

Visibility and Legitimacy of the Heterosexual Female

Character on *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List*

Quintin Walker

University of Minnesota

### Abstract

This project investigates the role of the heterosexual female character on two reality television shows, *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) and *The A-List* (2010-2011), that target a dual audience consisting of the homosexual male and the heterosexual female. In Section One, I investigate how both shows are able to target this dual audience, as well as the representational politics of each character type. From this, I perform a close textual analysis of the each character's coding by utilizing Katherine Sender's "Dualcasting," or the idea that both audiences can be targeted through advertising that is crafted to appeal to both demographics. In Section Two, I investigate what intent is behind the existence of the heterosexual female and whether her character reinforces or dismantles a heteronormative gender structure. In Section Three, I assess how the audience responds to both the homosexual male and the heterosexual female characters based upon fan forum response. In this section, my goal is to investigate the legitimacy of the female character through eyes of the audience and her role in creating significance on these shows.

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## Introduction

Amidst the vast quantity of research on queer visibility in television from 2003 to 2014, I noticed a very concerning trend. Namely, much of the preexisting research of queer and LGBT visibility on television has focused on the appearance of queer or homosexual characters on television that targets a heterosexual audience. However, there is very little research that investigates the role of heterosexual characters that target a homosexual audience. In other words, the focus of this paper will focus on the heterosexual character as a foil to the homosexual male. In order to address the inadequacy in research that I found, the research in this paper will investigate the representation of the heterosexual female in *Boy Meets Boy* (Bravo, 2003) and *The A-List: New York* (Logo, 2010-2011), two shows that, in part, target a queer audience. For the purposes of this research, the term “queer” will serve to differentiate between heteronormative audiences, which advertisers are accustomed to targeting, and audiences of individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. Although these shows may target a wider audience than the heterosexual female and the homosexual male, the research presented here will singly focus on the relationship between these character types. Furthermore, I will also focus on exploring the role of the heterosexual female through analyzing audience experience via responses on fan forums. These “fandoms” will serve as a source of audience feedback on not only the queer characters, but also how the audience either legitimates or denies the visibility of the heterosexual female.

First, this paper will analyze the representational politics of the heterosexual female presented on *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List: New York* by utilizing Katherine Sender’s theory of “dualcasting,” or the idea that a single program can target a two distinct audiences—in this case, the homosexual male and the heterosexual female audiences (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 302-303). I

aim to utilize my investigation of the “dualcast” tendencies of television programs in order to demonstrate that the heterosexual female character is given a role on said programs for a *purpose*. In other words, her role on these programs is to promote the “natural” friendship or partnership between the homosexual male and heterosexual female is something to be sought out by both audiences. In both shows analyzed in this research, audiences are presented with a representation of the homosexual male and heterosexual female as close friends or partners. Sender claims this representation has been crafted by advertisers and marketers in order to create an imagined “consumer culture” (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 302-303). This “consumer culture” is an endorsement of the idea that gay men should be heralded as a straight woman’s ideal match because of his taste, style, and affluent lifestyle, all which align with her interests in life (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 302-303). However, advertisers also gain from the grouping of these two disparate demographics, as they have the potential to increase viewership and advertising revenues when a show is marketed to both groups (*Business*, 2004, p. 5). *Boy Meets Boy* is an example of a “dualcast” show because it features a gay theme, but also has been, as Bravo network stated, targeted towards women through the marketing of the show’s controversy. Unlike *Boy Meets Boy*, *The A-List: New York* was originally targeted at a queer audience through maintaining an entirely queer cast and openly selling the show to advertisers as a queer-themed show. As stated, this queer audience is comprised of, but not limited to, the homosexual male audience. The use of “queer” here implies that the network originally intended to exclude heterosexual characters from the program. However, the show became “dualcast” due to plummeting ratings. Nyasha Zimucha, the heterosexual female, was “dualcast” in order to alter the show’s plot and increase viewership and ratings. Investigation of this process is important to understanding how heavily influenced our views on our own interpersonal relationships are by

marketing and advertising.

Second, this project will examine the representation of power dynamics between the homosexual male and the heterosexual female. Specifically, I aim to prove that dialogue between these characters has an effect in the reinforcement or deconstruction of heteronormativity, or the view that heterosexuality is the preferred or natural sexual orientation (Fiske, 2001, p. 4-5). Furthermore, this project will examine how dialogue is constructed within *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List: New York* through the camera, sound, editing, lighting, as well as actual storyline. For instance, I seek to show that the female character has the power to either reinforce heteronormative structure by reminding the audience of the difference between her “normative” sexuality and the main character’s homosexuality (“Guy Love,” 2009, p. 124).

Alternatively, however, she also has the ability to become a tool for expanding tolerance and/or acceptance of homosexuality in mainstream culture (Barnhurst, 2007, p. 5). In the latter case, the female shows the audience, especially other heterosexual females, that homosexuality should be tolerated, and even accepted, through her friendship with a homosexual male. However, it is imperative to note that she maintains a level of power over her homosexual male friend because it is still she who creates this tolerance. In both shows, it seems that the heterosexual female believes that she is present to expand tolerance. As Nyasha stated in an interview with Queerty.com, a news website for a queer audience, straight people and gay people should be able to hang out without it being “illegal” (Raymundo, 2011). However, she also notes that she enjoys being a cast member because “gay men love their divas,” directly supporting the claim that she reinforces a heteronormative structure through reminding the audience of the homosexual male’s difference from her “normative” sexuality through highlighting stereotypes of his character (Raymundo, 2011).

Finally, this research will explore the experiences of the audience during the airing of both shows by examining fan forums. In exploring the epicenter of fan response, this research will examine interactions between members of the audience on fan forums through the lenses of “dualcasting” and power dynamics —specifically focusing on how the audience reacts to the representational politics presented on the shows. This work will examine how the discourse of representation has changed since the creation of *Boy Meets Boy* and assess how this affects the audience response to representations on *The A-List*. Through the three sections of this thesis, specifically focusing on *Boy Meets Boy (BMB)* and *The A-List: New York (The A-List)*, I argue that the heterosexual female’s role on television programs that target a queer, or non heteronormative audience, is a creation utilized by producers and marketers in order to craft a profitable market, but also that she, either intentionally or not, is given enough power to influence how she, and others characters, are understood by the audience. Lastly, I will analyze the legitimacy that the heterosexual female herself receives from viewers who participate in online fan forum discussions in order to have a greater understanding of the effects she may have on the audience.

### Show Summaries

#### *Boy Meets Boy*

*Boy Meets Boy* is a U.S. dating reality show similar in format to ABC’s *The Bachelor*, in which Jeff Getzlaff, the show’s “leading man,” searches for love among 15 potential male suitors. In this homosexual format adaptation of a traditional heterosexual reality TV dating show, a world is introduced “where gay is the norm and straight men must stay in the closet” (Minerd, Ross & Smith, 2003, Ep. 1). In *Boy Meets Boy*, the assumption of sexual orientation shifts. This active shift of the “closet” in *Boy Meets Boy* attempts to open a dialogue about acceptance of

sexual identity in order to, as the host states, see if the show can “bridge the gap between straight and gay” through shattering stereotypes (Minerd et al., 2003, Ep. 1).

Premiering on the Bravo cable television network in July 2003, the show was deemed controversial, not only for the visibility of openly gay characters, but also for the twist that the show entails—that some of the male suitors are “closeted heterosexuals,” or straight men just pretending to be gay in an attempt to win the \$25,000 prize if they are chosen by Getzlaff. Just before its premiere, media outlets such as ABC News reported that the central controversy of the show was the executive producers’ claim that *Boy Meets Boy* would open “the hearts and minds of gay and straight viewers as they experience [ . . . ] the romantic journey of our leading man” (Oringer, 2003). This premise was deemed controversial because of the unique twist of *Boy Meets Boy*, which reportedly made straight viewers uncomfortable. However, it was also noted that this controversy drew in a younger, more progressive, female audience, and as a result, the show’s producers cast Andra, Getzlaff’s heterosexually identified female best friend, to serve as a heteronormative character who holds “veto power” over his decisions, with whom the “progressive” female audience could identify (Oringer, 2003).

#### *The A-List: New York*

*In The A-List: New York*, the Logo cable network’s “docusoap,” viewers are presented with a real, albeit edited, look into the relationships, careers and party-oriented lifestyle of six men who identify as gay or bisexual. The Logo network, owned by Viacom Media Networks, focuses on preparing programs that present “wildly original characters” that “live surprising and unapologetic lives” (“What is Logo?”). In recent years, the network faced financial turmoil, and was faced to incorporate media that “attracts a straight audience that wants to be ahead of the curve,” allowing them a larger audience (“What is Logo?”). *The A List: New York* premiered in



October 2010 and was produced by New York City-based True Entertainment, the production company made famous for Bravo's *Real Housewives of Atlanta*. *The A-List: New York* was notable because it cast and featured solely gay and bisexual men. This group was later titled Logo's "Housewives ... With Balls," in reference to the show's similarity to Bravo's Real Housewives franchise, which targets both heterosexual women and gay men. In the following year, however, the show was victim of poor ratings and in danger of being cancelled. In order to repair the show's image, the second season of *The A-List: New York* debuted one year later and maintained the same format, but added a new cast member—Nyasha Zimucha, a self-identifying heterosexual female. In 2011, *The A-List* expanded its franchise to Dallas, Texas, and also included a heterosexually identified female cast member in order to expand its audience, as stated by Nyasha herself.

Created nearly one decade apart, both shows are noteworthy for the partnership between homosexual men and heterosexual women that is presented to viewers. The packaging of both character types into a single show has been an enduring trend in Reality TV that targets a queer audience through the subject of the show, as the casting of only gay and bisexual men in the first season of *The A-List: New York* illustrates. Additionally, it has been a trend that can be seen in marketing and advertising techniques of shows to a female heterosexual audience, such as the controversy over *Boy Meets Boy* that drew in a young, progressive female audience. As Katherine Sender states in "Dualcasting: Bravo's Gay Programming and the Quest for Women Audiences," the initial airing of *Boy Meets Boy* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* in 2003 confused many viewers, due to the rapid proliferation of gay-themed programming on the network. However, Bravo asserted that the increase in gay-themed programming on what had previously been a network targeting predominantly heterosexual females did not implicate the

network as a “queer network” (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 302-303). Instead, it was important to target a larger, more progressive audience that consisted of heterosexual females and homosexual men in a niche network market (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 305-309).

In the years since *Boy Meets Boy* debuted on Bravo in 2003, there has been a proliferation of programs targeted directly at a queer-identifying audience. *The A-List: New York*, for instance, both featured a group of solely gay and bisexual men and was also sold to advertisers as a queer-themed show. Katherine Sender notes that Bravo utilized a very different marketing strategy from that of Logo, saying

In contrast to Logo’s strategy of gay narrowcasting, which requires that a large proportion of a relatively small target market be attracted to shows and watch advertising, Bravo is ‘dualcasting’: targeting two specific audiences, gays and women aged 18 to 49, with the same shows. Given the struggles PrideVision, Canada’s dedicated gay network, has faced in amassing a large enough subscriber base to become profitable, such dualcasting tactics might prove necessary to make gay television financially viable.

