Making Feminism Popular: Audience Interpellation in Late Post-Network Era Television (a Case Study of TNT's *The Closer*)

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the serial design model of *The Closer*. It answers the following question: How does *The Closer* offer multiple entry points along a spectrum of views on gender and feminism, appeal to a range of viewers, and thus secure popularity? To generate metadata of how *The Closer* is designed for popularity by offering what film scholar Christine Gledhill calls "a range of positions of identification" with the text, using a Fiskean method of textual analysis, I examine the television codes of the transgender figure and the gaze in Chapters Three and Four (Gledhill 1988, 73). Each chapter offers a detailed analysis of a single episode of *The Closer* and theorizes how television codes of one episode are designed to take advantage of the coexistence of many possible interpretations of the theme under review. As counterpoint to my readings, in Chapter Two I analyze a focus group study conducted with forty-two sample viewers in Tucson, Arizona in 2013. Combining textual, industrial, and ethnographic audience analyses, I find that *The Closer*'s historic popularity is due to the ways its television codes broaden hegemonic discourses, break gender binaries, and relieve the dominant male gaze—that is, temporarily, subtly, and anachronistically. This smart serial design offers characterizations and content that chip away at hegemonic ideologies of gender over the series run. Viewers along a spectrum of feminism, gender, or sexuality are interpellated into the text through differing characters and points of view taken up in individual episodes, as well as those across the series. This model of serial design offers more pluralistic gender frameworks while not sacrificing popularity. This model qualifies *The Closer* as a sea-changing text, and it is why this series has influenced myriad, similarly designed female protagonist dramedies since 2005.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Ashley Elaine York. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Focus Group Study on a Sampling of US Viewers of *The Closer*," No. Pro00035162, December 3, 2012.

Dedication

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Introduction

When *The Closer* premiered on June 13, 2005, it was heralded as "every bit as intriguing as it is intelligent"[1] and "a distinguished contribution to the cop genre."[2] Its impact on distributing network TNT was swift and positive. Its success shifted trade discourse about TNT from skepticism to praise. TNT's brand image, through its signature series, cemented a reputation as the new home of drama.[3] The then-TNT Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Steve Koonin, stated in a press release on September 7, 2005: "With *The Closer* leading the charge . . . TNT has firmly established itself as one of cable's top players in the original series arena."[4] Illustrating its newfound clout, even before the pilot hit the airwaves, TNT had made headlines by convincing the German automaker Audi to sponsor the pilot commercial-free in return for other considerations like on-air product placement. This was and remains a rare privilege for a U.S. broadcast and basic cable television series. It emphasizes how important and different the show was considered to be in 2005. And it joined a small, select class of shows afforded this clout—award-winning, quality television shows such as *Mad Men*. Additional high-end adverting deals followed that promoted the consumption of traditionally female-driven products of The Hershey Company, Hostess, and SoyJoy, along with typically male-driven goods manufactured by the Ford Motor Company, T-Mobile USA, and NASCAR. Along with media accolades and advertising successes, the show garnered the respect of the industry in its first season by earning Emmy, Golden Globe, and Screen Actors Guild (SAG)

nominations for Kyra Sedgwick, a SAG nomination for the ensemble cast, and a Saturn Award nomination for Best Syndicated/Cable Television Series.

Kyra Sedgwick, in her first lead role in a dramatic series, became an overnight star in Hollywood and popular U.S. culture starring as Brenda Leigh Johnson. She appeared on the covers of popular trade publications such as *The Hollywood Reporter* and *TV Guide*, as well as popular women's presses, including *Redbook*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *O*, and *More*, and general consumption papers including *Parade*, the *New York Times*, and *USA Today*. She was featured in articles on everything from her rock-hard bikini body to struggling with her body image, her idealized marriage to fellow actor Kevin Bacon, coping with the work-life balance, and surviving empty-nest syndrome. In other words, like her character, she became an over-forty poster child for what I refer to as the 2000s women's mantra of "making it work": a message that contrasts sharply with the characterization of women as "having it all," a sentiment that grew out of Helen Gurley Brown's 1982 book by the same name, and one that served as the ideological underpinning of depictions of postfeminism that factored heavily in television series and films of the 1990s.[5] By the turn of the aughts, the "making it work" construction of mature womanhood was relatable to the mass audience of television as represented in the believable portrayal of Brenda Leigh Johnson. When *The Closer* completed its freshman season, it ranked number one among ad-supported basic cable series.[6] By the conclusion of its fourth season, its distributing network TNT had traded its status as cable contender for leader of the pack. After replicating its prototype of Sedgwick's character and *The Closer*'s model of serial design in its television lineup with *The Closer* on Mondays, *Saving Grace* on Tuesdays, and *HawthoRNe* on Wednesdays, in July 2009 it became ad-supported cable's number one network.[7]

Although showrunner James Duff, known little outside of Hollywood staff writing circles before *The Closer*, became inundated with requests to comment on the new design of women-centered television that he had created, it is his female protagonist Brenda Leigh Johnson who is responsible for much of his, the network's, and the series' success. Labeled "the closest thing to a real character we've seen in police procedurals so far"[8] and "a study in nuance"[9] by popular television critics, this character, whom Sedgwick compares to Frank Colombo and Jim Rockford as an iconoclastic hero, breathed new life into the stodgy lineup of female-led primetime series of the mid-2000s.[10] Similarly constructed older female protagonists on *United States of Tara* (2009-2011)*, Weeds* (2005-2012)*, Nurse Jackie* (2009-2015), *The Big C* (2010-2013), and *Homeland* (2011-) on Showtime; *Enlightened* (2011-2013) on HBO; *HawthoRNe* (2009-2011) and *Saving Grace* (2007-2010) on TNT; *Damages* on FX/DirectTV (2007-2012); *The Killing* on AMC/Netflix (2011-2014); *Body of Proof* (2011-2013) and *Nashville* (2012-) on ABC; *Prime Suspect* (U.S.) (2011-2012) on NBC; and *The Good Wife* (CBS, 2009-) on CBS proliferated. By the 2011-12 primetime season, six years into the run of *The Closer*, a shift in television history had taken place. For the first time, twenty-three of the thirty-nine new shows on the Big Four broadcast networks (CBS, ABC, NBC, and Fox) featured a female protagonist, and 157 shows on cable and broadcast networks centered on the lives of women. Such a shift poses a number of potential questions of investigation, including why did this happen? What changed in television programming or contemporary U.S. culture for large numbers of Americans to begin watching dramedies exploring the experiences of middle-aged women in multidimension: their proclivities and frustrations as well as their abilities and desires, all within complicated professional and personal scenarios more reminiscent of Betty Friedan's "the problem with no name" than the *joie de vivre* of the protagonists of *Sex and the City*?[11] Is the change in

programming attributable to a feminizing of the U.S. television industry? A radical change in U.S. cultural politics? This dissertation argues that the shift in television programming from 2005-2012 is the result of a consensus among the constituents of the U.S. culture of production. Female protagonist dramedies of the aughts were designed to align viewer demands of representations of women on television with the needs of the Hollywood television industry in the late Post Network Era.[12]

I explore the blueprint for the contemporary model of primetime serial design offered by *The Closer*. Specifically, I examine how the television codes of individual episodes and those across the series interpellate a wide variety of viewers along a spectrum of gender and feminism, and thus promote popularity across the circuit of production. This project fills a gap in the television studies literature by offering a book-length study of the serial design of one text or one production company for the first time since Julie D'Acci's *Defining Women: Television and the Case of 'Cagney & Lacey' (1994)* and the only other time since Jane Feuer et al.'s *MTM Quality Television* (1985). I use an integrated analysis of one media text, *The Closer*, to reveal the ways that *The Closer* offers multiple entry points along a spectrum of views on gender and feminism, appeals to a range of viewers, and thus secures popularity.

Analyzing *The Closer*'s model of popular serial design presents television scholars with a construct for measuring the gender representations made available in one text with a female protagonist. Additionally, it delineates and problematizes the types and limits of gender representations allowable in a female protagonist dramedy designed to appeal to a large, diverse demographic of male and female basic cable viewers in the aughts. In examining the gender representations of *The Closer*, I note that the debates around women, femininity, and feminism represented in the program are anachronistic. Recognizing that these debates are chronologically

out of place allows me to understand which era of feminist theories the television industry expects (and I will argue produces) a contemporary basic cable audience to gravitate.[13] The producers of *The Closer* offer programming that raises debates that took place twenty years ago in terms of feminist theory and forty years ago in terms of theories of visual representations and viewing positions. Through this model, TNT has targeted the largest and most important block of the television audience - labeled by industry and advertisers as "the middle-American viewer"- with sets of anachronistic debates around feminism and viewing positions that contemporary scholarship has moved beyond, but with which the U.S. population writ large is still debating.

In a piece on June 23, 1968, journalist Joseph Kraft coined the term "Middle American" to refer to the political and socio-philosophical center.[14] Culturally, geographically, educationally, and politically, they fit a particular range of demographics. They are generally hardline anticommunist and hold conservative values on social issues. Some live in medium-income suburbia, small towns, and metropolitan or coast cities like Detroit, New York, or Los Angeles, but more reside in the heartland. Their status falls within a range of two (otherwise) distinct categories of social status hierarchies: the middle-class and the working-class. As such, they hold middle level white-collar, middle level blue-collar, or lower level white-collar jobs. And their income and education levels fall between just above or just below the national average. The late historian Eric F. Goldman describes middle-American as a "bastion of the traditional values of Mom, apple pie, and the flag; finding heroes in men like the astronauts."[15] This portrayal sheds light on the types of content and the range of gender representations to which middle-American viewers are typically drawn. Television creators design programs to appeal to this demographic group's presumed social characteristics, personal values, and entertainment

desires. Conceiving of middle-America as "a state of mind, a morality, a construct of values and prejudices and a complex of fears . . . [that] represent a vast, unorganized fraternity bound together by a roughly similar way of seeing things,"[16] as *Time* Magazine does, enables me to hypothesize the social positions middle-American viewers are hailed to when reading a series. It also answers for how and why programs are designed to appeal first and foremost to this all-important demographic still today.

Moreover, this large mass audience with heartland values who typically hold more conservative sensibilities, tastes, and midwestern social norms of religion, home, family, and shared, knowable community is targeted by programs described by media scholar Victoria E. Johnson as "old-fashioned," "bland and nonthreatening," of "quaint" character, and with a "down-home warmth and naïveté."[17] As a feminist media scholar, it is relevant to consider how wide and politically progressive the middle-American viewership has become in the first two decades of the aughts—nearly five decades after Kraft coined the term—and, moreover, how *The Closer* targets this segment of the television audience along with viewers who locate beyond the social center with narratives, plots, and characterizations that struggle over issues of gender. I read this program as targeting, foremost, a presumed middle-American viewership who may have ignored or been disinterested in the debates around gender taking place two decades ago in terms of transgender, three decades ago in terms of the backlash to second-wave feminism,[18] or four decades ago in terms of visual representations and viewer positions of women on screen.[19] But in the context of contemporary programming they find these debates interesting to explore, since they are, first, at a safe distance historically and, second, surreptitiously woven into narratives, themes, and character representations that do not detract from the series' primary use-value: as a vehicle for primetime entertainment. Other middle-American viewers may have been

aware of, but only moderately informed by, the debates around gender, feminism, and viewing positions taking place since the 1970s. They have yet to negotiate them in relation to their own lives, the lives of others, or in regard to on-screen representations of gender, but see the value in doing so contemporarily. Considering such hypothetical viewers is helpful in theorizing the range of viewers interpellated by series' creators and those viewers left out. It is also useful in understanding how producers use anachronistic representations of gender in order to draw a broadened viewership to contemporary popular television series.

Television, film, and cultural history scholar Tom Stewart has written on the subject of anachronism and popularity, arguing that the narrative design of renowned creator Jerry Bruckheimer's police programs use anachronistic police genre conventions as "a classical template for commercial success . . . [and] as a means of achieving brand distinction within the contemporary schedule saturated with legal dramas in serial form" and long-term story arcs.[20] Stewart posits the benefits of anachronism for both industry and audience:

> In discussion with native viewers of US television, they have conveyed to me how much a series like CSI which recalls the episodic formula series of US television from the 1960s and 1970s performs a nostalgic function for viewers who had grown up in those decades. Without much evidence beyond the anecdotal, it is difficult to know whether the affect of nostalgia is one cultivated by Bruckheimer in order to gain access to particular demographics but it is certainly a possibility. Whether or not we can apply any commercial logic to the nostalgic response, Bruckheimer's police programmes are certainly designed to be deliberately anachronistic.[21]

Contributing to a body of literature on anachronism and serial popularity, I relate *The Closer*'s anachronistic codes of gender and feminism to the popularity of a contemporary police procedural starring a woman and, in so doing, add gender as a correlate. My analysis goes beyond Stewart in considering the commercial value of anachronistic debates around matters of gender in popular serial designs. I argue that codes that explore dated representations and themes of gender and feminism in content hail a greater number of viewers, which increases its

use-value to the three coagents of television culture: the viewers of popular programming; a network in the process of rebranding itself—that is, moving from fledgling to prominent basic cable provider, as TNT was in the early aughts; and the big box advertisers who target an older, conservative demographic. Debates and the differing theories of gender and feminism that are taken up within these debates may feel unresolved to an evolving middle-American demographic that may be struggling, still, with anachronistic representations of what it means to be a working woman, a Deputy Chief, not a wife, not a mother, someone characterized as a fish out of water in terms of time, place, and professional position both on-screen and off-screen in the first decade of the aughts. These viewers may find the debates around women, femininity, and feminism taken up in *The Closer* to be fresh and relevant, rather than stale and redundant, as many a contemporary academic scholar or cultural critic might.

Moreover, as a popular cultural form, U.S. television addresses the typical—albeit in many cases imagined—middle-American viewer: his or her tastes, interests, and thresholds for interrogating all forms of gender and social roles.[22] Proposing a model of serial popularity in *The Closer* that successfully secured a historically large and broad demographic, while interrogating the representations and limits of gender made available in its construction, is a useful tool for better understanding the relationship between text, industry, and audience in the early twenty-first century. It illustrates how a popular text reaches beyond middle-American appeal. Namely, although *The Closer* targets the highly sought after middle-American demographic with contained character representations and themes, by opening up debates around women, femininity, and feminism with an anachronistic treatment of the issues, it invites a wider-than-middle-American demographic to the series. Put another way, it broadcasts to a general audience of viewers imagined to have middle-of-the-road values, preferences, and

demographic attributes, while it narrowcasts to smaller audiences in search of relatively radical content. Designing a series polysemically with myriad entry points to the text enables a series to interpellate a wide range of viewers who decode content differently. Providing a range of subject locations holds out the promise of a show appealing to a broader demographic and, ultimately, securing a large viewership. As a media text, *The Closer* serves as a valuable case study for examining how a basic cable network competes for viewers in the increasingly niche-oriented, latter stages of the Post Network Era. As a dissertation project, analyzing its serial design enables me to situate the show and its protagonist within a discursive formation of female protagonist television dramedies since the 1970s that include *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and the original New Woman, Mary Richards; *Cagney & Lacey* and its leading ladies inspired by second-wave feminism, Christine Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey; and *Ally McBeal* and its namesake character who has become a strong and endearing icon of postfeminism.

Models of Serial Design in Female-Led Television: A Relevant Series and Literature Review

When *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (*TMTMS*) premiered on CBS on September 19, 1970, it was an instant hit with broadcast viewers. During the 1970-71 television season, on Saturday nights at 9:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) over eleven million viewers watched Mary Richards navigate her home and work lives.[23] By the second season, the program rose in the rankings and became a top-ten rated series with an audience of nearly fifteen million.[24] This sitcom was heralded by the American Women's Liberation Movement[25] for being the first to show an independent single working-woman on television, and was touted by the Jewish community for marking the first appearance of a leading woman character of Jewish ancestry (Mary's friend Rhoda Morgenstern) since Molly Goldberg.[26] When *Time Magazine* later

included *TMTMS* among its "17 Shows that Changed TV," it merely referenced the series as "liberating" because Richards was not "a single gal defined mainly by her boyfriend"—alluding to the first actual independent single woman series on network television, *That Girl* (ABC, 1966-1971).[27] It more so credited *TMTMS* as "a sophisticated show about grown-ups among grown-ups, having grown-up conversations . . . and that was the liberation that mattered most."[28]

In the 1970s, network executives began measuring audience demographics including age and sex, income, and other sociological factors such as level of education, occupation, and personal habits and preferences. Television programming soon became indelibly influenced by the Nielsen family—that is, the 25,000 households that collectively provided a snapshot of the television tastes of U.S. viewers. Networks used such data to create shows that target particular segments of viewers within the larger imagined middle-American audience in order to compete against one another in the "Big Three" or Network Era.[29] As Felicia Bender notes, "[Writers-producers and creators James L.] Brooks and [Allan] Burns' concept for *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* fit into this new mold, appealing to upscale audiences with more refinement and sophistication than previously seen on network television."[30] This model of television production—one that successfully packaged and marketed a female-led sitcom to a broad audience—is what Jane Feuer coined a model of "Quality Television."[31] Referring to Feuer and others, media scholar Robert J. Thompson elaborates on a list of twelve aspects of quality television that go a long way in answering for the success of *TMTMS*. Among categories of quality television Thompson includes characteristics such as: best defined by what it is not—that is, not common, everyday, a standard example of a genre; attracts an audience with blue chip demographics; tends to have a large ensemble cast; creates a new genre by mixing old ones; is self-conscious (as a model, it is aware that it is being watched); aspires towards realism; and is

usually showered with awards and critical acclaim.[32] Thompson's list of quality television traits can be applied to the other two seminal programs under review in this series and literature review as well as to *The Closer*. Indeed, *TMTMS*'s model of popular serial design has had a lasting impact on the television production of female as well as male protagonist series: a key consideration for its inclusion as a comparative example to *The Closer* in this dissertation. Although *TMTMS* may be regarded in the collective memory as progressive in its gender politics and in advancing the American Women's Liberation Movement through Mary Richards as a feminist role model, the quality design of the series—its true legacy—did not construct it as such: its creators did not intend it as a feminist mouthpiece; mainstream popular presses do not universally regard it as a primarily female-centered sitcom, but one about universal liberation; and media scholars have questioned claims of the series' value as a feminist text (Bathrick, 1984; Taylor, 1989; Douglas, 1994; Dow, 1996).[33] As judged from a television studies perspective, *TMTMS* is more so a television series with a female lead designed to appeal to a broad but sophisticated audience, rather than a feminist or female-centric one.

Brooks and Burns personally downplayed any perceived intention on their parts of using the character Mary to personify aspects of the Second Wave of feminism,[34] or to make claims beyond the fact that she was a person who was witness to "a world where women's rights were being talked about and it was having an impact."[35] From their points of view, she was to speak to the gender politics of the day only to the extent "that you could be single and still be a whole person; that you didn't need to be married to have a complete life."[36] Although it starred a leading lady, *TMTMS* was offered to the universal audience as a meaningful, substantive sitcom whose primary use-value was to entertain.

An examination of its serial design points to three interconnected ways that Mary's feminist possibilities are contained: through tokenism, the commodification of her looks, and in her domestication. In the pilot episode, "Love is All Around," Mary applies for a secretarial position at the WJM Television station.[37] She is told by station manager Lou Grant that the position has been filled. A job of associate producer, however, can be made available—it pays "ten dollars less a week than the secretarial job," and if she "can get by on fifteen dollars less a week," he "will make" her "a producer."[38] After counting on her fingers, she demurely responds, "No, no, I think all I can afford is associate producer."[39]

What Mary buys is a job as the station's woman executive: a label by which she is regularly referred over the run of the series. In this capacity she provides on-air commentary to oblige Grant, who is under a lot of pressure to use women on the air. Because she is the only woman working in the newsroom, a local television columnist interviews her. And despite her superior rank, news writer Murray Slaughter says explicitly what the show alludes to all along: "You're our token woman!"[40] Additionally, her subordinated position situates Grant to warn without hesitation, "If *I* don't like you, I'll fire you. . . . If *you* don't like me, I'll fire you."[41] And for Mary to cower in response, "That certainly seems fair."[42] On several occasions across the series, *TMTMS* also stresses Mary's poor writing skills—an ironic characteristic given the job requirements of a typical associate producer. In season four, Grant puts an end to Mary's fretting over whether her lack of requisite skills in that capacity has any relevance to her position at WJM. She was hired because she was the right girl for the job and also because she was nice, well-dressed, and well-liked, he tells her. She is marketable: not only to the television station, but to a large broadcast viewership. Mary is a salable version of the liberated feminist, rather than a feminist icon of the American Women's Liberation Movement. She is a liberal person,

endowed with the choice of whether to take a position that pays ten dollars a week less than that of a secretary (and who knows how much less than if it were filled by a man). But, now that she has the job, the responsibility rests on her shoulders to measure up or to fail in that capacity on her own.

Cultural critic and feminist scholar Susan Douglas expounds on the relation between Mary as a token and her characterization in relation to the American Women's Liberation Movement, as well as her role as one of the few female protagonists represented on television at the time. She was "exceptionally attractive, slim, sociable, accommodating, dependent, helpless, incompetent, and under thirty-five. She almost always smiled . . . [and] was defined by submission, passivity, incompetence, and defense to male authority."[43] As such, "in a masterful balancing act, the show spoke powerfully to women yet domesticated feminism at the same time."[44] It did so in every sphere of Mary's life from love to friendship and work. Towards the end of the pilot, Grant shows up at Mary's apartment drunk and spouting on about his wife going away and leaving him on his own for a month. As a tongue-in-cheek ode to the possibilities that television feminism brings, Mary responds: "Now I know why you're here. Oh, yes, Miss Associate Producer. Mmm hmmm. He said he'd find something for you to do. At least you know you didn't get the job because of your personality."[45] Grants interjects—"You know, you've got a great caboose."[46] "There it is; you got the job because of your great caboose," she concedes.[47]

Mary's tokenism works hand in hand with her domestication. Media scholar Bonnie J. Dow writes, "Mary functions in the recognizable roles of idealized mother, wife, and daughter . . . [through which she] alternatively nurtures, mediates, facilitates and submits, bringing the accessible, other-centered, emotionally skilled 'True Woman' to the workplace."[48]

In borrowing the concept "True Woman," Dow draws on Serena Bathrick's conception that *TMTMS* articulates the postwar shift from the ideal of the "domestic True Woman" to that of the "career True Woman."[49] Media Scholar Ella Taylor also uses Bathrick's theory to criticize how *TMTMS* "[pulls] us in different directions through Mary's mediating skills at home and at work."[50] The serial design constructs Mary with traditional gender roles as daughter, sister, and mother in the workplace that domesticate her, while it "undercut[s] [her] (frequently ridiculed) professional skills."[51] As a "career True Woman," Mary is "a television producer who nonetheless retains the equable charm and mediating skills of the well-brought-up girl."[52] She knows how to nurture and concede better than any other character in the show. When Grant shows up at her apartment in a drunken visit, he interrupts her entertaining the fiancé whom she left to start a new life as a single girl in Minneapolis. Mary attends to Grant as surrogate wife, mother, and daughter directly, although inconvenienced. After she convinces him to submerse his forlornness in a love letter to his actual wife, she returns her attention to fiancé Bill to submit to male power in decision-making processes once again.

Bill: That's kind of a weird boss you got there.
Mary: I don't' know I think that's kind of sweet—a man who misses his wife that much.
Bill: Oh, you just couldn't wait, could ya?
Mary: Couldn't wait for what?
Bill: To bring up marriage.
Mary: Well I waited two years, Bill, that's not exactly 'couldn't wait.' That's waiting.
. . .
Bill: Come on, Mary, we got the whole night ahead of us and we're getting all caught up in words. Why don't you get us out of this? You say everything so well.
Mary: No, I don't. I say a lousy goodbye.[53]

Surrogate father-, husband-, and son-figure Grant comes to Mary's defense after Bill departs. "That guy, you didn't lose too much."[54] "But he sure did," she retorts.[55] "He missed out on the best wife."[56]

When Brooks and Burns devised Mary's character, she was a divorced woman picking up the pieces of her life by going back to work. This premise proved too controversial for CBS. Then-president Jim Aubrey explained it to Grant Tinker, co-founder of Mary Tyler Moore Enterprises, in this way: "We program for the people we fly over."[57] Moore and her production company—like the character—acquiesced and agreed for Mary to become a single girl, but not just any single girl as Moore recalls: the one who lived with a man, put him "through medical school and . . . then, upon graduating and about to become an intern and resident, he dumped me. CBS chose that over my having been divorced. They said, there's nothing funny about divorce."[58] Whether divorce was good fodder for humor at that time is debatable given that fifty-percent of Americans who married in 1970 were eventually divorced. But CBS, in writing for middle-America, was concerned that the public would never accept a divorced woman as a funny heroine in 1970. Better for her to be jilted but spunky: a liberated career gal who "might just make it after all."[59] Her liberation was thus contained. She was imbued with traditionally feminine qualities as a nurturer, an excellent communicator, good wife material, and boundless grace in acquiescing to others, despite her independent status.

Possibly the most consciousness-raising aspects of *TMTMS*'s serial design are the conversations between Mary Richards, Phyllis Lindstrom, and Rhoda Morgenstern that take place in Mary's apartment. These conversations "challenged the claim that women's talk was trivial, for they provided the safety wherein women could discuss both personal and political issues."[60] Phyllis confides to Mary that marriage requires, "a certain amount of sacrifice, unselfishness, denying your own ego, sublimating, accommodating, [and] surrendering," during one such conversation.[61] She then wishes that domesticated role on Mary, who acknowledges that she wishes it for herself. More often it is Rhoda, the "'brassy' contrast that serves as a foil

to Mary's perky perfection," who provides "the wry comment about a woman's position that is seconded by Mary but would not originate with her" for the series to remain popular.[62] Such stereotyping along ethnic lines mitigates Rhoda's portrayal as the first Jewish woman since Molly Goldberg to be featured on television; it does the same along gender lines for Mary's portrayal as one of the first independent women on television. This aspect of *TMTMS*'s serial design—containing women characters through characterization, dialogue, and setting—also works to appeal to middle-American viewers, an aim which CBS and Brooks and Burns foregrounded in their model of television production.

Unlike the case of *TMTMS*, in which the creators/writers-producers and the CBS network agreed to offer a traditionally feminine yet independent single protagonist within a sitcom format that targets a quality audience demographic, *Cagney and Lacey*'s (*C & L*) producer and creators-writers and the CBS network were on different wavelengths in terms of both the design of the series and its audience from the outset. Executive producer Barry Rosenzweig and creators-writers Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday set out to make gender—in both the protagonist and audience—a defining characteristic of the program's serial design. As Rosenzweig notes of its narrative construction, "[t]his is not a show about two cops who happen to be women; it's about two women who happen to be cops."[63] Avedon and Corday go further: "We were women, we were partners, we were best friends. We were a lot of the things that we were writing about. . . . We spent a good deal of the eight years that we wrote together talking about our lives. . . . What we tried to get into the characters . . . was us."[64] CBS argued that such women's talk was not garnering enough attention from their new target demographic. Although it hoped to attract as wide an audience as it had with *TMTMS* a decade before, CBS initially narrowcast *C & L* to a portion of middle-American viewers—a quality demographic still, but a smaller segment

comprised of working women. During the early stages of the show, this innovative marketing strategy impacted the serial design beyond giving voice to issues important to working-women viewers.

To attract a working woman's demographic, the series literally gives voice to Cagney and Lacey to raise concerns of the American Women's Liberation Movement themselves, without shifting those comments to another woman as ethnic foil in order to preserve their portrayals as less political, less feminist, and less resistant to the structures of patriarchy. In season one, episode one, the protagonists question their lieutenant's motives in keeping them on "John duty," despite having made a break in the case.[65] As the episode continues, they relate female subjugation to male authority in the public sphere to their personal and emotional lives outside of work.

Christine: How would it grab ya if we solved the Jimmy Hoffa Case?
Mary Beth: What she means is, what do we have to do to prove ourselves?
Lieutenant Samuels: Come on, you said it yourselves, you got lucky with that bust.
Mary Beth: We're still on John duty?
Lieutenant Samuels: Until something else comes along that you're better suited for. End of discussion.[66]

After spending all night on hooker detail, Christine asks Mary Beth if she has seen any action and she responds, "Only my feet. They're killing me."[67] Interrogating the work-life imbalance of such an assignment, Mary Beth adds: "I haven't had dinner with my family in two weeks. I kind of miss the smell of lima beans and Harvey's hair."[68] Near the end of the episode when a perpetrator-turned-snitch uses a line of reasoning similar to the Lieutenant's in questioning the suitability of their looks in relation to their jobs, Christine responds with a direct critique of gender inequality in the public sphere. "When you're doing a man's job you don't want anyone to think you've lost your femininity."[69] "I understand," he responds.[70] To which she retorts, "Yeah, I thought you would."[71]

To a greater extent than *TMTMS*, *C & L* raises the consciousness of the audience—or, at least, attempts to address feminism—through women's talk. Christine Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey discuss how their police cases affect them and about their lives outside of work. Although *TMTMS* does so tangentially, *C & L* explores second-wave feminism's mantra that the personal is political directly in elements of its serial design from character constructions and set design to episodic themes and narrative plots. Although women's talk occurs throughout its run, the protagonists more so discuss their professional lives in early episodes of *C & L*, before the series undergoes increasing difficulties in securing a large audience beyond a small cohort of fiercely loyal female fans, and increasing objections from CBS's advertisers who wanted to "[associate] their products with a 'safe,' noncontroversial program."[72] In a discursive analysis of the program, media scholar Judine Mayerle "reports . . . a gradual shift in 'personal discourse' screen time involving Caney and/or Lacey from 25 percent to 50 percent."[73] The shift in this aspect of the serial design is due in large part to a media backlash against feminism beginning in the 1980s. Yet, from the pilot, Christine and Mary Beth's conversations are contained both by topic and by space. In terms of subject matter, the series increasingly frames "major social problems . . . as specific to women [rather] than to society as a whole. The representation of feminism [changes], in other words, from a criticism of institutional inequities (sexism, racism, and to a lesser degree, classism) to an examination of women's issues (or what the industry imagines as such issues) that [have] the potential for dramatic intensity and exploitability."[74] Major women's-issues programs of the series deal with rape, wife-beating, sexual harassment, abortion, incest, child molestation, and breast cancer, as well as Mary's emotional breakdown, Christine's alcoholism, the birth of Mary Beth's baby, Christine's marriage proposals, Mary Beth's being taken hostage, and Christine's getting shot. As television scholar Julie D'Acci

points out in her excellent study of the program, "the channeling of feminism into episodes dealing with 'women's issues' [contains] the threat to the 'system' posed by more explicit and more wide-ranging feminism and by two feminist protagonists."[75]

C & L also restricts the protagonist's conversation to certain public spaces: the women's bathroom and the women's locker room at the police station, and to intimate private spaces away from male officers and others including an appropriated conference room, their squad car, at the firing range, or in Mary Beth's residence.[76] It topographically separates women's spheres of power from that of men's in the set design of the primary public spaces of the precinct squad room and the commander's office as well. In a similar fashion to that of male police procedurals of the day, including *Kojak* and *Hill Street Blues*, it demonstrates how otherwise all-male spaces of the precinct and general squad interactions are hostile to the only two women detectives. Operating within this institutional structure requires Christine and Mary Beth to "'get away' to talk freely and privately,"[77] which has the effect of containing them, even domesticating them, by casting them into women's-only spaces. It thus relegates them to the margins of the public sphere, which is how Teresa de Lauretis argues women's discourse operates under patriarchy.[78]

Because CBS "[proclaimed] that the women's audience, when all is said and done, wanted only traditional depictions and was indeed turned off by any deviations from this norm"[79]—a position similar to the one it took in relation to the quality audience of *TMTMS* a decade before—Christine's and Mary Beth's more resistant dialogue passages are nearly always contained, either by a male in power or by one or the other of them. When Christine declares, "I'm a cop. Now I wanna make Chief of Detectives. Something wrong with that?"[80] Mary Beth responds, "No, be Chief, just get off of the warpaths."[81] When they finally get their big break

and the Lieutenant assigns them to investigate a murder in plain clothes, Mary Beth confides to Christine:

Mary Beth: I talked it over with Harvey.
Christine: You what?
Mary Beth: That's right, I talked it over with my husband.
Christine: You're a cop.
Mary Beth: I know what I am. I am a mother-wife-cop, emphasis on the mother-wife. You want to be a superhero person, emphasis on the superhero, you're on your own.[82]

And when Mary Beth ponders, "We don't really have to be twice as good to be equal?"[83] Christine snides, "Says who?"[84] Then the precinct's phone rings and one of Christine's many "uncles" is calling for a date with the protagonist portrayed as sexually liberal, as opposed to her sexually responsible married counterpart Mary Beth.[85] Colleague Victor Isbecki asks, "How many uncles does she have?"[86] In response, Mary Beth only shrugs. On these and other occasions throughout the series, Christine's and Mary Beth's professional capabilities are undercut by subtle attacks on their character, sometimes at the hand of one another.

Additionally, in the case of Mary Beth, her ties to traditional social roles such as mother and wife are privileged over that of her public role. Like Mary Richards, Mary Beth Lacey "alternatively nurtures, mediates, facilitates and submits, bringing the accessible, other-centered, emotionally skilled 'True Woman' to the workplace."[87] She is portrayed as satisfied in her role as nurturer when she hugs the mother of a prostitute, saying, "Just let it go now."[88] When Christine offers up Mary Beth to the Lieutenant as the ideal detective to interrogate a witness, "one mother to another," rather than criticize this limiting portrayal of her personhood to one social role, Mary Beth concurs.[89] Furthermore, over the course of the series, Mary Beth smooths over ruffled feathers with regard to Christine in the office. She does the same with regard to the demands of her work at home with Harvey. In both spheres, she often rationalizes the structures of patriarchy or submits to doing it all, while prioritizing her roles as mother and as wife. On

one occasion, she even wears the garb of her oppressor home. In the middle of a John duty assignment, Mary Beth declares, "I'm going home to my kids."[90] "Aren't you gonna change?" Christine asks.[91] "Oh," Mary Beth blushes, "I thought I'd give Harvey a little something to go with his Tuna Bake tonight."[92]

In short, *C & L* speaks directly to both second-wave feminism and the deferred aims of the American Women's Liberation Movement, especially through the conversations of its two protagonists. It also contains such representations by relegating them to the margins of the precinct, domesticating them within the workplace, undercutting their professional achievements by attacking their personal characters, and using one of them, more often Mary Beth, to pull the other back in line with—or measure the other against—existing structures of patriarchy and gender norms. Such a model that contained feminism in both its characters and audience also failed to secure the women's audience, no less the quality audience or the larger middle-American viewership. The series won the Emmy for Best Drama in both 1984-85 and 1985-86, and either Sharon Gless (Christine Cagney) or Tyne Daly (Mary Beth Lacey) garnered the Best Dramatic Actress Emmy in six of the ten years of the decade. But *C & L* rated in the top twenty-five programs only once in seven seasons. As an unidentified CBS programmer explains: "They [Christine and Mary Beth] were too harshly women's lib. The American public approves of women getting the same pay for the same job, but the public doesn't respond to the bra burners, the fighters, the women who insist on calling manhole covers peephole covers. These women on *Cagney & Lacey* seemed more intent on fighting the system than doing police work."[93] That neither protagonist was as young or as conventionally attractive as Mary Richards, nor had bodily figures as easily exploitable as other female detectives of the 1970s-80s "jiggle" era, including those starring in *Police Woman* (ABC, 1974-78), *Get Christie Love!* (ABC, 1974-75),

and *Charlie's Angels* (ABC, 1976-81), only adds to their broaching of traditional depictions of women on television and, thus, partially answers for the negative readings of the general audience to which this unnamed television staffer refers.

One seventeen-year-old male viewer articulates why this aspect of *C & L* left him wanting.

> After watching 'Cagney and Lacey,' the new series about policewomen, I've come to two conclusions: Feminism's fine. But there's something nicer about pretty feminists. . . . In the several years television has been promoting working women it's always concentrated on attractive women—women who looked like models but played lawyers instead. Angie Dickinson, television's first policewoman, was sexy, even flaunted it. . . . My style of chauvinism is not pretty, but maybe it explains why as fine a show as 'Cagney and Lacey' can leave one unfulfilled.[94]

Harvey Shepherd of CBS joins this dialogue by answering to the question of *C & L*'s low ratings among a broad cross-section of women viewers. He argues that network research indicated the series "turned off a sizeable number of women who . . . were somewhat disturbed by seeing women in the traditional male role of police officer."[95] Responding indirectly Rosenzweig tells *TV Guide*, "What research? How many people did [CBS] talk to? I have my own research. I have thousands of letters, typewritten, intelligent letters—that say women loved the show."[96] A Poltrack, 2600-family audience demographic sample compiled by Nielsen supports Rosenzweig's assessment, finding that "most women who watch CAGNEY AND LACEY are college educated and over 35; they make more money (more than $40,000 a year) and watch less television than the average viewer."[97] Although it is impossible to pinpoint exactly which aspects of the series failed to attract working women of other classes, it is possible to surmise why the series that Bonnie J. Dow calls, "the most explicitly feminist program in prime-time television during the 1980s," failed in general. It contained feminism in its plots and character

constructions, but still went too far to remain popular to a broad cross-section of the 1980s audience.

Unlike series such as CBS's *Kate & Allie* (*K & A*) (1984-89) designed to target working women, it is impossible to label *C & L* a postfeminist text. Theoretically, such a text requires a "retreat from sexual politics. In the postfeminist vision, men do not have to change. . . . [It] is not about patriarchy after all; it is just about individual differences, about choice. . . . [The] implicit acknowledgment of feminism followed by a disavowal of its implications is the kind of negotiation at the heart of postfeminism."[98] Although I would not go so far as to claim that *TMTMS* is a postfeminist text, it certainly meets the qualities of Dow's definition of the same: despite airing in the 1970s, prior to the period feminist writer Susan Faludi calls the "backlash to Feminism" in media representations of women in the 1980s that led to academic theories of postfeminism in the 1990s, and in spite of serving as the New Woman model on television for millions of viewers in the 1970s.[99] This New Woman construct reframes second-wave feminism by representing the liberal feminist as one who lives alone, has a career, and engages in premarital sex. Period. As Robert H. Demining argues, a series with a New Women protagonist "is composed of numerous discourses, ideological propositions and modes of address, which together form a popular, at times progressive, but not necessarily feminist text."[100] Viewers can continue to read feminism in series such as *K & A* and *TMTMS*. But because these series reify an ideology that men do not have to change, they stand apart from *C & L*: a series that contains feminism only after portraying, first, the privileged positions of (especially white, heterosexual, middle-class) men and, second, the need to overcome women's oppression and male supremacy by alleviating the economic and social inequalities of patriarchy.

The following example from *K & A* illustrates the postfeminist retreat from such sexual politics.

Kate: It's a beautiful dream [referring to her boyfriend Ted's vision of the traditional family]. . . . It's not my dream. I've already been through that. I loved it. But I didn't love it enough to want to do it again.
Ted: This doesn't make any sense. My mother and father met, they fell in love, they got married, they had kids. What's happening? Who changed the rules?
Kate: I don't know. A lot of people who didn't get to live out their dreams, I guess.
Ted: (Looking out the window) Well, I don't think I like what's going on out there.
Kate: Give it time. It just got started.
Ted: What am I supposed to do?
Kate: Find someone who wants the same things you want. And you will.[101]

In this scene, Kate submits to male power in decision-making as Mary had. In the *K & A* or *TMTMS* worldviews, men do not have to change. But in that of *C & L*, women do not wait to be chosen. They participate in the decision-making processes that affect their experiences with social institutions including marriage. On the one hand, Mary Beth is happily married, but the program illustrates the many ways that her husband changes in order to make their marriage work. Christine, on the other hand, never marries, having declared after a second proposal that she was too independent to take up matrimony. This range of entry points in regard to women and differing marital statuses, specifically, but gender roles, social roles, and a spectrum of feminisms, more generally, illustrates why *C & L* as a something-other-than-postfeminist text failed with viewers. Cagney and Lacey as protagonists give voices to second-wave feminists who like those of the American Women's Liberation Movement are contained by patriarchy. Their dreams are deferred but they show up, participate, kick and scream, and resist male dominance and the structures of patriarchy that oppress them. Merely portraying their engagement is political, because the lack of it has defined most female protagonists and themes of female protagonist dramedies in television history, including *TMTMS* and *K & A*. As Dow argues:

> Television entertainment, for the most part, has taken this idea [that the personal is political [which] was meant to describe patriarchy] in precisely the opposite direction in representing feminism: The political is personal, it tells us, as a set of political ideas and practices is transformed into a set of attitudes and personal lifestyle choices. Feminist politics become feminist identity. Feminist identity, in turn, is defined by appearance, by job, by marital status and by personality, not by political belief or political practice.[102]

Because the serial design changes over the course of the show and the personal is political message becomes a less political and a more personal one in order to attract a larger number of viewers, *C & L* illustrates both what is desirable and what is impossible (read: not popular) on the small screen. Television always already involves a negotiation of competing interests, a struggle over whether and how to represent women, femininity, and feminism in its programming strategies. D'Acci reports that CBS learned a lesson from *C & L*—that is, a sitcom offers a safer representation of feminism and "[attracts] the working women's audience with far less risk."[103] What kind of feminism it offers, of course, is what is on issue. But in developing *K & A* and *Designing Women* (CBS, 1986-93), two sitcoms that drew respectable ratings among its target demographic of working women through the early 1990s, CBS illustrated a reaction to its failed experiment with *C & L*. In choosing to return to its serial design model of *TMTMS*, it once again offered New Woman-styled female protagonists that are liberated, but not feminist in the sense of Second Wave politics of the 1970s feminist movement.

In 1997, nine years after CBS canceled *C & L*, *Ally McBeal* (*Ally*) hit the Fox airwaves like a runaway freight train. It offered a model of serial design similar to both *TMTMS* and *K & A*: a workplace dramedy with a liberated, New Woman protagonist. Additionally, unlike *C & L*, *Ally* had the potential to garner popularity because its framework matched the demands of both its creator David E. Kelley and its distribution network FOX, as well as its target demographic of young, white, heterosexual and relatively youthful women caught up in the politics of 1990s postfeminist culture. In its inaugural year, *Ally* won the Golden Globe Award for Best Musical

or Comedy and Calista Flockhart, portraying Ally McBeal, took home the Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Musical or Comedy Series. One month after the season one finale, Ginia Bellafante lamented in her article that *Ally*'s success signposted two things: the theme of women's liberation in the 1990s was "It's all about Me!" and far more problematic, "feminism is no longer relevant to today's young women."[104]

Media scholars including Kim Akass and Janet McCabe denounced Bellafante for making unsubstantiated claims, and for not fully exploring the burgeoning Third Wave Feminist Movement in her analysis.[105] Critical evaluations among popular feminist writers also surfaced. Erica Jong writing for the *New York Observer* laid blame on the publisher for producing and reproducing sentiments of a backlash to feminism. She pointed out that *Time* Magazine had pronounced the "death of feminism" no less than 119 times between 1969 and 1988.[106] On the one hand, she mitigates the journalist who "probably [didn't] even know that her employer ha[d] run scores of stories like this long before she was born," and, on the other hand, criticizes Bellafante for "featuring Spice Girl lyrics cheek by jowl with Camille Paglia-esque analyses of the 'iconography' of Courtney Love."[107] Whether Bellafante was aware of the thematic history of *Time*'s news stories on feminism is unknown. But her linguistic and stylistic approaches to unpacking and writing about the ways that feminism functions as pastiche in the protagonist and the content mirror how feminism is constructed in media-driven accounts of postfeminism still. Feminism is incorporated and utilized for its irony and to justify satirical sexism as something other than what it is—actual sexism—whereas, postfeminism is produced and reproduced through its ties to celebrity, iconography, and fantasy. Postfeminism celebrates consumerism and promulgates the rise of the choice-making individual in order to advance the profit motives of neoliberal media including newsmagazines and television. I agree with Bellafante in finding

that *Ally* conveys an "It's all about Me!" attitude that follows directly from depictions of contemporary womanhood caught up in a culture of celebrity, individualism, narcissism, and a backlash to the goals of the American Women's Liberation Movement.[108] Because *Ally* resonated with a mass audience then, and still does today, it must be interrogated by feminist media scholars for its relationship to real-life television viewers.

But only two times in the article does Jong address Bellafante's hypothetical statements in relation to the medium of television, or how *Ally*'s protagonist and content are constructed along a spectrum of gender and feminism and viewers at the turn of the century. Early in the article, Jong states, "I don't know about the guys who run Time Warner Inc. and CNN, but I thought the way to change the world was to follow in the footsteps of the suffragists, not Mary Richards."[109] She makes an arguably contradictory point later in the article that "*Time*'s idiotic cover story on feminism is, in short, a symptom of what's wrong, not an analysis. Most women are not Ally McBeal and most women share Susan B. Anthony's passion for justice whether we apply the f-word to ourselves or not."[110] Jong claims, on the one hand, an influential relationship between real-life historical figures—suffragists and Susan B. Anthony—and the interpellated viewers whom Kelley and Fox target to watch Ally. On the other hand, she argues that these (presumably same) viewers are neither influenced by the protagonist nor the content of the series, as they relate to issues of gender, politics, and feminism. And, I disagree. It is the job of feminist media scholars to unpack the relationship between viewers and changing depictions of gender and feminism circulating and condoned (or interrogated) in contemporary television programming. This dissertation project does that by examining the ways that television depicts a modern feminist identity struggle in viewers still wrangling over a set of debates around feminism that call for the subversion of patriarchy to better women's and men's lives.

Whether women viewers are drawn in large numbers to a show that distances its protagonist and its viewers from "the f-word" is a critical point of analysis for feminist media scholars.[111] Positing that viewers do not take cues from television texts and female protagonists in regards to acceptable forms of woman, femininity, and feminism at any given sociohistorical moment gives short shrift to media as a social institution. As will be examined in Chapter Two, focus group participants discuss the ways that television representations and content construct matters of gender and feminism, and explore how they influence them as viewers of television. Two of the functions of television criticism is, then, to expose the gender politics at work in serial design, and to relate television representations to popularity among viewers. Bellafante's points are not the ones that Jong accuses her of. Rather, she contends that millions of women viewers were watching *Ally* and that the postfeminist representations of gender and power operating in it were resonating with them in meaningful ways. She argues that it matters whether female television protagonists consider themselves to be feminists. And, it does.

In regards to *Ally*, how the protagonist is constructed along a spectrum of feminism matters to series creator David E. Kelley, as well, who informs Bellafante that "[Ally's] not a hard, strident feminist out of the 60's and 70's. She's all for women's rights, but she doesn't want to lead the charge at her own emotional expense."[112] His feminist containment of the protagonist opens up a bevy of questions about the gender politics operating in the series. Which women's rights is Ally McBeal "all for?"[113] To what ends is she all for these rights? Does being for them—whatever they entail—allow her to have control over her life? Over her job? Over her home life? Moreover, does being for them change the institutional structure within which she operates? For example, does it make the system less biased against women? Is she less oppressed as a woman—less at the mercy of men in decision-making processes—by being

theoretically for women's rights, but neither emotionally involved in them nor a self-described "f-word" resisting patriarchy?[114] At the very least, is the series designed to raise debates around feminism? Most series featuring working women inherently bring up feminism; but to what extend does *Ally*'s content meet Dow's definition of a "postfeminist text?"[115] Do men have to change within the world of *Ally*? Or, rather, like Mary or Kate before her, is Ally a liberal individual defined as a liberated feminist who must resign herself to male decision-making processes and to existing structures of patriarchy, without the ability or the desire to resist the limits that those structures impose on gender equity? These questions matter, if feminist media scholars are to explore the popularity of a series in its time, but also in relation to the discursive formation of female protagonist dramedies over the past forty years. I concur with Bellafante that Ally, despite being for women's rights in theory, "is in charge of nothing, least of all her emotional life."[116] Ally's construction as a postfeminist subject and the postfeminist design of the television series around her elucidates a model of serial design that sheds light on the relationship between the gender politics of a protagonist, a television series, and its target demographic at the turn of the aughts.

Although they are not mutually exclusive, Bonnie J. Dow examines Bellafante's article and *Ally* from a media studies, rather than a broader gender studies, perspective, which is a key consideration for its inclusion as a comparative example to *The Closer* in this dissertation. While Dow does not agree "with most of the conclusions that article draws about the . . . state of feminism" in the U.S. in the late 1980s, its title, "Feminism: It's All About Me!" is "an apt title for a discussion of *Ally McBeal*."[117] Dow redirects the literature to the use-value of Bellafante's claims in terms of *Ally* as a television text. It is an illustration of the relationship between the series that *TV Guide* calls a "cultural flashpoint," the construction of its protagonist as

postfeminist, and a young female U.S. viewership caught up in the postfeminist cultural zeitgeist of an "It's all about me!" message that the series and the protagonist exploit.[118] Three weeks before Bellafante's article on *Ally*, another postfeminist series, *Sex and the City,* premiered on HBO. Like *Ally*, it hit a homerun for its network. The eruption of media coverage around the success of these then-newest examples of the New Woman television forms catapulted *Ally* from the #59 ranked show in its first season to #20 in its second. Audience popularity landed Calista Flockhart on Barbara Walters' couch as one of the "10 Most Fascinating People of 1998," despite "feminist objections to [the] 'dubious' new female role model" whom she portrayed.[119] One author even went so far as to call Ally the "real successor" to Mary Richards.[120] It is thus of value to examine *Ally*'s model of serial design.

On the one hand, *Ally* carries with it the single-girl narratives of *TMTMS* and *K & A*. The protagonist spends the run of the series pining for a dancing baby and wishing for the boy who got away to choose her initially, and after he passes away, to reassure and to guide her from the grave. The pilot opens to a visual of the protagonist looking out a window.[121] The text uses a nondiegetic soundtrack to dramatize Ally's lack by thematizing it narratively as a substitute. As Vonda Shepherd sings, "Here's the photo I've been looking for. It's a picture of the boy next door," in flashbacks viewers learn than Ally has loved Billy Thomas from childhood.[122] She followed him to law school, after which he broke up with her to pursue law review at another school. When she sees him next, he has married and is working at the law firm that recently hired her. In typical postfeminist fashion, Ally turns her narrative of lack into one of empowerment by proclaiming in voiceover: "Here I am. The victim of my own choices. And I'm just starting."[123]

This juxtaposition between the themes of lack and of empowerment takes place in all spheres of Ally's life. She accepts a new position, because being apolitical and resistant to suing her previous employer, she chose to "quit. I mean, if I didn't have my dignity, I had to at least make it look like I did," when her former law practice decided to retain the rainmaker partner who repeatedly sexually assaulted her rather than to protect her interests as a victim of sexual assault.[124] Much of Ally McBeal's construction—her supporting, getting dumped, and submitting to male decision-making processes on personal and professional levels—mirrors that of Mary Richards and Kate McArdle. Twenty-seven years after *TMTMS* and thirteen years after *K & A* premiered, this liberated but disempowered and apolitical female protagonist still had popular appeal.

