REPRESENTATION OF RACE, GENDER AND LGBTQ+ ON MODERN FAMILY

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to establish the representations of the main characters of *Modern Family* out of three themes: the representation of genders, race and LGBTQ+, based on theories within the field, such as representation and stereotypes. Earlier research shows that these three social groups often are represented stereotypically in media with more inclusivity in some aspects and less in some. Four episodes have been chosen from different years and have been analyzed from an intersectional perspective. This purpose of this research is to understand what codes have been used when creating the main characters, and it focuses on three research questions:

- In what ways are the female, male, Latin and LGBTQ+ characters on *Modern Family* represented?

- Has the representation of race, gender and LGBTQ+ changed over the nine years since *Modern Family* started broadcasting? If so, in what ways?

- What stereotypes replicate on the different characters depending on their race, gender and LGBTQ+?

To do this, descriptive text analysis and semiotics have been used to analyze each episode and for better understanding of the stereotypical traits and representation in the analysis, Richard Dyer’s definition of stereotypes and Stuart Hall’s theory of representation have been used. The results show different changes in representation regarding the three themes. In conclusion, the representation of genders has changed over the nine years, thus has the representation of the Latin race and LGBTQ+ community not changed in many significant ways.

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Introduction

Recently, I started watching the American television show “Modern Family”. I have heard many great reviews of the show and I instantly enjoyed it. Well, most parts of it. It was by surprise that I realized that during several scenes I immediately… cringed. The stereotypes and jokes addressing race, the LGBTQ+ community and gender were constantly used in order to make the show comical. In all fairness, “Modern Family” IS an including show, since it is representing different races and sexual orientations. However, the way the sitcom uses these “traits” in order to be funny is actually what makes it non-inclusive.

One of the main characters Gloria Pritchett once said: “A Colombian hot head is when you put someone’s head on fire.” This, among many other quotes regarding the Colombian culture, is what made me interested to study the representation of the main characters of “Modern Family”.

This paper will analyze the representation of race, gender and LGBTQ+ on Modern Family over a nine-year span (2009-2017/18). Whereas previous research on TV-shows generally focus on one of the previous mentioned themes, this study will analyze several episodes of Modern Family from an intersectional perspective, given that the representation of the characters is determined by several intersecting factors.

Discussions about Modern Family and whether it is including or excluding has surrounded the show from the very beginning. For example, the gay couple have several stereotypical traits that cannot go unnoticed. Moreover, the females on the show are stay-at-home moms for many seasons in the series, and the Latin characters refer to Colombia almost exclusively in a negative matter. This raises questions about representation.

Given that the series has been broadcasted for a long time, I was intrigued by the question of how the representation of the three marginalized group has changed on Modern Family. Presuming that our society has changed over the last ten years in terms of respect and acceptance, it is expected that this show would ”keep up”.

This paper will start by presenting the aim of study and research questions to the reader. It will therefore shortly describe the TV-show and present the several characters that are of relevance. Furthermore, previous research on the topics will be introduced to the reader followed by the theoretical framework and methods that shall be used in the analysis. The chosen material will be composed of the episodes chosen and proceed into discussing the ethical aspects of this study and the validity and reliability of it. The part after this is the analysis, in which I will compare traits found in episodes of Season 1, 4, 7, and 10, and establish whether the representation of gender, race and LGBTQ+ has changed and if it has, in what ways? The study will finish with a discussion about the results.
Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to research how the characters of Modern Family are represented. I aim to distinguish if there is any difference in the representation between when the show started broadcasting in 2009 and the episodes that aired the years after, concluding with the ones aired in 2019. The study will focus on representation of race, gender and LGBTQ+ in the tv-show and try to examine whether stereotypical traits are replicated.

The aim of the study in to gain a deeper understanding of what codes have been used to form the characters in Modern Family depending on their race, gender and whether they are LGBTQ+. The study will focus on answering the following research questions:

- In what ways are the female, male, Latin and LGBTQ+ characters on Modern Family represented?
- Has the representation of race, gender and LGBTQ+ changed over the nine years since Modern Family started broadcasting? If so, in what ways?
- What stereotypes replicate the different characters depending on their race, gender and LGBTQ+?

To answer these questions the collected material will be analyzed through the theory of representation as defined by Stuart Hall and the term stereotypes as defined by Richard Dyer. This will be done with the help of the qualitative methods which are descriptive text analysis and semiotic analysis.
Contextualization

In this part, a brief introduction of Modern Family is presented, as the knowledge about the TV-show and the leading characters is crucial for the reader to understand the analysis. Modern Family is an American mockumentary sitcom that premiered on ABC in 2009. A mockumentary is a type of TV-show that shows fictional events but presented as a documentary. (Link 1) The show follows the lives of three families all of whom live in the suburban Los Angeles. The families are all interrelated through Jay Pritchett and the show revolves around his family and his daughter and son’s families. All three families are different, as one is nuclear, one is a stepfamily and one is a same-sex family. The characters and members of the families will now be introduced. (Link 1)

Jay Pritchett, father to Claire and Mitchell Pritchett is married to Gloria Delgado-Pritchett and together they have their son Joe. Gloria also has a son called Manuel or Manny, from her previous marriage. Jay owned a business called “Pritchett’s Closets and Blinds” before he retired. Gloria used to work as a hairdresser but is now a stay-at-home wife and mother. Gloria is a lot younger than Jay, who is wealthy, and according to our society “living the dream” by marrying a young, beautiful woman. Jay has a very structured personality, is laid back and non-emotional. Gloria, on the other hand, is very passionate and loudly expresses her feelings. (Link 1)

Claire Dunphy, Jay’s daughter, is married to Phil Dunphy, a realtor and together they have three children. Claire is a stay at home mom for the first seasons but took over her father’s business later and is now chief executive. Claire is a very “by the book” character, that runs everything. Phil is a lot more relaxed and ”goofier”. Together they complete each other. (Link 1)

Mitchell Pritchett is Jay’s son and (later) married to Cameron Tucker with whom he has an adopted daughter, Lily Tucker-Pritchett. Mitchell is a lawyer and Cameron used to be at home with their daughter but now works at a school as a P.E. teacher. Mitchell is, as his father and sister, a “tidy” person. He is not very emotional. Cam is an ”emotional wreck” as described a couple of times in the show. He is very dramatic and eccentric sometimes, very gesticulative and stereotypic. He and Mitch are completely different. (Link 1)

The series have received criticism about the themes this paper will discuss. One specific episode that got much criticism is when Cameron is trying to prove his manliness by acting “straight” so that he could pick up a woman at a bar. When he fails, she states that she knew he way gay and says: “It’s obvious… The way you talk and walk and dress and your theatrical hand gestures”. The Week brings the episode up and states that it is a shame that Modern Family sent a message to many million viewers that if a “gay is girly, he is gay, no matter what he might say otherwise.” The plot replicated stereotypes and embraced that “straight guys re only masculine and anyone who is not is gay and in denial.”. (Link 2)

Michelle Haimoff from the Christian Science Monitor criticized the show for casting women as stay-at-home moms: “There is a difference between quirky, flawed characters and one who are incapable of professional success. And when the latter is reliably female, it makes for sexist television. It also makes for unrealistic television”. (Link 3) Arianna Reiche from Gawker commented on a specific event in the tv-show in which Gloria hides her skill at playing chess so that Jay would not be upset for losing. She says “This moment is at
best a sappy quip about compromise in an often heavy-handed series, and at worst, it’s a moment in a show with 9.3 million viewers, on a network owned by Disney, which explicitly validates girls and women subduing their intellect. “ (Link 4)

