

Riverdale's representation research



Marleen Gerritsen (2082720)

m.h.t.gerritsen@tilburguniversity.edu

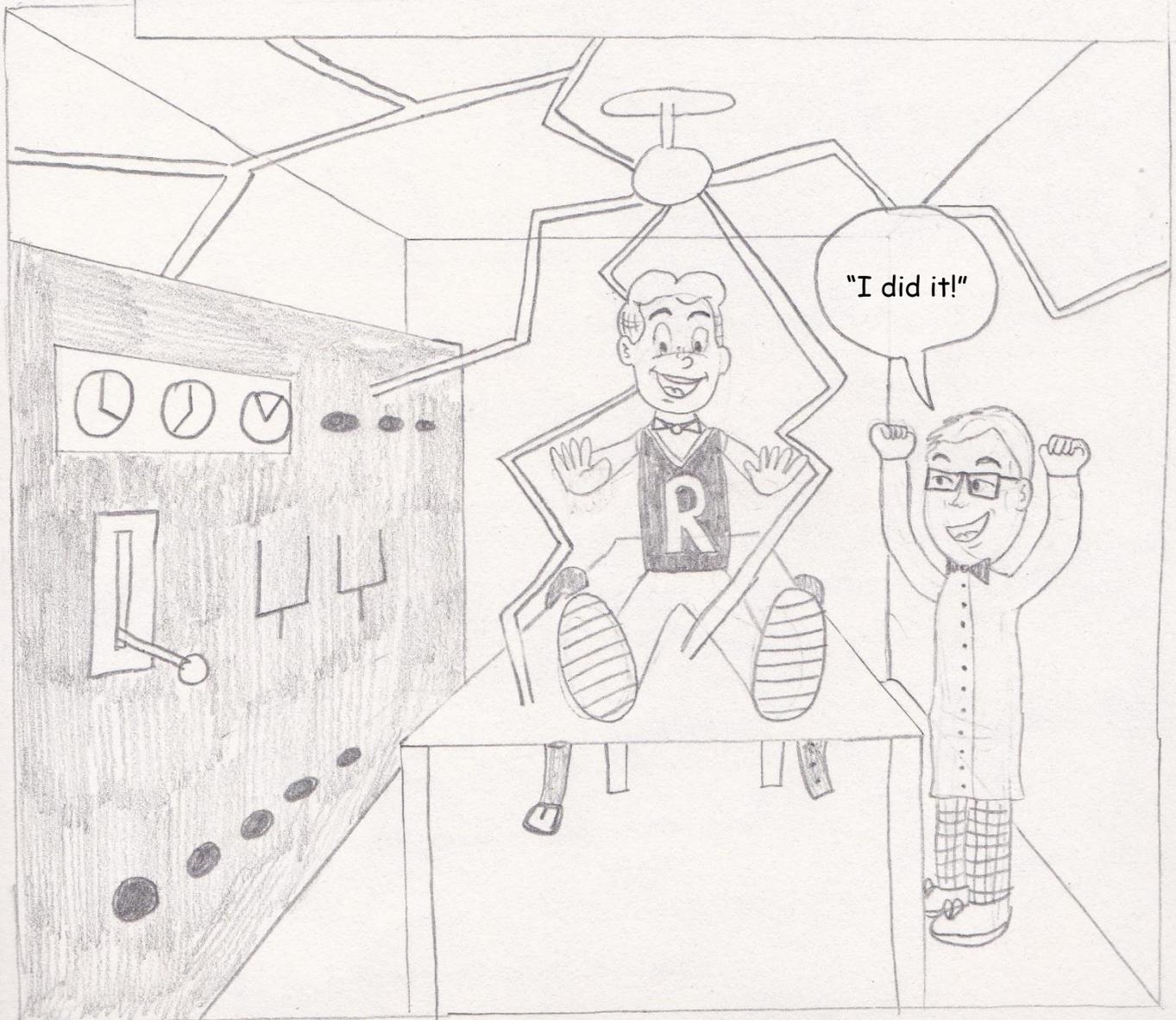
Original paper: Gerritsen, M. (2021). *"You act like we've got the same set of options": Queer representation in current teen shows and their role on heteronormativity among generations.* (Master's thesis). Radboud University, Nijmegen

Project created for the class Visual Thinking and Composition, Fall 2021, Tilburg University, Department of Communication and Cognition.

