

= Pilot (Will & Grace) =

" Pilot " (also known as " Love and Marriage ") is the first episode of Will & Grace 's first season . It was written by David Kohan and Max Mutchnick , and directed by James Burrows . It originally aired on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in the United States on September 21 , 1998 . In the episode , Grace Adler receives an unexpected marriage proposal from her boyfriend . Her gay best friend Will Truman tries to support her , but finally tells her that she is making a big mistake , even though he risks losing their friendship . The situation gets complicated when Grace 's socialite assistant , Karen Walker , and Will 's flamboyantly gay friend , Jack McFarland , interfere .

Kohan and Mutchnick based the show on their own lives ; for example , Mutchnick , who is openly gay , based the relationship between Will and Grace on his real @-@ life relationship with a woman named Janet . When the pilot was pitched to NBC , the network was positive about the project . There was still some concern , however , that the homosexual subject matter would cause alarm , since the sitcom Ellen was canceled because ratings had plummeted after the show became " too gay " . Since airing , the pilot episode of Will & Grace has received mostly positive reviews from television critics . It acquired a Nielsen rating of 8 @.@ 6 , equivalent to approximately 8 @.@ 4 million viewing households .

= = Plot = =

The episode begins with gay lawyer Will Truman (Eric McCormack) talking on the phone with his best friend , heterosexual Jewish interior designer Grace Adler (Debra Messing) , about their lives . The following day , Will hosts a poker game at his apartment with his friends , when Grace arrives and informs Will she just had an argument with her long @-@ term boyfriend , Danny (Tom Verica) . After the game is over , Will insists that Grace spend the night ? much to the displeasure of Will 's flamboyantly gay friend , Jack McFarland (Sean Hayes) , who was planning to move in with Will temporarily .

Later at her office , Grace Adler Designs , Grace tells her socialite assistant Karen Walker (Megan Mullally) about her argument with Danny . Karen tells Grace to make up with him , explaining to Grace that Danny is a " good catch " . After staying another night with Will , Grace decides to end her relationship with Danny . However , when she tries to end things she receives an unexpected marriage proposal from him , which she accepts . After the proposal , Grace goes to Will 's apartment and asks for his blessing . Will attempts to be supportive of her decision , but finally tells her that Danny is not right for her . Grace informs Will that she does not need his blessing , and that she is going to marry Danny regardless .

Will shows up at Grace Adler Designs the following day to apologize . Karen reveals to Will that Grace has gone to City Hall to get married . However , Grace shows up at her office and informs Will that she left Danny at the altar . Will takes Grace out for a drink and reassures her that she will find someone eventually .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception = = =

Will & Grace creators Max Mutchnick and David Kohan based the show on their own lives . Mutchnick , who is openly gay , based the relationship between Will and Grace on his real @-@ life relationship with a woman named Janet . Originally , Mutchnick and Kohan first went to the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) , who told them to create a television series about a new young love story , as Mad About You was going off the air . The character of Will was part of a sitcom Mutchnick and Kohan first pitched to NBC executives in 1997 . The original concept was an ensemble comedy featuring three couples , one of which was a gay man living with a straight woman . Warren Littlefield , the executive vice president of NBC at the time , was not excited about the first two

couples , but wanted to learn more about the gay and straight couple , so Mutchnick and Kohan was sent to create a pilot script centering on those two characters . NBC went to sitcom director James Burrows to see what he thought of the homosexual subject matter and if an audience would be interested in the show . Burrows liked the idea and when he first read the script in November 1997 , he decided that he wanted to direct it . Burrows said , " I knew that the boys had captured a genre and a group of characters I have never read before . " The filming of the pilot began in March 1998 . The actors who played Will and Grace , Eric McCormack and Debra Messing , were positive about the series and they thought it had the potential to last on television . McCormack said , " When shooting was finished that night , Debra and I were sitting on the couch and looking at each other and I said , ' We ' re gonna be on this set for a while . ' And we sort of clasped hands , but we didn ' t want to say anything beyond that and jinx it . "