An episode that caused reaction about the show being stereotypical and negatively portraying Latinas is when Glorias’ sister and mother are visiting to see Joe, whose first name is Fulgencio. In this episode, Glorias’ sister asks for directions to the garden, where she will harvest more corn. She also wonders where the rivers are while holding a laundry basket. Dalene Rovenstine from Pastemagazine criticized this saying that Gloria’s “I lived-in-a-village” jokes are tolerable, but that a whole episode of these were not funny in the slightest. About Gloria’s sister asking about the river she says: “just because the woman is from a developing country does not mean she’s an idiot. “ (Link 5)

I found the tv-show interesting to study due to the cast being various. A usual argument that is often presented in discussions about media and representations is how important it is for minorities to be represented in different ways. Media shapes people’s cultures, identities and perceptions of reality (Hammer, 2007), and helps them make sense of the world and is supposed to reflects normalized representations of our world (Jackson, 2014) and In saying this, and seeing this TV-show, it is contradictory to represent various minorities while still maintaining certain stereotypes that our society has about them. This study’s main focus is to study these representations in order to determine which stereotypes are appropriated, while keeping the society norms in the background and reflecting on the importance of real representation while establishing whether this classes as such.
Previous Research on Representation of Race, Gender and LGBT

In this chapter several previous studies that have been done in the field are presented. The following articles are of relevance for this study since the three main themes are being discussed out of different perspectives and can therefore put the study in a broader perspective while establishing what patterns in representation have been found.

Representation of race and different ethnicities in media

Studies show that media has a role in building up stereotypes regarding the three themes discussed in this study, as well as it has a role in tearing stereotypes down. One of the studies regarding representation in media state that “Media have been shown to have the potential to promote or call into question stereotypical views of social groups, including those defined by race, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity” (Scharrer and Ramasubramanian, 2015, p. 171, see also Mastro, 2015; Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2015). Stating that media influences the population, it can be to blame for people’s perception of other races than the white one. A study suggests that white people are recognized as the most powerful social group (Atuel, Seyranian and Crano, 2007). In the news are people of color more often than not described as the villains. Black men, for example, are the subject that has been targeted the most as being violent predators (Jeffries and Jeffries, 2017, p. 3). This group has also been presented in movies as villains or people with lower social status. Over the last few years, people of color have leadership roles as well as are represented in various aspects. Contemporary television offers a more respectable array of black people.

Another group of people that are often misrepresented as unsuccessful students or violent and bad parent are Latino Americans. They have also not established the same degree of inclusion on television and are often presented as hyper-sexualized (Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi 2015, p. 19, see also Mastro 2009). A study that the previously mentioned researchers did showed that ethnic minorities are in general represented as likeable on TV. However, their social status and profession varies over the years and these representations are consistent with the stereotypes that of ethnic minorities. Another study shows that Latino characters often are represented in roles as overly sexual and criminals (Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2017, p. 541) Other stereotypes that they “all make good domestics”, mispronounce words, speak Spanish, are impulsive, and are known for “cooking up a spicy storm” – and not only in a culinary way (Merskin, 2007, p. 136 see also Cofer, 2005, p.247)

As a compliment to this, Dong and Murillo (2007) state that individuals that rely on television to learn about race are likely to embrace negative stereotypes. This is also shown in similar ways is the study by Briley, Shrum and Wyer Jr (2006) that found that in general the representation of black and white people in TV-shows vary depending on what social role they were assigned.

These arguments are all valid due to the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities that has occurred in the past and to this day, thus less than before. A study regarding differences in a specific TV-show is needed to argue the fact whether people of color and minorities are better represented today than before.
Representation of gender in media

Females are often represented as performing traditional gender roles, something that the audience is used to see. Over time female representation have appeared more in children’s cartoons. This is shown in the study by Klein and Shiffman (2009) which found that it has inclined from the 1960 till the day the study was taking place. Another aspect is that not only are females underrepresented, but they have always been represented in similar ways, and whether this has changed is one of this study’s main questions. Feminist have fought against stereotypes on television (Gledhill, 2013).

The representation today, both in cartoons, and in general, are more various. Women have a wider range of roles, broader personalities and are represented as strong, independent characters (Hine, England, Lopreore, Horgan, Hartwell, 2018, p.10). Furthermore, male representation also varies in the personalities and behaviors shown on TV. The masculinity has been changed for years, for example in cartoons men are growing to accept a more “feminine” side, as to being more sensitive and the male roles are evolving and maturing as well (Hine, England, Lopreose, Horgan, Hartwell, 2018, p.4-5, see also Davis 2013). One could argue that masculinity has changed its “original” meaning overtime, and that today’s representations of someone sensitive could actually be perceived as “more” masculine than the opposite. Nixon (2013) discusses masculinity as invented categories (see also Weeks, 1991). Stating that these are products of cultural meanings attached to certain behaviors attributes etc, it is a fact that these differ due to cultures and due to the historical era that we are in. Gender representations do influence us very much, and the way we are and think and what we believe a woman and man should be. A study found that girls’ use of mass media helps them in reconstructing what is considered to be the “feminine ideal” (Durham, 1999, p.210). In order to be able to analyze Modern Family in the perspectives of gender, these previous findings will serve as a ground.

Representation of LGBTQ in media

The Hollywood production code and the Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters both prohibited depictions of homosexuality ended in 1968. When starting to include homosexuals on television, they were often represented in a negative manner such as child molesters or victims of violence (Raley and Lucas, 2008, p. 23) It was not often that they were represented in a positive way, or at least not for a long time. In 1997, Ellen Degeneres came out on television and Will and Grace became a phenomenon in 1998 (Cabosky, 2014, p.70). Another phenomenon that took place in the late 80’s and early 90’s was ”The New Queer Cinema”, which was an independent film movement featuring queer stories told rebelliously – meaning that stories were told from an angry point of view. This anger points to the heteronormative society and representation. These films presented members of the LGBT-community in a positive light, with an agenda of defying stereotypes (Jones and Juett, 2010, p. x; 4-5). The television has come a long way since then. However, stereotyping is common today. In media gay people are often described as overly feminine, or overly masculine on the other hand. They have often been presented as hypersexual, oversensitive etc. Media has helped creating a stereotype of a group that misrepresented certain member that do not share these personality traits (Cabosky, 2014, see also Eide, 2010). The NQC ended fast without getting into mainstream Hollywood, but still opened opportunities for cinemas to explore their ways of representing gay characters (Jones and
Juett, 2010, p. x). However, since 2010 tv-shows have come a long way in representing members of the LGBT community in more diverse roles, such as Orange is the new black or Brooklyn 99. The question that appears could be how diverse the representation is, and whether the representation is done rightfully or out of a heteronormative perspective Jones and Juett (2010) states that queer films (or in the context- queer representation) need to continually shift with society - just like the straight representation needs. Their research is based on many different movies in different periods of time, which is why I find it interesting to do a study similarly, while focusing at one TV-show only. A study by Vanlee, Dhaenens and Bauwel (2018, p.622) that took place in Belgium, showed an overrepresentation in gay male characters and a lack of ethnic diversity in LGBT characters, though the complexity of these characters is shown. An aspect that shall be discussed in this study is the “heterosexualisation of homosexuality” as Kates (1999, p. 34) defined it in the discussion about an ad that consisted of two men, a suburban house, a Toyota and two dogs. By changing the gender of one character the heteronormativity of the image is exposed (Nölke, 2017, p. 227-228)

In conclusion, the previous research done on the three themes shows that every group is in some way stereotypically represented on television: 1) different races are often represented as violent, poor or underrepresented; 2) the female characters are often represented in a traditional manner; 3) the LGBTQ+ community have only been present in television for twenty years, and are often represented as very sensitive and overwhelming.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework consists of Stuart Hall’s theory of representation and Richard Dyer’s theory about stereotypes. In particular, the role as reference presented by Richard Dyer is highly relevant for this study. To be able to define how the characters are portrayed on the TV-show one must investigate how the material is represented to us. Additionally, to understand how these characters are created and what traits the social groupings possess will be done through Dyer’s stereotyping theory. A brief overview of intersectionality will be presented to explain the intersectional perspective in this analysis.

