

# Children's Television and its Effects on LGBTQ Youths' Identity Milestones, Acceptance, and Comfort in Identity

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## ABSTRACT

Television has the power to influence and change a viewer's beliefs through the content and characters of a show. This study investigates to what extent the television LGBTQ young adults watched as a child affects their sexuality and gender identity development later on in life. My hypotheses were that watching representative television as a child would increase self-acceptance, lower the age of identity milestones, create positive views on the content of children's television, and increase comfort in identity. This study utilizes a mixed-methods survey for LGBTQ individuals ages 18-21 residing in the US. Using comparisons of means, Spearman's correlational analysis, and analyzing themes, I found no evidence to solidly confirm or deny my hypotheses. Quantitative data does not point towards a relationship between LGBTQ identity development and childhood television, while qualitative results do show that those who watched directly representative television as a child felt more positively about their identity development.

## **Introduction**

Television is a widely consumed form of media, with, on average, American individuals 15 and older watching 2.77 hours of television every day (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018) and American children watching about 3 hours every day (MedlinePlus, 2021). There is a vast area of research on television's effects within a multitude of groups. Child development falls among them, with many studies on personality, social, and behavioral development. Adults, sometimes specifically lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals are also a commonly researched group in this field. The LGBTQ community is a vastly underrepresented minority in the media (Klein & Shiffman, 2009) and this can have detrimental effects on LGBTQ individuals. The television programs one watches as a child affect their development in many ways. An under-researched area of child development that can be affected by television is that of sexuality and gender identity development (SGD).

Research shows that television has become more diverse over the past several decades (Banks, 2021). Due to increased representation, diversity attitudes have greatly improved (Żerebecki, et. al., 2021). Diversity in children's television is important, as it shapes their attitudes and behavior (Levinson, 2020; Mares & Woodward, 2005; Klein & Shiffman, 2009). It is widely accepted that television generally has an effect on child development, socially and educationally (İvrendi & Özdemir, 2010), and it is commonly claimed that television viewing negatively affects children. For example, shocking television content can cause negative psychological effects (Persegani, et. al., 2002). Researchers cite sleeping, mental health, and weight gain issues as major consequences of lengthy screen use (MedlinePlus, 2021). Some studies show that television has adverse effects on child development, easily encouraging antisocial behavior. While this may be the case, prosocial behavior can be just as easily provoked (Mares & Woodward, 2005). For example, the reduction of stereotyping is a prosocial behavior that may be displayed in television, and one study found that children who consumed non-stereotyped content showed more interest in playing with non-white peers than those who consumed stereotyped content (Mares & Woodward, 2005). This is not limited to race, as similar effects may extend to LGBTQ views among children (Mares & Woodward, 2005).

There are many theories and hypotheses that have been developed around the effects that television can have on a person. Cultivation theory is the idea that television can drive one's perception of the world or their beliefs and has been found to be effective in creating positive attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals (Żerebecki, et. al., 2021). The parasocial contact hypothesis claims that viewers can form friend-like relationships with characters and that these have the potential to change viewpoints. Research shows that this parasocial connection is important in content's power to change diversity attitudes. This hypothesis was developed around LGBTQ studies, and findings show that likable LGBTQ characters as well as straight characters who supported these individuals both resulted in positive attitudes towards the community. Observing these ideas, it is clear that television is a major driving factor of opinion and behavior for viewers, and therefore views on the LGBTQ community have the possibility to be changed by television content (Mares & Woodward, 2005; Zerebeki, et. al., 2021).

Not only does television have major effects on non-LGBTQ individuals' views on the community, but it also allows LGBTQ individuals to develop their own identities. LGBTQ identity development includes understanding one's identity, the coming out process, and comfortability in one's identity (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). The popular television show "Glee" contains many LGBTQ characters. Fans of the show state that it provides important representation of the LGBTQ community and can be helpful to individuals in understanding their identity and feeling comfortable in it (Meyer & Wood, 2013). Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) found a distinct relationship between LGBTQ identity and the media. It is made apparent in this study that the television shows participants watch had a major effect on "self realization, coming-out process, and comfort with their GLB [gay, lesbian, bisexual] identity" (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). Specific characters and television shows had these effects, and they all included LGBTQ characters and role models who participants could relate to as well as heterosexual characters who treated their LGBTQ counterparts well. LGBTQ young adults view television's impacts in different lights. While it is generally agreed that LGBTQ representation in television creates positive views toward this community and can be beneficial to LGBTQ youth's identity (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2021; Żerebecki, et. al., 2021), there are also negative impacts. Even though representation has become more common, it often creates a one-dimensional, stereotyped narrative (McInroy & Craig, 2016). Meyer and Wood's (2013) study found that viewers of "Glee" believe that while it is important for LGBTQ youth to see themselves represented in the media, and the show is a major example of this, the representation, similarly to many shows, does not create accurate characterizations of LGBTQ individuals and extremely stereotypes them. This can be harmful to how the LGBTQ community is viewed and how their identities form (Meyer & Wood, 2013).

