

Fen Shields - Unseen Genders Examining Non-Binary Representation in Photography, Film, and Television.

by Fen Alexander Shields

Submission date: 05-Jan-2021 10:25PM (UTC+0000)

Submission ID: 140950428

File name: 13490_Fen_Alexander_Shields_Fen_Shields_-_Unseen_Genders_Examining_Non-Binary_Representation_in_Photography_Film_and__1512414564.pdf (771.05K)

Word count: 7547

Character count: 41929

Unseen Genders: Examining Non-Binary Representation in Photography, Film, and Television.

Fen Shields

1802148

Independent Project ADAA6000

BA Photography in the Arts

Ryan Moule

6,490 words (excluding headings and the Project Summary)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA (Hons)

University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea, 5th January 2021.

Project Summary

This independent project will examine non-binary representation in the media, specifically photography, film, and television. It aims to explore why there is a lack of non-binary representation, why there should be more, how non-binary people are currently being represented, and how this is changing.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1.....	5
1.1.....	5
1.2.....	8
1.3.....	11
Summary 1.....	14
Chapter 2.....	14
2.1.....	14
2.2.....	18
2.3.....	20
Summary 2.....	24
Chapter 3.....	25
3.1.....	25
3.2.....	28
3.3.....	30
Summary 3.....	31
Conclusion.....	31
Bibliography.....	34

List of Figures

Figure 1: Akitt, J. (2016) *Non-Binary Portrait Series: Azee*. Available at:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BNZXZyeBClu/> (Accessed: 20 November 2020).

Figure 2: Philomene, L. (2020) *Non-Binary Portraits*. Available at:

<https://www.laurencephilomene.com/#2> (Accessed: 21 November 2020).

Figure 3: Shields, F. (2020) *Non-Binary Questionnaire Responses on Representation*.

Figure 4: Tritt, A. (2020) *Transcending Self: Max*. Available at:

<http://www.annietritt.com/transcending-self/2016/11/8/max-13-non-binary-california>

(Accessed: 22 November 2020).

Figure 5: Luiming, M. (2020) *Fen-Ma Luiming II; & III*. Available at:

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/ma-liuming/fen-maliuming-ii-iii->

[OclMmWnbNq8Ab1oMTaR_4Q2](http://www.artnet.com/artists/ma-liuming/fen-maliuming-ii-iii-OclMmWnbNq8Ab1oMTaR_4Q2) (Accessed: 24 November 2020).

Figure 6: Aftel, C. (2020) *Outside & In Between Cover*. Available at:

<http://www.chloeaftel.com/shop> (Accessed: 24 November 2020).

Introduction

Non-binary is an umbrella term referring to someone who is neither male nor female. As a non-binary person, I use photography to highlight LGBT+ issues, such as underrepresentation of non-binary people in the media. This dissertation will examine why there is a lack of non-binary representation in photography, film, and television, why there should be more, how we are currently represented, and how this is changing. I wanted to explore this theme as underrepresentation affects me directly. Being non-binary means having to argue over whether I exist with strangers and facing uncomfortable questions about what I have “down there”. More representation could mean more acceptance and tolerance of people like myself.

I will be writing in an autoethnographic manner, talking from personal experience and understanding because my experience as a non-binary person is relevant while discussing non-binary representation. Also, some people I will reference use gender neutral pronouns including “they”, “them” or “hermself” - these are not grammatical errors. The final chapter shall be shorter as it is about the way representation is going rather than how it was/is, therefore there are fewer existing examples to reference.

Chapter 1 discusses why there is a lack of representation and why there should be more. I will be considering how representation is impacted by its use to make profit, how it is often not fully achieved because of signifiers, and the importance it has for minorities. Specifically, it focuses on the writings of American writer David Foster Wallace, Swiss linguist and philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and Jamaican-British sociologist, cultural theorist,

and political activist Stuart Hall. It includes case studies of Jackson Akitt and Laurence Philomene's photography.

Chapter 2 focuses on how non-binary people are currently represented focusing on three areas: inhuman portrayals, unsubstantial representations, and fetishism. It uses photographs from Annie Tritt, Ma Luiming and Chloe Aftel as case studies while applying theories from Stuart Hall and Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud.

Chapter 3 examines how representation is improving through diversity, authenticity, and normalisation. It uses *One Day at a Time*, *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, and *Under My Skin* as case studies.

Specific terminology and acronyms are used throughout this essay. These include: AGAB meaning 'assigned gender at birth', and AFAB and AMAB meaning assigned female/male at birth. As transgender refers to somebody whose gender is not what they were assigned at birth, cisgender is the opposite. To be transphobic means to hold prejudice against transgender people. When I talk about 'the community' I am referring to the non-binary community, and when I speak of creators, I am referring to film and television creators. Finally, 'cishet' is shorthand for 'cisgender and heterosexual'.

Chapter 1: Why is There a Lack of Non-Binary Representation in Photography, Film and TV and Why Should There be More Representation?

1.1: Representation as a Commodity

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a commodity as “*Anything that can be bought or sold*”. (Cambridge University Press, 2020). Therefore, media representation is a commodity, because an undeniable aim of most media is to sell, which is done by appealing to as many people as possible. Statistically, most people in the western, English speaking world (the origin of most of my sources) are white, heterosexual, and cisgender. To appeal to this majority, media creators design characters with these identifiers so that the largest group of viewers possible can identify with them. American writer David Foster Wallace states that television is “...*an incredible gauge of the generic*” and refers to it as a “*mirror*” which reflects “*normality*” but often in a glamorised way (Foster Wallace, 1997, p. 22).