Representation

Cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall argues that “meaning is constructed by the system of representation” (Hall, 2013, p.7). It is a process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning. To further explain it, language operates as a representational system, in which we use signs and symbols to present our thoughts and ideas to other people (Hall, 2013, p. xx). For the listener to be able to understand each other, they would have be of similar culture or understand the language. Culture is, by the definition we are going to use in this work, defined as a set of practices. It an be understood as “shared value” by different participants; members of the similar culture shares concepts and ideas that makes it possible for them to understand and interact with the world similarly (Hall, 2013, p. xviii-xix). Stating this, it is not needed for people to speak the same language to understand each other’s thoughts and ideas. By speaking about different things, and the way we speak about objects, people or events, participants of a culture give them meaning. We also give things meaning by the way we represent them, and this refers to the words that we use to describe something or how much value something has etc. When belonging to the same culture we are belonging to a similar conceptual map, giving us the ability that through language refer to the world around us (Hall, 2013, p.xix).

There are different theories about how language is represented to the world. For the purpose of this study we will focus on the constructionist approach to representation. This approach build on the premise that people construct meaning by using signs and symbols. According to this approach there are two systems of representation. The first one defines a system of “mental representations” which we all carry around in our heads in order to be able to interpret the world meaningfully. This means that people construct systems of concepts by which they are able to share meaning with each other. The other system of representation in the constructivist approach is language. These shared concepts that exist in our heads have to be expressed in a common language that is part of the culture the participants are in. This could be in form of words, images, sounds, symbols and more. The general term used for these is signs. Signs are organized into languages and by using signs we translate our shared conceptual maps into a language that the world around us understand. The third link is the actual world we live in, the people and the places. The relation between the three systems is representation (Hall, 2013, p.2-5).

Further, when we are using these signs, the participants in our culture must know what the signs stands for. When the meaning is constructed and fixed by the system of representations we have to spread it. When doing this, we are using the code. Codes are the relationship between concepts and signs. Simply said, when we are telling something, we are encoding, while the listener decodes the meaning of the word. However, as meaning
shift and change, codes operate like social conventions more than fixed premises (Hall, 2013, p.7 & 45, see also Hall 1980). These codes are all around us in different forms such as film, television, paintings, words and much more and are represented to us and left to our interpretation (Hall, 2013).

In the study the focus will lie on the representation of race, gender and LGBTQ+ and analyzing the codes represented to us regarding these subjects. Richard Dyer (2000) speaks about the representation of social groups. His book *The Matter of Images* discusses different stereotypes, which will be addressed further in the text, and about the representation of these communities (Dyer, 2000, p. 2-3). He defines representation as the organization of the perception of the variations in skin color, gender, and sexual orientation into comprehensibility (Dyer, 2000, p. 4). He argues that it is not only the above mentioned groups of people that are ”social groupings” though that everyone belong to social groupings, only different. His book does not address the grouping with most power which refers to white people and heterosexuals. While he states that exploring masculinity and this group is a growth industry, as well as making normality strange, he states that the oppressed groups (women for example) are not still equivalent in these researches (Dyer, 2000, p.4).

**Stereotypes**

The term ”stereotypes” was coined by Walter Lippmann in his book *Public Opinion* (1922) which Dyer (2000) speaks about. He described stereotypes as ”pictures in our head” which we use to understand the world surrounding us. Stereotypes contain an evaluation that justifies social differences. Whether the stereotype is true or false is immaterial. Richard Dyer followed up Lippman’s ideas and used them in his research in media representation. The analysis in this study will largely depend on Dyer’s definitions of stereotypes.

According to Dyer, stereotypes have four roles. The first role is that stereotypes work as a form of ”ordering” the mass information that we gather from the world. This means that humans see patterns and generalities in the society. This activity of ordering is acknowledged as a necessary way that societies make sense of themselves. (Dyer, 2000, p.11-12). The second role is that stereotypes work as short cuts. This translates to stereotypes being a very simple form of representation but containing a lot of complex information which is required for the individual to actually make the connection and understand the stereotype (Dyer, 2000, 12-13). The third role is what Dyer calls reference which we will focus on further in the text. The fourth role is stereotypes as expression of values. Lippmann states that stereotypes are what we are thinking about a certain. The question that rises is who he refers to when saying ”we”. Most people get their ideas about a social group from stereotypes, so the statement that stereotypes work as a general agreement about a social group does not last, simply because that would mean that the agreement arose before (Dyer, 2000, p.14).

The role that stereotypes have as reference is the one that this study will focus mostly on and use in the analysis. As already mentioned, Lippmann refers to stereotypes as a projection on to the world. Dyer makes a difference between stereotypes and types and defines stereotypes as a subcategory of the type. The stereotype is easily defined by their social functions, whereas the types are easily defined by their aesthetic function, or ”as a mode of characterization in fiction”. – Dyer, (2000, p.13). When studying media
representation, aesthetic functions and social constructs are crucial for understanding. Further, the type is any character that is created by using a couple of recognizable traits that remains the same through the narrative and are similar to how the world really looks. The opposite of the type is the novelistic character that have traits that reveal to the viewer gradually and that often depend on the character developing (Dyer, 2000, p.13-14).

Dyer also discusses different typifications, which is a necessity for the representation of gayness, he states. (Dyer, 2000, p. 19) By saying this, he argues that being gay is not something that shows, nothing that declares that someone is gay. By signs of gayness, he speaks of gestures, expressions, clothing etc, and he states that typification may not be absolutely essential, though is important for representation, as it is the product of social, political, practical and textual determinations (Dyer, 2000, p.19). He continues describing the different categories of typifications, and states that there are four predominant gay types (Dyer, 2000, p. 29).

This study will focus mostly on one of these types—*the queen* and *the dyke*, categorized as “in-betweenism”. These are represented as if their sexuality means that they are in between the genders of male and female—they represent homosexuality through what is assumed to be a gender correlation. This type indicates that gay men are not “real men” which expresses the assumption that true masculinity often defines heterosexuality. The queen is thus indicated to be effeminate and much of the image relies on that gay man are more like the opposite sex. When represented in media, the characters are often seen as comic, and failing at being completely feminine or completely masculine, because they are—inbetween (Dyer, 2000, p.31-37).

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a term that was founded by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 and it is an analytic framework that attempts to identify how systems of power impact those most marginalized in society. Intersectionality as a concept stands for the fact that various forms of social stratification, as race, gender and LGBTQ+ and several others, do not exist separately from each other but are woven together (Cooper, 2016).

