

Analyzing Stereotypification in the TV Series *Modern Family*



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Introduction

In September 2009, the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) introduced America to a new award winning sitcom called *Modern Family*. The show is written and produced by Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd and is based on the stories they shared about their own families. The show centers around three different families who are all connected to each other.

Modern Family has been heavily criticized for reinforcing stereotypification of same-sex relationships. For example, Halpin suggests the following: “The purpose of *Modern Family* is to depict the ‘modern family’ in a positive light, but have the writers succeeded? No. By stereotyping Cameron and Mitchell to the extent that they have through their dramatic storylines I believe that the writers have, in turn, done the exact opposite” (Halpin). Actor Tuc Watkins, who is gay and lobbies for more diverse gay characters, also expressed his dissatisfaction of the way the gay characters in *Modern Family* are depicted: “What’s happening over at *Modern Family* is not blackface. Blackface is hateful. However, I do believe a stereotype is being perpetuated that can be harmful” (Watkins). The aim of this BA-thesis is to study the stereotypification in *Modern Family* and analyze how the relationship between the two homosexual characters, Cameron Tucker and Mitchell Pritchett challenges the stereotypification of same-sex relationships. This study is conducted from a gendered perspective. It involves theory about stereotypes, male-female relationships and humor in relation to stereotypes. The notion that in a same-sex relationship one of the two always has more feminine traits for example, is a notion repeatedly criticized by the gay community. The importance of this study is to show that the relation between humor and stereotypification in this TV series is not only used to reinforce stereotypification, but also to challenge it. In addition to identifying the stereotypical characteristics, I want to show that there are also qualities that depart from the stereotypical profile. Last, but not least, I want to show viewers

that there can be a more perceptive reception of *Modern Family*. Instead of labeling *Modern Family* as just stereotypical, I want to show viewers that this show also gives us an insight into homosexual relationships. This is important because as Schneider describes: “Children who probably never encounter a gay male in their daily commerce (or at least one who is openly out of the closet) may learn most of what they know about this category from watching TV” (344). This is not only true for children, but also for people in general who are not confronted with gay men in their everyday life. *Modern Family* can be a good guide to these people because it depicts two people in a same-sex relationship going through everyday life situations, for example adoption, but it also deals with parents struggling with their children’s sexuality and how they overcome this struggle.

The thesis statement of this BA-thesis is as follows: *Modern Family* not only reinforces, but also challenges the stereotypification of same-sex relationships and gay men. To analyze the relationship between Cameron and Mitchell in relation to stereotypification of same-sex relationships, I first discuss theory on stereotypes and gender roles in media. Next I present an overview of the opinions conveyed of stereotyping in *Modern Family* in secondary texts. Then I analyze three episodes from the first season and three episodes from the most recent season to show that the relationship between Cameron and Mitchell is not just stereotypical. The analysis I conduct is a comparative analysis. A comparative analysis can include two ideas or theories, which you compare and contrast. I compare and contrast stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits with the content of the six episodes. I use this method so that I can compare and contrast Cameron and Mitchell’s behavior to the stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits of gay men. The benefit of this method is that you can use a frame of reference to conduct the analysis. The disadvantage of this method is that if your frame or reference is somehow incomplete or unclear, the entire analysis becomes flawed. Other research, for example by Lehman, also implements a similar methodology.

Lehman compares and contrasts traditional gender roles and stereotypes of women to characters in *Modern Family* (1). In the conclusion I discuss insights obtained from doing the comparative analysis, relating those to other theorists' impressions.

1. Stereotyping and Homosexuality

In the dictionary, 'stereotype' is described as: "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing"(Oxford Dictionaries). Another more in depth definition according to the *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination* is: "the traits that we view as characteristic of social groups, or individual members of those groups, and particularly those that differentiate groups from each other. In short, they are the traits that come to mind quickly when we think about the groups" (Nelson 2). The definition I use throughout this study is as follows; traits that we view as characteristics of social groups, or individual members of those groups and widely held ideas about these groups or individuals.

It is first necessary to establish a definition of a stereotypical gay man, to be able to analyze Cameron and Mitchell as homosexual characters that are not stereotyped. According to Schneider "homosexuals are among the most stereotyped groups in modern life" (489). There are several descriptions of a stereotypical gay man. According to Becker, gay men are white, well groomed with a professional career and high income (398).

Another feature of depictions of gay men is that their relationships are still being depicted as heteronormative. One of the two men has to be the more masculine one while the other has more feminine character traits: "Despite the growing number of representations, these are still often criticized for their heteronormativity: the binary opposition of straight-gay remains intact, with heterosexuality as the normal and natural point of reference"(Ross 263). Freymiller did a study on how gay viewers respond to same-sex and gay/straight relationships on tv and according to Ross, the respondents "complain about the lack of depictions of actual same-sex affection but they also criticize the stereotype of gay men and lesbians as overly sexual, asking for more representations of their everyday lives" (264).

Schneider provides us with a table of 'gay' traits (see table 1). This table contains traits that according to 60% of the respondents that were questioned are traits for gay male stereotypes.

Table 1

Very or somewhat characteristic		Very or somewhat uncharacteristic
Engage in anal sex	Soft voice	Tough
Gay activist	Understanding	Masculine
Feminine	Different	Unemotional
Sensitive	Artistic	Close-minded
Transvestites	Soft-hearted	Act macho
Open-minded	Fashionable	Pick fights
Emotional	Touchy-feely	Hurt animals
Liberal	Hairdressers	Mean
Open about feelings	Lot of female friends	Cruel
Gentle	Sentimental	Prejudiced
Walk like girls	Melodramatic	Old-fashioned
In touch with themselves	Limp-wristed	Hard-hearted
Dainty		Traditional
Affectionate		Deep voice
Compassionate		Sloppy-looking

Note. Data from Madon (1997).

Source: Schneider, David J. *The Psychology of Stereotyping*. New York: Guilford, 2004. Print.