Although *Ally* like other New Woman shows meets Dow's definition of a television series that can be labeled a "postfeminist text,"[125] its serial design offers viewers a heroine with even less liberation than the marginally more independent Mary, whose message is "that you could be single and still be a whole person; that you [don't] need to be married to have a complete life."[126] Kate holds true to that standard as well. Yet the message of *Ally* is that a woman is emotionally unbalanced if she does not have a baby and a husband to complete her. The text cues viewers to this heteronormative ideology within seconds of the pilot. And it reifies it over the run of the series in episodes that portray Ally pining away after yet another man, or having hallucinations of a baby or of variations on the themes of love, romance, and vindication dancing in her head. When Billy tells Ally that he is glad that they ended up working at the same firm, adding that his sentiment follows "not as an ex-boyfriend, but as a lawyer who appreciates a talented addition to the firm," in a cutaway to a computer-generated graphic Ally withstands a half-dozen arrows through her heart.[127] When she cannot control her thoughts of lack at the

prospect of living in a world without him, she bangs her head against the wall, reciting, "I have my health; I have my health."[128] And, when the text is not presenting the oft-repeated theme of Ally's inability to concentrate while at the office due to thoughts of Billy as 'the one that got away,' it sends the related message of her failure to concentrate because she spends so much time dispensing man-hating jokes with colleagues and friends. "Men are like gum anyway," she says.[129] "After you chew they lose their flavor."[130]

Additionally, themes of unrequited love and man-bashing are often commingled, as when her roommate District Attorney Renée Raddick advises Ally:

> [Billy]'s a nice guy, cute little bangs. You two were like Barbie and Ken. But he's a wimp. Five years from now, he's nothing but one of those boring little lawyers looking over his stock portfolio, playing golf at a country club with nothing left to offer you at the end of the day but a sad limp little piece of fettuccini. And you can do better, so stop being in love with him.[131]

"Ok," Ally responds in dialogue.[132] Then, in the cutaway, the camera depicts her frolicking in the rain while kissing Billy. When she snaps out of her hallucination and opens her eyes, she is exasperated. Whereas Mary and Kate are portrayed as relatively happy and satisfied in their singlehoods, Ally is represented as terribly unhappy and, moreover, unstable due to the absences that single status signifies. The series ameliorates a narrative of lack though a serial design of comic playfulness and a humorous, idiosyncratic protagonist that together invite real women to identify with Ally and the postfeminist worldview that she espouses. This is what Bellafante warns of. As feminist media scholar Rachel Dubrofsky points out:

> Indeed, [Ally's] idiosyncrasies highlight her travails as an independent career woman and as a woman searching for love (husband, babies, family), because it is often in her search for love that she makes the biggest fool of herself. . . . Her idiosyncrasies encourage viewers to laugh at her travails as she struggles to be an independent professional woman searching for love—helping aestheticize this struggle, making it viewer-friendly, highly consumable, but certainly not encouraging any questioning of the larger social and economic structures that have contributed to her travails.[133]

Midway through the first season, Ally addresses the relationship between her as an individual woman and these larger social and economic structures. She tells Renée that she wants to change the world for women, but that she just wants to get married first.[134] This dialectic between the personal and the political in which all aims are ultimately personal elucidates *Ally* as a hyper-self-conscious text that clearly marks a point in postfeminist television where "patriarchy is gone and has been replaced by choice."[135] *Ally* like *TMTMS and K & A* revels in themes of choice feminism that negate a desire for change beyond the personal: a world in which feminist identity is defined by marital and parental statuses, rather than political practice or belief.

A Critical Approach to Television Studies

Television provides a "cultural forum," in the words of Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch, for studying contemporary society. Not only is it both a "communications medium" and "an aesthetic object," but also an "expressive medium that, though its storytelling functions, unites and examines a culture."[136] Taking a cultural studies approach to television studies provides a basis for studying the television industry and its specific articulation as a contemporary art form that both relays ideologies and rearticulates them. Like Newcomb and Hirsch, I understand television as "central to the process of public thinking," and, moreover, "television programming as a significant contributor to the way cultural debates are understood."[137] Indeed, cultural ideas circulate in the representations and discourses of television programs. Sometimes these articulations represent dominant, and at other times transgressive, ideologies in relation to historical norms. However, at all times, television discourses provide a theoretical framework for investigating how ideas circulate within, though, and outside the medium—that is, within the discursive formation. Because audiences use

television to socially construct and negotiate reality, taking up its "multiplicity of meanings" in relation to extratextual discourses circulating in society and individual experiences enables me to examine television's role within the cultural formation of the audience as well as culture writ large.[138]

I follow this critical cultural approach to explore the relationship among feminism, gender representations, and popular serial design in *The Closer*; to theorize whether these characteristics indicate shifts in American cultural understandings of social roles between 2005-2012—the period of the first-run airings of *The Closer*; and to better articulate their relation to culturally dominant meanings and conventional representations in television content since the 1970s. As Annette Kuhn writes: "It seems to me that one of the major theoretical contributions of the women's movement has been its insistence on the significance of cultural factors, in particular in the form of socially dominant representations of women and the ideological character of such representations, both in constituting the category 'woman,' and in delimiting and defining what has been called the 'sex/gender system.'"[139] Such meanings are redefined and rearticulated by programs and by viewers over time: over the life of not only one television series, but during a television epoch such as the Post Network Era, or across generations and decades including in the sixty-five years since women were first represented on television in post-World War II America.

Such a critical approach also views television's meaning-making operations as continual, often contradictory, and always contextual. It establishes a theoretical understanding of women as characterized on television and the difference between this construct and women's experiences. Teresa de Lauretis argues that the difference "between women as historical subjects and the notion of woman as it is produced by hegemonic discourses is neither a direct relation of

identity, a one-to-one correspondence, nor a relation of simple implication. Like all other relations expressed in language, it is an arbitrary and a symbolic one, that is to say, culturally set up."[140] This difference Kuhn defines between real women and women television characters has political ramifications. It gives voices to women in television, an influential cultural forum; it grants them power to be heard, but also to rearticulate womanhood for themselves.[141] I argue that, because gender is represented along a broader spectrum in *The Closer*, it opens up a space for nonnormative gender representations, which potentially speak to a growing number of viewers, both women and men, negotiating (as is our larger culture) not only the postfeminist notion of "having it all,"[142] as portrayed by Ally and the women of *Sex and the City*, but ongoing, evolving variations of the New Women archetype originating with Mary Tyler Moore who "might just make it after all."[143]

The worldview that viewers of *The Closer* engage through Brenda Leigh Johnson's character is distinct. As an older, angst-ridden, morally-elastic Deputy Chief without children and unmarried for much of the series run, she portrays on a weekly basis a twenty-first-century understanding of womanhood—one negotiating gender conventions, viewing positions, and modes of address along a spectrum of positionings that resonates from the past. She does this from a contemporary point of view of 'making it work,' as do many viewers of contemporary television. It is the work of this dissertation to theorize how providing an expanded range of positionings of gender and feminism in Brenda's characterization and those of others in the cast, as well as in different ideologies encoded in narratives and plots, leads to a broadening of what is allowable on television—a win for U.S. viewers and the discursive formation—and critical and popular success, which is a win for the television industry.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation follow from the theory of the "politics of representation" as developed by various members of the school of British cultural studies, including Stuart Hall and John Fiske.[144] Hall and Fiske build on Antonio Gramsci's and Louis Althusser's conceptions of ideology that complicate, albeit differently, Karl Marx's. By elucidating the structures of power that frame a politics of representation and the process of meaning-making inherent in cultural production, Hall and Fiske rethink the relationship between politics and representation and the systems representing both.

Marx original conception of ideology is concerned with uncovering the social relations that define the class structures in a capitalist mode of production. To explain his model of capitalism, he uses the terms "essence and appearance"—that is, the interrelated objective properties of the material world—which are distinct and represent the cognitive stages in the comprehension of the nature of society.[145] Appearance is the form of material objects; it is dynamic and changeable, whereas essence is enduring. The role of ideology, then, according to Marx, is to hide the essence as it contradicts the appearance. This benefits the ruling class at a given sociohistorical moment by leaving ruling class ideologies unchanged. As Marx writes:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling class, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.[146]

Describing ideology in this way conceives of it as both a fixed set of ideas and a process. The ideas produced by the dominant class predominate over the whole of society. But Marx concedes that during times of unrest ideology is vulnerable to challenge. In those moments the

contradictions become visible. It is useful to explore this point further, for it opens up the possibility of understanding how ideology operates as a mode of cultural production in popular culture. A central tenet of this dissertation is that television codes challenge ideology as a structure by placing dominant ideologies in conversation with others that transgress, even if they do not always subvert, patriarchy. In these instances, television codes essentially manufacture ideological unrest by making visible the contradictions between dominant and subordinate ideologies as they relate to competing notions of gender and feminism. This conception counters one of television as an apparatus that operates exclusively as a medium for the reproduction of patriarchy.

Gramsci enters the discussion at this juncture to posit that, wherein dominant ideologies are criticized, the concept of hegemony offers an alternative notion of meaning-making within the process of cultural production. Gramsci does not reinterpret Marx's theory of ideology, per se; but rather develops it. He contends that hegemony—that is, the process wherein society produces and maintains consent to dominant ideologies—is created in the domain of superstructure, which is a conceptual structure developed from patriarchy. "Whereas ideology connotes closure and a unidirectional flow of power, hegemony emphasizes the inherent conflict involved in constructing networks of power through knowledge."[147] In Chapter Three I argue that television codes of *The Closer* construct heteronormativity as a superstructure through dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality encoded in the text. But the codes also function as transgressive when they challenge heteronormativity. Relatively transgressive codes open up a discursive space to wrangle over an ongoing revolutionary fight in the form of representations of gender and sexuality on television. Television codes do the same when they challenge conventional viewing positions as they relate to woman as object, or what Laura Mulvey refers

to as the "male gaze," which I explore in Chapter Four.[148] In these moments, heteronormativity as a superstructure is denaturalized. Media as an institution of "civil society," rather than a domain of the State, produces and disseminates hegemonic power through encoded messages that offer dominant and transgressive ideologies in dialogue in individual scenes, within an episode, and across a series.[149]

Gramsci also contends that hegemony appears as "common sense," rather than a coherent body of thought, or how ideology is constituted.[150] Although the production of culture typically produces dominant ideologies, meaning-making is not one of direct acceptance but rather social action. Raymond Williams expounds upon Gramscian hegemony as it relates to media analysis. He writes, "A lived hegemony is always a process . . . not . . . a system or a structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits.[151] Put another way, hegemony is always contested; it is contingent on the exercise of social power at a given sociohistorical moment; it is always evolving, always unfinished. I contend that *The Closer* engenders a discourse that sometimes condones and at other times challenges both heteronormative ideology and conventional Hollywood looking arrangements. This dissertation seeks to illustrate, in Gramsci's words, "a distinction between coercion and consent as alternative mechanisms of social power" in viewers who are presented with a number of entry points along a spectrum from which to engage a television series and its messages.[152]

Althusser offers an important contribution on this point to the evolving interpretations of ideology in regards to multiple entry points to the text. Like Gramsci, he complicate Marx's notion, but in a more useful way for the purpose of understanding popular culture, in general, and, specifically, how viewers are interpellated as subjects who actively engage hegemony

through an expansive range of characters and content that articulate different spectrum positionings of gender and feminism. Althusser is interested in exploring power by way of ideology. He argues that subjects are inscribed in ideology by complex processes of recognition. Ideology is knowable through its practice, or its apparatus, and it "hails or interpellates *concrete individuals as concrete subjects*."[153] Through the notion of interpellation Althusser answers for how an individual recognizes her subject position, believes that her beliefs are true, rather than relative, and, in finding herself in the dominant ideology, becomes a subject. As Althusser writes:

> Interpellation or hailing . . . can be imagined along the lines of the most common everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' . . . The hailed individual will turn around [and] by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' address to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed' (and not someone else).[154]

What Althusser refers to as ideological state apparatuses, which include among others media, promulgate illusions about the nature of society through the process of interpellation. Put another way, media produces subjects, or turns individuals into subjects, by hailing them to specific categories of subjectivities that appear natural, but actually are particular. It always already indoctrinates individuals to uphold their subjectivity, or internalize social values, by identifying with images and content that are provided for them by the dominant ideology. Through this process, individuals become not the small-s subject, the individual person, but the capital-S subject, the structural possibility of subjecthood and the social position that a subject fills. This distinction identifies the dual nature of subject and Subject, wherein one is both the subject of language/ideology and is Subject to ideology—that is, "submit[s] unconditionally to the rules" and "behave[s] accordingly."[155] An individual first practices the tenets, for example, of womanhood as a subject. She then becomes a model capital-S subject by adhering to the rules

that she, as a subject, is subjected to. Although Althusser's account of culture does not concentrate on popular culture, his theories, which draw on Marxist social theory, enable an examination of the role of culture in the relationship between the ruling class and the subordinate classes, and, specifically, to media as an object and the operation of ideology through media as it functions socially and politically as a tool that imposes ideology on the masses as they experience media. Drawing on his interpretation enables media scholars to unpack how film and television texts produce ideology, or, put another way, how they constitute viewers as subjects and seemingly speak to them directly.

In exploring how ideological state apparatuses function, Althusser distinguishes between ideology (structure) and ideologies (historical and social) and expounds upon their interrelated roles in ideological formation. Ideology is a system and a structure that speaks us, that we inhabit. It works by giving us the illusion that we choose our beliefs freely and consciously; but, actually, belief systems (which he labels ideologies) are part of the Marxist conception of superstructure in which we locate unconsciously. Ideologies are nothing more than specific, historical, and differing representations of our social and imaginary reality, for example in the form of Marxist, feminist, or reactions to feminist such as postfeminist, ideologies. They are not a representation of the real itself. From Althusser's point of view, "it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world. It is this 'cause' which has to explain the imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world."[156] Ideology, then, does not "reflect," but rather "represents" the "imaginary relationship of" subjects to the real world.[157] This real world is not some

objective thing, but a product of subjects' relations to it. The ideological representations inscribed in the belief systems are what subjects are buying into when they watch television. In watching, what represents the real becomes what is real. That mode of cultural production enables media as an ideological state apparatus to both produce meaning and position subjects. Linking concepts of ideology, ideologies, and subjects enables me to consider television as both a structure and an apparatus, and to unpack how television codes interpellates viewers as subjects inscribed in ideology.

On this point, Althusser contends that ideology, as material practice, exists in two places—first, as an apparatus or a practice, and, second, in a subject, who is by definition material. Furthermore, he argues that subjects enable ideology to function. He writes, "the subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system . . . ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by material ritual, which practices exist in the actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his beliefs."[158] Belief systems and practices governed by those belief systems work because subjects believe in them and act on those beliefs. That is the job of ideologies—to get people to believe in them. As such, "there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects," and there can be no subject that is not ideological.[159] "Ideology has the function . . . of constituting individuals as subjects."[160] And subjects come to believe what ideological state apparatuses internalize in them, create in them, through their experiences of watching television. By associating notions of ideological reproduction to the operation of the state apparatus, Althusser marks specific sites of ideological production and relates ideology to concrete agencies and processes that point to the concept of interpellation as necessary and central to the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

The Closer interpellates, or hails, its viewers from across a broader spectrum of gender, sexuality, or feminist positionings by offering a range of subjectivities represented in its characters, plots, and modes of address. This interpellative process creates a model of serial design that overtly targets mass popularity—not through a consideration of spectators as having free agency in their viewing choices, or free will in reading television, but rather in understanding cultural production as offering different ideologies of gender and feminism that, albeit imaginary, represent a "real world" that appears to speak directly to viewers who, as subjects, inhabit illusory subject positions and identities that are propagated and allocated by television as an ideological state apparatus.[161]

On the one hand, *The Closer* appears more discerning and more progressive than it actually is, because different ideologies operate to mask the actual material relations of capitalist production, which are alienating. On the other hand, if viewers identify with television codes that break the gender binary or offer alternative looking arrangements to the male gaze, those subordinate ideologies become part of an expanded discursive formation of representations of gender, sexuality, and feminism on television. Ideologies as apparatuses have the effect of making visible the contradictions in dominant ideologies, a process that offers the potential to alter viewer's experiences with reality, and, over time, encourage the television industry to program more transgressive content. Examples of this trend in television programming are in evidence in several series that have followed *The Closer* including *The Good Wife*, *Nashville*, *Transparent* (Amazon, 2014-), and *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-). A critical approach to the study of television understands its meaning-making operations as continual, often contradictory, and always contextual. Since 2012, ideologies that challenge heteronormativity, postfeminism, and hegemonic femininity are more popular even among

middle-American viewers. A series which interpellates a broader no less larger viewership functions to fuel the profit-making underbelly of neoliberal ideology: a promulgation that reifies the central tenets of Althusser's theory.

Althusser's perspectives regarding institutional state apparatuses are also taken up in film studies in regard to gender and looking arrangements in the work of Laura Mulvey, which I explore in Chapter Four.[162] Mulvey challenges the patriarchal nature of mainstream Hollywood cinema by positing the ways that film as a popular cultural form reinforces power relations, and spectatorship expresses unconscious male desire to objectify women. She extends Althusser's theory of the ideological state apparatus to the realm of the cinema apparatus in developing a screen theory wherein the subject is created and subjected at once. "The ultimate ideological function . . . [of this process] is to position the spectator into the site of the transcendental subject, a socially constructed position of social identity through which the spectator comes to understand the world and his or her own place in it."[163] Her conception is not unlike the way Althusser describes how subjects are inscribed in ideology, or the way in which Althusser argues that language/ideology is used to construct meaning in the dual nature of subject and Subject in regards to the ideological state apparatus. In terms of the cinema apparatus, films convey meaning through the use of codes and conventions. This process of constructing meaning is conveyed by one shot or a sequence of shots that produce an idea above and beyond that which depicts the action of the plot: and that is of woman as object. Camera and editing codes and conventions turn individual spectators into subjects in ideology through a process of the male gaze that reproduces the dominant patriarchal notion of woman as object. This process forces women on-screen and viewers off-screen to take up what Mulvey describes as awkward viewing positions. Her theory originally conceived in 1975 still holds true. By exploring how the cinema

apparatus produces spectatorial positions, in the same way that Althusser argues ideological state apparatuses and social institutions produce social subjects, Mulvey develops a theory that uncovers how ideological processes operate in film and [as I will content television] production. I draw on her concepts to explore the problematic of the male gaze, but also its usefulness in securing a broad television audience built from middle-America out.

In addition to Althusser, I borrow theories developed by various members of the school of British cultural studies including Stuart Hall and John Fiske, as well as Annette Kuhn. These scholars argue that the production of culture is far more complex and is determined in part by factors outside the economy, which presents a useful framework in which to explore the relationship among television representations, serial design, and popularity. To borrow Hall's language, I understand television as a text that is "encoded" with particular ideological messages and "decoded" by individual viewers in context of their socio-economic backgrounds and various social identities.[164] Hall conceptualizes three hypothetical interpretive codes or positions for the reader—dominant, negotiated, and oppositional—and furthermore cautions that ideological messages are never natural, and that hegemonic ideology is always "encoded"[165] in the "dominant or preferred meanings" of a text.[166] Hall's model has been criticized by poststructural scholars, British television scholar John Corner, and others for presenting an inaccurate model of how communication actually works: specifically, for its limit of three hypothetical reading positions, and in general because it too narrowly defines cultural studies as a direct relation between culture (encoding) and society (decoding).[167] Although it remains important for what it tells us about the interrelations of readers and texts (which is why I draw on it in this dissertation), I, too, depart from Hall's notion that the number of viewer positions is limited to three. Especially in the late Post Network Era when viewers are more engaged with,

knowledgeable about, and invested in their media consumption than ever before, viewers decode more nuanced readings than Hall proposes. Additionally, in theorizing the audience, Hall disassociates the moments of production and reception. And instead I characterize their relationship as interactive, bidirectional, and ongoing.

To this end, I draw on Fiske who conceives of the "multiplicity of meanings" made available in texts.[168] Developing a polysemic framework for exploring both encoding limits and decoding possibilities is valuable in theorizing how *The Closer* was designed from the outset with a particular audience in mind. As I explore throughout this dissertation, it was designed to be distinct from other shows: those considered postfeminist such as *Ally*, New Woman such as *TMTMS*, and feminist such as *C & L*. It is a particular type of text, one that addresses (among others) viewers who "were born into the contradictions defining 'femininity' at the time. [And] within these parameters . . . it offers[s] many different places for its spectators to occupy and accommodate feminist-oriented positions, positions between feminist and traditional ones, and nonfeminist positions, to name a few."[169] That said, the industry determines which shows get on the television schedule and which get canceled. Advertisers have the power to force a problematized text off the air if its discourse is at odds with theirs. And television is a neoliberal institution whose primary goal is profit maximization. So, the relative degree of agency of viewers in their relations to cultural production is to a great extent "overdetermined," to use Althusser's term, both by ideology and by television as an ideological state apparatus.

Yet, Gledhill supports Fiske in maintaining that not only do "a range of positions of identifications . . . exist within any text; [but also] within the social situation of their viewing, audiences may shift subject positions as they interact with the text."[170] Fiske's theory of polysemy is necessary to consider alongside Althusser's concepts of ideology and ideological

state apparatuses because it further enables a framework for unpacking how and why a series is designed to offer viewers opportunities to enter a text through a greater number of available subject positions. I contend that this model, which is evident in *The Closer*, works to the advantage of the three agents of cultural production—the text, the audience, and the industry—and that is why the series is so well respected by fans, the TNT network, and members of the television community, and why it has positively impacted the range and types of representations of gender and sexuality, even feminism, allowable on shows since its original run. It meets the ends of producers who want to draw the greatest number of television watchers to a program, of viewers who want to be both comforted and challenged in their viewing choices, and of texts that reach beyond mainstream gender binaries and filmmaking practices to challenge dominant ideologies that are similarly under review in U.S. culture writ large.

Fiske builds on Hall's encoding and decoding model by expanding the number of possible reading positions, describing television's ideological messages as "polysemic," which he defines as open, interpretable texts that potentially offer a "multiplicity of meanings" not only in encoded but also in decoded messages. Through that process, viewers "struggle over meanings" as encoded in the source text and as drawn from their experiences, or those in context of other circulating discourses and social identities.[171] Those messages are still limited by both common sense notions and ideologies within the discursive formation. It is this cultural formation which frames the ideological limits of the text. But Fiske goes further than Althusser in marking out a range of discursive space, within which, viewers can struggle over meaning. He writes:

> This contestation [between forces of closure and openness] takes the form of the struggle for meaning, in which the dominant classes [or groups] attempt to 'naturalize' the meanings that serve their interests into the 'common sense' of the society as a whole, whereas subordinate classes [or groups] resist this process in various ways, and to

> varying degrees, and try to make meanings that serve their interests. The current work of the feminist movement provides a clear example of this cultural struggle and contestation.[172]

By addressing dominant classes/ideologies and subordinate classes/ideologies and ideological struggle in the form of class resistance, Fiske puts himself in dialogue with Marx's notion that, in times of unrest, ideologies have the effect of making visible the contradictions in dominant ideologies. By conceptualizing a greater discursive space, within which, dominant messages are placed in conversation with those that transgress, or even subvert, Fiske adds to the ideological lineage of Althusser, Gramsci, and Marx. Within this terrain, viewers have the opportunity to wrangle over dominant message and common sense notions, which gives viewers an opportunity to think differently about changing cultural norms and identities.

Indeed, Fiske grants a greater degree of relative agency to the process of meaning-making than does Hall. But all three—Althusser, Hall, and Fiske—share similar theoretical positionings in regard to limiting the capacity of viewers to generate meanings as only to the ideological limits of the text. Fiske posits its limits as "proscribed and not infinite; the text does not determine its meaning so much as delimit the arena of the struggle for that meaning by marking the terrain within which its variety of readings can be negotiated."[173] Even in terms of the relationship between polysemy and ideological constraints, Fiske concedes that "polysemic potential is neither boundless nor structureless: the text delineates the terrain within which meanings may be made and proffers some meanings more vigorously than others."[174] The ideologies extended "more vigorously" are depicted in the form of relatively conservative characterizations, themes, and conventions that run throughout episodes of *The Closer*. Yet, as I explore in Chapters Three and Four, it is precisely those elements that television producers consider comforting to the highly sought after middle-American viewer; and, as I illustrate in

Chapter Two, many focus group participants concur with the degree of comfort they take from watching conventional representations on television.

If the codes of television work similarly to those of film, then, following from Mulvey, the ultimate job of the television text as an ideological state apparatus is to inscribe subjects in ideology. The ideological limits of the text, from Fiske's point of view, fall in line with that notion as developed by Althusser; that is, the text's limit is ideology as a structure. Not only Althusser and Fiske but a pack of scholars including Kuhn, de Lauretis, and other cultural studies scholars at the University of Birmingham under the direction of Hall understand encoded messages to be at a great advantage in the struggle over meaning. They are the basis of hegemonic ideology, and, by definition, coincide with viewers' common sense characterizations of most daily situations. Their naturalized state translates to their hegemonic use. And, because viewers have been made to believe—that is, answered to the hails of the text, and located in particular subject locations—viewers' readings are greatly influenced by these encoded messages. Throughout this dissertation, I follow in line with this general theoretical framework to explore how we can consider texts as polysemic, but also as limited in their textual messages and representations, without falsely deflating the degree of audience agency available to meaning-making within "the terrain within which its variety of readings can be negotiated."[175]

Raymond William's theoretical model of the "flow of television" offers a way of viewing each of the conceptions I have addressed, from the politics of representation and the struggle over meaning to contextuality and the circuit of culture, in relation. Williams conceives of "flow" as "the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form."[176] He hypothesizes that, by scheduling programs back to back and within particular "dayparts," television producers imagine both television viewers and their desires.

Ads featured in programming and between texts are constructed with similar representations and discourses as surrounding programs. Moreover, in light of existing demographic data obtained from Nielsen ratings' research, television networks design serials on several levels: with regard to genre, characterization, episodic plot, and overarching narrative; and with constructed audiences' desires in mind. Advertisers similarly construct a target audience and design their ads as well as product placements around viewers' imagined wants. From this vantage point, the audience functions foremost as consumers with regard to advertisers, the industry, and the texts. William's model of television flow is of special value to the study of women-centric programming, for as Annette Kuhn writes, every viewers is always in the "process of gender positioning,"[177] not only in relation to texts, but also to advertisements in myriad forms from commercials and product placements to ancillary marketing and merchandising efforts. Kuhn argues that "meanings do not reside in images. . . . They are circulated between representation, spectator and social formation."[178] To theorize how the practices of television work to produce gender in its character representations, series discourses, and viewer practices, it is necessary to study the whole of television production from its politics of representation and intertextuality to flow and their relations to the circuit of cultural production.

John Fiske, who analyzes television culture historically in relation to its societal as well as industrial origins, uses Althusser's language to develop a process of interpellation as it relates to the study of television and to viewers as subjects in ideology who enter a text through different subject positions. By considering the relationship between polysemy and interpellation, and polysemy's usefulness to both industry and audience, a Fiskean theoretical framework is productive in answering the question of this dissertation. Drawing on polysemy enables me to explore how a multiplicity of meanings are produced both in the text and in viewers who, in

watching the program are hailed to subject positions, or in watching the program and recognizing the codes of television (as spelled out by Fiske and taken up in Chapters Three and Four), are confirmed as subjects of ideology. The audience research in Chapter Two indicates that many viewers believe they possess agency in their television viewing habits. But there exists only a range of options in regard to subject locations available in characters and in content—and this has nothing to do with the expanded range of characters, themes, or representations available in *The Closer*, or that of drawing on a Fiskean understanding of polysemy. Fiske and Althusser agree that subjects are inscribed in ideology through ideological state apparatuses. Even in the process of decoding messages, audience agency is still limited by both common sense notions and ideologies within the discursive formation. The cultural formation frames the ideological limits of the text. As such, viewer agency is not self-generated.

Moreover, subject positions are created in ideology under a capitalist system. The misperceived choice-making agency in viewers has been brought on by market demands that create a false notion of choice. A late Post Network Digital Download Era has created the illusion that picking what you want to buy as a viewer also suggests that you can choose to accept or ignore the hailing of interpellation. As Fiske contends: "characters . . . are the 'character' of the series in so far as they bear its distinctive features, its ideological practice, and are the main agents for 'hailing' and then interpellating the prospective audience."[179] Since hailing appears to call viewers discretely, with each under the impression that he or she is being addressed individually—that is, individually called to a character, or to a character's gender or feminist positioning, and thus to a subject position in regards to gender and feminism encoded in the show—individual viewers consider hailing (and the subject position each is recognized into)

as unique, as personal, and as true. This illegitimate interpretation of encountering television feeds the misperceived notions of viewer choice and self-generated viewer agency.

But Althusser also contends that the job of ideologies as apparatuses is to get people to believe in them; that's how ideology works. If viewers consider themselves to possess free agency in their viewing choices, it is a win for the television program and the television industry. The fact is: experiencing television or any ideological state apparatus turns viewers into capital-S subjects and, as such, their frameworks of choice are not legitimate, but rather "imaginary," to use Althusser's language. This overdetermining characteristic of cultural production benefits a series such as *The Closer* that is smartly designed to take advantage of how ideologies operates in culture. Fiske does not argue that viewers possess agency in their viewing choices, but rather, he contends that, in a polysemic text or in a text that offers a range of identifications, viewers will answer to the hails of a broader spectrum of subjection positions. And, Gledhill adds, viewers may switch between and among subject positions in reading a text. These subject positions are nevertheless eternal—that is, established prior to watching.

What we have here is a case of smart serial design in having characters articulate different spectrum positionings of gender and feminism in individual episodes and across the series. In many cases the feminist subject positions encoded in *The Closer* are in fact protofeminist ones that, on the one hand, offer moments of feminist intervention before the text returns to a male mode of address, and, on the other hand, offer the promise of feminism in the female protagonist, as will be explored in Chapter Four, and in other characters including the interdeterminate transfemale figure, as will be explored in Chapter Three. The clearest instances of feminism in *The Closer* occur in the series finale, when the show and the network no longer have to worry about marketability. In the Conclusion, I will reflect on what is troubling about

this industrial limitation, and how it also illustrates an audience limitation and, moreover, an audience preference that leads to wide viewership and series popularity. I explore the ways it is comforting for some viewers and profoundly discomforting for others—in other words, for whom is the male gaze or the cross-dressing plot comforting? And for whom is the program's conservative perspective profoundly discomforting? The audience analysis in Chapter Two indicates that many viewers are hesitant to see this aspect of watching television altered. They prefer to locate in ideological positions that feels true and, therefore, comfortable. Encountering television in this way enables viewers to be entertained with content and character representations intended for middle-America. Still others express discomfort in feeling positioned by the program. Fiske argues that those viewers will nevertheless "'consent' to view the social system and its everyday embodiments as 'common sense,' the self-evidently natural."[180] That is because viewers continue to operate under the illusion that they have a choice-making subject position, since texts such as *The Closer* offer an expanded number of gender or feminist subject positions for viewers to be recognized into. This dissertation examines how this means of cultural production leads to series popularity.

Method: The Codes of Television

As Fiske argues, "The technical codes of television can be precisely identified and analyzed. . . . But the conventional and ideological codes and the relationship between them are much more elusive and much harder to specify, though it is the task of criticism to do just that . . . [by] deconstruct[ing] . . . the 'reality' [of] this unity and expos[ing] its 'naturalness' as a highly ideological construct." Throughout this dissertation, I use Fiske's method of semiotic, textual analysis to explore how viewers recognize themselves in the codes of television and are

thus confirmed, in watching, as subjects of ideology. In Chapters Three and Four, I explore my readings of the television codes of the series and the multiple subject positions viewer's locate in. And I theorize how a series designed to both raise and contain matters of gender and feminism promotes wide viewership, and thus secures popularity.

Fiske defines a television code as "a rule-governed system of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture. . . . [A code] links . . . producers, texts, and audiences . . . [as] agents of intertextuality through which texts interrelate in a network of meanings that constitutes our cultural world."[181] A Fiskean method employs semiotic textual analysis in analyzing and theorizing the complicated relationship between social reality codes including speech and appearance, technical codes including camera, editing, and composition, conventional representational codes including narrative, action, and dialogue, and ideological codes of gender and power operating in a television text. A type of qualitative methodology, it is useful in investigating the nature of representations in mediated texts. And in investigating "how the textuality of television is made meaningful and pleasurable by its variously situated viewers, though it will also consider the relationship between this cultural dimension"[182] and television as a system of ideological production and subject interpellation that is overdetermining in that process.[183]

Because a semiotic analysis reveals how "layers of encoded meanings are structured into television programs, even . . . as small a segment as [a scene] . . . encourages us to perform a detailed analytical reading of it."[184] Analyzing a larger segment such as a sequence (of scenes), an episode, or an entire series provides us the additional opportunity of "talking about larger-scale codes, such as those of the narrative."[185] This mode of analysis usefully investigates

around polysemy, or multiplicity of meanings, an essential characteristic of television, and, moreover, polysemy's relation to series popularity. As Fiske writes: **"**A program provides a potential of meanings which may be realized, or made into actually experienced meanings, by socially situated viewers in the process of reading. . . . The point to make here is that the motivation to exploit the polysemy of the program is social: the polysemy of the text is necessary if it is to be popular amongst viewers who occupy a variety of situations within the social structure."[186] Viewers come to television from different perspectives and different social locations. Fiske's approach explores how television codes act as signifiers of gender that can be realized in different ways by different viewers based on the social experiences they bring to the text. Although all texts can be polysemic, not all texts can be popular. *The Closer* is cleverly designed not only polysemically, but broadly polysemic, to account for a wide range of viewer subjectivities in terms of gender, sexuality, and feminist positioning. By appealing to a wide range of viewers, the series offers the most potential for mass popularity.

Fiske's approach to semiotic textual analysis provides a means of situating real viewers in the subject locations that textual analysis theorizes and audience readings and ratings figures indicate. Fiske claims that a viewer who adopts the same ideological position in decoding as in encoding has been recognized into "the position of a white, male, middle-class American . . . of conventional morality. This reading position is the social point at which the mix of televisual, social, and ideological codes come together to make coherent, unified sense."[187] Following from Althusser, Fiske contends that, through that process, a viewer becomes "[a] subject-in-ideology."[188] Mulvey following from Althusser makes a similar argument in relation to the dominant viewing position of spectators as subjects in relation to mainstream Hollywood films. She theorizes that these narratives, through realism, work to reaffirm an individualistic,

Caucasian, male dominant ideology. A theoretical framework of semiotic textual analysis is useful in exploring whether or not the dominant reading subject constructed by the text is always that mix of identities—white, male, middle-class, American, with conventional moral standards—even when the text in question features a female protagonist and struggles with questions and issues of gender and feminism.

Because television codes are entrenched in the ideological codes of which they are themselves the bearers, I borrow a Fiskean mode of textual analysis in exploring a text at the intersection of its textual strategies and its confluence of discourses produced by and about gender in the sociohistorical moment of its production and reception. This mode of analysis enables me to precisely identify multiple subject positions and to denaturalize the cultural production of meaning, but also to illustrate how codes structure interpellation and polysemy (through textual analysis), and their relationship to viewer readings (through audience analysis) and series popularity (through industrial paratextual discourse analysis).

Media industries scholar Douglas Kellner contents that "for a critical media/cultural studies approach to the media industries, both political economy and more socially and culturally oriented approaches to the study of media culture should be combined, as should text- and theory-based humanities approaches with critical social sciences approaches."[189] He thus advocates for a mix of textual and audience studies in combination with political economy in media studies analysis. This dissertation answers to that call by combining semiotic textual analysis of the series and its industrial paratexts with ethnographic audience analysis. It uses a focus group methodology in Chapter Two to explore how real U.S. viewers decode the polysemic meanings made available in smaller scenes and in larger segments as well as in paratextual material of *The Closer*. Kellner notes the importance of this check and balance

system: "It is . . . important to distinguish between the encoding and decoding of media artifacts, and to recognize that an active audience often produces its own meanings and uses for products of the cultural industries."[190] Using the Birmingham groups' mixed methodological approach to cultural analysis to illustrate, Kellner observes "how various audiences interpreted and used media culture differently, analyzing the factors that made different audiences respond in contrasting ways to various media texts."[191] He contends that the usefulness of audience research extends beyond the academy to viewers because: "a critical media industry studies can help individuals become aware of the connection between media and forces of domination and resistance, and can help make audiences more critical and informed consumers and producers of their culture."[192] As I discuss in Chapter Two, viewers speak to the educational opportunities afforded them by participating in focus groups. Thinking critically about the media they consume is, in many cases, as revealing for them as it is for the researcher. It is also fundamental to an analysis of cultural production to give voices to all three elements of its system of coproduction.

By including audience analysis within a mixed methodological approach, this dissertation explores how viewers are recognized into various social locations in reading *The Closer* and in interpreting its paratexts.[193] This project benefits from a deeper understanding of how, why, and under what conditions viewers negotiate the themes and characterizations of *The Closer* and render them meaningful. Additionally, audience analysis serves as a check and balance on my readings of the social and gender entry points to the text and paratexts, and the larger relationship I theorize between a range of subjects in ideology, broad viewer-articulated likability of the series, and ratings popularity. Undertaking a conversation around the serial design strategies of *The Closer*, with a sampling of the U.S. audience, provides real viewer examples of how

polysemy and interpellation work in support of a model of serial design that attempts to reach as broad an audience as possible. To that end, this dissertation is useful in producing social facts that shed light on the contemporary production of consumption of audience members—that is, what consumers watch and why—in relation to a series that, despite its heavy dose of conservative content, also offers controversial treatments of gender and sexuality that challenge dominant ideologies without negating popularity. Postulating why this is the case with viewers offers counterpoints to my readings of and theories about the popular serial design of *The Closer*.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter Two of this dissertation examines the interplay of multiple readings that unfold through conversations between me, an American researcher, and a sampling of American viewers in relation to the serial design of *The Closer*. Audience analysis serves as a means of situating real viewers in the subject locations that textual analysis theorizes and ratings figures indicate. It is useful in understanding how, why, and under what conditions viewers negotiate these locations, as well as how they take up other aspects of serial design including characterizations, genre, target demographic, and network identity; themes of gender including the objectifying male gaze and transgender identity; and series' paratexts, and render them meaningful. These multiple readings elucidate the relationship between actual viewers encountering television and mass popularity of a series. This process of co-constructed reading between researcher and sample viewers gives weight to the core question of this dissertation and to the blueprint I theorize for the serial design model of the text.

Chapter Three explores how transgender issues are constructed in a character's dress, emotions, and interpersonal style; her points of view on perjury, self-identity, and gender roles;

and the varying responses of law enforcement officers on screen to her feminine performance, as well as her ability to change genders yet remain an effective police officer. This episode appears to make a mockery of transgender issues and naturalizes binaries of gender by episode's end. But individual images and lines of dialogue throughout break the binary frame for thinking about gender. The television codes of this episode are examined for the discourse they create around transgender identity for a wider than middle-American audience looking for content that challenges the binary frames within which gender identity is traditionally constructed.

Chapter Four explores how *The Closer* uses titillating narrative devices to move the plot forward, while disguising technical codes that toggle between a male gaze, a female appropriation of it, a feminist critique of it, and its ultimate restoration by scene's and by episode's end. This work enters a discussion of feminist visual cultural scholars since the 1970s in relation to the male gaze, by illustrating how camera and editing codes offer entry points to the text for viewers who locate along a spectrum of looking arrangements from the hegemonic male gaze to a protofeminist one in an effort to overdetermine appeal across the circuit of cultural production.

Chapter Five summarizes the findings of this dissertation and places in conversation the conclusions I have drawn from close textual analyses of the transgender figure and the gaze (as taken up in Chapters Three and Four), and those that followed from focus group discussions on those themes (as taken up in Chapter Two). Additionally, I offer a blueprint for the popular serial design model of *The Closer*. In part two of the Conclusion, I gesture to some of the broad questions about gender and feminism raised in the series finale. In part three, I look forward, reflecting on what I have accomplished in asking the questions of this dissertation and on what I might ask in the future.

Chapter Two:
Television as a Cultural Forum: Reading Popularity Among Viewers of *The Closer*

Introduction

On Monday, June 13, 2005, *The Closer* began its seven-season, one-hundred-and-nine-episode run on the U.S.-based TNT Network. One week later, Multichannel News reported that the pilot "averaged a 5.9 cable-universe household rating and a 4.8 national rating."[194] With 5.2 million viewers including 3 million adults (25-54), that made it the highest-rated cable series premiere of all time. Over the seven seasons, *The Closer* only increased its ratings dominance. 11.2 million viewers and 7.2 million national households in live-plus-seven-day time shifted viewing tuned in to watch its finale on August 13, 2012.[195] Surpassing the Nielsen TV household ratings for the series finals of *The Sopranos* (6.7 rating), *Sex and the City* (6.5), and *Monk* (6.1), *The Closer* became the highest-rated cable series finale in history. These juggernaut figures beg the question: why *The Closer* and why at the turn of the second decade of the aughts? What about this program especially appealed to a broad viewership? Did it offer something different from less successful women-led series of the past? Or had it been constructed from the outset to simultaneously (but differently) appeal to a wide range of viewers across a spectrum of genders and political persuasions, and to viewers more and less comfortable with programming that countermands the traditional gender and genre conventions of popular serial design?

As a feminist media scholar, I situate this sea-changing program within the U.S. socio-cultural milieu of the times, while negotiating the complex qualities of its serial design with the values and desires of the American viewers it so ardently targets. With this chapter, I hope to shed light on not only what makes *The Closer* successful, but also to explore two other timely

socio-cultural questions in the process: first, whether there is a relationship between this program and the general acceptability of a broader range of gender representations on the small screen today; and, second, what if anything this may say about a twenty-first century discourse between the industry, the text, and the audience that co-produce culture. To develop an increased understanding of *The Closer* as a model of popular serial design, it is beneficial to examine the interplay of multiple readings that unfold through conversations between me, an American feminist media scholar, and a sampling of American viewers in relation to three levels of programming popularity: first, dimensions of the serial design including the series' protagonist, cast, genre, target demographic, and network appeal; second, three themes of gender explored in the series including the gaze, transgender identity, and the intersectionality of femininity, power and space, and the public sphere; and, finally, the ways that a particular paratext—a 2011 creator-cast panel discussion with fans, one of only two in which the creator and cast convene to discuss the series and its audience—is negotiated in relation to the series.

The Background of *The Closer*

James Duff, an American television writer/producer/director from New Orleans, Louisiana and the Shephard/Robin Company, in association with Warner Bros. Television and Kyra Sedgwick created *The Closer* in 2005. The writers and producers of the series have enjoyed previous television programming success: James Duff as a writer for *Felicity* and *The Agency* and Michael M. Robin and Greer Shephard as co-producers of *Nip/Tuck* and *Popular*. Kyra Sedgwick adds muscle to the series as a film and stage star and the 1995 Golden Globe Award nominee for Best Supporting Actress in a motion picture for *Something to Talk About*. The co-creator of her highly popular character and a co-executive producer of the series from

2007-2012, Sedgwick won the 2006 Gracie Allen Award, the 2007 Golden Globe Award, and the 2010 Emmy Award for best performance by an actress in a dramatic television series for her role as Brenda Leigh Johnson.

The 'bible' of *The Closer* centers around eleven characters whose diverse experiences and divergent personalities not only define the series narrative but also the broad demographics of the show. Kyra Sedgwick as Deputy Chief Brenda Leigh Johnson is a mix of hard and soft, a combination of unflinching stop-at-nothing-to-get-the-bad-guy toughness and personal vulnerability that appeals to contemporary American viewers. This new millennial female powerhouse uses the dual forces of guile/feminine wiles and fragility/feminine need to entrap her perpetrators and reaffirm her reputation as 'the closer.'

The Forerunners of Research into Female Protagonist Programming

Amanda Lotz[196] and Julie D'Acci[197] in their studies of *Any Day Now* (1998-2002) and *Cagney and Lacey* (1982-1988), respectively, serve as key forerunners in researching women-centered programming within the conjunction of the three conditions of production: the text, the industry, and the audience. Amanda Lotz's quintessential study explores how the Lifetime Network series *Any Day Now* developed stories that recognized the intersectionality of identity for its two lead characters and the challenges its staff faced in telling these unconventional stories. Julie D'Acci's seminal study of CBS's *Cagney and Lacey* interrogates the cultural constructions of gender, the many troubles that underlie them, and American television's place in the overall process. Both scholars discuss how these earlier women-centered texts reveal both possibilities for and barriers to uncommon representations of women on television, and more importantly, to the audiences who react to and negotiate these myriad portrayals.

Although neither of these late-twentieth-century dramas garnered high ratings, they attracted and retained a small but loyal audience of U.S. women over a number of seasons. This chapter departs from examining marginally successful women-led television shows to examine *The Closer*, a series which arguably led a growing pack of solo woman-centered series including *The Good Wife* (CBS, 2009-), *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-), *Nashville* (ABC, 2012-), *Scandal* (ABC, 2012-), *Nurse Jackie* (Showtime, 2009-2015), *Prime Suspect* (U.S.) (NBC, 2011-2012), *The Killing* (AMC, 2011-2013; Netflix, 2014), *The Big C* (Showtime 2010-2013), *Enlightened* (HBO, 2011-2013), *Body of Proof* (ABC, 2011-2013), *Weeds* (Showtime, 2005-2012), *Damages* (FX, 2007-2010; DirectTV, 2010-2012), *The United States of Tara* (Showtime, 2009-2011), *HawthoRNe* (TNT, 2009-2011), and *Saving Grace* (TNT, 2007-2010) that mark a new wave in twenty-first century television programming from 2005 to present. As a cohort, these series feature older, angst-ridden, morally-elastic female protagonists: a character design element that I argue is due to an innovative aspect of the serial design of *The Closer*, which imbues its female protagonist with the complexity and breadth of (more typically) male protagonists in television history.

Brenda Leigh Johnson resonates with fans of police procedurals because she offers viewers the opportunity to identify with differing (and often competing) aspects of her personality. She draws on everything from feminine wiles to feminist angst to seduce a perpetrator into confessing. She changes her behavior based on the situation, rarely solicits permission from male authority figures, and routinely circumvents the patriarchal power structure to investigate a case. This chapter explores how *The Closer*, a contemporary text that mediates issues of gender with sexuality, reveals uncommon televisual representations and countermands the tradition of marginally successful women-centric dramas to serve as a model

of serial design that continues to influence primetime programming from broadcast to premium cable television.

Sampling Technique

To unpack the questions at the heart of this audience study, I used convenience snowball sampling to locate forty-two participants. Each engaged in one of four, four-hour-long focus groups held in Tucson, Arizona in 2013. Each focus group included eight to twelve of the participants. Together, the focus group members and I examined the full pilot episode, clips from four additional episodes, and the video recording of a creator-cast panel discussion with fans. Of the fourteen male and twenty-eight female participants, thirty-one are Caucasian, three are Hispanic, three are Asian, three are African American, and one is Native American. The participants are rather evenly spaced across a range of ages from twenty-three to eighty-one. Six are in their twenties; seven in their thirties; four in their forties; nine in their fifties; five in their sixties; nine in their seventies; and two in their eighties. Twelve are within the 18-34 age demographic, seventeen within the 18-49, and twenty-two within the 25-54—the latter, the target audience of procedural dramas and basic cable primetime television in general. Of greatest relevance to this project, twenty-six (or sixty-one percent) are ages 50-81: an older cohort of viewers that, as will be explored later in this chapter, are the implied demographic of the series.

All of the participants are American. They are generally highly educated. Three have earned doctoral degrees, fifteen master's degrees, fifteen bachelor's degrees, six have completed some college education, and three are high school graduates. All of the participants are either middle-class or upper-middle-class. Nineteen identify their political party or persuasion as liberal, twelve as conservative, five as independent, and six as non-affiliated. Thirty-nine are

heterosexual, one is bisexual, one homosexual, and one prefers not to disclose his or her sexual orientation.

The participants came to me in one of two ways. Thirty-four responded to a "call for participants," which I posted on more than a dozen Internet message boards, home pages, feeds, list-serves or classified advertisements of various groups, organizations, and news outlets in Tucson, Arizona. A project summary and consent form was attached to that call. The remaining eight participants were referred to me by other focus group members. All of the participants read, write, and speak English as a first or second language. All are relatively well versed in reading and deconstructing contemporary media texts, and either subscribe to basic or premium cable, Netflix, Amazon Prime, or Hulu Plus, watch free broadcast television, or watch television series in DVD box sets. Although all participants make a daily habit of watching television, they range in number of viewing hours from "one to two hours per day" to "whenever home." And they disclosed a range of "zero" to "considerable" previous experience viewing *The Closer*.

Many are fans of specific genres (e.g., Sci-Fi, "junk TV", documentary, or teen or crime drama), while others watch television randomly (e.g., "the first thing that catches my eye in the TV Guide," "the first thing that looks good as I channel-surf"). It is important to note that snowball sampling makes no claim to yield a representative sample of a group. But I would argue that a series of four-hour focus group discussions that entail close readings of a range of episodic themes encoded in text and in paratext among forty-two viewers who represent a relatively wide range of ages, ethnicities, political affiliations, TV viewing habits, and to a lesser extent sexual orientations, serves as a respectable research base from which to lay general claims of viewership and viewing habits in theorizing a model of popular serial design and the appeal of various aspects of *The Closer*. These focus groups give forty-two viewers the opportunity to

express their individual relationships with the themes and characterizations of this series, as well as television more generally. In discussing the ways they decode conventions and codes of television collaboratively, the participants illustrate the ways that television is taken up socially, as a collective practice, in addition to one experienced unilaterally.

Whereas the Nielsen ratings do relatively well at providing a representative sample of the number of viewers and households watching a specific television program at a given day and time, they do not—indeed cannot—articulate how, why, and under what conditions viewers negotiate the themes and characterizations of a text and render them meaningful. The aims of this audience study are thus to produce social facts that shed light on how a sampling of the audience engages gender representations in *The Closer*; to answer whether gender plays a role in either the serial design or the popularity of the program; and to serve as a counterpoint to my textual analyses of themes to follow in Chapter Three and Chapter Four of this dissertation.

Interview and Coding Methodology

I initially used a "responsive interviewing mode" to construct both the focus group and interview guides, which is suggested by sociologists Herbert J. and Irene S. Rubin in their "First Phrase of Analysis: Preparing Transcripts and Coding Data."[198] I left most of my questions open-ended during the focus group, which allowed the participants to direct the conversation in ways that were most relevant to their own readings, interests, and experiences, and probed more deeply to explore topics of particular interest to a majority of the group members or to address key issues of this study. I ultimately structured this study with a hybrid methodological model in mind, combining responsive interviewing, formal coding, and some tenants of the grounded

theory model to expand the breath of my research data in the early phase and narrow it during the analysis and interpretive phrases.

I conducted my focus groups in a suburban home around two connected rectangular folding tables. I began the focus group by asking the participants to summarize their television viewing habits and to share their previous experiences, if any, in watching or reading about *The Closer*, its distributing network TNT, or its stars. After this fifteen-minute ice-breaker, we watched the pilot episode of *The Closer* before engaging in an hour-long conversation about primetime television programming, the police procedural genre, and the television industry in general. We discussed the ideologies of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, class, religion, the criminal justice system, and contemporary American politics wrangled over in the pilot. We also examined issues of power and space as they relate to protagonist Brenda Leigh Jonson and the other members of the Priority Homicide Division. Finally, we critiqued various elements of the serial design of the main character, the cast, the genre, the imagined demographic, and the distribution network as it relates to targeting and securing broad appeal.

For the next one-and-a-half hours we held to a pattern of screening and discussion—that is, we watched an extended sequence of an episode from either season five, six, or seven, and then discussed it as an isolated case as well as in relation to previous discussions of other episodes. The episodes we screened and discussed during this period include: "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly" (S7 E12), "Make Over" (S5 E14), "Help Wanted" (S6 E2), and the series finale "The Last Word" (S7 E 21). During the last half-hour we watched and then discussed a creator-cast panel discussion held at the Paley Center for Media in Los Angeles on August 10, 2007. Of the forty-two participants, ten had watched one or more episodes of *The Closer* previous to the focus group, twenty-five were familiar with lead actress Kyra Sedgwick or the

show, and all but one was familiar with the TNT Network that broadcasted and distributed the series in first-run programming in the U.S.

Since I was interested in exploring possible reasons behind *The Closer*'s appeal in order to theorize a model of serial design that led to its historic popularity, I first asked the participants what if anything they found appealing about *The Closer* or its protagonist, cast, or genre, and whether they would recommend or watch the series again. As a group, we then unpacked—at great length and deeply—our readings of these episodes and paratextual material across several broad categories: the hybrid genre (a mix of the traditionally masculine crime genre with slapstick and Rom-Com elements) in relation to cross-gender and mass appeal; the messages, if any, the show was designed to send; the representations of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, class, religion, the criminal justice system, and contemporary American politics encoded in the series; past or present television programs and characters that are comparable to Brenda Leigh Johnson and/or *The Closer*; how this show potentially reinforces, opposes, or produces gender norms or mores in contemporary American society; and how these American viewers felt about their own varying attraction to and repulsion of aspects of the characters, the show, and the politics that both raise and undermine important aspects of gender and sexuality through the character, plot, and narrative devices of its serial design. What followed were free-flowing and highly illuminating conversations and co-constructed readings between research subjects. I use the term co-constructed to refer to a process wherein viewers and I discuss our individual readings of the text. Through these conversations, we are guided and contextualized by each other's points of view.

