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Come and Get Your Love: *Starsky & Hutch*, Disidentification, and US Masculinities in the 1970s

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1   Introduction

Despite the ironic ambition of my title, this chapter will not talk primarily about the production and reception of "love," nor of the 1974 hit song by Native American band Redbone from which the quotation is borrowed. It instead focuses on the American television series *Starsky & Hutch*, originally aired on the ABC network between 1975 and 1979. This chapter addresses the way in which the series responded to and rearticulated the tensions and anxieties of its era, while envisioning a strategic reconfiguration of male identity.

In the first part of this chapter, I will attempt to outline features of the cultural and social context to the series, mentioning a few crucial issues at stake during the 1970s and suggesting ways in which a complex historical moment has had an impact on gender identity. I will then move to an

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analysis of a few episodes from the first season of *Starsky & Hutch*. This series largely seems to reiterate and actualize a hegemonic vision of masculinity while justifying a traditionally conservative representation of state violence. However, *in spite of* these claims, I will propose a reading of the series as a fascinating experiment in progressive screenwriting and acting, as a somewhat new product on the American television screen that attempted to challenge old conventions in the representation of men's lives. I argue that *Starsky & Hutch* opens up a window of possibility for a new and more inclusive male identity, one that, in open conflict with traditional embodiments of hegemonic masculinity, thrives in collaborative efforts with the queer other while it articulates what I call a pragmatic egalitarianism. This "window of possibility" would arguably be shut down by the neoconservative backlash of the 1980s, the Reagan era.[1]

This interpretative endeavor originates, like quite often is the case, not only from my own critical standpoint but also from a personal, autobiographical positionality. As a young queer boy growing up in the late 1980s, I watched the series reruns on Italian television. My position, which I could only begin to assess and appreciate many years later, was akin to what José Muñoz termed "disidentification" in his groundbreaking work of 1999. The term refers to a multifaceted and heterogeneous survival strategy performed by the minoritarian subject in a repressive public sphere that marginalizes her/him or erases her/his very existence (Muñoz 1999: 4). It is an appropriative gesture that is neither an obedient identification nor a confrontational counter-identification, but rather an oblique, libidinal queer appropriation of a discourse that is potentially meant to exclude the subject; it marks the inhabitation of a hostile place that successfully transforms it into a playground of possibility.

Unlike most of the television that was available at the time, *Starsky & Hutch* provided me with a livable *space*. I could dwell in-between the lines of their script, amid the protagonists' acquaintances and friends, and thrive in their silent interaction. Despite the fact that there was no "me" there, and that I could not readily identify with any of the two detectives, the series seemed to me to produce a hospitable place where people like me could exist: "we" were not the abject to exorcise and destroy, the ghostly screen onto which the hero's rightful fury had to be directed. Queers were informants, teammates, and friends: they were equal citizens,

albeit on the margin of the storyline, who were treated fairly and considered as full persons.

Muñoz argues that disidentification relies on a powerful "tactical misrecognition" (1999: 160) of the Althusserian's ideological interpellation, whereby the subject may defy the State apparatus's call "Hey you!" appropriating and inhabiting positions that were not meant for her/him. The performance of disidentification, for the late scholar, disassembles the majoritarian public sphere and "uses its part to build an alternative reality. Disidentification uses the majoritarian culture to make a new world" (Muñoz 1999: 196). As I will argue later, many of the discourses articulated by the series were, indeed, not meant primarily for me or people like me, but the history of mass media is as much a story of its production as it is the story of its appropriation and defiant reception. The ten-year old me sitting unsupervised in that living room could at once consume the cathartic parable of the detection narrative (meant to purify society from the "bad guys"), appropriate the sexualization of the male body on screen, and ultimately envision a collaborative queer constellation, a utopian vision of inclusivity and respect.

My own conflicting disidentification with the series, and my retrospective understanding of it today, inform my reading of *Starsky & Hutch* and give life to the following pages.