Another factor one should take into consideration is the way stereotyping is connected to humor. Sitcoms are usually based on humor and can use stereotyping as part of humor, without having the intention to discriminate specific groups of people. According to Hood and Tabary-Peterson stereotyping is an important part of sitcoms; sitcoms use views on relationships between sexes, class and racial relations and play into these assumptions because these situations will be experienced as funny (25). According to the *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*, we cannot simply take a stereotype seriously when it is used in combination with humor: “With comic stereotyping what is represent acquires a different value- that of being a warranted object of amusement and hilarity in and of itself. The humor is legitimated by the stereotype, and vice versa. The shift has various implications for the operation, circulation, and reception of a stereotype” (737). Thus, it is important to look at the implications of using

a stereotype within a sitcom. The *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* also states how humor can be used to undermine stereotypes:

An idealized conception of joking and engaging in humor holds that they subvert our habitual ways of seeing, make the familiar seem strange, or allow us to accept the absurd in what we take seriously. If we adhere to this conception we might suppose that comic forms will work to undermine common stereotypes in everyday circulation and the seriousness with which they are understood, that they will compromise the conjunction between prejudicial expectation and perceived reality that stereotyping causes and confirms (737)

According to the book *Television Studies the Key Concepts*, there are sources who claim that stereotyping reinforces intolerance towards those being stereotyped, however, it also states that: “Stereotypes are thus more complex than they may seem on first reading. Bowes (1990) also warns against thinking about sitcom stereotypes too simplistically; and asks us to consider whether or not the stereotype is the subject of the humor or the producer of it” (33).

I created a list of stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits of gay men according to Fejes, Becker, Ross and Schneider.

Table 2

Stereotypical Traits	Non-stereotypical Traits
Gay activist	Tough
Feminine	Masculine
Emotional	Pick fights
Gentle	Hurt animals
Walk like girls	Mean
Soft voice	Prejudiced

Understanding	Old-fashioned
Artistic	Hard-hearted
Lot of female friends	Deep voice
Melodramatic	Sloppy looking
Heteronormative relationship	
White	
Good education	
Professional job	
High income	

Table of traits for gay male stereotypes divided into stereotypical traits and non-stereotypical traits.

2. Critique on *Modern Family*

A lot has been said about stereotypes in *Modern Family*, not only about the gay characters, but also about the other family compositions. Cordoza has written a critical essay about gender roles and stereotypes in *Modern Family*. He finds that every family in the show has something stereotypical. About Cameron and Mitchell Cordoza states: “The Prichett-Tuckers have stereotypical masculine and feminine traits because they are a gay couple”(Cordoza). However, Cordoza also concludes that Cameron and Mitchell do not always completely live up to these stereotypes and do not allow for themselves to be labeled because they serve up stereotypical traits. Cordoza concludes with the following statement: “Overall ABC’s *Modern Family* enforces many stereotypes towards women and Latinos. But the show also does a great job in depicting situations and actions that pull away from those stereotypes which are ingrained in the minds of people of our society today”(Cordoza). Cordoza thus claims that by switching up the stereotypes in different ways, *Modern Family* also pulls away from the stereotypes. This is also something I take into consideration in the analysis. I verify if these stereotypical traits are indeed switched throughout the episodes and if this implies that *Modern Family* also pulls away from the gay stereotype.

In another article called “ “Modern Family” Gay Criticism Misses Mark”, Pierce claims that the criticism the show receives about reinforcing gay stereotypes is not completely justified. He claims that even though there might be some stereotypical character traits, one cannot consider these characters to be the representation of all gay men:

Cam, in particular, does play to gay stereotypes. He's more than a bit flamboyant and emotional, and Stonestreet's portrayal can — at times — induce a cringe or two. But it's also true that there are plenty of men who are real-life versions of Cameron and Mitchell. Clearly, they do not represent all gay men — but then neither do Phil (Ty Burrell) or Jay (Ed O'Neill) represent

all straight men. Nor should they be expected to any more than any TV character represents an entire group. (Pierce)

However, Pierce also states that the show does reflect reality: “It's a comedy that reflects reality, whether you like it or not” (Pierce). Pierce makes it clear that even though Cameron and Mitchell are stereotyped, this does not mean that all gay men behave in the same way

King has written an article about how the show actually uses a form of reversed stereotyping: “The show plays with the audience's expectations, taking common sitcom archetypes, like the effete homosexual, the dumb kid, and the loony foreigner, and turning them on their heads” (King). About the relationship between Cameron and Mitchell King states:

Cam and Mitchell (Eric Stonestreet and Jesse Tyler Ferguson) both play to gay stereotypes and break them at the same time, especially Cam, who, with his paisley wardrobe and touchy emotions, counters Mitchell's assertion that gays always get picked last in gym class with a confident “I always got picked first. I could throw a dodge ball through a piece of plywood.” The couple has even grown from seeming like asexual roommates in the first season to an actual romantic couple this season, kissing included (King)

King thus claims that even though stereotyping is evident in *Modern Family*, Cameron in particular not only reinforces a stereotype, he also breaks it.

Lehman has written a paper called *How “Modern” is Modern Family? A Critical Review On The U.S Sitcom Regarding Gender Roles and Hegemonic Ideologies*. In this paper she describes how *Modern Family* reinforces stereotypical views on gender roles and hegemonic ideologies. For example, Lehman claims: “In contrast to its title, *Modern Family* promotes traditional gender roles and stereotypes of women, which result in the portrayal of an inaccurate image of the female and weakens the stance of women in today’s U.S. society”

(1). However, even though Lehman claims that *Modern Family* reinforces stereotypical views, Lehman is more focused on the female role in the series and does not mention anything about the same-sex couple Cameron and Mitchell.

Lauren Smir has written an article in which she talks about how there is also a stereotypical view on Latin women that is being reinforced on the show:

A large majority of the show's episodes involve a stereotypical presentation of women in both American and Latino culture and in 2013, the airing of one particular episode raised the eyebrows of many. "Fulgencio," the thirteenth episode of the fourth season of *Modern Family*, sparked great controversy by perpetuating Latino stereotypes in a way that ultimately crossed racial boundaries (Smir)

Smir concludes by stating the following: "Despite its popularity in ratings, many critics insist that the "Fulgencio" episode of the hit show crossed the line when it came to usual stereotype mocking through exaggerated clichés of what it's like to be a 'modern family' in our 21st century today"(Smir). Smir thus claims that *Modern Family* crossed racial boundaries by stereotyping Latino culture. Again, nothing is mentioned about Cameron and Mitchell being stereotyped.