The focus groups were taped and later transcribed. When I transcribed the conversations, I elected to remove "ums," "ahs," pauses, and repetitions. Although these are part of the natural

speech of participants, removing them does not alter the meanings or context of the material. When participants talked over one another, their comments were transcribed in succession. Breaks in conversation were noted in the transcript; however, within this chapter, an ellipsis signifies to the reader that passages from the conversation are missing from the quote, and conversations are represented in complete and full sentences. Editing the material for form but not content enables the comments and lines of argument presented to stand on their own, in succession, and in a free-flowing style that enhances the clarity of the content for the reader. Finally, I wrote methodological notes during and directly following each focus group regarding the general tenor of the conversations, my impressions of the participants in terms of the issues they raised, their non-verbal behavior during screenings and discussions, important points about their interactions and co-constructed readings, and other miscellaneous details regarding the setting, text, and applicable methodological or extant literature that came to mind.

Because of their backgrounds that include either higher education, active community service, global travel, and/or increased investment in watching media of all varieties, the participants responded easily to this sort of open-ending questioning about television. They wanted to continue the conversation well past the stated end time; thus, each focus group ran over schedule by thirty to forty-five minutes. The overall tenor was chatty and casual (although tempers became heated and dispositions became less cheerful and companionable on a few occasions), the banter for the most part light (even though the topics were often heavy), and the level of energy consistently high for a weekend convening that ran from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

The participants appeared to establish almost immediate rapport. They mentioned at times during the focus groups how much fun, emancipating, and enlightening it was to talk about television like this, even though it was not common for some of them to critique television or

their own viewing habits in general. Although these events took place in the context of a focus group, the setting—persons sitting around a table, in the living room, in front of a television—typifies the traditional milieu of watching television (that is, groups of people watching television together, while they discuss what is on or what they have just viewed, and while simultaneously processing that information themselves). Thus, the participants had built up opinions and thoughts on the subject over the years. And they enjoyed what was, for many of them, a rarer opportunity to engage the topics of gender representations and popular serial design characteristics, by participating in a water-cooler style conversation that was more common in the Network Era, but has nearly gone out of fashion since the proliferation of cable, niche TV, Internet streaming, and DVD box sets beginning in the 1990s. Since that time, television programming is viewable across multiple platforms, from the phone to the desktop, and in delayed programming available through Video on Demand (VOD) services and the Digital Video Recorder (DVR). These practices of watching television individually and out of sync with one another prevent viewers from experiencing television content in real-time, or at the same time, which was the typical case during the Network Era when viewers were restricted to three channel options. Watching television in the living room among family and friends, and talking about the content of a limited number of shows that the mass American audience was simultaneously experiencing, enabled real-time, social, collective discussions at home and at work, which the niche-oriented late Post Network Era limits. Focus group screenings simulated the experience of watching television as a collective audience, and enabled co-constructed readings of content and the meaning-making practices of watching television that partially answer for the popularity of *The Closer*.

As will be made clearer in the sections below, the participants were conflicted over what they saw and liked, as well as what those choices might mean for them as females or males and as Americans; for culture produced through television; and for the future of female protagonist programming. Like these participants, my attitude toward contemporary television, this trend in programming, and even *The Closer* is conflicted. As a feminist media scholar it is, therefore, beneficial to engage a sampling of individual viewers on what television they and their families watch and why. With this methodological study, I hope to fill a gap in the television studies literature by theorizing a contemporary model of popular primetime serial design in the case of *The Closer*. By analyzing in collaboration with viewer-participants a juggernaut program that set in motion a new wave of female protagonist dramedies, I hope to achieve a deeper appreciation for why, how, and in what social context Americans watch television today, and what they find particularly appealing about primetime procedural television in the new millennium.

A Reflection on Method

My role as the investigator was to lead the discussions. The conversations that developed in the focus groups explored the questions that drive my concerns of the program, as well as the lines of arguments presented by focus group members in regard to the relationship between *The Closer*'s serial design and broad popularity. The format was the same in each focus group. I proposed a topic at the start of a section. This topic was drawn from my readings of each episode, which I analyzed through close textual analysis during the prior year or two. As the conversation developed, when a topic concluded, one of two things happened. Either the participants transitioned to another topic of their own accord—one that was addressed in discussion or was sparked by it. Alternatively, I would propose the next topic, one that followed

up on a viewer's comment, or one that I was developing in textual analysis. Because the aim of the focus group study is to co-construct readings on the serial design of *The Closer* and its relation to wide appeal, I proposed questions and left them open-ended so that participants had the opportunity to direct the conversation in ways that were most relevant to their readings and fellow-participants' readings, yet addressed key issues of this study. In short, I brought my initial readings of two years to the group discussions; and the group discussions, in turn, guided and contextualized my readings as they developed during the focus groups and over the subsequent three years during which time I completed the dissertation.

This process of audience-textual analysis is one that I call co-constructed reading. It allows me to talk to the audience and it enables the audience to talk back to me. As a method, it satisfies an important aspect of media studies analysis, which understands television culture as a co-production of texts and their audiences. Additionally, it continues in line with John Fiske's methodological approach, which explores how television codes act as signifiers realized in different ways by different viewers based on the social experiences they bring to the text. Audience analysis is a critical if not necessary component of this dissertation, since it explores the topic of consumer popularity, and it considers whether and how a female protagonist dramedy achieves wide appeal by raising and then containing gender politics within a smart serial design. It is important to explore the myriad points of entry and identification that draw viewers to the show, and to discuss with viewers how they feel about their relationship to the text. Reflecting on the ways this process of co-construction enables my project gives me an opportunity to reflect on method: why I talk to people, how co-constructed readings make media studies research richer. But also how it detracts from and changes this project, the questions that drive this dissertation, and my findings.

It was key from the outset to gauge whether the audience has the same concerns as I have in terms of the treatment of gender issues and the strategies *The Closer* implements in targeting broad popularity, or at least, to ascertain whether the questions that drive my concerns resonate with sample viewers. As will be examined throughout this chapter, their concerns are not the same as mine in every case. Yet I find that the questions of this dissertation resonate with them, which suggests that this research is worth studying. Their readings act as a sounding board to my questions and findings, which gives me confidence in the meaningfulness and the direction of this project.

Additionally, the questions that drive their concerns open up new avenues of research in this project. Mine was a particularly sophisticated group of television watchers. Their astute understandings of television consumption, marketing and serial design practices, and interpellation—a process in which viewers are recognized into a text through different subject positions—shape individual readings, co-constructed focus group readings, and my own thinking. This process of co-construction affects my project on a micro level—that is, in terms of questions and findings—and on a macro level, in terms of the evolution of the project over the final three years.

Due to the profound benefits of co-constructed reading (i.e., how it influences not only the direction but the outcome of this project), focus group participants act as more than mere providers of data, or persons who answer my questions. As investigator and moderator, but more so in my role as discussion leader, I affect their readings and, thus, the project writ large. Yet, working with them changes the kinds of questions that I can ask, and thus changes the project as a whole. In one clear example of this, I often posed an initial question at the start of a section, which placed the discussion on the terrain of the terms with which this project is concerned. The

terminology that I used in my initial question was sometimes reused by participants during the discussion that followed. Some focus group members picked up on my vernacular, whether it was the formal terminology of media studies, sociology, or gender studies. As such, their voices often sound like my own. They offered more formal readings than they may have otherwise rendered. Yet they did not misuse terms that they may have been repeating, which suggests that participants were already familiar with them, or that they understood them in context of the discussion. I saw their similar usage of terms as mutually beneficial for audience and investigator. What unfolded were highly elucidating conversations about television on a very sophisticated level. As I noted earlier in this chapter, participants remarked on how rewarding this process of co-construction was. And because their conversations took place on a more formal level, the process of contextualizing their readings with my own was clearer. Our research married. I could compare and contrast my readings to theirs. And I could use similar vernacular to integrate their questions and arguments within the study.

That said, these focus group members were not shy about redefining their roles as participants in relation to me as the discussion leader, or in pointing out their opposition to the ways in which the program attempted to locate them in particular subject positions while watching. Not only did male and female participants discuss their refusal to be interpellated into a female subject position, for example, when watching Brenda in a scene, but one participant labeled one of my questions leading, after which he reworded it to one he preferred to answer. In all cases, the participants were clear on where they stood on the issues and were articulate in discussing their relationship with television and its content, which is the reason for and the value of audience analysis. Such individual agency and expression (even within the context of co-constructed reading practices) illustrate that in the analysis stage viewers do not always take up a

preferred reading position, and sometimes their views are extant to the questions of the project or the text under review. This suggests that a series designed with multiple entry points would prove appealing to a more sophisticated demographic. The ways these participants engaged the co-constructed reading process is the way in which they read the text: for its polysemy. They appeared to understand that both processes offer the coexistence of many possible meanings among individual viewers, and that these polysemic viewpoints are negotiated, if not guided and contextualized, by me as lead discussant and by fellow focus group members during the focus group conversations.

It is important to note that this would be a different project if I had different participants. My particular set of focus group members enabled, but also disabled, certain aspects of the project. For example, they prevented me from considering: What viewing subject locations are not interpellated by this program? Or, who is not watching and why? Less intellectually or culturally sophisticated participants may have been less competent (and confident) in their readings of substantive issues pertaining to gender, feminism, interpellation, patriarchal power structures, and television conventions and marketing practices. Younger participants may not have lived through different eras of feminism. They may have been less engaged with *The Closer* and other television programs. And, if the focus groups included fewer older participants, the discussions would have reflected a shallower, or at least a shorter television history. Even if I had guided or contextualized the conversations, and participants answered my questions about gender issues in regard to *The Closer*, they may have had less personal history to draw upon in relation to identifying with particular characters, themes, or conventions, and thus, would be less competent in speaking to the implied older demographic of the series. Finally, if a greater number of persons of color were among the participants, their arguments may have focused on

the lack of ethnic representation in the cast, or the stereotypical ways in which ethnic characters or ethnic themes were presented. Instead these participants cited stereotypical ethnic tropes as a key reason for the program's wide appeal, especially among conservative viewers. In these ways, my focus group participants disabled certain questions and lines of argument from percolating, whereas other participants would have broadened the research by raising and answering different, yet equally important questions, both of which would have altered my findings.

Because this was an especially engaging and confident group of television watchers, it was fascinating to be in a room with them. They represent a range of occupations. Many have backgrounds in the hard sciences, the academy, government, design professions, media arts, or film and television production. Seven of the forty-two participants have or had careers in Information Technology, five of whom (three PhDs and two MBAs) worked for a university. Two participants are lifelong homemakers; the rest work outside the home. Six hold occupations as a medical or biological researcher, sales representative, or technician: three took master's degrees and two were current doctoral students. The higher education of the latter group suggests that they were not repeating, but rather utilizing, my terminology. Six work in various fields of business; their occupational titles include office administrator, retailer, construction worker and remodeler, marketing executive, student union director, and insurance agency owner. Of these, all had some university education, two held bachelor's degrees, and two held master's degrees. Nine of the forty-two participants worked for the government or a government contractor, or a nonprofit agency. Six of these participants completed education degrees (two Bachelor's and four Master's); one graduated with a bachelor's degree in engineering, another with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry, and one with a high school diploma.

For the purposes of this study the most critical cohort to evaluate is the eleven participants who have backgrounds in film, television, radio, or art and design. Due to their command of the subject matter of (or subject matter related to) this project, their readings have an impact on the questions and concerns raised, and the topics developed in conversations among focus group members. Some of these participants work in television or film production, teaching, or preservation. One is a videographer for a broadcast station's news and sports, another a senior producer of documentaries for a university medical center, and a third the media specialist at a local public school. One teaches film and television at the high school level and another at the university level. One is a film archivist and preservationist for a local history museum. And another is a film and television actor. Among the participants who work in related fields, one taught illustration at a university and three work in interior or graphic design. Another was a sales representative for Clear Channel & iHeartMedia. All of these participants are to some extent versed in the theories and aesthetics of media, and have a command over the terminology used to discuss television and marketing strategies for reaching viewers. In many cases, they are knowledgeable about aspects of television serial design from characterization and camera work to narrative, dialogue, and action. Six of the eleven educated in media hold Master's degrees—five from media arts and one from fine arts graduate programs. These participants certainly guided and contextualized the focus group discussions of which they were a part. That said, their backgrounds in media add to, but also limit the project. They are already conscious of how to read media texts, which explains why they use language similar to my own. A large percentage have higher degrees, and several work for a university in a teaching, research, or production capacity. They are also comfortable talking about social issues and institutional structures such as media on a theoretical and practical level—beyond that of typical television

viewers. Yet, their presence disables more points of view from average television watchers. The other thirty-one participants, less familiar with media, bring different, every day experiences and concerns of watching television to the table. The makeup of this eclectic group strikes a balance that yields a highly productive conversation about television and society. The participants are representative of a wide spectrum of television viewers from highly informed to average, and, thus, serve as a representative sample of a cross-section of the audience. The design of this audience study is highly beneficial to the co-constructed process of reading television.

A Summary of Participant Issues: Five Characteristics of Popular Serial Design

Throughout the focus group discussions, participants shared their readings of the serial design of *The Closer*. Forty of the forty-one participants felt that the program was doing something unique or untraditional in the way it constructed foremost its female protagonist, the crime procedural drama, the age of its cast, and/or the programming style that TNT used to launch its brand identity of "We Know Drama."[199] Almost as universally, participants agreed that *The Closer*'s ethnically diverse cast and its broad demographic were less unique, even conventional. They found this comforting in the face of an untraditional lead and a hybrid genre, an older cast, and a series' marketing campaign that seemed to promote another *Cagney & Lacey* and a 'ball-busting' protagonist, but, upon viewing, was actually a story about relationships more than police cases—that is, the plots and the overarching narrative were constructed around a woman's internal denial/reward system, in which she punished herself until the job was done, and then overindulged in sweets to celebrate; and an external struggle for credibility. They felt strongly that *The Closer* offers something new and appealing, but also something in your face, which left them conflicted and contradictory in their readings. But in nearly 70% of the cases,

The Closer intrigued them enough to either recommend or seek out the series, or to tune in when channel surfing or browsing on Netflix in the future.

Although they discussed a dozen elements of its serial design including narrative, plot and thematic devices, technical codes of camera, lighting, sound, and editing, and the constructions of characters, cast, genre, implied demographic, and network branding, they especially unpacked five aspects in relation to its popular appeal: (1) a uniquely realistic, three-dimensional heroine who struggles internally for acceptance and externally for credibility, but offers a balanced portrayal of home and work lives; (2) a stereotypical, ethnically diverse but older cast of characters, each of whom offers a recognizable stock character from television comedies or police procedural dramas of old; (3) a hybrid crime genre that offers a specialist in the protagonist, post-crime case work that is incidental, and a workplace dynamic of the office family; (4) liberal content that politically conservative, older viewers might be curious about, and content titillating enough for male viewers to occupy a woman's space for forty-two minutes; and, (5) a statement piece that successfully sets its distributing network apart from competing fare on broadcast, basic, and premium cable television.

Issue One: A Heroine Balancing Home and Work, but Struggling for Credibility

Participants coalesced around four aspects of Brenda's characterization that makes her especially intriguing as a contemporary protagonist. First, she is realistic and complex. Second, she establishes credibility through a system of denials and rewards that correlates with an internal struggle for confidence, as well as a level of competency, as one participant described it, in "out-manipulating, out-bossing, outsmarting, out-everythinging everyone in every which way" that relates to an external struggle to prove herself.[200] Third, the series portrays her as a messy,

but balanced heroine with related home and work lives. And, finally, although she is not hateful, vengeful, or mean-spirited towards men, her main function as a heroine is to illustrate that a woman does not need a man to be fulfilled: professionally, sexually, or personally.

Their attraction to the realism and three-dimensionality of her character is one that several felt positioned to make. As Brianna notes, "I see what the producers are trying to do. On one hand, we have this two-dimensional, romanticized notion of what a woman can be—'I can snack all day and be pencil-thin,' but the interrogation process allows Brenda to show the flip side of that—her intelligent, gender-neutral side—and that complexity draws me to her."[201] Others woman viewers felt opposed to that duality in Brenda's characterization and to being positioned as a female due solely to their sex. Annie articulates this point of view: "I felt uncomfortably placed in the position of Kyra Sedgwick because I am a woman. I am uneasy with certain gender portrayals and gender positionings of the show, so I wanted more wiggle room in my readings. It didn't give me that, so I'm not sure that I would watch it again."[202] "That's why I never watched the show," Brianna adds, "because the promos position you so fully—almost anti-male—that I had no interest in watching yet another ball-busting woman try to get through the glass ceiling. Now that I have seen full episodes, I realize the writers are more subtle than that. She's well-rounded. She's not a bitch, but she is called one several times so that we have the chance to explore gender dynamics in a contemporary work setting. Her dual sensibilities are realistic; that's what I am drawn to."[203]

While certain women viewers wrangle over their varying attraction to and repulsion for Brenda's struggles for credibility and, moreover, feel uneasy about being positioned as a female because of it, all but one of the men appreciate this balanced portrayal and are willing to occupy that space for forty-two minutes because it does not negate their own points of view in the

process. "I can identify with the lead character because it's 'fish out of water,' but that point of view is strongly female. I feel I am being asked to empathize, to understand, but the show doesn't position me per say; I go there voluntarily," Caesar says.[204] "I didn't feel positioned either," Garth adds.[205] Jock goes further, contextualizing why the show may be positioning men to occupy a woman's space—"I did, but there was a strong attempt to contrast Brenda with LA—because LA is so sure of itself. She is portrayed and is portraying herself as a foreigner to such assuredness, which is appealing. It's more feminist, if I can say that as a man. It's a journey toward discovery which all of us are on. Although the producers are trying to put us into the female lens, it's an interesting point of view that I am comfortable spending time with. Then there are moments that I know are meant for me, for all of us (glancing at other men in the room). The scene of her with that top, her nipples showing, allows me to react as a man. I appreciate that as well."[206] Bill laughs, then quips: "That was about half-way through the episode when men were starting to fall asleep."[207] Other men reacted more strongly. A scowl on Brad's face shows his discomfort over being positioned, despite his enjoyment in gazing at Brenda in a revealing top. "I didn't have any choice but to see her point of view, she's in every scene. But I still watched it as a male—from a male perspective. I insisted on that. Because I am a man and I don't want to feel compelled to identify with a woman. The nipple scene gave me that opportunity. But there aren't enough moments like that, so I won't watch this series again."[208]

As opposed to Briana, Annie, Jock and Brad, viewers like Caesar and Garth were less cognizant of television as a site of interpellation, as an ideological state apparatus. As Althusser argues, media turns individuals into subjects; they are inscribed in ideology and drawn into "ruling class ideologies" with every television encounter.[209] Viewers are made to think that their

choices are not only self-generated, but varying—that is, they have the agency to choose which social locations to occupy in the watching. This misperceived choice-making agency has been brought on by the market demands of a Post Network Digital Download Era, when picking what you want to buy also suggests that you can choose the subject positions you occupy in watching. Additionally, this illusion is fueled by television series that are consciously designed with a spectrum of views on feminism and gender in their characters and plots, which makes it possible for persons to find multiple points of entry and identifications to the text. But such subject positions are actually established prior to watching; and viewers are confirmed as subjects of ideology in watching, when they are recognized into subject positions through television as a site of interpellation.

By not recognizing television as a mechanism for the reproduction of ideologies of the ruling class, viewers take more ownership of their decisions to like particular, even competing aspects of a text than they have power over. In describing their attraction to the protagonist, for example, they often use specific and comprehensive knowledge of her, which, in many cases, they gleaned from only a few hours of viewing. Designing a complex character, and then allowing her to exercise a spectrum of positions on gender and feminism over the run of the show, makes viewers feel that they understand her well, and that they have a choice in their viewing position/s of her. As Concetta notes:

> There's a contradiction in her; she's not comfortable in her own skin. She threw the donut out but kept licking her fingers. . . . After she solved the case, she ate a ding dong—in private. But in front of anyone else she wouldn't eat a donut. There are little innuendos there. She wants to be the stereotype female—'I don't have to be the hard, butch-type female cop. . . . I can still be the Southern Belle, wear the makeup and my hair up, wear the dresses, but I can still be strong.'[210]

Concetta's understanding of the character having never watched the series before this focus group illustrates how comprehensively Brenda's characterization is written into most scenes.

She is made transparent so that viewers can engage her on various levels as a fully-rounded protagonist in moments, rather than in episodes across the series. Concetta's reading is representative of animated discussions across the focus groups about the complexity of Brenda's character, and, moreover, the aspects of her characterization that set her apart from past and contemporary heroines. Participants list dozens of differences: competing, often conflicting elements of her personality that Concetta notes, "makes her real, compelling, and progressive for television."[211]

Specifically, they compare Brenda's soft looks and lady-like mannerisms to her hard-nosed, manipulative interrogation style. Ciara says, "She's got a sweet tooth, long blond hair, and an interrogation technique so subtle that the kill is often over before you know what hit ya."[212] Brad adds, "She's from the South, not butch; she's feminine, which is also rare. Women's libbers like Cagney and Lacey—they never are feminine. Normally, these types have short hair and are military-looking. This show would not have been popular if Melissa McCarthy or Oprah Winfrey were the leads. That I guaran-damn-ty ya."[213] Troy adds, "That's because this character is a modicum of American culture. We want our women to be women—slender. But, at the same time, she doesn't have to be a striking beauty to also be a powerful woman. Brenda's looks combined with her strength of character play into that role perfectly."[214]

Others note how her persona is describable beyond superficial signifiers including that she is attractive, but with mannish features; that she employs an interview style that draws on both traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine characteristics. This blurring of gender lines reveals traits that are psychological, deeply held, even dark, which is a compelling character design for a new millennial television audience. Karen's reading speaks to that: "Her stepping down from the FBI, being sweet on a married guy, not giving herself the opportunity to

eat anything with sugar until after she closed a case: all examples of testing herself again or doing penance, which is realistic, because of the prior ethics investigation in Atlanta and then the others she goes through during the series. They do something to her as a person, as a professional."[215] Kristy has a similar reading: "They give her an air of mystery and a darkness and intensity that balances her otherwise, 'Thanks, y'all, aw shucks,' feminine dimension."[216] Ciara notes—"The remark about 'I'd still be married if I liked being called a bitch to my face'—Wow! You just don't hear that on television in that context: not as a slur, but as a retort and a positioning of her belief system as a female. And the rewarding-testing of herself with sweets—there's a lot of complexity there. She's three-dimensional. A women's liber as Brad says, for sure, but more than that."[217] For these and other viewers, her complexity represents a three-dimensional portrait of a woman coping with the challenges of day-to-day life, at work and at home, and this appeals to them as a rare television representation.

Discussing how *The Closer* works to have it both ways in Brenda reveals competing messages that the series may be sending about the internal and the external struggles that plague, but also round out her character. Viewers like particular aspects of these characteristics. But even when they approve of the design elements that complexify her, they are conflicted about their contradictory readings of her as a woman who struggles, and what that means for them as men and woman in American society.

Jackie: The fact that donuts are tossed around for everyone to eat and only she looks at them and debates: 'I want to eat this. Should I eat this? I shouldn't but I want to' is a problem in terms of the message it sends. But it also gives real women the opportunity to examine the relationship between food, denial, and contemporary womanhood.
Annie: It really speaks to the pressures of being female, and it not being acceptable to eat because if you do you'll get fat and ugly and then no one will have sex with you.
Georgia: And it's portrayed in every other scene, it seems, when the only thing we see in the shot is the food—yogurt or a whipped-cream desert or a donut or a bar of candy—and Brenda.
Garth: Like in that one scene, after staring at the ice-cream bar in the dessert case, she looks at her reflection in the glass and straightens her hair.

Kristy: And then she takes the dessert out of the freezer, hesitates, and puts it back. That shows she's struggling.
Annie: She was being compared, I think, to an ideal archetype of a woman, because in the shot there were postcards of girls in bikinis and several women's magazines like *Lucky* in the background and she gets closer to the messages of those images by not eating.
Brianna: It exhibits a crisis of confidence in her character, but also women in general over the last twenty years since we were told we could have it all. That's why she tests herself with sweets, because she questions her confidence.[218]

When this issue is raised in another focus group, viewers read it as a concerted effort to appeal to a cross-gender audience. Similar to the fact that they report a generally higher comfort level with being positioned female in spite of being male while watching the show, men in general were more satisfied with the relationship between food, denial, and contemporary womanhood in Brenda than were women, who saw it as a collapse of feminist values purposely encoded for female views to interrogate.

Bill: The sugar thing tried to make her appear more feminine, that's all.
Jill: Not a sugar thing, an eating disorder.
Bill: The sugar balanced out her sour attitude. It balanced her character.
Cindy: That is fine for a male reading, but a female reading would relate it to her denial/reward system that real women are subject to. The show exposes that.
Flo: It's not necessarily offensive because it's pervasive, but here we have a character we are supposed to see as strong and funny and insecure like all of us, but the writers give her food issues and sex issues. Way to target the fact that she's a woman in those stereotypical ways—through her appearance, her body, the fact that she doesn't make good relationship choices, and she goes for the donut only to turn away. Only in her work is she secure. It's a show going out of its way to be atypical by being so very typical. It's conspicuous—it draws attention to itself, which is how I define consciousness-raising.[219]

A similar line of argument develops in another focus group. One male participant, Caesar, steps into what had become a discussion among female participants to challenge their emancipatory readings of Brenda's portrayal. Despite his comment, female focus group members remained adamant that the series characterizes her this way to incite and politicize them.

Caesar: The writers couldn't give her a drinking problem, a more neutral dilemma?
Donna: Her flaws are body image as opposed to gender-neutral addictions in equally brilliant characters for a reason—like prescription drug use in *House* or sex addition and alcoholism in *Mad Men* or methamphetamine production in *Breaking Bad* or running a drug cartel in *The Wire*

or selling alcohol during prohibition in *Boardwalk Empire*. We're sitting around talking about Brenda's problems in relation to expectations of appropriate female thinking and behavior, airing our grievances with such characterizations. That's the reason. It pisses us off. It makes us less complacent in watching television.[220]

These and other participants also insist that Brenda's internal struggles are presented in conversation with her external struggles to illustrate that women have to fight for credibility in every sphere, every day, and, moreover, that they have been doing that for a very long time—even in the past when other female heroines sent messages of women's liberation. Although they agree that such themes raise awareness, they disagree over whether they are appealing or even relevant for women viewers in the aughts.

Flo: She's been proving herself to males for a long time. That was obvious in the 'bitch' line, but also in how she outsmarts everyone, keeps things close to the vest, denies herself sweets.
Concetta: I was turned off by that. I mean, it's not that she wasn't good, but she wanted to display how good she was constantly.
Karen: I think she came in the front door, guns blazing, and demanded to be taken seriously as a professional. Sometimes you have to come on that strongly, especially if there is that much bias against you as the new person trying to break into a work organization.
Flo: That is why I never watched the show. From the promos I expected her to have a 'me against the world' attitude, and that's an old message.
Karen: Old for whom? The LAPD has been male-run and dominated for so long that the show finally takes a crack at that. It's relevant; it's time we see that on television. That's the reality of large corporations and that's what the LAPD is. I was naive when I first started working for a large corporation. You thought there's in-house mentoring for women and you work your way up, but no. Not the way the world works. Not fifteen years ago, not thirty years ago, not now.[221]

Contestations over Brenda as a role model in terms of illustrating the ends to which a woman must go, still today, to break down structural inequalities of gender take place in other focus groups as well. In one such example, viewers relate Brenda's characterization to real women, but also to other female protagonists in television history.

Jada: The show works to destroy established hierarchies. Brenda's role is to force that disintegration by getting her job not through working your way up the ladder, she doesn't follow protocol and chain of command, she tells people outside her chain of command what to do. It chips away at hierarchies as social organization and work organization. It illustrates how to break down hierarchies through the back door, when you can't get in through the front.

Rita: The whole show revolves around her credibility—she reproves herself in every episode. I don't know why I love this show so much, but I'm drawn to that reoccurring theme. It wasn't in *Sex and the City*, and I liked that show because it was fun, but it didn't speak to me as a woman—at least the way I see the real world operating for women. We constantly need to reprove ourselves—confront biases—every day.
Jada: I remember that *Cagney & Lacey* was on TV at the beginning of the Women's Movement and showed that women can do the same job men could. Brenda goes beyond that—she's out-manipulating, out-bossing, outsmarting, out-everything everyone in every which way. There are so many tensions set up in so many directions: gender, sexuality, race, religion, regional background. Addictions to sugar, work, a struggle for creditability in both. *Cagney & Lacey* was really the female version of the male police procedural. The only difference was that there were women in the roles. In *The Closer* we see a more balanced representation—the next step—the psychological tensions that go with gender equality.[222]

Those psychological dimensions are what sets the gendered representation of the protagonist of *The Closer* apart from "*Mary Tyler Moore* or *Murphy Brown* or *Designing Women* or *Cagney & Lacey*," Jada adds later in the discussion.[223] By portraying Brenda in both the public and the private spheres and showing her struggling but adapting without losing her identity or ultimately her power in the series finale, *The Closer* achieves a balanced portrayal that viewers are nearly universally drawn to.

Specifically, they are drawn to the way in which the serial design establishes not only a relationship, but a dialogue, between public and private life. "It makes her interesting personally and professionally," Jill notes.[224] Jock adds, "I didn't see her as struggling as much as achieving. She's well rounded, competent in her job, and seems comfortable and normal at home when she's laying on the bed. I can't think of another woman on TV like that."[225] Steve goes further in distinguishing her from other female protagonists: "Typically, every time you have a female in a male-dominated space, she is characterized as angst-ridden and thoroughly unhappy at work but also at home, if they even show her at home. That's the way the genre usually goes. I haven't seen a show with a happily married powerful female yet. This is a first."[226] Maruta feels, "That's because she is atypical, because she has power and isn't vengeful. She's unfazed

by the haters, which also makes her atypical."[227] "But she has cracks and wounds," Karen is quick to point out; "and having worked in male-dominated fields, I identity with that need to have a certain persona to get credibility, to establish yourself, and the toll such credibility-seeking takes on you professionally and personally. She is negotiating that in every episode we watched."[228] Although participants wrangle over her complexity and whether certain traits in her characterizations limit her potential as a female with true independence, most viewers, men and women alike, identify with Brenda's portrayal and her struggle for satisfaction in all facets of her life. Participants read her as realistic, but also as a progressive and refreshing character to negotiate.

In every focus group convening, participants debated what Brenda's messy but balanced characterization of womanhood signifies for viewers and for contemporary American culture. Moreover, it lead to more questions than answers. Such questions include: If this is a rare representation—a heroine as balanced individual—what message does it send about gender norms in the twenty-first century? Social norms? Women as gendered persons within society? In answering their own questions, many feel it indicates that a woman does not need a man to feel content—that she can be satisfied being alone. As William notes:

> I think the point of this show is to proclaim that women are not inferior to men. It may be more common on television in 2013, but it was rare in 2005 when this show started. Before that, popular female TV characters reminded you of the saying: 'Women are heads of the Honeydew Corporation. Honey do this, honey do that.' They're the bosses; they have always been. Like in the case of Obama—what Michelle says affects him, controls him. But Brenda doesn't need to control anyone but herself. She 'does this' and 'that' herself, for herself.[229]

Others feel this lone wolf depiction sends the wrong message about female independence. By encoding both self-determination and satisfaction in her characterization, but also struggle, the series limits her potential as a subject in order to appeal to a wide viewership. In most cases,

they point to the final scene in the pilot to explore the ways the serial design both diffuses and defuses messages of feminist possibility. Exploring an extended sequence of this discussion illustrates how viewers struggle over polysemic meanings and how, in so doing, they stumble upon the types of viewers whom they feel this show is, and is not, designed to appeal to.

Flo: I thought [her sugar thing] was comic relief, like the producers were trying to add something cutesy—'Oh, here's a donut!' I didn't like it.
Karen: I saw it as a reward system. She wouldn't let herself, A, eat it in public, and, B, only after everything was wrapped up. She set her own goals, she rewarded herself for meeting them. Wasn't that what 1970s feminism was about? Self-determination?
Concetta: It was also about collegiality. She wouldn't say to another cop, 'Let's go out and celebrate,' but for her own gratification and to celebrate she ate a Ding Dong, enjoying every single morsel, while she sat on the bed? And that's the only thing she's got right now to fulfill her—the Ding Dong? Because that's way too much enjoyment over a Ding Dong.
Cindy: Yeah, I can't say I go to my house on Friday nights and in celebration of a great work week lay on the bed and eat a Ding Dong.
Jock: It is a sex scene for women viewers, though. It is saying that eating a Ding Dong is a lot more satisfying than being with the guys celebrating in the bar at the end of the case.
Stan: I don't know about that. Her eating on the bed presented her as a very feminine person and forced me to look at her from the point of view of a man.
Jock: I definitely thought it was a sex scene but one about female empowerment—doing things your own way, but also rewarding yourself in ways you find meaningful.
Concetta: I'm playing devil's advocate, but I'm saying that too. She doesn't need the guy in the bed; she's really happy with this Ding Dong. She's content. She's saying, 'You don't need to always have a man in your life—you don't need a relationship, you can be satisfied with yourself.' Other females on TV say they don't need a man, then spend the entire show looking for one. She doesn't need to sleep with every Tom, Dick, and Harry. She could have invited that FBI guy home with her, but she didn't. She is sexual, but she doesn't need sex, a man, or a relationship. That is independence.
Cindy: That's the messages of the show, definitely, but I don't like it. Not all women are like that. She's a brilliant person, and to see her sitting on the bed eating chocolate is how a man would see a woman like Brenda—a woman with real power and a sense of purpose and emancipation—sitting on the bed alone on a Saturday night. It's this double-edged message that is troubling.
Concetta: But also promising.[230]

Although such representations of self-gratification may offer great fodder for debate among women viewers, men in general spaced out during these moments, when the series encoded signs of Brenda's self-contentment, which signaled to them that she has all of the tools, but also the desire, to satisfy her own needs.

Stan: That scene had fabulous potential for me as a man, when she laid the clothes out and had the gun, I said, 'Alright.' But then she went and ate chocolate and it ruined it for me. It's not a scene for men except to the extent that it keeps us watching in the hopes that she needs us down the line.
Bill: What went through my mind is, 'This show was on a long time ago. I wonder if Hostess was still in business then.' That's how unfocused on her satisfying herself sexually that I was. I thought about the fact that Ding Dongs came in a box of twelve, and they were still probably available at the time this episode was on, even though on the news recently it was revealed that Hostess wasn't making them anymore. As a character, she is not there for me, for men. She has another purpose. She is there to show that a powerful woman can like men—like she does on her date—and can respect men, but she doesn't need them to satisfy her. She satisfies herself. Frankly I'd rather think about Hostess making cupcakes.[231]

Although most participants found this aspect of the protagonist intriguing, viewers like Stan and Bill felt threatened or nonplussed by her characterization—literally left out of its appeal in certain scenes. Several male participants in other focus groups felt similarly displaced from their preferred viewing positions during such scenes. Donna refers to these participants when she follows up on her earlier comment, and suggests that they are the one cohort of viewers that the series may not have been designed to appeal to. "This show is open to a lot of interpretations. But the only viewer who wouldn't like her—and because of that this show—is an unconfident man who feels uncomfortable watching a strong female."[232] It is clear from the discussions-at-large that most men felt both drawn to and repelled by Brenda at different moments, but generally felt comfortable enough with her as a protagonist to watch the series again.

In wrapping up our discussions of the likability of the lead, we discussed whether her toughness is presented not only to balance her portrayal and to generate cross-gender appeal, but to reify stereotypes of excessive competition among powerful women that would limit the gender-neutral positioning of that aspect of her characterization. This topic led to a windfall of less chatty, less airy responses.

Rita: No one wants to put a woman in power, in media anyway, where media represents gender and power. . . . Having said that, everywhere I have worked, there is one person who is too competitive. On television, that person is always female and the victim of that aggressive

competition is female, too. I saw that in Brenda in the pilot and I didn't like it, but less and less so in later seasons and by the finale she was saving people—a kid, her deputy—working with them and the woman DA and IA officer as a united front against the establishment. She broke the stereotype. But it was far from gender-neutral. It was personal and political.
Alexa: Even her style of interrogation is personal and political. That's why I think this character had to be female. It'd be too intimidating if it were a man.
Jacob: I would have liked the character if it were a man. Powerful women intimidate me. I don't feel at ease around them. That's why I felt so uneasy watching her and why I maybe wouldn't watch the show again.[233]

For these viewers the protagonist is the program—at least in the case of *The Closer*. Brenda is a character who has "true balance, completeness, humanness: tough as nails one minute to very clear moments of genuine insecurity the next. And that insecurity propels her to do the work and to be tough," Patsy says. This balanced portrayal in most cases leads to high appeal of the protagonist in these viewers. For a minority of viewers like Jacob, Stan, or Annie, however, this well-roundedness mitigates a clear black-and-white portrayal that would allow them to feel less positioned to inhabit her point of view. Due to their unease, these viewers negotiate or reject such positioning by rejecting the program. Having said that, serials are designed to captivate viewers on myriad levels, not just through an admittedly strong female heroine, but with other design elements including the cast, the genre, the implied niche demographic, and network branding, which together offer additional entry points to serial appeal.

Issue Two: An Older, but Otherwise Stereotypical Cast of Ethnic Stock Characters

With so much innovation presented in the emotional range of the protagonist and the gender dynamics she instigates (and perpetuates), most viewers were relieved to have a stock ethnic cast: "the smarmy boss," "the hot Hispanic chick," "the smart aleck white guy," "the timid Black guy," and "the Asian who is smart."[234] "It seems like a broadcast show that is trying to show as diverse a cast as possible," Stan adds; "TNT needs to get as many people to watch as

possible, so they're going to put one of each color in the show so every viewer can identify with a character who looks like them."[235] Sensing that the series attempts to create a connection between stock ethnic characters and wide popularity, no participant rallies against it. Rather, they admit to a level of comfort with this conventional aspect of programming; and, in terms of popular serial design, they were least interested in seeing innovation in this area.

Georgia: The cast is stereotypical, but I think writers do that in this case to give Brenda someone to play off of. She wouldn't be able to show her strength—despite her insecurities—if she didn't have someone like Provenza challenging her like that.
Caesar: Which one's Provenza?
Annie: The asshole.
Patsy: And proud of it.
Caesar: So a good foil.[236]

As Caesar points out, even though another participant identifies Provenza as the asshole in the cast, he is accepted for the gender foil that he is. He is not just another asshole, but an asshole who serves a larger purpose. As Jackie says, "I liked him because of that. He's just himself and doesn't realize how far out he is—so far out that you don't cut into him."[237] Nell suggests that it is the job of the women in the cast to do precisely that. "What I liked is when he used the word 'bitch' he got it thrown back at him like a ping pong ball. He throws it out there and it comes back to hit him in the face—and by the only other woman detective in addition to Brenda on the squad."[238] It becomes clear as the discussion unfolds that sexist language and behavior is useful for interrogating gender politics, but also for representing aspects of realism in the characters whose language and points of view represent real people they know.

Jackie: The show tells it like it is. There are a lot of guys who use the word 'bitch.'
Caesar: It's true to his character.
Jackie: Especially among an older person like him. So to hide that would wreck the whole idea of the show.
Caesar: But it's not the only time the word 'bitch' is used. In the first scene, it's levied against Brenda and she throws it right back in the Black detective's face as well. This show is very self-aware of the way 'bitch' is used in media, where it's just thrown around and operates as subtle misogyny. But this show highlights and plays with it and explicitly deals with it through

Provenza's character, which is an interesting establishment of the fact that the show is from a female point of view, but not to the degree that a male viewer feels excluded. It offers an entryway to a female perspective.[239]

Caesar's remark highlights related aspects of *The Closer*'s diverse characters that are considered innovative: an older ensemble, wherein racial dynamics and gender dynamics are interactive and are dealt with as recursive issues. Karen relates her own life experience to its appeal.

Karen: Brenda's a little older than a typical TV heroine. And, at least the way that I feel as I get older, I'm more willing to speak my mind. I'm a lot stronger and I'm not going to put up with any of the old boys' club or the guardedness that people have. They're all older, actually, which is interesting, but which I would expect for detectives. They would be more experienced and older. But you don't see this in detective shows anymore, with the exception of the male boss.[240]

Jada goes further in contextualizing age, ethnicity, gender, and patriarchy.

Jada: She's willing to deal with men, women, and different races without backing down. She is not scared off by political correctness. There is a confidence in her that drives her. Because she is older and more self-assured, she admits her privileged position and deals with issues of race head-on. She knows that she stepped over the African American captain to get her position, and she also knows that the young African American detective is still resentful of her for that, but, in the end, she offers him a chance to work for her in her new position after he is sidelined in the Division. She acknowledges her racial privilege, but only in connection with her inferior gendered position. She and the detective have something in common in their fight against a biased system.[241]

In summary of this issue, a diverse cast addressing issues of gender, sexuality, race, religion, and regional background presents an opportunity for *The Closer* to appeal to a broad demographic. Creating hybridity in its format also helps to this end.

Issue Three: A Post-Crime Specialist, Incidental Casework, and Office Dynamics as Generic Hybridity

As Sally Anne notes, "There's less crime in this show than I've seen on a police drama."[242] "It's not just about crime; it's about drama, melodrama, law & order, suspense, psychological suspense, procedural. It's a mishmash," Jacob says.[243] "But I'm still interested in the crime they are trying to solve each week," Jada qualifies her investment as a fan.[244] These

statements illustrate the typical conversation that takes place when participants discuss the comprehensive generic elements that are commingled and remixed in the case of *The Closer*. Within seconds of each focus group, a handful of participants begin to lay the blueprint for its serial design, and, in so doing, discover what about its hybrid generic model sets it apart. Bill sizes up its hybridity after seeing only one full episode and parts of four others. "Cop dramas are not so titillating and graphic. Also, the crime already took place—there's little action in the series. It's talky—it's mainly talking and relating. Not a typical cop drama at all."[245] Like the transparent characterizations of the protagonist and the diverse cast, *The Closer*'s generic formula—one reminiscent of *Law & Order*, *CSI*, and a number of procedural crime shows—is laid bare for viewers to recognize in moments rather than in episodes across the series.

Many participants chose to focus on three aspects of its generic design that set it apart from its contemporaries. First, Brenda presents the point of view of a specialist rather than a cop. Second, she leads post-crime investigations and often personally discovers evidence that leads to convictions. Third, she has a pattern of discovering key facts by talking with and relating to members of her Division and her family, but also individuals involved in the victims' lives. This frees up the narrative to foreground office dynamics and the office family in ways that typical crime dramas cannot.

When discussing these various elements, participants tend to link them together rather than to address them individually, which indicates that *The Closer*'s reformulated genre is intrinsically connected to its popularity. As Caesar says: "It's innovative within a framework of traditional genres."[246] "And its strategically formulated because I have watched it when I was in the mood for a serious cop drama, and when I was in the mood for a silly comedy like *Police Academy*," Nell adds.[247] As will be explored later in the chapter, *The Closer*'s episodic tones can

range from emotionally heavy to silly slapstick across the series. "One of the episodes we watched drew me in because it looked like a typical police show—it had more action and police work than interrogation and relationship drama—but another was interesting because Beau Bridges was in it and it was about Provenza accepting the transgender identity of his old partner. I couldn't classify this show as just about police work, which is nice," Tina says.[248]

Although many consider it a refreshing trait that, despite a large cast of able-bodied detectives, Brenda does most of the crime-solving herself, many found this boring for people who like police procedurals. Their opinions illustrate that despite high ratings, the series may be less appealing to the typical broadcast viewer looking for a modern-day *Dragnet*; and instead, it is designed as a highly stylized, hybridized police procedural—one typically marketed to premium content subscribers, but with less nudity and swearing that would be found in series on HBO, Showtime, or Cinemax. "Brenda keeps most of the key information to the end, so there's not enough case development for people who like cop dramas like *CSI*, *Hawaii 5-0*, or *Law and Order*," Cindy notes.[249] "Gabriel plays the 'these are the facts of the case' character—he's on the beat like *Dragnet*, which leaves the show to portray all these interesting aspects of Brenda's personal life—interesting stuff on her desk that she has to clean up. The show is contrasted with and more interesting than a 'just the facts, man' cop drama, which is too old school for a young guy like me," Stan says.[250]

Many participants went even further in suggesting that by doing most of the discovery of evidence herself, the protagonist sends an important message about the relationship between gender and leadership. This plays an integral role in designing genre characteristics that have popular appeal especially with men. "Brenda always keeps her cards close to the vest, which is what men typically do on TV. She sends other cops out to do her bidding, her legwork; but

when it comes to solving the crime and getting the perpetrator to confess, she takes the responsibility and the credit. She's no police woman," Garth says.[251] Male participants in other focus groups were also drawn to her—'the buck stops with me'—assuredness.

Troy: She takes ownership of her actions, for sure; she takes responsibility, which is also another trait typically associated with men on television. We wouldn't be having this discussion about the unconventionality of the program if the lead were a man, I can tell you that. Did Walt ask for permission on *Breaking Bad*? No, he told his wife, 'You just do what I told you to do and don't ask me any questions.'
Brad: She closes the scene on the criminal, too, remember? And not in the interview room, on the street when he held the hostage captive and where there were a dozen cops and FBI agents at her beck and call. She's like, 'Here's the scenario,' while she has the gun on him, 'You shoot her, we kill you. This happens, we kill you. The only scenario where you come out alive is if you let her go.' That is consistent with her role as the closer, the buck stops with her, which is a rare type of women television character, but I like her.[252]

Only one male participant was offended by male characters being subsidiary both to the process and to the narrative.

Jake: What drives the discovery of truth comes from Brenda. The men were the worker bees.
Garth: If this show was shown in the 60s or 70s, it wouldn't have flown because men watching wouldn't have believed a woman could do all that. How many women were Deputy Chiefs in the 60s? Brenda is CIA-trained, so that trumps her over everybody else. But we wouldn't have believed she was in the CIA, even in the 80s. Cagney and Lacey were fighting to get off the streets as hookers. Now we don't think that way. So we believe her when she says—'I don't answer to the Captain, the misogynist or anyone else. I answer to myself.'[253]

On the other hand, a few women were offended by her being so insulated in solving cases, because they equated this trait with a lack of camaraderie in her construction that presented her as a Miss Know-It All. Sally Anne articulates this point of view: "She's a bitch, and I say that because she treats men like shit."[254] Cindy relates her bitchiness to an interpellated viewership: "She's a Plain Jane trying to be a bitch in a boys' world. Real women who are middle-class and like that—it is their dream to be in the big boys' world. She appeals to them."[255] Others, especially older women in focus groups, took issue with reading Brenda as a bitch. Once again, these conversations became less jovial as deep-seated points of view on gender were on the table.

Sandy: She takes names and asks questions later, if that's what you mean. That's no different from any leading man on TV from the 50s to today.
Alexa: Besides, if she were a man, no one would ask whether they liked her assertiveness or her ability to solve the case singlehandedly—they'd expect her to. She had to prove herself, and, in many cases, she couldn't trust any of the men. They were out to get her. She's just like women who have to prove themselves when they have upper-level jobs, and they do.[256]

One of the quietest and oldest participants, seventy-five-year-old Evelyn, took this as one of only two opportunities to make a point about the series, saying: "I like her. I wish I were more like her. She's strong and not introverted and doesn't need to ask for permission to be the smartest person in the room. That's why I never missed an episode."[257] "There's a difference between our generations," Sandy, a fellow participant, also in her seventies, adds while glancing around the table at the younger female participants in the focus group who rallied against Brenda's independence. "Women in our generation were trained to be timid, to ask for help, to let men make the tough calls and call the shots. We're still learning from characters like this."[258] "Absolutely. I'm more outspoken now, because I've been influenced by younger women like Brenda into feeling comfortable having the last word," Evelyn comments for the last time.[259]

Because Brenda does most of the case development in the interrogation room or in her own head, the hybrid genre is established around character work that acts as the procedural element of the plot of *The Closer*.

Jackie: The character work is the structure of this show. They fit the case into it.
Nell: It's like *Grey's Anatomy* with cops. It's more about the relationships between people than the criminal cases.
Brianna: Not only is it not about the case, it's not about catching the murderer, really. That's an aside. It's about the relationships of those in the office and her relationships outside of the office.[260]

Annie claims that this characteristic of *The Closer* has had a profound effect on crime procedurals to follow. "This aspect of its dramatic format is considerably different—the office dynamic, the workplace family. In a cop drama, it is less traditional. But, since this show, it has

gained more popularity. Look at *The Killing*, *Homeland*, *The Good Wife*."[261] Jackie adds, "I would say this is the most feminist aspect of the show—how it makes the private public. Her husband is the FBI liaison to her. They talk about cases at home and have to learn to balance home and work. She cares for her lieutenant, but he stabs her in the back and nearly gets her fired. She grows attached to victims but also to people she is trying to put in prison. Raydor opposes her; but once they get to know more about each other they become allies."[262] Jake interjects—"But not all of Brenda's relationships are beneficial. She seems to have an infantile relationship with her mother, which she mentions in the pilot and is still working out in the finale."[263] "But these relationships drives the plot," Caesar says, "the bad ones as much as the good ones."[264] What the participants stop short of pointing out (most likely due to their limited exposure in many cases to the series) is that Brenda uses insights gleaned from personal relationships and intimate conversations to solve nearly every homicide investigation. The light bulb moment comes to her when a colleague, relative, interviewee, or witness talks about themselves, about Brenda, or about a topic in general, and her conversation with them enables her to make a connection between it and information in the case, which, beforehand, made less sense as an isolated fact. Her relationships and the relationships of others in the office and at home are inextricably linked to solving murder cases. These relational moments serve as character work that acts as the procedural element of the plot of *The Closer*. This unconventional generic characteristic may, indeed, account for viewers investing long-term in a police procedural that, if it had stayed true to typical conventions of the crime procedural genre, would merely offer a discovery of evidence in developing the case of the week.

Issue Four: An Older, Conservative Niche Demographic and Male Viewer Appeal

Of the forty-two participants, thirty-five claim that the writers target viewers either conservative, older, and/or male. "Specifically they are targeting the husbands," Cindy says, "and conservatives. If you're liberal, you'd get bored by the topics of this program. These are things liberals talk about every day, but conservatives might be curious about."[265] Younger participants agree with Cindy's reading, but several mention that they find certain topics explicitly conveyed in this series, which they appreciate in contrast to the political correctness prevalent on broadcast television today. "Provenza has to go to sensitivity training, and yet he has a female boss that works to keep him in line. It's an interesting gender dynamic—it's exaggerated in the series but reflects real life scenarios we don't talk about generally," Virginia says.[266]

Older participants are in every case titillated by the subject matter. Although they do not mention their political affiliations during discussions, I was privy to them as listed on their information sheets, and only one of these older viewers self-describes as liberal. Additionally, none of them subscribe to premium cable. So I would claim that TNT attracts older, conservative viewers to *The Closer* with marginally controversial themes and titillating images offered more explicitly on HBO, Cinemax, or Showtime. TNT encodes a range of provocation deemed respectably middle-American so a mass audience with more conservative sensibilities and tastes and mid-Western values of religion, home, family, and shared, knowable community are interpellated. In the aughts, even these viewers want to be challenged with programming that tests theirs social values, but only to a certain degree. Participants across focus groups assume this to be the implied niche demographics of the series. They also point out several reasons why men and lesbians within this cohort are especially attracted to *The Closer*. "I'm surprised this is

on TNT. From the first scene, you see a naked body. And you know that you're in for some grisly imagery, use of profanity, very unusual themes like homophobia from a female point of view. I'm shocked at how basic cable can get away with that today. Now I know why my father watches this regularly."[267] "Yep, bang," Jacob says, "the eyeball is missing, the de-skinned body."[268] "And then two seconds later, the guy calls Brenda a bitch," William adds. "I have to say, I thought the bitch line was funny. It's a graphic package."[269]

Jake: There is no mistaking that it's a sexually daring show. The gender roles make me think of the Roman Polanski movie *Chinatown* and the sexual ambiguity, the lesbianism, the gender confusion that is often the weekly theme.[270]
Kristy: I hadn't watched the series before today and now I better understand why *The Closer* is popular with older lesbians. I know from lesbian friends. It deals with topics of gender and sexuality often; and although initially it seems exploitative, ultimately, it handles it sensitively.

