Upwardly Female:
The Excessive/Transgressive Bodies of Tall Women on Television

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Abstract

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This thesis works toward an understanding of how tallness is inscribed upon the female body in Anglo-Western popular culture through a textual analysis of three tall female television characters. As the ideal female body is positioned as being small, docile, and feminine, and the ideal male body as tall, powerful, and masculine, I seek to explore what happens when these signifiers intersect on the tall female body. The tall female body troubles and disrupts conventions of female embodiment, spatial negotiation, power dynamics, heteronormativity, and perceptions and understandings of sex and gender. Through case studies of Brienne of Tarth in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (Gwendoline Christie, 6'3"), Coach Shannon Beiste in Fox's *Glee* (Dot-Marie Jones, 6'3"), and 6'1" Miranda Hart in her BBC sitcom *Miranda*, I engage with concepts of excess, mobility, "taking up space" and "fitting," femininity and masculinity, otherness and liminality, gaze, unruliness, and the perceptible body versus the experienced body. I situate each tall character's embodied representation within the show's narrative, generic, tonal, and production context, drawing on work that addresses action heroines, gendered violence, and medieval fantasy world-building; musical affect, situational empathy, and retroactive continuity; and the comedic female body, slapstick, and unruliness. This thesis addresses the lack of attention paid to height in popular and scholarly discourse on gender and embodiment by arguing that televisual representations of tall women reflect, reproduce, and challenge gendered norms around height, and how bodies are visually defined and constructed within the boundaries of the screen.

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Introduction:
Girls to Look Up To

As a child growing rapidly into my own tall body amongst a sea of much smaller girls, and boys that I was able to look in the eye, I came to understand my place in the world through media. There were few depictions of tall girls on either screen or page, and I latched on to whatever I could find. My biggest nineties kid hero was Sailor Jupiter from the Japanese animated series *Sailor Moon*, who like me had brown hair with bangs, was fond of green and pink together, and stood head and shoulders above her shorter female friends. A few years later, I discovered Tamora Pierce's *Protector of the Small* quartet, about nobly-born teenage aspiring knight Keladry "Kel" of Mindelan: a tall, husky girl who again had similar hair to me.

Both Kel and Sailor Jupiter were tomboyish fighters who struggled to fit in. Kel was hazed by the boys she trained with for being the only girl, though her size and height put her on more equal footing with them, and Sailor Jupiter's first appearance showed her unable to find a school uniform in her size. While I fervently idolized both of them, Kel was written and Sailor Jupiter was animated, both brought to life with pen rather than camera, and as such, not real portrayals of *actual* tall girls. Kel and Sailor Jupiter were as real as the storyworlds they sprang from, which is to say both incredibly and genuinely real to a kid with a very active imagination, and yet so distant from the world I lived in.

Despite the dearth of tall girl heroines to (literally) look up to, the stories I read and watched were filled with chaste yet idealistic representations of heterosexual romance, inevitably consisting of tall, dark, and handsome heroes romancing petite, delicate girls that they were literally able to sweep off their feet. Femininity (and with it, girlhood) was dependent on being able to *fit into* this narrative. Women and girls were supposed to be small, delicate, and feminine; men and boys were supposed to tall, strong, and masculine; and these two ideal partners were meant to come together in a perfect embrace that all but demands romanticizing it in its ubiquity.

Yet, as Edda Baumann-von Broen contemplates in the animated opening to her 2012 documentary *Tall Girls*, what happens if the princess in a fairy tale finds herself taller than her eagerly-awaited Prince Charming? "The fairy tale of Prince Charming becomes a joke," Baumann-von Broen reckons, both parties looking utterly bewildered at what to do when the

default step of a man sweeping a woman off her feet and riding into the sunset is out of the question. But in an empowering retaliation to being shut out of the dominant narrative of heteronormative romance, Baumann-von Broen resolves that the princess would have to get her own "really tall" horse, and carry *herself* off into the sunset.

My mid-nineties obsession with Keladry of Mindelan and Sailor Jupitor faded into the background. I grew to be six feet tall, came out as queer, and with the explosion of the internet, found different narratives to identify with and to problematize. Yet there is an attentiveness that comes with inhabiting a body that is both unconventional and underrepresented, and a hunger for identification that made me hyper-aware of how very tall women were seen onscreen, if at all: either large and freakish, or elegant and slender. Fast forward to 2012, and my tall self is curled up on the sofa watching Brienne of Tarth take off her helmet on *Game of Thrones* (fig. 1). Brienne's helmet-doffing is preceded by a scene in which her previously-unseen character trounces a man in battle and forces him to yield, armour amplifying the size of her tall, broad-shouldered frame and eclipsing every feature that would identify her as female. As she reveals her face, and thus her gender, the crowd gasps onscreen, and I sit up straight and all but applaud in elation.

*Figure 1: Brienne after removing her helm; Loras Tyrell in background (*Game of Thrones *2.3).*

Brienne, played by 6'3" Gwendoline Christie, quickly became my new tall girl heroine —our similar names compensating for our dissimilar hairstyles—but her embodiment was not absolute in its empowerment. She was a badass on the battlefield and stood defiant in a world that viewed her as deviant, yet her appearance and gender were constantly disparaged. I couldn't

help but wonder if Brienne being specifically *tall* was a factor in conveying her as an unattractive outsider, and in selling her masculinity as innate.

This thesis is dedicated to exploring not just what it means to see tall women onscreen, but how tall women are *seen*, which in turn affects how tall female bodies are lived, experienced, and negotiated in the real world. Tallness is, as Arianne Cohen notes in *The Tall Book*, "exceedingly visible, defining, and above all unalterable" (146), yet it is woefully underexamined in the scholarly fields of media studies and body studies, and particularly through a feminist lens. I start from my own subject position not because this thesis is about me as a tall woman, but because its origin and composition are intensely situated in my own experience as a tall woman watching television, both prior to even considering it as a topic, and in its actual methodology, which involved me watching a *lot* of television. It arose from my fascination with Brienne, who is the subject of the first chapter, and grew to include two other tall characters: lumbering, soft-hearted Midwestern football coach Shannon Beiste[1] in *Glee*, played by 6'3" former wrestler Dot-Marie Jones; and 6'1" British comedian Miranda Hart's navigation of her own tall body in her sitcom *Miranda,* as she fluidly and alternately frames it as a burden and a joy, sophisticated and unruly.

I come from the position that objectivity is a falsehood, and while I challenged myself to step outside my own complicated embodiment when considering media representations, it is still an intensely personal undertaking rooted in having experienced life as a tall girl/woman in a culture that routinely assigns meaning and value to bodies through media. The chapters of this thesis, broken down into close analyses of three specific characters, leave little room within them for self-reflection, and while my own subjectivity is mostly absent from the actual analysis, the writing process still forced me to grapple offscreen and outside the texts with how I engaged with my own tall body.

I examine height from the position of studying popular culture because, as Dawn Heinecken notes in *The Warrior Women of Television,* "Looking at how popular media like film and television represent gender relationships, women, and the female body can thus tell us much about the governing ideologies about the culture itself" (3). Likewise, Anu Valtonen observes that media texts are "replete with height-related meanings" (206), and Arianne Cohen notes that

1 Shannon Beiste is written as a transgender man for *Glee*'s final season, and this development and my approach to it are explored more in-depth in Chapter Two.

"Popular media images often define femininity as petite-ness, or, more often, smaller-than-man-ness" (159). My close analysis of three live-action British and American television shows airing from 2009-2015[2] that prominently feature female characters over six feet tall centres around the ways in tallness is ultimately *made visible* through its juxtaposition against other bodies and objects, and through discourse, narrative, and characterization. The tall body takes up *physical* space as it moves about the world, and when shown onscreen, takes up *cinematic* space. It is impossible for the tall body to be visible without it being *hyper*-visible, and the heightened otherness of a tall body being female makes it even more of a spectacle. Beyond the physical and visual exceptionality of a tall female body, tall women also throw a wrench in a cultural norm that male bodies are innately superior, as "the societal ideal that men are more powerful is a myth—it's just because only 15 percent of women are taller than men" (Cohen 18).

I argue that a person's height is extremely tied to how their gender and position in society are manifested, interpreted, and performed, and while there are discursive specificities to tall and short women, men, and all the gendered possibilities between and beyond, I have chosen to focus this particular project on tall women as an entry point into a feminist discourse on height. From a critical perspective, tall women "sit at the crosshairs" (Cohen 159) of a cultural debate on what femininity is. My aim with this thesis is not to produce a universalizing conclusion that female tallness is inherently transgressive and empowering, and that media representations of it are overwhelmingly negative and problematic. Rather, I want to highlight tallness as an embodied characteristic that has received little scholarly attention in its capacity as a gendered signifier, and as a factor in how we as a culture talk about bodies. If we align femininity with smallness and daintiness, and masculinity with largeness and power, where does that put a body that is both large and female, and what happens when a body is expected to take up little space but is categorically unable to?

Framing the Body

I have chosen to focus on television for several reasons. Firstly, the characters I was most interested in exploring and whose representations yielded the most fruitful study happened to be on television. Secondly, the serial nature of television allows for richer and more extensive

2 *Game of Thrones* is gearing up for its sixth season as I write this, but my corpus only includes up to season four, which aired in 2014.

characterizations than are possible in feature films, with narratives and character development unfolding over several seasons, rather than being crammed into a few short hours. Jason Mittell notes that "Few storytelling forms can match serial television for narrative breadth and vastness" (253), and as "cumulative plotlines and character backstories" (253) are able to develop continually over episodes and years, a character's tallness can be forefronted and explored as *part* of a narrative without it overwhelming its entirety. Thirdly, as Linda Mizejewski explains, television has the potential to depict a greater diversity of bodies than mainstream film, as "glamourizing close- ups are fewer on the small screen and niche marketing can target female audiences" (20). Kathleen Rowe notes that while television is "an overwhelmingly conservative institution," it has a specific 'flow' that, "in contrast to the tight causal logic and textual 'integrity' of narrative film, releases women from the confines of the Oedipal plot and her and her positioning within a heterosexual couple" (80).

My study of television is also rooted in a specific *moment*: television is widely considered to be in its "second Golden Age," and has become "the dominant cultural medium of our time, in terms of discussion, in terms of inspiration, in terms of excitement" (Reiner, Greenwald in Cowan). Beyond cinematic quality, production value and cultural currency, television *viewing* itself has moved beyond temporally fixed telecasts, allowing for a heightened engagement that is simultaneously more individual (through self-designated viewing patterns), and collective (through online fan engagement). The shows I study "aired" between 2009 and 2015, but my viewing and study of them in 2014-2016 occurred far outside their original broadcast dates. However, this "temporal vastness" (Mittell 253) contains within itself a different order of observation, as noted by Rosie White:

> The virtual space of television as an industry, a form and a commodity appears to be a brave new world where its products and history are available to download any time, all the time. Television has become our personal Tardis. Yet there is a hierarchy of bodies just as there is a hierarchy of time in television. (417)

Through the lens of embodied feminist television studies, I aim to to examine how the screen specifically creates, fragments, and reconstructs the body, regarding television as a medium that contains possibilities for subverting stereotypes, but also transmits a set of ideal conventions of gendered embodiment. Susan Bordo notes that

> With the advent of movies and television, the rules for femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through the deployment of standardized visual images…. We no longer are told what "a lady" is or of what femininity consists. Rather, we learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images which tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behavior is required. (169-170)

Bodies that deviate from expected norms of gendered embodiment stand out as spectacular exceptions. This is doubly so for larger-than-average bodies that *literally* take up more screen space, and thus either necessitate different framing techniques, or stand out through their inability to fit within the standard frame of the screen. Marie-Laure Ryan notes that "Since the camera does not exist in the storyworld of fiction film, neither do all the effects of camera movement and editing" (38), but the only way for a spectator to observe the filmic-framed body is *through* the camera, even as they "pretend that they are watching unmediated events" (38). This means the *body* that is being filmed amasses with *how* it is being filmed, and as such is rarely beheld in its entirety: we witness it either close-up as a series of fragmented body parts, or far away as it propels its whole self across the screen.

My approach to "the body" is rooted in the concept that the body is not strictly a material entity, but that it is also "a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules and hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body" (Bordo 165). The body does not merely exist as a thing in the world with innate meanings, but accrues these meanings through socialization and cultural representation. In *Volatile Bodies*, E.A. Grosz notes that "the body must be regarded as a site of social, political, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural product" (23, emphasis in original). There are, of course, perceptible and measurable ways to characterize bodies and body parts, but the body is ultimately a "medium of culture" (Bordo 165).

As I deal specifically with scripted, live-action television, I focus on bodies that exist prior to their mediated representation, but whose signifiers are manipulated, employed, and occasionally subverted by these media representations, examining layers of visual and discursive signifiers through which an actress's body both becomes her character's and remains her own.

While an actress is ultimately the one to perform her own body, she performs it within the constraints of the screen and within the context of its creation, and filmic bodies must be analyzed with consideration to the multiplicity of "authors" who construct a particular representation of the body, including casting directors, screenwriters, producers, directors, cinematographers, costumers, and make-up artists. I do not posit to know how an actress relates to her own body (aside from interview quotes, some of which I consider and include in my analyses), but rather I aim to focus on how, through media, an incidentally tall body becomes a *deliberately* tall one in correspondence with characterization. Embodiment is rooted in a tension between how a body is seen and how it is experienced: in reality, we are always both perceiver and perceived, and the body is both corporeal and perceptible, experienced and seen.