NBC were positive about the project , but there was still some concern that the homosexual subject matter would cause alarm . Ellen DeGeneres ' sitcom Ellen that aired on ABC was canceled the year before Will & Grace premiered because ratings had plummeted after the show became " too gay " . Despite the criticism ABC received for DeGeneres ' coming out episode , " The Puppy Episode " , " there ' s no question that show made it easier for Will & Grace to make it on the air , " said Kohan . He added , " Will & Grace had a better shot at succeeding where Ellen failed , however , because Will has known about his homosexuality for twenty years . He ' s not exploring that awkward territory for the first time as Ellen did . The process of self @-@ discovery and the pain most gay men go through is fascinating , but the average American is put off by it . " Kohan also commented that rather than concentrating on Will ' s sexuality , Will & Grace is using it as a device : " It ' s like that When Harry Met Sally ... line when Billy Crystal says , ' A man and woman can never be friends , because sex always gets in the way . ' What we want to explore is what happens between a man and a woman when sex doesn ' t get in the way . "

= = = Cast and characters = = =

Mutchnick said Will was originally going to be named Will Herman (" her man ") because the staff wanted to use names that " speak exactly to the essence " of the characters . However , they changed it to Truman (" true man ") since they thought it was more accurate , as Will " really lives his life in an honest way " . John Barrowman was one of the final candidates for the role of Will , but was rejected because he " wasn ' t gay enough " . The part instead went to Eric McCormack , who revealed that taking the role was not difficult because he liked the concept of a gay show not being about the " issues " of being gay . Having played gay characters several times in his career , McCormack did not have a problem with it and thought his character could become a " poster boy for some gay movement " , like DeGeneres became a spokesperson with her character . He explained that when he first read the script , " what hit me immediately was that this was me . I mean , sexual orientation aside , Will was so much like me . He ' s a great host , he ' s relatively funny and he has great friends and he ' s a good friend to them ... the gay issue just wasn ' t really a big thing . " McCormack was also the first actor to be cast . In response to the relationship between Will and Grace , McCormack said that gay men and straight women have " more fun than anybody " in their relationships ; " Straight guys like me are jealous because of how much fun they have . We can show the audience part of that . "

Mutchnick , in regards of Debra Messing ' s character , said : " Grace doesn ' t fall into any of those categories that have stereotyped Jewish women . She ' s strong , she ' s pretty and she ' s a proud Jewish woman . " Mutchnick revealed that Nicollette Sheridan was originally brought in to read the part of Grace , but even though she did a " great job " , her performance was " too desperate " . Mutchnick and Kohan decided to cast Messing in the role instead , who at the time was starring in ABC ' s drama Prey . After her first meeting with them , Messing was not convinced she wanted the role . Messing revealed that Mutchnick and Kohan showed up at her home with a bottle of vodka ; " They poured me several shots , we spoke for several hours and they pitched me the show . I ' m a lightweight . I didn ' t need much to be a little giddy . By the end of the evening , they said , ' Will you do it ? ' I said , ' Let ' s talk tomorrow . ' " They called her the next day to inform her that they " loved

her " and asked " if she 'd made up her mind " . Messing still did not make her mind up . However , the following day , she called Mutchnick and Kohan and accepted the role . In discussion of the character , Messing said : " I have a lot more confidence and I 'm much more relaxed . I feel comfortable that Grace will be a character I 'll enjoy doing for a long time . " She later , however , admitted that director Burrows was the reason for doing Will & Grace . Messing was the last actor to be cast .

Sean Hayes was cast in the role of Jack . When a NBC casting executive saw Hayes 's role in the indie gay romance film Billy 's Hollywood Screen Kiss , he sent the script to Hayes , who was attending the 1997 Sundance Film Festival in Utah . Even though Hayes enjoyed the script when he read it , he threw it away as he did not want to spend money on a plane ticket to Los Angeles for the audition . However , a few weeks later when Hayes was in Los Angeles , he was sent the script again and decided try out for the audition . If asked if he regrets accepting the role , Hayes said : " If you 're truly an actor , in the long run ... I don 't know that I would have done it either . I think of all the things that I still want to do , and I don 't know if I 'll get to do them . " However , he admits that he " love [s] " the idea that people assume that he is either gay or straight . In an interview with Entertainment Weekly , Hayes admitted that people believe he is Jack " 24 hours a day " .

