representation is possible yet constantly denied" (63). The fact that media producers today are often more intent on presenting bait-and-switch tactics than actual positive representation—in spite of the cultural shifts that would now allow them to do so—is not something that can, or should, be celebrated.

2.3.3. Michael McDermott and the "Authentic" Narrative

Another scholar who has a different view of queerbaiting is Michael McDermott. Although McDermott shares Brennan's "hesitation to accept as self-evident the intentional exploitation of the queer sensibilities and investments of fans", his own argument veers in a different direction (McDermott 140). Focusing more on the cause than the effect, McDermott states that the fan/creator interactions that result in accusations of queerbaiting rely "on notions of authorial intention and control" (133). McDermott describes a contest between fans and creators over the "true" meaning of a text, one in which queerness has become objectified, positioned "as something 'in' the text—something that can be identified and read" (134). Though he does not propose that there is a "true" meaning to a text, nor a "correct" way to read one, McDermott connects queerbaiting to the debate surrounding questions of authorship and suggests that queerbaiting "ultimately relies on this notion of who has a claim to knowledge of [an] authentic narrative" (135).

The position I have placed myself in with regards to McDermott is also one of opposition. Like Brennan, McDermott makes several assumptions in his research. The most questionable of these assumptions is his assertion that "fans who employ the term queerbaiting as

a criticism of the purportedly intentional and exploitative use of implicit queerness seem to struggle with the notion of a polysemic text … Rather than seeing their interpretation of the narrative as just one of many possible and equal readings of the text, fans see it as *the* meaning" (136). It is notable that these statements are not followed by specific examples or cited materials that would provide evidentiary support. The fact is that fans *rely* on the notion of a polysemic text—on their ability to *create* alternative interpretations (through fanfiction, vidding, etc.)—and none but the most passionately enthusiastic believe that they are truly going to see the multitude of pairings that queerbaiting promises actually happen onscreen: "shippers aren't stupid. We are fully aware that our ships aren't canon and that the subtext we are reading into is usually unintentional" (J. Wood, see also AbFabSkyLife, "Brokeback McDanno"; AbFabSkyLife, "The slashgoggles"; Asher-Perrin; Kass; Lunaoh; Merlin Missy; Mod Peridot; Saika; Stuart).

McDermott also argues that the creators' use of humour to dispel any potentially homoerotic subtext—and to distance the idea of actual queerness being included in their work—is an attempt to "reinforce their authority over and desire to preserve what they deem as the authentic narrative" (141). In making this argument, however, he appears to present this use of humour as something positive, writing that humour is able "to acknowledge [homoerotic] interpretations without actively endorsing or discouraging fans' engagement" (138), and goes on to suggest that it is necessary: "Any discussion of the interpretations of queerness made by fans cannot be explicitly referenced to or amongst the creators … without the use of humour to distance the queerness from being perceived to have any 'legitimacy' in the primary narrative" (139). While a more thorough examination of the practice of presenting homoeroticism and homosexuality as comedic will be conducted in the chapters that follow, it is important to note that McDermott makes no effort to consider the problems inherent in this use of humour when

asserting its necessity. My position on this issue is more in line with Scott's, who points out that in cases such as these, the humour often acts "as a patina to evade any appearance of intent to harm … in order to dismiss the impact of [the creators'] actions" (151).

The last argument McDermott makes in his discussion of the "contest" of queerbaiting is that, in the ongoing struggle for narrative authority, an accusation of queerbaiting would represent an admission of defeat from fans in their fight to control the meaning of the story: "The very definition of queerbaiting has already created an imbalance of power and authority that, in an effort to criticize the intentional exploitation of audience's desire to see same-sex affection onscreen, places all control over the meaning of the text firmly in the hands and minds of … 'whoever is making the decisions'" (139-140). Unfortunately, this argument, like many of his others, is based on a faulty assumption; in this case, McDermott appears to build his argument on the idea that a contest over meaning between fans and producers wouldn't have a preordained winner. Laura Grindstaff highlights the fatal flaw in this scenario by invoking Stuart Hall's "Encoding/decoding", pointing out that "the media-audience circuit [is] reciprocal but not equal" (Grindstaff 345): "The power of [fan] appropriation doesn't level the playing field; there is no equivalence in the production-consumption relation. Rather, poaching articulates a struggle over meaning that both reflects and constitutes unequal power relations in late modernity" (348). Accusations of queerbaiting aren't a surrender of power to media creators. If anything, they are attempts to reclaim some of the power that is being held over them by media creators who want to benefit from queer subtext without having to include actual queer representation.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Post-Structuralist Textual Analysis

The main research method that I will be relying on in this thesis will be post-structuralist textual analysis. I will be using this method in order to examine selected examples of film and television. According to Alan McKee, there are three ways of approaching textual analysis. There is what he terms the "realist" approach, in which those within a particular culture or subculture believe that their viewpoint is the one, real, valid way of seeing the world; there is the "structuralist" approach wherein those within a culture or subculture would examine others with differing viewpoints in order to find out what kind of commonalities might exist; and there is the "post-structuralist" approach, wherein one accepts that people from different cultures and subcultures make sense of the world in different ways, each one just as valid as the next (McKee 9). In other words, McKee suggests that "people from different cultures experience reality differently" (9).

That is not to say that he believes there is no possible accepted truth, only that there may not be a *single* possible accepted truth: "[Post-structuralist textual analysis] seeks to understand the ways in which these forms of representation take place, the assumptions behind them and the kinds of sense-making about the world that they reveal. Different texts can present the same event in different ways, and all of them can be as truthful and accurate as each other" (17). In that same vein, popular culture texts can be interpreted in different ways; the presence of authorial intent does not automatically render one interpretation more valid than any other: "It is not the author, but the text … that 'generates' meanings and interpretations" (Trigg 185).

However, just because there may not be a single truth does not mean that any and everything goes. In fact, McKee notes that this common criticism of post-structuralist analysis

fails to understand this way of thinking (18). The possible interpretations of an event may be infinite, but the *reasonable* interpretations of an event are much more limited: "A variety of perspective[s] exist, but there is a finite number of sense-making positions available within a given culture at a different time" (19). McKee describes the process of interpretation as something that is "complex and unpredictable", but always "within predictable *limits*"; the process of interpreting specific texts draws on relevant knowledge, such as readings of similar texts, general knowledge of the particular topic (i.e. genre), and cultural codes (51). The goal, however, is not to determine which interpretation is the correct one, but to examine those that are *likely* (63).

This method of interpretation is especially important when considering subtext, which, by definition, is the meaning of a text that is "hidden" or implied, rather than obvious ("SUBTEXT"). Subtext can also refer to meaning that is accidental, or incidental to the story being told. This means that interpretations of subtext are not necessarily the result of a purposeful action on the part of those behind the scenes. Subtext is as much about what can be inferred as it is about what has been implied. When I speak about seeing homoerotic elements in the films and television series that I am using as case studies, I will do so with the understanding that I am speaking about just one way in which those scenes can be interpreted. I do not and will not suggest that this interpretation is the intended or only way to view the chosen texts, only that it is an existing one, and a valid interpretation to have upon viewing the material.

Roland Barthes once wrote that the author is dead, meaning that once a text has been created, it is open for interpretation beyond the meaning intended by its creator (105). And although my thesis is focused on the possible motivations of contemporary film and television creators, my use of post-structuralist textual analysis insists upon recognition of the fact that they

are not the sole arbitrators of the meanings of their creations: "It isn't possible to *prove* that the creator's interpretation of a text is the correct, and the most important one. And it's not possible to *disprove* it either. The question is based on value judgements that you either accept or you don't" (McKee 67).

Value judgements are often looked down upon in academia, as they rely on personal opinions rather than concrete facts ("VALUE JUDGEMENT"). They are not considered to be part of a scientific approach to research, but neither is textual analysis. McKee notes that there are two elements of textual analysis in particular that render it unscientific: the fact that it isn't quantitative or based around coding, and the fact that one cannot rely on the results being replicated by other researchers (118). Because of this, this research method is often dismissed as being "subjective" (119). This way of thinking fails to take into consideration two rather large and unavoidable issues. The first is that textual analysis is the practice of examining how human beings perceive the world around them, and while human beings can recognize logic, they cannot be depended on to always be logical (120). Any study that focuses on human behaviour or sense-making cannot rely on their subjects' thoughts and actions following a predictable formula (120). Human beings are not scientific, and therefore the accurate study of the thinking processes of human beings must allow for variation and subjectivity.

The second issue at hand is that dismissing unscientific research methods due to potential bias assumes that scientific research methods are inherently objective: "It's possible to argue that science is just one more culture that represents reality in particular ways" (120). The way that human beings perceive the world around us is filtered through our own experiences, and so even the results of a scientific approach to observation cannot be said to be without bias—no matter how replicable or quantifiable they end up being. No one exists in a vacuum, and no researcher

can operate outside of his or her humanity (123). Even if we could shed our personhood, according to post-structural scholar Elizabeth St. Pierre, the act of pursuing knowledge and the very knowledge we pursue are not without partisanship: "*science* is not one thing but a highly contested concept whose meaning and practices shift across philosophical approaches and historical and political moments" (614).

Despite its more "intuitive" nature, textual analysis—and other methodologies used in the humanities—are still considered valuable ways of gaining information (McKee 119). Just as post-structuralist textual analysis depends on *reasonable* interpretations, instead of on an "anything goes" mentality, so too does it depend on *reasonable* approaches to methodology. Educated guesses at possible interpretations rely on information gathered from related texts (92). These include "'other texts in the series', 'other texts in the genre', 'explicit intertexts', and 'dominant discourses in the culture where the text is circulating'", meaning that researchers use the same intertexts when interpreting how audiences interpret texts that audiences use when interpreting those texts (114; 92).

3.2. Interviews

In addition to post-structuralist textual analysis, I will also be relying on interviews and correspondence that I have conducted with writers, directors, producers, and showrunners who have worked on some of the films and television series that I am using as case studies. There are three main types of interviews one can conduct: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews require that all participants be asked the same set of prearranged questions, usually closed rather than open-ended, in order to elicit responses that can then be appropriately coded for analysis (Fontana and Frey 68). Unstructured interviews often take the form of casual conversations, and may not include scripted questions or other established interview techniques

(86). I wanted to prepare questions in advance, but the different jobs that my participants held in relation to their respective films and television shows meant that I couldn't ask them all the same set of questions; I needed to be able to alter the list, as needed, and I also wanted the opportunity to add follow-up questions in each interview if additional questions arose from a participant's responses, or to strike a question from the list if it became irrelevant. For these reasons, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews (Cousin 83; Kvale 65).

Arthur Asa Berger writes that interviews are one of the most common and indispensable research methods because they "enable researchers to obtain information that they cannot gain from observation alone" (135). Although the interview process can seem fairly straightforward, the way the process is approached has evolved over time. According to Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place" (90-91). This increasing interactivity has also resulted in more importance being placed on the interviewer being able to build a good rapport with the interviewee, which, as Glynis Cousin notes, "reverses the positivist position that requires a researcher stance of neutrality and objectivity" (76). This reversal is due to the fact that establishing rapport often requires a certain amount of reciprocal disclosure from the interviewer to the interviewee, which would negate any attempt from the interviewer to remain detached from the proceedings (76).

Although interviews are increasingly being seen as a dialogue between two participants, interviewers are advised to keep in mind the potential power imbalances that may appear between themselves and the people they are interviewing, as those imbalances can affect how an interviewee may respond to a question (or to the interviewer in general). Power imbalances can

occur for many reasons, including gender, class, and ethnicity, as well as the fact that only the interviewer knows what questions will be asked in advance (75).

However, the presence of a power imbalance is not guaranteed, and can depend on the status of the interview participants. When conducting elite interviews, Steinar Kvale notes that "the prevailing power asymmetry of the interview situation may be cancelled out by the powerful position of the elite interviewee[s]" (70). The interview requests that I sent out were directed at people who work in film and television, and due to the popularity of the entertainment industry—and the way that professional success within it is both coveted and difficult to achieve—the participants' positions as insiders afforded them that elite status.

The interview process for interviewing elites brings with it its own difficulties. While conducting interviews with high-placed business insiders, researcher Sally Lynne Conkright realized that she "had to walk a very narrow line between asking questions in which she was interested and recognizing that such questions might threaten to lead to the termination of the interview" (Seidman 107). Interviews with entertainment industry insiders are often sought by members of the press, and as a result, interviewees often develop "talking points" to fall back on when answering questions that could cause controversy among their audience. Berger points out that just because "a person agrees to be an informant and tell you something about some group or entity that the person has been involved with doesn't mean that you'll be getting 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth' from your informant" (149). Although these "talking points" may not be untrue, they may not be the interviewee's personal truth, or the full truth. It is important that the interviewer be able to recognize potential "talking points", as well as make the effort to attempt to deconstruct or delve beneath them without offending the interviewee or derailing the interview.

Another difficulty inherent in interviewing elites is access, especially since I had to rely on representatives to pass my initial requests on to their clients. Knowing that gaining access to these individuals could be difficult, I purposefully cast a wide net with my interview requests. I obtained contact information for the agents, publicists, and managers of over fifty potential interview participants, and after sending out my requests, received responses from less than ten. Of those who responded, three people agreed to be interviewed for my thesis, while a fourth agreed to let me to use the email correspondence we had engaged in, in my research.

For a project that depended on interviews, these results might have been catastrophic. However, I had no minimum or maximum number of participants needed for my research, as I had always planned to supplement whatever interviews I was able to do with interviews and articles that have been conducted or written by professional journalists and other media-related personalities, and made available in printed publications or online. While direct interviews would create primary sources that I would be able to ensure addressed the specific concerns of my project, I knew I would still be able to find secondary and tertiary sources with information that related to or otherwise connected with my project enough to still hold important relevance.

The three interviews that I was able to conduct were completed over long distance. Due to the different locations of the interview participants and my available resources, I was unable to arrange in-person meetings. I had initially planned and requested to conduct my interviews using one method, Google Hangouts (a website that allows users to create "rooms" in which they can video chat in real time), but circumstances surrounding interviewee availability and technical know-how led to these three interviews being conducted in three different ways: via email, over the telephone, and through Skype (an internet application that also allows for video chatting in real time).

Many researchers have commented on the pros and cons of conducting long-distance interviews. Irving Seidman, writing about email interviews, warns about the loss of spontaneity in both the participants' responses, and the interviewer's ability to revise their questions as the interview progresses (113). Although I could not influence the level of preparation that this participant put into his responses, I believe I was able to mitigate the problem of losing the ability to alter my list of questions. When making arrangements, I requested that this participant answer my questions in two rounds of emails; the first would contain the list of questions I'd prepared in advance, while the second would include any follow-up questions and/or requests for elaboration that came to mind after reading his responses to that first email. In this way, I was able to preserve the semi-structured interview format upon which I'd decided.

Fontana and Frey also write about conducting virtual interviews, lamenting the fact that "face-to-face interaction is eliminated, as is the possibility … of reading nonverbal behaviour" (97). While this was an obstacle to overcome with the telephone interview I conducted, long-distance interviewing does not always result in a lack of visual connection. Skype, for example, uses web cameras to connect users using both audio and video. Although there were some issues with the quality of our respective internet connections during the Skype interview I conducted, face-to-face communication was preserved and I was able to read this participant's verbal and non-verbal cues. This aided in establishing rapport.

All three interview participants, as well as the person who agreed to allow me to use our initial email exchanges, have waived anonymity. I am pleased to have been able to speak with two representatives from the British entertainment industry, as well as two from North America, as the case studies I am using were each produced in one of these two locations. The North American participants, Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie, are writing partners (although I

communicated with and interviewed them separately), who worked as writers and producers on the *Stargate* science fiction television franchise. In their interviews, we specifically discussed their work on *Stargate: Atlantis* (2004-2009).

The British participants, Julian Jones and Metin Huseyin, both worked on the BBC television series *Merlin* (2008-2012). Jones co-created the series and wrote many of the episodes, while Huseyin directed three episodes of the series in its second season. I will be using the material from these emails and interviews throughout my thesis, mainly in the chapters that will follow.

3.3. Interview Analysis

When considering which method of analysis to employ in the examination of qualitative data, many researchers will rely on coding to help them organize and interpret the information. This is especially helpful when the data collected can be neatly differentiated and categorized, but this is not always the case. Many post-structuralist researchers are now resisting this traditional dependence on coding data for interpretation (Roulston 305). St. Pierre argues that separating and categorizing data is not necessarily *interpreting* data, and that there is often too much emphasis placed on coding at the expense of actual theoretical analysis (621-622). St. Pierre asserts that coding is "a positivist practice", an outdated attempt to make qualitative data more quantifiable—as if the former were somehow lesser than the latter: "I expect we teach coding because we don't know how to teach thinking. But I will always believe that if one has read and read and read, it's nigh onto impossible *not* to think with what others have thought and written" (622).

St. Pierre is not alone in her assessment as Steinar Kvale notes that many researchers switch between multiple analytic methods as needed, in what he terms a *bricolage*: "This eclectic

form of generating meaning—through a multiplicity of ad hoc methods and conceptual

approaches—is a common mode of interview analysis" (115). He also goes on to state that

interpreting data does not necessarily require a specific method of analysis: "A researcher may

read through his or her interviews again and again, reflect theoretically on specific themes of

interest, write out interpretation and not follow any systematic method or combination of

techniques" (117).

  While I believe that methods involving coding can still be helpful and relevant, I did

decide—in keeping with my chosen post-structuralist approach—that they were not necessary or

preferable for this particular project. Instead, I considered the interviews I had done (both the

recordings and the transcripts) to be texts. In doing this, I was able to use post-structuralist

textual analysis as the analytic method for all of my research.

