Into the Wine, Not the Label: The Visibility of Pansexual Identities in Schitt's Creek

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Introduction: What Lies Ahead

In 2015, the Schitt family entered the homes of many families; television consumers were graced with the unique, multifaceted, and entertaining characters in the sitcom, *Schitt's Creek*. Following the bankruptcy of the Schitts, the family's only remaining asset is a small, rural town called *Schitt's Creek*. The four members of the family – Johnny, Moira, David, and Alexis – are forced to leave their privilege behind as they attempt to reinvent their lives starting from the ground up. While the producers, Daniel and Eugene Levy, were undeniably successful at bringing laughter to audience members evident in the nine prizes won at the 2020 Emmys, they also managed to achieve something greater: representation of LGBTQ+ identities on TV. The character of David Rose is an open and proud member of the LGBTQ+ community as he is pansexual, meaning he is attracted to people regardless of their gender. The casualty and ease in which David's sexual identity is accepted is monumental. The producer and actor of the character himself, Dan Levy, talked about the importance of representation in the media in his acceptance speech for a GLAAD award for LGBTQ+ advocacy: "I didn't have the security of seeing a lot of people like myself being celebrated in popular culture" (Sharpe, 2020). *Schitt's Creek* "incubates joy and creates a clarity that allows people to see themselves and each other more deeply" (Sharpe, 2020). The show illustrates sexual diversity in a covert manner by underemphasizing sources of strife typically experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ community. David is incredibly confident in his sexual expression, accepted in his family unit, and fully embraced by his community members; these are David's internal and external sources of support that affirm confidence in his sexuality. Although David's experience is heart-warming to witness, it is uncommon for LGBTQ+ members not to struggle with identity formation, coming out to one's family, and navigating one's minority status in the face of the public. Because David's experience is not the reality for most individuals, the progressive portrayal of his character has a utopian effect. *Schitt's Creek* serves as an ideal, safe space that ignores labels and embraces all sexualities, encouraging audience members to emulate the acceptance from the show into their own lives.

Background: The Importance of Media as an Agent of Socialization

Individuals are introduced and reared in society through the life-long process of socialization through which we acquire a self-identity and the physical, mental and social skills needed to survive in society (Diana, 2015). There are various agents of socialization that serve as teachers, conveying to us the things we need to know in order to properly participate in society. One main agent of socialization is the media. Specifically mass media, composed of large-scale organizations that use print or electronic means to communicate with large numbers of people, inform the public about events, introduce people's identities, provide varying viewpoints, sell services/products, and entertain an audience (Brown, 2020). There are different stages of socialization as we mature and grow throughout our life course. First, during childhood, we are introduced to the media through books and TV shows that shape our perceptions of norms. For example, our gender roles first emerge at the toddler stage; children are engrained to believe that girls and boys are distinct in their identities and interests.

In adolescence, a buffer time between childhood and adulthood, young people begin to explore their self-identities. Media is one medium in which they compare, confirm or negate their perceptions of self.

Communication and media theorist, George Gerbner, coined the term cultivation theory to explain the effects of media. According to the cultivation theory, the effects of media are cumulative, gradual and significant; overtime, media ingrains cultural norms and beliefs into its consumers (Brown, 2020). High frequency consumers are more susceptible to media messages, and subsequently, are more likely to believe that those messages are real and valid; this is also known as mainstreaming (Brown, 2020). In relation to identity formation during adolescence, the media cultivates our attitudes of what is considered normal or acceptable. This is exemplified through historical television shows with queer depictions such as *Will and Grace* and *Glee*. Premiering in 1998, *Will and Grace* was the first successful network series to feature gay characters in gay milieu. In addition to normalizing gay narratives for Americans and achieving groundbreaking firsts for gay television representation by featuring two gay characters, researcher Jacques Rothmann discusses its impact further. In his 2013 article, "Send in the (Gay) Clowns: *Will and Grace* and *Modern Family* as 'Sensibly Queer,'" Rothmann critiques the use of comedic satire in *Will and Grace*, arguing that it depicts gay men as "a joke." Additionally, researchers, Michaela Meyer and Megan Wood, explain an adverse effect of *Glee* for consumers in their 2013 article, "Sexuality and Teen Television: Emerging Adults Respond to Representations of Queer Identity on *Glee*." Although *Glee* paved the path for LGBTQ representation with their unparalleled diversity in both characters and casting, Meyer and Wood discovered that the queer narrative content did not produce a broader acceptance of non-heterosexual identities.