Zerebecki et. al. (2021) and Gomillion and Giuliano's (2011) findings relate in that both studies reveal the ability of television to impact beliefs. Cultivation theory and the parasocial contact hypothesis both explain that television has the power to influence and change a viewer's beliefs through the content and characters of a show. Gomillion and Giuliano find that LGBTQ individuals often feel as though their coming out process and comfortability in their sexuality have been influenced by the television they are exposed to, citing specific characters and shows that do so. The data found in this study proves the two aforementioned theories. Following the idea that television can shape attitudes and beliefs, it can be assumed that it also shapes behavior (Klien & Shiffman, 2009). For this study, these attitude and belief changes are encompassed by how they may view themselves and the LGBTQ community as a whole, and the behavior changes are encompassed by the coming out process.

Sexual and gender identity milestones are significant markers of LGBTQ development, including one understanding they were LGBTQ and coming out. These are measured by age and have been shown to occur earlier over the past several decades (McInroy and Craig, 2018). LGBTQ identity milestones can be affected by the media. McInroy and Craig (2018) show that participation in fandom correlates with an earlier occurrence of identity milestones. Fandom, defined as "a group of fans of someone or something, especially very enthusiastic ones" (Cambridge Dictionary), includes television shows. The increase in representation on television (Banks, 2021) may be an explanation for these younger ages of identity milestones. Exposure to LGBTQ characters in television as a child could cause identity milestones at a younger age. Seeing that this effect exists for young adults, it must also exist for children, as they are more impressionable to what they see in the media (Boston Children's Hospital, 2021).

The media one consumes as a child has the power to affect the formation of their attitudes. Childhood television is one of the first exposures a child will get to societal standards, which is highly influential in the development of attitudes (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). An important aspect of SGD is the age at which one hits significant identity milestones, and how accepted and validated LGBTQ young adults (18-21) feel and felt as a child. A study on the relationships between childhood television and LGBTQ identity milestones, acceptance, and comfort in identity is important to understanding the effects television can have. Not only has little research been done to relate television and LGBTQ identity development, but there is also a great lack of research on the effects stemming from television consumption after a long period of time. Looking specifically into television viewed as a child will reveal if it has a lasting effect on young adults, thus showing how great its effects can be. Expanding on this area of study will improve understanding within the broad topic of television and LGBTQ individuals. Studying young adults' identities and the television they watched as a child can give insight into these issues and how they may relate. This study investigates to what extent the television LGBTQ young adults watched as a child affects their SGD later on in life. Based on existing research, I assume that viewing television with ample representation of LGBTQ individuals as a child will cause earlier identity milestones and encourage positive outlooks on and comfort in one's own identity.

## Method

### Participants

Participants in this study were limited to young adults (18-21) who must identify as LGBTQ and reside in the United States. The decision to limit participants to only US residents was because the television shows listed in the survey are mostly US based. Including people of other nationalities could greatly increase the list of television shows, thus causing data to be much too broad. Participants were limited to ages 18-21 due to inspiration I took from McInroy and Craig's (2016) study, which explores LGBTQ youth experiences with media representations and their impact on them, defining LGBTQ "emerging adults" as 18-22 years old. I defined young adults as 18-21 because I felt that a slightly younger age group would suit the purpose of my research better, as it relies on memories from childhood. After creating my survey and getting IRB approval, I began advertising my study on Reddit (with permission from subreddit owners) and Twitter. This was the general post format I followed:

#### Childhood TV's effects on LGBTQ identity milestones and acceptance (US, 18-21, must be LGBTQ)

Hi, my name is [redacted] and I'm an AP Research student looking for participants to take my survey! I'm studying childhood TV and its effects on LGBTQ identity milestones and acceptance. It would be much appreciated if you could take 20- minutes to participate! [Survey](#)

**Figure 1.** General Reddit post format used to advertise survey

Because I used social media sites, some responses were disingenuous, containing profanity or obvious irony. These responses were deleted to ensure my data was as accurate as possible. On January 31, 2023, I closed responses.

### The Survey

I based my survey on three studies: Gomillion and Giuliano (2011), McInroy and Craig (2016), and McInroy and Craig (2018). Gomillion and Giuliano's (2011) study was the most important since it had a similar purpose to my research. They conducted two studies, one to confirm the relationship between media and LGBTQ identity through a

survey, and the second to explore how media specifically influences LGBTQ identity through interviews. In the first study, the questionnaire focused on how media affects the realization of one's LGBTQ identity, the coming out process, "current identity", as well as opinions on how LGBTQ individuals are portrayed in the media. The second study goes more in-depth on participants' opinions on LGBTQ representation in the media and how it affects their SGD. Questions 5, 6, 13, 16-18, and 21-25 are modeled after the two studies.

McInroy and Craig (2018) looked at how involvement in fandom, which includes television fandoms, affects the age at which an LGBTQ individual hits specific identity milestones. My questions 9-12 were inspired by this study, as the milestones are an integral part of LGBTQ identity development, and I expect that individuals who viewed television containing LGBTQ representation as a child will reach these milestones at an earlier age, similarly to those involved in fandom.