2   Hegemonic Masculinity, Persuasion, and Historical Change

Unlike the 1960s, with their grandeur, tragedy, and social-change movements, the 1970s, known as the "Me Decade" (Wolfe 1976), were an era of limited dreams, characterized by a dramatic economic restructuring. In the United States, the old national manufacturing model gave way to a new global service model, creating an explosive combination of high unemployment rate and so-called stagflation, where a stagnant economy is coupled with high inflation rate (see Bailey and Farber 2004: 1–8). Internationally, both the OPEC oil embargo (1973) and the "Fall of Saigon" (1975) eroded the nation's self-representation and confidence. On the other hand, in the domestic arena there was a colossal defining

moment: the Watergate scandal in 1974 and the resignation of President Nixon. Some of the old certainties were crumbling, and at the same time, new social and cultural phenomena were becoming more established. In fact, it was a socially explosive decade when most of the cultural changes prompted in the 1960s finally "settled in": from the normalization of sex outside marriage to a peaking divorce rate, from the erosion of censorship laws to the rise of widespread contraception. In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe V Wade* regulating abortion rights, and in 1978 the landmark decision of the Supreme Court, known as the "Bakke" decision, upheld affirmative action programs and declared *diversity* a "compelling state interest" (see Porter 2004: 50–52; Schulman 2001: 8–14).

Many of the conflicts that arose from these social transformations were reconciled in the consumer marketplace, and on television screens. Rebecca Feasey argues that the examination of masculinity in television "is crucial, not because such representations are an accurate reflection of reality, but rather, because they have the power and scope to foreground culturally accepted social relations, define sexual norms and provide 'common-sense' understandings about male identity for the contemporary audience" (2008: 79).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been one of the few landmarks in the field of masculinity studies. It was first coined in the mid-1980s by the sociologist R. W. Connell and an Australian-based research group in the article "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity", which critiqued the "male sex role" approach to masculinity and advocated for a model that could acknowledge multiple masculinities and power positions (Carrigan et al. 1985). Put concisely, it provides a framework for understanding and analyzing the most desirable and rewarded ways of being a man in a given society. However, hegemonic masculinity does not represent a certain type of man, but rather "a way that men position themselves through discursive practices" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 841).

The term "hegemony," borrowed from the early twentieth-century Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci, originally referred to class struggle and the ideological stabilization of social classes, and the "dynamics of structural changes involving the demobilization and mobilization of whole classes" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 831). In other words, Gramscian hegemony evokes a relentless struggle for dominance. For

Connell, the idea of a hierarchical relation between different masculinities was initially inspired by the experience of gay men, and the violence and marginalization they received from straight men (831). Another central research area developed around the idea of complicity with hegemonic masculinity, the complicity of those men who enjoy the benefits of patriarchy, of male privilege over women, without themselves articulating dominant practices of masculinity. In other words, these men enforce and support normative models of masculinity (even though they may perceive them as oppressive for themselves) precisely because they receive benefits over women in a male-dominated social environment.

In this sense, Connell continues, hegemony means "ascendency achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (832), the ideological process whereby a subordinated class internalizes the condition of its very subjugation as natural and immutable, and therefore perpetuates it: the hegemony of "hegemonic masculinities" is therefore significantly *also* the hegemony of men over men. However, with its focus on historical change, Connell highlights, the concept of hegemony is far from being a simple model of cultural control: it is a means for comprehending social dynamics. It aims, in fact, at accounting for difference (and change across time, cultures, and geographies) and power imbalances, and at overcoming clear-cut dichotomies between dominant/dominated, and investigating social transformation and multiple and overlapping layers of complicity and resistance.

When we focus on the decade of the 1970s, we can highlight how its social and cultural context informed a reconfiguration of male identity. During this decade, what R. W. Connell would term "hegemonic masculinities" was challenged by a crossfire of cultural and social forces: second-wave feminism, sexual and gay liberation, a fierce intergenerational conflict, and an ensuing widespread attack on patriarchal society. On the one hand, these movements and the discourses they produced undermined the dominance of traditional performances of gender identity, denaturalizing them. On the other hand, the social reconfiguration called for unprecedented and potentially progressive embodiments of masculinity and femininity. These new representations developed and circulated widely in the arena of popular culture, whose market-driven, consumption-oriented nature often positions it at the forefront of

cultural production when it comes to responding to new needs and satisfying new sensibilities. What the success of a Supreme Court decision like "Bakke" brought to the surface again at the end of the decade was the need for a renewed self-representation of the United States. Diversity had been a compelling interest of the United States long before, but it is in the 1970s that the media industry had to finally acknowledge the full significance of this statement. Television productions became more diverse, and social minorities that had hitherto had little visibility entered the American household: with them, a plethora of social constituencies that for the first time, and only gradually, started to acquire the complexity of real characters and to steer away from a tradition of one-dimensional degrading stereotypes (Bailey 107–128). Both as an inevitable response to a changed social context and in a conscious effort to please a growing number of young viewers, some of the character types that only a generation before were connoted positively as the heroes became the villains, and social patterns associated with normalcy and "righteousness" were discredited and ridiculed.