More Than a Measurement: Defining the Tall Body

While tallness is often delineated by measurements, I posit that the very *idea* of tallness is itself a cultural construct. In the front matter of *The Tall Book*, Arianne Cohen includes a graph showing average heights for men and women, noting below it:

> Because everyone asks: What is the definition of *tall*? You are tall if you're taller than the people around you. Height is relative.[3]

Tall bodies are not identified as such outside a world that defines them as being bigger than average, highlighted against a sea of smaller bodies, and objects made for smaller bodies. Tallness exists in contrast to an invented norm of how bodies should look, and the more a tall body diverges from the statistical average[4], the more it stands out as peculiar or extraordinary.

Despite having personally always seen and experienced height as a pivotal aspect of embodiment (and in particular, gendered embodiment), there is little existing scholarly work that examines height from a critical feminist perspective. My search for scholarly literature on tall women turned up a bevy of quantitative and qualitative biomedical, psychological, and sociological studies on height and gender, taking up height as a factor in "mate preferences" (Salska et. al 204), intelligence, sexual orientation, jealousy in relationships, posture, and professional success. There were also numerous biomedical articles detailing and often

3 This page occurs prior to the book's official pagination.

4 As of 2009, the average American is 5'9.2", and the average American woman 5'3.8" (Cohen 30). In American height percentiles, any woman over 5'11" is considered in the 99th percentile of female height (13).

advocating for the use of oestrogen therapy to "treat" tallness in pubescent girls, thus preventing them from becoming too tall yet, as Jo-Anne Rayner et. al aptly note in a critical linguistic analysis of these articles, simultaneously "creating subject positions for them that require medical surveillance and intervention" (1079).

Under Rayner et. al's examination of this literature, the tall female body has historically been viewed as "abnormal, an 'impaired body,' unambiguously lacking femininity," with tallness "considered a disruption to a woman fulfilling her projected life course, a failure to live up to normative ideals about what it means to be feminine, and a challenge to the stability of social relationships. The simultaneously personal and social threat posed by tall stature in women was expressed through their bodies as failed femininity" (1079, 1082).

It is crucial to emphasize that tallness is not universally considered a negative trait in women. Tallness is a prized characteristic for many athletes, and for fashion models (so long as they are not *too* tall), and tall women are often initially "perceived as more intelligent, affluent, assertive, and ambitious than short women" (Floud in Cohen 95). Tallness is also intrinsically linked with power, and Cohen notes that talls are categorically "the most powerful people in the world, bar none, and always have been" (18). The association of height with power is deeply ingrained in cultural representations of tallness: Ralph Keyes notes in *The Height of Your Life* that "From the Amazons to Wonder Woman, our sense of the tall woman as man's physical equal is culturally reinforced constantly" (139). Yet this association is limiting even as it is advantageous, and "plac[es] very tall women on a pedestal of intimidation that they didn't create themselves" (Phelps in Cohen 161).

Even as "an eye cast down is a powerful behavior" (Andersen in Cohen 94), one could easily argue that the cultural disparagement against tall women is in fact a reaction to the pervasive notion that, as Cecilia Hartley notes, "because women themselves are seen as somehow less than men, their bodies must demonstrate that inferiority" (62). Likewise, cultural expectations of heterosexuality idealize the arrangement of a tall man and short woman, ultimately "related to a need for dominance" (Keyes 157), and "shaped by internalized social norms about the 'appropriate' roles of men and women" (Salska et. al 206). In an article for *Bitch* magazine titled "Fear of Heights," Hannah Eko notes that "Women who take up more space than society feels comfortable with are considered to be messing with a deeply heteronormative tradition" (18). Portraying tall women as awkward, undesirable, and freakish

pre-empts the threatening subversion of this norm as imploding the very constructedness of heteronormativity to begin with.

Configurations of Tallness

Tallness is primarily observed and experienced in two main ways, which are referenced throughout this thesis as *verticality* and *magnitude*. These two spatial dynamics are at play any time the body is onscreen, and the length of a person's body performs different functions depending on how that body moves and positions itself. While the size of a person's body is immutable, the configurations of this size are far from static.

Verticality is the extent to which the tall body extends in the air. Simply put, a six-foot-tall person standing flat-foot on even ground will take up more vertical space and have a higher line of sight than a five-foot-tall person in the same circumstance, which heavily influences how bodies are framed by the camera. However, verticality is ultimately alterable if a tall person is sitting, or if a shorter person stands on a stool or wears high-heeled shoes, enabling a shorter person to possibly have a higher line of sight than a tall person in that specific moment (fig. 2). *Verticality* thus relates solely to the extent which, in a given moment, a person's body extends into the air, and is most relevant to issues of gaze and power.

*Figure 2: Stevie gaining the vertical advantage over Miranda by climbing on a step stool. (*Miranda *1.6)*

I use the word *magnitude* to describe the sheer amount of space that a body takes up, and how that impacts their relationship with sized objects around them. This dynamic relates mostly to issues of fitting, and how the tall body, with its larger three-dimensional "footprint," fits into and around objects and spaces that are designed for smaller bodies. While magnitude is most

often displayed visually as a specific spatial dynamic, the sheer amount of body that a person has plays into more conceptual ideas of excess, physical capability, movement patterns, and most importantly, the idea of there existing a specifically feminine allotment of space.

Not Woman Enough: Identifying the Female Body

There is, running through my negotiation of gender in this thesis, a tension between a desire to trouble the notions of gender as it is fixed to specific bodies, and the fact that popular culture texts often still enforce this binary through their depictions of gender. Even as the characters I examine display various forms of gender non-conformity and disrupt gendered relations through their large bodies, they still ultimately latch onto one side of the gender binary as an anchor point. I sensed a dichotomy between the way gender was portrayed on-screen, and the way it was coming to be conceptualized through an ever-changing queer cultural discourse. This discourse, through the immediacy and velocity of online media, seemed to be moving faster than academic discourse with its publication delays, and mainstream popular culture, with its very existence often contingent on having mass appeal.

As I examine the gendered body throughout this thesis, I note that there are specific characteristics idealized in male and female bodies beyond size. I personally believe that the presence or absence of those characteristics in no way makes a person any less female or less male, nor are those the only two possibilities along a spectrum of gendered and sexed embodiments and experiences. However, the association of these characteristics both visible and invisible is still part of a governing ideology that socially, legally, and culturally grants legitimacy to a person's gender based on their presence or absence, and height is *far* from being the most important delineation in a cultural obsession with defining who is "really" male or female.

Sarah Jane Blithe and Jenna N. Hanchey note that sex verification testing in competitive sports enables and perpetuates "discrimination based on internal bodily processes" and that "Despite a wide array of bodies and sex organs, individuals are disciplined to fit into either male or female categories" (486, 487-488). Blithe and Hanchey's research points to internal indicators of sex such as chromosomes, hormones, and internal reproductive structures as being as complex as gender presentation and body composition. The very impetus for sex testing is "rooted in the assumption that women are categorically inferior as athletes compared to men" (Buzuvis in

Blithe and Hanchey 499), and that any athlete whose skill approaches or exceeds that of a man "must not truly be female" (Blithe and Hanchey 499). Thus, female-read bodies that are seen as possessing more "masculine" characteristics are read as suspicious and less-than-female in order to enforce the idea that *women* are themselves lesser.

Talia Mae Bettcher posits that "a person's genital status is socially constituted as an important moral fact" that furthers the division of bodies into two sexes (328). Yet as it is considered impolite or vulgar to directly *ask* what genitals someone possesses, and nakedness itself is considered an affront to decency, "naked bodies are sex-differentiated within a system of genital representation through gender presentation" (321). Bettcher defines gender presentation as a "presentation of one's embodied self" that "includes attire, grooming, adornment, bodily gesture, posture, manner of speech, and socially interactive style" that is culturally delineated along gender lines despite often being "conventional and arbitrary in nature" (328). As such, people use visual and social cues to infer what genitalia someone possesses, drawing on "morphological features (such as height, muscle mass and fat distribution, bone width, Adam's apple, voice pitch, etc.)" (328), but also expecting that a person will "correctly" represent their body as being either male or female, which "requires sharply contrasting clothed gender presentation" (331). Bettcher continues that "the very referential system through which the intimate boundaries are constituted requires a binary: without the possibility of misrepresentation, there could be no possibility of correct representation" (331).

As such, people are delineated into the categories of "male" and "female" based on a set of embodied referents (that which is physically visible on the unadorned body), and aesthetic and affected referents (how someone adorns and physically negotiates their body), with an expectation that the two should ultimately correspond. Any level of anomaly between signifiers is seen a form of deviation, the former being an incidental but innate deviation, and the latter a deliberate deviation. The idea that female tallness is a deviation is both complicated and assuaged when a tall woman is assigned female at birth based on perceptible genitalia. On one hand, a body growing tall despite having other features that convey and signify "female" presents the body itself as a confusion of signifiers. On the other hand, possessing embodied features that signify "female" in various public and private ways offers validation as being "more" female. Transgender women are largely absent from the texts I investigate, but the figure

of the trans woman functions as a spectre, an invisible "other" against which the supposedly-embodied femininity of a cis woman can be affirmed.

Thus, for a body that has perceptible characteristics that signify as masculine, such as a large frame, tall height, and musculature, the emphasized possession of breasts and "lady-parts," which are emphatically drawn on by Miranda and Shannon Beiste respectively, are offered up as the ultimate "proof" of their womanhood as legitimate, and thus, positioning women who *don't* possess those parts as an other against which their gender can be rendered valid. This articulation still perpetuates a "hierarchy of bodies" (White 417), but enables the speaker to position herself higher on the continuum of how bodies are assigned and granted femininity and womanhood.

The Paradox of Femininity

The pressure for women to make their bodies smaller is situated in a chain-reaction of gendered ideals that connect small size with the "ideal feminine body" (Hartley 62), posit femininity as being "crucial to a woman's sense of herself as female" and thus "her sense of herself as an existing individual" (Barky 97), and then additionally position "heterosexuality as a defining characteristic of femininity" (Devor 55) that ultimately "hinges on female attraction to men and women's ability to incite desire in men" (Devor 103).

However, even as femininity is put on a pedestal as the optimal state of inhabiting a female body, it is also readily disparaged and viewed as an inherent liability within patriarchal culture. Even in feminist theory, femininity is often dismissed as "an artifice, an achievement" (Bartky 75), and viewed as being overwhelmingly "expressed through modes of dress, movement, speech, and action which communicate weakness, dependency, ineffectualness, availability for sexual or emotional service, and sensitivity to the needs of others" (Devor 51). This discourse then problematically roots empowerment in a woman's ability to "escape or transcend the typical situation and definition of woman" (Young 144) and "dismantle the machinery that turns a female body into a feminine one" (Bartky 91). The view that "Distancing oneself from stereotypical femininity… is a claiming of power" (Paechter 257) thus puts women in a double-bind whereby female masculinity is seen as simultaneously powerful and transgressive, yet freakish and threatening; and femininity is seen as ideal and normative yet inherently weak, oppressive, and powerless. As Carrie Paechter notes, if female masculinity can not be positioned as a direct "rejection of femininity," it is "simply another way of 'doing

woman'; it loses its transgressive and oppositional quality" (257). Throughout this work, I seek to avoid reinforcing a hierarchy between masculinity and femininity, though my thesis by nature engages with the signifiers of masculinity and femininity as they become stamped on specific bodies, and thus necessarily entering into conversation with a cultural precedent that femininity and masculinity are things one can "succeed" or "fail" at, and that specific bodies are by nature more masculine or feminine.

Some Notes on Intersectionality

The fact that none of the actresses and characters I study are women of colour, trans women or trans femmes, or have visible disabilities was not a deliberate choice, but that does not negate the influence of my own situatedness as a white, cisgender, temporarily able-bodied woman in selecting them. These characters came from texts that I was either already familiar with or that were recommended by friends, and were chosen because tallness was a focal aspect of their characterization. Yet, as I have ended up studying characters who are white, able-bodied, and assigned female at birth, it is important to acknowledge that studying bodies that were "othered" in other ways would impact how tallness itself functions. Beyond that, the focalization of these characters' tallness may be in part enabled because it is the most prominent way in which they deviate from the norm and inhabit "otherness."

All three texts are implicated in differing contexts of racialization: *Miranda* is set in predominantly white Surrey, England; *Game of Thrones*' major characters are all white, and as Valerie Estelle Frankel notes, "The minor characters of color who exist in the show are Otherized: basically, presented as exotic, evil, or helpless" with few exceptions (Frankel pt. I). *Glee*, despite its diverse cast, "actively depoliticizes questions of race and difference and steers viewers away from an engagement with structural inequality" (Lippman-Hoskins 111). Likewise, the very identification of a person as *tall* is contingent on having the ability to stand straight, and a tall body's occupation and navigation of space is impacted by their range of movement. The "ideal" female body is not just petite, slender, and feminine, but also white, assigned female at birth, and able-bodied. While I aim to be as intersectional as possible in my analysis, it is worthwhile to note the intersections that are made invisible within the texts themselves through privilege.

