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## Fashioning The Gays: A Representation Study on the Gay Protagonists in the 2000s Gay-themed American TV Series

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### Abstract

*This study focuses on the relationship between fashion and the gay community by observing the 2000s American TV series with gay characters as the protagonists. It intends to explain the way fashion is portrayed and its significance for gay culture. It can contribute to theory enrichment in cultural, literary and media studies. It would also increase people's knowledge about fashion in and for the gay culture. This research incorporated the main data in the form of dialogues as well as pictures of scenes showing fashion worn by the gay characters obtained from Will & Grace (1998-2006), Queer as Folk (2000-2005), Six Feet Under (2001-2005), and Some of My Best Friends (2001). By applying Hall's representation theory to analyze the data, this study discovers that the gay protagonists in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series are portrayed as fashionable people, who think of fashion as their pride. However, the fashion used in portraying gay characters has shifted from the effeminate looks that are mostly composed of women's clothes. Instead, they are still seen concerning with their appearance, but their exploration of fashion is sticking to men's clothes. This portrayal has two essential significances for the gay community. It affirms the modish of their identity, while at the same time refusing the feminine stereotype.*

**Keywords:** 2000s fashion; 2000s TV series; gay-themed TV series; gay community

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### Introduction

Making fashion a research object is not new in the academic world, especially in the field of cultural studies. Almost everyone is familiar with the term fashion because clothing is one of the most essential aspects of

human life. For that reason, fashion is both interesting and important to learn and understand. The development of fashion from the past to the present can indicate that society, culture and human thoughts have undergone great changes. Even though the study of fashion has been conducted by many

researchers, research topics related to fashion seem to never stop at one point.

Fashion needs to evolve from time to time to keep its industry afloat (Simmel, 1957, p. 541; Adhitya & Wulandari, 2020, p. 193). These changes have become increasingly obvious, especially in the era of globalization which has brought about a great impact on culture, including fashion (Ayuningtyas & Adhitya, 2022, p. 154). In other words, the change of era and the rapid development of technology have a great influence on the way people dress as well as the concept of fashion constructed by society.

Talking about fashion is both interesting and significant because fashion and its concepts always change continuously as well as the way people think about fashion (Adhitya, 2019, p. 2). For example, in the past, people tended to be dressed in layered clothing. In contrast, they nowadays prefer casual and comfortable outfits. Furthermore, it indicates a change in the way people perceive what and how they present the clothes they wear.

The same thing happens in the gay community. Fashion style is often something that attracts attention among gay people. There are various perceptions about clothing when it comes to gay culture. It is because gay men are often associated with unique and eccentric styles (Cole 2000 p. 2; Reid, 2003, p. 22). Moreover, they are often known as people who are highly concerned about their appearance (Hutson, 2010, p. 213). They are perceived as having quirky tastes and high sensitivity to fashion. This perception could be one of the characteristics of gay people that can be studied in academia.

Moreover, in American popular culture, like television and film, gay characters are often depicted as individuals who are in or close to the fashion world. Approaching the 2000s, a collection of TV series that caught the attention of Americans portrayed openly gay characters (Skover & Testy, 2002, p. 235; Sender, 200, p. 49). Their impact can even still be felt twenty years later. With the boom of streaming services, a whole new generation, including the Gen-Z's who were born in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, are re-discovering

them (Adhitya, Rosmawati & Fainnayla, 2022, p. 68).

The 2000s gay characters are then taken as fashion inspirations (Anest, 2020). As a result, the fashion from the 2000s is back on trend across all social media platforms (Feiam, 2022). #Y2K (i.e. hashtag year of 2000) went viral on Facebook and Instagram, became trending on Twitter, and made it to the "For You" page on TikTok. Since people commonly think that the clothes they wear can be perceived as a way to communicate something (Yonezawa & Nakatani, 2009, p. 326), the images showing the connection between fashion and gay culture can also be an indication that there are messages or meanings that society needs to understand. Therefore, if this is analyzed more deeply, there must be something essential behind those images.