(“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 314)

While Logo may not have begun its approach to *The A-List* in this fashion, it is important to note that increasing financial pressures in a niche marketing era forced the network to alter its approach to targeting a queer audience. Logo began to dualcast characters by including heterosexual female characters to shows previously focused on solely a gay audience.

### Literature Review

To elaborate on the ideas presented in the introduction, it is first important to examine the preexisting literature on the representation of queer people on television. To begin, Joshua

Gamson outlines that the late 20th century was a very influential time for the increase of visibility of queer folk (“It’s Been a While,” 2013). These years, he stated, are integral for the representation of “sexual- and gender-nonconforming people, many of whom had been longing for or actively seeking cultural visibility that more closely matched their own lives, the opportunity to speak for themselves was exciting” (“It’s Been a While,” 2013). This was, for many people, the first time they could be visible on television. Due to this time period of grasping for visibility, self-exposure was on the rise. Most importantly, Gamson discusses that the casting of straight women and gay men has changed representations on reality television, in that gay men are now seen as “style-mavens” and objects to be consumed, just as they consume (“It’s Been a While,” 2013).

To further articulate the arrival of homosexual characters on television, Katherine Sender, in the documentary *Off the Straight and Narrow*, outlines the arrival of queer visibility in media through the years 1967-1998. Even though she notes, “Most of us grew up not knowing any openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual people,” throughout these years, the American public saw an increase of gay and lesbian characters through television’s “rich panoply of characters for understanding the world” (*Off the Straight and Narrow*, 1998). First and foremost, representation of queer folk began as performing the role of a one-off character, or a character that provided comic relief from the heteronormative plot line (*Off the Straight and Narrow*, 1998). In this way, the gay male sexuality never had to be outwardly discussed. Even though the gay male could be considered the friend of the straight female leading character, he was limited to speaking about her life and experiences, using his own as the basis for a joke that would serve to “spice up the lives of straight casts” (*Off the Straight and Narrow*, 1998). However, this changed during the AIDS crisis when the world was opened to a very real reality—that gay people are sexual, even

though it was not shown on television (*Off the Straight and Narrow*, 1998). Sender notes that gay men were highly discussed, while lesbian women were all but left out of the dialogue about sexuality and sexual orientation. Even in the first television documentaries about homosexuality, not one female was interviewed (*Off the Straight and Narrow*, 1998). Thus, the gay male's immense visibility and representation left him the spotlight, allowing him to be perceived as the villain or cause of the AIDS crisis. This is important because it will later be the gay male, and not the lesbian female, who is legitimized by advertisers, possibly due to the sheer amount of visibility gay males got during the AIDS crisis (*Off the Straight and Narrow*, 1998).

Anthony Freitas, author of the essay "Gay Programming, Gay Publics Public and Private Tensions in Lesbian and Gay Cable Channels," writes about the creation of queer-targeted cable networks in the niche network era of television. "These very narrowly targeted channels," he states, "employed innovative funding and programming strategies to overcome financial and regulatory barriers," or in other words, were required to expand their viewership in order to maintain profitability (Freitas, 2007, p. 215). These networks, such as PrideVision in Canada and Logo in the United States, many times have not been founded by demand for representation of queer folk, but by "established media interests" that only sometimes will utilize lesbian and gay media groups as consultants (Freitas, 2007, p. 215). Additionally, these networks are consistently run by heterosexual individuals whose ideas of a queer audience stem from a "series of assumption about the lesbian and gay community," which represent it as "media-savvy, brand-loyal, trendsetting with large disposable incomes," and finally, as "the ideal market" (Freitas, 2007, p. 215). These non-queer executives create media, in this case television programs, that reinforce the stereotypes with which the programs were created, and in doing so, both call the viewer to identify with what they see, but also simultaneously aids in crafting the identity with

which the viewer identifies (Freitas, 2007, p. 215). As stated, gay men, and not lesbian women, have been targeted through the history of representation of queer folk on television. In both *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List: New York*, we see sets of gay or bisexual men, keeping up with the trends Gamson, Sender, and Frietas point to, while we do not see representation of any lesbian characters. Freitas reaffirms this, stating that in recent years gay men have been marketed as more financially stable than lesbians, who “are more likely to have lower disposable incomes than their straight contemporaries” (Freitas, 2007, p. 215). The visibility of the gay male, thus, is seen as visibility of an affluent community, while the visibility of lesbian women is still quite limited, even on niche marketing networks.

As invisible as the lesbian female character may be, the coupling of the homosexual male with the heterosexual female is a trend that has stayed consistent in reality television, especially in the early 2000s with the airing of shows such as *Boy Meets Boy* and the second season of *The A-List: New York*. According to Helene A. Shugart, this coupling is highly complicated. She notes that this coupling often appears on television created for heterosexual viewers who then maintain power over how the gay male is represented (Shugart, 2003, p. 68). However, the increase in visibility of the gay male character’s homosexuality is “consistent with privileged male heterosexuality but is articulated as extending heterosexual male privilege,” or in other words, Shugart believes that the coupling of the characters in and of itself “simultaneously is defined by and renormalizes heteronormativity” (Shugart, 2003, p. 68). James Allan author of the chapter in *Media Q: media/queered : Visibility and its discontents* titled “And Baby Makes Three... Gay Men, Straight Women, and the Parental Imperative in Film and Television” claims that gay men and straight women have long been paired together in television depictions of queerness. However, he also outlines that “various sociological studies have reported that gay

men, like straight men, generally prefer to socialize with other men,” even though “North American popular culture consistently generates stories that present, promote, and naturalize relationships between gay men and straight women” (Allan, 2007, p. 59). Gamson believe that, as is seen in *Boy Meets Boy*, the heterosexual female can show the audience a level of understanding towards the homosexual male that the audience can then reciprocate (“Reality Queens,” 2013, p. 54). About the pairing that Gamson discusses, Allan writes, “Creating gay-man-straight-woman duos is one of the least threatening ways to include gay male characters in mainstream media texts” (Allan, 2007, p. 59). The heterosexual female provides the audience a sense of comfort.

Knowing that the coupling exists in shows like *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List: New York*, it is important to investigate why executives of networks that target a queer audience would choose to cast the homosexual male and the heterosexual female as a set. In this section of my thesis, I examine how marketing interests have helped create a “consumer culture” that is comprised of homosexual men and heterosexual women. Marketing and advertising officials create this “consumer culture” by who aim to target both groups because the homosexual male is the ideal match for a heterosexual female because of his taste, style, and affluent lifestyle (“Dualcasting” 302-303). In her book *Business, Not Politics*, Katherine Sender outlines that although business and politics are closely intertwined, they are marketed (by marketers) as entirely separate spheres. This, she argues, is in order to maintain a sense of calm about the marketers themselves promoting gay-themed shows and brands, but not promoting queer politics. Business is described as “a rational system in which ‘economic action is separated from cultural and social relations and is carried out in a separate sphere, the economic’,” while politics is described as the “image of activities that are irrational, out of control, biased towards the

interests of one group, and utterly incompatible with—even damaging to—the needs of a healthily functioning economy” (*Business*, 2004, p. 3). In this separation, marketers are able to appease gay viewers by showing them as visible creatures that can find self-recognition in the ads that they see, while they can actually help the gay audience forget about gay politics—because the marketers have separated themselves from politics. Once again, we can see that it is not a coincidence that the heterosexual female was cast in *The A-List* for the second season. By showing her natural support for the homosexual male characters, Nyasha shows the audience a reality where homosexual characters are accepted by heterosexual females, obscuring the lived truth that queer people, homosexual men included, are still discriminated against. Through presenting viewers with an idealized setting of acceptance, marketers can maintain the separation between business and politics.

However, Sender outlines that marketers are actually creating the identity of the gay market, further complicating the gay identity on television. By this, she means that marketers form a distorted picture of what gay and lesbians are—leading the gay market to see a distorted self-image to identify with, thus, aiding in the creation of a consumer culture. As Freitas noted, this is an important aspect of marketing these shows, especially on niche networks like Logo. For example, when the audience views *The A-List*, gay men are shown a picture of what producers expect them to be, even if this is not the reality. Similarly, Andra, the heterosexual female in *Boy Meets Boy*, seems to reflect how producers believe other heterosexual females should accept their homosexual best friends. Sender notes that

A nuanced approach to studying the gay market, therefore, must consider how marketing does not merely represent gay and lesbian people, but produces recognizable--and sellable--definitions of what it means to be gay or lesbian. [ . . . ] Three premises

underpin this perspective on gay marketing: that sexuality is produced, not given; that marketing constitutes a primary discourse through which sexual identities are constructed; and that identities and social formations are produced through a complex relationship among media producers, marketing texts (including ads), and audiences.

(*Business*, 2004, p. 11)

The gay market, though, has been crafted and constructed by marketers in an attempt to transform a demographic of the population into an advantageous group. In order to establish a gay market, marketers largely focus on creating a vision of a gay “white, male, professional, urban” person “with an abundance of good taste and discretionary income” (*Business*, 2004, p. 7). While this definition leaves a large percentage of the population out of the “imagined community” marketers create, “aligning gay consumption with a specifically domesticated, monogamous model of gay relationships increases the respectability of those relationships” because others view members of the consumer culture as “just like them” (*Business*, 2004, p. 8).

Overwhelmingly, these are the types of relationships that are set up through both *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List*. James, for instance, is only concerned with finding “someone who can be monogamous,” while the stable, established characters in *The A-List*, such as Ryan and his husband Desmond, are married, in civil unions, or living together while practicing monogamy. These monogamous characters are non-threatening, easily relatable characters for an audience of straight women, even if this vision of monogamy is a reestablishment of a heteronormative system of relationships.

In the Bravo show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, a show also released during the “gay summer” of 2003 when *Boy Meets Boy* was released, a set of codes are introduced to the audience about the homosexual male and heterosexual female that are imperative to the research



in this thesis. Due to gay-themed television like these shows, gay men and heterosexual females have been coded as “superior” creatures to their straight male counterparts (Stadler, 2005, p. 109). The structure of *Queer Eye*, for example, features a set of five homosexual males whose job it is to improve the lives, looks, and living spaces of a heterosexual male who has sexually “repressed” by heteronormative rules (Stadler, 2005, p. 109-111). Gustavus T. Stadler, author of the essay “Queer Guy for the Straight ‘I,’” writes that these gay “heroes clean things up; filter through the apathy, self-denigration, and dirty laundry [ . . . ] and get their ‘guy’ going at life with the vigor to which he is entitled,” yet cannot obtain without the help of the homosexual male who has been previously liberated from his sexual repression (Stadler, 2005, p. 109). The true importance of this essay, in terms of this thesis, lies in the extension of the elevated status of the homosexual male to the heterosexual female that accompanies him on the journey of improvements and makeovers. When she recognizes his superiority and accepts him as legitimate, she also becomes liberated from “the accrued burdens of heterosexuality” that her heterosexual mate is buried beneath (Stadler, 2005, p. 109). Because shows like *Queer Eye*, *Boy Meets Boy*, and *The A-List* target the heterosexual audience, the heterosexual female character, when represented in them, is coded with a privilege that the audience of heterosexual females can aspire to obtain.

