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“For Aimee”

Writing an Imaginary Screenplay for the 2017/18 Master’s Class

“Trans*Television”

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1 Introduction

Before I took part in the seminar ‘Trans*Television’ in winter term 2017/18, I thought that I had a relatively solid general education in topics like gender and sex. Likewise, I believed the LGBTQ scene was not foreign to me either, because I knew some acquaintances. How wrong I was when I couldn't start with the term 'cisgender' right from the start. Cisgender is “an adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity and gender expression align with sex assigned at birth.”¹ Immediately after that, I noticed that the term could be replaced with “nontransgender” which indeed was familiar to me.

Nevertheless, I quickly realized in the very first seminar session that I had gone into an area that would require a basic understanding before I was able to discuss it properly. This gave me the motivation to learn something new on such an important topic at the moment, to shed light on different perspectives, and finally to be able to critically examine the portrayal of transgender people in the media, or more precisely, on television. During the seminar, many scenes of transgender characters from popular television series were played, so that we could take a closer look at detailed sequences.

While doing this, I got inspired to write a screenplay as a creative project rather than a classic research paper or a reading journal as I had done before. By discussing the way most trans characters are displayed on television, I was taking notes of the lack of characteristics the ‘stereotype’ was revealing. These notes help to set a representative frame for the following screenplay, which will be the main part of this paper. Having this in mind, I would like to focus on two points in my screenplay that are not represented or are represented far too rarely in television: trans men on the one hand and trans characters in higher services on the other hand. While the majority of television programs in entertainment and romance/comedy context display trans* characters as stereotypically funny and energetic, I intend to reflect the diversity of the trans* community by writing an imaginary screenplay.

The included screenplay in my paper is about an imaginary transgender man in high office who has his coming out live on TV while being interviewed about his political statements. In advance, however, it is necessary to take a look at the

¹ <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexuality-definitions.pdf>

stereotypical depiction of transgender characters on television beforehand to see the difference in the following screenplay.

Among all of the analyzed texts covered in the seminar, the role of Sophia Buset in *Orange Is the New Black*, embodied by Laverne Cox, is particularly interesting in this case. While I examined Laverne Cox's acting performance, I couldn't avoid following her career in the media and what she's currently occupied with: the case of Aimee Stephens. Stephen's case was recently heavily represented in the American media because her employer dismissed her when she came out as transsexual². Cox raised awareness by spreading Stephens' case in the media. Additionally, when the Supreme Court was dealing with the case, Cox demonstrated her support clearly when she was present that day.³ Cox's involvement has largely influenced the following screenplay.

Having these points in mind, I've tried to create content for a movie or a series including actual current events and their effect which changes above all the life of the trans protagonist, but through his powerful influence, the life of many others may also change. Although it is unusual for authors to explain themselves or their work at the end, I nevertheless intend to take the chance to review my process and give some additional information about Stephens' case and the increasing visibility of trans people in the media. However, the screenplay will leave space for some explanations at the end.

² <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/14/success/workplace-discrimination-lgbtq/index.html>

³ <https://www.newsweek.com/aimee-stephens-trans-case-supreme-court-1463900>

2 Proceedings and Central Theme

While it is now common to see gay characters on television, there is a lack of trans*people being represented on screen. With regard to trans* depiction in past and current television series, the question remains whether the rare illustration of trans* people is somewhat one-sided. In this context, the “transgender-on-the-way-to-transsexual identities” dominate depictions of trans* people in television. (Siebler, 2012, as cited in Poole, 2017). But also apart from that, the representation of trans* characters accumulates in the context of drag and cross-dressing (cf. Poole 2017: 2), in which they might be often “used for a cheap laugh” (2017: 2) to a straight audience, or they are displayed as hookers who are involved either as witnesses or as victims of crimes (cf. Poole 2).

However, this is compensated for in the increased representation of the male-to-female transsexual, whose sensitive character is precisely illuminated in order to make the audience as aware as possible of how he feels lost in the male body he was born in (cf. Poole 2). While this can provide empathy, the strong focus on ‘identifying as trans’ excludes the diversity and complexity of the character. Furthermore, an often used technique to create a ‘build up’ movement until a character is ‘revealed’ as transgender, either in a dramatic dialogue or in a common mirror shot where the trans* character gazes at his/her own body and thereby ‘tells the audience the truth’, reduces trans* characters to their bodies once again (cf. Poole 9). This ‘build up’ technique until the ‘revelation’ puts the trans* body all the more in the spotlight.

