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TRANSMISSION
PREMIUM TELEVISION REPRESENTATIONS OF CHARACTERS OUTSIDE OF
THE GENDER BINARY

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Daniel L. Ketchum
August 2014
Advisor: Rodney Buxton

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Title: Transmission: Premium Television Representations of Characters Outside of the Gender Binary
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ABSTRACT

Five fictional characters have emerged on the U.S. premium-pay-cable channels that blur the traditional male-or-female gender divide. The basics of queer theory (sex, gender, orientation, and transgender) and critical/cultural studies (encoding, decoding, and reading a text) are explained as a basis for the analysis of the characters, which seeks to answer the research question: does the premium-pay-cable television format offer truly empathetic non-binary transgender characters that challenge the dominant American ideologies about gender identity and expression? If so, how? If not, why not?

Shane McCutcheon from Showtime's lesbian melodrama *The L Word* (2004-2010), Lafayette Reynolds from HBO's supernatural drama-comedy *True Blood* (2008-2014), Roscoe Kaan from Showtime's corporate drama-comedy *House of Lies* (2012-), Brienne of Tarth from HBO's political-fantasy-epic *Game of Thrones* (2010-) and Job from Cinemax's pulpy action-thriller *Banshee* (2013-) are rigorously scrutinized, revealing their surprisingly complex, confident, and transgressive queer power.

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INTRODUCTION

The transgender community exists as a minority within a minority, more disadvantaged, misunderstood, and underprivileged than the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) communities at large. With the repeal of ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,’ the rapid increase of states ratifying marriage equality laws, the Supreme Court’s deliberation over the Defense of Marriage Act and Prop. 8, and the general growth in exposure and support for gay rights, the climate of acceptance for lesbians and gays in the United States has noticeably improved. The transgender (‘trans’) community, however, remains left out of much of these legal, political, and social discussions. Authentic trans experiences and narratives are essentially non-existent in mainstream society, rendering a crucial minority nearly invisible and voiceless. Regardless of this marginalization, activists, community groups, queer theorists, and internet resources have allowed trans individuals in the U.S. to become more connected, active, and empowered than ever in history. While transsexual individuals dominate the conversation and activism within the ‘transgender umbrella,’ other identities that challenge, combine, or erase the binary categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ have begun to congregate, mostly in digital spaces through the Web. Their discussions generate new terminologies such as *genderqueer*, *gender-fluid*, *bi-gender*, and *agender*, which many non-binary individuals use to describe themselves.

Popular media seems to have recognized their growing presence as well. In the last decade, an unprecedented number characters outside of the male or female ‘gender

binary' have appeared on U.S. television. From *Glee*, to *Adventure Time*, to *House of Lies*, to *True Blood*, non-traditionally gendered characters can be seen across a wide variety of genres and broadcast formats. Academic research on transgender characters in *cinema* is somewhat extensive, but studies on the contemporary transgender *television* personas has not been undertaken. Moreover, nearly all of the small body of research analyzing transgender characters focuses on transsexual characters. New representations of non-binary identities within the transgender umbrella are even further overlooked. Free of many of the censorship and advertisement constraints of broadcast television, content creators on premium-pay-cable channels such as HBO, Showtime, and Cinemax have generated the most fascinating of these non-binary characters.

Grounded in queer theory and critical/cultural studies, this thesis will consist of a rigorous analysis and comparison of five recent premium-pay-cable television characters who transcend the gender labels of 'male' and 'female' in the traditional way. Their storylines, their gendered narratives, and the apparent attitudes of the shows' creators will be dissected, revealing whether or not a new milestone in the televised representation of gender has occurred. This comparative, textual analysis will reveal patterns in the US television industry's conceptualizations of gender, the dominant binaries, and the transgender experience.

Though I am cisgender (not transgender), I am an LGBT ally, especially of the transgender community. The undergraduate university that I attended has a large, vocal trans community, and when they explained their identities to me, my preconceived notions of gender were shattered. With a new appreciation for the fluidity and complexity of gender, and with an arsenal of queer terminology, I was able to support a friend who

came out a transsexual man, comfortably adjusting to the male pronouns and new name that he requested. I am not an expert on transgender issues, and I have no experience being an oppressed minority, so I must recognize my privileges during this project. David Gaider wonderfully defines privilege as “when you think something is not a problem because it’s not a problem to you personally.” In fact, I have all of the American privileges as a straight, white, cisgender, college-educated, middle-class male. As long as I identify my own biases and privileges and conduct extensive research into LGBT issues and theory, my opinions and research about gender and sexuality are still valid.

I want to use my skills as a media analyzer to decipher the roles of transgender characters on television. I will delve deeply into queer theory to evaluate how TV conceptualizes identities that aren’t strictly male or female in the traditional, hegemonic understanding. At the same time though, I must recognize my limitations as an outsider. Linda Alcoff discusses the inherent issues that arise when researching another group: “When one is speaking about another, or simply trying to describe their situation or some aspect of it, one may also be speaking in place of them, i.e. speaking *for* them.” I want to avoid as much as possible, speaking *for* transgender/queer people. When defining these identities in the literature review, I will use many quotes from actual people in the communities, instead of pretending that I know what it feels like to be trans/queer. My textual analyses of these series will be my analyses alone, supplemented by articles, books, blogs, and other literature on television criticism and queer theory.

The literature review first explains the basics of queer theory, giving background on the postmodern approach to conceptualizing sex, gender, transgender, and most importantly, the binaries and those who transgress them. Next, I clarify the social

importance of media representations, noting the relevance of the project within critical/cultural studies. I then move to television criticism specifically, as a groundwork for how exactly I will interpret the texts of study. Finally, previous writings on transsexual representations in film provide a hypothesis about how trans characters might function on television. Specifically, Jeremy Russell Miller's theory that all transsexual characters in cinema function as objects of ridicule, fear, or sympathy will be put to the test for non-binary representations when I analyze five contemporary, live-action, fictional premium-pay-cable television characters in the body of my thesis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Queer theory: defining and framing sex, gender, orientation

An offshoot of feminist theory and post-modern thought, queer theory “seeks to transcend and erode the central binary divisions of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual in the construction of modern sexualities” (qtd. in Ekins, 208). The key concept for understanding queer theory, the binaries, and transgender, is the distinction between *gender* and *biological sex*. In society at large, the words *sex* and *gender* are conflated constantly. For trans individuals, the difference may be as apparent as left vs. right. Biological sex refers to the chromosomal and genital distinction of a person as ‘male’ or ‘female.’ The preferred term for people who aren’t traditionally male or female in their chromosomes, sex organs, or sexual development is *intersex* (Ekins, 204). Unlike biological sex, *gender* serves as a much more complicated and vast aspect of one’s internal identity and outward expression. Michelle Dietert and Dianne Dentice start off in their study of trans youth narratives by warning that “defining gender continues to spawn debates among social scientists, physicians, judicial systems, the federal government, feminists, transgender activists and their supporters, the media, and counseling professionals” (25). Gender is elusive and contested, repeatedly challenged and re-framed.

Feminist scholar Judith Butler famously conceptualized gender as a *performance*: a repeated conscious and subconscious active presentation of the self. In her view, establishing a gender identity is a personal, psychological process, taught or even indoctrinated by the society around the individual. In her words, “‘becoming’ a gender is a laborious process of becoming naturalized, which requires a differentiation of bodily

pleasures and parts on the basis of gendered meanings.” (Butler, 70). For most people, they establish comfort between their physical sex and their inner sense of self at a young age. But for some, like transsexual people, their exterior body parts are incongruent with their internal *gender identity*. According to queer theory, everyone has a gender identity.

A second aspect of gender is *gender expression*, the external way that a person expresses their gender through clothes, behavior, grooming, etc... In Riki Wilchins’ *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*, she quotes French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s definition of gender: “gender is a language, a system of meanings and symbols, along with the rules, privileges, and punishments pertaining to their use – for power and sexuality (masculinity and femininity, strength and vulnerability, action and passivity, dominance and weakness)” (qtd. in Wilchins, 35). Derrida’s definition points to a third aspect of gender: the societal aspect, described as an institution. In Anne Fausto-Sterling’s *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World*, she stresses the differences between gender as a social construct and gender as a personal identity. Her model is adapted from Lorber’s 1994 work *Paradoxes of Gender* which compares eight facets of gender. For example,

As a social institution, gender is composed of...gender imagery: the cultural representations of gender in symbolic language and artistic productions... [But,] for an individual, gender is composed of...gender display: presentation of self as a kind of gendered person through dress, cosmetics, adornments, and permanent and reversible body markers (7).

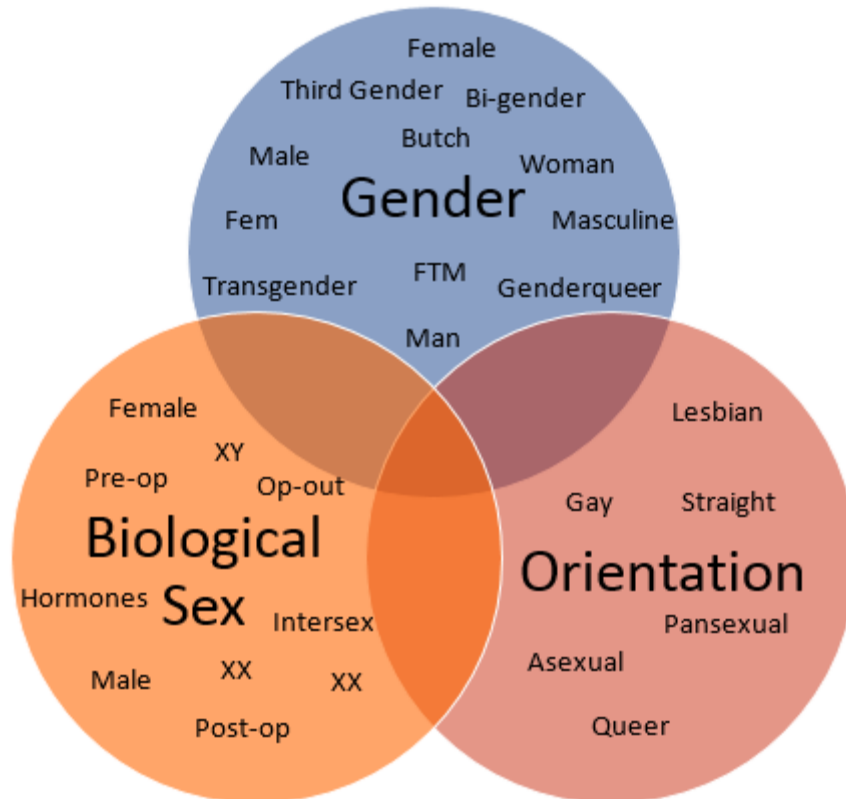
While the individual and societal aspects of gender are different, they are co-dependent, constantly informing each other about what constitutes ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine,’ ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable,’ ‘cis’ or ‘trans.’ Like language, gender norms are arbitrary, and vary by culture and over time (see figure 6 below).

Figure 6



The advertisement on the left for men available at a ‘host club’ in Japan is targeted to straight, Japanese women. The preppy jackets, long punk hair, and boyish features would be considered feminine or effeminately gay by U.S. standards, but their images reflect an ideal masculinity sought after by young Japanese women today. The ad on the right for an American gay bath house depicts masculinity as naked, hairless, muscular, and adult, with more ‘mannish’ jaw lines and facial structures. The ideal masculinity on display on the right reflects a completely different cultural attitude about gender by a radically different demographic (gay American men).

Figure 7



The relationship between sex and gender is further complicated when a third factor is introduced: orientation, which relies on a male or female gender for the labels ‘gay,’ ‘lesbian,’ and ‘straight.’ Additionally, orientation can vary from asexual (no sexual attraction) to pansexual (can be attracted to anyone, regardless of gender). The diagram I created above (figure 7) shows that the three aspects are distinct, but overlapping, and in many ways, inseparable...somehow discrete *and* co-dependent. The numerous fluid and personal ways that sex, gender, and orientation fit together could be thought of as a way to define an individual’s sexual identity. There are even more factors in the mix though, like sexual preferences and behaviors...some people are monogamous, or polyamorous, into S&M, are nudists, exhibitionists, voyeurs, dominant, submissive...sexual interests and fetishes are infinitely numerous and unique.

The reclamation of the word *queer*

Queer has been reclaimed among many people as a sort of ‘catch-all’ term meaning not straight and/or not cisgender. David Valentine defines it as “a synonym for

Figure 8



The screenshot shows a Facebook post and its comments. The post is by Kevin [redacted], a Top Commenter and Cashier at Rent-A-Swag. He asks why people use the word 'queer' as an identifier. There are four replies:

- Martin [redacted]**, Top Commenter from San Francisco, California, replies: "I believe it's because 'queer' is more inclusionary of a term than gay, as it includes gender identity, attraction, fluidity, etc. Not everyone fits into the neat little 'LGBT' community, and I think 'queer' represents a wider range of orientations (or even non-orientations) that should be included in our struggle for equality." (26 likes)
- Beaty [redacted]**, Top Commenter from Arlington, Texas, replies: "I use it because I get really tired of explaining to people 'what I am exactly'." (10 likes)
- Lauren [redacted]**, Top Commenter from Rochester, New York, replies: "I choose the word because I feel that I do not fit into the other categories, but still identify as non-hetero. words like gay, lesbian, and bisexual also have gender-specific connotations, so it's a way to say you don't believe in a binary gender system." (7 likes)

the lumpier ‘LGBT’ as an attempt to stress the commonalities of experience across particular identity formations.” The word can be quite liberating for some, rejecting the arguably narrow, simplistic, and loaded single categories of ‘gay,’ ‘bisexual,’ ‘lesbian,’ and perhaps even ‘transgender.’ Wilchins finds *queer* to be especially useful since she sees gender and orientation as essentially linked, despite the fact that the gay community and the gay rights movement have seemed to push gender away from their discourse (17-20). The discussion of *queer* in a BuzzFeed comment section above (figure 8) reflects the versatility of the word.

Conceptualizing transgender identity

John Philips, in his 2006 book *Transgender on Screen*, adapts the definition of *transgender* from queer theorist Stephen Whittle. The word arose in the 1990s as “an umbrella term for covering all crossings of gender and sex boundaries, whether temporary or permanent, vestimentary [clothing] or anatomical” (Philips, 11). Wilchins explains that *gay* originally functioned as an all-inclusive term for any identities outside of the mainstream. As the movement evolved; however, “gayness and gender became separated, [and] a new term was needed- *transgender*” (22). *Transgender* further advanced from a word referring to only transsexual people, to an “umbrella term for *anyone* who crossed the gender lines” (26). Depending on who you ask, the following identities, and others, may fit in the ‘transgender umbrella’:

- 1) Transsexual individuals – who have the other (male or female) gender as compared to their (male or female) birth sex.
 - a. Male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals a.k.a. transwomen, transsexual women, or transgender women

- b. Female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals a.k.a. transmen, transsexual men, or transgender men
- 2) Genderqueer or gender fluid individuals – who aren't wholly male or wholly female in their gender identities. Fluid refers to a gender identity that is not fixed and might vary from week to week, or even day to day.
- 3) Bi-gender or two spirits individuals – who are both male and female in their gender.
- 4) Third-gender individuals – who aren't male, female, both, or in-between in their gender.
- 5) Agender – individuals who do not have a gender

The limitations of labels and categories

It's important to note that the terminologies and classifications above are not concrete. Individuals have to self-identify with a terminology, choose to place or not place themselves within the transgender umbrella, or reject the classifications all together. For instance, some who self-identify as cross-dressers, transvestites, or drag queens, consider themselves to be trans, while others do not. Some transsexuals would reject the inclusion of those three identities under the umbrella because those crossings are more temporary, and are perhaps done for expressive or erotic reasons (Wilchins, 28). At the same time though, some transsexual people shed the label *transgender* once their transition is over; one transman told me he did this because his gender presentation is “no longer in flux.” Some people, who would be considered transsexuals by the above definition, simply want to be considered ‘men’ or ‘women’ without the burden of the ‘trans’ that could come before their gender label, regardless of their hormone or surgery

statuses. Others that don't fit into the gender binary reject the term 'transgender' all together. Terminologies can vary by class, race, and community (Valentine, 12).

Linguistic anthropologists Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet reinforce the crucial role that language plays in gender: "gender is, after all, a system of meaning – a way of constructing notions of male and female – and language is the primary means through which we maintain or contest old meanings, and construct or resist new ones" (Eckert, 6). Words like 'butch,' 'fem,' 'transwoman,' and 'genderqueer,' can hold immense power for a person's sense of identity, and for some a lack of language can be equally important, and perhaps even more radical. But language develops sporadically and without consensus. Obviously, the transgender community does not have a yearly summit to decide which terms should be used and what each term means. Individual people and micro-communities decide what terminologies work for them and what they mean for them personally. Aided by the internet, new terms arise constantly. For example, the terms 'gender variant' or 'gender non-conforming' are becoming more common to describe people in categories two, three, and four above (Wilchins, 29). The word *transgender* is relatively new, and it's a product of academics, social scientists, and activists, created as a way to both reframe and challenge the binaries and connect those that lie outside of them.

In his book *Imagining Transgender*, David Valentine argues that since gender identities outside of the binary system are so immensely personal and complex, labels and terminologies fail to capture them. He claims that "none of these people's understandings of themselves or their desires are intelligible in political categories of collective agency, because of the gap between their understandings of personhood and the political

categories of identity which claim to represent them” (Valentine, 108). He believes that gender itself transcends narrow classifications, and therefore *transgender* has become institutionalized through its terminologies, rendering the self as “unintelligible.” As an anthropologist, Valentine immerses himself in the culture that he studies. Large sections of the book recount his experiences navigating the Manhattan ‘Meat Market’ area of ‘fem-boy’ sex workers colloquially known as ‘chicks with dicks.’ He explains the gender fluidity of Tamara, a male-bodied sex worker who mostly presents as female while on the job. Valentine refers to Tamara as ‘she’ when Tamara presents as female, but ‘he’ when Valentine interacts with Tamara when presenting as male: “A few weeks later, I saw her dressed as Tamara again, but a week after that, Tamara was dressed as a boy once more. When I asked him why, he showed me a mark on his face: she was robbed, he said, and she’s scared of being robbed again” (111). Valentine’s stunningly queer use of pronouns, and his insistence on retaining the complexity of personhood, have inspired me to resist the urge to shoe-horn characters into ‘political categories’ that reduce and diminish their intricate identities.

The Binaries

Philips summarizes the three binaries, or the this-or-that separations as understood by mainstream society:

- 1) The male/female binary of sex.
- 2) The male/female binary of gender.
- 3) The heterosexual/homosexual binary of orientation.

Figure 9

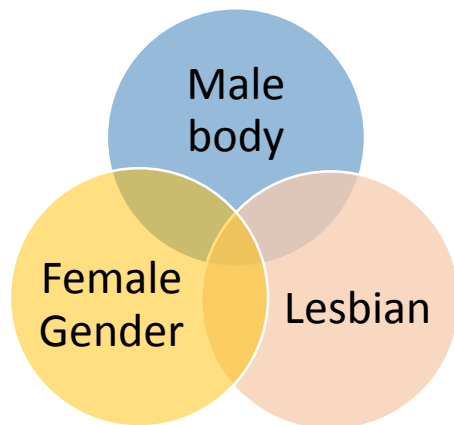
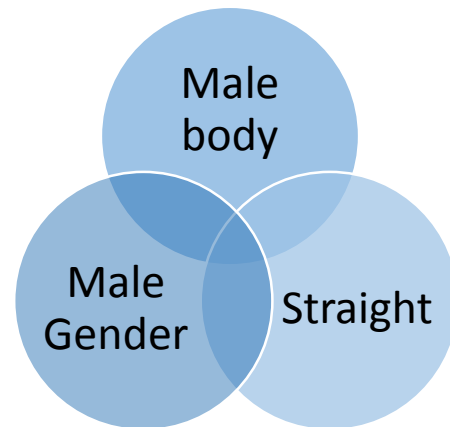


Figure 10



He smartly remarks that “the transgender phenomenon explodes all of these binaries” (8). In other words, the identities that challenge the binaries expose the restrictive categories as false dichotomies. For example, I met a male-to-female transsexual, who was born male bodied, has a female gender, came out as a transwoman in her thirties, but has only ever been attracted to women. So even though she was born biologically male, she considers herself a lesbian woman (figure 9). So transitioning to a new gender can even alter the label of one’s orientation, even though the orientation itself (such as only being attracted to women) remains the same. By contrast, I fit within the binaries because I am male bodied, my gender identity is male, and I’m only attracted to women (figure 10).

Richard Ekins and Dave King view gender as an on-going process, an “on-going accomplishment; something which is constantly being done” (33). They call this phenomenon ‘gendering.’ In most cultures, only two genders exist as socially acceptable. Biological males are expected to go through the process of ‘maling,’ while biological females are expected to go through ‘femaling.’ Ekins and Kings’ linguistic twist of gendered words into active verbs seems bizarre at first, but I find it to be a useful model.

When biological males ‘female’ or biological females ‘male,’ they deviate from norms and go through the process of ‘transgendering’ (33). The authors’ model separates transgendering into four modes, or pathways crossing the binary gender lines.

- 1) Crossing the divide permanently, “migrating” (transsexuals)
- 2) Crossing it temporarily, “oscillating” (cross-dressers, drag queens, transvestites, etc...)
- 3) Seeking to eliminate the divide, “negating” (agender)
- 4) Seeking to ‘go beyond it,’ “transcending” (genderqueer, genderfluid, etc...)

In the ‘negating’ category, they give examples of submissive ‘sissy’ men who relinquish masculinity and became feminized, as almost asexual masochists.

For Ekins and King, negating is the process of shedding a gender identity. They quote a biological female named Christie who rejects both male and female identities: “I wanted to get rid of both tits. I wanted my chest to be flat like a man’s, although I did not consider myself to be a man. I wanted my womb to be removed...I hated the idea that I was perceived as a woman” (qtd. in Ekins, 159). As an example of a ‘transcendent’ identity, they quote gender activist Holly Boswell, who describes her dual male and femaleness as “two swirling balls of light dancing in a magnetic field” (qtd. in Ekins, 200). I find that Ekins and Kings’ third and fourth categories to be slightly problematic. They do not make clear exactly how ‘eliminating the divide’ is different from ‘going beyond it.’ To me, they’re inevitably linked. I feel that to go beyond the binaries, you *must* eliminate them, or at least aspects of them. Non-binary gender identities seem too complex to separate into these discrete, arbitrary ‘negating’ and ‘transcending’ categories.

Transsexual Etiquette: Pronouns, Names, and Questions Not to Ask



In 2013, Katie Couric interviewed transsexual model Carmen Carrera (figure 11) on her talk show (watch it at <http://tinyurl.com/jwaz9g4>). After complementing how beautiful Carmen looks in an awkwardly surprised tone, she keeps steering the conversation toward increasingly personal questions about Carmen’s transition. Katie talks about Carmen’s past on *Rupaul’s Drag Race* “when she was still a man,” implying that her *body* defines her pronouns, not her gender identity. Katie seems to tell Carmen’s story *for* her, instead of allowing Carmen to explain her identity and her preferred pronouns in her own terms. Katie asks if she’s had surgeries, and if they were painful. Carmen, clearly uncomfortable and trying to change the subject, says, “I just got my nose done, and my breasts and some other stuff...” when Katie interrupts, “And so, your private parts?” Suddenly, something incredible happens. Courtney sticks her hand authoritatively toward Katie (figure 12, above) “shh”-ing her loudly: “I don’t wanna talk about that” she says. She’d rather talk about her career and her family.

It’s completely inappropriate to ask a transsexual person (or any person, obviously) about their genitals, especially on national television. Simply because *she* is trans, and *you* are not, does not give you the right to ask such a question. Imagine if Courtney asked Katie about her labia or cervix. Transgender actress and trans rights

activist Laverne Cox, one of the few vocal and visible trans people in mainstream culture, joined the interview following a commercial break (watch it at <http://tinyurl.com/pzdu8pt>). She passionately explained to Katie that these invasive questions “objectify transgender people,” citing the real life violence against transwomen with the tragic example of the murder of 21-year-old transwoman Islan Nettles, whose assailants have gone unpunished. The fact that the show producers or Katie herself didn’t do fifteen minutes of internet research on how to politely interview a transsexual person speaks volumes about the marginalization of their community.

If they had googled, they may have found the humorous and informative Youtube tutorial “10 Things NOT to ask a Transsexual” (watch it at <http://tinyurl.com/3jkzrh>) by transsexual actress Calpernia Adams. Among the disclaimer not to ask about genitals, it can be inappropriate to ask to see a photo of them from before their transition. Calpernia emphasizes her discomfort being interrogated about her former identity by retorting: “Can I see a picture of you on the worst day of your life? At your fattest? At your ugliest? At your most broken out?” Like for gays and lesbians, it is also not okay to ‘out’ trans people to others without their permission, especially at work. A friend of mine was outed on the first day of work at his new job by another employee who knew my friend when he was still presenting as female. Unfortunately, as of 2014, only fifteen states have language in their employment discrimination protection and housing discrimination protection laws that include gender identity and gender expression, meaning that the majority of Americans can legally be fired or denied housing based on their identity or expression (“Non-discrimination laws” see the map at <http://tinyurl.com/o7fdx5o>).

One polite way to ask about pronouns is “What pronouns do you prefer?” A transsexual person can then respond ‘masculine’ (he/him/his) or ‘feminine’ (she/her/hers). Most transsexual people ask others to use the name and pronouns associated with their gender identity and not their birth sex, regardless of their hormones, surgery status, presentation, etc... It’s rude to ask about a trans person’s birth name, especially when insensitively asked as “what’s your *real* name?” Thoughtless questions like these suggest that the speaker finds trans identities to be inauthentic.

In June 2014, Katie asked Laverne Cox back, and apparently more educated and empathetic, Katie addresses her previous blunders (<http://tinyurl.com/lx7y32g>):

I learned that [questions relating to one's genitals are] very, very upsetting to the transgender community because they feel that people are too often fixated on this, and that your anatomy actually has very little to do with your gender identity.

Laverne responded genuinely,

I so appreciate your willingness, to first of all, have me back, and to really go into depth and discuss these issues, and your willingness to learn out in public. What excited me about coming back was the possibility of discussing ‘how do we have difficult conversations?’

While errors of tact can be hurtful or uncomfortable, the crucial gesture to apologize and correct the error allows for what Laverne calls a ‘teachable moment.’ These moments apply to those identities outside the gender divide as well.

Voices of non-binary identities

While transsexual individuals permanently cross gender lines, in many ways, they can still uphold the gender binary. If a transsexual person knows that they’re on the other side of the binary than their birth sex, and they physically transition to match their body

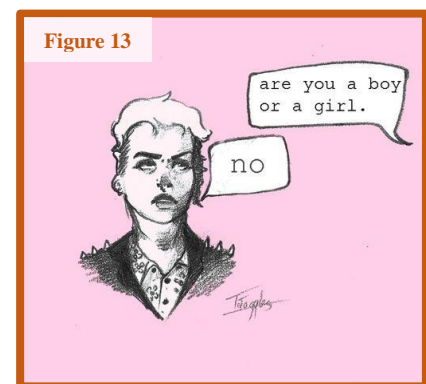


Figure 13

to their brain, while they've crossed the gender divide, their identity and transition might still reinforce the existence of only two discrete genders. For other identities in the umbrella, a binary identity is an impossibility.

These selection of quotes from internet blogs, message boards, and comments section reflect the wide range of diversity of non-binary individuals:

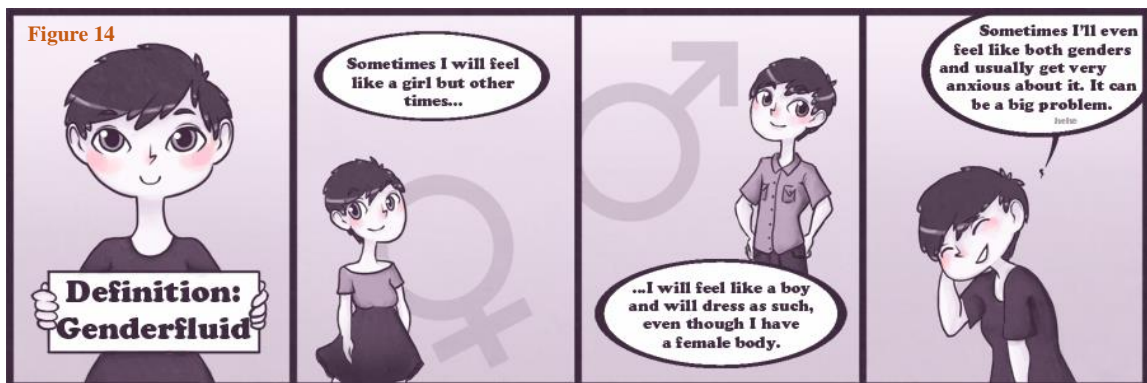
For me most days I feel that I'm a combination of both genders, I feel as if both and so I feel I am neither female or male but somewhere in the middle. It's like this a lot when I dream, it's rare that I can identify my gender when recalling a dream because I feel as if I am both genders at once (Helen, par. 1).

First, every person who identifies as *genderqueer* defines their gender differently. This is because genderqueer has become a big umbrella term encompassing so much variation in gender that it really does come down to each individual (micah 2013, par. 5).

Dolls are for girls, trucks are for boys, and puzzles are neutral. And my gender is a puzzle. I'm not a femme boy or a butch girl – I am too butch to be femme, too femme to be butch... It's not embracing both sides or one side; it's embracing neither. It's not an absence of gender, and it's not not-caring about my gender. Quite the contrary – I care very strongly about my gender, my gender expression, and my gender perception. I have a gender, and it's a neutral gender (micah 2011, par. 11).

If I were a woman I could be the man I always wanted to be (deadronin).

Some day's I feel like a boy. And it's not just "life would be easier if I were a boy." I really feel like a boy some days. And other days... I feel like a girl. And THEN, [there are days] when I don't want to identify at all. It's difficult for me because no matter what I am feeling, I [feel that I] must act like my sex, and not my gender. I'm not even sure how I'll come out at this (Fineshrine, par. 1).



From the academic arena, Ekins and King have many excellent quotes from non-binary individuals. Gender theorist Kate Bronstein defines gender fluidity as “the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change” (qtd. in Ekins, 203). Holly Boswell explains her fluidity in more detail:

I love gender. I hate gender. Gender used to enslave me, and now it liberates me. My pendulum has swung from the dictates of maleness, to the forbidden fruits of femininity. And now, just as I had predicted, I am returning to my center – which cannot help but transgress and transcend the entire paradigm of gender... My aim is not simply to transit gender, but transit what it means to be fully human. As a trans person, and as a bridge, that is my gift to humanity (qtd. in Ekins, 199).

Del LeGrace Volcano, a self-proclaimed “pansexual gender-terrorist” and photographer finds their identity to exist beyond all traditional categories:

I am everything. I am omni-gendered, or polygendered, as much as I am polysexual. I have lived for 37 years believing myself to be only female in one sense, without realizing that there is a possibility that I could also live as male... Recently I’ve wanted to be more proactive: in saying, yes, I am intersex. I don’t even know if I have a right to call myself intersex. Like, what the hell am I? (qtd. in Ekins, 216).

Boswell frames things in terms of hegemony, explaining that non-binary individuals aren’t necessarily “gender conflicted,” but they’re instead,

Living at odds - even at war – with our culture. It is our culture who imposes the polarization of gender according to biology. It is our culture that has brainwashed us, and our families and friends, who might otherwise be able to love us and embrace our diversity as desirable and natural – something to be celebrated (qtd. in Ekins, 198).

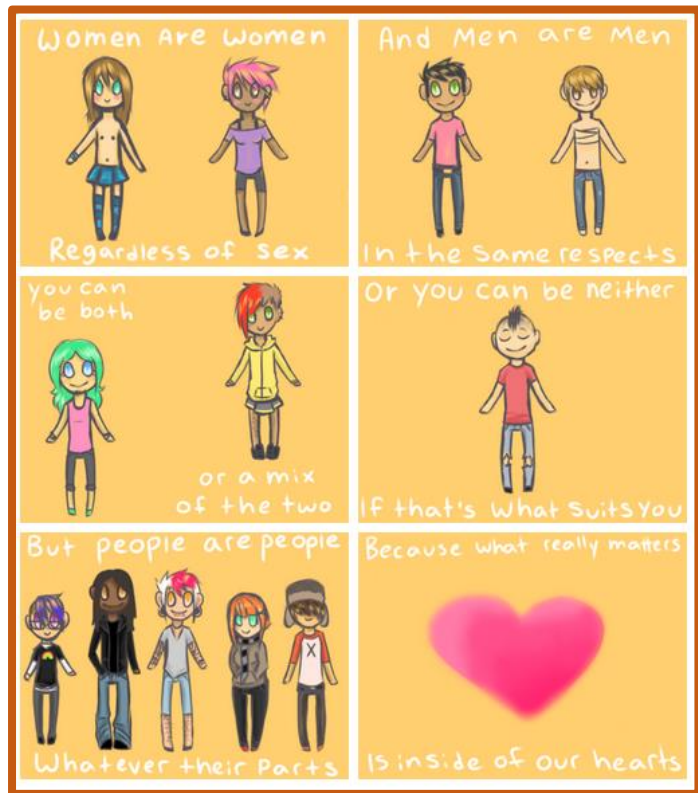
Radical gender activists stress the importance of recognizing the limiting ideologies around us. Wilchins demands that the cruel regime be dismantled:

The importance of gender oppression, whatever our identities, is that we understand how the gender system works. We’ve seen the moving parts behind the curtain. We have our hands around an ageless and transformative truth- one that is so obvious that no one sees

it yet. But it is a secret that hides in plain sight, and if we don't do the work, if we don't mount the movement. Who will? (Wilchins, 149).

The quotes and comics above reflect the wide array of gender identities, which are clearly both deeply complex and deeply personal. The Web has allowed for these geographically disparate individuals to communicate their self-conceptions in a global, digital

Figure 15



forum. The prevailing attitude from both non-binary individuals and scholars who study them is that gender identities are innate and gender diversity is something to be celebrated, not policed or ridiculed. In this thesis, I will investigate exactly how non-binary identities like these are represented in premium-pay-cable television.

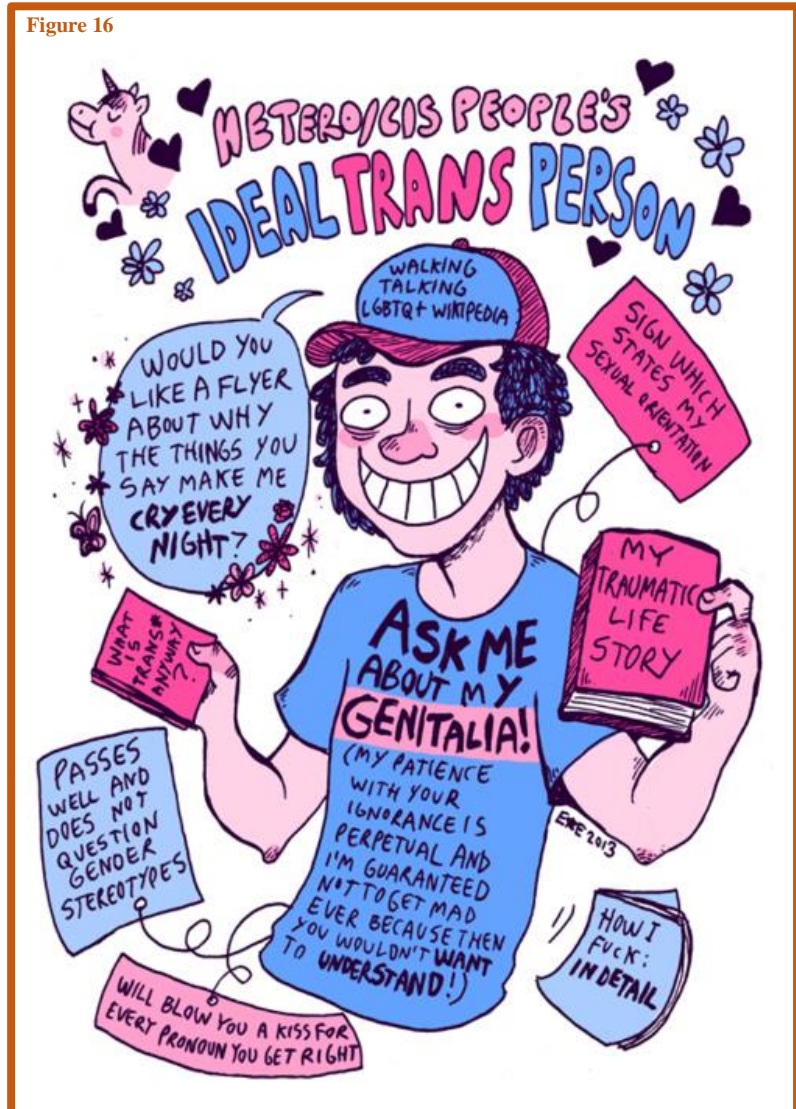
Etiquette for non-binary individuals in the transgender umbrella:

Almost all of the etiquette for transsexuals explained in the previous section is applicable for other identities under the umbrella. Non-binary individuals that may identify as genderqueer, gender-fluid, bi-gender, androgynous, or identify with other terms or no terms still have preferred names and pronouns. In fact, even cisgender people have preferred names and pronouns. I prefer male pronouns and the name 'Dan,' but for cisgender ('cis') people, their names and pronouns are unlikely to change from the ones

given at birth, and they are rarely socially and ideologically disruptive. The neutral *they/them* is becoming common as a more accessible gender-neutral pronoun for people who don't feel comfortable being referred to as simply male or female. I once saw on a gender-fluid friend's button the phrase "any pronoun will do," meaning that they're comfortable with male, female, or neutral pronouns. In their case, it's up to the speaker to choose whatever one feels right. I use male pronouns when I refer to him because I think that it suits him best. Some more exotic, radically queer pronouns have arisen in recent years such as *zie* and *hir* and are preferred by some binary-rejecting individuals. After noting the rude query "Are you a man? Or a woman?" Caplerna Adams masterfully decrees: "No human being should be asked this question. If you're not sure, you don't need to know." The fact that so many adults would ask someone a question like this reflects our cultural obsession with binary gender.

Cisgender people are inherently curious about trans, especially when they're uneducated about the issues or have never met a trans person before. When I first started interacting with trans people, I found that some of the etiquette was a little tricky, especially the pronouns. If you mess up a pronoun, it's not the end of the world. Apologize genuinely and quickly, then move on. Fretting and over-apologizing makes things more awkward. Saying "I got your pronoun wrong because..." might invalidate a person's identity. If you let empathy and logic trump your burning curiosity, it becomes pretty obvious what is appropriate to say, and what isn't.

Figure 16



This internet comic reflects the frustration that some trans people may feel toward the questions and attitudes of cisgender people. It's not a trans person's job to educate everyone or answer every personal question. The box "passes well and does not question gender stereotypes" perfectly addresses the limitations of binary thinking (comic by Elias Erikson).

How the Binaries Hurt

The *Growing Up Trans* study by Dietert and Dentice specifically focuses on the struggles of trans children. In relation to the binaries, they empathetically state that "transgender youths negotiate their gender identities within the confines of these

categories, which is often an impossible task for individuals who are gender variant or happen to deviate from expected gender characteristics assigned at birth” (26). Queer theory expresses the complexity and diversity of the relationship between sex, gender, and orientation, while society-at-large often oversimplifies, conflates, and ignores atypical identities, instead restricting humanity into a binary system that they can understand. Binaries can restrict and *police* those who do not fit comfortably into them. The policing occurs in the construction of male *or* female public spaces through bathrooms, locker rooms, and dressing rooms. It’s apparent with beauty products, clothing, toys, sports teams, and marketing. Children are gender policed when adults tell them “that’s not for boys” or “little girls shouldn’t do that,” or when peers call them a *pussy, tomboy, sissy, fag, or dyke* (Wilchins, 3). Recognizing the concept of the binaries and the dialectic between queer theory and public opinion forms a crucial foundation to my analysis of televised representations.

Riki Wilchins, a gender scholar and transgender woman, takes a personal and emotional approach to much of her writing in *Queer Theory, Gender Theory* (2004). She stunningly and succinctly explains how the binaries, based in the limitations of language, cause deep harm to people outside of them:

We know the meaning of *chair* by learning what is *not* a chair...we exclude all other close matches that aren’t quite chairs: stools, love seats, and so on... With gender, we create the meaning of *Woman* by excluding everything that is non-Woman, and vice versa for Man. We form idealized templates for what is perfectly masculine or perfectly feminine by excluding whatever doesn’t fit: the queer, the different, the mixed – people like me (36).

The “people like me” that Wilchins refers to are marked as ‘other,’ incompatible in an oversimplified either/or system. The ‘otherness’ is often exploited by media makers. A character will suddenly be revealed to be a transsexual, as a shocking, exotic twist, like in

The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, 1992). These representations further alienate trans identities from social acceptance, often villain-izing trans characters and increasing the perceived “ick factor” (Wilchins, 9). These characters also imply that transgender identities are a product of deranged mental illness, a prospect that is extremely contentious between the medical and transgender communities.



Figure 17

In *The Crying Game*, Fergus discovers that Dil is actually biologically male. After this objectifying gaze of awe and horror, he runs to the bathroom to vomit. Similar vomiting reactions from a straight male, upon discovery that a sexually desirable woman is biologically male, is also seen in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, *Family Guy*, and *The Cleveland Show*.

Debates about transgender identity

There's argument about how and why the transgender phenomenon occurs, and if their gender identities are truly legitimate. From the scientific perspective, there are arguments for both nature and nurture:

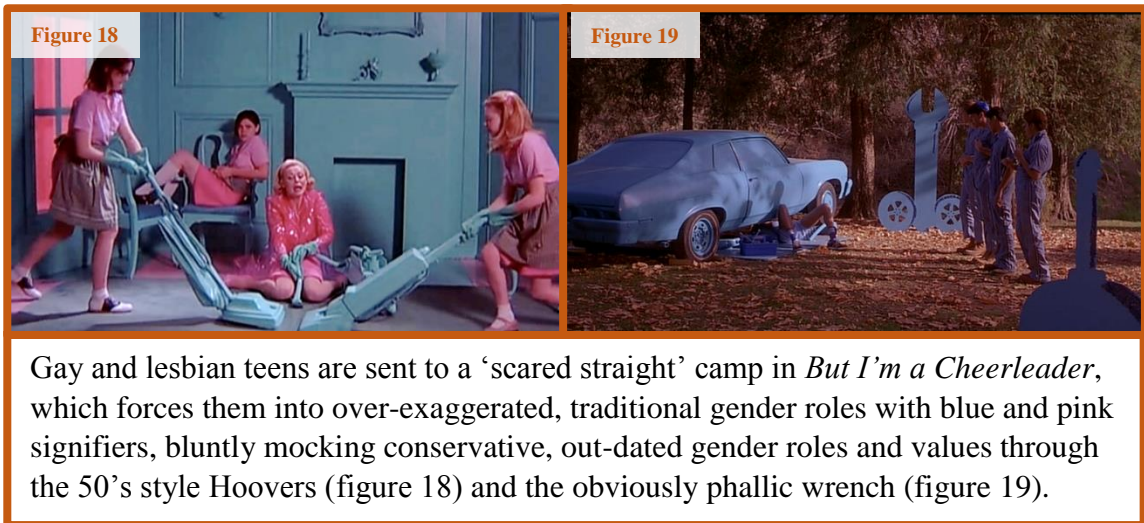
While some scientists believe that gender identity formation results from the effects of prenatal hormones on the brain, many cognitive and social psychologists understand gender identity formation to result from a process of learning, cognitive development, and social reinforcement” (Fausto-Sterling, 58).