CHAPTER FOUR: RELATIONSHIPS, GENDER, AND SOCIETY

4.1. Journeys without Ends (Holding a Mirror Up to Nature)

The three topics that fall under the purview of this chapter are, in and of themselves, considerable. For this reason, my main focus is on how—when examining the homosocial relationship—each one impacts, or is impacted by, the other. Film and television are both products, and reflections, of society. They cannot help but educate, even if they are only meant to entertain:

> No matter how fictional, [entertainment media] visualizes the behaviour models of a society to which viewers have to conform in daily life. It provides information on social value systems and holds up ideals with which the viewer can identify. In an entertaining way, films [and television series] enable people to orient themselves towards prevailing behavioural models, norms, and value systems, and … contributes a lot to the adoption of new attitudes. (Fourie 284-285)

According to Michaela D. E. Meyer, "Our identities are not only informed by popular narratives/representations, but are often an intricately constructed bricolage where the 'pop' and the 'real' become inseparable" (247). If it is true that who we are as members of society and how we relate to the others within it (including our perceptions and opinions) is informed—even in part—by what we see onscreen, then the importance of examining these onscreen narratives and representations cannot be denied.

4.1.1. Relationship Scripts

Romantic relationships, both onscreen and in real life, follow scripts. Relationship scripts are "cognitive structures that contain information regarding the key events that take place in a

romantic relationship, as well as the order in which those events typically occur. ... These scripts are generally regarded as consensually shared, culture-specific notions of normative relationship development" (Holmberg and MacKenzie 778). Film and television, in addition to following their more literal scripts (in the form of screenplays), also follow these behavioral scripts when building relationships between characters. However, this does not mean that there is a guaranteed, easily comparable route that all developing onscreen relationships follow: "just as actual relationships show some variability, so too do relationship scripts. ... although there are general consistencies in script ordering, no single order is universally applied" (780). Plot points specific to their stories make direct comparison of the development of different onscreen relationships difficult, but there are undeniable patterns of moments that audiences can expect to see: a memorable "meet-cute"; a misunderstanding that leads to an immediate conflict; recognition of a common enemy; personal disclosures that form common ground; the tentative beginnings of a friendship; a growing closeness and its accompanying tensions; habitual bickering as a form of flirtation. Each of these incidents and practices are recognizable steps that audiences can count on seeing in some form as an onscreen relationship develops.

Due to the fact that there is "broad agreement" regarding the order of these steps from both men and women, regardless of their level of previous relationship experience (778), audiences are also able to recognize when the progression of these patterns emerge in onscreen relationships that are not designed to follow a traditional romantic trajectory. Michael DeAngelis writes, "Bromance's manipulation of this progression [of relationship-building events] is evident in many of the phenomenon's earliest manifestations" (2). However, I would argue that it is not just those early manifestations of bromance that mimic the ways romantic relationships develop onscreen; today's bromances still run parallel to heterosexual romances.

In the pilot episodes for *Bones* (2005-2017) and *Castle* (2009-2016)—two television procedurals that featured male-female pairings as leads—the relationships begin in this manner: Person A is reluctant to work a case with Person B. In *Bones*, this is because Temperance Brennan has had a previous negative experience working with Seeley Booth and does not want a repeat; in *Castle*, this is because Kate Beckett does not believe that Richard Castle will take the case seriously, which will make her life harder. Despite their misgivings, after Booth and Castle each go over their heads to get approval from their respective bosses, Brennan and Beckett are forced to partner with them (Brennan with Booth, Beckett with Castle) on the cases. For the rest of both series' pilot episodes, the partners repeatedly clash in multiple arguments with varying levels of seriousness. However, by the end of the episodes each pairing has also had at least one moment of positive, sincere interaction that shows their audiences what their ongoing partnership might look like throughout their series, and hints at genuine affection between each pair.

In the pilot episode of *Hawaii Five-0*, the start of the relationship between Steve McGarrett and Danny Williams follows this pattern. Danny is reluctant to work with Steve on a case because Steve had taken the case away from him when they first met. In spite of Danny's protests that Steve will only make his job harder, Steve reveals that he has already spoken with Danny's boss and is making Danny his partner whether Danny likes it or not. Steve and Danny clash numerous times throughout the rest of the episode, but still manage to find moments before and after the climactic fight scene to have positive, sincere interactions wherein they are able to connect with one another and find some common ground. At the end of the episode the audience is left with a good idea of what a continuing partnership between the two might look like, and an assurance that, as the shooting script states, "[There's] No way around it: they dig each other" (Lenkov 61).

The existence and prevalence of these patterns brings with them the cultural belief that the ideal relationship is a romantic relationship, rather than one between friends: "The presentation of intimacy between close friends … carries with it connotation—or expectations—of a romantic conclusion" (Lam and Raphael 5). DeAngelis, referencing popular relationship discourse in film and television, writes that "the progression from 'just friends' to 'lovers' has become such a naturalized 'given' in culture that its absence is seen as either a mark of failure … or the cause for sorrow or regret" (2). And Friederike Danebrock cites Victor Luftig, when he points out that phrases "such as 'just friends' [and] 'only friends' all 'in effect describe friendship negatively'" and suggest that, when measured against a romance, there is a comparative lack perceived in any relationship that is decidedly platonic (Danebrock 40).

In the fourth season finale of *Stargate: Atlantis*, "The Last Man", John Sheppard is accidentally sent thousands of years into the future. Upon arrival, he finds and activates a holographic program that Rodney McKay had created and left on Atlantis for him. While they work together, the hologram tells John how a series of events, beginning with John's disappearance, brought about the deaths of nearly their entire circle of friends, and how Rodney had spent the remainder of his life focused solely on finding a way for John to travel back to the right point in time so that he will be able to prevent all of the death and destruction that Rodney lived through.

As the focus of the episode is on John and the hologram of Rodney in the future, with the events Rodney lived through being explained to John via flashbacks, the episode presents as a story that is focused on the two men, showcasing the lengths one will go to in order to save a friend. However, episode co-writer Paul Mullie, speaking of the creative process behind the episode in his DVD commentary, explained that the episode has a different focus:

> Originally [Rodney] was just [devoting his life to creating time travel] because he thought he could save Sheppard. … And that was fine. But once we discussed the idea that [Rodney and Jennifer Keller] would wind up together, and that she would die as a result of all the events that had happened, to me that just made the episode—it just really was the linchpin for the whole episode. That he was actually doing it because he was in love with this woman, and that he wanted to basically get her back. It just made the whole thing much more effective, I think, than it would've been if he'd just been doing it to [save John]. (Mullie and Wood)

Although either interpretation would seem to be valid on the face of it, Mullie proceeds to reiterate, multiple times, that Rodney's motivation in this episode is Jennifer, not John. When asked why he thought that would make the story more effective, Mullie explained: "Science fiction can get kind of cold if you're not careful to remember that it needs to have an emotional heart. So, I always prefer it if I can find, in telling a science fiction story—a cool science fiction story about time travel ... if it's about a relationship. ... I didn't want to make it just be about the science of it ... and saving Sheppard because he could" (Mullie).

It unfortunately remains unclear why Mullie felt that a story about Rodney saving Jennifer would be focused on their relationship—as opposed to the science of time travel, whereas a story about Rodney saving John would be focused on the science of time travel—as opposed to their relationship. However, it is logical to assume that this is a direct result of the aforementioned preference that our culture has demonstrated for romantic relationships, and the status that they are given, which friendships are not afforded. It is, in Danebrock's words, an "affirmation of the privileged status of heterosexual romance" (40).

4.2. Why Can't We Be Friends? (Why Can't We Be Friends?)

A common response to the premise behind my research—that it is problematic that those in a bromance relationship onscreen never become more than friends—has been the question, "What's wrong with friendship?" Unfortunately, this question misses the point, as while there is nothing wrong with portraying friendship onscreen, a bromance offers something less than that while presenting the appearance of something more, and—as will be discussed—there is more than one reason why there is something wrong with that.

4.2.1. Plenty of Fish in the Sea

The main problem with lamenting the state of friendship onscreen is that there is nothing to lament. There are plenty of male characters presently engaging in friendships in film and television—and bromances are especially popular. Actual queer relationships, however, are not as abundant. Bridget Kies suggests that "the presumption among media industries is that the desired audience for [science fiction] and action blockbusters would not want to see queer characters—though even a cursory search online for slash fan fiction indicates that, for those active in fan communities [within these genres], this is certainly not the case" (434).

Since 2013, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) has published annual "Studio Responsibility Index" reports, which track the quantity—as well as the quality—of representations of LGBTQ individuals "in mainstream Hollywood film" (GLAAD, *2015* 1), and organize the resulting data in a number of different ways, including by genre. During the 2015 calendar year, when I began my research, only 6.4% of the action, sci-fi and fantasy genre films released contained LGBTQ characters (GLAAD, *Studio* 7). The most recent report, covering the 2018 calendar year, found that that number had risen, with 13% of the action, sci-fi, fantasy, and horror genre films released that year containing LGBTQ characters (GLAAD, *2019*

9). However, even though the rate of increase is encouraging, 13% is still a very small number, and there is no guarantee that this growth will continue.

Despite its tendency to mimic film trends and portrayals, television does present a different picture when it comes to the number of LGBTQ characters represented in these genres. Unfortunately, GLAAD only divides its data on television representation by platform—not by genre—but even casual observation reveals the presence of multiple and varied LGBTQ characters in action and sci-fi on television—at least, in comparison to film. According to Ray Bradford, GLAAD's director of programs for entertainment media, "film still lags far behind television and online streaming content in providing platforms for queer voices that are not marginalized" (qtd. in B. Lee). And yet, despite the fact that television is notably ahead of film in this respect, the numbers are still too low. In fact, GLAAD recently challenged television producers to "make sure that within the next two years, 10 percent of series regular characters on primetime scripted broadcast series are LGBTQ", which means that the current percentage is less than that (*Where We Are* 5). Needless to say, platonic relationships between male characters are in no danger of becoming endangered; for better or worse, the bromance relationship is here to stay. The disparity between the number of bromances and the number of queer relationships onscreen is so large that transitioning a few bromances from these genres into romances would still leave plenty of examples of friendship for audiences to enjoy.

4.2.2. Imaginary Friends? (The Thin Line Between Love and Hate)

Another reason why idealizing bromantic friendships is problematic is that male characters in contemporary film and television are often not allowed to have genuinely close friendships with each other that aren't accompanied by conflict. Even characters that are positioned as close and dear friends cannot have an affectionate relationship without an

adversarial element also being injected into their connection. In his book, *Men Beyond Desire*, David Greven writes that "the insertion of male enmity into an adaptation can be just as problematic as the de-emphasization of it" (53), and there are two pairings amongst my chosen case studies that truly exemplify this phenomenon: Steve and Tony, adapted for the Marvel Cinematic Universe from the Marvel comics, and Kirk and Spock, adapted for the *Star Trek* reboot trilogy from *Star Trek: The Original Series* and its accompanying films.

In the Marvel comics, Steve Rogers and Tony Stark's "long-standing friendship" began in 1964 when Marvel decided to re-introduce the Captain America character to their universe and have him join the Avengers (Easton, "Rogers and Stark" 327; S. Lee and Kirby). Reflecting on their relationship, Easton writes that "both men care about each other's welfare and have helped each other through various personal and career crises" ("Rogers and Stark" 327). Entire pages and various panels have been devoted not only to describing their close friendship, but also to showing it in action (Millar, Yu, and Segovia; Heinberg and Cheung). One of the greatest tragedies of the comics' Civil War storyline is how being on opposing sides of the debate fractured and then destroyed that close friendship (Baker-Whitelaw).

Unfortunately, the relationship between the film version of Steve Rogers and Tony Stark never reaches the same level of closeness. Rather than having Tony Stark and the Avengers meet Steve Rogers by saving him from the ice as they did in the comics, the film introduces the two characters in the middle of a conflict, with Steve already having been rescued by a third party. Tensions are high and both men fall under the influence of an alien artifact soon after they meet. Their conflicting worldviews initiate an argument that is escalated by the antagonistic effect that the alien artifact has on their mental state. They learn to work together eventually but their personal relationship never recovers from the circumstances under which they meet.

This significant discrepancy can be attributed to filmmaker Joss Whedon, who wrote and directed the first two *Avengers* films, and who consequently shaped the relationship that developed onscreen between the two characters. While often credited for his depictions of male/female friendships, the relationships that Whedon creates between male characters include, or are defined by, animosity: "[Whedon] has a surprisingly soft track record when it comes to depicting male friendships. Most of the men in [Whedon's] stories have prickly or begrudgingly respectful relationships with one another" (Pascale 307). This would not necessarily be a problem if that was the route Marvel decided to take with this relationship, but it becomes problematic when Whedon and Marvel try to have it both ways.

The second *Avengers* film, *Age of Ultron*, sets up the team as a working unit with Steve and Tony sharing leadership responsibilities. The characters reference an amicable friendship existing between the two men in dialogue, but the storyline presented onscreen does not show what is being told. *Show, don't tell* is a well-known adage in filmmaking, used to "encourage [creators] to use the visuality of the screen to tell their stories rather than rely on dialogue. This includes using actions, objects and worlds to create meaning, and giving performers things to do to show the backstory and inner landscape of their character" (Kerrigan and Batty 2). *Age of Ultron* pays lip service to the idea that Steve and Tony are friends, with the sarcastic banter that the two share throughout the film, but that relationship remains superficial and thus inauthentic.

When push comes to shove, and Steve has an opportunity to show his trust in Tony, he instead demonstrates the opposite. Taking the word of a character—who up until that point in the film is one of the villains—Steve immediately confronts and then physically attacks Tony, causing the two men to come to blows for the second time in as many films. *Age of Ultron* tells the audience one thing while showing them another and when there is a discrepancy between

sight and sound, our cultural bias towards the former prioritizes it over the latter—seeing is believing (Dundes 8). For this reason, the film adaptation of the Civil War storyline could not hope to have the same impact as its comic's counterpart. Unlike in the comics, there is no real relationship between Steve and Tony to destroy. When the two men each lead a team to fight the other, it is merely the *third* time in as many films that they have come to blows. Despite assertions from the actors and filmmakers that "there is a love and respect" between Steve and Tony (Chris Evans, qtd. in Breznican), the actual defining characteristic of their onscreen relationship is conflict, as they fight—physically, verbally, or physically *and* verbally—in every single film in which they interact.

The practice of highlighting animosity over affection is also apparent in the approach taken when rebooting the *Star Trek* franchise. The friendship between Kirk and Spock throughout *Star Trek: The Original Series* and its accompanying films is all-encompassing for both men, and clearly summed up by the simple declaration made by Spock to Kirk, "I have been, and ever shall be, your friend" (Bennett). Based in affection, trust, and Gene Roddenberry's unique vision of a future without toxic masculinity, the original Kirk and Spock's absolute devotion to each other is unquestionable. Kirk and Spock repeatedly demonstrate a remarkable willingness to sacrifice for one another, with Kirk going so far as to sacrifice both his ship and his son in an effort to bring Spock back to life: "Though Kirk mourns the loss, David's death is coded as a small price to pay for Spock's return" (Kies 419). When Spock's father questions the choices Kirk has made, Kirk's reply is telling:

> SAREK
> Kirk. I thank you. What you have
> done is --
>
> KIRK
> What I have done, I had to do.

                    SAREK
          But at what cost? Your ship.
          Your son.

                    KIRK
          If I hadn't tried, the cost would
          have been my soul. (Bennett)

It is not fair to compare the long onscreen history that spans at least thirty years that the

original Kirk and Spock share to the three films that span less than five that are shared by the

reboot Kirk and Spock. However, it is important to examine the approach taken in re-imagining

the relationship between these two characters, and its resulting divergence from the original

portrayal. The reboot filmmakers made a conscious decision to distinguish the relationship

between the reboot Kirk and Spock from the originals by setting them up as enemies: "The idea

that their first meeting was in conflict was kind of the way we reverse-engineered what the arc of

their characters would be. If you met them as friends, what's as far away as you can meet them?

Well, you can meet them as enemies" (Abrams et al.).

It remains unclear why director J.J. Abrams was determined to start their relationship "as

far away" from the original as possible, but the oppositional approach extends even further, as

the power dynamics of their previous relationship are also reversed. With the reboot Kirk having

delayed his entrance to Starfleet Academy, his initial position is as Spock's subordinate, rather

than as his superior officer. The two are also placed in an "adversarial dynamic of

examinee/exam proctor, then cheater/accuser" (Kies 422), which culminates in an academic

hearing wherein their first words to each other are more akin to cruel taunting than the

affectionate teasing that sometimes characterized interactions between the original pair.

This antagonistic relationship between reboot Kirk and Spock is, according to David

Greven, "the most significant betrayal of the original spirit of *Trek*, which valorized male-male

love" (*Gender* 207). What makes the reboot filmmakers' approach even more confusing is that they also seem to valorize the relationship between the original Kirk and Spock. The animosity between the reboot versions continues through the first half of the film, until reboot Kirk is confronted with the original Spock (in a cameo appearance by Leonard Nimoy). A mind-meld (a psychic mental connection) between the two characters for the sake of exposition also allows reboot Kirk to feel and experience some of original Spock's life, and the temporary bond is "overwhelmingly emotional" (Orci and Kurtzman 94).