3   *Starsky & Hutch*, the TV "Cop Genre," and Its Discontents

In April 1975, the 90-minute pilot episode of *Starsky & Hutch* aired on ABC, directed by Barry Shear and written by William Blinn (the series creator). It starred Paul Michael Glaser as David Starsky and singer/actor David Soul as Kenneth "Hutch" Hutchinson, two plainclothes detectives riding a red 1974 Ford Gran Torino in an unnamed city resembling Los Angeles. Starsky was characterized as highly excitable: later in the following seasons, viewers learn that he is a Brooklyn native from a working-class background, and that his mother was herself a member of the police force who died on the job. Hutch was portrayed as the more thoughtful of the two and from a more economically advantaged background. He eats healthy organic food and has elegant taste for interior design. The show co-starred two African American actors: Bernie Hamilton as Captain Harold Dobey, their boss, and Antonio Fargas as Huggy Bear, a

flamboyant pimp-turned-informant who owns a bar in town. The producers targeted a diverse audience made of younger viewers hooked in by the fast-paced action and the car chase scenes, as well as older males who could buy into the "buddy" dynamics (Snauffer 2006: 102). Finally, it addressed a vast section of the female audience, which could make or break many television products, the intended audience of the sexualization of the two protagonists who became instant sex symbols and were shown shirtless or half naked—in locker rooms, showers, saunas, laundry rooms—an incongruous number of times (see Fig. 4.1). The show premiered in September 1975, on Wednesday at 10 pm, safely outside of family viewing time.

Police and crime drama is possibly the most masculine of all television genres, having an emphasis on physical action, the public sphere, and professional roles. Through a very simple formula—crime/pursuit/capture—the genre traditionally functions as a mechanism of social control, asserting not only the paternal care (and sanctioned violence) of the State but also the inescapability and powerlessness of the criminal. In the 1950s and 1960s, most cop characters were seen to "uphold standards of decency, honesty and humanity" and possess a strong moral compass (Feasey 2008: 82). Starting from the late 1960s, but especially in the 1970s, police force transformed into specialized squads, and this resulted in a new representation of cops that were at once more aggressive, unorthodox in their methods, and gradually out of touch with their community (Feasey 2008: 80).

The cop genre, and by extension the detection narrative at large, re-inscribes social tensions and resolves cultural anxieties by containing them into a strictly repetitive format, that aims at reassuring the viewer on the good use of the State's violence over its subjects. To some extent, the genre repetitively stages the rise of murderous chaos and anarchy in order to reinforce and justify the triumph of authority and order (Ibarra 1998: 409–414). We may argue, indeed, that the popularity of the genre quite often rises in times of crisis and social turmoil.

The 1970s were the busiest in TV history for those involved in the production of crime television (Snauffer 2006: 73). Universal Studios production, as well as the ABC network, had a leading role in this phenomenon, together with one of the most powerful TV producers,

Fig. 4.1   Screenshots showing the sexualized representations of the lead actors in *Starsky & Hutch* (https://it.pinterest.com/pin/117656608994230584/; https://it.pin-terest.com/pin/562457440940798439/; http://sara-merry99.livejournal.com/photo/album/1838/?mode=view&id=216389&page=1)

Fig. 4. 1   (Continued)

Fig. 4.1 (Continued)

Aaron Spelling, who was responsible for cult shows like *Starsky & Hutch* (with Leonard Goldberg) and *Charlie's Angels*.

   Starsky & Hutch maintains many of the elements of the cop genre, most of which I define as "conservative," and consequently it also reinforces a somewhat traditional vision of hegemonic masculinity. Let us consider the clear separation between private and public sphere, for illustration. As mentioned earlier, normative masculinity is a competitive and compulsory performance played out in a public arena—for other men to see. The show is set almost exclusively in the public sphere, and information about the protagonist's private lives is revealed slowly and only partially. The central cast is made entirely of men, both in the office, on the streets, and on the crime scene. Their masculinity, leadership, self-reliance, and ability to figuratively stand above and dwarf other men is iteratively questioned and reaffirmed with every episode. Eventually, the protagonists' gender performance goes unchallenged by other men's masculinity: nowhere can we find another male character that may aspire to the leadership of the two detectives, or who can command a similar power of seduction, not even among the sympathetic co-protagonists.