By challenging the audience to engage provocative material, but offering different entry points to the text—in other words, utilizing polysemy to infer subjectivity—*The Closer* expands its potential niche demographics.

Sandy: In several of the episodes, the identity of heterosexuals are destabilized as well—an interesting twist. The heterosexual fear of being duped by a lesbian in the first one. And then Provenza being uncomfortable with his ex-partner's transgender identity. It goes beyond issues of homosexuality.
Jada: I like it because it isn't afraid to be controversial. It's realistic, but ultimately sensitive. I'm no spring chicken. I don't want to be talked down to or preached to. I can make up my own mind about things.
Jessica: I felt that way—that it's more subjective than most shows.[271]

"I know a lot of 75- and 80-year-old men who watch it for all of the sex in it," says Jackie.[272]

"Really?" Garth quips. "Some things never change."[273]

Troy: I'm not going to lie—I loved the male banter and sexist humor. Like when Provenza says, 'You mean I have to go through sexual harassment training . . . again?' (He laughs wildly.)
Buck: It goes there, but it pulls back. There's that scene of her in the low-cut top with her nipples poking through, but then she changes before she meets the FBI agent for a drink, so it shows her propriety. At my age, I can appreciate both.[274]

It was precisely that quality of daring-to-be-politically-incorrect in an age of growing political correctness that draws older viewers who remember a time when political correctness was not an aspect of popularity. "I liked it because it's an equal opportunity offender. It does appeal to an older demographic—people in their fifties I would say. My father is 70 and he and his friends love it—the sexist banter, the 'Who done it?' And he really enjoys Provenza. He told me, 'He's like half the guys I was in NAM with,'" says Brianna.[275]

It is clear from the discussions-at-large that *The Closer* is popular with most men and women, older and younger. But when it comes to who it particularly appeals to, who watches it faithfully—older lesbian friends, fathers in their seventies and eighties—and the conservative participants ages fifty and older who read just the right amount of provocation in it, the comments of these participants go a long way in answering for the implied niche target demographics of *The Closer*. When the relatively older ages of the protagonist and the cast are also taken into consideration, as well as the older guest stars including James Avery (*The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*), Richard Roundtree (*Shaft*), John de Lancie (*Days of Our Lives*), Meredith Baxter (*Family Ties*), Frances Sternhagen (*Cheers*), Williams Daniels (*St. Elsewhere*), S. Epatha Merkerson (*Law and Order*), Barry Corbin (*Dallas*), Dominick Dunne, Larry King, Gil Garcetti, Adam Arkin (*Chicago Hope*), Curtis Armstrong (*Moonlighting*), Michael Beach (*ER*) , Fred Willard (*The Love Boat*), Debra Monk (*NYPD Blue*), Jane Carr (*Dear John*), and Beau Bridges, it becomes even clearer that the intention of the series is to attach viewers familiar with actors, writers, talk show hosts, and politicians best known from the 1970s to the 1990s. As previously mentioned, although the content of the series is not on par with that of premium providers in terms of the levels of sex, nudity, or profanity, it sets itself apart considerably from broadcast fare. In so doing, TNT offers a less expensive (since it is included in the basic cable package,

rather than acting as a stand-alone monthly subscription service) and less exploitive level of scintillating entertainment for older, conservative viewers who might be curious about controversial themes regarding gender, sexuality, religion, or politics, but neither have access to nor an interest in being taken beyond that limit on premium cable programming.

Issue Five: The Statement Series that Brands TNT, "We Know Drama"

Several participants had not known *The Closer* was broadcast on TNT until the focus group convened; and they were surprised to learn of this, especially after spending four hours screening and discussing the program. As Nell remarks, "This is heavy subject matter for the TNT I remember. I haven't watched it in close to ten years. But I remember watching TNT reruns of positive shows from when we were growing up in the 90s—*Family Matters*, *Full House*—or *Law and Orde*r reruns when I played hooky at university. *The Closer* is a statement piece that makes me want to see what else TNT offers now."[276] Those familiar with the network before and since 2005 notice a definitive change in its programming lineup. With original procedural dramas that followed *The Closer* including *Franklin & Bash* (TNT, 2011-2014), *Rizzoli & Isles* (TNT, 2010-), *Perception* (TNT, 2012-2015), and the spinoff of *The Closer*, *Major Crimes* (TNT, 2012-)—programs that have clear design aesthetics that distinguish them from comparable shows on broadcast and cable networks—TNT is sending a message to viewers about its aspirations as a network beyond its then-brand logo of "We Know Drama."[277] "We're not afraid to tackle tough issues like homosexuality and dodging the law," Donna offers.[278] "We're willing to take a risk and create a new mold," says Jackie.[279] "We're in the big leagues now and we came to play," Garth quips.[280] "We're just as sexy, just as tantalizing but we have class," Donna adds.[281] By pushing the boundaries of serial design on the levels of a complex

heroine, a politically incorrect older cast, a hybrid genre about relationships more than police cases, and niche target demographics of older, conservative adults and males, TNT is bound to test as well as reward viewers with content that is at once controversial and conventional.

Wrangling Over the Gaze, Transgender Representations, and the Intersectionality of Femininity, Power/Space, and the Public Sphere: A Summary of Participant Issues

It was clear throughout the focus group discussions that the participants were conflicted about their contradictory readings and reactions to *The Closer*. At times, they were drawn to, and at other times repelled by, the ideologies of gender and sexuality at play in the episode and scenes screened, and the consciousness-raising and ultimate undermining of many issues related to gender and sexuality. They were highly entertained in general by the series and found it to be more progressive than they had imagined at first blush. Yet participants were at odds—to a lesser extent within their own readings, and to a greater extent with others'—for what one viewer found to be an acceptable treatment of gender, another found a deplorable one. The discursive moments of focus group discussions led to the discovery of multiple points of view, what film scholar Christine Gledhill calls, "a range of positions of identification," which is useful as I theorize the ways *The Closer*'s model of popular serial design appeals to a wide demographic.[282]

Certain themes, in particular, encourage participants to think about and want to talk about gender and sexuality to a greater extent than other contemporary or historical series. These themes make it possible for viewers to notice the entertainment value of *The Closer* and want to explore social issues, social exclusions, social degradations, and social relations raised in response to the contradictory—often throw-back—definitions and representations of gender encoded in the text. I asked viewers to articulate their readings of these themes in regard to three episodes in particular: to address the objectifying male gaze in "You Have the Right to Remain

Jolly," the transgender representations in "Make Over," and the intersectionality of femininity, power and space, and the public sphere in the finale, "The Last Word." Although the first two episodes are treated individually in close textual analyses in Chapters Three and Four, and the finale is taken up in the Conclusion, engendering co-constructed readings with focus group participants serve as counterpoints to my readings. They produce social facts that shed light on the ways that controversial treatments of gender and sexuality in the content of *The Closer* challenge, but leave intact, its popular appeal.

Issue One: The Gaze as Either Objectifying, Nothing to Get Riled Up Over, or Sexy

In all focus groups, the scenes from "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly" lead to a range of readings, especially in response to the opening scene in which 'scantily clad' female elves are depicted wrestling over a sack in the middle of Santa Village, while male detectives and the camera objectify them sexually.[283] Participants range from annoyed to entertained in their readings of this lighting-rod subject matter. Most male participants articulate a strong attraction to it. "I'd stop and watch. It's sexy" Jock quips.[284] "Me, too," Stan agrees.[285] Jacob, in his seventies, says, "It's a bunch of gobbledygook, but fun and easy on the eyes."[286] The readings of female participants are more nuanced and break down by gender, but also by age demographic. Women agree that the material is encoded to attract males. But older women are nonplussed by it, while younger women are offended, and middle-aged women take a relatively neutral, matter-of-fact positioning.

Women fifty-five and older liken the gaze of male characters and the camera to a common device of objectifying women in real life. "It's all around us. You can't be offended anymore, it's everywhere, and not just on TV," Sally Anne says.[287] "It's trying to instill humor,"

Jill says.[288] "Bringing 'T & A' to the show," Concetta concedes.[289] Women younger than thirty-five are more critical in their readings. When a participant in her seventies notes, "This episode shows the writers take great risks, even in the seventh season of the show. It goes very far for a traditional cop show,"[290] a female participant in her early thirties retorts, "I think it's a case of running out of ideas by the seventh season."[291] And women thirty-five to fifty-five take the middle ground in their readings. Flo, for example, says, "It reminds me of *Charmed*, a bunch of young girls fighting, falling out of their tops, while men watch . . . intrigued."[292] "This is how TNT gets more men to watch the show," Cindy adds.[293] And, "silly and inane and lowest common denominator like a sitcom," Karen says, "but nothing to get too riled up over."[294]

Many participants in principal agree with Cindy: that narrative devices such as the gaze give *The Closer* the opportunity to target an audience wider than its implied demographic of older, conservative viewers. "This farcical material is appealing to a younger crowd, especially young men," Stan notes.[295] "I think the show got lost or mixed up with *Married with Children* for an episode," Bill, a man in his mid-fifties, adds. "It's in search of a fourteen-year-old male viewer. But this episode offers something new from its typically darker content. And at the end Brenda scolds the men for 'looking like a bunch of diabetics' staring at the detective's sister in the same way they did Santa's elves."[296] "I agree," Stan says, "the episode is simultaneously targeting women viewers by giving them opportunities to make fun of sexist men and see Brenda swoop in and save the day."[297] "That's why it is satisfying—the strong female character comes to a woman's rescue and rules again," Cindy smiles as she contextualizes her earlier reading.[298] Her comment, which frames Brenda as a heroine and savior, elicits one of the strongest emotional responses from fellow participants. A couple whoop and cheer, while others nod in agreement. I wondered at the time whether it was a sign of group relief that a potentially

lighting-rod topic such as gazing did not turn into an argument. Or whether the participants exhibited similar reactions to that of movie theatre spectators seeing the hero triumph over evil. In either case, most of their reactions illustrate a process of mediation taking place in viewers reading intermittent sexist modes of address as part and parcel of a serial that, in general, they admit to enjoying. This process illustrates the intended outcome of a model of popular serial design. It imagines viewers taking up multiple and even contradictory readings of polysemic content, but remaining satisfied enough to watch the series once again.

Issue Two: Representing Transgender as Either Making a Political Statement, Consciousness-Raising, or Exploitative by Design

The episode "Make Over" is about the transgender story line of ex-cop George (Beau Bridges), now Georgette, who returns to Los Angeles to testify on behalf of the LAPD.[299] Her change in identity in the intervening years since serving on the police force is met with negativity and overt prejudice by all members of the force other than Brenda. The treatment of transgender as comic fodder for entertainment, in this case, draws the widest range of readings by viewers of any episode screened. Participants' responses vary from abominable to hilarious. Although the gender representations in this episode garner far more negotiated readings, and respondents within age demographics are at odds with one another over the series' success in handling as sensitive a topic as transgender identity, I was surprised by their generally favorable responses. Only one of the participants, thirty-year-old Alexa, went so far as to state: "I will never watch this show again now that I've seen this episode," because she thought that the transgender politics were atrocious.[300]

Most participants read the transgender themes of this episode as making the strongest political statement of any they had seen in *The Closer*. From among them, one cohort feels that by portraying George as a surrogate for Brenda the series sends the message that women are more proficient as 'closers.' Virginia articulates this point of view.

> George is essentially Brenda in male form in the interrogation room. . . . He is proficient in using a female communication style to entrap a woman into confessing. He also shifts communications styles based on the object as Brenda does. The perp is attracted to him as George, and he knows it. So he adopts a female persona to seduce her into confessing again. The episode plays with the borders of gender—what is male and what is female? It makes a political statement, for sure.[301]

Jake argues that the work of the series is not to create a surrogate for Brenda, but to construct "a strong male in George by feminizing him in only certain ways. That makes an interesting statement about the arbitrariness of gender."[302] Concetta, reads the episode slightly differently, as portraying how women characters use gender as "a masquerade. Georgette is masquerading as male. Actually she is female, and like Brenda, is great at closing cases. The message of this episode is that the female communication style used by George or Brenda is a superior interrogation style, and by extension, that females have a superior aptitude for the job."[303] These differing comments illustrate the myriad moments of entry to the text, and the smart serial design that encodes various opportunities to read Brenda, transgender representations, and themes of female empowerment differently.

Another cohort of participants finds that, although this episode makes a political statement about gender, it is less than subtle in doing so. "They partnered him with the most sexist guy on the quad—Provenza. The show is making an obvious statement by contrasting their sexes and then marring their gender differences," said Flo.[304] But Jackie has a different take. "It positions Brenda to make the political statement clear—'It's about testimony, not testicles.' As a society we think gender is the equipment—you're either one way or the other. It

clarifies gender for us. There are more than two, and Georgette spends a good deal of time in the grey area."[305]

A final cohort of politicized readings establishes that the message of the episode is clearly that gender no longer matters.

Garth: It's saying that it doesn't make any difference who you are, only if you can do the job right.
Georgia: Through Georgette we see that a person has many identities and can be a great detective independent of gender.
Brianna: Part of George's identity was lost when he had to walk away from his role as a detective. He was able to regain that part of his identity by coming back.[306]

Although participants disagree over the precise political messages the episode sends and the degree of subtleness in their delivery, nearly all respond positively to Georgette's portrayal and never mention feeling uncomfortable in moments when she is dressed garishly in ill-becoming women's clothing, or when she returns to embody George in order to interrogate the perpetrator, despite initially refusing to do so on the grounds that she is a woman now. But some did.

Alexa: The first part was so offensive that I was annoyed— so unnecessary—it asked us to laugh at a certain population's expense. Here she is putting on makeup while saying, 'I love your jacket.' They were making a mockery of transgendered people with the lipstick and the powdering. It was over the top, exaggerated, and stereotypical. Then there was bullying involved when Provenza says, 'Oh come on, this is ridiculous. Strap your tits. Man up. And get on the stand.' Georgette gives in, dresses like a man, and ends up beating up the woman's son. This episode is tacky! I couldn't get past how they were presenting transgender people and transgender issues.
Syrcea: Yes, the touching up the makeup, being dramatic and crying, and the way she was like, 'Could I get a tissue . . . boo hoo,' was over the top. But they did it to add comic relief for the audience, thinking, 'This is too serious a topic. So no one is uncomfortable, we'll present it in a humorous light.'
Alexa: If you want a transgender topic in your show than you better work it out. You better figure out how you can present someone in a paramilitary setting properly. Do research, consult the LGBT community. I will never watch this show again now that I've seen this episode.[307]

Alexa is alone in feeling that the episode prevented her, full stop, from entering the text. But a handful of participants agree that the transgender politics are over the top. Moreover, they question the purpose of such exploitative messages, especially if the intention of the series is to

question the boundaries of gender. These passages from two focus groups illustrate how participants struggle over their discomfort. Members of one focus group show signs of polarity, offering either mildly to strongly oppositional readings, or preferred ones, of the episode.

Brianna: The show makes us think it's so comfortable with gender, and then they turn around and not take it seriously. It's all farce and judgment. And what are we supposed to take from that, other than that the show has no respect for people who might be in that position?
Georgia: See, I disagree with that. Even walking around in everyday life, I see transgender people who might have been born as a girl but identify as a man. You can tell that they have a predominantly girl's figure, but they're wearing clothes of a man. In a show, that might seem humorous because it's obvious, but in this episode it wasn't too farfetched to sidestep the issue.
Brianna: It's not that a transgendered woman wouldn't look like that. It's the way other characters respond to her that's key, the way the story is told around the issue—for example, the overblown crying and the comment, 'She's a woman now. Maybe she'll change her mind.' From all angles, it's disingenuous.[308]

Members of another focus group lacked such oppositional readings in their comments.

Brad: It is purposefully made to not meet with our conceived notions of womanhood. His portrayal is meant to insult because he is an ugly woman. He doesn't know how to use a handkerchief like real women do.
Maruta: So her portrayal would have been less funny if she knew how to carry a hankie and was beautiful?
Troy: The whole program is farcical, so why not? Is that so horrible? It's meant to be that way. You can tell that in the setup.
Brad: Right, it's a setup like in olden comedy skits. There are two guys at a bar and someone comes up from behind, whoops it's a cross-dressing woman.
Buck: I think what Brad is saying is that being a beautiful woman wouldn't have worked for her characterization or for the plot. I don't think that she, as a beautiful gal, would have gotten Doris to confess again—she certainly wouldn't have gotten the reaction from the son because she wouldn't have hit him or been aggressive if she weren't wearing men's clothing. The setup was part of the plot.
Virginia: It also would have changed the message. Georgette's character allows us to examine Provenza's character. From the pilot we know he has sensitivity issues and this episode forces him to work through them. It doesn't always make him look good, but it shows him growing. It's a teaching moment for him and for us.
Troy: When I watch shows like this, I do so only to be entertained, not to be taught. This episode has elements of comedy so I could get lost and, 'Ha,' for a few minutes. It's my favorite episode from the ones we've seen. It doesn't take itself or Brenda so damn seriously. A better looking transgender character wouldn't have been anything to laugh at.
Maruta: Also, it examining a different aspect of gender than the pilot did. If Georgette were hot, it would have repeated that theme—the heterosexual fear of being duped by a homosexual into arousal. If George would have been attractive, the men on the force would have been attracted to him as heterosexuals, and that would scare them as well as men in the audience.

We've done that theme. Now we're asked to examine transgender issues, not strictly issues of homosexuality. I think it pushes gender considerations further and it presents it outrageously, so that we feel at ease, not defensive, when it invites us to think about gender seriously. It could only do that after five seasons, right? By then it had an audience.[309]

These readings illustrate that, although viewers watch television to be entertained, many are cognizant of portrayals that offer humor at the expense of civility. This episode, unlike others, leaves few participants in the middle or on the fence. They either identify with or are entertained by the material, or they are not. The series must convince viewers that it is treating sensitive material humorously for good reasons—to highlight the progressive mission of the program. Otherwise, viewers are angered and embarrassed to think more highly of a show than it deserves.

Although participants who had contested readings were the most vocal and the most confronting in their debating style in conversation, the majority of participants in the focus groups read this episode for its subjective, rather than its objective, subject locations. Many note how it presents opportunities to think about gender in meaningful ways and to locate in a number of spaces made available in polysemic characterizations. Karen articulates this point of view in saying, "I like the fact that it makes you examine gender and ask questions about gender and sexuality. It's not simple-minded. It's not superficial. There's so many layers that you can analyze and read into it. Beyond its entertainment value, it makes you think."[310] Others note how subject positions are not occupied voluntarily by them—that they are produced to read characters, themes, and the series, in general, in a certain way. As Cindy argues, "I think the show makes it clear who is on the right and the wrong side of these issues. The DA questions [Georgette's] sexuality. She represents the majority of real people watching who still question the legitimacy of transgender identity. Georgette changes his appearance because he is sure of his sexuality—it is not a question in his mind. The show makes that clear. I can identify with

that point of view."[311] Of note, Cindy, like some other participants, uses the pronoun "he" to describe Georgette, even when reading her transgender identity as authentic.

Others cast a wider net in terms of the questions they find the episode posing. For example, Earl notes, "It is most definitely asking our society, 'Are our social mores what they really should be?'"[312] Jake reads the theme of the episode similarly: "It is still about morals, but a different type of morals. He didn't revert because he lost who he was, but because he had a moral sense about the case. He found a way within the boundaries of what he was comfortable with—in terms of his own identity—that allowed him to do what was needed to move the case along."[313] And still others stress the particularity of *The Closer*'s humorous treatment of transgender issues. "In similar shows, gender is tantamount to gimmickry," Jock says, "but in this show it seems as if gimmickry is used to uncover the importance of gender. Brenda treats it in a serious way so that viewers will see it through her eyes."[314] "Typically, when watching a movie or a show," Concetta adds, "you're not thinking that much about topics like gender and sexuality. Normally it's more subliminal. But this show brings these topics to the surface, and that makes me want to watch it again."[315] Mixed reactions by viewers who seemingly go out of their way to read progress and liberal views on gender into the themes and characterizations of this episode point to a key reason why *The Closer*'s model of serial design is so successful. Even when viewers are varyingly attracted to and offended by different moments of a given episode, most find it entertaining and highly subjective. These popular design aspects satisfy viewers' need to be comforted and challenged at different moments in watching. Of the forty-two participants, forty-one said they would watch *The Closer* again based on this episode.

Issue Three: The Intersectionality of Femininity, Power and Space, and the Public Sphere

In "The Last Word," the series finale of *The Closer*, Brenda is forced to decide whether she will pursue a longtime murder suspect at the expense of her position as Deputy Chief and, potentially, her life.[316] In so doing she allies herself with fellow female and homosexual law enforcement officers, and empowers a young witness to protect himself and an African American detective in her Division to save his own career. Many issues contested in Brenda's characterization over the run of the series are fully flushed out in the finale. Participants raise three topics related to themes of gender they negotiate in their readings of the episode: first, how traditional tropes of femininity are juxtaposed and constantly in play; second, how Brenda measures up in the line of fire; and finally, how she is represented as a progressive female character, but a typical law enforcement agent.

Focus group members are particularly intrigued by how the finale permits Brenda to try on motherhood and traditionally feminine ways of being, but allows her to fail at these social roles without judgment. As Annie says, "She's not June Cleaver; she's struggling, but she's trying on mothering."[317] The thematic intersectionality of motherhood, domesticity, and nurturance is wrangled over in Brenda's attempt to care for a teenage witness, Dusty. She puts his life at risk, as well as her own, when she engages a one-woman hunt for the serial rapist-murder, Attorney Philip Stroh, who has long evaded the law due to his membership in the old boys' network. Brianna points out, "She cooks for [Dusty], and we hadn't seen her cook in earlier episodes."[318] Karen, Jill, and Concetta discuss why that may be.

Karen: Because she is not any good at it. I like the line she makes, 'Nobody has ever asked for a second helping of my clam linguini.'
Jill: And also, 'What's the difference between spaghetti and linguini?'
Concetta: Yes, she doesn't know the difference. If she cooked a lot, she would.
Karen: I like the fact that the show makes clear and it's not assumed that every woman likes to, or can, cook.[319]

Participants across focus groups are attracted to the refreshing way in which *The Closer* represents Brenda's lack of domestic and mothering skills without recrimination. Participants in one focus group say:

Georgia: It opens her up to failing at motherhood. She tries to be domesticated—her house is clean in this scene, whereas in almost every other in the series her space is a mess.
Jackie: Still she fails. She's not sure how to deal with mothering or domestic duties, and she is initially hurt when she realizes that Dusty is right in saying that she's better with the dead than with the living.
Donna: Fritz accuses her of that, as well as not being a good nurturer or domesticated in many episodes. To hear someone else say that to her—someone she's only known for a few weeks—makes her come to terms with herself and her makeup for the first time.[320]

In another focus group, the same line of argument is evident in the discussion.

Sally Anne: The finale confirms what we knew from the first episode—she's not maternal.
Virginia: But it does so without reprimand or judgment, which is unusual for television—to avoid labeling her the bad wife or the bad mother. It sends a message that being a good mother isn't the only way to gain trust and to protect. Dusty knows that she is a good person and that she cares for him. He trusts her when she tells him to relax as Stroh holds a knife to his throat. As equals—not as mother and son—they get the bad guy. The show changes the script on motherhood.[321]

These participants read the episodes as telling a different story to the one typically reproduced in female television dramas: that a woman's worth is not predicated on maternal instinct.

Other participants are particularly drawn to the ways that the final moments create a conversation between Brenda and traditionally feminine things and ways of being beyond domesticity and motherhood. Traditional modes of femininity are constantly in play during the series finale. As Brenda fails at motherhood, she fails at using feminine devices to meet her desired ends of protecting Dusty, of bringing Stroh to justice, and of overcoming gender bias in her Division. The finale portrays her disrobing of femininity in a positive light as she meets these ends. She finally breaks free of the internal crisis of confidence that plagued her from the pilot. And she is constructed as a strong, successful, and well-rounded woman who is

independent of and liberated from the traditionally ascribed feminine attributes that held her back throughout the run of the show.

When the plot presents an opportunity for Brenda to test aspects of traditional femininity beyond motherhood, many participants read this representation as progressive for the outcome it brings, which is her emancipation from femininity. But a few find this portrayal unnecessary, and moreover, a digression from her less emotive, hard-lined characterization in earlier episodes.

Concetta: Everything she uses in the final scene is feminine: the curling iron, the purse, the mothering and the domesticity, the protecting her surrogate son from harm, protecting the hearth while her husband is off at work—she's tying on every aspect of stereotypical femininity in this episode, which is completely atypical for her character.
Jill: She is wearing pink; her hair is in a scrunchy.
Jock: She ran in the bathroom crying when Dusty hurt her feelings.
Concetta: She's living out *The Feminine Mystique* (she laughs), but it isn't helpful to her. The unhappy homemaker life is not her calling. In that vulnerable state she shows her ability to toss off emotionality, which she has no aptitude for, and think clearly. She picks up a curling iron to use as a weapon, not because of her strong women's intuition but because she is a great detective and realizes that the window screen is missing so Stroh must be in her house. She reacts as a cop, not a woman.
Cindy: Only because the gun was in the purse and not on her. Before she went for the curling iron, she went for the gun but it wasn't there. She is thinking like a cop, despite her attempt at domesticity.[322]

Readings on the various ways the scene attempts to feminize Brenda broke down most notably along gender lines. Male participants, in general, were adamantly opposed to this attempted softening of her characterization.

Jock: I like her less in this scene than in earlier ones. It makes her look vulnerable. She goes into the bathroom and almost throws up—almost physically giving up—which is a very different portrayal than earlier in the series. Also, it's simpler to read when her portrayal is more black and white; here, there's a lot going on. She is trying to mother, cook, be well liked, be domestic, and I found that kind of confusing and disconcerting.
Stan: In the pilot she's bossing people around, she's doing this and she's doing that, she's getting confessions. And then a kid comes in at the end and unravels her. She's gotta leave the room and gotta go to the bathroom. That seemed kind of odd to me. It seemed more like a digression than progression in her character.[323]

On the other hand, female participants across focus groups maintain that the series has Brenda try on traditionally feminine behaviors, and attempt to use feminine products, to make a political point. One focus group, in particular, focuses on the appeal of her multilayered state in the finale.

Cindy: I like her more in this complex state. You can see that she is still smart, can stand on her own, and she has her own opinions—but in this episode she is portrayed as stretching herself until she finds her center.
Flo: I like this complex portrayal of her, too. From the pilot, I could see her brain working but in a very one-sided way. By the finale, you see her thinking on two levels—she was talking like, 'You want desert?' and at the same time she's figuring out how to make this boy talk. So the cop side of her was coming out at the same time as she was doing her best to care for him. This is even beyond presenting her as a character who balances home and work. The finale portrays her as a balanced person within one space.[324]

The other focus groups concentrated on the appeal of her throwing off femininity in route to feminist emancipation.

Brianna: [She's balanced] precisely because she had thrown off femininity.
Annie: And that's when her black purse comes into play. It ties together every other shot in the scene and makes sense of every decision she makes in the last twenty minutes of the finale. Reading that in a Freudian sense makes that soooooo interesting. She shoots through the purse that she has carried since the pilot to bring Stroh to justice. This is cataclysmic. It makes us think because it makes a clear political statement about the relationship between feminism and femininity—that you can only have one without the other.[325]

Others did not read the scene for illustrating the ways a woman blows off femininity. Karen points out that Brenda "was about to die otherwise. Curling irons and crying were not helpful in saving her life. In that moment, she drew on her actual essence as a character. She's a detective, and she protects by using deductive reasoning skills and apprehending and shooting perpetrators, not cooking, cleaning, and making small talk about desert."[326]

When participants are asked to go further in reading how Brenda is presented in the line of fire, and what the series may be saying about power and space in relation to femininity, they speak to the ways her portrayal neutralizes gender. Unlike their readings on the ways the series

portray Brenda failing in domestic roles, their responses do not break down by sex. As Jacob says, "Just like if she were John Wayne, I wanted her to get the bad guy."[327] "She took ownership of her actions and she took responsibility. She was willing to put herself in harm's way to get the job done—all traits typically associated with men on television, but not in this case," says Troy.[328] Georgia's reading extends Brenda's portrayal to real life. "She has her life saved in an earlier episode and saves her own life in this one, which shows how balanced her portrayal is because that is probably the case with real officers of both genders."[329] I interjected at this point in the discussion to ask the participants: "What if she hadn't saved her own life in the finale?" And participants respond unanimously that such an option is not a possibility: it is neither within the parameters of her characterization, nor that of the serial design. As Georgia says, "If she hadn't saved herself in the finale, I, as a woman viewer, would have felt unsatisfied—let down from what I felt the show tried to do."[330] Buck goes even further, stating: "I'm glad she shot him. She needed to save the boy's life, and her own. If the husband showed up with the rifle and saved them in the finale it would have been totally wrong—the opposite impression of the whole show."[331] Alexa is so impressed with Brenda's characterization in the finale that she rethinks her attraction to the protagonist, saying: "They let her shoot him because it was the last episode, you know. Her personality was enough to make the show hugely engaging—they didn't need guns to make that happen. Taking that shot through her purse, but leaving him alive so he'd serve a life sentence behind bars, was evidence of her emancipation as a woman, as a sidelined cop, and as a female television character that breaks the mold. I said I wouldn't watch it again based on that awful transgender episode, but this episode reintroduced me to the character I thought she was before, and she's pretty amazing."[332]

Readings along these lines lead many participants to argue that the show is widely appealing because of the sophisticated ways that it presents, or represents, its protagonist in relation to its genre. As Karen says, "I find her progressive as a female character, but typical as a law enforcement agent. That's why the show works, and how it sets itself apart."[333] Concetta adds, "She has the presence of mind and reaction to shoot through her purse. If she trained at Quantico, then she would have had those instincts. But she is also an interesting, well-rounded, unique woman."[334] "She certainly has quirks that make her unique personally, and that's what makes her appealing to you women," Jacob notes. "We notice her unusual personality as men. She's not a traditional woman, but we accept that in combination with her steely-eyed professionalism. She is just like men on the job. She's not exceptional, but she always does her best to protect and serve."[335] To a great extent, then, participants appreciate what Flo calls "the marring of gender" lines in Brenda's character work, but her post-gender portrayal on the job.[336]

A Paratextual Analysis: "Don't Shave Your Face, but Shave Your Legs of Course"

Whether Duff has created a protagonist in whom gender matters is the question that participants discuss in the final moments of each focus group convening. After watching an excerpt of a showrunner and cast discussion with fans at the Paley Center for Media in Los Angeles, they consider how this paratext informs their earlier readings of the pilot and scenes of the series, as well as their conceptions of the creator and the cast of the show.[337] During this forum recorded on August 10, 2011, nearly one month into the first-run airing of the final seventh season, Duff divulged for the first time that from the outset he attempted to convey a world in which "two powerful women [Brenda and Raydor]" could "have a perspective on the justice system."[338] Moreover, he strived to portray professional women "arguing about the

justice system, and not about another guy." Problematically, these elucidative and progressive statements were preceded in his comments by, "I wanted this character [Brenda] to be a woman one-hundred percent of the time, because the women that I work with don't stop being women when they come into work." And was followed by, "Oh, but shave your legs of course"—to which Kyra Sedgwick adds, "I don't shave"—a comment which engendered boisterous and lingering laughter among those in attendance at the forum.

Although Duff's intention with regard to Brenda's characterization as a powerful purveyor of justice is valuable in offering an alternative representation of women on television. A nameless fan shouting something inaudible from the gallery may have caused a change of direction in his statement, and, potentially because of this, the conversation divulged into one promoting the need for women to shave their legs. Still, Duff's and Sedgwick's mutual support of this traditionally feminine proposition casts a feminine (read: problematic) light on Brenda's construction as a character, and casts a shadow on his goal of presenting a more progressive female protagonist and female-led series. These promulgations on the part of creator/showrunner Duff and co-creator/star Sedgwick illustrate how taken-for-granted assumptions of gender, including a compulsion for professional women to "shave [their] legs" and "be a woman one-hundred percent of the time," seem unrelated to him and apparently to Sedgwick and many forum fans, and, moreover, lie in opposition to his utopian conception that gender no longer matters for working women in law enforcement or in industry. Not surprisingly, this paratext elicits considerable response from participants whose readings fall squarely in line with Stuart Hall's three reading positions.[339]

A few report negotiated readings of the paratext, criticizing Duff's comments but using the masculine Hollywood complex as an excuse for his positioning. Stan articulates this point of

view, saying: "It's hypocritical, but, by the same token, natural for a creator in Hollywood to say that and think that way. He's trying to create a character that pushes the envelope, and he did. But, at the end of the day, he's still a male and he still works in a male-dominated industry and that is how it is."[340] Caesar contextualizes Stan's point by placing some of the blame on the expectations of viewers, without noting that viewer expectations no less than fictional character constructions are produced by media. "Television and movies are illusions. Duff brings out the fact that, although they are making a different story and are targeting a different market segment, at the end of the day, the world they created still had to be an illusion. Brenda still had to shave her legs—she still had to be pretty—because this is what viewers still expect. It's what we expect as a society."[341] Annie is one of the few women with a negotiated reading who mitigates Duff's and Sedgwick's responsibilities in reaffirming traditional gender tropes. She does so by referring to existing industry biases, but in context of the process of extemporaneous speaking.

> The industry is deeply misogynistic, and that's something that people in the industry have to overcome—men and women alike. I see him trying to overcome this gender bias by creating this show, this character—although they're not perfect, they are progressive and have had an impact on the industry and what viewers engage. He is trying to make progress by putting a distinctly different protagonist and primetime procedural forward independent of his extemporaneous comments. . . . Like Mitt Romney's comment about 'Binders full of women,' one line doesn't necessary tell us his full point of view on women. He's giving us that by spending eighty hours a week writing a character and a series that is a complex look at gender.[342]

Many participants, women and men alike, have a contested rather than a negotiated reading, precisely because they see Duff's comments as not off the cuff, but illustrative of contradictions in his thinking, which causes disingenuousness in the way he frames female television characters and real women. "I was offended because he's essentially telling me and all women—'You better shave your legs.' To hell with him," Kristy says.[343] Caesar cautions that Duff's role reversal might be to blame. "Whenever a man writes a women's point of view,

there's going to be a disconnect."[344] Jake agrees, "It shows the intrinsic contradiction of a man taking on a women's point of view. Although he was trying to be funny on the surface, I suspect that it portrays some deeply held internal beliefs."[345] Certain viewers go so far as to say that this paratext negatively impacts the established rapport they had developed with the series during the focus group, or even as fans of the show over a number of years. Karen says, "It was all forced, he was forcing the issue of equality and feminist positioning in the show. What a jerk. It's hypocritical and rewrites the narrative of his show."[346] Concetta adds, "I'm so disappointed. Why did you have to show that? (She smiles.) He was not being completely honest when he designed the show the way he did. He was giving us an important point of view, the one we wanted to hear—."[347] Bill interjects, "—to make money!"[348] "Right," she says, "but now I don't feel the same way about the character or *The Closer*. I look at them differently."[349] Finally, Brianna says, "When he says, 'It's nice to see two women arguing about the justice system rather than two guys,' it's a backhanded compliment. It's more telling than the shaving comment: a nonpoint that only brought out that we're women. So much different than the portrayals of women on his show. His comments are in poor taste, but enlightening. I wouldn't be able to see Brenda the same way now even if I tried."[350]

Far and away the larger number of participants have preferred readings of the paratext, criticizing nothing in Duff's or Sedgwick's comments or the potential sentiment behind them. Their comments elucidate their reasoning. These viewers, whom I would argue represent in many cases the niche target demographics of the show, are not only used to sexist banter like this, but drawn to it week after week in the series they watch. Such chiding banter spurs them on by offering fodder for mass entertainment. These readings-as-quips from various focus group members attest that their own senses of humor run along the lines of *The Closer*'s Provenza.

Buck: What [Duff]'s saying is that he wants a woman to be able to do that job, but he still wants her to be a woman—be pretty. That's good. And right (he chuckles).[351]

Jackie: Makes perfect sense to me and definitely how I saw the character and the show. Having to shave her legs and be pretty doesn't assuage her power, does it?
Garth: Plus, men who are lawyers, for example, are expected to shave their faces. If they don't, it would adversely affect their careers. This is no different except . . . well except that they don't have to be attractive (he guffaws).
Jackie: If they had the guts to put a woman with hairy legs in a primetime drama that wouldn't be of interest to me anyway. And it would really stand out because Brenda always wears skirts and dresses. Actually, that'd be a pretty disgusting prospect come to think of it![352]

Alexa: I'd probably scream—'Shave those hairy things!' (She laughs.) Or I'd make a joke like, 'Oh look at that hippy.' (She laughs some more.) But secretly (whispering), in winter, I only shave half my legs and I wear pants. It's all about choice.'[353]

Conclusion

I undertook this audience study so focus group members and I could make our "own socially pertinent meanings out of the semiotic resources provided by television."[354] Because television and culture are co-constructed at the intersection of the viewer and history, this negotiated, contested culture of production illustrates "television's power to construct its preferred readings and readers . . . [and] viewers to construct their meanings out of its texts."[355] The research subjects whom I quoted so generously in this chapter articulate the various entry points and subject positions along a spectrum of feminism and gender that hail them, and that they answer to or reject while watching and interpreting *The Closer* and its paratexts. Through our focus group conversations—and due to a process of co-constructed reading—I gained a deeper understanding of how, why, and under what conditions viewers negotiate the themes and characterizations of *The Closer* and render them meaningful.

This series arguably breaks new ground in how it constructs and characterizes its solo female protagonist, as well as its unconventional narrative and hybrid serial design. Participants credit its three-dimensional heroine, ethnically diverse but older cast of characters, hybrid crime

genre, liberal content that politically conservative, older viewers and male viewers are drawn to, and a game-changing model of network programming for its popular and historic success. They are recognized into a range of subject positions with regard to the themes of gender taken up in episodes of the series, from the gaze and transgender identity to the intersectionality of femininity, power and space, and the public sphere. Their comments illustrate how viewers negotiate and mitigate their readings with a paratext that offers additional entryways to the world of the text.

Chapter Three:
Cracking the Binary Framework for Thinking about Gender in *The Closer*

Introduction

This chapter reads a single episode of TNT's *The Closer*, "Make Over."[356] It examines how the series handles the transgendered storyline of retired police officer George Andrews, now Georgette, who returns to Los Angeles to testify at the request of her ex-partner Lieutenant Provenza. It explores how transgender[357] issues are constructed in Georgette's dress, emotions, and interpersonal style; her points of view on perjury, self-identity, and gender roles; and the varying responses of law enforcement officers on-screen to her feminine performance and, moreover, her ability to change genders yet remain an effective police officer. This episode may appear to make a mockery of transgender issues and naturalize binaries of gender; however, individual images or lines of dialogue successfully break the binary frame for thinking about gender. The television codes of "Make Over" are thus examined for the discourse they create around transgender for a wider than middle-American viewership looking for content that challenges the binary framework within which gender is constructed.

As explored in Chapter One, a culturally middle-American audience is one used routinely in the media studies literature and by popular cultural critics to mean the large, mass audience of viewers with mid-Western values.[358] They have more conservative sensibilities and tastes, and hold values of religion, home, and family, and are a shared, knowable community. Victoria E. Johnson claims the television program that targets this audience is "old-fashioned," "bland and nonthreatening," of "quaint" character, and with a "down-home warmth and naïveté."[359] I argue that *The Closer* reaches beyond this demographic to target imagined viewers drawn to content that temporarily challenges these conservative social values, but returns to them by episode's

end. Such a model of serial design dissuades few from turning the channel or watching episodes of the show in the future.

This chapter considers the transgender figure of Georgette as representative of the ways in which the program relates to a wider demographic, yet attends to industrial and audience limitations of a basic cable primetime procedural. The paradigmatic of a single transgender themed episode was a recurring theme of procedural television at the turn of the century. Medical procedurals such as *ER,*[360] *Chicago Hope*,[361] and *Diagnosis: Murder*,[362] legal procedurals like *L.A. Law*,[363] and crime procedurals including *NYPD Blue*,[364] *Nash Bridges*,[365] and *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*[366] all explored transgender characters in a case of the week format. In spite of a growing number of transgender protagonists in recent series such as *Glee*,[367] *Orange is the New Black* (hereafter *Orange*),[368] and *Transparent*, the single transgender themed episode continues to lay the groundwork for more radical transgender figures on television.[369] In this chapter, I examine how the television codes of *The Closer* offer multiple points of entry along a spectrum of gender nonconformity. Within the single episode paradigmatic, it constructs the transgendered character in three ways: within a cross-dressing plot, as a drag figure, and as a more radical transgender figure (terms that I will define in the next section).[370] By exploring the representations of Georgette, I investigate how *The Closer* portrays the transgender figure in various ways from hegemonic to subversive in order to appeal to a wide demographic.

In "Make Over," anachronistic definitions of gender nonconformity and traditional Hollywood conventions of transgender representations are offered alongside more radical constructions of gender identity in order to assuage the fears of middle-American viewers. These viewers are imaged by industry as (potentially) not watching *Orange* or *Transparent*, or

even *Glee*, due to their more radical and consistent transgender content. As will be explored in the Industrial and Theoretical Frameworks section of this chapter, using cross-dressing and drag conventions and employing them as defined in the 1980s and 1990s—that is, anachronistically—to shape and constrain the representations of a transgender character remains necessary, if a mainstream procedural drama is to encode content that explores gender nonconformity or unsettles traditional conventions of the treatment of transgender characters at any point in the episode.

Furthermore, the first opportunity to see dominant messages of a relatively radical transgender figure—that is, one who is encoded with signifiers that fall outside a heteronormative gender binary, but only temporarily in order to limit the degree of radical characterization embodied—occurs midway through "Make Over." By that point, viewers have been introduced to Georgette within a cross-dressing plot, and through television codes that inscribe drag images and tropes of hyperfemininity and performativity in her characterization. By designing the episode in this way—first using anachronism to construct a drag figure within a cross-dressing plot, then challenging outdated stereotypes on the levels of both gender and sexuality, before returning to a heteronormative discourse—"Make Over" illustrates the blueprint for a model of serial design that attends to the industrial limitations of a basic cable network. It cannot offer more radical gender representations throughout an episode or across a series without jeopardizing its mass audience, yet its smart design creates spaces for interrogating the heterosexist gender binary framework within one or more scenes. In doing so, it temporarily unsettles the Hollywood conventions that have conveyed gender-nonconforming figures since the days of Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, and The Three Stooges, and despite this temporary unsettling, typically do still today.

The most important social contribution of such a design is that it enables a mainstream procedural to take advantage of its typically heteronormative characters and content to bring a transgender character into the homes of older, conservative viewers for forty-two minutes, and to educate them on transgender issues without aggravating or intensifying their assumed fear of being asked to accept gender nonconformity, when they have tuned in to be entertained by the case of the week. Introducing a relatively radical transgender figure at a later point in an episode opens up spaces for the criticism of heteronormative ideologies that shape the characters and the program at other points in the episode and across the series from week to week. Additionally, a more radical transgender figure broadens the acceptable subjectivity of a gender-nonconforming character on a show designed for mass appeal. Although these binary-breaking representations are offered for only moments of an episode, they interrogate the dominant heteronormative ideology that viewers are recognized into through television as an ideological state apparatus (as spelled out by Althusser, reviewed by me in Chapters One and Four, and taken up in this chapter).[371] Narrative devices such as cross-dressing and drag are key vessels for reproducing dominant patriarchal ideologies. Offering a relatively radical transgender figure undermines such conventions and ideological production, and, thus, is worthy of study by contemporary feminist media scholars.

Terminology

In this chapter, I use the term transgender and distinguish between representations of cross-dressing and drag in close textual analysis. I follow from Judith Halberstam in understanding transgender as a general term for all positions that transgress gender norms, and specifically as "a gender identity that is at least partially defined by transitivity but that may well

stop short of transsexual surgery."[372] In defining a type of transgender person but also a typical Hollywood narrative device, I borrow Annette Kuhn's definition of cross-dressing as a "mode of performance in which—through play on the distinction between clothes and body—the socially constructed nature of sexual difference is foregrounded and even subjected to comment: what appears natural, then, reveals itself as artifice."[373]

Judith Butler—whose theories I take up as a means of exploring anachronistic messages of transgender at points reproduced and at others challenged in "Make Over"—prefers the term drag to cross-dressing for its theatric underpinnings, a performative quality that Kuhn recognizes as always already part and parcel of cross-dressing. Butler argues that

> Drag is not unproblematically subversive. It serves a subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized and undermines their power by virtue of effecting that exposure [something Kuhn takes for granted in her assumptions]. But there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion. [That is] heterosexuality can augment its hegemony through its denaturalization, as when we see denaturalizing parodies that reidealize heterosexual norms without calling them into question.[374]

For Butler, then, drag has the potential to be progressive or regressive—an important distinction from Kuhn's conception. Butler raises this problematic of drag, which, in addition to her anachronistic view of transgender, makes her useful to draw on in this analysis. Her conception enables me to examine the discourses of transgender identities in *The Closer* and in comparative examples such as in *Tootsie*, when the leading man says, "I was a better man with you as a woman than I ever was with a woman as a man." I investigate the problematic that follows from the leading man's drag persona as framed within a cross-dressing plot reinstructing him in the ways of hegemonic masculinity.

In this chapter, I generally use cross-dressing to refer to taking on the dress or make-up of the opposite sex—or, in other words, the act of wearing the clothing or the accoutrement

associated with a different gender than one's own within a particular society—as constructed within a conventional Hollywood plot device. When I am making a point of the overall persona—the active, engaging, or performance aspects—of a character in relation to the conventions of a cross-dressing plot, I typically use the term drag. Like Kuhn, I partially define cross-dressing as performative and moreover as an active plot device typical of Hollywood film and television codes that works hand-in-hand with drag discourses (dialogue, images, and mannerisms) to undergird the gender binary.

In this analysis, I explore how the performance qualities of a cross-dressing plot in combination with a drag performance work to appeal to mainstream viewers. Male facial and bodily features, cross-dressing apparel, and clumsy feminine mannerisms and hyperfeminine performativity join forces to remind viewers that the character's masculine power is only disguised by her feminine costume. At points throughout "Make Over," a transgender Georgette is represented via the conventions of drag within a cross-dressing plot to produce a dominant heteronormative ideology that undergirds patriarchy as a social structure, especially as it relates to gender and work. After it is challenged mid-episode, through television codes that represent Georgette as a relatively radical transgender figure, the gender binary is recuperated—just as the dominant male gaze is challenged but reconstructed by episode's end, as explored in Chapter Four. I investigate a model of serial design that offers opportunities for viewers to broaden their conceptions of gender by taking up the relationship between subversive codes that critique binary frameworks and dominant codes that naturalize the gender binary and heteronormativity at the end of most scenes and the end of the episode. Such a framework invites a multiplicity of readings along a spectrum of gender and sexuality, and positions the program to appeal to a wider-than-middle-American audience.

Industrial and Theoretical Frameworks

This episode is wrestling with mainstream gender theory, what is its relationship to contemporary feminist and queer theorizing around questions of drag (a largely unused term at the moment) and transgender issues. In some ways, what we see here is a sort of disconnect between the ways that transgender issues are theorized by scholars and distilled for television viewers—that is, anachronism—and the ways *The Closer* uses an anachronistic discourse of gender to secure contemporary popularity in an age of far more progressive transgender representations on current shows, including Netflix's *Orange* and Amazon's *Transparent*.

The Closer, whose pilot predated *Orange* and *Transparent* by eight and nine years, respectively, goes as far as its creator James Duff and network distributor TNT may have reasoned that it could when the episode originally aired in 2009. Taking into account key industrial limitations, even from a current standpoint, TNT does not have the content latitude of standalone monthly subscription services like Showtime, Netflix, or Amazon. Showtime, a network known historically for soft pornographic series including *The Red Shoe Diaries* (Showtime, 1992-1997) and other adult content, broadcast *The L Word* from January 2004 to March 2009.[375] Max, a female-to-male transgender character, was reoccurring on that series. Netflix, an on-demand digital streaming service, distributes *Orange*, which offers a sustained interrogation of transphobia—one that is highly attuned to race and class as well. Amazon, a rival digital-on-demand service, partnered with Jill Soloway to create *Transparent*. Soloway was previously a staff writer on ABC's *Dirty Sexy Money* (2007-2009),[376] which cast the recurring transgender character Carmelita. Additionally, she was the executive producer/showrunner of Showtime's *United States of Tara* (hereafter *Tara*) (2009-2011), a series about a protagonist with Dissociative Identity Disorder who transitions to the female-to-male cross-dressing Vietnam vet

Buck on many occasions.[377] *Transparent*, like *Orange*, explores the lives of families who discover that the men they knew as fathers and husbands are transfemales.

Showtime, Netflix, and Amazon earn their revenue directly from smaller (albeit potentially more broad-minded) audiences, whom I conceptualize as such because they pay a premium for access to content that routinely goes beyond what is available on broadcast and basic cable networks in terms of nudity, language, theme, and character constructions. Subscription services target those viewers in search of more progressive (read: left, feminist, nonbinary gendered) characters on television. And these cutting-edge distributors generally deliver on such expectations so that subscribers renew their contracts at the end of every subscription period. That said, a few recent shows targeting broader-minded viewers with progressive content were deemed too feminist, including Showtime's *Tara* and HBO's *Enlightened*,[378] but also NBC's *Prime Suspect* (US). These series struggled with low ratings and were canceled.[379] These examples illustrate that television, no matter the distribution method, can only go so far to upend gender patterns undergirded by patriarchy without losing appeal. Although *The Closer* does not—indeed cannot—meet the radical content metric of subscription-based *Orange* or *Transparent* and still attract and retain mass viewership or the revenue support of big box advertisers that follows from high ratings (both necessary characteristics of the basic cable revenue model), it goes further than the typical broadcast or basic cable procedural in exploring contemporary themes of gender and work that include transgender identity and institutional discrimination. It offers more subversive themes for consideration to older, conservative viewers, as well as to viewers looking for nonnormative transgender television representations. In a single themed episode—albeit less serious, less disruptive, less political than *Orange* or *Transparent—The Closer* succeeds in examining gender identity,[380] gender

expression,[381] biological sex,[382] and sexual orientation[383] (the four categories of gender that operate in the production of gender binaries), while maintaining its generic contract with viewers in delivering a police procedural whose primary mission is to solve a weekly case.

Contemporary Feminist Media Studies Scholarship on Transgender TV Figures

My primary goal in this chapter is to theorize how the television codes of "Make Over" offer more progressive representations of a relatively radical transgender figure without losing mass appeal. But why should feminist media scholars be concerned about this question, and what is at stake for them in engaging the field of transgender studies? As Susan Stryker argues in rationalizing why non-trans scholars should take up the field of transgender studies, "far from being an inconsequentially narrow specialization dealing only with a rarified population of transgender individuals, or with an eclectic collection of esoteric transgender practices, [transgender studies] represents a significant and ongoing critical engagement with some of the most trenchant issues in contemporary humanities, social science, and biomedical research."[384] This rationale also holds true for the continued value to feminist media scholars of exploring the relationship between transgender television representations and questions of contemporary transgender scholarship. Jean Bobby Noble adds that any study of feminism must include an analysis of transgender.[385] I enter the discourse at the intersection of feminist media studies and transgender studies to better understand how anachronistic representations and debates around transgender in the television codes of a contemporary female protagonist dramedy offer multiple entry points along a spectrum of gender and feminism and represent progress for a basic cable procedural interrogating the gender binary and heteronormativity.