McInroy and Craig's (2016) study explores LGBTQ youth experiences with media representations and their impact on them. They ask how participants feel that the media representation of LGBTQ individuals affects them, inspiring my questions 16, 17, 19, 20, and 23.

Questions 9-12 consist of age ranges as answer choices, starting at age 7 and then every 3 years following up to 18. This was inspired by Mares and Woodward (2005), who claim that television content, particularly prosocial content, has the most impact on behavior at this age, including a reduction of stereotyping and acceptance. The television shows included were popular children's shows between 2001 and 2016, the years that participants would have been 0-12, which were narrowed down and added to after data collection. Some questions were formatted as a Likert scale to gauge opinion and make data organization simple.

**Table 1.** *Survey questions.* Informed consent was at the beginning and was a requirement to begin the survey.

No.	Question	Answer options
1	Race	Black, White, Native American, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Mixed, Prefer not to say, other
2	Age	18, 19, 20, 21
3	Do you reside in the US?	Yes, No
4	Which of the following shows did you watch during the ages 0-12? (Choose all that apply. You are highly encouraged to fill in other shows not listed here!)	Drake and Josh (2004-2007), Kim Possible (2002-2007), SpongeBob SquarePants (1999- ), Dora the Explorer (2000-2019), Sesame Street (1969- ), Caillou (1997-2018), Legend of Korra (2012-2014), Adventure Time (2010-2018), Scooby-Doo franchise (1969- 2021), Gravity Falls (2012-2016), iCarly (2007-2012), Fairly OddParents (2001-2017), Zoey 101 (2005-2008), All That (1994-2020), Wizards of Waverly Place (2007-2012), Hannah Montana (2006-2011), Jessie (2011-2015), Phineas and Ferb (2007-2015), The Suite Life of Zack and Cody (2005-2008), Good Luck Charlie (2010-2014), Austin and Ally (2011-2016), Teen Titans (2003-2006), Avatar The Last Air Bender (2005-2008), Victorious (2010-2013), Star and The Forces of Evil (2015-2019), Regular Show (2010-2017), Other
5	What shows do you remember watching (from the ages 0-12) that had any kind of LGBTQ representation (can be anything from LGBTQ mentioned in a conversation to a LGBTQ main character). Please list as many as possible.	Open answer
6	For each of the shows you listed, do you believe that they had positive or negative (or somewhere in the middle) representation of the LGBTQ community?	Open answer

No.	Question	Answer options
7	How do you identify your gender?	Cisgender woman, Cisgender man, Trans man, Trans woman, Non-binary, Gender queer, Prefer not to say, Other
8	How do you identify your sexual orientation?	Staight, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Pansexual, Queer, Prefer not to say, Other
9	How old were you when you began thinking you identified as LGBTQ?	Under 7, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16-18, Over 18, Not sure/Prefer not to say
10	How old were you when you knew you identified as LGBTQ?	Under 7, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16-18, Over 18, Not sure/Prefer not to say
11	How old were you when you first came out to a family member?	Under 7, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16-18, Over 18, I have not come out to a family member, Not sure/Prefer not to say
12	How old were you when you first came out to a friend?	Under 7, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16-18, Over 18, I have not come out to a friend, Not sure/Prefer not to say
13	The TV I watched as a child has a connection to me beginning to think I identified as LGBTQ. (i.e. seeing a character of the same sex that you realized you were attracted to or seeing a transgender character that you identified with)	Completely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Completely disagree
14	I feel that the TV I watched as a child made me feel accepted for being LGBTQ.	Completely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Completely disagree
15	Explain what about the TV you watched made you feel accepted or not accepted.	Open answer
16	The TV I watched as a child encouraged me to come out as LGBTQ. (i.e. seeing representation of people like me on TV made me feel better about coming out later in life)	Completely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Completely disagree
17	Seeing LGBTQ representation in the TV I watched as a child had a lasting impact on me.	Completely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Completely disagree
18	Explain how you think the TV you watched as a child may have affected the development of your sexuality and/or gender identity.	Open answer
19	What shows/characters made you feel the most validated and accepted, if any?	Open answer
20	Did any characters in the TV you watched as a child make you think/realize you were LGBTQ? If so, please list them.	Open answer
21	I feel that there was enough LGBTQ representation in the TV I watched as a child.	Completely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Completely disagree
22	I feel that the TV I watched as a child contained (accurate) representation of LGBTQ people.	Completely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Completely disagree
23	I feel that the TV I watched as a child increased my acceptance for LGBTQ individuals.	Completely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Completely disagree
24	Identify any LGBTQ characters you remember seeing on TV, or any times you remember hearing LGBTQ mentioned on TV.	Open answer
25	Explain how you feel LGBTQ individuals were often characterized.	Open Answer

## Data Analysis

To analyze the data gathered from my survey I collected the television watched by participants and rated each show as representative, non-representative, neutral, or with no description provided using Question 6 (Q6). I also used Q6 to determine if the participant felt generally positively, negatively, or neutrally and categorized them based on this.