Captain Dobey, despite his role as the "boss," often appears to be ineffective in his leadership, and the heroes frequently escape his authority—but after all, would they be heroes if they did not resist this hierarchy? The Captain mirrors a post-60s liberal father figure, who respects the two protagonists and is in turn respected by them, while displaying the flexible, eroded authority that often marks him as a colleague rather than a boss. On the other hand, Huggy Bear is outside of the "masculine contest," so to speak. This eccentric character, quite literally off-centered, dressed in flashy polyester suits, fedoras, bowties and jewelry, functions as a foil to the protagonists but almost always resists the simplification of a caricature, mostly by way of a powerfully (and paradoxically) nuanced acting. His performance of masculinity is outside the realm of sanctioned manhood: part pimp, part child, part queer, part womanizer—from today's perspective, his ungraspable personality makes him one of the most intriguing characters in the show. While he nominally utters his heterosexual desire from time to time, his performance of masculinity seems to subvert any expectation of normative heterosexual manhood.

Both African American co-stars, however, produce a non-threatening image of masculinity, in a time when African American cultural nationalism and political activism was circulating models of manhood and hypermasculinity that were highly visible and pervasively powerful: think Malcolm X, or the TV series *Shaft* (1973–1974), but also Huey Newton and the Black Panthers. In tune with the rise of neoliberal multiculturalism, which co-opts diversity and commoditizes it, depriving it of most of its disruptive political significance, this is an instance of increasing diversity on screen while maintaining a traditionally reassuring distribution of power for the white majoritarian audience. In truth, this practice displaces tensions and anxieties that are hardly manageable in the actual social arena. Mr. Dobey may well be the captain in the workplace, but the fictional realm of masculinity in the series is still securely in the hands of white men.

While the performance of masculinity that the heroes embody, in all its nuances and ambiguity, is presented as appealing and worthy of our admiring gaze, the male gender identity exemplified by the villains of each episode is disposed of as negative, "corrupted" and ultimately doomed to failure. In particular, most of the villains in the show are the

stereotyped embodiment of popular pre-1960s hegemonic masculinities: cocky patriarchs, quite often in a suit and tie, who thrive in hierarchical relations with fellow men and subordination and objectification of women. They function as a screen onto which the new man of the 1970s can be projected, with his new understanding of sex, marriage and gender.

4   Eccentricity and Collaborative Visions

In the early examples of the "buddy cop" TV show, the two protagonists were just work "partners," however, in *Starsky & Hutch* they become best friends (Snauffer 2006: 100–102). In the pilot episode, after realizing that someone inside the police department is plotting to kill him, Starsky asks his partner "Who in the hell are we supposed to trust now?" Hutch replies "same people we always trust. Us." The two protagonists seem to have no family, or no close ties that are unrelated to their job, or that are even just unknown to the other half of the pair. Because the series begins *in media res* (not at the moment when, e.g., they first meet on the job), the audience has the impression that Starsky and Hutch have known each other for a long time, and the two reference their partner's private life, albeit seldom, in a tone that bespeaks an intimate relation. For instance, through a fleeting reference in the pilot episode, and again in the "Texas Longhorn" episode, we learn that Starsky has been dating someone for some time, and that Hutch used to be married to a certain Nancy.

  Their friendship is certainly the strongest thematic core in the series, and the chemistry between the two actors articulates their relation through the scripts as well as through many sideway glances, silences, and a remarkably effusive body language. Their relationship at times resembles what we now call a *bromance* dynamics, and it is possibly one of the first representations of this kind to reach the television screens. In fact, the term was coined much later, in the late 1990s, likely within the skateboarding community, but it started to circulate widely in popular culture only in the early twenty-first century (see De Angelis). Unlike the traditional "buddy" male friendship, a *bromance* is a homosocial bond that crucially relies on a shared emotional and physical intimacy, and while it

still steers away from overly sexual undertones, it effectively challenges traditional binaries of heterosexual masculinity. For example, Fig. 4.2 shows a series of screenshots (from Season 2 Episode 9), where Starsky teaches Hutch to dance, ending at a point where the pair look as if they are about to embrace.