In her work “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antirasict Politics” (1989), Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that Black women are often excluded from feminist theories and antirasist policies since these are based on experiences that do not necessarily reflect on the relationship of race and gender (1989, p. 140). Crenshaw states that the problem will not be solved by simply including Black women’s experiences into the established analytical framework but suggests a change of the existing policy frameworks (1989, p. 149).

In her later work “Mapping the Margins, Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color” (1991), the discussion continues, but Crenshaw includes Latina women in the problematics. In this article she presents “structural intersectionality” that suggests that it is impossible to separate race, gender and class when addressing a woman of color that have been marginalized by all three systems of power (1991, p. 1946).

Intersectionality is of high significance for this study since the whole analysis will be studied out of this perspective. Taking an intersectional view accommodates multiple
aspects of someone’s identity and the goal is not to separate these parts when trying to analyze a character. The analysis will be done in line with Crenshaws theory.

In summary, Crenshaw’s (1991) term intersectionality will reflect on this paper while Hall’s (2013) and Dyer’s (2000) theoretical framework will be used in order to expose and establish how the characters on “Modern Family” are represented and which stereotypes the show replicates.

Methodology and Material

This part serves to present the methods that the analysis is built on. To be able to study the ways that representation has/has not changed in the different episodes of Modern Family, I have used qualitative text analysis. To ensure that my description and my interpretation are as accurate as possible I have chosen to combine descriptive and semiotic analysis of the content.

Qualitative text analysis allows me to study the stereotypes and representation shown on Modern Family in depth and trying to understand the meanings of their actions (Ekström and Larsson, 2012, p.15), which is why the method is suitable for this study, in difference to the quantitative method which measures how often a variable occurs. The descriptive analysis serves to describe the context of the episodes to help foster a more-in-depth semiotic analysis. The combination of the methods gives an opportunity of putting the analysis into context with an intertextual perspective.

Qualitative text analysis

The qualitative method defines as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600, see also Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17). The qualitative method is characterized by its ability to analyze the text in depth and going into detail. The researcher is present and personal while doing the analysis and is not only trying to gather as many parts of a conversation or social actions as possible but also find the signification and importance in these actions. The meaning of the word “personal” in this context is that the researcher’s subjective references will affect the study. With that being stated, it is of relevant to understand that while the researcher is a human being with personal references and background, he must not let his own thoughts and experiences influence the study. In this method the researcher searches for meaning (Ekström and Larsson, 2012, p. 15-19).

When speaking of researchers interpreting a text, it usually means the written word. However, this is not something obvious, since the word ”text” has gained a broader meaning and refers to language, picture, illustrations etc. Texts that contain visual elements are called visual texts (Bergström and Boréus, 2014, p.31)

This interpretive method has its roots in hermeneutics, which is the art of interpretation and reading. What defines hermeneutics it that a text can only be interpreted as the sum of its parts and the individual parts can only be understood if the whole text is understood. This is the central principle in hermeneutics, seeing parts of the text in relation to the whole and the whole text in relation to its individual parts (Ekström and Larsson, 2012, p.15-19; Bergström and Boréus, 2014, p. 26-27; 30-31). Longxi (2018) explains
hermeneutics as the principle that one must firstly recognize the sense of the word in order to know a meaning of a sentence, and when one knows the meaning, they can therefore understand the whole piece and later the entire book. Further, the other side must understand the entire book to be able to understand a piece and therefore determine the meaning of a sentence to be able to understand the meaning of a word. Simply, by accumulating small parts, one sees the whole, and by seeing the whole, one is able to understand a small part. This is called “the hermeneutic circle” and is the philological learning of the Qianlong and Jiajing periods (1736-1820) (Longxi, 2016, p.1).

**Descriptive text analysis**

For the analysis of the chosen material, descriptive text analysis will be used as one method. It is a qualitative method that focuses on what is happening in the text and how meaning is being created. This method pays particular attention to how the text builds a relationship with the reader/viewer, how it interacts with other visual texts and who it ”speaks” to. When using this method, the researcher interprets the text in depth, while also considering the context in which the text has been created. Every text is written out of specific reasons and put into a social context (Ledin and Moberg, 2012, p. 155-157).

An important term in this method is intertextuality. This regards the text’s interaction with other texts, because every text is a link in a chain of texts that have been written and that will be. The interaction between different studies and texts is what creates meaning. Further, recontextualization is a term that also refers to the interaction texts between each other, similarly to intertextuality, but the focus lies on how different words can have different meanings due to different coherence (Ledin and Moberg, 2012, p. 155-157).

**Semiotics**

This part will introduce semiotics, as it is necessary to explain before starting the coding and de-coding of “Modern Family”.

In his book *Media Semiotics – An introduction* (1997) Bignell describes the semiotic approach that is found in Roland Barthes work and that builds on Ferdinand De Saussures theories. According to Saussure the sign consists of the signifier and the signified. The first refers to the material form the sign takes, as image or sound for example, while the signified is defined as the concept to which it refers (Chandler, 2007, p. 14-15; 51). The relation between them is what produces a sign that becomes language which produces meanings and could be used to reference people, objects etc (Hall, 2013, p. 20). Saussure’s model is the base of the semiotic approach (Bignell, 1997, p.7).

Roland Barthes semiotic method has three steps which are denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation is the literal meaning of the sign, while connotation is used to describle the cultural associations of the sign (Chandler, 1994). Fiske (1982, p.91) defines denotation as what is being photographed and connotation as how it is being photographed.

Both of these term are often used when speaking of representation. Barthes argued in his earlier work that images carries three different messages, which would be the linguistic message, the symbolic message – which translates to connotation, and the literal message – which is denotation. The relationship between these describes the “intention” of the image/shot, or in this particular case, advertisement (Barthes, 1982, s. 29-34).
To explain *denotation* further, it is the first tool we use when we see a sign. By using denotation we describe what is actually happening at the image, without any connotation string (Barthes, 1977). It is hard to distinguish denotation and connotation, because people always interpret from their own perspective instantly.

As Barthes (1977) explains *connotation*, it as the interaction of what we perceive and what it means, the deeper meaning of the image. Chandler (2015) suggests that connotation is actually culturally conditioned and depending on who the perceiver of the image is and their age and gender and background matters, meaning that connotation is subjective.

The third tool that Barthes used in his analysis would be *myths*. Mythes are the dominant ideologies of our time. According to Barthes, myths work to neutralise dominant cultural beliefs so that they are natural for all in the same culture. They serve to communicate a social and political message (Bignell, 1997, p.22). To believe a myth would be a clear distinction of what is “masculine” and what is “feminine”. It could also be used to define stereotypes (Chandler, 2015). The bringing together of signs and their different connotations to send a message is what Barthes calls a “social phenomenon”, the making of a myth (Bignell, 1997, p. 16). I will in my research, in relation to this use myths to investigate how the “masculine” and “feminine” stereotype, but put focus on race and the queer community to see what connections can be found.

I have chosen to implement Barthes analytical tools to answer the main questions of this study. In order to be able to understand how the characters, their assets and personalities are created to send a specific message, denotation and connotation, as represented in Chandlers book *Semiotics – the basics* (2015) and Bignells *Media semiotics – an introduction* (1997) will be used. According to Bignell (1997, p. 141-143) much of what is broadcasted on television is apparently denotative, including both visual images and speech, however many of these signs are coded and mythic. Many of these signs are specific to television or shared by the cinema, like cinema music for example (Bignell, 1997, p.142). This study will try to answer which messages different races, gender and LGBTQ+ members sends on *Modern Family*, and what codes are implemented.