2.1 Laverne Cox as Sophia Burset in *Orange Is the New Black*

In regard to current television, Laverne Cox is “the most visible transgender person” (2017: 4), thanks above all to her role as Sophia Burset in *Orange Is the New Black*, a Netflix TV series that is set in a women’s federal prison. While Cox’s portrayal makes an important contribution to the visibility of trans* people on television (not least because Cox herself is an out trans* actress), it also leaves enough room for criticism when it comes to Sophia’s shallow character. Before the viewer gets a deep insight into her character, the main focus is on her body – or to be

more precise – on the transition from her prior to post operation body (S01E03). On one hand, this not only confirms that the transition is, as mentioned before, the dominating depiction, but also that Sophia’s body is sexualized as her post-op body suggests what a desirable feminine body should look like. Apart from that, also the change in Sophia’s professional life is to be criticized. We learn through flashbacks that Sophia once worked in her old identity as a firefighter, but after her transition she works as a hairdresser. While both jobs are of the working-class professions, the hairdresser profession is considered typically female and the profession as a firefighter reflects masculinity. Accordingly, a critical picture of social inequality is presented, which in turn is even confirmed by a female supervisor and her sexist comment in the series, “Why would anyone ever want to give up being a man. It’s like winning the lottery and giving the ticket back” (2017: 6). This is not the only expression of male superiority; it is also expressed through a horny prison guard who stigmatizes Sophia as a prostitute and “proceeds to offer for Sophia to perform fellatio on him in exchange for favors” (2017: 5). Even if she doesn’t get involved, Sophia’s “utter victimization within a totalizing system” (2017: 6) becomes apparent as well as another association of trans* characters with sex work, even if it is in a critical light.

The series successfully provides a new insight into trans* television which is the importance of hormone treatment after transitioning. Once more, Sophia gets victimized when the prison staff denies her hormone treatment (S01E03), as they do not “classify her case as an emergency” (Weiss 2014: 56), even though Sophia explained that her post-op body could not produce the required hormones itself. In this case, the series does not only shed critical light on the rights of prison inmates, but also on the legal status of trans* people when it comes to health care, as “many transgender, intersex, and other non-conforming persons often face discrimination, predominantly in the era of healthcare and criminal justice [...]” (2014: 55). Exposed to this constant discrimination, the character Sophia manages to arouse compassion among the audience. This is complemented by sympathy for her personality and behavior, as she is not only supportive by providing beauty tips for fellow prisoners, but “while cutting hair in the prison’s salon, she is often seen encouraging and empowering her clients” (Decarvalho/Cox 2015: 72). While Sophia indeed triggers

sympathy, her portrayal as the good listener who seems to hold herself back to pay enough attention to others, oddly reminds viewers of the stereotype of the ‘black best friend’ whose presence merely plays a minor role to the most likely white main role in any circumstance. Not surprisingly, in the medial representation, “the lives of transgender people are rarely represented, and when transgender characters do appear in mainstream film, they tend to be treated as caricatures” (Richter, 2013, as cited in Poole 2017).

Even though Cox’s performance as Sophia in *Orange* is increasing the visibility of trans* women in media, the representation of trans* masculine characters continues to receive little attention (cf. Capuzza/Spencer 2017: 221). While Sophia represents not only trans* women, but also people of color, the representation of “trans men of color [are] even worse: Representations of their lives in scripted media are nonexistent” (2017: 221). Thus, there is still a wide spectrum of trans* and other non-normative characters to cover.

Also, there has been no representation of trans* people in American entertainment television that can influence social thinking such as a trans* character as a public figure who could potentially alter public perspective. As trans* issues are most likely discussed by trans* characters than by cisgender characters, the problematic tends to be mainly considered by trans* people (cf. Capuzza/Spencer 222). But that would change if the trans* character was a public figure, at best in a political, influential position. In order to discuss this possible role, a trans* masculine politician is the protagonist of my screenplay.