Despite the enormous potential for a homoerotic "slash" fiction reading of the central relationship in the programme, I would argue that one of the central motifs of the series is based around mutual help and collaboration. Unlike the lonely hero of the hardboiled fiction and crime narratives of the early and mid-twentieth century (Feasey 2008: 80–93), these men crucially rely on each other and on a wide network of friends and collaborators to succeed.

Therefore, the self-reliance and independence that so strongly epitomize dominant images of masculinity are both maintained, as the cops defend their autonomy of action even from their own boss, yet also challenged, since they do not hesitate to ask for help from each other and from a vast network of eccentric collaborators. These include, for example,

Fig. 4.2 Screenshots showing Starsky teaching Hutch to dance (Season 2 Episode 9)

what seems to be a stereotypical lesbian tattoo artist, Ray, who is apparently an old friend, appearing for the first time in "Texas Longhorn," the third episode of the first season. In this episode, written by Michael Mann (who later became the award-winning director of *Collateral*, *The Insider*, *Ali*, *Heat*, among others), two criminals rob, rape, and murder the wife of a Texan car dealer, and then disappear. According to the established pattern, the two detectives have to rely first on their network of friends and acquaintances to find the criminals. When they find out that one of the aggressors had a particular tattoo on his forearm, they go to a tattoo parlor and ask their friend and tattoo artist Ray.

HUTCH: *(enters)* Ray?
RAY: *(with a cigarette between her lips, without interrupting her tattooing of a young woman's leg)* Back here! *Starsky and Hutch* … what's this?
STARSKY: Looking just fine, sweetheart *(He is standing behind Ray, facing the client. It is unclear whether he is referring to Ray or to her client)*.
RAY: *(turning her head around to face Starsky)* What about me?
HUTCH: Well, you're special. We brought you something. *(showing her the photo of a full body traditional Japanese tattoo).*
RAY: That's really nice!
HUTCH: *(looking around her tattoo studio, whose walls are covered with drawings and photos of tattoos)* Where do you want me to tuck it up?
RAY: Anywhere gorgeous. (*to Starsky*) Thoughtful of you boys. *(Hutch is behind the client, and he is gesturing toward Ray to dismiss her)* … Well, that'll be 15 bucks. *(the client pays and leaves)*
STARSKY: That's a lot of lady.
HUTCH: *(now sitting in front of Ray, where the client was before. He looks in the direction of the door and then towards Ray)* Well, she was distracting. Ray you can do something for us.[2]

We understand that they are friends with her from the way they greet each other, and from the fact that Hutch brings her a gift, a photo of a

Japanese full body tattoo, which she seems delighted to receive. Ray is a short-haired, butch woman, who sports a lit cigarette in her lips and is intent on tattooing the upper leg of a young woman in a skimpy dress. As soon as the client is dismissed, Hutch exclaims, while taking a seat in front of Ray, "well, she was distracting" and glances toward the tattoo artist. Even these minor details reveal that for the protagonists Ray is a part of the team, "one of us," so to speak, not only as an acquaintance close enough for Hutch to express his implied sexual interest toward another woman, but possibly as someone who could share the same interest toward that client (distracting for whom? whose attention was required, in this scene?). With regard to this last aspect, however, the entire dynamic is so understated that we are left with mere conjectures. The way Ray addresses the two detectives, "gorgeous," and "boys," at once echoes the affectionate or seducing "sweetheart" pronounced by Starsky, and on the other, it reverses the typical masculine attitude of using nicknames to praise a woman's physical appearance and beauty, interestingly and subversively infantilizing the two detectives in the process. This scene presents the viewer with the possibility of diverging interpretations: even for just a few seconds, it displays a rather conservative imagery of two predatory men intent on seducing and visually consuming a woman's partly exposed body. Conversely, it stages a seemingly independent (and unaccompanied) young woman who is getting her skin tattooed with a traditionally rebellious mark, but also, in the character of Ray, an affirmative queer female professional who relates to the heroes in a loving and egalitarian way. The queer window that may open with Hutch's glance toward Ray and his "she was distracting" may produce a vision of inclusivity, whereby Ray's sexual desire and identification are known to the protagonists and do not constitute a hurdle to their friendship and to the apparent affective connection between them.