There are plenty articles and papers that refer to gender stereotyping or racial stereotyping in *Modern Family*, but less about gay stereotyping. This could mean that this topic has not been extensively studied.

3. Stereotyping and *Modern Family*

The first season of *Modern Family* focuses on the establishment of the different family compositions on the show. It introduces the different characters by ‘breaking the fourth wall’, which means that the actors address viewers directly by talking and looking directly into the camera. It also gives us a baseline for typical character traits of all the characters. S01E01 focuses on Cameron and Mitchell adopting their daughter Lilly. When they take Lilly home they struggle with getting her to sleep and Mitchell is worried about the absence of a motherly figure. Mitchell is afraid to tell his father that they adopted a baby and is worried about his family’s reaction. In S01E11, Mitchell and Cameron are fighting about each others parenting skills. Mitchell wants to try the Ferber method, which means that you let your baby cry itself to sleep. Cameron on the other hand cannot stand to hear or see Lilly cry and wants to comfort her every chance he gets. In S01E24, Cameron gets a job as a wedding singer and Mitchell has to stay home to take care of Lilly. Mitchell panics and destroys the living room when a stray pigeon gets into the house. Throughout the first season we get to see the struggles each of the families go through in everyday life. We get to know more about their traditions, such as family gatherings, but also about their struggles with sexuality, for example how Jay (Mitchell’s father) struggles with the fact that Mitchell is gay. The season concludes with a family portrait that is ruined because all of their clothes get muddy. However, this season shows us that even though all of the characters are very different and argue with each other, they are still one big family.

The seventh season of *Modern Family* takes place 5 years later after Mitchell and Cameron get married and return from their honeymoon. In S07E01, Mitchell decides to try painting after losing his job and although Cameron is supportive in the beginning but he later tries to get Mitchell re-hired at his old job. Lilly is worried that her family might be poor. In S07E03, Mitchell takes on a consulting job for his father’s biggest rival. Jay is upset about

Cameron taking on this job because he is convinced that his rival only hired Mitchell to spite him. In S07E11, Mitchell is left in charge of Lilly's slumber party while Cameron helps Gloria with her hot sauce project. Mitchell struggles with entertaining the girls while Cameron gets into an argument with Gloria because he is trying to take over her whole project. This season deals with the different stages of life the characters are in. The children either have a job or attend school and some of the characters lost their jobs or found new ones. It also focuses on the love interests of the children.

For the next part I provide a complete overview of all occurrences of stereotypical and non-stereotypical gay traits throughout the different episodes. I use tables to clarify which traits are present in what episode (See Appendix). The analysis starts with the stereotypical traits and then moves on to the non-stereotypical traits.

Gay activist:

Throughout the six episodes, nothing is mentioned about Cameron or Mitchell being part of any LGBT groups. They do not talk about gay rights or equality in any of the episodes, so there is no evidence that Cameron and Mitchell live up to the stereotype that all gay men are gay activists. In S01E01 Mitchell criticizes a painting for being too gay:

MITCHELL: No, can you call Andre, have him paint something a little les gay? (0:09:17)

What is interesting is that Mitchell uses a gay stereotype and makes fun of it. The painting in question is very feminine in the way the bodies are positioned and Mitchell refers to it as too gay. This is evidence that Mitchell actually uses a gay stereotype to create a humorous situation.

Feminine:

In S01E01 it becomes clear straight away that Cameron has typical feminine traits. At 0:08:55 Cameron enters Lilly's bedroom very gracefully and admires the beauty of a portrait on the wall of Cameron and Mitchell on clouds with wings In S01E24, Cameron expresses how much he loves flowers:

CAM: Well, I would've blown the money on flowers anyway. They're saving me a step (0:03:08).

Cameron also calls himself a Diva, which is usually a word to describe women:

CAM: Plus all the great divas are rewarded in flowers (00:03:10).

Mitchell also presents himself as feminine in this episode. A pigeon gets into their house and Mitchell is very scared of pigeons so he jumps on his chair in a very feminine way (0:06:44). Another feminine moment for Mitchell is when he is running from the pigeon screaming in a high-pitched voice (0:10:16). The effect this has on the stereotypical gay traits of Cameron and Mitchell is that it shows viewers that Cameron may be feminine in his ways, but depending on the situation, Mitchell can be too.

Emotional:

At the beginning of S0E01 we can see Cameron and Mitchell coming home after adopting Lilly. Mitchell gets very emotional about the fact that Lilly has not slept for the entire flight and worries that she can only sleep feeling the presence of a female body.

MITCHELL: She barely slept on the plane and she's still wide-awake. This doesn't worry you?

CAM: Oh stop worrying.

MITCHELL: I can't. That- that orphanage was all women. Maybe she just- she can't fall asleep unless she feels a woman's shape (0:07:55)

Another example is when Cameron is being emotional about gaining some weight while waiting for Lilly:

CAM: Yes I gained a few pounds while we were expecting the baby, which has been very difficult. But apparently your body does a nesting very maternal, primal thing where it retains nutrients, some sort of molecular physiology thing. But that's science, you can't, you can't fight it, so...(0:08:28)

Again, this shows us that neither Cameron nor Mitchell is the one who is always very emotional. In S01E011 Cameron gets very emotional when he hears and sees Lilly crying on the monitor. He is crying because he feels bad that he cannot comfort her (0:04:20). In S07E01 Cameron gets very emotional when telling Gloria that one of the baby otters he was watching on his live feed died:

CAM: The little one's dead

GLORIA: What?

CAM: The mother, she did nothing while an eagle pecked it apart. Nature is cruel (0:14:13).