After that experience, reboot Kirk is willing to pursue a friendship with reboot Spock—and in the next film, *Star Trek Into Darkness*, is even intent on it, spending most of that film attempting to get Spock to reciprocate. However, even after reboot Spock is informed by his original counterpart that he and Kirk could have "a friendship that will define you both in ways you cannot yet realize" (127), he seems baffled by Kirk's desire for his friendship, much to the other man's frustration. While the end of that film does feature an intense emotional display from Spock on Kirk's behalf, the moment—as well as the bond that it seemingly reveals—is unearned. The reason it lacks merit is that it is built onto the end of a scene specifically designed to remind the audience of the relationship between the original pair. The scene in question even uses direct quotations from 1982's *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*—although the lines being spoken by each character are switched so that the scene isn't an *exact* duplication—and therefore tries to draw a parallel where one cannot be said to exist. Contrasting the two relationships only emphasizes the superficiality of the reboot's version of what was—for the original pairing—a well-deserved and profoundly emotional moment.

Bridget Kies notes that as "*Star Trek* has moved from television to blockbuster cinema, demands of the industry, including expectations for what audiences desire, have turned the

longstanding Kirk/Spock (b)romance into a simplistic competition between two angry adolescents over women and toys" (435). In the 2009 film, original Spock tells his younger self that he "could not deprive you of the revelation of all that you [and Kirk] could accomplish together" (Orci and Kurtzman 127). And yet, in choosing to take an oppositional approach to updating the Kirk and Spock relationship for the 21st century, the reboot filmmakers have deprived both the characters and the audience of another revelation—that a deeply loving friendship between men can exist without the need to be qualified by conflict.

4.2.3. Rule 63[5] (When a Man Loves a Woman)

Perhaps the main problem behind idealizing the many examples of bromantic friendships in film and television today is the restraints that this type of relationship places on these pairings—restraints based solely on their genders. The truth of the matter is that, if one was to remove the "heterocentric lens" through which these stories are often viewed (Easton, "Sharing a Quick" 144), these pairings—as introduced—each contain the potential for romance. I would therefore argue that, if any of these pairings had been introduced as male-female partnerships instead of partnerships between two male characters, the relationships that then played out onscreen would have been romantic.

My evidence is varied, but I will begin by building on the comparisons I drew earlier in this chapter between *Bones*, *Castle*, and *Hawaii Five-0*. In examining four series involving male-female pairings solving mysteries (including *Bones* and *Castle*), Sarah Kornfield notes that "in their pilot episodes, [all four series] hint at a romance between their detective partners as the characters interact in romantically charged scenes" (127). Kornfield also observes that television

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[5] Part of the online zeitgeist, Rule 63 is one of the Rules of the Internet: "an unofficial, often humorous list governing internet conduct and phenomenon first compiled on online forums in 2007" ("Rule 63"). While the list as a whole is often incredibly misogynistic, individual rules have gained mainstream popularity. Rule 63 states that "for every fictional male character, there exists a female version of that character, and for every female character, there exists a male version", and "is often used as a shorthand to refer to gender-swapped characters" ("Rule 63").

critics had made note of these "burgeoning romances" in their reviews (which were presumably

of each series' pilot episode), with many citing "the detectives' witty dialogue, lingering glances,

and sexual chemistry as evidence of the programs' assured 'slow-burning' romances" (127).

As it happens, reviews of the pilot for *Hawaii Five-0* highlight similar points of interest

for their readers. Steve and Danny's "easy chemistry" is mentioned (Goldman), and much is

made of the witty dialogue (Poniewozik) that occurs in the many scenes that consist of "amusing

banter and bickering" between the two leads (Singh). *AV Club*'s review states that "the most fun

the episode has to offer comes from when [Danny] and [Steve] are driving around Hawaii and

making fun of each other" (VanDerWerff), while *Collider*'s review observes that the scenes

between Steve and Danny "manage to crackle" and asserts that they are "a solid pairing to build

the show around" (Bettinger).

It is interesting—and important—to note that these storytelling aspects only seem to

imply romance to critics when the onscreen partners are of opposing sexes. The chemistry and

tension that are highlighted in *AV Club*'s review of *Castle* are described as "an old, familiar

dynamic but one [the two lead actors] play well" (Phipps), and *Entertainment Weekly*'s

descriptions of the bantering and bickering that create the chemistry between *Bones*' two leads

are followed by the observation, "If *Bones* holds up, it'll be because that old Sam-and-Diane,

Maddie-and-David, Mulder-and-Scully opposites-attract stuff never feels standard when it's

done right" (Flynn). No such callbacks are made in reference to the beginnings of Steve and

Danny's partnership, despite the fact that the way that the developing relationships between the

partners on each of these three shows are described is seemingly interchangeable.

Neal King observes that in detective series, "Male-female pairs tend to lapse into

heterosexual romance … The male-male pairs, however, provide the very different spectacle of

cops who love each other but never kiss or make love" (*Heroes* 153). This is no doubt due to the heteronormative values that permeate our society and affect our collective mindset, whether we subscribe to them or not: "That we experience far less difficulties in conceptualizing male/male- and female/female-friendship is certainly attributable to the fact that those relations are in a sense 'protected' by heteronormative standards: Friendship does here not compete with the romantic union as the 'default case'" (Danebrock 41-42). Steve and Danny's chemistry is "easy", while Beckett and Castle's is "tempestuous"—not because one pairing's interactions differ significantly from the other's, but because sexual tension is expected between a man and woman just as much as it is *not* expected between two men (Goldman; Phipps). It is therefore reasonable to assume that if the pilot episode of *Hawaii Five-0* had featured a Steve and Danielle, or a Stephanie and Danny, that the chemistry between the two leads would have been described as something other than "easy".

The science fiction and fantasy genres offer more examples that support my argument. *Stargate: Atlantis* was created as a spin-off to the series *Stargate SG-1*, and while *SG:A* pairs John and Rodney as the lead soldier and scientist on the Atlantis base, their *SG-1* counterparts— the lead soldier and scientist of Stargate Command for most of that series' run—are Jack O'Neill and Samantha Carter. The pairing of O'Neill and Carter is interesting because despite being acknowledged as a romantic pairing by those behind-the-scenes (Mallozzi, "Ships and What Ifs"), the two characters never actually enter into a romantic relationship onscreen. This is due to the fact that O'Neill is Carter's superior officer and team leader for most of the series' run, which would mean they would be violating the US Air Force's anti-fraternization regulations if they were to embark on a relationship.

In this way, O'Neill and Carter present a unique point of comparison because they demonstrate that a relationship does not have to be realized onscreen for it to be acknowledged. Although Rodney is not part of the military, he is a member of John's team and therefore—as with O'Neill and Carter—the anti-fraternization regulations would still apply. Also relevant to the John and Rodney pairing is the United States' "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which forbade gay men and women from openly serving in the military, and which was still in place throughout the run of *Stargate: Atlantis*. From the start of each series, based solely on who these characters are, it is not possible for either pairing to become a romantic couple.

And yet O'Neill and Carter are still recognized as having been positioned as each other's "romantic interest" (Millward and Dodd 45), and are allowed—on multiple occasions—to admit romantic feelings for each other, even if they are never able to act on them ("A Hundred Days"; "Divide and Conquer"). The various tropes involved in science fiction (alternate universes and time loops, to name a few) even allow the two characters—or versions of the two characters—to have romantic moments together onscreen ("Point of View"; "Window of Opportunity"). There is no reason this could not have also been the case with the John and Rodney pairing, despite the professional logistics that keep both pairs apart. With the only significant difference between the two pairs being the genders of those involved, it stands to reason that if either John or Rodney had been female, their relationship's romantic potential could have also been acknowledged. When given this hypothetical scenario, both *SG:A* writer/producers that I interviewed agreed that it would have been possible: "There would have been the potential for romance, I'm sure" (Mallozzi, "Responses").

Julian Jones, co-creator of BBC's *Merlin*, had a similar response when asked to apply this hypothetical scenario to his own series: "[Arthur and Merlin] come from very different

backgrounds, and then … they both begin to enjoy the relationship that they have, and enjoy

each other. [And those are] the basics for a romantic story between a man and woman. It

could've easily—we could've played that, we could've given Gwen a few powers and put her in

that role, and you could've developed that relationship" (Jones). As the question posed to Jones

asked about the romantic potential between Arthur and Merlin if one of them had been female,

the reference to Gwen (Guinevere, Arthur's canonical love interest) in his response is

particularly interesting for the equivalency it suggests exists between those two characters. If

giving Guinevere magic is the answer to creating a female Merlin character, the implication then

becomes that the only difference between Guinevere and a male Merlin, aside from magical

ability, is their gender. The fact that, with magic, Guinevere could fulfill the role of a female

Merlin strongly suggests that a reverse role-reversal must also be true—that a female Merlin

could fulfill the role of the future Queen of Camelot.

When examining pairings within the superhero genre, no hypothetical set-ups are

necessary in order to arrive at a clear conclusion. This is because, in the limited-run series *Dark

Reign*, written to focus on the aftermath of Marvel Comics' Civil War, Reed Richards is able to

view multiple alternate universes as he tries to see how the war could have been avoided. In one

of these universes, Earth-3490, Iron Man is Iron Woman—*Natasha* Stark instead of Tony

Stark—and Iron Woman is married to Captain America (Hickman and Chen). Little else is

revealed about this particular universe, or about the character of Natasha Stark; despite the

potential differences that growing up female could have caused in the character's history, there is

nothing to suggest that she is not—aside from her gender—an exact mirror image of the male

Tony Stark. All the reader is told—aside from the fact that in this universe Tony is Natasha—is

that the civil war never happened in Earth-3490, "primarily" due to the romantic relationship

between Captain America and Iron Woman, as it enabled them to act as "a deterrent to each [other's] more aggressive behavior" (Hickman and Chen). It is therefore possible to conclude not only that Captain America and Iron Man's relationship *would* become romantic if one of them were female, but that a world in which they were romantically involved would be *better* because that relationship would have prevented the civil war.

Although the pairing of Captain America and Iron Man is the only one from which an obvious conclusion can be drawn, I have found evidence that many of the case studies I've chosen, based solely on how these pairings have appeared onscreen, would—or, at the very least, *could*—have become romantic relationships if one of the men in each partnership had been female. I further submit that if gender is the only difference between my platonic case studies and their canonically romantic counterparts, then the status quo is unacceptable and must be changed. In 2020, gender cannot be the determining factor that precludes the possibility of an onscreen romance; that both characters in these pairings are men is no longer a valid excuse for these relationships to remain within the bounds of friendship.

4.3. Let's Talk About Sex

In *The Celluloid Closet*, Russo notes that "male-male relationships are defined in terms of sex, yet in many minds affectionate love between men is out of the question" (211). While there is no doubt that western society has become more accepting in the time since his book was published, there is a strange new trend emerging that might prompt Russo to now make the opposite complaint:

> While in the past [gay men] were depicted as 'not really men' at best and sick and
> depraved at worst, today representations of gay males in the media often separate
> same sex desire from the males who practice it, representing the latter in a

positive, masculine, and upbeat manner while making the former invisible.

Mainstream media gay masculinity is a curiously de-sexed, de-eroticized

phenomenon. (Fejes 115-116)

There is a curious combination of romanticism and sanitization currently being applied to

popular bromance pairings. This is particularly evident within many of the promotional materials,

where a new catchphrase has been coined.

4.3.1. A Love Story Between Two Men

In "To Boldly Go", a featurette on the 2009 *Star Trek* reboot DVD, producers J.J.

Abrams and Damon Lindelof spoke about their approach to rebooting the series:

ABRAMS: "From the very beginning we talked about wanting to do a Kirk and

Spock story. You were never shown why and how Kirk and Spock became Kirk

and Spock. Like, how did they meet, and what did that look like?"

LINDELOF: "And then, what happens when these people meet and they have to

work together? And, beyond that, fall in love, in a way." (qtd. in "To Boldly Go")

Echoing that sentiment when discussing Holmes and Watson, Guy Ritchie, director of *Sherlock*

Holmes, confirmed that "these guys are sort of in love with each other" (qtd. in Thomas 42), and

Nettleton describes *Nip/Tuck* creator Ryan Murphy as being "unequivocal in his description of

[the series'] premise, saying it's 'a love story between two heterosexual men'" (122). A variation

of that last quotation, the phrase "a love story between two men", has recently become the go-to

way for actors and creators to describe the plots of films and television series that centre on

bromances (Boucher; Herman; Jones; Ludovici; Murphy and McGrath). The commonality

evidenced in all of these quotations is the growing acceptance—and even willingness—to

characterize bromance pairings as romantic, even as the sexual implications of those characterizations are simultaneously denied.

Battles and Hilton-Morrow write about "the new masculine, asexual images of gays in media" (92), and although my case studies are canonically heterosexual, the treatment of the homosocial relationship reflects the treatment of homosexuality. King refers to the "'open secret' that homosocial and homosexual desires look a lot alike" (*Heroes* 155), in recognition of the fact that homosociality is "where same-sex intimacy cannot be reduced to sexual desire but where desire that might inflect this intimacy cannot be discounted or denied" (Forster 192). And yet, even though intimacy and desire cannot be denied, it also very much *can* be—and is. As Jeffrey Weeks asserts, "The erotic acts as a crossover point for a number of tensions whose origins lie elsewhere … This is what makes sex a particular site of ethical concern—and of fear and loathing" (44). The insidious nature of these sentiments permeates our society, affecting the ways these relationships are viewed within the cultural zeitgeist. Even the language used to describe the moments highlighting these relationships has changed in a reflection of this practice.

Prior to the popularization of the term *bromance*, the term most often used to describe scenes and relationships that highlighted homosociality was *homoerotic*. That *homoerotic* has been replaced with *bromance* at the same time that this practice of desexualizing gay characters has become popular is no coincidence. The popularity of *bromance*, with its focus on the emotional and the romantic, reveals a cultural preference for the sanitization of male-male relationships that *homoerotic*, with its focus on the physical and the sexual, cannot provide.

As James Keller notes, in our current culture, "only the verbal declaration of homosexual orientation is permissible, no overt demonstrations of desire [are allowed]. … Gay men can be seen only so long as they act straight; they can proclaim their sexuality so long as they do not act

it out" (qtd. in San Filippo, *The B Word* 174). According to Fred Fejes, these practices "are a variation of the strategy of the closet. In the past, a gay male acted masculine as a way of hiding the fact he was gay. Today, a gay male can be both masculine and openly gay, but cannot in any way suggest that being gay has anything to do with erotic desires and practices" (116). And even though both Keller and Fejes are writing about canonically gay characters, their words apply to onscreen bromance relationships as well. If creators are now willing to characterize their bromance relationships as romances, then the only difference between the homosocial and the homosexual onscreen is the erotic component.

As DeAngelis writes, "with the friends-into-lovers model remaining such a familiar relationship dynamic, [a bromance] sustains its identity from the anticipation of a sexual 'something' that will never happen, thereby becoming a phenomenon that depends upon the audience's acknowledgement *and* disavowal of sexual possibilities" (3). This quotation prompts three important questions that must now be asked: Why must sexual possibilities in bromance relationships be disavowed? Why is acknowledgement of their existence and potential only possible as a precursor to denial? Why is classifying a bromance relationship a "tragic romance" ("Children of the Atom") now acceptable practice, but implying actual sexual desire—without immediate denial—is still a bridge too far?

4.4. Macho, Macho Men (The Problem of Masculinity)

Kenneth MacKinnon writes that although masculinity was "once taken for granted as transparent, normal [and] too natural to require explanation" (qtd. in Feasey 153), there is now increasing consensus that the masculine identity is just as specifically gendered as the female. However, the recognition that gender is a social construct does not alleviate the expectations that often accompany discussions centering on gender identity. The toxicity of masculinity is an

acknowledged problem in our modern society. The power of representation and its ability to both break new ground as well as perpetuate old stereotypes only compounds these issues: "images of gender in the media become texts on normative behavior, one of many cultural shards we use to construct notions of masculinity" (Kimmel, qtd. in Spangler 93).

R.W. Connell established the notion of hegemonic masculinity, something that "is not a fixed character type", but rather the type of masculinity that holds the hegemonic—or dominant—position of power in society, and exerts undue influence (76-77). While not necessarily representative of the majority of men, the equating of masculinity with dominance and power that characterizes this perception of manhood has certainly become normalized and held up as an ideal to which men should aspire: "*Normative* definitions … offer a standard: masculinity is what men ought to be. This definition is often found in media studies" (70). The dangers of an ideal being set up as the standard onscreen become apparent when one considers the influence that both film and television have on our culture. As Pieter Fourie asserts, both film and television "serve to orient people in society … [each one] has an [inherently] educational function, … and can act as an ideological agent" (278). This can lead to widespread harm or cultural evolution, depending on the ideology being presented. Unfortunately, onscreen ideas of gender are slow to evolve.

4.4.1. Battle of the Sexes

In an interview done shortly before his death, *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry reflected on the culture of the entertainment industry, stating that "writers and producers are more or less expected, on network television, to perpetuate all of the modern myths: the male is vigorous, battle is the true test of a man (that was particularly so in Westerns), and stereotypes about women and men" (qtd. in Alexander 10-11). These assumptions about gender, and

specifically masculinity, are deeply entrenched in our culture and stem from the fact that, as Michael Kimmel writes, "masculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine, not in the direct affirmation of the masculine, which leaves masculine gender identity tenuous and fragile" (274). Echoing Connell's observation that these two genders are "inherently relational concepts" (44), Kimmel cuts to the heart of the matter when he writes that "the reigning definition of masculinity is a defensive effort to prevent being emasculated" (282). This idea of "anti-femininity" is central to how we conceive masculinity (272).