What is not simply conjectural, on the other hand, is the overall respectful attitude toward a cultural phenomenon and a profession like tattooing that certainly did not share the degree of popularity and respectability it has today. In fact, her response regarding who can tattoo "those kind of fish" in town ("Macao is the only place"), Ray acts as an expert professional, who knows the schools and trends in tattooing, and points the men in the right direction for solving the case. The tattoo artist, like

many other analogous eccentric informants in the series, is represented as someone with whom the detectives relate respectfully and have a friendly dialogue—these are significant changes for a television genre where cops traditionally demanded obedience, or extorted information by threat (or actual use) of force, and looked down on any unorthodox lifestyles. Here instead, the two detectives courteously wave goodbye to Ray at the end of the scene, with an affectionate "See you Ray!" which sounds surprisingly chivalrous for two characters that otherwise tend to rush outside of a room heading somewhere else and interrupting whoever is in the process of talking to them. Additionally, the tattoo parlor and the tattoo artist, and even the single female client, are portrayed matter-of-factly, avoiding any charged characterization of the tattoo profession as a dirty business (and counterbalancing the fact that the murder/rapist himself had a tattoo on his forearm).

These interactions reinforce the perception that Starsky and Hutch (unlike the traditionally conservative TV cops of the previous decade, as well as most pairs of the same era) are perfectly in tune with their social environment, their narrative time and place. Not only do they withhold judgment of "eccentric subjects," in a pluralist/multicultural fashion, but they also establish synergies with them, egalitarian relations, and they treat traditionally marginalized subjects as peers, with dignity and respect. Because of their position as television role models and exemplars of masculinity, the identity they embody becomes a powerful new vision of collaborative, non-hierarchical masculinity.

5   The Caring Man

I would like to conclude with a discussion of an episode titled "The Fix" (Season 1 Episode 4), in which the progressive gender performance I highlighted above is further complicated by the representation of the "good" man as a caring man, a man who is not afraid to display physical affection to his fellow man.

In this episode (which was banned from British television in the 1970s due to the topic of heroin use), Hutch is dating a young woman named Jeanie, and judging from a photo of the couple in his bedroom, we

understand that this must have been a long relationship. For the audience it may nonetheless be perceived as a surprise, an abrupt opening in the private life of a character that they had been following for a few episodes. As I mentioned above, the erasure of their private life from the narrative is a traditional move in the genre, and it is functional to the representation of their normative masculinity. In "The Fix" Hutch is kidnapped and drugged because an older mobster (played by Robert Loggia), Jeanie's former partner, wants her back. Immediately we see the obviously marked difference between the villains' masculinity, hierarchical and objectifying, and Hutch's, who protectively refuses to reveal Jeanie's location under torture, and needs to be nearly overdosed with heroin to do so. At the same time, Starsky first gives his partner a long leash for a week of absence because, as he says justifying Hutch to their boss, "Captain, he is in love!," but then he realizes that something must be wrong and finds out that *his man* is missing.

The pursuit and rescue here have an unparalleled emotional intensity: Hutch's helplessness is counterbalanced by Starsky's determination and urgency. Hutch is finally rescued, still hooked to heroin and "weak as a kitten" (in Starsky's words), and for the next two days he is kept hidden in Huggy Bear's place. Starsky is invested in finding the men responsible for Hutch's abduction and is motivated by what seems to be personal revenge: "[this case] is mine!" is what he tells Dobey, who immediately understands that the case and all the information related to it must be given to no one but Starsky. Meanwhile, at Huggy Bear's, Starsky takes care of his partner, with the help of Huggy, and the dynamic between the three is remarkably affectionate: from Huggy who does anything from untying Hutch's shoes to bringing them hot coffee, food, and towels, to Starsky who literally holds and lulls a sweating and trembling Hutch to sleep (see Fig. 4.3). In a phone call, Captain Dobey calls Huggy and in a heartfelt way says "Huggy, I appreciate what you're doing for my boys." The entire male cast embraces a motherly concern, and masculinity becomes visibly the ability to take care of your "weak other," displaying physical affection and intimacy.

The larger plot of the episode is nonetheless both classic and conservative, and reminds us of Eve K. Sedgwick's influential work on homosocial bonding in British literature (1985): in this quintessential paradigm, a

Fig. 4.3 Starsky and Huggy Bear hold Hutch as he recovers from heroin addiction

woman/outsider interferes with the intense relationship between two men causing chaos and disruption. In order for harmony to be restored, the female character must eventually disappear. "The Fix" episode inaugurates the use of Starsky and Hutch's various girlfriends, almost exclusively seen at the beginning or the end of each episode, as counterpoint to their "manly" adventures, and possibly as a guarantee of their inherent heterosexuality. Not incidentally, the absence of female characters from the visual horizon of the series also functions to reveal the two male sex objects as available to the visual consumption of the audience—an audience traditionally understood by television studies scholars as predominantly female (Joyrich 1996: 11).