Too Much Woman: Exceeding Bodily Boundaries

While there is very little scholarly work that explicitly deals with *tallness* within the fields of body studies, media studies, and cultural studies, tall women's bodies challenge norms about the amount of space that a woman's body should take up. As such, any discourse on tallness is in conversation with work on other embodiments that challenge these norms, such as fatness, muscularity, and activeness, especially when these embodiments are also present on a particular tall female body.

The fat female body is regarded in popular discourse as grotesque, unruly, and excessive, and many critical examinations of it in body studies connect the distaste towards fat women in particular as related to limitations on how much space women should be able to take up. Sandra Lee Bartky notes a "tyranny of slenderness," under which women are "forbidden to become large or massive; they must take up as little space as possible" (87), and Cecilia Hartley notes that "those women who claim more than their share of territory are regarded with suspicion" (61). Women are instead encouraged to self-regulate in order to "produce a body of a certain size and general configuration" (Bartky 79), and are "bound by fears, by oppression, and by stereotypes that depict large women as ungainly, unfeminine, and unworthy of appreciation" (Hartley 64).

Female bodies that exceed these bounds are thus considered unruly: Angela Stukator notes that unruliness "gains its meaning from that which it is not: ordered, rule bound, and restrained, attributes associated with normative masculinity and femininity" (199). In *The Unruly Woman*, Kathleen Rowe specifically delineates unruliness as "unsettl[ing] social hierarchies," noting that "Femininity is gauged by how little space women take up; women who are too fat or move too loosely appropriate too much space, obtruding on proper boundaries" (19, 63).

Anne Hole defines the fat female body as "that mixture of disparate parts that overflows its allotted space in signification that cannot be confined to the category of 'Woman'. Hence, the female body is not only 'less-than-Woman,' she is also 'more-than-Woman' (necessarily, physically)" (318). Hole's concept of "more-than-woman"/"less-than-woman" is central to how I approach the tall body's negotiation of spatiality in this work. The only way by which a large, female body can be seen as taking up *too* much space is by specifically labelling it in *as* female in the first place, and thus within a discourse of expected smallness. Yet largeness, as a signifier of masculinity, also marks the body as being *inadequately* female.

Excess references both the actual body that exceeds these bounds, and the category itself that establishes the bounds that certain bodies and bodily characteristics *exceed*. But even more than the amount of space a body takes up, there is also a delineation of which bodies should even take up space to begin with. Excess is a paradox whereby something is viewed as being in excess because it is already seen as abject, and abject because it is excessive. The fat body is considered unattractive because it is *too much* body, but also because fat bodies are considered unpleasant to look at, and the idea of an unattractive body taking up cultural and physical space compounds both its excess and its abjection. Fatness operates on a double-bind, where by being both large *and* unattractive, it always occupies *too* much space since the ideal is that it not occupy space in the first place. With tallness, the bodies that are not considered excessive are the ones that are already considered attractive, and this usually means being not just slender, but *as* slender as a shorter woman.

The pressure for women to take up as little space as possible extends beyond the corporeal body, and into bodily engagement. Dawn Heinecken notes that "Women's bodies are valued for the spectacle they provide, but at the same time women's bodies must be small and unthreatening and must never intrude upon public 'male' space" (3). In *Throwing Like a Girl*, Iris Marion Young notes that "Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified" (153). Aaron Devor[5] likewise notes that "Body postures and demeanors which communicate subordinate status and vulnerability to trespass through a message of 'no threat' make people appear to be feminine," which happens by keeping "their arms closer to their bodies, their legs closer together, and their torsos and heads less vertical then do masculine-looking individuals" (51). The expectation that women should contort their bodies to take up less space is even more difficult a demand for tall women, who are "disoriented by years of being scrunched into pretzel-people" (Cohen 191).

Fat female bodies and muscular female bodies are intrinsically situated in an assumed process of becoming, that their bodies and the boundaries they defy are the result of specific actions that can also be undone and return their bodies to "the right size and shape that also

5 *Gender Blending* was published in 1989 under the name Holly Devor, but the author transitioned to male in 2002 and now goes by the name Aaron H. Devor. As *Gender Blending* has not been reprinted since its initial run, it is listed in my bibliography as being written by Holly Devor, but out of respect to the author, I will use the name Aaron Devor in my in-text citations.

displays the proper styles of feminine motility" (Bartky 87). For the tall female body, the pressure to take up less space is rooted in the fact that it is *impossible*: there is no correct arrangement of the body that can make it smaller, and while there is not the same onus put on tall women to be responsible for the amount of space that their bodies take up, its immutability nonetheless renders tall bodies as "matter-out-of-place" (Williams and Bendelow 76).

The Body of Work and the Work of the Body

Method

My corpus includes seasons 2-4 of *Game of Thrones*[6], seasons 2-6 of *Glee*[7], and all three seasons and both specials of *Miranda.* My primary research on this project began with screening the television shows discussed within. I watched all episodes containing the characters discussed between October 2014 and March 2015. Throughout these screenings, I made timestamped observational notes on significant scenes and episodes, personally transcribing spoken dialogue as best I could[8], describing relevant onscreen actions as objectively as possible, and taking screen captures of visually critical scenes and shots as a reference for body language. At the end of this process, I had over one hundred pages of transcribed notes, which I relied on as my primary reference while writing. The transcription notes themselves functioned as an essential reference to and representation of my chosen text, but the actual process of creating these notes forced me to more directly engage with and examine the material I was watching, and was invaluable as a method of gaining a deeper understanding of these texts. After compiling these observational notes, I re-read them and compiled over sixty pages of critical notes, providing initial reflections and conclusions that I used as the building blocks of this thesis, and noting similar themes between texts, such as sexuality, gender identity, movement, and verbal articulation.

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6 Brienne of Tarth first appears in season two. Season five of *Game of Thrones* aired during the writing of this thesis, but I decided to exclude continually airing material from my corpus, and had not seen season five at the time of writing Brienne's chapter. The television show *Game of Thrones* is based on George R.R. Martin's epic fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (the first volume of which is titled *A Game of Thrones*), but as I am focusing on visual media, I am not including them in my corpus. I briefly reference the second volume, and have not personally read all five published volumes in their entirety.

7 Coach Beiste first appears in season two. I drew upon the active *Glee* Wiki for episode guides, and skipped episodes where Beiste did not appear or was not mentioned.

8 For most episodes of *Glee*, I transcribed dialogue from Netflix subtitles, and for select episodes of *Miranda*, I referred to scripts published in *The Best of Miranda*. I used Canadian spellings in my own transcriptions, and based punctuation on the actor's cadence.

Interpreting Medium

In my initial notes, I focused on documenting on the most *visible* manifestations of tallness: overt references to height, often in verbal mentions of *big* and *tall*, and cinematography that specifically showcased the tall body. Yet as my work progressed, it became clear that tallness couldn't be separated into neat moments in which it was directly addressed, and I often went back and added observational notes on scenes I had not initially recognized as being connected to size, tallness, and bodies.

My interest in studying popular culture arose while studying literature in my undergraduate degree, and I was particularly intrigued by the different ways bodies were conveyed across mediums. In *Storyworlds Across Media*, Marie-Laure Ryan notes that "the choice of medium makes a difference as to what stories can be told, how they are told, and why they are told. By shaping narrative, media shape nothing less than human experience" (25). In literature, a person's appearance must be deliberately described and detailed, and these features become indicative of specific personality characteristics. Yet, as Peter Mendelsund notes in *What We See When We Read*, "Even if an author excels at physical description, we are left with shambling concoctions of stray body parts and random detail (authors can't tell us *everything*). We fill in gaps. We shade them in. We gloss over them. We elide" (19, emphasis in original). Repeated mentions of a specific characteristic emphasize its importance, with Mendelsund even noting that "Only a very tedious writer would tell you this much about a character" (24). Yet in visual media, the body is *always there*, and it is possible for it to be pivotal aspect of characterization being without ever addressing it directly. *Tallness* as a concept is shiftingly focalized, and the moments when it is made textually significant impact the moments when it is just *there*, unaddressed but not unimportant. The tall body never stops being tall, and the signifiers that are established during the moments it is focalized carry on throughout that character's entire narrative arc.

Thus, as I continually studied these characters, scenes I had not previously considered attentively in my initial screenings popped out as significant. Addressing these scenes—and other forms of embodiment—enabled me to examine tallness as a ripple effect, as the signifiers flowed throughout the entire character trajectory.

Interpreting Genre

This thesis comprises three linked essays, each a close analysis of an individual character, and somewhat cheekily named after a characteristically significant quote in that text. The texts themselves are linked only by the fact that they all contain female characters whose tallness is made intensely visible, but they represent a wide variety of television genres, production contexts, and storyworlds within Anglo-Western media. *Glee* is an American high school musical comedy-drama, *Miranda* is a British sitcom, and *Game of Thrones* is an American-produced epic fantasy drama set in an imaginary medieval-style universe where most characters have British accents. The unique pacing and narrative techniques of these diverse genres mean that focalizations of tallness are manifested differently in each show. While I have highlighted overlapping themes that are present in each text, the manifestations of these themes are not presented in a way that enables direct parallels between narratives, as they take place in very different cultural contexts. Yet the pervasiveness of specific themes and characterizations throughout these texts points to how they reflect the governing cultural ideologies of gendered embodiment, even as they exist in different storyworlds.

I approached each character using a common bank of theory, literature, and concepts, which I have outlined in this introduction. However, I found while writing that each individual show had its own unique nuances, narrative strategies, and cultural context that necessitated literature and theory specifically applicable to the individual show and character, and these are detailed and unpacked in the individual chapters. I was excited to find varying depths of scholarly work on all three texts, and the recentness of these texts meant that this work was often published and discovered midway through my writing process, allowing my critical lens to continually evolve. Beyond scholarly work, I drew on online and popular sources, such as blog posts, wikis, and cultural journalism as both interpretive and referential sources[9]. Even as this thesis is an academic text, I want to acknowledge and enter into conversation with some of the valuable and thought-provoking cultural critique that is happening outside academia, often with greater immediacy.

My approach to examining themes varies by each show's narrative strategy. *Miranda* and *Glee* are heavily episodic, and as such, episodes have self-contained storylines that often follow a

9 Many of these sources are digital and as such lack page numbers, and in citing eBooks, I have named the chapter or section rather than page number.

theme that is heavily reflected in the episode title. *Game of Thrones* is intensely serialized and follows multiple characters, and episode titles will more often reflect the plot lines of other characters than Brienne, and plots are rarely encapsulated into a single episode. When citing individual episodes in parentheses, I will refer to them in numerical order, such as 2.3, and will specify which show I am referring to in chapters that make reference to more than one series. In cases where the specific episode is relevant to what I discuss (often in relation to its overall narrative arc), I will refer to it by name in the text at large. Each chapter combines chronological and thematic analysis, examining recurrent motifs and archetypes within the context of the character's overall narrative arc. In-depth bibliographical information for all shows is cited in the episode appendices. Cast and character appendices for all referenced characters provide basic contextual information, including the actors' heights. This thesis also includes screen captures embedded throughout as a visual reference for the onscreen action discussed[10].

By the Text, Within the Text, and Problematizing "Problematic"

Even as this thesis interrogates and examines depictions of tall women within a normative gender structure, I am not interested in modes of media critique that overwhelmingly focus on what a show is doing "wrong" from a feminist standpoint (as if there is even an objective measurement of "wrong"). Nor am I interested in tallying up "problematic" instances as proof that a show's treatment of women is demonstrably bad and using a critical mass of these moments to condemn an entire show, or conversely, holding up moments of agency as proof that a text is empowering. Frankly, I find these modes of analysis to be boring, reductive, and unable to account for nuances in tone and narrative structure.

While this thesis does, indeed, designate specific things as being *problematic*, I have made an effort not to lean on that particular word, as I feel that its ubiquity as a detrimental modifier nullifies the importance of *problematizing* as a critical strategy. Constructing *problematic* as the ultimate criticism implies that there is a way for something to be *unproblematic*. (There isn't.) What I am incredibly interested in is contrasting how a character, theme, event, or social issue is treated *within* a text against how it is treated *by* the text, and I reference these two distinctions throughout this work as a central lens. I do not believe that the

10 Unless otherwise noted, I personally captured all images while watching media on my laptop, and I will cite the media it derives from in the figure captions.

inclusion of "problematic" things *within* a text means that the text itself endorses them (though the repetition of certain elements is important to question), but that how a text itself contextually, tonally, and narratively approaches these occurrences is more telling than their countable presence. Concurrently, positive treatment of a character *within* a text does not ensure that all messages sent about them are positive, or that their representation as a whole is positive.

Chapters

In the first chapter, "All My Life I've Been Knocking Men Like You into the Dust," I examine Brienne of Tarth in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011-present), played by 6'3" Gwendoline Christie. Brienne's characterization is rooted in a central tension between the identities of "lady" and "knight," and in her active engagement with her *corporeal* body through combat while estranging herself from her *perceptible* body. Brienne harnesses power through her large, active body, yet her storyline is centred around successive male threats against her bodily autonomy and agency. I unpack how *Game of Thrones*, as a show readily criticized for its representation of women and frequent depictions of sexual violence, creates space for a woman who is repeatedly disparaged *within* the text to be granted agency *by* the text. In addition to scholarly work on active bodies, space, and gender transgressions, I draw upon direct critical writing by online bloggers and journalists, and Valerie Estelle Frankel's 2014 book *Women in Game of Thrones.* Central to my analysis of Brienne is Anne Hole's concepts of "more-than-woman"/"less-than-woman," and Simon J. Williams and Gillian Bendelow's assertion that "bodies which do not function 'normally' or meet 'acceptable' standards of appearance are regarded, both visually and conceptually, as 'matter-out-of-place'" (76).