This revelation that misogyny is a core component of masculine gender identity helps to explain the complicated relationship between masculinity and gay men. Kimmel writes that, historically, "homosexuality [was] seen as an inversion of normal gender development" (280). This created the impression—consciously or not—that gay men were comparable to women: "Homoerotic desire is cast as feminine desire, desire for other men. Homophobia is the effort to suppress that desire, to purify all relationships with other men, with women, with children of its taint, and to ensure that no one could possibly ever mistake one for a homosexual" (276). This impression and the fear it produces still holds true today, despite our evolved understanding of gender development, due to the continued presence of institutionalized patriarchy. As Connell writes, "Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity … Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. And hence—in the view of some gay theorists—the ferocity of homophobic attacks" (78).

4.4.2. The Rough and Tumble, Strong, Silent Type

There is a seeming irony in the idea that fear may be at the heart of what it actually means to be a man, especially when fearlessness and bravery are central to the idea of

manliness—at least, manliness onscreen. There is a long history of romanticized notions of masculinity being privileged onscreen, as they have been privileged in Western culture: "Men of action and strength were the embodiment of our culture, and a vast mythology was created to keep the dream in constant repair. Real men were strong, silent, and ostentatiously unemotional" (V. Russo 5). According to Aaronette M. White and Tal Peretz, the expectations regarding power and dominance that fuel hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal standards are characterized by what have been called "feeling rules", which require that "real" men suppress and repress any feelings that might make them emotionally vulnerable (405).

As previously mentioned, most men do not necessarily perform masculinity in ways that are consistent with the hegemonic ideal, and one can question whether or not most men actually follow these "feeling rules". However, it is a fact that hegemonic masculinity has been positioned as the ideal to which all men should aspire, and there is the tendency in film and television to create characters that disproportionately fit to those ideals (J.T. Wood 260; Fourie 285). Because of this, the majority of onscreen male characters do exhibit the traits and behaviours associated with this normative idea of what it means to be a man:

> The lived experience of masculinity will always be more complex and fluctuating than those representations of manhood and the male role being depicted in contemporary [film and television], however, this does not detract from the power of the medium to define norms and conventions, to provide "common-sense" understandings of gender and sexuality and to portray what is considered to be both "appropriate" and "inappropriate" social relations. (Feasey 155)

While this would seem to contradict the previous assertion that onscreen bromances are characterized by shared emotional intimacy, as Chen observes, "bromances are striking in part

because of their rigid contours" (252). Bromances *are* characterized by emotional intimacy, but only under specific circumstances and with certain results. Men in bromances are allowed to let down their emotional barriers with their partners as long as they simultaneously reaffirm their masculinity; they are allowed to express their vulnerabilities because the vulnerabilities that men in bromances tend to confess to do not then lead to revelations that would undermine their ability to conform to the masculine ideal. The seventeenth episode of the fifth season of *Hawaii Five-0*, in particular, exemplifies these interactions.

During the fifth season, Steve and Danny are required to attend counselling sessions in order to work on their personal relationship, in an effort to improve their professional partnership. In episode 5.17, they are given a workbook to complete which includes a series of questions they need to answer about each other. Most of the rest of the episode is spent with the two on a stakeout, and Danny decides to work on the assignment as a way to kill time. One of the questions asks Danny to "list something your partner is very passionate about" ("Kukaʻawale"), and when Steve mocks the superficial answer Danny has written, Danny asks Steve for an actual one. Steve admits that he used to play guitar, but when Danny asks why he stopped Steve is reluctant to answer, telling Danny that he "just stopped" ("Kukaʻawale"). It is not until the middle of that night, when Danny wakes up to find that Steve has been looking through the workbook, that Steve gives Danny the real reason:

> Tenth grade talent show, I signed up to perform. … I was standing in the wings, my guitar was in tune, they called my name, I walked out on stage. I turn around and look at all those people. And I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it, so I walked off and never played guitar ever again. … I didn't have stage fright; it was bigger than that. … I guess it was an existential crisis. I just, in that moment, I couldn't

handle the vulnerability that I was experiencing. I couldn't handle how exposed I

felt. … I was raised differently than you, okay? … The McGarrett men are a

different breed. To them, showing emotion is like showing weakness, you know?

I mean, it's stupid, but it's just the way it is. ("Kukaʻawale")

While the mise-en-scène displays the intimacy of a quiet confession on a shared couch made by

moonlight, the substance of the confession only maintains the necessary status quo. Although

Steve admits to a moment of unbearable vulnerability in his past, his inability to deal with that

emotion is not said to be due to some inadequacy on his part. Instead, it is due to the fact that he

is *so* tough, *so* strong, *so much of a man*—a "different breed", even—that he could not allow

himself to show weakness. It is also worth noting that he has to reject the idea that he merely had

stage fright, instead framing the experience as an "existential crisis". This is in keeping with

White and Peretz's assertions that "real" men are allowed to express strong emotions "only under

extreme conditions" (405). In these ways, Steve's confession reaffirms—rather than risks—his

masculinity, and realigns him with the hegemonic ideal.

As previously mentioned there is irony in the fact that a central characteristic of the

hegemonic man is fearlessness, when it could be said that the hegemonic man is actually driven

by fear. David Leverenz writes that the American ideal male "hides a great deal of fear, not so

much of women as of other men" (452). The hegemonic man must be confident and secure but

only because if he is not, other men will look down on him: "the real fear is not of women but of

being ashamed or humiliated in front of other men, or being dominated by stronger men" (451).

This both connects back to homophobia, in addition to revealing the term's double meaning. The

traditional understanding of the term *homophobia* is that it is a combination of *homosexual* and

phobia, but *sexual* is notably absent from the resulting compound word ("Homophobia"). What

is actually combined is the word *homo* with *phobia*, and *homo*, "from the Greek homos", means *same* ("Homo-"). *Homophobia* then, in addition to its more colloquial meaning, also actually means fear of the same, or in this case, men's fear of other men. This dual meaning is confirmed by Kimmel's assertion that "the great secret of American manhood [is]: *We are afraid of other men*. Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood" (277).

4.4.3. The Sexual Spectacle

The fear that fuels this homophobia makes itself apparent in subtle ways that are easily overlooked. When Joss Whedon submitted the first draft of the script for the first *Avengers* movie, Marvel Studios initially sent it back with the suggestion that the Black Widow character (the only female Avenger at the time) be removed from the story (Rogers). According to Whedon, the studio only relented after he told them that "without her the Helicarrier was going to feel like a gay cruise" (Rogers). That this argument apparently convinced the studio that Black Widow's presence was necessary implies not only that they agreed that a group of men without a woman present would appear to be gay, but also that such an appearance had to be avoided. Jeffrey Brown highlights the "insistent need" to establish the heterosexuality of superhero characters, calling it the "flip side of depicting their bodies as spectacles" (47). Referencing Laura Mulvey and her male gaze theory, Brown argues that "any prolonged displays of male bodies risks placing them in a feminized position", and so repeatedly reaffirming their heterosexuality—and avoiding any possible perception of homosexuality—is a way to compensate for any potential threat to their masculinity (47).

Steve Neale elaborates on this idea in his article, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema", which he wrote to supplement Mulvey's original publication. In his discussion of how the male gaze affects male characters, Neale writes, "In a heterosexual

and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed" (8). The way that Neale says the look is most often motivated in these cases is by aggression; physical violence—moments where "male struggle becomes pure spectacle"—offers another reason for a charged confrontation (12). David Greven concurs with this assessment, expanding on this tendency for violence to provide plausible deniability: "homoeroticism often finds vent in violence between men, as if the only way to register male-male desire for physical contact is through the impact of fists on flesh" (*Gender* 207).

A clear example of this can be seen in the first *Star Trek* reboot film, when a series of contrived circumstances lead Spock to physically attack Kirk. The shooting script for the scene is unbelievably Freudian in its description of the encounter: "<u>WHAM</u>! SPOCK HAS JUST HIT KIRK—and Kirk goes to hit back, but Spock fucking DELIVERS A SERIES OF POWERFUL BLOWS—Security stand back as the Captain attacks… And Spock is now fucking <u>choking</u> Kirk—<u>HE SLAMS KIRK AGAINST THE WALL</u>" (Orci and Kurtzman 107). The repeated use of the word "fucking", the underlining, and abundant capitalization—along with the fact that the removal or substitution of only a few of those words is all that would be needed to turn this description into one that is *overtly* sexual—all combine to create an incredibly evocative passage that is fraught with subtext and double meanings.

The idea that there is a substitutive connection between sex and violence is not new, nor is the idea of a connection between homophobia and masculinity. Mike Donaldson writes that "hostility to homosexuality is seen as fundamental to male heterosexuality" (648). However, when it comes to the entertainment industry it is important to note that it is *not* hostility to homosexuality that is inextricable with male heterosexuality, but hostility to gay *men*: "The

explicit sexuality of two men onscreen is [more] offensive and upsetting to audiences than lesbian sexuality" (V. Russo 294). As referenced briefly in chapter two, there is a titillation factor in the sight of two lesbians onscreen that is in direct opposition to what Battles and Hilton-Morrow call a "culturally constructed revulsion against gay male sex" (95; V. Russo 6).

This issue is one that appears stagnant, despite the way that other views on gender and sexuality have evolved over time. Even now, when pitching a film or television series, the inclusion of a lesbian character is "an easier sell" than the inclusion of a male character who is gay (Mullie). According to Mullie, who—in addition to his work on *Stargate: SG-1* and *Stargate: Atlantis*—also co-produced *Stargate: Universe*, the first *Stargate* property to feature a canonically gay character[6], there is a perception in the industry that "an onscreen kiss between women isn't really going to raise a lot of ire, especially nowadays. But an onscreen kiss between men is probably still a little bit pushing the boundaries. Why is it different? I don't know. … but I think there is a difference, for sure" (Mullie). Speaking specifically about portraying actual relationships onscreen, rather than just individual gay characters, Jones is in agreement with Mullie: "I have the sense that a homosexual male relationship, … there's still large parts of the population—male population, in most countries, that would feel it was difficult for them to possibly admit that they enjoyed it. So, I would say you've got more chance of getting a show with … a lesbian relationship" (Jones).

Other entertainment insiders have expressed similar sentiments (D'Angelo 74), with one suggesting that this may have been the reason why two male characters in the recent *Star Wars* trilogy, Finn and Poe, remained platonic friends throughout all three films, despite "widespread fan interest" in them becoming a romantic couple (Lang). Actor Oscar Isaac, who plays Poe, has been vocal in his disappointment over the film's failure to develop that relationship: "Personally,

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[6] Camile Wray, a lesbian character played by Ming-Na.

I kind of hoped and wished that maybe [Finn and Poe's relationship] would've been taken

further in the other films, but I don't have control. It seemed like a natural progression, but sadly

enough it's a time when people are too afraid, I think, of… I don't know what" (qtd. in Vary).

Instead of Finn and Poe, the *Star Wars* saga's one moment of LGBTQ representation comes in

the form of a brief celebratory kiss between two unnamed—but female—characters (*Star Wars*).

Although there is much prevaricating as to the cause of this double standard, it is

important to note that this fear that is being referenced, as well as the revulsion that Battles and

Hilton-Morrow write about, only come into play when considering the portrayal of gay male

relationships onscreen. I am not alone in suggesting that the reason they do not factor into the

idea of representing lesbian sex and romance is because—in addition to being fetishized—two

women onscreen together do not pose the threat to hegemonic masculinity that two men would[7].

The existence of the male gaze is also a strong factor for why masculine eroticism must be

denied or supplemented with violence. As Neale writes, "were this not the case, mainstream

cinema would have to openly come to terms with the male homosexuality it so assiduously seeks

to either denigrate or deny" (15).

4.5. On the Evolution of Species (AKA Working in Progress)

Western culture's evolving attitudes on gender and sexuality have been referenced

numerous times in this chapter. It is true that cultural institutions have changed and that the

presentation and representation of LGBTQ individuals onscreen is better than it used to be.

However, better is not the same as good, and that things have evolved and changed does not

mean that there is not more work to be done. There is a lot of attention and focus on how things

have improved, but it comes at the expense of acknowledging what still needs improvement.

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[7] I do not suggest that there are no problems in portraying lesbian relationships onscreen, nor do I deny that gay
male relationships onscreen are also fetishized by certain segments of their audiences. I maintain, however, that on a
macro level, the reverse is generally the more pressing issue for each of these two genders.

4.5.1. Paying Lip Service (The Revolution Will Not Be Televised)

There is a habit among film and television creators of patting themselves on the back for the small moments of positive representation that they do offer without acknowledging the fact that they could do more. When asked about LGBTQ representation in *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* prior to its release, director J.J. Abrams claimed that "it was important to me that people who go to see this movie feel that they're being represented in the film" (qtd. in Vary). He went on to make a point of smiling even as he refused to spoil the film—despite the fact that revealing what turned out to be a fleeting kiss, inconsequential to the plot or main characters, would have hardly been considered a spoiler.

Steven Moffat, co-creator of BBC's *Sherlock*, has a similar obstructionist optimism:

> I don't think there is anything that suggests Sherlock is gay but if he was he wouldn't fancy John. It's just that thing of two blokes hanging around together living together—in this nice modern world it leads to people saying, "Oh are they a couple?" And that's nice. I thought how the world has changed, there is no disapproval. How much more civilized the world has become. (qtd. in Connolly)

While Moffat may claim that there is no disapproval of the idea of Sherlock and John becoming a romantic couple, it seems a bit hypocritical of him to celebrate that fact while actively refusing to allow it to happen on his show (that he makes a point of stating that even if Sherlock *were* gay, he would not be interested in John, makes that very clear). That the involved characters are iterations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes and Watson makes it particularly unfortunate, as the author once rather famously (if allegedly) responded to a request from a playwright to adapt Holmes with, "You may marry him or murder him or do anything you like with him" (qtd. in

Liening 38). Or, as Balaka Basu—referencing the historical contexts of both Doyle's original

stories and the BBC's modern adaptation—writes:

> In some ways, we could read the Victorian text, which never alludes to sexual
>
> orientation explicitly, as *more* open to queer possibilities because there a reader
>
> could imagine that such possibilities remained unvoiced only because of the
>
> constraints of the period. Here, where the text can refer to the subject forthrightly,
>
> we might interpret the dismissal of queerness as "homosexual panic": the writers
>
> know that when two men live together these days, questions about sexual
>
> orientation will be raised and they must explicitly deny the possibility. … when
>
> we talk about queerness openly, but it is never really on the table as a feasible
>
> alternative, how far have we truly come? (Basu 206-207)

Other evidence that our level of acceptance as a society has been romanticized became

evident in the run-up to the release of 2009's *Sherlock Holmes*. The publicity tour featured a lot

of talk about the bromance between this version of Holmes and Watson, with Robert Downey Jr.

being particularly outspoken-yet-coy about the specific nature of their relationship. Downey

teased and hinted so much so that "the holder of the U.S. copyright for the Holmes character

threatened to pull the plug on any sequels that might pursue the idea more fully" (Graham and

Garlen 31): "It would be drastic, but I would withdraw permission for more films to be made if

they feel that is a theme they wish to bring out in the future" (Andrea Plunket[8], qtd. in Kelly).

This practice of undermining our efforts at acceptance also plays out onscreen, within the

films and television series themselves. Episode 5.17 of *Hawaii Five-0* provides a perfect

example. While on their stakeout, Steve and Danny pretend to be housesitting and a neighbour

---

[8] There is some question as to whether Plunket actually is the U.S. copyright holder for the Sherlock Holmes property (The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Estate). However, whether or not she could have succeeded in interrupting the production of the sequel does not change her intentions, which she announced publically.

mistakes them for a gay couple. In response, Steve issues an immediate denial, instead revealing that he and Danny are undercover police officers. When the neighbour leaves, Danny tells Steve that he would have allowed the misunderstanding to continue in order to maintain their cover. Despite this comment establishing that Danny does not have a problem with someone thinking he is gay, his acceptance of the error is undercut by the fact that the show instantly shuts it down. Having a character demonstrate acceptance of being mistaken for a gay man does not make much of an impact if the script ensures that the mistake is immediately corrected: "These bromances may work to broaden acceptance of close homosocial relationships … but resistance to being thought of as gay is also clear in these programs" (Nettleton 128).

4.5.2. Implicit Bias (Pride and Prejudice)

It would be easy to suggest that all of this is evidence that cultural attitudes have not changed and social prejudices have not evolved. However, this does Western attitudes a disservice because the level of discrimination against the LGBTQ community is *not* what it used to be, and representation onscreen *has* improved. However, although they are still in need of improvement, the overt, conscious beliefs and attitudes are not the ones that require the most attention, it is instead our implicit biases that now need to be addressed.

According to research done on the science of implicit cognition by Anthony G. Greenwald and Linda Hamilton Krieger, "actors do not always have conscious, intentional control over the processes of social perception, impression formation, and judgement that motivate their actions" (946). Implicit biases are therefore defined as "discriminatory biases based on implicit attitudes or implicit stereotypes. Implicit biases are especially intriguing, and also especially problematic, because they can produce behaviour that diverges from a person's avowed or endorsed beliefs or principles" (951). Although often difficult to highlight because

they are relegated to the unconscious, there is at least one famous example in popular culture that clearly illustrates this behavior.

In episode 4.16 of *Seinfeld*, Jerry and George are mistaken for a gay couple and their response, "We're not gay!—Not that there's anything wrong with that!" ("The Outing"), has become part of the cultural zeitgeist, while the situation that Jerry and George find themselves in has been called a "gay-friendly straight-man's double bind" (Becker 239). The episode won a GLAAD Media Award for "Outstanding Comedy Episode", an award that is given for "fair, accurate and inclusive representations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community and the issues that affect their lives" ("Seinfeld - Awards"; "31st Annual"). However, as Mahzarin R. Banaji and Greenwald point out, "the humour in that oft-repeated line derives from a contradiction: While contemporary attitudes toward homosexuality may have come so far…, the very need for the denial signals that at some level, many of us must believe that there's *something* wrong with it" (53). The key words in this quotation are "at some level" because the suggestion is not that those who use this catchphrase are consciously, purposefully homophobic. The negative implication is buried within a positive expression, and yet it still exists and should not be denied.