In her essay “Dualcasting Bravo’s Gay Programming and the Quest for Women Audiences,” Katherine Sender discusses the years during the rise of gay-themed television on Bravo—specifically focusing on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Boy Meets Boy* (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 302). As *Boy Meets Boy* premiered during the beginning of the niche network era, Sender notes that “the dissipation of audiences and the proliferation of gay images” in this period led to advertisers to market these shows to women, even though they maintained a

gay theme (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 302). She further addresses that, because of this, gay men are often portrayed as a straight woman’s best friend, like we see in both shows addressed in this thesis. However, “dualcasting” has is so integral to this thesis that it is important to analyze how marketers have allowed for heterosexual females to enjoy a gay-themed show, even though it operates in very different ways in both shows.

First, in 2003, *Boy Meets Boy* ushered in the first gay-themed reality dating show, and with it came the multilateral critique of the representation of sexuality. Bravo was faced with a two-pronged issue—recognizing that the gay market had become an idealized group for marketers and advertisers while maintaining their history of targeting heterosexual female viewers (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 306-307). However, due to the numerous critiques of Bravo’s movement towards gay programming during the early 2000s, the network was forced to deny that they targeted a queer audience (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 306). Bravo President Jeff Gaspin stated that they were interested in shift[ing] the dominant demographic from older viewers [ . . . ] towards a younger population” (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 307). Gaspin and other executives knew that “Bravo had to develop programming that signaled a niche appeal,” the gay theme of *Boy Meets Boy* for instance, “but could still garner large enough audiences to gain advertiser attention” (“Dualcasting,” 2007, p. 303). “Dualcasting” was an ideal means to an end. Producers were able to schedule content that targeted a queer audience at peak times while maintaining their primary interest was the heterosexual female audience, allowing a marketing method that allowed Bravo to target two demographics in one show.

The A-List, on the other hand, was created and produced by LOGO, the American LGBT-interest network. With the intention of portraying the lives of solely gay and bisexual men, there were no pretenses about LOGO promoting a show to a heterosexual audience. Instead, the

network aimed to target solely a queer audience with their programming. Nearly ten years after *Boy Meets Boy* premiered, *The A-List* was much more brazen about sexuality, love, and romance between gay men. However, viewers and critics alike criticized the show as depicting vain and vapid stereotyped images of the gay culture, and thus; the show was not going in the direction that the network was interested in (Alexiou, 2012). From the first season, the show received relatively low ratings, and for the second season a heterosexual female was added to the cast in order to open the network to a broader audience (Alexiou, 2012). In this way, the show began “dualcasting” in order to survive the niche market. Gamson references shows that appear on networks like LOGO that cater to lesbian and gay audiences saying,

These shows expose queer worlds in which straight men are edged out even further. For instance, true to formula, *The A-List* (“housewives with balls”) depicts a narrow, rarified, bickering, competitive, status-hungry, consumption-oriented crew of attractive young professionals. But they’re a gay crowd; one in which homosexuality, including its sexual aspects, is assumed, central, and celebrated. (“Reality Queens,” 2013, p. 54)

Both *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List*, then, have employed this form of marketing to increase viewership due to social, political, and financial influences.

The central question in regards to “dualcasting” is what purpose it plays, intentional or not, in either maintaining or destabilizing the heteronormative roles normally viewed on television and further, what effects this may have on the audience. First of all, one of the most common representations of the homosexual male on television is, as Gamson addresses, the “gay-man-as-style-maven” role (“Reality Queens,” 2013, p. 52-54). Through this role, the heterosexual female is easily targeted due to her existence in the consumer culture with the homosexual male. Gamson notes that

Reality television has exaggerated the gay-man-as-style-maven role and its class meanings: playing up queenly insight into the consumption habits and cultural customs of the upper middle classes, and the ability to transform a dowdy, “taste challenged” man, woman, or space into a fabulous, “classy” one. This strategy reaches female viewers, and to a lesser degree gay male ones, in a product-friendly genre. (“Reality Queens,” 2013, pp. 52-54)

This representation, along with the “Best Gay Friend (BGF),” or the homosexual male as a “reverse fag-hag,” who acts as “a straight woman’s support, shopping companion, or confidant,” can easily lead to a confusion or problematization of the norms of heterosexuality, especially in the role of the straight man (“Reality Queens,” 2013, p. 53). In the world outside of television, Gamson notes that “heterosexual intimacy reigns and the straight man remains the most powerful player” due to his celebrated traditional heteronormative expression of masculinity. However, within the realm of the gay style maven and the BGF, we see a role reversal in terms of power between the gay and straight male. Similar to the juxtaposition of power in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, as noted by Stadler, “When straight men appear in interaction with gay style mavens, it is because *they* need fixing; a queered, classed masculinity becomes the means by which heterosexuality is recuperated” (“Reality Queens,” 2013, p. 53). Here, the gay man helps to improve the straight man, calling his *celebrated* sexuality into question.

Thus, the homosexual man becomes powerful, while the heterosexual man is forced to recognize the loss of his privilege. In *Boy Meets Boy*, a similar goal is sought—to blur the lines between homosexuality and heterosexuality, and as a result, the heteronormative system seems to be abolished. However, as Ron Becker writes in his book *Gay TV and Straight America*, blurring these lines has caused a “straight panic” that has necessitated a redefinition of masculinity (*Gay*

*TV and Straight America*, 2006, p. 13-16). With the definition of the “straight” man under question, it is important to note that television has a dual role by both reinforcing norms of homosexuality, but also by calling into question the normality of the homosexual male. Becker outlines that the political and cultural dynamics behind the rise of gay-themed and gay-targeted programming on U.S. network television in the 1990s affected not only television, but also the political and cultural landscape of the 2000s (*Gay TV and Straight America*, 2006, p. 13-16). A symptom of the cultural landscape of the 2000s, the term “Straight panic,” is used to describe “what happens when heterosexual men and women, still insecure about the boundary between gay and straight, confront an increasingly accepted homosexuality,” as we see in the plot of *Boy Meets Boy* and through Nyasha’s constant commentary about they gay men on *The A-List* (*Gay TV and Straight America*, 2006, p. 13-16).

“Straight Panic” is vital to the research of this thesis because of the real experience that *Boy Meets Boy* faced with it prior to its premiere. Heidi Oringer, the author of the article “Gay Bachelor TV Show Has Nasty Surprise,” was the director of entertainment programming at ABCNEWS.com at the time of the airing of *Boy Meets Boy* (Oringer, 2003). She criticizes the executive producers and creators of the show, saying that the twist of the show, that roughly half of the suitors vying for the attention of James (the gay bachelor) are straight, is potentially dangerous (Oringer, 2003). However, she does not attack the twist of *Boy Meets Boy* on behalf of the gay leading character. Instead, Oringer asks her audience to “Think back to The Jenny Jones Show incident” where

In March of 1995, Jonathan Schmitz, then 26, agreed to appear on a secret admirers segment. Apparently, producers had led him to believe his admirer was a woman, not Scott Amedure, his gay neighbor. Amedure told the audience of a fantasy that involved

Schmitz, some whipped cream, strawberries and champagne. A few days later, Schmitz was said to be so embarrassed by the so-called ambush incident that he went on a drinking binge and shot Amedure to death with a 12-gauge shotgun. Schmitz was eventually convicted of second-degree murder and is serving a 25-year sentence. I realize that this is an extreme example of ambush TV, but it did happen. (Oringer, 2003)

Oringer outlines that the premise of *Boy Meets Boy* is flawed, and potentially dangerous, because she fears for the psyche of the straight men pretending to be gay—as well as potential embarrassment they may feel while “in the closet” (Oringer, 2003). This example outlines the necessity of discussing the “straight panic” in this research.

For this thesis, it is important to recognize the role of the heterosexual female during the redefinition process because it is she who serves to constantly remind the audience of the difference between homosexual and heterosexual men. Both shows attempt to play with the boundaries of sexuality, yet simultaneously help restore the audience’s understanding of sexuality through Andra and Nyasha. Even in spaces like these where homosexuality is at least partially accepted, the characters suffer from “a gay-friendly straight panic,” or an alteration of the traditional “panic” that Becker writes about (*Gay TV and Straight America*, 2006, p. 35). In this case, characters like Nyasha are represented in order to guide the audience of individuals who are “trying to adapt to a culture where once-unquestioned hierarchy regulating sexuality (and structuring gender) [is] increasingly questioned” (*Gay TV and Straight America*, 2006, p. 35). Through the heterosexual female, masculinity can be redefined.

Another necessary connection to make for this thesis is the definition of friendship between two heterosexual men on television during the period of redefinition of masculinity. In his chapter of *Queer TV: Theories, histories, politics*, titled “Guy Love: A Queer Straight

Masculinity for a Post-Closet era?” Ron Becker puts in question the very recent phenomenon of “Guy Love,” or a strong emotional relationship between two heterosexual men (“Guy Love,” 2009, p. 121). “Guy Love” proves that, to Becker, masculinity, and especially *straight* masculinity, is being redefined due to the acceptance of changing male sexuality norms as a result of the partial “destabilization of heteronormativity” that has been brought on by the gay rights movement’s challenges to the naturalness of heterosexuality (“Guy Love,” 2009, p. 122-124). He reminds readers of Eve Sedgwick’s male homosexual panic, which is defined as “a virulent homophobia directed both inward and outward” that calls upon the masculinity portrayed in television to be changed (“Guy Love,” 2009, p. 123). Finally, Becker addresses the acceptance and tolerance of openly gay men in television as the impetus for this redefinition. The openly gay characters make viewers comfortable that the straight characters are truly straight because, as society begins to be more accepting of homosexuality, there should be no fear of coming out (“Guy Love,” 2009, p. 127).