MARLY

AND HER
THESIS QUEST

“This story starts, I guess, with what Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa did in 2017. He let the characters of Archie Comics come to life and filmed their adventures in a show called Riverdale”.



"The show about Archie and his friends were followed by many fans all around the world on television."

"One of their loyal followers was Marly."



"But after a day like any other, Marly's mind started to wander..."



"Riverdale portrays queer characters and storylines ...

... but how stereotypical is their portrayal of this minority group?"

"And how does it affect teens who are watching such teen shows?"

"Marly's dream gave her a clear purpose: she is going to find answers to those questions."



"First stop: Dhaenens."

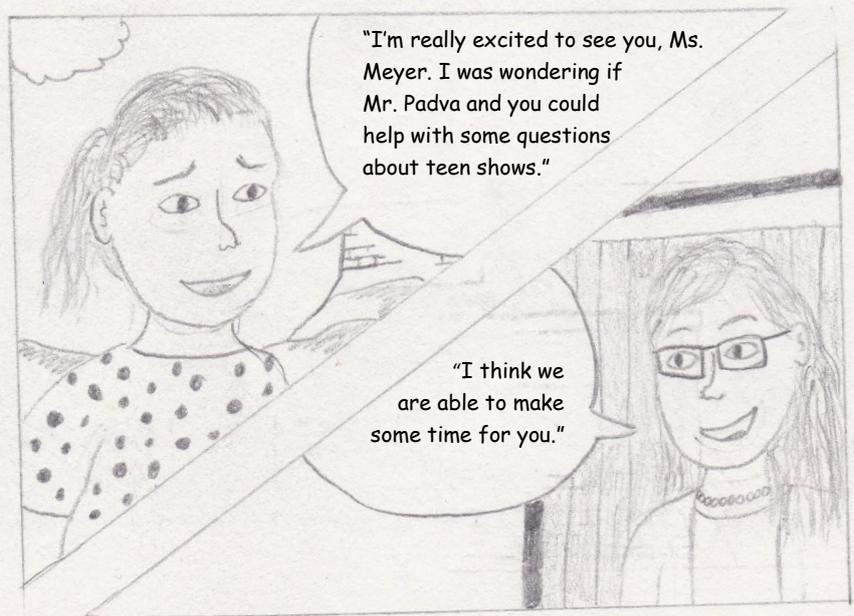
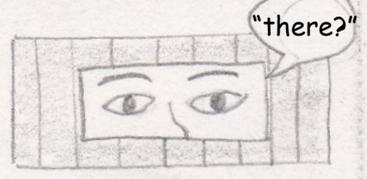
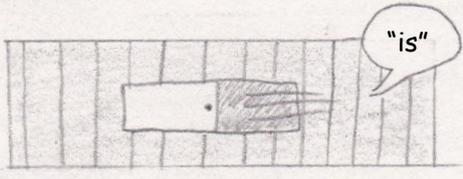
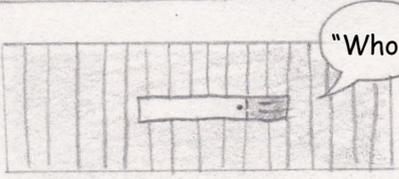
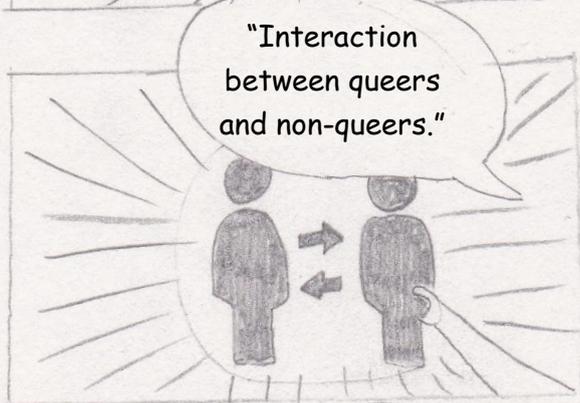


"Welcome, come in."