A literature review was conducted by reviewing research discussing the issue of fashion in the gay community. Cole's research (2000) studied in detail how gay fashion styles contributed to the development of gay culture in the U.S. and it can be a reliable reference when discussing fashion in the gay community. Yonezawa & Nakatani (2009) as well as Hutson (2010) focused on the relationship between clothing and the strengthening of the identity of gay and lesbian people. Additionally, Reid (2003) discussed the role of fashion for gay men in South Africa. Meanwhile, there are not many current studies that put forward the issue of clothing and its relation to gender, especially concerning the gay community. Therefore, the literature review of this study only found three studies discussing the general phenomenon of clothing and its relation to consumer tastes, identity and gender which were conducted by Thompson and Haytko (1997), Twigg (2009) as well as Akdemir (2018). However, those researchers have not yet thoroughly demonstrated how fashion is represented in popular culture through gay characters and its impact on gay culture. This study then aims to fill this gap in research.

Furthermore, any discussion of fashion in gay culture needs to begin with an explanation of fashion as a concept. Many definitions can be formed regarding fashion in the realm of

clothing. Several definitions of fashion from numerous studies are collected to define the concept used in this study. According to Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992, p. 1), fashion or clothing does not only always mean clothes in general, but it can also involve changes made to the body, such as piercing and tattoos, or decorative additions, such as accessories, cosmetic and perfume. Meanwhile, Aspers and Godart (2013, p. 173) suggest that the term fashion could be interpreted as being collective and it would mean changing or adding something old, that is already existing, into something new. The two ideas above show that the concept of fashion has a meaning that indicates changing or adding something to make one's appearance more attractive.

In addition, according to Simmel (1957, p. 549), fashion displays something different for every individual that might not always be in accordance with other people's views. Modifications or embellishments for the sake of fashion that a gay man tends to do indicates that something is different about him even though the changes are probably not approved or seen right by others. This concept of fashion used in this study can be associated with the choice he dresses in a certain type, color or style of clothing and additions in the form of accessories, tattoos and piercing intended to modify and beautify one's appearance in order to look more attractive.

Popular culture has long used fashion as a character trait to the extent that fashion is often associated with certain groups of people, especially the gay community. In the US, for instance, there have been gay-themed TV series portraying openly gay characters showing their fashion skill. It is no longer a strange thing if many people associate fashion with gay people. Since it is taken as a reasonable notion, fashioning gay characters becomes essential. How gay characters are portrayed through their fashion and the significance of the portrayal for the gay community in the 2000s American society thus need to be studied. These objectives can be achieved in this study by identifying the fashion worn by the gay characters in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series.

Furthermore, this interdisciplinary study focuses on the scope of fashion, popular culture, identity and minority. In theory, it will contribute in enriching the analytical thinking in the fields of cultural, literary and media studies. It is also expected to be a referential source for researchers who have similar research interests. In practice, the findings of this study can be useful to enhance people's understanding of the fashion in gay culture and improve their perception of the community.

## Methodology

This study of fashion and its relation to gay culture is qualitative research as well as library research. It will analyze data obtained from gay-themed American TV series that appeared in the early 2000s. The beginning of the 2000s, known as the beginning of the third millennium, was a period of significant changes in all aspects of human life. Transformation in science, technology and mass media had a great impact on the visibility of gay culture on American TV and films (Rudy, 2016, p. 62).

Daytime TV programs might have depicted openly gay characters widely watched by the public (Marcus, 2005, p. 197; Benschoff & Griffin, 2006, p. 286). However, they are mostly supporting characters, such as Stanford Blatch and Antony Marentino in *Sex and the City* (1998-2002) and Bob Hunter and Lee McDermott in *Desperate Housewives* (2007-2012). Therefore, this study will analyze TV series whose main characters are gay men. Four gay-themed TV series that became popular at the time were *Will & Grace* (1998-2006), *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005), *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), and *Some of My Best Friends* (2001) which could attract people's attention and occupy high ratings as programs that many people viewed at the beginning of the 2000s (Skover & Testy, 2002, p. 235; Sender, 2004, pp. 57-58; Streitmatter, 2009, p. 135). Therefore, the data collection included all the episodes of the TV series mentioned above.

These TV series can be useful data to gain ideas and understanding of fashion in the gay community. These series are watched closely from the first to the last episode in

chronological order to collect the data for the analysis by using the note-taking technique. The primary data is in the form of words and pictures. Dialogues related to fashion, including but not limited to clothing styles and fashion brands, are transcribed, scene descriptions are retold in the form of statements, and scenes showing the clothing worn by the main characters are screenshotted.