In S07E11 Gloria does not want to work with Cameron anymore and he sees this as if Gloria is breaking up with him:

CAM: You're breaking up with me? This business was my idea, I got you into the farmers market, I got you into those baskets, you were nothing but a housewife when I found you...I didn't mean that I've always admired you, being a housewife is the hardest job on the planet. You're never not at work it's just- how did we get to this place? Unless, there's someone else isn't there? Oh wow how could I be so blind? Let me guess, somebody with more experience? Somebody Columbian? Well

you're no picnic either. So who is it? Hm? SAY SOMETHING!

(0:17:10)

Neither Cameron nor Mitchell is always the more emotional one. Depending on the situation, both of them can get emotional. It would be interesting to study if this is something that is only true for Cameron and Mitchell, or that the other characters in *Modern Family* can also get emotional at times.

Gentle:

In general, Cameron is the one who moves in a very gentle and graceful way. However, in S07E01, Mitchell is the one who moves in a gentle way. He makes some very gentle gestures with his hands while talking about his paintings (0:11:39). This is again evidence of the fact that both Cameron and Mitchell show signs of this stereotypical trait and that this trait is not limited to only one of them.

Walk like girls:

Cameron has a very feminine way of moving in general, however Mitchell has his moments too. For example in S01E24, Mitchell is scared of a pigeon and runs from it in a very feminine manner (0:07:12). This shows us that the stereotype of gay men walking like girls may be true for Cameron, however Mitchell only lives up to this stereotype when he is scared. The stereotype that gay men walk like girls is thus divided in two parts. Cameron does move around in a more feminine way, but there is the moment that he wants to chest-bump with Mitchell, which is a masculine act. Mitchell on the other hand moves in a more masculine way. However, when he is distressed his movements seem to be more feminine.

Soft voice:

Throughout all of the six episodes it is apparent that Cameron has a softer voice than Mitchell. However, Mitchell does use a soft voice throughout season one when talking to their daughter Lilly. The fact that he uses a softer voice when approaching Lilly does not necessarily prove that Mitchell lives up to this stereotype, it rather shows us that men as well as women use a softer voice when approaching children.

Understanding:

In S01E01 Cameron is portrayed as very understanding when Mitchell tells him that he has not told his family that they were adopting a baby:

MITCHELL: All right, look. I – I – I never told my family we were adopting a baby.

And-

CAM: I know.

MITCHELL: You do?

CAM: Yeah, and I don't blame you, I know your family. You'd tell 'em. They'd say something judgmental.

MITCHELL: Exactly

CAM: You'd get mad.

MITCHELL: I know. And then something that's supposed to be nothing but joyful...suddenly turns into this huge fight.

CAM: And who wants a big emotional scene like that?

MITCHELL: Thank you, Thank you. I'm so relieved you understand (0:09:32).

Another example in S01E01 is when Cameron is being very understanding about the fact that Mitchell does not always want to play the good cop because he thinks that Lilly will prefer Cameron over him:

MITCHELL: Listen Cam, I- I can't always be the bad cop here. I- I know it's my issue but she can't grow up with one huggy, happy, cuddly dad and one frowny, lesson-teachy dad. Because guess which one she's gonna ask to walk her down the aisle.

CAM: Okay, you know what? I can be the bad cop sometimes. I'll always make her eat her vegetables (0:19:52)

In S01E24, Mitchell is understanding about his niece Alex who just broke up with her boyfriend and tries to give her some advice:

ALEX: Hey uncle Mitchell.

MITCHELL: Hey! Oh uh, honey, what's wrong?

ALEX: Nothing, I- I just said goodbye to Sanjay, we broke up.

MITCHELL: Noooooo.

ALEX: No! Its- Its okay, we're, we're going to school and ready to focus, it's the smart thing to do. We both feel really good about it (crying).

MITCHELL: You don't look like you feel good.

ALEX: Well, yeah, he was sadder than I imagined so I'm being strong for the both of us, which he said he admires...I think. It was hard to hear him with all the John Legend and the sobbing.

MITCHELL: Ugh, you know what, I recently went through a hard time and I've found something that really navigates my feelings (0:15:26).

In S07E01, Mitchell is not understanding about his dad's feelings when he tells him he wants to represent his rival:

MITCHELL: Listen, there's something I wanna talk to you about, uhm- I got an offer

to handle a case, but I'm a little worried about who it's for

JAY: What's the matter now? Killing wales, drilling for oil, child labor? Let me tell you something, I got a paper route when I was 7 years old. You know what they gave me? A work ethic, and a right arm like Popey.

MITCHELL: No dad, I'd be working for Closets Closets Closets..

JAY: The next word better not be Closets

MITCHELL: Of course it's Closets!

JAY: I'm confused, are you talking about Closets Closets Closets Closets? Or Of Course It's Closets? Because Rick Carson is a straight shooter

MITCHELL: Are you really making me say this again? It's Closets Closets

JAY: You're not working for that Rolodex stealing Earl Chambers

MITCHELL: It's a short term just a few weeks

JAY: You know why he's doing this?!

MITCHELL: Because I'm a good lawyer who handled a similar case for you last year.

JAY: He's doing this to mess with me!

MITCHELL: I was referred by another lawyer, I doubt Earl even knows about it.

JAY: That Rolodex was full of A-list clients, you're Eric Estrada's, you're friend Arkington, you're Leslie Uggums

MITCHELL: I'm sorry are this real names?

JAY: What about that probate? How'd you mess that up, client's dead!

MITCHELL: Okay this is crazy, why am I worried about your feelings when you obviously have no concern for mine. I'm taking that job (0:05:30).

In the end Mitchell discovers that Earl was using him to get back at Mitchell's father.

Depending on the situation, both Mitchell and Cameron can be understanding towards each

other and towards others. However, there are also instances where they are not understanding at all. This shows viewers that Cameron and Mitchell are well-rounded characters; they show different facets of personality and character traits.

Artistic:

Even though there is nothing mentioned about either Cameron or Mitchell being artistic, in S01E11 he does show us that Cameron wants his daughter to be artistic in some way. He wants her to learn to play the violin:

CAM: As long as you make her practice her violin (0:20:07).