The theory of cognitive dissonance asserts that "becoming aware of the conflicts between our beliefs and our actions, or between two simultaneously coexisting beliefs, violates the natural human striving for mental harmony, or consonance", which results in an uncomfortable mental state (Banaji and Greenwald 59). This discomfort can be especially prominent when those dissonant ideas conflict with how one conceives of one's self as a human being. Upon taking a test that can identify implicit biases, writer Malcolm Gladwell reported:

[The test] told me that I had a moderate preference for White people. … I was

biased—slightly biased—against Black people, toward White people, which

horrified me because my mom's Jamaican. … The person in my life who I love

more than almost anyone else is Black, and here I was taking a test, which said,

frankly, I wasn't too crazy about Black people … and it was this creepy,

dispiriting, devastating moment. (qtd. in Banaji and Greenwald 57)

Geoffrey Beattie, citing Banaji and Greenwald, points out that one problem with implicit biases

is that they are "activated outside of conscious attention", because that "activation occurs more

rapidly than can be mediated by conscious activity … and [is] initiated by (subliminal) stimuli"

(qtd. in Beattie 136). According to Patricia Devine, this automatic activation is "a legacy of our

common socialization experiences", and cannot be immediately eliminated by conflicting

conscious beliefs (qtd. in Beattie 113).

However, that does not mean they cannot be *eventually* eliminated, as research does

suggest that these implicit biases can be changed; according to Beattie, "there is the possibility

that being consistently exposed to [positive] exemplars … (particularly in the media) could lead

to more permanent changes in underlying implicit attitudes" (142). If collective socialization is

the root cause of implicit biases, then changing the messages communicated through one of the

sources of collective socialization can help to negate those biases. This lends even more credence

to the idea that there is a need for more positive representations of LGBTQ characters and issues

onscreen, even as it provides a sobering assessment of the level of difficulty involved in

instigating such an effort.

The biggest obstacle in the path to overcoming implicit biases is society itself. With the

evolution of cultural attitudes, internalized social norms—the unwritten rules of what is and is

not acceptable behaviour—have also changed (Billig 96; "Social Norms"). According to Victoria Clarke, "not only is there a social norm against overt expressions of prejudice, but also overt prejudice is framed as irrational" (695). At first glance, this would seem to be a positive change, but the individualistic aspect of our society turns this into its own problem (Scharff 121). This is because rather than focusing on how we might move past our prejudices, we instead focus on ensuring that we are not seen to have them: "Accusing someone of being prejudiced or implying that someone's behaviour reflects prejudice are judgements that are likely to evoke strong emotional reactions on the part of the person being accused… [there is] a cultural perception that prejudice is evil, and this perception makes it offensive to have oneself or one's behaviours labeled as prejudiced" (Swim et al. 944).

The individualistic preoccupation with identity-related labels, as well as the aforementioned pursuit of mental consonance that Banaji and Greenwald describe (59), creates an automatic defensiveness that actually gets in the way of self-improvement. One does not have to be *a* racist to display racist behaviour, and one does not have to *be* homophobic to present homophobic images to an audience—the label is irrelevant, and the attempt to contest categorization does not erase the actions that prompted the initial complaint. In order to lessen our implicit biases, we must be willing to admit that they exist and work to correct them. If we cannot control our first thought, then—until we can re-train it—our second thought must be one of recognition and modification, not denial.

4.6. Chapter Summation: Moving Out of the Friend Zone?

Relationships follow social scripts, and the similarities between the romance and bromance scripts are undeniable. As Chen has noted, "to the extent that bromances are recognized, monogamous, and intimate, they provide sharp parallels to marriage, which can be

problematic" (253). The problem arises from the fact that romantic relationships are given more

cultural value than friendships receive. According to Danebrock, who cites Robert Lapsley and

Michael Westlake, there is no doubt "that 'our culture does want romance and the promise of

happiness it brings'. It does not search for 'mere friendship' and thus cannot contain itself with a

relationship that must necessarily appear vague and unclear in a conceptual framework that

privileges romance" (51-52). Unlike acknowledged onscreen romances, bromance pairings are

never allowed to reach what is seen to be the pinnacle of human relationships. Despite the

journey that the relationship takes having been built using the same conventions that onscreen

romantic relationships follow (Jacey 243), bromances are never allowed to fulfill the promise of

that journey—forever held just short of our cultural idea of a happy ending.

Although it will be difficult, Hollywood must take the lead in overcoming the implicit

biases that prevent necessary changes from being made. In recognizing and then changing their

patterns, positive representations will have a better chance of ending up onscreen where they will

be in a better position to affect the collective social consciousness. Unfortunately, this will be no

small feat, as there are particular behaviours and practices that film and television creators have

grown accustomed to integrating into their work—at times, to an alarming degree—that will

need to be brought to an end.

CHAPTER FIVE: SEEING QUEERLY AND QUEERBAITING

5.1. Seeing Queerly

In chapter three I highlighted Alan McKee's assertion that "people from different cultures experience reality differently" (9). The ability to *see queerly* extends from this idea—only in this case, the act of seeing has created a culture, rather than the views of a culture guiding how one sees: "[Seeing queerly] is the fans' acknowledged decision to approach [a film or] series through the particular angle of gender and sexual identity, underlining the potential or realized queerness of its narrative and characters" (Le Cudennec 37-38). Queerness, in this case, refers to the type of analysis that emphasizes "the discursive, non-fixed character of all sexualities, an approach that indicates a move beyond the hetero-homosexual binary" (Kohnen 210). Audiences who see queerly reject the idea of universal heterosexuality—that, in the absence of information specifying otherwise, a character should be presumed heterosexual—and often embrace the possibility of more fluid sexual identities, like bisexuality, so that a character shown in a heterosexual relationship can still have queer potential: "In representation, as in life, you might never know for certain [what someone's sexual orientation is], as silences and gaps in information can be as telling and meaningful as what is said or shown. It is arrogant to insist that all non-blatantly queer-coded characters must be read as straight" (Doty 3). As C.S. Lewis once wrote, "the absence of smoke simply proves that the fire is carefully hidden" (26).

It is important to note that the *practice* of seeing queerly is not the same as *being* a queer spectator—or, not necessarily the same (Kohnen 208). Some individuals who identify as queer also see queerly, but some do not; there are also many individuals who see queerly but identify as heterosexual: "just as much as queer visibility cannot be limited to films and TV shows that feature explicitly gay and lesbian characters, queer spectatorship cannot be limited to queer

spectators. The recognition that seeing queerly is practiced widely among a diverse audience is crucial at a time in which cultural sexual norms are so hotly contested" (209; 210).

According to Kohnen, most of the scholarship surrounding the idea of seeing queerly focuses on audiences who identify as queer, suggesting that the idea that heterosexual viewers also see queerly "leads to fears on the part of scholars who regard straight viewers' forays into queer spectatorship as a co-optation of gay and lesbian culture" (209). Although I do see a potential problem in this type of viewership, cultural appropriation is not that problem—applying knowledge of gay and lesbian cultural codes is not the same thing as adopting them as one's own. However, the potential for exoticism—the tendency to fetishize something outside of one's own experiences—is a reasonable concern, but not one that should discourage the practice entirely. As Kohnen explains, "the insistence that seeing queerly is limited to queer spectators implies that a 'straight' view is the default view … instead of acknowledging that queer moments can arise anywhere and be seen by anyone" (209-210).

5.1.1. Isn't it Romantic?

Alexander Doty writes that, for him, "any text is always already potentially queer" (2), and Kohnen builds on this approach by adding that "we need to recognize that every interpretation is potentially queer as well" (210). At times, queer potential can even be inadvertently ingrained in the very concept of a film or television series, and the BBC's *Merlin* is an excellent example of a series that centres on a platonic relationship that is built on traditional romance tropes—specifically, the concept of destiny. This traditionally romantic element is set up in the very first episode of the series, when Merlin is informed by Kilgharrah (a magical creature) that it is his destiny to protect Prince Arthur. This sentiment is repeated throughout the episode:

> GUARD: Merlin, Prince Arthur wants you right away.
>
> GAIUS: Your destiny's calling. You'd better find out what he wants. ("The
>
> Dragon's Call")

The idea that two people are destined to be together—that it is possible to search for and find a soulmate, someone who is meant to make us complete—is "pervasive" in Western culture, and undeniably romantic (Vannier and O'Sullivan 236). According to the *Encyclopedia of Romance Fiction*, this trope is "particularly prevalent" in the fantasy genre (Horne 19). Subsequent episodes of *Merlin* continue to code the dynamic between the two characters in romantic terms; in the second episode—after the two men argue—Kilgharrah comforts Merlin, insisting that his relationship with Arthur will improve and that Arthur does not hate him: "A half cannot truly hate that which makes it whole. ... That your and Arthur's path lies together is but the truth" ("Valiant").

Throughout the series, Merlin's devotion to Arthur remains absolute, so much so that after Arthur dies in the series finale and Kilgharrah prophesizes that one day "Arthur will rise again" ("The Diamond of the Day"), Merlin is shown to spend the rest of his seemingly immortal life waiting for Arthur's return. Asked if the finale was meant to express the love story between the two characters, the episode's writer instead suggested that "it was the culmination of a love story, really" (Jones).

Of course, subtext does not need to be embedded in the concept of a story to exist—although it can often seem like it is to those who see queerly. *X-Men: First Class* is an origin story for both the X-Men and the Brotherhood, the two factions who fight for mutant rights in opposing ways throughout the original *X-Men* trilogy. According to Robert Grimminck, "At the heart of the story, there's a strongly implied gay relationship between Charles 'Professor X'

Xavier (James McAvoy) and Erik 'Magneto' Lehnsherr (Michael Fassbender)" (29). Writing

specifically about the sections of the film where Charles and Erik go on a road trip together to

track down other mutants, and then create a home for the ones they've found where they can

train their abilities, Grimminck asserts that "During that time, the two become intensely intimate.

In one scene, they share a powerful mind connection that leaves them both in tears; in another,

they even share a bed. While it's not stated outright, the film strongly hints that the two men are

lovers" (29).

   While I would argue as to whether or not the film itself is purposefully hinting at such a

relationship existing between the two characters, Grimminck's interpretation is certainly valid

based on how Charles and Erik's relationship unfolds onscreen. According to William Earnest, it

would have been easy for the filmmakers to manipulate the subtext attached to their relationship:

"[because that subtext is] homo*erotic*, not homo*sexual* in the literal sense, so it's about desire,

tension, and, above all, unrequited love. No clothes have to come off, and so far as we know,

they don't. But there are looks, body language, conversations, and above all, *intimacy*" (qtd. in

Arrow). The idea that "mutants [are] a perfect symbol for the social struggles of lesbians and

gays" has been a reoccurring one in the media coverage for the *X-Men* films since the original

trilogy (Earnest 216), and *X-Men: First Class* continues that trend with its own parallels:

> ERIK: You were in my head. How did you do it?
>
> CHARLES: You have your tricks, I have mine. I'm like you. ...
>
> ERIK: I thought I was alone.
>
> CHARLES: You're not alone. Erik—you're not alone. (*X-Men: First Class*)

One can appreciate the dual meaning some might hear in this exchange if one considers that,

according to Bridges, "Living under constant legal and physical threat, queer modes of

communication in repressive societies have always taken place under the radar" (118). That the

film takes place in 1962 would only strengthen the parallel being drawn.

On some occasions, what starts out as subtext exists long enough to be referenced within

the text itself. In the novelization for *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, written by series creator

Gene Roddenberry, there is a somewhat famous footnote that directly addresses rumours of a

romantic relationship between the original Kirk and Spock. Inserted to provide an explanation

for Spock's use of "my t'hy'la" to describe Kirk (Roddenberry 22), the footnote explains that

t'hy'la is a Vulcan term that means *friend*, but "can also mean *brother* and *lover*" (22n1).

Although the footnote goes on to deny that the last meaning of the term applies to the

relationship between Kirk and Spock (despite some apparent in-universe speculation), the fact

that it appears in the definition at all bears consideration. After all, Vulcan is a made-up

language—and the term *t'hy'la* had not appeared in the *Star Trek* canon prior to this novelization,

so Roddenberry was not tied to a previously established definition. There was no reason for him

to include *lover* as a valid translation for *t'hy'la* if he did not want it to be one.

Furthermore, the Roddenberry Footnote (as it is known in *Star Trek* fandom) also

contains an interesting quote from now-Admiral Kirk, seemingly solicited by the book's editor

(the conceit being that the novelization is a collection of published reports compiled by an editor

who exists within the *Star Trek* universe). Kirk explains, "although I have no moral or other

objections to physical love in any of its many Earthly, alien and mixed forms, I have always

found my best gratification in that creature *woman*" (22n1). This passage has generated

numerous responses from critics, fans, and scholars alike, with many—including Henry

Jenkins—asking what Kirk means by asserting that his "*best* gratification" has been with

women: "How has [Kirk] come to be in a position to make such an evaluation? He doesn't, after

all, say that it was his only gratification" (Jenkins, "Out of the Closet" 251). Even as

Roddenberry seemingly closes the door on the possibility of a relationship between Kirk and

Spock, he simultaneously—inadvertently or not—opens a window for continued speculation

(251).

According to Jenkins, it is very important to consider denotation versus connotation when

attempting to see queerly, as the former is the "explicit or direct meaning", while the latter "can

be something suggested or implied ..., rather than being explicitly named or described"

("Denotation vs. Connotation"). Jenkins cites D.A. Miller's work on Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* as

a well-known example of homosexuality as "a matter of connotation" (Jenkins, "Out of the

Closet" 251): "While the homosexuality of *Rope*'s major characters has been taken for granted

by almost all critics writing about the film, their sexual preference is never explicitly stated and

thus remains a matter of interpretation" (251). However, the problem with homosexuality-as-

connotation is that "by its very nature, it denies … queer visibility" (252). As important and valid

as the practice of seeing queerly is, the truth is that it can only go so far: "despite the availability

of queer interpretative challenges, scholars have argued for the importance of viewers having

canonically LGBT representations rather than being confined to excavating queerly resistant

readings" (Ng 2.2).

5.1.2. Crowd Control

It doesn't help that creators are often resistant to these resistant readings of their work:

"creators who purportedly have a strong understanding of how drama and storytelling work will

often weaponize those tropes to shut down particular fannish readings and criticism" (Scott 156).

According to teen drama *Riverdale* writer Britta Lundin, "creators, I think, have always felt like

they get to decide what's best for the story because they're the creators, and screw all those other

voices" (qtd. in Scott 156). However, it is one thing to put an emphasis on maintaining control of

the narrative of a text, and it is quite another to disparage fans who find other meanings in what

has been presented to them.

Derek Johnson suggests that creators "construct 'acceptable' fan activity by building

critiques of unruly fans directly into the text" (294-295), and episode 3.01 of *Sherlock* proves

him to be correct. After two years of fans trying to figure out how Sherlock could have survived

jumping off a building in order to fake his own suicide in the second season finale, the third

season premiere doesn't try to provide a serious explanation. Instead, the episode features a

handful of possible scenarios throughout the episode, explained to or by Anderson (a minor

character), each unlikely in its own way. Lestrade, upon hearing the first of Anderson's ideas,

observes that it has been "Two years and the theories keep getting more stupid" (Gatiss 4).

Although many reviewers took that to be a jab at the show's fan base (Bettridge), it wasn't the

most egregious one. A subsequent theoretical scenario imagines Sherlock giggling on the roof

with the evil Moriarty before the two men lean in for a kiss—which Anderson's disbelieving

voice interrupts as the scene changes:

<div align="center">

ANDERSON
Are you out of your *mind?*

</div>

ANDERSON sits with a group of people, some of them in deerstalkers. Prominent
is a plump, gothy girl - LAURA.

<div align="center">

LAURA
(sulky)
Don't see why not. It's just as plausible
as some of *your* theories. (Gatiss 30)

</div>

Anderson then demands that Laura take the situation seriously, which Judith Fathallah takes

exception to, arguing that the implication is that "queer identities and desires, apparently, are not

a 'serious' possibility. This is queerface, and there is something disturbing and disingenuous

about asking queer viewers to identify with and invest in a text before such a dismissal" (498).

The description of Laura as a "plump, gothy girl" is also problematic as it continues to

perpetuate a stereotypical view of female fans as, among other things, lonely, unhappy, not-

conventionally-attractive women who try to live vicariously through their favourite characters

(Busse 186; 189-190). There is a purpose to this characterization, as well as to Anderson's

dismissal of her, as Léa Le Cudennec observes: "The negative depiction of fangirls in the show

… indicates how the producers indulge in policing the fans' involvement in the series" (44-45).

The *Sherlock* producers are far from alone in their desire to maintain sole creative control.

Joss Whedon once, rather infamously, was quoted as stating "I need to give [the fans] what they

need, not what they want" (qtd. in Havens 44), and Hart Hanson (creator of *Bones*) once argued

that "although fans claim to want Booth and Brennan together, this might not be the case: 'Fans

desperately want it, but if they get what they want, they could be very, very, disappointed'"

(Cattrell 280). Needless to say, neither of these statements was well-received by their respective

fan bases.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, fans have gotten much better at clearly articulating what

they want to see onscreen, why they want to see it, and how they feel when they do not see it

("About"; Le Cudennec 33; "Mission Statement"; Ryan). The struggle for authorial control is at

the heart of the issue of queerbaiting, but not—as McDermott suggested—because fans are only

interested in one interpretation of a text (136). Whether it's due to passive aggression, marketing

and consumerism, an unimaginative sense of humour, or an honest desire to provide what

representation they can, queerbaiting is something that creators do *on purpose*, and usually at

queer viewers' expense.