Free-response answers were analyzed based on keywords and interpretation. Participants were numbered so as to keep television watched and free-response answers together. To begin I marked answers that were generally positive, negative, and neutral. In order to categorize free responses, I searched for keywords such as yes/no, did/didn't, helped/hurt, accepted, validated, positive/negative, and good/bad, and other similar keywords that indicate positive or negative feelings. This method of categorization is not foolproof because some of these keywords may not fully indicate the participants' opinions. Taking this into consideration, some general interpretations had to be used. Then, I went back and checked the participants' answers for the section about their television viewing (questions 4, 5, and 6) and looked to see if there was a pattern of those with positive free-response answers also having a history of viewing more representative television. Each question was checked for this pattern separately in order to see which aspects contained this correlation.

To determine if viewing positive LGBTQ representation as a child causes younger identity milestones I found the average age range for which each identity milestone was hit, and then the mean ages at which those who viewed positive, negative or neutral representations hit milestones. These means were compared using percent differences between each category and the total.

I treated the television's representation rating as an independent variable and the questions asked on a Likert scale (LSQs), questions asking for age ranges, and free-responses (FRQs) as dependent variables (more simply put, questions 4, 5, and 6 were independent variables and questions 9-25 were dependent) and compared them to see if representative television correlates with earlier identity milestones, positive influence on identity development, and/or positive views on the nature of LGBTQ representation on television, and vice versa. Throughout the whole study I used comparisons of means as describe prior as well as Spearman's correlational analysis. To determine if these relationships were significant, I decided that the percentage differences must be at least 50% and Spearman's rho must be greater than 0.5.

I chose this method because it was the best way to answer my research question. A survey allowed me to get opinions directly from LGBTQ young adults on the television they watched between the ages of 0-12 as well as their identity milestones, experiences with television, and how they believe it might have affected their identity development. The use of both qualitative and quantitative questions allowed me to effectively explore all parts of my topic and to analyze the data in a way that separates the different pieces of my question so that it would be more manageable and in-depth.

## Results

My hypotheses for this study were that LGBTQ individuals who watched representative television shows as a child would:

1. Experience earlier identity milestones
2. Indicate effects made on their identity development due to television content
3. Indicate more positive views on the content of children's television shows

Overall, the data analysis processes I used to determine whether these relationships existed proved inconsequential. I will now analyze the responses in groups predetermined by question type.

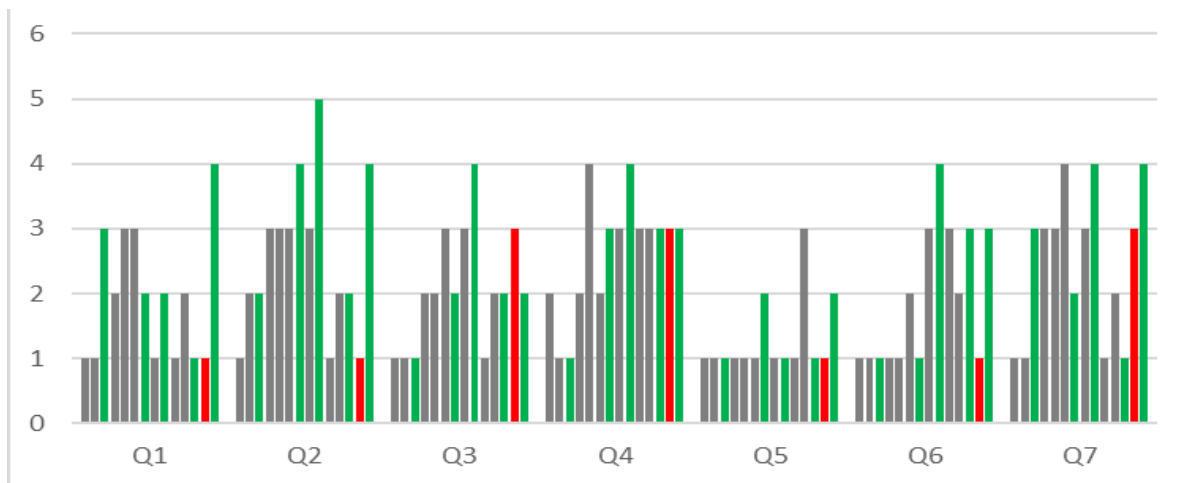
## Television shows

**Table 2.** Television shows listed by participants organized by directly representative or indirectly representative

Directly representative	Indirectly representative
Steven Universe, Adventure Time, The Loud House, The Ellen DeGeneres Show, and RuPaul’s Drag Race (these two shows are not children's television but they were listed by a participant as important so they were included in the list), Gravity Falls, The Owl House, Good Luck Charlie, and Arthur.	Danny Phantom, My Little Pony, Ben Ten, Fairly Odd Parents, Scooby Doo, Legend of Korra, iCarly, Wizards of Waverly Place, Regular Show, Avatar, Victorious, Always Sunny in Philadelphia, and Clarence.