As non-binary people do not fit this statistic normality, they are not reflected by this ‘media mirror’. *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey* showed that only 31% of its transgender participants identified as non-binary, and even less used more specific identifiers (USTS, 2015). Similarly, a 2011 report from the *UK Equality and Human Rights Commission* shows that only 0.4% of respondents identified as neither binary nor intersex (Equality Human Rights, 2011). Being a small minority, they often are not reflected in mainstream media not only because sales increase when more people feel represented, but also because it is easy to forget such a small group. However, there is a market for selling representation to underrepresented groups because they are desperate to see themselves reflected. I will expand on this idea when discussing diversity in Chapter 3.

Profit decreases with representation of LGBT+ people (Observer, 2020). It is hard to relate to people perceived as different from you, but another reason for the decrease is that many people do not support or accept minorities and often boycott media representing them or do not care enough to view it. Speaking from an

autoethnographic perspective and my experience as a non-binary person, there is a lot of hostility towards us. Creators sometimes exploit this by making non-binary people a joke. This represents non-binary people without losing sales from transphobes despite GLAAD not considering this proper representation (GLAAD, 2020). Examples include *The Kings of Summer* (2013) and *Zoolander 2* (2016). In *The Kings of Summer*, a character called Biaggio is asked if he had ever felt that masculine to which he replied “*I don’t really see myself as having a gender. Is that a problem?*”, which was met with “*It’s not great*”. This ‘joke’ framed Biaggio as ridiculous, especially when coupled with the character’s absurdity and tendencies to make situations awkward. In *Zoolander 2*, the character named All describes herself as “*...not defined by binary constructs*” and refers to herself with the pronoun “we”. Pale skin and shaved eyebrows make All seem inhuman (a concept covered in Chapter 2). All is ridiculed, and questions and assumptions are made about their genitals which, unfortunately, is common in real life too. Portraying us in negative ways can affect society’s perception of us and validate hostility towards us.

Foster Wallace also theorises that pretty people dominate the media because people are more inclined to look at them (Foster Wallace, 1997, p. 53). He is referring to *Western* beauty standards as he is writing about American fiction. Such standards encourage binary gender, which is discussed in *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West* (Jeffreys, 2014). Jeffreys explains the heavy focus on binary gender roles is a patriarchal tool for oppression. Non-binary people do not fit these roles and so do not fit the beauty standard. Since in the Western world, non-binary people are not commonly viewed as pretty, Foster Wallace’s theory shows that media industries would deem non-binary representation a valueless commodity

and choose to represent 'pretty' people instead. This is purposeful underrepresentation of an underrepresented community.

LGBT+ individuals need representation because media is a huge part of their culture. Getsy chose a passage from Nayland Blake for *Documents of Contemporary Art: Queer* that read "*Queer people are the only minority whose culture is not transmitted within the family...*" and continues, "*To be queer is to cobble together identity...*" (Getsy, 2016, p. 120). It is important to notice that he overlooked disabled people, who share this situation. The media is what LGBT+ people cobble together. American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler wrote "*If gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently...*" (Butler, 2007, p. 10). If non-binary people are constructing their culture from media, could they construct a new perception of gender? While it is impossible to reconstruct gender without society agreeing to, minorities are creating their own culture (explored in Chapter 3).

1.2: Signifiers

Signifiers are a linguistic concept that appear in Swiss linguist and philosopher Saussure's work on Semiotics. He teaches that the sign is something that communicates meaning. It is made from the sign's physical form: 'signifier', and the mental concept it evokes: 'signified' (Saussure, 1966, p. 65-70).

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan uses Saussure's linguistics to support his idea that language forms a barrier to what you desire. He believed meaning had become convoluted by language. People would not be able to achieve what they wanted because they would not consider the signifier. Lacan states, "*When one talks about the signified, one thinks of the thing, whereas in fact signification is what is involved.*"

(Lacan, 1991, p. 248). For example, if people see a photograph of an apple, they think 'apple', not 'photograph'. This is like gender expression and how it links to gender identity.

Gender identity is the gender that someone identifies as, and gender expression is how a person presents themselves in terms of gender (Alberta, 2018). It is commonly believed that gender expression and gender identity need not match up. Society has turned things like clothes and makeup into gender signifiers which can act as a barrier because of beliefs that arbitrary things can signify gender. Applying Lacan's theory, if someone is wearing lipstick, people tend to think 'woman' when they should be thinking 'lipstick'. Lipstick does not signify womanhood. Media representation struggles with this as society tends to assume gender identity based on gender expression. This leads to creators presenting non-binary characters as androgynous to combat binary gender assumptions. Non-binary people may then feel restricted by the continuation of the stereotype that everyone in the community appears androgynous. With so much controversy around this, it is easier for the media industry to avoid representing the non-binary community.

Lacan's *Mirror Stage* is also useful here. It refers to a developmental stage where children first recognise themselves in a mirror and understand they are an individual, separate from their mothers. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018).

Developed from Freud's idea on the Ego, Lacan theorised that infants realise that their appearance does not accurately represent their internal identity and they must learn that there are no signifiers for identity, only aspects of it. Their whole self will never be signified. So, can *gender* identity be signified?



Figure 1 (Akitt, 2016).

The above photograph is from Jackson Akitt's *Non-Binary Portrait Series*. It shows an androgynous-looking non-binary person standing centre-frame, looking at the camera. It demonstrates that androgyny can be presented by mixing signifiers that are linked to the binary genders (i.e., short hair linked to men and earrings linked to women). This is how non-binary people attempt to appear androgynous and is commonly done to alleviate gender dysphoria (a feeling of strong discomfort because of one's perceived gender). It could also be to socially transition (a method of

transitioning how your gender is perceived by society). A person may present with a lot of signifiers typically associated with their AGAB and still be trans because expression does not signify identity. As gender identity cannot be signified by gender expression, it makes visual representation difficult.