Barthes analytical tools will reflect upon the analysis, putting emphasis on myths. The study was performed by watching the four chosen episodes several times, comparing them and describing them. While describing them, different comparisons and connections appeared in my thoughts instantly, which I later wrote. Note that my analysis does not follow any strict denotation-connotation mall as many other semiotic analyses may do, but rather are lying as an undernote during the study.

**Material**

The chosen material for this study are four different episodes of *Modern Family*. The specific episodes are chosen because they have gained most attention online and/or have the most viewers of the season that they belong to. They will be analyzed chronologically so that a comparative analysis can take place.

The first one is ”Airport 2010” that belongs to season one and was broadcasted in May 5, 2009. The second one is ”The Kiss” that serves as a response to the criticism the first episode received and was broadcasted on September 29, 2010. The third episode chosen is ”I don’t know how she does it” which aired on March 2, 2016. The fourth episode is “Tough Love” which aired on December 6, 2017.
These episodes were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, “Airport 2010” and “The Kiss” have gained attention on social media due to the course of action of these shows (which shall be discussed in the analysis). It was also of importance to choose two episodes that were broadcasted in the show’s early days, making it possible to do a chronological analysis. Later on “I don’t know how she does it” and “Tough Love” were streamed six and seven years later which made a good span which is crucial to be able to see how the series have developed. I approached the material by first watching all of the episodes in all seasons. Later on, when watching again, I narrowed it down to fifteen episodes that seemed fit for the study. The meaning of “fit” in this sentence is that the representation of the three themes: race, gender and LGBTQ+ are fairly simple to recognize in these episodes. When starting the analysis, only two episodes had definitely been chosen, “Airport 2010” and “The Kiss”. When watching the newer seasons again, I made the final decision. All four episodes contains all of the three themes – however, one theme could be of higher relevance in a specific episode. The first two focus on the LGBTQ+ theme while the third and fourth discusses gender stereotypes, and breaking these. The constant is the race theme, which is transparent through all of the series and therefore not being the main reason any of the episodes were chosen, since there were never a lack of racial stereotypes.

**Ethics**

The empirical material chosen for this study are episodes of a TV-show that is available for anyone to watch. Since the material is public, everyone with internet access have the possibility of analyzing the representation of Modern Family. Due to the choice of method and the used data there have not been any major ethical issues to take stance to.

**Validity and reliability**

Regardless whether the researcher is using a qualitative or quantitative method there are two important requirements to achieve for a study to be scientific. Validity and reliability are conceptualized as trustworthiness and quality in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604).

*Validity* means that the study answers the questions at issue (Ekström and Larsson, 2012, p. 14). *Reliability* refers to, in this study, the researcher not doing any “errors” or, more specifically, letting my own personal references influence the study. High reliability occurs if another researcher gets similar results when doing a similar study (Ekström and Larsson, 2012, p.14-15). Since the analysis does answer the questions, the validity in the study is high. The reliability, however, is hard to answer, since one cannot be certain to which extend the personal references influence a study. Since the methods being used are interpretive it comes with a risk due to the fact that I have my own subjective reality and live in a certain culture. As Barthes says in Fiske (1990:119), the same objective can be interpreted in different ways when factors like the culture we live in and the personal values come into play. Therefore, I have analysed the three themes out of the theories and methods represented.

**Limitations in the study**

The study will be limited to study the three presented themes of representation in *Modern Family*. The three themes will be studied using an intersectional approach. The choice to
limit the study to the three themes is due to time and resources given. One could surely analyze different themes in *Modern Family* and present a broader analysis if studying every episode. My study, however, can show a small part of the changes occurring.

For the sake of clarity, this part will define what each theme that shall be analyzed presents in this study. When speaking of LGBTQ+ in the series, it refers mainly to Mitchell and Cameron and their relationship since they have the main roles. When discussing gender, only male and female will be analyzed, since the show does not have any non-binary or other characters. This refers to all characters in the series. Lastly, when discussing races, the focus will be on the Latin race since Gloria and Manny are from Colombia.

**Analysis**

The analysis will focus on the representation of the three themes: race, gender and LGBTQ+. In the analysis the four analyzed episodes will be referred in the text as “episode 1, episode 2, episode 3, episode 4” for the sake of clarity.

**Analysis of episode “Airport 2010” - 2009**

In this episode Gloria plans a vacation for Jay’s birthday and surprises him by taking him but also the whole family to Hawaii. In the majority of scenes in this episode, Gloria is dressed in a very deep cut shirt and is looking stereotypically “Latin” as in high heels and seductive clothing. This goes in line with Tukachinsky, Mastro and Yarchi’s research (2015) study which showed that Latin Americans are often shown as hyper-sexualized. In this episode, Gloria is also shown mispronouncing words and not being able to remember the correct word, which is also stereotypical to see in the media, as shows Merskins (2007) research. The relationship between Gloria and Jay foregrounds questions of race and stereotypes. For example, Gloria paid for the entire trip for everybody with “her” money, something which Jay reacts to hearing since the money, in fact, is his.

Another character which features in this episode is Manny, Gloria’s son. In one scene, Manny and Gloria are being held for questioning since Manny’s name matches a name on a no-fly list. Even after Gloria interrupts the guard by saying that they have already been through this at the check-in, he insists on taking them to questioning. Some frequent stereotypes are referenced during the questioning. For example, Gloria shows a great knowledge about smuggling weapons on airports and states “of course I know, I’m from Colombia”, which refers to a known stereotype about Latin countries represented as criminal and dangerous. Representation of Latinos often include characterizations as criminal or having criminal bands which a research from 2007 showed (Mastro, Behm-Morowitz, Ortiz, 2007, p, 350 see also Dixon and Linz, 2000; Greenberg et al., 2002, Mastro & Greenberg, 2000).

The homosexual couple, Mitchell and Cameron are on the airport when Mitch realizes he has forgotten his wallet at home and starts blaming Cam because he did not help him pack that morning. In this episode, many stereotypical gay traits can be defined. Cameron
is very loud and gesticulates a lot when speaking. In various scenes he is melodramatic and almost starts crying when discussing Billy Elliot and his passion for ballet with Mitchell, which is a very common representation of the LGBTQ+ community. Studying this in relation to Dyer (2000) and his definition of stereotypes one could say that Cam is represented as “the queen”, indicating that Cam is not “a real man” due to his behavior. Analyzing this with help from Barthes (1997) third tool, the myth, one could argue that Cam’s representation is used to help strengthen stereotypes in what kind of behavior is “gay”. This shows similar results in comparison to Cabosky’s (2014) theory that media has helped creating a stereotype of a group that do not share the same personality traits and are misrepresented.

The third couple introduced, Claire and Phil are at the airport when the episode starts. Phil leaves the airport to help Mitchell, which makes Claire angry since she is terrified of flying. Through most scenes in this episode she will be shown a bit irrational and scared, and only waiting for Phil to get back. When she calls him to see when he is coming back, he states that “she is pretty tightly wound.”, which is a stereotype to describe women in general, as saying that they are a bit “whiny”. Dyer’s (2000) definition of types is applicable to this representation. Since it is explained as any character that has a couple of recognizable traits that remain the same throughout the narrative, and are similar to how the world really looks.