According to a 2017 study titled, "Perspectives of LGBTQ Emerging Adults on the Depiction and Impact of LGBTQ Media Representation," young people look for confirmation of how their sexualities are characterized through the representation in the media. Researchers at the University of Toronto, Lauren McInroy and Shelley Craig, investigated queer depictions in traditional (offline) media versus contemporary (online) media. Through sampling and analyzing 19 young adults about the messages of sexual orientation in traditional media, the differences in the experiences of LGBTQ adults in traditional media compared to new media, and how the consumption of these messages impact LGBTQ emerging adults, they concluded a distinct difference. New media (i.e., social media) offers platforms for creativity and discussion whereas traditional media representation of LGBTQ community members is often stereotypical; although traditional media has the ability to entice open dialogue, it often limits how young LGBTQ adults perceive their sub-identities and future trajectories (McInroy & Craig, 2017). With this background knowledge, the importance of how characters are portrayed is evident. Historically, sexual minority characters in television have lacked the depth and breadth of representation that is integral to the identities of young adults. However, in *Schitt's Creek*, David Rose fills this hole by contributing a unique presence on screen that invites open dialogue around pansexual representation.

Literature Review: Existing Conversations Pertaining to Sources of Strife for LGBTQ Members

Joining the existing scholarly conversations surrounding the LGBTQ community, it is evident that the hardships faced by some individuals within this community is determined by the level of parental acceptance, romantic relationship ease, and identity preservation in the face of the public. Formulating one's own identity is a personal process that takes time and understanding. Through this gradual process, an individual must come to terms with their own identity and eventually reveal their identity to their community through the coming out process. The coming out process begins internally by noticing feelings that transgress being straight, or heterosexual, and is fulfilled when one is open and honest about their sexual orientation and identity. During

late adolescence, someone who is of sexual minority status will face both risks and benefits of coming out. One system of support that is imperative for LGBTQ+ members is parental and familial approval. The attachment theory, which states that our attachment figures guide the way we think about our relationships and ourselves, is a guiding force in the disclosure process. Carnelley et. al. (2011) explains two possible reactions of coming out: “If met with rejection, a person may feel more insecure in attachment relationships, but if met with acceptance it may lead to security in relationships” (218).

In the first case in which LGB individuals are met with rejection from their parents, the consequences can be catastrophic to one’s confidence and relationship success. Hesitancy and fear begin to brew prior to disclosing one’s sexual minority status to their parental figures. According to the Pew Research Center (2013), in a survey conducted with LGBT Americans on the coming out experience, around one third of LGBT adults admittedly reported not disclosing their identity to their parents. When asked about the reasoning why in an open-ended question, two reasons emerged. Some respondents said that the subject never came up, while others expressed concern over potentially ruining their relationship with their parents if they were to come out. This concern is not unreasonable for it is rooted in historically ingrained stigmas and prejudices against the LGBTQ+ community. Carnelley et. al. (2011) states that “about half of LGB individuals report that parents react negatively” (218). Negative parental reactions can stem from a variety of factors including internalized homophobia, traditional beliefs about family, lack of education, personal sense of failure, etc. When parental acceptance is not established and maintained, an individual can face the consequences of detachment and relationship destruction in the future. Rohner et. al. (2005) notes the parental acceptance-rejection theory, also known as PARTheory, in which children exemplify the need for a positive response from their parental figures in the form of acceptance. When this need is not met, a child can be “hostile and aggressive, dependent or defensively independent, impaired in self-esteem and self-adequacy, emotionally unresponsive, emotionally unstable, and to have a negative worldview,” and “appear to be disposed toward behavior problems and conduct disorders, to be depressed or have depressed affect, and to become involved in drug and alcohol abuse” (300). The adverse effects from parental rejection are quite clear, resulting in negative mental and behavioral health outcomes.