Fausto-Sterling's approach to summarizing sex and gender comes from biology, with help from psychology and sociology. It's in many ways quite clinical; queer theory is nowhere to be found. "Transgender," "queer," "binary," and "LGBT" are not entries in the extensive index, but "Gender Identity Disorder," "hippocampus," and "synapses" are. While this approach favors rigorous scientific data and theories, the transgender voice is lost.

Most queer theorists and people in the transgender community, by contrast, strongly resist the DSM-IV's classification of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) or the description of transsexualism as "gender dysphoria". Richard Ekins and Dave King state in *The Transgender Phenomenon* that transsexuals are in the wrong body, but this statement is framed slightly differently by those who invalidate the transsexual identity. The dissenters stress that transsexuals *believe* that they are in the wrong body, dismissing their convictions of truth about their identities and implying some sort of psychosis. Wilchins criticizes the medical community's institutional policing and 'correcting' of non-traditional sexuality and gender: "Sadists, masochists, transsexuals, cross-dressers, the intersexed, sissy boys, and tomboy girls- all were deemed *deviants* in need of *treatment*. Until thirty years ago, this list also included millions of homosexuals" (Wilchins, 53). Many intersex children are 'corrected' to whatever sex the parents and doctors think the child should be, often before the child is old enough to express their gender and decide for themselves what should be done or not done with their 'ambiguous' genitalia.

Many trans children are forced to conform to binary gender norms by their families and schools (Dietert, 25). Behavior modification techniques are still legal, even

endorsed by some in the medical community. In these methods, children are punished for exhibiting opposite sex behaviors and praised and rewarded for acting more traditional. Films like *But I'm a Cheerleader* (Jamie Babbit, 1999) have satirized these harmful cultural responses to atypical gender and sexuality. Investigating TV depictions of trans characters, especially trans youth (*House of Lies*), will reveal how each show reinforces or challenges the gender policing in American culture.



Transgender activism

Figure 20



The now solidified 'alphabet soup' of gender and sexual minorities of *LGBT* (or *GLBT*, or most extravagantly, *LGBTQIA*) implies that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activists are closely aligned as consistent partners, fighting for rights

together. In practice though, this idealized collective alliance does not always occur. Some trans activists (often united under the symbol of the transgender flag, figure 20 above) harbor resentment toward the more mainstream lesbian and gay activist movement because many LG activists leave ‘gender identity’ off of the equal rights legislation they intend to pass (Roberts, 2007). The Human Rights Campaign especially came under fire for this with the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), but have recently made more steps to include the ‘T.’ Their relationship remains contentious, however (Beyer, par. 3) For some gay and lesbian activists, who might heighten marriage equality as top priority, perhaps gender difference seems too exotic and complex to confront the dominant, heterosexual social class with. As Colette Seguin Beighley, a radical ally, once told me, “What does a homeless, transgender woman of color stand to gain with marriage equality? Absolutely nothing.” An upper-middle class, marriage-based, supposedly ‘LGBT’ activist approach ignores those in the fringes, perhaps most marginalized by society.

Wilchins imagines LG activists saying, “Gender issues are something *those people over there* have. We’re doing the right thing by including them, but it’s not a problem *any of us* have.” She goes on to remark “If it sounds like I’m disappointed, I am. It was second-class treatment from the gay and feminist movements that propelled many of us to start a separate transgender activism” (29). Valentine originally saw the term ‘transgender’ as a unifying umbrella for identification, support, and activism because it incorporates all gender variance (4). But later in his ethnographic research of gender communities in New York City, he realized that many people outside the gender binary, especially people of color, reject the term and simply consider themselves ‘gay,’ ‘fem

queens,’ or a mixture of many other terms (5). Most crossdressers he interacted with at a crossdressing debutant ball were straight males who dressed for erotic pleasure, insisting that their gender identities were male when Valentine asked (87). At the same time, most drag queens that he studied at another event were gay men who did not consider themselves to be transgender (97). The intricate fluidity of gender identities across the LGBT spectrum are potentially diminished and conflated when shoved into discrete political terminologies such as ‘transgender,’ ‘transsexual,’ and ‘genderqueer.’

In February 2014, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and Facebook teamed up to change the gender options available for Facebook users to select for their profile. Previously ‘male’ ‘female’ and blank were the only options. Now, ‘male’ ‘female’ and ‘custom’ are selections allowed to the user. Once ‘custom’ is entered, the user can select one, two, or as many as ten of a variety of terms such as ‘transgender man,’ ‘gender fluid,’ ‘genderqueer,’ ‘bi gender,’ and dozens of others.

Wilchins has seen, first-hand, internal disputes over identities within the transgender rights movement. Some branches of the movement attempt to demarcate a hierarchy between different types of trans individuals, where the most transgressive identity is the least privileged. A friend told her that “transsexuals should come first, because they’re the most oppressed” (30). Wilchins fears that these petty internal rankings and disputes might further fracture the movement. Analyzing trans characters on primarily lesbian/gay shows, such as *The L-Word*, may reveal the tension between the two problematically allied groups. Additionally, television content creators are faced with a representational dilemma, inevitably upsetting huge sections of the LGBT population because their characters will never align with everyone’s views of how orientation and

gender identity *should* be depicted. The lived experiences of hundreds of thousands of transgender people are too complex to succinctly sum up in one trans character, but one popular, binary-crushing trans character could potentially inspire millions of viewers to re-think the narrow, hegemonic views on the elusive, multi-faceted, and contested concept of gender.

Critical/Cultural Studies: why study television characters?

Works of art and entertainment do not exist in a cultural vacuum. It is dismissive to say “it’s just a TV show, you’re over-analyzing it” or “stop taking it so seriously, it’s just entertainment!” Television is better considered a storyteller and mythmaker, a forum within which cultural values are articulated (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983; Gray & Lotz, 2012). Television analysis considers the ways that images and language have been infused with meaning and have echoed power arrangements within specific cultural contexts (Williams). Rather than dismiss television as “low culture,” an insignificant source of frivolity, or worse, a “vast wasteland” (Minow, 1961), the study of television enables people to consider how societies articulate the ideology and hegemony that they take for granted. The thesis promises to make a contribution specifically to the exploration of how televised representations of gender and of transgender have emerged in recent years, suggesting the shift in societal views regarding gender and transgender.

Decoding – the active viewer response

The academic study of television programming began in the 1970s. At that point, scholars were rethinking the dominant paradigm of “media effects,” moving toward the consideration of television as the cultural meeting point of “technologies, industrial formations, government policies, and practices of looking” (Spigel, 2004). No longer

were viewers considered passive receivers of media messages; rather, audiences were conceived of as active viewers, and scholarly attention turned away from context-ignoring analysis of media messages to audience or “reader” response. One of the pioneers of this reader-response focused study, Stuart Hall, argues that

Before this message can have an ‘effect,’ satisfy a ‘need’ or be put to a ‘use’, it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which ‘have an effect,’ influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences” (130).

Representations take on a new meaning when interpreted, meanings that the creators may not have intended, meanings that could offend or insult, or that could be ‘read’ oppositionally, providing support for viewpoints quite different than what creators may have anticipated. Through audience discussion, media messages “enter into culture...the reading of a program is a process of negotiation between the story on the screen and the culture of the viewers” (Katz and Liebes, 420). Once the audience engages in thoughtful conversation, they may make claims such as sexism, racism, and/or homophobia in the text, or suggest that the text conveys a controversial message such as political or military propaganda. Conversely, another audience or interest group, viewing the same text, could claim that it rightfully promotes patriotic family traditions and values. Roland Barthes in “From Work to Text” (1971) gives this poetic and abstract description: “The text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning...the text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination.” To categorize the readings of these multitudes of meanings,

Hall proposes three positions, or codes, that viewers can take when interpreting messages:

- 1) The dominant-hegemonic position – the viewer “decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded” (136). In other words, the most standard and conformist manner, without recognition of transgressive or unexpected interpretations.
- 2) The negotiated position – the viewer decodes with a mixture of dominant and oppositional tendencies, recognizing hegemony, and employing more transgressive approaches when they see fit: “it accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to ‘local positions’ ... it operates with exceptions to the rule” (137).
- 3) The oppositional position – the viewer “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message in some *alternative framework* of reference” (138). The decoder completely dismantles the dominant code, in favor of a completely different critical approach.

The “alternative framework” that I will use to decode representations outside of the gender binary will be queer theory, a radical approach to re-conceptualize sex, gender, identity, and personal expression.

Encoding – meaning makers

On the encoding side, every text is a product of the culture it arose from, consciously or unconsciously reinforcing and/or dismantling the dominant ideology.

Therefore, in the words of Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, “every film is political” (“Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” (1969), 814). In Robin Wood’s “Ideology, Genre, Auteur” (1977), he defines the American capitalist ideology as seen through early US film:

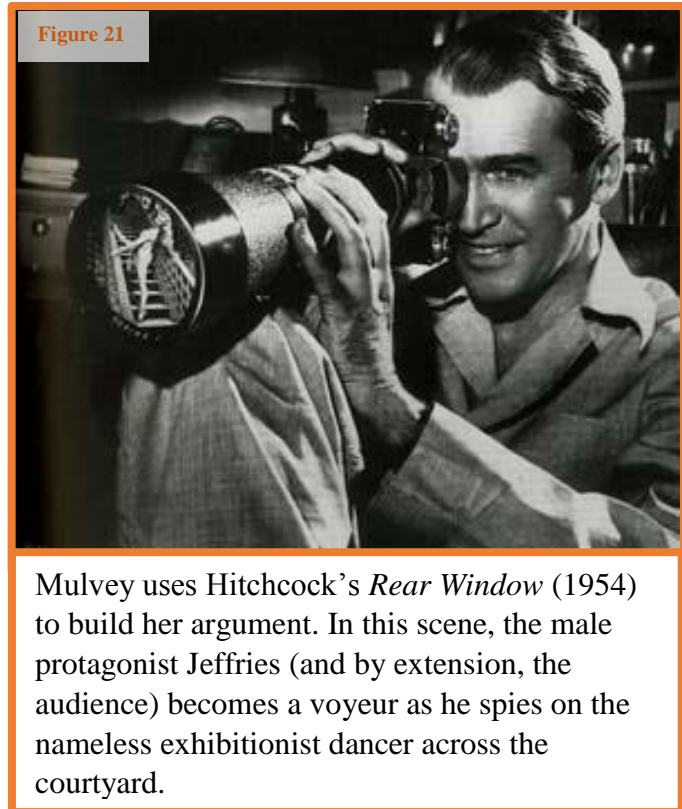
The values and assumptions so insistently embodied in and reinforced by Classical Hollywood Cinema...capitalism; the work ethic; marriage (heterosexual monogamy); the ideal male: the virile adventurer, potent, untrammelled man of action; the ideal female: wife and mother, perfect companion, endlessly dependable, mainstay of hearth and home” (Wood, par. 22).

Though these authors discuss cinema/film, these same principles apply to television series, which, of course, are also films. This thesis will recognize the ubiquity of American ideology, especially as related to gender, masculine and feminine roles, and transgender. Each text and character will be dissected, revealing how each reflects and/or challenges the hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality. Supplemental interviews and statements from show creators and producers collected from the web will help reveal the supposed intentions of the texts’ encoders.

Voyeurism, exhibition, and the ‘gaze’

Perhaps the most famous feminist film criticism is Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema” (1973). She argues that in most films, men play the active, initiating role, and that women function as passive objects of desire, for men to look at, pine after, rescue, etc.... She zeroes in on the idea of looking at, coining the term ‘the male gaze.’ Through the framing and editing, male characters look *at* the submissive female, and by extension, the film itself aligns male viewers with male looking: “In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (11). She explains that this

imbalance reflects the patriarchic society that cinema is a product of. Since transgender and queer characters, by definition, disrupt the male/female binary, the gaze exchanges and power relations involving these characters may create new visual codes, or a transgender gaze. The most progressive alternative would abandon the typical objectification of the trans body, shifting the



viewer's subject position to the transgender character, creating true empathy. Such a radical approach could fulfill what Mulvey prophesizes as "the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive of a new language of desire" (8). I will investigate which TV trans representations may qualify as a radical, groundbreaking approach, and which simply reinforce the limited binaries of the past.

In his introduction to *Cultural Studies and the Study of Pop Culture* (2003), John Storey clarifies that "'culture' in cultural studies is defined politically rather than aesthetically. The object of study in cultural studies is not culture defined in a narrow sense...but culture understood as the texts and practices of everyday life" (Storey, 2). In

the view of cultural studies, 'culture' is an all-encompassing combination of social views, social trends, politics, ideology, and values. Horace Newcomb calls this relationship 'the cultural forum,' and he suggests his model "offers a perspective that is as complex, as contradictory and confused, as much in process as America is in experience" (Newcomb, 513). This thesis will recognize the multifaceted, multilayered, diverse array of American culture, and the equally varied constellation of cultural readings. At the same time, it will continually stress the complexity and diversity of gender identity and expression.

Television Criticism

Television production is one type of filmmaking, a writing, shooting, and editing approach that differs from movies in their budget, structure, and pacing. Many television shows don't even have a planned ending when they begin. Critic Brad Nguyen describes how television feels different from other narrative media:

A television show does not propose a story—in the traditional sense of a beginning, middle and end—so much as it proposes a world and narrative logic that functions in the same way that the chorus does in jazz music: it is a base that one improvises off, elaborates on or reworks over time...The important thing for the audience is that the series stay true to a certain dynamic. A television show is, at its essence, only a situation (Nguyen, par. 7).

Nguyen's quote beautifully expresses how the consistent story-world of a television series can provide the viewer with extraordinary comfort. Simultaneously, he suggests the huge influence that a show can have as a socio-political stage. The long-term narrative and character dynamics can easily be interpreted as representative of larger philosophical issues; for example, the Spock/Kirk relationship in *Star Trek* ('66-'69) and the Locke/Jack dynamic in *LOST* ('04-'10) reflect the intellectual argument of logic vs. faith. *Twin Peaks* ('90-'91) creator David Lynch has stated that "television is to

communication what the chainsaw is to logging” (qtd. in Caldwell, 3). I interpret that as a comment on TV’s speed, directness, and immense power to broadcast messages. As opposed to the theater which a person must actively visit, television signal seems to be directly beamed into viewers’ homes. The pervasive influence and expansive reach of television warrants a rigorous analysis of how gender is constructed on television – specifically - how those outside of gender norms are imagined.

Leah R. Vande Berg and Lawrence A. Wenner lay out dozens of approaches within the larger tradition of television criticism. I want to highlight several which I will employ in the thesis. A *semiotic* approach allows a scholar to consider a television show, like Barthes, as a *text*, picking apart the signs and symbols, and considering what the denotative and connotative meanings of each one (Vande Berg, 29). Semiotics comes out of linguistics, in the way that each shot in a sequence can be thought of like a word in a sentence. The moving image then has a grammar and a syntax, a rhythm and a structure. In the thesis, I use semiotics to dissect crucial scenes to determine where a transgender character fits in the cinematic structure. Specifically, I would ask, how do the individual shots exist on their own? And how do their suturing together through editing convey the character as a passive object, an active agent, a victim, a force of terror, a psychologically complex individual, etc...?

Vande Berg and Wenner also establish *gender ideology criticism* as a viable body of work within television criticism. The approach makes gender roles and gender construction in the text the principal aspect of the analysis: “gender ideology critics evaluate how television texts maintain or deconstruct existing cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity” (Vande Berg, 35). By extension, my thesis will delve beyond

the binary categories of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ and look into categories of queer, trans, gender-bending, and gender-fluid. Vande Berg and Wenner keenly address that audio and music (not just camera, editing, costume, and the other elements that I’ve already addressed) on TV help to define gender, power, and privilege (35). Their explanation, logically, comes out of feminist criticism. With the added tools in queer theory, I’m not only looking at male privilege and the patriarchy, but the directly correlated concepts of *cisgender privilege* and the gender binaries.

Critic Mimi White explains that ideological criticism, which originated in Marxist theory, recognizes that cultural artifacts such as television reflect social values and have economic power. She views television as a stage to play out cultural conflict, or “a struggle for hegemony, over which ideas are recognized as the prevailing, commonsense view for the majority of social participants. Hegemony appears to be spontaneous, even natural, but it is the historical result of the prestige enjoyed by the ruling class” (167). While, most likely, well-over 99% of people are cisgender, it still *is* a privilege, to be recognized and challenged. A critical reading of these transgender characters on television will expose the seemingly “natural” hegemony of binary gender.

Horace Newcomb and Robert Alley asserted in 1983 that “television is anonymous.” John Thornton Caldwell denies this claim, clarifying that the shows are rarely anonymous, but for a time, the show creators were. I vehemently disagree with Newcomb and Alley as well, but I have the benefit of hindsight. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (’70-’77), *Hill Street Blues* (’81-’87), *Miami Vice* (’84-’89), and *Twin Peaks* (’90-’91) could hardly be described as ‘anonymous.’ Many recent shows exude a clear authorial stamp of their show creators: David Simon with *The Wire*, Vince Gilligan with

Breaking Bad, Matthew Weiner with *Mad Men*, Nic Pizzolatto with *True Detective*, Jane Campion with *Top of the Lake*, and many others. The contemporary surge in big-budget, high-concept, ‘intellectual’ series has arisen, in part, due to a growth in television distribution avenues.

Broadcast Formats

In the digital age, the myriad ways to access televisual entertainment have exploded. DVR-equipped broadcast television, cable/satellite packages, premium-pay-cable channels, OnDemand

content, and an assortment of legal and illegal internet download, rental, and streaming options have allowed consumers to access tens of thousands of hours of content at a moment’s notice.

Sturken and Cartwright

(2009) lay out the model of broadcast, narrowcast, and webcast. Broadcast signal is emitted from one central location to many venues, while narrowcast is targeted to niche audiences through cable or satellite (233). Webcast distribution, through services like Netflix, Youtube, Hulu, Apple, and Amazon on dozens of devices such as laptops, tablets, smart phones, Roku boxes, Apple TV, Blu-ray players, game systems, and Smart TVs offer an overwhelming amount of home exhibition possibilities. Massive cable conglomerates such as Comcast and Time Warner (who as of writing this in 2014 are

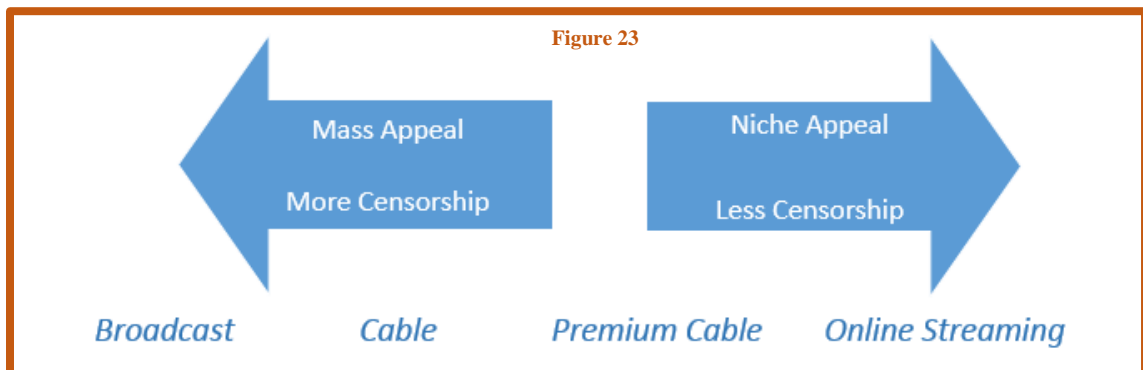
Figure 22



A selection of ‘apps,’ analogous to channels, as viewed through Apple TV internet streaming.

attempting to merge to an even larger super-monopoly) also provide internet to millions of homes and are struggling to adapt to a changing media landscape and retain exclusive distribution of cable content (Hiltzik, 2014; Gill, 2013). Comcast and Verizon have both been accused of intentionally slowing streaming speeds of Netflix and other services to encourage users to stick with cable (Hastings, 2012; Fung, 2014).

With the loss of analog antenna signal in the US in 2009, the divide between ‘the big five’ and cable may be shrinking, but a noticeable spectrum from mass appeal content to more niche market content remains. Shows designed around specific subcultures (such as black, Hispanic, and lesbian/gay series) are much more common toward the right side of the model that I created below.



With a larger array of channels to choose from and more programming geared toward minority communities available on cable, one would expect a growth in diversity in both production and representation. Sturken and Cartwright; however, state that,

Some critics of the cable phenomenon have emphasized the intensification of existing problems in the television industry with the advancement of cable networks, such as lack of diversity in management and hiring and the proliferation of conventional programming that deploys racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes (Sturken, 234).

For my analysis of non-binary characters on premium-pay-cable, I will determine if negative gender stereotypes persist in these series.

Premium-pay-cable and online streaming outlets tend to have more adult content and often have more intellectual, complex, and cerebral original series (Smith, Anthony, 11). These series typically have high production values, long episode lengths, fewer episodes per season, and are geared toward highly educated, affluent audiences. Anthony Smith believes that networks such as HBO and Showtime have been “awarding producers greater storytelling freedoms, partly due to the fact that the appointment of perceived authorial figureheads has proved to the taste of such audiences” (12). In other words, a type of ‘auteur television’ has arisen as a compelling new approach to storytelling.

Television critic Paul Kerr calls these prestige series “quality television.” He believes that NBC’s strategy with *Hill Street Blues* was “buying ‘high quality’ consumers via ‘quality’ programmes... transforming itself into the supplier of character drama” (Kerr, 150). *Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987) entered the television stage as a groundbreaking, gritty, and complex crime drama, which according to Kerr, “dexterously handled orchestration of tone, such a panorama of points of view, so many characters, so much over-lapping dialogue, so many intricate – and yet integrated – storylines that it is, ironically, a difficult series to police” (Kerr, 151). The show set a new standard for cinematic scale and loose narrative structure. Show creator Steven Bochco remarks on the supposed socio-political ‘ambivalence’ of the show: “The appeal of Ronald Reagan... has always been solid simple answers to very complex questions... those simple, easy answers don’t yield results” (qtd. in Kerr, 154). The show is therefore not *about* problems, but set amongst them (Kerr, 156). The ‘quality television’ shows that I will analyze (*Game of Thrones*, *True Blood*, *House of Lies*?) may

more directly reference complex social problems and may challenge or satirize gender conventions more directly.

Caldwell names this same phenomenon ‘boutique television.’ He remarks that it quickly became “a selective, signature world where artistic sensitivity went hand in hand with social relevance and viewer discrimination.” He views boutique TV as a restrained reaction to the over-the-top visual and formal flourishes of typical shows to “discipline excessive style” (Caldwell, 110). Curiously, many new boutique shows seem to combine excessive style with rich artistry and social relevance, such as *True Blood*, and *House of Lies* which use flashy digitally-manipulated imagery and sound effects to develop their story worlds.

Transsexual Representations in US Film – Miller’s Model

As noted earlier, most US media reflects and reinforces the binaries and the conflation of sex and gender. Screen representations rarely include characters outside of the gender binary, and when they do, the depiction is often negative, inaccurate, sensationalist, and/or othering. In the 2012 doctoral thesis *Crossdressing Cinema: An Analysis of Transgender Representation in Film*, author Jeremy Russell Miller begins by stating, “Transgender representations generally distance the trans characters from the audience as objects of fear, ridicule, or sympathy” (Miller, iii). This statement implies that trans characters serve an objectifying *function*; they become a salacious plot device instead of a fully realized character identity. In the case of ridicule and fear, the trans character becomes a gimmicky punching bag, used to reinforce the hegemony of the gender binary and make a clown of all those who defy it. With the sympathy function, many trans characters seem to be included for political reasons (since all film is political),

...serving up a cultural taboo for the sake of diversity and/or novelty, without ever deeply challenging our culture's gender norms and expectations.

In *Representations of Trans Youths in Multiple Medias*, the author expresses similar views:

The representation of the transgender subject is largely confined to two characterizations: the comedic and the horrific...[the piece of media] uses the trope of cross-dressing to elicit laughter from the audience... [or] ... cross-dressing and transsexualism are depicted as perverse or hysterical symptoms of a psychotic condition" (Smith, Adeline, 36).

I have never seen a show with a trans characters use the opportunity to explain the basic ideas of queer theory and gender identities. While a didactic lecture would be awkward, I think that queer ideas could be easily integrated into dialogue and storylines for a trans character.

Miller analyzes twenty-four transgender characters in film, and he concludes that not a single one seriously challenges gender norms and becomes deeply empathetic. Miller believes that it is impossible to create a truly empathetic trans character without engaging with the ideas of queer theory on screen. As a hypothesis for my research, I agree with him. I feel that an audience member would be unable to feel emotion *with* a trans character if the character never expresses what exactly their gender is, and how it relates to their sex and orientation. Examples from Miller, other researchers, and examples that I've found myself help to explain the problematic three functions of ridicule, fear, and sympathy.

1) Ridicule

Phillips explains that from the 1990s on, it became socially unacceptable to ridicule gay characters, so instead "cross-dressers who fulfilled the same comic function

as the effeminate gay, but without the now unfashionable character of direct ridicule of a sexual minority” occupied the required homophobic space. See the two examples below:

Figure 24



Woody Harrelson, a masculine, cisgender male actor plays a ridiculously-costumed, German, transvestite prostitute “Galaxia” trying to provoke Adam Sandler’s character in *Anger Management* (Peter Segal, 2003). Sandler says “I actually like to spend most of my time in GirlsWithoutWeiners-ville,” followed by an equally juvenile off-screen reveal of Galaxia’s penis, “whoa, there it is!”

Figure 25



Iqbal Theba plays Nazhgalia, an androgynous supposed transwoman in the *Arrested Development* (2003-2006) episode “Shock and Awe” (S1 E14). She is continually ridiculed throughout the scene, and doesn’t get to say a word. Gob says “you’ve got a mustache. I mean you’ve got milk on your mustache. I mean you have a milk mustache.”

These one-joke cross-dressers are usually only present in one scene of a TV show or film, but in some cases, they become a running gag of an entire TV episode. In the *Sex and the City* episode

“Cock-a-Doodle-do,” Samantha is continually awoken up by a gaggle of loud, catty ‘trannies’ of color (note the crude title of the episode). In voice-over, Carrie describes them



as “your friendly, neighborhood pre-op transsexual hookers. Half man, half woman, totally annoying.” They exist as garish, freakish objects of the viewer’s gaze,



encouraging us all to gawk out Samantha’s window (see the voyeuristic still above, figure 26) at their broad shoulders, flat chests, and skimpy dresses. At brunch, Samantha quips, “I don’t want to live in a

neighborhood that’s trendy by day and tranny by night,” while Carrie jokes that these “chicks with dicks” are possibly “the other white meat.” The next night, after showing off her nearly naked ‘real’ female body to the camera, Samantha goes down to street level to confront them (figure 27). She refers to them as ‘ladies’ and ‘women,’ and she kindly

asks that they move down the block. They introduce themselves as Destiny, China, and Jo, and amiably joke with each other. This moment of sympathy is suddenly undone by Carrie's crass voice-over, unwilling to resist re-establishing that these women are not really 'women': "Samantha always knew how to get her way with men. Even if they were half women." The group is referred to with male pronouns for much of the rest of the episode.

When the sex workers, now nicknamed 'the up-the-ass players,' return below Samantha's window, causing more disruption, she throws a pot of water out the window, blowing



the wig off of China and exposing her breast padding (figure 28). She's revealed and humiliated, to the laughter Samantha, Jo, and Destiny.

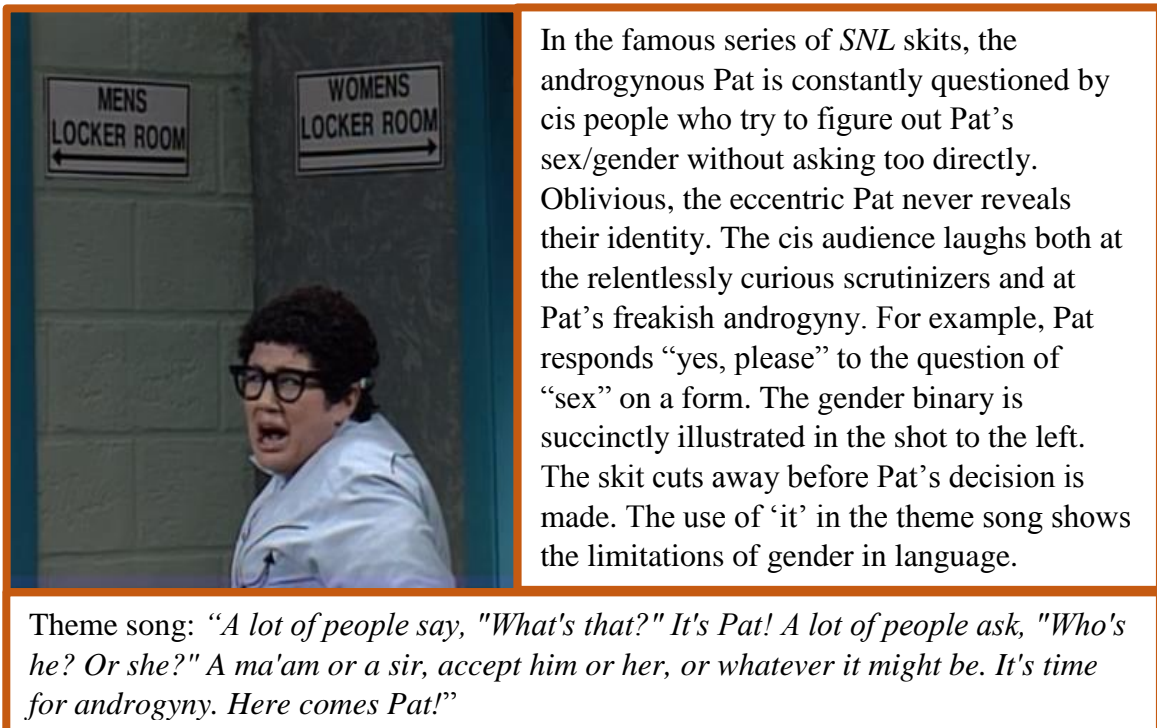
After insulting these stereotypical male-bodied-fem-diva sex workers throughout the entire episode, she has suddenly made amends with them, inviting them and their friends to her rooftop party in the show's closing scene. A more forgiving reading of the scene would defend the party invitation and ensuing dance scene as sympathetic. After all, Samantha is not frustrated with the women because they are trans, but because they are loud and disruptive. Carrie's smile and laughter while dancing with China might be a sign that her transphobic views are fading.

From a more pessimistic reading; however, it could be argued that instead of allowing the 'up-the-ass players' to express their identities and reconcile with Samantha on a human level, she basically *buys* them out of her life using food and alcohol. The

sinister irony of four, upper-middle class, white, New Yorker, cis women using their privilege to shove these impoverished, undesirable sex workers and transgender women of color under the rug, seems to be lost on the show producers.

This short analysis of “Cock-a-Doodle-Do” includes many of the main critical aspects of the approach I will use in the body of the thesis: pronouns, gazes, camera placement, power relations, gender presentation, and discussions of the ‘real.’ Since Destiny, China, and Jo only exist in one episode, it’s easy to dissect the shows attitude’s about their genders. I will not include characters in my thesis unless they are in the main cast or are a significant supporting player, having a major role in the plotlines of at least five episodes in a series. I’m interested in analyzing the longitudinal presence of characters, the lasting arc that is typical in long-format, serial television shows.

Figure 29



2) Fear

As mentioned earlier, media makers occasionally use crossdressing or transsexualism as a twist and/or a villainous quirk, such as Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathon Demme, 1991). Buffalo Bill psychotically kidnaps overweight women with the intent to torture, murder, and mutilate their corpses. His




supreme goal is to harvest their skins to make a skin suit of female flesh for himself to wear. After putting on make-up and a wig and breathing “would you fuck me?” to the mirror/camera in the creepiest, most androgynous voice imaginable, the sequence cuts to one of the most famous shots in thriller history, often parodied, such as in *Clerks II* (Kevin Smith, 2006). In the iconic long take (figure 30), he tucks his penis between his legs and seductively dances for the camera, imaging himself with a female body.

Similarly, in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), Norman Bates is revealed to be a



deranged, multiple-personality, cross-dressing as his deceased mother in a nightmarish, Freudian kill-spreed. The climactic visual reveal of Bates in his mother’s clothes (figure 31) suggests to the audience, “Oh, THAT’S why he’s so crazy.” Miller observes that “the

transgender identities are withheld in order to construct an image of the transgender characters as objects of disgust and fear” (107). The ‘transgender thriller’ trend also conflates transgender with mental illness, wrongfully confirming stereotypes that all trans people are deviants, freaks, liars, psychotics, and evil-doers.

<p>Figure 32</p>  A character from the video game The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword. The character is Ghirahim, an androgynous villain. He has a pale, almost white face with dark, hollow eyes. He wears a purple and white suit with a red cape and a red gem on his chest. He is shown in a dynamic, slightly twisted pose, with one arm raised and the other bent.	<p>I couldn't find any examples of non-binary characters used as objects of fear in film or television, and that absence is intriguing. Typically, that trans fear role is instead filled by a transsexual woman who passes as female, because of the straight male fear of having sex with 'a man.' But Ghirahim, shown left, is an androgynous villain in the 2011 video game <i>The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword</i>. User Kat on the blog Gamervescent was originally intrigued by Ghirahim's queer design, but after playing the game remarked, "Unfortunately, as we discovered, his role was all too predictable—the creepy, gender-variant villain" (Kat, par. 4). Ghirahim is portrayed as perversely effeminate, instead of confidently and assuredly genderqueer.</p>
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3) Sympathy

Adeline Smith does a fascinating analysis of Isis (figure 33), a real-life transwoman on Tyra Banks' reality competition show *America's Next Top Model*. While homeless, Isis was hired to be a background extra in a homeless-themed shoot (yikes!) from a previous 'cycle' of the show. When first meeting her, Tyra was stunned by her "couture" poses and confidence, and even more impressed that she was transgender. She picks her as a contestant on the following season, highlighting her gender identity as a story of inspiration. Tyra constantly

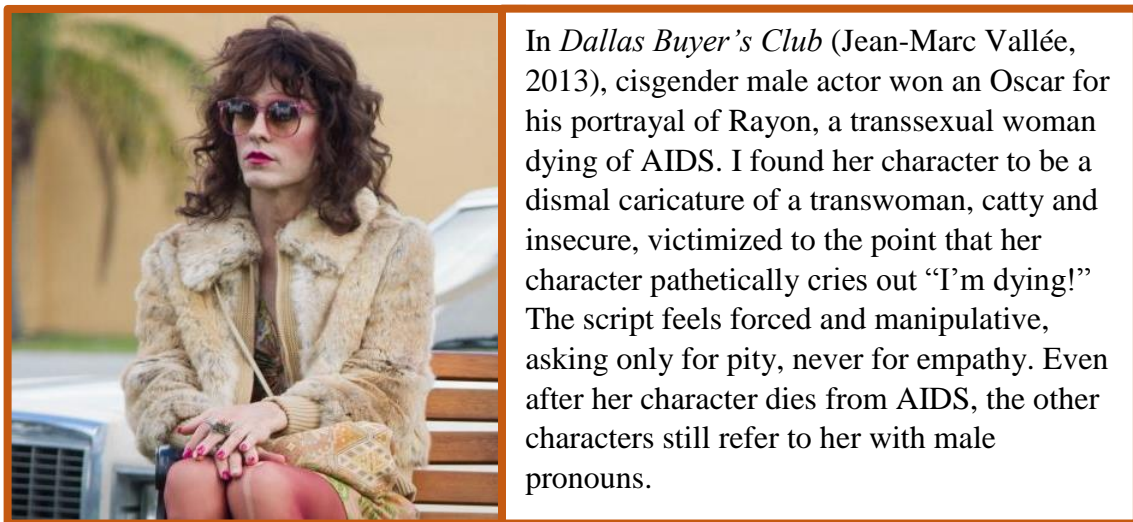


reframes Isis' story in Tyra's own terminologies and words, using Isis' trans identity as proof of her success: "If you want to be a model, you can, and you're already an inspiration for the LGBT community." Smith suggests that Tyra and the producers of the show selected Isis because she's a fairly non-controversial, family-friendly transsexual:

The transgender woman chosen for this very public role wants to have sex reassignment surgery [SRS] "to become the woman" that she is, as Isis puts. Isis is aligned with the transsexual narrative rather than queer ideals. This view of transsexuality is much easier for the public to swallow because it's less challenging to the binary organization of sex and gender. This way, one could concede that perhaps it is possible to be born in the 'wrong body' without having to question the essential existence of only two genders and two sexes (42).

It's surprising that an actual transsexual can have such a large role in a show but uphold the binaries instead of challenge them. Isis and Tyra focus on SRS the defining aspect of 'becoming a woman,' as opposed to expressing that a person's gender identity may define them regardless of their sex and surgery status.

Figure 34



A transgender blogger known as 'prodiGal' addressed her personal complaints about Rayon:

Leto has been praised for endeavoring to stay in character the entire time on set in order to immerse himself in the character of Rayon. But that immersion was never

intended to get a better understanding of what it's like to be a transwoman or what it felt like for me in the early years of transition. It wasn't intended to capture what it was like for me to go out to a party for the first time presenting as a girl and hearing people whispering "is that a guy or a girl?" as I passed by. It wasn't attempting to get into my mind and understand my feelings, the fear of "is this how it's always going to be for me/Will I always be an outlandish-looking freak/Will I ever have a normal life again" racing through my mind after hearing that. The character of Rayon was not made for my benefit in any conceivable way: it was made entirely for the benefit of cis people (prodiGal, par. 6).

These pseudo-progressive, pseudo-sympathetic representations may be as ideologically insidious as the ridicule and fear functions. Again, it appears that when mainstream media incorporate trans characters, they rarely do so in a socially disruptive way that encourages the viewer to consider the unwritten rules of the world around them. Like Smith and prodiGal, I want to take a thoughtful, critical, detail-oriented approach to my analysis of dramatic television characters.

4) Empathy?

A fourth category of trans representation might exist: true empathy. An empathetic representation would most closely reflect queer theory and advocate the legitimacy of transgender identities. In the *Crossdressing Cinema* dissertation, Miller makes the important distinction between feeling sympathy vs. empathy for a transgender character. He argues that most portrayals of trans characters are sympathetic (being aware of pain and suffering) rather than empathetic (feeling and knowing what the other person feels). This disconnect occurs "not only because of a lack of personal understanding of what the characters are experiencing, but also because the films are unwilling to convey the level of intimate knowledge necessary to connect with the character at a deeper level" (Miller, 162). The character(s) and/or screenwriter(s) never fully engage with the binaries, the complexity of gender, and the pain of bullying, harassment, and gender

policing. Additionally, the formal elements of framing, editing, and reaction shots radically effect the viewer's identification with a trans character and their point-of-view. The placement of the camera and the editing selection in a close-up could craft the character as a pitiful victim, a broken hero, a strong survivor, or an active agent. The psychological subjectivity and objectivity as determined by these formal factors will be crucial in the sections of semiotic analyses in the thesis.

Miller discusses the many readings of *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Pierce, 1999) at length. In Halberstam's extremely detailed reading of the climax of the film, which depicts the murder of the protagonist and transman Brandon in a bathroom, he makes the case that the film briefly exhibits an empathetic "transgender gaze." While Brandon is stripped, exposed as biologically female, humiliated, and graphically beaten, the camera does a subjective, psychological POV from his perspective, where he sees a second, clothed, intact version of himself. This double represents the spiritual part of him that will survive the rape and murder, the one where his male gender identity will remain intact (Halberstam, 6). Miller argues that "this gaze remains a sympathetic feeling sorry for Brandon rather than a true empathetic connection with him. The transgender gaze is not sustained through the

entire film" (169).

He goes on to explain that Brandon is problematically framed as a lesbian woman throughout the film. Since



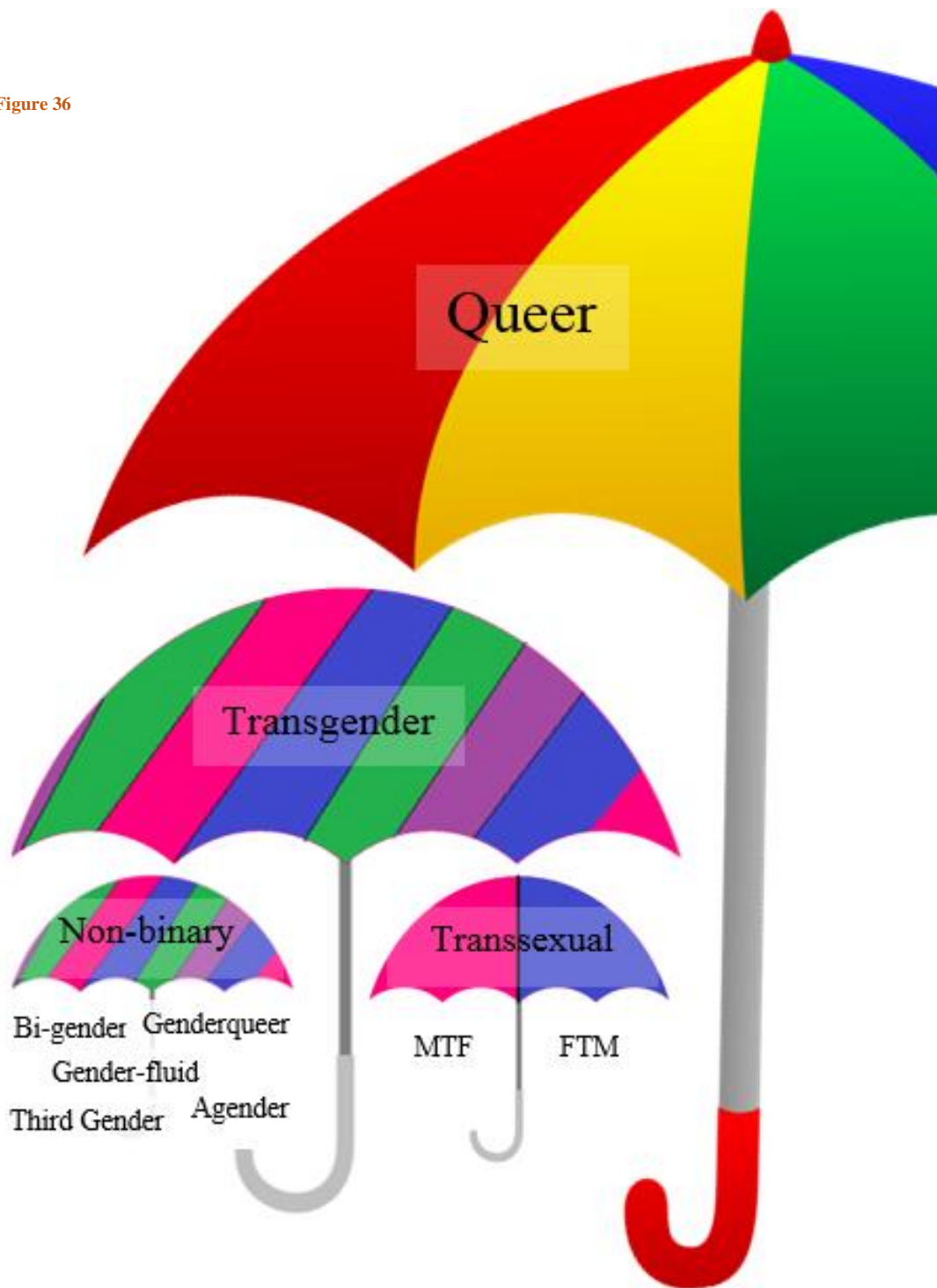
Brandon never explains how his male gender differs from his female body, and since he is attracted exclusively to women, the audience is more likely to read Brandon as a lesbian instead of a straight transman. The murkiness surrounding Brandon's identity keeps him at distance, denying the possibility for true empathy from a cis viewer. He cites Philips' reading of the film: "A film like *Boys Don't Cry* simultaneously generates sympathy for the gender-confused Brandon (whom the narrative turns into a tragic victim) while reassuring the audience that their own sex/gender identities remain intact" (qtd. in Miller, 170). Miller believes that the dominant ideologies surrounding sex and gender must be adequately challenged in order to provide an empathetic space for the character to fit into and the audience to respond to. I will employ this careful approach, recognizing gazes, point-of-view, and the critique (or lack thereof) of the hegemonic viewpoints surrounding sexuality and gender to discover the power, dominance, and societal norms being displayed. Much of this analysis will be accomplished through semiotic deconstruction of the formal elements used to create meaning in the texts.