5.2. Queerbaiting, or: Whose (Punch)Line is it Anyway?

Queerbaiting occurs through deliberate actions from those behind the scenes. Veteran TV writer-producer Jane Espenson has gone on record admitting that "she and other writers and directors intentionally queerbait with no plan of pursuing a queer character arc or relationship" (Bridges 121). The problem is that, in addition to continuously punishing queer audiences—and audiences who see queerly—by repeatedly dangling the possibility of "quality LGBTQ representation" onscreen before taking it away (116), queerbaiting limits any ideas of actual or potential queerness to playing the role of comic relief (Mueller 185). Queerbaiting therefore becomes "not just a marketing strategy to win over certain audience groups, but a strategy that makes for texts with homophobic undertones" (185). Humour as a defense mechanism is typical of the bromance (Fathallah 494), but unpacking these "jokes" reveals that what is actually being laughed at isn't very funny.

Towards the end of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Tony's friend Rhodey joins the Avengers in the climactic battle. His appearance helps to turn the tide and he and Tony happily engage in banter as they fight:

> RHODEY: Now this is gonna be a good story!
>
> TONY: Yep. If you live to tell it.
>
> RHODEY: You think I can't hold my own?
>
> TONY: We get through this, *I'll* hold your own.
>
> RHODEY: You *had* to make it weird. (*Age of Ultron*)

This moment received a lot of laughter when it screened in theatres ("The Avengers Age"), and in his director's commentary Joss Whedon calls the exchange "a really nice bit of personal texture" for the two characters (Whedon, "Audio commentary"). An examination of the actual

dialogue, however, shows that the laughter and praise are being directed at the idea that something sexual happening between the two men would be *weird*. As Maria San Filippo writes, "to comically de-eroticize male same-sex desire defuses its threat" ("More Than Buddies" 183).

In *Empire* magazine's review of *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, the reviewer noted that the bromance between Holmes and Watson, which was already quite overt in the first film, had become "less a subtext than [an] extended routine" (Nathan), to such a degree that Mueller suggests that the movie "seem[s] to mock the idea it had put into its audience's heads in the first place" (183). Carlen Lavigne agrees with this assessment, listing the scenes of Holmes "dressing (poorly) in drag, grappling intimately with Watson, and asking Watson to dance[9]" as examples of how the film's subtext transitions "into open satire" (14). While some might suggest that there's nothing wrong with poking fun at bromance relationships, the problem is that, as Battles and Hilton-Morrow point out, "the polysemic nature of joking allows audiences to either laugh *with* … or *at*" an onscreen bromance, and—as has already been established—creators cannot control how an audience will react (98).

The practice of creating punchlines out of the idea of queerness also often results in difficulties taking the bromance relationship seriously: "Homosexual tropes adopted in the service of exaggerated humour both highlight and downplay the relational significance of homosocial interactions. Male closeness is thereby expressed without the potential of the 'naturalized given'" (Lam and Raphael 5). This habit has caused audiences to become complicit in the trivialization of these types of relationships: "the suggestive 'are they/aren't they?' dynamic depends on audiences' acknowledgement of the unspoken possibilities of the relationship, and their willingness not to take the relationship at face value" (5). Queerbaiting as

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[9] The scene where the two dance together at a high society ball is exceedingly jarring due to the fact that the dancing is unapologetically public at a time when homosexuality was illegal, trivializing the real-life consequences that such an act would have had in the same era that saw Oscar Wilde sent to prison for gross indecency (Beckson).

comedy not only makes a mockery of queerness, it also makes it difficult for future bromance relationships to successfully transition into positive queer representations because audiences have been trained to laugh at the very possibility.

5.2.1. Onscreen Queerbaiting

There are a variety of ways that queerbaiting appears within the texts of films and television shows—some more obvious than others. Bridges writes that "media creators can 'have their cake and eat it too' by playing to queer audiences in ways largely unnoticed by straight viewers", and while I would change that distinction to one between those who see queerly and those who do not, I believe her overall point stands (119). While there are many instances where the presence of queerbaiting is obvious, there are just as many instances that fly under the radar for those who are not necessarily looking for it.

In episode 1.10 of *Marvel's Daredevil* there is a flashback to Matt and Foggy's first meeting—when they were assigned as roommates at Columbia Law School. After Foggy apologizes for making an insensitive remark upon realizing that Matt is blind, Matt laughs it off, explaining that he finds Foggy's behaviour refreshing:

> MATT: Most people dance around me like I'm made of glass, I hate that.
>
> FOGGY: Yeah, you're just a guy, right? A really, *really* good-looking guy.
>
> MATT: Oh, I—
>
> FOGGY: —I mean, girls must love that, the whole wounded-handsome-duck-thing. Am I right?
>
> MATT: Right. Yeah, it's been known to happen.

> FOGGY: This is gonna be awesome! … Me as your wingman! You're gonna
>
> open up a whole caliber of women I've only dreamed of—a *lot*. ("Nelson v.
>
> Murdock")

On the surface, this exchange is a throwaway piece of dialogue that establishes how quickly their relationship originally formed. Closer examination, however, reveals a specific purpose to the words being used. To those who see queerly, Foggy's initial compliment opens possibilities for his character—his expression of admiration for Matt's appearance allows for the possibility that he might be something other than heterosexual. Even his quick reversal as soon as Matt starts stuttering an awkward response doesn't necessarily close that door—Foggy could simply be backing off to avoid making his new roommate uncomfortable. His emphatically declared attraction to women throughout the rest of the exchange can be read as genuine, but it can also be read as an effort to placate someone he knows he will be spending a lot of time with—or even as a combination of both. Character intent aside, what the end of this exchange does is establish the dynamic that Matt and Foggy's friendship will be based on—the idea that Matt will attract women for both of them to enjoy. The dialogue in this scene both opens a door and closes it; whatever attraction Foggy does or does not initially feel for Matt, this flashback reveals that their friendship is explicitly built on compulsory heterosexuality: "Homoerotics may be jokingly implied or suggested, but they are not openly admitted and never seriously investigated in the unfolding of the homosocial narrative. They will be entirely eliminated by the heterosexual resolution" (Forster 194).

Admittedly, one could argue that this type of queerbaiting is in the eye of the beholder rather than the creator. In two separate interviews, *Merlin* executive producer Julian Murphy has denied involvement in the practice, telling the interviewer, "We never play on it. No way" (qtd.

in Golder, "The Battle" 77), and pointing out, "[The fans] find innuendo in anything, and everywhere. We sit there at screenings sometimes and people are laughing at innuendo, and we're going, 'We never saw that!'" (qtd. in Golder, "Merlin"). This may be a valid complaint for creators to make, but it is undermined by evidence that suggests that Murphy doth protest too much.

According to Metin Huseyin, who directed three episodes in *Merlin*'s second season, the bromance between Arthur and Merlin "was consciously pandered to by the showrunners - Julian Murphy and Johnny Capps - who saw how fans reacted to the two young actors. So they wrote towards that end" (Huseyin, "Bromance"). The content of the show itself lends more credibility to Huseyin than to Murphy. Queerbaiting was abundant on *Merlin*, and ranged from the *potentially* inadvertent, to the teasing, to the *flagrantly overt*—as a review for episode 4.04 asks, "Was there actually a narrative need for Merlin to get Arthur half-naked and then wrestle him on the floor? Especially in the same episode where they were crawling around together in Arthur's bed? … I'm not complaining, I'm just asking for the sake of clarification" (Hass).

Although rarely as scandalous as Merlin eagerly jumping Arthur after magically pulling the other man's pants down, instances of onscreen, textual queerbaiting are peppered through all of my case studies. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, after saying goodbye to Tony, Steve finds Natasha in an otherwise empty room:

> STEVE: You want to keep staring at the wall, or do you want to go to work? I mean, it's a pretty interesting wall.
>
> NATASHA: I thought you and Tony were still gazing into each other's eyes.

The instability of Steve and Tony's relationship in the Marvel films, as discussed in chapter four, makes her response a particularly conspicuous attempt at queerbaiting. Other properties that habitually rely on this practice manage its inclusion much more seamlessly.

Hawaii Five-0 manages, at times, to showcase some signs of maturity in their queerbaiting; in later seasons, Steve and Danny are able to say "I love you" to each other with sincerity—and without any immediate "no homo[10]"-type caveats ("Makaukau 'oe e Pa'ani?"; "E Malama Pono"). This maturity, however, is offset by the numerous clichéd queerbaiting scenarios that the series also indulges in, such as the episode that saw the two men accidentally attending a couples' weekend retreat after Steve signed them up for what he thought would be a three-day workshop for their work relationship—a "bro-cation" ("Kuleana").

On *Sherlock*, queerbaiting has become, as Lavigne terms it, "the joke that will not die", as the idea of Sherlock and John becoming a romantic couple is referenced—and ridiculed—in nearly every single episode (16). Ayann Agane highlights the problematic pattern of the creators' onscreen queerbaiting—regularly coupled with off-screen denials—by observing that "even if the series' writers do not imagine a gay Holmes, they consistently and explicitly point to this potential interpretation" (162). Agane then goes on, as Sherlock might, to draw the only logical conclusion: "The comedic potential of toying with viewers' interpretations of queer gender and sexuality seem limitless" (167).

5.2.2. Off-screen and Paratextual Queerbaiting

In addition to the queerbaiting that occurs within the films and television series, there is a significant amount of queerbaiting occurring outside of these texts and in accompanying paratexts (merchandise, blooper reels, etc.). This type of queerbaiting is arguably more hurtful,

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[10] "A phrase said after saying something that could be interpreted as homosexual to someone of the same gender as the speaker" ("Urban Dictionary").

as creators and actors don't have the deniability that a fictional universe provides—the ability to maintain that an interaction is in-character, or necessary for the plot.

One type of paratext that has seen queerbaiting become more prevalent in recent years is the blooper reel (also known as a gag reel): "although the reels are put together by the studio, actors are aware that what they are filmed doing on set may end up on those reels, and this content is therefore also a channel through which producers communicate with viewers" (Ng 2.5). Whether or not it's by design, these blooper reels often promote the idea that each of the casts is one big happy family by using outtakes the feature laughter, dancing, and displays of overblown affection. Two of the most popular of these displays are the *almost kiss* and the *mock passionate embrace*, and while these displays can take place between actors of opposing sexes, they tend to grab more headlines when they involve two of the same (Fitz-Gerald; Franco; Guglielmi): "Outtakes like these offer almost-textual possibilities for the episodes, since they are so close to what is seen on the show. Thus, while being dissonant with actual episodes, these paratexts are nods to fan wishes in teasing what canon could in theory look like" (Ng 7.4). And while fans might appreciate getting an actual visual image of what a romantic relationship between two particular characters might look like, the fact that these visuals are only present in the blooper reel is yet another way that same-sex desire is reduced to comic fodder.

Merchandise is another paratextual method through which queerbaiting occurs, as targeting "the 'pink dollar' has become more and more significant and appealing to culture industries" (Miller 115). In June 2018, CBS introduced a brand new t-shirt to their *Hawaii Five-0* online store. At that time, within the narrative of the series, Steve and Danny were considering opening a restaurant together as a precursor to retiring from the police force, and the t-shirt referenced that idea. Seemingly designed as an advertisement for what was to be an Italian

restaurant, the t-shirt features a cartoon drawing of Steve and Danny sitting at a table for two,

sharing a bowl of spaghetti in an obvious homage to Disney's *Lady and the Tramp* ("Hawaii

Five-0 McDanno's"). The name of the restaurant, spelled out above and below the image, is

McDanno's Bar & Grill.

The romantic imagery, combined with the use of the portmanteau "couple name" that the

pairing is known by in fandom, was problematic on its own considering it advertised a

relationship that did not exist within the series. However, this was compounded by the

promotional email sent out by the CBS Store which presented potential consumers the

opportunity to "Celebrate Pride Month" by purchasing the t-shirt, offering a "20% off" discount

if they used the coupon code "PRIDE" when checking out ("stellar's meadow"). The attempt to

position Steve and Danny's relationship as *Hawaii Five-0*'s contribution to celebrating Pride

Month is disingenuous at best, and reveals a cynicism that verges on maliciousness. Steve and

Danny are not, and have never been—within the canon of the series—in a romantic relationship

with each other; in this case, the queerbaiting not only mocks the possibility of a queer

relationship on *Hawaii Five-0*, it tries to make a profit in its place: "queerbaiting excludes the

possibility of representing actual queer relationships. Queer subtext can function as a stand-in

when queer representation, for one reason or another, is impossible; but it is not an adequate

replacement. In the case of queerbaiting, the text invokes homosexuality, but contains it by

turning it into an inside joke" (Mueller 185).

Unfortunately, the most egregious examples of offscreen queerbaiting are found within

the most direct interactions between creators and audiences—especially those that occur on

Twitter. The official *Hawaii Five-0* account regularly queerbaits through its promotional tweets

that advertise Steve and Danny's relationship by suggesting that the two are "going on a man

date" (@HawaiiFive0CBS, "Are Danny & McGarrett"), and encouraging viewers to retweet

their tweets "if you can't get enough of that #McDanno love" (@HawaiiFive0CBS, "RT if you").

The practice of "live-tweeting" (tweeting in real time to respond to something that is airing on

television) has also created opportunities for creators to queerbait via their personal Twitter

accounts, with one writer-producer tweeting that Danny "should have just sprung for an

engagement ring" after a scene in which Danny gives Steve an expensive guitar (@dwolkove,

"Uh, Danny just"), and asking fans, "Skin on skin contact. That's something, right?" after a

scene in which Steve touches Danny's hand and arm (@dwolkove, "Skin").

There is a marked lack of subtlety in these posts and others like them, as they all work

towards encouraging fan interest in the romantic potential of these relationships—despite the fact

that there is no intention of exploring that potential onscreen. While this may be better than

actively misleading a fan base by making explicit promises that won't be kept, the continued

encouragement without follow-through evidences both condescension and a lack of care for the

importance of what is being denied: "the increasing familiarity of producers with the interests of

fan communities does not necessarily lead to a change in representation, but instead may lead to

the containment and control of fans' resistant readings and transformative practices" (Mueller

175).

5.3. Chapter Summation: With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

Having established the pervasiveness of queerbaiting on and around film and television,

it is important to consider the impact that the practice has, and where to go from here. The fact is

that "well-developed, canonically queer characters *with visible love lives* appear on screen very

infrequently" (Bridges 122, emphasis mine), and although they are not an adequate substitute, in

many cases bromances could offer the next best thing—provided they stop laughing at the very idea.

Creators are not being asked to relinquish control of their narratives—only the privilege that has enabled them to ignore the consequences of what they do and do not put onscreen: "until LGBTQ leads become commonplace and unremarkable, creators have the ethical responsibility to deeply consider the impact of their work on audiences. LGBTQ youth are five times as likely to have attempted suicide, compared with their heterosexual counterparts, in large part due to family or peer rejection" (122). Danny and Steve don't have to suddenly confess undying love for each other, but the fact that—as of the middle of its tenth season on air—*Hawaii Five-0*'s only queer characters have been two women appearing in a single episode (as the villains-of-the-week), whose major contribution was to have a lot of sex with each other that Steve and Danny obviously wanted (but were unable) to see, is clearly not indicative of an adequate amount of positive representation ("Kukaʻawale"). Queer people *do* exist in Hawaii, though one could be excused for not realizing that when watching *Hawaii Five-0*.

Queerness needs to start being seen as something intrinsic to a character instead of something convenient to the plot. More than one creator has suggested that they would support a character coming out if it was right for the story (Mullie; McDermott 136), but no one takes the time to explain why the current story requires that these characters be heterosexual. Louis Peitzman has said that "Male sexual fluidity feels like an important new frontier in representation" (qtd. in Roberts 516), and perhaps introducing more bisexual characters is the approach with the most potential for success. However, Helene A. Shugart is correct when she writes that visibility "is no guarantor of legitimacy" (68). Introducing more bisexual characters in order to introduce more bisexual "humour" doesn't serve anybody. Quality over quantity is an

especially important factor to consider: "Instead of looking at numbers as a sign of social progress, critics should look for ways in which [LGBTQ characters] are represented in popular culture texts targeted to a broad audience, and how such representations conform to and challenge normative structures of our heterosexist society" (Battles and Hilton-Morrow 102). To do this also requires an examination of onscreen opposite-sex relationships, and how they could impact—and be impacted by—these social changes.

CHAPTER SIX: WOMEN IN BROMANCES

Although a bromance is defined as a relationship between men, the women peripheral to that relationship also have roles to play: "Bromances necessarily implicate women because women are explicitly excluded from these relationships" (Chen 255). Any examination of the impact and implications of onscreen bromances must include an analysis of their effect on female characters, whose primary purpose in male-oriented genres has typically been as the hero's love interest. The inclusion of and focus on a bromance relationship displaces the traditional romantic subplot—and with it, the lead female character—as the secondary man in the male-male pairing takes her place opposite the hero. Efforts at dramatizing these shifts in relationship hierarchies have led to some unfortunate female characterizations. Film critic Roz T. writes that bromance "is rarely achieved in modern cinema without a side helping of misogyny" (qtd. in Mueller 186), and screenwriter Helen Jacey laments that "the bromantic relationship in many mainstream texts, … seems to necessitate the presence of the female stereotype" (249). I will argue that, despite growing recognition of this problem and efforts to improve, four distinct positions have evolved for women involved in bromances featured in traditionally male-oriented genres, all of which result in the subordination of their characters to those relationships.