As analytical descriptive research, this study employs Hall's representation to analyze the data. In the field of representation, everything can be considered or seen as a symbol that forms a meaning that can be used to describe realities (Hall, 1997, p. 19; Storey, 2003, p. x, Adhitya & Wulandari, 2021, p. 31). The collected data, such as dialogues, scene descriptions and scene screenshots are treated as symbols and are analyzed to identify what is being represented by the discussed object or the phenomenon to explain the correlation between fashion and the gay community.

## Results and Discussion

The results of the data analyzed in this study. It is divided into two subsections, presenting the portrayal of fashion in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series and its significance for the gay community. The data analyzed in this study, supported by references and related research as secondary data, has shown that it is undeniable that fashion plays a significant role among gay people.

### ***The Portrayal of Fashion through Gay Protagonists***

Portraying gay characters is incomplete without mentioning fashion. In a heteronormative society, gay men, like other non-normative sexual orientations, i.e. lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals, are considered minorities. However, indifferent to racial and ethnic minorities stereotyped based on physical appearance, i.e. Asians' slanted eyes and Afro hair, there is no direct relation between sexual preference and physical quality to stereotype non-sexual normative minorities. Therefore, gay men are stereotyped by their fashion choice.

The gay protagonists in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series are portrayed as fashionable men. Since gay men are widely perceived to be interested in experimenting with clothing and are known to have a better understanding of fashion, people have a perception that gay men have an influence on men's fashion (Cole, 2000, p. 2). In general, the gay characters in the TV series are depicted as fashionable men who are selective in the fashion department. In the TV series, they are described as having good fashion sense and attractive appearance. For instance, in the episode "Love Plus One" of *Will & Grace*, Jack gave his comments on fashion.

Jack : "I say yes on the pants, yes on the sweater and definitely yes with the other decision you're struggling with."

Jack's remarks in the dialogue may indicate that fashion always seems to be a priority or something that gay men value. This reflects their desire to look modish because an attractive fashion style can increase their self-confidence.

The scene shows that the first comment made by Jack is about the outfit. This may reflect that whatever a person does in his daily life on any occasion, he needs to pay attention to the clothes he wears. It then paves a way to see that fashion and outfit styles become an attraction or even the main interest for the majority of gay men who live an urban lifestyle. Therefore, gay men are often associated with fashionable styles of clothes. According to Devall (1979, p. 183), attractive fashion and style are necessary a way to emphasize the importance of being different, unexpected and unique in gay culture.

In addition, the fashionable style among gay people can indicate that gay men with their modish clothes can reflect something different in daily life. It is not surprising that the study conducted by Reid (2003 p. 7) reveals that the link between the gay community and fashion could show a deep emotional outburst towards a modern lifestyle. Gay men, who live in big cities and make prolific earnings, tend to enjoy shopping to beautify their appearance. Additionally, according to Simmel (1957, p.

545), someone who appears in fashionable clothes can reflect a high social class because fashion is able to express an assessment of beauty, social life and individual style. It is expected that many of them are willing to spend a huge amount of money to purchase clothes from high-end brands in order to look more fashionable.

That image of fashionable gay protagonists also seems to influence the way gay men view their bodies. To look fashionable, it is not surprising that an ideal or slim body is often the concern of gay men. For that reason, a fat body shape is avoided and is often considered an unfashionable shape in the gay community (Baker, 2005, p. 15; Ridge, Plummer & Peasley 2006, p. 507; Hutson, 2010, p. 225). There is a scene from *Will and Grace* showing the gay protagonist Jack wearing a magnetized, titanium girdle.

- Will : “Oh my God, is that a girdle?”  
 Jack : “No, it’s a man-girdle.”  
 Will : “Why would you wear something like that?”  
 Jack : “You don’t know the pressure to be thin at a gay network, Will.”

A fashionable appearance for the gay community is not only in terms of clothing, but an ideal body shape is also necessary.

This portrayal is, however, not a damaging one because their interest in fashion can have a positive impact on the fashion industry. The gay community is even known as consumers who have high purchasing power and they are targeted by large clothing companies as well as fashion advertisements as well as entertainment industries (Ingebretsen, 1999, p. 125; Cole, 2000, p. 135; Rohlinger, 2002, p. 63; Skover & Testy, 2002, p. 223; Reilly, Rudd & Hillery, 2008, p. 313). In other words, a fashionable and attractive appearance and branded attire seem to be a necessary lifestyle for urban gay men.

An example is seen in *Queer as Folk* series. There is a scene in Episode 17 of Season 2 (2002) showing the two gay friends having a talk.