The limitations of Miller's model

Miller's dissertation only covers cinema characters, not television, and all of the characters he analyzes are transsexual characters or are in crossdressing comedies like *Some Like it Hot* (Billy Wilder, 1959) and *Tootsie* (Sydney Pollack, 1982). Since I am looking at non-binary transgender characters on television, Miller's application to my research has limitations, since transsexual identities differ from non-binary ones. I want to use Miller's model as a foundation for the analysis to determine exactly how non-binary characters function as compared to transsexual characters. If any of the five characters that I analyze transcend the three demeaning functions of ridicule, fear, and

sympathy and inspire true empathy in the viewer by challenging gender norms, a significant shift for queer identities on screen has occurred.

Figure 36



How exactly I'm using different terminologies

The dozens of terminologies regarding gender identities, gender expressions, orientations, biological sexes, and the many unique and fluid ways that they interconnect can be overwhelmingly complex. The fact that different people use the terms in different ways and must self-identify with the various terms further complicates things. Despite the drawbacks of placing people in discrete, potentially problematic categories, I must use *some* labels or my analyses will not be coherent.

Figure 36 above is a model that I created that visualizes how I see the various 'umbrellas' and terms fitting together. *Queer* is the most inclusive term, uniting all sexes, orientations, and gender identities outside of the majority straight, cisgender, and cissexual (not intersex) hegemony. Terms like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, cross-dresser, genderqueer, transman, transwoman, intersex, asexual, and pansexual can all fit in this queer umbrella. The transgender umbrella within the queer one limits the population to gender identities that are not cisgender (though a person can be both transgender and intersex, or transgender and lesbian, etc...*transgender* is not an exclusive term). When I use *transgender*, I mean the widest definition possible. Any person who feels that their gender identity or expression is not 'male' or 'female' in the traditional way, or who's gender identity or expression differs from their birth sex is included. When I use the term *trans*, I use it as a shorthand for this inclusive definition of *transgender*. Some queer and transgender people use the term trans* (with an asterisk) to signify added inclusiveness (Jones, par. 3). The asterisk version illustrates the perpetual attempt from activists and minority members to escape the trappings of linguistic categories by inventing and clarifying new terminologies. For this project, I find the asterisk

unnecessary because I'm clarifying now that I mean the fullest diversity when I use the term *transgender* or *trans*.

Within the transgender umbrella, I want to re-iterate the difference between transsexual identities and non-binary identities. *Transsexual* refers to people that are the other gender than their birth sex, female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). In many cases, transsexual people are still working within the binary gender system, even though they are crossing over the dividing gender line. For those who have a gender identity or expression that transcends, challenges, shatters, combines, or experiments with the gender binary, I am using the term *non-binary*. I find that the term has a broader use than specific identities like *genderqueer*, *gender-fluid*, *bi-gender*, *two-spirit*, *third-gender*, *transvestite*, etc... because those terms are selected by individuals to describe themselves in a personal and expressive way. Non-binary characters, as opposed to transsexual characters, are the focus of my thesis. Since none of the characters that I'm investigating use a specific term to describe themselves, *non-binary* is an effective, less problematic term for me to use. It's also crucial that I note the differences between *gender identity* and *gender expression* in my analyses. Gender expression refers to the outward presentation of clothes, hair, make-up, voice, and body language, while gender identity is internal, emotional, and psychological.

METHODOLOGY

RQ: Does the premium-pay-cable television format offer truly empathetic non-binary transgender characters that challenge the dominant American ideologies about gender identity and expression? If so, how? If not, why not?

This thesis will consist of the close reading of five non-binary characters on fictional, scripted, premium-pay-cable American television from the year 2000 and onward. Unscripted television, such as talk shows, news, and reality programs will be excluded because their production constraints and narrative structures are too different from scripted, fictional television. I've chosen to limit the study to premium-pay-cable television for two reasons. First, to limit the size of the study to a reasonable amount, and second, because I believe that the lack of censorship and the advanced and intellectual nature of premium-pay-cable may lead to more nuanced and complex queer characters. I've chosen to limit the study to non-binary transgender characters because they are gravely overlooked in academic study, and they may challenge gender norms, binaries, and dominant ideologies more than typical transsexual characters.

The shows span several genres: crime, action, drama, comedy, fantasy, supernatural, and thrillers. Despite these differences, all of the series share the fundamental qualities of a fictional, serial structure, filled with scripted characters and events. The foundational framework for the analysis is the three-function model of trans characters as laid out in Miller's research. Though Miller's research concerns mainly transsexual characters in cinema, I think that his model will inspire compelling connections and comparisons, maybe illuminating an empathetic tendency in premium-pay-cable.

Few of the five characters actually self-identify as ‘transgender.’ Several of these characters, in fact, identify with no terminology. Based on preliminary viewing and research, I am considering the following five characters to be under the transgender umbrella (in the umbrella’s widest possible definition) because they all appear to be outside the binary, or they are crossing the binary in terms of their gender presentation and perceived identity. The analysis may reveal that a character is actually upholding the binaries, and the label of ‘non-binary’ is therefore inaccurate, and they will be discussed accordingly. Many of the terminologies that I’ve placed on these characters are my own interpretation of their identities, which I may reject after deeper study of each character. The analyses of these five characters make up the body of the thesis:

1) **Shane McCutcheon** a polyamorous lesbian, biological female, and hair stylist with an intentional androgynous gender expression on *The L Word* (Showtime). She is a main character in the entire six season series (2004-2010).



Figure 37

2) **Lafayette Reynolds** (Nelsan Ellis), a gay biological male, a cook, and drug dealer



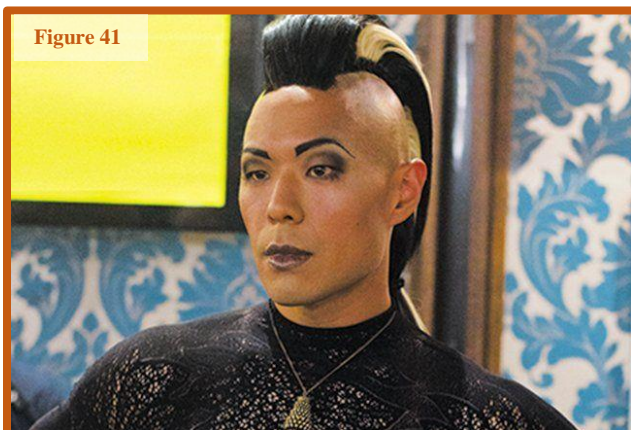
Figure 38

with extremely queer gender presentation and expression on HBO’s *True Blood* (2008-2014). He uses his muscular body to protect himself in rural, conservative Louisiana, yet his personality is typically gentle and sassy. He is a main character throughout the show.



3) Roscoe Kaan (Donis Leonard Jr.) – The gender bending, biologically male son of Marty Kaan (Don Cheadle), the lead character on *House of Lies* (Showtime). Roscoe is present in seasons 1 – 3 (2012 to 2014).

4) Brienne of Tarth (Gwendoline Christie), a biologically female warrior who uses her brute strength and masculine gender presentation to navigate the patriarchic world of Westeros in HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Her sense of honor and her strict moral code guide her decision making. She is a supporting character in seasons 2 and 3 (2012 and 2013).



5) Job (Hoon Lee) is a master computer hacker and criminal in *Banshee* (Cinemax). His sex is male, but his wildly experimental hair and clothing varies all over the gender spectrum. He is a supporting character in seasons 1 and 2 (2013 and 2014).

For deep analysis, I will select episodes that focus most heavily on the non-binary character, meaning that they are directly involved *in* or are the focus *of* at least one storyline of the episode. Critical/cultural studies will serve as a basis for the analysis, zeroing in on the trans characters' functions in the storylines, their voice and power (as seen through their gazes, dialogue, and actions), and the formal elements used to convey their gender identity and expression. Using queer theory, the thesis will evaluate the discourses in each show, considering the presentation of each trans character, to illuminate the perspectives of the binaries, sex vs. gender, and the legitimacy of trans identity.

For all characters, I want to note the first time that they appear in the series, observing the gender presentation, pronouns, names, and framing devices used by the show to denote the sex and gender identities of the characters. Episodes in which the characters actually discuss gender, trans, binary language, identity and other issues of sexuality are highly remarkable. The moment(s) of 'reveal' of their sex, gender, and/or orientation, coupled with the other characters' reaction to the news, are crucial to defining the characters functions as well. Dissecting the formal elements of camera, editing, music, etc... in moments like these will help define the power relations, psychology, and emotions of the characters as well as the attitudes of the shows' creators.

While the focus will be on textual analysis, articles and reviews posted on the internet will be used to supplement the textual analysis, illuminating the cultural conversation surrounding trans issues as displayed on these specific television series, and most importantly, recognizing feedback from actual transgender people. The internet content utilized will include existing interviews with show creators and actors, reviews

and criticism from professional critics and fans, as well as publically-posted internet blogs and comments about these shows, especially from trans individuals.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I seek to consider the state of representations of characters outside of the gender binary in contemporary premium-pay-cable television. Acknowledging my limitations as a privileged community outsider, recognizing that the dominant ideologies about gender and sexuality are too limited to include all identities, and treating each television show as a cultural text to be dissected, I will rigorously analyze five television characters. A careful reading of point-of-view, as seen by camera placement, gaze exchanges, reaction shots, and dialogue, will reveal if, and how, each character functions as an object of ridicule, fear, or sympathy. Perhaps, they may even boldly assert themselves as an active and truly empowered, empathetic queer voice.

CHAPTER ONE: SHANE – *THE L WORD* (Showtime)



The L Word began in 2004 as a drama series revolving around the lives of a group of lesbians in Los Angeles. The series played for six seasons on Showtime from 2004 to 2010. Even before the show premiered, comparisons were made HBO's massively successful dramedy *Sex and the City* and Showtime's own gay series *Queer as Folk*. The punny tagline of *The L Word* is even 'Same Sex, Different City' (figure 42). Like New Yorkers Carrie, Samantha, Miranda, and Charlotte, the (mostly) wealthy LA cast on *The L Word* gab often and openly about love, sex, and their careers together while indulging at trendy cafés and restaurants. Both shows feature explicit premium-pay-cable nudity and hook-ups, but on *The L Word*, as the title suggest, most of the encounters are between women.

The show has been criticized by some in the lesbian community for portraying nearly all of the women as glossy, thin, hyper-feminine, straight-friendly 'lipstick lesbians.' Ariel Levi of *Slate* said of season one, "much has been made of how conventionally feminine and improbably gorgeous all the women on *The L Word* are, and

it is true that theirs has been a butchless universe. (Most lesbian enclaves on planet Earth are not),” but she concedes that later seasons explored a wider diversity of types. She also lauds the show’s use of sex, calling it “corrective” by depicting legitimate female desire and intimacy, instead of pornographically exploiting female-female hook-ups for male pleasure. Heather Havrilesky of *Salon* questioned of the show in the first season, “so where’s the woman afraid of introducing her butch girlfriend to her parents? Why not have just one character who’s not a Size 6 or under? How about one woman who’s ambivalent about how she could ever fit in with the lesbian scene?” (Havrilesky, par. 7). Havrilesky believes that the show goes to such extreme lengths to depict these women as confident and successful, that they aren’t emotionally compelling.

User MsUnderstood on an *L Word* discussion board on the forum site Democratic Underground defends, “the show isn’t meant to be a cross section of Lesbians. It is meant to be about a group of friends in West Hollywood. I wouldn’t call all of these girls



Figure 43

Lipstick lesbians but they are not "dykes (diesel, butch or otherwise)." (MsUnderstood). Ironically, in 2009 Showtime launched a line of actual lipstick modeled off of four of the most popular *The L Word* characters (shown above). Writer Simcha on website The Frisky humorously reported on the announcement of the cosmetics by beginning "you can finally rub sexy Shane all over your lips – well, her and all your other favorite lipstick lesbians on *The L Word*" (Simcha, par. 1). While Shane McCutcheon, played by the Katherine Moennig, is a strikingly beautiful fan-favorite, she could hardly be described as a hyper-feminine 'lipstick lesbian.' Shane's gender presentation and expression defy traditional norms in favor of a more fluid, queer approach.

Shane first appears in the show's pilot episode at The Planet, a coffee shop owned by Marina, which becomes the standard meeting place for the main characters in the series. Shane is identified when a girl across the counter says "Hi, Shane!" Then she's immediately identified as female when Marina replies for Shane saying, "She doesn't talk to anyone before her morning shot [of espresso]." Shane takes the shot and the camera



Figure 44

lingers on her and her friends Dana and Alice. Shane is tall and thin, with shoulder-length, black, punk-rocker style hair, a collared shirt with the sleeves ripped off, a black wristband, and a pair of aviator sunglasses in the V of the half-buttoned shirt, where cleavage would be if she wore a bra. The collar, the aviators, and the shaggy hair are all masculine markers, but her thin arms, soft facial features, and hint of breasts render her as somewhat female. Her more androgynous gender presentation and transgressive look stand out from the more typical female clothes and hair of Dana, Alice, and Marina.

The sequence cuts as Shane stands to leave, then the camera follows her toward the exit, accentuating her androgyny further by showing her wide, masculine stance and heavy gait. She flirtatiously says, “Bye, Lisa” to the woman who called to her earlier. The women with Lisa gasp in excitement, implying that Shane is sought-after in this community and her affections are difficult to attain. She’s framed as a confident rogue and ladies’ (wo)man in this introductory scene.





Figure 46



Figure 47



Figure 48



Figure 49



Figure 50

Several scenes later (depicted above), Jenny, the only ‘straight’ main character in the ensemble cast of women (figure 48) spies Shane and an unnamed blonde woman approaching her next-door neighbor’s pool. Shane unashamedly strips naked, revealing her biologically female body. Shane gracefully dives into the pool to meet the blonde, who she begins kissing passionately as Jenny, the ‘straight’ female voyeur looks on with interest. This is the first moment when Jenny’s orientation is questioned. Shane corners her lover against the wall of the pool and assertively turns her around pleasuring her from behind. The blonde woman moans with pleasure. Shane’s dominance in the sexual encounter aligns her with a traditionally ‘male’ role, but they are of course, both women, being watched by a woman. Shane un-knowingly becomes an exhibitionist object of a straight female gaze, but Jenny’s expression appears curious, not perverse or degrading. Perhaps Jenny is a cypher for the many straight female viewers of the show, signaling to them that it’s okay to look...it’s okay to indulge or be (bi?)curious.

After a few moments, Jenny looks away, recognizing the privacy of the couple and the scene ends with her conflicted face. In most media, a scene like this one would focus on a straight man eyeing a female encounter with a sexually-objectifying pleasurable expression, heightened by bumbling music. The scene would then indulge in gratuitous ‘girl on girl’ sex and nudity, aimed at providing pleasure for the straight, male audience. But *The L Word* does not pander to the fantasies of male viewers. It’s a show made for women, especially for women who partner with women. The pool scene has no music and focuses on the desire between the two women more than the flesh. More importantly, Shane’s self-assurance and sexual authority renders her as anything but a powerless object of the gaze.

Later, Dana, Alice, Marina, and Tina are chatting at The Planet. The closeted Dana harasses Alice about her bisexuality: “Christ, Alice! When you gonna make up your mind between dick and pussy. And spare us the gory bisexual details.” Alice retorts, “Well, for your information, Dana, I’m looking for the same qualities in a man as I am in a woman.” To which Dana jokes, “big tits,” refusing to take her sexuality seriously. Her rejection of Alice’s identity while upholding the heterosexual or homosexual binary frames her as a fairly spiteful and unlikable character. Her binary thinking moves into gender territory as the conversation continues.

Tina begs Alice and Dana to help her find another sperm donor while she’s still ovulating. Marina reassures Tina: “between the four of us we’ll come up with someone, what, he has to be healthy, strong, creative, handsome,” [Shane enters the frame in the background, figure 51] “artistic” adds Tina. “There’s always Shane,” quips Dana out of



Tina – white blazer
Alice – blue blouse
Dana – black shirt

earshot of her. Shane greets them warmly in the same androgynous outfit.

Dana: “You know, do you have to dress like that all the time?”

Shane respond with a goofy, mocking expression (figure 53), “Like what?”

Dana: “Well, I wouldn’t be seen on the street with you.”

Shane: “Yeah?”

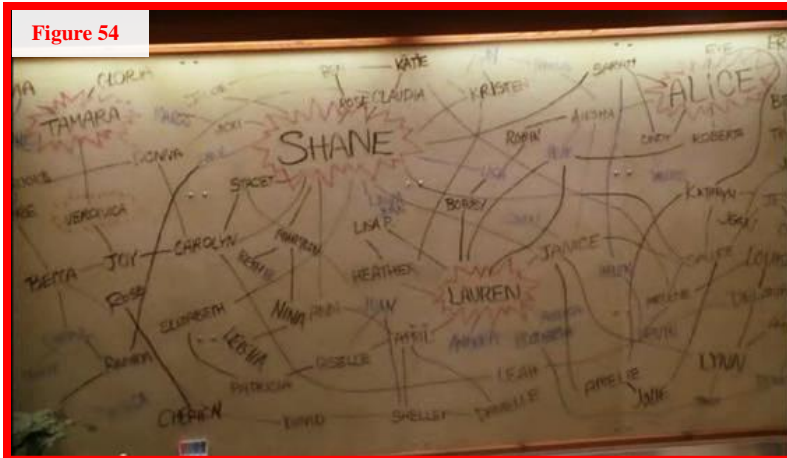
Dana: “Everything about the way you’re dressed, like, *screams* dyke.”

Alice: “God, Dana.”

Shane: [coolly] “Sorry, man.”

Shane doesn’t fight back or act offended. She just calmly leaves. She’s always on the move. Dana attacked both Alice and Shane by reinforcing binary definitions of gender and sexuality because of personal anxieties about her orientation and her fear of being outed. Alice scolds Dana by saying, “You are gonna pickle in that self-loathing homophobia, I swear.” Dana has a personal hierarchy of acceptability for women, with straight women at the top, lesbians next, then bisexuals (Alice), and ‘dykes’ at the bottom (Shane). To her, crossing gender lines is more disruptive and disgraceful than crossing orientation lines, and this attitude is shared by many Americans. Consider when people say things like “I have no problem with lesbians, but I don’t understand why some of them have to act so butch.” Shane’s indifference to gender policing and bullying points to another emotion in Dana: jealousy. Dana is envious of both Alice and Shane’s liberated sexual identities.

Shane constantly runs into women who wanted more than a one-night stand, but Shane says, “I don’t do relationships,” framing her as a rogue, polyamorous heartbreaker. Alice creates a six-degrees-of-separation style map (figure 54) of all the women in the



lesbian community of LA, connecting them by who they've slept with. Shane has a web to dozens of women and Alice remarks, "she could have us here all night." Shane doesn't completely dismiss the possibility of a long-term relationship for herself, however. At the end of the two part pilot, she

stumbles onto Brooke and Tina's front porch, after presumably ducking out of a one-night stand at sunrise. She's wearing another gender-bending outfit, a tiny, feminine, leather, corset-style top that actually highlights her flatter chest and broad shoulders (figure 55). Below it, she sports black jeans worn well below the waist like many young men wear pants. The smart costuming choice here twists a traditional and oppressive article of feminine clothing, the corset, and re-tools it for gender blending and sexual self-expression.

At another *Sex and the City* style café gab scene in episode 3, Dana announces that she has no gaydar, and that's why she can't find a partner. Shane and Alice stress that orientation is not as simple as 'gay' and 'straight,' and that people hook up when it

feels right. Shane says, “Sexuality is fluid, whether you’re gay, or you’re straight, or you’re bisexual, you just go with the flow.” While Shane verbally challenges the rigid cultural norms about *orientation*, she mostly challenges *gender* norms through her gender expression and freewheeling attitude. She never talks about how she feels inside about her gender, or in queer theory terms, her internal gender identity.



Figure 56



Figure 57



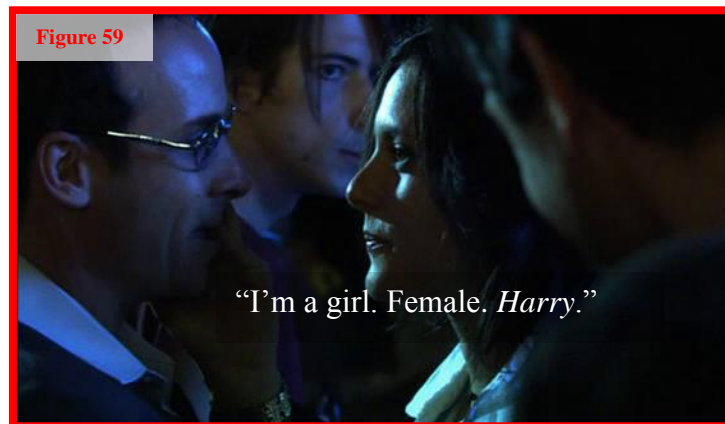
Figure 58

In episode six, Shane and Alice meet in a hotel lobby. The conversation is interrupted when Alice notices two handsome, well-dressed men staring at Shane, noting one of them as celebrity Harry Samchuck. Shane throws her newspaper down, saying, “Fuck, he thinks I’m a guy, all those fucking gay Hollywood mafia fags think I’m some twink they can pick up on.” Normally, Shane seems comfortable and nonchalant about her androgyny, but in this case, she had an intense, even homophobic reaction to being mistaken for a man and

becoming an object of a gay male gaze. Her explosive reaction begins to make sense when she runs into an old friend named Clive who reveals a bit about Shane’s dark past.

At a gay (male) bar, Clive leads Shane over to Harry to introduce them. After snorting a bit of coke, Harry says, “Oh good, he brought him. Divine, isn’t he?” Harry gropes Shane’s butt and an offended Shane says, “What the fuck?” Frustrated, Shane

questions Clive: “Why didn’t you tell him?” Harry still thinks that Shane is male. Shane clears up the situation directly:



Surprised, he theatrically laments “my, my, my, androgyny confounds, doesn’t it?! Well, I suppose it is revolutionary, but I must admit I am disappointed because it’s always the skinny boys that have [Harry gropes Shane’s crotch] the biggest cocks.” Shane would normally walk away from harassment from an arrogant pig like Harry, but she’s desperate to advance her career as a stylist. Clive gives expository background info on his and Shane’s time as prostitutes as he talks to Harry: “Shane and I turned tricks in Santa Monica for six months. She only gave handjobs. No matter how much they offered her, she coulda made a lotta money.” Harry says, “Well that is called integrity. Unfortunately it’s not something you can buy or steal.” Clive’s reveal may explain why Shane reacted so negatively to Harry’s initial false gender perception. Harry triggered Shane’s painful memories of using her androgyny to prostitute herself, passing as male. Shane’s current gender expression functions as a liberating and personal act, not as a ruse or deception to make money. Her poor class background and money remains her only impediment to complete self-assurance.

Shane’s refusal to conform to traditional femininity comes to a head in the season three premiere. Shane has developed a long term, monogamous relationship with

Carmen, a Latina L.A. native. Carmen asks Shane to meet and have dinner with Carmen's large, extended, Hispanic family, including her mother who has rejected Carmen's lesbian orientation, pretending that she is still straight. To make things less stressful, Carmen asks Shane to pose as a straight, female friend. Though she dreads the act (her insistence on displaying her genuine self so key to her character), Shane accepts. Things begin awkwardly as Carmen's mother, Mercedes, attempts to fix Shane up with one of her sons or nephews and then accidentally insults Shane's wild hair-do. Carmen's mother is horrified when Shane explains that she's not in contact with her family. Carmen lies saying that Shane was in foster care, and Mercedes goes into full rescue-mode, hugging Shane exclaiming, "We're your family now, okay!"

The assertive Mercedes then forces Shane to try on one of her own dresses that she had when she was young and thin. She insists that Shane must wear it to the quinceañera of one of her nieces. Mercedes holds the dress onto Shane, and Shane looks visibly uncomfortable, saying "No." She insists that Shane try it on, then unknowingly adding sexual insult to gender injury, asks, "You have a boyfriend, Shane?" Shane fakes a pleasant smile and replies, "No, not yet." Mercedes leaves the room for a moment and Carmen, excited that Shane has won the approval of her mother, begins kissing her intensely, as a painting of Christ watches in the background. The conservative, Hispanic, Catholic ideology even watches over them even when Mercedes leaves the room. Carmen takes Shane's shirt off, then picks up the dress to put it over Shane's head. Shane pleads, "Please don't make me do this" with an expression that ventures beyond irritation into genuine anxiety and discomfort (figure 61). Breathing heavily in distress, she succumbs to both Carmen and the dress, letting out a disgusted 'ughhh' as it comes over her.

Figure 60



Figure 61



Figure 62



Figure 63



Carmen sneaks another kiss when suddenly Mercedes walks back in, and the two immediately break their embrace. Mercedes says “Oh my goodness.” But she did not see the kiss, she’s in awe of how beautiful she thinks Shane looks in the dress. Shane says, “It’s something else” and uneasily pushes her hands down on the skirt, feigning admiration. The scene reflects that Shane’s choice to wear masculine clothes is not simply a preference, but a deep, internal identity. She treats the dress like a parasite or a needle prick, nearly in tears when it goes on. It denies and masks her sense of self. She despises it with every fiber of her being.

In episode two, Shane puts the dress on again just before the quinceañera, and sulks out from behind a wall to show Carmen. She declares solemnly “I, feel like a piñata.” Carmen playfully retorts “you’re too small to be a piñata, but how about the top of a tranny wedding cake?” Shane responds, “You’re not helping me,” and Carmen apologizes. While Shane prefers a queer gender presentation, she does not want to look like or feel like a transsexual person. Nor does she want to present like a traditionally feminine woman. And as shown in season one, she despises being mistaken for a man. Her preferred gender expression is extremely specific and unique: masculine but not completely male. It’s essential to her confidence and personal well-being. She’s only willing to make a sacrifice like this because of her love for Carmen.

Carmen comforts Shane, again kissing and flirting with Shane to appease her. Carmen promises Shane copious amounts of oral sex in exchange for wearing the dress. Carmen pulls the white dress up and Shane is wearing men’s black briefs underneath, but Shane pushes the skirt of the dress back down (shown below). It’s unclear whether she does this is embarrassment, frustration, or discomfort. I would say that it’s a combination



of all three emotions: Shane doesn't feel sexy when forced into the costume of traditionally feminine clothing. Carmen won't let Shane keep the black Chuck Taylor Converse shoes on, and Shane resists. The shoes and the panties are the last remaining artifacts of Shane's true tradition-rejecting identity. The black color of both items recalls Shane's non-conformist, rebellious, and transgressive black wardrobe. The white dress suggests marriage, domesticity, virginity, and submission, four concepts that in no way define her. Carmen insists that Shane wear a pair of Carmen's "cha-cha heels." As Carmen runs off for them, Shane is left alone with a horrified expression.

Later, Mercedes notices Shane in her dress in the room where all of the women are getting ready for the quinceañera. Shane is visually confined in a frame-within-the-

frame, a mirror, flanked on either side by images of Mercedes

(figure 67). The smartly

designed composition

accentuates the oppression and

discomfort that Shane feels from

Mercedes in these feminine

clothes. Mercedes says, “Oh my

gosh, Jane you look bonita!

Look everybody! This is

Carmen’s friend Jane, she’s

wearing my dress!” Shane

smiles, uncomfortably, and

waves, awkwardly. Her

orientation, her girlfriend, and

her non-binary name and

presentation have all been taken from her for this event. She’s forced into the role of a

straight, girly puppet in order to appease Carmen’s family. To add insult to injury,

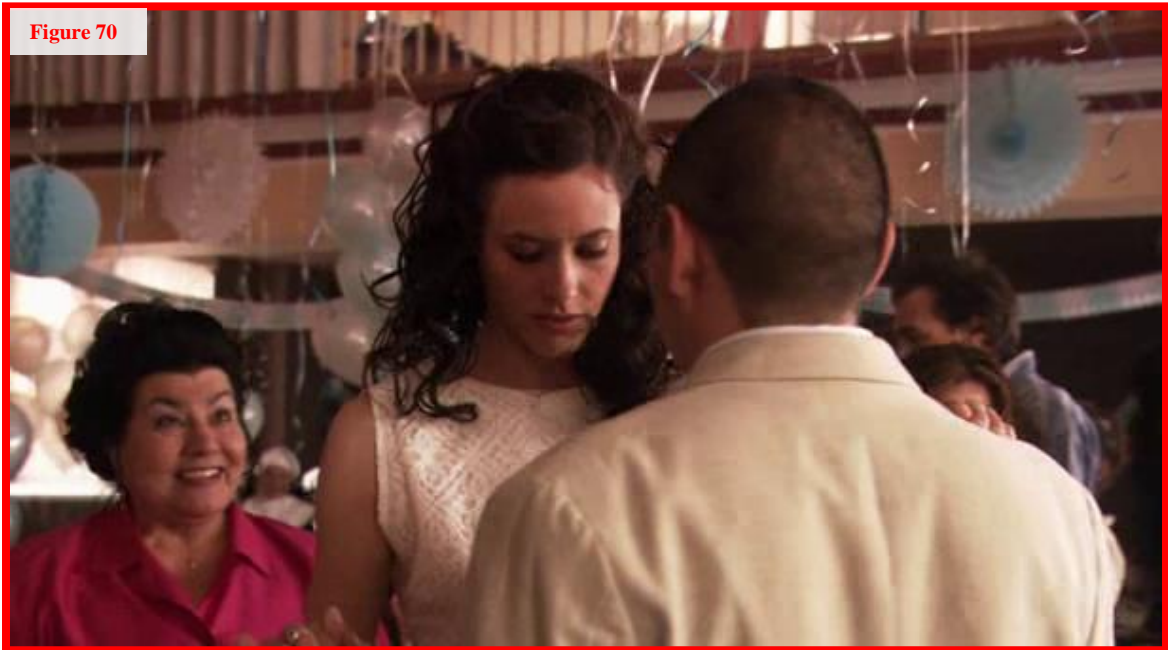
Carmen’s mother tells Shane to get her hair and make-up done by a stylist. A legitimately

distraught Shane resists, but the stylist says, “Such a pretty face, I’ll make you look

beautiful, come.” Carmen reassures her, and Shane reluctantly agrees, tripping on her



high-heeled shoes as she makes her way over to the make-over chair. The stylist says “Jane, your hair is a little uneven, you want me to cut it straight?” Shane reacts with an intense “no” (figure 69). Carmen’s pushy, gender-policing family has good intentions, but the anxiety that they cause Shane is undeniable.



Carmen’s mother plays match-maker again, forcing Shane to dance with Luis, a childhood friend of Carmen. Shane’s revealed to be wearing a long, curly black wig, her femininity accented by mascara and pink lip gloss, her unwanted transformation into a feminized marionette doll complete. While they dance, Luis admits that he’s always had feelings for Carmen. Shane politely expresses that Carmen wouldn’t feel the same way, careful not to reveal their true orientations. Carmen comes up to them and says “hi, mind if I cut in?” Carmen then joins Shane, awkwardly denying Luis the dance that he assumed was meant for him. A paranoid Shane looks around and warns Carmen: “isn’t this a little risky?” Carmen explains that in Latino culture, two women dancing is socially acceptable and “not exactly queer.” Carmen jokes, “I love your hair!” and Shane laughs with her

genuinely, admitting defeat and persevering through the ordeal with the support from Carmen.

Later at home, Shane has removed her confining wig and dress and regained her steely androgyny, smoking a cigarette in briefs and a wife-beater; her safe, personal space for androgyny and same sex affection is restored. Carmen praises Shane, telling her how much the family loves her, especially Mercedes. Shane genuinely responds that she loves them too, then she pulls Carmen onto her lap and sexily dares:

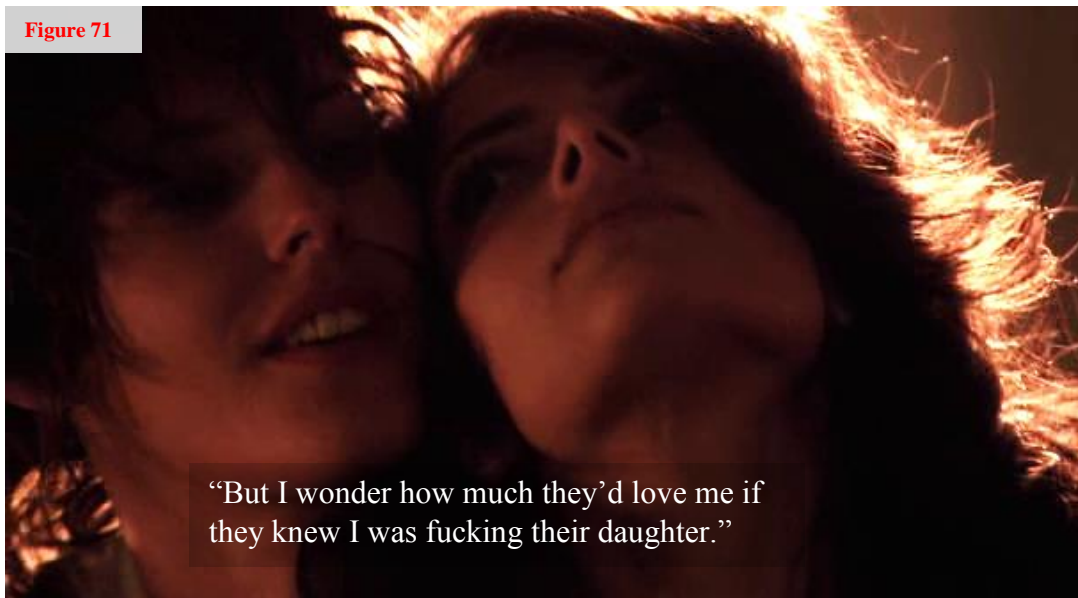


Figure 71

“But I wonder how much they’d love me if they knew I was fucking their daughter.”

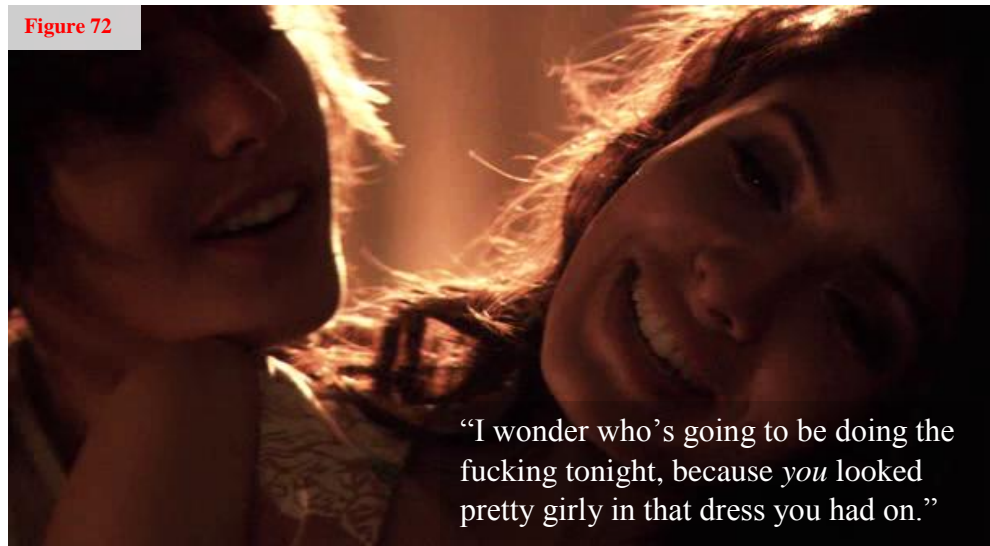


Figure 72

“I wonder who’s going to be doing the fucking tonight, because *you* looked pretty girly in that dress you had on.”

Figure 73



Figure 74



Carmen puts music on and begins to dance, as Shane leans back on a table in a wide stance, pulling on her cigarette, the back light highlighting her strong shoulders and minimizing her thin hips. In this moment she oozes coolness, masculinity, and dominance as intensely as Humphrey Bogart, Steve McQueen, or James Dean. She initiates and holds the gaze on Carmen as she exhibits herself playfully and erotically for Shane. In the wide shot, Shane's breasts are barely visible, marking her female body, but also accentuating her mix-and-match approach to gender expression. By contrast, Carmen

pulls off her dress
revealing her
stunning,
curvaceous body,
large breasts,
thighs, hips, and
butt, lean waist, and



long, flowing hair. Their foreplay is interrupted when the phone rings. Shane begs Carmen not to pick it up, but Carmen worries that it might be an emergency. It's Jenny on the phone with her new girlfriend Moira, who's perhaps even more androgynous than Shane and often mistaken for a man. Jenny and Moira need a place to crash and Shane and Carmen accept. As the season continues, Jenny and Moira, the trappings of monogamy, and Carmen's traditional family take a strong toll on Shane and Carmen's relationship.

In season 3 episode 3, Jenny and Moira arrive to move in with Shane and Carmen. Moira is dressed in men's clothes and has hair down to her jawline. She's also fairly



blunt and socially awkward, with a soft, feminine voice. When Carmen offers to help unpack their gear, Moira declares, "You girls just relax, and let

us butches unload the truck, c'mon Shane [Moira slaps Shane on the shoulder]." Moira walks to the truck, then Carmen jokingly repeats Shane's slap saying "C'mon you big butch! Unload the truck!" Shane walks over to Moira who throws a heavy bag at Shane to carry. While Shane is certainly not hyper-feminine and despises being confused with a man, she's also not comfortable with the label 'butch' either. Later in the episode, she confirms that she rejects labels in general.

Most of the characters meet together at a fancy dinner party for Jenny. Since Moira is lower-middle class and from a small Midwestern town, she feels uncomfortable and poor looking over the expensive menu. Shot and edited from her perspective, the other women are not particularly inviting either, presumably not accustomed to Moira's rural 'butch' presentation and standoffish demeanor. Feeling anxious, Moira retreats to the bathroom where two women whisper about her gender, suggesting that they don't think she should be in the ladies' room. Simultaneously, the women at the table gossip, scrutinizing Moira. Alice describes Moira as a 'stone butch' and Shane defends Moira saying, "I wouldn't necessarily call Moira a 'stone butch.'" After the women continue to patronizingly question Moira's identity and Jenny's motives for being with her, Shane interrupts, proclaiming, "What difference does it make if someone is butch or fem? We should just leave labels alone and let people be who they are." After a quiet moment where the women realize their cruelty, the gossip ends. Shane sees the best in people, and on multiple occasions, she shuts down gossip regarding a person's sexuality and gender expression. As the season progresses, it turns out that Moira needs more support and acceptance than anyone at the dinner realized, when Moira discovers that they are actually Max, a female-to-male transsexual.

Max first presents as male at Shane's grand opening of her alternative hair stylist mini-salon inside a skateboard shop and skate park. Max enters wearing a suit and is called "handsome" by Dana, while a crowd cheers for Shane (who is also wearing a men's suit with a red tie) as she shaves the head of a woman in her new salon chair. The mostly queer and



alternative crowd seems to be celebrating the break-down of gender norms that Shane's initiating with her clippers. Shane's suit and Max's suit have different connotations. Shane's suit openly rejects gender boundaries because she still identifies as a woman, even though she is wearing 'men's' clothes. Max's suit confirms his male gender identity, and he perhaps even wears it to intentionally 'pass' as male. Visual markers of gender function much differently for this non-binary character versus this other transsexual one. Shane's role in her lesbian community is not threatened by her gender expression, but Max's awkward place in the group becomes even less secure when he begins his transition.

At a concert, Shane and Carmen gossip about Max to Alice. Shane says, "She's having a sex change, Al," and Carmen adds, "Yup, Moira's becoming a man." Alice responds "Are you fucking kidding me? Does Jenny know?" and Shane confirms, "She's

helping her.” Shane broke two serious rules of etiquette, and seems to have backtracked on her previous stance on minimizing gossip. She outed Max as a transsexual, and she used female pronouns for Max instead of male. As a gender-bender and someone who claims to be more knowledgeable about transsexual people, Shane should be much more empathetic and polite about Max. Shane, Carmen, and Alice were dishing about Max’s body and mid as if it were a juicy piece of info, not a personal identity. It’s strange that the show creators treat Shane’s gender expression with such respect (it’s never questioned



when Shane wears suspenders and glasses in the next episode, fig. 79), yet in this instance and many others, they use Max’s transition for excitement, shock, and surprise.

Carmen and Shane’s relationship is tested when Shane cheats on Carmen, when Mercedes finds about about their relationship, and when Carmen cheats on Shane. After all of it, they make up and their passion is reignited. When Dana tragically succumbs to breast cancer, Shane is a vulnerable mess, and she asks Carmen to marry her. Carmen



says “Yes.” The rash decision in the midst of all of their interpersonal conflict and infidelity seems ominous of coming disaster.

The wedding is held in Whistler, British Columbia, Canada, one of the few places where same-sex marriage was legal at the time the season aired (2006). When Carmen and Shane arrive at the hotel, all of

Carmen's family have surprised them. Mercedes apologizes to Carmen and greets Shane warmly. She tells Shane, "You're going to make such a handsome bride, err, groom! So handsome!" Minor character Peggy toasts Shane at her bachelor party: "Although I don't understand why you would embrace an institution that breeds conformity and restricts free will, if you give one another children, I only hope that they're generous and kind." Shane is asked whether she wants kids or not, and she uncertainly responds yes. She seems unprepared and anxious about her impending marriage. Her doubt seems to intensify when her father shows up, and Shane catches him on a date with a woman that's not his wife. He tells Shane,

"I'm not proud of this. It's just who I am. Okay? I know you know what I'm talking about."

An extreme close-up on Shane's face emphasizes her uncertainty.



Figure 81

At the ceremony, everyone excitedly awaits Carmen and Shane. Mercedes escorts an elated Carmen down the aisle. Alice interrupts them on the aisle, stops them, and whispers to Carmen and Mercedes. Alice recounts a personal message to Carmen from



Figure 82



Shane: “She says that she doesn’t expect you to forgive her. She’s not proud of this, it’s just who she is.” Echoing her father’s words and actions, Shane disappears without saying goodbye. In a self-fulfilling philosophy, Shane proves to herself that she’s truly a rogue, unable to truly commit to one person, or

conform to society’s rituals - not just rituals of marriage or monogamy, but the hegemony of heterosexuality, traditional gender roles, and ‘acceptable’ gendered dress and presentation. The season suggests that her feelings of abandonment from her father, and her lack of a family caused her trust, intimacy, and commitment issues, culminating in her leaving Carmen at the altar.

Conclusion

Analysis of *The L Word* from some feminists in the lesbian community have made me question exactly how nuanced and transgressive the Shane character and the show as a whole are. In *Reading the L Word: Outing Contemporary Television*, a book that analyzes the first two seasons from a critical, queer perspective, authors Kim Akass and Janet McCabe argue that Shane is certainly not a butch and not even as masculine as she’s discussed by other characters in the show: “Shane’s masculinity is talked into being

via conversational cues, while her appearance, except for the fact that she always wears pants, does not differ radically from her circle of friends” (Akass, 165). I find that there’s far more to Shane’s masculinity than her pants, and Akass and McCabe even acknowledge that in their next quote, but they speak to a truth that Shane’s only hypermasculine in the context of this hyper-fem group.