Contemporary feminist media scholars examining transgender content raise several questions in regard to how television codes function politically—that is, what they unsettle ideologically. These questions include: Do they offer a queer critique in at least one scene of an episode? Do they address the sexual identity of gender nonnormative characters? Do they resonate with contemporary or earlier understandings of transgender persons? Or, through humorous narrative devices, do they function to make characters and viewers seem relatively less transgressive? Although the focus of this chapter is to examine the television codes of "Make Over" in close textual analysis and to theorize their relation to broad popularity, it is necessary to position my analysis within the terrain of contemporary scholarly enquiries of transgender characters and to emphasize feminist methodologies and questions in that process.

Gender scholar Sal Renshaw in "Queering *The L Word*" argues that, "If a more radical gender politics is what we're interested in . . . then . . . alongside . . . dominant heteronormative representations" of transgender characters exists "a queer critique of normativity [which] . . . functions politically as the internal contradiction that unsettles the otherwise all too comfortable norms of gender and sexuality which defined most of the characters, in most of the story arcs, most of the time."[386] "Make Over" permits the visibility of Georgette's transgender identity and expression as well as her lesbian sexuality within the episode. During one key scene, she defines herself as a male-to-female transsexual and a lifelong lesbian. At the time she is dressed in gender-neutral clothing (a robe and a towel wrapped around her head). She is applying makeup. And she is exclaiming in dialogue that, even though she now pees while standing up, her genetic makeup remains the same. She has always been a female, and a lesbian, even though her physical appearance and sexual apparatus has transitioned. By blurring the lines of clearly ascribed markers of masculinity or femininity in dress, makeup, and dialogue, *The Closer* invites

viewers to explore Georgette's former and present gender expressions at once. Masculine markers of skin texture and physique are visible at the same time as she speaks of no longer peeing while standing up, dons an interdeterminate style of dress, and explains that what is in her heart is the same as when she was male. Reality codes of appearance and representational codes of dialogue are organized into coherence and social acceptability by an ideology of individualism that invites a preferred reading of Georgette as neither male nor female, but another category of gender that lies across or between the binary: one unmistakably transgender, and one that offers a queer critique of normativity.

Additionally, by addressing Georgette's sexuality together with her transgender identity, *The Closer* denaturalizes gender and sexuality binaries at once and unsettles heteronormativity. This line of inquiry among contemporary feminist scholars illustrates how far a program may go in delivering nonnormative representations of gender and sexuality, while remaining appealing to middle-American viewers. Taking up this question of heteronormativity in relation to *The L Word*, Renshaw writes that it "was nowhere more politically edgy, more progressive, perhaps more subversively feminist than when it tackled the issue of sexual identity through overtly gender-nonnormative characters."[387] Television scholar Merri Lisa Johnson adds that encoding progressive content requires the inclusion of nonthreatening material as well, if the series is to remain appealing to a broad cross-section of the audience. This balancing act is achieved when "conservative and progressive ideologies intertwine and counterbalance each other on *The L Word*."[388] But, as Renshaw notes, while this aspect of mainstream serial design attends to industrial demands, it offers a more radical challenge to heteronormativity than would appear at first blush. Regarding *The L Word*, she writes:

> The places where the producers took the most risks—bracketing how well they negotiated those risks—was with the gender non-normative characters. So in taking

> these marginal arcs seriously we open up a space that acknowledges the presence of a critique that was there from the start. In so doing we see the dominant normativity around the core characters revealed to be precisely what it was all along, a ransom paid to get us six seasons of a show . . . in a media context that presumes it is straight audiences and their desires that pay the bills.[389]

The core question of this dissertation investigates how television codes unsettle gender ideologies, yet meet the needs of mainstream audience and industry. Renshaw's subtle understanding of both progressive content delivery and industrial limitations holds true for *The Closer* as well. This aspect of popular serial design is particularly meaningful in the case of *The Closer*, because the series is distributed by a basic cable network rather than a monthly subscription-based one. How its television codes function politically, and the degree to which they challenge the gender binary and heteronormativity, are helpful themes to consider in theorizing the tolerance threshold for transgender content at the turn of the aughts in a series targeting middle-American—especially older, conservative—viewers. This chapter explores how far left "Make Over" could go in 2009 to critique gender and sexuality binaries without jeopardizing the show's position as the number one original basic cable series at that time.

In addition to exploring the ways heteronormative ideologies are challenged by gender-nonconforming characters, contemporary feminist media scholars question how transgender terms are defined—that is, which era of gender scholarship they are drawn from—and whether such categories of transgender characters are primarily utilized for comic value. Television scholar Rebecca Beirne notes that, while drag characters have a long-standing history on television, transsexual and transgendered characters do not.[390] Even *The L Word*, from Beirne's point of view, fails to explore the growing number of diverse gender identities due to its reliance on mainstream viewers, or what Candace Moore calls television "tourists."[391]

The L Word, Beirne argues, uses an anachronistic (1970s) definition of lesbianism—that is, "an ideological, ethical, or political posture . . . a way of seeing the world which is 'woman-identified'"[392]—to juxtapose that form of sexuality with another, bisexuality, in order to marginalize the latter, label it as more transgressive, and position the former as the cisgendered normal: the non-transgendered category.[393] To normalize the core lesbian characters on the show, Lisa, a male-to-female transwoman guest-starring in season one, self-identifies as "a lesbian-identified man" and appears in bodily form as a man.[394] She also serves as comic fodder through her characterization. Beirne writes that "these moments of intended humour, by offering older stereotypes of lesbianism, make the more mainstream lesbians of *The L Word* seem less transgressive by comparison. In these scenes, it is incongruity with gender norms that produces the humor; but far from undermining gender norms, the attitudes of these characters in fact reinforce them."[395] Through humor as a narrative device, the binary framework of *The L Word* is maintained.

Although Georgette self-identifies as a lesbian transgendered woman and appears in bodily form as a male at points and as a female at others—and, like Lisa, through a cross-dressing plot and drag conventions, she is used for comedic value—in the case of *The Closer*, the rhetorical practice of drawing on anachronistic definitions of binaries of gender and sexuality to highlight gender differences has potentially greater subversive value. It challenges patriarchy mid-episode by depicting Georgette not only as transgender, but with interdeterminate dress and mannerisms. This scene unsettles dominant messages of how Georgette had been introduced to viewers; it interrogates the cross-dressing plot and the conventions of drag that proceeded it; and it opens up "a space that acknowledges the presence of a critique that was there from the start."[396] By subverting hegemony, and, moreover, doing so after dominant messages have been

laid bare for criticism, Georgette as a transgender figure—as an interdeterminate figure—illustrates what contemporary feminist scholars such as Renshaw and Bernie are looking for with regard to exceptions to the gender normative rules of popular serial design. By entwining gender and sexuality as sites of interrogation, by upending them temporarily, *The Closer* cracks the binary frameworks of both, and illustrates how producers target a wider-than-middle-American viewership with transgender content in the early aughts.

Questions of this Chapter in Relation to the Dissertation

The questions that drive this chapter center on whether and how the representations of a transwoman figure disrupt gender binaries, and to what degree she is subversive or hegemonic at points or throughout the episode. By offering multiple points of entry along a spectrum for viewers to locate in, *The Closer* cleverly offers a polysemic text in which Georgette does not remain consistently hegemonic. Engaging a discourse around, indeed interrogating, an ideology of heteronormativity and a social order grounded in sex/gender binaries and compulsory heterosexuality accounts for my reading of *The Closer* as both progressive and self-conscious television.

This dissertation aims to deconstruct and theorize a model of serial design that offers more pluralistic gender frameworks while not sacrificing historical popularity. What is important about the model of serial design this study theorizes is that it enables media scholars to better understand the means by which creators and network executives raise but contain feminism—in gender practices and identities that include transgender—in contemporary programming without losing mass appeal. Television codes that offer resistance to heteronormativity may challenge some viewers more than those that construct Georgette as

hegemonic; yet both sets of television codes do similar industrial work—that is, they encode traditional and progressive representations to achieve popularity across the widest possible demographic. Making available more points of entry in the design of a basic cable program had become necessary by the premiere of *The Closer* in 2005, due to the proliferation of networks and the breaking of storytelling boundaries that cultivated an expectation in viewers of cutting-edge programming in primetime television series across the dial and the World Wide Web.

In two separate chapters of this dissertation, I examine how *The Closer* raises but contains feminism in the television codes of the transgender figure and the gaze. Each chapter explores how characters negotiate an anachronistic set of debates around gender in relation to their twenty-first century lives. By investigating a single episode wherein a character is represented in a cross-dressing plot via the conventions of drag, yet how these constructions are negotiated and even mitigated by another that portrays her as a relatively radical transgender figure, this chapter illustrates the ways *The Closer* undermines mainstream gender theory while appealing to a broad cross-section of the U.S. audience.

Episodic and Chapter Overview

In "Make Over," the laboratory that submitted the toxicology report on Doris Osgood's victim was recently discredited, and the clinical sample of the morphine used in the murder is no longer admissible in court. The only way for the LAPD to avoid Osgood's early release from jail is for Detective Andrews (Beau Bridges) to testify to her spontaneous and unrecorded confession of seven years before. Since that time, Andrews has become a male-to-female transwoman. Although, she considers it her duty to return to Los Angeles to testify, Deputy District Attorney Andrea Hobbs (hereafter DDA Hobbs) refuses to put Georgette on the stand as a woman.

Concerned that conservative jurors may conclude that the retired police officer was as confused about Osgood's confession as she was about her gender, Hobbs, other members of Major Crimes including Chief Pope, and Brenda's husband Fritz pressure Brenda into convincing Georgette to inhabit her old persona while taking the stand.

This chapter looks at three distinct ways in which Georgette is represented. First, it examines cross-dressing as a plot device used to portray Georgette as a drag figure. Second, it unpacks the conventions of drag through television codes that portray Georgette as George. And, finally, it reads Georgette as a transgender figure in a scene that cracks the gender binary. By deconstructing the television codes that open up spaces for viewers along a continuum of preferred readings of Georgette from heteronormative to relatively radical transgender figure, this chapter illustrates how *The Closer* is designed to appeal to a broad viewership.

Section One: Cross-Dressing as a Plot Device and the Conventions of Drag

A heteronormative ideology has been deployed in television codes that use male-to-female cross-dressing plots as vessels for comedic entertainment for nearly a hundred years. Since the silent films of Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, and The Three Stooges, viewers have been conditioned to feel comfortable with programing that employs a binary framework—one that "reidealizes heterosexual norms" by "not calling them into question."[397] Because *The Closer* builds its audience from the middle out, early scenes portray Georgette as a cross-dressing, hyperfeminine, drag figure, rather than as a transgender figure, or how she comes to be characterized later in "Make Over." Viewers are invited to get to know Georgette, initially through television codes of drag, before they are invited to engage more serious questions around her gender identity and gender expression, biological sex, and transgender life.

The first time Brenda sees Georgette transmitted electronically over a computer monitor in the Electronics Room she is aghast and says, "Oh, for heaven's sake," to which Provenza retorts, "Heaven had nothing to do with this."[398] In the cutaway, Georgette sucks in her cheeks, purses her lips, and dabs her cheeks with a sponge while studying her reflection in a compact mirror. The editing cuts to a wide shot of Flynn, laughing. He along with Pope, Buzz, DDA Hobbs, Provenza, Fritz, and Brenda gaze via monitor at the retired detective, as she carefully returns the makeup compact to her purse.

Fritz: Wait a minute, is it just the dress or did he—you know—go all the way?
Flynn: Oh yeah, he's a real lady.
DDA Hobbs: I can't put Detective Andrews on the stand like that.
Brenda: Why not? We need her testimony, not her testicles.
The editing cuts to a close-up of Provenza looking uncomfortable upon hearing the word 'testicles' in relation to his now female ex-partner.
Hobbs: All that Osgood's lawyers need to say is that if Andrews was confused about his gender, maybe he was also confused about what Osgood told him.
Pope: Hobbs is right—it goes to credibility.
Brenda (partially off-screen): But Detective Andrews is the only person who can testify to Osgood's spontaneous and unrecorded confession.
The camera looks down at Georgette from a high angle as Brenda continues off-screen. Georgette strokes Brenda's pink faux-fur parka gingerly. After looking around to confirm that no one is watching, she lifts the hood to examine it closely. A huge grin emerges on her lips.
Hobbs: Look, if we were trying this case in Santa Monica, I'd say roll the dice, but we're not. We're in the North Valley on this one. The jury there will never see past Andrew's makeup![399]

Situated early in the episode, the scene illustrates Provenza's high level of discomfort with the transgendered Georgette. His character represents the entry point of viewers who may share his anxiety over Georgette's now absent testicles, especially in relation to her male-to-female transgendered body.

The scene also incorporates members of Major Crimes as well as DDA Hobbs speaking frankly about their discomfort regarding the retired Detective's appearance. "North Valley" jurors can be read as representative of a random sampling of conservative television watchers. This episode welcomes these viewers, giving them an opportunity to articulate their concerns

through characterization and dialogue. The scene may challenge others invited to read Provenza's, DDA Hobbs', and Flynn's behavior, thinking, and speech in regard to the transfigure Georgette as outdated, small-minded, and unbecoming of public officials. Television codes go further than that, even, in taking cross-dressing to the level of drag—that is, performance—when the camera visually portrays Georgette's longing for Brenda's bright pink parka. The protagonist made it clear, earlier in the episode, that her husband Fritz bought her the outerwear as a gift. But it was a poor choice—the color was too loud and garish—for her sweet, Southern-girl tastes. By differentiating the taste levels of Brenda and Georgette, the television codes characterize the coat as representative of the attire of an "unruly woman"[400]—that is, Georgette as drag figure conveyed in a cross-dressing plot—rather than the conservative, married, heteronormative female protagonist of the program. Georgette's drag performance occurs as she strokes the parka. She watches out for prying eyes, and then thinking that she is alone, grins widely to reveal how much pleasure she takes from this hyper-feminine outerwear. In these moments, dominant messages are conveyed through drag, rather than transgender codes of representation. Georgette's mannerisms reinforce the incongruity with gender norms that produces the humor.

Television codes of dialogue, speech, and character, and the visual image of Georgette as drag figure are potentially less disruptive to spectators because they have been trained to see male-to-female cross-dressing as part and parcel of screen comedies since the silent films of Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, and The Three Stooges. After Joseph Breen retired and the enforcement of the Motion Picture Production Codes was relaxed in the 1950s, male-to-female cross-dressing was made commonplace in mainstream Hollywood films. Early hits such as *Gentleman Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Some Like it Hot* (1959), as well as successful films of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries including *Tootsie* (1982), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993),

The Birdcage (1996), *Big Momma's House* (2000), *White Chicks* (2004), and films in the *Madea* franchise,[401] all employ male-to-female cross-dressing plots as vessels for comedic entertainment, rather than as serious treatises on the relationship between cross-dressing and transgender. This traditional model illustrates how codes are employed in Hollywood films and television series described as broad. They target audiences with middle-of-the-road values: those expected to be more comfortable consuming taken-for-granted assumptions of gender. Cultural producers do not want to dissuade this highly regarded section of the audience composed of viewers looking for opportunities to be entertained rather than educated in their media consumption. Nor do they want to dissuade the big-box advertisers who market to them.

Like film, television sitcoms have used cross-dressing storylines such as Georgette's, but they have done so to considerably less popular success than their filmic counterparts, especially when featuring a cross-dressing lead. For example, ABC aired the Tom Hanks-starring *Bosom Buddies* for two seasons, from 1980-82, and thirty years later canceled *Work It* after only two episodes.[402] Secondary drag characters on the level of Georgette have proven more durable and appealing to a broadcast television audience. Routinely used for comedic purposes, they ostensibly address issues of discrimination and the difficulties encountered by transpersons when trying to be themselves.

In addition to *The L Word*'s transgender character Lisa, Fox's *Glee* features the character Wade Adams who cross-dresses as his alter ego Unique.[403] *Friends*' Kathleen Turner stars as Chandler's father, Charles Bing, who interacts with the world as Helena Handbasket: a burlesque show star in Las Vegas.[404] *Arrested Development*'s Tobias Fünke disguises himself as British nanny Mrs. Featherbottom in order to maintain a relationship with his estranged family.[405] And, *Boston Legal*'s Clarence Bell known primarily as Clarice but also as Clavant

and Oprah is introduced as a transvestite client who seeks legal advice after being fired from his job as a department store Santa Claus. He later joins the firm: first as a legal assistant, and eventually as an attorney.[406] These cross-dressing television representations, as well as those of transatlantic hits *The Benny Hill Show* (1955-1991) and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974)—both of which aired in syndication on PBS stations—and domestic variety shows such as *The Flip Wilson Show* (1970-1974) and *The Carol Burnett Show* (1967-1978) have produced U.S. television viewers to read cross-dressing primarily as a plot device and as comic fodder. *Prima facie*, these figures read as nonthreatening and, moreover, as disconnected to matters more germane to the serious subject of transgender including "redress[ing] the traditional marginalization of the cross-dressing"—or the transgender—"subject."[407] They contain transgendered material, in essence, by making a mockery of it, which makes these series popular with middle-American viewers and big-box retailers who have a vested interest in advertising everyday consumer products on programs that promulgate middle-class values.

American film scholar Andrew Grossman argues that "the Hollywood-style slapstick treatment of adult male cross-dressing has created . . . [a] 'transvestite plot,' 'wherein a heterosexual character must temporarily cross-dress in accordance with a narrative contrivance, only to be happily unmasked at the conclusion."[408] This analysis is in line with the characterization of *Tootsie*'s Michael Dorsey who is reinscribed in the ways of hegemonic masculinity after his turn as a cross-dressing female. On multiple occasions in "Make Over," television codes reify, reverse, or otherwise disrupt this conventional formula.

Polysemy in *The Closer* offers characters and viewers the opportunity to occupy multiple points of entry along a spectrum made available in the text's differing messages of the transgender figure Georgette. From the outset, she is subversive to heteronormativity in

continuing to date women after her male-to-female sex confirmation surgery. As a lesbian, Georgette contests the heteronormative underpinnings of the cross-dressing plot. Twenty-nine minutes into the episode, she reverses her initial decision to resume her male persona in reinterrogating Doris Osgood, claiming that she is "doing undercover work," rather than conveying a masculine expression that is inauthentic to her transfemale identity. In the final scene, Georgette returns to wearing feminine attire. The conventions of her dress have changed from drag-like cross-dressing to one less hyper-feminine. Georgette's clothes in the final moments mirror Brenda's in terms of Southern womanliness: a sun hat, a pastel dress, and sandals with a flower detail—shoes Georgette purchases after admiring Brenda's pair. This final scene conveys Georgette with a feminine gender expression in line with her feminine identity, and through an authentic rather than a drag characterization that unmasks masculinity or relays hyperfemininity. Yet the codes represent her, still, within a heteronormative framework.

It is at a halfway point in the episode when the text altogether breaks the binary framework for thinking about gender. Unlike prior and subsequent scenes that moderately undermine the codes of a cross-dressing plot, the television codes of the penultimate scene at twenty-minutes convey Georgette as indisputably transgender. She is dressed in interdeterminate clothing of a unisex robe and towel. She talks of peeing while sitting down. And she describes her human nature—what can be construed as her personality, her judgment, and her view of the world—as unchanged, in spite of her sex confirmation operation. These differing representations of a transgender Georgette unsettle the binaries of gender and sexuality and offer Georgette as a subversive, even relatively radical transgender figure in varying degrees across the episode.

In Section Two, I illustrate how Grossman's cross-dressing plot is used in "Make Over" to convey Georgette as George via the conventions of drag. Such codes work to secure middle-

American viewers. But due to the innovative way in which they are treated in *The Closer*, those drag conventions also broaden viewership by inviting viewers on-screen and off-screen to critique the binary framework that underpins heteronormativity.

Section Two: Georgette as George and the Conventions of Drag

As the scene continues, DDA Hobbs and the members of Major Crimes ask Brenda to convince Georgette to take the stand as a man. Their concerns over the assumed negative reactions of conservative jurors to a male-to-female transwoman testifying under oath center on whether Georgette's professionalism, credibility, and memory will be placed in question alongside 'his' female identity. Television codes of the scene construct heteronormativity as a superstructure—that is, a conceptual structure developed from patriarchy—within which Georgette's gender identities (characterized as traditionally female versus male traits) are interrogated for their appropriateness, value, and normativity in relation to the ascribed[409] and achieved[410] traits that jurors expect of a credible witness. The text herein makes a link between heteronormativity and patriarchy.

Pope: Osgood's son has hired some of the best defense attorneys around.
Brenda: So you're just gonna let a murderer go free?
Flynn: Well, I believe the thought was that maybe we should try to get George to take the stand as a man.
Pope: Right. And, since this is your case—
Brenda: You want me to talk Detective Andrews out of his dress? I've never even met him—her.
Brenda shudders in response to her incorrect identity usage, and then turns up her nose.
Pope: That's why Lieutenant Provenza will accompany you.
Provenza turns his gaze towards Buzz.
Provenza: You got any duct tape in here?
The editing cuts to a two-shot of Buzz who answers matter-of-factly, and Flynn who remains speechless but simpers.
Buzz: Yeah, the second drawer of that cabinet.
The editing cuts to a two-shot of Fritz and Brenda.

Fritz (whispering to Brenda): The sooner you convince Andrews, the sooner we head for the Hills.[411]

Provenza faces the camera after retrieving the duct tape. He exhibits a scornful expression. He passes through a two-shot of Buzz and Flynn and lifts the duct tape in the air: visually communicating the means by which he plans to compel Detective Andrews into returning to her former persona while taking the stand. Flynn's smile widens at the suggestion, but Buzz folds his arms and looks away. In the cutaway, Georgette is displayed on Gabriel's laptop screen, where she is being surveilled by Gabriel, Sanchez, and Tao. With lips protruding, she cocks her head. And while gazing into her compact mirror, she runs a lipstick tube back and forth across her bottom lip with little finesse.

In these moments, the text works to construct heteronormative hegemony. It is, at once, making a mockery of Georgette's play at being feminine, while pointing out that she was born male with male genitalia, and moreover can return to that biological state with ease and by choice, similar to the *Tootsie* character Michael Dorsey. It produces these constructions to give viewers the impression, as Butler states, of "that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* [the original male biological state] compared to . . . what is being imitated [which] is rather comic [the ability to choose to be a woman]."[412] If the text were to make Georgette's gender confirmation unnoticeable to the naked eye—for example, by giving her a softer look and making her deft at applying makeup—female gender normativity could subvert the dominant, hegemonic, binary framework for thinking about gender.

Put another way, if reality codes of appearance, dress, and makeup constructed Georgette to look like a woman, rather than a man in drag, there would be nothing comical about the scene. Georgette's expression would match her transgender identity: that of a person who once looked like a man, but now resembles a woman. Such a construction is both progressive and

problematic for middle-American viewers presumed to be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with characters portrayed as transgender. Unlike the more numerous and hegemonic representations of drag characters employed as comic entertainment, characters offering a serious interrogation of the relationship between cross-dressing, drag conventions, and transgender identity are rarely represented even on premium cable television. A guessing game of whether content will alienate viewers is unsettling for TNT, a basic cable network partially reliant on advertising revenue to support *The Closer*'s production and distribution costs. During the initial televised moments responsible for suturing[413] viewers into the episode's plot and character constructions, the scene makes Georgette's birth sex unmistakable in her appearance, thereby "encapsulat[ing] the patriarchal ideology that implicitly underlies popular cinematic representations of cross-dressing"[414] via drag constructions that confirm hegemonic masculinity.

R. W. Connell defines masculinity as "social relations of gender . . . realized and symbolized in bodily performance," which influence men's identities and practices and ultimately reproduces patterns of male hegemony.[415] Masculinities function hierarchically, with hegemonic masculinity representing the culturally exalted gender practice that enables male dominance.[416] This is because hegemonic masculinity is constructed within a binary framework of gender that subordinates all women and some men—that is, nonheterosexual men and men of intersecting racial or traditionally effeminate identities—to men who denote practices of hegemonic masculinity. This hierarchical structure not only idealizes gender norms, but privileges heterosexuality and leads to heteronormative hegemony. Viewing hegemony, masculinity, and heterosexuality in this context, Butler would argue that scholars should undertake a subtle analysis of how drag is used to either subvert or reidealize hegemonic masculinity.

In this scene and implicitly throughout the episode, Georgette's power as an effective police officer is tied to her former identity as a man. As George, she elicited a full confession from Doris Osgood. Described by Provenza, the event was "one of the greatest moments in LAPD history," and George was "the best partner a cop could ask for—hands down."[417] Continuing to portray Georgette with male facial and bodily features, in drag apparel, and with clumsy feminine mannerisms reminds viewers that her masculine power is only disguised by her feminine costume. She is represented via the conventions of drag to keep patriarchal ideology intact and to confirm hegemonic masculinity.

The reality codes of speech and dialogue and the dominant messages around transgender they impose invoke additional layers of signification. Various discourses that draw on biological sex, feminine versus masculine markers of gender expression, and perjury in relation to gender identity illustrate the manner in which *The Closer* produces viewers to read Georgette as nonthreatening. British cultural studies scholars beginning in 1970 shifted emphasis from industry-level media production to audience analysis that interprets how viewers perceive and consume media content. A cultural studies approach to an analysis of *The Closer* is useful in comparing the readings intended by producers and those interpreted by audiences. In 1980, Stuart Hall went further in categorizing different audience readings. He conceived of three levels of reading positions including preferred, negotiated, and oppositional for measuring the communications process between television producers who impose a dominant version of the discourse of a message known as "encoding," and viewers' individual interpretations of it known as "decoding."[418] Although Hall notes that producers adapt their media messages based on potential audience readings, he stops short of granting viewers the agency to decode just any message in regards to hegemonic ideology. Rather, following from Louis Althusser, and in line

with John Fiske (as reviewed by me in Chapters One and Four), Hall understands that subject locations are always already available. A viewer is hailed to a text in watching the program. She recognizes her subject position, believes that her beliefs are true rather than relative, and in finding herself in the dominant ideology becomes a subject. What Fiske adds to Althusser's understanding of this interpellative process is this: that by recognizing the codes of television, the viewer is confirmed as a subject of ideology.

To encourage a preferred reading that Georgette's power as an effective police officer is tied to her former identity as a man, the television codes of "Make Over" impose hegemonic discourses about the biology of sex to undermine Georgette as a transwoman in this scene. Flynn's dialogue works to delegitimize Georgette's feminine identity by denoting that she became a woman through surgery, but that she was not born this way. After Fritz asks if Georgette is merely cross-dressing or if she "[went] all the way"—in fact, inquiring whether she underwent sex confirmation surgery—Flynn smirks, responding: "Oh yeah, he's a real lady."[419] That dialogue serves to highlight her operation in the eyes of viewers, but also through the reality code of expression, to render it strange, awkward, produced, and comical.

By reading her gender biologically, something that Butler would want viewers to critically consider, Flynn illustrates how "denaturalizing parodies . . . reidealize heterosexual norms *without* calling them into question."[420] Georgette's sex is denaturalized when Flynn invokes her male-to-female sex change operation. But the power of this purposefully polysemic text stems from designing a narrative that can be read differently by viewers who locate at various points along a spectrum of belief systems in regard to the relationship between gender and sex. On the one hand, Flynn's denaturalizing parody of Georgette's sex change operation leads neither to a change in his thinking, nor in his behavior toward her; and he does not take her

up as a woman. Rather, soon after he mentions her sex change operation, he attempts to convince Division members to "try to get George to take the stand as a man."[421] He sees Georgette as George, and moreover sees George as impersonating a woman. Such reality codes of expression reinscribe hegemonic codes of gender in Georgette by suggesting that her effectiveness as a police officer remains in her natural, original, biological male sex.

Flynn operates from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, despite Georgette enunciating her gender identity clearly in the first scene when telling Provenza and Flynn that being female is "the real me—finally,"[422] and never wavering in that conception of her gender identity throughout the episode. Although Georgette marks her sex change operation as the event that allowed her to finally express her gender identity, she explains that, "The change I underwent . . . was more about how I identified with the world personally,"[423] and thereby clarifies for viewers on-screen and off-screen that the operation altered her gender expression, not her gender identity. Moreover, her dialogue offers a critique of the gender binary that disallows a person from identifying as a sex other than the one they were assigned at birth. Those moments of entry invite viewers to take up a negotiated or oppositional reading of Georgette as a drag figure, and to read her as a transgender figure instead. Although a preferred reading reifies heteronormative hegemony, the polysemic scene is designed for viewers to read against the dominant messages of the television codes of ostentatious drag conventions and transphobic dialogue, and to call into question the heterosexual norms and gender binaries that define Georgette as male because she was assigned that sex at birth. In so doing, it offers an opportunity for viewers to read Georgette as subversive.

Still, as Butler argues, "there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion."[424] Bringing Georgette's sex change to the forefront

in dialogue and combining this with Flynn sneering, while referring to her as "a real lady," work to encode a particular preferred reading.[425] The television codes color viewer's interpretations of her female identity by reminding them that she was born a man. This aspect of her sex is something that she had hoped would diminish by having a sex confirmation operation. Social reality codes work together to "generate and circulate meanings" for viewers.[426] In other words, they interpellate viewers who are recognized into the text based on their own existences in subject locations always already available in relation to the meanings that producers encode. In so doing, the text reproduces dominant messages that transgender subject matter is nonthreatening, and that Georgette as a transgender character is powerless to stand up to patriarchy's disrespectful response to her choice in gender identity. Even after undergoing surgery, Georgette is powerless to stem others' biological readings of her gender.

As the scene continues, in addition to drawing on biological sex to underpin heteronormativity, the representational code of dialogue and the reality code of speech take up a conservative discourse around the binary of feminine versus masculine traits of gender expression. These television codes offer a second layer of dominant messages that undermine Georgette as a transgender figure and invite a preferred reading of her as nonthreatening. Several characters including Fritz, Flynn, DDA Hobbs, and Brenda misuse pronouns in describing Georgette's previously male genitalia as well as her gender identity. Flynn asks, "Did *he* go all the way?" in regards to Georgette's male-to-female sex confirmation surgery, and Flynn responds, "Oh, yeah, *he'*s a real lady."[427] Additionally, DDA Hobbs explains that potential jury members will not trust Georgette's testimony because they will think that "Andrews was confused about *his* gender."[428] Brenda, even, corrects a mistaken identity usage

when she expresses her discomfort in talking Georgette "out of her dress" because she "never even met *him—her*."[429]

Codes of action and camera in addition to dialogue and speech portray Georgette as nonthreatening. Her actions can be read as comical when she runs a tube of lipstick across her lips with little finesse; and, while thinking she is evading authoritative eyes, appears giddy as a schoolgirl while stroking Brenda's bright pink parka. In the case of the latter, technical codes reify reality and representational codes with a high angle perspective that looks down on her. That camera code has the effect of diminishing Georgette as a subject, which makes her appear less powerful. Codes of camera and action work in tandem with those of speech and dialogue to make a visual (as well as an intellectual) connection between Georgette as drag figure and Pope and DDA Hobbs as credible cisgendered professionals. These codes impose dominant messages organized into coherence and social acceptability by ideological codes of patriarchy, power, and privilege that keep existing social systems (and the binaries that underpin them) intact.

One of the defining characteristics of protagonist Brenda Leigh Johnson is an association the program makes between her lipstick and the work of her lips. Her lipstick is always messy and brightly colored. Her lips appear particularly full on most occasions, and she is often conveyed through her mouth: peppering sentences with drawn out "y'alls," and speaking sometimes faster, sometimes more than any other character in a scene. These codes link feminine aspects of Brenda's personality that convey an unthreatening girl-next-door-ness, to masculine aspects of it that display a keen ability to verbally manipulate criminals into confessing. These codes use Brenda's lips as an entry point for viewers to interrogate the gender and the social constructions of a 'lady' cop.

In contrast, Georgette's lips are employed—at least *prima facie*—to make a mockery of Georgette as a drag figure. The number of times she touches up her lipstick, the way she purses her lips in an unfeminine and exaggerated manner, and the clumsy manner in which she applies lipstick all signify her unnaturalness as a female to remind viewers that she was born male. Reality codes of makeup and gesture shape the representations of her. Drag representations, in turn, serve as the intellectual basis of DDA Hobbs, Chief Pope, and Division detectives' fear that Georgette will not convince jurors that she solicited a full and spontaneous confession from Osgood seven years before unless she takes the stand as a heteronormative male.

Because signs of drag in this scene are conveyed both glaringly and at times uncomfortably, they offer moments of entry to read the images and their intellectual underpinnings along a spectrum from acceptable to problematic. Characters squirm or cross their arms in response to Georgette's exaggerated dress and mannerisms. Such responses have the potential to criticize a conservative politics of gender. I agree with Andrew Grossman that these drag conventions and the cross-dressing plot that underpins them read as recognizable—that is, nonthreatening, entertaining, and not worthy of interrogation—to a broad demographic. But they also appear to a contemporary audience as exaggerated, even aggressively transphobic. They "expos[e] the naturalized status of heterosexuality,"[430] and call heterosexual norms into question with exaggerated language that seems unconvincing as simple mistakes: for example, "her testicles;"[431] "he's a real lady;"[432] "his dress;"[433] and "him—her,"[434] and in regard to Provenza's violent answer for fixing Georgette's biological state with duct tape. Television codes use overstated conventions of a cross-dressing plot and drag representations to referentially (re)construct Georgette as George, and, in so doing, focus on a gendered binary that many viewers, in the aughts, cannot help but interrogate. Put another way, a heteronormative

superstructure is denaturalized in these moments. It becomes possible to have a preferred, negotiated, or even oppositional reading, depending on the experiences and points of entry of individual viewers.

In addition to drawing on discourses of biological sex and feminine versus masculine markers of gender expression, in the scene that follows, the text makes its strongest connection between Georgette's point of view on perjury and gender identity. It also speaks to traditionally held beliefs about women's versus men's natures in relations to emotions, dress, decision-making, and professional strength. These textual constructions appear to further undermine Georgette's credibility as a police officer because of her newly female identity, but they also offer opportunities for interrogation among viewers.

Georgette: I guess I should apologize for showing up—(She looks down at her body.)—uh, unannounced. But when this case was overturned, I felt it was my duty to put aside my personal worries.
. . .
Provenza: Oh, for God's sake. Here's the deal. You can't take the stand looking like that, George.
Provenza extends the roll of duct tape to Georgette.
Provenza: Strap them down, lose the dress, cut the hair, man up.
Georgette: Sorry, I'm afraid I can't do that.
Provenza: What, you'd rather walk around here waiving those 'fun bags' in the air? Provenza shakes his hands in the air as he stares at her breasts. The editing cuts to the Murder Room, wherein Sanchez and Tao watch the scene unfold on their laptop monitor. The former is portrayed doubled over in laughter, and the latter is smiling.
. . .
Georgette: I absolutely refuse to participate in this trial dressed up like a man. Not only would I be committing perjury, I'd be lying to myself. And I've gone to a great deal of trouble not to do that anymore.
Provenza: Oh, Lord have mercy.
Pope: So, now what?
The camera pans to a close-up of Flynn.
Flynn: We wait. She's a woman now; maybe she'll change her mind.
He half-giggles. The camera pans to a medium close-up of DDA Hobbs who looks aghast. In the cutaway, Georgette raises her purse strap to her shoulder.
Georgette: So enjoy the protests.
As Georgette approaches the door, Provenza stops her with a verbal assault.

Provenza: You know, Andrews, when those doctors cut your balls off, you should have had them pull the stick out of your ass at the same time.
Georgette begins to cry. Her emotional release and Provenza's discomfort with the same are portrayed in a shot/counter-shot sequence.
Georgette: You—you of all people . . . you—.
Her crying intensifies.
Provenza: What's happening? What's he doing?
Brenda: What do you think? She's crying. You've hurt her feelings.[435]

Georgette's crying imposes dominant messages of femininity and moreover feminine fragility, which is indirectly correlated with professional strength, credibility, and effectiveness as a police officer. She is centered in the background of the frame, dabbing her eyes with a tissue, while Provenza and Brenda are foregrounded in the three-shot. Provenza and Brenda possess more readable masculinities in these television codes, which depict them arguing and holding direct eye contact. Brenda's masculine traits are nonthreatening, even empowering, in this instance, because she is constructed as heteronormative in relation to a transgressive and unreliable Georgette, who has the propensity to change her mind. As the scene continues, Georgette is conveyed with increasing power; but, unlike Brenda, that power continues to be drawn from her former sex (and the connection made between masculinity and performance as a police officer), rather than her current gender.

Provenza: Feelings?
Georgette: Yes, my feelings, you—you insensitive bastard. I came here despite enormous fears because I wanted to do the right thing, and you've done nothing but insult me since I stepped off that train. Well I'm not going to let you bully me into raising my hand and swearing that I'm a man. I won't do it.[436]

Reading her behavioral changes in relation to her dress, Georgette is aggressive in both her delivery of dialogue and her stance in these moments. Leaning toward Provenza and towering over him by a half-foot in heels, she appears brash, virile, and moreover Provenza's physical superior, all of which have readable masculinities. Brenda is constructed as both a female and in

power of her emotions and environment in this scene. But, in Georgette, representational codes of empowerment serve as reminders of her original male sex, since they are offered in tandem with exaggerated, even volatile, traditionally feminine emotions uncharacteristically displayed in the professional, masculine environment of police headquarters. The gender binary is reified when, after responding to Provenza, her facial features soften as she looks back toward Brenda. She shakes her head gently and allows tears to roll down her cheeks.

Georgette: I can't. I can't.
Brenda takes hold of both of Georgette's hands with one of hers, and with her other hand, she strokes Georgette's shoulder. Georgette presses their clasped hands against her forehead and cries freely.
Brenda: Of course you can't.
No longer in the background, Georgette is the focal point of the shot. Her expression portrays a look of loss. In the close-up cutaway, Provenza seems increasingly uncomfortable; and, finally, he looks away.[437]

Several signs of gender are operating in this scene. First, Georgette's professionalism, which was questioned in prior scenes through identifiers such as dress, lips, and general appearance, is now confronted head-on and in association with her integrity. Brenda and Provenza ask Georgette to misrepresent her identity in order to help the LAPD win its case against Osgood. They also relate aspects of drag characteristics of her dress to her biological, sexual anatomy. No longer using it as a humorous narrative device, or mocking it as unnatural in dialogue, the text now claims through Provenza that Georgette's female identity is a ruse, and that it can be eliminated or at least hidden simply by "strap[ping] down" her "fun bags."[438]

Furthermore, Provenza claims that eliminating the appearance of female anatomy will enable Georgette to "man up."[439] She will come through in getting Osgood reconvicted, and will save the day for the LAPD, in short, by serving as the model (read: male) cop. Interrogating this taken-for-granted notion of gender and organization may be the basis for Georgette's storyline. Unlike a series such as *Orange* or *Transparent*, *The Closer* does not offer viewers an ongoing

exploration of transgender issues. But devoting a single episode to transgender content contributes to the broader questions and continuing themes of a series about gender and the workplace. Through Provenza's refusal to accept Georgette's present gender identity, and Brenda at certain points shutting down the conversation about transgender, and at other times pretending that Georgette's gender change does not exist, the television codes offer dominant messages that deny Georgette's transgender identity and undermine her as a transgender figure within the male dominated criminal justice system. The heteronormative ideology that these codes of dialogue imply naturalize Georgette's character as unprofessional when she refuses to take the stand as a man—when she refuses to swear that she is a man, because doing so is unethical and is in denial of her transfemale identity.

Polysemic codes of the scene offer opportunities for subversive readings of gender normativity as well. For the first time in the narrative, Georgette is granted the opportunity to examine her own identity ethically. By proclaiming that she is female, and that to say or to pretend otherwise is tantamount to "perjury" and to "lying to herself," the text invites viewers on-screen and off-screen to confront Georgette's appearance not simply as drag and the storyline as not simply a cross-dressing plot.[440] Such content and characterization are far more threatening to the popularity of a number-one ranked show, since television so rarely interrogates heteronormative values by engendering a discourse around the separation of sex and gender, or by exposing their negative impact on a transgender person's life. Georgette asserting her rights within a series using a mainstream framework for interrogating transgender invites negotiated, even oppositional, readings to her as a drag figure—that is, Georgette as George. And, for the first time, the episode engages a serious discourse on transgender identity.

But a subversive Georgette is not yet the dominant message of the text. She is constrained by Flynn who attacks her reliability on the basis of feminine emotionality when he says, "She's a woman now; maybe she'll change her mind."[441] By representing the feminine gender as unreliable and unprofessional, and citing as factors Georgette's excessive (and inappropriately timed) bouts of crying, as well as her lack of dependability in decision-making—both traditionally ascribed feminine traits—the episode rationalizes a cross-dressing plot that reaffirms masculine dominance through a gender binary.

Such television codes can be read, first, in the dialogue of DDA Hobbs who, early in the episode, says, "All that Osgood's lawyers need to say is that if Andrews was confused about his gender, maybe he was also confused about what Osgood told him," and second in the persistent actions of DDA Hobbs and others to get Georgette out of her dress.[442] Those codes use a cross-dressing plot to plant further doubts about Georgette's credibility in the minds of viewers on-screen and off-screen. They naturalize reliability and heteronormativity, on one hand, and on the other hand unreliability and transgender. Codes of dress, makeup, behavior, speech, and expression delegitimize Georgette in the dominant messages of early scenes in the episode, so that when DDA Hobbs later says, "the jury up there will never see past Detective Andrew's makeup," Georgette's fickle representation will contextualize the indignation in Hobbs statement.[443] Instead of critiquing the potential prejudice operating in Northern California jurors, or the lack of ethics in their potential discrimination against Georgette as a transfemale, a dominant reading of the text returns the burden to Georgette. It is up to her to prove that she is reliable, dependable, and professional—that is, to succeed as a male cop. Codes that construct her as unreliable (read: feminine) assuage the worries of viewers uncomfortable with the Division members' disingenuous and narrow-minded treatment of her.

In addition to her supposed unreliability in decision making, Georgette's emotionality is used as a narrative device to reify hegemonic masculinity on a second level, when television codes construct her as being at ease in displaying emotionality and vulnerability to Brenda. As females, they both may be expected to value an ease in displaying emotions, especially if the text is to remain true to historical television representations. In an earlier scene, Provenza was made uncomfortable by Georgette's crying and overtly alludes to a gender binary between crying-female and not crying-male in dialogue. "What's *he* doing? . . . Feelings?"[444] Georgette responded with male aggression, leaning into him, raising her voice, and showing unflinching physical resolve. Towering over him, she lashed back, refusing to "[dress] up like a man" or to "let [Provenza] bully [her] into raising [her] hand and swearing that [she's] a man."[445] Georgette's dialogue and stance have readable masculinities in these moments. Her ethical convictions in combination with her aggression are naturalized as aspects of her original male sex. Television codes use Georgette to reaffirm (rather than subvert) Provenza's binary gender framework and, more specifically, his consideration of Georgette as biologically male.

To meet the ends of a program designed for broad popularity, the text offers moments of entry to viewers more antagonistic to traditional understandings of the relationship between sex and gender. Through an ideologically progressive lens, this scene can be read as unsettling heteronormative hegemony with Georgette's sentiments. She critiques the notion of dress as a gender signifier by refusing to put on the clothing of a man in the context of swearing under oath, which she defines as cross-dressing. This is a highly political point of the text. Moreover, given the opportunity to express how transgender affects her larger life, even her ethical convictions, Georgette invites viewers on-screen and off-screen to confront the difficulty encountered by transgender people when trying to be themselves. She speaks of her "enormous

fears" in returning to the LAPD as a transgender person: fears which materialize both in the detective's treatment of her and in how Division members frame jurors' likely assessment of her.[446] Finally, Georgette seems resolved to let the LAPD endure a heated public debate in response to letting Osgood go free—"So enjoy the protests," she says—if the Division's only preventative measure is for her to falsely testify under oath as a man.[447] The key consideration for scholars addressing transgender representations in these moments is how Georgette stands resolute in her identity: as a female, as ethical, and as a transgender person. In effect, that interconnected characterization of a transfigure offers a critique of the cross-dressing plot from within—what scholars such as Renshaw and Johnson are looking for when exploring contemporary transgender television representations, and what Butler argues is the transformative power of a drag representation—that "it serves a subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized and undermines their power by virtue of affecting that exposure."[448] Georgette redefines drag within a cross-dressing plot, and at the same time the binaries of reliable/ethical/heteronormative vs. unreliable/unethical/transgender that underpin heteronormativity and its conceptual structure (in relation to gender and work) developed from patriarchy.

In line with popular serial design, moments later the text offers dominant messages that return Georgette to a position of questionable character, when technical codes makes a negative association between her and Doris Osgood. Camera codes make this connection, the first time, twelve minutes into the episode.[449] In the middle of discussing the case, Brenda asks the detectives if anyone has a question. Sanchez says, "Oh, yes;" but his query has nothing to do with the case when he asks, "Detective Andrews, sir . . . ma'am, what happened to your

penis?"[450] In the cutaway, a horrified, angry expression comes across Provenza's face. Brenda stomps her foot in an attempt to put a kibosh on Sanchez's intrusive (albeit instructive) line of inquiry. Sternly, she says, "Detective Sanchez, that is not an appropriate question."[451] To which Georgette quickly responds, "No, no, no, no, it's fine, Chief Johnson. In fact, I'd like to answer, if it's okay with you."[452] Here the text opens itself up politically, ideologically, to discuss transgender issues.

What is problematic is the way in which the elements are arranged in the frame that follows. Georgette appears opposite the mug shot of Doris Osgood, the convicted felon at the center of the case. This composition invites a comparison of the two women by arranging them in a medium close-up two-shot, side-by-side, and on the same eyeline. Whether this design is used to mark Georgette as socially marginalized, equally deviant, or simply to relate Georgette's transgender to Doris Osgood's criminality will be made individually by viewers. For, in such moments, "reading becomes a negotiation between the social sense inscribed in the program and the meanings of social experiences made by [a] wide variety of viewers."[453] Independent of how individual readings are rendered, the camera codes make apparent their work in undermining Georgette's credibility by associating her with the criminal whom she is responsible for convicting.

The editing cuts to Brenda who, responding to Georgette's enthusiastic offer, puffs out her lower lip, but stops short of censoring her or terminating Sanchez' inquiry. "Interestingly enough, Detective," Georgette continues, "I still have a lot of the same equipment I had prior to the surgery. It's just been inverted and refashioned to look pretty much like any other woman's sex organs. In fact, the advances they've made in vaginoplasty are truly amazing."[454] During the dialogue, the editing cuts to a series of counter-shots to illustrate the varying responses of

detectives to her educational lesson. Provenza covers his eyes with his hands; Tao winces; Sanchez leers; and Flynn cringes and contorts his upper body. As she concludes, the camera returns to Sanchez and, following his line of sight, tilts down from Georgette's eyes to her genital region. Brenda notices his leering gaze and, no longer willing to contain herself, hijacks the discussion. She bounces up and down on her knees, waves her hands in the air, and shrieks, "Okay, that's very informative," which brings the subject to a temporary close.[455]

Because gazes of both the camera and on-screen characters obscure their liability in objectifying Georgette, they must be critically considered. Television codes of camera, editing, dialogue, and character work in combination to reposition Georgette as responsible for rejecting a social norm and as, therefore, deserving of others' objectification of her. The men and women who stare on-screen and those who have a preferred reading off-screen are reacting to Georgette's lack of tact in relaying too much information. Television codes work to hide patriarchy's responsibility in disseminating and reifying taken for granted assumptions of gender that produce discomfort in listeners and viewers as Georgette relates her sex confirmation surgery to her once male, now female, identity. The camera in the latter part of the scene undermines her by conveying an array of dismissive glances from the detectives listening when she answers for her own gender identity and biological sex. Unlike theirs, her point of view challenges a biological framework for thinking about gender. As a transgender individual, Georgette is no longer the sex that she was born as; and, as such, she cannot easily be categorized within a framework of binaried gender. This is problematic for a basic cable program, especially one that aired before transgender protagonists and content began trending and gaining mainstream acceptance on shows including *Orange* and *Transparent*.

Yet the assumption of creators and producers that off-screen viewers in 2009 would be drawn to subject matter offering a more balanced representation of transgender identity and transgender life go a long way in answering for the serial design of this episode. Television codes, on the one hand, objectify Georgette and, on the other hand, use her own voice to define gender and biological sex. The scene provides alternative entry points to the subject matter. Yet, it does not go far enough to subvert heteronormative hegemony or to countermand a binary framework for thinking about gender, in spite of this short dialogic passage examining taken-for-granted assumptions of gender, sexuality, and biological sex. The television codes still work to contain Georgette and to portray her within a cross-dressing plot for the benefit of viewers assumed to be unfamiliar with nonhegemonic representations of gender in mainstream police procedural including *The Closer*. The relationship between viewer curiosity/desire and objectifying television codes is a direct one that goes hand-in-hand with a Hollywood production model that raises but contains transgressive gendered themes for the big payoff of broad appeal.

To this end, in spite of Brenda's discomfort and attempted intervention, Sanchez continues to interrogate Georgette. "One second, Chief. So, [Georgette], do you like men or women now?"[456] "As a matter of fact, I still like women," she responds with a smile.[457] In a series of quick cutaways, Sanchez raises his eyebrows; Provenza rolls his eyes and says, "What?"[458] Brenda shoots Provenza a dirty look; and Georgette gives Provenza a questioning glance. Provenza is incapable of hiding his particular character brand of contempt and amazement across the series, and not surprisingly quips, "You had a sex change to become a lesbian?"[459] "The change I underwent had nothing to do with my sexual preference," she responds matter-of-factly; "it was more about how I identified with the world . . . personally."[460] The editing cuts to a three-shot of Flynn looking skeptical, Sanchez smiling, and Tao resting his

index finger on his lips, portraying their differing (but equally unsupportive) reactions to her elucidation. In the cutaway, Brenda appears to listen intently, which sets her apart as the more evolved protagonist and prepares viewers for a temporary change in dominant messaging. "And you weren't bothered that I was a lesbian when I was a guy," she responds to Provenza.[461] This dialogue "tackl[ing] the issue of sexual identity through overtly gender-nonnormative characters" marks the episode's first dominant blow to heteronormativity.[462] But his retort, "Oh, I'm sorry. All I heard was: blah, blah, blah—'lesbian,'" undermines Georgette once again.[463] She gasps.

Taking full advantage of the *tête-à-tête* between Georgette and Provenza, Sanchez follows-up his question with another, asking her, "Do you currently have a girlfriend?"[464] Growing increasingly discontent, Brenda bangs her hand on the desk—twice. She looks him squarely in the eye and shouts, "Detective Sanchez, enough."[465] The scene, regardless of Brenda's intervention, ends as it began, containing Georgette within the cross-dressing plot to which Andrew Grossman refers. Although it primarily offers humorous entertainment to viewers, it operates on other levels. It educates a diverse cast of characters (and viewers with similar subjectivities) on transgender issues through Georgette's detailed (and firsthand) accounts of her sex confirmation surgery, sexuality, and gender, while fulfilling its generic obligation to move the plot forward in solving the case of the week. It particularly appeals to a certain segment of the audience—older, conservative viewers—for it reveals in Brenda a Southern civility that refuses to talk about such things at least out in the open, while it also reasserts her position as 'the boss.' Participants in my audience study (explored in Chapter Two) confirm that these qualities—discretion and authority—were appealing traits in a protagonist, independent of gender.

"Make Over's" most ardent attack on heteronormative hegemony to this point in the episode was delivered by Georgette in self-identifying as a lesbian transfemale, and prior to her sex confirmation operation as a lesbian man. The subtlety of this single but important line of dialogue may be lost on an audience reading it for humor. Philosopher Monique Wittig, approvingly cited by Butler, argues that "Women, lesbians and gay men . . . cannot assume the position of the speaking subject within the linguistic system of compulsory heterosexuality. To . . . speak at all in that context is a performative contradiction, the linguistic assertion of a self that cannot 'be' within the language that asserts it."[466] I argue that an additional category who cannot speak within that system is a transgender person. And, moreover, that "the language that asserts it" is binary—that is, male versus female—and not just heterosexual in positioning.