1.3: Importance of Difference

When looking at why representation is important to the non-binary community, the book *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (Hall, Evans, and Nixon, 2013) will be the focus. Particularly Chapter 4, Section 1.2 called *Why Does 'Difference' Matter*. This chapter was written by Jamaican-British sociologist, cultural theorist, and political activist, Stuart Hall.

Hall deduces that there are four main reasons that difference matters. He begins with “...‘difference’ matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning could not exist.” (Hall, Evans, and Nixon, 2013, p. 224). This linguistic based concept references the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (discussed in Chapter 1.2).

Specifically, Saussure’s concept that meaning is derived from opposites, for example, light is light because it is not dark. We saw examples of this earlier while discussing the Freudian idea that women are women because they are not men. Hall does point out that defining through opposites can be very reductionist by reducing people to set few characteristics. This is an important way to represent non-binary people as it shows there are categories that are neither male nor female, allowing people who do not feel like either binary gender to discover themselves. The Other must be shown to validate feelings of gender difference.



Figure 2 (Philomene, 2020).

Laurence Philomene's photography demonstrates defining through opposites.

Relating back to Chapter 1.2, it mixes traditionally binary male and female identifiers

to create an androgynous look. The subject here has breasts, wears long gloves, makeup and a delicate necklace but also sports a beard, body hair and tattoos. This mix of what society uses as binary male and female signifiers creates a category of Other. The viewer is likely to believe that this is not a man as they have breasts, but also, this is not a woman as they have a beard so they might deduce that this is a non-binary person. However, as it is becoming understood that gender identity and gender expression are not always aligned, the idea that the subject is non-binary might be incorrect. Representation like this is important because it helps to combat binary thinking. There are issues with Philomene's use of fetishism as a shock factor to draw people in because it can turn the subjects into a spectacle which alienates them from the audience.

The second reason is "*...we need 'difference' because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the 'Other'.*" (Hall, Evans, and Nixon, 2013, p. 225).

This reason takes influence from Bathkin's ideas that meaning stems from discussion about differences. An issue that Hall identified with this is that because there would always be discussions about differences, meaning would constantly be negotiated and never be consistent. In the context of non-binary representation, this would translate to representation showing lots of differences in expression and identity which would help to prevent stereotypes. Although, people who this does not affect may lose patience with an ever-changing definition, perhaps leading them to resentment stemming from fear of the unknown or preference of sameness.

The third reason is focussed on Douglass's work and states "*...culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system.*" Hall, Evans, and Nixon, 2013, p. 226). This reason is based on the idea that everything needs to have meaning and be labelled, and if anything were to be out of

place or categorised incorrectly, society would be disrupted. While precise labels can hurt non-binary people for being so constricting, representing all sub-sections of umbrella terms like non-binary could be educational and aid in creating communities.

The final reason is “...*the “Other” is fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as subjects, and to sexual identity.*” (Hall, Evans, and Nixon, 2013, p. 227). This is based on Freud’s work that Lacan based his Mirror Stage theory on as discussed in Chapter 1.2. The idea is that people are only able to define themselves when they are old enough to look in a mirror and notice that they are not their mother but something different. Non-binary media representation would teach that when looking for who you are, man or woman are not the only options. This allows people to identify their own gender more easily.

Summary 1

To summarise, non-binary people are often underrepresented to increase profits and because the meaning society attach to signifiers make it difficult to express gender without assumptions being made by viewers. Representation is important, nonetheless, as it allows non-binary people to find themselves and community while educating cisgender people.

Chapter 2: How are Non-Binary People Represented in Photography, Film and TV?

2.1: Inhuman Representation

There is a trope that non-binary people are represented as inhuman in the media such as aliens like Double Trouble from *She-Ra* or The Gems from *Steven Universe*, demi-gods like Beelzebub or Pollution from *Good Omens*, and robots or systems such as BMO from *Adventure Time* or Janet from *The Good Place*. I sent out a questionnaire to non-binary people as part of another project I am working on, but this survey included questions on representation, so I have added a table below (see Fig. 3) showing responses from those who answered these questions. It is noticed multiple times that there is little human representation.

Non-Binary Questionnaire Responses on Representation (Not including the respondents who didn't answer these particular questions)			
Respondent:	What enby representation do you know of and why do you like/dislike it?	How would you like to be represented?	Do you think there are stereotypes about non-binary people? If so, what are they and what do you like/dislike about them?
Moll		NOT dead centre of male and female, include more non-androgynous folk, more femme and more AMAB people	AFAB, androgynous/transmasc, white, they/them pronouns
Juda	Double Trouble from She-Ra	More variety of representation, as a kind person rather than a political stance	Confused teenagers
Jolly	Double Trouble - She-Ra, Stevonnie - Steven Universe, Beelzebub and Pollution - Good Omens	Human of all sexes (most enby representation is inhuman), as person with human rights from United Nations	Scrawney, androgynous, white, AFAB, teenager, short hair, binder and hoodie
Finn			Androgynous
Ren	Double Trouble from She-Ra	More representation, especially kids shows	Androgynous
Anonymous 1	TikTok	Black, AMAB, curvy people	White, AFAB, femme, androgynous, "special cis people", "transgenders", "uwu soft bois"
Anonymous 2			Attack helicopter jokes about xenogenders/mogai
Anonymous 3	Ruby Rose, Asia Kate Dillon, Jacob Tobia and Alok Vaid-Menon	As a person without making a big deal about their gender, more AMAB people, more variety of expressions	"Women-lite", AFAB, "trans-lite", attack helicopter
Anonymous 4	Ruby Rose	Gender neutral	Cisgender peoples stereotypes for enbies: Ugly, awkward, confused, attention-seekers Other enby's stereotypes for enbies: hot
Anonymous 5	Double Trouble from She-Ra		Hasn't seen enough representation to identify stereotypes
Anonymous 6	Ezra Miller, enbies on TikTok and Reddit	Older enbies, people who present more masculine/feminine, inclusion i.e. "guys, gals and non-binary pals", not making a fuss	Confused teenager, androgynous, women trying to flee femininity
KP	Jonathan Van Ness, Kate Moening, Rain Dove	With an open mind, more celebrity gender benders	Child molester, drag queen
E	@JamesIsSmiling, enbies on Reddit	Someone whose gender is personal and private, accepted unquestioned, able to present however they want	Edgy androgynous teens, attack helicopter
Silo	Books with non-binary people that at the end decide they are binary	In a good way	3 letter names and noun names (cheese, mac, rock, star etc.)
Jasper	It's bland or non-existent		
Anonymous 7	Double Trouble from She-Ra (love visibility for femininity in non binary but wish for human representation)	More human representation - we're not inhumane, normal human	Androgynous, 3 letter names, noun names
Bow	Hearing alternative pronouns		
Anonymous 8	Alex Fierro	Like normal people	Enbies like space