In terms of the spectrum of gender expression of real-life lesbians, she’s not as overwhelmingly masculine as Dana or Harry suggest that she is. Akass and McCabe believe that Shane doesn’t appear androgynous or butch enough to be realistically mistaken for a man:

As Shane, Moennig integrates some masculine was of speaking, gesturing and moving into her portrayal, but ultimately reads visually and contextually – as one of a circle of lesbian friends – as undeniably female. Although Shane’s androgyny is readable in the script, it lacks full believability on-screen in season one. This allows the show’s producers to have their cake and eat it too: they are able to successfully introduce the notion of a woman unintentionally being read or intentionally passing as male without visually alienating the squeamish viewers by rendering one of *The L Word*’s permanent characters as male in appearance, or worse, gender ambiguous. Relating this scripted androgyny to butch representations, Shane does not register explicitly butch signifiers but rather is implied as contextually butch when positioned alongside the other characters’ femme gender displays... [Regardless], the character does speak to current ideas about gender fluidity. Considering where Shane falls along a high femme to stone butch spectrum, it seems reasonable to label her as a ‘soft butch’ (Akass, 162).

Gender perception is obviously extremely subjective, but I think that Akass and McCabe rightfully question the believability of Shane’s androgyny. The authors, like others mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, seem to take *The L Word*’s lack of butches personally. But Shane doesn’t have to be a butch to fluidly combine masculine and feminine markers in a unique and meaningful way. Her confident erasure of many gender norms. Her role as the most masculine of the main cast makes her a target, perhaps unfairly, of continued criticism that *The L Word* slights butch identities.

Akass and McCabe also suggests that the conflation of Shane's masculinity and promiscuity is problematic: "*The L Word* seems to make a one-to-one correspondence between more masculine self-expression and unattached sex with multiple partners, a comparison that veers toward pop-psychology-based essentialism" (162). They go on to argue that Shane's 'player' masculinity is only tempered by the gentle, monogamous, feminine connection she develops with Carmen. They believe that this plot shift progressively suggests the complexity of gender identity, but implies that female masculinity must be tamed by a more traditional femininity, instead of embracing the potential that "alternative masculinities can be radical in their own right." (Akass, 164). I'm not sure if I find these arguments valid, but they're certainly provocative. I find that Shane's binary-rejecting and label-rejecting attitude to be liberating and progressive, though I wish that the show would do more with her class and gender instead of focusing mostly on her sexuality and relationships. But that's my bias as someone who's analyzing her gender and looking for as much richly gendered material as possible. Akass and McCabe seem to have a bias about how female masculinity, promiscuity, and butchness *should* and shouldn't be depicted, proving that no one representation can satisfy the ideological desires of an entire minority community.

Malinda Lo did a fascinating critique of the gender and class politics of the show in 2006, calling out the problems of the scene where Shane defends Moira/Max at the fancy dinner when she rejects the 'butch' and 'femme' labels:

Shane essentially contradicts herself in these statements, advocating a world free of labels while simultaneously insisting that people should be allowed to be who they are, eliding the fact that people often *want* to take on identities such as "butch" or "femme." Speaking those words in a positive light and identifying on a personal level with those identities are ways that individuals act on a daily basis to resist gender norms (Lo, par. 15).

Shane rejects labels for herself, but she shouldn't necessarily eliminate labels for all people in the queer community. Moira self-selected the label *butch* and seemed to take great pride in it. Shane's take-down of the trappings of labels might actually speak to the show's resistance to include butch women:

Historically in lesbian communities, butch lesbians have typically been working-class women, partially because they were only able to hold down jobs usually reserved for men due to their physical appearance. Upper class lesbians, in contrast, have historically been feminine in appearance, allowing them to blend in with heterosexual society. On *The L Word*, these women are clearly upper class or are at least aping an upper-class existence, and their discomfort with difference in gender expression is also a discomfort with class difference (Lo, par. 13).

Though Shane is the most masculine of the bunch, and has a poor class background, the complex, historical aspects of 'bitches' in the lesbian community are not engaged with on-screen, essentially alienating an entire demographic of the lesbian experience out of the show. Shane and Max, therefore, receive the majority of the directed frustration of viewers who decry the lack of the type of butch representation that they crave to see in the series. Interestingly, in the late 1970s, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force declared that positive lesbian representations cannot be butch or promiscuous because that would reinforce negative stereotypes about lesbians (Montgomery, 1989). In that way, Shane's representation, no matter how arguably butch she is or not, shows a progression away from the fearful, limited constraints of the NGTF of the past. There's a way to incorporate gender non-conformity and promiscuity into lesbian and gay representations without rendering the character as a one-dimensional stereotype as seen with Shane and with Lafayette in chapter two.

In the show's narrative, Shane's non-binary dress and expression exist secondary to her love life and career, but remain significant. Her queer, at times transgressive

presentation of the self, feels unique - especially for television. Shane never explains her internal gender identity, but the committed acting by Kathering Moennig and the nuance of the writing suggest that she experiences her womanhood in an atypically masculine way. She rejects being confused with a man, and she prefers female pronouns.

Simultaneously though, she repels the cultural norms of femininity, shown by her anxiety over the quinceañera dress and her often androgynous clothing and hair. Shane's gender bending is framed as assertive and personally expressive, not as a comic joke, something to be feared, or something to be pitied.

CHAPTER TWO: LAFAYETTE – *TRUE BLOOD* (HBO)



The HBO series *True Blood* began in 2008 as an adaptation of Charlaine Harris' southern gothic series of novels known collectively as *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*. It quickly grew into an immensely popular pay-cable series, averaging between four and five million viewers on the original broadcast of each episode from season 2 onwards, with as many as four times that figure when estimated across all viewing platforms (Seidman, par. 2). The show's fans, 'Truebies,' as the more dedicated followers might call themselves, tune in to see supernatural mayhem wreak havoc on the sexy inhabitants of the fictional rural town of Bon Temps, Louisiana. Most of the characters in the gigantic, ensemble cast are humans or vampires, but as the series progresses, werewolves, witches, and fairies are introduced into the complex web of intersecting plotlines. Most absurdly and exotically, a Maenad (a Bacchus-creating hypnotizing monster from Greek mythology), an Ifrit (a fire-demon out

of Arabic folklore) and a group of inbred, trailer-trash 'were-panthers' (exactly what it sounds like) terrorize a few characters in some of the stranger and less effective B and C storylines.

The main storyline; however, begins with Anna Paquin's Sookie Stackhouse, a telepathic, virginal waitress at the show's central location of Merlotte's Bar and Grill, which is owned by Sam Merlotte. Sam is a close friend of Sookie's but harbors romantic feelings toward her. Sookie's fiercely outspoken best friend Tara and her sassy, lovable, gay cousin Lafayette are employed at the restaurant as well. Sookie's boyishly-handsome playboy brother Jason works on a road crew in town. The two are close to each other and their grandmother 'gran' because their parents died in a car accident when they were children. The mundane lives of the human cast are changed forever when Bill Compton, a vampire and Civil War veteran, enters Merlotte's. For the first time, Sookie encounters a person whose mind she cannot read, and the mystery and relief of this prospect makes her instantly attracted to him. Bill opens Sookie and the others up to an entire community of 'vamps,' most importantly, the powerful Viking Eric and the sardonic Pam. Lafayette, Eric, and Pam provide most of the humor for the show, which is often campy and self-deprecating. The moments of sarcasm and wit help the show revel in its own ridiculousness to avoid an overly self-serious tone.

The series and books differ from most vampire narratives in that vampires are not a secret, hidden order anymore in this story world. They have publically 'come out of the coffin,' one of many plot points that serve as a larger LGBT rights/human rights allegory. The phrase 'God Hates Fangs' comes up as another instance of direct satire, as political pundits argue on TV about how peacefully co-exist (or not co-exist) with vampires.

Vampires no longer need to feed on humans to survive because a synthetic blood drink called True Blood has been invented. Additionally, thousands of human ‘fang bangers’ have become enamored with vampires and willingly give some blood in exchange for the intense, undead sex that often comes with it.

Vampires and fang bangers are typically found in vampire bars, potentially analogous to gay bars, attracting those looking for an alternative night-life experience. Most vampires accept male or female humans for blood and have similar polyamorous preference for sexual gratification. Their race seems to be more sexually ‘evolved’ in terms of their open partnering with both sexes. The risk that humans take to be with vampires, who could kill them in an instant, could be compared to the potential for HIV in unprotected, promiscuous sex. There’s even a blood virus called ‘Hepatitis V’ that humans can carry which is extremely harmful to vampires. Show creator Alan Ball, the openly gay writer of *American Beauty* and creator of *Six Feet Under*, publically dismisses these obvious parallels:

To look at these vampires on the show as metaphors for gays and lesbians is so simple and so easy, that it’s kind of lazy...If you get really serious about it, well, then the show could be seen to be very homophobic because vampires are dangerous: They kill, they’re amoral (qtd. in Shen, par. 7).

Regardless of Ball’s rejection of a one-to-one extended metaphor between his TV vampires and real life gays, GLAAD awarded True Blood the most LGBT inclusive show in 2010. The show had six regular LGBT characters at the time, 1% of all on U.S. television (Loritiz, par 2).

Somehow even more so that traditional vampire media, *True Blood* glorifies a twisted combination of sex and violence, expressed most viscerally in this September 2010 *Rolling Stone* cover show below. Unlike other pay cable shows like *Game of*

Thrones, *True Blood* has a very balanced mixture of male and female nudity, and of gay and straight sex scenes. The scenes vary in nature from erotic and consensual, to dream sequences, to forceful vampire on human rape, often via the mind control power of ‘glamouring,’ to straight-up freakish and violent, like when Bill literally turns the head of his vampire lover around while penetrating her.



The moments of gay male intimacy have turned off some straight male viewers, like this entitled, homophobic: “This season I think I’ve sat through more gay sex scenes than straight ones, the least they could do is throw some girls together” (XSShadow, par. 1) Most famously, Philadelphia Eagles player Todd Herremans tweeted, “Caught up on *True Blood* last week. Not a fan of how they get u hooked with the 1st 2 seasons then bring on a barrage of homosexuality” (qtd. in Nededog, par. 2). Herremans publically apologized for the tweet after criticisms of homophobia and bigotry. Despite the conflicting criticisms that the show is either “too gay” or potentially “anti-gay” through the vampire rights/gay rights allegory (Newitz, par. 6), one character seems to be a fan favorite from straight and queer viewers alike: Lafayette Reynolds. The viewers and creators became so enamored with the character, that the show producers adapted his

character to live past season 1, whereas he died at the end of the first book of Harris' series, the literary basis for the first season. While Lafayette is a double minority as a black, gay man in the rural Deep South, he unashamedly presents himself as overtly queer in his gender expression. As of writing this, the show is nearing its final, seventh season, but nearly all of the most fascinating scenes for Lafayette's gender analysis occur in season 1.

Lafayette is first introduced in the pilot as a cook at Merlotte's. Panning over from the grill, we see two hands shake spices onto a burger patty on a frying pan. The cook wears a bling-y gold watch, has thick muscular arms, wears a white apron over a red and black tank top, and adorns himself with



earrings and a gray hair wrap. He sashays gracefully along with the motion of the spice shaking. Sookie approaches his counter, and he answers her request with a deep and masculine "got it." He looks up at her with a fierce gaze and furrows his brow in surprise, saying in a higher, feminine register, "Ooh, Sookie! Chicka-chicka-*brown-rown*. You look like a *porn* star with that tan and that pink *lip, stick*, you gotta date?" He emphasizes every few words cattily, but he's spirited in his banter, not a bully. The poetic cadence of his voice sounds almost sing-songy.

As he steps into the overhead light in front of him, it exposes his blue eye make-up and lipstick, then accentuates the musculature of upper body with gorgeous specular highlights on his dark complexion. His appearance is both intensely male (in his tall, thick body) and intensely female in his clothes, make-up, and most importantly, his diva gestures and voice. The conservative Sookie, taken aback, replies, “No, when I wear make-up I get bigger tips.” Lafayette roars with laughter, then suddenly snaps back into a sexy, restrained, oratorical voice declaring, “Yes girl, dat’s it. These damn rednecks are suckas for packaging,” flaunting his body with a shoulder twist and a lip pout over the word “packaging.” His classification of ‘these rednecks’ marks a separation between himself and the others in the town, presumably because of their race. Lafayette clearly stands apart from the crowd not just in skin color, but in his flashy affectations as well. The unexpected dissonance between his hypermasculine sex, and his hyperfeminine *joie di vivre* makes the character instantly enticing and unique. The added cultural context of a blue collar ‘man’s man’ society that enforces macho behaviors for men makes Lafayette’s avoidance of these customs jarringly bold.

The conversation evolves as Arlene, another waitress walks up. Sookie explains that she has to play dumb with the customers, or they seem scared of her. Lafayette points out that “They ain’t scared a’ you, honey child! They scared a what’s between your legs.”



Figure 89

He does a suggestive dance over the word “legs,” which he stretches to about three syllables with his Cajun/creole infused speech pattern. Sookie scolds him for his

vulgarity, while Arlene laughs adding, “Do you even know what’s between a woman’s legs, Lafayette?” He proclaims with conviction, “I know every man whether straight, gay, or George motha-fuckin’ Bush is TERRIFIED, of the *pus-sy*.” He gestures theatrically over each key word, truly believing that all men are intimidated by the female body. Arlene disagrees with his assertion, responding with a mixture of homophobia and playfulness, “Listen, not everybody is gay! Not everybody wants to have sex with you!” He scoffs and bites back: “Oh you would be surprised, Arlene, people *you* know [he wistfully flutters his hand across the air between them]. That’s all I’m sayin.’” He’s suggesting that he’s slept with several closeted men in the community. By contrast, Lafayette may be one of the *least* closeted gay men in the entire state of Louisiana.

Dawn, another waitress comes up and adds, “Well I don’t want to have sex with you!” Lafayette counters quipping, “You don’t know what you’re missing, I got six gears on these hips!” as he begins obscenely thrusting a drawer, the silverware clanging loudly. Dawn jokingly moans along with him, slapping her ass and flaunting her body, trying to



Figure 90

match Lafayette’s outrageous level of overt sexual display. The prudish Sookie, who’s a virgin, becomes increasingly uncomfortable throughout the exchange of workplace repartee.

On her way back out onto the restaurant floor, Arlene gestures her breasts toward Lafayette goading, “I got your peaches and cream, baby” he turns and counters, grinding in place daring, “I give you a little cocoa, cocoa!” His choice of the word “cocoa,” along

with his wildly confident effeminate gestures, prove in this short introductory scene that Lafayette loves being a gay man of color and wants everyone to know it. Each sassy movement he performs defies the gendered expectation of his hypermasculine body. Lafayette's delivery is irresistibly hilarious, but his voice and commanding gaze keeps him from becoming an object of ridicule. He initiates most of his spicy dialogue, and he always has the last word in the banter. He's a main character with a major role in plotlines, not a queer clown character that is mocked for cheap laughs. His gigantic, fresh personality makes him an instant scene-stealer throughout the show.



Later in the pilot, we see that Lafayette works on the road crew in town as well. Out of practicality, and potentially because of the hypermasculine environment, he's wearing jeans, a t-shirt, and an orange construction vest, but he keeps the flowing head wrap and earrings, marking himself as differently gendered, an intriguing fusion of butch and femme. In another scene in the pilot, he interacts with his cousin Tara for the first time. He's wearing a tight fitting shirt with extra-short sleeves and a matching head wrap



Figure 92



Figure 93



Figure 94



Figure 95



Figure 96



Figure 97

that flows down over his back, mimicking long hair. In the middle of a sentence, he stops and checks out the bar's only patron, an obese white man in overalls, an archetypical hillbilly. The gender and racial power reversal of a queer black man eyeing a large white man and saying, "Ooh" in the deepest South makes for rich social commentary. Twenty or thirty years ago, this gesture would be unthinkable. Perhaps it's still unthinkable in present-day Louisiana, but Lafayette's character seems to have been written to defy all traditions of power and privilege. The man looks away from Lafayette's flirtatious gaze, ceding the power of the scene to Lafayette.

Tara and Lafayette talk about the attractive womanizer Jason, and Lafayette remarks, "That boy is sex on a stick!" while making a squatting motion as if to 'ride' Jason's 'stick.' A disgusted reaction shot from the hillbilly immediately follows, the man looking at Lafayette like he's from another planet. Without missing a beat or taking a breath, Lafayette slides over the counter toward him with a sexy "How you doin'?" Tara laughs at the hillbilly's discomfort, telling Lafayette, "Look at you, scaring that white boy." Lafayette continues: "Ain't nobody scarin' him. He too big to be scared. I likes a big man. Look at that belly. I'd dance all over it. You can be my Santy Claus." He saunters away from the bar and it's revealed that he's actually wearing a large denim kilt with metal studs in it, a glitzy belt holding it at his waist.

In the Jim Crow era, Lafayette would likely be beaten, jailed, or killed for talking to a white man that way or 'cross-dressing' in a skirt. In today's world, Lafayette's comments would obviously be considered inappropriate for the workplace at best and sexual harassment at worst. But in the free-wheeling, frisky story-world of *True Blood*, Lafayette comes across as a comedic hero, tromping around as a fearless person of color,

challenging gender norms with reckless abandon, and Tara and most of the other characters play along with his infectious optimism, encouraging the viewer to do the same.

In episode 2, Lafayette presents himself as much more butch at a block party with his friends in the black community. In an



outfit consisting of a black t-shirt studded with rhinestones and a black flat brimmed baseball cap that says “hustler” on it, he smokes a cigarillo. Both the cigar and the hat are intensely masculine identifiers. He’s not wearing any make-up and has toned down the sass a few levels. Tara points out to another partygoer that she’s “watching her fool cousin trying to hit on the straightest man here.” Lafayette is then shown grinding on a disinterested man, a bit of his red dew rag visible under his hat. Maybe Lafayette feels fluid in his gender, dressing as more butch or fem depending on how he feels each day. And/or maybe he likes to play up the cross-dressing at Merlotte’s because he has fun making the white customers uncomfortable.

He doesn’t explain how he thinks of his gender on the inside, but it’s obvious that Lafayette feels extremely self-confident, even arrogant in his personal expression. Later in the episode, he reassures Sookie, “Don’t let nothin’ get you down. It’s the only way to live.” He beams at her lovingly, fanning himself and popping his upper body to the side

Figure 99



dramatically, sincerely following his own advice. Lafayette has a lot of love to give, both to himself and to others, sometimes freely, and sometimes as revealed later, only if the price is right.

When Tara arrives at

Lafayette's trailer with a gash on her head, he calms her down, offering this hilarious medical advice: "Naw, you just need to put some peroxide on that, then take two vicodin, with a BIG glass of red wine, then smoke some BADass ganja, baby. And by the time you wake up...UHNN! All heal." The eccentricity in his speech and mannerisms is matched by the many gaudy patterns and furnishings seen around his apartment. He has leopard print pillows and carpet against hexagonal patterned wallpaper, a striped char, a turquoise shrine to Buddha and Jesus, all set against his literally flaming pajama pants.

Figure 100



The clashing design elements somehow feel right together, much like Lafayette's distinctive mosaic of male sex, fluid gender expression, and openly gay orientation. The smart art direction of his home perfectly matches his character.

Sitting on his couch comforting Tara, the two share a joint. He twirls the length of his dew rag, as if it were his own flowing locks, re-tooling the masculine



African American signifier into an effeminate one. Suddenly an older white man comes out of the bedroom, tucking his shirt in and looking at Tara with fear and surprise. He won't give his real name and says to Lafayette, "I left the uh... on the uh..." suggesting a drug and/or sex transaction. The man leaves and Lafayette says, "That was a state senator." Surprised, Tara asks, "So you're a prostitute now?" "I'm an entrepreneur," Lafayette corrects. The show doesn't treat Lafayette's sex work or drug dealing with disdain by cueing insidious music or seedy visuals along with the acts. His illegal, non-violent activities simply are the way they are. The risk that he takes, coupled with the arguably morally deviant behavior that he's engaged in, does paint Lafayette as a more ethically complex individual. His choices could potentially land him in serious physical or legal danger, underscoring what he reveals to be his desire to leave the low quality of life that he finds in Bon Temps. He seems unafraid of and unconcerned with these potential consequences.

In fact, Lafayette has a wonderfully optimistic attitude. When he briefly whines to Tara about his back-breaking job on the road crew, he follows it by shaking his hips, saying, “But I ain’t complaining baby, no I ain’t, cause it gives me this bod’, UHNN! And this bod’ is gonna be my fuckin’ tickETTE...outta here.” He continues to emphasize syllables in a dramatic manner, and adds little UHNNs reminiscent of a lovable, sassy black woman, but to me, they never feel false, stereotyped, or anything like minstrelsy. He has four jobs as a line cook, a road worker, a drug dealer, and a prostitute, all in hopes of saving up to leave Bon Temps. As the season continues, it becomes clear that the four

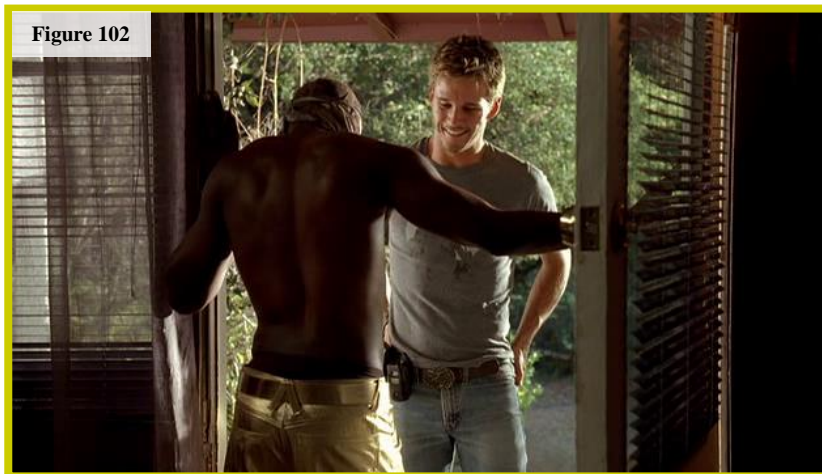


Figure 102

jobs allow him to express different aspects of his complex gender.

Jason comes to Lafayette’s trailer looking to buy

something, and Lafayette flirtatiously greets him at his door, “Well hello! [looks down Jason’s body] Hot-ness.” Jason doesn’t react with discomfort, instead, he enthusiastically remarks that Lafayette’s wearing gold pants. Lafayette looks down over his bare chest and examines the pants without comment. Jason sheepishly admits that he wants Viagra, and Lafayette laughs, telling him to get it in the drug store because he only sells illegal stuff. The typically virile and promiscuous Jason was unable to sexually perform a few nights earlier, and it seriously wounded his fragile pride.

The masculinities of the two characters are interesting to compare. Lafayette experiments with his gender, unafraid of any insult, confusion, or disgust from others, while Jason puts on a show of cocky, traditional hypermasculinity. In actuality, Jason's quite boyish and insecure, his ego easily defeated. Lafayette is entirely genuine and content about himself, even in a culture around him that rewards strict, traditional binary gender and heterosexuality. Instead of Viagra, Lafayette recommends something more expensive and unique, "V," vampire blood. In the intricate lore of *True Blood*, vampires have blood as well. It causes magical effects when humans consume it. They feel



euphoric and have beautiful visions. They also become extremely aroused and men can, according to Lafayette, "Get it up, keep it up, and have the best sex you have ever had." Jason is sold on the idea, eyeing the erect, phallic vile with anticipation (figure 103). He wants to use it immediately but needs

until the afternoon to get money together. Lafayette pulls on Jason's arm when he gets up to leave and insists in a deep voice that he doesn't have a layaway program. Standing

over Jason in a low angle shot he struts his enormous, shirtless upper body formidably (figure 104). Though he may act like a gentle woman at times, he's a seriously intimidating force when it comes to enforcing his business. He can turn up or down the muscle in an instant, consciously playing to the strengths of his masculinities and femininities for not just expressive purposes, but practical ones as well.

Lafayette suggests that Jason can dance on camera for his profitable gay video website (his fifth job!) in exchange for the advance on the money. In only his whitey-tighties, a nervous Jason becomes the object of Lafayette's gaze, Lafayette's camera's gaze (figure 107), and of course, the gaze of the audience themselves.

Lafayette gives him a Laura Bush mask to wear over his face so that his identity remains a secret, effectively feminizing and emasculating his lean, muscular



Figure 105



Figure 106



Figure 107



Figure 108

body. He has him ironically dance over a techno song with the repeated chorus “I like to do manly things.” Lafayette cat-calls to him during the sexy-dance, exclaiming, “Ooh, lover, you gonna make me clutch my pearls!” Lafayette provides much of the humor for the show, but not at the expense of his character’s dignity, the way that Jason does in this scene. Lafayette is self-assured, smart, and resourceful; he’s a pragmatist. Yet he takes a major risk selling drugs, especially V: if vampires catch a human singling their sacred essence, it’s a death sentence.

Lafayette’s most crucial and memorable scene in the entire series occurs in episode 5 at Merlotte’s. Arlene comes to his counter, complaining of a group of rude, drunk rednecks that she’s serving who are visible in the background. Lafayette is in full view of the rednecks’ booth. Peeking over at the booth of the laughing men, he coaxes the truth out of Arlene: one of the men joked to her that “the burger might have AIDS.” They probably noticed his flamboyant sparkly rolled head-wrap, thick makeup, and large earrings, or were simply aware of him as the openly gay cook. The country rock song “I Play Chicken with the Train” by Cowboy Troy, an African American country rapper, diegetically plays in the background, the lyric “oh no, oh here we go” heard as Lafayette freezes with the reaction to the news. The suspense and anticipation is palpable. With his gaze fixed on the rednecks, he pulls off his earrings and apron in one smooth motion. He grabs a burger and approaches their booth (see following pages, and watch the entire scene at <http://tinyurl.com/6kpzu4>).

Figure 109



Figure 110



Figure 111



Figure 112



Figure 113



Figure 114



Figure 115



Towering over their table in a low-angle shot, with his beefy arms exposed in a black tank top, he asks gently, “Skew me, who ordered the hamburger...with AIDS?” The men snicker, and the blond man on the left clarifies, “I ordered the hamburger deluxe,” essentially exposing himself as the one who made the homophobic comment. Lafayette then launches into an enthralling gay rights rant and personal verification: “In this restaurant, burgers come with lettuce, tomato, pickles, mayo, and AIDS! DO ANYBODY GOTTA PROBLEM WITH THAT?” He screams this last part, bringing the entire restaurant to a halt. The redneck responds angrily, “Yeah, I’m an American and I gotta say in who makes my food.” Lafayette continues:

Figure 116



Figure 117

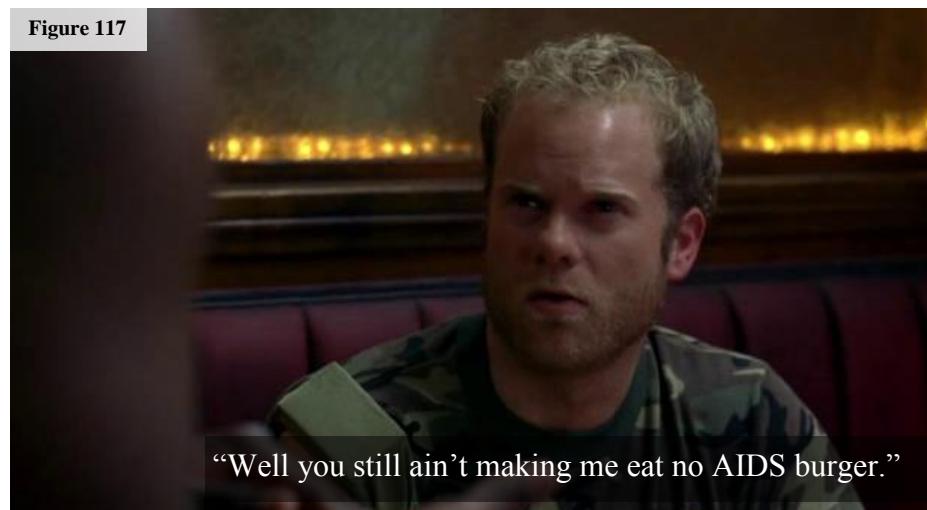


Figure 118



“Well, all you gotta do is say ‘hold the AIDS’ ‘Here...’”

Lafayette licks the bun then smashes it into the blond bigots face. The three men all try to stand and attack him, but Lafayette quickly hits them all back into their seats. The customers gasp in surprise. He screams again in an even deeper and more authoritatively masculine voice, “Bitch, you come into my house, you gonna eat my food THE WAY I FUCKIN’ MAKE IT! Do you understand me?” His voice is shockingly loud and macho, quickly flipping from docile to frighteningly thuggish. He dumps the food in the petrified redneck’s lap, and before turning to leave for the kitchen, he adds with a girlish hand gesture, “Tip yo’ waitress,” his cool and collected diva essence returned.

Figure 119



Figure 120



Figure 121



Jason, who's sitting nearby, claps and gives Lafayette a hi-five, his one ally in a room full of those indifferent or opposed to him.

Interestingly, Jason, Sookie, Sam, and Tara (and later in the show, vampires Bill, Eric, and Pam) all treat Lafayette's queerness with respect or without comment, never belittling his



identity, and encouraging the viewer to do the same. Despite the conservative, rural setting, the AIDS burger scene marks the first time that Lafayette's way of being is directly challenged. Ball normalizes Lafayette's behaviors and appearance through the reactions of the other characters in the show to avoid obsessing over Lafayette's presentation as a socially transgressive act. As a result, viewers can begin to psychologically normalize Lafayette's character as well, imagining a real-world environment as tolerant of gender queerness as the one presented by *True Blood's* main cast.

Lafayette refuses to be made an object of these strangers' ridicule. He *actively chooses* to go over to confront and correct the homophobic remarks, educating the men and the rest of the restaurant, that gay people exist in every job and it's time to get used to it. Since gays are involved in all aspects of society now, by the redneck's misguided logic, "everything on your goddamn table got AIDS." The entitled redneck speaks as if

he has a 'right' to eat food that's only cooked by straight, traditionally gendered people. Even though he wears blue eye shadow and a sparkly headdress, he physically dominates the drunk men with his strong body and skilled moves. Being as openly non-binary in the not-so-tolerant environment of Bon Temps, he rightly learned how to defend himself. In a scholarly analysis of the sequence, Xavier Reyes remarks, "This scene undoes gender taxonomies by undermining and problematizing the boundaries between masculine and feminine codes of received behavior through a character who easily encapsulates and confuses both" (Reyes, 58). It's a keen observation that Lafayette simultaneously reinforces and deconstructs both male and female genders. The way I read the scene, Lafayette uses his fluidity to his advantage, first attempting a gentle, feminine approach, then when that fails, he turns up the masculinity to take down the ignorant men who insulted him. Had he left the situation alone, it may have encouraged these men and other patrons of the small-town bar to create a tradition of heckling Lafayette. He instead put a stop to it before it started.

Lafayette actually re-encounters the blond redneck in the season 2 premiere. Lafayette is kidnapped by vampires and chained in the dungeon-like basement of Fangtasia as punishment for selling V. The blond man gets chained up next to him for killing a group of vampires, and he confesses all of the things he regrets about his life, trying to figure out why he deserves the punishment he now endures. The man reveals that his name is Royce, yet he doesn't state that he regretted insulting Lafayette. Royce asks Lafayette what he regrets, and Lafayette sarcastically replies, "I got in trouble with my boss once for punching out three stupid rednecks at the bar."

Royce laughs, "Do you regret that?"

Lafayette: “Hell no, you fuckin’ deserved it.”

Royce: “I’m sorry I hassled you for being gay. I was an asshole about it.”

Lafayette: “Well at least I got through to you.”

Though Lafayette’s methods of retaliation are extreme, they’re apparently effective.

Royce frames his comment as an insult “for being gay,” but I wonder if Royce would have called Lafayette out in the same way if Lafayette was traditionally masculine in his presentation and expression. I don’t think he would have. The crossing and blurring of gender lines can be much more socially disruptive than being attracted to the same sex. Royce might only be apologizing because of the extreme circumstances that they’re in, but he apologized nonetheless. Royce, and the other characters in the bar that night, are unlikely to ever forget Lafayette’s physical and ideological victory.

While Lafayette typically behaves melodramatically, punctuated by moments of defiant aggression, he can also be a deeply empathetic listener and comforting friend. Back in season 1, after Sookie’s grandmother is shockingly murdered, Sookie has a meltdown at the wake held at her house. Tara guides her upstairs to console her, away from the others, and on her way up the stairs Tara says to a concerned Sam, “Just give us a little girl time. Come on Lafayette!” Tara is, of course, considering Lafayette as ‘one of the girls,’ and Lafayette doesn’t seem to object. He simply listens and offers support while Tara talks out Sookie’s emotions and psychology with her. The personality traits of nurturing and concern are traditionally associated with women, but those are character attributes that should define any great friend. Sookie explains that she can’t relax or think straight and just wants to sleep. Lafayette lovingly says, “Your wish is my command!” offering her a Valium. While much of Lafayette’s advice involves drugs or alcohol, he’s

still looking out for the friends around him. He communicates best with women, who don't seem to be threatened or uncomfortable with his radical queerness. Though much of his theatricality seems showy, he's a genuinely caring, tender, and reliable companion, unlike so many of the scheming and selfish characters on the soapy show.

He encourages the fragile Sookie again in season 1 episode 7. Sookie has sex for the first time, and it's with Bill, who consensually bites her during the encounter. Sookie feels elated, but Arlene, Jason, and most of the people close to her are horrified to see the bite marks on her neck. She looks to Lafayette for a reaction instead. Lafayette seems uneasy; he remarks, "I was always too scared to let him bite me. So I just think that when there's blood involved, a line's been crossed." Sookie doesn't miss a beat, triumphantly acknowledging that "I definitely crossed a line. But I'm glad I did." Lafayette is

impressed with Sookie's bravado, "Well go on hooker with your badass. Good for you! It ain't possible to live unless you're crossing someone else's line." Sookie cracks a satisfied smile and walks back toward the dining room. The real world taboo of gay sex does not exactly compare

Figure 123



Figure 124



to the fictitious taboo of vampire-human sex, which is yet another example of why Alan Ball and others in the gay community are uncomfortable with a one-to-one vampire/gay correlation. Regardless of the queer allegories that are or are not at play, Sookie and Lafayette are both experiencing what it feels like to be a social outlaw in a rigidly traditional sexual environment. Lafayette proudly confirms that he's very aware of the hegemony that he defies, but he finds the crossings of gender and sexuality to be liberating and cathartic, not shameful or alienating. Lafayette acts genuine and honest about his identity, but as episode 10 makes clear, he despises the falseness and hypocrisy seen in many others.

In a hysterical scene, Lafayette watches an old black-and-white romance film on TV, *The Bad and the Beautiful* (Vincent Minnelli, 1952), starring Lana Turner and Kirk Douglas. Sitting shirtless and waxing his chest alone in his trailer, he comments over the all-white movie, re-appropriating it with black and campy flair. Turner and Douglas embrace melodramatically on screen, when another seductive woman appears over them. Lafayette comments, "Uh oh, Georgia, your replacement just showed up!" He says one of the lines along with her, then changes one of Douglas' lines to "Bitch, I love you, you scandalous WHORE!" He encourages the mistress saying, "Take yo' man. Take his ass!" The fifteen second sequence doesn't serve the plot in anyway, but it illustrates that Lafayette isn't just posturing a false diva personality when others are around, this is really his true self. He can enjoy the limited viewpoint of a 50's Caucasian film by making it his own, the same way that he endures the white redneck culture of Merlotte's by embracing his big, black, beautiful, and gay self. While he's watching the film, there's a knock on his door and the supposed politician customer from before returns.



Lafayette flirts with him, thinking he wants sex, but the man wants V instead. Lafayette is sold out, much to the disappointment of the customer. The politician is dressed in a suit with an American flag pin on it, and he wanted the V because of stage fright for a speech he is to give that night. Lafayette moves to go down on him, certain that oral sex will help his confidence. The man excitedly follows Lafayette into the bedroom pleading, “Don’t mess up my clothes!”

In the next episode, Lafayette sees the highlights of the man’s speech on the news. His name and title is revealed to be State Senator David Finch. He’s going on an ultra-conservative diatribe, decrying the evils of immigrants, vampires, and gays to a supportive audience. He says of vampires, “Their very blood turns our children into addicts, drug dealers, and homosexuals. None of these vampires or vampire-loving deviants deserve any rights at all!” Lafayette screams back at the TV, “You’s a lyin’ ass motha fucka! Two-faced sum bitch!” Lafayette calms himself, stroking his hair wrap as a relaxation technique. He hears that the senator will be publically appearing nearby that night and makes a note to follow up with him.



Figure 127



Lafayette arrives at the meet-and-greet press event as the only person of color in the room. Completely bald, wearing a suit, and no make-up, he pushes his way into talking with Finch. He's essentially incognito as a straight, cis man, free of any queer identifiers. Finch looks terrified but tries to diffuse the situation by politely smiling and pretending that he's never met Lafayette before. Lafayette grabs his hand firmly and stares him down, instantly in complete control of the situation. He slyly tells him, "I am so happy and proud to shake the hand of someone with your values. Too often we're governed by criminals and hypocrites, don't you agree? I applaud the efforts that you've made against the poor and disenfranchised, like the vampires, and the gays." Finch is likely based off of real-life closeted gay politicians and religious leaders like Ken Mehlman, Larry Craig, and Ted Haggard, who all actively fought against gay rights as a source of their social, political, and economic power before they were outed as gay men themselves. Lafayette threatens to expose Finch, "You might want to be careful, ya hear?" Finch bitterly says, "Yes." As an openly gay man of color, Lafayette is one of

those ‘disenfranchised people,’ but because of the dirt he has on Finch, Lafayette now holds immense political power. Lafayette is not a gay rights or vampire rights activist, but Finch angered him deeply with his rampant and oppressive hypocrisy. Though private in nature compared to the ‘AIDS Burger’ incident, Lafayette shuts down bigotry again, refusing to let hatred and intolerance pass idly by.

Conclusion

Anita Sarkeesian, creator of the famous vlog *Feminist Frequency*, does not find Lafayette to be a unique queer voice:

Lafayette, oh, you know we all love him, He’s really dynamic and really interesting and funny, and he has definitely some choice lines, BUT he is every stereotype about black, queer men all rolled into one little pretty package and it constantly infuriates me (“Beyond *True Blood*’s Sensationalism”).

She expresses similar thoughts of blogger Tami of WhatTamiSaid in her article “*True Blood*: Tired Stereotypes”:

Tara’s cousin and support system Lafayette, played with two-snaps-up-in-a-circle-campiness by Nelsan Ellis, is a short order cook, who not only deals drugs, but is also a gay prostitute who runs his own porn site (Tami, par. 4).

I can see how a black man being a drug dealer is a well-known negative stereotype, but I don’t see how being a black queer man and being a prostitute or exposing yourself on a porn website were known clichés. While I agree that those three jobs are viewed as negative by those with the most cultural power to influence hegemony, I think that Ellis makes Lafayette a fresh creation, absorbing and twisting masculine and feminine traits into a unique gender salad. The writing stresses that Lafayette is a compassionate and kind-hearted individual who has dreams of his own. He’s not simply a sassy, gay cross-dresser or a hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold, he’s a fully developed character with a constellation of traits. Mike McCray, a critic who defends Lafayette, writes of Ellis,

“Probably the greatest sign of acceptance and respect was casting a man who could capture the balance between alpha male and sultry romantic instead of the caricature of homosexuality viewers have grown accustomed to” (McCray, par. 12). I agree that Lafayette’s unique gender expression is what makes his role as a gay man on television feel fresh and worthwhile.

Ellis is a straight man from Alabama, and he recorded men at gay clubs and channeled his mother and sisters for inspiration to play Lafayette (Hiltbrand, par. 7). He said that it took him a while to figure out how to make Lafayette work without being a stereotypical queen:

In the break down he was supposed to be almost drag queenish, but I didn’t really play that right coming in, even when I got the job. I didn’t really find Lafayette until the third or fourth episode because I certainly didn’t have him in the pilot. There were takes where I was playing with who he was and takes that I was doing it wrong—they just happened to pick takes that were consistent with who Alan Ball thought the character should be (“Nelsan Ellis Talks True Blood”).

Certainly by the time the AIDS burger scene comes about in episode 5, Ellis seems to know exactly what he’s doing. He said in an interview that “I have more makeup on than any of the females in the cast. Once they get me with the fake eyelashes and the eye makeup, I listen to some Rihanna and I’m there” (Hiltbrand, par. 15). Alan Ball originally planned to have Lafayette be a recurring character in season 1, then be killed in the finale like in the book. He was so impressed with Ellis’ performance that he wrote Lafayette to be in every episode of the first season, then survive and remain a main cast member throughout the show (Hiltbrand). He’s a queer force that can’t be stopped.

Later in the show, it’s revealed that Lafayette has supernatural powers of his own. He is a *medium*, a body which spirits can enter and inhabit to communicate their desires and carry out their actions from. On two separate occasions, female spirits take temporary

control over his body, their words spoken through his sassy, disembodied voice. The show creators' choice of Lafayette as a medium smartly matches his liberated mindset, spiritual openness, and gender fluidity, allowing him to become a literal vessel of an assortment of spirits across the gender spectrum.

Through the incredible performance by Nelsan Ellis and the compelling writing in the series, Lafayette defies the stereotypes of the sassy gay friend and becomes memorably unique. He's intensely passionate, fiercely outspoken, brutally honest, and daringly non-conventional in his gender expression and sexuality. Through his clothes, jewelry, make-up, speech, gestures, movements, and dialogue, he challenges the rural Louisiana culture of what it means to be a man. On a larger level, Alan Ball, Nelsan Ellis, and the writers and directors of *True Blood* encourage viewers to reconsider the crossing of gender lines as an expressive and powerful act, not a deviant behavior deserving of mockery, fear, or pity, as Miller laid out for transsexuals in cinema. Lafayette aligns himself with the audience in a more empathetic way, since we see him celebrate his gay, non-binary identity in his own words, from his own point of view.

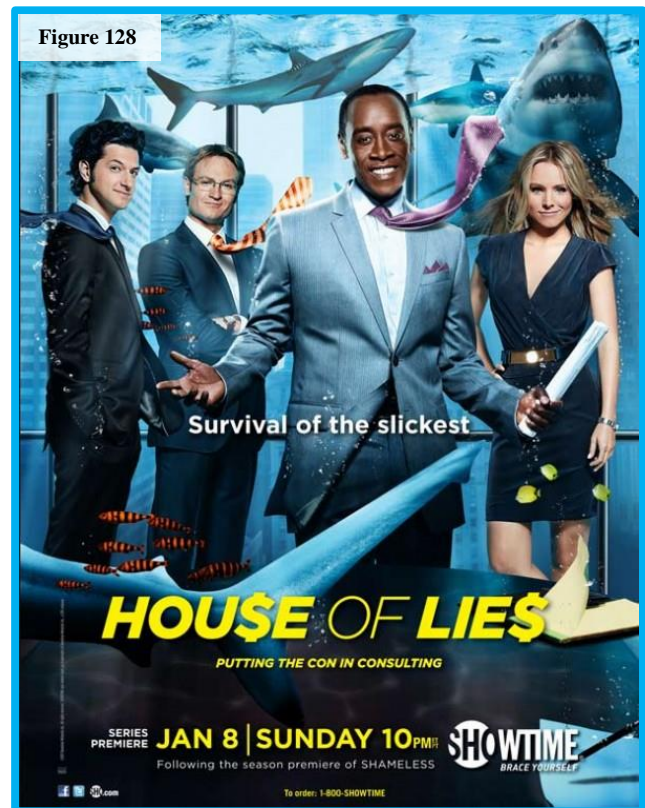
Like most trans characters; however, the focus of Lafayette's gender deals with the external presentation and expression, rarely directly addressing how he feels inside about his internal gender identity. Through his great advice "Don't let nothin' get you down. It's the only way to live," and "It ain't possible to live unless you crossin' someone else's line," a viewer can see that genuine self-expression and optimism are highly valued by Lafayette. It's obvious that he enjoys to wear feminine adornments while commanding the room and the conversation like a diva, but it's not as clear what motivates this behavior. Is this done for erotic reasons? To deal with boredom and

outsider status? Or is this his truest self? I'm captivated his charms, so I would say the latter, and the *Bold and Beautiful* scene makes the strongest argument for it. Lafayette's external fluidity set against his deeply passionate and loving internal personality brings his character closer to a place of empathy than almost any trans character on television.