An interesting aspect of this episode it that the two last mentioned couples are fighting over different things but that the solution is in plain communication, which they realize as they try to help each other. During these conversations they all forgive each other, so when Mitchell and Phil get back the couples make up. That makes for the most interesting scene of the episode, where Claire and Phil kiss and hug, while Mitch and Cam only hug. The couples are represented not sharing same physical affection, or basically, not letting the gay couple kiss. This scene got much attention in the media as well, as it raises questions about how inclusive Modern Family really is.

The TV-show was not scared to have a LGBTQ+ couple as its main characters but is afraid to represent physical affection between them. Analyzing this out of a Barthes (1982) analytical tools, the denotation of this image is that the heterosexual couple show physical affection, while the homosexual couple do not. The connotation of this image depends on the perspective and the viewer, as Chandler (2015) suggests. Firstly, out of a media representation perspective, the connotation could be that the show did not want that scene to be uncomfortable for people that are not as supportive of LGBTQ+ communities. The question in that case that remains is why people with those ideologies would even watch
the TV-show? Secondly, a deeper meaning could be that the couple did not want to show physical affection in public because of people’s judgement (keeping in mind that this was broadcasted in 2009), as if the show kept the scene “realistic”. However, the message from this image is that homosexual couples do not kiss, while straight do – which ever perspective it is analyzed from. This will be further discussed in the analysis of episode 2.

**Analysis of episode “The Kiss” - 2010**

In this episode, Claire is feeling disconnected to Alex, her younger daughter. She then reads her text messaged and sees that she has been texting a boy. In similarity with season one, Claire is still dramatic and is trying to control everything. This episode ends with Claire admitting that she was not always such a “good girl” as she tries to present herself. She confesses since Jay told the girls that she Claire once was dropped of naked at home in a police car. However, being the “good girl” and wanting her girls to be this way is very gender identifying for women. It is stereotypical that this is what girls should aspire to. With that being said, a conclusion can be drawn that the series represent stereotypic behavior but also shows on the opposite, which goes in line with Hine, England, Lopreope, Horgan and Hartwells (2018) research, which showed that women today have a wider range of roles.

Mitch and Cam are out shopping for a new shirt for Cameron. To compare with the episode from 2009, not much has changed in the couple dynamics. Cameron is even more gesticulative, feminine and enthusiastic while he cannot decide on what shirt to buy. Mitchell is trying to be supportive but is clearly getting impatient. This could easily be seen as a typical behavior when a heterosexual couple goes to shopping – the bored husband and excited wife, which could be described by using the definition heterosexualization of homosexuality by Kates (1999) which implies that the heteronormative society sets ground to how the homosexual relationships look. When they decide on the shirt, Cam tries to kiss Mitchell. Mitchell rejects him a discussion about Mitchell’s problem with public affection is opened where Cam remembers one time when Mitchell high-fived him at New Year’s Eve, and he says: “Two problems with that. One, gays don’t hi-five. Two, gays don’t hi-five.” This quote is exclusive and problematic since it is putting all homosexuals into one box. Gloria is cooking traditional Colombian food to honor her late grandmother and Jay makes fun of her and her food. After realizing that Gloria is upset, Jay starts apologizing and offers to help with the food. Gloria uses the situation the get revenge at Jay, making him do ridiculous stuff all day and saying that it is Colombian tradition. To compare with season one, Gloria is still wearing very tight and “provocative” outfits in all scenes and spends majority of the scenes cooking and looks attractive even in her movements (Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2017, p. 541). Gloria tells some references about Latinos, thus they are not negative. She says that Latinos kiss for no special reasons and that they are not lunatics (referring to the stuff she manipulated Jay into doing).

Phil has spent the day helping Jay with his printer and he was very excited to do so since Jay never asks for his help with anything. Jay states in the episode that his son-in-law is not better in anything than him, and in the majority of scenes Phil is represented a bit clumsy,
unlike the patriarch of the family. An interesting aspect is the representation of masculinity in these characters. Jay is, in general also, but in this episode a very stereotypical man with no emotional displays and takes care of everything. Phil is more of a nerd and more sensitive. For example, after he fixed Jay’s printer, he only gets a “thanks” from Jay. He gets a bit disappointed but receives a hug from him after the rest of the family intervenes. For example, coding for masculinity do not allow weakness to be shown and privilege the attribute of toughness, for example in western movies, thus this is a general statement (Hall, 2013, p.315) Masculinity has changed “definition” over time, arguing that being able to show a more sensitive side is perceived as a strength.

The whole family gather at Jay and Gloria’s to honor her grandmother but the whole thing gets out of hand when Mitchell rejects yet another kiss from Cameron. A big family discussion is started, and the family realize that Mitchell’s discomfort with showing emotions in public is due to Jay being emotionally closed off and never kissing or hugging his children. Jay finally kisses Mitchell and Claire, with Mitch and Cam kissing in the background subtly. This is the biggest change compared to the episode analyzed before in this paper. The kiss is also interesting from different aspects. Firstly, the couple finally kissed, after a lot of pressure from viewers. It appears that the cast had a good story developing which had to put the kiss on hold. Secondly, the kiss happened in the background, while Jay was kissing Claire. After episode 1 aired, a big Facebook campaign called ”Let Cam and Mitchell kiss on Modern Family!” was created. When they finally did, episode 2, the kiss turned out to be “both frustratingly and admirably understated” Willa Paskin from Vulture comments. She continues: “On the one hand, seriously, that's what you call a kiss?!” On the other, Modern Family’s creators didn’t bow to the pressure to make Cam and Mitchell’s kiss a huge deal, sacrificing character and story line in the process”. (L6) This kiss could be also be discussed with help from Barthes (1977) analytical tools. The denotation of this scene is that the viewer could barely see the couple kiss, since it was in the background. The connotation, however, could be approached from two point of views: 1) the tv-show did not want to create a big scene out of this kiss, once again for the sake of the more non-including viewers; 2) the tv-show wanted to make the scene very “casual” as if the first kiss by the homosexual couple is normal (which they fail to do in season one).

Analysis of episode “I don’t know how she does it” - 2016

The plot of this episode is that Claire has turned into “super mom” while running Jay’s business, where she is chief executive and Jay retired. She also has enough time for all the duties at home. She actually has an assistant that helps her with her tasks, but she feels like she is failing in the most important area for her, which is being a mom. In comparison to the episodes before, the greatest change is that Claire has a job after twenty years of being a stay-at-home mom. This episode is particularly interesting to analyze from a gender perspective in various ways. On one hand, the chief executive of a big company is a
woman, which is still rare today (Link 7). On the other hand, Claire still feels that being a mother is the most important thing for her. However, the most interesting aspect is the expectation that she is supposed to be able to do it all - take excellent care of the children and excelling at her new job at the same time. This also goes well in line with Hine, England, Lopreope, Horgan and Hartwells (2018) research which showed that women are represented with strong and independent personalities more than before.

Jay and Gloria are exhausted after not sleeping because Joe cried all night and is still full of energy. In this season, Gloria is still dressing in provocative outfits in all the scenes. An interesting aspect is that Gloria has been cooking in this episode and that Jay once more does not appreciate the food and wants to feed Stella with it. That is a pattern that can be noticed in the last two seasons, that Colombian food is referred to as “weird” (Due to people being fond of Latin cuisine in general, it is quite interesting that the show takes it up on this note. In this episode, Gloria referred to her life in Colombia to compare with Joe not sleeping, when she had to watch for the marauders in her village and that kept her up. Colombia, even if briefly, is still being spoken of in a negative context in this season.