2.2 Aimee Stephens: Michigan Transgender Discrimination Case

Aimee Stephens is a U.S. citizen who was dismissed by her employer in Michigan because she came out as transsexual.⁴ With the support of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the case was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court. When the Supreme Court heard the oral arguments on October 8, 2019, Cox was present at the event⁵, supporting Stephens. Stephens now is still with the woman she married before she came out as a trans* woman and lives on medical

⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/14/success/workplace-discrimination-lgbtq/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.newsweek.com/aimee-stephens-trans-case-supreme-court-1463900>

disability while she waits for the verdict⁶. What has attracted public attention is primarily the fact that the Supreme Court is set to consider transgender rights for the first time.⁷ Considering legal rights, the question arises if an employer can fire someone based on their gender identity. So far, the employment law protects you considering religion, sex, and race, but the Court has never addressed gender identity until now. The outcome of Stephens' case is likely to depend on how the Court interprets Title VII of the *Civil Rights Act* from 1964, which is “a federal law that prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin and religion.”⁸ Here, one could debate the exact meaning of “sex” and whether it cannot be associated with gender identity. A recent article considers that “defendants in the cases before the Supreme Court argue that sexual orientation and gender identity aren't subsets of *sex*, meaning they aren't protected classes”, which suggests that state courts have not determined whether that law applies to sexual orientation or gender identity.

Until now, Stephens' case shows that the law did not protect her from being discriminated against based on “gender stereotyping” (yet). It remains to be seen until spring or summer 2020 how the Court rules on the case.⁹

Having a public figure with a large reach on the internet like Laverne Cox who addresses gender related topics has an educative effect and largely influenced the following screenplay considering lack of representative trans* people in media and employment protections in the LGBTQ community. The imaginary screenplay will already begin in the next section. Beforehand, I have to mention that I believe in the fact that the visibility of trans* people in public media does influence the creation of trans* roles in entertainment television (we create what we know), but that it can have the same effect the other way around (visibility in public life due to visibility in television).

⁶ <https://www.newsweek.com/aimee-stephens-trans-case-supreme-court-1463900>

⁷ <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/08/supreme-court-clashes-over-meaning-of-sex-in-lgbt-discrimination-cases.html>

⁸ <https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/legal-resources/know-your-rights-at-work/title-vii/>

⁹ <https://www.inquirer.com/news/university-of-pennsylvania-transgender-employees-title-vii-supreme-court-20191108.html>

3 Screenplay

For Aimee
Written by
Berina Alomerovic

FADE IN:

INT. CNN LIVE BACKSTAGE - EVENING

(PRESENT DAY)

JOHN BROWN (61) and his wife MOLLY BROWN (59) face each other in the backstage area of CNN. JOHN is on the verge of entering the stage to publicly express his political views. MOLLY puts her hands on his chest and looks him in the eyes.

JOHN

Two minutes left...
This evening is going to change
my life forever. Our life-

MOLLY

And also, the lives of many others!

JOHN

MOLLY, you don't have to go through
this with me-

MOLLY

(interrupts)

I have always loved you, in all your
being, because you are still you.
Whatever happens, I will stay by your
side.

JOHN

(leans in)

You see me.

MOLLY

You're my husband. You're my man.

JOHN embraces MOLLY with his arm and draws her closer to him as he slowly slides his other hand down and touches his groin.

JOHN

(inhales)

I'm a man.

INT. CNN LIVE ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

JOHN enters the stage and the audience applauds. The presenter FELICIA BURNS (55) shakes his hand and shows him which chair to sit in.

JOHN takes a long look at the audience and the cameras. Then they both take a seat.

FELICIA

JOHN, I appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today.

JOHN

Thank you for having me, FELICIA.

FELICIA

(looks into camera)

Last night's conference was the first-ever town hall event focused on LGBTQ issues in...

INT. PRODUCTION CONTROL ROOM AT CNN - CONTINUOUS

The communications director NANCY (37) enters the production control room and walks past a group of technicians standing beside the wall of video monitors. She pulls out her cell phone and types.

NANCY

(to all)

We're supposed to tape for 15 minutes. Let me quickly design a hashtag and let's project the exchange on Twitter

(points at a screen)

on this one.

INT. CNN LIVE ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

FELICIA

(looks into camera)

In regard to the last event, we invited several governors to comment on the recent town hall discussion. Our guest tonight is JOHN BROWN, who for over ten years has been the Governor of Michigan.

(looks at JOHN)

JOHN, am I correct in assuming that the stance of the 2020 Democratic Presidential candidate on LGBTQ issues, is of great importance to you?

A note flashes on the screen: "John Brown (D) Michigan Governor".

JOHN

That's right. We have to make a stand for problems regarding marginalized groups within the U.S.

FELICIA

We have heard in the LGBTQ community employment protections shall be strengthened, conversion therapies shall be banned, and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation in the child welfare

system and within adoption agencies shall be banned.

JOHN

I support the proposed plans for the protection of the LGBTQ community.