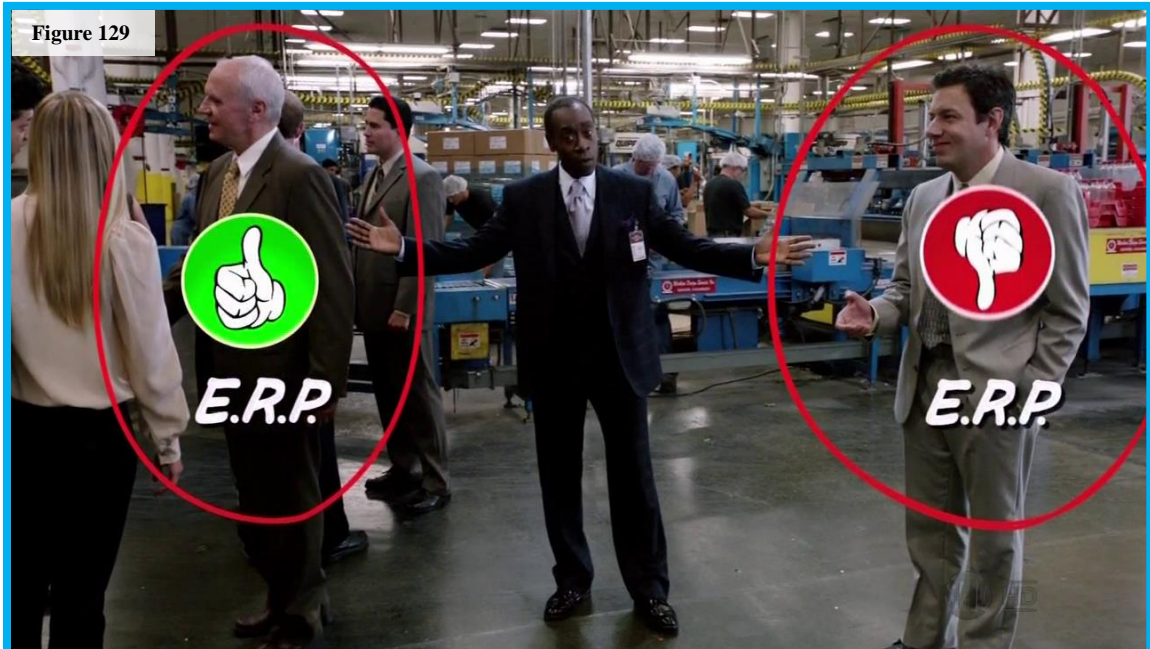
CHAPTER THREE: ROSCOE KAAAN – *HOUSE OF LIES* (Showtime)

Based on the book *House of Lies: How Management Consultants Steal Your Watch and Then Tell You the Time* written by former consultant Martin Kihn, Showtime's original series *House of Lies* stars Don Cheadle as Marty Kaan, a divorced corporate consultant who lives with his father Jeremiah and his child Roscoe. Each episode of the half-hour comedy-drama centers on a different corporate management 'case,' a financial or image problem that a company poses.

Marty's team then attempts to 'solve' that problem at massive personal profit. The team, which Marty refers to as a 'pod' consists of Jeannie (Kristen Bell), with whom he has a will-they-or-won't-they, pseudo-romantic relationship; Clyde, the goofball, ass-kissing wild-card; and Doug, the nerdy and awkward numbers-man who can't keep up with the witty banter among the others in the group. The cases often lead the pod into absurd, lewd sexual escapades, depicted with expected amounts of explicit, pay-cable nudity and kinkiness.



Most of Marty's job revolves around spin and empty rhetoric. Each episode the team flies to a different city, bullshitting clients into believing that their PR team is a necessity to sustain the client's business. In hyper-stylized digitally-manipulated sequences, Marty will freeze everything in the scene except himself, and then walk around their stationary bodies, addressing the audience directly and using drawings and



graphics to explain his sleazy business tactics. These fourth-wall-breaking scenes most directly emphasize the show's themes of greed and deception, becoming a direct indictment of the public relations industry and corporate one-percenter culture. The outrageous and raunchy satire and humor found in the main narrative is sharply contrasted by the rich drama of the B-storyline, the poignant and unique family dynamic between Marty, his father, and his adolescent child Roscoe. Roscoe is experimenting with non-binary gender presentation and expression, which causes conflict among the three parental figures: Marty, Marty's mentally unstable ex-wife Monica, and Marty's father Jeremiah. Although the characters in the show use male pronouns for Roscoe, I refer to

them with gender neutral pronouns because more than any of the five characters of study, Roscoe openly rejects being shoehorned into either a male or female category.

The first shot of the pilot depicts Don Cheadle’s Marty Kaan waking up naked beside a blonde, white woman. Marty, apparently confused and hung over, inspects the woman lying next to him. He recognizes her identity and clearly regrets her presence and their sexual encounter. He puts a pair of pants on and tries to awaken the woman, to no avail. He looks around toward the bedroom door nervously, as if someone could come in at any moment. He tries to dress the unconscious woman, sitting her up in a chair with a laptop on her lap. Suddenly, the bedroom door opens and a child walks in saying, “Hey dad?” A startled Marty yelps upon being discovered. The child says, “Grandpa’s making French toast... What’s mom doing here?” Marty tries to cover up the tryst between him and his ex-wife, and his child seems to believe the lie. The most intriguing aspect of the scene is the appearance of the child, who only later in the episode is identified by a gendered pronoun and the name ‘Roscoe.’ Since the child is pre-pubescent, their biological sex is not immediately apparent. Their gender expression; however, feels distinctively non-binary.



Roscoe is first shown from the feet up, to twist the audience's expectation of the top half of their gendered body. We first see ankle-length, brown men's boots, then argyle socks, lavender tights, a short gray skirt, and a purple hoodie with a star on it. The female expectation of the face and hair to match is undone when Roscoe's face and



super-short hair are revealed, but they appear to be about eleven or twelve years old. The rounded facial structure and the higher voice make the sex of Roscoe unclear. The gender identity is also ambiguous because the short hair and boots suggest male, but the skirt, tights, and scarf are feminine indicators. Roscoe says, "Should I make *her* French toast?" pointing flamboyantly at their mother, swinging their hand up to their chest. As they walk out of the room, they spin through the doorway theatrically. Their gestures appear campy and effeminate as well. The scene becomes a stylized freezing sequence, and Marty address the camera exclaiming, "Don't *ever* fuck your ex-wife!" This final comment makes the crux of the scene Marty's relationship with his ex, not Roscoe's gender fluidity. Roscoe's gender is addressed more directly in the scene immediately following.

In the kitchen, the ex-wife Monica says, “Bye, boys” to Marty, Roscoe, and the Grandpa, who’s named Jeremiah. She’s identifying the child as a boy, but again, I would hesitate to mark them with male pronouns. Roscoe tells their Dad about their audition for *Grease* in the school play.

Marty: “What part are you auditionin-?”

Roscoe: “[Interrupting] Sandy! [Marty pauses in surprise in a reaction shot]. The part immortalized by Olivia Newton John?”

Marty looks up at his father Jeremiah uncomfortably, and his father just stares back assertively, apparently signaling to Marty not to discourage Roscoe. Marty looks down at his food, then feigning excitement he tells them, “That’s great bud, think you got a shot?”

Roscoe leaves the scene, and Marty and his father have a fascinating conversation about how to respond to Roscoe’s crossing of gender lines. Marty begins, “So I just...?”

Jeremiah: “Yeah, as if it were any part in any play.”

Marty: “‘Cause dressing up like a slut and trying to get John Travolta to fuck you, that’s just like trying out for the little league, right Dad?”



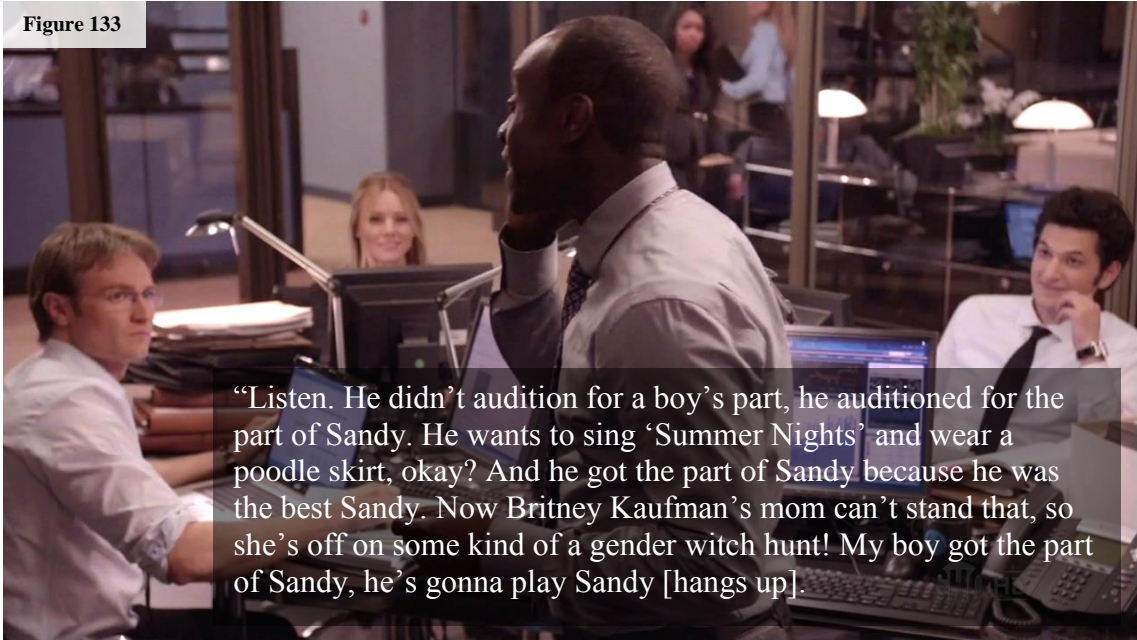
Marty: “Right, exactly. Why don’t you go play dominoes and stop telling me how to raise my kid.”

Jeremiah: “He wouldn’t have to be here if he had one fit parent between the two of you.”

Unexpectedly, the older generation is more supportive of Roscoe’s gender-bending, presumably because he was a psychiatrist, and perhaps because he spends more time with Roscoe than Marty. Marty’s not completely horrified by Roscoe’s desire to be Sandy in the play, but he’s certainly not happy about the idea. Marty sees Roscoe’s behavior as ‘acting out,’ while Jeremiah views Roscoe’s actions as genuine, something for Marty to positively reinforce. Both men use male pronouns to identify Roscoe, but it’s not made clear yet if Roscoe feels comfortable with that label. Roscoe re-enters the room and asks Marty if he will take them shoe shopping. Marty reluctantly agrees, and Roscoe hugs him, saying, “Thanks, Dad.” In these first scenes of the show, Roscoe comes across as a loving, polite, energetic, confident, and positive child, pursuing their socially transgressive aspirations with absolute conviction.

Later in the episode, Roscoe’s optimistic, hippie principal, ‘Principal Gita’ calls Marty and gleefully tells Marty that Roscoe was outstanding in the audition and that the teacher “decided to use him as Sandy.” Marty replies half-heartedly, “And that’s great, isn’t it?” The principal explains that Britney Kaufman’s mom is upset and thinks that it’s unfair that Roscoe got the Sandy part when there are so many other roles for boys in the show. Marty suddenly begins to defend Roscoe vehemently, unashamed that his nearby co-workers can hear what he’s saying:

Figure 133



“Listen. He didn’t audition for a boy’s part, he auditioned for the part of Sandy. He wants to sing ‘Summer Nights’ and wear a poodle skirt, okay? And he got the part of Sandy because he was the best Sandy. Now Britney Kaufman’s mom can’t stand that, so she’s off on some kind of a gender witch hunt! My boy got the part of Sandy, he’s gonna play Sandy [hangs up].”

The reaction shots from Marty’s co-workers/friends, who are in the room, show expressions of intrigue and surprise at Marty’s intensity instead of laughter or ridicule at Roscoe or Marty’s defense of Roscoe. Marty seemed conflicted about supporting Roscoe’s desire to gender-bend as Sally, just moments before the principal divulged the opinion of Mrs. Kaufman, which trigger a parental tirade. He’s intensely reactionary to the smallest push back against Roscoe, authoritatively demanding that everyone else accept Roscoe, despite the fact that he’s unsure how he exactly he feels about their identity and behavior. He’s daring the administration to fight back, but more importantly, he’s essentially daring himself to fully embrace Roscoe, using the principal and his co-workers as an audience of witnesses.

Marty runs into his ex-wife Monica again, who’s heard about Roscoe’s part in *Grease*. She spitefully tells Marty, “You just let him flounce around like it’s a done deal, [it’s as if you’ve said] ‘oh well.’ Our son is a tranny for life!” Marty cuts in defensively: “He’s experimenting with different expressions of g-gender identification.” Marty

stumbles over the phrase ‘gender identification’ as if he’s not sure he believes the legitimacy of the concept himself. Monica sees his weakness and retorts, “Oh my God, I can actually see your Dad’s hand shoved up your ass and working your little mouth like a sock puppet” Marty has the last word, declaring, “He keeps the kid sane you fucking psycho!” At this point in the series, it appears that Marty’s struggle with Roscoe’s identity takes precedence over Roscoe’s personal gender journey. Monica’s hateful use of the word *tranny* further develops her as a villain; she’s an antagonist of Marty, and by extension, she’s an antagonist of Roscoe, whose behavior has been framed as expressive and fun-loving, not deviant.

The parental triad of Marty, Jeremiah, and Monica proposes three points on a spectrum on how adults might react to a gender-variant child: empathetic, supportive, and encouraging (Jeremiah), dismissive and repulsed (Monica), and uncertain but making a small effort (Marty). The fact that the show even says the phrase *gender identification* and openly discusses the approach to raising a non-binary child is a pioneering achievement. To do so in the pilot episode is even more remarkable.

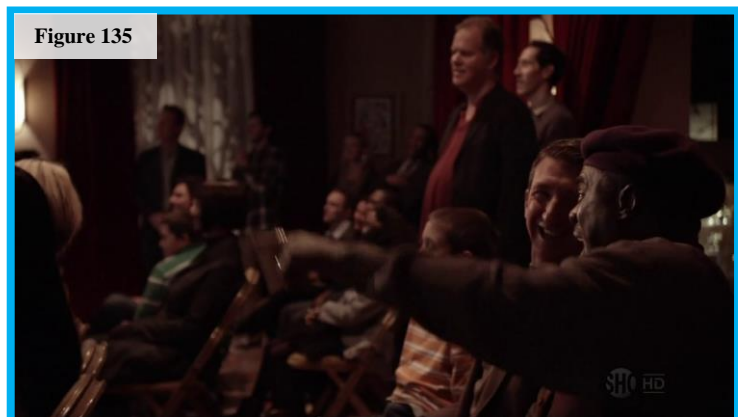
Marty goes to Roscoe’s school to meet with Principal Gita and Mrs. Kaufman. Instead of telling the ‘gender witch-hunting’ Mrs. Kaufman off, Marty is entranced and rendered speechless by her stunning beauty. In the following scene, he tells Roscoe the compromise that the three of them agreed on off-camera. Brandy Kaufman will play Sally, and Roscoe will play Rizzo, the second biggest female part. Roscoe responds vocally in frustration: “What? She can’t play Sandy, and Rizzo’s a slut! *She* should play Rizzo...I got the part of Sandy. It’s not fair!” Marty reassures Roscoe that life’s not fair.

It's implied that part of the unfairness may be that Marty only backed down because he wanted to hook up with Mrs. Kaufman.

The episode edits forward in time, via an audio advance, to the school performing "Summer Lovin.'" Roscoe is shown gleefully dancing at the premiere of the play, in a black skirt, black blouse, and a red scarf, with their head still shaved. Roscoe stands out



from the other girls, not necessarily because Roscoe's biologically male, but because the others wear pastel poodle skirts and gesture robotically, appearing a little bored.



Roscoe is a star: a diva unafraid to 'cross-dress' on stage in front of their peers, their parents, and the entire community. In the audience, Jeremiah exclaims to a man seated next to him, "That's my boy!" and the two smile and laugh approvingly. This key

moment signals to the audience that Roscoe is not a comic, ‘tranny’ joke, but a talented and worthwhile human being.



Roscoe sings one of their lines, “*He* got friendly, holdin’ my hand,” in a female register, apparently unafraid of people thinking that they might be attracted to boys. They intentionally stomp on Brandy’s (Sandy’s) foot, literally stepping on the toes of the lead, the part that they wanted. Jeremiah turns to his left and two seats are empty. Marty and Brandy’s mom are having graphic sex in her minivan during the performance. In the next scene, the final one of the pilot, Marty examines himself in the mirror, uncertain of how he feels about himself. Skirting the clichés of transgender portrayals, Marty endures an identity crisis, not Roscoe. Roscoe knows exactly who they are. Marty puts the hedonistic pleasures of sex and money ahead of his family responsibilities.

In episode 2, Principal Gita calls Marty, who again is out of town, with more conflict over Roscoe’s gender expression. She tells him, “Ms. Calderon sent Roscoe to the office because his outfit was distracting the children.”

Marty: “What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

Gita: “A group of the class parent body wanted to put a stop to Roscoe’s un-restrained and joyous disregard for the gender-specific cross-dressing-“

“You really wanna do this. You think this is a good idea? Do you have any idea what you are opening yourself up to?”



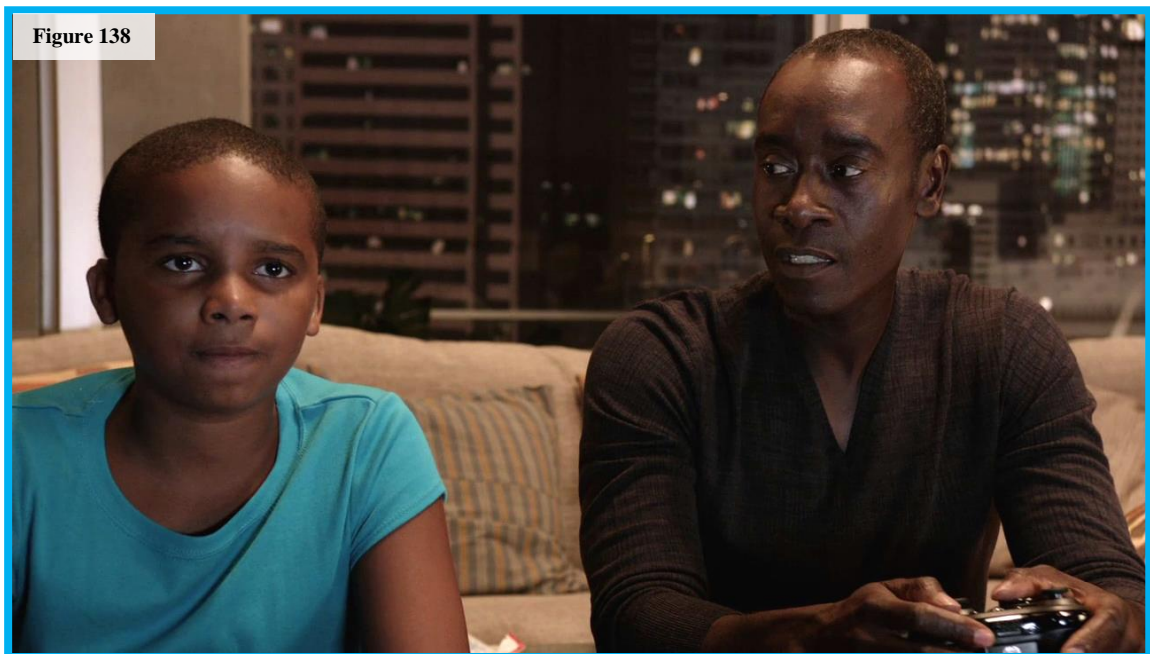
Roscoe walks into Principal Gita’s office asking if they can go back to class.

Roscoe seems unfazed by the drama erupting around his atypical self-presentation.

Roscoe is wearing tight fitting girls’ clothes: black leggings, a white t-shirt with a bird on it, a turquoise cardigan, and a long sparkly scarf wrapped around the neck. Principal Gita smiles and politely obliges Roscoe’s request. She seems to really respect Roscoe’s gender expression, calling it “joyous” and “un-restrained” just moments before. Marty threatens that he’ll come fight on behalf of Roscoe, and then he hangs up. Like in the first episode, Principal Gita does not seem to be uncomfortable about Roscoe’s dress or behavior, she’s only trying to diffuse the situation between Roscoe and the parents of their peers. To

make it more clear to the audience exactly how Roscoe is feeling, it would have been helpful if Roscoe would have picked up the phone and talked to Marty, but it seems that the show wanted to emphasize how geographically and emotionally distant Marty is to Roscoe. The two (sort of) address the issues at school later in the episode.

Marty and Roscoe play a competitive shooter video game together, focusing intently on the screen. Roscoe, who's wearing a powder-blue girl's shirt and colorful



bracelets asks Marty, “Dad, what’s a fudge packer?” Concerned, Marty turns away from the screen and looks at his child, gently replying, “Why are you asking me that?” Roscoe, with eyes never leaving the screen, explains that another student called them that at lunch. Marty asks him more, but Roscoe interrupts by squealing with delight that they killed Marty in the game: “I was just messing with you, Dad.” Unsure of whether Roscoe was joking or not, Marty sympathetically asks “Did somebody really call you that?... Roscoe?” Roscoe doesn’t respond. With an expression of anxiety on Marty’s face, the

episode ends. Marty and Roscoe continue to avoid directly and openly discussing Roscoe's gender-bending and both of their feelings about the topic.

Episode 3 opens on Roscoe's dancing legs. They're wearing pink pants and converse shoes, one green and one orange. On top, they're wearing a turquoise hoodie and another multi-colored scarf. Jamming out to a rap beat, they exclaim "I'm on fire, put me out, yo!" Marty walks by in the background and says nothing, but when Jeremiah walks in, he encourages Roscoe and mirrors the dancing for a moment. Roscoe stops Marty in the kitchen and asks, "Hey, Dad, what do you do if you like a girl, AND you like a boy?" Marty looks him in the eye, sighs, and croaks "I-I-I don't know Roscoe, I don't know." Unfazed, Roscoe says "Welp. I'm open to whatever." It appears that Roscoe is not only queer in their gender, but in their orientation as well. Marty's not sure how to react to either aspect, yet he doesn't openly degrade and police his child's desires and actions.

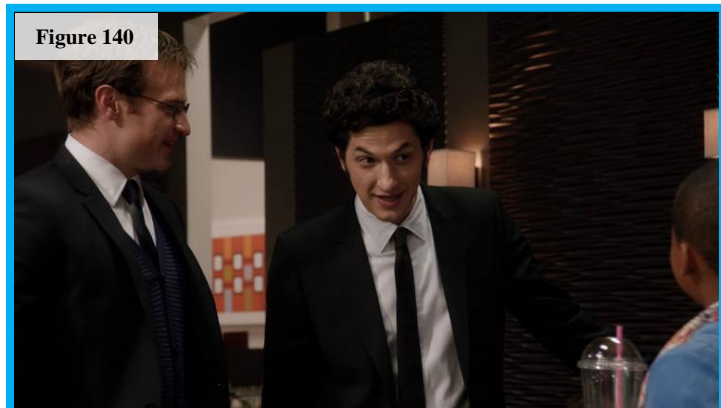
Four minutes later in the episode; however, Clyde harasses Doug about how he went home with a "tranny" the night before "with an apple the size of a fucking handball." Marty and Jeannie listen intently, laughing at Doug. Doug claims that he didn't go home with her because he "felt her whiskers" when she kissed him on the cheek. Marty laughs and changes the subject, but it does not seem that he moves away from the topic out of respect for the supposed transwoman. It's simply a transition forward in the plot of the episode. Despite having a gender-variant son, Marty (and by extension, the show creators) make no attempt to correct the degrading, transphobic language of Clyde. Clyde is an insensitive, boorish character, and most of the ridicule is directed at Doug's cluelessness, not the transwoman, but I still find the scene

problematic. It seems asynchronous for the writers of *House of Lies* to respect the atypical gender identity of one major character, but stomp on and humiliate the identity of another, unseen character, simply for a trite and cheap laugh.



In episode 4, Marty is forced to bring Roscoe to work on a trip to San Francisco when Jeremiah and Monica already have plans. Roscoe wears another scarf, skinny jeans, and shiny purple boots. Their ensemble is accented by a bright pink Tory Burch designer bag that they wear over one shoulder. Marty does not seem ashamed of his child's outfit, in fact, he affectionately adjusts Roscoe's scarf as he asks them about bullying at

school. Roscoe says that “a couple of kids started this thing about me,” but they refuse to reveal more. Marty wants to call Principal Gita, but Roscoe politely refuses. The two



exchange a friendly secret-handshake and the episode cuts to the opening title. Marty introduces Roscoe to Clyde and Doug, who graciously accept Roscoe. Clyde says, “I heard you absolutely slayed it as Rizzo,” to which Roscoe replies sassily, “I brought the house DOWN!” with a snapping hand movement. Marty grabs Roscoe’s hand as if to restrain and correct the effeminate gesture. Clyde and Doug react in surprise, but I read their expressions as impressed not belittling. Though Marty is more

understanding of Roscoe’s girlish behaviors than many fathers would be, he still seems to harbor a bit of embarrassment. The typically sycophantic Clyde, by contrast, acts surprisingly supportive, not missing a beat, complimenting Roscoe without his usual stain of inauthenticity or cruelty.

Marty abandons Roscoe several times throughout the episode, placing his work priorities above family ones. While Marty schmoozes a client, Doug awkwardly tries to befriend Roscoe. Roscoe reveals that they’re only ten years old. Roscoe opens up to

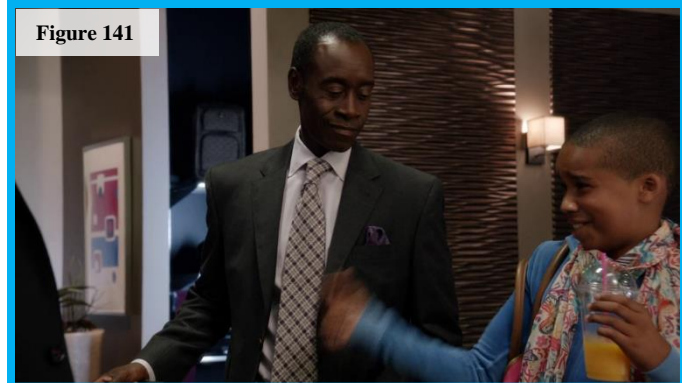




Figure 144



Figure 145

Doug about the bullying at lunch, and Doug relays a story about the bullying he endured in school, reassuring Roscoe that the bully is just jealous of your “awesome awesomeness.” This is a genuine moment of compassion and connection for both Doug and Roscoe, humanizing them both. Doug’s typical ridicule function is undone for a moment of sympathy,

reminding the audience of the difference between the playful bullying of an adult and the psychological and emotional trauma that bullying can cause a child.

When they return home to LA, Marty tries to ask more about the bullying and apologize for his behavior in San Francisco. Packing their own lunch into a pink lunch bag, Roscoe insists that they’re fine, exclaiming, “Best weekend ever.” The communication gap, which stems mostly from Roscoe’s non-binary expression, weakens their father/child relationship.

In episode 6, Roscoe and a flamboyant boy sit in Principal Gita’s office. The boy is disgusted that Roscoe kissed him, but Roscoe says that the boy kissed Roscoe: “I didn’t, I considered it, but I’m not that into him,” Roscoe tells Gita. Marty, Monica, and Gita meet, and Gita reveals that the other boy’s father is pressing sexual harassment charges. Marty is furious, aggressively interrupting and rudely insulting Monica, Gita, the

Figure 146



boy' father, and the school. Monica tries to calm him saying, "I think we should really listen to what Gita has to say, our son is wearing dresses and he's attack-kissing other boys!" Gita tries to expel Roscoe, but Marty declares that Roscoe will be attending school on Monday. The two agree to talk it over further on Sunday. The scene taps into real-life contemporary issues of LGBT children in schools. Several gay and trans students have been punished or policed by school administrations for non-traditional behavior. A six-year old trans-girl in Colorado Springs was banned from using the girl's bathroom in 2013, bringing national attention to trans bathroom issues in schools (Frosch, par. 5). In 2011, a gay Texas high-school student was suspended for being caught kissing another male student on surveillance camera (Burroway, par. 1).

On the way in for the second visit, Roscoe asks Marty, "You believe me, right?" and Marty replies, "It doesn't matter if I believe you, you're my son." Roscoe stops him and repeats, "Dad. Do. You. Believe me?" Marty confirms, "100%," and after a look of uncertainty from Roscoe, the two do their handshake. Roscoe consistently seems more

committed to their father-son relationship than their father. Marty loves his child, but his job and Roscoe's fluidity puts Roscoe at an emotional distance. Marty tries to blackmail the school about their publishing of faulty test scores, but Gita hits back at Marty personally: "It's not about the school. It's about you, Mr. Kaan. It's about you and your very sweet son, and about how you're going to lose him if you can't plug into his issues on a very real, and emotional, and substantive level." Gita gives excellent advice here. Her warning to Marty could be read as a potent warning to media creators of the potential detachment and alienation caused by not addressing gender variance directly. Much later in the show, the creators take Gita's advice, and Marty does plug into Roscoe's 'issues' on a substantive level.

Before all that though, back at the meeting with Gita, Jeremiah, Monica, and Gita begin to talk to Marty about his mother's suicide, suggesting a connection between Marty's trauma and his parenting difficulties with Roscoe. Marty feels attacked and becomes overcome with a wave of anxiety, addressing again that Marty is the one with psychological problems, not Roscoe. Before the intervention can continue, Roscoe and the boy come in, and the boy admits that Roscoe was telling the truth. The boy tried to kiss Roscoe, not the other way around. Roscoe smiles saying, "I told him 'no hard feelings.' I get it. I have an irresistible magnetism." Roscoe's attitude is so joyously optimistic and self-assured when it comes to their fluidity, conflict with the school, or really anything else. Marty does not share Roscoe's enthusiasm. He feels relieved that the blame bounced away from him, but he seems more concerned with himself than his child. Roscoe perseveres because they are kind, confident, and forgiving. By contrast, his father is combative, selfish, and vulgar.

As the series progresses, Marty and Monica go through a custody battle over Roscoe. Roscoe decides to live with their mother after being repeatedly disappointed by their father dropping the ball on their plans. Monica becomes a more involved mother and begins to be more supportive of Roscoe's gendered behaviors. In season 2 episode 3,



Roscoe emerges from their bedroom at their mother's house, wearing skin-tight black leather pants, a black men's shirt with the sleeves cut off, and a black, feminine knit hat, all accented by a gold chain necklace and a large amount of black eyeliner. Their gender pendulum seems to have swung much more toward masculine than most of season 1, they're certainly still non-binary. This punk/goth look is highlighted by a hard rock guitar solo that blares out of Roscoe's room as they exit it. Monica recognizes this as her eyeliner that he borrowed without asking, and Roscoe snaps at her saying, "Well, maybe if you didn't buy me that shit from Rite Aid." Roscoe's voice has deepened and their shoulders broadened, marking them as more biologically male than before. Roscoe's behavior has soured; they've become more of an emotional, crass, and hormonal teenager, but the show suggests that this attitude shift stems from puberty, not from their

gender identity. After Roscoe leaves, Jeremiah, who's in the room, lectures Monica about her parenting: "You know, if you buy him shitty make-up, then you're really telegraphing your disapproval of his choice to be gender-fluid." For the first time, Roscoe's gender identity and/or expression has a label, which comes from Jeremiah, not Roscoe. Since Roscoe and Jeremiah are close, it could be extrapolated that Roscoe approves of this term, but some validity of the label is diminished since Roscoe doesn't introduce the term themselves. But perhaps Roscoe's rejection of labels may be a source of liberated identity an expression, as season 3 makes clear.

In season 3, Roscoe has grown taller and more physically masculine, their voice deepened even further. They've also chosen to move back in with Marty and Jeremiah. In the season premiere, Roscoe announces to Marty that they're trying out for the basketball team. Free of make-up and in men's clothes, Roscoe is in their most masculine presentation yet. They're also not as flamboyant and sassy in their gestures and speech. Marty is delighted to hear Roscoe's announcement and begins a pretend one-on-one game of basketball in the living room. Jeremiah walks in, and Marty relays the news.



Figure 148

Jeremiah reacts as surprised as Marty, and standing behind Roscoe, Marty makes a masculine arms-flexing gesture to Jeremiah, excited that his biologically male son is taking such an interest in a traditionally macho activity. The audience is reminded that Roscoe still retains a few atypical male interests when Roscoe asks Marty if he saw the Peking Opera when he was in China, adding, “That make-up is fly.” Compared to the bright pastel-colored girls’ clothes and accessories Roscoe wore in season one, his new outfit wouldn’t be considered out-of-the-ordinary for a biological boy. His cool demeanor and restrained physical gestures reflect that of an ordinary teenage boy as well. Roscoe’s gender expression fluctuates, and in episode 2, Roscoe speaks about their internal gender for the first time, a notable exception in the history of trans representations.

Roscoe makes point guard for the team and feels pumped for the upcoming season. Marty and Jeremiah are thrilled. Roscoe has more good news though, they tell their father “I met someone kinda cool.”

Marty: “On the team? That’s great. This person have a name?”

Roscoe: “Lex.”

Marty: “Just Lex?”

“Yup.”

“And you like this...Lex?”

“OH yeah”

Marty is fishing for the sex/gender of Lex, but Roscoe doesn’t take the bait. The moment of awkwardness with Marty’s pauses in his question reflect the limitations of gendered language, which makes referring to non-binary characters with non-binary pronouns awkward (also evident in my own writing in this chapter with the neutral *they/them and*

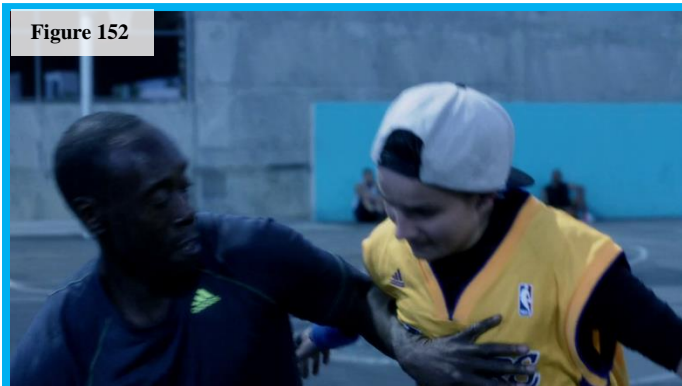
their/themself for Roscoe). Roscoe and Marty playfully mock each other about their basketball skills, and they promise to duke it out on the court. Roscoe dares Marty, “You should pick me up after school, bring your Victorian, lace-up, leather, athletic BOOTS, and we’ll see.”

Marty and Roscoe begin one-on-one on the court, in friendly competition, when Roscoe misses the ball and an unseen figure catches it. Roscoe looks at the person and smiles wide, but only an out-of-focus backwards baseball cap of the new challenger is in

view. They greet Roscoe warmly, with a higher, somewhat feminine voice, and Roscoe says, “Hey, Lex” back. Marty moves in to meet Lex who is then shown in full view. They’re wearing a Laker’s jersey and they have short hair with a backwards baseball cap. Their face, chest, and voice are extremely androgynous, but they appear to be a young teen and Caucasian. Marty’s greeting is met with attitude from Lex, and he looks down at Lex, confused, and then



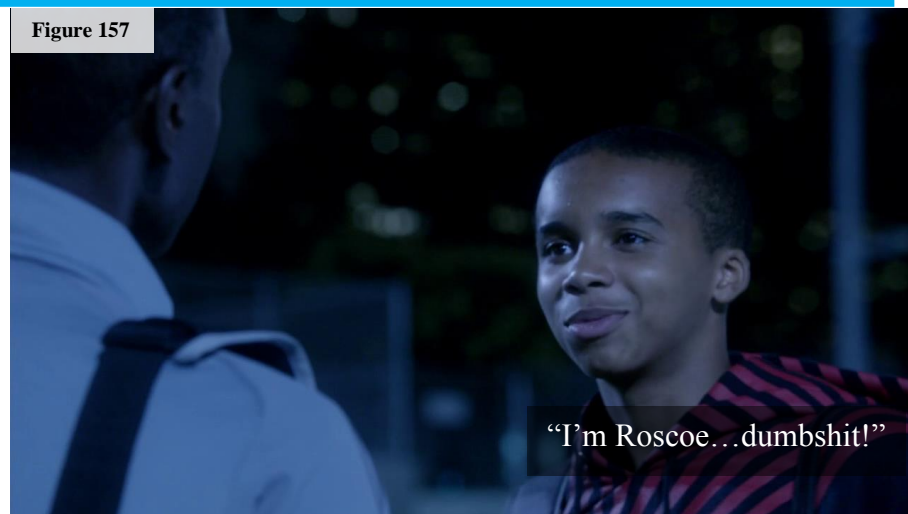
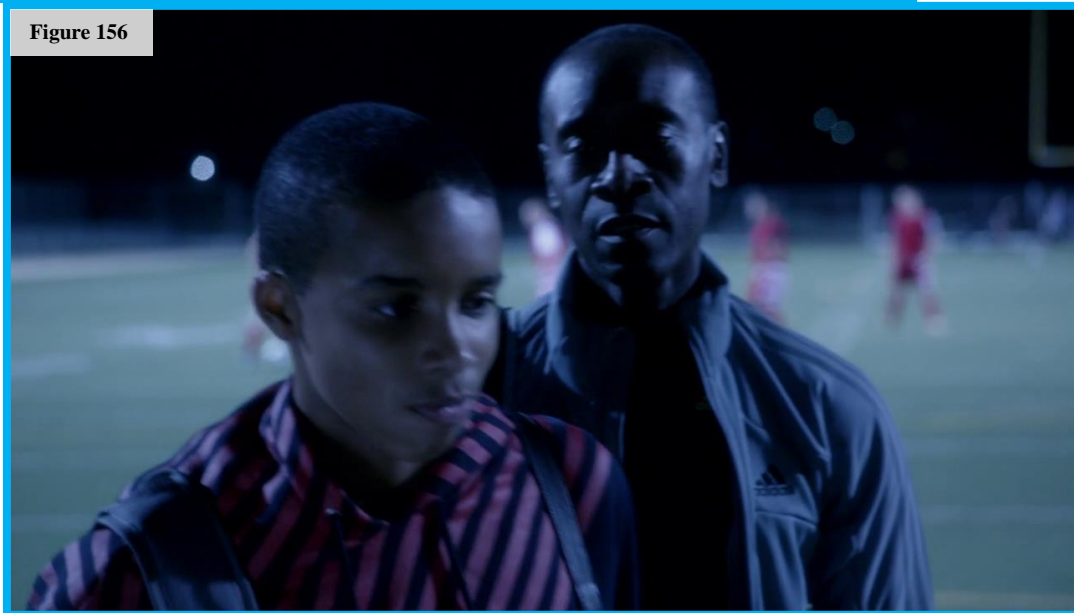
straight at the camera. Marty looks at the audience occasionally in the show to signal to them an emotion. This time it's hard to say whether he's reacting to Lex's androgyny, their attitude, or both. They begin a two-on-two half-court game with Lex and Roscoe on one team and Marty and a blond boy on the other. Lex and Roscoe run circles around Marty, and Lex has an aggressive defense that would certainly be considered worthy of many fouls in a refereed game. Marty says to Roscoe, "Your man's fouling me," but neither react to the male label Marty placed on Lex. In a slow-motion sequence, Marty



pushes Lex away from him when Lex gets too close, and touching their chest, Marty has a surprised, confounded, and cartoonishly comedic reaction, clearly not sure what Lex's biological sex is. It's unclear whether Marty's goofy expression, his gaze directly at the camera, signals for the audience to laugh at Lex or to laugh at Marty's confusion. The moment of cisgender scrutiny seems to be a moment of transphobia initiated by the *character* of Marty, potentially putting Lex into the ridicule

function, but the incredible following scene puts the queer issues of sex and gender in a startlingly progressive and empathetic perspective, proving that the *show itself* is not transphobic.

In the next scene, after the game, Marty and Roscoe walk together in an objectively framed, wide-angle two-shot. Marty asks a binary question, “So Lex, boy or girl? What’s the deal?” Roscoe smiles and responds, “Lex is a boy spelled b-o-i, or a girl spelled g-r-r-l [Marty struggles to understand]...but yes, Lex was born a girl.” Though not explicitly stated in queer theory terms, Roscoe essentially notes the difference between sex and gender, and states that there are identities outside of the male/female gender binary, evoking the queer terms *boi* and *grrl*. Marty genuinely and softly says, “Oh, born a girl. Okay, doesn’t matter, that’s cool.” Instead of changing the subject, Marty makes the crucial choice to ask another question, “So what are you, then?” Roscoe walks close to the camera, stops, turns seriously, and the gaze shifts. Roscoe suddenly commands the power and perspective of the scene, an unusual POV in this Marty-centric show. They look at their father in the eye and seriously respond, “I’m Roscoe” before smiling and adding “dumbshit.” Marty playfully chases Roscoe across the field because of the insult, and the two wrestle in the distance and laugh as the scene ends. The reaction suggests that Marty feels satisfied with the answer. For a television series to have a non-binary character that openly rejects gender labels, a character who instead directly expresses that “I’m me” in a confident, poignant, and liberating way, is a groundbreaking milestone in television. This may be a genuine moment of empathy, where a transgender character explains (however briefly) their own identity in their own terms, shot and edited to visually align the audience with the trans perspective.



Marty and Roscoe return home to find Jeremiah and Jeannie sitting on the couch. Jeannie looks at Roscoe's men's basketball outfit and compliments, "You look butch, what are you doin'?" Jeannie's added a label to Roscoe's look, but Roscoe doesn't seem to mind. Her supportive and encouraging tone sounds warmer than Marty's typically does, much more like Jeremiah's. Roscoe says, "Me and my friend Lex just kicked my Dad's ass in basketball" "Lex, huh?" Jeannie responds kindly, poking for more gendered information. "He's a baller," Roscoe declares. "Yeah, I guess she got a little game," adds Marty. Jeannie looks confused as the discrepancy between the two pronouns. Roscoe's reaction is not shown, but Marty changes the subject. Perhaps either pronoun is okay, but Lex never said, and this is the first time that Roscoe has labeled Lex with a pronoun. Marty's selection of *she* reflects biological determinism in identity, while Roscoe's use of *he* suggests gender determinism of identity. Lex's pronouns become a point of argument much later in the season.

Lex and Roscoe share their first kiss in episode 4. Lex starts by saying, "You're really pretty, you know that?" They both wear men's clothes and black baseball caps.