## Likert

Beginning with Likert scale questions (LSQs), participants who responded positively to Q6 generally yielded a higher mean response than the total and vice versa with negative respondents (see Table 3). Neutral respondents in Q6 did not stray very far from the total mean. The mean of responses was around or lower than 3, meaning that the general opinions of participants fell mostly under the disagree or neutral categories. Only a few percent differences between participant groups were over 50%, the threshold set for statistical significance. Some percent differences do come close to 50% (see Table 3) but cannot under the bounds of this study be firmly indicative of a relationship. Looking at Figure 2, there is a trend showing differences in typical Likert responses between participant groups, however, data points are extremely varied among groups and the lack of more negative respondents brings me to the conclusion that the trend is not very strong.



**Figure 2.** Likert scale answers categorized based on Q6 (5= Completely Agree, 1=Completely Disagree)

Sperman’s correlational analysis on this question group did not show a significant correlation between Likert response and participant category. The pho value is only 0.2903, indicating the absence of a strong correlation (see Table 4).

**Table 3.** Likert scale mean answers categorized based on Q6

	LQ1	LQ2	LQ3	LQ4	LQ5	LQ6	LQ7	All
Pos Mean	2.75	4.00	2.75	3.00	1.50	2.50	3.50	2.86
All Mean	1.93	2.57	2.07	2.64	1.29	1.93	2.50	2.13
% diff	35%	43%	28%	13%	15%	26%	33%	29%
Neg mean	1.00	1.00	3.00	3.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	1.86
All Mean	1.93	2.57	2.07	2.64	1.29	1.93	2.50	2.13
% diff	63%	88%	37%	13%	25%	63%	18%	14%
Neu Mean	1.75	2.25	1.88	2.50	1.25	1.75	2.25	1.95
All Mean	1.93	2.57	2.07	2.64	1.29	1.93	2.50	2.13
% diff	10%	13%	10%	6%	3%	10%	11%	9%

**Table 4.** Spearman's correlation between Likert response and participant category (-1=negative participant, 0= neutral participant, 1=positive participant)

	Q6	Likert avg	Q6 rank	Likert rank
p1	0	1.14	5.5	1.5
p2	0.00	1.14	5.5	1.5
p3	1.00	1.71	12	4
p4	0.00	2.00	5.5	7
p5	0.00	2.43	5.5	10.5
p6	0.00	2.57	5.5	12
p7	1.00	2.29	12	8.5
p8	0.00	2.43	5.5	10.5
p9	1.00	3.43	12	14
p10	0.00	1.57	5.5	3
p11	0.00	2.29	5.5	8.5
p12	1.00	1.86	12	5.5
p13	-1.00	1.86	1	5.5
p14	1.00	3.14	12	13
Spearman's rho= 0.2903				



### Identity Milestones

Based on comparing the means of participants who responded positively, negatively, or neutral to Q6, there is no significant relationship between the television watched and the ages at which milestones were hit. This is shown in Figure 3, as there is no significant trend showing positive respondents reaching identity milestones at younger ages. This is also shown in Table 5, which shows that minimal groups, compared to the total mean, have at least a 50% difference. A correlational analysis table is not shown, but spearman’s rho is -0.213, meaning there is no correlation between participant category and age of identity milestones.