In opposition, if disclosure of one’s sexual identity is met with acceptance from parental figures, the LGB individual will be encouraged to express themselves truthfully and confidently. Carnelley et. al. (2011) provides a theoretical model that illustrates how children’s experiences with their parental figures may influence romantic attachment models and relationships. The quality of the child-parent relationship during childhood affects whether a child decides to come out to their parents and predicts their parents’ reactions to disclosure. Parents who are more accepting and encouraging of independence during childhood are more likely to react positively to a disclosure; subsequently, the LGB individual will be gain a secure romantic attachment, able to breed trust and optimism in their romantic relationships as a result of the trust and optimism received in their parental relationships. Once again referring to the study from the Pew Research Center (2013), the survey results confirm the benefits of a positive disclosure experience. Although the majority of respondents report difficulty during conversations in which they reveal their sexual identities, the majority also report that their relationship with parental figures either grow stronger or do not change after sharing this information. While the coming out process is unique to the individual and should be evaluated taking into account one’s safety and well-being, the benefits from a positive coming out experience can be transformative in empowering and developing a positive self-image for an LGB individual which they can then carry into their relationships with others.

In addition to navigating the coming out process with one's family, LGB individuals can also struggle finding satisfaction and ease in their romantic relationships. Similar to the pros and cons with familial relationships in the coming out process, there are also benefits and risks in romantic relationships. The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy explains it best: "The day-to-day activities of their lives often are similar, but the social context in which they live differs greatly, largely due to the influences of the dominant heterosexual culture and traditional expectations of gender roles within a relationship" ("Therapeutic Issues for Same-sex Couples"). Breaking this quote down into two distinct parts, we can first explore the benefits of same-sex relationships, which are succinctly noted by David Knox in the text, *Marriage and Family*. In terms of relationship satisfaction, factors that contribute to the quality of relationships are the same for lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. As long as both partners share equal power and control, are emotionally expressive, perceive much attraction to the relationship, have few distractions, place high value on attachment, and share decision making, relationship satisfaction will be great (Knox, 2018, p. 145). Distinct benefits for same-sex relationships are that gay and lesbian couples tend to resolve conflict more positively and have a more equal division of labor. Regardless of the gender, the partner with the greater resources in the relationship is more likely to perform fewer household tasks. Satisfaction with division of labor and sense of being appreciated for one's contributions to household tasks were positively correlated with overall relationship satisfaction.

In contrast, a same-sex relationship can face challenges particularly pertaining to preserving its face in the public eye. These challenges can arise in the intrapersonal context of the relationship or in the grander social context of your surroundings. Because the emergence of one's personal sexuality can take several years to form (from the first awareness of one's feelings to complete confidence in their identity), a LGB individual is oftentimes navigating their personal identity while simultaneously exploring a new relationship. Many same-sex partnerships merge before each person has completed their own identity growth, complicating the development of their relationship. Based on their backgrounds, each partner is likely to have a different level of comfort, or what the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy refers to as "stage discrepancies" ("Therapeutic Issues for Same-sex Couples"). Clarkson alludes to this further in "The Limits of the Discourse of Norms," when explaining the degrees of transgression. Clarkson argues that, "for gay visibility to challenge the hegemonic gender regime, the acceptance of outspoken, disobedient, visible gay men and lesbian is necessary to raise acceptance of all gay people, including those who identify as straight acting, and to recognize the diversity of gay identities" (2008, 369). The need to acknowledge the diversity within the gay community itself helps explain the various levels of security one might feel about their own sexuality, and even their partners. Some straight-acting homosexuals may feel uneasiness towards others in the community who have a very flamboyant personality because they do not want to be associated to the stereotypical norms for gay men. Although, acceptance of all gays is necessary to challenge the hegemonic gender norms as it will broaden visibility and promote a unified front of the gay community to society. A statistic from the NY Times reports that at least 5% of American men are gay (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2013). With millions more still living in the closet by hiding their sexuality on social networks, not disclosing their sexuality in anonymous surveys, and remaining in marriages with women, it is evident the fear, discomfort, and in some cases, selective homophobia that still exists within some LGB individuals. Pride.com offers suggestions for how to navigate a relationship with a partner who is in the closet; by prioritizing respect and individuality, people in a same sex relationship can recognize and accept the fact that their partner's sexual orientation visibility levels may vary from their own (Lewis, 2016).