In the second chapter, "Hard and Badass on One Hand, and Soft and Girly on the Other," I examine the character of Coach Shannon Beiste in Fox's *Glee* (2009-2015), played by 6'3" Dot-Marie Jones. I situate *Glee*'s positioning of Coach Beiste's tall, large, muscular body by examining *Glee* as a text that employs therapeutic rhetoric, collapses "difference," moralizes "issues of the week," and utilizes its musical numbers towards a deliberate emotional affect that precludes logical resolution. In the chapter's first few sections, I examine Coach Shannon Beiste as a character whose "hard" masculine exterior (body, presentation, and occupation) obscures her "soft" feminine interior, and who must bear the burden of disproving stereotypes about her own body. Coach Beiste seeks and achieves belonging and acceptance, yet this optimistic affirmation

belies the camera's tendency to use her body and personality for laughs, constructing her as crass, unruly, and inherently undesirable. *Glee* compromises its uplifting message of belonging through the awkward creative decisions to write Beiste's only reciprocal male romantic interest as abusive, and to write Beiste as a transgender man for the show's truncated final season. In my examination of *Glee*'s sixth season, I perform a critical analysis of the character (now named Sheldon) in his onscreen transition, examining how rewriting the character's interiority as male rewrites the signifiers of Dot-Marie Jones' body. In this chapter, I draw on work that addresses "masculinity" and unruliness, but predominantly engage with work that directly examines *Glee* as a text, drawing in particular upon critical work in the 2015 anthology *Glee and New Directions for Social Change*.

In the third chapter, "A Child Trapped in the Body of a Woman Trapped in the Body of a Man Trapped in the Body of a Bigger Woman Trapped in the Body of a Kong," I examine 6'1" comedian Miranda Hart's authorship and navigation of her own body in her BBC sitcom *Miranda* (2009-2015). I first situate Hart's slapstick performance within the context of comedic navigations of the female body, paying particular attention to the use of the large body as a source of comedy, and the dichotomy between pretty/funny as explored by Bridget Boyle and Linda Mizejewski. *Miranda* differs from the two previous texts in its overarching light-heartedness, but also in Miranda Hart's creative control as the writer, producer, and star of the show. I examine Hart's characterization of her fictional double and physical manipulation of her body as clumsy, childish, grotesque, awkward, and unfeminine, yet alternately joyful, triumphant, empowered, and alluring. I also readily situate Miranda within Kathleen Rowe's concept of the "unruly woman," examining her embodied engagement with fleshiness, excess, and fatness, while considering her friendships with and juxtapositions against other (smaller) women, and her failures and successes with heteroromantic courtship.

And now, as Miranda would say, let's crack on with the show.

Chapter One
"All My Life I've Been Knocking Men Like You Into the Dust": The Perceptible Body, the Material Body, and Brienne of Tarth as the Paradoxical Lady/Knight in *Game of Thrones*

Brienne of Tarth, played by 6'3" Gwendoline Christie, is introduced in the second season of HBO's *Game of Thrones* as a swordswoman swearing her allegiance to would-be king Renly Baratheon after trouncing his male lover in an exhibition match. Brienne is "tall, less classically 'feminine' in appearance, and lives in a world where she is constantly being policed for her gender, and mocked for appearing masculine" (Keyhan). At the same time, Brienne is a demonstrably capable fighter, and she draws on her size and strength to hold her own against men in battle. Writing about female action heroes, Dawn Heinecken notes that "women's bodies are valued for the spectacle they provide, but at the same time women's bodies must be small and unthreatening and must never intrude upon public 'male' space" (3). As a large, masculine woman, Brienne threatens male space while offering no appeal to the male gaze, and though her body is viewed as aesthetically abject and grotesque, it is also physically transgressive. While she surrenders ownership over her perceptible body, she reclaims it experientially and materially, drawing upon her size, strength, and assertive style at movement to regularly knock men into the dust (Brienne in 2.8).

While Brienne is beloved by many fans for being a "strong woman" (Frankel pt. I), she's rarely hailed as such by other characters within the text, and is often the target of misogynistic violence. The word *woman* is regularly asserted against Brienne as an insult: she is simultaneously *just* a woman and as such is not taken seriously by men, but her occupation, size, and masculine presentation lead to a sense that she is *not quite* a woman. Her size, physicality, and masculine gender presentation render her "unwomanly and freakish" (Frankel pt. II), but her sex marks her as a deviant intruder in masculine realms, occupying space that should physically and socially belong to men. Beyond the routine taunting that she faces in almost every social interaction, Brienne's bodily autonomy and agency are successively threatened by male antagonists: she is captured and tied up, threatened with rape, coercively clothed in a dress, and forced to fight a bear for the amusement of her captors. Writing about Brienne means examining

a narrative of degradation, in a text that is regularly critiqued for its treatment of women, yet also situating her within a tradition of female action heroes and the contrasting depictions of gendered agency in *Game of Thrones*' medieval fantasy storyworld.

"A Lady Whether You Want to Be or Not": Gender and Stature in Westeros

Game of Thrones is a heavily contentious text. Based on George R.R. Martin's bestselling series of epic fantasy novels *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which currently comprises five door-stop sized tomes, the HBO drama is "a glossy smorgasbord of rape, gratuitous sex and ultra-violence" (Penny). The show and books are set in Westeros, "a raw medieval world similar to the European Middle Ages. It is realistic in its depiction of power struggles, violence, and sex, but it also has a few magical elements such as dragons, undead warriors, and spells" (Klastrup and Tosca 298). As the title suggests, *Game of Thrones* details the fight between several noble houses for control of the Iron Throne of Westeros. Many characters are morally ambiguous, and the show's narrative tactic of switching perspectives makes it difficult to assign clear-cut heroism or villainy to anyone in particular. (The character appendix for *Game of Thrones* included in this thesis contains greater details on political and familial affiliations, along with shifting alliances.)

In *Women in Game of Thrones*, Valerie Estelle Frankel notes that "Women's treatment in medieval Europe is somewhat reflected in their treatment in Westeros" (pt. III), though *Game of Thrones* presents itself as a hybrid of medieval gender conventions filtered through a modern lens. In *The Medieval Motion Picture*, Andrew James Johnston and Margitta Rouse note that "medieval film both encapsulates and problematizes the typical ways in which film as a particular medium encounters, shapes, and questions notions of the past" (2).

Feminist criticism of *Game of Thrones* has paid particular attention to its questionable handling of rape: Brent Hartinger notes that "one argument against such brutal content, and it's a compelling one, is that the sexual humiliation of women in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is just too cavalier, too omnipresent—that it overwhelms other aspects of the books" (qtd. in Frankel pt. I). Many critics have justifiably renounced the show because they find that its problematic aspects outweigh its positive ones, but my approach to examining it aligns with Laurie Penny's assertion that "To say this series is problematic in its handling of race and gender is a little like saying that Mitt Romney is rich: technically accurate, but an understatement so profound that it obscures

more than it reveals." While Brienne is often treated horribly *within* the text, I want to avoid broad statements condemning the show solely because it depicts violence against women. Nor do I want to argue wholly that the show's *handling* of this violence excuses its occurrence. Instead, I want to examine how Brienne fits—physically and metaphorically—into gendered conventions of Westerosi society, and into *Game of Thrones*' overall depictions of gender. Even as Westeros puts itself forward as a society with very rigid gender constraints, Brent Hartinger notes that a large number of the focalized characters "violate major gender or social norms" (qtd. in Frankel pt. III), and Frankel pinpoints multiple characters as being queer not as in "the opposite of heterosexual," but "because they establish nonconformist lifestyles in the incredibly binary medieval society of brawling men and dainty ladies" (pt. III).

Frankel characterizes Brienne's masculinity as a strategic rejection of femininity, claiming that she has *consciously* "cast aside all traces of femininity to compete with men and thrive in a man's world" (pt. II). While I want to acknowledge that Brienne's height is constructed *by* the text as a signifier of her masculinity, I personally interpret Brienne's masculinity *within* the text as an innate part of her identity and self-conception. Brienne visibly chafes against any expectations of femininity imposed on her, and expresses a consistent inclination towards masculine dress, comportment, and occupation. A queer theory lens can bring a greater understanding to how contemporary audiences conceptualize and relate to Brienne's gender, and blogger Rosainverno notes that many fans "have read Brienne as at least genderqueer." However, the medieval fantasy setting of *Game of Thrones* does not provide the language for Brienne's gender identity to be articulated as anything how she is presented: female in sex and shape, and masculine in size, presentation, and occupation, all interpreted through a lens of obligatory femininity.

As a tall woman and a nobleman's daughter, the concept of "stature"—which can refer both to a person's physical height and their social ranking—is intrinsic to how Brienne and others conceptualize her body and gender. Brienne repeatedly bristles at being called a lady, but as Cersei Lannister points out in a confrontational scene, "You're Lord Selwyn's daughter. That makes you a lady whether you want to be or not" (4.2). She both *must be* and *cannot be* a lady: while she cannot escape her class background, she also cannot live up to the requirements of feminine gender performance and comportment dictated by her nobility. She is institutionally saddled with being a "lady," but is just as sharp to correct her squire Podrick's assumption that

she is a knight (4.5), a status that is off-limits to her because of her sex. She does not identify as a lady, but can never be recognized as a knight (and in fact, the only available honourific is "Ser"), leaving her stranded in a liminal identity where she is both and neither.

Cecilia Hartley notes that "when a woman's stature or girth approaches or exceeds that of a man's, she becomes something freakish" and "implicitly violates the sexual roles that place her in physical subordination to the man" (62). Through her corporeal size and her active engagement with her body, Brienne steps outside the prescribed limits of not only what a woman should do but what she should *be able to do*, and in doing so, becomes a threat to the established power dynamic of masculine superiority. Williams and Bendelow state that "bodies which do not function 'normally' or meet 'acceptable' standards of appearance are regarded, both visually and conceptually, as 'matter-out-of-place'" (76). The fact that Brienne is *too much* matter means that there is no set place for her in feminine realms, and she can never fully fit into masculine realms because she is the *wrong kind* of matter. She takes control of how her body's matter moves and functions, but distances herself from how that matter is regarded by others, seeking to emotionally disengage from the trauma that arises from constant external scrutiny.

A Quick Note on Cinematography

Of the three texts I study, *Game of Thrones* is the most visually dynamic, its anchoring on HBO and large budget granting it a more cinematic quality. Brienne's tallness is specifically emphasized through cinematography that fragments and reconstructs her body, and as such, I reference it more in this chapter than the others. Aside from two-shots that emphasize height differences between her and her co-stars (fig. 3), Christie as Brienne is frequently shot from below, leading to a sense that point-of-view characters (and by extension, the audience) are always looking up at her, or that she is often looming over them (fig. 4). In the scenes in which she is under male control, she is usually seated, and in the bear fight, her male audience looks down on her from a platform. While the actual size of her body does not change, the shift in perspective makes her look smaller, and therefore less powerful and imposing.

Figure 3: Brienne walking with Catelyn Stark in Renly's camp; Catelyn is on slightly lower ground. (2.3)

Figure 4: Brienne guarding Catelyn's tent, looming over a male messenger. (2.7)

"If You Can Call That a Woman": Repulsion and Retaliation

From her initial introduction in season two, Brienne's gender and body are both obscured and foregrounded. Seen through the perspective of Catelyn Stark, Brienne first appears battling Ser Loras Tyrell in an exhibition match in honour of throne contender Renly Baratheon, who is in a secret relationship with Loras and newly wed to his sister, Margaery Tyrell. Outfitted in bulky, rugged armour and a helm that obscures her face (and therefore her sex and identity), Brienne dominates the makeshift dirt arena, wielding her larger body against Loras, played by 6' Finn Jones. Loras is a notably adept fighter, but Brienne eventually knocks him into the dirt and forces him to yield (fig. 5). When Brienne silently pulls up her helm at Renly's request, the crowd gasps upon realizing that she is a woman, and Loras' embarrassment at his defeat is

deepened by the public revelation that he was not only beaten by a *woman*, but by a woman who is larger and more masculine than he is.

Figure 5: Loras Tyrell yielding to Brienne in an exhibition fight. (2.3)

In *Gender Blending*, Aaron Devor notes that "people see maleness almost whenever there is *any* indication of it" (48, emphasis in original). In Brienne's introductory fight scene, male-coded adornments, such as her armour, obscure the embodied characteristics that signal Brienne as "female" (the shape of her body, her facial features, her voice), and amplify her height and frame, making her seem more masculine. Her expansive body posture and wide range of movement "insinuate a position of secure dominance" (53) over her opponent and surroundings that is usually associated with masculinity. Frankel notes that this scene is designed to emphasize "that male is 'normal' and female is 'unusual' or 'surprising'" (pt. I), emphasizing "women's status as Other" (pt. I). By establishing her first as a capable and imposing warrior prior to revealing her sex, the writers briefly grant Brienne affirmation for how she engages with her large, athletic body, but only because she is assumed to be male. Once Brienne is revealed to be a woman, the valourization of her size and strength come to a halt, and she is immediately regarded by men and women as "matter-out-of-place" (Williams and Bendelow 76). She is no longer seen as a warrior on her own merits; rather, she is continually qualified as an "ugly female warrior" (Albone).