6.1. Doomed or Disappeared (out of sight, out of mind)

The easiest way to downgrade the importance of a character is to remove them from the story—if not the narrative. Cynthia Fuchs writes that "contemporary cop-buddy movies emphatically heterosexualize their homosocial protagonists (through off-screen ex-wives or girlfriends who die on-screen)" (196). The female character's (or characters') presence is present; she existed within the world of the story, even if she won't within the story itself. She confirms the hero's heterosexuality, and is then removed before she necessitates that he

demonstrate it. *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), the sequel to *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) starring Robert Downey Jr., is an excellent example of this phenomenon. As Hannah Mueller points out, "The increase of bromantic tension between Holmes and Watson in the movie sequel is inversely proportional to the importance of the female characters" (186). In the 2009 film, Irene Adler (Holmes' flirtatious adversary), and Mary Morstan (Watson's soon-to-be fiancée), are well-developed characters. Each woman possesses characteristics and motivations informed by hints from and exposition detailing their individual pasts; they are more than mere extensions of the male leads. However, in the 2011 sequel, they are both disposed of in separate—though similarly efficient—manners.

Adler dies within the first ten minutes of the film, uncharacteristically tricked into ingesting a poison by the villainous Moriarty. She expires onscreen in a swoon, conveniently leaving behind a bloodied handkerchief for Moriarty to deliver to Holmes. Morstan lasts long enough to marry Watson and begin their honeymoon before Holmes throws her off a train into a lake—"a merely symbolic death that takes her out of the action nevertheless" (Mueller 187)—ostensibly to keep her safe, but really so that his adventure with Watson can begin.

The methods by which Adler and Morstan are absented from this film also serve a specific function within the narrative—they serve to guarantee that the women will not be replaced. Holmes' careless ejection of Morstan from the train causes Watson continuous worry. Even after he is assured of her safety and resolved to work with Holmes, he is preoccupied with thoughts of his new wife. He wears a scarf that she made for him, despite ridicule from Holmes, to remind him (and the audience) that no matter what sort of homoerotic shenanigans he and Holmes partake in over the course of the film, she is the one who will be waiting for him at home.

Adler's death at the start of the film allows her memory to cast a shadow over the rest of it. Her bloodied handkerchief, given to Holmes by Moriarty, serves as a tangible reminder of her loss. Holmes carries it with him for part of his journey, an apparent talisman. It is only after Watson finds it amongst his possessions that Holmes, in an uncharacteristically emotional moment, releases it into the wind. His obvious grief serves the same dual purpose as Watson's worry for Morstan; not only do these expressions reinforce each woman's importance to each man (and with that, remind the audience of both men's heterosexuality), they also act as substitutes for romantic subplots that allow the focus of the film to remain on the relationship between Holmes and Watson: "When male friendship takes the place of romance in cinematic narratives, there is no room for women anymore—after all, romance is often the only purpose of female characters in male-oriented movies" (Mueller 186). Holmes' ongoing grief and Watson's newly married status justify a lack of new love interests. Therefore, the absence of both women for the majority of *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* serves strategic value (if only for the male characters) in that it allows their bromance to flourish within the safety of a proven heterosexual framework.

6.2. Convenient Girlfriend (used as needed)

This second position is more prevalent in television than in film due to the former's ongoing method of storytelling, and is a step above the first in that the female characters are—at times—both present onscreen and involved in the story. However, their appearances are sporadic, which results in both an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality, as well as difficulties in attempting to portray the natural progression of adult relationships. Therefore, this position ultimately serves the same purpose as the one discussed previously—to remind the audience of the male characters' heterosexuality, and to mitigate the need for the show to introduce new romantic

subplots. *Hawaii Five-0*'s use and treatment of Steve and Danny's girlfriends (most recently Lynn and Melissa, respectively), exemplifies this problematic positioning.

Melissa Armstrong is first introduced in the twelfth episode of the fourth season of *Hawaii Five-0*, where she is quickly set up as a potential love interest for Danny. By episode 4.19—which is, coincidentally, the episode in which Danny and Steve first say "I love you" (to each other)—Danny and Melissa have started dating, and their relationship continues through season seven. Celia Lam and Jackie Raphael write that "the presence of female characters attenuates the closeness of the male homosocial bond by offering heterosexual objects of desire" (3). "Object" is the key word in that quotation, and the reason for the parenthetical subtitle for this section, "used as needed", because despite the fact that Danny and Melissa's relationship lasts more than three seasons (with 25 episodes in a season), and Melissa is referenced whenever the subject of Danny's love life arises, the character is only actually seen in six episodes of the entire series. These periodic appearances—spread out over four seasons—assist in providing regular reminders of Danny's heterosexuality, but they also compromise the portrayal of the very relationship they are meant to reinforce.

Episode 6.14, season six's Valentine's Day episode, inadvertently reveals the inconstant nature of how their relationship is represented. In this episode, Danny and Melissa have been a couple for approximately two years, and yet their subplot revolves around the fact that Danny has not yet said "I love you" to Melissa—he could not even write "Love, Danny" on her Valentine's Day card ("Hoa 'Inea"). The fact that this argument is coming so late in their relationship is no doubt due to Melissa's infrequent appearances, but as surveys have shown that men and women in romantic relationships usually confess their love for each other within the first six months (Ben-Zeév), the placement of this episode within the progression of Danny and

Melissa's relationship calls the stability of that relationship into question. The unlikeliness of this scenario—the episode ends with the words still left unsaid and the situation unresolved, but with the relationship continuing, seemingly without issue—not only stunts any potential character development by leaving the relationship in stasis, it also reveals how inconsequential their relationship is to the series as a whole. If, from a storytelling perspective, clarifying his feelings for her is not important, the relationship itself cannot be important to the story.

The relevance of Steve McGarrett's romantic relationships has fluctuated through the run of the show. The first of two long-term girlfriends, Catherine Rollins, was introduced in the first season as a lieutenant in the US Navy who would get together with Steve whenever she was on leave. Her active-duty status provided a reasonable excuse for her sporadic appearances in the form of casual hook-ups, and although she occasionally used her position in naval intelligence to give Steve information related to the case-of-the-week, her role on the show seemed to be mainly to demonstrate that Steve did, in fact, have sex—with women. In the third season, when the actress was promoted to a regular cast member, Catherine and Steve's relationship was retconned[11] into an actual—and not just physical—serious relationship: "As a narrative device, [female characters] personify the heteronormative 'conclusion' for male characters whose desire for, pursuit of, and partnership with [women] reaffirms the convention of heterosexual union" (Lam and Raphael 3). However, it was only after the announcement that the character would be leaving the show at the end of the fourth season that those behind-the-scenes decided to have Steve propose (a proposal that he did not go through with after he found out she was leaving the island). The failed proposal still serves a purpose, however, as—in a situation similar to Holmes' with Adler—Catherine's absence and Steve's lingering feelings for her provide an alibi for his

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[11] The verb *retconned* means to "revise (an aspect of a fictional work) retrospectively, typically by introducing a piece of new information that imposes a different interpretation on previously described events. … [an] abbreviation of retroactive continuity" ("retcon | Definition").

single status in the following season. It is only when Catherine returns for a friend's wedding, only to announce that she is leaving again when it is over, that Steve is made to realize that he can no longer wait for her. It is with this realization, at the start of season six, that the introduction of a new love interest became necessary.

In episode 6.07, Steve begins dating Lynn Downey, and it is the treatment of her character and this relationship that truly showcases the inevitable misogyny inherent in including female characters solely for the sake of convenience. Although the actress only appears in five episodes during their entire relationship, Steve and Lynn continue to date throughout season six. Steve mentions that they are keeping things casual, but both refer to each other as their boyfriend/girlfriend—there is no mention of a break-up. In spite of this, one of the first scenes in episode 7.01 features Steve having a heart-to-heart with an older man (credited and CGI-ed to look like the late Jack Lord) in a military hospital chapel. After learning that the older man's wife is in surgery, Steve expresses his sympathies and the conversation turns to his own love life:

> JACK LORD: What about you? You married? Girlfriend?
>
> STEVE: No. ("Makaukau 'oe e Pa'ani?")

Although one might take this exchange to mean that the relationship between Steve and Lynn has ended off-screen, that would be incorrect. Subsequent episodes continue to reference both Lynn and the ongoing relationship—without mentioning a break—and Lynn appears onscreen as Steve's girlfriend in that season's Valentine's Day episode (alongside Melissa, who is still with Danny). Apparently Steve—or more likely, Peter Lenkov, the episode writer and *Hawaii Five-0* showrunner—merely forgot that Lynn existed when writing that scene (which aptly demonstrates her importance to the series and the regard it has for her character).

Pamela Hill Nettleton writes that "female romantic interests come and go with much less drama than is afforded the moments when the men are feuding" (122), and in accordance with this statement, the apparent ends of the relationships between Steve and Lynn and Danny and Melissa have both happened off-screen. In episode 8.01, Danny asks Steve if he's seen anyone since he broke up with Lynn, which is the only indication that Steve is single again (and apparently has been for some time). Although there has been no recent onscreen update regarding Danny and Melissa's relationship status, the press release for episode 9.15 states that Danny and his ex-wife Rachel will "get close…" ("CBS Press Express"), so it may be safe to assume that his relationship with Melissa also ended off-screen. However, as there is precedence for the show temporarily forgetting the existence of one main character's longtime love interest, it is still possible that Melissa will either appear or be referenced—as Danny's girlfriend—in a future episode.

The position of convenient girlfriend is one that ensures that male characters are free to pursue their bromance without needing to continuously clarify that they are not romantically involved with each other (even though they often still do). The female love interests on *Hawaii Five-0 do* appear (when convenient) and *are* referenced when they are not onscreen (when necessary), but they are not given the same value or dimensions that recurring characters who are not positioned as love interests receive. And aside from "reaffirm[ing] sexual boundaries" (Benson), they remain an afterthought—uninvolved and secondary to the most important relationship on the show.

6.3. The Third Point of a Love Triangle (also known as the "third wheel")

Although the convenient girlfriend is devalued because she remains on the periphery of the core male relationship, the female characters who take the third possible position are not

afforded more value despite their being an intrinsic part of it. As the central point of a love triangle, female characters in this third position are inescapably involved in the bromance relationship. While love triangles are commonly used plot devices in nearly every genre, they serve a specific function when they are tied to a bromance. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick cites René Girard when she writes that "in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved … the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love', differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent" (Sedgwick 21). A female character in a love triangle that includes a bromance is not only tasked with reminding audiences of the male characters' heterosexuality, but her mere existence is also the means through which the growing closeness between the two men is facilitated. The trinity of Jim Kirk, Nyota Uhura, and Spock in the rebooted *Star Trek* films offers a layered example of the pitfalls involved for female characters in this position.

A discussion on the evolution of the Kirk/Spock relationship and how it has been transformed for the rebooted films has already taken place, but the addition of Uhura to their changed relationship dynamic is important not only for what it does to and for their characters—it is also important for the toll it takes on hers. Margaret Weitekamp writes that the original Uhura "is arguably the most historically significant character in the franchise. … [she] broke new ground in television and helped to change history for real women" (23-24). It is unfortunate then, that in the reboot version, Uhura's primary role is that of the love interest. While I do not suggest that the new Uhura has been reduced to merely fulfilling that role—and only that role—in the rebooted trilogy, I am arguing that it is her *primary* function within the narratives of the first two films, *Star Trek* (2009) and *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), above anything else her character has to offer.

As the central point of a love triangle involving a bromance, Uhura is used to tell the male characters' stories, rather than her own. Accordingly, she does not get her own introductory scene that establishes her character and the factors that helped to make her who she is, as both Kirk and Spock do. She does not get to bluster her way through interrupting a scene-in-progress, capturing the audience's attention in the process, as Dr. McCoy does. She is not even first introduced at her workstation, firmly establishing her character as a Starfleet Officer, as are the remaining members of the main cast, Sulu and Chekov. Instead, the shooting script describes her first appearance in the film thusly: "a WOMAN SWOOPS INTO VIEW in front of us – we PUSH BEHIND HER in the short skirt and high boots as she ENTERS the place – a local, busy BAR – the woman makes her way to the BAR, and we see her GORGEOUS, DIGNIFIED FACE. THIS IS UHURA. She leans into the bartender warmly, her smile glorious" (Orci and Kurtzman 30). Kirk happens to be at the same bar, and so Uhura's introductory scene quickly becomes all about him and—in order to establish the first half of the triangle—his interest in her:

> KIRK (CONT'D)
> Okay, so you're a cadet. Studying.
> What's your focus?
>
> UHURA
> Xenolinguistics. Lemme guess: you don't
> know what that means.
>
> KIRK
> Let me guess: study of Alien languages:
> phonology, morphology, syntax-- it means
> you've got a talented tongue. (32)

Andrea Whitacre notes, "In context, the dialogue that establishes Uhura's credentials as a xenolinguist is crafted to highlight Kirk's unexpected intelligence" (100), and in addition to using her uniqueness to enhance his own, the dialogue also serves another purpose. The sexual innuendo in the last line not only makes his sexual objectification of her obvious, it also suggests

there is something inherently sexual about her chosen career. This further subordinates the importance of her professional role, and places further emphasis on the idea of Uhura as a potential romantic (or sexual) partner, rather than on the idea of Uhura as an up-and-coming Starfleet cadet.

Once Kirk has stepped onto the path that his meeting with Uhura pointed him towards, the story jumps forwards three years in time. While Kirk and Uhura's relationship remains unconsummated—having settled into flirtatious antagonism—it is soon revealed to the audience (and after that, to Kirk) that she is instead in a serious romantic relationship with Spock. In discussing the decision to create a romantic relationship between these two characters, Roberto Orci, co-writer of *Star Trek* and *Star Trek Into Darkness* commented:

> In the original series, the first interracial kiss ever on television was between Kirk and Uhura, and it seemed that one of the themes we were playing with in this was because it's a changed timeline, what might be some of the fun differences? That was clearly one of the fun differences. What if, instead of the lady's man getting the prize of Uhura's attention, we let it be a way to humanize Spock? (qtd. in "Writing" 21)

Orci's words are unfortunate, not only because they highlight that this decision was made solely in service of the male characters (there is no mention made of what the relationship might add to Uhura's own development), but also because they reveal that the inclusion of a romantic relationship was obligatory—that the question was not *if* a relationship should happen, but if it should happen with Kirk or with Spock.

The result, according to Bridget Kies, is that "Uhura's new position as Spock's lover [is] complicated. Because the audience sees little else of Uhura's character, it is easy to read her as

merely an instrument through which Kirk and Spock express their heterosexuality" (426). The fact that Uhura had to be paired specifically with either Kirk or Spock in the reboot films lends credence to the belief that the purpose of including the relationship was, as David Greven argues, "another effort to squelch the attendant homoeroticism of the Kirk-Spock relationship … [The romance] also makes [Spock] a normatively heterosexual male figure by reassuring us of his interest in the opposite sex and, perhaps even more importantly, the opposite sex's interest in him" (*Gender* 208).

With the fight for Uhura's affections over before it really begins, it would be easy to say that the relationship between these three characters resists being called a "love triangle", particularly after the first reboot film. However it does still qualify, as the characters continually rely on that triangle in order to relate to each other. In the sequel to the first reboot film, *Star Trek Into Darkness*, Uhura's presence remains the mediator of Kirk and Spock's closeness, and Kirk finds himself put in the position of third wheel in Spock and Uhura's relationship—by others as well as by himself:

> KIRK: Your boyfriend's second-guessing me every chance he gets. I'm sorry, that was inappropriate. It's just sometimes I want to rip the bangs off his head. You know, maybe it's me.
>
> UHURA: It's not you.
>
> KIRK: It's not? Wait, are you guys fighting?
>
> UHURA: I'd rather not talk about it, sir.
>
> KIRK: Oh, my God. What is that even *like*?! (*Star Trek Into Darkness*)

Peter Forster writes that love triangles are "crucial" to bromance relationships, suggesting that the woman "remains an essential point of reference. … as the institutionalized object of

normative male desire, she offers bros the opportunity to have a level of intimacy and liberty

with each other … while at the same time providing them the assurance (or the loophole) that

they do not feel any desire for the same sex in general and for each other in particular" (208).

This remains true even after the initial triangle is repurposed.

  After Kirk has accidentally established that Uhura is angry at Spock, all three of them go

on an away mission together in a small spacecraft. Situated on the screen in a literal triangle

(with Kirk in the middle), the following conversation takes place after Spock gives Kirk the odds

of their survival:

> UHURA: Good thing you don't care about dying.
>
> SPOCK: I am sorry, Lieutenant. I could not hear what you said.
>
> UHURA: Oh, I didn't say anything. Actually, I'd be happy to speak if you're
>
> willing to listen to me.
>
> KIRK: Guys.
>
> SPOCK: Lieutenant, I would prefer to discuss this in private.
>
> UHURA: You'd prefer not to discuss this at all. ...
>
> KIRK: Are you, are you really gonna do this right now?
>
> UHURA: I'm sorry, Captain, just *two* seconds. At that volcano, you didn't give a
>
> thought to us. What it would do to me if you died, Spock. You didn't feel
>
> anything. You didn't care. And I'm not the only one who's upset with you—the
>
> Captain is, too.
>
> KIRK: No, no, no. Don't drag me into this. She *is* right. (*STID*)

While the way that the triangle has been repurposed positions Kirk as the third wheel, it is still

Uhura's job to facilitate his connection to Spock. Her defined role allows Kirk to demonstrate

vicarious curiosity about their relationship (notably, he empathizes with Uhura's position, rather than Spock's), and her ability to express concern, hurt, and care for her boyfriend offers Kirk the opportunity to confirm those same feelings for his friend without the confusion that expressing them in her absence could create. When, near the end of the film, Kirk and Spock have an intimate exchange wherein they profess clear emotion for each other (as Kirk is dying), Uhura is there to act as a silent witness to their display—and as a silent reminder of just what kind of display it is.