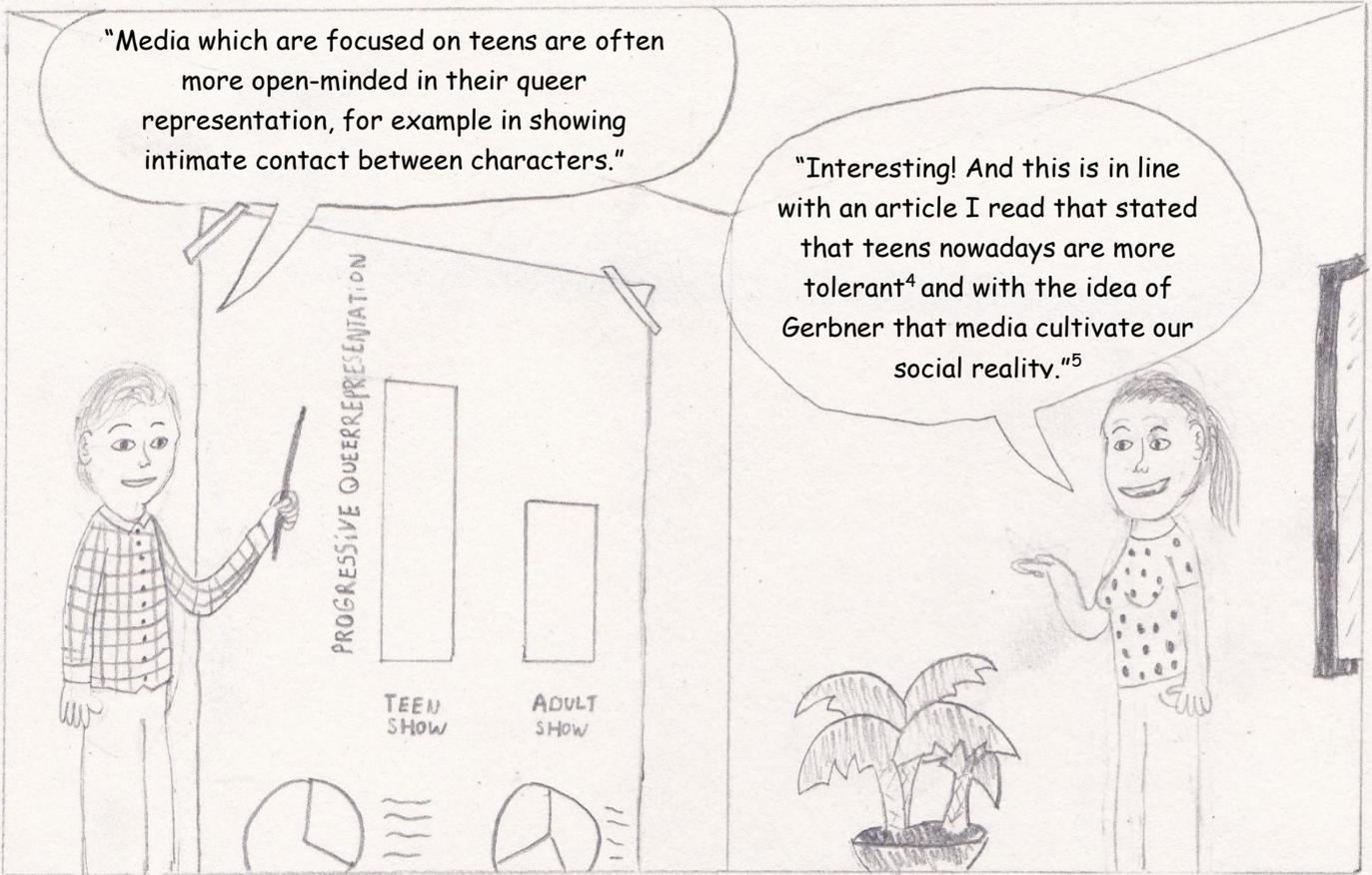
"I read that you did research on queer representation in *Glee* in 2013¹. Could you give me more insight into this topic?"