Before Megan Mullally was given the role of Karen , she had previously been cast as a series regular on sitcoms such as The Ellen Burstyn Show , My Life and Times , and Rachel Gunn . Mullally guest starred on many other shows , including Ned & Stacey , on which she first worked with Messing . Mullally informed her agent that she did not want to do any more sitcoms or auditions for sitcoms , during the time that Will & Grace came around . " Because my feeling was , like , Look , I 've done it . It 's not clicking . It 's not for me . But he [her agent] was always arguing the point that the right thing hadn 't come along yet . " She initially auditioned for the role of Grace , but admitted that she did not want to audition for the part of Karen . When asked about Karen 's voice , Mullally revealed that the voice was an " instinctive thing " . She also said , " ... I think it was just a feeling that I had that it would be better for the pace of the show and it would be funnier in some way , but I didn 't know why . Karen has a lot of joy , even when she 's in a bad mood . She 's pretty much happy with who she is , and that is something I think is a great thing to play , because the character of Karen could have been very unlikeable , and I think she 's likeable because she has joy and she can be very childlike . "

= = Reception = =

The episode was first broadcast in the United States on NBC on Monday , September 21 , 1998 , in the 9 : 30 ? 10 p.m. (PST) timeslot . In its original American broadcast , the pilot tied with Working for forty @-@ first place in ratings for the week of September 21 ? 27 , 1998 . With a Nielsen rating of 8 @.@ 6 , equivalent to approximately 8 @.@ 4 million viewing households , it was the fifteenth highest @-@ rated show on NBC the week it aired . Since airing , the episode has received mostly positive reviews from television critics . Joyce Millman of Salon Entertainment said the episode has " glimmers of class " and the jokes are " relatively sophisticated " . John Carman of the San Francisco Chronicle commented that Burrows 's direction was " sharp as usual " and the writing was " above average " . Brian Lambert of the St. Paul Pioneer Press said the pilot was " nicely staged by veteran director Jimmy Burrows , and coming from a couple producers , Max Mutchnick and David Cohan , who assisted Boston Common and Dream On , the show ? which is to say the pilot episode (everything could go to hell next week) ? has the best verbal interplay of any of the season 's new sitcoms . " William Horn from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) thought the episode was a " wonderful " representation of a gay man 's life " regardless of whether he 's in a relationship in that very moment . I think it 's important that American audiences realize that lesbians and gay men are not simply all about sexual situations . " Ellen Gray of the Chicago Tribune was also positive about the show : " For those who believe that Hollywood 's engaging in a conspiracy to ' normalize ' a sexual orientation that many Americans still find abhorrent , Will & Grace will look like a candy @-@ coated poison pill . To those who think that Hollywood isn 't moving fast enough in offering sexual parity for gays , it may just look like poison . But ... there 's a large audience out there

that 's somewhere in the mushy middle , an audience that might be ready to embrace Will & Grace . "

The actors ' performances were praised by several critics . Carman thought McCormack and Messing worked " nicely " together , and called the supporting cast " an asset " . Kay Mcfadden of the Seattle Times also praised McCormack , Messing and the supporting cast as " very funny " . Robert Laurence of The San Diego Union @-@ Tribune wrote : " Messing and McCormack play wonderfully together , tossing lines back and forth as if they 'd been at it for years , making their relationship quite believable . Sean Hayes , as the flamboyantly gay Jack , adds to the mix . Jack is flighty , temperamental , good @-@ humored and highly likable . " A reviewer for USA Today said he thought it would be nice to see Will have a " full life of his own " , and not just serve as a " love @-@ life adviser " to Grace and Jack . " I know it won 't happen soon ; NBC is so skittish about the so @-@ called Ellen ' gay show ' stigma , it 's gone to Herculean lengths to avoid mentioning Will 's sexuality . But a grace period can only last so long . "

The episode received less positive reviews as well . Rahul Gairola of PopMatters wrote that while " the pilot lays the usual groundwork by showing how the characters ' lives are intertwined , it also demonstrates immediately the sitcom 's major drawback , that the stereotypical gay character is the stand @-@ out comic figure . " A reviewer for the Los Angeles Times said " there 's something not quite right about this show 's approach to homosexuality ... It has everything to do with Will 's attitude . It approaches asexual , his gayness appearing to exist solely as a device to give him the moral authority to repeatedly ridicule the mincing manner of his bandanna @-@ wearing homosexual friend , Jack , without being labeled homophobic . " Suite101.com 's Hana Lewis thought it was " regrettable " that the pilot 's jokes revolved " solely around gay stereotypes and sexual innuendo " . Some reviewers were also skeptical about the future of the show . One such review said , " If Will & Grace can somehow survive a brutal time period opposite football and Ally McBeal , it could grow into a reasonably entertaining little anomaly ? that is , a series about a man and a woman who have no sexual interest in one another . But don 't bet on it . If it 's a doomed relationships viewers want , they 'll probably opt for Ally . "