To break the hegemonic framework for thinking about gender and sexuality in this scene, Georgette must set herself apart from both binaries by self-describing as a male-to-female transgender attracted to women, and also as a lesbian prior to this when biologically male. "For, if to identify as a woman is not necessarily to desire a man, and if to desire a woman does not necessarily signal the constituting presence of a masculine identification . . . then the heterosexual matrix proves to be an *imaginary* logic that insistently issues forth its own unmanageability."[467] The dialogue between Georgette and Provenza in this scene breaks down that "imaginary" relationship and replaces it with another possibility: "a set of non-causal and non-reductive relations between gender and sexuality."[468] Georgette makes a proclamation about her lesbian identity while cloaked in drag paraphernalia and framed within a cross-dressing plot typically used to reify masculine or heteronormative hegemony on television. This dialogic passage illustrates how *The Closer* takes up feminist and queer theories in interrogating gender;

but, additionally, how it mitigates problematic representations that follow by delivering them through a heterosexual messenger—that is, a male actor, Beau Bridges, dressed as a woman.

In addition to opening up a discourse around the binary of sexuality through Georgette's self-described lesbianism, the scene illustrates the manner in which it constructs Georgette to fit within the gender binary, even as a transgender figure. Her behaviors and demeanor, speech, action, and ways of engaging the world change along with her image through a vacillation between Georgette as Georgette, when dressed in feminine apparel, and Georgette as George, when dressed as a man. In the remainder of this section, I analyze how she is constructed with feminine signifiers including emotionality, an interest in the fashion-beauty complex, gentility in communication style and manner of expression, and expectations around gender roles when interacting with a man as a woman—namely, coquettishness and chivalry. Finally, I explore how she performs differently when dressed as a man. Television codes throughout the scene organize her varying characteristics of appearance into social acceptability through ideological codes of patriarchy that construct (and confine) her within the binary framework that Butler finds problematic. I follow from Butler in conceptualizing the two frames of reference as follows: "'men' are those defined in a sexually dominating social position and 'women' are those defined in subordination."[469] Georgette, throughout this scene, performs as one or the other of this binary pair based on her dress.

When dressed as a woman, Georgette acts and reacts in a number of ways traditionally ascribed as feminine. First, she is emotional and expressive; she often cries and looks at others compassionately; she sighs and giggles with buoyancy. Second, she is interested in fashion. At one point in the narrative, she admires Brenda's parka and, on another, her shoes, which she later buys and wears in the final scene of the episode. The text constructs her not only in relation to

Brenda, but also with a feminine consciousness for the fashion beauty complex. Such characterizations work to undergird hegemonic femininity by falling in line with a trope of cultural feminism that highlights her essential difference and as such her female nature. Additionally, they illustrate a "gender performativity" on the part of an unconventional actor adopting the beauty practices of femininity in order to subvert its hegemonic or binary underpinnings.[470]

Third, when dressed as a woman Georgette is often genteel in her approach to conversation, as well as in her manner of expression. She replies, "That's nice of you to say,"[471] when given a compliment, or uses the phrase, "Let's call it women's intuition," to explain her professional acumen in predicting that Doris Osgood will confess to "George" once again. [472] Additionally, she displays gestures unmistakably feminine. In the aforementioned scene she holds Brenda's clasped hands in hers and then rests them against her forehead, showing that she is emotionally exacerbated, but also that she longs to make a physical connection with another woman who understands her vulnerability.

Fourth, when wearing feminine garb, Georgette behaves in ways women are expected to around men. At one point, she kisses Louie's (aka Provenza's) cheek, leaving an imprint of her lipstick behind without compunction. Simply by calling him Louie, publically and privately,[473] something only his ex-wife does over the course of the series, the text conveys the flirtatious intimacy that Georgette establishes with men.[474] Her coquettishness is noted by Provenza's present partner Flynn who near episode's end chides him, "So you ready to go, Louie?" to which Provenza replies with nervous laughter and a signature quip, "Call me that just once more and Georgette won't be my only ex-partner without a penis."[475]

Additionally, the expectation that men will act chivalrously toward her goes hand-in-hand with Georgette dressing as a woman. Not only is she aware of, but also taken aback by, a man who does not give up his chair or open a door for her—a 'lady.' This marker of femininity is used throughout the episode to illustrate how different detectives respond to her female performance. The production of her transgender body is also the sticky point to examine critically, for it begs the questions: Does the text's desire to make the body match the identity and the desire to fit a transformed body into unconventional gender practices uphold patterns of gender within the episode or subvert them? The serial design of this episode does either, at one point or another, illustrating how a smartly designed text accounts for polysemy in exploiting popularity.

The first instance of Georgette's expectations of chivalry occurs when Tao offers her his seat, which she takes without hesitation, saying only, "Hmmm, thank you" as she does.[476] Her expression reminds viewers of Brenda's ubiquitous response to social niceties: "Thank you. Thank you so much." When they re-enter the Electronics Room later in the episode, Provenza follows behind Georgette. Seeing an open seat, she says, "Oh," and walks towards it; but Provenza walks around her and takes the seat for himself.[477] Georgette looks hurt in their two-shot and responds with a dejected, "Uh."[478] The camera pans to the left to include Buzz who has watched the scene unfold. He glances up at Georgette and conveys an apologetic expression on behalf of Provenza who appears clueless to the social etiquette expected of a man offering an open seat to a lady. This reality code of expression works in combination with a representational code of dialogue when the witness in the cutaway says to Brenda: "I knew that woman was a menace."[479] To which Brenda responds, "And, by that woman, you mean Doris Osgood—the woman you knew as Doris Parker?"[480] Parker, like Georgette, has undergone a change. And

similar to the way in which the text invites viewers to compare Georgette and Osgood in the two-shot described earlier, herein the text implies that both women, in their changed states, are menaces.

Because both Georgette and Osgood are transformed, ideologically, the text organizes into social coherence and acceptability the relationship between physical transformation, danger, and threat. It also makes available an opportunity to be critical of an on-screen character (in this case Provenza) desiring to match Georgette's female identity to his idea of a female body. The scene illustrates the blueprint for *The Closer*'s model of popular serial design. On the one hand, it denaturalizes conventional gender practices and works to subvert patterns of gender, which make available additional entry points for interrogating the ways in which femininities are oppressed and subjugated by masculinity. On the other hand, it raises but contains feminism in gender practices and identities that include transgender to reassure viewers, assumed to be unfamiliar with nonhegemonic representations of gender in mainstream programming, that conventional representations are still available for them in *The Closer*.

In a final example of how chivalry is constructed in the television codes in "Make Over," while Brenda is still interviewing the above witness, Provenza announces that he is going to talk to another witness and he invites Georgette to join him. After agreeing, she takes a step towards the door, fully expecting that Provenza will let her go ahead of him. In proceeding, she nearly runs into him when he steps through the doorway before her. He does not so much as keep the door ajar as Georgette follows behind him. Although no other characters are critical of Provenza's actions, his unchivalrous behavior provokes a scowl in Georgette, which the camera captures when she turns back and lingers until the door shuts in her face.[481] It depicts her reaction to Provenza's rudeness to remind viewers that Georgette expects others to relate to her

female gender expression, and she behaves as a female because she identifies as a female. The television codes in this scene portray Georgette in a transformed body disguised in drag, which does not match her identity. And they depict Provenza acting in accordance with conventional gender practices that do not require him to let a person he conceives of as a man walk ahead of him through a doorway. They uphold patterns of gender and impose dominant messages for viewers more comfortable with a text naturalizing ideological constructs of Georgette's once male sex, rather than her now feminine gender.

As Butler writes, "Gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort."[482] Although Georgette when dressed as a woman does not perform as an ideal female in all cases except the final scene of the episode, she attempts to throughout. From one point of view, television codes that construct her subverting hegemony denaturalize the gender binary and open up spaces for a critique of heteronormativity. From another point of view, the primary job of a basic cable text during the first half of an episode is to set up a critique of patriarchy coming later. Early on, television codes illustrate how hegemonic notions of femininity are hard to subvert due to taken-for-granted notions of gender practices and gender roles (as depicted in characters' reactions and behaviors on-screen). They also do so because the television industry is a social institution that typically undergirds patriarchal notions to assuage the worries of advertisers and basic cable affiliates targeting not only mass audience, but what a mass audience is expected to largely be: viewers with middle-of-the-road values. Early scenes highlight why dominant messages are imposed in the first place. But Butler and Renshaw would argue that the exposure of industry and advertisers and their aim in making comforting images and narratives available to viewers is, in and of itself, potentially subversive as a denaturalizing process. It reveals the patriarchal

substructures of the cultural industries, and the nature of social reality and status quo in television viewers.

Although Georgette does not perform femininity perfectly, as a means of establishing dominant messages that convey patriarchy and to highlight the power of heteronormativity, the television codes construct Georgette performing ideal masculinity as George. She refuses, throughout, to pose as a man under oath—an act which she argues would deny her gender identity. Yet, nearing the end of the episode, she returns to her old persona to reinterrogate Doris Osgood in the interview room, because she considers this an act of undercover investigation. Believing that Osgood still has a crush on George, Georgette embodies her former male persona—and, moreover, draws on his charming personality—to entice Osgood into confessing once again. During a two-part sequence of scenes, Georgette as George "incessantly and repeatedly" performs ideal masculinity. The codes, thereby, keep the binary framework of gender intact, and, moreover, illustrate Butler's conception of how gender is achieved in patriarchy.

In portraying George, Georgette gives no indication of a transgender look or a drag performance. Her actions and demeanor are so smooth, her comfort level so high, as to make viewers forget that "Make Over" is structured around a cross-dressing plot. As George, she conveys none of the behaviors, demeanors or expressions of a woman. Opposite was the case when, as a female, she repeatedly failed at gender performativity. As George, Georgette tugs on the top knot of her tie. She flirts with Osgood, saying, "Oh those eyes, just as beautiful as I remember."[483] And she sexually objectifies Brenda, saying, "With a caboose like that, course she [gets what she wants]."[484] She puffs out her jaw rather than purses her lips. And she slaps

Pope on the back—mimicking Provenza's earlier reaction to seeing her in a suit and tie in preparation for interrogating Osgood.

Moreover, during the reinterrogation, Georgette mirrors Brenda's everyday *modus operandi* of using sexual tactics to get the perpetrator to confess. In Georgette's case, she conveys a boy-next-door-ness, which compels Osgood to fall under George's spell and to confess to murder for a second time. On this occasion, Osgood goes further and implicates her son as an accomplice. When Georgette returns to the Electronics Room post-confession, the son, who has watched the reinterrogation remotely with the detectives, reacts to his mother's statement by verbally accosting Georgette. As George, Georgette does not accept abuse. She becomes gruff and even violent: shoving, pushing, and slamming Mr. Osgood against a wall and into a chair. Such brute behavior finally garners Georgette the chivalry of Provenza. After the detectives leave the Electronics Room to formally arrest Osgood, Georgette, still dressed as a man, extends a male social gesture by opening the door for Provenza and indicating for him to go first. But Provenza shakes his head and says, "Ladies first."[485] Having successfully performed as a man (and, moreover, in a heterosexual context, since Osgood was enticed to confess due to her attraction to George), Georgette has earned credibility, something that eluded her as a transfemale. In Provenza's view, Georgette has thus earned the right to be treated like a lady, and is now deserving of the social gestures traditionally bestowed upon her female sex.

It is important to note the degree to which Georgette's and Provenza's performances not only reify patriarchy but convey the hold of social reality codes and the status quo. By Provenza paying Georgette this social gesture while she is dressed as a man, performing ideal masculinity, and only after she has acceded to the detectives' terms of returning to her male persona to reinterrogate the murderess, the dominant messages of the plot can be read as parody rather than

as a change of heart on the part of Provenza. As drag is to transgender, such a behavioral change may represent a form of window-dressing rather than certain proof that social marginality can be so easily realigned in Provenza's mind.

Nevertheless, Georgette gladly accepts Provenza's chivalry. After he directs her to go first through the doorway, the editing cuts to a close-up of Georgette. The camera captures her broad smile, which follows directly from hearing the long sought after words, "Ladies, first," from her ex-partner.[486] The editing cuts to a two-shot of Brenda and Pope, also smiling. But in the cutaway Provenza does not, in fact, hold the door open for Georgette. He gestures to Georgette to keep it open for herself and walk through first. Rather than calling him on his failed attempt at chivalry, Georgette follows his directive. The television codes herein undermine their earlier gender subversion. The codes had raised the possibility of Provenza treating Georgette, a transfemale, as he would a heterosexual female. They also raised the possibility of Georgette performing ideal femininity. And both sets of television codes would have served to undermine the gender binary and dominant messages of heteronormativity made available in the text. But, ultimately, they contained Provenza and Georgette as subversive figures, when Georgette opens the door for herself, walks through first, and Provenza slides through afterwards. On his way out, he glances back at Brenda and Pope, seeking nonverbal approval for his unsuccessfully performed social gesture. In the cutaway, Brenda glances at Pope. Her expression is one of sympathy mixed with a smile, as if to convey, 'He doesn't get it.' In the reverse shot, Pope returns her sentiment with a sly smile of his own. Once again, potential subversion is circumvented by parody and fodder for a comic plot. Brenda and Pope get a kick out of Provenza's mistaken impression that he has done something special, if not equitable, through his

actions. But Brenda, Provenza, Pope, and Georgette do anything in those moments to challenge a binary framework for thinking about gender.

What these non-drag constructions may say about how *The Closer* aligns masculinity and femininity within binary categories to comfort middle-American viewers (who may read any of the aforementioned scenes as breaking the binary framework for conceptualizing either gender identity or gender performance) is a key aspect of understanding how gender constructions are contained in popular television. Such representations answer to the goals of this chapter and to the dissertation at large. Before it is possible for a popular text to further deconstruct hegemonic ideologies of gender, it must first expose the binary framework that undergirds those hegemonies—if for no more important reason than because, in the case of *The Closer*, Georgette has been constructed to perform ideally only as a woman dressed as man. It reminds viewers that her masculine power is disguised by her feminine costume, as in the case of Michael in *Tootsie*, and as underpins the cross-dressing plot as conceptualized by Andrew Grossman. Because viewers have been conditioned, even produced I would argue, to read on-screen cross-dressing plots and drag characters as unproblematic since the days of Chaplin, it is unlikely that many will read against the taken-for-granted assumptions imposed by typical Hollywood television codes. Casting a minor celebrity like Beau Bridges further ensures that many among the audience will not be tricked into thinking that Georgette is a woman and, as such, protects against the unsettling effect that construction might have on mainstream viewers or the general aim of the program, which is to first secure this all-important demographic.

That does not mean that viewers will not read, nor are they disinvited from reading, against the grain. Indeed, the text's polysemic design accounts for (even banks on) the possibility of negotiated and oppositional readings of hegemonic constructions. The way

Georgette takes on a drag persona for the first third of the episode invites viewers to read Georgette as unnatural in the role of woman. In the scenes that follow, her cross-dressing performance as George naturalizes her performance as a man. Yet individual images and lines of dialogue successfully break the binary frame for thinking about gender in both sets of constructions. Polysemy invites viewers critical of drag representations or a cross-dressing plot to read against the grain of dominant codes of heteronormativity, and with the grain when subversive messages are encoded in the text.

The importance of such moments in employing a gender discourse is well stated by Butler who argues that:

> The very notion of 'dialogue' is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated. Otherwise, the model of dialogue risks relapsing into a liberal model that assumes that speaking agents occupy equal positions of power and speak with the same presuppositions about what constitutes 'agreement' and 'unity' and, indeed, that those are the goals to be sought.[487]

The Closer represents Georgette via the conventions of drag within a cross-dressing plot to *prima facie* assuage assumed viewers' worries that they will be expected—even invited—to examine "the traditional marginalization of the . . . transgendered subject"[488] in this lightweight, popular primetime dramedy. But it also acts to mitigate distributors' and advertisers' fear of dissuading a mass, typically conservative, middle-American viewership from watching the show. By laying bare its conventional model of representation, *The Closer* opens itself to criticism on the grounds of denying Georgette equitable power and voice to act with agency in self-identifying as transgender. I would argue that the real but disguised intension of this episode is to encourage interrogation—to subtly challenge "'agreement' and 'unity'" on issues of transgender—in order to open up spaces for additional viewers who challenge mainstream gender theory.[489] To

temporarily replace this limitation and to crack the binary framework for thinking about gender, a subsequent scene portrays Georgette through neither drag conventions nor as a male embodied George, but rather as interdeterminately gendered. Presented at the halfway point of the episode, viewers have been made comfortable and entertained with television codes imposing dominant messages in support of patriarchy. The text is now in a position to offer a subversive Georgette, whose work it is to engage a serious treatise on transgender identity and at the same time broaden viewership.

Section Three: Georgette as a Transgender Figure and Breaking the Gender Binary

The scene that is the most productive in terms of expanding the possibilities for thinking about gender takes place twenty minutes into the episode. By mid-episode, the text is in a position to encode more problematic representations interwoven with a continuing "cross-dressing plot" so as to invite viewers comfortable with further unpacking to read the text for its subversion of conventional binary gender representations. It is useful to examine this scene in relation to Butler's notion that, "if gender is not tied to sex, either causally or expressively, then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex."[490] That notion is evident in the semiotic constructions of the scene that actively denote Georgette as transgender.

For the first time, Georgette is represented as a relatively radical figure: one, I argue, who does not resist (as in previous scenes) but undermines the gender binary. In this section, I examine four ways in which the television codes represent this transgender figure as interdeterminate: unisex clothing, invisible makeup, masculine skin texture and facial bone structure, and dialogue that enunciates Georgette's sex and gender.

Provenza: Did you think you could just sashay off the train and everything would be like old times?
Georgette: We're old friends, Louie.
Provenza: No. No, I was friends with a guy named George who doesn't exist anymore.
The editing cuts to Georgette applying foundation with a makeup sponge in the bathroom mirror. She is wearing a white robe and a white towel wrapped around her head.
Provenza: Maybe he never did exist.
In the reverse shot, the camera returns to Georgette applying makeup.
Provenza: Maybe one of the greatest confessions in the history of the LAPD never existed.
The editing cuts to a medium two-shot of Georgette looking into the bathroom mirror, which also reflects Provenza. Georgette is giving him a dirty look.
Provenza: Nobody else ever heard Doris Osgood say—
Andrews: Alright, that's really low. You know I was much too good a cop to file a false confession. And, yes, I look different. I'm not a man anymore, which means I don't pee standing up. I wear a dress instead of a suit. I walk differently. I've changed how I do a lot of things, but not what's in my heart. I've always been your friend, Louie. You can't turn your back on all the years. Look at you, you're not even listening. The second people start talking about their feelings, you—
Provenza: No, no, no. Wait. Wait. We were thinking Doris Osgood only changed her appearance. . . . [Maybe] she changed her entire M.O.
Andrews: Oh, yes.[491]

Beyond retreading ground that uses her feminine performance as a reason to question her reliability, ethics, and professionalism (if no longer a man), this scene conveys Georgette as neither female nor male but a third gender altogether: an interdeterminate gender. For the first time, Georgette is constructed without clearly inscribed markers of either masculinity or femininity. From Butler's perspective, "achieving" a feminist critique of the binaries of gender requires "a differentiation from the opposite gender. Hence, one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces this restriction of gender within the binary pair."[492] Television codes of this scene follow, theoretically, from Butler with a feminist treatment of Georgette as an interdeterminate gender, a figure who conveys aspects of both femininity and masculinity in terms of her gender performance, but a gender across or between the two in terms of her identity. This space of entry to the text and to a gender discourse can be classified as a trans space.

The first way this scene "differentiat[es]" a trans Georgette from previous drag representations is through television codes that construct her with interdeterminate dress. The dress codes used to convey her as transgender go further than even Butler describes, for they neither represent conventions of drag nor are assignable solely to categories of either femininity or masculinity. On the one hand, Georgette's dress encourages a feminine reading (a towel wrapped around her head). Other feminine markers can also be read from the scene. For example, just before the conversation transcribed above, Provenza is disgusted that he has to pick up after Georgette around the house. She has left a ladies' jacket on the couch, a pair of woman's sandals by the sofa, and her nightgown and white lace panties lay on the floor outside the bathroom door. To inject comedy into the storyline and to play off opposites by having one character experience discomfort in his ex-partner's now female identity, Provenza picks up Georgette's panties with his handkerchief while expressing a scowl on his face.

Additionally, just before their conversation, Provenza had read a two-page newspaper spread featuring eight different pictures of Osgood, which Pope has advertised with the heading: "Have you ever seen this woman?"[493] That image marks the third comparison between Osgood and Georgette in the episode. The first was the two-shot of the women and the second was the reference to them as menaces—a loaded term meant to connote both as a particular (read: negative) type of woman, but a woman no less. The newspaper advertisement codes Georgette as female (rather than through drag conventions), as does the strewn clothing, and, finally, as the opposite of Provenza's male. Those different markers of femininity and masculinity are laid down early in the scene so that they can be interrogated as the scene progresses, and gender binaries fade into interdeterminacy by the end of the scene.

After reading the paper, Provenza joins Georgette in the bathroom. He finds her patting her face with a makeup sponge—an action visible to viewers off-screen and to Provenza on-screen. But for the only time in the episode her makeup is invisible to the naked eye. Additionally, as she has on other occasions, she greets him with "Louie," a term of endearment that, as mentioned, he allows only his ex-wife to use. They are ostensibly presented as a heterosexual husband and wife—her yin to his yang—and in the middle of a spat over her picking up for herself around the house. He is articulating what he wants her to do; and she is articulating why she will not do it.

In a sequence of tightly framed close-up shot and counter-shots, Georgette and Provenza's faces act as portraits, wherein viewers can easily identify their similarities in male bone structure and masculine features such as bushy eyebrows. Their skin is also akin (and distinguishable from women's) for its porous, rough texture of male middle age. Unlike the level of ostentation previously displayed in drag clothing—bright messy lipstick and gaudy makeup—this scene invites viewers to explore Georgette's former and present identities at once including masculine markers of skin texture and physique that are made difficult to read because they appear together, and, moreover, are obscured by an interdeterminate style of dressing. The most telling feature of her present attire is her white robe, which is no different from one a man would wear. As she delivers these lines: "I look different;" "I'm not a man anymore, which means I don't pee standing up;" "I wear a dress instead of a suit;" "I walk differently;" "I've changed how I do a lot of things, but not what's in my heart," she is dressed in a white robe and a white towel that do not signify either category of the binary code.[494] And, as such, she is unmistakably constructed as transgender for the only time in the episode.

These discursive conventions invite viewers to negotiate Georgette's gender interdeterminacy, even if they did not expect to do so in watching a series that promotes itself as a fun, lightweight, police procedural. Having been drawn to the program for its genre, they may have preferred not to do so; but the smart serial design encodes dominant messages along a spectrum of belief systems in regard to the relationship between gender and sex, and these are indisputably interdeterminate moments. The transgender image of Georgette "has the force to disperse the univocity of the paternal signifier and seemingly to create the possibility of other cultural expressions no longer tightly constrained by the law of non-contradiction."[495] Because Georgette's image in this scene illustrates the "divergence, breakage, splinter, and fragmentation as part of the often tortuous process of democratization" of gender, it forces viewers "to acknowledge its contradictions and take action with those contractions intact."[496] It offers a serious treatise on transgender persons and transgender issues, while exploring gender outside its binary frame.

This scene is more impacting than that, even, for it speaks to another dimension of gender criticism and queer literary theory, which asserts that a character's sexual orientation must be considered to get the full meaning of a narrative. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues,

> What constitute[s] coming out for [a] man, in this situation, [is] to use about himself the phrase 'coming out'—to mention . . . com[ing] out to someone else. . . .' I am out, therefore I am,' is meant to do for the wearer, not the constative work of reporting that s/her *is* out, but the performative work of coming out in the first place. . . . Silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech, in relations around the closet, depends on and highlights more broadly the fact that ignorance is as potent and as multiple a thing there is as knowledge.[497]

In this scene, Georgette essentially comes out. No longer represented via the conventions of drag and cross-dressing, she is now made queer[498] via interdeterminate dress and authentic dialogue that temporarily empowers Georgette to define her own identity. By enunciating her

sexuality along with her gender, she not only performs as transgender but as a lesbian, and thereby forces Provenza on-screen, and viewers off-screen, to take her up as a lesbian transfemale.

Deconstructing multiple oppressive systems at once helps to expose, decenter, and destabilize binary frameworks for thinking about gender and sexuality. As Sedgwick argues, "A deconstructive understanding of these binarisms makes it possible to identify them as sites that are *peculiarly* densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation—through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition, or more succinctly, the double bind."[499] Unpacking Georgette's gender and sexuality as a "double bind" destabilizes the binary frames of thinking about both systems.[500] It also grants power to Georgette to define for and speak for herself. No longer accepting of the discursive authority of patriarchy over both sexuality and gender, her speech now treats transgender and lesbian issues on a level of seriousness that goes beyond their usefulness as comic fodder undergirding a cross-dressing plot.

As Butler argues, "the queer appropriation of the performative mimes and exposes both the binding power of the heterosexualizing law *and its expropriability*."[501] Georgette, made queer, is no longer undermined. She exposes and expands the binary of gender. And, finally, forces an ideological interrogation of her transgender life and the day-to-day professional and personal difficulties encountered by transgender people when trying to be themselves. That textual moment is instrumental in exploring how her appearance, words, and behaviors are offered to appeal to viewers looking for more progressive images and themes. And how, although those textual moments may challenge some viewers more than either drag representations or a cross-dressing plot, they do the same producerly work of conventional

representations.[502] That is, they offer multiple entry points to a text smartly designed to encourage mass viewership and thus achieve popular appeal.

Chapter Four:
Three Ways of Looking Beyond the Male Gaze without Losing Mass Appeal: The Pseudofeminist Man, the Postfeminist, and the Protofeminist Heroine in TNT's *The Closer*

Introduction

This chapter reads a single episode of TNT's *The Closer*, "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly."[503] It examines how the codes of gender represent three modes of looking at woman beyond the "male gaze."[504] This analysis is useful in exploring the productive, dynamic relationship between multiple looking arrangements and the appeal of popular television. Within a single episode, the television codes (as spelled out by John Fiske and reviewed by me in Chapters One and Three) operate to move the plot forward while enabling or constraining viewing positions inscribed in technical codes that toggle between the dominant objectifying male gaze, a female appropriation of it, a feminist critique of it, and the ultimate restoration of it by scene's and by episode's end. Through camera work and editing techniques as well as storytelling devices, the codes of "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly" construct three ways of looking beyond the male gaze. This analysis enters into a discussion with feminist visual cultural scholars since the 1970s, including Laura Mulvey, to explore the nature and aims of codes that offer multiple constructions of the gaze in an effort to attract viewers more and less critical of objectifying women on screen.[505] An additional benefit of this investigation is that it extends many conceptions of the cinema apparatus to the television apparatus. This reframing is useful in arguing that Mulvey's concept of the dominating, objectifying male gaze, originally conceived in relation to classical Hollywood films of the 1950s, is productive in explaining the conventions of popular television, and the process by which ideology functions through television as an ideological state apparatus. Investigating how subversive ideologies challenge

that objectifying male gaze at points throughout the episode is equally critical, however, in answering the core question of this dissertation.

To this end, I draw on Mulvey but place her theories in conversation with others in conceptualizing and unpacking the dynamic relationship among the gaze as an apparatus, different types of spectatorship in operation while interpreting various modes of looking, and serial design popularity. Closely analyzing four looking arrangements as a framework for theorizing how the gaze operates in a single episode of *The Closer*, I broaden the scope of Mulvey who narrowly interprets spectatorship and conceives of the work of the gaze as always male, and as operating solely in the practice of cinema as an ideological state apparatus (as spelled out by Althusser and reviewed by me in Chapters One and Three). I find that it has this ideological function at the end of each scene and at the conclusion of the episode. But, in moments throughout the episode, viewers experience different modes of gazing in relation to the dominant one. Drawing primarily on Fiske's conception of the multiplicity of meanings in encoded and decoded messages, I theorize more complicated looking arrangements between images and viewers of a text designed with polysemy in mind.

Fiske argues that the ideological limits of the text are "proscribed and not infinite; the text does not determine its meaning so much as delimit the arena of the struggle for that meaning by marking the terrain within which its variety of readings can be negotiated."[506] Within that contested space, viewers are presented with multiple opportunities to experience various ways of seeing through conventional and nonconventional codes that differently portray women. Christine Gledhill, following from Fiske, asserts that not only is there a range of subject positions made available to viewers, but, moreover, that viewers may switch between and among subject positions in the process of reading a text. Exploring how dominant and subversive

ideologies are conveyed in television codes beyond those more often studied (codes of narrative, plot, and characterization) enables me to illustrate how camera and editing codes are also polysemic in form. Although the work of television as an ideological state apparatus is to inscribe viewer-subjects in ideology by scene's and episode's end, my analysis of *The Closer*'s model of serial design explores how far a program may go in moments within scenes and across an episode in delivering nonnormative representations of woman on screen while remaining appealing to middle-American viewers.[507]

Theoretical Frameworks of the Gaze

This chapter considers the gaze of the camera and editing techniques as representative of the ways in which the program relates to a wider demographic, yet attends to industrial and audience limitations of a basic cable primetime procedural. A traditional mode of looking is a productive process assumed to reassure the imagined middle-American spectator conditioned since the first theatrical films of the early twentieth century to read those generic narrative techniques as typifying classic Hollywood cinema. The status of the dominating male gaze as the standard-bearer, the conventional mode of looking processes in filmmaking is directly related to the nature of media as a superstructure—a conceptual structure developed from patriarchy. It is also related to the association between subjectification and ideology, and their roles in relation to media as an ideological state apparatus (as spelled out by Althusser and reviewed by me in Chapters One and Three). To relate Althusser's understanding of this interpellative process to the concept of the dominating gaze, spectators first practice the tenets of 'woman as object,' and then become model capital-S subjects—that is, the structural possibility of subjecthood and the social position that subjects fill—by adhering to the rules that woman, as object, is subjected to,

and, as such, objectifying.[508] Viewers may be under the illusion that they choose their beliefs freely and consciously and, as such, can at will read a woman on screen as subject rather than as object. But, following from Marx's theory of superstructures, Althusser argues that subjects locate in those belief systems unconsciously. To be inscribed in ideology is to be inscribed in its practices: the means of production of conveying woman as object. The television apparatus as an interpellative practice produces dominant meanings and positions spectatorial subjects; and the ideological reproduction of that notion of woman as object operates through the dominant gaze due to its conventional ideological status.

Similar to signification, the gaze works as a binary of opposites. In Chapter Three, I explored the binary of gender in relation to the transgender figure. In this chapter, I examine the binary of the gaze. According to Mulvey, this binary framework operates as the "male gaze," which structures the look and its bearer, or the woman as object ("the image") and the "man as bearer of the look."[509] In all binary structures, power rests on one side. That is, one side of the binary is privileged, dominating, and normative, while the other side is subjugated and aberrant. In regard to the male gaze, the position of power lies with the bearer of the look: the man. The binary framework of the gaze—not only one conceived as male, but any model of the gaze—by definition constructs the visual field as the terrain of seeing. It encompasses not only the side of the binary that is seeing, but the side that is being seen. Considering the entirety of the visual field as a framework of analysis, rather than only the image, is productive to feminist media analysis for the ways it enables an examination of the relationships between subjects and objects within the frame and also that of spectators to on-screen images.

The opportunities in studying the male gaze without placing it in conversation with other theories of the gaze and gazing processes must be weighed against the problematics of doing so.

The male gaze as a theoretical conjecture has come to be regarded as almost too narrowly focused, too exclusively associated with Mulvey and her particular understanding of the voyeuristic process which the male gaze entails, the privileged (read: coercive) position of mainstream Hollywood cinema, and the power of surveillance over women structured on one side of the proverbial two-way mirror being objectified by a dominating man (or someone looking from his point of view) on the other side.

As E. Ann Kaplan argues, what "perpetuates" the "oppression of women" in the gazing process may not be "the masculinity of the gaze . . . but the construction of binaries such as male/female, signifier/signified, or active/passive that are inherent in patriarchy."[510] I follow from Mulvey and Kaplan in understanding that the reproductive power of the gaze rests in the implications of patriarchal ideology. I understand that media as an ideological state apparatus functions to inscribe viewers in ideology. And it satisfies its mandate by returning to television codes that construct the male gaze at the end of scenes and at the end of an episode. But it is productive to ask other questions around the conception of the gaze and the process of gazing including: What happens within scenes or across episodes, before subjects are reinscribed in ideology at scene's and episode's end? During those in-between moments, are other conceptions of the gaze observable through textual analysis? Even in such moments when the narrative is conveyed through the male gaze, are other approaches useful in theorizing how competing messages impact the relationship between spectatorship and women constructed as objects and men as bearers of the look? Are there observable instances wherein those looking arrangements are exaggerated, even brazen, which make visible the contradictions in ideology, and, as such, become ripe for critique of the dominant male gaze or (temporary) rejection of a dominant male mode of looking? Marx notes that such exceptions are possible, and Gramsci develops the

concept of hegemony to explain the terrain within which hegemony is always contested, always contingent on the exercise of social power at any given sociohistorical moment. I undertake an examination of the gaze to argue that Mulvey is right in the last instance—that is, the dominant gaze in the cinematic apparatus (and by extension the television apparatus) is male, and, moreover, inscribes subjects in patriarchal ideology. But, at points in the text, other gazing processes are potentially in operation. I explore different gazing modes, both dominant and subordinate, as they pertain to the entire visual field that constitutes the social act of looking, to better conceptualize how the gaze works not only to reinscribe ideology but to critique it.

Religious visual culture scholar David Morgan conceptualizes the elements of the gaze that act as parameters, all of which must be addressed, if scholars are to adequately comprehend the complicated gazing process. He writes:

> The concept of gaze . . . consists of several parts: a viewer, fellow viewers, the subject of their viewing, the context of setting of the subject, and the rules that govern the particular relationship between viewers and subject. These rules, implicit in a given genre of imagery and the occasion on which an image is viewed, stipulate conditions such as the subject's knowledge of being seen, what the viewer can expect from the act of seeing, whether the viewer can be seen looking at the subject, and whether other viewers can see the subject for themselves. Protocols also urge appropriate demeanor, gesture, and response among viewers. For instance, on certain occasions one should yell or sigh or cry or keep silent. The rules outlining suitable behavior are learned and therefore they can change over time along with the style, prestige, appeal, and authority of images.[511]

Each element that Morgan highlights to a greater or lesser extent structures the looking arrangements within the frame and between viewers and screen images. This is what Morgan conceptualizes as "the social and cultural embeddedness of seeing."[512] In this chapter, I explore four viewing positions that differently situate the many components of the gaze that Morgan enunciates. I investigate the viewing practices and looking arrangements associated with each in respect to how women are depicted as screen images, and the different ways that spectators may

decode various gazing processes and render the messages of camera and editing codes meaningful.

Mulvey's Conception of the Male Gaze and "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

In her landmark 1975 essay, Mulvey criticizes the patriarchal nature of mainstream Hollywood cinema. Drawing on psychoanalytic accounts of cinema's ideological apparatus, she argues that film, as a popular cultural form, operates to reinforce ruling class ideologies and reaffirm dynamics of existing power relations. She theorizes that spectators of the cinema apparatus articulate the unconscious male desire to objectify and dominate women. The mechanics of representation—the technical codes of cinema that include technology, camera movements, and editing techniques—are produced to represent reality. Within a spectatorial event, the cinema apparatus puts the spectator in a masculine subject position and positions the female screen image as object of desire who is coded with a "to-be-looked-at-ness."[513] This looking arrangement and ideological process she conceives of as "the male gaze."[514]

Her conceptions extend Althusser's theory of the ideological state apparatus to the realm of film. Their similar ideological practices enables her to describe mainstream Hollywood film as reaffirming dominant male ideology. Because the spectacle (the woman as image) creates the spectator (bearer of the look) as subject, and not the other way around, the spectator is created and subjected at the same time. This is not dissimilar to a process that Althusser explores, wherein the individual becomes a subject when he finds himself in the ideology of the text. He argues that ideology is knowable through its practice, or its apparatus, which "hails or interpellates *concrete individuals as concrete subjects*."[515] As Mulvey explains the ideological practices of film: "Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera

movements (determined by the action of the protagonist), combined with invisible editing (demanded by realism) all tend to blur the limits of screen space. The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action."[516] Those codes of realism that Mulvey identifies mirror Althusser's conception of the imaginary reality—that is, the relations of the conditions of existence as represented in ideology rather than the real world. Realism operates to disguise the ideological function of the elements including woman as object, man as bearer of the look, and spectator as capital-S subject. The cinema apparatus positions the spectator "into the site of the transcendental subject, a socially constructed position of identity through which the spectator comes to understand the world and his place in it."[517]

Mulvey also considers how mainstream Hollywood films supplement meaning through the use of codes and conventions that drive ideological reproduction. Through a simple combination of shots, the cinema apparatus creates an addition idea above and beyond that which is depicted—of woman as object. Mulvey argues: "A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude."[518] The dominant meanings of the film together with the way the viewing subject is constructed and the mechanics of the actual production of making the film—that is, frame by frame, and cut by cut—affect the representations and roles of the subject and the object. Film as a cinema apparatus operates to keep gender power asymmetrical in film as it does in patriarchy.

In her later 1981 article, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," Mulvey broadens her conception of the gaze and addresses some of the problems with her earlier article, namely a narrowly defined singular gazing process as

always male, Caucasian, dominating, etc.[519] Six years after writing her signature piece, she explores an exception to her conception of the way the gaze operates. Female spectators do have the opportunity to shift positions, she argues, in the form of alternating between a connection with the female object as passive and the male subject as active. When the spectator is positioned in this gazing process, she oscillates between a male-coded and a female-coded viewing position, which Mulvey refers to metaphorically as transvestite. Although she writes of the discomfort in occupying this viewing position and likens it to a female spectator wearing "borrowed transvestite clothes," her identification of a female viewing position—and as such a female subjectivity (albeit one masquerading as male)—offers the possibility of an alternative gazing process to the only one she originally conceived: that of the omnipresent, dominating male. This evolution in her theorization is useful in analyzing three alternative viewing positions read in the textual analysis of a single episode in this chapter, and one in particular in the form of a female spectator on screen who is repulsed, early on, in participating in the objectification of other women, yet later drawn to that objectification process herself—even entertained by it. Later still, she enjoys being positioned as the image, the spectacle, in scenes in which she is the object of men's desire, the image that men gaze upon. By enunciating the viewing position of the transvestite, and placing her in conversation with the omnipresent male gaze, Mulvey offers alternative approaches to understanding how spectatorship might be negotiated in moments of the text, even if, in the final moments, they are denied.

By evolving in her reading of the possibilities of the gaze, and contending that subjects can switch between subject positions in the process of reading a text, she makes a theoretical connection with scholars who similarly conceptualize those gazing possibilities including Gledhill and Fiske. This change in positioning warrants placing her in conversation with other

feminist visual cultural scholars since the 1970s. Around the time of her "Afterthoughts" article, in the 1980s and 1990s, Fiske, Gledhill, and other cultural scholars were developing the field of cultural studies to further complicate the understanding of film and television as sites of hegemonic contestation between dominant and subordinate ideologies. The sophistication of Hall's encoding and decoding models put forward during the same period adds to that discussion. Their viewpoints taken in context of one another open up possibilities for resistant readings of dominant encodings in observable moments of the text. In the next section, I position Mulvey in conversation with feminist visual cultural scholars since the 1970s to contextualize how other gazing processes are possible (notwithstanding media as an ideological state apparatus), and, moreover, how these alternative modes are conceptualized by her contemporaries: E. Ann Kaplan, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Jackie Stacey, and Linda Williams, who conceptualize how far away from the concept of the male gaze a text can go.[520]

Contextualizing Mulvey's Theoretical Frameworks of the Gaze: Feminist Visual Culture Scholarship Since the 1970s

Film and television scholars since the 1970s have challenged Laura Mulvey's conception of the male gaze for its ability to explore the complex looking arrangements of images and spectators in relation to contemporary screen practices. Yet her psychoanalytic approaches to studying screen images and their relations to spectatorship are useful in forming a throughline to scholars who conceive of less male-centric approaches to understanding spectatorship in relation to the gaze. Mulvey draws on the ideas of Freud to argue that objectifying women on-screen "satisfies a primordial wish for pleasure looking, but it goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect."[521] Scopophilia is the instinctual drive to look at other people as objects, and the pleasure and sense of power derived from looking. Narcissistic scopophilia is looking at

other people and seeing them as surrogates for oneself. By examining these processes in relation to screen practices, Mulvey ostensibly addresses the duality of looking/being looked at in all spectators in her historical model.

On the one hand, she does an exemplary job of unpacking the heteronormative male gaze, explaining that male spectators escape into voyeurism or fetishism in order to assuage the castration anxiety they experience in looking at so-called castrated (women's) bodies on-screen. But she fails to address the female spectator's gaze as independent from the male's, or to upset heteronormative hegemony by textualizing the body outside the binary framework of gender. This chapter attempts to explore the ways that women on screen are encoded as both objects and subjects in moments of the text, but also how such looking arrangements are contained at the end of every scene and every episode to appeal to a mass audience more interested in taking up the conventions of procedural dramas and its inherent reliance on the male gaze, than in interrogating on-screen gender constructions in a contemporary context.

Scholars including E. Ann Kaplan,[522] Kaja Silverman,[523] Teresa de Lauretis,[524] and Jackie Stacey[525] object to conceptualizing the gaze in only one way—that is, from the male point of view, and, hence, as the male gaze. Kaplan and Silverman argue that the conception of the gaze should not be sexed, since the gaze can be taken up by women and men. Moreover, a female spectator is not always passive, nor a male spectator always in control in the process of gazing. De Lauretis adds that either sexed spectator has the potential to read against the grain of the gaze. Stacey goes the furthest in objecting to the heteronormative limitations of Mulvey's argument for the male gaze, since it offers only two distinct modes of gazing, neither of which accounts for the reading positions of spectators who self-identify as neither heterosexual nor as male or female. Considered together, these scholars expand Mulvey's notion of the male gaze,

envisioning multiple forms of cultural power in operation when women are reproduced visually on-screen, and when female, non-cisgendered, and non-heterosexual spectators experience pleasure in looking and being looked at within this process.

Beyond the heteronormative and the male-centric limitations of her model of the male gaze, Mulvey's hypothesis that a woman in the frame always already connotes a "to-be-look-at-ness" must also be reexamined in relation to cultural power. Unlike her theory that such visual reproductions serve only to establish women as objects of male desire and visual pleasure, a passive positioning that prevents women on-screen and viewers off-screen from producing or even benefiting from being looked at, television codes are often organized into coherence and social acceptability by ideological codes more in line with Kaplan's and Silverman's theories, but only temporarily. That is, women can experience power by being looked at on-screen, and viewers off-screen can benefit from looking but also from being looked at in moments when they choose to occupy the objectified women's images. Yet the text ultimately returns to the male gaze. To better understand contemporary looking arrangements that offer viewers (more and less critical of the male gaze) moments of entry into the text, it is useful to take up the arguments of Linda Williams and Kaja Silverman in conversation with Mulvey. Together, they offer a sounder theoretical positioning from which to explore how television codes target mass appeal by establishing women not only as objects of the male gaze, but also—intermittently and temporarily—as inhabitors, appropriators, or feminist critics of it.

An expansion of Mulvey's model of the male gaze is necessary for scholars to theorize the design of a text that presents multiple points of entry and identification with potentially feminist characters including Brenda as well as male characters Detective Sergeant Gabriel and Mr. Watson, but also detectives including Lieutenants Provenza and Flynn who certainly are not.

Offering viewers on any spectrum of feminism a place suggests that a range of viewers will be recognized into the text. As Linda Williams argues, "Film feminisms"—and I would extend that to include television feminisms—"have indeed become a more heterogeneous, dynamic, and contested set of concepts and practices" since the days of classic Hollywood filmmaking.[526] She calls on scholars to conceptualize the gaze not as attributable, solely, to a "perhaps too clearly identifiable patriarchal villain,"[527] and to examine it from outside "orthodox feminist position taking"—that is, the gaze as male.[528] Responding to Williams' manifesto is useful in developing a more elastic model of interpreting both the polysemic meanings encoded, and the multiple readings decoded, in contemporary screen/viewing practices.

Kaja Silverman answers to William's call by offering a model that upsets the subject-object dichotomy of Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. In an interview, she states:

> I don't know how we managed for so long to think that women don't want to be looked at, or that there is no agency or pleasure in being seen. We all want to be seen. Indeed, we need to be seen—not only by the gaze, but by other human beings. Of course, what we want is not just any look, but rather one which finds beauty in the colour of our hair, the arch of our calf and the way we move our hands when we speak. What we want is the look which allows us to shine. The look confers the radiance when it responds to our solicitation.[529]

In attending to the duality of seeing and being seen within gaze theory, Silverman moves beyond the limitations of Mulvey's original model on three levels. First, she puts the experience of being seen on par with that of looking, and, moreover, defends both processes as acceptable, even human—that is, psychologically necessary. Second, she argues that "the seen . . . initiates visuality . . . not the seer," thereby extending both agency and pleasure to women reproduced visually.[530] In other words, the nexus of power emanates from the seen person—the observed subject—who solicits the gaze of the onlooker. And, the final step in this process, she contends,

is when the seen returns the look back, a perspective that conceptualizes the gaze as circular, rather than as bidirectional, in form.

Her model unsettles the isolated, privileged position of viewers in the gazing process. By defining the seen and the seer, dually, as subject and as object of the other, Silverman provides a jumping off point from Mulvey's original conception that there exists only one gaze, and it is male. Silverman offers a framework for better conceptualizing the complex, contemporary looking relations of screen images and of screen spectators. Moreover, in affirming that (at least some) cultural power rests on the side of the objectified image, Silverman provides a model for exploring a text with more viewing, subject, and object positions, how television codes are polysemic in form, and the ways that viewers are invited to occupy different viewer and viewed positions. However, it also raises the question of whether Silverman extends too much agency to the seen. For the power of being seen is contingent on a structure within which the gaze is in fact constituted as male, and power and subjectivity is assigned to masculinity precisely in the moment of perception. In this chapter, I apply Silverman's model in addition to Mulvey's. I explore how the single episode of *The Closer* "You Have a Right to Remain Jolly" contests and disrupts the codes by which conventional Hollywood narrative devices objectify women, and how they, as Silverman argues, upset the subject-object dichotomy of the dominant male gaze—and the temporary benefits and limitations in that process for both audience and text.[531] I also examine how television codes are contained by those expanded looking arrangements, through textual analysis that unpacks how conventional representations of masculinity and femininity, within the codes, construct three ways of looking beyond the male gaze to negotiate characters, ideological themes, and viewers. I also attend to the temporary condition of the representation of

woman as subject in a popular television series, and, for this reason, how Mulvey's model of the gaze remains productive.

Three Ways of Looking Beyond the Male Gaze: The Pseudofeminist Man, the Postfeminist, and the Protofeminist Heroine

In the textual analysis of this chapter, I first explore a type of man, namely, the pseudofeminist man, who (to a certain degree) is critical of the sexual objectification of women for male visual pleasure, yet acts as a voyeur within that process. Second, I explore a type of postfeminist woman who inhabits the male gaze due to her voluntary desire "to be looked at."[532] Although this position is at odds with a feminist critique of the male gaze according to Mulvey, Silverman would argue that it offers viewers (including women) the opportunity to temporarily locate in (and even find a degree of agency within) the objectified women's images. Thirdly, I examine a type of protofeminist heroine—the female protagonist—who emerges in order to succeed where the pseudofeminist man and the postfeminist woman have failed.

I use the word "proto" as a prefix to remark that the protofeminist heroine has the power to challenge and reverse the objectifying male gaze. She holds out the possibility of—indeed the promise of—feminism throughout. But the television codes compromise and contain her within a framework of feminist possibility in episodes leading up to the series finale. Establishing a protofeminist heroine as the best choice among a variety of options, and then compromising and containing her in episodes over the series' run, is an important component of *The Closer*'s model of popular serial design. In "You Have a Right to Remain Jolly," such feminist containment is encoded in the television codes that reassert the objectifying male gaze at scene's and episode's end. I am careful in using the term "heroine." A feminist heroine who would save other women is not a feminist heroine at all. Feminism is not about empowering one woman to work on

behalf of others, but about working towards empowering all women—and not only women but all subjugated—to actively fight and to ultimately alter the patriarchal structures that bind them. The protofeminist heroine typically represents feminist promise over the run of *The Closer*, and only in the series finale does she realize a feminist practice and effectively alter the patriarchal structures that have authoritatively dominated her. At the same time, she empowers others to subvert their disenfranchisement (as I will explore in the Conclusion). Her function, thus, is on the one hand to assuage the anxieties of imagined middle-American viewers in episodes leading up to the finale, and on the other hand to live up to her promise as both a feminist and a heroine in the finale. Because *The Closer* is a serial designed to appeal to the many, it is useful to explore how structuring an episode with multiple looking arrangements offers a model of television production that creates spaces for feminist critique, which is alluring to viewers interested in watching more agentic representations of women on television, but then contains looking arrangements, ultimately, to remain palatable to the widest possible demographic.

Method

I use a Fiskean methodological approach (as spelled out by Fiske, reviewed by me in Chapter One, and taken up in this chapter and Chapter Three) to explore the complicated relationship between the technical codes of camera, editing, and composition, and the ideological codes of gender and power operating in *The Closer*. His method enables me to denaturalize the complex looking arrangements of a contemporary police procedural by analyzing the codes of camera and editing. Through such a framework of analysis, I precisely identify a multiplicity of subject positions with regard to contemporary camera and editing techniques. I explore how the codes of one scene, and then one episode, disrupt the power dynamics of the male gaze by

positioning non-protagonist women as inhabitors or appropriators of it, and the protagonist as the vehicle for a temporary feminist critique of it. These techniques ultimately work to contain the promise of feminism, but are necessary conventions of a genre—crime television—which, similar to the genre of film noir, offers an established grammar that relies on the male gaze to entertain viewers.

It is useful to explore other looking arrangements that offer temporary relief of the male gaze since they explain readings by viewers who locate in multiple entry points to the text. That said, the most progressive images—those that reverse the male gaze temporarily and position a woman as subject (rather than as object)—ultimately fail to countermand the power of a dominant male gaze. By the end of each scene and the end of the episode, the text returns power over the narrative to a male character who saves the day and reverts to a masculine form of address. Moreover, the camera and editing codes return to the male gaze in visually reproducing women including the protagonist acting as the protofeminist 'heroine.' The expanded number of looking arrangements on offer in the single episode "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly" attend to Silverman's and other feminist visual cultural scholar's concerns about theorizing a single male gaze, but they also illustrate the ways that Mulvey's theory of the male gaze remains productive. The textual analysis of this chapter reaffirms the gaze as an apparatus and as a tool of patriarchal ideology and, thus, the standard-bearer and key agent of the television apparatus.

Case Study: Three Ways of Looking beyond the Male Gaze in a Single Scene

To explore how television codes work together to produce three ways of looking that temporarily unsettle the male gaze and then return to it in a single scene, this section provides a case study of an eight-minute scene in "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," in which a perpetrator is suspected of sabotaging the zip line that led to Santa Randy's death as he was

making his entrance to the North Pole Village. After examining the crime scene, Brenda questions the leading suspect, proprietor Santa Jack MacBride. She prematurely ends her interrogation when a loud ruckus emanates outside the Village. She then returns to the crime scene only to find it overrun with what can be conceived of as scantily-clad female elves wrestling over a sack, and the male detectives of Major Crimes doing little to disentangle the women or quell the feud.

Carmen: He would have wanted me to have it.
Lisa: He was my husband, you slut.
Carmen: He doesn't love you anymore.
Detective Sergeant Gabriel: Drop the bag.
Carmen: It's all legally mine.
Gabriel: Ladies.
Detective Sanchez is chuckling, looking well entertained by the scene. The women's breasts bob up and down as they struggle over Santa's bag of loot.
Lisa: Not yours.
Lisa, the victim's widow, pounces on her late husband's mistress, Carmen, and wrestles her to the ground. A third female elf—also suspected of having an affair with the late Santa Randy—jumps on top of Lisa.
Detective Lieutenant Flynn: Girls, come on, knock it off.
Gabriel: Ladies, come on.
Gabriel takes a step towards the women, but Detective Lieutenant Provenza holds him back.
Detective Lieutenant Provenza: Gabriel, give them a sec. One of them might say something incriminating.
Gabriel: Ahhh.
Provenza smirks while continuing to watch the elves wrestle. Gabriel puts his hands on his hips. But, after a beat, he turns back his head to watch.[533]

Several aspects of the women's representations in this scene offer opportunities to explore how gender operates in the technical codes of camera and editing, and, moreover, how the female gender is organized into coherence and social acceptability by ideological codes of class. First, dialogue suggests that the female elves are money-grubbing and even sexist. Their rude behavior and nasty insults are grounded in gender, for example, Lisa calling Carmen a "slut" and Detective Lieutenant Flynn calling the women "girls." The female elves are also represented as interchangeable, in spite of their different social statuses as wife or as mistress. Third, class is

displaced onto gender, as evidenced by the relative state of undress of the female elves and their fully dressed professional counterparts in Brenda and Civilian Officer Buzz Watson's sister, Cassie Watson. Finally, humorous moments of the plot partially disguise the gaze of the camera, which conveys a sexist mode of looking.

The action of the scene works to draw attention away from the objectifying male gaze. By beginning the scene with the female elves wrestling over a sack, the plotline features competition among women, which is a direct challenge to female solidarity. Such ideological containment works to the advantage of popular serial design on two levels. Ideologically, viewers are brought into the world of the elves portrayed as more and less acceptable types of women: the wife, a loveless but legal heir; the mistress, the adored "slut." Rather than debunking such gender and social role stereotypes, the text benefits from featuring these genre conventions. Second, such devices are used to recuperate a patriarchal mode of looking. Camera and editing codes manipulate viewers into looking at the women as objects, and keep them stimulated as long as possible with an action-packed storyline designed to titillate certain viewers. This process of conflating gender, morality, and class by visually establishing the women as 'scantily clad' elves—wives and mistresses together, jostling over a sack of loot—confirms ideology as neutral and action as story-driven, when, in fact, both are constructed within a conceptual framework for understanding how femininity and masculinity operate in popular culture, and how camera and editing codes work to naturalize that ideological process.


4.1[534]


4.2[535]


4.3[536]

Unpacking the detectives differing reactions to the scene illustrates the way television codes foreground action but also a humorous plot in naturalizing an interpellative process that genders and classes characters and viewers. The nature and aim of the gazing process is important to evaluate, since television constructs viewers as subjects, but also characters as subjects of the text. After the lateral pan, the editing cuts to a medium-wide shot of the women fighting. The composition draws your eye to an elf's breasts, which bob up and down in the center of the frame. Detectives Sergeant Gabriel and Detective Lieutenant Provenza appear half-hearted in their attempts to quell the drama. Provenza is the least embarrassed by his enjoyment in watching the female elves wrestle. He and Gabriel try, initially, to separate the women, but seemingly only so that onlookers and their more chivalrous colleagues, including Detective Lieutenant Michael Tao and Buzz Watson, witness them endeavoring to do their jobs. Moreover, when Gabriel attempts to intervene for a second time, Provenza stops him, saying: "Gabriel, give them a sec. One of them might say something incriminating," and then he laughs.[537] These characters act as agents of both the narrative and the viewers. Within the narrative, their apathy and reluctance to stop the fighting prolongs the spectacle for detectives and bystanders on-screen. In relation to the audience, their tête-à-tête provides humorous character moments that distract from the objectifying gaze of the camera and operate to keep patriarchal modes of looking intact longer. Such a process works to assuage the anxieties of some conservative viewers, while provoking feminist outrage in others.

A Pseudofeminist Man and a Postfeminist Woman Emerge


4.4[538]


4.5[539]


4.6[540]

Although *The Closer* is a police procedural, and its core viewership likely expects misogynist overtones in its themes and a male point of view in its camera and editing work, the series is designed with a female protagonist in order to interrogate these genre conventions. Detective Julio Sanchez serves as the throughline of the male gaze. The *mise-en-scene* constructs Sanchez as apathetic, as it had Gabriel and Provenza, when he laughs and does nothing but grin while watching the women wrestle on the ground. But two contestations of the gaze are offered in the background of this shot when Watson and Casey walk forward in the frame. Both look uncomfortable with what they see, but keep their eyes glued to the action. Watson acts, first, as the critical stand-in for feminist angst. When the camera pulls focus, he mouths, "What is this?"[541] He looks as if he is going to intervene while others stand by complacent. The camera establishes his atypical response in relation to Detectives Flynn, Provenza, Gabriel, and Sanchez. Watson's criticism is conveyed not only in his disapproving expression, but also in his actions when he throws his hand up in disgust. Watson's discomfort in the objectification of women via the gazes of onlookers offers the first alternative point of view to the dominating male gaze in the scene.

In Watson's character, the text creates a type of man, what I call the pseudofeminist man, and allows him to emerge, for the moment, to partially disrupt patriarchal modes of looking. As the camera disguises the apparatus of the gaze, so here the pseudofeminist man disguises the politics of representation. This archetypal character is a man who, to a certain degree, is

committed to equality. He steps in, temporarily, to represent feminist angst when women are being objectified in the television codes of the text. But, he later acts as a voyeur, abandoning this worthy goal. Because he fails to act as a precursor to liberation, and ultimately holds out no possibility of feminist change, I refer to him as a "pseudo-" rather than a "proto-" feminist character.

Undermining the Postfeminist Woman

Popular serial design structures television codes that return to the typical gazing conventions of the police procedural in order to satisfy expectations of core fans of the genre, as well as assuage the anxieties of imagined middle-American viewers. As explored in Chapter One, middle-American viewers hold conservative values on social issues; reside more so in the heartland, small towns, or suburbia; have middle- or working-class jobs and incomes and education levels around the national average.[542] They are targeted as a block of viewers by broadcast and basic cable networks, since big box advertisers market primarily to this demographic, and non-premium providers rely on advertising to (at least partially) cover production and distribution costs. Due to these industrial limitations, broadcast and basic cable series offer content that appeals foremost to this demographic.

As is the case with all viewers who want to be comforted during some moments and challenged at others, these viewers are wooed with narrative devises meant to titillate, but they must feel comfortable enough to return to the series week after week. To meet these competing industrial and audience needs, by the end of a scene or an episode, the text reverts to the genre conventions expected of a mass viewership. In this scene, Watson's previous critical expression and offensive stance are contained by Casey acting as the second archetypal character, the

postfeminist woman. Due to her gender, viewers may expect Casey to take offense at the visual objectification of women, and even more so at the detectives' apparent exploitation of it. Casey initially appears as uncomfortable as Watson had. But her disapproving expression dissipates as she watches the brawl in the cutaway. In the reverse shot, she exhibits a half-smile and mouths, "Oh."[543] Her dialogue and amused expression convey that she is coming around to the male detectives' point of view—in, at least, seeing humor or absurdity rather than objectification in the women's catfighting, and in her and the detectives' enjoyment and inaction in regard to it.

Television codes produce polysemic meanings so viewers can decode multiple readings. Designing a scene in this way offers the potential for broad appeal. Encoding Casey's evolving reaction within this shot sequence opens up entry points to viewers more and less critical of the objectification of women. Casey can be read as voluntarily inhabiting the male gaze, which I argue is the dominant/intended meaning of the scene.[544] This looking arrangement is at odds with a feminist critique of the male gaze because Casey's change in expression and dialogue have worked to undermine any potential subversion in her position as the postfeminist woman. In other words, the codes undermine a feminist promise that Casey will take up a female gaze, rather than appropriate or inhabit a male one. This recuperation process works to lessen any discomfort viewers feel in watching a scene struggle over gender. There is no obvious critique of the male gaze in this scene; no one opposes this objectifying spectacle overtly. No one averts the male gaze. Rather, this scene offers its critique in the form of the temporary discomfort of certain on-screen viewers and in the subtext of the narrative. In their analyses, viewers have the choice to discount the literal and/or the connotative intentions of the encoded text in the process of decoding its ideological messages about gender.

Casey can also be read with increased agency—that is, as benefitting in two ways from the gazing process. She experiences pleasure in looking (as do the male detectives). Additionally, as a result of narcissistic scopophilia, she feels desire in being looked at when occupying the objectified women's images. Situating Casey in two ways invites viewers to wrangle over the question of power in relation to looking and being looked at, and to consider an aspect of the gaze that Silverman conceptualizes: whether (and to what degree) the female elves—and Casey when locating in their images—experience power and/or agency in either soliciting or receiving back the look. That change in dynamics of the gaze would not be read by all viewers as offering feminist possibility (only postfeminist rhetoric, which is why this character archetype is named as such). In any case, the codes establish this looking arrangement only temporarily. It gestures to feminism, only to take it back.

Undermining the Pseudofeminist Man and Reconstructing Him as Bearer of the Look

Like Casey, Watson is encoded in two ways to illustrate the complexity in both his character and the dynamics of the gaze. The text depicts his criticism in his initial expression and thereby constructs him as the pseudofeminist man. Seconds later, it undermines his position when he begins videotaping the women. Although his criticism of the male gaze remains evident in his pitying expression, he is comfortable enough to simultaneously partake in it.

Having thus undermined his position as the pseudofeminist man, the television codes work to reconstruct him as bearer of the look. In prior scenes, the codes ensured that viewers were aware that Watson was not obligated to videotape the female elves fighting over the sack. His job requires him to videotape a dead body on location, or to record an interrogation at the Los Angeles Police Administration Building—important background aspects of his character that

gives context to his actions. On this day, Watson began videotaping during a personal visit to The North Pole Village. His mother "said she wanted pictures" of him and Casey at this holiday amusement park that they have gone to every year since they were kids.[545] Shortly after their arrival, Watson and Casey watched Santa Randy travel down the zip line—a trip that ended in his death. Watson handed off his video camera to Casey and told her to stay put. The editing cut to a new location, where the detectives of Major Crimes arrived and commenced an initial investigation. Watson retrieved his video camera from Casey, off-screen between shots, and began recording a dead Santa Randy trapped under the chimney.[546] After documenting this crime scene, Brenda releases him from further duties.[547] From 5:08, Watson is conveyed as a civilian, even excusing himself and Casey at one point from observing the ongoing investigation, telling his colleagues: "Excuse us, please. We don't want to interfere with your work."[548]

During the three-and-a-half minutes of screen time that followed, Watson was shown carrying (but not using) his video camera on twelve occasions.[549] Then, at 8:43, he mouths, "What is this?" when he and Casey stumble upon the women wrestling over the sack. He turns his video camera on and starts recording the brawl. In the two-shot, he is framed next to Casey who looks shocked, her mouth agape. Watson looks distressed, but neither stops recording nor steps in to end the women's brawl.[550] By conveying that Watson's actions are his own and not a requirement of his job, the text invites a wider range of readings.

Watson's actions can be read as a stunned reaction to what he was witnessing—similar to the way in which Casey initially appears shocked, but later is amused at the women's display. This negotiated rendering of the codes reads against the grain of the gaze. It considers Watson's videotaping to be a natural reaction to the discovery of his colleagues ogling over, but not acting in a meaningful way to quell, the brawling in the middle of a family amusement park. Despite

his disapproving expression and dialogue, Watson can be read as acting no differently than male detectives on the scene. This oppositional reading holds him accountable for commencing the recording of his own volition; as such, he is a voyeur, and responsible for his actions. In spite of Watson's initial discomfort, he can be read as acting like a typical American male in the last instance. This preferred reading characterizes Watson's behavior as falling in line with contemporary U.S. gender norms of masculinity that form hegemonic, biological excuses around men who gawk at—even videotape—women conceived of as scantily-clad and catfighting in public. As an open/closed text it permits the proliferation of readings and thus expands the appeal.

A certain ideology is reproduced in a type of viewer-subject who, like Watson, is comfortable gazing in these contradicting ways. Viewers recognized into that subject position are critical of the sexual objectification of women for male visual pleasure, but are hesitant to challenge behavior that falls in line with contemporary American standards of masculinity. This point of identification expects nothing more than for Watson to examine his participation in that objectifying process, as viewers do the same from their armchairs at home. This example illustrates why the establishment of "woman as image, man as bearer of the look" became and remains the standardbearer of camera and editing production codes.[551] It establishes a dominant/intended meaning that corresponds with what can be conceived of as hegemonic patriarchal ideology—that is, the taken-for-granted assumptions of male dominance that circulate in a particular culture. Even if an individual viewer challenges this particular ideology personally, she knows others in her culture who do not. More problematically, in terms of social reproduction, by encoding codes that guarantee the truth and naturalness of Watson's

representation as an all-American male, the scene works to condone his actions in light of his expression.

These contradictory (or at least chafing) constructions are made even more complex by the Christmas reindeer sweater he wears. As Fiske argues, the "meanings [codes] convey depend on the other social and technical codes by which they are contextualized, and by the ideological codes brought to bear upon them."[552] A Christmas sweater has been used, historically, to characterize an attractive but emasculated, old-fashioned, and boring man in postfeminist films such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*. I examine its use-value in this episode to shed light on how ideologies of dress contextualize and undermine Watson's position as the pseudofeminist man.

Like the character of Darcy in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Watson's voyeuristic action is recuperated partly by his dress, which essentially emasculates him. It also works in tandem with the other ways in which he is characterized as nonthreatening. Watson's duties as a civilian officer keep him sidelined from much of the action of the job. As an audio video technician for Major Crimes, he neither investigates nor discusses cases. Additionally, despite the presence of a female Deputy Chief, the criminal justice system is generally represented as a hyper-masculine complex in *The Closer*. Watson operates on the margins of that masculinity and that agency. Wearing a reindeer jumper and not engaging in investigations are material signifiers of both his emasculation and his inability to reverse the dominating male gaze of the narrative.


4.7[553]


4.8[554]


4.9[555]

The polysemy in Watson's characterizations, especially in relation to the gaze, grows even more problematic as the scene progresses. Prior to Watson commencing his videotaping,

the female elves were captured with their breasts bouncing up and down. They were standing erect, shot in half-, if not three-quarter, framing. And their faces were clearly established. After the editing cuts back to Watson and he starts videotaping, the codes representing the women become recognizably pornographic. The women's faces are obscured by other body parts or clothing in context of the action of the scene. As they wrestle on the ground, the camera most often captures them from the rear. Their splayed legs, buttocks, and crotches fill the frames. And their red panties act as material signifiers of how costuming works to naturalize the correlation of lower-class with villainous. Since it is generally assumed that 'respectable' women would not allow their panties to show in public, the color red attaches ideological codes of the scarlet woman to the female elves: a category of woman historically associated with danger, brazenness, adultery, and villainy.

Prior to this shot sequence, viewers were informed through dialogue that the victim's mistress is trying to steal something from the victim's wife, who is fighting to keep it. By the time viewers learn (at the conclusion of the scene) that the sack the women are fighting over contains marijuana and black market cash, the codes have already worked to naturalize a correlation between the women as morally corrupt and villainous. Codes of appearance, behavior, and dialogue have delegitimized them. When viewers see that the female elves are hiding illegal contraband, their soiled identities contextualize the pornographic nature of the videotaping. Thus, it is less problematic for viewers uncomfortable with the objectification of women via the male gaze. These codes operate on another level still: to diminish the impact that Watson's earlier expression, dialogue, and dress may have had on viewers on-screen and off-screen. By mitigating his potential power to reverse the male gaze, the codes discredit Watson as the pseudofeminist man and reestablish him as bearer of the look.

Networks such as TNT have to compete for viewers with boundary-pushing, genre-defining series across the dial and the World Wide Web. For seven years, TNT rebranding itself on the back of *The Closer* by advertising that it offered a new style of procedural starring an unconventional leading lady. This industrial paratext manifests itself in the codes at the end of the scene, when *The Closer* adds another looking arrangement to its narrative framework for thinking about gender. It opens up ideological space for a third archetypal character, the protofeminist heroine, to emerge and succeed where Watson as pseudofeminist man and Casey as postfeminist woman have failed. The text positions Brenda Leigh Johnson as the protofeminist heroine and the best choice among a variety of options, but even she is compromised and contained by scene's end.

A Protofeminist Heroine Emerges


4.10[556]


4.11[557]


4.12[558]

The differing reactions of detectives to the women portrayed as morally questionable through material signifiers of costuming, composition, and action offer viewers a range of viewpoints to take up when reading the dominant/intended meanings of hegemonic femininity encoded in the scene. As it continues, Tao looks concerned, and moreover, aggravated. He yells, "Elves . . . elves, please."[559] His code of expression competes ideologically with that of Flynn's, who stands blurred in the foreground of the frame, flush right, with his chin resting on his knuckles, his head cocked to the side, and his mouth upturned in the shape of a smile. Unlike Tao, Flynn appears unapologetic for enjoying the show. In the cutaway, the camera captures the

image he enjoys: the elves' long chestnut hair or blond locks blowing in the wind. Together with the sack they are fighting over, their hair takes center stage and obscures their faces and therein their individuality. In addition, by attaching characteristics of villainy and of moral repugnance to the women through dialogue, action, and narrative that works to naturalize their sexualized portrayals, the text mitigates the gazes of Flynn and Provenza, the voyeurism of Watson, and the inaction of Gabriel and Tao.

Then a turn in the narrative opens up a space for a feminist critique of the male gaze to emerge. In the subsequent three-shot, Watson continues to look stupefied, but carries on recording. His sister, who seems no longer displeased by the show, or even shocked, now laughs and appears entertained along with the male detectives. Herein, the television codes undermine her position as postfeminist woman, as it did Watson's as pseudofeminist man. Then, at 9:03, Brenda runs into the scene and takes a moment to assess it. After Tao's appeal of, "Elves . . . elves, please," has no effect, her look of concern turns to outrage.[560] She yells, "All right, I've had enough. Put 'em all under arrest."[561] The protagonist's rebuking reverses the dominant male subjectivity of the narrative for the first time. It also offers a physical break in the male gaze for viewers for the first time. And it finally does what Watson as pseudofeminist man and Casey as postfeminist failed to do: it opens up a space for a feminist critique of the male gaze while simultaneously asserting (and promoting) the protagonist's power.

Brenda's position as the protofeminist heroine is reversed in short order, however, when the television codes return to the sexual objectification of women for male visual pleasure. During the next eight seconds, the codes again become recognizably pornographic, and as before, draw attention away from the ideological work of the narrative at key transitional moments by foregrounding the action of the plot. After Brenda's rebuking, the male detectives

heed her proclamation. They round up the female elves and quell the drama. But in the process they manage to objectify the women further than heretofore in the scene. At 8:40, the camera establishes a shot of one of the elves with her breasts extending out of the V-neck of her dress. Unsurprisingly, in a subsequent shot at 9:11, the camera frames the sack she wrestled away


4.13[562]


4.14[563]


4.15[564]

beside the cleft between her breasts. Sanchez catapults her onto his shoulder. In the reverse shot, his left hand cradles the cleft between her buttocks when he grabs her backside so hard that her underwear is once again exposed, and his grip takes center stage. This combination of visual and narrative codes "naturalizes the man's executive role of instigating action and the woman's role as object of the male gaze."[565] Although the protofeminist heroine initiates a feminist intervention by ordering the men to arrest the elves, she calls for that action from the sidelines, while male detectives are encoded as responsible for taking action on her command. She is constructed in this scene as the promising but ultimately the passive (read: protofeminist) agent, and they as the active (read: dominant male) agents, in affecting change in their social environment. Through the conventional representational code of action, the male cops, not the female protagonist, reestablish order, which is why I refer to the protofeminist as passive. Additionally, how that order is established must be problematized. Sanchez captures the arrestee in an aggressive way. The camera takes advantage of his action by objectifying the female elf sexually. Off-camera, Gabriel says to another woman, "You are a very strong elf," which is ironic, since a majority of the codes that shape the representation of the women in the scene convey the ease with which the detectives take control of them physically and, moreover,

objectify them sexually.[566] As the camera disguises the apparatus of the gaze, so the protofeminist heroine disguises the politics of representation.

4.16[567]

4.17[568]

At 9:15, Brenda walks into the cutaway staring at something yet unseen to the viewer. She blinks and then a slight smile breaks free on her lips. Money and marijuana spill out of the sack in the next shot. Without reprimand or challenge of the men, the scene ends. The illegal contraband serves as the opening image of the next scene. The camera tilts up to capture Brenda and the male detectives standing over the evidence in the murder room at the Los Angeles Police Administration Building. It is made clear in her demeanor and in the absence of dialogue interrogating their sexist, unprofessional behavior that Brenda condones their preceding actions because they have led to an uncovering of evidence. Her tacit acceptance of their objectification and her weak position as an authority figure—in issuing a command, but in not ensuring that the female elves are arrested in a dignified manner—are at odds with a feminist critique of the male gaze. These conflicting codes undermine Brenda's position as the protofeminist heroine. Like the pseudofeminist man and the postfeminist woman before her, she is unable to stop the objectification of women or to avert the male gaze outside of offering temporary relief of it. By scene's end, the codes revert to an objectifying male looking arrangement.

Because the discovery of evidence gives claim to a procedural drama's generic category and rewards its target demographic, it operates as a more important textual consideration than

either themes of sexism or acts of unprofessionalism on the job. I would argue that opposing generic characteristics of the police procedural is not constructive. These conventions ensure that imagined middle-American viewers are not dissuaded from watching more of this episode or a future episode because they have turned in for a case of the week format, and instead been invited to explore gender. By recuperating a traditional mode of looking, as well as undermining Brenda's feminism, the television codes operate on three levels of generic consideration. On the level of the plot, the loot in the sack is about to become key evidence in the case of the week. On the level of the gaze, the female elf's breasts are centered in the frame. And, on the level of the dominant subjectivity of the narrative, Brenda as the protofeminist heroine is undermined. In these ways, the text satisfies its generic call of forward movement in the case-of-the-week plot, while inviting viewers to watch (but also to challenge) the gender ideologies at play in various looking arrangements.

Case Study: Three Ways of Looking beyond the Male Gaze across an Episode Interrogating Gender, Representations of Power, and the Male Gaze

"You Have the Right to Remain Jolly" offers alternative ways of looking beyond the male gaze not only within one scene, but across the episode. From 9:22 to end, the looking arrangements of the postfeminist woman and the protofeminist heroine are revisited and expanded upon, offering an opportunity to explore a deeper level of complexity in these two gazing processes.

Once back at the Los Angeles Police Administration Building, the detectives discuss possible motives for using a Christmas village to sell drugs. Watson chastises Casey when she comments that, "People use Christmas to sell everything, and that's what Santa Jack was all about."[569] Making her opinion public garners Casey the gazes of all detectives in the room. Her

voice and her ideas hold their attention, for the moment, and not her objectified image. Additionally, her behavior, posture, and demeanor indicate that she takes pleasure and power in soliciting and amassing their gazes. She holds direct eye contact, sits forward, waves her index finger, purses her lips, and shakes her head while delivering her theory. This aspect of her experience in the gazing process falls in line with gender constructions of a dominant female subject. Temporarily, some cultural power rests on the side of Casey as a subjectified female when she solicits the look based on her voice and her ideas rather than her image.


4.18[570]


4.19[571]


4.20[572]

Casey's actions have opposing consequences for Watson as the pseudofeminist man. He appears publically humiliated when she airs her opinion. As soon as she utters her exposition, he rises, walks around her chair, and while towering over her warns, "We do not interrupt detectives when they are discussing a case."[573] The camera tilts up his body as he returns to a fully erect position. Watson then turns towards Brenda and begs for forgiveness for his sister's spontaneous outburst. These television codes convey a dominant/intended meaning of his emasculation by using groveling in this scene, as it had in wearing a Christmas reindeer sweater while serving as an impotent voyeur in the prior scene. A pseudofeminist man does not have to be an emasculated one in theory; the codes could avoid constructing him in either an emasculated or in a hypermasculinized state. However, television codes in this scene (as in the last) characterize him as emasculated to convey that he holds no feminist potential. Since feminism requires action, and emasculated men lack power, the pseudofeminist man represents no threat to either the male gaze, the traditional conventions of police procedurals, or viewers who watch police

procedurals primarily to be entertained. Watson's emasculation is conveyed in his sycophancy, but, ironically, in his bullying of Casey as well. The television codes works to naturalize ideologies of masculinity, both those that he meets as a voyeur and those that he fails to achieve as an emasculated male, which influence his behavior, readings of him, and the gazing process in complex ways.

Watson can be read as taking advantage of a subject who is already vulnerable in Casey; as reacting to being marginalized, himself, in the Division; or as a mechanism of saving face. In context, his behavior falls in line with what R. W. Connell (following from Antonio Gramsci) defines as "hegemonic masculinity"—that is "a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes."[574] Bullying Casey, in the context of his deference to Brenda, connotes his attempt to escape emasculation and marginalization in the cultural processes of his work and private lives: spaces both in which he is conveyed as unsuccessful. An important takeaway from this archetype is that the potential criticism offered by his character towards the start of the episode when he initially appeared uncomfortable with the objectification of women—when he was behaving as if he would take action in spite of the male detectives' inaction, but was undermined by his voyeurism and eventual participation in that objectification process—is contained. As pseudofeminist male, Watson has no potential in working towards empowering anyone, including himself, nor in reversing the dominating objectifying male gaze.

So Brenda as the protofeminist heroine emerges to end Watson's bullying of Casey, by suggesting that his sister may have a valid point. As in the prior scene, Brenda's moment of feminist activism comes to a quick end when the television codes position Gabriel to act as an alternative pseudofeminist man to the failed Watson. In the prior scene, Gabriel initially

attempted to separate the women as they wrestled over the sack, but Provenza held him back, saying, "They might say something incriminating," to the ends of comic relief and disguising the objectifying gaze.[575] During the subsequent scene, Gabriel seems positioned to go further in his defense of Casey than he had with the elves.


4.21[576]


4.22[577]


4.23[578]

The television codes illustrate this when the camera tilts up Gabriel's body to establish him crossing his arms and producing a stern, protective expression on his face. His crossness lessens as his look turns to pride. He works to catch Casey's eye; and after he secures it, smiles broadly, nodding in support of her. His expression changes for a third time when it turns salacious. He scrunches his face and lips into a sexy grimace, mouthing, "Ooh," as he ogles her.[579] Tilting his head slightly, he takes her up as an object. The intensity of his sexualized gaze is overt. Brenda as protofeminist heroine is the first to respond when she notices his objectification of Casey. She gazes at him squarely; and, tilting her head up, she raises one eyebrow and smirks, in effect chastising him for his unprofessional behavior. Gabriel responds like a good 'underling' by clearing his throat and relaxing his contorted facial expression. In the cutaway, Casey, in line with Silverman's theory, takes pleasure in being looked at/being seen for her beauty, but ostensibly for her intellect and her courage, as well. She returns Gabriel's look with a devilish, sexy, appreciative expression of her own.

In the background of the shot, Watson as the failed pseudofeminist man-turned-bearer of the look, now reemerges to compete with the newly crowned pseudofeminist man-turned-dominant male Gabriel. Noticeably angered by the gazing exchange between Gabriel and Casey,

Watson sits down beside his sister.[580] Casey does not let Watson's protective move stop her from returning Gabriel's look. Noticing his ineffectiveness, Watson directs a scowl at Casey—from behind her eye line so she does not notice. As soon as Brenda is out of sight, Gabriel catches Casey's eye again.[581] She cocks her head and smiles back at Gabriel. Watson responds by producing his now customary, disapproving grimace. When Gabriel walks out of the frame, he wears the broadest, toothiest grin yet. Carrying the sack replete with marijuana and money, his smile in conjunction with his temporary possession of the loot/evidence act as dual material signifiers, first of his prowess (both occupationally and in relation to conquering the female sex), and second of his position as bearer and Casey as voluntary object of the look.[582]

Of key importance in the power structure of the gazing process in this scene is that it is Gabriel, and not Casey, who produces the final look in their exchange. Whatever agency Casey may have secured by opinion-making, soliciting, and returning Gabriel's look earlier, in this moment that potential work is contained. She is once again conveyed as the object of the narrative and of the gaze. Watson is similarly undermined (once again) in this scene, by failing in his attempts to control Casey and to protect her against Gabriel. Certain viewers will desire, if not expect, for Brenda as protofeminist heroine to at least critique the text's return to a masculine form of address, as she had in the prior scene when ordering the men to arrest the elves. But, on this occasion, Gabriel ignores Brenda's feminist rebuking and continues to gaze at Casey. By scene's end, the television codes have undermined all three alternative looking arrangements and returned power over the narrative to Gabriel as the dominant male subject/bearer of the look. The protofeminist heroine will have another opportunity to fulfill her feminist promise nearer episode's end, but not before the men's gazing of Casey and her ostensible comfort with (and desire of) their gazes is further explored in the middle of the episode.


4.24[583]


4.25[584]


4.26[585]

At 25:03, Pope, Taylor, Flynn, and Provenza among others are serving overtime because Santa Jack voluntarily confessed before he was Mirandized. They are waiting for him to sober up so they can begin the interview process once again. This narrative device puts Commander Taylor, Assistant Chief Pope, and every male detective of Major Crimes other than Tao on one side of a two-way glass, and Santa Jack, Watson, and Casey on the other.

Commander Taylor: So, why are we all standing here?
The camera pans left as Casey walks into the center of the frame.
Casey Watson: Oh, excuse me.
The editing cuts to a wide shot of the men ogling her.
Casey: Sorry, I need to get through.
All but Chief Pope gladly make way for her; but he stands transfixed, staring.
Detective Lieutenant Provenza: Please, allow me.
Provenza opens the door for Casey.
Detective Sergeant Gabriel: You can go through.
Gabriel grins. Detective Lieutenant Flynn chuckles.
Casey: Thank you.
Provenza: Mmm, mmm.
Gabriel: Yes, siree.
In the cutaway, Casey enters a kitchen on one side of a two-way glass. The camera portrays her walking through the doorway and then out of frame. It pans left to capture a wide shot of the detectives and Pope grinning, 'ooh'-ing, and looking awestruck in their gazes of her.
Pope: Wow. Who is that?
Gabriel: That is Buzz's sister, Casey. She does the weather in Seattle.
Detective Sanchez: She's hot, sir—but she has opinions.
A medium pan shot of the men watching Casey captures Taylor's mouth agape. In the cutaway, an over-animated Sanchez turns back to Pope, mid-sentence, to highlight the disappointment he feels in discovering that Casey is more than her good looks.
Pope: Oh.
The subsequent medium four-shot of Sanchez, Pope, Taylor, and Gabriel portrays their similarly subdued responses in discovering that Casey has a brain.[586]

In this scene, the television codes not only establish the male gaze and the lewd language the detectives use to describe Casey—for example, "She does the weather"[587]—they also convey

that Sanchez considers Casey's "opinions"[588] to be a negative (read: non-sexualized, subjective) aspect of her personality—and that other male detectives agree. Rather than establishing her as taking power from public opinion-making, Sanchez paints a dual picture of her. That characterization acts as a double-edged sword in terms of the ideologies of gender naturalized in the postfeminist woman. On the one hand, she is hot, and thus able to be objectified; on the other hand, she is opinionated—read: potentially feminist—and thus poses a threat to the objectifying male gaze.[589] This is an example of potential feminism—that is, opinions made palatable. Moreover, public opinion-making typically establishes an individual asserting his or her power. Using her voice to engage the public, such a person has the potential to question structural inequalities and taken for granted assumptions of neoliberal values. Casey addresses these discourses with her assertion that, "People use Christmas to sell everything." This textual moment offers opportunities for negotiated or oppositional readings to either representation of her: as a colluder with dominant male values, and thus, a passive object of the narrative, or as an active, opinion-making subject.

Furthermore, the dominant/intended meaning of this scene establishes a masculine form of address in the text and in the gaze; yet, its material signifies are so overtly discriminatory and sexist that the codes invite all but the most patriarchal-minded viewers to challenge them. As noted earlier, the typical ideological work of Hollywood television is to make sexism appear as feminism. The television codes of this scene work by characterizing the men's language and thinking as material signifiers of buffoonery; by using humor to convey their sexist tête-à-têtes; and by reaffirming Casey's courage and intellect, despite (and because of) the chafing it causes to Watson's emasculation and to Gabriel and the other detectives' ability to gaze at her without negotiating aspects of her makeup beyond her looks. The complexity of these codes opens up

alternative ways of reading the various processes of objectifying Casey. But because the male gaze is maintained as a key and a persistent regime of looking, even when other opportunities present themselves temporarily, male power over the narrative is recuperated in short order.

No sooner than Casey is positioned dually as the subject and the object of the text, the television codes undermine her once again. In cutaways that follow, the camera frames her strong desire to be looked at when Santa Jack thinks the men are gazing at him through the window, and says, "The power of Santa Claus causes these jaded police officers to gaze on me in wonder and awe."[590] Casey looks up, realizing that they are, in fact, gazing at her.[591] Using the word "gaze" in dialogue is telling, since a more common, colloquial term such as "look" is more suitable as dialogue in a basic cable police procedural. By highlighting the gazing process through language that calls attention to it, the codes stress that both a look and an object are in operation in the scene. Viewers are invited to struggle over the ideologies of gender at work within the gazing process.

Casey responds to their looks by grinning; she then initiates a more dynamic exchange by waving at the detectives and Pope. These codes establish Casey as the pursuer of the male gaze at the moment of perception. She responds to their look by soliciting it back—but at a higher level of engagement than they had offered. To some degree, Casey's response illustrates a feminist critique of the male gaze here. Casey refuses to be a passive object of the male gaze. She does not reject the gaze per se, but she does reject its objectifying functions. A horizontal pan in the reverse shot captures the detectives waving back at Casey. This shot/reverse-shot sequence establishes a nonverbal dialogue between Casey and the male detectives that constructs their relationship as two-way and on par in terms of intention and power. Silverman's argument would support this reading. But such a reading stands to be criticized because as Mulvey argues,

in fact, their relations are not on par. Not only do the male detectives commence the gazing process, they also end it by producing the final look. Furthermore, after Santa Jack thanks Casey for "her healing attentions," while touching her breasts under the guise of removing "lint from [his] beard," she waves off the concern over Santa's groping registered on Watson's face.[592] By appropriating and inhabiting a male gaze earlier, and then pursuing her general desire to-be-looked-at, Casey colludes with—even buttresses—the dominant male gender dynamics encoded in this scene.


4.27[593]


4.28[594]


4.29[595]


4.30[596]

When the men turn Santa Jack's impression "that what [he] represents is real" into a sexist comment about Casey's breasts, the text opens up ideological space for the protofeminist heroine to emerge and to attempt for a final time to succeed where Watson and Casey have failed.[597]

Sanchez presses his hand against the glass and gazes in Casey's direction. Taylor adjusts his tie, and then tucks his hand between his jacket and his chest. A look of utter satisfaction crosses his face.
Taylor: They certainly look real.
One of the detectives groans—'Mmm.'
Pope: Maybe I should show them around.
The editing cuts to a four-shot that includes Gabriel and Taylor who look to Pope for further explanation.
Pope: I mean Buzz and his sister, while she's in town.
Taylor: Yeah, right.
Gabriel: Oh.
Gabriel: Ahhh.
In the cutaway, Taylor (still holding his hand against his chest), Sanchez (remaining starstruck with his hand pressed against the glass), and Pope continue to be entertained by Casey who is now bandaging the wound that Santa Jack sustained after he passed out drunk in the electronics room.
Pope: You know, as chief of police, I can take her places nobody else can.
Gabriel chuckles and mumbles, 'Ah-huh, mmmhmm, I'm—.'"

Brenda (off-screen, chastising them): Would y'all look at yourselves? Like a bunch of diabetics standing in front of a candy store.[598]

The visual and narrative codes finally work their way to the penultimate moment when the feminist promise of the episode is expected to be realized. Viewers who are recognized into feminist subject positions, who object to the male gaze, will desire to critique the male gaze when it is most obviously rendered. They will identify with a character who acts to put a stop to it. When Brenda, off-screen, says, "Can Santa wake up from his long winter's nap so we can all get back to work?" the camera establishes a deep focus reaction shot of the detectives taken from behind Brenda's shoulder. The Deputy Chief is constructed in the frame as the feminist scolding them for making sexist remarks and for gazing. Viewers can hear Brenda's rebuke, but they cannot see her delivering it. Instead, the shot focuses on the group of male detectives who appear small in the rear of the frame. The back of Brenda's head and her right shoulder appear otherwise, filling sixty-percent of the foreground.

The men react in varying ways to knowing that they live in a world and work in a space in which the old boys' club is being dismantled and what used to be condoned is now understood as sexual harassment. Pope exhibits an expression of annoyance and Taylor looks nonplussed. Sanchez glances at Brenda, but does not recoil. His hand, which remains pressed against the two-way mirror for the entirety of the latter part of the scene, represents getting closer to if not touching and physically possessing the object of his dreamy gaze through the looking glass. Provenza and Flynn hem and haw, but ultimately look ashamed. Gabriel looks not only embarrassed but humbled as he holds his breath and looks away.

In the cutaway, viewers see the protofeminist heroine's face for the first time in the scene. She stands with her hands on her hips, which is assumed by her posture and the positioning of her arms, since her hands and hips rest beneath the frame. Her schoolmarmish

costuming (a grey button-down cardigan sweater, pearl earrings, hair pulled back in barrettes, and a muted shade of lipstick) reflects a caricatured American feminist and further situates her rebuking dialogue and physical intervention.[599] As material signifiers of the protagonist, they characterize not modernity, but an old-fashioned nature that causes her to chastise the 'boys' for their sexist behavior and dialogue. Her talk serves to embarrass them, but not to confer an expectation nor a requirement to change their thinking in regard to Casey or women in general. Moreover, they do not adhere to her orders. The editing cuts to a two-shot of Pope and Gabriel. After a beat, Pope nods. He looks back at Gabriel. "Really, guys, can we please? We have important work to do here. Come on."[600] The cutaway, like that of Brenda's feminist rebuking, is shot from behind her shoulders. The men hustle to get back to work, but based on Pope's command—not the protofeminist heroine's. They have ignored the orders of their Chief, but her Chief's, those of a man, they have adhered to. As they do, the men move from background to foreground in the frame and appear larger than before. Power is returned to them via the gaze, but also via the plot and the action. The protofeminist heroine who has been constructed to serve as subject of the look and the penultimate power figure is ultimately contained. By recuperating a traditional mode of looking and returning narratival heroism to Pope at scenes' end, the text comforts a large percentage of the audience tuning into the series for its generic conventions, rather than its subtly conveyed interrogations of the dominant objectifying male gaze.

Conclusion

This episode offers looking arrangements that complicate the conventional representations of women "as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look."[601] It temporarily opens up spaces for interrogating the gender dynamics

of the gaze, while theorizing the relationship between various looking arrangements and a broad viewership. Additionally, it periodically offers olive branches to viewers looking to be entertained by (if not identifying with) characters who work to unsettle the conventional codes of Hollywood serial design—even if, ultimately, these characters do so only temporarily. By merely contesting and disrupting the codes by which conventional Hollywood serial design models objectify women, *The Closer* offers the possibility for a text to have a long-term effect on the discursive formation of television programming.

This is the case because, even if, in the last instance, the protofeminist heroine and her feminist intervention fail to end the objectification of women or permanently reverse the male gaze, the television codes have worked together for forty-two minutes to produce three additional ways of looking. It has opened up spaces, at least temporarily, for a feminist critique of the objectification of women via the gaze to emerge. But it also illustrates that, within the serial design of a text aimed at a wide audience, there is no room for pseudofeminist heroes to succeed, nor non-dominant males. If these characters were to triumph, it would be in the same context as the protofeminist heroine, which would undermine her as the series' protagonist. This is the limit of her role: she is the character best suited (serially) to hold out olive branches of feminist promise across episodes of the series leading up to the finale. And non-dominant males and pseudofeminist heroes are not beneficial (to even that extent) in offering a feminist critique of the male gaze, nor in altering the outcome of the narrative, due to key narratival considerations. The only males who succeed in a police procedural are characterized within a framework of hegemonic masculinity. The text returns power over the narrative and the gaze to dominant men via their hyper-masculine gender constructions.

There is also no room for the postfeminist women to succeed, for she is caught up in her desire to be looked at. Thus, in the last instance she offers no feminist promise. Based on the serial design model I read in *The Closer,* there is no room for feminism in a basic cable police procedural before the series finale. If the protofeminist female were to succeed in empowering all women across the series run, she would be a truly feminist role model. And, a truly feminist character may have caused the show to be canceled halfway through the first season, as was the case with *Prime Suspect* (US).[602] Although this episode fails to reverse the male gaze, its subtle interrogation of various looking arrangements and the ways the text reveals the benefits and the limitations for both audience and industry in that process offers feminist media scholars the opportunity to examine what is being retheorized in the dynamics of the gaze in a contemporary, popular text. It gives them an opportunity to consider how offering multiple looking arrangements is useful in terms of creating spaces for a feminist critique of the objectification of women via the male gaze without losing mass appeal.

Chapter Five:
Conclusion: Theorizing the Serial Design Model of *The Closer*

Introduction

This dissertation aimed to theorize the blueprint for the serial design model of *The Closer*. It answered the core questions: How does *The Closer* offer multiple entry points along a spectrum of views on gender and feminism, appeal to a range of viewers, and thus secure popularity? To generate metadata of how *The Closer* was designed for popularity by offering what film scholar Christine Gledhill calls "a range of positions of identification" with the text, I examined the themes of the transgender figure and the gaze in Chapters Three and Four.[603] Each offered a detailed analysis of a distinct, single episode of *The Closer* and theorized how television codes of one episode were designed to take advantage of the coexistence of many possible interpretations of the theme under review. Whereas textual analysis examines television's power to construct its preferred readings and readers, close audience analysis explores the viewer's power to construct meanings out of its texts. As counterpoints to my readings, in Chapter Two I carefully analyzed a focus group study conducted with forty-two sample viewers.

In part one of this conclusion, I summarize my findings from Chapters Three and Four, each in dialogue with audience feedback on those themes from Chapter Two. Additionally, I theorize the blueprint for the serial design of *The Closer* and explain why this model is useful as a framework for analyzing any serial designed to appeal to a broad demographic. In part two, I gesture to some of the broad questions around matters of gender, feminist issues, and the series finale to explore why gender still matters in television programming. In part three, I look

forward to reflect on what I have accomplished in asking the questions of this dissertation, and on what questions might be posed by feminist media scholars in the future.

A Summary

Because I theorized how *The Closer* was smartly designed to appeal to viewers along a spectrum of positionings in regard to gender and feminism, in Chapter Three I followed from John Fiske in assuming that "the motivation to exploit the polysemy of the program is social: the polysemy of the text is necessary if it is to be popular amongst viewers who occupy a variety of situations within the social structure."[604] In Chapter Three, I explored how *The Closer* was designed to appeal to viewers with a "range of positions of identification" in regards to transgender identity and expression.[605] I theorized multiple readings made available in the episode "Make Over," and the multiple viewing positions of a range of viewers as I read them in close textual analysis.[606] Beyond answering the questions of this dissertation, I also interrogated the representations and limits of transgender content made available in its construction. The series is constrained on the one hand by conventional televisual codes, and on the other hand by the need for the program to appeal to a wide audience. I explored how the codes of drag conventions worked with a cross-dressing plot to contain relatively radical transgender content—in essence, by making a mockery of it—and the benefits in that process for both industry and audience. Drag constructions represented a hyperfeminine Georgette, which reidealized heterosexual norms without calling them into question. A cross-dressing plot conveyed Georgette's play at being feminine, while pointing out that she was born male with male genitalia, and simply by duct-taping her breasts could return to that biological state with ease and by choice. Such conventional Hollywood codes undermined a transgender Georgette and

functioned to keep patriarchal ideology intact and to confirm hegemonic masculinity as a prequel to opening up spaces for their contestation.

At the halfway point, the television codes broke from these conventions. Exploring gender outside a binary framework lines up with Judith Butler's prescription for undertaking a feminist critique of the gender binary. Maintaining this framework requires "a differentiation from the opposite gender. Hence, one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces this restriction of gender within the binary pair."[607] Butler contends that this differentiation is, in fact, how gender is constructed. Although codes throughout much of the episode relied on a cross-dressing plot and drag conventions to draw viewers assumed to be unfamiliar with non-hegemonic representations of gender in basic cable police procedurals, they did little to invite and sustain niche audiences beyond the mainstream looking to enter the text through more progressive gender representations and a relatively radical transgender figure. Offering an interdeterminate Georgette opened up space for a serious discourse on transgender identity, and made available additional entry points for reading positions resistant to the gender binary.

Following from Fiske in Chapter Four I explored how *The Closer* was designed to appeal to viewers with a "range of positions of identification" in regards to the gaze.[608] From that theoretical vantage point, I set out to theorize the multiple looking arrangements encoded in the television codes of "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly" and the multiple viewing positions of a range of viewers as I read them in close textual analysis.[609] Beyond answering the dissertation question as to the multiple entry points to the text, I also interrogated the representations and limits of gender made available in its construction. First, I explored how the episode contested and disrupted the codes by which conventional television codes objectify women and the

benefits in that process for both audience and text. Second, I examined how such looking arrangements, although raised, were ultimately contained by what Laura Mulvey calls the objectifying male gaze. This analysis reaffirmed that her theory of the gaze, originally conceived in 1975, remains true in the second decade of the aughts.

The pseudofeminist man offered the first of three entry points to the text. A representative of gallantry and old-school chivalry, he was to a certain degree critical of the sexual objectification of women for male visual pleasure. He offered the potential of saving the objectified women from this process. But when he failed, he acted as a voyeur. In videotaping the women, he captured them with their breasts bouncing up and down, their faces obscured, and from the rear with a focus on their splayed legs, crotches, and buttocks. These pornographic television codes mitigated his potential power to reverse the dominating male gaze; they discredited him and kept patriarchal modes of looking intact longer. This viewing position opened up a space for spectators critical of the sexual objectification of women for male visual pleasure, but hesitant to challenge behavior that falls in line with contemporary American standards of masculinity. Viewers reading against the grain of the gaze from this negotiated position may object to the objectification of women, but expect nothing more than for the pseudofeminist man to examine his participation in that objectifying process as they do the same from their armchairs at home.

The postfeminist woman offered the second of three entry points to the text. She inhabited a male gaze when experiencing enjoyment in watching the women's spectacle and when voluntarily desiring to be looked at. Additionally, the codes represented her both soliciting and returning the gaze as well as acting as the subject of the narrative when public opinion-making. This more complex looking arrangement challenged Mulvey's theory and the

traditional Hollywood filmmaking practices of the dominating male gaze. It raised Silverman's thesis that the gaze can be taken up by women as well as by men. But it ultimately confirmed Mulvey's hypothesis because this alternative looking arrangement offered only temporary relief.[610] The postfeminist woman was undermined by her double articulation when characterized by a male detective as "hot," but also as "ha[ving] opinions."[611] The television codes recuperated the male gaze and returned power over the narrative to the dominant male subject. Nevertheless, in moments when the postfeminist woman solicited or returned the look, or acted as the subject of the narrative, she offered entry points to viewers critical of a one-way (male-to-female) gazing process and one produced exclusively for male visual pleasure. This more complex looking arrangement invited a discussion over the question of power in relation to looking and being looked at in viewers who entered the text through the postfeminist woman.

The protofeminist heroine presented the final of three entry points to the text. Her way of looking offered the option of feminist intervention expected of a female protagonist. As a procedural drama designed to draw more conservative viewers, her vantage point was raised but contained by episode's end. She opened up a space for a feminist critique of the male gaze, while simultaneously asserting and promoting her power. She classified the men ogling and making sexist comments as "a bunch of diabetics standing in front of a candy store."[612] And she asked them to "wake up from [their] long winter's nap so we can all get back to work."[613] The men reacted in varying ways to knowing that they live in a world and work in a space in which the old boys' club is being dismantled and what used to be okay is now understood as sexual harassment. These moments offered an alternative looking arrangement to the dominating male gaze. But this contested viewing position was ultimately undermined as well. The codes

recuperated a traditional mode of looking and returned narrative heroism to Pope when he (not the protagonist) convinced the men to get back to work.

The audience analysis in Chapter Two pointed out the importance of raising but containing a feminist perspective in a serial designed for popularity. As Caesar said, "This show is very self-aware of . . . misogyny. . . . [It] highlights and plays with it and explicitly deals with it…which is an interesting establishment of the fact that the show is from a female point of view, but not to the degree that a male viewer feels excluded."[614] Readings of the objectifying male gaze broke down further along gender and age demographics. Older women were nonplussed by it, with Jill saying, "It's trying to instill humor."[615] Younger women were offended by it, with one female participant in her early thirties calling it, "a case of running out of ideas by the seventh season."[616] And middle-aged women took a matter-of-fact positioning, with Cindy reasoning, "This is how TNT gets more men to watch the show."[617] Men were also more cognizant of network considerations in their readings. Stan concurred with Bill that the episode "is in search of a fourteen-year-old male viewer."[618] But he read *The Closer* as "simultaneously targeting women viewers by giving them opportunities to make fun of sexist men and see Brenda swoop in and save the day."[619] "That's why it is satisfying—the strong female character comes to a woman's rescue and rules again," Cindy adds.[620] Her comment, which framed Brenda as a heroine and savior, elicited one of the strongest emotional responses from fellow participants: a couple whooped and cheered while others nodded in agreement. A serial design that raises but contains alternative ways of looking comforts a large percentage of the audience tuning into a series for its generic conventions, rather than its subtly conveyed interrogations of the dominant objectifying male gaze. How the gaze operates in the design of this episode illustrates why conventional looking arrangements are still used. They are expected by most viewers and

condoned by others who find objectifying women problematic. Those condoning it are partly assuaged by temporary moments of feminist intervention for the promise they hold out for feminist change to existing (patriarchal) social formations in future episodes.

As was the case with the serial design of a protofeminist looking arrangement in relation to the gazing process in "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," the most radical transgender representations of Georgette came at the midway point of "Make Over." Viewers had been made comfortable and entertained with television codes that imposed dominant messages in support of patriarchy trough minute twenty, at which point the text was in a position to offer a subversive Georgette, whose work it was to broaden viewership. In these moments, the transgender figure was presented in such a way that patriarchal ideology could not remain intact, and the heteronormative superstructure was denaturalized. No longer represented via the conventions of drag, Georgette was now made queer via interdeterminate dress; and authentic dialogue empowered her to identify and express herself as a lesbian female. These codes represented Georgette's gender and sexuality as a double-bind that destabilizes the binary frameworks of both systems. The text and the gender and sexuality discourses they fostered became a trans space that undermined heteronormativity by treating issues of transgender and homosexuality seriously, rather than as comic fodder undergirding a cross-dressing plot and drag conventions.

Themes of the gaze and transgender are also linked by their similar interpellative processes. Laura Mulvey examines how women are forced to take up awkward viewing positions—at one point calling them "transvestic." And she is interested in exploring how the apparatus produces spectatorial positions in the same way that Althusser is interested in how ideological state apparatuses and social institutions produce social subjects. The awkward viewing position to which Mulvey refers is in fact a male viewing position. It was taken up by

Casey, a postfeminist woman, who objectified the female elves along with male detectives on the scene. Georgette as a transfemale also occupied this awkward viewing position at points when she was positioned through conventional representational codes of dialogue, action, and narrative to 'see' herself—that is, to hear and observe her gender expression—through the eyes of Division members and prospective Northern California jurors, all gazing from viewing locations that, as Queer theorist Donald. E. Hall writes, represent "patriarchy in action."[621] This reading also follows from Mulvey's, who in her seminal work argues that women have only two potential locations for positioning: as the image or by occupying the subject location of the male protagonist. Even when she later concedes that a female subject can oscillate between a male-coded and a female-coded viewing position by wearing "borrowed transvestite clothes," that female subject masquerades as male. Hence, although the textual analysis of this dissertation has shown that there are more radical subject locations for women, for example, when Georgette is positioned as trans, and women can temporarily locate in those, Mulvey is correct that women's subject and viewing positions are typically contained. And spectators are generally recognized into the text through these conservative subject locations. Such viewing positions are expected, or at least condoned, by basic cable viewers assumed to be in search of a primetime procedural drama that foremost entertains.

Such constraints of the serial design do not prevent viewers from reading against the grain of the text in order to enter through subject locations that resist hegemonic masculinity or heteronormativity. Although the nature of comfort to viewers must be problematized—in other words, for whom is the male gaze or the cross-dressing plot comforting? And for whom is the program's conservative perspective profoundly discomforting? These questions will be explored in audience readings summarized in this section. A key takeaway, in terms of the core questions

of this dissertation, is that popular serial design makes available myriad entry positions for viewers both comforted and discomforted by matters of gender including the objectifying male gaze and the gender binary. Brenda as the protofeminist heroine temporarily critiqued the objectifying male gaze when she chastised detectives for their objectifying behavior. Georgette as a relatively radical transgender figure offered an interdeterminate viewing position that criticized the gender binary from within and unsettled heteronormativity through dialogue in which she stated that she was a lesbian, even as a biological male. The text denaturalized media as an ideological state apparatus in these moments, and opened up spaces that critically examined gender as a social construction. Content that explores both the gaze and the transgender figure allow viewers to critique taken-for-granted notions of gender and organization. Unlike a series such as *Orange is the New Black* or *Transparent*, *The Closer* does not offer viewers an ongoing exploration of transgender issues. Neither does *The Closer* offer consideration of feminism or a feminist protagonist throughout, unlike the first season of *Cagney & Lacey* and *Prime Suspect* (U.S.). Either of these characteristics of serial design would have put *The Closer* in jeopardy of cancelation. But devoting individual episodes to relatively radical transgender content and to critiquing the dominating male gaze contribute to the broader questions and the continuing themes of this series about gender and the workplace.

The handling of the themes of the gaze and the transgender figure reveal three characteristics of the serial design of *The Closer*. First, having comforted viewers with conventional representations in the first half of the episode, the primary job of the second half is to encourage interrogation, to subtly contest agreement on gender and hegemony. Second, *The Closer* skews center-right in targeting a populist audience in the first and second decades of the aughts. It persuades viewers with more conservative values to engage gender content in a

meaningful way. This demographic perspective distinguishes it from predecessors *Cagney & Lacey*, which skews center-left, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* that skews dead-center. Finally, textual analysis of transgender themes and to a lesser extent the themes of the gaze reveal *The Closer* as something other than a postfeminist text. Following from Dow, a postfeminist text theoretically requires a "retreat from sexual politics. In the postfeminist vision, men do not have to change. . . . [It] is not about patriarchy after all; it is just about individual differences, about choice."[622] A transgender Georgette did not retreat; she insisted that gender identity is not a choice; and she forced ex-partner Provenza to see and to hear about her interdeterminate gender, and thus to accept her as trans. The protofeminist heroine in the gazing process called attention to and classified the men's behavior as sexual harassment. Through her the television codes temporarily offered a female mode of address and a dominant female gazing process that interrupted conventional looking arrangements. But despite these temporary challenges to heteronormativity and the objectifying male gaze, neither the protofeminist heroine nor the relatively radical transgender figure had the power to stop the narrative's eventual return to a dominant (male) subjectivity by episode's end, prior to the series finale (as taken up in the Note on Gender, Feminism, and the Finale in this chapter).

By temporarily using a feminine form of address and turning power over the narrative in key scenes to protagonist Brenda instead of the male detectives in "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," and to a transgender lesbian Georgette rather than the dominant male (Provenza) subject in "Make Over," the text does unsettles patriarchy, however, as well as the hegemonic processes of masculinity formation and heteronormativity that undergird patriarchy as a social structure in episodes over the run of the series. Additionally, these television codes move beyond the hegemonic discourses of gender and feminism that are typically conveyed in

television programs (including *The Closer*) that cater to mainstream viewers. One scholar might argue that the show is popular because gender and feminism are contained in the television codes. In other words, the combination of shutting down feminism and nonnormative gender representations by episode's end is what makes it palatable to a mainstream audience and, thus, what enables the program to remain popular. That argument may answer for why the program stayed on the air for seven seasons, but it does not answer for why the program was hugely popular, especially among its implied demographic of older, socially conservative viewers.

I argue instead that *The Closer*'s historic popularity in regards to its mainstream and niche audiences is due to the ways the series' television codes broaden hegemonic discourses, break gender binaries, and relieve the dominant male gaze: temporarily, subtly, and anachronistically. This smart serial design offers characterizations and content that chip away at hegemonic ideologies of gender over the series run. Along the way, it offers an expanded number of opportunities for entry. Viewers along a spectrum of feminism, gender, or sexuality are recognized into the text through differing characters and points of view taken up in individual episodes or those across the series. This model of serial design is what kept a wide and diverse group of viewers comfortable, yet titillated enough to return to the series week after week. It is what qualifies *The Closer* as a sea-changing text. And, it is why I posit that this series has influenced myriad, similarly designed female protagonist dramedies since 2005.

The audience analysis in Chapter Two underscored the relevance of these characteristics of popular serial design in viewers' readings of *The Closer*. In regards to the feminine form of address and Georgette's power over the narrative, some viewers argued that the text portrayed Georgette as a surrogate for Brenda to send a strong message of the superiority of the female interrogation style. She, like Brenda, is represented as having a greater aptitude for the job.

Through such codes, the text reproduces the message that women are more proficient 'closers.' Like many audience readings of the protofeminist looking arrangement in "You Have a Right to Remain Jolly," focus group participants in general felt satisfied in seeing a female, either Brenda or Georgette, swoop in and save the day.

Participants also commented on the implied demographics of the series, contending that such content would not be considered liberal by socially progressive viewers, but politically conservative, older viewers might be curious about transgender representations beyond a cross-dressing plot or drag conventions. As Concetta remarked, "Typically, when watching a movie or a show, you're not thinking that much about topics like gender and sexuality. Normally it's more subliminal. But this show brings these topics to the surface, and that makes me want to watch it again."[623] Older lesbian viewers of mainstream television series are not accustomed to seeing themselves represented on a basic cable procedural drama even today, participants argued, and are therefore drawn to this content as well. Kristy spoke to this underrepresented niche audience, saying, "Now I better understand why *The Closer* is popular with older lesbians. I know from lesbian friends. It deals with topics of gender and sexuality often; and although initially it seems exploitative, ultimately it handles it sensitively."[624]

The treatment of transgender as comic fodder for entertainment nevertheless drew the widest range of readings—from abominable to hilarious—of any episode screened. Many viewer-participants felt that a stereotypical, ethnically diverse but older cast of characters, each of whom offers a recognizable stock character from television comedies or police procedurals of old—including the bigoted cop and the slapstick plot: "There are two guys at a bar and someone comes up from behind, whoops it's a cross-dressing woman"—was in large part responsible for the show's popularity.[625] One participant called this "a teaching moment . . . [that] allows us to

examine Provenza's character. From the pilot we know he has sensitivity issues and this episode forces him to work through them."[626] Most viewers admitted to a level of comfort with this conventional aspect of programming. And, in terms of popular serial design, were least interested in seeing innovation in this area. Such comments highlighted the continued relevance of the cross-dressing plot and drag conventions to both industry and audience. It also reaffirmed television scholar Merri Lisa Johnson's thesis that encoding progressive content requires the inclusion of nonthreatening material, as well, if the series is to remain appealing to a broad cross-section of the audience. Both textual analysis and audience analysis indicate that Johnson's theory remains productive. In applying her theory, this chapter offers a point of contemporary relevance in examining how far Duff felt his highly popular series could go in the early aughts, and still remain palatable to a mass audience.

As much as participants agreed over the comfort level of stock characterizations, they disagreed over the relevance of them, as well as the intent of dominant messages of gender encoded in "You Have a Right to Remain Jolly." Some said it was playing with gender borders—"What is male and what is female?"[627]—others that it spoke to the arbitrariness of gender—"a strong male in George . . . feminizing him in only certain ways."[628] And still others that it revealed how women characters use gender as a "masquerade": all feminist positionings, which entered the text in moments that broke the binary framework for thinking about gender.[629] Others felt the content was post-gender—"It's saying that it doesn't make any difference who you are, only if you can do the job right."[630] Those readings were strikingly opposed to a single female viewer who remarked, "If you want a transgender topic in your show than you better work it out. You better figure out how you can present someone in a paramilitary setting properly. Do research, consult the LGBT community. I will never watch this show again now

that I've seen this episode."[631] She reversed her positioning after viewing the series finale, which she found strongly feminist. Thus, her opposing reading positions confirmed that contemporary viewers watch television programming to feel comforted at certain moments, and challenged at others. Her complex viewing position illustrates why designing episodes with polysemy in mind, and making available a wider spectrum of entry points—some of which offer moments of relatively radical gender content—is an important aspect of successfully designing a popular primetime series in the aughts. Viewer observations that speak to topics of polysemy and popularity, in consultation with my close reading of the text, enable me to contextualize Johnson's theory, and thus expand upon her work.

A Note on Gender, Feminism, and the Finale

No longer constrained on the one hand by conventional televisual codes, and on the other hand by the need for the program to appeal to a wide audience, the finale "The Last Word" offered a female protagonist who ultimately undermined the institutional structures that had disenfranchised her throughout the series.[632] Professionally, Brenda collaborated with other women, a homosexual Latino medical examiner, and an African American detective to bring a long-awaited perpetrator to justice. Along with her coconspirators, she subverted Chief Pope, the dominant male figure in *The Closer*'s fictional Los Angeles Police Department (hereafter LAPD), and the representative archetypal hero of the police procedural genre. Even the most feminist series within that generic category, the original British version of *Prime Suspect*, locates a heteronormative male in the role of Chief law enforcement officer.[633] Brenda disrupted this convention by securing a female dominated mode of address in the finale. She undermined generic conventions by taking a stand against Pope's official position—and, not coincidentally,

the informal position of the male detectives she supervised—all of whom had a vested interest in protecting the perpetrator Attorney Philip Stroh as a privileged member of the LAPD's 'old boys' network.' She then resigned as the LAPD Deputy Chief of Priority Homicide—Pope's number two 'man.' And she accepted a position as Chief law enforcement officer of the Los Angeles District Attorney's Bureau of Investigation: a division headed by women, and one with a mission statement that mirrors the feminist, Marxist aim of universal emancipation.

In addition to depicting the ways that Brenda undermined patriarchy professionally, the finale explored her failed attempts at performing well as a woman constrained by femininity personally: as protector of home and hearth and surrogate mother to Dusty, the teenage witness she was harboring. When Dusty asked her to explain the difference between spaghetti and linguini, she did not know the answer. In these moments, the text illustrated Brenda's lack of domestic acumen. Focus group member Concetta read the scene as portraying that "[Brenda] doesn't know the difference. If she cooked a lot, she would."[634] Karen contextualized this portrayal with series' aims, adding, "I like the fact that the show makes clear and it's not assumed that every woman likes to, or can, cook."[635]

Additionally, Brenda broke with conventions of femininity in how she protected Dusty. While in her home and under her care, Dusty was kidnapped and held at knifepoint by Stroh: the man he witnessed burying the body of Karen Oncidi, a rape-murder victim. Stroh had been stalking Dusty, trying to eliminate him as a witness ever since. Because feminism is not about saving others, but rather working to empower others to save themselves, in the penultimate scene of the finale, Brenda conveyed to Dusty, verbally, a means by which he could save himself. "Don't struggle," she said. "Let your body go slack." When the camera cut back to a two-shot of the men, Dusty started his slide to the ground. Brenda nodded as a means of encouraging

Dusty more. She appeared calm and in control of her environment. Working in consultation with Brenda, Dusty overtook Stroh physically. He slipped from Stroh's arms just enough to throw the perpetrator over his shoulder and onto the ground. That process gave Brenda the time she needed to retrieve her gun, fight off Stroh, and shoot him defenseless. Rather than portray her ability to mother or protect Dusty in traditionally feminine ways, the codes established that Brenda worked from the vantage point of a law enforcement officer, not a mother. The finale offered the broadest spectrum of entry points to gender and feminism of the series. It depicted Brenda as failing at motherhood and domesticity, but exceptionally, without recrimination. And it illustrates a type of modern feminist identity struggle that we rarely see resolved on television.

Via revolutionary themes of subverting institutional structures, and by resolving the protagonist's character arc from that of a protofeminist constructed with individual subjectivity, yet as holding out the promise of feminism, to an enfranchised female protagonist who works to empower others to challenge the patriarchal structures that have excluded or subjugated them, the television codes of the finale unsettle hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity and engage a discourse around broader questions of gender and patriarchy. In so doing, *The Closer* makes important contributions to the cultural production of gender in television programming and to the discursive terrain of historical female television representations.

In large part due to the codes of the finale, *The Closer* debunks the myth of postfeminism—the idea that we have entered a period in which gender no longer matters. This rare disavowal of postfeminism on shows about contemporary female figures and their lives impacts the range of representations available on future television programs and the increased number of entry points to viewers of those programs. In the final diegetic moments, Brenda affirms that gender matters by relinquishing her reliance on men to save her, and by working

with others to unsettle patriarchy. Her collaborators are depicted as having different historical experiences based on their differing identities; and they are shown to revolt against patriarchy in varying degrees and in various ways in the finale. They are given voice to explain in dialogue and to illustrate in action that they are challenging institutional structures to satisfy needs that differ from those of the female protagonist. There is no universal, Caucasian, female savior offered in the finale, but rather a collection of individuals who challenge and subvert existing (patriarchal) social formations. The text, rather than being descriptive, is discursive. It explores a shared aim of universal emancipation by way of myriad subjectivities that do not conform to hegemonic standards of dominant masculinity or heteronormativity. And it offers a feminist protagonist, feminism as a theme, and a feminist entry point—and, thereby, a feminist Subject position—that viewers can be recognized into and that is not undermined by the text returning power over the narrative to a male character who saves the day, or reverting to a masculine form of address, for the only time in the series.

How the television codes characterize a broadened spectrum of characters and their varying histories and approaches to subverting institutional structures illustrates a feminist politics that discursively empowers all to work towards liberation, but not one based on the application of a universal white, educated, middle-class, female experience: a position of white privilege that remains a key criticism of the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970s, and the protagonists based on second-wave politics such as Cagney and Lacey. In the final moments, *The Closer* sends two important political messages to a populist audience of the aughts: that feminist goals are only achievable through collective action based on the varying needs of those in the struggle; and that revolution is necessary, still, to destabilize the institutional structures

that bind women and ethnic, gender, and sexuality minorities because these structures are not gender-neutral, and, as such, gender still matters.

Although the finale stakes a position in regard to feminism, it does so only after several years of exploring gender issues from a variety of feminist positions. Put another way, *The Closer*'s strategy for critiquing gender on television is to enter into debates that are de-politicized because they are thirty years old. *Cagney & Lacey* failed because its political commentary was too raw for a broadcast network like CBS in the 1980s. Its strategy—targeting a smaller working woman's audience—led to low ratings by alienating many middle-class viewers (especially men and socially conservative women) who were in search of programming that first entertains, and then engages feminism from a safe distance. The serial design of *The Closer* meets the needs of the diverse agents of cultural production. It resolves the arc of a protagonist who had served as an emblem of protofeminism for most of the series, and through her promise of (rather than her embodiment of) feminism, had invited a wide viewership to enter the text at many points in episodes leading up to the finale. It succeeded in securing and maintaining a mass viewership for seven years in first-run airings and to date in syndication in countries across the globe, in part, due to her containment. In the finale, she takes possession of the narrative and has the last word. This model of serial design can be replicated by programs that aim to offer more pluralistic gender frameworks while not sacrificing popularity.

At this eleventh-hour juncture, there are few repercussions for either creator, series, or network. There are no more episodes to draw viewers back; thus, the agents overdetermining content from an Althusserian point of view—the creators and distributors—need not worry about future ratings, offending viewers or advertisers, or competing for future viewership with more conservative programming available on broadcast networks. Additionally, series finales

typically portray more contentious aspects of a protagonist's character construction than were offered in previous episodes, as a means of resolving a central story line or indicating a sharper character arc. Such changes are often necessary, especially in the case of a protagonist like Brenda Leigh Johnson who feels compelled to resolve a previous storyline metered out over several seasons in order to end the series on her own terms. Additionally, it illustrates how Duff and TNT influenced the expectations of presumed crossover viewers of *Major Crimes*, the sequel of *The Closer*, which premiered the night *The Closer* bowed. Captain Sharon Raydor, the antagonist-turned-ally of Brenda in *The Closer*, worked with the protagonist to subvert patriarchy in the finale. The way Brenda was constructed in relation to her feminist identity struggles, which she ultimately resolved, likely framed the expectations of existing viewers in regard to the type of female protagonist Raydor would be (or would become) in *Major Crimes*. The audience analysis in Chapter Two conveys the importance of operationalizing gender and feminism in *The Closer*'s finale. Depicting an enfranchised protagonist and the ways she works to empower others to subvert patriarchal social structures fulfills the ultimate feminist promise of a female protagonist. Additionally, it satisfies viewers who enter the text through more radical feminist subject locations and may have been waiting for an entire series to do that without feminist compromise.

Sandy, a participant in her 70s, expressed how Brenda impacted her and other real women, saying, "We're still learning from characters like this." Evelyn, also in her seventies, went further in explaining how viewers changed by engaging Brenda's feminist struggle: "I'm more outspoken now because I've been influenced by younger women like Brenda into feeling comfortable having the last word." *The Closer*, in syndication, and the female-protagonist dramedies it has influenced offer the possibility of continued change, of a social transformation

particularly around questions of gender and feminism. These and future primetime series' designed to target both popularity and progress hold out the promise of encoding dominant messages of feminist change over the run of the show, and of challenging, even breaking, gender hegemonies from the pilot, rather than being beholden to industrial limits that, if ignored, are expected to lead to low ratings, as in the cases of *Cagney & Lacey* and *Prime Suspect* (U.S.), or to steer clear of feminist change or the resolution of feminist identities until the finale, as in the case of *The Closer*.

The analysis in this dissertation indicates that raising but containing feminism in television content offers a polysemic framework that interpellates a vast number of viewers; and, although it does not ensure popularity, it certainly enables it. A gesturing to feminism that some might refer to as a 'steel magnolia' type of thinking—a virtuous, delicate femininity that is apolitical and nonthreatening—is useful to television, text, and audience. *The Closer* deploys that conception in its television codes, but it also goes beyond representations of femininity—even liberal feminism—throughout the run of the series, denaturalizing and further interrogating the relationship between gender, feminism, and power. At periods throughout the seven seasons, dominant codes portray a female protagonist trying on but failing at feminine fragility, domesticity, and motherhood, and, in the finale, no longer accepting of the status quo of the 'old boys' network.' No longer definable by the combining form 'proto,' now feminist, Brenda is fearless, competent, beyond gender, and political in her maneuverings—all necessary prerequisites to breaking down patriarchy. These political tools, which she employs during her feminist awakening, are similarly utilized by others across gender, race, and sexual orientation lines in the finale. By smartly interpellating a range of viewers within each episode and across the series, and deploying more characters than just the protagonist in various forms of a

revolutionary struggle during their moments of feminist awakening, *The Closer* produces an ideological dance that serves its producers and its viewers well. Structured with a clever framework, it remains popular while interrogating various status quos. In so doing, it broadens discourses around gender politics; and it contributes to a continual shift in what constitutes middle-American content as well as the themes of gender, feminism, and power explored in a popular series.

Scholars in the future might investigate whether fewer constraints on gender politics are in evidence in the dominant representations of television programming. The findings of this dissertation point to a continual trend in female protagonist dramedies since the 1970s. It indicates that the form of political representations evolve at glacial speed, but the resting point may shift to more feminist representations from the pilot. This is in evidence in several contemporary series following *The Closer* such as *Orange is the New Black* and *Transparent* in regard to transgender politics, and *The Good Wife* and *Nashville* in terms of tropes of femininity and performativity around notions of the 'good wife' and the 'good mother.'

Impact and Future Research

The series finale of *The Closer* is not ironically entitled "The Last Word." The last word in this instance points to a never-ending feminist struggle for change based on an understanding that patriarchy is not gender-neutral, and that media as a superstructure developed from patriarchy is an ideal discursive space to wrangle over this ongoing revolutionary fight in the form of gender representations and content. Brenda had her 'last word' by resolving her feminist identity struggle. Several of her colleagues challenged the ways they and victims were marginalized by the criminal justice system, and thus had their 'last words.' Yet the codes of the

finale indicate that the revolution continues for all including these characters, since patriarchy is founded upon, nurtured by, and reliant on a lack of gender neutrality and gender power asymmetry. Arguably of greatest social value as a text, *The Closer* encourages an older, socially conservative demographic to think about matters of gender and feminism. That aspect of the series fits into wider conversations in media studies about the anachronistic nature of popular serial design. Contemporary programs such as *The Good Wife* and *Nashville* position themselves similarly to their respective audiences. Participants in focus group readings celebrated Brenda's commitment to highlighting social problems and for taking action to reform oppressive social and gender structures for herself, while working to empower others to do so on their own terms. Additionally, they stressed that based on Brenda's exit from the LAPD and the requirements of her new position as Chief of the Los Angeles District Attorney's Bureau of Investigation, the dominant message of the finale, and I would extend that to include the series, is that gender discrimination is ongoing. Thus a commitment to continual subversion of institutional structures that reward and foster marginalization and subjugation must be encouraged in both television and American culture.

The serial design of *The Closer* stuck a balance between audience and industrial limitations and audience and industrial progress for basic cable television in its time. Subsequent series including *Nashville* and *The Good Wife*, but also *Transparent* and *Orange is the New Black*, offer similar serial design models that strike that balance for their distributors and audiences in the present day. Each offers a range of characters and content that stake a position in regard to feminism. Viewers along a spectrum of gender and feminism can find places to enter each text. As comfort levels in regard to transgender issues continue to expand among middle-America viewers, *Transparent* and *Orange is the New Black* offer the potential to grow

their niche audience into broad cross-sections of the mass audience. Comparable representative progress can be evidenced in *The Good Wife* and *Nashville*, which examine the unresolved feminist identity struggles of their protagonists and heteronormativity as a superstructure on a weekly basis. Both engage discourses around larger questions of gender, sexism, social roles, and disenfranchisement that represent principal platforms of the 1970s American Women's Liberation Movement. Both generate high ratings, and have reached a mass viewership that includes middle-American viewers. And both revolve around older, angst-ridden, morally-elastic female protagonists who adhere to what I call a 2000s women's mantra of 'making it work,' a politically active positioning that illustrates a continual effort to attain gender equality, rather than the portrayal of Ally and the women of *Sex and the City* at the neoliberal end of liberal feminism—as already 'having it all,' following from Helen Gurley Brown's conception—or Mary at the traditional end of liberal feminism, as represented in the opening song of *TMTMS*, in which 'she might just make it after all.' These contemporary series have been designed to appeal to larger and increasingly diverse audiences for their distributers by offering more pluralistic frameworks of gender and feminism than those previously made available in popular programming. This progress, I argue, is due to the evolving emancipative gender discourses offered in *The Closer*.

By exploring gender from a variety of feminist positions, both anachronistically and across the series, and by presenting a protagonist who ultimately subverts patriarchy and resolves her feminist identity struggle, *The Closer* offers Brenda Leigh Johnson as a character archetype that influenced the more progressive representations of gender we see in television programming. The construction of its protagonist and the design of the narrative around her illustrate the lasting impact and the historical importance of this text to scholars, viewers, and

industry alike. Theorizing its model of serial design and implied demographic and the ways viewers engage questions around gender and feminism in its representations and content, and thus how it achieved popularity, is the greatest contribution of this dissertation to the academy.

Yet we have not yet arrived at a moment in history when a series offering a consistently feminist protagonist—that is, without feminist compromise or containment—can stay on the air for more than a few seasons. HBO's *Enlightened* and Showtime's *United States of Tara* illustrate that. Additionally, because middle-American viewers have, potentially, only become more comfortable with transsexual and transgender discourses in recent years, as they have developed in mainstream media, industry and the big-box advertisers they cater to, arguably, still imagine that distributing transgender content through a traditional broadcast or basic cable medium may fail. Evidence of that premise can be read in the flow of television, for no show of similar design to *Transparent* or *Orange is the New Black* is available in the programming schedules of the Big Four broadcast and basic cable networks even today.

The big takeaway from this dissertation is that we have entered a point in television history when female protagonists can address questions of gender and feminism without sacrificing mass popularity. Key questions for future research center on to what extent and at what rate of progress these questions are being addressed in broadcast and basic cable television. If the most radical content continues to premiere on subscription-based online services, what is the relationship between the increasing proliferation of channels, as the industry transitions from the late- to the post-Post Network Era, and questions around gender and feminism raised in network programming? What is the relation, if any, between progressive gender discourses being relegated to the margins of distribution and to the sharp decline in primetime dramas featuring a female protagonist since the record high of the 2011-2012 television season: a period

referred to as "The Year of the Woman on TV," and the final, seventh season of *The Closer*? What benefit does this continual demarcation of radical content to the margins, to niche demographics of the audience, offer to a broadcast and a basic cable television industry largely beholden to advertising revenue and big box advertisers targeting middle-American consumers? And, finally, what is the industry losing by not offering and sustaining more radical content, while holding out the expectation that viewers will rise to the occasion, and, over time, will accept these representations as the new status quo? Exploring these questions allow feminist media scholars to investigate not only a changing industry and audience in the aughts, but the texts made available in future years across the dial. It also opens the door to interrogating a never-ending struggle for feminist change based on an understanding that patriarchy is not gender-neutral and that media as a superstructure developed from patriarchy is an ideal discursive space to wrangle over this ongoing revolutionary fight in the form of gender representations and content.

Endnotes

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[10] Eric Deggans. "TV Women, Hear them Roar." 2 June 2007. *St. Petersburg Times*. http://www.sptimes.com/2007/06/02/news_pf/Tv/TV_women__hear_them_r.shtml. Accessed October 7, 2015.
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[13] Throughout this dissertation, I use bell hook's definition of feminism: "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." See Bell Hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), viii.
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[16] "Man and Woman of the Year: The Middle Americans." *Time*, January 5, 1970. http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/film/middle.htm. Accessed May 1, 2015.
[17] Victoria E. Johnson, *Heartland TV: Prime Time Television and the Struggle for U.S. Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 166.
[18] See Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 10.
[19] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (1975): 6-18.
[20] Tom Steward, "Authorship, Creativity, and Personalization in US Television Drama," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24:5 (2010): 745.
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[22] The television industry "imagines" viewers in a similar fashion as anthropologist Benedict Anderson notes that nations "imagine" communities. Imagined viewers are distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness as cohorts, but as indefinitely stretchable nets of clientships, limited only the breadth of the demographic targeted by a series or a network. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).
[23] "TV Ratings: 1970-1971." *ClassicTVHits.com*. http://www.classictvhits.com/tvratings/1970.htm. Accessed September 30, 2014.

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[25] Throughout this dissertation, I understand the American Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s as a collective struggle for equality that sought to free women from oppression and male supremacy. The Movement consisted of women's liberation groups, advocacy, protest, consciousness-raising, and second-wave feminist theory. The Movement originated after American women participated in the New Left and Civil Rights Movements of the 1950s and early 1960s, and found that they were not treated equally. I also understand the American Women's Liberation Movement to be associated with the Second Wave of Feminism.
[26] The leading female of *The Goldbergs*, a comedy-drama which aired on CBS from 1949 to 1951 and on NBC from 1952 to 1956.
[27] James Poniewozik, "17 Shows That Changed TV," *Time International*, Atlantic ed. 170:12, 51-54. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost. Accessed September 30, 2014
[28] Ibid.
[29] The Network Era refers to the period in television broadcasting history from 1952 to the mid-1980s when three television networks—namely, CBS, NBC, and ABC—controlled the airwaves. The transition to what is referred to as the Post Network Era began in the mid-1980s due to a proliferation of channels especially on cable television, a wider diversity of programming due to narrowcasting, and less constraint on viewer's medium (television verses computer), location (living room verses office), and viewing time (i.e., the technologies such as the VCR and later the DVD rendered broadcast time—and thus, appointment TV—less relevant).
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[31] Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr and Tise Vahimagi, eds., *MTM: Quality Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1984).
[32] Robert J. Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age: From 'Hill Street Blues' to 'ER,'* First Syracuse University Press Ed. (New York: Continuum, 1996).
[33] See Serafina Bathrick, "The Mary Tyler Moore Show: Women at Home and at Work', in Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr and Tise Vahimagi, eds., *MTM: Quality Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1984), 99–131. See Ella Taylor, *Prime Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989). See Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random, 1994). See Bonnie J. Dow, B., *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).
[34] Throughout this dissertation, I understand the Second Wave of Feminism to span the 1960s and 1970s, from the discovery of birth control in 1961 and the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1962 to the emergence of different second-wave feminisms, which addressed the differences, the different standpoints, and the divergences between women that gradually grew into what is now referred to as an "identity politics" that led to various third wave feminisms. I also understand the Second Wave of Feminism to be associated with the American Women's Liberation Movement.
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[36] Quoted in Robert S. Alley and Irby B. Brown, *Love is All Around: The Making of the Mary Tyler Moore Show* (New York: Delta, 1989), 50.
[37] James L. Brooks and Allan Burns (creators/writers), Jay Sandrich (director), "Love is All Around," *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, CBS, September 19, 1970.
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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Douglas, 200.
[44] Ibid., 205.
[45] Ibid., "Love is All Around."
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Dow, 40.
[49] Bathrick, 100.
[50] Taylor, 125.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., "Love is All Around."
[54] Ibid.
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[56] Ibid.
[57] Allan Neuwirth, *They'll Never Put That On the Air: An Oral History of Taboo-Breaking TV Comedy* (New York: Allworth Communications, 2006), 101.
[58] Larry King. On Air Interview aired May 8, 2002, at 21:00 EST. From the transcript available online at http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0205/08/lkl.00.html. Accessed October 1, 2014.
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[61] Ibid., "Love is All Around."
[62] Dow, 46-7.
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[64] Julie D'Acci's interview with Corday in Los Angeles, California in February 1984.
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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Julie D'Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney & Lacey* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 73.
[73] Ibid., 131.
[74] Ibid., 155-6.
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[76] Ibid., 183.
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[79] D'Acci, 73.
[80] Avedon, Corday, and Rosenzweig, "Bang, Bang, You're Dead."
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[82] Ibid.
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[87] Dow, 40.
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[91] Ibid.
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[96] Ibid.
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[99] Faludi, 10.

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[193] Gerard Genette (1997) coined the term paratext as a subset of intertextuality to refer to those elements surrounding a text whose sole aim is to inflect particular readings of that text. Examples of paratexts include network, creator, or star comments in the presses, print advertisements, promotions, 'making-of' documentaries, and even the public personas, fashion sense, and activist causes of the stars or creators of the text. As Jonathan Gray writes, even when there is "no natural connection between text and paratext, we must add the proviso that the two become virtually inseparable, with the experience of one wrapped up in the experience of the other. And in the media world flooded with synergy, cross-marketing, and endless advertisements and promotions . . . [paratexts] acclimatize us to texts in certain ways." See Jonathan Gray, *Watching with the Simpsons: Television, Parody, and Intertextuality* (New York and Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2006, 36.
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[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Focus Group, Tucson, Arizona, February 17, 2013.
[207] Ibid.
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[230] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[233] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[234] Focus group members brainstorming stock characters from Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[235] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[236] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[237] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[240] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[241] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[242] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[243] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[244] Ibid.
[245] February 17, 2013.
[246] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[249] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[252] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[253] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[254] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[255] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[256] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[257] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[261] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid
[264] Ibid.
[265] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[266] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[267] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.

[268] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[271] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[272] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[275] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[276] Ibid.
[277] The official TNT tagline from June 12, 2001 to May 13, 2014.
[278] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Gledhill, 73.
[283] James Duff (creator/writer) and Michael Alaimo (writer), Rick Wallace (director), "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," Season 7, Episode 12, *The Closer*, TNT, December 5, 2011.
[284] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[287] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[288] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Sandy, Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[291] Ibid, Alexa.
[292] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Michael Alaimo (writer), Rick Wallace (director), "Make Over," Season 5, Episode 14, *The Closer*, TNT, December 14, 2009.
[300] Alexa, Focus Group, Tucson, March 3, 2013.
[301] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[302] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[303] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[306] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[307] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[308] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[309] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[310] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[313] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[314] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[315] Ibid.
[316] James Duff (creator/writer) and Mike Berchem (writer), Michael M. Robin (director), "The Last Word," Season 7, Episode 21, *The Closer*, TNT, August 13, 2012.
[317] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Multiple-person passage from Focus Group, February 17, 2013.

[320] Multiple-person passage from Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[321] Multiple-person passage from Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[322] Multiple-person passage from Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[326] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[327] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[328] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[329] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[332] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[333] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[334] Ibid.
[335] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[336] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[337] James Duff, "An Evening with 'The Closer,'" August 10, 2011, http://www.paleycenter.org/2011-summer-an-evening-with-the-closer. Accessed 26 October 2014. A showrunner and cast discussion with fans at the Paley Center for Media.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Stuart Hall conceptualized three potential reading positions of audience members in relation to media messages. The preferred reading is one where the viewer takes the actual meaning directly and decodes it exactly as producers encoded it. A negotiated reading is one where the viewer accepts certain elements of the encoded message—that is, those text codes he or she agrees with—but modifies other elements to reflect his or her own experiences and interests. Finally, an oppositional reading is one where the viewer rejects the text code of the encoded message full stop and forms his or her own interpretation of the message. See Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse* (Birmingham, England: Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973), 507-17.
[340] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[341] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Karen, Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[350] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[351] Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[352] Multiple-person passage, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[353] Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[354] Fiske, *Television Culture*, 65.
[355] Ibid.
[356] See endnote 196.
[357] I follow from Judith Halberstam in understanding transgender as a general term for all positions that transgress gender norms, and specifically as "a gender identity that is at least partially defined by transitivity but that may well stop short of transsexual surgery." See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 161. In addition, The American Psychological Association defines transgender/gender variant as "the behavior, appearance, or identity of persons who cross, transcend, or do not conform to culturally defined norms for persons of their biological sex." See "Report of the APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance" (American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., 2009), 28.
[358] See Johnson, 166.
[359] Ibid., 166.

[360] Paul Manning (writer), Daniel Sackheim (director), "ER Confidential," Season 1, Episode 9, *ER*, NBC, November 17, 1994.
[361] David E. Kelley (creator/writer) and Linda McGibney (writer), John Heath (director), "Boys will be Girls," Season 6, Episode 13, *Chicago Hope*, CBS, February 3, 2000.
[362] Joyce Burditt (creator/writer) and Tom Chehak (writer), Christian I. Nyby II (director), "All American Murder," Season 3, Episode 3, *Diagnosis Murder*, CBS, December 22, 1995.
[363] Steven Bochco (creator/writer), David E. Kelley (writer), Alan Brennert (writer), and Patricia Green (writer), Paul Lazarus (director), "Speak, Lawyers, for Me," Season 5, Episode 19, *L. A. Law*, was broadcast, NBC, April 25, 1991.
[364] David Milch (creator/story), Steven Bochco (creator/story), Ted Mann (teleplay), Gardner Stern (teleplay), Burton Armus (teleplay), Rick Wallace (director)"Jumpin' Jack Fleishman," Season 1, Episode 14, *NYPD Blue*, ABC, January 18, 1994.
[365] Carlton Cuse (creator/writer) and Jed Seidel (writer), Colin Bucksey (director), "Javelin Catcher," Season 1, Episode 5, *Nash Bridges*, CBS, April 19, 1996.
[366] Dick Wolf (creator), Ken Storer (writer), Peter Leto (director), "Transitions," Season 10, Episode 14, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, NBC, February 17, 2009.
[367] *Glee* features the male-to-female transgender character Unique Adams (previously Wade Adams). Although she was cast as a reoccurring character for seasons three and four (debuting on Season 3, Episode 16, "Saturday Night Glee-ver," which aired on Fox on April 17, 2012), she was promoted to a main character for seasons five and six (through the series finale, Season 6 Episode 13, "Dreams Come True," which aired on Fox on March 20, 2015).
[368] Distributed on Netflix from July 11, 2013 to present.
[369]Distributed on Amazon from February 6, 2014 to present.
[370] See http://americantransman.com/2011/05/13/the-spectra-of-gender-sexual-orientation-and-biological-sex/ for (1) definition of spectrum, (2) an explanation of the "Diagram of Sex and Gender" (including biological, ID, express, and sexual orientation) and its (3) source (Center for Gender Sanity), (4) variations on this theme, (5) a detailed spectrum of sexual orientation along the Kinsey scale, and—halfway through—the (6) "spectra of biological sex" from male to female, and (7) putting them all together in the "normal woman." Also see http://www.gendersanity.com/diagram.html for explanation of biological sex, gender ID, gender expression, sexual orientation, and further explanations for the scale, the schema, the conditions, and the model.
[371] As communications media, television is a site of interpellation—an ideological state apparatus, a mechanism for the reproduction of ideologies that, in the last instance, support social and economic reproduction. Narrative devices such as a cross-dressing plot and drag performances are key vessels for reproducing dominant patriarchal ideologies.
[372] See Judith Halberstam, 161.
[373] See Annette Kuhn, *The Power of Image,* 49.
[374] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 231.
[375] *The Red Shoe Diaries* was distributed on Showtime from June 27, 1992-June 1, 1997.
[376] Distributed on ABC from September 26, 2007 to August 8, 2009.
[377] *United States of Tara* was distributed on Showtime from January 18, 2009 to June 20, 2011.
[378] Distributed on HBO for two seasons from October 10, 2011 to March 3, 2013.
[379] See note 295.
[380] The American Psychological Association defines gender identity as "a person's basic sense of being male, female, or an indeterminate sex." See "Report of the APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance," 28.
[381] The American Psychological Association defines gender expression as "the way in which a person acts to communicate gender within a given culture; for example, in terms of clothing, communication patterns, and interests. A person's gender expression may or may not be consistent with socially prescribed gender roles, and may or may not reflect his or her gender identity." See "Report of the APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance," 28.
[382] The American Psychological Association defines biological sex as "attributes that characterize biological maleness and femaleness. In humans, the best known attributes that constitute biological sex include the sex-determining genes, the sex chromosomes, the H-Y antigen, the gonads, sex hormones, the internal reproductive structures, the external genitalia, and secondary sexual characteristics. . . . To distinguish between a person's sex and gender . . . the terms male and female are used to describe sex; the words boy or man and girl or woman are used to describe gender." See "Report of the APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance," 28.

[383] The American Psychological Association defines sexual orientation as "the tendency to be sexually attracted to persons of the same sex, the opposite sex, both sexes, or neither sex." See "Report of the APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance," 28.
[384] Susan Stryker, "(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies," in Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3-4.
[385] Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: FtMs Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 150-2.
[386] Sal Renshaw, "Queering 'The L Word,'" in Dana Heller, ed., *Loving the L word: The Complete Series in Focus* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), 58.
[387] Ibid., 76.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Rebecca Beirne, "The T Word: Exploring Transgender Representation in 'The L Word,'" in Dana Heller, ed., *Loving the L word: The Complete Series in Focus*, 25.
[391] See Candace Moore, "Having It All Ways: The Tourist, the Traveler, and the Local in 'The L Word,'" *Cinema Journal* 46:4 (2007).
[392] Beirne quotes Jacquelyn N. Zita, "Male Lesbians and the Postmodernist Body," *Hypatia* 7:4 (1992): 110-11, in Beirne, 26.
[393] Cis is the Latin prefix for "on the same side." It compliments trans, the prefix for "across" or "over." Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook define cisgender persons as those "who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity." See Kirsten Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality," *Gender & Society* 23:4 (2009): 461.
[394] Joshua Senter (writer), Ilene Chaiken (creator), Michele Abbott (creator), and Kathy Greenberg (creator), Clement Virgo (director), "Lies, Lies, Lies," Season One, Episode Four, *The L Word*, Showtime, February 8, 2004.
[395] Beirne, 26.
[396] Renshaw, 76.
[397] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 231.
[398] "Make Over," 05:59-6:02.
[399] Ibid., 06:02-06:41.
[400] An "unruly woman" is "by definition . . . [one who] transgresses boundaries and steps out of her proper place" by being conveyed with an "exaggerated masquerade of a femininity." See Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 42 and 182.
[401] The six Madea franchise films to date include *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), *Madea Goes to Jail* (2009), *I Can Do Bad All by Myself* (2009), *Madea's Big Happy Family* (2011), and *Madea's Witness Protection* (2012).
[402] First-run airings on January 3 and January 10, 2012.
[403] See endnote 307.
[404] Helena Handbasket was referred to in earlier episodes but makes her first appearance in episode twenty-two, season seven, "The One with Chandler's Dad," on May 10, 2001. She also appeared in the final two episodes of that season.
[405] Tobias Fünke is a character in sixty-eight episodes of the four-season series (through May 26, 2013).
[406] Clarice Bell is introduced in episode two, season three, "New Kids on the Block," on September 26, 2006, and appears in thirty-six episodes including the finale of season four, "Patriot Acts," on May 21, 2008.
[407] Victoria Flanagan, *Into the Closet: Gender and Cross-dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 175.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Ascribed social statuses are assigned at birth based on gender, race, family origins, and ethnic backgrounds. They remain fixed and associated with the positive and negative stereotypes linked with one's ascribed statuses.
[410] Achieved social statuses are voluntarily assumed and believed to reflect both personal ability and merit. There are no limits to the number of social statuses one can achieve. However, one's achieved social statuses come with sets of roles and expectations that provide a social identity.
[411] "Make Over," 06:40-07:10.
[412] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), 189.

[413] This concept is most often used in film theory to describe the way a viewer is interpellated in the narrative. Kaja Silverman writes, "The match of the subject and cinematic discourse occurs not just at the level of the shot, but at that of the story. . . . Films reinterpellate the viewer into pre-established discursive positions not only by effacing the signs of their own production, but through the lure of narrative." See Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 220-21. I use the term to describe a process in relation to television, wherein a program has but minutes to sew a viewer into its narrative, or in other words encourage her or him to stay tuned in.
[414] Flanagan, 176.
[415] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 54.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid., 03:30-03:48.
[418] Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse*, 507-17.
[418] Fiske, *Television Culture*, 65.
[419] "Make Over," 06:05-06:09.
[420] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 231.
[421] "Make Over," 06:48-06:51.
[422] Ibid. 04:48-05:03.
[423] Ibid., 13:36-13:45.
[424] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 231.
[425] "Make Over," 06:07-06:09.
[426] Fiske, *Television Culture*, 4.
[427] "Make Over," 06:05-06:09.
[428] Ibid., 06:15-06:21.
[429] Ibid., 06:54-06:58.
[430] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 231.
[431] "Make Over," 06:14-06:15.
[432] Ibid., 06:07-06:09.
[433] Ibid., 06:56.
[434] Ibid., 06:57-06:58.
[435] Ibid., 7:43-10:11.
[436] Ibid., 10:12-10:38.
[437] Ibid., 10:41-10:53.
[438] Ibid., 08:44-08:56.
[439] Ibid., 08:47.
[440] Ibid., 09:23-09:26.
[441] Ibid., 09:35-09:38.
[442] Ibid., 06:15-06:21.
[443] Ibid., 06:38-06:40.
[444] Ibid., 10:08-10:13.
[445] Ibid., 09:20-10:35.
[446] Ibid., 10:21-10:22.
[447] Ibid., 09:40.
[448] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 231.
[449] "Make Over," 12:14.
[450] Ibid., 12:41-12:49.
[451] Ibid., 12:50-12:51.
[452] Ibid., 12:52-12:56.
[453] John Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television," 269.
[454] "Make Over," 12:58-13:17.
[455] Ibid., 13:18-13:19.
[456] Ibid., 13:20-13:24.
[457] Ibid., 13:25-13:27.
[458] Ibid., 13:28-13:29.
[459] Ibid., 13:32-13:35.
[460] Ibid., 13:36-13:45.
[461] Ibid., 13:46-13:48.

[462] Renshaw, 76.
[463] "Make Over, 13:49-13:53.
[464] Ibid., 13:54-13:57.
[465] Ibid., 13:57-13:59.
[466] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 157-8.
[467] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 239.
[468] Ibid., 240.
[469] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 238.
[470] Butler, *Gender Trouble*.
[471] "Make Over," 07:51-07:52.
[472] Ibid., 30:25-30:27.
[473] At 20:18 in private, when she steps out into Provenza's living room wearing a robe and a towel wrapped around her head, and at 29:25 in public when Georgette responds to Provenza's approval of her dressing as a man.
[474] In "Fools Gold," Season 7, Episode 7.
[475] "Make Over," 42:22-42:31.
[476] Ibid., 16:28.
[477] Ibid., 24:31-24:36.
[478] Ibid., 24:37-24:39.
[479] Ibid., 24:14-24:17.
[480] Ibid., 24:18-24:24.
[481] "Make Over," ends 25:15.
[482] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 152.
[483] "Make Over," 30:59-31:03.
[484] Ibid., 20:58-21:00.
[485] Ibid., 39:10-39:11.
[486] Ibid.
[487] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 20.
[488] Flanagan, 175.
[489] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 20.
[490] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 152.
[491] "Make Over," 21:12-22:35.
[492] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 30.
[493] "Make Over," 20:43.
[494] Ibid., 21:42-21:54.
[495] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22.
[496] Ibid., 20.
[497] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2008), 4.
[498] Butler defines "queer" as "a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and future imaginings . . . that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes." See Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1993): 17-18.
[499] Kosofsky Sedgwick, 10.
[500] Ibid.
[501] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 232.
[502] Fiske defines producerly work as "the discursive power to make meanings, to produce knowledge of the world [and by extension the text] . . . a power that both program producers and producerly viewers have access to." See Fiske, *Television Culture*, 239.
[503] Duff, "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly."
[504] The male gaze was originally conceived by Laura Mulvey. See Mulvey, 6-18.
[505] See Mulvey, 6-18. See E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997). See Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Subjectivity," 2-9. See de Lauretis, 133. See Jackie Stacey, "Desperately Seeking Audience," in John Caughie, Annette Kuhn, and Mandy Merck, eds., *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), 244-257. And see Linda Williams, "Why I Did Not Want to Write This Essay," *Signs* 30:1 (Autumn 2004): 1270.

[506] John Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television," 269.
[507] Joseph Kraft coined the term "Middle American" in 1968. To explore its original conception, see Safire, 427. The late historian Eric F. Goldman further defined the term in relation to middle-Americans. See Goldman, 46. *Time* magazine further explored middle-American traits. For that article see the *Time* article, "Man and Woman of the Year: The Middle Americans." And, finally, for her conception of the way this term is conceived in relation to a particular, highly sought-after television demographic, see Victoria E. Johnson, 166.
[508] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 178.
[509] Mulvey, 11.
[510] Jeffrey S. Longacre, "Review," Review of *Feminism and Film*, by E. Ann Kaplan, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21:1 (Spring 2002): 131.
[511] David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkley; Los Angeles: London: University of California Press, 2005), 3-4.
[512] Ibid., 260.
[513] Mulvey, 11.
[514] Ibid.
[515] Althusser, 171.
[516] Mulvey, 13.
[517] Pearson, "Cinema Apparatus," 80.
[518] Mulvey, 12.
[519] Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," *Framework* 15/16/17 (1981): 12-15.
[520] See Mulvey, 6-18. See E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other Feminism*. See Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Subjectivity," 2-9. See de Lauretis, 133. See Jackie Stacey. See Linda Williams.
[521] Mulvey, 9.
[522] E. Ann Kaplan.
[523] Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Subjectivity," *Framework* 12 (1980): 2-9.
[524] de Lauretis, 133.
[525] Jackie Stacey.
[526] Linda Williams.
[527] Ibid., 1270.
[528] Ibid., 1264.
[529] Martina Pachmanová, "Mobile Fidelities: Conversations on Feminism, History and Visuality," *n. paradoxa: international feminist art journal*, no. 19 (May 2006): 37.
[530] Ibid., 36.
[531] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly."
[532] I follow from Rosalind Gill in regarding "postfeminism . . . as a distinctive sensibility, made up of a number of interrelated themes. These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification . . . a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment . . . and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference." See Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10:2 (May 2007): 147.
[533] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," 08:30-8:55.
[534] Duff, "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," still image.
[535] Ibid.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Ibid., 8:49-8:55.
[538] Ibid., still image.
[539] Ibid.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid., 8:43.
[542] A culturally middle-American audience is one used routinely in the television industry literature and by popular cultural critics to mean the large, mass audience with midwestern values and more conservative sensibilities and tastes. Victoria E. Johnson claims the type of program that targets this audience is "old-fashioned," bland and nonthreatening," of "quaint" character, and with a "down-home warmth and naïveté." See Johnson, 166.
[543] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," 08:47.

[544] According to Stuart Hall a preferred reading is one where the viewer takes the actual meaning directly and decodes it exactly as producers encoded it. See Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse*, 507-17.
[545] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," 00:17-00:19.
[546] Ibid., 02:56.
[547] Ibid., 3:00.
[548] Ibid., 5:08.
[549] Ibid., 03:13, 03:23, 03:43, 03:55, 04:10, 04:13, 04:19, 04:25, 04:32, 04:56, 5:06, and 8:41.
[550] As evidenced at Ibid., 8:43, 8:47, and 9:05.
[551] Mulvey, 6-18.
[552] Ibid., p. 8.
[553] "You have the Right to Remain Jolly," still image.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Ibid.
[556] Ibid.
[557] Ibid.
[558] Ibid.
[559] Ibid., 8:58-9:02.
[560] Ibid.
[561] Ibid., 9:03-9:06.
[562] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," still image.
[563] Ibid.
[564] Ibid.
[565] Fiske, *Television Culture*, 11.
[566] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," 09:13-9:15.
[567] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," still image.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Ibid., 09:37-09:42.
[570] Ibid., still image.
[571] Ibid.
[572] Ibid.
[573] Ibid., 09:41-09:45.
[574] R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, California: University of Stanford University Press, 1987), 184.
[575] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," 8:49-5:55.
[576] Ibid., still image.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Ibid.
[579] Ibid., 9:54.
[580] Ibid., 09:11-09:12.
[581] Ibid., 09:20.
[582] Ibid., 09:21-09:23.
[583] Ibid., still image.
[584] Ibid.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Ibid., 25:03-25:28.
[587] Ibid., 25:22-25:23.
[588] Ibid., 25:25.
[589] Ibid., 25:24-25:26
[590] Ibid., 26:07-26:15.
[591] Ibid., 26:17.
[592] Ibid., 27:03-27:13.
[593] Ibid., still image.
[594] Ibid.
[595] Ibid.

[596] Ibid.
[597] Ibid., 26:17-26:24.
[598] Ibid., 26:21-26:42.
[599] As defined by liberal feminism—that is, feminist politics that are aimed at, among other things, equal representation of women within systems of power and governance.
[600] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," 26:48-26:52.
[601] Mulvey, 13.
[602] *Prime Suspect* (US) was distributed on NBC for thirteen episodes, or one-half the 2011-2012 season, from September 22, 2011 to January 22, 2012.
[603] Gledhill, 73.
[604] Fiske, *Television Culture*, 15-16.
[605] Gledhill, 73.
[606] Season 5, Episode 14, TNT, December 14, 2009.
[607] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 30.
[608] Gledhill, 73.
[609] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly."
[610] Silverman, "Masochism and Subjectivity," 2-9.
[611] "You Have the Right to Remain Jolly," 25:24-25:27.
[612] Ibid. 26:39-26:42.
[613] Ibid. 26:43-26:46.
[614] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[615] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[616] Alexa, Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[617] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[618] Ibid.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Ibid.
[621] Donald E. Hall, *Fixing Patriarchy: Feminism and Mid-Victorian Male Novelists*. (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), 3.
[622] Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism*, 103.
[623] Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[624] Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[625] Brad, Focus Group, March 2, 2013.
[626] Ibid., Virginia.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Jake, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[629] Concetta, Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[630] Garth, Focus Group, February 24, 2013.
[631] Alexa, Focus Group, March 3, 2013.
[632] Season 7, Episode 21, TNT, August 13, 2012.
[633] DCS Michael Kernan, 1991-1995.
[634] Concetta, Focus Group, February 17, 2013.
[635] Ibid.

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