"Of course! There are 3 important elements in queer representation, especially in teen shows:"

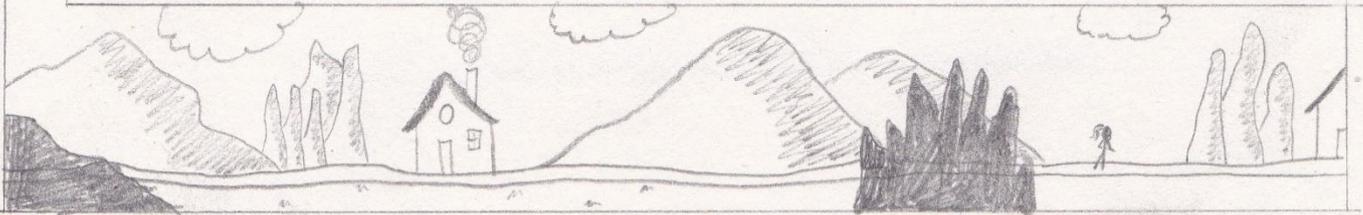


"Media which are focused on teens are often more open-minded in their queer representation, for example in showing intimate contact between characters."

"Interesting! And this is in line with an article I read that stated that teens nowadays are more tolerant⁴ and with the idea of Gerbner that media cultivate our social reality."⁵



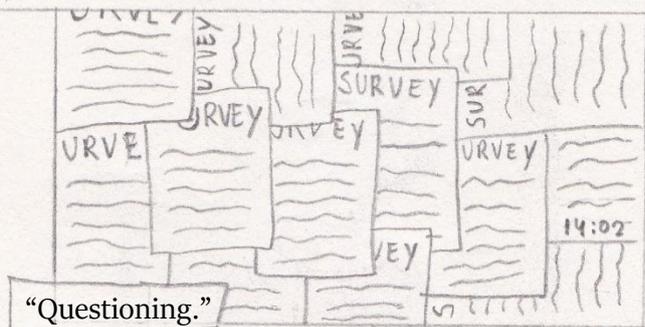
"A long day of visiting many professors had passed when Marly walked home, determined to find the answers about Riverdale."



"At home, Marly immediately started her research. That didn't happen by itself. After hours and hours of ..."



"Watching."



"Questioning."



"Discussing."