Their embrace looks like a gay kiss, since they are both in such a masculine presentation, but I read it as a radically *queer* kiss. The genders and orientations of both Roscoe and Lex defy binary categorization, and their confident, youthful experimentation is treated with respect by the lack of music in the soundtrack and the intimate camerawork Lex abruptly leaves after the smooch with a butch, passive, and fraternal “Later, dude.” Marty offers to drive Lex home, asking to talk to them one-on-one. Lex declines, saying that they drove themselves. Marty seems uncomfortable with Roscoe dating someone, but it’s not clear whether Marty feels uncomfortable about Lex’s gender until the next episode.

Marty wants to bring Roscoe to see a client who’s a trendy clothing designer. Roscoe asks if they can bring Lex, and Marty laughs saying, “No, we are not bringing our family circus to a client’s house.” “Fuck that shit dot com, because if I’m going, Lex is going,” snaps Roscoe. Marty tries to assert his fatherly dominance over Roscoe, telling them that they can’t lip off to him like that, “You better act like you’re getting ready, before you and I have a real problem.” “But Dad, we do have a problem. You’re calling me and Lex a circus! Grandpa would say that I could bring Lex.” “You know what, grandpa’s not here, okay?...Now go get ready and get your mind right.” Roscoe has a point. While Roscoe was disrespectful, they were responding to the disrespectful attitude and degrading comment of their father. Gender and orientation are only two aspects of this fight; Roscoe challenges their father partially out of teenage rebellion, asserting their independence and demanding to be treated like an adult. The catalyst that brings out Roscoe’s underlying outrage is Marty’s claim that he’s embarrassed by Lex and Roscoe’s relationship, implying that it’s freakish. Marty seems to have backtracked on the tolerance and open-mindedness that he expressed just a few episodes ago.

Later, Marty brings Roscoe to a client's house, and Roscoe uses the opportunity to act sullen and spiteful towards Marty, embarrassing their father in front of the important business associates. Marty sighs and jokingly recommends that the client kill their kids when they get to be teenagers. Then he articulates how he feels about Roscoe: "It's not exactly what I thought I'd be fielding, but I love him. He's a great kid. I just wanna keep him safe." Marty acknowledges in this piece of dialogue that while Roscoe's gender and sexuality were unexpected, he's still willing to embrace his child the way that they are. Marty's declaration suggests that the underlying cause of conflict is the parent/teen relationship, inherently fraught with conflict, and Roscoe's queerness functions as one contentious aspect of the conundrum.

In episode 7, the conflict between Marty, Roscoe, and Lex intensifies. Getting ready for school at Marty's house, Roscoe and Lex wrestle on the floor, much to Marty's discomfort. Lex takes a dominant role in the wrestling, and in their relationship. Lex tells Roscoe to go change clothes because they don't like Roscoe's outfit. Lex talks to Marty alone for the first time, starting conversation, saying, "The kid's amazing Marty. He's like the nicest guy ever," fighting for dominance by calling him *Marty* instead of *Mr. Kaan*. The outfit that Lex picks out is more feminine than Roscoe's recent 'butch' wardrobe. Marty pulls Roscoe aside to talk one-on-one: "What's going on man? You've been dressing your own self since you were 18 months old! Why are you taking fashion advice from *Boy's Don't Cry* in there?"

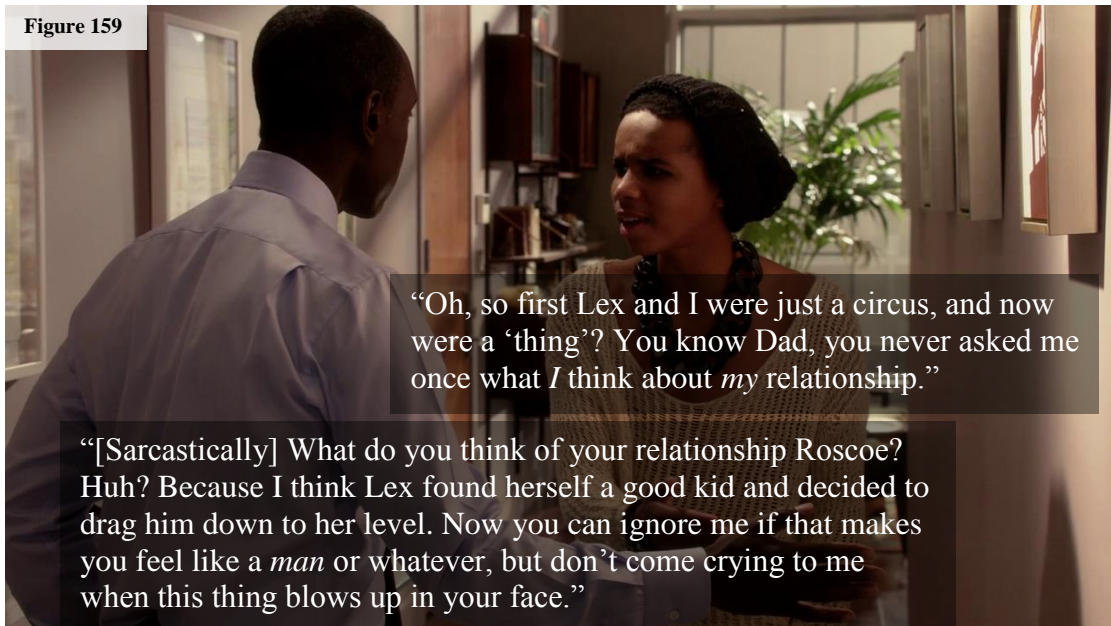
Roscoe: "Because he's my girlfriend"

Marty: "Listen, you have always been a kid who's made good choices. She's not worth you losing that?"

“‘*She’s* not.’ Why, because you said she’s not? I think *he’s* the first person who’s ever really gotten me.”

“Really? ‘Cause I think I get you Roscoe. I know you. And you are losing yourself to this thing [makes hand gesture from Roscoe to Lex]”

Figure 159



“Don’t worry Dad, I won’t. ‘Cause you won’t even be here anyway.”

There’s so much to unpack in this short scene. Marty seems appalled that Roscoe is dating such a butch and crass ‘girl,’ demeaningly referring to Lex as *Boy’s Don’t Cry*, which is ironically, a film about a real-life transman who is murdered because of transphobia. Marty doesn’t seem to seem to realize or care how hurtful and debasing that reference is. Roscoe’s insistence on the pronoun *he* for Lex does frame him more like a transman, but Roscoe’s delightfully queer pronouncement of “He’s my *girlfriend!*” expresses how unique and queer both Lex and their relationship are. Marty continues to use female pronouns for Lex during their fight, apparently not understanding or not caring about the conventions of preferred pronouns. Despite their non-binary fluidity,

Marty and the other characters refer to Roscoe with male pronouns, and Roscoe never seems to reject that label. The disdain in Marty's tone when he says, "If that makes you feel like a man *or whatever*," may point to Marty's wish that Roscoe was more traditionally male. Marty felt that basketball was a way that he could connect with Roscoe again, amidst Roscoe's rebellious, teen-angst phase, but immediately Lex took that opportunity away from him.

Roscoe gets the final word, an insult that's honest and hurtful: Marty is a fairly absent father. And when Marty is around, his parenting approach is much more confrontational and punitive than his therapist father, which of course causes even more push back from Roscoe. Jeremiah enables and positively reinforces Roscoe's crossing of gender lines much more than Marty, including the relationship with Lex. Jeremiah is willing to let Roscoe make their own mistakes and learn from them, while Marty steamrolls over Roscoe, trying to prevent potential problems before they happen. As a result, Roscoe only feels more propelled to be close with Lex. The family dynamic here is immensely complex, combining three generations, two different parenting approaches, an absent father, divorce, teenage rebellion, sexual orientation, and gender fluidity into a potpourri of richly layered conflict. Most families could relate to at least one aspect of the domestic struggle.

Later in the episode, it appears that Marty had a point about the negatives of Roscoe's relationship with Lex. Marty returns home to find Roscoe and Lex sloppily drunk and the apartment equally trashed. Marty declares the relationship over and drives Lex home with Roscoe in the front seat. When they reach Lex's house, Lex locks himself in the back seat and turns the dome light off. An angry Marty tries to drag him out, but

Roscoe says, “No, Dad, Dad, we have to turn around.” Roscoe doesn’t mean turn the car around. They gesture to their Dad and the two of them physically turn away from the car. Lex emerges from the car in a dress, a cardigan, and flats, their hair pulled over one eye in a more feminine way. Ashamed of himself in this presentation, he rejects the approach of both Roscoe and Marty, who don’t know what to say. The soundtrack is quiet, and



Roscoe and Marty both look on sympathetically. Lex approaches the front door and their father answers, apparently angry and dismissive. Marty tries to wave at the father in a friendly way, but the father just shuts the door. “They call him Michelle,” Roscoe mournfully summarizes, and the scene ends. This shocking and emotional moment gives insight into why Lex might be so aggressive and impolite. Their home life is far worse than Roscoe’s, since he’s forced to dress and express himself in a way that defies his identity in every way. He’s a victim of the rigid gender binary, gender policing, and the hegemony of what it means to be a ‘girl.’ Roscoe’s key wording of “they call him Michelle” reinforces the authenticity of the internal over the external, without directly invoking queer theory. In contrast to Lex’s father, Marty is immensely supportive of Roscoe’s gender fluidity, shown humorously in the next scene.

Sobered by the upsetting realization of Lex’s family problems, Marty tenderly helps Roscoe (who wishes they were sober) into bed. Roscoe pleads, “Don’t be mad at Lex. It was my idea.” Roscoe leans over the bed to throw up in the trash can, but misses and hits their designer purse. “Lesson learned. Drinking is for boys with cheap purses,”

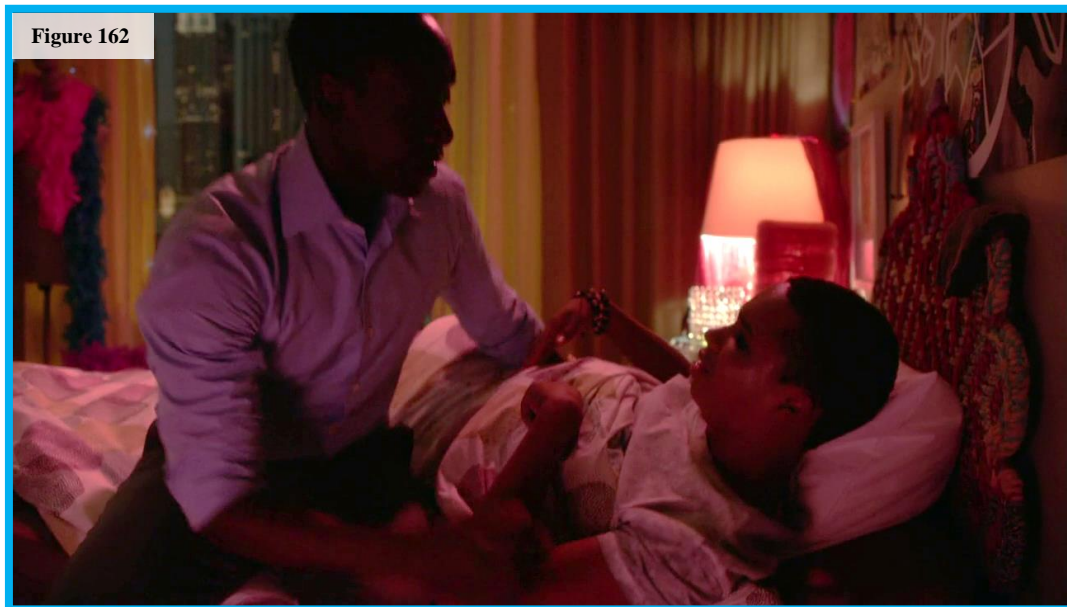


Figure 162

Marty quips, validating his son's identity. If Marty were like Lex's father, make-up, purses, and jewelry wouldn't be allowed in the house at all. Both school and Marty's apartment are a safe haven for Lex to present as more male, their truer identity. The skirt dress and cardigan instead function as the costume, since the audience sees the male clothes first, and because it's obvious which Lex feels more comfortable in. In this way, the scene where Lex exits the car, demoted to a lie of his true self, with a deeply pained expression, may be another moment of true empathy. Roscoe's reaction shot is equally as aching; they can't bear to see their partner dehumanized that way. The nuance of the writing and characters of Roscoe, Lex, and Marty bring a raw and intricate look into the struggles to raise a gender-variant child in a culture that denies the legitimacy of a range of identities.

Marty follows through with the ban on Roscoe and Lex's relationship, despite the tragic look into Lex's home situation. Roscoe resents their father and nearly refuses to speak to him. Roscoe meets Lex in secret, with the approval of Jeremiah, and the two argue about whether or not to go to a krumping (a form of stylized street dancing) event that another boy invited Roscoe to. Roscoe is excited to try it out, but Lex mocks it and refuses to go, obviously jealous of the other boy, who may have a crush on Roscoe. When Jeremiah drives them there, Roscoe seems nervous to try out their moves in front of the older, more talented dancers. Lex singles Roscoe out, addressing the crowd, calling Roscoe a *biter* (someone who just watches dancers and copies their moves later, instead of boldly expressing themselves). Humiliated, Roscoe turns and leaves. They go home and hug Marty, literally crying on his shoulder. Lex and Roscoe had become supportive queer partners, but the simple emotions of jealousy and insecurity tear them apart.

Marty and Jeremiah differ in opinion about whether Roscoe should be able to meet up with Lex at the basketball court to resolve or end their relationship. Jeremiah thinks it's an important step for Roscoe to take themselves, but Marty wants to stick to his word and protect Roscoe from Lex. Jeremiah and Marty discuss it, and finally Marty gives into the wishes of Roscoe, "Go ahead, man," a big step of trust for Marty, who now acknowledges Roscoe's developing maturity, which is unrelated to their gender fluidity. At the nighttime two-on-two basketball game, Lex angrily harasses another boy in the group, Coltrane, aggressively fouling him during the game. Lex forcefully kisses Coltrane then demands that Roscoe kiss Coltrane next because "You've been wanting to for months." Roscoe says no, but Lex grabs their shirt, shoving his face into theirs yelling, "What, you can't handle the truth being shoved into your face, faggot!?!". Roscoe stands up for themselves, bringing his face to touch Lex's screaming "FUCK YOU, LEX!"



effectively ending their relationship. The choice of the word *faggot* is peculiar. Is Lex jealous of the other boy because they are biologically male (a 'real' boy), and so *faggot* somehow reduces Roscoe because Lex was a "girlfriend?" Or is Lex appropriating the hypermasculine side of the gender binary by using the feminizing insult? Maybe Lex just

used it because they were angry and it's a hurtful word. Regardless, the anger and resentment that Lex feels, which is fueled by his transphobic parents, destroyed their teenage relationship.

The climax of their Roscoe and Marty's storyline for the season occurs at another krumping meet-up. Marty and Jeremiah show up to see Roscoe come into their own, assuredly dancing in a face-off against a grown man. Marty looks on in pride, smiling, then the smile fades for a moment into contemplation. I read the smile as Marty finally realizing that Roscoe is no longer a child and that Roscoe will never be type of man that he thought they would be. And that's okay. Roscoe has skills and dreams that Marty

never imagined. The two hug each other, their conflict-ridden father/child relationship resolved, for now. In this moment, Marty



seems to have accepted the totality of Roscoe's unique expression, whether artistic, gendered, or sexual. His relationship with Roscoe can function as a space of solace in his otherwise disastrously messy life.

Conclusion

House of Lies creator Matthew Carnahan has spoken extensively about gender and sexuality as they relate to Lex and Roscoe both in interviews and in a Huffington

Post piece that he wrote himself on the issue. He seems to be fairly well versed on the basics of queer theory and trans issues:

The thing that I notice about kids their age is they're incredibly reluctant to put any kind of identifying moniker to their gender preference and their gender identity, so I really resisted putting any definition on Roscoe, and on Lex, for that matter. But I would say that Lex is much closer to being what we would describe as transgender [I think Carnahan means *transsexual*] or gender queer and Roscoe would fall more into a gender fluid or non-gender identifying kind of category if he had to be placed in any. I prefer to keep letting him...continue to defy the audience expectations and just when you think you've got it pegged, he morphs a little and explores something else (qtd. in Halterman, par. 2).

Carnahan based Roscoe off several real life gender variant children, but one in particular:

I have friends with a genderqueer son, who I've watched grow from a child into a remarkable person who had the incredible good fortune of never being pushed in any one direction, so he gets to be uniquely himself. That was my goal for Roscoe: to let Roscoe be uniquely himself. In meeting Lex, I wanted to take Roscoe from a child with gender issues into sexuality issues— because gender and sex are very different— and wanted to show the importance of what's in your heart rather than what's between your legs (qtd. in Chloe, par. 13).

Since Carnahan privileges unique internal personhood over biological sex, binary thinking, and labels, this has led to confusion from fans and critics who don't seem to understand exactly what he's doing with the Roscoe character:

An entire segment of the audience simply dismisses Roscoe as gay. Another immediately jumps to pushing him into a transgender role. Some just think he's weird. How about this: he's just Roscoe (Carnahan, par. 2).

The dually fluid sexuality and gender of Roscoe challenges two falsely binary structures within our culture. Carnahan chose to perplex both of these limiting, hegemonic framings through a child, a person who hasn't endured as many years of gender policing and ideological brainwashing. As a surprise to me, the avoidance of terminologies in this case has actually led to a more radical and thought-provoking representation than one that would explain the vast lexicon of trans and queer neologisms. I realized through Roscoe

that *eliminating* categories can be more groundbreaking than *explaining* existing categories and terminologies that much of the audience might not be familiar with.

Fifteen-year-old Donis Leonard Jr., who plays Roscoe, seems to understand a lot of what makes Roscoe compelling and unique:

That's what I love about my character, Roscoe, because he's so comfortable with himself and I feel so honored to play that role. I mean hopefully a lot of kids aren't watching *House of Lies* because it is adult, but especially for the parents, my relationship with Marty might be inspirational for them. Marty lets Roscoe be exactly who he is without assigning labels (qtd. in Chloe, par. 11).

Leanord's assertion that Roscoe could help parents is wonderfully echoed by and expanded upon by Diane Ehrensaft, a child psychologist who advocates for 'gender non-conforming children.' She's written a book on the subject and "applauds Showtime and the writers of *House of Lies* for bringing a new perspective on children's gender in a compelling and sympathetic way" (Ehrensaft, par. 2). After noting her frustration with critics' mis-categorization of Roscoe as "flamboyantly homosexual" or "conflicted about his pubescent sexuality," she gives a stirring plea for adults to recognize gender, its cultural construction, and the open-minded approach that parents should take to a child's confident understanding of the self:

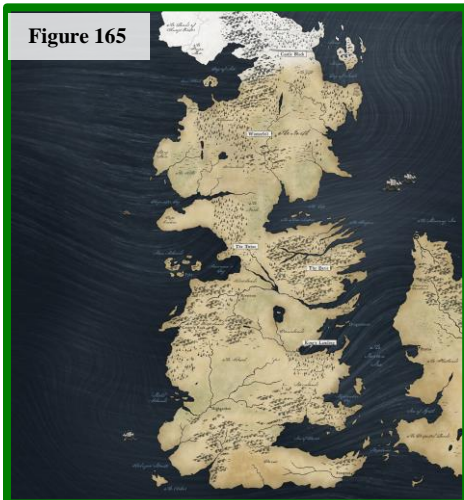
Typically, with gender-nonconforming kids, the questioning is more ours than theirs. It can make us anxious when we can't pinpoint a child's gender. It can make parents especially anxious; they're the ones who get fingers pointed at them, with people asking, "Why do you let your kid do that? That's sick." To escape the anxiety that a gender-bending kid like Roscoe can generate in all of us, we may be tempted to jump to, "Oh, it's just a phase. He'll outgrow it." Any time you have a phase to outgrow, it equates with something we all hope will disappear. Children's gender expressions may indeed evolve over time, but gender is never a phase. It may be a cross-section in time, it may be a forever thing, but it is always a deep and real thing about a child at that particular time and place. The best thing we can do about our own questioning is to use it to relearn gender and come to know that parents have very little control over their children's gender identity but tremendous influence over their children's gender health (Ehrensaft, par. 6).

Dr. Ehrensaft powerfully addresses the intricacy and legitimacy of gender and the problems associated with gender policing children. The dynamic between Jeremiah, Marty, Monica, and Roscoe reflects the different parental approaches to a gender non-conforming child from reinforcing, to ignoring, to rejecting atypical gendered behavior, presenting meaningful questions about parenting, children, gender, and sexuality to viewers of the show.

Roscoe develops from a confident, androgynous, effeminate biological boy, to a moody, combative, and vulnerable young teen, and then they re-emerge as an independent, adventurous, and mature biological man. While Roscoe's gender expression leans from more feminine to more masculine as the series progresses, it's clear from the "I'm Roscoe" scene that they reject the limited labels of boy/girl or man/woman. Roscoe exists outside of the gender binary, and outside of the heterosexual/homosexual binary as well. Their relationship with their father is written with rich complexity and believability, treating Roscoe's identity and expression not as a comic joke or a pitiable affliction, but a legitimate way of being. The family dynamic could serve as a meaningful lesson to parents and children that gender diversity is not something to police and discourage; it's a difference to celebrate and reinforce. Roscoe simply is the way they are, and they don't try to fight or reject their true self. Aided by reassurance from Jeremiah, and eventually from Marty, they have the support system that they need to embrace their queerness, both inside and out. Unlike many of the other characters analyzed in the thesis, Roscoe directly addresses their internal gender identity in the brief, but groundbreaking scene where they refuse to label themselves as a boy or girl (or even a boi or grrl). They're a unique individual beyond the bounds of constricting labels. Through this scene, and the

tender moment when they look on at the enforcement of Lex's birth sex with deep compassion, Roscoe becomes a justifiably empathetic queer character.

CHAPTER FOUR: BRIENNE OF TARTH – *GAME OF THRONES* (HBO)



(Clockwise from left) A map of Westeros, the city of Winterfell, and the sigils of the seven houses/kingdoms.

Game of Thrones is a serial drama series, combining political, fantasy, and war genre elements. It's adapted from the epic fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin. It's currently HBO's ultimate prestige series featuring a massive budget, stunning scenery shot across four countries, dozens of named characters, close to ten sprawling storylines, graphic sex and violence, and immaculate pseudo-Medieval fantasy costuming and set design. The lush detail and gigantic scale of the series is unmatched by anything else on television. While nearly unanimously praised by critics and viewers, the show is often criticized about its tendency to objectify women. I've written about the debate over female sex and nudity in the show's many brothel scenes (view my essay here, warning contains graphic nudity: <http://tinyurl.com/kcn9rzv>).

The fictional world of Westeros, the Western continent which most of the show's characters inhabit, is a brutal, feudal, patriarchic world. The show begins as a period of peace between the 'Seven Kingdoms' (the regions of the continent) comes to a close, throwing the major lords and their 'houses' (familial power structures) into open warfare, with five 'kings' fighting for the Iron Throne, the reigning seat that unites and controls the lands. The honorable northern Starks of Winterfell seek to remove the rich, scheming Lannisters from the Throne in the continent's centrally-located capital of King's Landing. South of the capital, brothers Renly and Stannis Baratheon, mortal enemies, each seek the Throne as well, claiming the right by blood since their deceased brother Robert Baratheon reigned as king previously to the young and ruthless Joffrey Baratheon, the current king. Joffrey's seat is questioned when rumors circulate that Joffrey is not a biological son of Robert, but a bastard born out of incest between Robert's wife Cersei Lannister and Cersei's own twin brother Jaime Lannister, the Kingslayer. The intricacy of the plot, the moral complexity of the many characters, and the unexpected deaths and story shifts have inspired a massive following of dedicated viewers. The fandom is split between 'book readers' who know what's coming next, and spoiler-wary 'non book readers,' who watch with baited breath.

Characters in both the book and show are not narrowly written as morally 'good' or 'bad,' 'hero' or 'villain.' Instead, each character is a constellation of traits, motivations, and allegiances. It's easy to root against the Lannisters, until Tyrion Lannister emerges as arguably, the most likable and righteous character on the show. Viewers' sympathy toward characters are slowly twisted and challenged, like when Jaime

Lannister is redeemed as a heroic victim, or when Theon Greyjoy betrays Robb Stark in hopes of earning the respect of his own estranged father.

Men, in the story-world of *Game of Thrones*, are valued by their power, wealth, confidence, combat skills, and virility. On several occasions male characters re-iterate that eunuchs like Varys and The Unsullied are “not men.” The male accessories of swords and knives, genital related humor, and the many sex scenes where men aggressively dominate their female partners re-iterate phallic power throughout the show. Women, by contrast, are constantly subjugated and mistreated. Cersei Lannister, the queen, perfectly explains the rigid gender roles of Westeros:

When we were young, Jaime and I we looked so much alike, that even our father couldn't tell us apart. I could never understand why they treated us differently. Jaime was taught to fight with sword and lance and mace, and I was taught to smile, and sing, and please. He was heir to Casterly Rock, and I was sold to some stranger to be ridden like a horse whenever he desired (Season 2, Episode 9).

Her monologue reflects the social indoctrination of children into ‘acceptable’ roles. For Cersei, she was forced to marry a man that she did not love, and she became his property. Even though she is queen, she still feels in many ways powerless and weak as a docile, domestic woman, longing to play a more forceful role out in the world as only the men are allowed.

While women are at a massive social disadvantage, the show features many strong female characters. Catelyn Stark, Arya Stark, Danyres Targaryen, Cersei Lannister, Melisandre, Yara Greyjoy, Olenna Tyrell, and Margarey Tyrell all refuse to be made into powerless, second-class citizens. Each of the women take an active role in their own fate, and in turn, they affect the outcomes of the conflicts around them. Arya, a tomboyish and precocious child, temporarily disguises herself as a boy in order to stay

safer, but she's not the most gender non-conforming character in the show. From a gendered perspective, the most fascinating character is Brienne of Tarth, a physically intimidating female warrior who uses her impressive combat skills and confident demeanor to navigate the ruthless patriarchy around her.

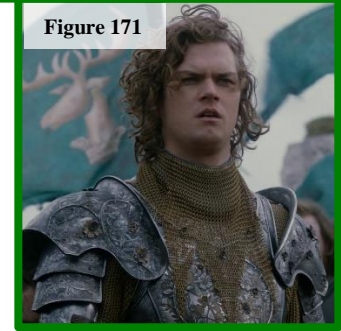
Brienne first appears in season 2 episode 3. Renly Baratheon hosts an intense duel between Loras Tryell (one of the most skilled fighters in the realm, and the secret gay lover of Renly) and an unknown, giant, masked warrior. The masked warrior overpowers Loras and approaches 'king'

Renly. Renly asks the warrior to unmask, and Brienne of Tarth is revealed in all of her androgynous glory. Reaction shots of surprise from Catelyn and Loras

immediately follow her unveiling, as the soldiers around them murmur in awe. She asks Renly for a spot in his Kingsguard, an elite protective force of seven

loyal knights, and he accepts, to further shock from the crowd. Her voice sounds deep and confident.

When Catelyn approaches Renly, and refers to him as 'lord,' Brienne



assertively corrects “‘your grace.’ And you should kneel when you approach the king.”
Catelyn is taken aback by her assertiveness.

In the next scene, Catelyn and Brienne walk together, the significant difference in their size highlighted. Brienne’s stature looms intimidating, and her short hair, wide stance, and heavy gait make for a masculine gender presentation. Her bronze armor highlights her masculinity in its flat-chest and large shoulders, but her lower soft armor resembles a skirt and accentuates her wide, feminine hips. Brienne begins their conversation by saying “if you’ll follow me my lady.” Catelyn bows and replies:



Brienne's wonderful rejection of the title 'lady' perfectly complicates her gender identity. All high-born women in Westeros, like Catelyn and Brienne, are traditionally referred to with the title 'lady,' whereas the men get the title 'lord.' Brienne most directly dismisses the title 'lady' because she rejects the domestic and prissy 'lady' role; the same life that Cersei laments. She's discarded a female gender expression, and in its place, she's fashioned a persona out of desirable masculine traits (physical power, authority, assertiveness, size, combat skills, bluntness) and other gender non-specific traits (loyalty, honor, empathy, trustworthiness). She eschews the more problematic traits found in many of the men in Westeros, such as misogyny, aggression, betrayal, greed, and selfishness.

She's certainly discarding a traditional female gender *role* and female gender *expression*, but it's not clear whether she's discarded a female gender *identity*. How she feels internally about her gender is not completely clear, though judging from her external presentation and behaviors, a viewer can easily assume that she feels similarly masculine and powerful inside. Connecting directly to trans issues, her discomfort with 'lady' brings to mind the idea of a preferred pronoun. Based on this first appearance, she does not consider herself to be male, or deny that she is a woman, but she confidently adopts a unique gender presentation that transcends the binary: an identity that allows her unprecedented agency in a ruthless, male-dominated society.

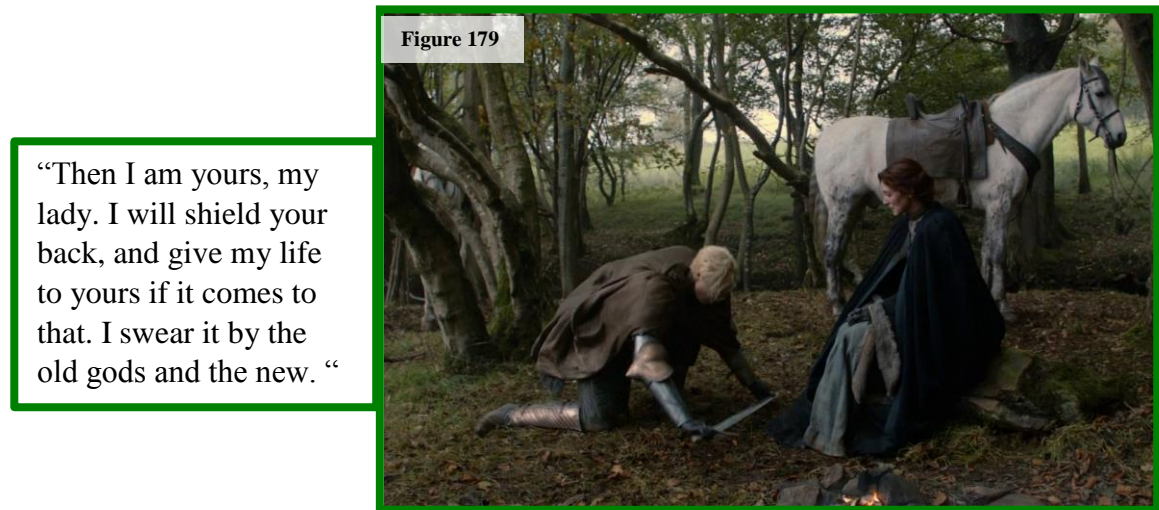


In episode 5, Renly is inexplicably murdered as Brienne screams in horror. Renly collapses in her arms and dies while the supernatural assassin vanishes. She defends herself against the two guards (figure 177), bringing them to the ground with ease. She's an immensely powerful, intensely skilled fighter, delivering a gruesome final blow down the back of the neck of the second guard. In a moment of shock and perhaps 'feminine' vulnerability and emotion, she weeps over Renly's body. Catelyn encourages her to leave before more men come, and at first, Brienne refuses to leave his side. Catelyn fiercely



declares "you can't avenge him if you're dead." Reluctantly she escapes with Catelyn.

Later in the episode, Brienne and Catelyn discuss their next moves in the woods. They bond over the fact that they both lost their mothers at an early age, perhaps partially explaining the atypical feminine strength that they both possess. Brienne respects Catelyn's honesty and bravery: "I could serve you, if you would have me. You have courage. Not battle courage perhaps, but, I don't know, a woman's kind of courage." She swears allegiance to Catelyn, kneeling before her:



Catelyn takes her hand and accepts her humble gesture, promising to never ask Brienne to do any dishonorable task.

The scene reveals a more vulnerable and comforting side to both Catelyn and Brienne, who often resort to an icy and frank communication style in order to avoid being viewed as weak. They connect over their feminine perseverance, and are both in desperate need of an ally in this frightening time of war. Brienne's choice of the phrase "a woman's kind of courage" to describe Catelyn may further imply that Brienne does not consider herself to be a 'woman.' Brienne's choice to not explicitly define herself as 'man' or 'woman' becomes one of her most fascinating character attributes.

Brienne seems content to serve others, though this does not make her weak and submissive. Though perhaps not officially in title, she is a knight, and she alone decides who is worthy enough for her to pledge fealty to. She has conditions of service as well; she says to Catelyn just before she pledges “when the time comes, promise me that you *will not* hold me back from Stannis.” Catelyn, with tears nearly welling in her eyes, accepts Brienne’s selfless gesture of fealty and her terms.

In episode 8, Catelyn has secretly bid Brienne to transport the prisoner Jaime Lannister, the Kingslayer, to King’s Landing, in an attempt to trade him for Catelyn’s captive daughters. Jaime is an arrogant smart-ass, and begins their first exchange when Brienne removes his face cloak. He looks up at her declaring, “you’re much uglier in daylight.” Brienne ignores his insults and dismisses his attempts to engage in conversation. Jaime is near-universally hated because he murdered the previous king before Robert, the ‘Mad King’ Aerys Targaryen. Brienne explains her hatred directly to Jaime: “you’ve harmed others. Those you were sworn to protect.” Although most people in Westeros despised the mentally unstable King Aerys, and rejoiced in his death, Jaime is still looked down upon for being an oath-breaker. Oaths are especially sacred to Brienne; honor is, perhaps, her dominant and defining character trait.

Brienne easily overpowers the bound Kingslayer, ordering and dragging him around like a dog. Their humorous banter becomes the highlight of their storyline:

Figure 180

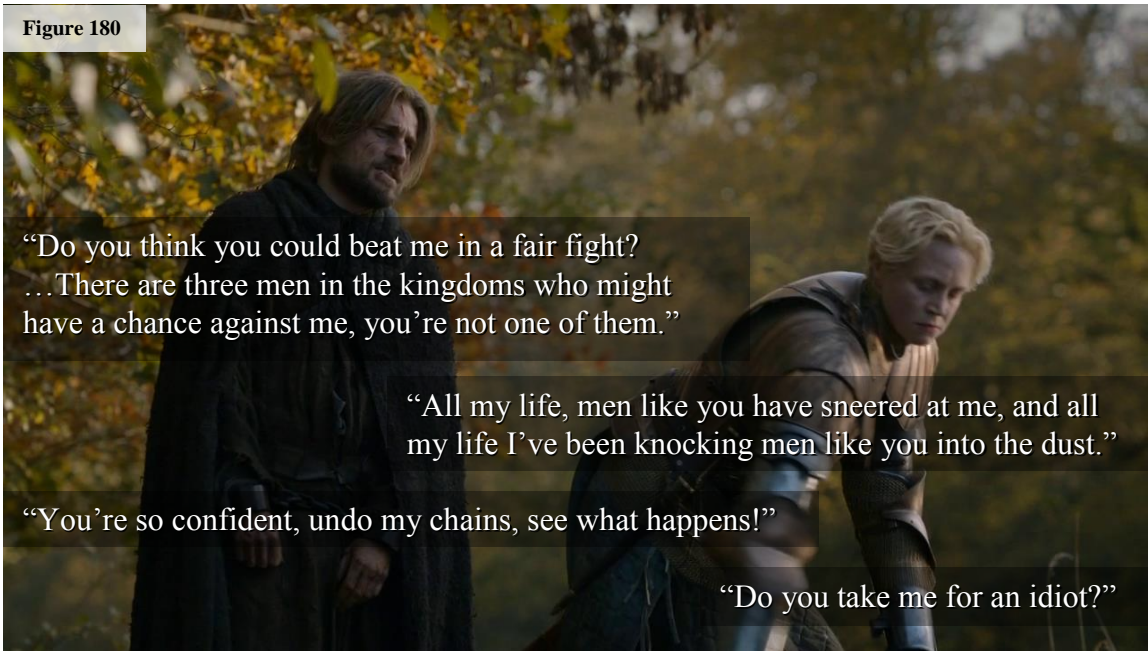


Figure 181



Figure 182



Figure 183



Figure 184



Twice in this short scene, Jaime conflates Brienne with a man, and twice she snaps back at him, self-assuring, without ever accepting or rejecting the labels ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ She’s one of few feminist icons in Westeros, lauding the power of women while rejecting a narrow view of the gender binary. The humorous scene ends on the almost romantic, wide-angle shot of the canoe, suggesting the trope of a modern-day road movie with two conflicting leads who just can’t get along.

Gender roles and power come into play again in Episode 10, when Brienne and Jaime go ashore. Jaime teases Brienne again, this time about her sex life:

You're a virgin I take it. Childhood must have been awful for you. Were you a foot taller than all the boys? They laughed at you, called you names. Some boys like a challenge. One or two must have tried to get inside *big* Brienne. [Brienne, irritated, says "one or two tried"]. Ahh, you fought them off! Maybe you wished one of them could overpower you, fling you down, tear off your clothes. But none of them were strong enough. I'm strong enough. [Brienne: "not interested"]. Of course you are! You'd love to know what it feels like to be a woman.

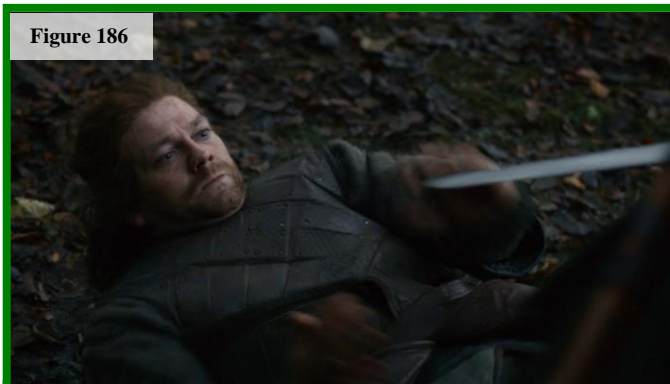
At that moment, they stumble upon the hanged corpses of three tavern women, raped and killed by the Starks for sleeping with Lannister soldiers. Jaime's monologue seems more

Figure 185



sinister in this context, as the bodies are visual reminders that being a victim of a violent rape is not a fantasy that Brienne or any other young women have. What happened to these tavern girls is certainly not what 'it feels like to be a woman.'

A horrified Brienne goes to cut down and bury the women, while Jaime uses the situation as an opportunity to test Brienne’s rigid moral code. He goads her for “fighting for the Starks,” when some of their soldiers act this deplorable. She defends herself saying that “I don’t fight for the Starks, I serve Lady Catelyn.” Suddenly, three Stark men happen upon them. The men are intimidated by the armored soldier, then laugh hysterically when they realize, from her voice, that Brienne is actually a woman. They brag about killing the women, and she asks if their deaths were quick. “Two of them



were, yeah” the bearded man replies. The men recognize Jaime, and ask her to surrender him. She springs into violent action, filmed powerfully with low angle shots, dispatching two of the men in seconds, and bringing the third man, the bearded one, to the ground.

She repeats his cruel line back to him, “two quick deaths...” before brutally penetrating his belly with her long-sword. The rape revenge imagery is unmistakable. After he unsuccessfully pushes the sword



Figure 189



Figure 190



Figure 191

away from his abdomen, while lying on his back, she jabs down the giant, phallic sword into him. He squirms and struggles slowly, as she savors the moment. Jaime looks on in awe before she removes the sword, which is revealed bloody. The sound effects are loud, gushy, and wet throughout the sequence, making the rape comparison even more nauseating. She addresses Jaime like a dog again (“STAY!”), before finally cutting down the brutalized women.

Brienne is undeniably

vicious in her final scene of season 2, destroying the abusers as if they were her own attackers. Her justice is swift and unmerciful, further developing her atypical moral code. She chooses *individuals* to serve, instead of becoming a drone of one familial institution, such as the Stark army. She wields her own fate, executing her retribution and gender presentation on her own terms.

The show catches up the Brienne and Jaime storyline in season 3 episode 2.

Brienne has Jaime on a leash again, though his mouth remains unrestrained. He insults

Renly's femininity and laziness, and when Brienne defends him, Jaime realizes that Brienne "fancied him." Jaime sarcastically laments that "you're far too much man for Renly," joking that "it's a shame the Throne isn't made out of cocks, they'd have never got him off it." Brienne snaps and grabs him by the hair. Jaime responds with a surprising observation: "I don't blame him. I don't blame you either. We don't get to choose who we love." Jaime empathetically states that attraction, even same sex attraction like Renly's, is not a choice. The sentiment is uncommon in the homophobic world of Westeros, and likely reflects the ideologies of real world 2013 HBO, careful not to let Jaime's anti-gay remarks be the last word in the exchange. At the same time though, Jaime's dialogue equates orientation with brother-sister incest, since Jaime's un-chosen love is his sister Cersei. Opponents of LGBT rights often associate same-sex relationships with incest (Sartain, par. 2; Millhiser, par. 5), a conflation that many queer advocates strongly reject (Babelwright, par. 2; Khurram, par. 1). Regardless, his argument is thought provocative, especially in the three layered context of Renly, Brienne, and Jaime's dangerous attractions.

The moment is interrupted when a farmer discovers them, presenting another ethical dilemma to Brienne. Jaime and Brienne talk out their options, Jaime visually framed as a shoulder devil. Jaime wants to kill the farmer, saying that the farmer appeared to have recognized him and could snitch to the many soldiers and bounty hunters around. Brienne insists that "he's an innocent man." She chooses not to pursue the farmer. The consequence of her decision becomes apparent in the climactic, final scene of the episode.

While crossing a bridge, Jaime tricks Brienne and grabs one of her two swords, cutting his rope free. Though exhausted and still bound by his wrists, the Kingslayer is still one of the top swordsmen in the Seven Kingdoms. Brienne’s earlier canoe taunt about who would win a fight between them nears its answer. In an intensely filmed and choreographed sequence, the two are identically matched, and Jaime insults her as “a great beast of a woman” while giving her tips on her form. When Brienne backhands him across the face with her fist, the tide of the fight turns. She soon brings him to his knees and dismissing his final, feeble attempt, she stands defiantly in a low angle shot. She again proves herself as equally powerful as, or perhaps *more* powerful than, any man



around her. Her pummeling of Jaime seems to have released a lot of built up frustration from Jaime's constant verbal abuse, sort of like the angry make-up sex from a bickering couple, as Jaime hints later: "we enjoy a good fight, gets our juices flowing." Their storyline is a feminist twist on the trope of the sexual-tension-filled man and woman journey stories like *The African Queen* (John Huston, 1952) and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Steven Spielberg, 1984) where the leads' relationship develops from bitter enemies to passionate lovers. With Brienne though, she's the dominant, level-headed-one in the relationship, and Jaime is the emotional blond. Belittle her mannish demeanor and appearance all you want, she's still an unstoppable force to be reckoned with.

Her moment of victory is short lived. A group of armed men on horseback led by the mysterious Locke approach Jaime and Brienne. The farmer is with them, pointing out the Kingslayer whom he indeed recognized earlier, confirming Jaime's suspicions. Locke says to Jaime, "looks like your woman is getting the better of you, if you can call that a woman." Again, Brienne's gender is questioned, and again, she refuses to respond. Locke captures them and plans to deliver them to Robb Stark, Catelyn's son, the King in the North. As a consequence of her rigid code of honor, Brienne becomes a prisoner as well, leveling her power imbalance with Jaime.