The character of Uhura in *Star Trek: The Original Series* was so groundbreaking that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. personally convinced Nichelle Nichols to continue in the role after she'd decided to quit after the first season (Nichols); it is therefore a shame that, in the reboot film series, Uhura's primary role is that of the love interest[12]. It cannot be a coincidence that it is only in the third reboot film, *Star Trek Beyond* (2016), when she and Spock have temporarily ended their relationship, that she is given a significantly larger role in the overall action. Before that, as the central point of a love triangle involving a bromance, her purpose is mainly to act as a conduit between Kirk and Spock, enabling their relationship while offering object proof of their heterosexuality.

6.4. The Third Musketeer (if you can't beat'em, join'em!)

The last distinct position for a female character in a bromance is as the third member of what becomes a newly-formed triad. A triad differs from a love triangle in that the bromance relationship is already well-established before the female character is introduced to either man (to contrast with the previous example, Uhura meets both Kirk and Spock separately before they

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[12] No discussion of Uhura's role is complete without a consideration of race. There are arguments to be made that contradict the importance I place on Uhura's role as love interest, but they rely on the first-hand observations of black women and other persons of colour, and are therefore outside of my experience. For further reading, I would suggest Christine Scodari's "Nyota Uhura is Not a White Girl: Gender, Intersectionality, and Star Trek 2009's Alternate Romance Universes" in *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2012, pp. 335-351.

are introduced to each other). This triad features close emotional bonds between all three

members, as well as a sexual relationship that is limited to the female character and one of the

two men (this is the important difference between a triad and a "threesome"). While this position

can be much more generous to the characterization of the female character, she is still made to

act in a way that prioritizes the relationship between the male members of the triad above all

else: "a properly functioning homosocial bond features the woman as a receptive medium who

simply channels the more important 'partnership' at stake" (Alberto 70). The relationship

between Sherlock, John, and Mary on the BBC's *Sherlock* is a perfect realization of this trend.

Mary's first appearance in the series is in episode 3.01, and it is not an auspicious

beginning. Sherlock, having faked his death at the end of season two, masquerades as a waiter in

a fancy restaurant so that he can surprise John, who is in the middle of proposing to Mary. The

revelation that Sherlock tricked John into believing he died leads to multiple physical

altercations that lead to all three being kicked out of multiple restaurants. Mary remains by

John's side the entire time, and even though she has no reason to react positively to Sherlock

considering she has no history with him and he has hurt the man she loves, she inexplicably

does:

> SHERLOCK stands with a hankie over his bloodied nose. MARY's right by him.
> Some way off, JOHN is hailing a cab.
>
> SHERLOCK
> I don't get it. I said I'm sorry.
> Isn't that what people do? …
>
> MARY
> You don't know much about human
> nature, do you?
>
> SHERLOCK
> Nature...no. Human...no.

MARY
I'll talk him round.

SHERLOCK
You will.

MARY
Oh yes. …

JOHN
(calls)
Mary.

Mary winks at Sherlock then joins John in the cab. … JOHN sits, fuming.

JOHN
Can you believe it? The bloody
nerve.

Mary looks over.

MARY
I like him.

JOHN
What?

MARY
(shrugs)
I like him. (Gatiss 26-27)

The only reason, at this point in the story, for Mary to decide that she likes Sherlock is that those

behind the scenes are aiming for a different sort of love triumvirate. With John as the point of

connection between Mary and Sherlock, any triangle involving the three of them would place

John at the central point—the traditional placement of the female character. However, if Mary

was to be positioned as Sherlock's competition, and both were to fight for John's affections, the

implication would be that John held the same *type* of affection for both Sherlock and Mary. As

the writers have repeatedly reiterated their refusal to even consider such a possibility, the

relationship between the three characters has to follow a different route—one where all members

exist in affectionate harmony, rather than in antagonism and rivalry.

Kathryn E. Lane observes that during the third season, "John's romantic life hasn't

impeded his relationship with Sherlock but instead strengthened it" (239), and this is never more

apparent than in episode 3.02, during John and Mary's wedding. The shooting script for that

episode paints a clear picture of what writer Steve Thompson wanted the audience to see:

> The doors fly open - the organ swells - and the BRIDE and GROOM emerge,
> newly married. JOHN and MARY side by side, beaming with joy and pride. …
>
> And SHERLOCK is alongside them.
>
> *Right alongside them!*
>
> They emerge from church as a threesome, framed in the doorway. JOHN and
> MARY seem completely un-phased by his intrusion. (4-5)

This refusal to exclude Mary results in her near-immediate and thorough inclusion, as she is

neatly incorporated into Sherlock and John's relationship—she quickly begins to help them solve

crimes ("The Empty Hearse"). As a result, Sherlock is neatly (albeit not sexually) incorporated

into Mary and John's relationship as well—he helps Mary with the wedding planning and keeps

her company during the reception: "SHERLOCK is with MARY - they've become quietly

inseparable. Surrounded by JOHN'S family it's as though SHERLOCK has become her comfort

blanket" (Thompson 9).

While Mary's incorporation into the men's activities allows her room to grow as a

character that isn't always afforded female love interests, the overall effect is not always positive.

Since Mary does not compete with Sherlock for John's attention, she must always be willing to

accommodate their desire for each other's company—even at the cost of her own time with

them:

> MARY has made a tray of tea - swans out of the kitchen. …
>
> JOHN and SHERLOCK have their coats on and are headed for the door. They jump when she enters - guilty expressions.
>
> > MARY (CONT'D)
> > Errands to run?
>
> > JOHN
> > I want Sherlock to help me choose
> > some...
>
> And he can't think of a single credible lie. So MARY helps him out.
>
> > MARY
> > Why not go with 'socks'?
>
> > JOHN
> > Yep. …
>
> MARY gives them an indulgent smile.
>
> > MARY
> > It'll probably take you a while,
> > that.
>
> And they're out of the door. (Thompson 33-34)

In addition, as is the case with the three previously identified positions for female characters, the third musketeer is also "used to police male-male relationships, ensuring that heterosexuality is the true sexuality of the main characters; though homosocial and homosexual tendencies might be expressed" (Fjordside 100).

In episode 3.02, Sherlock and John are uncharacteristically verbose in their declarations of affection for each other. This makes sense, given that this is the wedding episode—in which Sherlock becomes and acts as John's Best Man. However, it is the actual words used in these declarations, and Mary's function within them, which are of importance here. When John asks Sherlock to be his Best Man, he states that when he gets up to the altar, he "want[s] to be up

there with the two people that [he] love[s] and care[s] about most in the world. Mary Morstan and you" ("The Sign of Three"). Louise Fjordside notes that "Mary's presence in the sentence creates a heterosexual safe space for John to express sentiment, without it being perceived as being more than homosocial. However, Mary's place in the sentence also equals her to Sherlock, which creates an ambiguous reading of the scene" (104).

Sherlock's wedding speech, however, is even more exemplary of Fjordside's observation. As his speech draws to a close, Sherlock looks over at John and says, "Today you sit between the woman you have made your wife and the man you have saved – in short, the two people who love you most in all this world. And I know I speak for Mary as well when I say we will never let you down, and we have a lifetime ahead to prove that" ("The Sign of Three"). Mary serves the same purpose in Sherlock's speech that she does in John's request, her presence acts as a safety net that allows the writers to allow Sherlock to plainly articulate that he loves John without fear that his words will be misinterpreted (or, if they are misinterpreted, her inclusion in the statement becomes something the writers can then point to as proof of their actual intent).

As stated earlier, Mary is allowed to have more character growth in her role as the third musketeer than other positions for women are granted when adjacent to bromances. However, that growth is merely compensation for the fact that, above all else, her purpose is to serve the relationship between Sherlock and John—something, it turns out, she can do just as well dead as alive. After Mary is shot and killed in episode 4.01 (saving Sherlock's life in the process), comments made by those behind the scenes were not about the resolution of her story or attaining closure for her character. In an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, co-creator and co-executive producer, Steven Moffat, reminded viewers of the series' real focus, saying that they "had fun making it a trio but it doesn't work long term. Mary was always going to go and we

were always going to get back to the two blokes" (qtd. in Hibberd). Unfortunately, Moffat never

explained why the trio would not work in the long term. When fans complained about the death

of one of the few female characters appearing in the series, Moffat cited the original Mary's

death in the source material to say that their hands were tied (qtd. in Fullerton). However, in

earlier interviews both Moffat and co-creator/co-executive producer Mark Gatiss had pointed out

that the stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle implied—but never actually explicitly stated—that

the original Mary died (Moffat, qtd. in Hibberd; Gatiss, qtd. in "Sherlock creators"). In addition,

preserving Mary's life would hardly be the first time *Sherlock* has deviated from its source

material—there is no mention of her character's past as a secret assassin in the original stories.

While one could argue that Mary's death means she must be moved from the fourth

position (The Third Musketeer) to the first (Doomed or Disappeared), her two appearances

subsequent to her death help her to maintain her place in the trio. In episodes 4.02 and 4.03,

Mary appears in a video that she conveniently recorded and put in the mail before she died. In

episode 4.02, the video is instrumental in bringing Sherlock and John back together again after

Mary's death had threatened their bond, and in episode 4.03, the video allows Mary to remind

Sherlock and John (and the viewers) of what is really important: "I know you two; and if I'm

gone, I know what you could become. ... Well, you listen to me: who you really are, it doesn't

matter. It's all about the legend, the stories, the adventures. ... My Baker Street boys: Sherlock

Holmes and Doctor Watson" ("The Final Problem"). The sole purpose of this video is in keeping

with the sole purpose of Mary as the third musketeer; it allows her to once more assist in

enabling Sherlock and John's—platonic—relationship, this time from beyond the grave. The fact

that she does not have to be alive in order to adequately perform the role of her position is a clear

indication of her character's importance to the series.

6.5. Chapter Summation: What a Girl Wants (what a girl needs)

When created as a supplemental character to a bromance, there are four distinct roles that female characters are usually given to play. While some allow for more growth than others, none allow for continuous, fair, and valued representations of women as individuals—even the third musketeer is defined by her proximity to the bromance relationship. The portrayal of heterosexual relationships also suffers in these situations, as "with such limited forms of female characterization, many bromances reinforce the impossibility of intimate friendship between men and women that is not predicated on sexual attraction" (Jacey 249); this then fortifies the misogynistic idea that women only have one purpose. These issues are no doubt compounded by the fact that traditionally male-oriented genres haven't always seen a need for fully realized representations of women, although change is happening.

What has been underestimated, however, is how positive change for women could be effected through changes made to relationships between the male characters. If the prevalence of bromances in traditionally male-oriented genres changed to allow for more inclusion and better representation of same-sex romantic relationships between main male characters, women could be featured because they were necessary to the story being told, rather than because they were required protectors of the heterosexual status quo.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1. Where Men Actually Have Gone Before (AKA No Guts, No Glory)

In an interview given in the late 1970s, *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry explained his approach to creating the relationship between the original Kirk and Spock: "I definitely designed it as a love relationship. ... Also, dramatically, I designed Kirk and Spock to complete each other" (qtd. in Shatner et al. 145). Moving on to compare the relationship between Kirk and Spock to that of Alexander and Hephaistion, Roddenberry asserted that while *Star Trek: The Original Series* had never consciously suggested "physical love between the two", that "we certainly had the feeling the affection was sufficient for that, if that were the particular style in the 23rd century" (148). While the use of the word "style" does demonstrate an ignorance of the fact that being gay is not a choice, Roddenberry's words also confirm that—in a more accepting time—Kirk and Spock could be portrayed as lovers. As the first to (officially) re-imagine Kirk and Spock for the twenty-first century, the reboot filmmakers had the opportunity to truly realize Roddenberry's vision. However, instead of doing what they *could* do, they congratulated themselves for what they were *willing* to do: "[Spock and Uhura's romantic relationship is] the most intensive departure from canon in the movie… This was the gutsiest thing that we did. Blowing up Vulcan is nothing compared to saying Spock and Uhura are in love with each other and are having this incredibly intimate relationship" (Abrams et al.). However, the validity of this assertion is disputed by the numerous and varied—yet always female—love interests that the original Spock had throughout *Star Trek: The Original Series* and its accompanying films (Segall).

7.2. It Remains To Be Seen... (Pics or It Didn't Happen)

In 2016, *Star Trek Beyond* (the third reboot film) became the first property within the *Star Trek* universe to introduce a gay character—or reintroduce him, as the character in question was revealed to be Hikaru Sulu, a long-established crewmember from the original series whose previous heterosexuality had always been implied but not explicitly defined. Co-screenwriter Simon Pegg explained that he thought it was important that "it wasn't just an ancillary character. It was one of the main characters, and that aspect of their character had no bearing on … what happens to them in the film. It's just a detail of who they are" (qtd. in "Beyond the Darkness"). Journalists were told that "Sulu's queerness will [not] be a crucial part of the story so much as a simple fact that gets revealed as the events of [the film] unfold" (Roth), and the actor who plays Sulu, John Cho, told one interviewer, "I liked the approach, which was not to make a big thing out of it, which is where I hope we are going as a species, to not politicize one's personal orientation" (qtd. in Roth).

While no doubt well-intentioned, it is important to note that Sulu is not, in point of fact, a "main" character in the reboot films—of the seven recurring characters in the trilogy, he is billed sixth—and that not making "a big thing" out of the first onscreen appearance of a gay character in the *Star Trek* universe is not actually a good thing. Instead, it is an example of what has been called "a new type of 'don't ask, don't tell'" (Romano). It may be that in the year 2263 (when *Beyond* takes place), humanity has outgrown all prejudice, and queer identities are as accepted and unremarkable as heterosexual ones are today—but we are not yet living in 2263. The LGBTQ rallying cry warns people that *we're here*, and entreats them to *get used to it*; blink-and-you'll-miss-it moments of representation might—comparatively—be a step forward, but they don't actually challenge the status quo. In order to "get used to" something, it must first be

clearly seen and explored. This is important, not only for the LGBTQ audiences who deserve to see themselves—front and centre—onscreen, but also for every other member of the viewing public. As Bradford points out, "For most people who don't know someone who is LGBTQ, seeing them in film or on TV is often the only way they find out who we are, what our lives are about and how we can live together" (qtd. in B. Lee).

7.3. Sooner or Later (Coming to a Screen Near You?)

In Paul Aaron's 1978 film, *A Different Story*, he "tells the tale of a lesbian and a gay man who unexpectedly and quite naturally fall in love with each other", and while gay critics have noted that "as written, directed, and played, the film really is about two people who fall in love", they also rightly protested because—as ideas involving sexual fluidity had yet to be widely introduced to mainstream audiences—many felt that the film "reinforced the notion that [gay people] can 'go straight'" (V. Russo 231) .

However, in an interview after the film premiered, the following question was posed, "Could Paul Aaron have directed a really different story? Perhaps a film about two heterosexual husbands who suddenly and quite naturally fall in love with each other?" (231). Aaron's answer was frustratingly optimistic: "Could I have done that movie today? … No, not yet. But it'll happen soon. It has to" (qtd. in V. Russo 231-232). *Not yet, but soon*—a sentiment expressed in an interview that took place over *forty* years ago, and no doubt also expressed repeatedly by many others in the entertainment industry in the years since then. Clearly, "soon" is not soon enough.

7.4. Ready or Not (How Soon is Now?)

Towards the end of his book, Vito Russo concludes that "Hollywood is too busy trying to make old formulas hit the jackpot again to see the future. Hollywood is yesterday, forever

catching up tomorrow with what's happening today. This will change only when it becomes financially profitable, and reality will never be profitable until society overcomes its fear and hatred of difference and begins to see that we're all in this together" (323). One of the aims of this thesis was to evaluate Russo's work in a modern context, and unfortunately, I believe that a lot of what he writes is still very applicable, even if the specific causes of those problems have evolved.

It is too easy and too obvious to say that the underlying problem is our society's fear and hatred of difference. I believe that the problem is actually our society's inability to recognize that, though it may have been transformed, their fear and hatred of difference still exists: "Implicit bias is a kind of distorting lens that's a product of both the architecture of our brain and the disparities in our society" (Eberhardt 6). The problem is that confronting implicit bias requires us to "face how readily stereotypes and unconscious associations can shape our reality", but it is only "by acknowledging the distorting lens of fear and bias [that] we move one step closer to clearly seeing the social harms—the devastation—that bias can leave in its wake" (7). Implicit biases have explicit consequences, but we cannot overcome what we refuse to acknowledge is there.

Ensuring that this information begins to inform onscreen characterizations is an important first step. Jennifer Eberhardt writes that "diversity itself is not a remedy for, though it may be a route to, eliminating bias" (291). In my introduction I asked if the inclusion of bromance relationships in traditionally male-oriented genres could help with the acceptance of homosexuality in our culture, and my research has led me to believe that they *can*—but not as they are currently being realized onscreen. If emotional intimacy between male characters is valorized instead of stigmatized, and the idea that their intimacy could become physical is

introduced as something other than the set-up to a punchline, the cultural perception of the ideal man could shift to one that is not so narrow. Shortly before his death, Gene Roddenberry opined, "I think that I, along with other writers, can make great changes in our world because of the power of sound and image that is often as real to people as their own lives" (qtd. in Alexander 14). Hegemonic beliefs are maintained through complicity; if change is to happen, we can no longer afford to be complaisant.

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