- Michael : “shopping?”  
 Ted : “Of course he has. What else does a faggot of leisure have to do all day except shop?”

Fashion cannot be separated from shopping. Therefore, gay characters are depicted as shopaholics. Their penchant for fashion seems to pave the way for the emergence of fashion companies that make gay men their biggest consumers. This means that the gay community is considered one of the markets that fashion companies take into account. This is also in line with the findings revealed by Wheeler-Quinnel (2010, p. 4) that gay consumers are a group that could be categorized as consumers with high purchasing power.



Figure 1 & 2. The gay protagonists’ fashion in *Queer as Folk* (2000)





Figure 3 & 4. Will's and Jack's fashion in *Will & Grace* (1998)

The relationship between fashion and the gay community can be perceived as a good image. Gay men who are often associated with fashionable clothes can show that they have good taste and talent in fashion and they can be respected in society.

Consequently, the images of fashionable gay characters depicted in the TV series can also indicate that the visibility of gays in the world of entertainment media, especially television programs, has become increasingly clear and widespread (Gamson, 2005, p. 4). Before *Will & Grace* was aired, gay characters are mostly in supporting roles, creating the degrading stereotype of 'Gay Best Friend' to the main characters (Hodkinson, 2010, p. 239). Therefore, being the protagonists in the story, allows gay characters and the fashionableness they are portrayed in to be front and center. This portrayal then gets embedded in the minds of the audience.

This condition makes more people see and know about gay culture, one of which is the interest of gay people towards fashionable style, particularly, those who have an urban lifestyle. Moreover, the fashionable gay characters that appear in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series can also symbolize an effort to show that the gay community is more identical with fashionable clothes and attractive appearance. This perception seems to be able to fight the societal stigma that tends to demean the gay community.

Furthermore, the analysis also reveals that as fashionable men who have a high concern for the modish outfit, the gay protagonists are portrayed as thinking of fashion as their pride because it is what makes them feel confident and thus look attractive.

The gay characters in the TV series are often depicted with talent and skill associated with fashion and beauty. It indicates that such ability can be perceived as a source of pride for them. The discussion of pride needs to be viewed from the facts about the social environment gay people have faced.

History has recorded that most gay people have experienced unfair and discriminative treatment from society dominated by heteronormative culture (Harper & Schneider, 2003 p. 23; Embrick, Walther & Wickens, 2007, p. 757). It can be understood that the bitter experience has made them think that they need to make themselves proud so that they will be able to be respected in society. In the 2000s, many homosexual men began to reveal their sexual identity as gay, resulting in mainstream culture also started showing tolerance and acceptance of gay men (Rohlinger, 2002, p. 5; Herek, 2009, p. 90; William, Giuffre & Dellinger, 2009, p. 29). However, in reality, some people still show their dislike and hatred toward homosexuality.

Many gay men who used to hate themselves because of the pressure, rejection and discrimination they experienced in the past have to struggle to reform themselves by sharing with people who are close to them and showing pride in their gay identity (Marcus, 2005, p. 46). Thus, it seems that they need a powerful means that can support them to continue showing their pride as gay and maintain their existence. For instance, in a scene from the episode "A Brief Encounter" in *Some of My Best Friends*, the gay protagonist Vern observes the outfit worn by his heterosexual friend.

Warren : "You look very very nice."  
Frankie : "What's he doing?"  
Warren : "Judging you."  
Vern : "Question... how many sales people helped you pick this outfit together?"  
Frankie : "None. I picked it up myself."  
Vern : "Well... impressive. You may go."  
Frankie : "I may go?"  
Warren : "It's passed."



Figure 5. Vern is judging the outfit worn by Frankie, a straight character in *Some of My Best Friends* (2001)

The scene and dialog above indicate that the gay character shows talent in fashion from the choice of color to outfit matching. Expertise in assessing how to dress is not owned by everyone. This image can be perceived as a sense of pride because it shows good value.

Another example, in *Queer as Folk*, one of the main characters, Emmet explains to his friend how important fashion is to the gay community so that they can increase their sense of pride.

Emmet : “But in my world, if you don’t look like you just stepped out of a Calvin Klein underwear ad, you’re nothing.”

The main gay character, David, in *Six Feet Under* (2001) is depicted as a picky gay man and he wants his boyfriend to look attractive as well.

David : “Keith, tell me you’re not really planning wearing on that.”