Mitch, Cam and Lilly are on a wedding and placed at a very bad table which surprises them, and they discuss what could have caused this. After a lot of speculating, they finally get an answer from Pepper, the wedding planner, that the reason they have been treated “poorly” is because they have answered the last two wedding invitations rudely. Mitch and Cam realizes that they never had gotten the invitation, and it comes out that Lilly was the one that RSVP-ed for them because she is embarrassed because of the way her dads dance. They ignore this and dance even more. In this episode Mitch and Cam spend all the scenes on the wedding, where every guest they speak to are of the LGBTQ+ community and acts have rather stereotypical gestures, communication between them, for example a lot of gossiping, and are getting dramatic for rather small reasons. The biggest change in comparison to the seasons analyzed before is that Lilly obviously have grown enough to RSVP wedding invitation and feel embarrassment. Mitch and Cam’s dance and movements are very “over the top” and are stereotypical when describing a gay couple. (Dyer, 2000, p. 19) This aspect has remained the same when comparing to the episodes before, the LGBTQ+ characters are still represented with remarkable stereotypical traits and show little, if any change.

This goes in line with Dyer’s (2000) second role of stereotypes, which indicates that they work as shortcuts – meaning that stereotypes are a very simple form of representation, but actually are containing complex information. It takes much for an individual to understand a stereotype. Since our society sees this behavior as stereotypical, we could implement Barthes (1997) tool myths again.

Bringing together signs, like Cam and Mitch dancing “feminine”, the dramatic movements and everybody hypersensitive at the gay wedding together strengthen the stereotypes and in order with that, the myth of how homosexual people are. Since everyone showed (except for Lilly) acted the same way, it can be studied out of Halls (1997) theories about different cultural assumptions within different cultures. Since culture is understood as “shared value” among different member of the same culture, a line can be drawn that the “members” of the LGBTQ+ community behave alike, and are also represented that way in general.
Analysis of the episode “Though Love” – 2018

This episode starts by explaining to the viewer that Phil recently left his real estate firm to strike out on his own. He decides that a solo camping trip in the woods for a week is what he needs to boost his confidence before starting. When he is there, everything goes wrong and he ends up taking in on a hotel on the first night, not the seventh (as planned). Phil does this trip to prove his masculinity by staying in the wild for 6 days. When the trip does not go as planned and every bad thing possible happens, he checks in at the hotel the first night. When speaking to Claire, he tells her he is still in the wild since he is embarrassed to admit that he could not stick with his camping trip. Discussing this out of a gender aspect, it is interesting that in 2018, Phil cannot tell Claire that he checked in early because he is too proud and scared to be less masculine.

Masculinity today is portrayed differently that it was before. Stuart Hall (2013) discusses the “new man”. His argument regarding menswear in first hand, but can be used to explain the “new man” as a way of representation. A lot of practices, such as shopping, grooming, dressing are all-important to be part of the “new man” imagery. Keeping in mind that this analysis refers to the 1980’s, and primarily on the looks, thus it is also applicable today and in this case of Phil, sitting at a bubble bath in a bathrobe. Simultaneously, Claire is having a lot to take care of at work and there had been some mix up because of which Claire has to drive a truck since no one else is available. Claire does not know how to drive a truck and learns this on the way. The show does not explain how she was able to do this, since she would need a commercial driver’s license to do so. However, in doing this she states that driving a truck “makes her feel like a real man”. Once again, the show takes on a stereotype about gender roles, and how it is manly to, in this specific case drive a truck. The scenes are also happening at the same time, so while Phil is preparing his bubble bath at the hotel, Claire is driving a truck. It is an interesting aspect that while the characters are saying stereotypical lines, they are represented behaving in ways that are clearly un-stereotypical and are in this way challenging the gender roles. In comparison to the episodes streamed before, Claire’s character has grown from being a stay-at-home mom to a chief with too much on her plate, to a woman that handles what is thrown at her and still has time to go comfort her husband. Furthermore, Phil’s character has always been a bit vulnerable and sensitive, but is being more honest with these as the seasons go by, and challenging the typical “masculinity”, which is somewhat similar as the findings from Hine, England,

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Lopreose, Horgan and Hartwell’s study (2018, see also Davis 2013) which shows that male roles are evolving and maturing. Nixon’s (2013) approach could also be suitable in this scenario. Stating that masculinity are products of cultural meanings attached to certain behaviors, and that they differ due to culture and era, one could argue that Phil’s lack of being able to show vulnerability is changing from twenty years ago when that aspect would not even be shown.

Jay and Gloria are having trouble accepting Manny’s new girlfriend which is also his teacher. She tries to strangle her which is what the viewers are to expect since Gloria is shown in the episodes analyzed before as an impulsive character. Another interesting aspect is that Gloria is still wearing outfits with a lot of cleavage in most of the scenes. Her movements are mentioned in this episode again as in episode 2 of this analysis. This aspect has not changed over the last nine years since the show started streaming and with the character becoming a mother again. She is still represented as very attractive. Something that has changed is her behavior after she tries to strangle Manny’s new girlfriend, which is something Manny discusses himself. When speaking to Jay about the situation and his insecurities regarding his new girlfriend we can discuss some different interesting topics.

Firstly, Manny is unsure about being intimate with his new girlfriend and speaks to Jay about it. This is the second time in this episode that a male character shows vulnerability and can be referred to the new definition of masculinity – being able to show emotion (Hine, England, Lopreose, Horgan, Hartwell, 2018, p.4-5, see also Davis 2013) Secondly, when discussing Gloria’s acceptance with Manny and his girlfriend sleeping over, he says: “Where is the crazy Colombian the one time I need her?” from which the viewer can assume two things: 1) Gloria has matured in her character as a mother; 2) Colombian women are crazy. The first comes naturally, as the series have streamed, and Manny is almost an adult. The other, however, is interesting since it is implying that she is not “crazy” anymore, yet the viewer is supposed to pick up on the hint that Colombian people are crazy in general, as the analysis so far have shown. In comparison with the other analyzed episodes, it is clear to state that Colombia is still represented mostly in a negative matter since the show starts streaming. There has not been much evolving with Gloria’s or Manny’s character if speaking about how Colombians are represented. Growth in the characters is seen in other ways which are not valuable for this study.

Mitch and Cam have also remained same in their dynamics in the relationship, as Mitch being the structured and calm one, and Cam the overly dramatic one. The characters are still having a heteronormative relationship as presented in the beginning of the show and as discussed above.
Summary

This analysis has focused on representation in *Modern Family*, limited to three themes: gender, race and LGBTQ+. Other views of representation, for example of the children or the society have not been questioned since they are not of value in this analysis. What is possible to conclude regarding these topics is that several aspects have changed during the nine-year span, as where other have remained the same.

When discussing the female gender, the focus has been on Claire where it is obvious that the character has evolved from being a stay-at-home mom to being chief executive. The importance of this is huge since she is not only a businesswoman, yet she is excelling at it and it is represented as something in the norm, yet hard. On the other hand the focus has also lied on Phil where "masculinity" have taken on a different toll, exploring the limits of how a non-typical masculinity is regarded as something different yet human and encouraged. With that being said, the analysis have shown traditionalist tendencies in these roles as well, especially in episodes one and two, where some more stereotypical traits are shown, such as Claire keeping up the story about being a "good girl" while young in episode 2, and Phil being very calmed and not particularly understanding in episode 1.