Figure 3 (Shields, 2020).

A good thing about inhuman non-binary portrayals is that many members of the community enjoy the fluctuation of gender expression given to inhuman characters.

Switching between appearing as either binary gender or something different is a skill that humans do not possess, however, inhuman characters can achieve as they are not bound by science – they are fictional. Many non-binary people like the concept of being able to change how their gender is perceived by society. A drawback of this representation is that it dehumanises non-binary people and makes them seem different and unrelatable. An idea behind why creators choose to represent this way, is because it reduces the risk of intolerant people boycotting or criticising the movie/show because of the argument ‘non-binary does not exist’ and ‘there are only two genders’. This is because society will much more readily accept an alien has no gender, because there are no commonly understood rules about aliens and their potential genders. Robots and systems are more readily accepted too because society tends not to gender machines. The same applies to demi-gods – Christianity believes that angels have no gender, so a genderless or gender-different demi-god would likely be accepted amongst Christian viewers. This way, the producers can capitalise on the community’s thirst for representation (as mentioned in Chapter 1.1), while also avoiding the issue of losing money through people’s transphobia (manifested by boycotting and criticising said media).

While this reasoning makes sense, it is unfair on the non-binary community. They do not deserve to be exploited for profit. The community also deserves a less passive form of representation. Inhuman representation allows producers to say, ‘you can allow this character to be non-binary because aliens don’t necessarily have the same genders as humans’, when they should be saying ‘you can allow this character to be non-binary because some people are non-binary and that is valid’.

2.2: Unsubstantial Representation

In photography, non-binary people are often shot in casual clothes with natural light. They tend to appear as mundane images with the point of interest being the gender of the model. For example, Annie Tritt's work as shown below.



Figure 4 (Tritt, 2020).

Transcending Self is a series of portraits of trans and non-binary youth aged 2-20 and includes interviews with either the children or their parents/guardians. This image shows a 13-year-old, Californian non-binary person called Max sitting on a windowsill and looking into the camera. This image does not appear unique or artistic, the interest stems from the context. The attached interviews make gender the talking point which sheds light on gender identity. Photographs like this are purposefully mundane as they are designed to normalise. However, gender

expression (explained to be different from gender identity in Chapter 1.2) becomes the focus because these photographs capture the outside appearance not the internal identity. Portraits reminds us that, like *The Mirror Stage* (explored in Chapter 1.2), external appearances cannot represent internal identity. Another danger of this representation is that instead of normalising being non-binary, it normalises non-binary people looking a certain way. In other words, it creates a stereotype. Since most photographers that work with this subject are AFAB, white and present androgynously, this becomes the stereotype as they subconsciously seek to self-represent (e.g., Jackson Akitt, Åsa Johannesson, and Laurence Philomene). Figure 3 (shown in Chapter 2.1) shows multiple respondents named these identifiers as non-binary stereotypes. This is how substantial representation is often hidden by hollow stereotypes.

In film and television, unsubstantial representation is seen through poorly developed characters. This occurs when either a character's only personality trait is that they are non-binary, or when a character comes out as non-binary without previously showing any concerns with gender. GLAAD does not count these portrayals as representation (GLAAD, 2020). It plays on the community's thirst for representation (as discussed in Chapter 1.1). For example, Snowflake from *New Warriors* by Marvel (2020).

New Warriors was designed to be inclusive and diverse, however, it was written and designed by Daniel Kibblesmith and Luciano Veccio; two white, cisgender men.

While representation is encouraged, it is looked down on for someone to create minority characters without consulting the minority groups these characters belong to. This is because it can end up being an incorrect representation due to the creator's lack of knowledge and experience on the topic. As for the character name,

people should not attempt to reclaim words on behalf of minority groups. Although Kibblesmith proudly states “...a lot of the names are about fighting against labels that are put on them.” (Marvel, 2020). There was backlash to this as he is trying to reclaim a word on behalf of a community that he does not belong to. It is both not his to reclaim and something that most people do not want to reclaim. The other issue is that, while their brother Safespace is described as a jock and the other characters have been given personality traits, Snowflake is only described as non-binary. GLAAD rejects this type of representation (GLAAD, 2020), it is reductionist and exploits the community for profit (as explained in Chapter 1.1).

2.3: Fetishised Representation

In Chapter Four of *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall wrote the segment *Fetishism and Disavowal* (Hall, Evans, and Nixon, 2013, p. 253-259). It investigates the fetishised way black people were represented in media at the time. Hall's writing is relevant to the way non-binary people are currently being represented. The below photographs demonstrate the lack of progress in the non-binary representation, respectively: Fen-Ma Luiming II; & III from 1993 and the cover of *Outside & In Between* by Chloe Aftel from 2019.



Figure 5 (Luiming, 2020).



Figure 6 (Aftel, 2020).

Fen-Ma Luiming II; & III shows two images side by side of Luiming, naked with makeup on. Luiming describes it as "...*the graceful face of a woman on the body of a man.*" (Getsy, 2016, p. 119). The cover of Aftel's *Outside & In Between* was published twenty-six years later and shows a non-binary person in their underwear, sitting on a bed by a window. The level of disavowal that spectators experience has increased between the release of these images. Hall describes disavowal as when "...*a powerful fascination or desire is both indulged and at the same time denied.*" (Hall, Evans, and Nixon, 2013, p. 257). To understand how to apply Freud and Hall's ideas of fetishism and disavowal, it is necessary to know relevant context: non-binary people are often looked at in an anatomical way. It is common to be asked about your genitals upon meeting somebody new. The curiosity of people and their blindness to etiquette entice them to begin conversations with questions like "but what are you really?", "but what do you have *down there*?" and "so do you have both?". I know this both from personal experience and from conversation with other non-binary individuals. It becomes apparent that the disavowal in both photographs stems from people's desire to categorise non-binary people into binary categories. This is indulged through being allowed to see the gender signifiers of the subject's bodies and denied through not being able to understand the mix of binary gendered signifiers (used to create androgyny as discussed in Chapter 1.2). When looking at Luiming, the anatomy is what society aligns with men and though the combination of this and "*the graceful face of a woman*" (Getsy, 2016, p. 119) can be confusing, society is more likely to categorise them as male because genitals appear to be the key determining factor (based on the questions people ask about what we have '*down there*'). However, with Aftel's photograph, the disavowal stems from the indulgence of seeing a typically feminine face and typically masculine chest, but the

denial of seeing the genitals. This adds to the confusion over which binary gender to categorise the subject as, which is what the viewer wishes to do. Some spectators' curiosity about transgender bodies is uncomfortable and can be dangerous for transgender people.

Fetishism is also present in these photographs. Fetishism, as Freud describes it is *"...the substitute for the woman's penis that the little boy once believed in..."* and he links this to his theory on castration anxiety (Freud, 1977, p. 353). Freud coined the phrase scopophilia and defined it as the sexual element of looking, claiming it was innate. He believed it to be a subconscious search for an unfulfilled desire. In *Representation*, Hall discusses fetishism by applying it to the case of "The Hottentot Venus" (Saartje Baartman). Brought from South Africa and to Europe in 1819, she was used as an attraction that people would pay to see because she was black and overweight which was uncommon at the time. She was exhibited in London and Paris for five years and her 'performance' consisted of her following commands to leave and re-enter the cage in which they kept her. Hall described her as fetishised because her body had been treated as an object, even more so after her death when she was dismembered, and her sexual organs were preserved. He wrote "Fetishism involves the substitution of an 'object' for some dangerous and powerful but forbidden force." (Hall, Evans, and Nixon, 2013, p. 256). In the case of *The Hottentot Venus*, Ma Luiming's self-portraits and Chloe Aftel's photograph, this dangerous, powerful, forbidden force is Otherness. The subjects were all reduced to their bodies and looked at as an object because of their Otherness.

British feminist and film theorist Laura Mulvey also analysed Freud's theory of fetishism and discusses scopophilia in the context of cinema. She talks about the separation from the subject felt by watching people through a screen and the

separation from each other in a dark theatre. Mulvey claims it gives viewers “...*an illusion of looking in on a private world.*” (Mulvey, 1989, p. 17). Photography also allows viewers to experience this. In fact, David Foster Wallace differentiates this from voyeurism for only one reason: the people featured know they are being watched. He writes that people only choose to be on television because “...*this truly huge crowd of ogling somebodies...*” is there to ogle at them and “...*television is performance, spectacle...*” (Foster Wallace, 1997, p. 23). However, this still allows people to examine these subjects and their bodies without being noticed or facing repercussions. This separation between viewer and the viewed, Mulvey argues, allows viewers to indulge in a voyeuristic fantasy where they can gain pleasure from watching while being unseen. This allows fetishism to occur like with Luiming and Aftel's work. People are viewing the subjects as objects because of their Otherness while enjoying the anonymity and separation of looking at them through a frame. Fetishised representation is harmful and dangerous as it exposes the minority group to an unforgiving audience. It exposes their bodies (which society already deems controversial) for the gratification of the viewer.

Summary 2

To sum up, inhuman representation allows for fluctuation of gender expression but can make non-binary people seem unrelatable. It is also too passive and allows viewers to rationalise rather than accept non-binary identities. Unsubstantial representation often attempts to normalise but ends up creating stereotypes and inadvertently centres around gender expression rather than gender identity. However, sometimes unsubstantial representation is used to draw in more viewers

without upsetting majority groups who may hold prejudice. Fetishised representation objectifies non-binary people and exposes their bodies to potentially harsh audiences.

Chapter 3: How is the Representation of Non-Binary People in Photography, Film and TV improving?

3.1: Diversity

Diversity is about including and representing a wide variety of people. Humans have natural diversity, meaning that people differ from one another. Naturally, one would assume that media would also be diverse because diversity in society should logically translate to diversity in representation. However, this is incorrect. In GLAAD's diversity report this year graded all eight major studios it looked at as "insufficient" (GLAAD, 2020). As majority groups have high numbers of people, they create media to reflect the world that they see which is a world of similar people. They also may actively choose to represent minority groups to sell representation as discussed in Chapter 1.1.

Increasingly, as the means become available, minority groups have started to create representation for themselves. The number of people of colour working as television show creators more than doubled between 2012 and 2017 (UCLA, 2019). Knowing that minorities are under-represented, they are often more proactive in trying to represent other minorities too, for example, *One Day at a Time* (2017) which was created by a Cuban-American woman called Gloria Calderón Kellett and was based on a 1975 sitcom by the same name. Kellett's series was renowned for its diversity

as it was based around a Cuban-American family and the main characters included war veterans, a single mum, a lesbian, a non-binary person, a Jewish person and an addict. The show managed to represent all these minority groups without backlash for being problematic despite having a non-binary character played by a cisnet actress which is often viewed as offensive, as the show and cast were careful to represent respectfully, be open, and communicate. However, Netflix dropped *One Day at a Time* after just three seasons which came as a surprise as it was a critical darling (meaning critics loved it). The show was loved by fans too - enough to get “#SaveODAAT” trending on twitter (Teen Vogue, 2019). Lots of people began to criticise Netflix for dropping so many shows that have LGBT+ representation but keeping straight shows that seem to be repetitive (The Tab, 2020). LGBT+ circles on social media were flooded with posts about straight romantic films/shows appearing identical to each other yet being kept for multiple sequels while shows portraying queer storylines were dropped. Foster Wallace has an explanation for this; “...*the Audience really craves sameness but thinks, deep down, that it ought to crave novelty.*” (Foster Wallace, 1997, p. 40). This means that while it seems like viewers love a novelty rom-com storyline, what viewers actually enjoy about a new rom-com is the predictability of its sameness. Sameness is appealing which makes change hard.

Another show with extensive representation is *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018). As shown in Figure 3, it is popular amongst the non-binary community. Out of the six respondents that listed shows with non-binary representation, five named She-Ra.

Non-Binary Questionnaire Responses on Representation

(Not including the respondents who didn't answer these particular questions)

Respondent:	What enby representation do you know of and why do you like/dislike it?	How would you like to be represented?	Do you think there are stereotypes about non-binary people? If so, what are they and what do you like/dislike about them?
Moll		NOT dead centre of male and female, include more non-androgynous folk, more femme and more AMAB people	AFAB, androgynous/transmasc, white, they/them pronouns
Juda	Double Trouble from She-Ra	More variety of representation, as a kind person rather than a political stance	Confused teenagers
Jolly	Double Trouble - She-Ra, Stevonnie - Steven Universe, Beelzebub and Pollution - Good Omens	Human of all sexes (most enby representation is inhuman), as person with human rights from United Nations	Scrawney, androgynous, white, AFAB, teenager, short hair, binder and hoodie
Finn			Androgynous
Ren	Double Trouble from She-Ra	More representation, especially kids shows	Androgynous
Anonymous 1	TikTok	Black, AMAB, curvy people	White, AFAB, femme, androgynous, "special cis people", "transgenders", "uwu soft bois"
Anonymous 2			Attack helicopter jokes about xenogenders/mogai
Anonymous 3	Ruby Rose, Asia Kate Dillon, Jacob Tobia and Alok Vaid-Menon	As a person without making a big deal about their gender, more AMAB people, more variety of expressions	"Women-lite", AFAB, "trans-lite", attack helicopter
Anonymous 4	Ruby Rose	Gender neutral	Cisgender peoples stereotypes for enbies: Ugly, awkward, confused, attention-seekers Other enby's stereotypes for enbies: hot
Anonymous 5	Double Trouble from She-Ra		Hasn't seen enough representation to identify stereotypes
Anonymous 6	Ezra Miller, enbies on TikTok and Reddit	Older enbies, people who present more masculine/feminine, inclusion i.e. "guys, gals and non-binary pals", not making a fuss	Confused teenager, androgynous, women trying to flee femininity
KP	Jonathan Van Ness, Kate Moening, Rain Dove	With an open mind, more celebrity gender benders	Child molester, drag queen
E	@JamesIsSmiling, enbies on Reddit	Someone whose gender is personal and private, accepted unquestioned, able to present however they want	Edgy androgynous teens, attack helicopter
Silo	Books with non-binary people that at the end decide they are binary	In a good way	3 letter names and noun names (cheese, mac, rock, star etc.)
Jasper	It's bland or non-existent		
Anonymous 7	Double Trouble from She-Ra (love visibility for femininity in non binary but wish for human representation)	More human representation - we're not inhumane, normal human	Androgynous, 3 letter names, noun names
Bow	Hearing alternative pronouns		
Anonymous 8	Alex Fierro	Like normal people	Enbies like space

Figure 3 (Shields, 2020).

The character listed is 'Double Trouble' played by genderqueer actor Jacob Tobia.

The show was created by Noelle Stevenson as a reboot of the She-Ra television series from the 1980s. As a lesbian, Stevenson is a minority herself and has been

very mindful of representation. Creating characters of multiple genders, ethnicities, and sexualities, as well as a character written to be autistic. One of the reasons that *Double Trouble* is so highly regarded in the community is because the actor playing them is also non-binary (the importance of this is discussed in Chapter 3.3).

Initially, it seems that *Double trouble* falls into the inhuman trope (as described in Chapter 2.1), however, this is not necessarily correct. Some people do argue that any non-human non-binary falls under this category because they avoid making the audience confront the reality of human non-binary people. However, others argue that this rule does not apply if the show or film has multiple non-human characters of different genders because this way, they are not equating being non-binary with being non-human.

3.2: Authenticity

In philosophy, authenticity means that someone's actions are in line with their beliefs. Nietzsche spoke about it in the context of truth and beauty when he rebutted Socrates' theory that to be beautiful, something must be intelligible. Nietzsche argued that music is beautiful and unintelligible and so he then deduced that knowledge must not all be intellectual, but also instinctive. He theorised that authenticity was to act in line with one's own instincts. Philosopher and author Albert Camus developed Nietzsche's ideas on authenticity and viewed it as a form of truth (McBride, 1992, p. 43-46). Therefore, when applying it to representation, authentic representation must instinctively feel fair, accurate and true to the community. Only the community being represented would instinctively know if something feels this

way because it relates to their identity. Therefore, media creators are expected to communicate with members of the community they are representing.

For example, Marvel's Snowflake (Marvel, 2020) could never be an authentic representation of non-binary people for multiple reasons. Firstly, they are written by a man who has no experience or knowledge of the subject area; therefore, it cannot be genuine or true. Snowflake was created by Daniel Kibblesmith and Lucino Veccio who are both cisgender men who did not discuss their ideas with any non-binary people. This ended up being very noticable. Secondly, almost all the community reject this representation because it is understood to be offensive and unsubstantial, meaning it cannot be accurate or fair and so is not authentic either. It is viewed as offensive mostly due to the name as both Snowflake and their brother Safespace are named after terms commonly used to degrade non-binary youth (Evening Standard, 2020). There was also criticism that Snowflake was drawn with feminine features and the siblings had a blue/pink colour scheme which appeared to represent the gender binary. Some people then took to social media to articulate their offence at the names and concern that the designs would act as ammunition for transphobes.

An example of authentic representation would be *Gender Talents* by Carlos Motta (Carlos Motta, 2020). Gender Talents is an online collection of video portraits by transgender and intersex activists who discuss gender. It is curated by Carlos Motta who is a Colombian artist based in New York. There is no representation that is more fair, accurate and true to the community than a collection of work *by* the community. Motta is using their platform to spread awareness for the community without taking their voices away. This is real progress in terms of representation.

3.3: Normalisation

In Chapter 2.2 it was discussed that often, attempts of normalisation in media end up producing unsubstantial representation instead. So, what does normalisation look like? It is the process of making something appear more normal to wider society and usually occurs through exposure to the topic and education about it. Normalisation of non-binary people through media relies on exposure of both non-binary characters and non-binary actors. This is evident from an article on trans media representation that states that representation “...has two sides: the character and the performer.” It explains “Both elements of representation play a crucial role in normalizing TGD [transgender] individuals for audiences.” (Mocarski *et al.* 2019, p. 430). It is possible to argue that the normalisation of non-binary genders has begun because in the past decade there have been more and more representations of non-binary people in the media. However, there is a huge lack of examples of representation so cannot be viewed as normal yet.

This year, *Under My Skin* (2020) was released and has made huge progress in normalising being non-binary. There have been films about being transgender or gender non-conforming, but this is the first time a film has been specifically about a non-binary person.

Writer and Director David O'Donnell made a strong choice to have four different non-binary actors play the same character. Most people seem to believe that Denny is played by four actors for the same reason which is evident from various film reviews such as those by *Nerdly* (2020), *Battle Royale With Cheese* (2020) and *Gscene* (2020). They believe that Denny is not comfortable in their body but does not know how they would want to present, so the viewer is not allowed to get comfortable with

any presentation they choose either. While an interesting analysis, I believe that the change of actors was to prevent creating a stereotype that there is a certain way that non-binary people look (as previously discussed in Chapter 2.2). It shows a variation in gender expression, body type and race to prevent associating the traits of one actor with being non-binary.

Summary 3

In summary, natural diversity of society does not translate to diversity on screen. Minority groups are beginning to get the opportunity to represent themselves and, when doing so, often represent other minority groups too. Although these often get cancelled for being unable to pull in enough viewers, it could be down to society's subconscious preference for sameness and not just the prejudice of potential viewers. Authentic representation is fair, accurate and true, so tends to stem from minorities self-representing. Normalisation occurs when people have been exposed to something regularly and educated about it. This works best when there are diverse representations as it prevents the creation of a stereotype.

Conclusion

In conclusion, non-binary genders have become more noticed in the past decade, but the representation has not been sufficient. Creators often decide not to represent non-binary people as they believe it will harm their profits. When they do decide to represent the community, it tends to be inconsequential or offensive which harms the way the community is perceived and validates hostility towards them. Creators find this an easier way to keep audiences happy as it appeals to the majority groups

which include the majority of people, therefore, more potential viewers to buy tickets. Viewers like to view pretty people, and by Western beauty standards, non-binary is not pretty. It is also hard to represent what you cannot signify. Society perceives certain signifiers as gendered and, to prevent gendering, they mix signifiers to create androgyny. If all representations of non-binary individuals are androgynous, this forms a restrictive stereotype that pressures people to conform to a particular gender expression they may not feel comfortable with. Androgyny cannot be the only portrayal as variety helps create meaning because opposites are essential to meaning. Meaning also comes from a dialogue with the Other, having labels to classify as, and seeing examples of the Other. Therefore, it is vital that the Other is represented as it starts discussions, creates the language needed to define oneself, and presents answers to those trying to figure out their identity.

When there is representation, it risks falling into tropes. Inhuman representation is too passive as it gives people the ability to rationalise what they are seeing and continue to ignore the existence of non-binary people. This is because society does not gender things like robots or supernatural creatures and does not constrict aliens to a human gender system. It dehumanises and can make the community unrelatable and further people's perception that non-binary people are abnormal. It is a way to exploit the community's thirst for representation for profit without having to face backlash from mainstream audiences. At least it is a more interesting way of portraying the community than if they fell into the unsubstantial trope. Even if it was an attempt to normalise, mundane representations cannot normalise a gender identity, only a gender expression. This creates stereotypes. Objectively, it is worse if they intend on creating characters without any substance because that is not even an attempt to normalise. However, fetishised portrayals are worse because they are

not just perpetuating negative stereotypes, they are exposing minorities to potentially malicious viewers. It objectifies the community.

However, representation is increasing and improving - photography, film, and television are becoming far more diverse. Portrayals are more authentic now society is learning transgender characters should be played by transgender actors and more minorities are given the opportunity to tell their own story. The increasing exposure of the community looks to be the start of normalisation. Acceptance is seeming attainable.

Bibliography

Websites

Alberta (2018) *Gender, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression*. Available at:
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/gender-ID-expression-LGBTQ.aspx>
 (Accessed: 20 November 2020).

Battle Royale With Cheese (2020) *Under My Skin: Review*. Available at:
<https://battleroyalewithcheese.com/2020/11/under-my-skin-review/> (Accessed: 17
 December 2020).

Cambridge University Press (2020) *Cambridge Dictionary: Commodity*. Available at:
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/commodity> (Accessed: 15
 November 2020).

Carlos Motta (2020) *Gender Talents*. Available at: <https://gendertalents.info/>
 (Accessed: 25 November 2020)

Equality Human Rights (2011) *Technical Note Final*. Available at:
https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/technical_note_final.pdf
 (Accessed: 15 November 2020).

Evening Standard (2020) *Marvel Receives Backlash After Naming First Non-Binary
 Characters Snowflake and Safespace*. Available at:
[https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/film/marvel-criticism-non-binary-characters-
 snowflake-safespace-a4402666.html](https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/film/marvel-criticism-non-binary-characters-snowflake-safespace-a4402666.html) (Accessed: 28 December 2020).

GLAAD (2020) *GLAAD's 2020 Studio Responsibility Index: Highest Recorded
 Percentage of LGBTQ-Inclusive Films but Racial Diversity Drops and Zero
 Transgender Characters Appear*. Available at:

<https://www.glaad.org/releases/glaad%E2%80%99s-2020-studio-responsibility-index-highest-recorded-percentage-lgbtq-inclusive-films> (Accessed: 27 December 2020).

Gscene (2020) *REVIEW: Raindance Film Festival – Under My Skin*. Available at: <https://www.gscene.com/arts/review-raindance-film-festival-under-the-skin/> (Accessed 17 December 2020).

Marvel (2020) *Introducing the New ‘New Warriors’*. Available at: <https://www.marvel.com/articles/comics/introducing-the-new-new-warriors> (Accessed: 23 November 2020).

Nerdly (2020) *Raindance Festival 2020: ‘Under My Skin’ Review*. Available at: <https://www.nerdly.co.uk/2020/11/04/raindance-festival-2020-under-my-skin-review/> (Accessed: 17 December 2020).

Observer (2020) *Analysis Shows Just 2% of Recent Films Have Explicit LGBT Representation*. Available at: <https://observer.com/2020/09/lgbt-film-representation-data-ellie-lockhart/> (Accessed: 27 December 2020).

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2018) *Jacques Lacan*. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/#MirStaEgoSub> (Accessed: 20 November 2020).

Teen Vogue (2019) *Netflix Cancelled “One Day at a Time” Because “Not Enough People Watched”*. Available at: <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/netflix-cancelled-one-day-at-a-time> (Accessed 28 December 2020).

The Tab (2020) *‘Netflix Hates Lesbians’: Fans are Raging After Netflix Cancels THREE Lesbian Led Shows*. Available at: <https://thetab.com/uk/2020/08/24/netflix->

[hates-lesbians-fans-are-raging-after-netflix-cancels-three-lesbian-led-shows-172334](#)

(Accessed 28 December 2020).

UCLA (2019) *Hollywood Diversity Report*. Available at:

<https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/UCLA-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2019-2-21-2019.pdf> (Accessed 28 December 2020).

USTS (2015) *USTS Full Report*. Available at:

<https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/USTS-Full-Report-FINAL.PDF>

(Accessed: 15 November 2020).

Books

Butler, J. (2007) *Gender Trouble*. 2nd edn. Oxon: Routledge.

Foster Wallace, D. (1997) *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. Great Britain: Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

Freud, S. (1977) *On Sexuality; Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. 7th edn. London: Pelican Freud Library.

Getsy, D.J. (2016) *Documents of Contemporary Art: Queer*. London: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Limited.

Hall, S., Evans, J. and Nixon, S. (2013) *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Jeffreys, S. (2014) *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*. 2nd edn. Hove: Routledge.

Lacan, J. (1991) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 1: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.

McBride, J. (1992) *Albert Camus: Philosopher Littérateur*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mulvey, L. (1989) *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Saussure, F. (1966) *Course in General Linguistics*. 3rd edn. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.

Articles

Mocarski, R. *et al.* (2019) 'The Rise of Transgender and Gender Diverse Representation in the Media: Impacts on the Population.' *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 12(3), p. 430.

Films and Television Shows

One Day at a Time (2017) Created by Gloria Calderón Kellett, Netflix.

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power (2018) Created by Noelle Stevenson, Netflix.

The Kings of Summer (2013) Directed by Jordan Vogt-Roberts, USA: Big Beach Films.

Under My Skin (2020) Directed by David O'Donnell, UK: Raindance.

Zoolander 2 (2016) Directed by Ben Stiller, USA: Red Hour Films.