FELICIA

But even before that, you were particularly active in supporting LGBTQ rights.

JOHN

Yes, at the last press conference, I announced that we would be campaigning for more funding for LGBTQ organizations.

FELICIA

What exactly are you aiming at in the first place?

JOHN

It is important to us to ban the conversion therapy in Michigan once and for all.

FELICIA

As of November 2019, there is no statewide ban on conversion therapy in Michigan—

JOHN

(interrupts)

Which is why it is of the utmost urgency to change this.

FELICIA

But, why now?

JOHN

Conversion therapy is a controversial practice that supposedly tries to

change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. It is high time to ban this form of humiliation.

FELICIA

When you say that people experience hatred, have you witnessed this yourself?

JOHN

To combat those experiences, thanks to funding for LGBTQ organizations, we've recently launched a 24/7 mental health crisis hotline and sex-ed support lines—

FELICIA

(interrupts)

Do you personally answer the phone?

JOHN

Well, I am not in contact with the callers myself, but I am regularly informed about the statistics, and in that sense, yes, I do see the hatred myself.

FELICIA

(looks into camera)

But you don't talk to the callers?

JOHN

The numbers speak for themselves.

FELICIA

(pauses)

Then you can tell us for sure if there's been any fluctuation in the numbers since last night.

JOHN

(looks into audience)

During and after the town hall, twice as many callers dialed the hotline than last week. Although the tone of the calls were much different this time.

FELICIA
Different how?

JOHN
(leans in)
The callers were hopeful.

FELICIA
(nods)
The conference gave them hope for a better future.

JOHN
Frustration is a known driver of change, but hope is the powerful catalyst needed.

FELICIA
Do you consider yesterday's conference to be this catalyst?

JOHN
(leans back)
I see yesterday's event as a necessary reaction to what happened to Aimee Stephens. If we should speak of a symbol of hope, it is Aimee.

INT. PRODUCTION CONTROL ROOM AT CNN - CONTINUOUS

NANCY
(to all)
Fade in a banner by asking all viewers to tweet using #CNLive and

#CNNBrown. Let's also include 'Aimee' in the hashtags. Who can send me a link to our last post about her?

INT. CNN LIVE ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

FELICIA

Now that Aimee's name has been mentioned, you've been campaigning in Michigan to support her case with funds. Besides that, you're often associated with Aimee Stephens. Can you explain why?

JOHN

(looks down)

When Aimee was fired in 2013 because she came out as a trans woman, the information reached my office after the EEOC had supported her case, but I had no hope for Aimee's case at the time-

FELICIA

(interrupts)

But politically Michigan aligns with the governor-

JOHN

(interrupts)

Even my hands were tied. Luckily, the Supreme Court took up the case (looks at FELICIA) and Aimee's story was heard (shakes his head) Aimee's case has inspired me.

FELICIA

JOHN, I need to make sure that we're on the same page. Why do I perceive that you feel particularly connected to this case?

INT. PRODUCTION CONTROL ROOM AT CNN - CONTINUOUS

NANCY

(looks over her glasses)
Guys, FELICIA'S on to something.

INT. CNN LIVE ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

JOHN

We all come from somewhere. I had a life before I became the JOHN BROWN you know today. I admire Aimee for standing by her truth, and the truth shall set her free, regardless of what she has to go through first.

FELICIA

(leans forward)
I see. What's your truth, JOHN?

INT. PRODUCTION CONTROL ROOM AT CNN - CONTINUOUS

NANCY

(stands up)
Oh, she's so good. I'm going to include 'reveal' and 'truth' in the hashtags and I want them in the next banner. Now.

INT. CNN LIVE ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

JOHN

(inhales)
The truth is, to circle back to your question earlier, I do know what hatred feels like, not because I've observed it, but because I've experienced it. I felt it on a personal level when Aimee claimed,

that she felt imprisoned in a body that does not match her mind. I had a gender identity disorder and I've struggled with it for a long time.

Silence.

A look of shocked disbelief crosses Felicia's face.

INT. PRODUCTION CONTROL ROOM AT CNN - CONTINUOUS

A look of disbelief on Nancy's face.

INT. CNN LIVE ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

JOHN

I was born in a female body where I never felt at home. That was a long time ago, but I will never forget the oppressive feeling of being lost in my own body.

FELICIA

(gasps)

Born as a female-

JOHN

(interrupts)

I'm a man. My brain, my personality, my heart, and my soul are male. Despite not having the privilege of being born in a male body. I'm a man. This is my truth.

