

I chose to study *The Simpsons* and the way it addresses sexuality and sexual identity, other than just heterosexuality. When I was watching my seasons to annotate them, I happened to watch a few of the episodes I focused on in my timeline, which highlighted LGBTQ+ themes. The first one I saw was “Homer’s Phobia,” which is very clearly an attack against homophobia, and works to make a statement about the show feels about debates of homosexuality. I then had to watch some later seasons of the show, where I watched “Three Gays of the Condo.” That episode focuses a lot on LGBTQ+ themes, but it addressed it in a different way, I thought. Homer moves into Springfield’s gay neighborhood, and moves in with a gay couple, but the show doesn’t take any sort of stance on LGBTQ+ rights like “Homer’s Phobia,” did, instead just used the setting and characters as further jokes. Based on how differently the show treated both episodes, I wanted to see if the show’s approach to these issues morphed and changed over time. I also was intrigued by Smithers as a character, in part just because he was one of my favorite residents of Springfield, but also because of how many references are made to his sexuality without ever coming out. My biggest question in my research was whether *The Simpsons* changed its views on LGBTQ+ issues over time (because it has been on the air for so long), and whether that has been influenced by the ongoing presence of various movements towards LGBTQ+ rights.

As I looked at the various data for the episodes, I realized there was a number of episodes whose main theme was something regarding LGBTQ+ rights, and they all spanned the entire length of time the show has been on air. Because they didn’t all emerge from a specific period of time in the show’s run, that led me to analyzing the

show over time. Once I had identified which episodes to focus on, I did a deep reading of each, and the way it approached my topic. Meanwhile, I also researched various moments within the time that *The Simpsons* was on the air that marked a shift in various gay rights movements, good or bad. Again, I noticed that nearly all of the major shifts in legislature occurred during the same time that *The Simpsons* was airing. Because of this, I decided to use a timeline tool to create a way on analyzing the episodes alongside the movements, to see if they matched, or if the Simpsons felt more progressive or conservative in comparison.

First, I wrote all my blurbs for what I envisioned going onto my timeline onto a document, with all the Simpson's episodes on the left, and all the legislative moves on the right. This visualization helped me to realize that they did match up very closely, and this was the start of my deeper analysis. At this point, because I knew that many scholars have already studied *The Simpsons* and culture/politics, so I looked into various scholarly research as well. I was kind of surprised to see that often times, the show wasn't very progressive in it's depictions of gay life, and almost entirely absent was any sort of mention of characters that were anything other than gay or lesbian (including bisexual or transgender characters, despite there being jokes throughout the series about this). In most popular culture, this isn't actually that surprising, as often any sort of representation other than straight white men is pretty abysmal. But because the show so often mocks various political views and American society in a left-leaning way, I kind of expected to push the boundaries against the norm a little bit more.

What I most want other people to take away from my work is a more encompassing approach to studying *The Simpsons* and LGBTQ+ representation. Like

stated previously, I tried to find scholarly research discussing these themes as well, and while they exist, they often studying only one episode or moment in depth, and studying it without context. Based on what we've been to accomplish in class, I tried to take a more inter-disciplinary approach to my research. I didn't want to completely condemn the show's representation, or lack thereof, but I did want to show that although the show takes a very liberal tone, it often isn't as progressive as it might believe that it is. That doesn't negate the strides it has taken, but I wanted to look at all sides of it's satirizing.