In Bravo’s attempt to break down stereotypes through “bridging the gap between straight and gay,” the audience was presented with a confused view of masculinity. Because of this, many valuable questions are raised over how the homosexual male is represented in a show designed around his identity. In discussing gay representation in film and television, Katherine Sender’s documentary *Further Off the Straight & Narrow* outlines the two approaches to the “difference” of sexual identity in a post-Gay 1990s world, or as Ron Becker cites this dichotomy, the “paradox of identity-based civil rights” (*Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, 2006; *Gay TV and Straight America*, 2006, p. 30). The main difference here, as Sender and Becker argue, is the distinction between gay characters fitting into the “normal” through others’ acceptance of difference or the characters’ own acceptance of others’ sameness and assimilating to it. In other

words, The A-List intended to push the envelope of what is acceptable for a representation of gay men on television. However, in maintaining many of the stereotypes about gay men, the show actually fit inside the box of what can be expected of gay men (*Gay TV and Straight America*, 2006, p. 30).

At the root of the redefinition of masculinity seems to be a concern with maintaining heteronormative power—a power that can be used by the heterosexual female to either legitimize the homosexual male or simply reinforce her power. In *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, Sender notes that, throughout the past decade, straight characters have been seen as a way for gay or queer characters to gain power and legitimacy (*Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, 2006). However, as I intend to argue in my analysis of both shows, Andra and Nyasha, as heterosexual female characters who have a level of power over their homosexual male counterparts, legitimize only those who partake in the same heteronormative structure of sexuality that they do.

In an interview with Nyasha Zimucha posted on Qweerty.com, a website that claims to be “free of an agenda. Except that gay one,” she is asked about the role she has on “a gay white show” (Raymundo, 2011). The article, written by Oscar Raymundo, outlines, that she is an effort to give some spice to the all male cast. The interview continues with Raymundo asking Zimucha about why producers cast her. In response, she stated, “I think that question is very ’90s. It’s not illegal for gay people and straight people to hang out. It’s weird that people would be shocked to see a black girl hanging out with a bunch of gay guys. We know how gay men love their divas” (Raymundo, 2011). Zimucha continues, stating that she has enjoyed being a part of the show because her hair extension brand has been spread to a wider audience than just straight women. Her company is being “dualcast” to multiple audiences. Raymundo brings up a different



interview with Zimucha, stating that “the show is so real that even straight women can relate,” but it is through seeing Zimucha on camera that women will be able to identify with her (Raymundo, 2011).

Although the research summarized above is extensive, it is not sufficient to fully understand the phenomenon of the heterosexual female on shows like *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List* that feature gay and bisexual men. In previous research, the homosexual male has been analyzed in reference to his heteronormative surroundings. Conversely, this research will add to the previously described research by analyzing the heteronormative character on two programs that feature queer characters—those who do not identify as heterosexual and may break from heteronormativity. Through textual analysis of both programs, I intend to show that the heterosexual female is not only a useful tool in “dualcasting,” but also is a figure that aids in reinforcing heteronormative structure in programs that deviate from it. In all, though, her role has an immense function in how the audience understands the characters of the program.

### Method

The method of analysis used in this research will be close textual analysis that John Fiske outlines in *Television Culture* (Fiske, 2001, p. 4-5) through investigating fan forums. While this paper will take the entire first season of *Boy Meets Boy* (a total of six episodes) and the second season of *The A-List: New York* (a total of 12 episodes) into account, I intend to primarily focus on the first episode of both shows, referencing how each show’s initial framing and staging has an effect on the audiences’ experience and understanding of the show. Further, the first episode will be important in analyzing the casting of both the homosexual men that are a part of both shows and Nyasha and Andra —specifically in why both heterosexual women were cast. In

utilizing the terminology of John Fiske for my research, I plan to focus on all three levels of coding of television, “Reality,” “Representation,” and “Ideology” (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). The first pertains to how the appearance, dress, and other physical characteristics, as well as expression, code the gay men as stereotypically gay on *The A-List: New York*, while the second is how technology, such as camera angles and lighting, aids the encoding of the first level of codes (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). Finally, the most important level of codes for the analysis of how the heterosexual female either reinforces or debases heteronormative structure is the third level, or the ideological codes. The third level, or the level of coding that I am most interested in researching and the part that will have the largest impact on my thesis, consists of codes which television reproduces that are deeply embedded into the culture of the viewer and either reproduced, or not, through the show (Fiske, 2001, p. 6-7). In the case of *Boy Meets Boy*, heteronormativity is an ideological code that was not explicitly reproduced due to the queer theme of the show, and thus; as stated, many straight viewers were uncomfortable with the show. In terms of the fan forums, I am interested in discovering how audiences understand and identify with the characters presented on these programs.

However, as with any research, it is important to note the limitations of my thesis. Audience analysis in any form is inherently incomplete and there is no way to analyze an entire audience online. Many viewers did not choose to participate in the dialogue happening on fan forums, and thus, I am missing many voices. However, as this research intends to look at conversation threads with keywords or titles related to the leading characters of *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List: New York*, these contributors have felt enough about the shows (in support or otherwise) to participate. Furthermore, only a small piece of the immense amount of dialogue that has taken place online will be analyzed. For the purposes of this research, only direct quotes

from the fandom will be used in order to infer what the fan thinks of the show. The title of the fan thread, the date of the comment, and any information I am given about the person who posted the comment will be noted and cited in my paper as important information about how the audience identifies with characters on both shows. The sources of the fandoms that will be investigated are Television Without Pity (<http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com>) and Fans of Reality TV (<http://www.fansofrealitytv.com>).

### Section One: Analysis of Coding as “Dualcast”

#### The Homosexual Male

In both *BMB* and *The A-List*, there seems to be a dichotomy in representation of the homosexual male. In one set of codes, the physically active, traditionally masculine gay male is represented, appealing to both the straight females, who can enjoy watching a man that is similar in his characteristics to how a heterosexual male would be coded, but also the gay male audience as they know that he is also gay. Characters like James (*BMB*) and Reichen Lehmkuhl (*The A-List*) take on the “traditionally masculine” codes that allow them to perform a dual role as a character in the show (Shugart, 2003, p. 72). Because the traditionally masculine gay man has been used in other spaces, such as in the character of Will from *Will & Grace*, the NBC sitcom of the early 2000s, the straight female audience can be comfortable with him, as he is “more consistent with mainstream tropes of heterosexuality” (Shugart, 2003, p. 72). As Shugart notes about Will, the conventionally masculine male lead from *Will & Grace*, “vanity does characterize [the gay male lead] to a certain extent, it is a vanity highly consistent with contemporary, middle-to-upper class heteromascularity” (2003, p. 77). Both Reichen and James fit into this form of vanity, always putting in just enough effort to look presentable, but not too much where they appear to be too feminine.

In the next set of codes, however, the audience can note a shift in representation of the stereotypically gay man. Instead of being represented as traditionally masculine, he has “exaggerated the gay-man-as-style-maven role” (“Reality Queens,” 2013, p. 52) His presence seems to exist so that characters like James and Reichen, or the “lead gay male characters,” are “contrasted with highly flamboyant, outrageously stereotypical gay male characters who function as foils against which the leading men emerge as more traditionally masculine” (Shugart, 2003, p. 72). In this way, the gay male audience can feel comfort in seeing a duality of representation, while the straight female audience has both the stereotype of the sexy gay male and the style maven in one show.

As expressed, within the first episode it is possible to see a dichotomy in how these two heterosexual male characters are represented through their appearance and dress. These codes demonstrate “[w]hat passes for reality in any culture” and, as Fiske notes, this

“reality” is always already encoded, it is never “raw. ” If this piece of encoded reality is televised, the technical codes and representational conventions of the medium are brought to bear upon it so as to make it (a) transmittable technologically and (b) an appropriate cultural text for its audiences. Some of the social codes which constitute our reality are relatively precisely definable in terms of the medium through which they are expressed - skin color, dress, hair, facial expression, and so on. (Fiske, 2001, p. 5)

In terms of appearance, James and Reichen, two of our gay lead characters are represented as physically fit, athletic men who go to the gym. Their appearance is coded as traditional masculinity, even though the men identify as gay, which deviates from the heteronormative structure of traditional masculinity (Fiske, 2001, p. 6). In fact, when he is introduced to the audience of the show, James is seen shirtless amidst a game of volleyball, showing that even

while being gay, he is traditionally masculine (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1).

It is important to note as well that the opening montage of the second season shows Mike Ruiz, one of the traditionally masculine characters ask “Do I look really masculine?” in a deep voice, which is immediately followed by a scene in which Reichen and Rodney are kissing in a hot tub (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). The effect that this positioning has is to place importance on these characters. By showing the show’s three traditionally masculine characters first, the show reemphasizes heteronormative structure through the technological codes of editing (Fiske, 2001, p. 7-9).

On the other hand, immediately after the scene with Reichen and Rodney, the “sexual” characters whose traditional masculinity can also appeal to a heterosexual female audience, producers show TJ, one of the characters represented as deviating from traditional heterosexuality, saying “I didn’t know I was a top until I saw that” (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). His statement, especially appearing after the other men, is humorous, reinforcing the stereotype dichotomy that gay men are either traditionally masculine or girly and humorous (Fiske, 2001, p. 5).

Furthermore, Robb (*BMB*), one of the suitors who is later outed as gay, and Derek (*The A-List*) show a difference in how their appearance is coded from how James and Reichen are coded. Instead of appearing shirtless or playing sports, throughout the series, the audience sees them spend time looking in the mirror or primping themselves for the day. Characters like Robb seem to spend more time dancing or primping than they do anything else, and even if their daily preparation is not shown on camera, they always appear to be camera-ready. This is in opposition to characters like Reichen whose style and appearance is more gruff and disheveled. Due to our preconceived ideals of what constitutes a masculine man, his facial hair and messy

bed-head tip off the viewer that he seems “straighter” than our more feminine characters (Fiske, 2001, p. 4-5).

Both shows, thus, reinforce the ideological code of heteronormativity by positioning the traditionally masculine men in a position of power over the others—even in shows focusing on specifically gay and bisexual men. In a sense, it seems as if the men who do not follow gender lines of traditional masculinity are pitted against each other to fight as “catty bitches” so that the audience can watch something that represents what they have come to expect of in a show with humorous gay characters (Fiske, 2001, p. 6). As one of such characters, Derek, once an agent for a modeling firm, quits his job before the start of the second season to open his own spray tan business called “Tansexual” (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). In the opening of the first episode, Derek is seen participating in one of his tanning sessions, reinforcing to the audiences of the show that he is stylish and concerned with his appearance (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1).

Another important aspect to investigate in representing the gay male character on *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List* is clothing. Our characters happen to be represented very similarly in terms of how they are with appearance and dress. Our traditionally masculine men are represented as traditionally masculine, where others are represented as “different” or feminine (Fiske, 2001, p. 6). Both Reichen and James maintain their traditional masculinity by appearing in button-up shirts and clothing made specifically for men, while Derek pushes the norm of masculinity by wearing clothes that are not always traditionally masculine. In one episode, he plans to buy black sequined booty-shorts that he can wear to a party (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). Robb also pushed the envelope in *BMB* by wearing a pink, ruffled button-up, showing of his stylish side. In the opening sequence of the first episode, he is seen dancing out of a limousine in his pink shirt (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). In this way, both audiences once again maintain a

vision of the traditionally masculine and gay style maven characters.

Further, it is important to catch a brief glimpse of the behavior and speech of the homosexual male characters. Derek and Robb both speak with an audible vocal inflection that reminds the viewers that they are not heterosexual, but additionally, the one of the first things Derek says once the show begins is “There is no market for fat, pasty models” (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). Characters like Derek work to alleviate the tension that Becker poses is a result of the redefinition of masculinity due to the straight panic over the blurring of lines between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Derek walks in a way that appears traditionally feminine compared to other men from the cast, and Austin, the youngest of the cast goes as far to refer to Derek as a “big queeny ass,” insinuating that he is inferior to Austin in terms of his sexuality (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). Ryan, another character from *The A-List: New York* purses his lips and squints his eyes when speaking with other cast members. Additionally, he addresses his male assistant as “girl,” even though he identifies as a gay man. In this way, he is coded as a feminine character because he takes on the codes that feminine characters in other spaces have taken. Even though it is unnecessary for homosexual male characters to call other, less traditionally masculine homosexual male characters “big queeny ass” or other slurs, this shows the audience that even among the gay men on both shows, there is a heteronormative structure with which they can identify (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1).

Robb, in a similar way, is constantly referred to as the most feminine of the suitors. In the opening montage, we see him kissing another contestant’s hand as he states, “I love ya,” (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). Similarly, throughout the series, when James and his best friend Andra deliberate over who to send home, we hear each of them discuss Robb’s femininity, as if it is something that gets in the way of James’ interest in him. James, as the “masculine” man,

seems embarrassed of Robb's feminine nature, furthering the heteronormative structure that *Boy Meets Boy* provides to viewers. However, the show allows Robb to grow through the season, leading to a deeper understanding of himself. As he is finally asked to leave the show, his ending monolog states

The most liberating thing about being here is that I've been able to be myself and have a really good time. I kinda realized, who cares if I'm a little too feminine or if anyone thinks I'm not funny, or if anyone thinks that I'm not good looking? As long as I'm comfortable with who I am, then I think that's all that really matters.

(Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1)

Robb, in turn, is outed as a gay character, which shows the audience that he fits with their preconceived notions of what a gay character should be due to the audience's preconceived ideas of how gay characters should behave on camera (Fiske, 2001, p. 5).

As this research also focuses on the heterosexual female, it is important to note how the camera actively codes her character in order to understand how she "dualcast". Andra (*BMB*) and Nyasha (*The A-List*) are the two heterosexual female characters on the shows that I argue serve as a mediator for the heterosexual female audience to view a show featuring a gay theme. Both women were cast for a reason and their presence brings up a very valid question about why a straight female is important in a gay-themed show. Further, she not only expands the possible target audience, but serves as a way to reinforce the homosexual male and heterosexual female "partnership" we see in both shows. As Allan notes, and *The A-List* intended to demonstrate in its first season, gay men prefer to associate with other gay men to women (Allan, 2007, p. 59). Why, then, do we see the appearance of a female character on reality television that was designed for a gay audience? If we assume that there is at least partial logic to this theory, then



why are these characters appearing on shows with gay themes? I intend to investigate her presence on these shows and argue that she exists, at least in part, to expand the potential audience of the show.

Andra is the heterosexual female character from *Boy Meets Boy*. She serves as James' female best friend. Immediately after we meet James, we also meet Andra. From just this setup alone, we can tell that her presence will be important to the plot of the show. Additionally, we find out that she will be helping James make all of his decisions about who stays in the house and who goes home. Even more interesting, however, is that she holds what the producers of *Boy Meets Boy* call "veto power" (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). She not only helps James choose, but ultimately has the power to reverse his decision if she wants to keep one of the suitors in the game. Due to this, we know that Andra is a character that is coded as powerful.

### The Heterosexual Female

In the first moments of the show, the positional power that Andra has as James' best friend is framed for the audience. She enters the camera after the host of the show notes, "most gay men have a girly best friend" (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). When Andra enters, we see a blonde female wearing a dress, with her hair held up by a hairclip. In her traditional feminine attire, she is coded as a woman that the audience can identify with (Fiske, 2001, p. 4). Her appearance and behavior at this point allow the audience to recognize something familiar that they can understand, even in a show with a gay theme (Fiske, 2001, p. 4). As a traditionally feminine character, she serves as an anchor with which a heterosexual female audience can begin to understand the show and the homosexual gay male.

As stated in the literature review of this thesis, a common trend, and ideological code, in

the years from 2003-2011 on television has been the partnership or pairing between a homosexual male and heterosexual female. In *Boy Meets Boy*, Andra and James are immediately coded as the “best friend” duo, and in being so; they expand the notion that a gay man’s best friend is sure to be a straight female (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). In a firsthand interview, they tell the audience that they are each other’s “turn-to person” and “best friend in the world” (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). The producers of the show have highlighted these phrases during editing in order to help reinforce the idealized “consumer culture” that marketers have created (*Business*, 2004, p. 5-8). Additionally, James describes their relationship on the show as “maybe literally [his] left brain and [his] right brain in two different bodies” (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). All of these instances show the audience a relationship that they should aspire to have. *Boy Meets Boy* advertises the homosexual male, heterosexual female duo as something that should be aspired for (Fiske, 2001, p. 4).

In addition to dialogue, however, their relationship is also coded through how both characters behave towards each other (Fiske, 2001, p. 4). As noted, James’ status as the homosexual male that still ascribes to conventional masculinity, allows him the agency to be “palatable” to a heterosexual audience, especially when paired with his straight best friend (Shugart, 2003, p. 68-70). In order to make James palatable as a “best friend,” the two must show enough intimacy to be perceived as best friends, but also maintain space enough so that the his position as a homosexual male is never questioned. For instance, the two are seen hugging at least once an episode, yet they always seem to mention their status as friends, even when the scene does not feature their relationship as a focal point (Fiske, 2001, p. 6).

The relationship between James and Andra in *Boy Meets Boy* seems to deviate from Shugart’s belief that “sexual tension,” or even control of the female sexuality, characterizes the

relationship between the homosexual male and the heterosexual female (Shugart, 2003, p. 68). While James is a victim of the “heterosexualization of the gay male lead” through maintaining his friendship with Andra, his relationship with her is never sexual in the manner that Shugart implies when she notes, “First, with very few exceptions, the sexual activity depicted between the characters is unilateral: gay men are represented as having sexual access to and license with their heterosexual women friends, but the women are not depicted as having truly reciprocal privileges” (2003, p. 80). Instead, physical touch, apart from the occasional hug, is not present between the two, as if to remind the audience that the premise still centers on James finding his match, and not the relationship between he and Andra.

However, Andra seems to maintain a different relationship with the suitors. After James meets all of the suitors, Dani, the host, also introduces Andra to the men, saying “I’ve noticed we’ve got one of these leis left, and I think it’s about time we introduce the fifteen mates to Andra, and that’s James’ best friend. So you’ve not only got to win over James this week, but you’ve also got to win over Andra” (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). Her presentation as the “final surprise” for the suitors so to speak is important because it reinforces her power in the show and forces the men to pay attention to her, while still playing the “game” for James (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). Thus, she is positioned as powerful. In her interactions with many housemates, as in the luau party in the first episode of the series, she is coded differently than in her relationship with James. For instance, she seems less serious, she enjoys spending time with the men, and she is more playful (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1).

Her change of character when partying with the men begs the question why is she acting differently among these men, while she appears more stoic with James? What effect does this have? Towards the end of the first episode, James has series of one-on-one dates with a total of

three of the housemates. During this time, he leaves Andra to get to know the others, simulating the role of both a spy and a friend as she tries to get to know the male suitors (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). Sex, for one example, is a topic that is never breached by Andra and James while together, but when Andra is around the other men, she changes this. At one point, she asks the men, “Are you going to all hook up together later?” resulting in laughter--forced and real from the men of the show (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1). In changing her representation from logical and stable when with James to a fun, hip, and understanding heterosexual female while with the other men, what effect does she have on the audience’s understanding of the gay male characters represented in the show?

Nyasha, on the other hand, does not play the role of “heterosexual female best friend” to any one of the characters on *The A-List*. However, she is important to note because of her addition to the cast of a show whose “producers did go out of their way to just cast gay men originally” (Raymundo, 2011). When asked by Qweerty why she was cast and how many of the cast members she knew, Nyasha stated, “No, actually I did not know any of the guys. I was working on another TV project when I was approached by the casting director” (Raymundo, 2011). So after one full season of the all gay male cast hashing out their drama, she steps into the picture—as a straight woman. Her purpose, she notes, is to allow “even straight women” to relate to her life (Raymundo, 2011). Note that she is interested in women viewing the show being able to relate to the drama through *her*, not through the homosexual male. Because she was added to the second season of the show, she is undoubtedly coded as an important figure (Fiske, 2001, p. 5).

Furthermore, when asked the question, “You think that the producers brought you on to broaden the audience and reach out to female and minority viewers?” she noted,

I'm not ruling it out, but I don't think it was a defining factor. They saw something in me. And it's a great way to show America how normal the show is. I cry, I get bloated, I get my period, I call my mom every day. I think people will be surprised to see how genuine these relationships are. It's not just stereotypes. I don't snap my fingers every time I finish an argument. (Raymundo, 2011)

Nyasha was virtually unknown to the men from the show before the season began; however, she jumps right in to start drama with the other cast members. Even before the first airing of the show, she exists as a "dualcast" character, or a tool for the heterosexual female audience to understand a show that, as stated, was produced originally for just a queer audience ("Dualcasting," 2007, p. 302-303).

When the first episode begins, the characters are all together, sitting around a table as drama begins to unfold. Rodney, Reichen's on again, off again Brazilian boyfriend throws an insult at Derek's mother, and the usual madness the audience expects ensues. Because the men are gay, it is expected that there is drama, especially when paired with Nyasha, a heterosexual female who enjoys gossip (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1, 4). Even though Nyasha has not been introduced to the audience yet, we notice that there is a female character sitting at the table with the group of gay and bisexual men, leading the audience to question her role on the show (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). However early we may recognize her presence on the show, Nyasha is not introduced to the audience of the show until fourteen minutes into the first episode, which begs the question, why is the new character on a show left out until nearly one-third of the episode has passed?

As the dualcast character in this space, Nyasha seems to exist solely for the purpose of expanding the audience of the show to the heterosexual female audience that Sender and Gamson

note is a part of the “consumer culture” created by straight, white male network officials in order to keep afloat in a niche network era (*Business*, 2004, p. 5; “Reality Queens,” 2014, p. 52). First, when Nyasha enters the screen the audience sees the camera pan up the body of an African American female that was seen in the first scene of the episode. Here, though, she is wearing knee-high leather boots, Louboutins as we later find out from one of the gay cast members, a short romper, a light-colored jacket, sunglasses, and a purse (Fiske, 2001, p. 4-5). We see her walk towards the camera in slow motion, emphasizing her bouncing brown curls and the power and confidence she exudes as she walks. Upon introducing Nyasha, the music changes from the constant techno beat found behind most of the action in *The A-List* to a female vocalist singing “All the girls in the club, you know what I’m talking ‘bout” (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). In effect, she is instantly coded *differently* than the homosexual male characters. As a female on a show that represents entirely men, she is coded with a different type of music (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). The music change, in addition to her clothes and appearance, allow the audience to envision another conventionally female character, much like Andra in many ways, but that seems more concerned with a high level of vanity that characteristic of the “consumer culture” in which she is supposed to belong (*Business*, 2004, p. 7).

Her heterofemininity, power, and assumed interest in her appearance can be understood by the audience through the layers of post-production editing producers use to highlight her character as feminine. For instance, the music change to a female artist and the slow-motion effect of the camera showing her hair bounce as she struts down the road emphasize her conventional femininity (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). However, it is also important to note that she does not introduce herself to the audience. When she enters the restaurant that she arrives at after her arrival scene on camera, Mike introduces her to us. She is introduced to us by one of the

established characters on the show that is traditionally masculine in appearance, but he also is known for his monogamous, long-term relationship (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). By having one of the stable gay male characters introduce Nyasha, she gains a sense of legitimacy in the audience. After being introduced, we get a brief glimpse into her life as “an ambassador for the continent of Africa,” a role which shows her “African and [her] glamorous side” (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). In this way, Nyasha seems similar to Andra from *Boy Meets Boy*. The audience senses that it is important to accept her for the “promising new artist” status she is given. As Andra was announced as the “best friend,” which gave her power and legitimacy on a gay-themed show, Nyasha is given legitimacy through her tough personality, glamour, and work-ethic, all aspects that “the gay market” has been artificially crafted with and reinforced as important (*Business*, 2004, p. 7; Fiske, 2001, p. 5). As the heterosexual female character, neither she nor Andra are forced to pursue gaining legitimacy. Instead, the camera codes both heterosexual females as legitimate through both social and technical codes, such as dress, appearance, behavior, camera, editing, and music (Fiske, 2001, p. 6-10).

## Section Two: Analysis of Power Dynamics

Through the representations of both the gay male character and the straight female, a set of ideological codes are reinforced that can either maintain or debunk heteronormative structures. In this section of this thesis, I intend to use both shows as a reference point to see how stories of power have been shown to viewers through a dualcast show. Fiske describes an ideological code in the following way:

These codes and the televisual codes which bring them to the viewer are both deeply embedded in the ideological codes of which they are themselves the bearers. If we adopt the same ideological practice in the decoding as the encoding we are drawn into the

position of a white, male, middle-class American (or westerner) of conventional morality. The reading position is the social point at which the mix of televisual, social, and ideological codes comes together to make coherent, unified sense: in making sense of the program in this way we are indulging in an ideological practice ourselves, we are maintaining and legitimating the dominant ideology, and our reward for this is the easy pleasure of the recognition of the familiar and of its adequacy. (Fiske, 2001, p. 11)

Here, I question what effect the coded representations of the homosexual male, as either “conventionally male” or as “gay-style-maven,” and the heterosexual female have had on the character’s own power and agency that can be seen in the shows.

Through this textual analysis of *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List*, we can see that the heterosexual female’s role on “dualcast” television shows that cater to a queer audience is to help the audience understand the difference between the homosexual male and the heterosexual male. The difference that she maintains stems from ideological codes, or the final level of coding that Fiske discusses. The audience has been told that there is a visible difference between homosexual and heterosexual men, and thus; she attempts to reinforce these beliefs for the audience (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). Further, she aids the audience by helping them through the process of redefinition of masculinity (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). In the years since the airing of *Boy Meets Boy*, a heterosexual audience has had to come to terms with the ever-increasing visibility of a queer presence on the television—especially in reality television (Oringer, 2003). As heterosexual masculinity has felt the need for redefinition in an age of queer representation on television, the heterosexual female character is important due to her role as a “middleman” that is able to facilitate the reconstruction of heterosexuality. In fact, the heterosexual female in *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List* seems to constantly remind the characters, and viewers, of their sexual orientation.



Furthermore, she reminds the audience that this sexual orientation is biological and cannot be altered, allowing the audience to once again feel comfortable with the difference between the homosexual and heterosexual male on television.

In order to reestablish difference between the sexualities, the shows rely on two essential ideological codes—that the heterosexual male is innately different from the homosexual male, and two, that the heterosexual female is very similar to the homosexual male in terms of tastes, interests, and lifestyle (Fiske, 2001, p. 4-6; *Business*, 2004, p. 11). Conversely, it is also important to note that the homosexual male remains coded as an unstable character that needs her stability in order to become recognized as legitimate by the audience. For example, if we take Andra as the stable character that she is represented to be through how she is coded in *Boy Meets Boy*, it seems that she is to move between the realms so easily this lies upon two things—her biological sex as a female and her sexual orientation as a heterosexual.

Even though Allan noted that the homosexual male was more likely to be friends with another male, the friendship between James and Andra depicts the ideological code that marketers and producers have created—that a homosexual male's ideal friend is a heterosexual female (Allan, 2007, p. 59; *Business*, 2004, p. 5). However, we also see Andra as holding more power than the other men presented on the show. Because she is able to veto James' decisions, she, as a heterosexual character, is deemed as more powerful than the group of homosexual characters (Minerd, et al., 2003, Ep. 1; Fiske, 2001, p. 5).

For this reason, it is important to investigate Andra and Nyasha through the lens of Jon Kraszewski's article entitled "Multiracialism on *The Real World* and the reconfiguration of politics in MTV's brand during the 2000s" (Kraszewski, 2010, p. 140). Even though neither character identifies as "a multiracial character," their gender identity allows them to move

between homosexual male characters on the show and heterosexual female members of the audience (Kraszewski, 2010, p. 140). For instance, Andra has more agency and ability to move between the two sexual orientations than either the mono-orientation individuals (heterosexual or homosexual males) because she also maintains her “ethno-imperialism,” over the others (Kraszewski, 2010, p. 140). This ability to impose one’s understanding of sexuality over other less powerful characters is visible in the experiences that the homosexual male characters have with Nyasha. During her interaction with Mike and his life partner, she addresses both how “sexy” and “fabulous” they are, after saying “I could show you off to my ex-boyfriend” (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). As a heterosexual female, she is coded as having the ability to be both a friend to the homosexual characters, while maintaining a level of heteronormative power over them (Kraszewski, 2010, p. 140).

However, there is a notable distinction between the heterosexual female character’s ability to move between the sexual orientation spheres and the instability of multiracial characters that Kraszewski describes. James, as the one who is stuck in the middle of the turmoil in *Boy Meets Boy*, is seemingly unbalanced. As Kraszewski states, his instability comes from “the inability to have healthy interpersonal relationships and the inability to commit to monogamous relationships,” which is a strong ideological code that has been reinforced through images of homosexual male characters on television, such as in Reichen’s storyline throughout the season (Kraszewski, 2010, p. 143). As a homosexual male, he is unable to be faithful to Rodney and gets caught sending nude images to another person online (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1-3).

However, Andra and Nyasha, the orientation-empathetic characters, are actually able to help these homosexual characters make better decisions, bringing them to a level of “stability”

(Kraszewski, 2010, p. 143). As stated, Andra has the power to veto the decisions that James makes. Through doing this, she provides her stability as a white, heterosexual woman. This is notably where Kraszewski's analysis of *The Real World* departs from *Boy Meets Boy*, as Andra should be the unstable character due to her ability to move between the spheres so easily. Conversely, though, with her heterosexual power, she is able to make decisions for James, who can be viewed as the instable character by the audience. This innate power that she has is key in the show's plot line and representations of biological sex and sexual orientation.

One possible interpretation of the representation of the heterosexual female as stable and the homosexual male as unstable is to reinforce the heteronormative power structure and help redefine masculinity. When Nyasha interacts with other characters, she calls them "girl," "babe," and "hun," rather than addressing them in the way she addresses other heterosexual females and heterosexual males (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1-2). In this way, she exists as "a force to remind, to comfort people that they can tell the difference, and the way to tell the difference is by looking at gender signs" (*Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, 2006). Furthermore, it is important to recognize that gender is socially constructed. The representations of gay men on *Boy Meets Boy* are pre-constructed ideals, and "television makes, or attempts to make, meanings that serve the dominant interests in society," or those interests of the heterosexual in this case (Fiske, 2001, p. 4). In this way, the gay representation in *Boy Meets Boy* begs the question, how is it that a heterosexual maintains power over homosexual characters in a show designed to bring the two closer together? How is this a positive representation of the homosexual?

The heterosexual on *Boy Meets Boy* becomes lost between his straight guilt of forcing the homosexual into the closet and the gay-friendly straight panic of potentially losing his power. Thus, *Further Off the Straight and Narrow* raises the question, when such a strong assimilationist

approach is taken, “what happens when we cannot tell the difference between straight and gay? What happens to straight privilege?” (*Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, 2006). In both shows, the heterosexual female is a character that maintains her straight privilege, allowing her to speak directly to a straight audience. In the case of *Boy Meets Boy*, I argue that, although the straight suitors may lose their individual heteronormative power by being put “in the closet,” the heterosexual female maintains her own heteronormative privilege over him by being the basis for tolerance.

### Section Three: Analysis of Fan Forums and Response

While textual analysis is integral to the research presented in this thesis, it is not sufficient material to understand the audience’s interpretations of the text itself. In other words, textual analysis is limited, as it does not incorporate the perspectives of the audience. As Fiske notes,

texts are unstable, unconfined. The ad and the program may be part of the same text in their interaction in the production of meaning and pleasure. Meanings are not confined by producers’ boundaries between programs, but are part of the ‘flow’ of television as experienced by its audiences. (Fiske, 2001, p. 15)

Audience analysis, then, is central to this research, as my goal is to understand how a character, such as the heterosexual female, influences the audience’s understanding of the program and its characters. In order to do this, one must not only analyze the text itself, but also the words of the audience. Television, Fiske notes, intentionally codes its characters in a certain way so as to reinforce ideological beliefs that the audience holds (Fiske, 2001, p. 15). However, the audience is the central point where coding is translated to meaning—a meaning that can be distinct from the intent of the producers of a program. Thus, it is imperative to investigate how the audience

responds to the program, its characters, and the codes used to create meaning (Fiske, 2001, p. 15).