INT. PRODUCTION CONTROL ROOM AT CNN - CONTINUOUS

All of the employees talk excitedly, and Nancy speaks over their heads in a loud voice.

NANCY

Stay focused. I'm going to include now #LGBTQ and #BROWNISTRANS and I want to monitor all incoming tweets!

NANCY supports herself with her hands on the table as she continues to follow the interview until she notices the incoming tweets on the other monitor.

It reads:

"@USjournal: #FeliciaBurns' #JohnBrown interview is startlingly intimate and direct. What a turn!
#BROWNISTRANS"

"@JennyK: It's all a setup. The state wants to fool us as always. A governor who is trans? Lol who believes this?
#CNNinterview #BROWNISTRANS"

"@Anjanettethereal: 'I'm a trans man. This is my truth.'
Yasss honey, the truth shall set you free! What a beautiful night #BROWNISTRANS #CNNLGBTQ
#TransLivesMatter"

INT. CNN LIVE ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

FELICIA

(adjusts her glasses)

Let me try to put this together. You were assigned female at birth, but you've never identified yourself as a woman, because you've felt you belonged to (swings her hand) the nature of a man?

JOHN

Yes, but what is the nature of a man anyway? This question has been touched upon by some of the smartest people in history, but I can't answer it. I'm me. That's all I know.

FELICIA

JOHN, may I ask, since when have you lived out your true self?

JOHN

When I was in elementary school, I realized that I didn't belong to my given body. While I was in college, I was able to convince my parents of my truth. At that time, I was twenty.

FELICIA

(nods)

Your parents were very wealthy?

JOHN

(pauses)

We were comfortable, yes.

FELICIA

Am I right in assuming that your parents have supported you best during your...

(swings hand)

...transitioning process?

JOHN

That's right. I can say I was incredibly lucky to receive the help and support of my parents. In that way, I was able to transition early as compared to people like Aimee who often can't.

FELICIA

If I'm understanding you correctly, you're trying to support Aimee now and in reverse, Aimee helped you somehow to stand up for your truth.

JOHN

I've made it easy for myself and have kept the subject secret. Why

shouldn't I? You can't tell by looking at me that I once had a female body.

FELICIA

Then why this revelation today?

JOHN

(looks at audience)

Because I believe that it takes truth to assess a situation realistically and to change it sustainably. I realized that, when Aimee was heard, just think of how many others like Aimee there are. I mean, I'm like Aimee. Governor or not.

FELICIA

(takes off glasses)

MR. BROWN, am I right in assuming the President doesn't know about this?

JOHN

Not until now.

Mrs. Burns has no answer for him.

JOHN

I love my country and have devoted my life to public service. I'm still the governor and I'm not helping anybody by just answering the phone. Instead I'm helping by being man enough to stand by my truth whatever challenges it may bring.

FELICIA

Speaking of challenges, do you see any possible risks following this evening?

JOHN

I do. I see my political career endangered; I see my faith questioned, and I even see my life threatened. Because,

(looks at audience)

we're not as far as we think we are,

(looks at FELICIA)

but we've never been as far as we are today.

FELICIA

Who would have thought that you would be coming out tonight?

JOHN

This doesn't change

(stands up)

my performance as governor, my faith as a Christian, or my role as a husband and still,

(looks at audience)

I wanted you to know because I can't hide anymore. Also, I'm doing this for Aimee and everyone else who's ready to stand for their truth. For me, the case was a calling. It has given me a chance to help people. I truly firmly believe that we're going to make a difference in the world.

INT. PRODUCTION CONTROL ROOM AT CNN - CONTINUOUS

Nancy sits in front of the monitor and tracks the incoming tweets.

It reads:

"@dolly0411: The case was a calling and change is coming! Bravo, Brown and hello future! #ForAimee #CNNlive"

"@damijankaufman: Tolerate everything? I've better things

to think about than when my neighbor tells me that he now wants to fuck a horse e.g. health care #ComeOnAmerica #CNN"

"@SimonSugar: This #CNNinterview is exactly what the world needs! Brown, we hear YOU. #Brown4President #Transgender"

"@MaryAnnMichael: "The truth shall set you free", he says, but not until it is finished with you! Oh Lord, the world is falling apart. #CNNlive #PrayForAmerica"

"@AndersonSportNewsHD: If you're a man, you don't have to worry about your manliness. #JohnBrown proves with his performance he has balls!! #HatsOff #CNNlive"

Nancy looks at the clock and sees that only 15 seconds are left.