Brienne's characterization as ugly originates in Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels, where focalizer Catelyn Stark's first reaction on seeing her in the second volume, *A Clash of Kings*, is to question whether there is "any creature on earth as unfortunate as an ugly woman" (Martin 344). Her facial characteristics are described in such thorough detail to convey her

unattractiveness as objective: Catelyn describes Brienne's hair as "a squirrel's nest of dirty straw" and her features as "broad and coarse, her teeth prominent and crooked, her mouth too wide, her lips so plumped they seemed swollen" (344). But in the television show, former model Gwendoline Christie is put forward as the sole face of Brienne, which complicates the books' portrayal of Brienne's ugliness as objective and innately rooted in her unseemly facial features. The television show instead conveys her unattractiveness through hair, makeup, and costuming choices that code her as masculine, unruly, and unconcerned with her appearance. Christie, who describes her own gender presentation as "highly feminized," struggled with seeing her embodied self being "displayed as unattractive, large, masculine," though noting that the abjection of Brienne's appearance is rooted in a "social conditioning that causes us to view these traits in a woman in a negative way" (Christie in McQuoid). The construction of Brienne as a television character is bound up equally in Christie's own body, and in a series of social perceptions that construes "large women as ungainly, unfeminine, and unworthy of appreciation" (Hartley 64).

The majority of insults hurled against Brienne invoke her sex, size, and appearance: Jaime alone calls her "a giant, towheaded plank" (3.2) and a "great beast of a woman" (3.3) who is "as boring as [she is] ugly" (2.8). Any time she asserts her body against a man, the word "woman" is hurled against her as a slur: while guarding Catelyn Stark's tent, a male soldier hisses at her to "Keep your hands off me, *woman*" (2.7); a group of male travellers laugh and comment "You're a *woman*!?" (2.10) after Brienne speaks and reveals her sex; and Locke comments to Jaime as he fights Brienne, "Looks like your woman's getting the better of you, if you can call that a woman" (3.2). Calling out Brienne's sex as an insult emphasizes her otherness, simultaneously reminding her that she is *just* a woman, while at the same time *not quite* a woman.

After Renly is assassinated, Brienne swears loyalty to Catelyn Stark, who charges her with transporting Jaime Lannister to King's Landing as a hostage exchange for Catelyn's daughters. Jaime is antagonistic towards Brienne, and frustrated at her physical control over him as she drags him around in chains (fig 6). Unable to gain the upper hand physically, Jaime attacks Brienne psychologically and unleashes a series of verbal insults disparaging Brienne's looks, personality, gender, and perceived sexual proclivities (which I address more in-depth later). After assessing Brienne as a "humourless mute" (2.8), he draws on his own sharp tongue

to undermine her, and seemingly approaches Brienne's custody of him almost jokingly. So long as he feigns amusement in a woman holding power over him, he appears complicit in his own captivity, and can pretend that it is merely a temporary deviation from the freedom, privilege, and high regard he is accustomed to.

Figure 6: Brienne guiding a handcuffed Jaime Lannister. (2.8)

While Brienne is adamant that she will not let him "provoke [her] to anger," she responds to each jab by shoving Jaime aggressively, and finally states, "All my life, men like you have sneered at me. And all my life I've been knocking men like you into the dust" (2.8). This statement effectively summarizes Brienne's relationship to her body: accustomed to constant derision based on others' perception of her, she retaliates physically, and in doing so, asserts and reconstitutes her body as a useful instrument rather than an object for gaze. Alexandra Howson states that the female body "is encouraged to be on show, and women are obliged to produce their bodies as adequate and acceptable spectacle, as objects external to self" (70). Having been mocked since youth for "her height, her skill at swordplay, her 'ugliness'" (Frankel pt. II), Brienne grew into her body with an intense awareness that she would never be able to fit into the social expectations of ornamental passivity that came along with "the feminine role that she was born into" (Rosainverno). As an adult, she possesses a resigned expectation that she will be verbally demeaned at every opportunity. Brienne cannot refute the omnipresent perception of her body as failure of femininity or advocate to be accepted for her size and presentation, but by proving herself physically, she is able to embrace and engage with her abundant size and capabilities wholeheartedly, and take back her body as something that is her own.

After his fighting hand is hacked off by Locke in the third season, Jaime's illusion that he was only temporarily disempowered is shattered, and he must reorient himself in the context of his own "otherness." When Jaime laments losing his hand, Brienne remarks that he has gained "a taste, only a taste, of the real world where people have important things taken from them. And you whine and cry and quit. You sound like a bloody woman" (S03E04). Whereas Brienne has been demeaned her entire life for how her body is regarded and how she chooses to use it, Jaime's disfiguration[11] disrupts his lifelong status of innate entitlement. Prior to losing his hand, Jaime's own deviations—his slaughter of previous King Aerys Targaryen, and his singular desire for his sister Cersei—were primarily mitigated and camouflaged through his privilege as an attractive, charismatic man granted high social status through his noble birth, knighthood, and ties to the royal family. Brienne lives her entire life under derision, but as an outsider, she is expected to accept the rampant hostility thrown her way as punishment for her gender transgressions, and her stoicism is rooted in an awareness that while society is hostile to her embodied masculinity, responding to that antagonism emotionally would only make her sound "like a bloody woman" (3.4), a word that has been used repeatedly against Brienne to demean and undermine her.

"You'd Love to Know What It Feels Like to be a Woman": Troubling the Archetype of the Virgin Warrior

Frankel characterizes the masculinized women in *Game of Thrones* as "virgin warrior[s]" (pt. II), invoking the trope that in order for a woman to gain power through masculinity, she must "sacrifice and devalue what has traditionally been considered feminine" (Bolen in Frankel pt. II), including sexual relations with men. For most women in Westeros, virginity acts as a marker of their purity, but as Brienne is "looked upon as sexually undesirable" (Albone), her chastity is regarded as evidence that she is sexually repellent. The only sexual and romantic options available are unrequited love towards men who respect her as a warrior but do not desire her, or "corrective rape" (Rosainverno), a threat administered under the assumption that forceful penetration would reorient her towards femininity.

11 While I do not believe that terms like mutilated, disfigured, or deformed should be used as respectful, or even accurate descriptors for amputees, they are incredibly useful concepts for understanding how Jaime's body functions and is perceived in this storyworld after his hand is cut off.

Female desire towards men in Westeros is viewed only as a prelude to the end goal of marriage and motherhood, which Brienne refers to as "a bloody business" (2.7). Even though Brienne demonstrates attraction towards men exclusively, conventions of heterosexuality are dependent on "women's ability to incite desire in men" and her masculine presentation, occupation, and comportment shut her out of heteronormative requirements that women should "dress, move, speak, and act in ways that men will find attractive" (Devor 103, 55). She is widely mocked for daring to even feel desire as she herself is not desirable, and Hannah Albone notes that this mockery "could indicate that on some level the other characters have accepted her masculinity and thus see her affection towards Renly as homosexual." After inferring Brienne's unrequited feelings toward Renly, Jaime comments that she is "not Renly's type," as Renly "preferred curly-haired little girls like Loras Tyrell. You're far too much a man for him" (3.2). Jaime's comment reinforces the trope that male homosexuality is linked with effeminacy, establishing both Brienne and Loras as gender deviants while ironically normalizing Renly's proclivities. Even if Brienne identifies as male, she can never be the *right* type of male: Renly's desire, which Jaime explicitly describes as being toward "cocks" (3.2), excludes her on the basis of her genitalia. Brienne is not seen as woman enough to be desired as one, but her body prevents her from desired as a man.

Brienne's sexuality is framed within the belief that womanhood—both in the sense of femininity, and the sense of having attained female maturity—must be granted through heterosexual intercourse. Brienne's large, masculine body does not cater to a male sexual gaze within the show and it is not targeted as such to the audience, though it is worth noting that her particular aesthetic plays into a queer gaze that validates and sexualizes female masculinity. Yet she is still positioned *in relation* to the male gaze, which defines her gender identity by her inability to conform to conventions of embodied femininity. Brienne's experience of desire is ultimately rooted in a sense of deficiency: her own gaze is directed at men who are categorically incapable of loving her, she has no true reciprocal romantic attachments, and her lack of sexual experience symbolizes both an inability to incite male desire, and the absence of an experience thought to confirm and define womanhood. Early in their travels, and under the auspices of "get[ting] to know one another," Jaime asks, "Have you known many men? I suppose not. Women? Horses?" (2.8). His comment implies that Brienne is so sexually repugnant to men that

the only avenues for her to express her sexuality would be deviant, through either queerness or bestiality, yet a later pestering reveals that Brienne's sexual history is non-existent.

> *Jaime*: You're a virgin, I take it. Childhood must have been awful for you. What were you, a foot taller than all the boys? They laughed at you, called you names. Some boys like a challenge. One or two must have tried to get inside Big Brienne.
>
> *Brienne*: One or two tried.
>
> *Jaime*: Ah—you fought them off. Maybe you wished one of them could overpower you, fling you down, tear off your clothes, but none of them were strong enough. I'm strong enough.
>
> *Brienne*: Not interested.
>
> *Jaime*: Of course you are. You'd love to know what it feels like to be a woman. (2.10)

Having grown taller than the desired size for a woman, but being characterized by her *lack* of femininity, Brienne embodies Hole's assertion that large female bodies are both "more-than-woman" and "less-than-woman" (318). As a tall child, Brienne's body put her on a vertical level with the boys, rendering her body a threat to their burgeoning male power that they responded to with aggression and ridicule. In Jaime's words, the only way for the boys to "get inside Big Brienne" would be to "overpower" her. Brienne's size, strength, and masculinity position her as physically and emotionally impenetrable, and the only sexual interest expressed towards her by men is as a conquest. In his initial assertion that she would ultimately desire for a man stronger than her to "overpower" her so that she can "know what it feels like to be a woman" (2.10), Jaime romanticizes sexual violence as a necessary experience that affirms and awakens an assumed inner femininity, in order to get under Brienne's skin.

However, Jaime's inference that Brienne would need a man to overpower her comes horrifically true when Locke and his men[12] capture her and Jaime, and threaten her with gang

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12 While I most frequently use the word "men" in this thesis to refer in general to people who are male, in the feudal society featured in *Game of Thrones*, "men" is often used to refer to footsoldiers, bannermen, and men-at-arms who serve and swear allegiance to a greater lord. When writing about *Game of Thrones*, if I use the word "men" with a possessive (such as "Bolton's men," or "Stark men"), it refers to any group of men serving in the employ of the lord or commander named.

The organization of male bodies and house allegiances in Westeros means that when Brienne deals with male persons, she is almost always dealing with complex hierarchies of male power. For example, Roose Bolton commands a minor liege house in the North, and while he

rape. Locke's men recognize Jaime despite him being dirtied and dressed in rags, but Brienne is considered only "some big dumb bitch from who cares where" (3.3). The imminent threat of rape—positioned as eventual rather than conditional—is the first attack in which Brienne is truly overpowered, and in which her body is intimately threatened. After her captors violently drag her off-screen while she screams, Locke comments to Jaime that he's "never been with a woman that big" (3.3), invoking Brienne's size as a measure of conquest. While Brent Hartinger notes that all female characters "who aren't raped outright at some point in [*Game of Thrones*] must live with the knowledge that such sexual degradation exists as a very real possibility" (qtd. in Frankel pt. II), the rape threats levelled against Brienne are intimately entwined with the fact that her large, masculine body is figured as a threat to male supremacy. Locke and his men intend to rape Brienne in order to remind her even though she has managed to infiltrate masculine realms and engage with combat with men on equal footing, men can still gain psychological and physical power over her through sexual violence.

Jaime, who is himself chained to a tree, appeals to Locke to spare Brienne. He alleges that "Lord Selwyn [Tarth] would pay his daughter's weight in sapphires if she's returned to him. But only if she's alive, her honour unbesmirched" (3.3). His fib later proves fruitless as Tarth's reputation as "the sapphire isle" refers to the colour of its waters, but he rhetorically argues that Brienne's large size would translate to a larger reward, and her virginity, previously put forward as evidence that she is sexually undesirable, is reconfigured as a virtue. Brienne's identity is rooted in an implicit tension between one gendered identity (lady) that she cannot live up to, and another (knight) that is off-limits because of her sex, but Jaime's invocation of her objective identity as the virgin daughter of a lord temporarily resituates Brienne within a script of normative heterofemininity that had heretofore been conveyed as outside her reach. However, the revelation of her nobility offers only temporary protection, and once Jaime and Brienne arrive at Harrenhal, Locke and Bolton draw on these traits to further humiliate her and attack her bodily autonomy. Jaime's intervention costs him his fighting hand—rather than invasively defiling Brienne's body, they visibly mutilate Jaime's body, marking him as less than whole and in a sense, less of a man in an act of symbolic castration.

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was originally sworn to the Starks (who command the North from Winterfell), he is in a secret alliance with the Lannisters. Bolton commands his own group of men, including his minion Locke, and Locke is often put in charge of his own group of men.

Wearing Male, Baring Female

Brienne's body is predominantly showcased in the context of its public use and adornment, her large size amplified by masculine dress and movement patterns. Her armour protects her during combat, but it also allows her to self-determine her silhouette as a more masculine one. Even off the battlefield, she dresses in simple, streamlined tunics and wide-legged trousers in earth tones (fig. 7), the garments downplaying her curves and conveying a more masculine silhouette.