Keith : “What’s the matter with it?”

David : “It covers up all your good big ... parts.”

Keith : “My good big parts?”

David : “Yeah. Take that thing off and go put on something better. Maybe your silver DKNY T-shirt.”

Keith : “Is this a brunch or fashion show?”

David : “I want everybody to be jealous of my beautiful boyfriend, is that Ok?”

...

David : “You knew that sweatshirt was a bad idea when you put it on.”

According to Hutson (2010, p. 213), many gay men tend to show their pride by revealing their expertise in fashion. This makes them proud of themselves and they can show it to get attention, appreciation and respect from the community. It also seems like a way to change people’s perception of them.

The pride portrayed by gay characters in TV series may have an impact on societal acceptance of gay people. They are more likely to see how gay people are shown in TV series. This has paved a way for TV show producers to show gay people’s talents. In the U.S., for example, a reality TV show entitled *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was launched in 2003. The show demonstrates the skill of five gay men, called “Fab Five”, who makeover the appearance of heterosexual men to be attractive to their partners, girlfriends or wives. It quickly became a popular TV show that ran for four seasons (Sender, 2004, p. 1, Gamson, 2005, p. 3; Streitmatter, 2009, p. 137). Fifteen years later, Netflix reboots the show with a new set of “Fab Five” calling it simple *Queer Eyes* (Schlichte, 2018). This image seems to show that gay people with their skills and talent for fashion are present in the midst of society to help men more attractive and fashionable. It can at least reflect that there are good values displayed by gay people that can indicate a sense of pride among them.

### ***The Significance of Fashion Portrayal***

Many studies have presented findings showing that a person’s identity can be expressed in various ways. One of them is through what the person wears. Various kinds of identities can be presented in fashion (Kopnia, 2007, p. 378). Connected to the role of fashion in the gay community, the results of the analysis suggest that fashion is perceived as a symbol of who they are. Through fashion, a person can express what he wants to say about

himself or what he wants to show to others. It works for gay people as well.

Discussions about fashion will generally be associated with showing the identity of a tribe or ethnic group, religious beliefs, age, educational background and social status (Akdemir, 2018, p. 1389). Besides, fashion can also be used as the emphasis of one's gender and sexual identity (Thompson & Haytko, 1997, p. 15; Twigg, 2009, p. 2). A person's identity is not only related to his profession, social status, financial condition or characteristics but his sexual orientation is also included as part of the identity that he wants to express in his daily life in society, especially among gay people. This point then leads to a deeper understanding of the concept of identity. The term 'identity' has been thrown a lot, but it might be difficult to understand due to its diverse definition.

In understanding the definition of identity, it is necessary to begin with the search for the value contained in the term. Brubaker and Cooper (2000, p. 2) argue that since ancient times in the world of philosophy, the term has often been applied to reflect resilience and unity in the midst of fast currents of social and cultural change as well as diversity. It shows that people in general need to emphasize the importance of maintaining their existence despite the various changes they experience. For this reason, people can use several kinds of ways or means, including fashion to express who they are and to confirm that their identity is significant.

In relation to the types of ways of showing identity, Cole (2000, p. 4) underlines that symbols or signs play an essential role in the gay community because they often interpret symbols and use certain items to show something to others, including interacting with either fellow homosexuals or heterosexuals. Therefore, fashion can be used as a means to reflect who they are. Expressing identity is an important effort to do, especially for minorities in order to be true to themselves, and not be twisted or turned around.

Fashion is indeed essential for the gay community to maintain their existential identity. They want to show the image that

they can be reliable when it comes to fashion. For example, in *Will & Grace* (1998), a scene in the episode "Sweet & Sour Charity" shows Jack's pride as a gay who knows about fashion.

Karen : "I have spent most of my adult life and millions of my husband's dollar learning about fashion. What are your qualifications, hm?"

Jack : "Um.. I'm a gay."

The dialog can be used as an example to point out that there is a perception that gay men have skills or talents in terms of fashion. It is significant to reveal that they have something that they can rely on to strengthen their existence in society. Thus, an attractive appearance aims to enable them in expressing as well as affirming their identity as gay (Hutson, 2010, p. 221). It means that people, especially heterosexuals, can be aware of the existence of gay men and be encouraged to show respect to the gay community.