NANCY

(to all)

Let them know, that show time is over.

INT. CNN LIVE ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

A melody begins to play softly and slowly becoming louder and louder. JOHN looks questioningly at FELICIA and she gestures him to sit down again.

FELICIA

Thank you for joining us tonight and being so courageously honest. You've given us a great deal to think about.

JOHN

Thank you, FELICIA.

FELICIA

(looks into camera)

And that concludes our live one-on-one exclusive interview with JOHN BROWN. You can watch the entire interview on our website. And as always, we invite you to give us your thoughts and comments on Facebook and Twitter. But for now, thanks for watching and good night.

INT. PRODUCTION CONTROL ROOM AT CNN - CONTINUOUS

NANCY

And we're off.

Nancy watches through the monitor as FELICIA and JOHN stand up and shake hands. Then she looks over to the other monitor, where one tweet after the other arrives at breakneck speed.

FADE OUT.

THE END.

4 Conclusion

Although scriptwriters don't typically explain themselves or the story at the end of their work, I would like to take the opportunity to say a few concluding and explanatory statements. Since I do not consider myself transgender, I have found it tremendously difficult to create an authentic scene wherein the trans* character and their 'opponent' behave in the most credible and comprehensible way.

At the end of the script, it remains unseen what will happen with John Brown. The ending is deliberately left open because any possible conclusion exceeds my imagination. I can imagine that he continues to make headlines on the internet and triggers the most polarized people to comment on his coming out. The inclusion of various imaginary tweets as reactions in the screenplay was inspired by a social TV analysis on Twitter reactions to Diane Sawyer's interview with Caitlyn Jenner, when she came out as a transgender woman. The analysis not only notes how viewers are brought together in a virtual social setting but also aptly describes the actual state of trans* rights within a cultural context:

Given the current state of transgender rights and the ongoing debates and votes about bathroom bills, discrimination laws, and so forth, the current work must be positioned within the current culture – a culture that is not yet trans inclusive and, in many instances, not even trans tolerant. (Miller/Behm-Morawitz 2017: 148)

However, despite ongoing debates about how to represent trans* issues in public media or on television, or if one should include them at all, the visibility of transgender content is on the rise in media and “television continues to offer important and helpful means for the transgender community (Poole 2017: 4).

As shown above, I have taken into account all the points raised in the second section of my paper in order to create a scenario in which perspectives that may have been lacking were considered. Such as, how would a presenter on live television react if a guest of a high-ranking political position was revealed as transgender? To what extent does the politician respond to intimate questions without losing focus on the political relevance of his answers? What are the reactions of the American viewers, who are able to express their opinions in real-time via social media? Lastly, to what extent would such a coming out heighten the awareness that there is no right

way to determine a gender identity until an announcement? The final question sheds light on a critical missing factor, that the gender representation of a character cannot be identified as trans until said character reveals that information unless however, one gazes at their body or sees them in sexual acts.

Although I was not able to find a ‘correct answer’ to the questions, I intended to include points that are of great importance. Contrary to the frequent focus on the body, I have completely ignored this point and instead emphasized that John Brown does not define himself by his past. As a way to reinforce his gender identity, he touches his groin in the beginning while declaring he is a man. He admits in the dialogue with Felicia Burns that he does not really know what the definition of a man is, but that he knows that he is one. Even if one always strives for an exact definition in order to call things by its name, I intended to use John’s words to illustrate the problem of “gender stereotyping”, as the spectrum of gender identities is not easy to subdivide. Due to financial help from his family, it was especially easy for John Brown to gain access to life-changing surgery at an early age. Therefore, he never had to explain himself regarding his ‘new identity.’ Why then does he take the risk of being discriminated against and above all of jeopardizing his position as governor? I think that very conscious risk demonstrates transphobia as real and raises the need for more attention.

However, attention should be achieved not by former stereotypical depictions of trans people, but through a wide range of positive, influential, and perhaps significant trans characters. The series *Orange Is the New Black* was praised for “depicting transgender issues” (Decarvalho/Cox 2015: 65) which confirms that trans content is becoming more and more popular in mainstream formats, because a positive reception of a ‘popular’ transgender person “may be especially important for transgender individuals’ cultivation of their perceived acceptance and legitimacy in society.” (Miller/Behm-Morawitz 2017: 141). According to this, a spectrum of the most diverse transgender people in the media, or more precisely, on television, can certainly lead to (more) trans tolerance within the current culture.

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