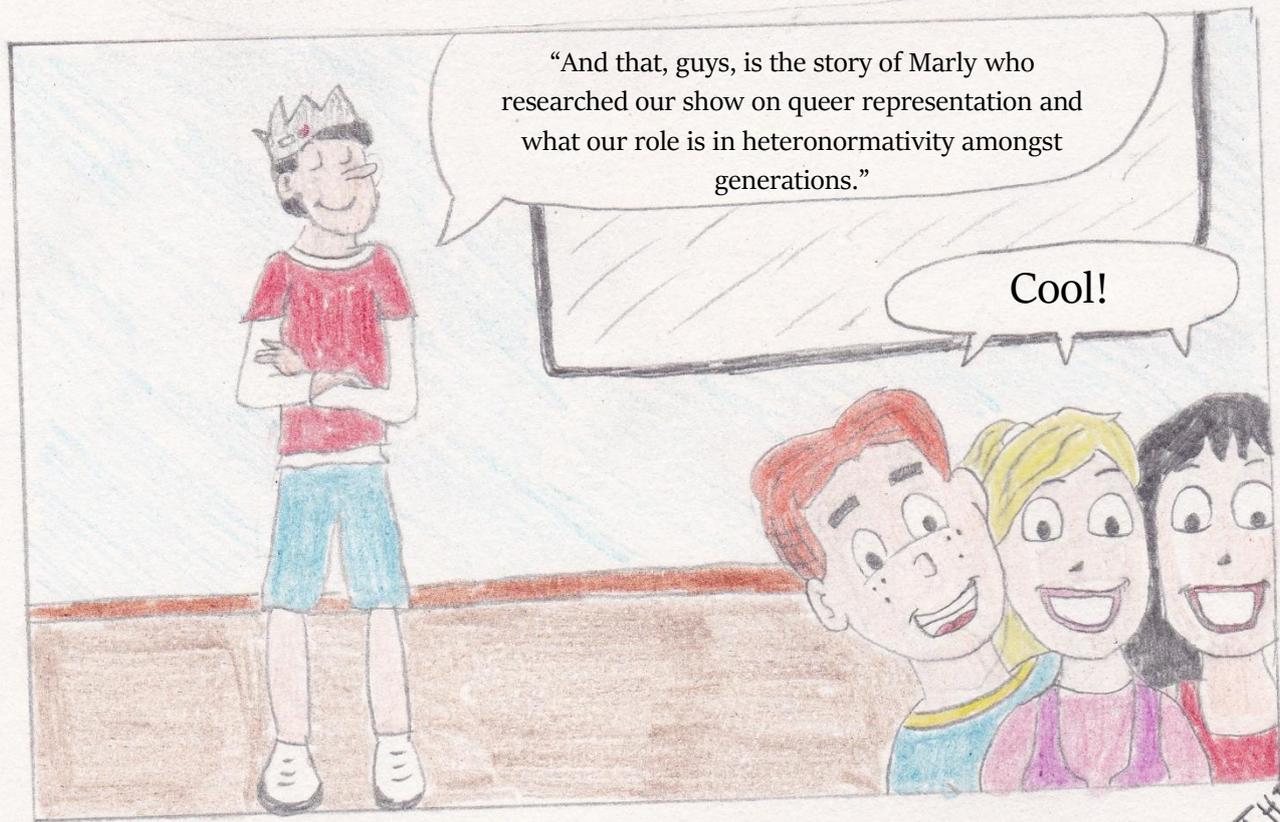


"Analyzing."

.... Marly finally found it!"

The Scroll of Riverdale's Representation Research ⁶

- Current teen shows like Riverdale still show a mixed picture: queer characters are often victims of heteronormative* characters.
- Riverdale is limited in representing the sexuality of queer characters. Sexuality is mainly represented in the form of insults or jokes.
- Queer characters in Riverdale often meet the expectation in terms of gender stereotype, for example gays are portrayed as feminine.
- Riverdale does show progression: newer seasons are more progressive in their representation.
- Younger generations are more exposed to teen shows with queer characters which is positively associated with less heteronormative expectations.



References

- ¹ Dhaenens, F. (2013). Teenage queerness: negotiating heteronormativity in the representation of gay teenagers in Glee. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16(3), 304-317. Doi: 10.1080/13676261.2012.718435
- ² Meyer, M. D. E. (2003). "It's me. I'm it". Defining adolescent sexual identity through relational dialectics in Dawson's Creek. *Communication Quarterly*, 51(26), 2-276. Doi:10.1080/01463370309370156
- ³ Padva, G. (2004). Edge of seventeen: Melodramatic coming-out in new queer adolescence films. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 1, 335-372. Doi: 10.1080/1479142042000244961
- ⁴ Pew Research Center. (2020). *On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far* [article]. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/>
- ⁵ Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., Signorielli, N., & Shanahan, J. (2002). Growing up with television: Cultivation processes. *Media effects: Advances in theory and research*, 2, 43-67. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, publishers.
- ⁶ Gerritsen, M. (2021). "You act like we've got the same set of options". *Queer representation in current teen shows and their role on heteronormativity among generations* (Master's thesis). Radboud University, Nijmegen
- ⁷ van der Toorn, J., Pliskin, R., & Morgenroth, T. (2020). Not quite over the rainbow: the unrelenting and insidious nature of heteronormative ideology. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 34, 160-165. Doi: 10.1016/j.cobeha.2020.03.001
- ⁸ Robinson, B. A. (2016). Heteronormativity and homonormativity. In N. A. (red.), *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of gender and sexuality studies* (2nd edition) (pp. 1-3). Doi: 10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss013