

Gender Stories

Negotiating Identity in a Binary World

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Chapter Four

"Males," *Aggressive*
Fernando Suay, and
Competitive Fighting in
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Depression and Violence

L. Feindler, Suzanne

Junior High School

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Gender, 34.

American Psychologist 60

Focusing on *Difference*

William B. Eerdmans,

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BEST SELLERS GENDER STORIES IN POPULAR CULTURE

*When will I learn? The answer to life's problems
aren't at the bottom of a bottle, they're on TV!*

Homer Simpson, *The Simpsons*

You get dressed watching Brad and Angelina interviewed on *Good Morning America*. You drive to school listening to the top 40, singing along when your favorite Beyoncé song comes on. You drive through a landscape of billboards advertising everything from Pabst Blue Ribbon to T-Mobile. You stop at Starbucks to get coffee and check out a couple of your friends' Facebook pages before class begins. Television, music, advertisements, coffee shops, and the Internet are just a few of the sources of messages competing to sell you various visions of who you should be. All of these forms of entertainment—the "best sellers" of popular culture—are the stories you are supposed to "buy" about how to be attractive, sexy, fulfilled, and successful.

Many of the stories the best sellers of pop culture tell are about gender. As you watch, buy, listen to, and participate in them, these stories employ a variety of strategies to invite you to accept the perspectives on gender they offer. Some of these stories retell the binary, reinforcing in various ways the expectations of the binary for gender roles. Other stories

revise the binary, suggesting that the categories of this matrix can be modified. A third type of story rewrites the binary, challenging and overturning it. We turn now to an explanation of each of these strategies and how they function in the best sellers of pop culture to retell, revise, or rewrite the binary. We obviously can't include all of the media stories that are out there, but we encourage you to look for the stories that are most influential for you and to reflect on the types of stories they are.

Our goal in presenting these samples is to provide you with a framework for analyzing and evaluating the texts that are delivered to you through mass media, digital media, and all forms of popular culture. We hope that the gender literacy you develop as a result encourages you to ask questions about what you watch, hear, and read and prompts you to be more aware of the role of mass media and pop culture in constructing your views of reality around gender. If you are able to analyze critically the messages being offered you in the form of gender stories throughout the culture, you will be able to make more informed choices about the kinds of stories in which you want to participate and the ones you want to use as resources for constructing your own gender stories.

GENDER STORIES THAT RETELL THE BINARY

Many of the gender stories that are offered to you in pop culture retell the binary—in other words, their messages about gender align with the prescriptions of the master narrative of the binary. These stories encourage you to conform to traditional, normative gender expectations by telling stories of men and women who meet those expectations and who are rewarded for doing so. Stories that retell the binary use three primary mechanisms to encourage you to adhere to the binary's expectations for gender: (1) preparation; (2) prescription; and (3) reinscription.

PREPARATION

One mechanism for retelling the story of the binary is preparation, a strategy directed primarily at children and teens. Pop-culture stories of preparation socialize children in anticipation of adulthood in the binary, telling children that they will be expected to look and act in certain ways. This preparation assumes many forms, including explaining how children should be as adults, actually modeling the expected behavior, showing the rewards to be gained from following the binary, and projecting negative consequences for those who do not conform. Dr. Seuss's books

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and Taylor Swift's music are examples of the strategy of preparation employed in gender stories that retell the binary's expectations for women and men.

DR. SEUSS

The Dr. Seuss books not only introduce children to the fun of language and a set of wacky characters, but they communicate a clear message about gender differences. They anticipate substantial variation between the kinds of lives men and women are expected to live. They illustrate the binary's hierarchical value of the masculine over the feminine in stories that show that males are more important than females, and boys will have more adventures and more say about what goes on in the world than girls.

Dr. Seuss's books preview the greater importance of males in the adult world through the predominance of male characters in his books. All of the active roles in his books are performed by males, as novelist Alison Lurie notes: "There is the almost total lack of female protagonists; indeed, many of his stories have no female characters at all. . . . The typical Seuss hero is a small boy or a male animal."¹ In fact, not one of the 42 children's books written by Dr. Seuss has a female title character.² In the few Dr. Seuss books where female characters assume relatively major roles, those characters are unlikable. In *Horton Hatches the Egg*, Mayzie is a lazy bird who traps Horton into sitting on her egg while she flies off to Palm Beach, and Gertrude McFuzz in *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories* is "vain, envious, greedy, stupid, and fashion-mad. She gorges on magic berries to increase the size of her tail, and ends up unable to walk."³

The female characters in his books are not only largely absent and unpleasant, but when they are present, they appear as "mostly silent sidekicks."⁴ The lack of words spoken by female characters in Dr. Seuss's books is striking. Of the 170 speaking parts in his children's books, 148 of them are male. Of all the words spoken in the books, 86.9 percent are spoken by males, 10.4 percent by characters of uncertain gender, and 2.7 percent by females.⁵

Some specific examples clearly point to the message of Dr. Seuss's books that men matter more and that boys will play a more active role in the world when they grow up. In *The Cat in the Hat*, the two main characters are a boy and his sister Sally. The boy narrates the story and is the one who captures Thing One and Thing Two, while Sally hides behind her brother and doesn't say anything throughout the entire story. Similarly, Peter, the main character in *Scrambled Eggs Super*, spends the book explaining what a wonderful cook he is to Liz, who remains silent. In *The*

Glunk That Got Thunk, a girl with a powerful imagination conjures up a monstrous, green glunk. When she is unable to unthink the monster, she is rescued by her brother, who turns on his Un-thinker so they can unthink the glunk together. He then advises her not to take any more risks: "Then I gave her/Quite a talking to/About her Thinker-Upper."⁶ The pattern continues in *You're Only Old Once!*, which contains a female receptionist (although only her arm is visible) and a female nurse; all of the other characters are male—a patient, an orderly, doctors, technicians, and a fish.

Using the strategy of preparation, Dr. Seuss's books explain to children the kind of world in which they will live as adults and how important they will be in that world. Boys will become men who will matter the most and will have adventures that make them central to the world, while girls will have minimal participation in the world. These messages align with the binary's evaluation of men as more important than women and its prescription that men are the ones who do the major and most visible work of the world.

TAYLOR SWIFT

Pop culture offers every generation of girls and boys models for them to use for growing into adulthood. The music of country and pop singer Taylor Swift resonates particularly with today's pre-teen girls, and it is likely to constitute a formative musical experience for many of them. Swift's musical stories introduce girls to some key components of the binary's expectations for them as women. In particular, she previews a key role she says girls should play when they grow up—the princess—a role Swift models in her songs and videos. In "Love Story," she calls herself *Juliet* and her boyfriend *Romeo* and sings: "I'm standing there, on a balcony in summer air. I see the lights; see the party, the ball gowns." She develops the princess theme even more explicitly in these lyrics: "You'll be the prince and I'll be the princess. It's a love story, baby, just say yes." Swift's modeling of the princess role is evident as well in "Today Was a Fairytale": "Today was a fairytale, you were the prince. I used to be a damsel in distress. You took me by the hand, and you picked me up at six." Swift also dresses like a princess in her photograph on the bottle of her perfume, the name of which, *Wonderstruck*, alludes to life as a princess.

Swift's songs play out the binary script by suggesting that love and romance are the most important concerns for girls and women. These are far more important, for example, than studying and excelling at school. In

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her videos, Swift often i a romantic relationship or studying in a library the video for the song " schoolbooks when she transported to a castle s tury clothing, including her look every bit the p all that matter as Swift balcony of the castle wit Swift's lyrics often p The lyrics for "Love Stor knelt to the ground and never have to be alone./ your dad—go pick out a Me," which deals with S wins him when she appo very much like a weddi complete with boutonni sage to young girls—a r master narrative of the bi you can be the center of a will be a happily-ever-af boys, the message of Swi do the choosing in roman on the beauty and appear

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her videos, Swift often is shown exchanging her books and her studies for a romantic relationship. Several videos begin with Swift walking to class or studying in a library while wearing a school uniform and glasses. In the video for the song "Love Story," Swift is walking across campus with schoolbooks when she sees the man of her dreams. Both are instantly transported to a castle setting, where everyone is dressed in sixteenth-century clothing, including Swift, whose almost-strapless ball gown makes her look every bit the princess. Love, romance, and attracting a man are all that matter as Swift flits among lantern-lit gardens and lingers on the balcony of the castle with her prince.

Swift's lyrics often present marriage as the ultimate goal for women. The lyrics for "Love Story," for example, describe a marriage proposal: "He knelt to the ground and pulled out a ring and said/Marry me Juliet, you'll never have to be alone./I love you, and that's all I really know./I talked to your dad—go pick out a white dress." In the video for "You Belong With Me," which deals with Swift's unrequited love for the boy next door, she wins him when she appears at a dance dressed in a white, strapless gown very much like a wedding dress. He likewise wears a wedding-like tux complete with boutonniere. Swift's music offers a clear preparatory message to young girls—a message that aligns with the prescriptions of the master narrative of the binary: Dress like a princess and be beautiful so that you can be the center of attention and attract and marry a prince. The result will be a happily-ever-after world, according to Swift's music. For young boys, the message of Swift's music is complementary: You are expected to do the choosing in romantic relationships, and your choices are to be based on the beauty and appearance of the woman.

PRESCRIPTION

Other best sellers are marketed toward adults and explicitly prescribe how men and women should be. These narratives depict adult masculinity and femininity in ways that conform to the gender binary and often reveal the rewards to be reaped from meeting the binary's expectations. The music of rapper Pitbull, the articles and ads in *Cosmo* magazine, and the sport of snowboarding illustrate stories that give advice on appropriate behavior for women and men and, in the process, retell the binary using prescription.

PITBULL

Rapper Pitbull's songs and videos prescribe that masculinity is constituted largely by sexual prowess and the achievement of material success,

two key ingredients that are requirements for normative masculinity in the binary. Sexual prowess is accompanied by aggressiveness and confidence, and Pitbull's lyrics and videos clearly suggest that he can have sex whenever and with whomever he chooses—single women, groups of women, and even women who have other boyfriends. The lyrics to "Hey Baby" are typical of his demonstration of confident sexuality: "Hey baby girl, what you doin' tonight?/I wanna see what you got in store/Hey baby, givin' it your all when you're dancin' on me/I wanna see if you can give me some more." In "Give Me Everything," he sings, "Tonight I want all of you tonight/Give me everything tonight," and the implication is that she will not refuse. The video for "Hotel Room Service" also makes explicit the idea that he is sexually active as he is joined in a hotel room by a number of women dancing, taking bubble baths, and inviting him to participate in group sex.

The binary's requirement that men be materially successful is also evident in Pitbull's lyrics and videos. He is shown in many of his videos dressed in an impeccably tailored suit, suggesting a high income. In the video for "Hotel Room Service," he is seen driving a sleek black car, another typical symbol of success. When he enters an opulent high-rise hotel, he shows the hotel clerk his ID, which has the name *Armando Bond* on it. *Armando* is Pitbull's first name; *Bond*, of course, references the charming, successful, and idealized James Bond. Pitbull reinforces his status as a successful man in the lyrics to "Go Girl": "Baby, I'm a superstar/Always posted at the bar." Because of his status, he has leisure time and sufficient money to spend his days drinking and entertaining himself with women.

The proper role for women in Pitbull's music and videos is complementary to men's roles. If men are supposed to be sexually confident and aggressive, women are supposed to be sexually available so they can satisfy men's appetites. "I know you want me, want me/You know I want cha, want cha," he sings in "I Know You Want Me," suggesting that women are willing to engage in sex with him. In his videos, Pitbull is typically shown at the center of a group of women, all of whom are focused on him as they dance suggestively. Women dressed in strapless mini-dresses dance behind him in "Go Girl" and, at the end of the video, they encircle him, much as football players in a huddle. Pitbull emerges with lipstick kisses all over his face. In the video for "Hey Baby," women at one of his performances are seen doing the same things as the women in most of his videos—dancing suggestively with their attention focused exclusively on him, signaling their availability. Because women's primary func-

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tion is to satisfy men: "Hotel Room Service," with the names of many women—*Lina*, *Sofia*, and *Stefany*—focuses largely on the man's status and wealth. Women's products are usually available to men.

COSMO

Using the strategy of the magazine, *Cosmo* targets female readers that life as girlfriends or wives. The magazine, is to create a fantasy that is accomplished by the products. Ads appear promoting the products that enhance the ideal beauty. Women's facial products ads for all kinds of makeup, hair color, hair remover, facial hair removal, facial hair fortifier, hair color and anti-frizz cream. Ads help women construct their identity according to the magazine's help to remain thin (one-size-fits-all), bikini strips and grow-faster bikini wax. Women are encouraged to be sexually attractive. *Lovestruck*, and *Forbidden* are sexually attractive. Men's engagement rings and jewelry—laces—rewards for their

That shopping is the focus not only in the ads but in the magazine often the very ones being advertised. *Cosmo* discusses "lipstick shades" and *Cosmo* Beauty Awards. *Cosmo* woman "more like that stays put all night that wearing snakeskin temptress." It includes

tion is to satisfy men sexually, women are interchangeable, as seen in "Hotel Room Service," in which Pitbull sings "Mujeres!" and follows it with the names of many different women: *Roslin, Zulema, Christina, Carolina, Sofia, and Stefany*. The prescription offered by Pitbull's music, then, focuses largely on the nature of masculinity as rooted in sexual prowess and wealth. Women's place, according to this gender story, is to be sexually available to men.

COSMO

Using the strategy of prescription, *Cosmopolitan* magazine tells its female readers that life is about making themselves sexually attractive to men as girlfriends or wives. The primary duty for women, according to the magazine, is to create a body that is sexually appealing to men, a task that is accomplished by buying and applying a wide array of beauty products. Ads appear every second or third page in the magazine, promoting the products that women need to develop or enhance their physical beauty. Women's faces are a particular focus of attention, so there are ads for all kinds of makeup—foundation, eye shadow, lipstick, moisturizer, facial hair remover, eyeliner pencil, and mascara. Hair plays a big role in sexual attractiveness, evident in the ads for shampoo, hair spray, hair fortifier, hair color, conditioner, moisturizer, hair-repair treatment, and anti-frizz cream. Ads for jeans, shoes, watches, and bras and panties help women construct their wardrobes in ways that enhance their appearance according to the magazine's particular standards. Diet aids offer help to remain thin (one of the prescribed attributes). Ads for nail-polish strips and grow-faster base coats depict the accepted appearance for nails. Women are encouraged to buy perfumes with names such as *Seductive, Lovestruck, and Forbidden Euphoria*, reminding women of the goal of being sexually attractive. Most important, the *Cosmo* women are sporting engagement rings and wearing diamond bracelets, earrings, and necklaces—rewards for their superb performances as *Cosmo* women.

That shopping is the key route to sexual attractiveness can be seen not only in the ads but in feature articles that promote beauty products—often the very ones being advertised in the magazine. "Beauty: His Picks" discusses "lipstick shades he likes" and tells where to buy them. "The Cosmo Beauty Awards" describe sexy lip shades that will make the *Cosmo* woman "more kissable," false eye-lashes-in-a-tube, and lip gloss that stays put all night long. The article "Ssseriously Sssexy" suggests that wearing snakeskin "can morph you from girl next door to total temptress." It includes photographs of skirts, blouses, dresses, shoes,

pants, and belts that look like snakeskin and provides information on where they can be purchased. Not only the ads but the articles themselves provide information about what to buy so that women can make themselves sexually attractive.

Cosmo women are supposed to be sexually attractive for one reason: to be available to perform sexually in ways that are pleasing to men. Most of the feature articles in the magazine help women achieve this goal by offering advice about sex. "Naughty Sex Tips" contains ideas about how to make sex as exciting as possible, such as doing it in a "teeny, tiny space" or on a skateboard. Another article offers "Four Words that Seduce Any Man . . . Anytime," while in "The Lap Dance He's Dying to Get," a dance instructor teaches readers how to do men's favorite parts of a lap dance. The importance of performing sexually is underscored by the question-and-answer columns in *Cosmo*, where many of the questions and concerns deal with sex: "I'm dating a new guy, and we're having a ton of sex . . . like, up to four times a day. Is it possible to do it too much?," asks one reader. "I want to handcuff my husband to the bed, but I feel weird initiating it. What's the best way?," asks another. *Cosmo* women have sex on their minds because, according to the magazine, that's what concerns and attracts men.

Cosmo advises women on how to be sexually attractive: Purchase the right makeup, hair products, clothing, and perfume, and the result is an engagement or wedding ring. This is the reward for women's focus on their man's sexual needs and desires. Using the strategy of prescription, *Cosmo* asserts and reinforces women's primary activities in the binary—applying beauty products and performing sexually in the service of a goal the binary says is all important for women—being in a relationship with a man.⁷

SNOWBOARDING

Sports are a common way in which the prescriptions of the binary for boys and men are transmitted. Men's sports such as football and hockey clearly present and reinforce a view of masculinity as aggressive, violent, and competitive, with women as attractive cheerleaders and spectators. In contrast to many sports, snowboarding is a gender-integrated activity with male and female boarders participating next to one another. But the snowboarding culture nonetheless employs a variety of strategies both to prescribe a particular type of masculinity for male participants and to reinforce a masculine culture for the sport.

The masculinization of the sport began in its early years when the core snowboarders—largely men at the time—were "at the forefront of

developing athletic exp elements of two existir kid" and the "gangsta snowboarder. By stres essential requirement fo nected snowboarding t aged women from belie boarder explained, "I th kind of a skating back; much. The guys who sta it."⁹ Snowboarders also less, aggressive, and het stas—such as "'dressing and headbands,' baggy shorts, gold chains and communicate that snow

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The metaphors use masculinity.¹³ Terms su ing, fresh kill, and tearin,

developing athletic expressions, style, and jargon."⁸ They appropriated elements of two existing cultural versions of masculinity—the “skater kid” and the “gangsta”—to help develop the stereotypical masculine snowboarder. By stressing that a skateboarding background was an essential requirement for success in snowboarding, male participants connected snowboarding to an almost exclusively male sport and discouraged women from believing that they could be as successful. As a woman boarder explained, “I think most of the girls that I know don’t have any kind of a skating background, and I didn’t either, and it helps you so much. The guys who started skating just like stepped on a board and rode it.”⁹ Snowboarders also co-opted elements of the urban “gangsta”—fearless, aggressive, and heterosexual. The clothing, styles, and tastes of gangstas—such as “‘dressing all street style, wearing T-shirts on their heads and headbands, baggy clothing, low riding pants with exposed boxer shorts, gold chains and listening to rap and hip hop music”¹⁰—helped communicate that snowboarding is a masculine sport.

As the sport grew, masculinity—and a particular type of masculinity—was enforced in other ways. One was snowboarding’s privileging of physical strength and toughness, characteristics the binary assigns to men. Toughness is emphasized in the glorification of injuries that characterizes the sport. Because “tolerance of physical risk carries enormous symbolic capital” among men, male athletes are encouraged “to ignore or deny injuries and pain,” and “admitting to injury or suffering is seen as an admission of weakness.”¹¹ Interviews in snowboarding magazines usually include questions about worst injuries, with replies reported in gory detail. Also included are pictures of riders displaying their gashes, black eyes, bruises, stitches, and broken bones. Likewise, most snowboard films include a slam section that features crashes and injuries.

In contrast, the media direct very little attention to female riders’ injuries. Professional rider Tara Dakides recalls the injuries she has suffered over her career: “I’ve fractured my back, dislocated elbows, and torn ligaments in both knees. I’ve gotten whiplash six or seven times this year and who knows how many concussions.”¹² Instead of proclaiming such women to be tough, strong, and daring, the snowboarding media rarely discuss their injuries. As a result, the media strengthen the image of the male rider who is tough and courageous and who is a more legitimate participant in the sport.

The metaphors used in snowboarding idealize and valorize men and masculinity.¹³ Terms such as *killing*, *slashing*, *destroying*, *ripping*, *slaughtering*, *fresh kill*, and *tearing it up* are used to describe good performances,¹⁴

suggesting that men are supposed to be aggressive and even violent. The names of and graphics on the snowboards for men reinforce the appropriateness of aggressiveness for men. Men's boards are named *K2*, *Attack Banana*, *Horrorscope*, *Destroyer*, *Youngblood*, *Ultrafear*, *Garage Rocker*, *Happy Hour*, *Flying V*, *Buckwild*, *Crush*, *Bully*, *Goliath*, and *Evil Twin* and feature images of skeletons, guns, monsters, comic-book graphics of action figures, graffiti, and frightened faces. Women's boards, in contrast, carry names such as *Diva*, *Lily*, *Diamond*, *Biddy*, *OMG*, *Lip-Stick*, *Feather*, *B-Nice*, and *Snowbunny* and are adorned with birds, flowers, cats, snowflakes, and sewing machines. Despite the presence of large numbers of women in the sport of snowboarding, female riders must fit into space constructed as masculine, which is defined as physically tough, fearless, and aggressive. The story of snowboarding, then, retells and reinforces notions of masculinity despite the participation of women in the sport.

REINSCRIPTION

Reinscription is a strategy that retells the binary but in a more complex way than the strategies of preparation and prescription. The best sellers that employ this strategy use two steps to achieve reinscription. The first step is to tell a story that challenges binary guidelines, introducing gendered ways of being that violate the expectations of the binary. They encourage audiences to challenge the binary's expectations or to engage in a subversive or oppositional reading to these expectations. As a result, audiences position themselves as smart and enlightened because they recognize the binary's limitations. A story that makes use of reinscription, for example, might depict women and men in ways that the audience views as "retrograde or exaggerated or unrepresentative,"¹⁵ thereby suggesting that the binary should be mocked and dismissed because it is outdated.

The second step of reinscription involves reinforcement for the binary at the same time it challenges it. Reinscription revives the binary and encourages the audience to embrace it by offering an equally (or more) compelling message with which to identify. This message takes precedence over the audience's earlier dismissal of the binary. As a result, audiences are encouraged to align with the very binary they rejected earlier. Reinscription, for example, might depict women as housewives concerned only with cleaning products, encouraging the audience to see such a portrayal as limiting and silly, at the same time that it brings the audience around to supporting that very portrayal of women. An episode of *The Simpsons*, an issue of *Us Weekly* magazine, the Japanese graphic novel *Ouran High School Host Club*, and Chaz Bono's narrative of his gender-

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THE SIMPSONS

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transition surgery illustrate how the strategy of reinscription appears to challenge but ultimately reinscribes the gender binary, bringing the audience back to adherence with its norms and expectations.

THE SIMPSONS

Homer and Marge and their children Lisa, Bart, and Maggie star in the longest-running comedy on American television, *The Simpsons*. An episode from the eighth season, "Homer's Phobia,"¹⁶ revolves around Homer's efforts to keep Bart from becoming homosexual after a gay man, John, enters the Simpsons's lives. The episode illustrates the strategy of reinscription first by encouraging viewers to see homophobia and heterosexism as silly and ridiculous but, ultimately, asking them to see homosexuality as abnormal and undesirable. It both challenges and reinforces the binary's heteronormativity (the idea that heterosexuality is the norm), but reinforcement of the binary wins out at the end of the episode.

One way in which "Homer's Phobia" challenges the binary's stance toward homosexuality is to show how ridiculous prejudice toward gay men is by making fun of homophobic people like Homer. When Bart appears to identify with John, Homer reacts negatively, behaving in a stereotypically homophobic way. He criticizes Bart's Hawaiian shirt as gay, for example, and he is horrified when Bart chooses a pink snowball instead of a chocolate cupcake for dessert. He sees both Bart's dessert and clothing preferences as signs of homosexuality and therefore of deviance from the gender norm. Homer's intolerant, narrow-minded behavior toward what he sees as Bart's budding homosexuality is depicted as stupid and foolish.

A second way in which "Homer's Phobia" encourages the audience to challenge the binary is by presenting positive ways to think about gay men. After John saves Homer from attack by a pack of reindeer, his friends Barney and Moe lament, "We were saved by a sissy. We'll never live it down." Homer's reply calls them on their negative attitude toward gay men: "Hey! We owe this guy, and I don't want you calling him a *sissy*. This guy's a fruit, and a . . . no, wait, wait, wait, queer, queer, queer! That's what you like to be called, right?" He uses a term that many gay men and lesbians prefer to be called, suggesting that the audience knows about and is accepting of gay men. The show's references to filmmaker John Waters, a gay icon, also acknowledge gay culture. Because the episode shows both how ugly homophobia is and, in contrast, what an open, insider perspective on gay men looks like, it allows audiences to position themselves as progressive, sophisticated viewers who know more than Homer does about gay men and, unlike Homer, treat them with respect.

At the same time that it encourages a disruption of the binary's negative attitude toward homosexuality, "Homer's Phobia" is designed to reinscribe or reinstate homophobia. As the episode ends, audiences that earlier were critiquing homophobia and congratulating themselves on their openness toward gay men are encouraged to support the binary's norms of heteronormativity. In the concluding dialogue between Homer and Bart, Homer's attitudes toward John seem to have changed when he tells his son, "You know, Bart, maybe it's the concussion talking, but any way you choose to live your life is okay with me." This ostensibly open stance toward homosexuality is undermined by the word *concussion*. Homer suffered a concussion when he was rescued from the reindeer, and his reference to it suggests that his moment of transformation is the side effect of an injury and thus is likely to be fleeting. To hold an enlightened, accepting stance toward homosexuality, he suggests, is a result of something awry in the brain.

Heteronormativity is highlighted and seen as the superior attitude as well when Bart wonders what Homer means by his statement encouraging him to live as he chooses. When Lisa clarifies by whispering, "He thinks you're gay," Bart appears shocked and confusedly proclaims, "He thinks I'm gay?!" Bart's shock indicates that being presumed to be gay is an insult and cause for consternation; it clearly is inferior to being heterosexual. As TV critics Steve Williams and Ian Jones observe, the episode "leaves such a nasty taste in the mouth"¹⁷ precisely because, at the same time that it encourages audiences to break with the binary and to see homosexuality as a legitimate alternative to heterosexuality, it reinscribes the norms of the binary. Audience members are brought back to a place where they are asked to see homosexuality as deviant and abnormal.¹⁸

US WEEKLY

As you wait in the checkout line at the grocery store, you are likely to encounter stories of gender told in celebrity magazines or celebazines such as *Us Weekly*. Although these magazines include stories about both men and women, women are much more frequently the subjects of the articles and features. Readers might learn about Sean Kingston's jet-ski accident or the expensive necklace Justin Bieber purchased, but men are not the focus of attention and are not subjected to the same kind of scrutiny as women. This scrutiny is at the heart of the reinscription strategy employed by *Us Weekly* that ultimately retells the story of the binary.

The women who are the focus of *Us Weekly* earned their celebrity status because of prominence in their fields. They excel in their careers as

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actors, models, business polished, confident, powerful have worked hard to achieve. You may read these magazines and they implicitly recognize they are successful professionals. They tell us that the binary's housekeepers can be accomplished professionals.

But the binary is reinforced because of their focus on ideal feminine beauty undermined in that the women are valued primarily by their bodies and must be gorgeous, sexual. The magazine prompts audiences to use a direct mode of address through first names or nicknames and "Jen's New Love," women personally. Because of them, just as a close friend, the ideal of feminine beauty.

Readers are encouraged to look "for signs of ins of femininity."¹⁹ They are aware of weight gain, faces, put into maintaining the ideal. The headline of the magazine, "I gained weight since the encouraged to applaud the Little Bl who look thin and toned

In "Who Wore It Best" graphs of celebrities wear Holmes or Jessica Simpson. Staff at the magazine or Rockefeller Center to rent percentages are reported upon won 57 percent of the vote even more explicit in "Fa

actors, models, business executives, and working mothers and are accomplished, confident, powerful, and economically independent. They also have worked hard to achieve their success and fame. Although audiences may read these magazines thinking that the content is silly and frivolous, they implicitly recognize that the women in them are featured because they are successful professionals in their fields. One story that *Us Weekly* tells is that the binary's ideal of women as dependent, nonprofessional housekeepers can be challenged by women who are independent, accomplished professionals.

But the binary is reinscribed in the gender stories that *Us Weekly* tells because of their focus on whether or not the women meet the standards for ideal feminine beauty. Their careers and their professional success are undermined in that the women featured are judged and defined exclusively by their bodies and their appearance. As the binary dictates, they must be gorgeous, sexually alluring, thin, and perfectly attired. The magazine prompts audiences to scrutinize the women through an intimate and direct mode of address that encourages them to call the celebrities by their first names or nicknames. Headlines such as "Zoë's Sexy Breakthrough" and "Jen's New Love," for example, assume that readers know these women personally. Because they do, they can monitor and discipline them, just as a close friend might do, to make sure they conform to the ideal of feminine beauty.

Readers are encouraged to scrutinize the women microscopically, looking "for signs of insufficient adherence to this forceful, pointed code of femininity."¹⁹ They are prompted to judge the celebrities on their figures, weight gain, faces, hair styles, clothing, and the time and effort they put into maintaining their appearance. "Passion Adds Pounds," for example, is the headline of one story that features four women who have gained weight since they started dating or got married. Readers are encouraged to applaud celebrities when they don't gain weight, illustrated by "The Little Black Bikini," which shows ten celebrity women who look thin and toned in their bathing suits.

In "Who Wore It Best?," readers are asked to study juxtaposed photographs of celebrities wearing identical outfits and to decide whether Katie Holmes or Jessica Simpson looks the best "in an Isabel Marant jacket." Staff at the magazine ostensibly asked 100 people in New York City's Rockefeller Center to render their judgments on the question, and the percentages are reported under the pictures of the women; Jessica Simpson won 57 percent of the votes to Katie Holmes's 43 percent. The judgment is even more explicit in "Fashion Police," in which women are chastised for

what they are wearing with taglines like "Perfect for dusting the red carpet" or "The love child of Barney and Big Bird."

The magazine explicitly undermines women's professional success through its focus on weight and clothing. Although they have the freedom and independence that come with success, thus disrupting the binary's expectations for women, the binary's norms for physical appearance for women are revived when readers are asked to focus their attention not on the women's talent and hard work but solely on their physical appearance. As a result, despite its focus on successful, professional women, *Us Weekly* ultimately reinscribes or retells the binary's expectations for women.²⁰

OURAN HIGH SCHOOL HOST CLUB

Japanese graphic novels known as *gender benders*, a subgenre of *shōjo manga*, also exemplify the strategy of reinscription. Exported to the United States and translated into English, the novels are first serialized in magazines and later published as paperback novels. When published in the United States, they retain the Japanese layout, so English readers begin at what they would consider the back of the book, reading sequentially right to left and ending at the front. Written by women for a female audience, these graphic novels feature relatively empowered and often cross-dressing female protagonists.

The graphic novel *Ouran High School Host Club* by Bisco Hatori is an example of these gender benders. In *Ouran*, the protagonist is Haruhi, the poorest girl in an elite high school, who breaks an expensive vase. To pay off her debt, she is forced to join the all-male Host Club, which provides dating services for female students. Haruhi is initially mistaken as male by the other characters in the novel (and probably by most readers), thus expanding gender boundaries simply because she successfully passes as another gender. Haruhi considers herself androgynous and explains that she doesn't "fully appreciate the perceived differences between the sexes"²¹ as a rationale for why she typically dresses in men's clothing. The novel thus challenges the assumption "that gender is natural and predetermined by biology, suggesting instead that females can be masculine and males can be feminine" because these are "socially constructed categories, not physiological states."²²

Even as *Ouran* challenges and extends gender norms, however, it reinscribes the binary. Although the novel suggests that gender roles can be reversed, it does not challenge biological sex as the basis for gender. Haruhi eventually becomes romantically involved with another member

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of the Host Club, and changing clothes, her biological sex as but "removes any genders."²³ The notion that sex is also reinforced with (often falling in love with) biological sex. In constructing and reaffirms the gender binary body and gender.

Ouran also reinforces heteronormativity in that romance is appropriate only between women seriously and serve as a model for the Host Club—twins in a relationship with one another. A novel depicts them as deconstructing a bisexual man who is a parody on a humorous light. Although the novel depicts sexual relationships, an androgynous figure in which the genders may be significant gender portrayals that challenge the norms of the binary as well.

CHAZ BONO

Chaz Bono, who was born as a woman, has a gender transition that has attracted the attention of the pop singing duo Sorbus. Bono, an advocate for transgender rights, tells the story of his gender transition in his narrative, *Chaz: A Boy's Story*, which describes his experiences of men and women and encourages the audience to challenge the expectations of the binary.

Bono's narrative of his transition describes the kinds of feelings and experiences he has. Although he was born a woman, at birth, he did not follow the expectations to act like a boy: "As soon as I was clear: I chose boys' cloth-

of the Host Club, and when her boyfriend walks in on her while she is changing clothes, her biological sex is revealed. This act not only establishes biological sex as the basis for establishing someone's "true" gender but "removes any gendered ambiguity between the primary characters."²³ The notion that there is a real gender that is based on biological sex is also reinforced when straight men in the novel respond to Haruhi (often falling in love with her) as if they are somehow aware of her biological sex. In constructing a biological basis for gender for Haruhi, *Ouran* reaffirms the gender binary and a required alignment between the physical body and gender.

Ouran also reinforces heterosexuality and thus the binary's heteronormativity in that romantic relationships in the novel are seen to be appropriate only between women and men—same-sex couples are not taken seriously and serve as a source of comedy. For example, two members of the Host Club—twins Hikaru and Kaoru—perform a fake homosexual relationship with one another to entertain their female clients, and the novel depicts them as deviant and amusing. Likewise, Haruhi's father is a bisexual man who is a professional drag queen; he, too, is presented in a humorous light. Although the presentation of ambiguous gender, homosexual relationships, and transgendered persons expands the ways in which the genders may act, it also suggests that these are not real or significant gender portrayals, thus expanding the binary but reinscribing the norms of the binary as well.

CHAZ BONO

Chaz Bono, who was born *Chastity Bono* in 1969, is a celebrity whose gender transition has attracted media attention because he is the child of the pop singing duo Sonny and Cher. A female-to-male transgender person, he is an advocate for LGBTQ rights, a speaker, and an author. Bono's story of his gender transition is another example of the strategy of reinscription in that his narrative modifies the binary by enlarging the categories of men and women. But, at the same time, it checks that expansion and encourages the audience to align once again with the norms and expectations of the binary.

Bono's narrative of his gender transition begins with an expansion of the kinds of feelings and activities that the binary links to female bodies. Although he was born with female genitals and was assigned female at birth, he did not follow normalized gender roles and chose to dress and act like a boy: "As soon as I was able to dress myself, my self-image was clear: I chose boys' clothes, boys' shoes and sneakers, and was interested

in boys' toys, games, and other preferences."²⁴ As Bono grew older, these feelings did not change: "Over time, it began to dawn on me that though embodied as a female, I was not a woman at all. That despite my breasts, my curves, and my female genitalia, inside, I identified as a man. This meant, of course, that I was transgender, literally a man living in a woman's body."²⁵ In such statements, Bono expands the gender binary, assuming a gender that does not have to match the biological sex characteristics with which he was born. Whereas the binary dictates that biological sex is the basis for the determination of gender, Bono disagreed, believing that his feelings, activities, and appearance could be masculine even though his body was feminine.

Bono began transitioning to male at the age of thirty-nine, undergoing counseling, hormone therapy, and top surgery to remove his breasts and to sculpt a male chest. His transition was completed on May 7, 2010, when a California court granted his request to change his gender and his name. He found adapting to the life of a man very easy: "I didn't really have to learn how to act like a man because in my head I'd always been one. I already knew how a man stands, dresses, combs his hair, and hails a cab. I was born with this knowledge, and as soon as I stopped trying to pass as a woman, I knew how to live as a man."²⁶

In the story he tells following his surgery, Bono reinscribes the tenets of the binary that he previously rejected, encouraging his audience members to do the same. Bono asserts that a certain gender identity and certain kinds of activities and roles can only be performed by someone with a certain body. To do conventionally male things or act in a masculine way, a person must have a male body. Individuals need not engage in activities that match their bodies, he suggested earlier, but when he tells how his new more-male body creates activities that align with the binary, he reverts back to conventional views about the link between behavior and bodies.

Bono offers many examples of how his gender transition has transformed his personality, reflecting his perspective that a biologically male body determines personality traits. He asserts that he is "more gadget oriented now,"²⁷ and he reports an increased sex drive.²⁸ He reports that his girlfriend says his "smile is not as big as it used to be"²⁹ and perceives him as "less sweet."³⁰ Bono's challenge to the link between body and gender prior to his sex change is reversed when he reconnects biology and gender following the procedure.

Three mechanisms are used by the best sellers of pop culture to retell the binary's narrative—preparation, prescription, and reinscription. As

pop culture acts on you: exposed to the binary's forced for accepting the they are expected to be should look and behave even as it allows audier ened for rejecting it.

GENDER STOI

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JEAN-MICHEL BASQU

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pop culture acts on you with these strategies that retell the binary, you are exposed to the binary's expectations for women and men and are reinforced for accepting them. Preparation prepares boys and girls for how they are expected to be as adults, prescription advises them on how they should look and behave as adults, and reinscription revives the binary even as it allows audiences to feel temporarily progressive and enlightened for rejecting it.

GENDER STORIES THAT REVISE THE BINARY

Best sellers also offer you gender stories that revise the binary—stories that stretch or modify it in some way. The binary stays in place, but it is challenged and expanded in these revisionist narratives. Two primary mechanisms used in pop culture to revise the binary are: (1) critique; and (2) expansion.

CRITIQUE

Sometimes, forms of pop culture critique the binary, questioning its utility, appropriateness, and consequences. As they do, these stories encourage audiences to interrogate the matrix that is the binary, questioning what they might earlier have taken for granted. Gender stories of critique encourage audiences to ask questions such as "Is the binary useful?" "Is it appropriate?" "What does a binary system do to individual identity and to relationships?" and "Are the consequences of the binary positive or negative?" Such questions revise the binary by raising questions for audiences about the system in which they have been participating. The paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat and a J. Crew advertisement that sparked controversy over appropriate gender activities illustrate the strategy of critique.

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

The paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat tell a gender story that critiques and thus revises the binary. Because his paintings tell about the cost to black men of attempts to live the ideal binary script, they provide a critique of the normative masculine ideal through the lens of the black man's experience. Many of his paintings depict the nature of the gender binary as it intersects with race to construct unique requirements for black men. They depict the stereotyped ways in which black men are often viewed—fighting, boxing, playing basketball, driving cars, shooting guns, and playing the saxophone. Basquiat points in his paintings to

some of the qualities black men are asked to adopt as well. Many of the men he depicts have gold crowns hovering over their heads, as though status and dominance over others have not yet been achieved but are primary goals. The crowns also suggest that men should seek glory and status and should strive to be rich, successful, and powerful, competing with other men to be seen as legitimate and successful.

Basquiat not only identifies and explicates the binary that requires black men to act in narrowly confined, stereotyped ways but challenges the system as well. His paintings tell a story about the costs—incompleteness and fragmentation—to black men of the roles they are asked to adopt. Black men's bodies are often shown fragmented in his paintings, with feet, legs, arms, and heads isolated and disconnected. "Appearing always in these paintings as half-formed or somehow mutilated, the black male body becomes," as feminist theorist bell hooks observes, "incomplete, not fulfilled, never a full image."³¹ Basquiat exposes the binary system as shallow and superficial when he depicts black men as stick figures, painted flat and without perspective in a childlike manner. Black men cannot be whole, adult, full human beings when they are caught in the requirements of the binary. That many of the black men have skulls for faces in Basquiat's works also suggests that black men can never become live, fully human men under current conditions. They lack the flesh that marks embodied, living persons and are simply caricatures of human beings.

In *Napoleonic Stereotype Circa '44*, which Basquiat painted in 1983, he illustrates both his portrayal and his critique of the binary. The painting shows two men fighting each other, and words such as *bip*, *bop*, and *splat* fly between them. They fight against a background grid of tiny squares, and a list of very large numbers runs down the left side of the scene. Black men are shown as confined to stereotyped boxes or in roles that involve fighting and aggression in which they must compete with each other to dominate and to win monetary rewards. At the bottom of the painting is the head of boxer Joe Louis depicted as a skull with the word *crown* written under it. The word *boxed* runs down the left side of this panel, repeated six times, with each letter in a small square. Even the successful boxer is confined, and the costs of his success in the binary clearly have been high. His body is neither complete nor alive, suggesting that those who fight for and achieve success, as defined by the binary's dictates for black men, ultimately lose their wholeness and their humanity. Because Basquiat's paintings critique the system in which black men are required to live, they revise the binary, suggesting the negative consequences for

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following its prescriptions. As a result, they challenge the hold of the binary on viewers' conceptions of gender.

J. CREW AD

An advertisement for J. Crew that was e-mailed to customers in April 2011 is an example of the strategy of critique because it invites—and almost demands—contemplation of and reflection on the binary. The ad features Jenna Lyons, president and creative director of J. Crew, and her five-year-old son Beckett, who is pictured with bright pink polish on his toenails. The tagline reads, "Saturday with Jenna . . . See how she and son Beckett go off duty in style." Below the picture is a quote from Lyons: "Lucky for me, I ended up with a boy whose favorite color is pink. Toenail painting is way more fun in neon."

For many viewers, the ad is not one they can easily ignore because something about the ad is likely to strike them as wrong, puzzling, or intriguing. They see a mother painting the toenails of her child—not an unusual act—but then they see that the child is a boy, and boys don't usually have their toenails painted. A mother is playing with her child—not an unusual act—but mothers don't usually play with their sons in ways that encourage them to dress and act in feminine ways. Also surprising is that the color of the polish she is painting on his toenails is pink, usually associated with girls and not boys, and the mother seems to be flaunting her son's preference for that color. Readers are also likely to wonder why J. Crew chose to advertise its clothing using this particular strategy. Beckett's mother seems to be advertising her delight that her son does not conform to gender prescriptions. Is the company thus aligning with a particular position on gender? Is it saying that breaking gender norms should be encouraged?

The controversy that erupted over the ad suggests that the strategy of critique was, indeed, effective because it encouraged viewers to reflect on gender roles. Some viewers responded negatively to the ad, claiming that it celebrates transgendered identity and that Lyons's act is likely to result in negative psychological consequences for Beckett as he grows older. Commentator Erin R. Brown of the Media Research Center, for example, saw the ad as supporting the expansion of gender roles when she suggested that J. Crew has "a new demographic—mothers of gender-confused young boys."³² Psychologist Keith Ablow also reacted negatively to the ad: "Yeah, well, it may be fun and games now, Jenna, but at least put some money aside for psychotherapy for the kid—and maybe a little for others who'll be affected by your 'innocent' pleasure." He predicted

highly negative outcomes for Beckett and other children whose mothers allow expanded gender options for them: "This is a dramatic example of the way that our culture is being encouraged to abandon all trappings of gender identity—homogenizing males and females when the outcome of such 'psychological sterilization' . . . is not known."³³

Other viewers answered the questions the ad raised about gender in more neutral or positive ways. Psychiatrist Jack Drescher explained that most research on gender identity and sexual orientation concludes that neither is a choice and that a parent's behavior does not cause these conditions: "I can say with 100 percent certainty that a mother painting her children's toenails pink does not cause transgenderism or homosexuality."³⁴ Many online readers responded in similar ways to the ad: "A small child, with no secondary sexual characteristics, cannot be considered 'transgendered' or even a transvestite," wrote one.³⁵ Another commented: "I don't think it's all that uncommon for little boys to want their toenails painted 'like mommy's.' Kids are kids—my daughter sees me with colorful toenails and wants to copy me. If I am using a power tool, she wants to copy me. I guess that makes us both transgender in some people's eyes."³⁶ Because viewers of the J. Crew ad cannot easily dismiss it, they are asked to question and reflect on appropriate ways for being gendered. They are asked to contemplate the binary and the degree to which they see themselves aligning with or challenging it.

EXPANSION

Stories of pop culture that expand the binary remake the two gender categories of male and female. They suggest that there are multiple ways of being a man and a woman—ways that expand the prescriptions of the binary. Such stories allow the categories of female and male to become larger and to encompass more characteristics and qualities appropriate to the genders than the binary usually allows. In this way, stories of revision open up the categories of the gender binary. The movie *Fast Five* and *Men's Health* magazine offer different approaches to revising the binary through the strategy of expansion.

FAST FIVE

Fast Five, the 2011 installment in *The Fast and the Furious* franchise, expands the binary and thus models new ways of doing gender for moviegoers. Written by Chris Morgan and directed by Justin Lin, the movie revolves around the efforts of Dominic Toretto, his friend Brian O'Connor, and his sister Mia Toretto to steal \$100 million from a corrupt business-

Best Sellers

man in Rio de Janeiro with the heist, one of unfold, the team member, a former police officer, a businessman and his partner, and a police agent who is pursuing

Fast Five is an expansion of the standard binary gender categories, gun fights, bribery, and a heist, suggesting a view of age, and the capacity to do multiple things at the same time, how to balance competing concerns concerning both femi-

Fast Five deviates from the standard binary femininity because it shows a character who is exactly the same thing as a man: he has the expectations of femininity, drives fast cars and motorcycles, and is a motorcycle after being a bad guy, plot twist. He is just as competent as the men. This remains true even when he is asked to drive fast cars and motorcycles without the conventional not to mention the protection. Whereas the standard binary aggression, and daring, and daring disagrees. It says that the standard masculinity, challenging one gender or the other.

Not only is the character a traditionally masculine activity, he does it well. Brian, a former police officer with a beard that would be considered a woman's law, and is more feminine than these movies. He does what traditionally men do. He is just like the villains, and to some extent, marginally masculine. He can be quite capable of performing activities that include body types and the binary's ideal pre-

man in Rio de Janeiro. The trio recruits seven additional people to help with the heist, one of whom is a woman, Gisele. As the plans for the heist unfold, the team members must contend not only with the cunning businessman and his partners but also with a US Diplomatic Security Service agent who is pursuing them.

Fast Five is an example of the action-film genre, which usually provides standard binary messages about masculinity with car chases, explosions, gun fights, brawls, and close escapes. The movie has all of these, suggesting a view of masculinity that means brawn, aggressiveness, courage, and the capacity to drive anything with an engine at high speed. At the same time, however, the movie expands the message of the binary concerning both femininity and masculinity.

Fast Five deviates from the master narrative of the binary in terms of femininity because the two women characters—Mia and Gisele—do exactly the same things in the film as the men. Admittedly, they meet expectations of femininity in terms of appearance, but they drive souped-up cars and motorcycles expertly and fast (Gisele, in fact, arrives on a motorcycle after being recruited for the team). The women are pursued by the bad guys, plot the next moves, and escape, just like the men do. They are just as competent as the men at all of the activities of the team, and this remains true even after Mia announces her pregnancy. She continues to drive fast cars and to participate in brazen and risky escapes, defying the conventional notion that pregnant women are fragile and in need of protection. Whereas the binary suggests that masculinity involves speed, aggression, and daring—and femininity precisely the opposite—*Fast Five* disagrees. It says that femininity may involve the very same qualities as masculinity, challenging the binary's division of traits and activities into one gender or the other.

Not only is the appropriate role for women stretched to include typically masculine activities, but men's roles are expanded in the film as well. Brian, a former FBI agent turned criminal, is of slight build, wears a beard that would be more likely to characterize a professor than an outlaw, and is more feminine in appearance than the men who usually star in these movies. He does everything, however, that the large, heavily muscled men do. He is just as able to drive cars fast, to fight and outmaneuver the villains, and to survive. A man who might be seen by the binary as marginally masculine because of his slight stature is shown in *Fast Five* to be quite capable of performing aggressively. Masculinity thus expands to include body types and appearances that deviate in some key ways from the binary's ideal presentation of the masculine.

Fast Five, an action film that, at first glance, seems to be a conventionally masculine film, offers audiences a disruption of the binary. The film says that women and all kinds of men can be aggressive, physically powerful, cunning fighters, and action heroes. The kinds of bodies typically thought to be required for these kinds of roles are seen in the film, but so are bodies that definitely are not associated with this kind of masculinity—male bodies that are small and slight and women's bodies. Employing the strategy of expansion, *Fast Five* broadens the meanings of both masculinity and femininity in terms of body and personality.

MEN'S HEALTH

Men's Health is a magazine that also expands the binary, seesawing between reinforcement of conventional masculine roles and qualities and expansion of them to include new (and conventionally feminine) activities and qualities. For men, reinforcement of the binary can be seen in the feature articles and ads in the magazine that assume that men are rich and sexy. Ads for watches, razors, colognes, and body washes suggest that men are to be well groomed and sophisticated in how they dress. Ads for athletic shoes, sunscreen, breakfast cereal, power drinks, pre-workout energy bars, and dietary supplements indicate that men are physically active. According to the ads, their primary interests, aside from work and sports, are cars and music (or at least portable digital music systems).

Another message the magazine gives readers is that men are expected to perform sexually. The article "Limp to the Bedroom" discusses how over-the-counter pain relievers, taken for athletic injuries, can cause erectile dysfunction. That the ideal man is heterosexual is clear in that one of men's major goals is to attract a "perfect beach babe." In one article, pro surfer Maya Gabeira gives tips on how to meet and keep such a babe happy by zeroing in, breaking the ice, cozying up, and mixing sexy beach cocktails. "Thirty-Nine Things She Wishes You Knew" begins, "You've admired, explored, stroked, cupped, and caressed women's bodies since you were first able to get away with it. But you can still learn. We enlisted the help of 2,439 women to point out what you may have missed." Men's performances in the bedroom, then, are expected to satisfy.

According to *Men's Health*, men are to be rich, sexy, physically active, and able to perform sexually, all of which reinforce the binary's conception of masculinity. But some of the articles in the magazine expand the binary by suggesting that men can and should do things that once were considered to be the exclusive domain of women. In other words, the magazine breaks with stereotypes of masculinity to expand the roles

available to men. Art store have the best an tomatillo, and kohlr cooking elaborate m Ads tout various ski lift cream, overnight that are largely assoc ally attractive. Men a and are even advised femininity, because "

Some of the arti implicitly acknowlec contrast to the expec Men are shown as things. "Rocket Fuel mountains" or acco becoming friends wit Do Everything Bette shoes, keep beach sa upper management, game. Men are also t ies, and theme park that, contrary to the where they are goir *Men's Health* to inclu sive domain of wom ence some key aspec

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available to men. Articles about which exotic vegetables at the grocery store have the best antioxidant properties (Tatsoi, Peruvian purple potato, tomatillo, and kohlrabi) suggest that men are not just grilling but are cooking elaborate meals—typically considered the purview of women. Ads tout various skin-care products for men, including face cream, eye-lift cream, overnight renewal serum, and hair removal cream—products that are largely associated with women's efforts to stay young and sexually attractive. Men are also choosing clothes that make them look good and are even advised to wear pink, the color traditionally associated with femininity, because "it gives a warm glow to your face."

Some of the articles in *Men's Health* expand the binary in that they implicitly acknowledge that there are things that men do not know, in contrast to the expectations of the binary that men have all the answers. Men are shown as not always knowledgeable about even some basic things. "Rocket Fuel for Your Workday" tells men how they can "move mountains" or accomplish their goals by maintaining a steady to-do list, becoming friends with fear, and assessing their potential speed. "How to Do Everything Better" explains to readers how to tune up a bike, shine shoes, keep beach sand out of a car, mix sangria, move furniture, impress upper management, spot a bench press, and take a woman to a baseball game. Men are also told how to find their way around airports, large cities, and theme parks in "Never Ask for Directions Again," suggesting that, contrary to the stereotype, they may not always know how to get where they are going. The gender binary is being expanded, then, in *Men's Health* to include activities and interests once considered the exclusive domain of women, even as its gender stories simultaneously reference some key aspects of the binary for men.³⁷

You encounter many gender stories that revise the binary in some way. Some modify it by providing a critique of it. They point to the power of the binary and scrutinize and assess it, suggesting some damaging and harmful impacts it has on people. Still others stretch the binary's options for men and women, suggesting that you can be a woman or a man even though you are not conforming precisely to the binary's rules for your gender. The binary has not disappeared in the revisionist gender stories told by pop culture, but it has been questioned, modified, and expanded. Such stories make that category larger and allow some traits or behaviors that normally would not be seen as appropriate to be exhibited by all human beings.

GENDER STORIES THAT REWRITE THE BINARY

A third group of stories told in pop culture rewrites the binary. These stories disrupt any connection between bodies and gender expectations, suggesting that any behavior, any quality, and any kind of appearance is appropriate for any body. By constructing alternative versions of gender and opening up possibilities for new kinds of gender performances, these narratives ignore, defy, or undo the binary system of gender that delineates two gender categories and prescribes how they should be. In these stories, gender truly is fluid, ambiguous, and multiple within the same person. Two mechanisms are used for conveying messages that rewrite the gender binary: (1) synthesis; and (2) innovation.

SYNTHESIS

Some best sellers from pop culture rewrite the binary by presenting a new gender that includes elements of both the conventionally feminine and the conventionally masculine. Although traces are still evident of the binary in that components of the two genders are synthesized into one, the strategy allows one body to carry markers and meanings of both genders simultaneously without privileging either. These stories, then, create a genuinely ambiguous gender that does not fit into either the female or male category of the binary. The movie *Palindromes* and fashion model Andrej Pejčić illustrate the strategy of synthesis that rewrites the binary.

PALINDROMES

The movie *Palindromes* employs synthesis to rewrite the binary. A 2004 film written and directed by Todd Solondz, it traces the adventures of Aviva, a girl whose primary goal in life is to have babies. After having sex as a teenager with a family friend, she becomes pregnant and is forced by her parents to have an abortion that results, unbeknownst to her, in a hysterectomy. She runs away from home, begins a sexual relationship with a truck driver, is taken in by a Christian fundamentalist foster home, watches the truck driver shoot the doctor who performed her abortion, and has sex once again with the young man who impregnated her earlier. The film ends with Aviva's announcement that she has a feeling she's going to be a mom.

The strategy of synthesis that rewrites the binary is employed in the movie in the portrayal of Aviva's character. Aviva is played in the film by eight different actors of different ages, races, and genders. She appears on screen in various scenes as a five-year old black girl, a thirteen-year-old

Best Sellers

red-haired white girl, a adolescent black girl, a woman. The movie unfolds the main character keeps the scene of the movie, the among six of the versions shown to contain and personality characteristic her as the same person performance, and they order performances.

As an audience member among so many different because of expectations: consistent across various film, most audience members displayed by the main character on with this character. The ability of the protagonist to challenge notions for gender. As the likely to begin to reflect both for the character her

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red-haired white girl, a ten-year-old brown-haired white girl, an obese adolescent black girl, a white adolescent boy, and a middle-aged white woman. The movie unfolds in standard narrative fashion, but the form of the main character keeps shifting among the eight personas. In the final scene of the movie, the depictions of Aviva switch every few seconds among six of the versions of her persona. The same character, then, is shown to contain and to synthesize dramatically different physical and personality characteristics. The other characters in the movie respond to her as the same person, despite the substantial variations in her gender performance, and they never acknowledge her dramatically different gender performances.

As an audience member, watching the character of Aviva switch among so many different versions of gender is disconcerting simply because of expectations that a gender performance remains somewhat consistent across various contexts and life stages. At the beginning of the film, most audience members might be shocked at the gender multiplicity displayed by the main character and focus on figuring out what is going on with this character. They have an initial resistance to the gender instability of the protagonist simply because it disrupts conventional expectations for gender. As the film progresses, however, audience members are likely to begin to reflect on what the various versions of gender mean both for the character herself and for standard conceptions of gender.

The most important aspect of the film is that the audience is prevented from stereotyping Aviva. When audience members focus on a predominant characteristic such as age or race, they tend to attribute certain qualities to the person as a result of that single characteristic. Audience members cannot do that with *Palindromes*. Aviva stays complicated and nuanced as a character and cannot be pigeonholed or caricatured on the basis of any one identity marker. Audiences are reminded that all people are complex, and to define them by focusing on one aspect of their identity is to deny them the richness and complexity that characterize all human beings. The film also emphasizes how identity markers such as age, race, and size frequently affect judgments on how closely people successfully embody a gender ideal. *Palindromes* rewrites the binary by showing multifaceted gender embodied in the protagonist, and it also encourages audience members to reflect on any uneasiness they may feel about this kind of interruption of a conventional gender portrayal.

Some features of *Palindromes* clearly do reference and enact the binary, but they serve as contrast for the rewriting of the binary that occurs in the film. The titles for the various sections of the movie are the names of the

main characters, and the boxes around their names are either blue or pink, depending on the gender traditionally associated with the name. But these boxes contrast dramatically with the multiple and fluid form of the gender of the main character and seem old-fashioned and outdated as a result. Even the title of the film, *Palindromes*, suggests a rewriting of conventional gender requirements. A palindrome is a word that is the same forwards and backwards, and the names of the main characters in the film—*Aviva*, *Bob*, and *Otto*—are all palindromes. Standard conceptions of gender are rewritten and reordered in the film, questioning the standard ways in which the binary imposes order. That one character can be embodied by individuals of various genders, races, and ages suggests that gender appears and functions differently when it integrates or synthesizes various aspects of the feminine and masculine as well as other aspects of identity. *Palindromes* depicts on screen an example of gender that truly is dynamic, fluid, and multiple.

ANDREJ PEJIĆ

Andrej Pejić is an androgynous model assigned male at birth whose fashion photographs rewrite the gender binary because his body is a site of synthesis for conventionally feminine and masculine as well as ambiguous genders. He models in both men's and women's shows for fashion houses such as Jean-Paul Gaultier and Marc Jacobs, incorporating into his body female, male, and sometimes androgynous clothing, accessories, postures, and hair styles.

In some photographs, Pejić models women's fashions and looks exactly like the thin, white, young woman who is the ideal of the binary. In these photos, he is typically shown with long, blond, curly hair that covers his chest. He wears eye makeup, pale pink or bright red lipstick, bright red nail polish on long fingernails, and dramatic women's jewelry. He might be modeling, in these photos, a red fur jacket or a form-fitting black leather jacket with a plunging neckline and pink flowered pants. His body postures mimic those traditionally linked to women in the binary—his head is cocked, for example, or his thumb is in his mouth, little-girl style.

In other images, Pejić models men's clothing and performs a conventional male gender wearing traditional male clothing. In these photographs, his hair is pulled back so that it appears to be short, has a side part, and is often brown in color. He wears classic styles of men's clothing such as a long cashmere coat, a gray cable-knit sweater with white pants, a striped sweater and white shirt over gray trousers, a tuxedo, or a letter-

Best Sellers

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man-style jacket. In some photos, all of his clothing and accessories conform to stereotypical male markers of success, but there is one ambiguous aspect. In one such photo, he wears a dark suit, striped shirt, tie, and oversized glasses and is carrying a briefcase and a bouquet of flowers—all elements that contribute to a conventional presentation of professional and successful masculinity. Only his long blonde hair adds a touch of ambiguity to the look.

In some images, Pejić presents as a synthesis of femininity and masculinity, creating an androgynous look. Viewers would have difficulty deciding whether he is male or female, for example, in a photograph for *PF Magazine* in which he wears a white jumpsuit, or in another photo in which he wears jeans, a black print jacket over a sweater, and a scarf casually wrapping his neck. Pejić performs a different kind of androgyny when he does not conceal but exposes his penis and flat chest while wearing women's clothing. In one such photograph, he and model Hannah Holman pose together. Both have long blonde hair parted in the middle, wear red lipstick, and are naked from the waist up; Pejić is wearing white men's briefs, while Holman wears bikini panties. A white lace mantilla is draped over their heads and shoulders, and they are holding hands. Another image shows Pejić with his long hair in curlers, wearing women's makeup, and his eyes are downcast. He is taking off his top, exposing his flat chest, and his pants are riding below his belly button. In these photos, both male and female gender markers are juxtaposed, and no effort is made to conceal or privilege one or the other.

In his fashion photos, Pejić's gender performances embody both the feminine and masculine within one body, and he performs both equally convincingly. The story the photos tell rewrites the binary that typically allows only one set of characteristics to inhabit a gendered body, allowing masculine, feminine, and androgynous gender forms to be synthesized within a single body. Pejić "admits that his look doesn't just blur the line between male and female, it seems to erase it." When asked if he sees himself as a man or a woman, he responded, "I see myself."³⁸

INNOVATION

The stories that employ the strategy of innovation show that individuals can rewrite the gender binary by escaping it altogether. Individuals in these stories no longer follow the binary's prescriptions for being a man or a woman and create or invent their own genders. Gender cannot be linked to any particular kind of body, and the body does not reference any of the conventional types of genders rooted in the binary. Openness and flexibil-

ity are the only rules for constructing and performing this kind of gender. The Asexual Visibility and Education Network, genderless children, and CN Lester's genderqueer identity illustrate the strategy of innovation.

ASEXUAL VISIBILITY AND EDUCATION NETWORK

The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) not only challenges the binary's expectation that individuals are heterosexual, but it challenges the binary's expectation that individuals are sexual. It simply opts out of the binary's dictates concerning sexuality. Founded by David Jay in 2001, AVEN provides information about and support for people who do not experience sexual attraction and who claim asexuality as their sexual orientation. Asexuality is not celibacy; neither is it something experienced by people because they are defective or late bloomers, are sexually dysfunctional, were abused as children, or are fearful of intimate relationships. For asexual individuals, their orientation is a choice.

Asexual individuals acknowledge the strength and power of the gender binary that expects people to have sex: "See, what all of these sexual people have been told, and what all of us asexual people have been told, is that sex is necessary. In classrooms, in advertisements, in locker rooms and sleepovers we've all been told that everyone needs sex, that it's unavoidable."³⁹ In the context of a highly sexualized culture, asexuality seems abnormal and strange, but for asexual individuals, having sex seems strange. Kate Goldfield, an asexual college student, offers an analogy to describe how she and other asexual individuals feel about sex: "It's almost as foreign to me as someone saying 'You know, when you're 18 we're going to take you on a space shuttle and we're going to go to Mars.'" Her view of sex as alien is echoed by forty-year-old Angela: "I have never had interest in sex all my life, at all. It's like algebra. I understand the concept, but have no interest."⁴⁰ Another asexual person explains: "Perhaps asexuality bothers some because people can be frightened and hostile to anything that is different from the norm. Well, we're here to show that different from the norm isn't bad—it's just different."⁴¹

Asexual people have romantic relationships; those relationships simply do not include sexual activity. Because they have no models for creating asexual romantic relationships, asexual people believe they have more freedom than sexual people do to create satisfying intimate relationships: "Asexual relationships are a 'blank slate.' There are no rules dictating how nonsexual love is expressed. . . . It's up to us to make up words to describe our bonds with other people."⁴² One asexual individual appreciates the freedom that asexuality brings in relationships: "Figuring out how to flirt,

to be intimate, or to be challenging, but free ways that are ground

Using the strategy to invent new ways of reference sexuality. I prescriptions—how and how to do it. A and unnecessary an Asexuality as an original way: "News flash: sex never gets boring, if and you're looking us."⁴⁴ AVEN thus is gender entirely ap

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to be intimate, or to be monogamous" in a nonsexual relationship "can be challenging, but free of sexual expectations we can form relationships in ways that are grounded in our individual needs and desires."⁴³

Using the strategy of innovation, AVEN and asexual individuals invent new ways of doing gender that are not based on and do not even reference sexuality. Engaging in sex is a very important part of the binary's prescriptions—how to look and act in order to get it, who to do it with, and how to do it. AVEN dismisses all of these prescriptions as irrelevant and unnecessary and creates a new gender identity in which sex is absent. Asexuality as an orientation is summarized by one asexual person in this way: "News flash: sex is a choice, and if it's not fun don't have it. . . . If it ever gets boring, if that whole sexual thing ever gets tired and frustrating and you're looking for a good time then, baby, you know where to find us."⁴⁴ AVEN thus innovates in the binary, inventing new ways of doing gender entirely apart from its norms and expectations.

GENDERLESS CHILDREN

In 1972, Lois Gould published a story called "X" that began: "Once upon a time, a Baby named X was born. It was named X so that nobody could tell whether it was a boy or a girl. Its parents could tell, of course, but they couldn't tell anybody else. They couldn't even tell Baby X—at least not until much, much later. You see, it was all part of a very important Secret Scientific Xperiment, known officially as Project Baby X."⁴⁵ Gould's story follows X through interaction with family members, X's parents' efforts to buy toys and clothes for their child, X's experiences at school, and the negative response of other parents to X. When it was published, "X" seemed like a futuristic fantasy tale that was humorous and bizarre. But some parents are now using the story as a model for raising genderless children. They refuse to assign the label of *female* or *male* to their babies, thus innovating in and rewriting the gender binary that requires the assignment of a child into one of these two categories at birth.

Several years ago, a couple in Sweden decided not to announce the sex of their baby at the time of the child's birth.⁴⁶ The pseudonym given to this child in interviews with the parents was *Pop*, and only a handful of close relatives know the nature of the child's genitals. If anyone asks about Pop's gender, Pop's parents simply say that they don't disclose that information, and they plan to identify the child's gender when Pop decides to do so. The parents explained that their decision was rooted in a commitment to disrupt the expectations of the binary: "We want Pop to grow up more freely and avoid being forced into a specific gender mold

from the outset. It's cruel to bring a child into the world with a blue or pink stamp on their forehead." Pop's wardrobe includes both trousers and dresses, and Pop decides each morning how to dress. Pop's hairstyle changes regularly, ranging from feminine to masculine to androgynous. Pop's parents never use personal pronouns when referring to the child; they just say *Pop*. Swedish gender-equality consultant Kristina Henkel supports Pop's parents' decision, suggesting that if a child is given no gender, the child "will be seen more as a human" rather than "a stereotype as a boy or girl."⁴⁷

When Kathy Witterick and David Stocker of Toronto, Canada, had a baby in 2011, they named the child *Storm* and also decided not to announce the gender of the child. Storm's brothers, a close family friend, and the two midwives who helped deliver the baby are the only ones who know the nature of Storm's genitals, and they have promised not to tell. Witterick and Stocker sent out this e-mail message after the child's birth: "We decided not to share Storm's sex for now—a tribute to freedom and choice in place of limitation, a standup to what the world could become in Storm's lifetime." Storm's parents explained that children "receive messages from society that encourage them to fit into existing boxes," particularly boxes concerning gender. "We thought if we delayed sharing that information, in this case hopefully, we might knock off a couple million of those messages by the time that Storm decides Storm would like to share." The reaction to the parents' decision illustrates the strength of the binary, as Witterick explains: "Everyone keeps asking us, 'When will this end?' And we always turn the question back. Yeah, when will this end? When will we live in a world where people can make choices to be whoever they are?"⁴⁸ As they present a new option for gender, the parents of Pop and Storm are defying and innovating in the binary, substantially rewriting it.

CN LESTER

CN Lester, an alternative singer-songwriter and a mezzo-soprano in the classical music ensemble *En Travesti*, identifies as neither male nor female. Instead, Lester claims the identity of "both transsexual and transgender" or genderqueer,⁴⁹ queering identity and choosing to express gender in nonnormative ways. As such, Lester innovates in the binary, refusing to be categorized as female or male and choosing both a new gender and a new label for that gender. With the introduction of a third gender into the options offered by the binary through these acts, the matrix of the binary is disrupted and rewritten.

Lester enacts a challenge to the binary for the presence of the pronoun in their ambition to remove themselves from a typical male conventional wardrobe. In their video *Just Like a Woman*, Dylan's song about black pants with

Lester explains the binary: "I didn't do anything I've ever done before, eternal, external come from trying to possibly allow that a social norm do a lot of good they disgustin"

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Lester enacts genderqueer identity in various ways. One is in a preference for the pronoun *they* instead of *he* or *she* to refer to themselves. Another is in their ambiguous performance of gender. Lester has had top surgery to remove their breasts and wears their hair short in the back and sides in a typical male style but with a big shock of hair in the front, closer to a conventional women's style. Lester's gender presentation can be seen in their video *Just Like a Woman*, in which they plays piano and sings Bob Dylan's song by the same name. In the video, Lester wears eye makeup, black pants with suspenders, a black shirt, and a stud in their right ear.

Lester explicitly rejects the two categories of gender articulated by the binary: "I didn't see the world as divided between 'men' and 'women.' Nothing I've ever read or seen has convinced me of those immutable, eternal, external categories. I think that so many of the world's troubles come from trying to force humanity into narrow categories that cannot possibly allow or contain the diversity of the creatures within them, and that a social movement to challenge that process of categorization could do a lot of good."⁵⁰ They summarizes: "Urgh, false dichotomies—aren't they disgusting?"⁵¹

Lester's goal is for each person to do gender in a unique manner, unconfined by the binary—to perform "a big mess of unique."⁵² They urges others to "constantly question the 'conventional wisdom' of the static binary sex/gender system" and "to allow each human being (yourself included) the bodily and mental autonomy to follow their own heart, and craft their own future, caring not a jot for the category they were forced into at birth."⁵³ "I'm not fighting for the right for everyone else to be exactly like me. Not even vaguely like me," Lester explains. "But I would give everything for each person to be wonderfully, and strangely, and totally themselves."⁵⁴

Although more rare than those that retell or revise the binary, gender stories that rewrite the binary are also offered to you in pop culture. Some of them synthesize the conventionally masculine and feminine into one body, allowing it to stand as evidence that an individual cannot be placed into one gender and excluded from the other. In fact, these narratives suggest a synthesis of both genders can produce a third ambiguous gender in which both genders are present simultaneously. A second mechanism for rewriting the binary is innovation. Using this strategy, gender narratives create and embody alternative ways of doing gender to that of the binary, dispensing with key aspects of the binary's prescriptions altogether and operating entirely outside of the system by claiming no gender or a new gender. In these instances, the gender binary has become irrelevant and is no longer undergirding the performance of gender.

You cannot escape the best sellers of pop culture that offer you all sorts of messages about gender and invite you to do gender in various ways. Some of them retell the binary, imploring you to follow its prescriptions for being a man or a woman. Some revise the binary, expanding and modifying it so that expectations for masculinity or femininity are enlarged. A third type of story rewrites the binary, dispensing with it altogether and creating entirely new possibilities for gender. These stories offer models of different ways to relate to the binary, serving as resources for formulating your own gender stories and making your own decisions about how to do gender. This process is the subject of the next chapter, which deals with crafting your gender stories.

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- ² Jan Benzel, "Dr. Seuss Finally Transcended the Gender Barrier," in *Of Sneetches and Whos and the Good Dr. Seuss: Essays on the Writings and Life of Theodor Geisel*, ed. Thomas Fensch (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997), 182.
- ³ Lurie, "The Cabinet of Dr. Seuss," 159.
- ⁴ Benzel, "Dr. Seuss Finally Transcended the Gender Barrier," 182.
- ⁵ The Kidd, "Reading Dr. Seuss Can Be Dangerous," *The Slacktiverse*, May 18, 2011, <http://slacktivist.typepad.com/slacktivist/2011/05/reading-dr-seuss-can-be-dangerous.html>
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- ⁷ All of the examples and quotations from *Cosmopolitan* magazine in this section are from the October 2011 issue.
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- ¹⁰ Holly Thorpe, "Embodied Boarders: Snowboarding, Status and Style," *Waikato Journal of Education* 10 (2004): 186.
- ¹¹ Holly Thorpe, "Jibbing the Gender Order: Females in the Snowboarding Culture," *Sport in Society* 8 (2005): 89.
- ¹² Thorpe, "Jibbing the Gender Order," 90.
- ¹³ Thorpe, "Jibbing the Gender Order," 88.
- ¹⁴ Thorpe, "Jibbing the Gender Order," 88; and Thorpe, "Embodied Boarders," 189.
- ¹⁵ Susan J. Douglas, *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism: How Pop Culture Took Us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2010), 191.
- ¹⁶ The episode, written by Ron Hauge, originally aired on February 16, 1997.
- ¹⁷ Steve Williams and Ian Jones, "Five of the Best . . . and Five of the Worst of *The Simpsons*," May 2002, http://www.offthetelly.co.uk/?page_id=382
- ¹⁸ David Proper's analysis of "Homer's Phobia" informed much of this discussion. See David Proper, "I Like My Beer Cold, My TV Loud and My Homosexuals Flaming":

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²⁰ All of the examples
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²³ Kornfield, "Cross-C
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- ²¹ Sarah Kornfield, "Cross-Cultural Cross-Dressing: Japanese Graphic Novels Perform Gender in U.S.," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 28 (2011): 221.
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