In S01E24 we see an artistic side of Cameron for the first time. He explains how he was discovered in a karaoke bar and is now a singer (0:02:52). In S07E01 the artistic side of both Mitchell and Cameron is discussed. In the beginning of the episode Mitchell claims that he has always wanted to paint (0:03:02). A few minutes later we can see how Mitchell has started to paint and the whole living room is filled with paintings (0:07:00). Next, Cameron sums up a few artistic hobbies he has had over the years:

CAM: Mitchell really embraced this whole take a little break thing far more than I expected- but for years he supported both of us while I pursued my passions: photography, hiphop dancing, fox hunting, so I couldn't be the one to tell him get a job (0:07:17).

These examples show us that both Cameron and Mitchell have an artistic side. However, it is hard to say if this proves that gay men are artistic. We cannot see if throughout these episodes, Cameron is actually good at singing and dancing. The question remains, is this stereotypical trait only true if the gay men are actually good at painting or dancing?

Lot of female friends:

According to the study by Schneider, having a lot of female friends is a stereotypical character trait of gay men. However, apart from the women in their family, Cameron and Mitchell do not seem to have any female friends. Cameron even emphasizes that they at least do not have any lesbian friends:

CAM: They are already mean enough could you imagine one of them pregnant, no thank you (0:03:14).

There is however, a lot of talk about male friends. For example in S01E01, we only hear names of male friends such as: Andre, Pepper and Longinus. This shows us that Cameron and Mitchell do not live up to the stereotype of gay men having a lot of female friends. Because Cameron and Mitchell do not live up to the stereotypical trait of having a lot of female friends, it departs from the depiction of gay men on television. For example, the popular 1998 TV show *Will and Grace*, is known for the friendship between the gay male characters and the straight female characters. Another example is the 2013 movie *G.B.F.*, which stands for Gay Best Friend, and centers on the relationship between the gay male and straight female character as well.

Melodramatic:

In S01E01, when Cameron and Mitchell are on the plane taking Lilly back home, Mitchell acts very melodramatic because he thinks that they are being judged for being two gay dads:

MITCHELL: Okay, excuse me, excuse me. This baby would have grown up in a crowded orphanage if it wasn't for us "cream puffs". And you know what? Note to all of you who judge- Love knows no race, creed-

CAM: Mitchell..

MITCHELL: Or gender. And shame on you, you small-minded, ignorant few-

CAM: Mitchell!

MITCHELL: What?

CAM: [whispers] She's got the cream puffs (0:03:41).

Another example is when Cameron and Mitchell tell the rest of the family about adopting Lilly. Cameron presents Lilly in the air as if he was Mufasa from the Lion King, presenting Simba to the animal kingdom. He does all of this while wearing an African themed robe with The Circle of Life playing on the background. Again, these are examples that show that both of them can be melodramatic at times. In S01E11 Cameron is the one who is being melodramatic because Mitchell wants to try something called ferberizing, which means that you let the baby cry herself to sleep:

MITCHELL: Ferberize. It is a method of getting the baby to sleep through the night...by yes, basically letting her cry herself to sleep.

CAM: Torture.

MITCHELL: It's not torture Cam

CAM: It's just hard if you happen to be a person who hates to hear another person suffer (0:04:06).

In S01E24, Mitchell is being very melodramatic while running away from the pigeon. He runs around the house while screaming "oh my god oh my god" repeatedly and he is hysterically calling Cameron:

MITCHELL: There is a pigeon in our house. What do I do? What do I do? (0:07:12)

Another instance of Mitchell being melodramatic is when he takes a tennis racket and smashes everything in his reach, trying to hit the pigeon. He even goes as far as destroying a family picture of the couple and he does not hesitate to use fire extinguisher (0:11:09).

In S07E03 Cameron gets very emotional and very dramatic when telling Gloria that one of the baby otters he was watching on his live feed died:

CAM: The little one's dead

GLORIA: What?

CAM: The mother, she did nothing while an eagle pecked it apart. Nature is cruel (0:14:13).

In S07E11, Gloria does not want to work with Cameron anymore and he sees this as if Gloria is breaking up with him:

CAM: You're breaking up with me? This business was my idea, I got you into the farmers market, I got you into those baskets, you were nothing but a housewife when I found you...I didn't mean that I've always admired you, being a housewife is the hardest job on the planet. You're never not at work it's just- how did we get to this place? Unless, there's someone else isn't there? Oh wow how could I be so blind? Let me guess, somebody with more experience? Somebody Columbian? Well you're no picnic either. So who is it? Hm? SAY SOMETHING!
(0:17:10)

Cameron as well as Mitchell has emotional and melodramatic moments. Neither one of them is always the more emotional nor melodramatic one. Cameron can be very emotional and melodramatic when it comes to Lilly crying, and Mitchell can also get very dramatic when he is in distress. However, being melodramatic is also part of the comedic side of the show. Especially in Cameron's case, emotional moments are magnified which creates humorous situations. In this case, we could state that the stereotype is not the subject but the producer of humor.

Heteronormative relationship:

There is evidence that Cameron and Mitchell's relationship is a heteronormative one. For example in season 1 episode 11 Cameron compares himself with a mother bear:

CAM: I can't help it, I'm like a mother bear, when I hear my cub crying, I have to run to her. (0:11:02)

This adds to the notion that in a gay relationship, one of the two has to be the woman in the relationship. However, we can describe the statement by Cameron that he is like a mother bear as humorous. We could state that the writers choose lines like this for Cameron to play in to the stereotype on purpose to create a humorous situation. Cameron is in this case the producer of humor, not the subject of it. In season 7, the roles are reversed when Mitchell is the one who has to throw Lilly a sleepover and he is the one in charge. This is something in most straight relationships the mother is in charge of, so you could say that in this case Mitchell takes on the role of the mother. The fact that gender roles are switched is evidence for Cordoza's conclusion that the show switches between stereotypical traits. We cannot state that either Cameron or Mitchell is always the woman in the relationship.

White:

It is obvious that both Cameron and Mitchell are white. According to Fejes: "To be a gay male in today's world one would be young, white, Caucasian, preferably with a well muscled, smooth body, handsome face, good education, professional job and high income" (115).

However, it is interesting that being white is not always perceived as something positive in the show. For example in season 7 episode 11, Mitchell describes being white as a disadvantage:

MITCHELL: Breaking the ice with the other parents has been a little tough. Cam and

I are the only white parents, the only gay parents, the only parents that find us funny (0:07:00).

What is interesting about this quote is that Mitchell starts with being white instead of being gay. One would assume that being gay is the focus of their characters but instead Mitchell focuses on being the only white parents. Mitchell uses the stereotype of gay men being white to create a humorous situation.

Good education:

Throughout the six episodes, we do not hear anything about Cameron's education. We can assume that he does not have a PhD in anything because the jobs he has throughout these episodes vary from being a wedding singer to being a gym teacher. However, Mitchell is an environmental lawyer so we can assume that he went to law school. Again, only one of the two lives up to this stereotype. Because Cameron is mostly unemployed throughout the episodes, *Modern Family* also shows viewers that gay couples struggle with the same issues as straight couples.

Professional job:

In S01E24 it becomes clear that even though Cameron claims he has a job as a wedding singer, he does not actually get paid in money for this job, so it is not really a professional job.

In S01E24 it becomes clear that Mitchell has not been working as a lawyer for a while and that they are now struggling to pay bills:

LILLY: Daddy looks tense

CAM: He's just paying bills. Is everything okay honey?

MITCHELL: Oh you walked over here, I just thought you ubered everywhere.

CAM: Okay

MITCHELL: Okay I gotta breathe, that's still free isn't it?

CAM: Mitchell it's not that bad

MITCHELL: Really, because I haven't worked in weeks, I have no prospects, we're living off of a gym teachers salary, and somehow I let you talk me into buying the apartment upstairs.

LILLY: What's going on are we poor?

CAM: No, while other daddy looks for a job, I'm gonna be taking on some work as a summertime driver's ed. teacher (0:02:23)

In S07E03, Cameron is working as a gym teacher at Manny's high school. However, this job is not being portrayed as a very serious one, he is watching a life feed of baby otters at his office and his office also seems to serve as a storage room:

GLORIA: You share an office with a tetherball.

CAM: I just have let nature take it's course. Just like this webcam I've been watching. It's a live stream of wild otters (0:08:29).

However, we do get to see how Mitchell is trying to pick up his work as a lawyer again:

MITCHELL: Hey guess what I just got an offer to handle a case.

CAM: Good, because I think this cereal is mostly sawdust.

MITCHELL: It is great, it's just that uhm- there's a slight complication. It's for Closets, Closets, Closets, Closets (0:00:17).

Throughout the seasons and episodes, Mitchell is always portrayed as a lawyer, even when he is between jobs. Cameron, on the other hand, is constantly switching from career. This goes completely against the notion that gay men have professional jobs.

High income:

In S01E01 there is not a lot of evidence that any one of them has a very high income. The only thing that could point to a high income is the fact that they adopted a child from Asia, which is a process known to cost a lot of money.

In S01E41, Cameron does not get paid for his singing; he is being paid in flowers:

CAM: So I guess you could say that I'm a professional singer now.

MITCHELL: Well, they're paying you in flowers, so... (0:03:00).

In S07E03 it becomes clear that Cameron and Mitchell do not have as much money to spend as they did before, they had to change cereal brands:

CAM: Because this is the store brand, but it's delicious (0:00:16).

Throughout the episodes there is also evidence that when Mitchell loses his job, Cameron is working as a gym teacher and drivers ed. and they have trouble paying their bills. So, the notion that gay men always have a high income is not true

Tough:

In S01E01, even though Mitchell assumed the worst about people judging him on the plane, he did feel tough enough to stand up for himself and give a speech about how love knows no race, creed or gender. During S01E11, Mitchell is the tough one who lets Lilly cry and is trying to prevent Cameron from comforting her. He even goes as far as trying to physically stopping Cameron from going to Lilly:

MITCHELL: I will bring you down.

CAM: You can't bring me down

MITCHELL: I will sweep your legs (0:15:36)

At a certain point Mitchell jumps Cameron's back trying to take him down (0:16:03). In S01E24, Cameron shows us that he does have a tough side through his reaction on Mitchell's fear of the pigeon:

CAM: Calm down. You know I grew up around many animals. One time a rooster attacked me and my mom wrung its neck, and we had it for dinner (0:07:12).

In S07E03, Mitchell helps his father break into his rival's office because Jay wants to sweep his man parts against his rival's cigars (0:14:26). They eventually get busted but Mitchell was able to steal his father's old Rolodex that Earl had stolen from him years ago (0:18:21). In S07E11, Cameron helps Gloria steal blood peppers:

CAM: Fine, we'll just go get some blood peppers

GLORIA: They're impossible to get

MANNY: Unless, you're willing to break some rules.

GLORIA: Why are we back on your thing again?

MANNY: It just so happens that they grow blood peppers at the botanical gardens

CAM: Great, let's go

MANNY: You're adorable. We're talking rare flora and a secure location.

GLORIA: Okay, so then what do we do?

MANNY: First, apologize for calling me a goody-goody because I'm about to lay out a plan so daring that the two of you may not have the guts to follow it.

GLORIA: Should I take my knives?

CAM: I have a baseball bat in my car (0:03:38).

The notion that gay men are not stereotypically tough is not true for Cameron and Mitchell.

Even though Cameron has feminine character traits, *Modern Family* actually breaks this

stereotype by making him the one who lived and worked on a farm and describing scenarios in which he, for example, killed a rooster.

Masculine:

In S01E01 there is one instance where Cameron presents himself in a masculine way. While trying to give a pep talk to Mitchell about telling his parents that they adopted a baby he yells the following:

CAM: You can do this! Sports guy chest bump

MITCHELL: No..

CAM: Sports guy chest bump, do it!(0:17:50)

Where after they give each other a chest bump. At some point during S01E11, Cameron goes against Mitchell's wishes and he takes Lilly out of her bed in the middle of the night. Mitchell finds them sitting on the couch watching the movie Scarface. You can consider watching Scarface as masculine because it is a movie filled with action and drugs (0:04:36). Another masculine moment is when Mitchell is trying to physically hurt Cameron by jumping his back and taking him down (0:16:03). At a certain point during S07E01, Cameron tells us how he once was into fox hunting (0:07:27), which you could describe as being tough and a masculine thing to do. In S07E03, Mitchell helps his father break into his rival's office because Jay wants to sweep his man parts against his rival's cigars (0:14:26). They are eventually discovered, but Mitchell was able to steal his father's old Rolodex that Earl had stolen from him years ago (0:18:21). Both Cameron and Mitchell have masculine character traits; this is in line with the depiction of the stereotypical trait being tough. We cannot label Cameron or Mitchell as just a masculine or feminine character.

Picks fights:

In every episode there is a moment where either Cameron or Mitchell are picking a fight with each other or with a family member. According to Schneider, this is a non-stereotypical thing to do for gay men. Throughout the episodes there are several characters that pick fights with each other, so picking fights in this case is not something that is just limited to Cameron and Mitchell as gay characters. The arguments that the characters have with each other in this show are evident throughout both seasons so we could state that picking fights is a basic quality of the show.

Hurts animals:

At a certain point during S07E01, Cameron tells us how he once was into fox hunting (0:07:27), which you could describe as being tough and a masculine thing to do. In S01E24, Cameron describes how he killed a rooster and had it for dinner:

CAM: Calm down. You know I grew up around many animals. One time a rooster attacked me and my mom wrung its neck, and we had it for dinner (0:07:12).

It is also the only evidence I found during this analysis of the non-stereotypical trait hurting animals. However, it does show us that gay men are not incapable of hurting animals.

Mean:

In S01E01 there are several instances where either Cameron or Mitchell is being mean to each other or about other people, for example lesbians:

CAM: They are already mean enough could you imagine one of them pregnant, no thank you (0:03:14).

In this situation Cameron actually creates a stereotype, namely that Lesbian women are mean.

Another instance is when Cameron proudly shows Mitchell the painting he arranged for Lilly's bedroom. Mitchell does not like the painting and is being mean about it:

MITCHELL: Yes, we tore you away from everything you know, but don't worry, things are normal here. Your fathers are floating fairies. No, can you call Andre, have him paint something a little les gay? (0:09:12)

In S01E11, when Mitchell comes home from work because he does not trust Cameron that he will not comfort Lilly when he hears her cry, he calls Cameron an unreliable partner:

MITCHELL: It's okay. I told everyone I have an unreliable partner and, uh, they understood (0:15:26).

In S01E24, Cameron also reacts in a mean way when he sees how Mitchell made a mess of the house:

CAM: Mitchell I get it. You're terrified of small talk and birds. You're just lucky that pigeon didn't want to chat you up about the weather (0:14:57).

At the beginning of S07E03, Cameron refers to Mitchell as a leprechaun:

CAM: Here you go, a nice, yummy breakfast.

LILLY: Hey, where's the little leprechaun?

CAM: Oh I think he's still getting dressed.

LILLY: No on the box, this isn't our normal cereal (0:00:01).

In S07E11, Gloria and Cameron are running out of time to finish their sauce, so they make the children at Lilly's slumber party help put the sauce in jars. They are even wearing hats and special protection for their clothes (0:18:42). Throughout all six episodes it is shown that Cameron and Mitchell both say mean things about other people, but also about and to each other. This shows us that even though being mean is not a trait that is usually associated with

gay men, they are both capable of being mean. We also have to consider that saying mean things is also part of the humor used in Modern Family.

Prejudiced:

In S01E01, Mitchell is being prejudiced about other people on the plane. He immediately assumes that the attention they are getting is negative attention because they are a gay couple that adopted a baby. When a woman on the plane sees Lilly with cream puffs she says: “look at that baby with those cream puffs” (0:03:34). Mitchell assumes that the woman is calling them ‘cream puffs’ because they are gay, while in fact she is talking about Lilly holding the cream puffs. This also shows us that Mitchell as a gay character is worried about stereotypical views others may have on gay men.

Old-fashioned:

According to Schneider, being old-fashioned is not a typical gay stereotype. Apart from Cameron being a stay at home dad in the first three episodes, these episodes do not show us any more evidence of the couple being old-fashioned. However, this does show us that they are old-fashioned when it comes to their roles in the family. Cameron is more of a caring, comforting motherly figure and Mitchell is the one who provides for the family.

Deep voice:

It is clear that Cameron does not have a deep voice, and even though Mitchell’s voice is somewhat deeper than that of Cameron, you could say that it is true that in this case gay men do not have a deep voice. However, as Pierce states, Mitchell and Cameron are not the representation of all gay men. This does not show us that gay men never have a deep voice.

Sloppy Looking:

In all of the episodes Cameron and Mitchell are well dressed. We never see them in any kind of sloppy outfit except for when the family throws mud at each other during the family portrait. In this case, the stereotype of gay men not looking sloppy is true for Cameron and Mitchell. However, other characters such as Claire Dunphy also care about their appearance, so this is not something that is just true for Cameron and Mitchell.

4. Conclusion

At the beginning of my research I defined ‘stereotype’ as: traits that we view as characteristics of social groups, or individual members of those groups and widely held ideas about these groups or individuals. However, this definition does not mention anything about using stereotypification to produce humor. A more accurate description of ‘stereotype’ would be: traits that we view as characteristics of social groups, or individual members of those groups and widely held ideas about these groups or individuals, which can be used to produce humor. The primary definition of ‘stereotype’ also does not include anything about truthfulness. Pierce stated that *Modern Family* also reflects on reality, but we do not know if this means that there is a truth to the stereotypical traits of Cameron and Mitchell.