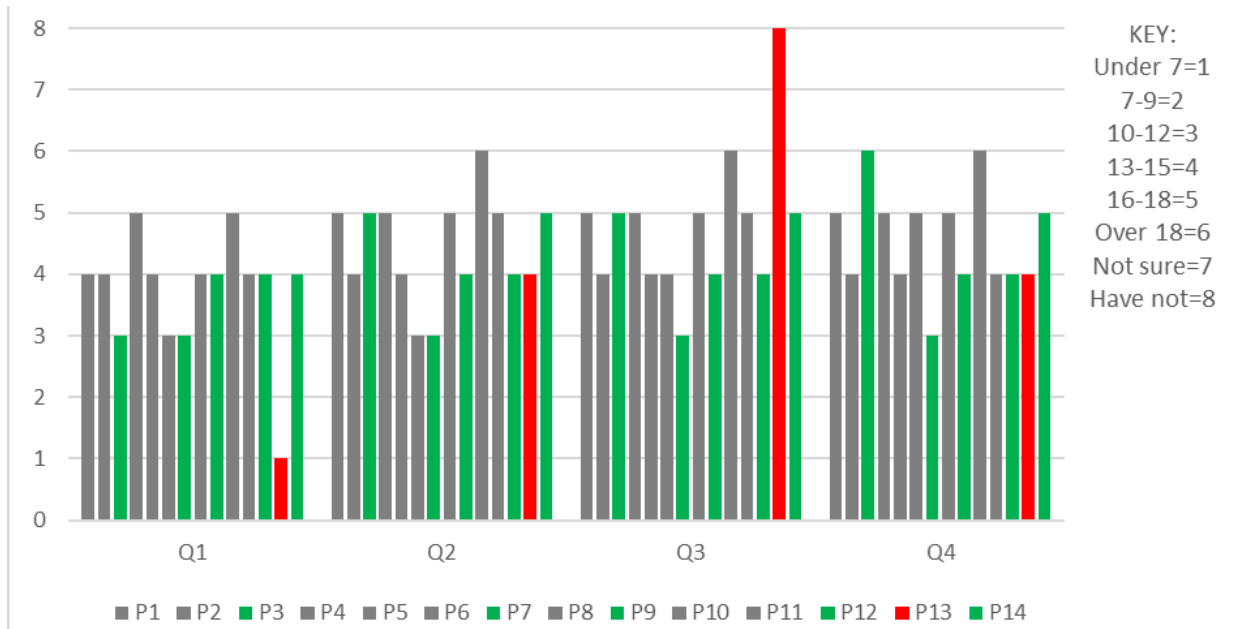


Figure 3. Questions 9-12: Indicated age ranges categorized by participant category

Table 5. Percent difference: Mean age responses based on participant category

	AQ1	AQ2	AQ3	AQ4	All
All mean	3.714	4.429	4.786	4.571	4.375
Pos mean	3.6	4.2	4.2	4.4	4.1
% diff	3%	5%	13%	4%	6%
All mean	3.714	4.429	4.786	4.571	4.375
Neg mean	1	4	8	4	4.25
% diff	115%	10%	50%	13%	3%
All mean	3.714	4.429	4.786	4.571	4.375
neu mean	4.125	4.625	4.75	4.75	4.5625
% diff	10%	4%	1%	4%	4%

### Free Response Questions: Quantitatively

When assigning numerical values (0= Negative, 2=Positive) to free response answers, no significant patterns or correlations exist. In Table 7, Spearman's rho does not show a significant correlation between FRQ response and participant category. Table 6 continues the themes found previously, as the percent differences between the participant category mean and the total mean are very low. Still, positive participants typically answered more positively than the total mean, and negative and neutral participants typically answered more negatively than the total mean.

**Table 6.** Percent difference: FRQs based on Q6

	FRQ1	FRQ2	FRQ3	FRQ4	FRQ5	FRQ6	FRQ7	Total
Pos mean	1.25	1.17	0.85	1.38	1.13	1.38	0.82	1.14
All mean	1.14	0.93	0.79	1.29	1.14	1.29	0.79	1.05
% diff	9%	23%	8%	7%	1%	7%	4%	8%
Neg mean	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.71
All mean	1.14	0.93	0.79	1.29	1.14	1.29	0.79	1.05
% diff	13%	7%	200%	25%	13%	25%	200%	38%
Neu mean	1.27	0.65	0.77	1.16	0.89	0.99	0.95	0.95
All mean	1.14	0.93	0.79	1.29	1.14	1.29	0.79	1.05
% diff	11%	36%	2%	11%	25%	26%	19%	10%

**Table 7.** Spearman's correlation between FRQ response and participant category (-1=negative participant, 0= neutral participant, 1=positive participant)

	Q6	FRQ ans avg	Q6 rank	FRQ rank
p1	0	0.85714286	5.5	6
p2	0.00	0.71	5.5	3
p3	1.00	0.85714286	12	6
p4	0.00	1.14285714	5.5	9.5
p5	0.00	1	5.5	8
p6	0.00	1.42857143	5.5	11
p7	1.00	1.71428571	12	12
p8	0.00	1.14285714	5.5	9.5
p9	1.00	1.85714286	12	13.5
p10	0.00	0.85714286	5.5	6
p11	0.00	0.28571429	5.5	1

	Q6	FRQ ans avg	Q6 rank	FRQ rank
p12	1.00	0.71428571	12	3
p13	-1.00	0.71428571	1	3
p14	1.00	1.85714286	12	13.5
Spearman's rho=				0.4479

### Free Response Questions: Qualitatively

It is important to also look at FRQs qualitatively.

**Table 8.** Themes discovered through free-response answers

Theme	Definition	Times appeared
Indirect Effects	A non-explicit way television had affected their identity development, such as realizing that there was an effect later on in life or general positive themes in television taking an effect on sexual and gender identity development. - Includes "Crush on a Same-sex Character" and "Emulating a Character".	3
Unawareness of LGBTQ Community	Simply not knowing the LGBTQ community was a thing until much later in life.	4
Queer Relationships	Seeing queer relationships on the television watched as a child.	4
Stereotypes and Comedic Representation	Portrayal of LGBTQ characters in a one-dimensional way. Most often negative and creates poor attitudes around being LGBTQ. Also, LGBTQ characters were portrayed in television as comedic. Their existence was purely to laugh at. Gay people participants saw were often shown as "effeminate", "catty", or generally stereotyped as the "gay best friend trope" and existing as a joke. Lesbian characters were often portrayed stereotypically as well, being described as "masculine or tough", and "she hulk". Transgender characters were rare, often only being portrayed through cross-dressing as a joke.	9
(Un)acceptance	Feelings of being accepted or not accepted by the messages and imagery in television for being LGBTQ. Also includes comfortability/discomfort in identity. Participants cited feeling "alone" or "normal"/ not "normal".	8
Emulating a Character	Typically shown in transgender or non-gender conforming individuals. The desire to be like a character that was of the opposite sex at that time and wanting to embody their gender characteristics.	2
Crush on a Same sex Character	Having a crush on a character who was of the same sex, often causing a realization of homosexuality.	5