Figure 7: Brienne introducing herself to Olenna (l) and Margaery (r) Tyrell after arriving in King's Landing. (4.1)

Talia Mae Bettcher notes that gender presentation serves a "communicative function," having "the capacity to symbolically confer a sexed body that is 'visibly' present 'under one's clothes'" (330, 334). While Brienne presents masculinely, with her helmet off, others are often quick to recognize that she is female in sex, yet her clothing is not seen to adequately perform the communicative function as a "euphemistic replacement of naked-presentation" (Bettcher 329), thus immediately establishing her as a gender deviant and "matter-out-of-place." Brienne's initial crime—beyond her physical *use* of her body—is to resolutely perform masculinity on her body *below* the neck (and thus on the parts of her body that can possibly be regarded as *naked*), despite her face and voice conveying her as female. Yet devoid of her sartorial self-expression, Brienne's body exists visually as a set of contradictions between masculine signifiers (size) and feminine signifiers (breasts, vulva, and curves).

Even as she is not seen to adequately "impersonate" manhood, the "femaleness" of her body is still under scrutiny. As Bettcher notes, "Boundaries on genitalia are linked to a particular kind of sexual intimacy, namely [heterosexual] *coitus*" (326, emphasis in original). Because

Brienne is established as being a virgin, particularly in a cultural situation where women often use sexuality as a tactic of power and manipulation, she is seen to not be making proper *use* of her genitals, rendering them private in a cultural situation where they are seen as the primary conduit of power. Beyond rape as a tactic of control and degradation, and motherhood (as the occupation of the womb facilitated through intercourse) being seen as social control through maternal devotion, *Game of Thrones* takes place in a culture where women are often shown using sex as a means to assert power. This avenue of power is dependent on a sexual capital that Brienne does not possess, yet the fact that she pursues power by she using her clothed body as a *physical* instrument rather than her naked body as a *visual* one marks her as "less-than-Woman" (Hole 318) because it does not draw on the specifically *female* parts of her body.

In "Full-Frontal Morality: The Naked Truth about Gender," Talia Mae Bettcher notes that "Without the social possibility of being clothed, there could be no corresponding social possibility of being naked" (322). Bettcher notes that while naked presentation is a "raw display of the bodily truth or reality," it is also a "distinctive, morally infused and regulated modality of self-presentation, rather than some pre-cultural state" (330). *Game of Thrones*' ubiquitous female nudity occurs predominantly in explicit sex scenes, and scenes of female disrobing are overwhelmingly positioned for a male gaze both onscreen and off-screen. As maleness is not just the default *gaze*, but also the default *body* and "the standard against which the female body is judged" (Williams and Bendelow 115), the nude female body is always judged in relation to how it is viewed by men—as both "not male" and "for men"—and can thus never truly be neutral under the male gaze as it is always clad in a layer of external sexualization. Disrobing is a performative action defined more by the *presence* of nudity rather than the *absence* of clothing, under which female nudity is itself a costume, rather than the raw representation of an individual's corporeal self. *Within* the text, as mentioned above, the nude female body is presented as an instrument of sexual power and temptation against which all (heterosexual) men are powerless, and the flaws of Brienne's body are manifested in its failure to sexualize itself.

Yet when Brienne bares her body, which she does "more from anger than a desire to show off her body" (Frankel pt. I) the scene actually cinematographically and narratively *redirects* the male gaze away from Brienne's failure to meet it, and reorients it towards Brienne's body as an innately powerful instrument. In Bolton's custody at Harrenhal, Brienne is seen bathing alone in a large tub when Jaime enters the bathing room and against Brienne's protests,

strips and seats his mutilated body across the tub from her. Bettcher notes an "asymmetry" between male and female nakedness:

> It may be that a man viewing the naked body of a woman, in the absence of legitimizing conditions, constitutes a pre-consensual violation of her privacy (and hence, of her).… On the contrary, exposure of his body constitutes a pre-consensual decency violation (and hence a violation of her). (327)

As such, Jaime stripping and entering a tub already occupied by a naked Brienne constitutes a dual violation: he is not just putting himself in a situation where he can view her naked body, but displaying his own naked body *to* her. Brienne's first reaction is to exclaim "There's another tub!" and to pull herself into the corner. Brienne immediately recoils and tucks her knees into her chest, an act which shields her body from view and intrusion, but also contracts it to take up as little space as possible (fig. 8). The bathwater, while it acts for the camera as a liquid screen that obscures Brienne's and Jaime's bodies below the shoulder, acts as a medium *within* the scene that connects their bodies. The dirt from each (private) body commingles together in the shared bathwater, a simulacrum of the shared traumatic process through which they *acquired* that dirt. Jaime's invasion of space is not just visual, but also *visceral*, present in a way where Brienne can gain distance through physically shielding her body, but not escape the tainted water without visually baring her *own* body.

Figure 8: Brienne (r) contracting her body after Jaime (l) enters the tub without her consent. (3.5)

Having entered the bath, Jaime's violation of privacy moves beyond physical and visual and into verbal: rather than insulting her on the basis of her looks, gender, or sexuality as he had before, he targets her fighting ability and loyalty.

> *Jaime*: You swore a solemn vow, remember? You're supposed to get me to King's Landing in one piece. Not going so well, is it? No wonder Renly died with you guarding him. (3.5)

Reaching a critical mass of frustration, Brienne uncoils her body, bursts out of the water and stands over Jaime, admonishing him "Don't you mock me" (3.5). Brienne's breasts and vulva are presumably visible to Jaime, but not to the audience, and instead the cinematic focus is on the action of standing, the camera emphasizing the difference in verticality between Brienne and Jaime. Her nude body is shown from two angles, both taken from below: in the first shot, her bare buttocks and lower back are shown in the foreground, with Jaime in the background, looking up at her face; in the second, the camera looks up at her face, Jaime's head blocking her breasts from view (fig. 9).

Figure 9: Brienne standing over Jaime in the tub, whose head is slightly visible in the foreground. (3.5)

By not showing her genitals and breasts, the camera eludes the possibility of an overtly sexualized male gaze upon Christie's body, which, while sized in relation with her height[13], is still proportioned in a way that falls under the purview of conventional attractiveness, curvy yet fit as a necessity of playing an active character. The visual absence of the female body's "two-tiered nakedness" through both the female chest and genitals constituted as private (and therefore sexual), with Jaime's buttocks viewed in the same scene as Brienne's, equalizes their nakedness on a representational level even as male and female bodies are "subject to differential structures"

13 It is worth noting that Brienne is the only character who is not labelled as "fat" or "overweight" within her home text, in heavy contrast to the textual emphasis on Beiste's and Miranda's girths and appetites.

(Bettcher 327). However, the absence of a sexualized gaze on Brienne (encompassing that her gender presentation, even while naked, appeals to a queered gaze that valourizes female masculinity) plays into the continual cinematic rhetoric that *within* the text, Brienne is ugly, and as such, her body inherently flawed.

Standing over Jaime, Brienne is *literally* looking down on him, creating a disruption of power dynamics that prioritizes Brienne's own gaze upon Jaime. His jab against her fighting skills targets the one aspect of her body that she takes pride in, alleging that his own disfiguration (and thus his disrupted sense of embodied superiority) is due to her incompetence and failure to properly fulfill the role she fought so hard to take on. Instead of questioning her worth in relation to a role she has accepted her own inability to fill (that of a lady), he questions her worth in relation to a role that she has fought hard to be valued for (knight), but that due to her sex, can never fully be acknowledged. Jaime attempted to reinvigorate his own wounded masculinity by intruding on Brienne's space in a situation he presumed would make her uncomfortable. By responding with an aggressive assertion of her naked body into *his* space, Brienne challenges his self-assuredness that he could easily gain psychological power over her. Jaime quickly apologizes and suggests a truce, though Brienne shoots him a look of utter dismay and repulsion as she slides back into the water.

> *Jaime*: There it is. That's the look. I've seen it seventeen years on face after face. You all despise me. Kingslayer. Oathbreaker. Man without honour. (3.5)

In labeling himself "Kingslayer" in the face of her disapproval, Jaime draws attention to Brienne's own gaze against him, and by including her in a collective distaste for him, repositions his own self as the other. After a lengthy monologue divulging that his true motivation for killing the "mad king" Aerys Targaryen was to prevent him from burning the entire city of King's Landing, he begins to convulse and collapses in the bath, and Brienne lunges forward to physically support his body and keep him afloat.

The idea that nude female bodies are inherently sexual extends to an assumption it is not possible for adults to engage in non-sexual bodily interactions while nude, emphasizing Bettcher's assertion that "intimate visual access is constitutively allocated to coitus and the path that leads there" (327). However, this scene, which is "built as a moment of honesty between characters, with no seduction on either side" (Frankel pt. I) uses the actual presence of nudity to represent emotional bareness and vulnerability. Brienne's transformative engagement

with her body extends far beyond Christie's curves being visible to the camera and Jaime. Armour enables her to simultaneously shield and assert her body, but in its barest state, she must either contract her body and use her limbs as a barrier to maintain her modesty, or employ her body's full range of motion, take up more physical space, and expose her nakedness. In her ire, Brienne instinctively prioritizes her own engagement with her body over others' judgment of it, taking back the outward gaze upon it as deviant and abject, and reorienting that gaze it towards how she sees and experiences her own corporeal self.

The Bear and the "Maiden Fair"

However, Brienne's storyline in the remainder of season three, which details her captivity in Harrenhal under the custody of Roose Bolton and his minion Locke, is marked by their successive attempts annihilate Brienne's sense of bodily autonomy through attacks that are remarkably hands off and more effective because of it. The most intimately violent acts against her force her to voluntarily relinquish her body's power through social decorum and self-restraint, or demonstrate her vulnerability through public humiliation.

The scenes in Harrenhal also mark the first time in *Game of Thrones* that Brienne is explicitly shown in an indoor space, having previously only been shown in camp tents, on the battlefield, or on the road. Harrenhal's physical structure emerges as a field of social containment, under which Brienne does not have the social freedom to determine her body's movement the same way she had in open spaces, and must thus monitor her own actions. Brienne and Jaime are next shown in the Harrenhal dining hall, across the table from Roose Bolton. Brienne is clad in an ornate pink dress with a fur collar, and while she is sitting up straight and her expression remains neutral, she is clearly uncomfortable. Bolton comments drolly, "I see my men have finally found you something appropriate to wear," to which Brienne sarcastically responds, "Yes. Most kind of them" (3.6). The fabric of the dress acts as a tangible and visible reminder that even though Locke and Bolton are not physically restraining her, her body is under their control so long as she remains under their custody in Harrenhal. The dress is not designed for Brienne to blend into conventional feminine nobility, but to highlight the way that it does not fit her, and emphasize that there is ultimately no place for a woman like her in Westerosi society. She is not "fit" to wear armour in the sense that she is not a true knight because of her sex, but even as her masculine gender presentation is constructed as deviant and misrepresentative, she

also *cannot* fit into the script and styles of conventional femininity because of her size and her own embodied masculinity.

Brienne remains in Locke's custody while Jaime is escorted back to King's Landing and Bolton travels, but after finding out that Lord Tarth's ransom offer was rejected, Jaime realizes that Brienne is in danger and persuades his captors to return to Harrenhal. Jaime rushes towards a cheering crowd on a raised platform surrounding a circular arena in the Harrenhal courtyard, and the camera pans down to show Brienne in the pit, fighting a large bear armed with only a wooden sword and still clad in the pink dress (fig. 10). Brienne attempts to fend the bear off, but her fighting skills are no match for the bear's brute strength, and her mobility is further encumbered by the dress's tight bodice and billowy skirts. The bear lunges at her, grabs the sword, swipes his claw against her face, and knocks her down.

Figure 10: The crowd at Harrenhal looking down on Brienne fighting a bear in the pit; Qyburn and Jaime are the two figures in the centre. (3.7)

As the healer Qyburn explained to Jaime, Bolton's men "have been at war a long time. Most of them'll be dead by winter. She'll be their entertainment tonight. Beyond tonight, I don't think they care anymore" (3.7). Bolton's men are acutely aware of their own mortality, and any remaining masculine pride is threatened by "the subconscious sense that Brienne embodies the roles that they are supposed to take on better than they do themselves" (Rosainverno). With her father's ransom offer deemed inadequate, they realize that the opportunity to disempower Brienne through a public spectacle of lethal humiliation is even more valuable to them than material compensation. Since Brienne's size and strength are equal to or even greater than a man's, any attempt to make her look weak *in relation* to men would only highlight the facade of an innate masculine superiority. Isolating Brienne from visible male control and pitting her

against a beast forces her to demonstrate her own vulnerability under the auspices that this is a fight she is *losing,* and an inevitable defeat that she, through an innate feminine inferiority, is bringing upon herself.

Forcing her to fight in the pink dress individualizes her inability to fully occupy either category of lady or knight by framing this as a personal, corporeal failure that renders Brienne as "matter-out-of-place" (Williams and Bendelow 76). The dress makes Brienne seem unfit for combat as it physically prevents her from using her body to its full capacity, and symbolically, its hyperfeminine styling reminds Brienne that her mortality and vulnerability are specifically gendered, and it conveys to the men watching that she is only a woman playing a man's game. Brienne's attempts to keep herself alive as long as possible have completely destroyed the previously ornate dress, and its tattered, bloodstained, and mud-splattered remnants (fig. 11) emphasize that she is equally unfit for the femininity she was born into.