The majority of stereotypical traits of gay men are visible in both characters. However, there is evidence that some stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits are true. Mitchell and Cameron both have an artistic side, however, due to the lack of a more comprehensive description of ‘artistic’ we cannot explicitly state that they are truly artistic. Even though one could consider painting, singing and dancing as artistic, we do not know if Cameron and Mitchell are actually good at these skills. The question remains if this trait is only true if these skills are conducted in a proper way. Another trait that is visible throughout the episodes is that Cameron and Mitchell are both white. However, Mitchell makes fun of this stereotype by commenting on the fact that they are the only white parents in Lilly’s school which makes it difficult to fit in. Mitchell actually challenges this stereotype by using it to produce a humorous situation. According to Schneider, having a deep voice is not a stereotypical trait for gay men (. In this case, Cameron’s voice is somewhat higher than that of Mitchell but they both have higher-pitched voices. Another non-stereotypical trait is that gay men are usually not sloppy-looking. In this case both Cameron and Mitchell are always well dressed. However, this is something that we can hold true to every character in *Modern Family*. None

of the characters appear to be sloppy-looking, so we could assume that looking well groomed is a trait of every character in *Modern Family*. This shows us that even though some of the stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits may be true, but they also use these stereotypes to create humorous situations.

There is also evidence of traits that do not apply to Cameron and Mitchell. For example, they are not gay activists. Throughout the episodes it does not become clear if they are part of any LGBT communities, in fact, Cameron even makes fun of Lesbians. King stated that the show goes against expectations by turning stereotypes on their head. The fact that Cameron creates a stereotype, namely that of lesbians being means, and does the exact opposite a gay activist would do, is also evidence for reversed stereotyping. Another trait that does not apply to Cameron and Mitchell is having a lot of female friends. In a lot of depictions of gay men on television, they always have a straight female best friend or they surround themselves with a lot of women. In this case, Cameron and Mitchell do the exact opposite. This is also in line with the statement by the *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* which claims that: “Comic forms will work to undermine common stereotypes in everyday circulation and the seriousness with which they are understood, that they will compromise the conjunction between prejudicial expectation and perceived reality” (737). Schneider also claims that being mean and picking fights is not stereotypical for gay men (489). However, both Cameron and Mitchell can be mean towards each other and others. This makes for numeral hilarious situations that pull away from the stereotype that gay men do not pick fights. Another non-stereotypical trait that is not true for Mitchell is being prejudiced. In the scene where Mitchell assumes that the other people on the plane are judging him and Cameron because they are gay, Mitchell shows us that he might even be worried about the stereotypical views on gay men. This shows viewers that the writers of the show are aware of the stereotypical views on gay men and it also shows how Mitchell was wrong and that these

people were not even focused on them but on the baby. As the book *Television Studies: The Key Concepts* explains: we cannot look at sitcom stereotypes in a simplistic manner because they might be more complex than we assume (33). Lastly, Cameron and Mitchell's relationship does show signs of being old-fashioned. Even though some of the traits are true, they are used in a humoristic way. In most cases, the stereotype produces the humor and is not the subject of it.

As for the remaining traits, they are continuously being switched between Mitchell and Cameron. They both have feminine and masculine character traits and they both show instances of being emotional and melodramatic. These stereotypical and non-stereotypical character traits are being used interchangeably throughout the show. As Cordoza stated, because these stereotypical traits are switched, they do not become a label for either one of them. We do see more of the stereotypical traits in Cameron, however, we have to keep in mind, as Pierce suggested, that Cameron and Mitchell are not the representation of all gay men, just as the other male characters are not the representation of all straight men. The writers of *Modern Family* introduce Cameron as a stereotypical feminine, emotional and melodramatic gay man, but go on to challenge this stereotype by creating unexpected situations that go against the prejudicial expectations viewers may have because of the stereotype. The writers also show that they are aware of the existing stereotype by making Mitchell worried about stereotypical views on gay men in the plane scene. In most cases, the stereotypical behavior of Cameron and Mitchell produces the humor and is not necessarily the subject of the humor. In conclusion, *Modern Family* not only reinforces, but also challenges the stereotypical view of gay men by using the stereotypical traits interchangeably, so we cannot hold these traits as a label for either Cameron or Mitchell. Furthermore, these stereotypical traits are the producer of humor instead of the subject of humor.

Although this research was carefully prepared, I am aware of its limitations. Due to the length of this paper, I was not able to analyze *Modern Family* as a whole and was limited to only six episodes. It would be interesting to conduct a more in depth analysis of the show as a whole, and to establish if the stereotypical traits are limited to Cameron and Mitchell or if they also apply to other characters.

5. Appendix

Table 3

Stereotypical Traits	Non-stereotypical Traits
Gay activist	Old-fashioned
Walk like girls	Deep voice
Soft voice	Sloppy looking
Female friends	
Heteronormative relationship	
White	
Good education	

Table of stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits that are visible or not visible throughout all of the six episodes.

Table 4

Stereotypical Traits	Non-stereotypical Traits
Feminine	Tough
Emotional	Masculine
Understanding	Mean
Melodramatic	Prejudiced
High income	

Table of stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits that are present in S01E01.

Table 5

Stereotypical Traits	Non-stereotypical Traits
Emotional	Tough
Understanding	Masculine
Artistic	Mean
Melodramatic	

Table of stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits that are present in S01E011.

Table 6

Stereotypical Traits	Non-stereotypical Traits
Feminine	Tough
Artistic	Mean
Melodramatic	
Professional job	
High income	

Table of stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits that are present in S01E24.

Table 7

Stereotypical Traits	Non-stereotypical Traits
Gentle	Tough
Understanding	Hurt animals
Artistic	Masculine
Professional job	
High income	

Table of stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits that are present in S07E01.

Table 8

Stereotypical Traits	Non-stereotypical Traits
Emotional	Tough
Understanding	Masculine
Melodramatic	Mean
Professional job	
High income	

Table of stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits that are present in S07E03.

Table 9

Stereotypical Traits	Non-stereotypical Traits
Emotional	Tough
Melodramatic	Masculine
	Mean

Table of stereotypical and non-stereotypical traits that are present in S07E11.

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