Another character, which has been discussed in terms of masculinity, is Jay. While it is evident that he represents the typical man in the first three episodes, with little emotions and not understanding the point of them, his authoritative figure and being the head of the family, it is possible to see growth in the character in episode 4, where he talks to Manny about his feelings towards his girlfriend. I am not saying that men are incapable of showing emotions, however it is important to show this on television, so that young boys identifying themselves with the characters are aware. Same things can reflect on young girls watching Claire managing her job and life in a good way.

The character that has been discussed in terms of race, but also from a gender perspective is Gloria. A safe statement to make is that her character has not changed appearance in any remarkable way during the nine-year span. Stereotypes are replicated many times, as in referring to Colombia as criminal and poor or any way negative. Even though very slight comments were made, for example in episode 4, it is to be understood by the viewer that Gloria and other Colombians are a bit "crazy". It is possible to identify growth in this character as well in the last episode when she is accepting Manny’s girlfriend. However, this does not regard the "growth in representation of race" or stereotypes regarding Latin people, in which the show has not changed comparing to the beginning of the series.

The last theme is regarding the LGBTQ+ or Mitch and Cam. In all of the episodes analyzed it is rather easy identifying the "female" and "male" of the relationship, in which Cameron appears as the theatrical, melodramatic wife and Mitch the husband that takes care of it. With this being said, Mitch himself is not represented as a "manly" male, only the calmer one. I will once again state that this analysis is speaking of the episodes above. There have been other episodes that may have shown a different picture, thus has this remained the premise for the TV-show. The show may strike as progressive; thus it is hard not to realize that the couple is represented from a heteronormative perspective, replicating almost all of the stereotypes that LGBTQ+ faces daily. The biggest change that the tv-show has made regarding this couple is actually allowing them to kiss in episode 2. The tv-show insists that the kiss took that long to appear due to Mitchell’s difficulty of displaying
affection publicly. However, the case remains that it took a whole season before the kiss took place. In episode 3 or 4 it was no kissing of the characters either.

**Conclusion and discussion**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the representation of the two genders, the Latin race and LGBTQ+ characters in *Modern Family* over nine years of the show running. To perform the analysis, several tools from the semiotic approach and descriptive text analysis have been used. The results show that the female characters on modern family was represented as stay-at-home mothers with a wish to control the most. Since the analysis was done from an intersectional perspective, the different characters have been analyzed from different views and taking different aspects into consideration. The next three paragraphs serve as answers to the research questions.

- In what ways are the female, male, Latin and LGBTQ+ characters on *Modern Family* represented?

The representation of females have is broader, it is meant that the characters have shown growth in different areas of life; the male representation have changed as well, since the traditional masculine patriarch is present simultaneously as the funny and sensitive man is, which gives “masculinity” the chance of changing – which it constantly does; the LGBTQ+ characters are represented stereotypically, and even though the tv-show is inclusive for having these characters, the representation of them is done from a heteronormative perspective, as our society is.

- Has the representation of race, gender and LGBTQ+ changed over the nine years since *Modern Family* started broadcasting? If so, in what ways?

The representation of the female characters has changed over the nine years since the show started running, since the characters have grown both emotionally and professionally. However, some aspects, as Gloria being represented as an overly attractive house-wife, or Claire as a controlling mother have not changed; the main way in which the representation of the male characters shows is regarding their emotional growth, as Jay being able to discuss Manny’s problems out of Manny’s perspective as an emotional young man instead of his own, and Phil forcing himself to tell Claire that he does not feel masculine after failing at his camping trip, but still not being able to tell her that he checked in on the hotel early shows that there is more work to be done in this area; the representation of the LGBTQ+ characters have changed in the matter that the characters showed physical affection in episode two, thus has the representation of these characters not changed in a big note over the nine years. In season nine, Mitchell is shown a bit more careless, and Cameron is working, which could be the greatest changes found in the analysis of these episodes.
What stereotypes replicate the different characters depending on their race, gender and LGBTQ+?

The stereotypes that replicate regarding the female gender are both stay-at-home moms, at least in the beginning, which can be discussed as sexist out of a traditional perspective; regarding the male gender, all of them, except for Cameron have successful carriers. Cameron not having one is something that shall be further discussed in the study. The male characters are also represented as strong and independent. Even though Phil is sensitive, it is not implied that he needs Claire in the way she has shown the need for him in episode 1 and 3, until the last episode, where the viewer understands that he needs her, but he is too proud to say it – which also is a stereotypical trait; regarding the LGBTQ+ characters the analysis point at many stereotypes being replicated such as Cameron’s gestures, the way he dresses, the way the characters resonate with each other and alone in the interviews. Another stereotypical trait regarding the homosexual couple is that one of them is found more feminine, or the “girl” of the relationship, which a heteronormative society expects. Mitchell replicates other stereotypes as being more private and not taking up much space when they are in the public, neither with his behavior nor physical affection. He appears calmer, until the last episode, when he and Cam are shown dancing in an (for Lilly) embarrassing way, meaning that the dance is very dramatic and attention-drawing, which is also a stereotypical trait.

The analysis found that the representation of the characteristics of several main characters have changed over the nine years since episode 1 and episode 4 aired, but not in all. Claire and Gloria have been analyzed from different aspects since Gloria’s character have been studied out of a race view as well. The results of analyzing Claire show that the representation of her has changed for the last five years of the show running, since she after five years started working again which opened new ways of representing the female gender. Since being a rational and structured person over-all, it is interesting to see from how she excelled at being a house-wife, she now excels at running her father’s company. As earlier research by Hine, England, Lopreose, Horgan, Hartwell, 2018, p.4-5, see also Davis 2013, show, women are today represented with broader personalities and stronger characters – which continues to develop with season 9 in Modern Family and Claire Dunphy’s business running.

The male gender has also witnessed some change during the years. While not expecting that to be the case due to the nature of the tv-show, both Phil and Jay have shown capability of showing emotions and being less “macho” than the norm once was. The representation of Latinos on Modern Family has not changed over the nine years – the Latin woman stereotypes and a little racial connotation to the jokes are still crucial for the show – even if saying them like Manny says in episode four: “Where is the crazy Colombian when I need her?” implies that she is not “crazy” anymore, the connotation behind it suggests
craziness. Due to our population demanding a more inclusive society, and having done so for the past nine years, I expected that the results would show that *Modern Family* have dropped the stereotyping. Due to Gloria’s behavior and Manny’s comment we can state that the representation has not improved in this area. Regarding Gloria as a female character, she represents the traditional stereotypes as well, often shown cooking in the comparative analysis, while always looking attractive. Lastly, the representation of the LGBTQ+ community might be where I was most surprised to find little to no change in the stereotypical traits that define the queer community. Raley and Lucas research (2008) shows that LGBTQ+ characters were represented as negative lights in the beginning of including them. While this certainly is not the case today, and not in this tv-show, other stereotypes regarding behavior and character are replicated.

Studies regarding representations of minorities in media are always welcomed due to their importance. This study limits on only four episodes on a show that has many, many more which points to the fact that a bigger study can be done on *Modern Family* to distinguish more stereotypes and/or whether they have been reduced – or will be in the last two seasons. Other interesting questions to study could be the audience perception on these kinds of shows, to try to establish how much of a negative influence these stereotypes can build or an analysis of gender representations in shows broadcasted after 2015 only. Since the society we live in today is becoming more inclusive all the time, so should the media representations.
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