In the following episode, the unlikely couple sit captive on a shared horse. When they argue about their duel, Brienne heightens the sting of his loss by saying "and I'm a woman." For the first time, she clearly states that her sex is female, though she does not talk about if she feels like a woman. Jaime warns that she will be raped by the men in the night, and they have an unsettling conversation about women and consent:



Jaime ends the exchange by saying “If I were a woman, I’d make them kill me. But I’m not, thank the Gods.” While in one way, Jaime is looking out for her, in another, he’s trivializing rape. As a male of privilege, he has no conception of the physical agony and psychological trauma that a repeated gang rape would have on a woman. It’s upsetting that the first time that she openly addresses her sex, is when she’s facing imminent sexual assault. Rape is the most extreme way for the patriarchy to ‘put a woman in her place.’ When the moment finally arrives, Jaime proves much more cunning and empathetic.



At night, a group of Locke's men untie Brienne from a tree, and begin to pull her into the shadows to rape her. Her arms still bound, she lands a few strong blows on them before they beat her into physical submission. Visually, she and the men exit the scene to the edge of the woods, but her screams are blood-curdling and continuous. Jaime looks on in horror and sympathy (figure 197). Thinking quickly, he lies to Locke, trying to convince him that Brienne's father Selwin Tarth is the filthy rich lord of the 'Sapphire Isle' of Tarth. He suggests that Tarth would "pay her weight in sapphires if she's returned. Her honor unbesmerched." Locke is persuaded, and he has the men return her, presumably before she's been penetrated. Jaime pushes his arrogant cunning too far, asking for more food and more comfortable conditions. He thinks that his status and the riches of his father will reward him endlessly. Locke resents Jaime's privilege and glamour, and for that, he takes his hand. His sword hand.



In the next episode, Jaime is forced to wear his severed hand around his neck, continually humiliated and tortured by Locke. He's lost all will to live, since without his sword hand, he feels that he is no longer a man: "I was that hand," he tells Brienne. His mutilation acts as a symbolic castration. Brienne pities him, and tries to encourage him,

telling him that he must endure to seek revenge. Later, she counters his self-pity more aggressively, criticizing his ignorance of his own rich, male privilege: “you have one taste of the real world, where people have important things taken from them, and you whine, and cry, and quit...you sound like a bloody woman!” Her slight at Jaime twists her gender identity again. She says it as if women are a group over there, a group that she doesn’t consider herself to be a part of. It directly contradicts her earlier declaration that she is, in fact, a woman. Maybe her previous statement referred only to her body. Or maybe she feels like a woman at some times, but not others. Maybe her gender is fluid. Brienne never clearly defines her gender identity, making her character more defiant and complex.

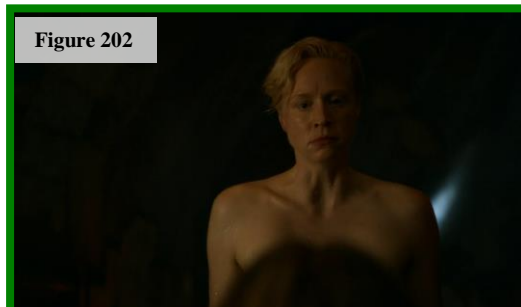
Brienne recognizes that Jaime saved her from her impending rape, but she’s perplexed as to why. When she asks him, he doesn’t respond, but the scene immediately cuts from his face, to that of his sister, in another storyline. The implication is that he saved Brienne because he imagined Cersei facing the same fate, and he couldn’t bear the thought. As season three goes on, the focus shifts more toward Jaime, and his redemption; however, there are still two key scenes which further develop Brienne’s gender identity and power.

In episode five, Jaime and Brienne are transferred to Lord Bolton at Harrenhall, who treats them with considerably more care and comfort than Locke. Jaime enters a bathing room, undresses, and joins Brienne in her tub, despite the many other vacant tubs around them. Brienne is uncomfortable. The visual framing of Jaime standing naked and proud above, with her sheepishly covering herself in the corner of the bath, creates an

image of sexual male dominance, especially considering the two inherently phallic columns and the partially visible genitals of Jaime within the composition.

Jaime, still distraught over his dismemberment and captivity, insults Brienne again: “you were supposed to get me to King’s Landing in one piece. No wonder Renly died with you guarding him.” Brienne immediately reacts, standing confidently nude, reversing the power imagery from a moment before. Jaime sits low and small in the frame, with shots of

Brienne’s front and rear towering over his battered, broken, ‘castrated’ body. In one of the series’ few moments of sexual restraint, Brienne’s breasts are obscured by Jaime’s



head. Typically the show, and HBO in general indulge in, every opportunity for sex and nudity. On *Game of Thrones*, naked women are constantly shown in full, lingering views.

Brienne is different, her dignity and dominance intact. The concealment of her breasts and genitals keeps her female biological sex, which she may not identify

with, hidden in respect. For an audience member who does not recognize the divide between sex and gender, showing full frontal nudity would diminish and eliminate the queer and gender-blending aspects of her character. The tact shown by the show creators and the network to not objectify or degrade a strong woman is quite admirable.

Later on in the scene, Jaime tells the true story of why he murdered the previous king. Jaime actually saved hundreds of thousands of lives by breaking his oath, since the ‘Mad King’ was going to burn the capitol to the ground. Brienne, shocked by his revelation, finds greater empathy for Jaime than ever before. In the next episode, Lord Bolton has dinner with his two captives. He makes Brienne wear a frilly, pink dress,



forcing a traditional, female gender presentation onto an un-traditional gender bender. Additionally, he plans to send Jaime to King’s Landing and keep Brienne in Harrenhall. Despite their resistance to the plan, and Brienne’s insistence that Catelyn asked her to deliver Jaime personally, Bolton refuses to keep them together. Jaime fears leaving her with Locke and the other ruthless men in Harrenhall, and has come to care for Brienne deeply. His redemptive transformation comes to a head in episode seven, the season three climax of their storyline.

Just before leaving, Jaime visits Brienne's cell. He tells her that she will be left in Harrenhall with Locke, and that he owes her a debt. He promises to return Sansa and Arya to their mother Catelyn, since Brienne will be unable to complete that part of her mission for Catelyn. Their expressions and the music in their parting is quite emotional. Brienne seems somewhat doubtful that Jaime will fulfill his promise, but she calls him "Jaime" for the first time, instead of 'Kingslayer' as she had before. It is perhaps a callback to when she asked Catelyn not to call her 'lady.' The gesture implies that she now views him as a friend, instead of an enemy or prisoner. As he leaves Harrenhall, Locke taunts him that "we'll take good care of your friend."

A few miles outside Harrenhall, Maester Qyburn tells Jaime that Brienne's father offered a large ransom, but Locke refused it, since he believed that Brienne's father was filthy rich because of Jaime's lie. Qyburn explains that Locke will use Brienne for "their entertainment, tonight." Though he's about to embark on a short journey home to safety, he announces that the group must return to Harrenhall. He uses his privilege, threatening that he'll lie and dishonor the men when they reach King's Landing, so that Jaime's powerful father will have the men killed.

When they return, Jaime finds Brienne in a large pit, forced to fight a grizzly bear with only a wooden sword. She's being tortured and humiliated, basically sentenced to death in the same pink dress, while dozens of men, led by Locke, taunt and insult her from above. The scene is shot from Jaime's perspective, turning Brienne into a damsel in distress. Brienne tries her best in the circumstances, but without real weapons, the bear is overpowering her. Jaime jumps into the ring, putting himself in-between Brienne and the



Figure 206



Figure 207



bear, despite her protests. Jaime boosts Brienne up the wall, and the men Jaime has blackmailed help her up. Brienne has them hold her legs and lower her down, so she can pull Jaime up by his one hand. At the last second she prevails. Locke refuses to let Jaime take Brienne (“The bitch stays!”), but Jaime says Locke will have to kill him in order to keep Brienne. Since Jaime’s father is the most powerful man in the Seven Kingdoms, Locke regrettably admits defeat. The two leave for King’s Landing and the episode ends.

While Brienne is effectively rescued by a man, I don’t find the scene to be sexist or disempowering. It would be illogical for Brienne to suppress 50+ men while being held prisoner, or subdue a giant grizzly bear. Jaime is only successful in the rescue

because of his privilege as a Lannister. He's not stronger, smarter, or more honorable than Brienne. Additionally, Brienne does not exist as a plot device for Jaime to change as a character, their character growth works both directions. The two characters each learn empathy from the other, in a platonic and genuine way. When they met, Jaime dismissed her as a mannish, hideous virgin brute, then came to respect her honor and combat skills, saving her twice. Brienne thinks of Jaime as an arrogant, selfish, despicable oath-breaker at first, but comes to realize the truth of his past and his tortured sense of self. She encourages him to overcome his maiming and endure, and through her compassion, his condition and values improve. The first selfless act of his life is saving her.

Conclusion

Brienne's sex and gender, both in the show and in the books have been questioned by fans extensively. Due to her overwhelming size and strength, one fan asked George R.R. Martin, the author of the books, if Brienne was chromosomally and biologically female. He replied, "She is female," but did not address the character's gender or seem to know the difference. When fans ask other fans online if they think that Brienne is transgender, the most common responses are vehemently 'no,' with fans defending that she's not a transsexual and merely a 'butch' or 'tomboy.' They often use the evidence that Brienne is attracted to men as evidence that she is not transgender, missing the distinctions between sex, gender, and sexuality. Most fans are apparently unaware that there are other identities in the transgender umbrella than transsexual as well. One commenter, Ser Sweets, pointedly remarks, "I've always considered Brienne the medieval equivalent of genderqueer." A blogger, Alex AKA Madrigogged, states, "I think she lives in a culture where there's really no terminology to call oneself transgender." To me, these

assertions ring much more true of what's on the screen with Brienne. She obviously openly rejects traditions and expectations of femininity, but Westeros has no women's rights movement, let alone a transgender one. I could imagine Brienne being a major source of inspiration and self-affirmation for biological females who may be more queer or masculine in their gender.

Gwendoline Christie, the actress who plays Brienne, has stated in interviews that she feels very feminine herself, and the Brienne role was the first where she had to eliminate a lot of that. She was very adamant about cutting her own hair instead of using wig:

I'm the type of person that has to make those kinds of external changes to get in touch with and increase my own masculinity... When they cut my hair off, the transformation was complete. I really, really miss it. When I had it cut I was a good girl on set – I went to my dialogue session and my horse-riding session – then I went to my hotel room, shut the door and sobbed for two hours. I found it deeply upsetting. It's such a minor thing, but I think women tie-up so much of their femininity in their hair. I certainly did – being six foot three and having that gone and playing such an androgynous character, I felt I'd lost so much of the person I identified as me and who I knew. It felt like a bit of a death (qtd. in Davies-Cole, par. 42).

Christie's confession seems to be a mirror opposite of the discomfort her character felt when forced into a dress. Gender expression and gender identity are co-dependent and inseparable. Losing one's ownership of expression can cause direct harm to their identity. Christie's relationship to Brienne grew out of loss into something much more positive and transformative. She poignantly remarked in another interview that she gained "More of an ownership of one's sense of womanhood, and it actually goes against all notions of aesthetics and it's about something else entirely" (watch the interview here: <http://tinyurl.com/ldxv6ed>). HJ Albone, a media studies student and blogger, believes

that the widespread acclaim for Brienne may bring about more uniquely gendered female characters into prominence in the media:

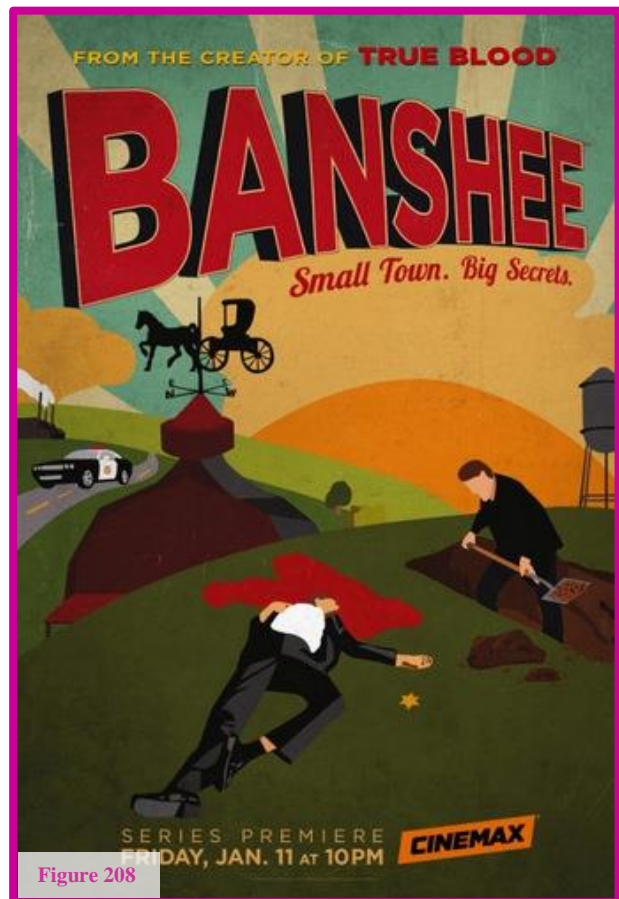
Brienne's immense popularity within the television show *Game of Thrones* reveals that audiences are not only willing to accept so called gender-bending females, but that they wholly excited and ready for them in the media landscape. Brienne's male gender marks that females do not need to use their sexuality in order to establish themselves, and that she eventually earns genuine respect and honour from the other characters only makes her triumphs better earned. Brienne is not the first female character to subvert gender roles, but she is most surely one of the most recognisable and one of the most popular to do so. Her rise to fame only proves that audiences are more accepting of 'different' women these days, and it can only be hoped that media producers will begin to explore more gender subversion in women with the same level of success as Brienne of Tarth (Albone, par. 8).

By extension, Brienne may inspire a larger cultural conversation about gender, and the many types of femininity and potential womanhoods imaginable.

Brienne blurs external gender lines with two underlying motivations: to improve her life prospects and because of her internal desires, which can be inferred from her speech and actions. She refuses to be made into an ineffectual, domestic 'lady,' and uses her physical strength, her will power, and her code of honor to shatter the oppressive patriarchy that she was born into. While she certainly doesn't consider herself to be male, in gender identity or in biological sex, she doesn't exactly consider her gender identity to be female either, at least, not in any traditional way. The mystery and queerness of her gender makes her voice stronger and more unique, instead of rendering her as unsympathetic or other. Perhaps future seasons of the show will delve into her backstory and psychology more, unveiling her motivations more concretely.

CHAPTER FIVE: JOB - *BANSHEE* (Cinemax)

Banshee began in January 2013 on the HBO-owned channel Cinemax as part of their new campaign to create original programming in the action genre. The series is created by Jonathon Tropper and David Schickler, though the marketing of the show emphasizes executive producer Alan Ball. The posters and trailers laud “from the creator of *True Blood*,” despite the fact that Ball is only one of five executive producers and has not written or directed a single episode. The show is a



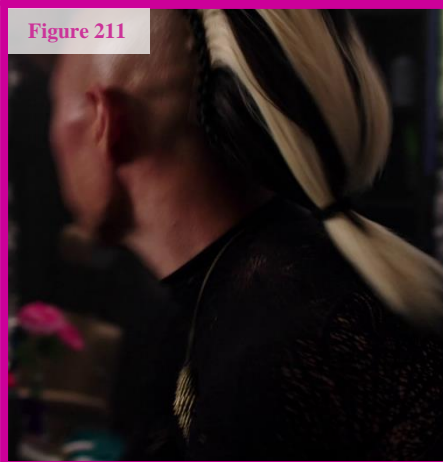
pulpy action-crime thriller about a team of criminals reuniting after a fifteen year separation following a diamond heist gone terribly wrong. The series revels in outlandish, elaborately-staged, large-scale action sequences and intentionally excessive sex and violence. The gratuitous sex and nudity is unsurprising considering that Cinemax, often nicknamed ‘Skin-emax’ by the general public, is known for its nightly broadcasts of original soft-core porn flicks and series.



In *Banshee*, the nameless protagonist of the show, played by Anthony Starr, completes his fifteen year prison sentence, and upon release, he tracks down his former lover and partner-in-crime Anna (now under the identity 'Carrie') in the fictitious, rural Pennsylvania town of Banshee. The unique demographics of Banshee consist of a mixture of Dutch-speaking Amish, Native Americans, and lower, middle, and upper class whites. Most of the wealth of the region is controlled by ruthless crime boss Kai Procter, one of the primary villains. The mysterious Rabbit, the former employer of the protagonist and Carrie (and also Carrie's father), relentlessly hunts the two and ultimately functions as the 'big-bad' of *Banshee*. Through a bizarre set of circumstances, the protagonist illegally assumes the identity of Lucas Hood, the new sheriff of Banshee, despite being an ex-con and having no police experience. To avoid confusion, I will refer to Starr's protagonist character as 'Lucas,' and the deceased Lucas Hood as 'the real Lucas Hood.'

Lucas is a rugged, aggressive, traditionally-masculine alpha-male, quick to get physical, both sexually (with his many female partners) and violently (when beating, shooting, or stealing from the newest thug or hit-man). His short hair, beard, and his understated every-man wardrobe of t-shirts/jeans or a police uniform sharply contrasts the look of Job, whose flashy designer clothes, stylized make-up, and extreme hair-dos fluctuate wildly around the gender spectrum.

Job is introduced in the second scene of the pilot episode of the series, when Lucas enters the Manhattan salon that Job owns, where Job works as a hairstylist. Job is speaking in a soft, feminine voice to a client, but falls silent when seeing Lucas. Job's look is jarring, but wholly unique. His head is bald except for a tall, thick, black and



blonde Mohawk that extends down into a ponytail. It's so extreme that he evokes an anime or comic-book character. His thinly waxed eyebrows, mascara, and lip gloss accentuate his transgender appearance. After he stares down Lucas in shock, he groans in a deep, masculine voice, "Fuck me." In the next shot, Job enters his basement studio,

finding Lucas and revealing the full extent of his own wild outfit: a lacy, high-necked, elbow-length top under a dress with a hard-fabric, hour-glass shape across his middle, which extends out into a feathery skirt. Job pops his hand on his hip, and in a calm, strained, and somewhat effeminate voice, he attempts to reason with Lucas. Lucas starts throwing Job's expensive computer equipment across the room, demanding Job to give him "the address." Job, who's depicted as hot tempered and vulgar, explodes with a "motherfucker!" with each destroyed computer, then returns to the calm voice, saying, "Stop the carnage." Reluctantly, Job gives Lucas the address, urging him not to pursue it. Job and Lucas clearly have a history together, and Lucas seems unsurprised of Job's gender-bending appearance.

Lucas goes to Banshee and has to dispose of three dead bodies that result from a conflict in a local bar. Two of the corpses were a result of Lucas. They were hitmen who killed the real Lucas Hood, the third body, a new sheriff who happened to arrive in town at the same time that 'Lucas' did. 'Lucas,' the ex-con, assumes the identity of Sheriff Lucas Hood because no one in the town had seen him yet, except bartender Sugar Bates, an older African-American man who's also an ex-con. Sugar becomes an ally and confidant for Lucas. While burying the three bodies, Lucas calls Job for help stealing Sheriff Hood's identity. Job answers the phone with what sounds like "He/she Salon" which is revealed on the sign to be Hishi salon. This time, Job is wearing a black, collared silky blouse, skin tight leather pants, and high-heeled pumps. His hair has changed to black-and-blue, full-headed, chin-length, and straight, much more traditionally masculine than the last. The room is decorated with a blue and pink theme,

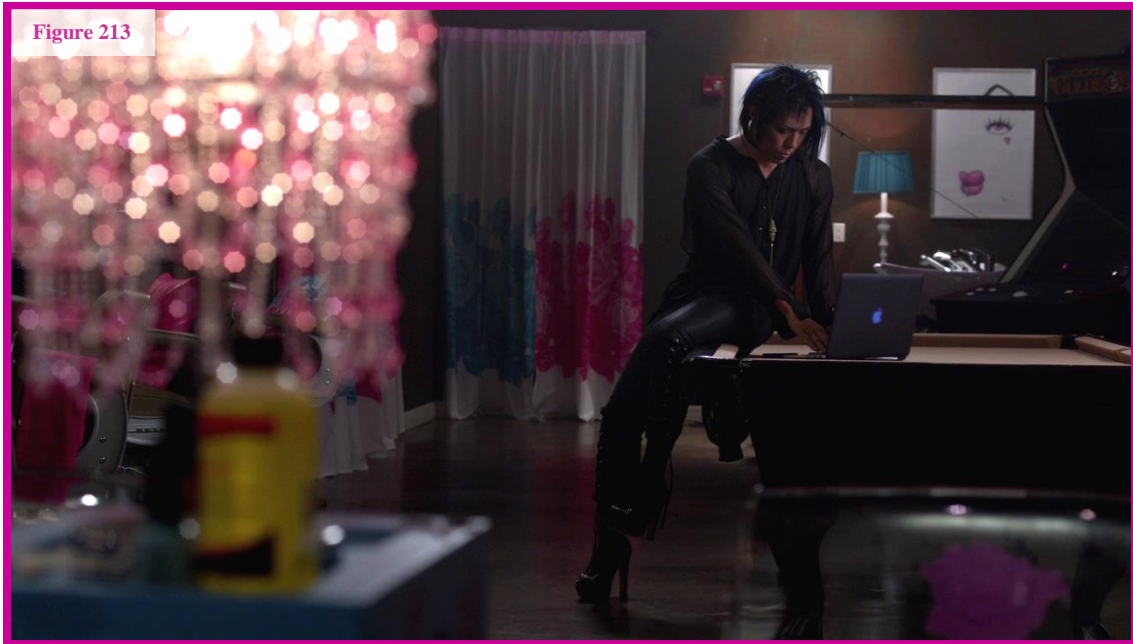


Figure 213

playing off of the he/she pun, and suggesting a dual male/female aspect to Job himself. On the phone call, Lucas says, “I need help becoming someone else” and



Figure 214

Job replies, “Honey, don’t we all,” implying that his own identity is not static. Job is revealed to be a master computer hacker, and could help Lucas with his identity theft. Lucas questions his ability and Job yells, “Suck my tit, bitch! Of course I can do it!” His choice of the word *tit* instead of *dick* aligns his angry power with a female instead of male body. The back and forth between Job’s calm, feminine voice and his deep, assertive masculine one, highlighted by his appearance, the dual-gendered adornments of the room, and the pun of ‘Hishi’ salon, frames Job as a radical non-binary character, perhaps fluid or double in his/her/their gender.

Later in the pilot episode, one of Job's assistants rushes into the room warning of two dangerous-looking men at the door. Job is bald and sporting elaborate blue eye makeup. When he stands up to greet the two men, it's revealed that he's wearing a blue kimono over a black, silken



gown with a plunging neckline. One of the men eyes him up and down suspiciously. Job springs into action, attempting to slash one of the men with a knife in a quick, skilled, martial-arts motion, but he's outnumbered and quickly subdued by the hitmen, who reveal that they are working for Rabbit. One of the assassins calls him a "fucking slope cunt," certainly insulting his ethnicity, and perhaps insulting his gender expression. The men are looking for information on Lucas. Job pleads with them, promising to get information from the safe. The safe leads to a secret exit, which he uses to escape, before destroying the passage with a bomb, detonated by pushing a button on his necklace. Like most macho action heroes and villains, he doesn't look at the explosion behind him, but

his female clothing and hip-swaying walk twist the trope in a hilariously queer way, making it feel fresh and new again.



Figure 217



Figure 218



Job continues his role as sassy, assertive, comic relief in episode 2, but his authority and control over every conversation and situation

prevent him from becoming an object of ridicule. Instead, Job himself creates humor through his snappy dialogue and unexpectedly commanding presence. Lucas makes a phone call, then the scene cuts to a pair of exotic, black, stone-studded ultra-high-heeled shoes, and then then the camera glides up to a hooded Job, bald, in heavy make-up, with a choker and a burka-esque outfit. He gently presses on his ear to answer the phone, then angrily and quickly spews “where’s my fuckin’ money?” at Lucas, asking for compensation for the destroyed salon, and angry that he had to flee Manhattan because of Lucas’s actions. Currently sitting on an Atlantic pier, he’s disgusted with the conditions around him. A young woman walks by and asks “is that a cape?” He stares her down condescendingly, then proclaims “this is Diane Von Ferstenberg, chica! Shoo! Go get pregnant!” Job is proud of his couture, designer wardrobe, and refuses to let anyone demean or dismiss his chosen style, and by extension, his identity. This self-assurance comes across most triumphantly in episode 4.

Figure 219



Figure 220



Figure 221





When Lucas gets ‘boxed in’ during a heist, he calls Job for help, terrified of returning to prison. Job answers the phone from a diner with a warm and effeminate “Hello!” immediately followed by a deeper growl of “Where’s my fuckin’ money?” While the phone conversation between Job and Lucas continues, a second narrative develops simultaneously. A group of hick men across the diner gawk at and joke about Job, who’s currently bald with lots of make-up. He’s wearing a fairly restrained outfit compared to his normal, more outlandishly-feminine get-ups. One of the hicks says, “I bet she could suck the chrome off a trailer hitch.” Job doesn’t react, instead he’s hacking into the security system of the museum and trying to soothe an anxious Lucas, “I’m in there with you, I’mma get you out,” Job reassures him. Lucas takes another call from Carrie in the middle of the ordeal, and when he puts Job back on the line Job loudly and cattily reprimands him, “I know you did not just take a call while I’m trying to save your pasty dumb ass!” The hicks over-hear Job’s flamboyant voice, laugh harder, and then directly harass him, “Hey mamma, you suck any dick yet tonight? Yeah, like, maybe your own?” Job glares over at them intensely, reversing the gaze and power structure of the scene to himself. One of the men says, “Oh, she’s getting’ pissy!” Job says to Lucas softly, “I’ll be right back,” as the bass-heavy music swells.

Walking across the room, Job’s floor-length dress and androgynous blouse and jacket are seen as he picks up a plate from the counter. In seconds, he attacks all three men, punching one, breaking the plate over the second’s head, then chopping the third one in the throat. He points a knife at them declaring, “Sit yo’ bitch asses down! Now I am going back to my table. The next one of you that gets up out of this booth will be pissing sitting down for the rest of his life,” threatening to literally emasculate the already

figuratively emasculated men. The fact that they've been rendered impotent by a biological man who's already chosen to strip himself of most traditional masculine markers adds sting to their wounded pride. The women at the main counter are calling the police and as Job passes them he says, "Oh sure, knock on a sister," evoking an urban, female identifier for himself. This is one of the few instances where he labels himself with a gender. Now that both Job and Lucas have police in pursuit of each of them, Job hacks faster and finds a way out for Lucas. Job moves to leave the diner, his heels gently clicking on the floor. He politely acknowledges the women at the counter, saying "Ladies," then he turns to the hicks and says, "Bitches," before making an elegant exit.

Job confirms in this scene that he's a queer force to be reckoned with, immensely skilled in both hacking and close-quarter combat. He doesn't butch up or normalize his gender presentation for anyone, even if he's alone on the road in rural America. *Banshee* makes it clear through POV camerawork and editing, and Job's uncompromising voice and physical power, that he's not a passive object to be humiliated for 'cross-dressing.'

Instead, he's a slayer of those who would police and mock his identity. He gets to perform all of the funniest lines of dialogue and always has the last word. The combined effect of these production choices inspire the audience not to laugh *at* Job, but laugh *with* him. Job actively produces the humor himself, relegating the intolerant or confused bystanders into the submissive position of ridicule, never letting himself slip off his pedestal of dominance. It's impossible to resist his bossy, vulgar charms.

Later in the episode, Job surprises Lucas in *Banshee*, mocking his false authority by sprawling out on the trunk of Lucas's police car in a Mohawk-afro hybrid and yet another dress. Lucas is happy to see him, and jokingly asks "what do *you* want?" Job

takes control of the conversation, demanding \$750,000 for his blown-up business and telling Lucas to find him somewhere to live. Job is one of the few people that can put the typically alpha-male Lucas into the passive, listening role. In fact, he oozes authority so intensely, that everyone he encounters must accept a temporary power demotion when he enters the scene.



In episode 9, Sugar and Job discover a corpse in Lucas' home, which is owned by Sugar and is more of a barn or shack. Job looks down at the body, his boots in a blood stain and says "sweet Jesus." Sugar says "what you've never seen a dead body before?" Job, who's wearing a tank top with a crocodile on it and "oh snap!" in giant letters counters with "no, I just never had you pegged as a slum lord. Would it kill you to slap a coat of paint on this place? Rotate your furniture? Maybe a nice throw rug?!?" Sugar rolls his eyes at Job. He's the only major character who seems uncomfortable with Job's queerness, calling him a "potty-mouthed drag-queen" when returning Job's banter in episode 5. Job tries to repair their somewhat tense relationship when at the bar later in episode 9. Sugar pours Lucas and himself a drink, but ignores Job. An impatient Job asks "are you just going to stand there or are you going to pour me a drink?" Sugar quips:



Despite his confrontational and sarcastic behavior, Job has moments of genuine tenderness and affection, his nurturing femininity cooling his hot-headed moments of masculine rage.

In episode 10, the season finale, Job (sort of) refers to himself as male for the first time. Bald, in some sort of martial arts leather gear, and with no make-up he says to Sugar, “I need 20 men doing this, and I ain’t got ‘em. It’s just us two.” Job and Sugar are suiting up to rescue Lucas who’s being held by Rabbit in a nearby factory. They make

allies with the police department, and heavily armed, they prepare for a raid on the factory, the climactic action sequence of the season. Job approaches the perimeter,



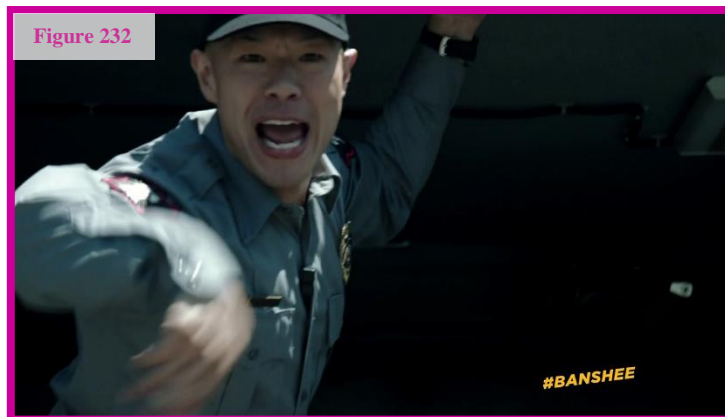
alone, and with black war paint over his eyes and his signature hand-on-hip stance. He politely and effeminately asks the two guards in front of him to open the gate. The guards resist him, then Job does an eenie-meenie-miney-mo routine, and each guard falls from a loud gunshot as he gestures at them. The men were shot by the other members of his



posse, who emerge from the darkness behind him. The six of them enter the grounds heroically. Job holds his own in the ensuing, massive firefight, taking out three of Rabbit's thugs with military tactics and immaculate precision. Job proves again and again, that despite his often feminine gender expression and presentation, he is dominant, competent, and assertive in both conversation and combat.



In the season 2 premiere, Job infiltrates an armored van by dressing like one of their security guards. For Job, the butch uniform looks like the costume (whereas a runway-model, designer gown would feel just right). During a ridiculous highway chase scene, Job pops out of the back of the armored van in the costume, still maintaining his non-binary vibe by his flamboyant hand gesture and screaming, “Flip that bitch!” to



Carrie, asking her to turn her pick-up around. Job throws the money into the rest of the team's backwards-driving pick-up truck, and then he jumps across the gap. At a re-



grouping session back at the bar, Sugar finally gives Job a drink without Job having to ask for it, but Sugar has put an aforementioned, frilly umbrella in it, a callback to season 1 (figure 244). Job, with his massive, muscular arms showing out of a men's tank-top, scowls at Sugar and casually tosses the ornamentation out of his

liquor. Only Job chooses what to feminize himself with and when to do it. In this scene, for example, he's presenting as hypermasculine, presumably these clothes were under his security costume, but he doesn't seem uncomfortable in it. His demeanor is fierce, but he's fiercely loyal as well, passionately promising Lucas that he'll never cut him out of the money that they'd made from the heist.

When Jason Hood, the son of the real Lucas Hood, comes to Banshee, things get more complicated. Job becomes the young man's guardian, keeping him out of trouble and preventing the truth about Lucas from being exposed. Jason first meets Job in season 2 episode 4 when Lucas and Job wake him up in his motel room. Jason looks at Job, who's dressed in an elaborate blond and black wig, a collared shirt and tie. Jason squirms and recoils and says, "What the fuck?!?" and Job responds, "Right back at you." Jason

tells Lucas “look man, I don’t know what kind of kinky shit you’re into...” and Job just rolls his eyes in a reaction shot, silently refusing to function as a



transvestite clown character. Job has a fairly high tolerance for rude comments about his gender expression, unless it gets to level of the rednecks at the diner. In the wide shot, it’s revealed that the collared shirt is actually a unique gender-bending top that becomes a corset at the waist: visually, he’s both male and female at once. This further complements the duality seen in his personality and speech.

Later, Job (intentionally) nearly runs Jason over with his car, furious that Jason left his motel room. Proudly and assertively stepping out of the car in the same glorious outfit, which looks even queerer in daylight, he asks Jason, “Were you or were you not supposed to stay in your room?” in a polite, almost motherly way. Jason tries to make an excuse but Job interrupts tersely and deeply, snapping, “Get in the fucking car!” Jason meekly resists, but Job’s dominance is unshakable.



Jason submits after hearing Job's terrifying threats and the two speed away. Job is truly dual in his gender, an almost multiple-personality reflected in his voice, clothing, and mannerisms. He's graceful, gentle, and feminine when he begins conversations, yet he typically becomes unrelentingly aggressive, powerful, and dominant when he needs to take control or when he loses his temper. The switch often happens in an instant, sometimes several times in one conversation. In this way, he celebrates the tenderness of traditional femininity, but discards the gentle passivity of a woman's tact when he doesn't immediately get results with that approach. Simultaneously, he revels in male authority and physical strength when he verbally and/or physically explodes with masculine aggression and barely-controlled rage. The bizarre combination seems to work for him. His male anger is a source of humor because of his colorful vulgarity and expert timing, accented by the sharp contrast with his wildly queer outfits. Unlike many real-life hot-tempered men, Job never becomes abusive or unjustly violent.



In episode 7, Job's in his most masculine presentation yet (previous page): a sport's tank top, bald with no make-up. Unlike the cop uniform, he's expressing himself this way by choice, not necessity. Though he doesn't say so, it suggests that there's a fluidity to his gender; some days he may feel



wildly femme and others traditionally masculine. Unsurprisingly, he never discusses his internal gender identity, but gender expression is a reflection of internal identity, so his inner queerness can be extrapolated from what's made clear from Job's exterior. Clearly, he's fluid as shown by the pink scalp and purse get-up above.

In the season finale, Job has his most fascinating gender scene yet. In an extended flashback, we see the events following up to the failed diamond heist that put Lucas in prison for fifteen years. The scene begins with the disco hit "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" by Sylvester, and a silhouetted hand is shown twirling and snapping, backlit by a spotlight. A head with white curly hair and a decorative flower is shown next bobbing up and down. The figure turns around into the light, and it's revealed to be Job in a lip-sync drag performance. He's wearing an absurd outfit: a nearly rainbow-colored, ornate, Marie Antoinette style dress, white stockings, and a thick layer of make-up that makes him look like a porcelain doll (watch at <http://tinyurl.com/p5hqhhv>).



The audience of the club, which consists of traditional men, flamboyant men, women, and drag queens, hoots and cheers. One patron yells, “You go girl!” confirming the validity of this female identity. Lucas, who’s watching, is even smiling and enjoying himself. As the protagonist of the show, and a more relatable character to the straight, male viewers of the show, Lucas is signaling to the TV audience, saying that this behavior is something to be celebrated. Job dances and gestures confidently, shaking his hips and swooping his hands theatrically. The pink and blue lighting theme of Job’s costume and the club recalls the same shades of pink and blue as seen in Job’s salon in the pilot episode. It’s a chromatic reminder of the boy/girl gender binary, and Job’s fascinating rejection and re-appropriation of it.

Job struts forward off of the stage and puts his leg up on the chair of a man, suggestively flashing his stocking and strutting his chest while singing the line of the chorus, “You make me feel, mighty real!” Perhaps these drag performances make Job feel like a ‘real woman,’ but it does not seem like Job is a transsexual woman. The man touches Job’s knee, and then Job playfully slaps his hand then finger-wags at him. Turning back to the



stage, Job flips the back of his dress-skirt up toward the men. Reaction shots of women at the table laughing confirm that the crowd is impressed and encouraging, not uncomfortable or disgusted. This seems to be a safe space for Job to express, to the most extreme degree, his desires to gender-bend. The playful, sexual moment of the performance, with the leg on the man's chair, is the first moment in the whole series where Job suggests any sort of personal sexuality or orientation. Before this moment, Job is arguably asexual. He's single, he's never flirtatious, he's not shown having sex (unlike the ultra-horny Lucas), and he doesn't talk about any past relationships or sexual desires. It also doesn't seem that his 'cross-dressing' is ever done for erotic reasons, though he seems to truly enjoy being on stage as a drag queen.

When Job reaches the high note of his lip-sync, he throws his head back like a diva, and thrusts his hand above himself, as a high angle camera shot pulls back on his elated face. At the same moment, a man can be seen in the background, heckling Job, yelling, "Nice shoes! Did you buy those before or after he sodomized you?" Job's



Figure 246



beaming smile turns to a grimace and he signals to cut the music. Job commandingly snaps at someone nearby, and another queen hands him an actual, live microphone, as opposed to the lip-syncing prop. A voice in the background says, “Oh, I know how this is gonna end!” His power accented by the low angle over-the-shoulder shot, Job responds to the heckler, beginning in his soft, sweet, feminine voice:

Figure 247



“I’m sorry I couldn’t hear you over the music. What was that you were sayin’?”

Figure 248



“I said your daddy ass-raped you” [the crowd gasps and boos]

[To the angry crowd] “No, no, this here is a place where we all can come to express ourselves freely. Lord knows I do!” [some people cheer]. These gentlemen here have every bit as much right to express themselves as any of us. I applaud you, gentlemen. Coming here was an act of great courage. At this stage in your lives when you’re struggling with your homosexuality [some people catcall and hoot]. Still buying each other rounds hoping one of you gets drunk enough to suck the other one’s dick and then pretend to forget about it in the morning. Let’s hear it for our new gay friends, ladies and gentlemen! Let’s give them a *hand* [makes a hand job gesture]”

Figure 249

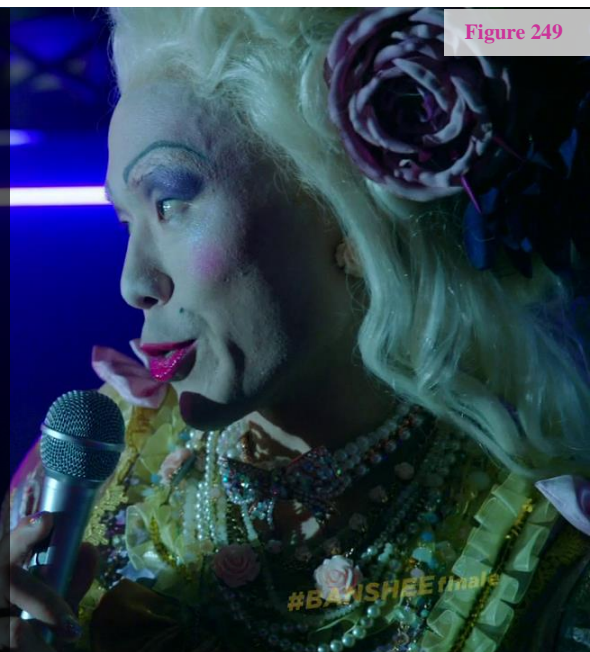


Figure 250



“I’m gonna fuck you up!”

Figure 251



The man goes to swing at Job, and with one hand, Job swats the punch away, hits the man in the face, throws his head into the railing, then kicks him several feet across the room (with pumps still on!) to the floor. The man appears to be knocked out. Even though Job looks like a childish marionette doll at the moment, he brings the boorish man to his knees in an instant. Throughout the exchange, the crowd cheers

Figure 252



at Job's insults, and even louder for his take-down of the foolish heckler. Lucas has another reaction shot with a satisfied expression after that moment. The timing and placement of the other reaction shots from the queer community make it clear that they laugh *at* the homophobic man, and derive humor from Job's sassy come-backs.

This club is clearly a queer community of acceptance for Job, just as his salon seemed to be. That realization suggests why Job was so angry to lose his salon and leave

New York, forced to live in a town without a queer culture, with no one else like him. No one validates his identity the way the people of the drag club do. For the LGBT community, the act of drag functions as a rejection of the limiting hegemony of binary gender roles and expression, a symbolic ‘fuck you’ to the heteronormative patriarchy. As Philadelphia drag queen Ann Artist puts it, “I see drag as a big "Fuck You" to societal norms. I feel that it is one of the most punk rock things a man or woman can do. It is the art of screwing with people” (Daily Dragsbian). Although *Banshee* is an action series with a hypermasculine, straight male protagonist, the show takes a fairly queer stance on the drag performance. The scene signals to the audience through gazes, reaction shots, and Job’s speech that gender diversity and gender transgression should be rejoiced, not mocked, ridiculed, and rejected. This is a truly progressive moment in action television.

Conclusion

Hoon Lee, who plays Job, describes Job’s gender as intricate and fluid in an interview with The Backlot, a gay media news site:

We typically bounce between masculine and feminine notes throughout both seasons – Job is constantly exploring the zones between ideas like “male” and “female” or “high” and “low” brow. I think he feels empowered and energized by that liberty. And that’s tremendous fun for me and the design team...And even when a look is predominantly biased towards one gender stereotype or another, we’re looking for interesting ways to pull that other side in. So while it’s sometimes easier to access Job’s heightened nature through certain outfits, I feel like it’s always lurking under the surface no matter what he’s wearing. He’s someone who is remarkably honest about what he desires at any given time (qtd. in Halterman 2014, par. 6).

On various blogs, media sites, and interviews, Job is labeled with terms such as *transvestite*, *cross-dresser*, *transgender*, and *drag queen*. Cinemax’s official site for *Banshee* describes him as “a cross-dressing hair stylist and genius computer hacker.”

According to GLAAD’s glossary of transgender terms, *transvestite* is a defamatory word

and *cross-dresser* is preferred. I tried to edit *Banshee*'s Wikipedia article to remove the word *transvestite* from Job's definition and replace it with one resembling Cinemax's own definition, but the main editor of the page put the term back, saying that Wikipedia "doesn't censor" and providing sources to random media sites who used the term to describe Job. Hoon Lee was asked specifically how Job identifies in another interview with *The Backlot* in 2013. The interviewer posed the same labels above and asked Lee to clear up the confusion. Lee responded,

I feel like, for Job, the whole idea of figuring out the label of who he is and every aspect of that is something he's not interested in. And that Job as a character, as a person, is somebody who is in a constant state of evaluation and evolution. And that's partly why his look and presentation keeps changing. And this is something that we've thought about in terms of sort of a guiding light for his styling and his presentation in general, but it's been fueled by larger thoughts about who this person might be (qtd. in Halterman 2013, par. 9).

The Job in Hoon Lee's mind rejects labels and categories and that seems to come across with the Job on screen. Job never selects any of the above labels for himself, and neither does Cinemax, who uses the verb *cross-dressing* instead of any noun label. Lee sees Job as a character in flux, not a static figure whose label fits into a definite lexical category, and I view him Job the same way.

Throughout *Banshee*, Job's varying gender expression is treated with a sense of dignity and respect. As a character with a commanding and active presence, he does not let himself become a victim of intolerance. Job always has the last word, or the last strike against the foolish bigot who underestimates his impressive martial skill set. While all of Job's gender-queerness comes from external expression, through clothing, hair, make-up, speech, and gestures, it's clear that he's not presenting himself in this way out of mental illness or sexually deviance. Instead, Job picks up and puts down masculine and feminine

adornments or affectations fluidly, both for practical and personal reasons. Carefully maintaining authority (and an impressive collection of haute-couture apparel), the creators of *Banshee* and actor Hoon Lee avoid the trite and outdated role of the transvestite clown in favor of a complex, genuinely funny, immensely likable, and confident non-binary queer character.