Figure 11: Brienne holding a sword against the bear, her dress all but destroyed. (3.7)

The episode, "The Bear and the Maiden Fair," takes its title from a popular in-universe ballad which is drunkenly sung by the onlookers watching the fight, and its ironic transposal to Brienne's situation is made even more horrific by its intrinsic mockery. The song recounts the tale of a maiden "pure and fair," who is unwillingly swept up by a "hairy bear" who "lick[s] the honey from her hair," and despite initially squealing and kicking, the bear and the maiden fair end up going off together ("The Bear and the Maiden Fair," *A Wiki of Ice and Fire*). Brienne, framed continually as abject and deviant, is far from the "pure and fair" maiden depicted in the song, yet her objective positioning in the rigged fight as a feminine-clad virgin threatened by a wild beast forces her into a grotesque manipulation of the "damsel in distress" trope, the danger

of the situation a grisly distortion of the song's uncanny depiction of the maiden falling in love with the bear despite being captured against her will.

The public spectacle of the fight, which Locke refers to as "one shameful fucking performance" (3.7), is rigged to portray Brienne's demise as evidence of her own weakness. But it is also incredibly intimate, and only successful if Brienne goes down with a visceral sense of her own failure, having lost faith in her body's capabilities. Though Locke rejects Jaime's initial attempt to save Brienne by paying her ransom, claiming that Brienne's humiliation "makes [him] happier than all her sapphires" (3.7), Jaime physically intervenes and rescues Brienne before the bear slaughters her, and deprives the audience of the spectacle of Brienne's ruined body. While Brienne reciprocates Jaime's rescue by subsequently pulling him from the pit after he lifts her to safety, the inconceivability of her escaping the walled pit without help underscores the gendered helplessness of the situation.

"A Woman's Kind of Courage": Brienne and Other Women

In the direct company of other women, Brienne is defined as an outsider by her failure to properly perform her designated gender, rather than because of her gender itself. Corporeally, she is *too much* woman to fit into the constraints of noble femininity, which behaviourally renders her *not enough* of a woman. While the men of Westeros "have a terrifying approach to Brienne's masculinity" (Rosainverno), Brienne also faces hostility from other women, who view her as "a kind of hybrid that they cannot tolerate" (Albone), though her homosocial interactions are minimal. Cersei Lannister publicly mocks Brienne for daring to bow towards the royal family at Joffrey and Margaery's wedding, and later scorns her for "flit[ting] from one camp to the next, serving whichever lord or lady you fancy" (4.2). For Cersei, who "bemoans being trapped in a woman's body" and "spends her time seething over men's advantages" (Frankel pt. II) yet limits her own pursuit of power to the constraints of hegemonic heterofemininity, Brienne represents a path that Cersei herself never saw as an option.

Her most significant moments of affirmation from other women acknowledge the difference between how each woman negotiates power and autonomy in a violent and misogynist society while putting them forward as equally valuable. When Brienne offers her allegiance to Catelyn Stark, she praises Catelyn for having "a woman's kind of courage" (2.7), in contrast to Brienne's own sense of battle courage. Catelyn herself is relatively unfazed by Brienne's choice

of occupation, and after Brienne initially corrects her, respects that Brienne does not see herself as a lady.

> *Catelyn*: You fought bravely today, Lady Brienne.
>
> *Brienne*: I fought for my king. Soon I'll fight for him on the battlefield. Die for him if I must. And, if it please you, Brienne's enough. I'm no lady. (2.3)

Their relationship is far more egalitarian than Brienne's dutiful reverence towards Renly, with Catelyn swearing that she would "not hold [Brienne] back" (2.7) from avenging Renly's death when the time came. Her service to Catelyn abstractly revolves around protecting other women, and transcends loyalty to any particular house.

After returning to King's Landing in Season Four, she meets with Margaery Tyrell and her grandmother Olenna to disclose the actual cause of Renly's death. She is first shown from the waist down, the camera focusing on a seated Margaery and Olenna, and Olenna exclaims "My word!" upon seeing her (4.1). The angle prioritizes Olenna's gaze upon Brienne as she stands before the two women in tailored, masculine clothing, and Brienne flinches and braces for the insult she is so accustomed to. Instead, Olenna regards her with awe and admiration, and while Brienne's face only shows mild surprise, the validation is so foreign to her that she does not now how to respond to it.

> *Olenna*: "We know who you are. We've heard all about you but ah, hearing is one thing—aren't you just marvellous! Absolutely singular. I hear you knocked my grandson into the dirt like the silly little boy he is." (4.1)

Tall bodies are inherently and intensely visible, and the sheer amount of body that Brienne possesses and the way she wields it render her a constant spectacle, unable to escape a public gaze that is overwhelmingly antagonistic. Olenna's marvel at Brienne recasts this spectacle, and provides Brienne with a rare moment of homosocial validation. By characterizing Brienne as "marvellous" and "singular," Olenna focuses on what Brienne *is,* rather than what she *isn't*, and presents the option for Brienne to define herself outside the constraints of lady and knight, or to even synthesize the two to forge a new identity.

Brienne is not the only female character in *Game of Thrones* to engage in combat, dress androgynously, and assert herself in traditionally masculine realms, but Arya Stark, Yara Greyjoy, Meera Reed, and Ygritte are all considerably smaller (with the actresses' height ranging from 5'1" to 5'6"), and more conventionally attractive than Brienne. In *The Warrior Women of*

Television, Dawn Heinecken states that the female action hero "destroys conventional ideas of the female body as passive, as to be looked at, as controlled by men. The female hero *takes up space*" (3, emphasis in original). However, the smallness of their bodies means that even if they take full advantage of "the space available to [their] movement" (Young 143), the amount of space that their bodies are *able* to take up will still be relatively small in proportion to their size. and their activity is thus less threatening to norms of male superiority than larger active women like Brienne, who is regarded with much more derision.

Like Brienne, Arya Stark is a lord's daughter who rebels from the nobility-based expectations of femininity, and the audience first sees her as an eleven-year-old who is "clearly miserable in her role as a girl" (Frankel pt. II). Over the first four seasons, Arya learns swordplay and disguises herself as a boy after she flees King Landing when her father is beheaded. But unlike Brienne, Arya "is afforded more generosity around her gender non-conformity because she is still classically beautiful, no matter how short she cuts her hair" (Keyhan). As a petite adolescent *girl*, Arya's identity is still in flux, whereas Brienne, as a grown woman, is an established gender transgressor who has never had the option of fitting in. Scott Meslow notes that "tomboyishness is not the same thing as masculinity" (Meslow, "The Powerful Women of Westeros") and while Arya rebels against prescriptive femininity, dressing as a boy is a means to an end and she ultimately "demands respect as a girl who can do boy things" (Keyhan).

While Brienne is transporting Jaime to King's Landing, they come across three "tavern girls" hanging dead from a tree, ostensibly as punishment for the sexual transgression of "lay[ing] with lions" (2.10)[14]. Brienne's presence in this scene contrasts her, as a strong yet unfeminine warrior targeted by men for her gender transgressions, against conventionally feminine women who are still susceptible to violence *because* they fit into the male gaze, and their deaths reinforce that there is ultimately no safe way to be a woman in Westeros. Brienne's immediate reaction upon seeing these women is to tie Jaime to a tree trunk and cut their bodies down to give them a proper burial. However, their killers soon return and cackle at Brienne when they realize she's a woman. After one of the men recognizes Jaime, Brienne swiftly executes two of the men (fig. 12) before slowly driving her sword into the third man's groin, mimicking his earlier boast that he'd only given two of the women quick deaths.

14 "Lions" refers to Lannister soldiers, who take the lion as their sigil.

Figure 12: Brienne giving her second "quick death." (2.10)

Her actions are motivated in part by a desire to maintain her and Jaime's anonymity, but she later refuses to kill a passing peasant over the same concern, claiming that "he's an innocent man" (3.2). Her fury at these men taking pleasure in baselessly killing tavern girls for daring to express sexuality provides her the emotional drive to execute them with little demonstrated remorse, and her empathy with these women overrides any political affiliations. After Jaime expresses surprise that she would kill Stark men, she responds, "I don't serve the Starks. I serve Lady Catelyn. I told her I'd take you to King's Landing, and that's what I'm going to do" (2.10). While Brienne's exclusion from knighthood denies her official recognition for her skills, it also gives her the freedom to swear allegiance to not just a particular person, but to a particular *mission*, and she "takes ownership over her concepts of honor and glory. She becomes the embodiment of a protector of the weak; the embodiment of a true knight" (Rosainverno).

Oathkeeping and Ownership: A Resolution of Sorts

Brienne truly takes hold of her mission in the fourth season, encouraged by Jaime Lannister, who gifts her with new armour custom-made to her measurements, and a freshly-forged sword of Valyrian steel (fig. 13). Her new armour is more streamlined and elegant, but its bespoke construction legitimizes her body's purpose: it is not only made for her, but she is made to wear it. The sword is also significant, as Jaime notes:

> *Jaime*: It's been forged from Ned Stark's sword. You'll use it to defend Ned Stark's daughters. You swore an oath to return the Stark girls to their mother. Lady Stark's dead. Arya's probably dead. But there's still a chance to find Sansa and get her somewhere safe. (4.4)

After Brienne accepts Jaime's gifts, Jaime also appoints Podrick Payne, who had previously served his brother Tyrion, to be Brienne's squire, citing that her employment of him would be "chivalry" (4.4).

Figure 13: Brienne in her new armour with Oathkeeper strapped to her belt, standing before Jaime Lannister (l) and Podrick Payne (r). (4.4)

Podrick is instinctively dutiful to Brienne and respects her as a knight regardless of her sex, a level of regard so foreign to her that she does not know how to accept it.

> *Brienne*: I've made it this far in the world without a squire. Don't see why I need one now.
>
> *Podrick*: All knights have squires, m'lady.
>
> *Brienne*: I'm not a knight. And I'm not a slaver, either. I don't own you. (4.5)

Brienne's disinclination to accept Podrick's help stems in part from a frustration with his seeming ineptitude at squirely duties, but also from the tenacious self-reliance she had assumed was her lot in life. When Podrick jumps up to assist her with her armour, she brushes him off and retorts, "I've been removing my own armour for quite some time, thank you very much" (4.5). Brienne's perseverance as a warrior had heretofore been an independent pursuit, devoid of practical support even in the service of others. Podrick's appointment as her squire is a marker of status, but she views accepting his assistance as a concession of her own independence, despite the gender inversion of a man serving a woman.

Podrick's youth and naïveté enable him to determine his own personal conception of knighthood, and appoint it based on character rather than an official designation off-limits to Brienne because of her sex. Podrick sees her as a knight on her own merits, and this sentiment is echoed by Arya's former companion Hot Pie, who now works at an inn. After serving a kidney

pie to Brienne and Podrick, Hot Pie compliments Brienne's armour and asks if she is a knight. When Brienne abrasively refutes this, he comments that "people with armour are usually knights," also noting later that Brienne "seem[s] like a proper lady," which he defines as "someone who could be trusted" (4.7). Hot Pie does not see Brienne's "ladyship" as incompatible with her symbolic knighthood, and as a peasant, the systems of nobility that classify both these identities as off limits to Brienne are as unfamiliar to him as the notion that she could be both is to her.

Brienne ultimately materializes her ownership of her body outside the constraints of courtly decorum and formal combat. At the end of the fourth season while on the road with Podrick, she chances upon Arya Stark practicing her swordplay. Like Podrick and Hot Pie before her, Arya speculates that Brienne is a knight based on her armour. Brienne refutes this politely, and with a smile, confirms Arya's clarification that Brienne "know[s] how to use that sword" (4.10). They share a tender moment of fellowship and solidarity over their shared interests and occupations before Sandor Clegane, a large, gruff, and merciless fighter widely known as "The Hound," returns from relieving himself, and Brienne identifies Arya.

> *Arya*: Who taught you how to fight?
>
> *Brienne*: My father.
>
> *Arya*: Mine never wanted to. He said fighting was for boys.
>
> *Brienne*: Mine said the same. But I kept fighting the boys anyway. Kept losing. Finally my father said, "If you're going to do it, you might as well do it right." (4.10)

Brienne's ultimate goal is to "take [Arya] to safety" (Brienne in 4.10), yet to Clegane and Arya, Brienne's friendship with Jaime seems incompatible with her continued oath to Catelyn, and reads as inherently suspicious. Arya's cynicism and mistrust of adults has only grown while on the road, and she has no interest in being under anyone's guardianship. She sneaks away to hide herself against a cliff as Brienne and Clegane's verbal dispute about who is most fit to "watch over her" (Clegane in 4.10) progresses into physical combat (fig. 14).