The relationship between gay people and fashion has indeed been considered by many people as an effort related to strengthening their existence. It has been a long time since fashion style and behavior have become something attached to the gay community and societies have perceived it as a way they do to present themselves and form identity (Cole, 2000, p. 189). Affirming identity as a gay seems to be essential in gay culture. A gay man who has come out and lived an openly gay life will still assert his identity as a gay man as a kind of effort so that hetero-normative society can show respect to him. Despite the various consequences that must be faced by gay people, strengthening identity in the gay community can still be perceived as a way of survival in the midst of heteronormative cultural domination in society.

Even at a time when the rights of gay people in European countries, the US and Australia have been widely equated with the rights of heterosexuals, there are still many people who have a perception that gay is an unusual sexual orientation. This view has been rooted in society because of the strong influence of hetero-normative culture. As a

consequence, gay people are often underestimated, looked down upon and unappreciated by society. Academic studies in the 2000s have widely discussed this topic. According to William, Giuffre & Dellinger (2009, p. 32), it is necessary to know that a person's sexuality can be perceived as a category that shows his identity as a result of an interaction. The significant point in terms of showing identity is that gay people's sexual orientation show who they truly are and live a gay life (Auchmuty, 2003, p. 183; Schindel, 2008, p. 58; Navarro, Larrañaga & Yubero, 2015, p. 17).

The problems that happen between heterosexuals and homosexuals are related to the expression of identity and it is a part of social relations (Iborra, 2007, p. 292). Even though not all gay men are interested in showing their fashion style as an emphasis on their identity, there are still a lot of them who use their clothes and fashion as a way to reveal their identity (Cole, 2000, p. 2). In various ways, the gay community struggles to show and strengthen their identity as gay men who want their rights to be respected and their existence accepted by society. Therefore, fashion for gay men has significance as a means to affirm their identity of belonging to the gay community in the heteronormative society.

Nevertheless, while fashion is used in affirming their identity, at the same time it is used to reject the stereotype attached to the gay community. Negative stereotypes constructed by society have been degrading to gay men for a long time. The most notorious one is, in general, they are often associated with being effeminate or less masculine (Edward, 199, p. 3; Baker, 2005, p. 134; Marcus, 2005, p. 25; Poole, 2014, p. 280). The stereotype that gay men behave in an effeminate way has influenced people's perception of the way they dress.

Gay men, as a non-heteronormative community, face great challenges in convincing the public about masculinity in gay culture. The concept of masculinity formed by society tends to exclude gay men from the masculine category. Masculinity is constructed based on gender norm, which is dominated by

heteronormative cultural influences that reject gender differences (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836; Poole, 2014, p. 281).

Masculinity debated in society reveals that there are many kinds of factors that help conceptualize masculinity. It can be seen as one of the main concerns of gay men. By revealing their sexual identity as gay men, they believe that there are various ways to be a man, even though they are always seen as men who violate the mainstream masculinity concept (Alt, Lewis, Liu, Vilain & Sánchez 2014, p. 1553). It means that a man's masculinity shall not simply be determined from a heteronormative point of view which tends to emphasize heterosexuality as a standard of masculinity.

Subsequently, toxic masculinity has made gay men labeled as less masculine men. People then merely assume that they like fashion style that is flamboyant and quirky. It can foster negative stereotypes that have left them cornered and depressed. However, this assumption can be misleading. Gay men dressing up fashionably in men's clothes and those wearing women's clothes are two different things. In the acronym 'LGBTQIAP+', the former is represented by the letter 'G', for 'gay', while the latter is either represented by the letter 'T', for 'transsexual', or 'Q', for 'queer' (Coyt, 2019, p. 11).

Various attempts can be made by gay people to break the stereotype constructed by society. One of them is through fashion. Gay men are fashioning themselves to express their opinion and address this misconception about the stereotype circulating in society. In addition, according to Hutson (2010, p. 221), the way gay men style their appearance is seen as their way of dealing with the stereotype, breaking it and distancing themselves from the ridicule of society. They thus use fashion to show that the way gay men dress up is not necessarily identical with feminine and colorful clothes as people generally think. It can be seen in the fashion chosen to portray Brian, a protagonist in *Queer as Folk* (2000), as well as David and Keith, the main characters in *Six Feet Under* (2001).