A large portion of responses were neutral or filled in as N/A or equivalent. Of the 14 responses to each of the 8 FRQs, totaling 112 responses, 61 were neutral, 18 were negative, and 33 were positive. In addition, participants who answered positively to Q6 typically answered positively for the rest of the FRQs, with the exception of Participant 12, who typically answered neutrally. This participant's response to Q6 was graded as positive, but they were unsure in their response, not knowing what LGBTQ representation they saw but knowing they saw it. Many responses were neutral due to the fact that the participant did not watch any television with LGBTQ representation or discussion as a child, and many questions could not apply to these individuals.

## Discussion

Based on the results of my study, it is not clear if consuming representative television as a child has effects on LGBTQ identity development. Television watched as a child did not have an explicit effect on the LSQ and age range responses to this survey. Quantitative results show that there were differences in the answers of positive and negative participants compared to the total mean response value. This follows along with the hypothesis that those who watched positive television would respond more positively to LSQs and hit milestones sooner than the sample size as a whole. While this pattern does exist, the percent differences between groups and the total mean as well as Spearman's correlational analysis were not indicative of a relationship. Seeing this, it is reasonable to say that there could be some relationship between the representation level of childhood television and identity development, but the data is not significant enough to solidify this claim, and thus it cannot be assumed that television has a significant effect on identity development.

## Correlational Analyses

Correlational analyses done on the three question groups show that there is no strong correlation between participant category and responses.

## Data Analysis | Qualitative & Quantitative

Data analysis through quantitative and qualitative methods were inconsistent with each other and did not yield obvious results. Quantitative analysis methods showed a possibility of there being a relationship between childhood television and identity development but could not confirm this. Qualitative analysis, though, showed a more nuanced and clear perspective. The themes identified within FRQ responses showed that a lack of representative television had negative effects.

The original purpose of this study was primarily to see the effects that representative television had on identity development, with the hypothesis being that viewing representative television would promote positive attitudes and younger identity milestones within LGBTQ young adults. However, the results of this study show the more pervasive issue is the effects that a lack of representation has.

Participants were graded as neutral or negative due to their responses to Q6 indicating a lack of exposure to representative television. Those who were graded positively had 1-3 examples of representative television, other than Participant 3, who listed 4 shows, all with a main character who temporarily transitions genders. Table 2 shows that a majority of shows indicated as representative were indirectly representative. Participants who indicated watching directly representative television (7, 9, and 14) were also those who answered mostly positively in the FRQs, while those who watched indirectly representative television were not as positively inclined. This gross lack of truly representative children's television could be an explanation for the low percent differences between participant categories' responses and leads me to believe that quantitative data would have been more significant if participants had been graded positively only if they indicated directly representative television.

## Stereotypes

Participants who identified stereotypes (see Table 8) were not exposed to direct LGBTQ representation as a child. Only those who watched directly representative television cited LGBTQ representation on television as positive. It is likely noncoincidental that participants who did not have access to representative television had more negative views on how the LGBTQ community was portrayed, and that these participants typically answered negatively or neutrally to all questions in the survey.

## (Un)acceptance

Exposure to negative, positive, and neutral television generally came with some effects. A major theme found in this study is television bringing about feelings of acceptance or unacceptance (see Table 8). Participants who had negative feelings towards the television they were exposed to, cited some negative effects such as not knowing of the LGBTQ community until later in life, delayed realizations of sexual/gender identity, and/or discouragement to come out. Positive participants cited effects such as encouragement to embrace their identity and/or come out, and an appreciation of positive role models, similarly to Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) findings.

## Same-Sex Crush/ Emulating Characters

An interesting result of this study is that a common positive theme showing indirect aspects (see Table 8) was a leading factor of identity development for quite a few participants. Many of the television shows were deemed representative because participants listed them as containing their crushes or realizations of sexual/gender identity. These shows, which contained characters who participants were attracted to or wanted to be like, had an effect on the participant's identity (see Table 8). This theme may indicate that due to the lack of direct LGBTQ representation, individuals will search for outlets in media to explore their identity. It might also indicate that identity development is reliant on identification with characters, similarly to the ideas posed by Zerebeki, et. al., (2021) regarding the parasocial contact hypothesis.

## Likert

LSQs had overall negative/neutral responses. When asked if the participant thought their television viewing had an effect on their identity development the mean response was "Disagree", but the most common was "Completely Disagree". This is most likely due to the fact that television watched by participants lacked any representation, so no effects could be made. As previously stated, the mean responses of participant groups differed from the general mean. This trend continues throughout the rest of the LSQs.