In the third and final section of this research, I focus on “polysemy, or multiplicity of meanings,” or more specifically, I focus on the different interpretations of the characters presented on *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List: New York* (Fiske, 2001, p. 15). In order to understand how the audience may grow to understand or deem any number of the characters “legitimate,” I focus on the particular members of the audience that felt strongly enough about the shows to post comments on Fan Forum sites, such as *Television Without Pity* and *Fans of Reality TV*. These sites and comments are an important tool for audience analysis because of the voluntary action of posting associated with the fan forums. While the comments available for analysis are limited, both because the fan forums have closed and archived and due to the fact that these forums represent the thoughts of only a small portion of the total audience of both shows, they are public spaces available for textual analysis that express direct beliefs of the audience members themselves.

In this section of the research, I will analyze the legitimacy of the members of both *The A-List* and *Boy Meets Boy*, or the acceptance and recognition of a character by members of the public. Specifically, my interests are two-fold. First, I seek information about how the ideological codes simultaneously reinforced and negated by the heterosexual female are legitimized and understood by members of the audience. Second, I am interested in the dialogue that is written by contributors who identify as female and how they seem to identify with or argue against both the homosexual male and the heterosexual female. From the comments of these populations, I hope to extrapolate the differences and/or similarities that exist between the audiences of *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List: New York*.

### The Homosexual Male

In researching fan response to *Boy Meets Boy* and *The A-List*, it is obvious that the forms of legitimacy given to gay characters by other gay men and by women have changed substantially since 2003. Since the increase of representation of homosexual male characters, a paradigm shift has occurred in how representation is received by an audience. In the early days of queer visibility on Bravo, some heralded characters of *Boy Meets Boy* as figures that begin the process of breaking down barriers. However, it seems that the tangible excitement of fans disappeared after *The A-List: New York* premiered. Replacing the excitement that fans exhibited over the “love story” that *Boy Meets Boy* showed was frustration, and at times, anger about the conventional stereotypes of gay men that *The A-List* reinforced to the audience, among which seem to be vanity, sex, partying, and heavy levels of consumption--of both clothes and alcohol.

#### *Boy Meets Boy*

Whether it was due to the novel appearance of a leading gay male character or because Bravo effectively promoted the show to both the homosexual male and heterosexual female audience, the audience recognizes James as a legitimate character. In a forum on *Fans of Reality TV* called “James - The Leading Man,” he is described superficially, with many contributors recognizing his conventional masculinity. One notes, “our boy is the hottest one of all....and GAWD is he a catch, a real dreamboat. The only thing is I wish he was about 15-20 lbs more muscled. Then he would be worthy of lifelong worship,” while another states, “Very handsome indeed. I don't think any of the contestants can compliment him lookwise... Hottie and a cutie...” (Foggy Doggy, 2003, CJT, 2003).

However, it is worthwhile to note that the discussions about his appearance and conventional masculinity soon shift to conversations about him as a gay man, more specifically,

he references the level of “how gay” he and other characters act on camera. A frequent contributor to the forum named Bostonsinclair talks about the lead man, saying,

[H]e definitely is a good looking guy although you can 100% tell hes gay as he has a few gay mannerisms. As far as asking about other guys sexuality, he said he had no reason to because producers had told him that they were all gay. So why would you question that (he didnt figure out that he was being used by the producers for sensationalism and was going to be tricked [ . . . ] It makes for good TV but it is rather cruel, and I know I would have been very upset [ . . . ]. He also said some of the guys were more fem and some more masculine... so you know theyre gonna have a str8 guy whos feminine and a gay guy whos very masculine. just from looking at the pics, some of them look more str8 and some more gay, but I ll reserve judgement till seeing the show [ . . . ] Too bad they said no more than kissing...Thats not really fair... (bostonsinclair, 2003).

In this quote, we note that, even though bostonsinclair identifies as a gay male, he mentions how the audience should decode the characters of the show--some, he says will be intentionally “fem,” yet be straight, while others will be intentionally coded as “masculine,” yet actually be gay (bostonsinclair, 2003). Others reply to his post by lamenting that the surprise “twist” is unnecessary and malicious. These contributors feel sad and upset for James, who they believe soes not deserve to be treated in this way (Oringer, 2003). Mr. Obvious notes that

“James should have quit the show once he learned the cruel twist. He totally felt betrayed. He could probably suffer forever from a broken gaydar for choosing a straight guy, but I couldn't blame him since he assumed that everyone was gay since the first episode. James said he eventually stayed, saying he owed a favor to those who were gay and actually wanted to date him. I wish him luck in choosing someone gay... (Mr. Obvious, 2003).

Extrapolating to a larger scale, it seems as though the audience on Fans of Reality of TV is mostly concerned with two things--that there is a representation of a gay male on television, and that the representation of the gay male lead is treated with respect. While there is some discussion of which the individual contributors prefer for James, there is overwhelming support for the gay characters. On the other hand, it is the closeted straight characters that are heavily criticized ("James," 2003).

### *The A-List*

As noted above, there is a much different sentiment among viewers who watched *The A-List* and decided to post on Fans of Reality TV and Television Without Pity. Instead of seeing the excitement about any representation of a homosexual male on television, the tone has changed. The men face a tougher battle in pursuing legitimacy from an audience. Instead, the men, and Logo for that matter, are critiqued by the audience more often than they are supported.

As one viewer notes, "Way to set the gay community back Logo[.] Scripted or not this is a terrible representation of what young, gay men are all about," as another notes, "It may not be fully scripted, but the cast members certainly seem to be aware of what their 'roles' within the group are supposed to be. Which is just as bad" (raisinintheshun, 2010, MFWalkoff, 2010). Here, both contributors are pointing out two essential aspects of representations on the show. One, the coding of characters through their clothing, appearance, and behavior is obvious and not taken seriously by viewers (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). Second, and equally as important, it seems as though viewers becoming better at analyzing the codes of "representation" as well as the codes of "reality" in the years since *Boy Meets Boy* (Fiske, 2001, p. 5). This means that in the years that reality television has existed, the gay audience has grown to see certain representations, such as



those represented in *The A-List* as negative stereotypes that producers latch onto in order to garner an audience.

However, through scouring the forums of Fans of Reality TV, I found two individuals that enjoyed, at least in part, the cattiness that the show is notable for. One of the two contributors goes by the name “its\_glinda\_now,” and she identifies herself as a straight female interested in the premise of the show, stating, “My boyfriend and I both really like this show. lol I love the cattiness and the drama, that's why I watch reality tv!” (its\_glinda\_now, 2009). She continues her analysis and critique of the show’s gay cast by outlining her favorite and least favorite of the characters.

I think Ryan and Tj are my favorites. They are fierce and fabulous and I loved what they had to say about Reichen's newly decorated apartment! They sure didn't hold anything back. Reichen is annoying and I don't like that he's mean to Rodney because he seems so sweet. Austin is just a douche and I couldn't believe his naked photo shoot! He does not have the body for that at all right now. Derek is a bitch and I love it! He's pretty fierce. (its\_glinda\_now, 2009)

Her approval of the characters seems to be based on predicted stereotypes of the gay market that provide “overestimations of gay affluence” by constructing characters as “white, male, professional, [and] urban,” while maintaining “an abundance of good taste and discretionary income” (*Business*, 2004, p. 7). For instance, she enjoys the “fabulous” characters that we see going shopping, have sessions with a personal stylist, and work in a hair salon (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). From her comments, we can see that it seems as if its\_glinda\_now, a straight female audience member, is identifying with the two based upon the codes that the show reinforces about gay men--namely, that because of how Ryan and TJ are coded by the show, the two are

seen as the “gay-as-style-maven” characters through the activities that they participate in together (“Reality Queens,” 2013, p. 52).

#### Analysis of Response: The Homosexual Male

Each of these contributors allows a look into the thoughts that the audience had at the time of each show’s premiere. As stated, upon reading these comments, I believe it is easy to note the drastic shift between the audience’s contentment with *Boy Meets Boy* and apparent frustration with the representations presented in *The A-List*. While the early years of visibility allowed the audience to feel content knowing there was a representation, as Sender notes in *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, comments about *The A-List* put in question “what are they saying about [queer characters]?” (2006). Further, I believe that these contributors prove that the shaping of the gay market was accepted in the early 2000s. Freitas writes,

Ads and programming use subtle or overt cues to hail viewers—‘Hey, queers, watch me!’—not only as individuals—the hail was not ‘Hey, queer!’—but as a group: not only does the product hail me, it hails others like me. As the marketers of the product seek a queer market, they also produce that market; they call it into being. The individuals and their attractions to others of the same sex existed before the hail, as did the community itself. But the hailing pulls them together as queers, if for a moment, and it ties this product into that pre-existing notion of community while simultaneously reinforcing that the community exists. (Freitas, 2007, p. 217)

I believe these marketing techniques were extremely effective due to the fan response to *Boy Meets Boy*. The overall acceptance of the representations presented on *Boy Meets Boy*, proves that the audience was successfully “hailed” by the gay market created and reinforced on

television (Freitas, 2007, p. 217). It is important to note the community-focused comments of the audience of *Boy Meets Boy*. Many contributors state “our guy” in reference to James, or at the very least, seem to feel part of a larger gay community (Foggy Doggy, 2003).

However, I believe that the group of hailed viewers of *The A-List* expected that the representations they saw on television were more aligned with whom they identify as. In the comments over *The A-List*, we can see a misalignment with the representations and the response. In other words, while the representations of the homosexual male stayed relatively similar, the audience expected something more than was presented. In 2011, nearly a decade after the premiere of *Boy Meets Boy*, the representation of the homosexual male was very similar to that of the male suitors. However, this representation should have changed with the times in order to adjust to a gay market that has been much more focused on “gay politics” than in previous years due to the ever-increasing focus on same-sex marriage (*Business*, 2004, p. 3). Extrapolating these comments to a larger scale, I believe that the homosexual male audience no longer completely buys into the “consumer culture” that they were forced to be a part of in the early 2000s (*Business*, 2004, p. 10-12). Instead, a population with growing concern over gay politics is interested in pushing the stereotypes that they are shown on television.

### The Heterosexual Female

This research would be incomplete without attempting to understand the legitimacy of the heterosexual female character, and more specifically, how the audience views her. As stated, in the first and second sections, Andra and Nyasha both represent the heterosexual female character present in the shows. They have a “dualcast” purpose, but their purpose runs deeper. They also exist for the purpose of aiding to redefine a new masculinity during a period of confusion in the

heterosexual audience. However, it is still important to investigate what discussion exists in fan forums about the two female characters in order to get a sense of the willingness of the audience to legitimize them.

First and foremost, Andra is an extremely popular, celebrated character amongst contributors to the fan forums on both *Television Without Pity* and *Fans of Reality TV*. In fact, on the latter site she maintained a nine-page thread titled “Andra - The Friend” that features 84 comments of fans who are excited about the appearance of Andra. One of the first comments, posted by lobeck, seems to encapsulate much of what the audience thought of having a straight female character on a gay-themed show like *Boy Meets Boy*. The contributor notes, I like Andra so far. I think it'll be interesting to see just how much James listens to her opinions/advice. And when she and James are told some of the "mates" are straight, I wonder if she'll start telling James to kick off XXX because she might be interested in them... (lobeck, 2003).