Figure 6. Brian wearing black leather coat in *Queer as Folk* (2000)



Figure 7 & 8. The protagonists' fashion in *Six Feet Under* (2001)

The gay protagonists in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series are portrayed wearing clothes identical to everyday men's clothing, such as men's suits, leather jackets, T-shirts, dress shirts and jeans in monochromatic, neutral color scheme. The outfit reflects that the gay image is no longer homologous effeminate or feminine fashion style. This portrait may also emphasize that a person's sexual orientation cannot always be related to the way he dresses.

On the other hand, gay characters who intentionally or comfortably wear flashy or feminine clothing styles on certain occasions can still be seen on American TV series in the 2000s. A few of them are Marc St. James and Justin Suarez in *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010) as well as Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson in *Glee* (2009-2015) (Russell, 2011). Instead, they are served as a symbol of freedom of self-

expression or a critique of the heteronormative domination in society. Nonetheless, fashion in gay culture is always considered an essential tool to convey a particular message.

Moreover, gay men are not different from heterosexual men in terms of physical appearance and styles. Carroll (2003, p. 218) explains that the gay community of the 1970s in the US, for instance, has started showing displaying masculinity such as the image of macho men in gay culture. Many of them have seen the significance of wearing manly men's clothing style to evoke their masculine aura and reflect more value on their appearance (Cole, 2000, p. 93). It turns out that appearance or fashion style showing masculinity is necessary for the gay community to change people's perceptions of them. They believe that to distance themselves from the stereotype, they must present themselves as similar to ordinary heterosexual men so that their masculinity can be enhanced.

Aside from focusing on the type of clothes, masculinity can be assessed from a man's body. Gay men thus put effort into building athletic physique with big muscles (Filiault & Drummond, 2010, p. 69; Sánchez & Vilain, 2012, p. 114). A lot of gay characters in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series are portrayed by actors whose figure is muscular. It is exemplified by Ben Bruckner, the protagonist in *Queer as Folk*, who is a college professor.



Figure 9. Ben Bruckner's muscular posture in *Queer as Folk* (2000)

The portrayal of masculine gay characters in the 2000s American TV series has set the precedent for gay characters that TV series

portray in the future. To name a few are Will Lexington in *Nashville* (2012-2018), Alejandro Rubio in *Devious Maids* (2013-2014), Dom Basaluzzo and Kevin Matheson in *Looking* (2014-2015), Lito Rodriguez in *Sense8* (2015-2018), as well as TK Strand and Carlos Reyes in *9-1-1: Lone Star* (2020-present). The masculinity of the first and the last two characters is even more heightened by the costume of their profession as a country singer, a 911 paramedic and a police officer, respectively.

The stereotype about gay men associated with women's fashion has encouraged the portrayal of gay men to prove that the taste and preference of fashion in the gay community vary from one individual to another. Joe Biden, who at the time was the Vice President, praised the 2000s gay-themed American TV series, mentioning *Will & Grace* in particular, to have elevated the perception of the general public toward the gay community in a new light (Eldridge, 2012). Therefore, they want society to understand that it is irrelevant to associate gay men with feminine styles. Gay fashion cannot be considered a women's style. Experimenting with clothes shall be correlated with neither effeminate behavior nor sexual orientation. In reality, men who strive to look attractive and fashionable are not necessarily gay.

## Conclusion

After discussing the results, the findings of this study can be summarized into four points. (1) The portrayal of gay characters is inseparable from their fashion. The gay protagonists in 2000s TV series such as *Will & Grace*, *Queer as Folk*, *Six Feet Under*, and *Some of My Best Friends* are portrayed as fashionable men who are intensively concerned about their appearance. Their interest in fashion makes them a profitable target market for the fashion industry. (2) Fashion is portrayed as the pride of the gay protagonists. Clad in the 2000s fashion, they are portrayed with impeccable taste, thus making them a reliable aid when it comes to fashion. This sense of pride symbolizes an impact resulting from the hardship the gay community has experienced in the heteronormative society.

Undeniably, the fashion portrayed in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series plays a significant role in the gay community. (3) Fashion is employed to affirm their identity as gay men. As a minority, affirming identity is necessary for both a sense of belonging and an attempt to be respected amid toxic masculinity. (4) At the same time, fashion is utilized to reject the effeminacy stereotype associated with gay men. Clad in everyday men's outfits, the gay protagonists are portrayed in a more masculine manner, moving away from the feminine 'Gay Best Friend' trope. To boost the level of masculinity, actors with muscular body are chosen to portray them. This portrayal and its significance become the mold for the portrayal of gay characters in the future.

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