Something that stands out is that the general mean for question 14 was 2.5, or between "Disagree" and "Neutral", but the mean for positive respondents was a 4, or "Agree". This means that those who had access to representative television felt much more accepted for their identity as a result. This is an integral result of my study. This conclusion could not be solidly made using the survey as a whole but based on this question asking participants directly for their feelings on the subject, I can conclude that viewing positive LGBTQ representation on television as a child does have some effect on aspects of identity development, specifically self-acceptance. Still, the quantitative results cannot confirm this, but the qualitative data is overwhelmingly in favor of this conclusion.

## Identity Milestones

Regarding the identity milestones portion of this study, there is no substantial evidence to prove that television representation levels have an effect on identity milestones. Quantitative data does not show significant enough correlation or percentage differences in support of this hypothesis. There is no clear pattern showing positive participants reaching milestones at a younger age. In fact, participant 13, the only participant to answer outstandingly negatively to Q6 and to the rest of the FRQs and LSQs, had one of the youngest identity milestone age ranges overall. Because of this, I cannot say that viewing or not viewing LGBTQ-representative television as a child influences identity milestones as I had originally hypothesized.

## Conclusion

The hypotheses for this study were that watching representative television as a child would increase self-acceptance, lower the age of identity milestones, create positive views on the content of children's television, and increase comfort in identity. I have found that the results of this study can not prove or deny these hypotheses due to inconsistent results. Quantitative results do not point to any solid conclusions. Qualitative results did lean towards proving my hypothesis though, showing that those who indicated watching shows with LGBTQ representation in Q6 typically answered positively to the rest of the FRQs. They displayed positive attitudes towards representation on children's television and showed that the representative television they watched had a positive effect on their identity development. An integral outcome of my study is that those who did not watch representative television as a child felt that children's television harbored negative stereotypes and narrow portrayals of LGBTQ individuals. In addition, those who responded along this theme typically cited some sort of negative effect that it had on their identity development, most commonly feeling unaccepted.

## Implications

The information found in this study can be corroborated with Gomillion and Giuliano's (2011) and McNroy and Craig's (2016) studies. Both found the effects of television on identity development and obtained positive and negative perspectives. McNroy and Craig (2016) found that television often creates a narrow and stereotypical view of LGBTQ individuals and that this can be harmful to identity development. Most of my participants who did not watch LGBTQ-representative television were critical of children's television in respect to how, if at all, it portrays LGBTQ individuals, and common themes in my results ensued such as unawareness of the LGBTQ community and feelings of unacceptance. On the opposite end, Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) found that LGBTQ representation was beneficial to identity development in many ways, similarly to my participants who watched representative television as a child having more positive views on how the content of television affected their identity. McNroy and Craig's (2018) study on fandom, did not match up with my study's results. They found that LGBTQ fandom participating youth hit identity milestones sooner, which was connected to the positive and accepting environments that their fandoms make. My study did not find similar results between the ages of identity milestones and exposure to representative television as hypothesized.

As shown in my study and others discussed in the Literature Review section of this paper, viewing representative television has positive impacts on LGBTQ identity development. In the past, researchers have studied this relationship, but few have focused on specifically children's television. It is well known that the experiences one has as a child can shape them far into the future (Ívrendi A. & Özdemir A. A., 2010; Boston Children's Hospital, 2021; Mares M.-L. & Woodard, E 2005; Persegani, C. et. al., 2002). My study points toward the conclusion that watching LGBTQ-representative television as a child can have some positive effects on identity development throughout life. While my study could not explicitly come to this itself, putting it into conversation with the sum of literature that has

found this with adult media makes my findings worthy of attention. If this study was to be done on a larger scale, perhaps a confirmation could be made if the television one watches as a child influences LGBTQ identity development. My findings and the connections they have with pre-existing research can be used to inspire children's television producers to include LGBTQ characters who are accurate and positive representations of the community.

## Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The inconsequential results of this study are most likely due to the small sample size that was garnered for the survey. Only 14 participants were collected, and the range of representation levels experienced by these participants was not broad enough to have an adequately diverse set of experiences. There was only one participant who was categorized as negative through Q6, thus making it hard to reach conclusions for negative representation viewers. Also, there are aspects that should be looked further into. I believe that identity milestones should be researched more in-depth in relation to the television watched as a child. If a larger sample size could be gathered and a study was conducted solely on this topic, more conclusive results could be obtained.

In addition, there are many other aspects that affect identity development other than media, such as demographics, family, education, etc. Any future research should take this diversity into account by either asking more detailed questions about these factors to acknowledge how these can create differences in responses or narrowing the sample size to a more specific demographic. Another aspect to consider is that the specific subgroup of LGBTQ a participant is in, including gender and/or sexuality, and their ethnicity often create vastly different experiences, and these factors should be considered when doing future data analysis. Due to such a small sample size, many of these factors could not be considered in this study, but for a wider-reaching study, I believe these things are necessary.

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