CONCLUSION

In the past ten years, five premium-pay-cable television characters have emerged that blur and complicate the rigid hegemony of the male-or-female gender binary. Examined together, Shane, Lafayette, Roscoe, Brienne, and Job provoke compelling questions about the many ways that a person can be a man, be a woman, or reject those two categories completely, exposing the dichotomy as a fallacy. More specifically, these fictional, uniquely gendered creations reflect how boutique American television series imagine gender and the alternatives to traditional tropes and types of queer folks. Comparing and contrasting the five transgender representations, some thought-provoking trends can be discovered:

1) The focus on the external expression of gender

Television functions most fundamentally as an audiovisual medium. Unlike many novels, TV rarely puts the narrative perspective directly into someone's thoughts and feelings. Instead, character psychology and emotion is expressed mostly through acting, dialogue, cinematography, editing, and music, with assistance from art direction, costuming, make-up, and sound design. None of the shows analyzed in this thesis use voice-over narration for the five characters of study, meaning that the majority of gender cues are conveyed with visual signifiers in the clothing, make-up, hair, speech style, dialogue gestures, and movements. This rings true for all five characters:

Shane's discomfort in the quinceañera dress...

Lafayette gently twirling his hair wrap, lovingly calling women 'hooker'...

Roscoe's designer purses and liberal use of eye shadow...

Brienne's short hair and heavy, wide gait...

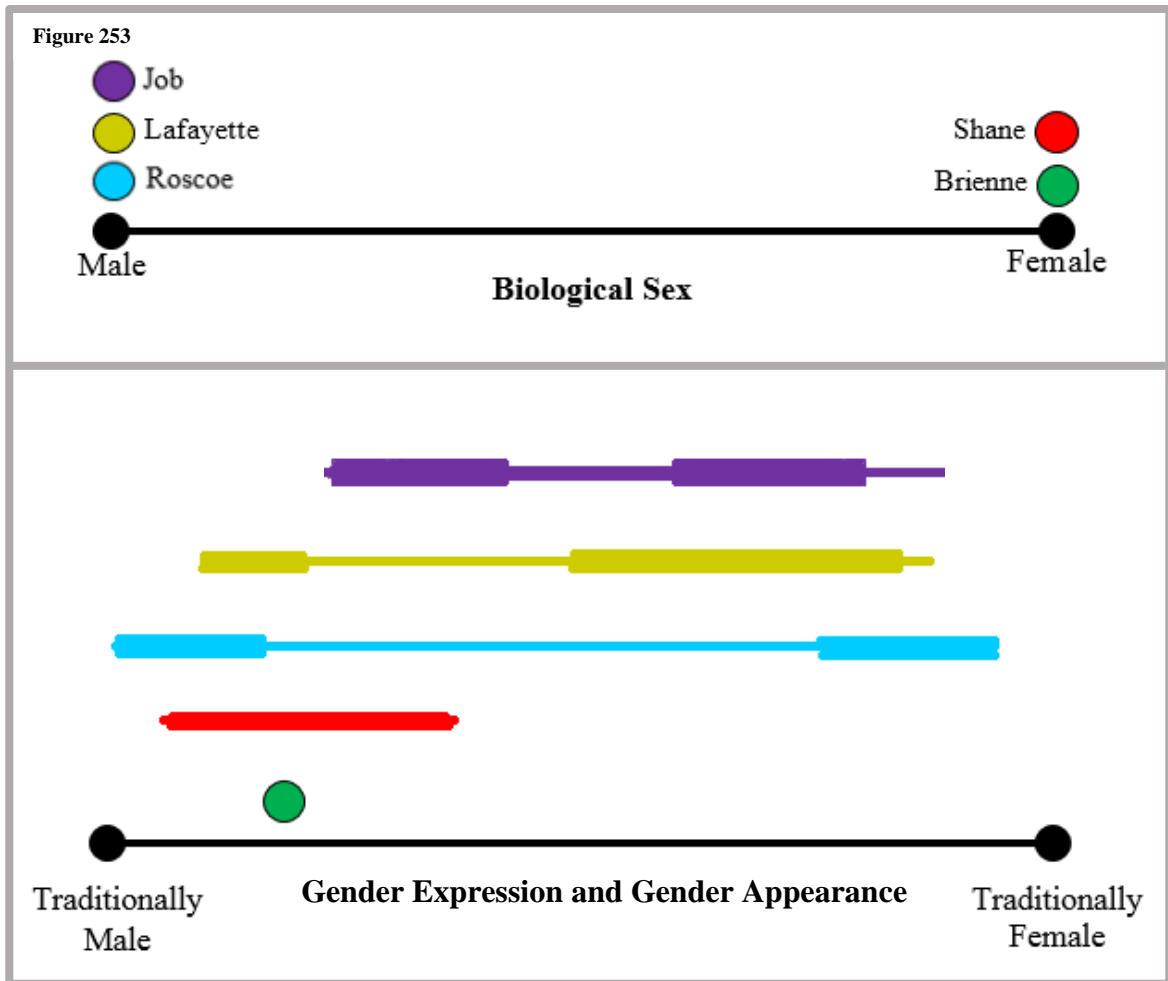
and Job's wacky wigs and couture, gender-blending outfits.

The two biologically female characters, Brienne and Shane, are fairly consistent in their gender expression, except when they are both forced into a dress against their wishes.

This speaks to the immense power that a dress holds as a feminine signifier.

Conversely, at one time or another, Roscoe, Job, and Lafayette, the three biological males, are all seen wearing a skirt or dress. These scenes reveal the disruptive power of a biological male in the most iconically female outfit in U.S. culture; other characters turn their heads in curiosity or disgust, or with Roscoe, the camera does swooping reveals of their many outfits. The cultural norms about 'boys' and dresses are so intense that Roscoe faces harsh bullying, while Job retaliates against the rude 'gender police' he encounters. The make-up of the three males functions similarly. The image of a man's body in a gown and painted with eye shadow can be jarring, or used as a source of comedy or freakishness, but not in these series. All three biologically male characters convey through their movements and facial expressions, that they are comfortable and confident in this presentation. Shane and Brienne carry themselves equally assuredly with their shorter hair, their masculine wardrobe and stances, and their interest in masculine activities (skateboarding and swordplay respectively).

In the graphic that I created below, I have attempted to visually chart the gender expressions of each character after noting their biological sex. None of the characters are identified as intersex, and all the biological sexes of all of the characters are revealed.



Their sexes are of course the same as, and dependent on, the sexes of their corresponding actors. The physical body of the actor becomes an essential part of casting a trans character in live-action media, and determines much of the character’s perceived gender. Their gender expressions, which I’ve color-coded to match their names in the biological sex graph, are much more complicated and amorphous. I’ve drawn their shapes on the graph to reflect my personal reading of how ‘traditionally male’ or ‘traditionally female’ or wherever in between they appear to me. The center point between the two ends of the spectrum reflects the most androgynous and gender-queer presentations. I’ve added “and gender appearance” to the label on the graph, since it’s impossible for me as an analyzer to *completely* separate how ‘masculine,’ ‘feminine,’ or ‘queer’ the characters are trying to

come across from the appearance of their physical body. For example, I find that Roscoe appears more feminine than Lafayette when they wear women's clothes, because Lafayette's huge upper body constantly reminds me of his inescapable masculinity. I've included dress, make-up, hair, speech, affectations, and movements in my conceptualization of gender expression.

The width of the line reflects how far across the spectrum the character *chooses* to experiment in, since gender expression is a reflection of what's inside. If a character is forced to don clothing that they're not comfortable with, like the Brienne and Shane dress scenes, then those moments are not included in the graph. The height or thickness of the line reflects how much time I perceive that they spend in that area. A thick line represents that the character hovers in that area of gender expression for a lot of the time, while a thin line means hardly ever. Brienne has a green circle instead of a green line because her gender expression does not waver. Her short hair and suit of masculine armor are consistent through all of seasons 2 and 3. Her speech and mannerisms remain consistent as well. The other four characters, however, fluctuate in their gender expression and gender appearance.

After Brienne, I found that Shane (red) fluctuated the least because her punk hair and lack of make-up never vary. She typically wears black, masculine clothes, *always* pants. Her tops; however, vary much more from revealing, fairly feminine tops, to butch collared shirts. Her men's underwear and lack of bras further push her slender line toward the male side of the graph. I had her line extend further to the left (male) than Brienne because based on the reactions of characters in their respective shows, Shane is mistaken for a male more often and for a longer duration of time than Brienne. Recall when Harry

tells Shane, “My, my, my, androgyny confounds!” Interestingly, none of the biologically male characters are ever mistaken for biological women in their story worlds, no matter what their presentation. The shows never decide to put the three bald males in realistically female wigs. Maybe it’s a coincidence, or maybe the difference suggests that premium-pay-cable show creators believe that women can be men in a way that men *cannot* be women.

The patriarchic American culture may value a woman who adopts culturally desirable masculine traits like strength and assertiveness, yet frown upon biological males who adopt some stereotypically feminine traits like gentleness, sassiness, and prettiness. Marked as feminine, the traits become points of ridicule or disgust when attempted by males. The patriarchy reinforces strict guidelines on what constitutes a man and what constitutes a (lesser) woman. From this perspective, sex and gender are interchangeable terms, and no spectrum exists between male and female. This viewpoint would reject queer and non-binary representations. On the other hand, a radical queer perspective would argue that persons are capable of performing any gender expression that they desire, regardless of their birth sex. They would laud a character that confounds gender perceptions and carefully distinguishes between biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. These shows split the difference by not fully appeasing the dominant patriarchy or the radically queer.

Roscoe (blue), covers the most ground in the gender spectrum because before puberty, they dressed mostly female and could potentially pass as female more so than any of the other biologically male characters. But in season 3, Roscoe wears almost exclusively men’s basketball clothes and only retains some femininity by eye make-up,

jewelry, and some sassiness in their gestures and speech. Since they've developed as physically male by that point, that skews their appearance as more male.

The similarities between the three biologically male characters are unmistakable. They are all fairly fluid or dual in their gender, switching between external gendered presentations for personal expression or for practical means. All three are racial minorities in addition to being non-binary, making them in many ways, double minorities. They all wear make-up and women's clothes at times, especially flashy, high fashion clothes. They are all witty, feisty divas, loud, talkative, and animated in their communication. They are all bald, so their shaven heads then function as blank slates for any gender of wig, hat, or hair-wrap to adorn. Lafayette (yellow) is slightly less fluid than Roscoe, mostly hovering on the fem side or in the gender-queer middle range when cooking or in their apartment. The yellow block on the male side represents when he dabbles in more traditionally masculine presentations like at the block party, when he confronts Senator Finch, and when he verbally and physically asserts himself in the AIDS burger scene with a deep, intimidating voice and with his powerful fists.

Job (purple) is dual in gender as well, switching far faster between male and female approaches to speech, beginning at a soft, caring tone, and then entering a masculine rage in seconds when his short temper flares up. In his wigs, designer fem outfits, and thick make-up, he fits in the more feminine block to the right, but when he goes incognito as the security guard or suits up for a martial arts combat scene he fits in the more masculine block on the left. The middle ground between Job's two blocks is thicker than the others because many of his outfits and speech patterns combine both male and female aspects, experimentally blended into stunningly queer androgyny, like

the corset that flares out into a collared shirt. His masculine block doesn't go as far left as Lafayette's because many of Job's outfits mask his muscular body, whereas Lafayette's arms are almost always visible. When sexual orientation is added into the discussion, Lafayette's 'gayness' defines much of his masculinity, while Job is arguably asexual. Job retains a girlish flamboyancy even when he tries to assert himself as male, whereas Lafayette comes across as hypermasculine when he goes into macho mode. The perfect example to illustrate this is the comparison between the eerily similar AIDS burger scene and Job's takedown of the men at the diner.

Both scenes occur in a restaurant and involve a group of three rednecks in a booth making loud, homophobic comments about the non-binary individual. In both instances, Lafayette and Job *choose* to confront the triad of bigots and physically neutralizes the threat, adding a catty one-liner on their exit ("Tip your waitress," and "Ladies... bitches" respectively). Seeing as *Banshee* came after *True Blood*, and that the show creators of *Banshee* have *True Blood* show runner Alan Ball as executive producer, it's probable that Job is based off of, or inspired from, Lafayette. The diner scene may be an homage to the infamous AIDS burger scene (or a rip off of it, depending on your point of view). While both confidently standing men make quick work of the unskilled, seated rednecks, Lafayette's voice and body are terrifyingly hypermasculine, his booming voice and sinewy arms bringing the room to a halt. Job has a more feminine stance, mincing walk, his arms are covered, and he's wearing a dress in his scene. The way he says, "Sit your bitch asses down!" is still intimidating, but it has a girlish hiss to it that doesn't tip to quite the masculine range that Lafayette's does. In terms of physical power, though, neither can match the devastating brutality that Brienne can unleash.

The Westerosi equivalent of the trio of rednecks is the trio of rapist/murderers who confront and belittle Brienne, then brag to her about their responsibility for the mutilated corpses that hang above. To make matters worse, they threaten the safety of Brienne. Though they laugh at the image of a large woman in armor, she swiftly and powerfully takes them to the ground, slowly penetrating one in the abdomen in obvious rape-revenge imagery. The straight-male patriarchy of her world is so violent and oppressive, that she has to assert herself on a level far beyond that of Job and Lafayette, even though they are all equally outnumbered three-to-one.

In a much more subtle way, Shane has a unique gendered quality that the rest of the characters do not share. Lafayette and Job occasionally choose to present closer to their birth sex for pragmatic reasons without expressing a profound loss of identity, but Shane experiences deep anxiety when pressured to wear Mercedes's dress. She nearly begins to cry. Roscoe seems content all over the gender spectrum, slowly transitioning from feminine clothes, affectations, and interests, to more male ones as puberty begins. Looking at Roscoe in Rizzo-mode compared to the b-ball slinger two seasons later is almost like examining two different characters, but each Roscoe is undeniably charismatic and self-assured.

2) Confidence and assertiveness in crossing gender lines

For all five characters, the desire to 'cross-dress' is not framed as a deviant or erotic act used to elicit humiliation, fear, or disgust in the viewer, it's simply the way that these characters express their truest selves. All five are extremely self-assured in their presentation, strutting their non-binary vibes openly in public. When harassed about their gender expression, the four adult characters either ignore or confront the attacker:

Shane is unfazed by Dana's "dyke" insult...

Lafayette confronts and blackmails the hypocritical closeted senator...

Brienne ignores the constant insults from Jaime and other men. She kills the three rapist/murderers who laugh at her...

and Job shuts down the homophobic/transphobic heckler during his drag performance with verbal insults and a combative takedown.

The adolescent Roscoe; however, has a more complex relationship with the push back against their gender expression. Roscoe expresses to Clyde that they want to beat up the bully at lunch, and feels helpless against them. At school, a place we almost never see Roscoe interact at, violence and aggression are punishable offenses, even if done against a verbally abusive tormenter. At home though, Roscoe stands up to their father when he diminishes the non-traditional relationship in which Roscoe is involved, bringing a complex milieu of queer issues into what might be a rote teenage rebellion storyline in a lesser show. The parenting and sexuality dynamics complicate the gender politics of the scene. Though we don't see Roscoe attacked about their gender explicitly on screen, Roscoe boldly blurs gender lines in their dress, speech, and hobbies. They're willing to boisterously play Rizzo in the school play, dominate their opponents on the basketball court, or cathartically 'krump' with the older dancers.

For Roscoe and the adult characters, their wishes to cross gender lines are not a source of confusion, anxiety, stress, or self-loathing either. The audience is not asked to pity these people and their 'identity crisis' the way that so many of the transsexual movie characters in Miller's dissertation were. The gender bendings and blendings are a genuine form of queer self-expression, not an attempt on behalf of a traditionally gendered person

to deceive or trick others for personal gain, like in cross-dresser comedies like *Tootsie*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *She's the Man*, and *Mulan*. Shane, Lafayette, Roscoe, Brienne, and Job appear to know exactly how their gender comes across, and they celebrate these differences and hold onto them tightly:

Shane refuses to let Carmen's relative cut her hair.

Lafayette: "It ain't possible to live unless you're crossin' somebody's line"...

Roscoe: When asked what their gender is, they say, "I'm Roscoe"

Brienne: "Just 'Brienne' is fine...I'm no Lady"

Job: "this here is a place where we all can come to express ourselves freely. Lord knows I do!"

The confident erasure of gender norms in the five characters' voices and dress implies that they feel differently gendered on the inside, but aside from Roscoe's bold declaration, none of the characters directly address their internal gender identity.

3) The avoidance of discussion about internal gender identity

I stated in the literature review as part of my hypothesis, based on Miller's conclusions about transsexual characters in film, that it's impossible for a typical cisgender/straight audience member to truly empathize with a non-binary trans character without the character explaining their internal gender identity. Now that I've spent time dissecting these characters, I believe that my hypothesis was wrong. I underestimated both the television format and the power of acting to elicit empathetic responses. The TV format can spend dozens of hours with characters instead of the typical 90-to-140-minute format in cinema. This allows the audience time to mentally normalize queer dress and actions, eventually coming to enjoy or respect non-traditionally gendered characters and

their behaviors, even if the characters don't explain to the audience exactly why they deviate from the norm. Additionally, the incredible performances of Katherine Moennig, Nelsan Ellis, Donis Leonard Jr., Gwendoline Christie, and Hoon Lee help to transcend the barriers between trans character and cis audiences. In their voice, eyes, and facial expression, complex emotions can wordlessly be conveyed, like when Shane experiences severe anxiety when forced to don a dress, or the look on Roscoe's face when he sees Lex forced into a false female presentation. I believe that the average viewer could root for, sympathize with, and in some scenes, even empathize with all five of these characters.

While an internal gender identity can certainly be extrapolated from gendered behaviors and expression, most people are not aware of the difference between sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior as laid out in queer theory. My original bias was that this perspective and these terminologies had to be addressed to truly understand what a trans/queer character might really be thinking. What I've realized is that letting the characters simply *be* confidently non-binary on screen in their appearance and actions might be more effective than trying to educate an audience on a particular ideology. The latter approach could easily come off as pandering and didactic, or awkward and tangential. Even worse, the terminologies and labels of those in the trans/queer communities can actually become trappings that separate identities into smaller and smaller limiting boxes instead of signifying and inspiring the multitude of ways to be human.

In *House of Lies*, Jeremiah and Marty use the phrases "experimenting with different kind of gender identification" and "gender fluid" without explaining them, and they don't do a lot to help the audience understand what Roscoe's going through. But

when Roscoe proclaims to their father, “I’m Roscoe, dumbass!” it’s obvious that they’re different and proud of it. That’s all we really need to know. Job’s drag performance and ensuing diatribe make it crystal clear that he and his community believe in free expression, and everyone else can take it or leave it. If *Banshee* were to *teach* the distinction between biological sex and gender identity directly, it might not be particularly insightful for an audience member to better understand Job’s character. Based on the films and shows that I’ve seen, the sex/gender distinction seems more important to understand in order to empathize with the psychology and emotions of a *transsexual* character. Though non-binary identities and transsexual identities are both in the transgender umbrella, they function differently on screen. These five characters don’t have a name or preferred pronoun that differs from their birth sex, and they don’t desire any permanent body modifications. These aspects of transsexuality seem to be a major point of confusion or a potential cause of alienation among cis viewers. ‘Butch’ women and ‘fem’ men; however, seem to be more socially acceptable than transsexual people, and the humor and charisma of these five characters inspire meaningful connection with the audience instead of humiliation, fear, or pity.

My original hypothesis was closely linked to my prescriptive urge to demand that these shows educate the audience about trans issues if they’re going to have a trans character in their series. I’ve discovered that a character’s non-binary gender identity can exist as one aspect of a constellation of demographic and personality traits instead of being the defining character trait in need of a scholarly or socio-cultural explanation. *True Blood* doesn’t need to elucidate that Lafayette has a ‘more feminine gender identity’ for an audience member to realize that he’s a sassy diva and a self-assured badass. *The L-*

Word doesn't need to use the phrase *gender binary* or be explicitly told that Shane 'rejects hyper-feminine expression' to understand that Shane feels most comfortable in punk hair, men's clothes, carrying herself with an aura of masculine authority. Nuanced writing, compelling acting, POV camerawork, and conscious costuming and make-up accomplish this instead. The role of LGBT characters on television doesn't have to resemble that of a university lecture about queer studies. Television characters can subtly suggest the diversity of the human experience as a by-product of their entertaining and emotive functions.

While I reject my hypothesis that non-binary characters cannot be empathetic without queer ideals explained, I maintain the belief that a suggestion of the concepts in queer theory can increase empathy *specifically for a non-binary character's gendered actions*. That short, key scene between Roscoe and Marty after the basketball game aligns the audience with Roscoe's point of view, and his rejection of being put into cultural categories of 'boy,' 'girl,' and even 'boi,' 'grrl,' 'gender-queer,' and 'gender-fluid,' poignantly proposes the multitude ways a person can feel inside. This mere suggestion of internal identity makes Roscoe's gender more palpable and empathetic than any of the genders of the other characters. That scene and the later one in front of Lex's house make Roscoe's demeanor, their varied clothes and make-up, and their wide range of interests suddenly much more understandable. If Job, Brienne, Lafayette, and Shane talked about their internal sense of self and/or relayed backstories related to their gender, it may encourage a similar level of compassion that the creators of *House of Lies* elicited with Roscoe. The queer theory terminologies need not be used, but portraying the underlying

conception of internal identities differing from the external body can make the dress and behaviors of a non-binary character more understandable and empathetic.

4) Sexuality/orientation closely connected to gender

One unexpected trend that I noticed in the analysis was how much a character's sexuality and orientation factored into the understanding of that character's gender. I neglected to take to heart my overlapping Venn-diagram model of sex/gender/orientation as interconnected. The terms *gay* and *straight* are completely dependent on the gender of the person in question (and their partners). A character who's fluid in their gender and/or rejects gender labels all together, renders *gay* and *straight* into incoherent, useless terms. A character's sense of masculinity, femininity, power, and submission helps define their role in sexual encounters, dating, discussions about sex and dating, and in their flirting behaviors. Shane takes an archetypical 'bachelor guy' approach to sex with a lack of prolonged, monogamous attachment. Lafayette broadcasts to everyone in ear shot how much he loves to have sex with men. The link between gender and sexuality works in the opposite direction as well. Roscoe takes a submissive role in their relationship with the hypermasculine Lex, whereas before, they wouldn't let anyone else pick their clothes for them. All five characters talk about sex or sexuality at some point, often in a gay, lesbian, or queer context:

Shane [To Dana]: "Sexuality is fluid. Whether you're gay, straight, or bisexual, you just go with the flow."

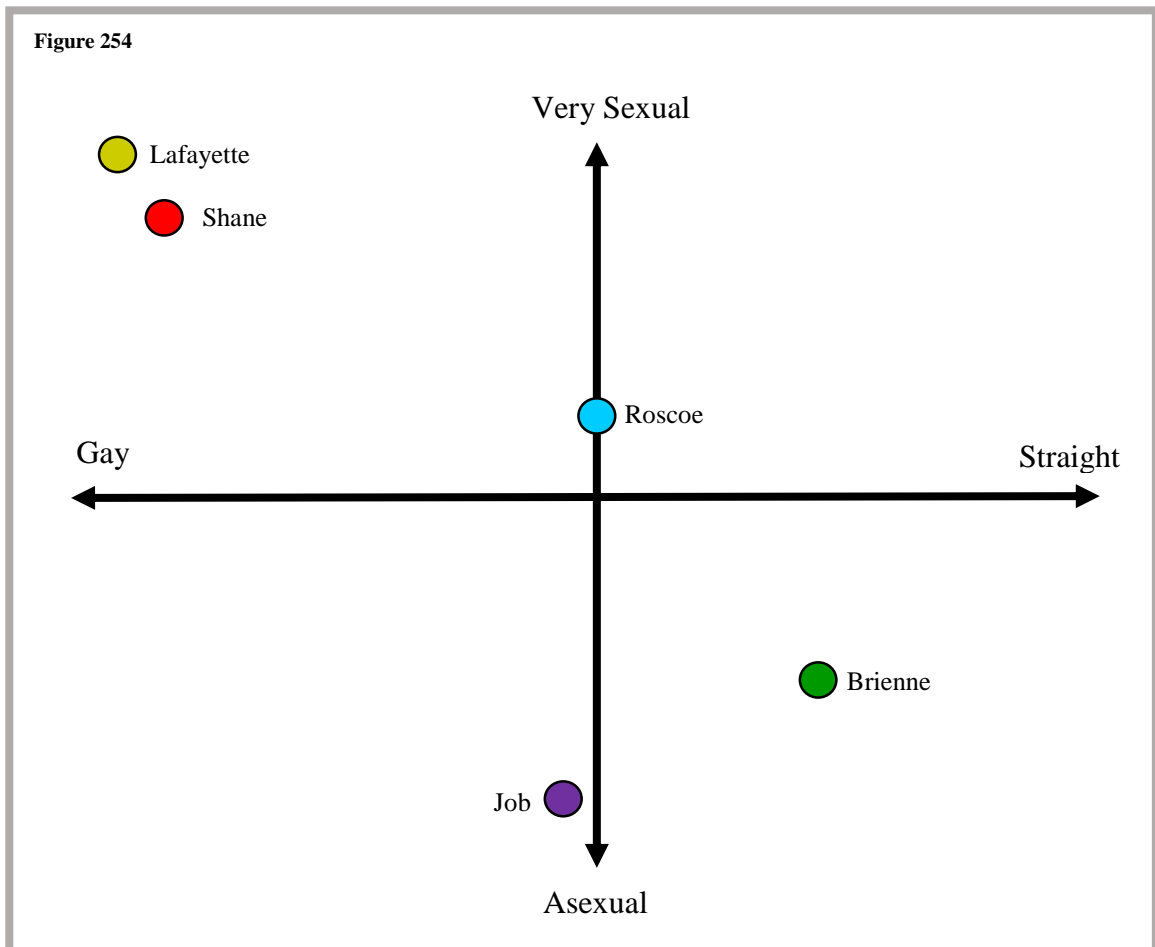
Lafayette [To Tara and the hillbilly]: "That boy is sex on a stick!"

Roscoe [To Marty]: "What do you do if you like a girl, AND you like a boy?"

Brienne [To Jaime]: "If you were a woman you wouldn't resist?"

Job [To heckler]: “Honey, you ain’t my type.”

Though Lafayette and Job have many similarities, they are almost opposite in terms of sexuality. Job only hints at sexual attraction once, during the drag show when he puts his leg up on the male audience member and then says the above quote sarcastically to the rude heckler. Lafayette is all sex all the time, constantly gesturing suggestively, talking about sex, having sex, or performing for his pornographic site. Like with the sex and gender diagram above, I’ve graphed the sexuality and orientation of each character along two axis. The vertical axis represents a characters intensity of sexuality in their sexual desire, dialogue, attraction, and actual physical encounters. The x-axis depicts the gradations along the gay/straight spectrum. The exact center of the diagram would reflect



an averagely sexual person who is bisexual, pansexual, or queer. A simple gay/straight line cannot accurately reflect the diversity of orientations, but I still find the graph helpful.

Lafayette and Shane are the two most similar characters in terms of their sexuality and orientation. Lafayette's status as 'gay' and Shane's status of 'lesbian' are major defining character traits. Moreover, they both have many sexual partners throughout their shows, they both avoid monogamous relationships in their first seasons, and they both have a history with prostituting themselves for male clients. Lafayette is more sexual than Shane on the graph because he's even more flirtatious and sex-obsessed than Shane. He's a current prostitute and has a sexual website that he runs. Shane's lesbian-ness defines her character so crucially. She loves women. She craves them and seeks them out relentlessly. She does not want to partner with a man ever again, and she vehemently rejects being mistaken for a gay man. In this way, her sexuality defines her gender.

Roscoe falls closer to the middle in terms of sexuality because they're interested in dating, they're shown kissing on screen, and they even perform a hypersexual hip-hop dance for the school. They sit exactly on the line for sexual orientation because their orientation couldn't be queerer. Since they don't identify as 'boy' or 'girl,' they've had crushes on both boys and girls, and they've dated a transgender person, labels like 'gay' and 'straight' are completely irrelevant. Brienne is very non-sexual. She's presumably a virgin, she refuses to talk about sex, and she denies her attraction to Renly and her potential attraction to Jaime. Her only sexual action in the show is her assertive naked stance she takes against Jaime in the bath. Her obvious love for Renly and her possible crush on Jaime skew her orientation toward straight. The basically asexual Job only

addresses any sort of attraction in the aforementioned drag performance scene. Although it may only be part of the theatricality of the lip sync dance, his feelings are directed toward a man, so I skewed him to the ‘gay’ side slightly. It seems like he may just be in love with his computer and not really need a sexual partner. For him and Brienne sexuality really has nothing to do with their gender expression and identities, because their sexualities are basically non-existent. But for Lafayette, Shane, and Roscoe, their attractions and orientations define much of their queerness.

Perhaps even more progressive and more radically queer characters are possible. Imagine an intersex character who identifies as somewhat masculine but whose sexual orientation leans toward biological males, effectively disrupting all three binaries (male or female sex, man or woman gender identity, and straight or gay orientation). Biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior are not equivalent aspects of character or person, but they overlap and inform each other in inseparable ways. I’ve tried to separate the categories and chart them visually as a means of discussion, but while I find them in some ways helpful, at the same time they inevitably oversimplify by making immensely complex and intersecting issues clean and neat. Though I pose spectrums of gender and sexuality, those lines and endpoints even frame things in somewhat binary terms. Truly radical queerness seeks to complicate or eliminate all binaries and labels, transgressively destroying the arbitrary, limited structures created and enforced by the cisgender, straight ruling class. While *House of Lies* makes several big steps in that direction with the fluid, gender non-conforming Roscoe and the moving parent-child relationship that’s tested by their identity, future representations may see a completely mind-blowing, ideology-shattering approach.

5) The flexibility of the premium-pay-cable format

The shows are experimenting with new types of gendered characters, just as the characters experiment with gender themselves. The reduced constraints in premium-pay-cable allow show producers and creators to attempt non-binary trans characters in a way that other broadcast formats might not. On broadcast and cable channels like Fox, CBS, AMC, and FX it may be too risky to lose audience members who find a show ‘too queer,’ or lose advertisers that don’t want to be associated with that content. On HBO, Showtime, and Cinemax, bowing to the demands of corporate advertisers and government censors is far less of an issue. The audience of premium-cable channels skews more toward affluent, educated Americans. Based on the popularity of *The Newsroom*, *The Wire*, *Homeland* and *Real Time with Bill Maher*, premium channels seem to skew ideologically toward liberals as well. LGBT content fits better with the audiences on these channels. Shows like *Queer as Folk*, *The L-Word*, *True Blood*, and *Looking* are proof that Showtime and HBO are un-afraid of turning away viewers because of shows with many or mostly LGBT characters. In fact, premium-pay-cable may be a ‘safe-space’ for gender experimentation and the non-binary community, just as gay bars, coffee shops, and drag shows function as safe community spaces for the five characters, and for real-life LGBT individuals.

Unfortunately, the high cost and exclusivity of the channels may prevent these queer characters from reaching lower and middle class viewers. The channels seem to target upper-middle class, white, college-educated audiences, potentially rendering their content unattainable or irrelevant to less affluent viewers and viewers of color. While many premium-cable shows may feature an array of minority characters, the protagonist

is almost always white (*The L Word*, *Banshee*, *Game of Thrones*, *True Blood*, *The Wire*, *The Sopranos*, *Weeds*, etc...). Three of the five characters analyzed are ‘double minorities’ as racial and gender minorities, and for each, their gender plays a much more significant role in conflict than their race, perhaps suggesting that gender difference remains more ideologically contentious than race. The intersectionality of race and gender on television demands further investigation.

6) The incongruity with Miller’s three-function model.

The other aspect of my hypothesis involved putting Miller’s three-function model to the test for these five non-binary TV characters. He concluded in his dissertation that for transsexuals in cinema, all characters fell into three functions:

- 1) Ridicule/humiliation
- 2) Fear/villainy
- 3) Sympathy/pity

I found that all five characters avoided these limiting and potentially diminishing functions. While Lafayette, Job, and Roscoe are a source of much humor in the show with their sassy diva personas, they actively command and create the humor as opposed to becoming a passive object to be laughed at. The thoughtful writing, authoritative acting, and point of view camera work prevent them from becoming a ‘tranny clown’ all too often seen in throwaway scenes in media like *Arrested Development* and *Anger Management*. The trope of the crazy transsexual killer as seen in *Silence of the Lambs* and *Psycho* is irrelevant here as well. Lafayette, Brie, and Job instill are intimidating forces, but they only instill fear in the un-named bigots around them, never in the audience. All five characters are too confident and assertive in their gender expression to

be pitied for it. We're never asked to pity Shane or Roscoe for some sort of 'identity crisis' as it's framed in *Dallas Buyer's Club* or on Katie Couric's talk show.

These five characters are more certain of themselves than most of the cis characters on their respective shows. Lafayette feels much more secure in hybrid masculinity than Jason does with his attempt at hypermasculinity. Shane feels much more liberated in herself than the self-hating Dana and Jenny. Roscoe's an adolescent, but they still know who they are and what they want more than their falsely content and inauthentic father. Brienne has a clear head and a rigid code of honor unlike most of the cast who are fearful, scheming manipulators. Job keeps cool under pressure whereas the unnamed macho lead of the show occasionally crumbles into anxiety and post-traumatic stress.

These representations reinforce the idea that variance in gender is not a crippling disability or a freakish deviancy. Instead, these characters celebrate gender diversity, boldly expressing (what we imagine as) their internal selves, breaking the un-spoken rules of a binary society. While these internal identities are rarely, if ever, explicitly revealed, the writing, acting, and production team help us infer the psychology and emotion inside of the boundary-crossing individual. The self-assurance and likability of each character allows for an empathetic viewer-character relationship to form over several years through dozens of episodes, a format unavailable to the characters analyzed in Miller.

If Miller's theory does not apply to this study, is queer theory still a valid approach to deciphering these non-binary characters? Queer theory emphasizes the difference between sex, gender, and orientation, and the diversity of gender expressions

and identities. Most scholars who write about transgender, begin with an overwhelming introduction of terminologies, attempting to lay out the many ways that community members may conceptualize their own genders and refer to themselves. At first glance, one might assume that the authors are simply putting identities into smaller and smaller isolated boxes or ‘political categories.’ But with further reading, Wilchins, Valentine, and Ekins/King all laud the radical identities that transcend dichotomies, labels, and classifications in the on-going discussion that is queer studies.

Likewise, Shane, Lafayette, Roscoe, Brienne, and Job each render gender identity terms irrelevant, and they are each proud to do so. The label-free characters (“‘What are you?’ ‘I’m Roscoe’”) are more radically queer than an explicitly ‘transsexual,’ ‘genderqueer,’ or ‘bi-gender’ character might be. A discrete linguistic term instantly places a person into a conceptual framework, a boundary with biases and limitations. The absence of language challenges hegemony in the most extreme and progressive way. Instead of promoting equality for all *named* categories of gender, the content creators of these shows have employed *erasure* as equality, framing the ideologically-shattering, label-less gendered behaviors as triumphant. Their queer dress, mannerisms, and actions are celebrated by the five non-binary characters, their peers in the show, and on an extra-narrative level by the actors and fans as well. In a perfect marriage of un-pretentious entertainment and genuinely provocative sociocultural commentary, these characters encourage viewers to re-examine gender and human expression. In this way, queer theory is indeed a valid lens to view these television characters through.

Final thoughts

In queer theory, the internal experience of gender always trumps the external, but the medium of television inherently privileges the exterior body and the outward expression of gender. I was surprised to find that these differences did not hinder the characters from fulfilling many of the tenets of queer theory. I began my analysis expecting to find many scenes that ridiculed or pitied these five non-binary characters, but I was surprised to find that the shows framed these characters as overwhelmingly self-assured and freewheeling. Through their audio-visual transmissions, HBO, Showtime, and Cinemax are encouraging gender diversity and free expression to be appealing attributes for people in American culture. If advocacy for radical gender is the next movement for social change, following in the footsteps of the racial, feminist, and gay rights movements that came before, then the media portrayals of queer gender have never been in greater need of continued, critical examination.

While the exterior appearance and actions of these non-binary characters are privileged far above internal gender identities, the shows avoid writing, casting, and production choices that render the trans characters as lesser or other. These characters may signal the beginning of a trend that eventually trickles down into cable and broadcast television, inspiring viewers to question our society's beliefs about sexuality and gender, masculinity and femininity, and the myriad combinations and unique expressions of identities across the spectrums of personhood.

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APPENDIX

List of Scenes Used for Chapter One: Shane

Season 1: Episode 1

2:00 – Introduction at Diner

9:50 – Jennie spies Shane in pool

13:30 – Ladies discuss sexuality; Dana jokes that Shane is a man

1:29:00 – Hook-up web; “Shane could have us here all night”

1:32:50 – Shane talks to Bette and Tina about monogamy

Season 1: Episode 2

9:30 – The ladies discuss sexuality again; Shane “sexuality is fluid...”

Season 1: Episode 5

5:00 – Shane mistaken for a man by Harry

26:30 – Shane and Clive suggest their pasts as prostitutes

Season 1: Episode 6

1:30 – Shane and Harry confront each other at the bar

Season 1: Episode 10

5:30 – Shane suggests a dyke mullet now that Dana is out

Season 3: Episode 1

36:45 – Shane meets Carmen’s family

40:30 – Shane tries on dress

Season 3: Episode 2

36:20 – Shane tries dress on again; “tranny wedding cake”

38:40 – Shane presents herself in dress to Carmen’s family

41:30 – Shane’s wig is revealed, dance with Reese

46:10 – Shane returns to a more butch mode and hooks up with Carmen

Season 3: Episode 3

12:05 – Shane meets Moira; “us butches”

31:30 – Dinner party

40:30 – Dinner scene continued; butch discussed again

Season 3: Episode 4

40:40 – Shane’s opening; shaving head

50:15 – Shane gossips about Max’s sex change

Season 3: Episode 9

16:50 – Tattoos

35:50 – Carmen outs her relationship to the family

Season 3: Episode 11

41:15 – Shane proposes

Season 3: Episode 12

Shane’s wedding, entire episode

List of Scenes Used for Chapter Two: Lafayette

Season 1: Episode 1

10:40 – Lafayette introduction in Merlotte’s kitchen

41:10 – Shot of Lafayette at road crew

45:20 – Lafayette at bar with Tara and hillbilly

Season 1: Episode 2

8:10 – Butch outfit

14:20 – Block party

50:00 – “don’t let nothin’ get you down”

Season 1: Episode 3

36:55 – Tara at Lafayette’s trailer; prostitution revealed

44:05 – Jason at Lafayette’s trailer; Jason dance

Season 1: Episode 5

34:10 – AIDS burger scene

Season 1: Episode 6

15:50 – Lafayette comforts Sookie

Season 1: Episode 7

27:15 – “Crossin’ somebody’s line”

Season 1: Episode 10

17:55 – Lafayette watches *The Bad and the Beautiful*; senator returns

Season 1: Episode 11

11:55 – Lafayette watches senator’s homophobic speech on TV

21:10 – Lafayette confronts senator

Season 2: Episode 1

22:15 – Lafayette re-encounters redneck when imprisoned

List of Scenes for Chapter Three: Roscoe

Season 1: Episode 1

00:55 – Roscoe is introduced in Marty’s bedroom

01:45 – Jeremiah introduced; parenting discussion

10:30 – Gita calls Marty

17:30 – Monica describes Roscoe as a ‘tranny’

30:30 – Roscoe hears the news about Sandy part

31:00 – *Grease* performance as Rizzo

Season 1: Episode 2

5:15 – Marty’s second call with Gita – “gender specific cross-dressing”

27:00 – Marty and Roscoe play video games, address bullying

Season 1: Episode 3

1:10 – Roscoe’s dance

6:30 – Clyde harasses Doug over “tranny”

Season 1: Episode 4

2:00 – Marty and Roscoe talk at airport; Marty adjusts Roscoe’s scarf

4:45 – Clyde and Doug meet Roscoe

16:20 – Doug and Roscoe talk about bullying

Season 1: Episode 6

3:20 – Roscoe and boy kiss

8:30 – First meeting with Gita

22:45 – Second meeting with Gita

Season 2: Episode 3

2:30 – Roscoe’s new punk look/teen angst

Season 3: Episode 1

12:55 – Roscoe tells Marty about basketball tryouts

Season 3: Episode 2

6:00 – Roscoe gets on basketball team, talks about Lex

15:40 – introduction of Lex

17:30 – Roscoe talks about gender

19:05 – Jeannie says “you look butch” to Roscoe

Season 3: Episode 4

20:30 – Lex and Roscoe’s first kiss

Season 3: Episode 5

22:45 – Marty and Roscoe’s first big fight; “circus”

25:45 – Dinner party where Marty expresses how much he loves Roscoe

Season 3: Episode 7

1:00 – Marty and Roscoe’s second big fight; “he’s my girlfriend”

23:30 – Drunk Roscoe and Lex; Lex’s home life and home gender

25:30 – “Drinking is for boys with cheap purses”

Season 3: Episode 12

14:30 – Roscoe and Lex break up

21:10 – Roscoe krumping

List of Scenes for Chapter Four: Brienne

Season 2: Episode 3

11:00 - Introduction of the Brienne Character

15:45 – Brienne and Catelyn talk; “I’m no lady”

Season 2: Episode 5

5:00 – Brienne reacts to Renly’s murder

38:20 – Brienne pledges fealty to Catelyn

Season 2: Episode 8

13:40 – Brienne and Jaime’s first interaction

Season 2: Episode 10

13:50 – Brienne and Jaime banter again; rape revenge scene

Season 3: Episode 2

9:00 – Jaime and Brienne argue; “We don’t choose who we love”

53:30 – Jaime and Brienne sword fight

Season 3: Episode 3

12:30 – Jaime chides Brienne about rape while they’re captive

47:00 – Brienne nearly raped; Jaime’s hand removed

Season 3: Episode 4

3:30 – Brienne encourages the ‘castrated’ Jaime

24:20 – Brienne encourages him again; “you sound like a bloody woman”

Season 3: Episode 5

35:40 - bath scene

Season 3: Episode 6

34:30 – Dinner with Bolton; Brienne in a dress

Season 3: Episode 7

33:45 – Jaime says goodbye to Brienne

50:30 – Jaime returns to Brienne, rescues her from the bear

List of Scenes for Chapter Five: Job

Season 1: Episode 1

2:20 – Job introduced at Salon

26:30 – Lucas calls Job in pink/blue theme

35:25 – Job gets attacked by hitmen; blows up salon

Season 1: Episode 2

15:37 – Lucas calls Job at beach; “Is that a cape?”

Season 1: Episode 4

5:10 – Job helps Lucas when he’s boxed in while rednecks harass Job

52:10 – Job arrives in Banshee

Season 1: Episode 9

3:50 – Job argues with Sugar

5:40 – Job banter with Sugar again; over umbrella in drink

Season 1: Episode 10

10:00 – Job gets macho and suits up

27:05 – Job leaves for the climactic battle

38:20 – Job approaches guards at gate

Season 2: Episode 1

Job in men's clothes

Season 2: Episode 4

Job and Jason

Season 2: Episode 6

Job with purse and pink hair

Season 2: Episode 7

Job in men's tank top

Season 2: Episode 10

08:25 – Job drag performance