This post, like many others, shows that the audience is not only interested in her appearance on the show, but also her interest in the men on the show. Contributors note their excitement in the possibility of her finding a match, even though this seemingly contradicts the idea of the first gay dating show that focuses on something never represented on television. Along the same lines, another posts, “I hope Andra will be helpful once they learn the truth about the show. Maybe she will be able to flirt with the guys and determine who likes her better than James? Ha ha” (Splatty, 2003). Splatty jokes about her acting for James as a sort of lie-detector who can actively work to attract the straight men, opening up the chance for them to be “outed” by her.

The fan interest in Andra does not stop at the level of interest for her romantically, but continues, emphatically heralding her as the character who has allowed for large-scale change in terms of the representation of gay characters on television. “Dear Andra,” writes trinket, a self-identified gay man, “Although I have been watching *Boy Meets Boy*, I never intended to join or write in this forum, but after watching a rerun of Episode 6 and being moved to tears, I felt I had to.... I simply feel I have to tell you that you made a difference. God Bless you” (trinket, 2003). Others write, “James is so lucky to have [her] as a friend” (CJT, 2003). Both trinket and CJT demonstrate a level of admiration for Andra that seems, in part, to discount the experiences of James. Even though he is the lead character of the show, the audience reaction seems to be in much higher favor of her than him. She also gains a distinct level of true admiration from the audience, while it seems that his most noteworthy qualities are that he is gay and attractive. Why is it that the conventionally heteronormative character once again wins out in terms of power and agency--even when on a show that was designed around a gay audience? What did her character accomplish in terms of creating positive representations of queer people on television? Is this admiration founded in anything?

Finally, it is important to note that Andra replies to the forum thread about her. Given the moderator title “ANDRA\_BMB,” she is able (and very willing) to connect with the fans that admire her. At one point in the discussion, she states how she has felt touched by the supportive comments about her. She writes,

I wanted to thank you guys for taking the time to put posts on these message boards. I appreciate the messages that touched my heart and the friendships that are forming, and can honestly say I have also learned from ones that questioned actions, reactions, and (at

times) character. They gave me a glimpse into how the show/we were coming across to people who didn't know us, and were not there with us. (ANDRA\_BMB, 2003)

In this outpouring of support, Andra is legitimized by the audience. She is given a magnitude of power, and along with it, she retains her power as the heteronormative character on the show. She is viewed as logical, stable, and “sensible,” whereas James is discussed in terms of his attractiveness (Foggy Doggy, 2003).

Alternately, Nyasha does not receive the same legitimization from the audience, but rather, many contributors to the *Television Without Pity* forum consider her a problematic character. Audience analysis here was interesting because the comments about the characters shifted from the gay male cast members to Nyasha rapidly, even days before the premiere of the second season. She was undoubtedly a source of conflict on the show in the eyes of the audience--both gay men and straight women alike.

Nyasha, a heterosexual female character, is often called a “drag-queen” and a “tranny” on the fan forum. Contributors cite this view as being due to the wigs that she wears and amount of makeup she applies. For instance, Popnography writes, “So was I the only who thought Nyasha was either a drag-queen or trans-sexual? Just me? Figured it would explain why she's even on this show,” which implies two things--one, that the commenters in this forum are not interested in watching a female cast member on a gay show, and two, that the audience, in part, does not view drag queen characters the same as they do conventionally masculine male characters (Popnography, 2011). By repeatedly trashing her appearance, it is possible to extrapolate that she is not considered as legitimate as the gay male characters. Why, though, does she receive such treatment on a show that is supposed to be more accepting of difference on a network that targets a queer audience?

Other male viewers attack her gender identity attacked through the comments. One viewer, who notes that he identifies as a gay male, writes,

Nyasha is AWFUL! What a phony, pretentious bitch. Why the hell is she there?

Ultimately I blame the casting directors, who apparently did too much coke and decided she would be a good addition to the show. She has no purpose there. At least last season, they did a semi-reasonable job of making the cast members appear to know each other before the show (though several didn't). But she just makes it so obvious that there's no reality at all behind the casting. (violetr, 2011).

However, violetr is not the only angry fan of the show. Others cite that “girlfriend needs to G-O” instead of continue participating in the show (icecreamlvr, 2011). It is not clear, though, why viewers are not interested in Nyasha as a character. Many commenters, such as Turkish, consider her sole contribution to be the role of “some sassy black girl/fruit fly to stir up trouble on the show,” while Cosmic Muffin asks, “Are they trying to attack women, straight people, African Americans or something? Add some diversity? So far she doesn't seem entertaining, so she needs to go” (Turkish, 2011, Cosmic Muffin, 2011).

These individuals target her not only for her gender identity, but may also target her because of her race. As Sender notes in *Off the Straight and Narrow*, traditionally difference is usually coded one variable at a time (1998). In other words, Nyasha, a straight black woman, can be understood as extremely different. Not only is she one variable different from the cast of *The A-List* by being a female, but she is also heterosexual and a racial minority. On the other hand, Ashley Kelly, the heterosexual female character on *The A-List: Dallas*, identifies as a blonde, straight, white woman. Unlike Andra, she is more similar to the cast. Her status as white may allow for more support from the audience who may view her as similar enough to pass in the

show (Weinstock & Hersh, 2011). It is possible that the scope of her difference is too large for the audience of *The A-List: New York*.

One very interesting anti-Nyasha comment comes from 80s Baby, who identifies as a straight black woman herself. She writes, “If I want to see a black woman behaving like an overdramatic fool I will watch *Basketball Wives* or wait for the next season of *RHOA*. No racism here, I am a black woman and I just hate the stereotype character she is playing. She needs to go sit down and take her 70's wig with her” (80s Baby, 2011). In this way, it seems that, much like the comments about gay male characters between 2003 and 2011, viewers are also more accustomed to viewing a certain set of stereotypes on television--a set of codes that they may have started to recognize are not always the truth. As the comments became more negative overtime, it seems as though the audience of these shows has a firmer grasp on what sort of representations they are not interested in being represented on television.

#### Analysis of Response: The Heterosexual Female

In the fan forums of *Television Without Pity*, Nyasha does not receive legitimacy, and she is seen as an outsider attempting to enter the group. Even though many contributors note that the men did not know each other before the show aired, they seem to refute her legitimacy as a character. One reason for this could be due to race. The men in the show, with the exception of Mike and Rodiney, are all white. However, even Mike, a fashion photographer, and Rodiney, a Brazilian model, play by the same codes that the other white gay men do. With the exception of Rodiney's accent, which is viewed as “cute” and endearing by many fans, the two men sound and act the same as the other characters (violetr, 2011). This is to say, their presence is not different than the others because of race. Enter Nyasha, the sassy straight female character who



identifies with both her femininity and “African-ness” in the first episode (Willey, et al., 2011, Ep. 1). In this way, she is the only character to recognize their sexuality, gender identity, and race all at once. What does this do to her character, though? Why does the audience resist this?

Another reason for her lack of legitimacy could be because of her status as a straight female on a network that was started by queer producers and executives, as well as targeted a queer audience. Logo, unlike Bravo, may have a higher set of standards around it in terms of the gay representations due to their history of being a niche network created for a queer audience. This means that the addition of a heteronormative character may either intentionally or unintentionally be interpreted as seeking to debase any level of power that queer politics may have made. Thus, the gay audience, in attempting to gain legitimacy themselves, could be resistant to accept a straight female character like Nyasha on this show.

Andra does not face the discrimination due to her race that Nyasha does. In fact, Nyasha is targeted because of her race, while there is never a mention of Andra’s whiteness. Due to her race, Nyasha is not able to fit into a show featuring white and Latino men, even though she is a heterosexual female—a “perfect” match for a homosexual male. In a “progressive” show, like *The A-List*, that features the lives of a minority group, the audience of *The A-List* does not accept Nyasha for who she is. As Ralina Joseph, author of *Transcending Blackness From the New Millennium Mulatta to the Exceptional Multiracial*, writes, “Instead of showing Americans embracing blackness in messy, hybridized, multiracial forms, [as one would expect in a show centered around lives of gay men,] [ . . . ] contemporary representations of multiracial Americans is that blackness must be risen above, surpassed, or truly transcended” (Joseph, 2013, p. 4). Nyasha, then, fails to “overcome” her race. The audience does not view her as legitimate at least partially because she is not reinforce the ideological codes that the audience of the show wants

her to reinforce (Fiske, 2001, p. 6). Although she attempts to represent her culture heritage as “Miss Africa United States,” it is not well received by the audience because she does not do what other racialized characters on the show, such as Rodney and Mike, do and shift between sets of codes of white people and people of color (*The A-List*). Joseph notes, “Following the ideology of transformation, race is at once deeply embedded in the racialized codes” of reality television (Joseph, 2013, p. 128).

Finally, it is a distinct possibility that Andra is accepted because she was featured on *Boy Meets Boy* in the early 2000s--a time when gay representation was not prominent. During the inception of gay representation, as Sender notes in *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, straight character representation was assumed, while gay representation was never guaranteed (*Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, 2006). Similarly, it came as no surprise that a straight character like Andra appeared on a gay-themed show. However, nearly a decade later, it is important that Nyasha was neither expected, nor well received, as a character on a gay-themed show.

Once again, it is possible to see that there was a drastic shift in perceptions of the characters presented on these shows. Both Andra and James were allowed an overwhelming legitimacy by the audience on fan forum sites. Even if certain contributors did not enjoy the premise of the show, there was still a tangible energy and excitement about the representation of a homosexual male on television, as well as the open support of a heterosexual female. However, the audience on the same fan forum sites did not accept the ideological codes that they were presented with, such as gay men being sexually promiscuous, sculpted, tan, affluent individuals who are concerned with social status and money. I believe that today’s homosexual male audience is more concerned with the *type* of representation, rather than the excitement about being represented at all.

### Conclusion

The overall work of this thesis has aimed to add to the pre-existing literature that focuses on the pairing of the homosexual male and the heterosexual female on reality television. Through investigating the relationships between the homosexual male and the heterosexual female on television shows that first and foremost target a gay audience, I have shown that the heterosexual female has been included in both shows in order to increase viewership, and thus, ratings and return on investment of advertising. Furthermore, I have shown that her presence has an effect of connecting with the audience of heterosexual female viewers, allowing tolerance of the homosexual male to increase. Finally, my research has investigated the codes of each character type and the effects that these codes have on members of the audience. My findings have shown that the pairing of the homosexual male and heterosexual female has not been as successful in the years since *Boy Meets Boy* premiered in 2003. In fact, legitimacy has halted for many representations of the homosexual male on television—even on *The A-List*, a show on a network centered around programming for a queer audience.

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