6   Conclusion: The Matter with Representation

Certainly, any hegemony creates its own counter-hegemony, and any institution of power aims at maintaining its power. Therefore, we could justly ask ourselves, with the scholar MacKinnon, whether these figures of masculinity are choosing "to become less hegemonic precisely in order to stay

hegemonic" (2003: 73). We must remember that we are discussing cultural products that are entangled with the dynamics of late capitalism and neo-liberal cultural politics, whereby inclusivity and multiculturalism are co-opted by the forces of the marketplace, and are at the service of an increased productivity and profit making. Therefore, on the one hand, the inclusion of complex and sympathetic African American characters, as well as that of strong and independent female characters (although in both cases more peripheral to the storyline), may be suspect, because in order to appeal to a wider audience it simulates the resolution of a social conflict in the realm of representation. On the other hand, representation matters precisely *as representation*, since cultural work impacts the way in which we understand ourselves, it can give us awareness of our marginalization, as well as shape our dreams and visions of empowerment. Similarly, circulating images of counter-hegemonic masculinities, may be both a strategy for maintaining men in control (by giving them a friendlier face), or instead, as I prefer to believe, a way to envision new possibilities of masculinity, and providing powerfully appealing models that refuse hierarchy, value diversity, and embrace collaboration across difference as a strategic resource.

I intentionally resist promoting a gay reading of the relationship between the protagonists (these readings abound, as you can guess, both by the gay community and by homophobic viewers) not only because at this point in critical history they are relatively easy to make, but also, and more precisely, because I am fascinated by the cultural significance of these two men being, after all, embodiments of a "new" heterosexual man (see also De Angelis 2014). The performance of gender they endorse is therefore, or strives to be, an innovative "mainstream" embodiment of masculinity: to envision any variation from a dominant, traditional representation of manhood as a "gay" variation is clearly reductive, and it jeopardizes the very transformation and struggle that concepts like "hegemony" evoke. If they were gay, anything they say or do would always already be outside of the sanctioned masculine behavior: this rhetorical move would do nothing but stabilize a monolithic and oppressive understanding of heterosexual masculinity, rather than questioning its inherently exclusionary construction. This would actually be in line with the most oppressively bigoted ideas that define phys-ical displays of affection between men, as well as emotionality, caring and empathy across diversity, as less-than-masculine, or other-than-masculine.

In other words, it is precisely because this television series is expanding the realm of alluring "straight" masculinity, embracing egalitarianism, cooperation, and the display of affection as its main features, that I argued for its potentially progressive message.

The title of this chapter aims at highlighting, somewhat ironically, precisely this libidinal traffic, this circulation of affect and attachment, both within the show and between the series and its audience. The direct interpellation of the Redbone's hit song, *Come and Get Your Love*, then may signal at once the ideological power of the media, imperatively addressing the individual viewer to "join" its product, but simultaneously it marks its own powerlessness in the face of that viewer's agency. It is *your* love, after all, that you are going to *get*, and the act of viewing, of consuming the media product becomes in itself an active, and potentially subversive, appropriation: one that I evoked at the beginning of this chapter by borrowing the notion of "disidentification" by the late scholar Muñoz.

The massive circulation of these images of care, collaboration, and egalitarianism becomes a trademark of the series and the performance of masculinity it endorses and even encourages. It creates a productive, counter-hegemonic space of possibility for a queer utopian community, which is less a revolutionary rewriting of gender identity and structural power imbalance as it is a strategic egalitarianism aimed at producing a functioning and successful new society, and it is therefore uniquely entangled in a historical time of reconfiguration of gender and national identity.

Notes

1. A satisfactory outline of the extent of the 1980s backlash clearly exceeds the scope of this chapter. Let me just mention here the heating of the Cold War by the Reagan administration following several operations in Latin America and Africa, as well as the erosion of policies supporting social justice and the aggressive pursuit of a neoliberal economic agenda, and finally the systematic attempt to justify through religious language a conservative political agenda. Many of these issues converged in the AIDS crisis and Reagan's responsibility and disastrous (in)actions in response to it.
2. The transcript of this scene is mine, from *Starsky & Hutch: Season 1*. (2014) DVD version.

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