The last aspect that affects the visibility of LGB relationships is the social environment of the couple; the norms and values of the surrounding community play a major role in either denying or confirming the acceptance of that couple into society. In America, perceptions about social acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community differ by region of the country. Cities and coastal towns are largely depicted as more accepting of LGBTQ+ members as the Pew Research Center reports that “those living in the West (51%) are more likely than those living in the South (29%) or Midwest (29%) to say there is a lot of acceptance of LGBT individuals in their city or town” (“The coming out experience,” 2013). However, with 2.9-3.8 million LGBT people living in rural America, the majority of these LGBT individuals (88%) do not choose their geographical location based on the level of social acceptance (“The coming out experience,” 2013). LGBT individuals choose their home based on the same factors that appeal to heterosexual people: “tight-knit communities with a shared sense of values that typically revolve around places like the church, schools or local businesses” (Fadel, 2019). While LGBT individuals face similar challenges to heterosexual individuals including health care access, housing shortages, the opioid epidemic, and job loss, these challenges are heightened for LGBTQ+ members. Therefore, it is crucial for them to be protected by LGBT-inclusive laws at the federal, state and local level; without non-discrimination protection policies in place, LGBT members are disproportionally impacted which could lead to choosing between “these basic rights and protections and where they call home" (Fadel, 2019). Across the country, anti-LGBT hate crimes are on the rise; more frightening is that crimes motivated by homophobia, homonegativity, and transphobia are likely underreported given flaws in data collection and the hesitancy toward reporting one’s perpetrator. The most marginalized communities, whose makeup is largely that of minority racial and sexual statuses, are the most vulnerable to hate crimes including bullying, harassment, sexual violence, or murder. This reality for LGBTQ+ members is saddening and horrific which is why it is imperative that this community has legal protections to combat the crimes stemming from negative attitudes and beliefs.

After thorough analysis of various scholarly texts, it is apparent the role that familial relationships, romantic partner security, and social environments play for sexual minorities in developing their identities. This is further explored by implementing the media text, *Schitt’s Creek,* into the existing scholarly conversation surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. Looking through the lens of the reviewed scholarly articles to analyze *Schitt’s Creek*, it is apparent that David Rose’s experience being pansexual in the grander scheme of the show’s plot is idealistic, positively increasing the visibility of the LGBTQ+ community.

Analysis: How *Schitt’s Creek* Promotes Visibility of Queer Identities

Using the medium of *Schitt’s Creek*, we can analyze whether the representation of sexual diversity was successful or not. Throughout the entirety of the series, the fact that David’s minority status being pansexual is never explicitly stated creates a utopian illusion. Audiences are first given a hint to David’s sexual identity in Season 1, Episode 8. Not long after David befriends Stevie, the motel manager, they act on their sexual chemistry. In one of the most iconic scenes where David and Stevie are shopping for wine after a casual hookup, Stevie approaches the topic of sexuality. Wanting to inquire about David’s sexuality in a covert manner, Stevie alludes to sexuality by using a metaphor to wine. In the following dialogue, red wine refers to having sex with a person of the opposite sex, while white wine refers to having sex with a person of the same sex:

> Stevie: “I only drink red wine. And up until last night, I was under the impression that you too only drink red wine.”
> David: “Um… I do drink red wine. But I also drink white wine. And I’ve been known to sample the occasional rose. And a couple summers back I tried a merlot, that used to be a chardonnay.”
> Stevie: “Yeah, so, you’re just really open to all wines.”
> David: “I like the wine, and not the label” (Levy et al., 2015).

This example, in which David describes himself as being pansexual without ever saying “pansexual,” is the only instance in the show where sexual labels were implied, but still never explicitly stated. The producers’ decision to distract the focus from labels was intentional and strategic for it conveyed to the audience an accepting and non-judgmental culture in *Schitt’s Creek*. Furthermore, it de-emphasized the need for constricting our identities to social constructs; while labels can be helpful to individuals who are struggling to describe their feelings, they also can serve as a hindrance for individuals who feel that a singular umbrella term limits their self-expression. This scene alone most resembles the coming out process, revealing to audiences David’s sexuality while simultaneously normalizing pansexual representation.

Although David technically “comes out,” or clarifies his sexuality, to both Stevie and audiences in the wine store scene, a coming out conversation is never had between David and his family. It is implied by the fact that his parents, Johnny and Moira, and his sister, Alexis, do not question David’s choice of partners that they are aware and accepting of his sexuality. Even in the few flashbacks throughout the series, the producers choose not to include a coming out story as background knowledge to his character; the effect of this decision illustrates unconditional acceptance. As discussed in the literature review, Carnelley et. al. explains the effect that a close parental-child relationship in one’s childhood can have in the decision to come out. For the Rose family, their progressive family dynamic and open, unfiltered dialogue can be viewed as an encouraging factor in David’s choice of being an open and proud member of the LGBTQ+ community. Every member of the Rose family has an extravagant, over-the-top personality which enables the audience to perceive David as fairly normal within the context of his family: Johnny is high-maintenance, Moira is theatrical and dramatic, Alexis embodies every feminine stereotype, and David transgresses gender norms exemplified by his clothing choices. Overall, David’s relationship with his immediate family encourages the development of a positive self-image that, in turn, allows David to be undeniably confident in himself and his sexuality.

Because of David's familial background, his romantic relationships (mainly with Patrick) mirror the healthy relationship development and qualities that were first fostered in his relationship with his parents. As mentioned in the literature from past studies, when parents encourage acceptance and independence in an LGB child, the child will be able to develop a secure romantic attachment, breeding trust and optimism in their romantic relationship as a result of the trust and optimism received in their parental relationship. David and Patrick both illustrate positive relationship satisfaction from their romantic relationship. David Knox reminds us of the factors that contribute to healthy LGB relationships including, but not limited to, equal power and control, emotional expressiveness, few distractions, and shared decision-making. The couple complements one another, communicates effectively, and is able to resolve conflicts in a healthy manner. For example, in Season 6, Episode 14 in which David and Patrick are about to get married, Patrick pays for David to get a pre-wedding massage; little did Patrick know, he actually paid for a happy ending for David. Although Patrick is angry, he also realizes and admits responsibility for the situation: “All I did was leave an envelope full of cash and a note that said take very good care of you. And now that I’ve said those words out loud, I can see how a certain person would interpret that the wrong way” (Levy et al., 2020). In the end, they were able to laugh off the situation, claiming “this is going to make for a very strange story one day” (Levy et al., 2020). Despite a few other similar hiccups throughout their relationship, they are able to persevere as a couple, business partners, and eventually, husband and husband.

No relationship is perfect, and for LGB couples, perfection is a rarity especially considering the additional challenges they may encounter. For David and Patrick, as their relationship progresses, they have to overcome what the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy refers to as stage discrepancies. Although David never needs to disclose his sexuality to his family, Patrick, on the other hand, has never dated

a man before. When his character is first introduced, Patrick admits that he has only dated women in the past. As the more experienced man in the relationship, David respectfully navigates Patrick through the coming out process to his parents. In Season 5, Episode 11, David invites Patrick's parents to town for a surprise birthday party. The parents, who assume that David and Patrick were strictly business partners, are surprised to find out that their son is gay when Johnny Rose accidentally outs him. Pushing personal feelings of being the closeted boyfriend aside, David decides to keep this mishap a secret, and rather, encourages Patrick to come out on his own terms: "What you're dealing with is very personal and its something you should only do on your terms" (Levy et al., 2019). Although the parents express sadness over being excluded from personal details in Patrick's life, they respond pleasantly when Patrick finally explains that David is his boyfriend. His mom reminds him, "You are the only thing in the world that matters to us. And if David makes you happy, then that's all we care about" (Levy et al., 2019). The serious and kind-hearted manner in which the producers portray Patrick's coming out experience with the guiding support from David exemplifies to audiences what a healthy coming out conversation can look like and how parents or loved ones can properly respond.

The last aspect of *Schitt's Creek* that uniquely contributes to the show's utopian effect is the unrealistic correlation, or lack thereof, between a rural township and the community's acceptance levels of the queer visibility. As evidenced by the Pew Research Center, perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community are generally less accepting in the Midwest and South where tight-knit, traditional communities typically reside, rather than in bustling cities or coastal towns home to a more diverse population. The town of *Schitt's Creek*, filmed in the tiny hamlet of Goodwood, Canada, resembles rural America for the population remains around 600 people. Home to only a handful of businesses including Bob's Garage, Rose Apothecary, and Café Tropical, *Schitt's Creek* is undoubtedly a small town; yet, despite seeming more traditional on the surface, the community members do not reflect conservative perspectives. While originally surprised by the flamboyant and high-maintenance personalities of the Schitt family, the town remains welcoming and open-minded, illustrating a willingness to learn about differing experiences. The community's united acceptance of David and Patrick's relationship is most refreshing to witness. Challenges that are typically heightened for LGBTQ+ individuals such as harassment, healthcare/housing discrimination, and hate crimes are completely absent in *Schitt's Creek*. Instead, audiences are exposed to a welcoming culture in which David and Patrick's momentous relationship milestones are celebrated by the surrounding community including the opening day of Rose Apothecary, Patrick's serenade of David, and the couple's wedding.

Discussion: Approval from the Entertainment Industry and LGBTQ+ Community

An extensive exploration of David's familial relationships, romantic partner security, and social environments reveal that the illustration of sexual minorities in *Schitt's Creek* consistently idealizes the LGBTQ+ experience. However, because the media plays such a vital role in representing various communities, the portrayals of these identities should be accurate. Inaccurate representations can lead to unrealistic perceptions or expectations of a community, whereas accurate portrayals can lead to the cultivation of accepting and inclusive beliefs. Audiences are able to speak about representation they see in television or movies by either confirming or denying its accuracy through entertainment awards and on their personal media platforms.

Without a doubt, the entertainment industry is warmly receptive to *Schitt's Creek,* illustrated in the multitude of nominations given and awards won. Although the Canadian sitcom was first released in 2015, it exponentially gained traction and blew up in 2020 when the show hit the streaming platform, Netflix. Approval of the show was widespread resulting in awards from infamous television academies as well as recognition from LGBT advocacy organizations. Most notably, *Schitt's Creek* won nine Primetime Emmy Awards in 2020 for

Outstanding Comedy Series, Lead Actor in a Comedy Series, Lead Actress in a Comedy Series, Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series, Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series, Writing for a Comedy Series, Directing for a Comedy Series, Contemporary Costumes, and finally, Casting for a Comedy Series; it swept all seven comedy series categories, making history for the first show in Emmys history to do so ("List of awards and nominations received by *Schitt's Creek*," 2021). Furthermore, the series won two 2021 Screen Actors Guild Awards (Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series and Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Comedy Series) and two 2021 Golden Globe Awards (Best Television Series – Musical or Comedy, and Best Actress – Television Series Musical or Comedy). From GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), Daniel Levy won the Davidson/Valentini Award in 2019, and *Schitt's Creek* won Outstanding Comedy Series in 2020 and 2021. And from The Queerties, an online magazine and newspaper covering gay-oriented lifestyle and news, Daniel Levy won TV performance in 2020, and *Schitt's Creek* won TV series in 2021 ("List of awards and nominations received by *Schitt's Creek*," 2021). The overwhelming recognition from the public confirmed by the aforementioned awards proves that a show featuring LGBTQ+ narratives can be successful in entertainment, while simultaneously educating consumers about the normalization of queer culture.

While the nominations and awards from the entertainment industry benefit the fame and success of both the show and cast members, it is more important to understand the impact *Schitt's Creek* made within the LGBTQ+ community. On social media platforms and pop news sources alike, reactions from LGBTQ+ members positively embrace the queer narrative that *Schitt's Creek* aimed to portray. In a Huffington Post article titled, "How *Schitt's Creek* Is A Role Model For Queer Families," the show is praised for being both a social phenomenon and an invitation to do better. Author, Brianna Sharpe, writes, "Homosexuality isn't the punchline to any jokes here. In presenting David's pansexuality as the least exceptional thing about the outrageous Rose family, *Schitt's Creek* is wonderfully different" (2020). When media representations of the LGBTQ+ community are positive, they help youth form their own identities and foster resilience within the community itself. LGBTQ+ fans comment on their takeaways from the show in a BBC article titled, "*Schitt's Creek* normalises LGBTQ relationships." One fan, Eliza Gilbert, says, "They're not seen as 'the gay couple', they are the couple that everyone's rooting for… [Which is] really important, because the LGBTQ+ community are always searching for shows that have healthy representation, and it's so rare" (Pandey, 2020). The overwhelming, heart-warming expression of gratitude from the LGBTQ+ community is summarized perfectly in a letter addressed to the creators, cast, and crew of *Schitt's Creek*, read aloud in the documentary, "Best Wishes, Warmest Regards: A *Schitt's Creek* Farewell." A Facebook group of almost 5,000 moms with LGBTQ kids, called Serendipity Doo Dah, thank *Schitt's Creek* for everything they have done for their kids and the community they represent. Signed by more than 1,8000 moms, the kind words bring tears to the cast members: "You have created new ways for queer viewers to see themselves represented, and in its own way that is just as important as the battles we are still fighting" (Segal, 2020). Through analyzing credible responses from LGBTQ+ members who adore seeing their community represented in an authentic manner, we can better understand the monumental impact the show has made in increasing the diversity and visibility of queer identities on television.

Conclusion: Why Any of This Matters

In conclusion, *Schitt's Creek* is a groundbreaking and popular media text as it highlights sexual diversity in a manner that has not been accomplished before. Previous television shows have attempted to represent the LGBTQ+ community by focusing on the narratives that typically marginalize queer identities, rather than liberate them. As explored in the literature review, members of the LGBTQ+ community face additional

challenges associated with identifying as a minority sexual status. When forming their self-identities, LGB individuals encounter hurdles in the coming out process, navigating their familial relationships, merging their identities with a romantic partner, and dealing with acceptance or rejection from society at large. However, David's pansexual representation in *Schitt's Creek* is idealistic which is uncommonly found in media; David expresses confidence in his self-image, receives unconditional support from his family, engages in a healthy relationship with Patrick, and is warmly accepted by the surrounding town members. This depiction of LGBTQ+ experiences, in which typical sources of strife are disregarded and nonexistent in David's storyline, creates a utopian effect. The show illustrates a society in which homophobia is excluded and queerness is celebrated, giving hope to LGBTQ+ audience members for an inclusive future. In response to the normalization of sexual diversity in media, the public's perception of the LGBTQ+ community is broadened and made more accepting. In sum, while a media text remains an amazing source of entertainment for the public, Daniel and Eugene Levy illustrate the powerful impact and responsibility in diversifying the visibility of stories, identities, and communities in *Schitt's Creek*; hopefully future media creators are inspired to do the same in an effort to one day achieve true representation, liberation, and equality for the LGBTQ+ community.

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