Figure 14: Brienne fighting Sandor Clegane; Arya Stark in foreground. (4.1)

The three-minute fight is choreographed to appear as equal of a match as it can be under the circumstances, though Clegane—played by 6'6" Rory McCann—is "considered one of the most skilled and dangerous fighters in Westeros" (*Game of Thrones Wiki*). When Brienne assumes victory and holds her sword against his throat, she chivalrously tells Clegane, "I have no wish to kill you, Ser," but Clegane responds by grabbing the tip of her sword with his bare hands, raising it up against her, and gritting out, "I'm no knight" (4.10). Clegane uses his voluntary exclusion from knighthood as justification to fight outside the chivalric code, and the sword fight devolves into a brutally unscrupulous hand-to-hand brawl. While the act of extending her body outwards in combat violates gender norms of feminine stillness, the sword is also an extension of her body that maintains physical distance between her and her male opponents. Forcing a man to yield with a sword at his throat demands a voluntary concession of pride, and slaying a man exerts power over his very existence, but Brienne's battle with the Hound is as hands-on as it is underhanded, collapsing this distance as the fight descends into visceral attacks on both bodies. Brienne and Clegane wrestle for dominance, knock heads, bite each other's flesh and pull each other's hair, pin each other down, and kick and punch each other in the head, stomach, and groin (fig. 15). A fatally wounded Clegane later comments to Arya, "big bitch saved you" (4.10), but he approaches their combat with no real regard for Brienne's sex, whether as a motivator for violence or deterrent against it. His kick between her legs is a response to her earlier punch at his groin, targeting her genitals as an effective strike because they are sensitive, rather than because they designate her as a woman. After a harrowingly close

fight, Brienne eventually unleashes a series of facial punches that push Clegane increasingly close to the edge of a cliff until he tumbles off.

Figure 15: Clegane grabbing Brienne's hair as she readies a punch to his groin. (4.10)

Yet even in her most challenging and significant victory, Brienne's ultimate motivation for fighting Clegane was gaining custody of Arya Stark, a triumph that would finally fulfill her vow to Catelyn Stark. On an effective level, Arya's disappearance renders Brienne's victory over Clegane bittersweet, her allegiance to her mission compromised by Arya's own determination and independence. The fact Brienne ends season four fruitlessly screaming Arya's name into the hills while a fatally wounded Sandor Clegane lies bleeding on the rocks below effectively summarizes Brienne's continually shifting engagement with her body and gender, and how she relates to others. Her oath to Catelyn Stark was sworn within an abstraction of her daughters' identities, and Brienne's pledge to protect other women was conceived of only as such. Her battle with the Hound is Brienne's first fight with a man in which her gender is neither obscured or spotlighted, and unlike her previous male aggressors, the Hound's urgency to inflict violence on Brienne does not stem from a desire to return her to a position of feminine subordination in an attempt to assert his own masculinity.

As *Game of Thrones* continues to air, and Brienne of Tarth's story is not complete, I want to avoid making broad statements about her relationship with her body having reached any definitive conclusion or transformative resolution at the end of season four. Additionally, approaching Brienne's narrative as a linear development of self-confidence and acceptance risks positioning male-instigated acts of violence against her as necessary hurdles that beneficially facilitate character development. According to Aaron Devor, "Major social deviations are rarely

tolerated easily, and individual or group deviation from gender schema prescriptions can be perceived as extremely threatening to a social order which is, to a large degree, predicated on the use of gender as a major cognitive schema" (61). So long as male supremacy and female subservience remain governing ideologies in Westeros, Brienne's large body will continue to threaten these established power dynamics. Men approach her excessive body as a threat to their own presumed sense of the male body as inherently superior, and endeavour to restore her to a place of feminine subordination, often through horrific tactics targeting her sense of bodily autonomy. Tallness and power are intrinsically linked, and as Brienne's size and strength are equal or sometimes even greater than a man's, she is not only "more-than-Woman" (Hole 318), but also often more-than-man.

Her engagement with her body—and her freedom to do so—is often symbolized by her attire. The femaleness of Brienne's body is revealed in layers. She is first shown as a large, active, armoured body in an official combat ring, and until she removes her helm, she is presumed male by default. In Catelyn's service and on the road with Jaime, her worn, bulky armour shields her body and masculinizes her silhouette, and while her facial features and voice only reveal her as female upon closer inspection, the juxtaposition of these elements positions her in a liminal space between male and female signifiers. In the bath, her nudity initially conveys her as exposed and vulnerable, but it ultimately enables her to reclaim the capabilities of her unadorned and unprotected body from a mocking male gaze, though on a microcosmic scale. Her ultimate deprivation of bodily autonomy occurs when she is forcibly clothed in the pink dress, signifying the psychological power that Locke and Bolton hold over her, and her inability to fit into the constraints of femininity dictated by her noble birth. While forcing her to wear the dress is humiliating enough, it is designed for eventual ruination in the bear fight, serving as a tangible reminder that she is *just* a woman playing a man's game, and it also encumbers her from fully exercising her ability to successfully perform masculinity and engage in combat.

Her casual dress is simple and elegant but androgynous, fitting within the conventions of courtly attire, while also allowing her to put forward a masculine silhouette. She has no need for armour in the courts of King's Landing where words are wielded more sharply than swords, but at the same time, she is even more constrained by her inability to physically respond to verbal derision. When she sets out independently with Podrick, the fact that her new armour is custom-

made to her measurements provides a minor yet vital resolution to Brienne's defining predicament of not fitting anywhere.

Even in the light of her growing confidence in season four, the intrinsic tensions of her embodied self continue to determine her identity. Her large body is still "matter-out-of-place" (Williams and Bendelow 76) that renders her simultaneously "more-than-woman" and "less-than-woman" (Hole 318), and her masculine presentation and active engagement with her body continually suspend her in the liminal space between the social constraints of "lady" and "knight." However, the interplay of these elements is continually shifting, and her initial disengagement between her widely-disdained perceptible body and her own experience with her corporeal self lessens as she begins to take ownership of both.

Chapter Two
"Hard and Badass on One Hand, and Soft and Girly on the Other": Embodied Masculinity, Hidden Femininity, and the Vexed Interiority of *Glee*'s Coach Beiste

Within moments of her first appearance on Fox's musical dramedy *Glee* (2009-present), football coach Shannon Beiste, played by 6'3" Dot-Marie Jones, spells out her last name, immediately refuting its homonymy with "beast." This moment encapsulates how *Glee* puts forward Coach Shannon Beiste as a character: immediately perceived as intimidating, unruly, and unfeminine, yet constantly bearing the burden of proving that she is otherwise. As Jackson Adler notes, Dot-Marie Jones[15] and Beiste are "tall, broad, muscular people, and much of Beiste's character arc is about how every woman deserves to be respected, to feel pretty, and to have a chance at love" (Adler). Coach Beiste's inclusion in *Glee* rests entirely on the premise that she is innately other, both individually different from the norm, and collectively different through her affective associations with the titular glee club. Beiste's introduction comes with two intertwining assumptions that emphasize her innate otherness: that others will automatically make assumptions of her based on her looks, and that she herself will be self-conscious about her appearance. In an article on *Glee*'s overweight[16] characters, Natalia Cherjovsky remarks on Beiste: "A fat girl with low self-esteem? That's a novel idea! I am simultaneously offended and bored" (217). Beiste's entire construction as a character is based on the stereotype that any woman whose body falls outside the norm would have a level of internalized self-hatred that can only be assuaged through external validation, which *Glee* doles out in small, inconsistent doses.

Beiste's first and second focalized episodes ("Audition" and "Never Been Kissed") seek to emphasize that Beiste is more than her appearance (and specifically more than the *assumptions* that are made based on her appearance), yet in subsequent episodes, harsh appellations towards her are doled out with nary a hint of problematization. Others routinely express disgust at her eating habits, and Sue habitually hurls insults such as advising Beiste to "hurry on to your next face-widening session at the John Travolta Institute for Head-Thickening

15 Dot-Marie Jones has also acted under the name Dot Jones, and some sources refer to her this way.

16 Cherjovsky seemingly uses the words "fat" and "overweight" interchangeably, though she introduces Beiste by noting that she is "not obese, and she is portrayed as someone who is fit" (217).

and Facial Weight Gain" (3.7). The overall gloss that *Glee* is a show about accepting difference is belied by its tendency to turn on a dime and ridicule those same characteristics, its affirmations ultimately ringing hollow and hammered in more by deliberately affective musical performances than any attempt at real structural change. As Margeaux Lippman-Hoskins notes, *Glee* utilizes a "therapeutic rhetoric" that

> …encourag[es] people to solve their own problems without so much as considering issues of race or gender – in essence, the rhetoric of pulling one's self up by his or her bootstraps without a consideration of the structural or social inequities that constrain action and movement. This actively diverts attention away from one's social location and how that identity is influenced by power and toward a notion of personal responsibility for one's discomfort. (114)

In its employment of Shannon Beiste towards moralizing ends, *Glee* never remotely examines norms of beauty and femininity that align femininity with "petite-ness, or, more often, smaller-than-man-ness" (Cohen 159) and impart masculinity onto large bodies. Cecilia Hartley notes that "when a woman's stature or girth approaches or exceeds that of a man's, she becomes something freakish" (62), and Aaron Devor notes that beyond women being *attracted* to men, heterosexuality hinges on a woman's ability to "dress, move, speak, and act in ways that men will find *attractive*" (51, emphasis mine).

Shannon Beiste carries the sole burden of changing stereotypes of how her large female body is perceived, and she must *constantly negotiate* her use of her innately large body in order to forefront a feminine interiority. The burden is on *Beiste herself* to manage how others see her, and verbally hammer in the lessons that it's not easy "being a female football coach, being different" (2.1) and that she knows she "can be a little intimidating sometimes, but deep down inside where no one can see, I'm just a girl" (2.6). Even as these lessons seemingly enable others to see beyond her appearance and accept her, the affirmations doled out in her first appearances are undercut by the bizarre writing decisions to give her "a problematic love interest" (Cherjovsky 217) in Cooter Menkins and retcon her entire interiority by writing the character previously put forward as Shannon Beiste as a transgender man.

In *Glee*'s sixth and final season, Beiste physically and legally transitions to living as male, and changes his name to Sheldon. In an emotional coming out speech, Beiste confesses to "having felt like this [his] whole life" (6.3), an assertion which heavily contrasts Shannon

Beiste's repeated emphasis of her feminine interiority. For the purposes of this thesis, I have decided to approach Shannon and Sheldon Beiste as separate but linked fictions, personas presented to the audience meant to represent a singular character, using she/her/hers exclusively to refer to Shannon, and he/him/his to refer to Sheldon[17].

I will be approaching Sheldon's identity as a trans man and the assertion that he has "always felt this way" as an application of *retroactive continuity*, or *retcon*, which the website *TVTropes* characterizes as "reframing past events to serve a current plot need… In its most basic form, this is any plot point that was not intended from the beginning." Approaching this character development as a retconning specifically devised for season six enables me to first examine Shannon Beiste wholly within the context of how she was presented to the audience as a heterosexual, cisgender woman in seasons 2-5, and to then examine Sheldon Beiste as a gay trans man who has a history of being read as Shannon. Rewriting Shannon Beiste as Sheldon reorients the signifiers of Dot-Marie Jones' body, and examining Shannon and Sheldon as separate but linked fictions provides the opportunity to consider how exterior and interior masculinity and femininity manifest differently on the *very same body.*

Moralizing and Choralizing

Glee tells the story of a "group of outsiders who overcome odds to achieve success" (Marwick et. al 633), and the titular glee club, known as New Directions, is comprised of a purposely diverse, though somewhat tokenistic, group of "talented misfits" (Dubrofsky 83). The cast includes including multiple Jewish, Black, Latina/o, and Asian characters; a plethora of male and female characters who identify as LGBT; and one student who uses a wheelchair. These characters are ascribed different socio-economic backgrounds, body types, academic abilities, and social standings. In *"Glee* and 'Born This Way': Therapeutic and Postracial Rhetoric," Margeaux Lippman-Hoskins notes:

> After 2011's rash of high-profile LGBT youth suicides, teaching young people how to embrace difference became a top priority. In response, a glut of popular culture was produced that proclaimed the beauty of difference and the need for individuals to embrace their supposed flaws. Although well-intentioned insofar as

17 In situations where other characters refer to Sheldon with female pronouns prior to him coming out, I will use male pronouns in brackets. In cases where my analysis applies to the entirety of the character, I will refer to Coach Beiste as s/he.

> they attempt to provide a corrective to existing social intolerances, these artifacts located the solution to such intolerance as an increase in one's self esteem. (111)

Glee's formatting of diversity—which impacts how Coach Beiste's own othered characteristics are performed, manifested, regarded and approached—serves an overarching gloss that it is ultimately a text that embraces difference. New Directions functions within the text as a physical and symbolic space of belonging within the volatile atmosphere of high school. However, the uplifting message of acceptance and inclusion is compromised by a number of factors that either undermine or contradict this message, or present it overly simplistically. *Glee* relies on an episodic plot structure of antagonism and resolution where an "issue of the week" is introduced, problematized, and resolved within the space of an episode, and then considered "dealt with." A microaggression seems to suddenly appear as a problem, thus individualizing structural marginalization by attributing this antagonism to characters who learn to accept difference by the end of an episode. *Glee*'s characters are a flat screen for a moralistic tone, but with a rotating cast of who experiences antagonism, each character is presented as being innately vulnerable when they are a target, though this sensitivity doesn't always translate to a sense of empathy when another character is antagonized. Rachel E. Dubrofsky notes that *Glee* makes oppression "commonplace and normalized, part of the everyday experience of any teenager's life, with the suggestion that overcoming racialized oppression is akin to overcoming one's awkward teen years and learning to celebrate one's uniqueness" (98).

The potency of *Glee*'s "exuberant, optimistic tone" (Lesley 2) relies on utilizing powerful musical performances at pivotal points in the narrative, providing "an affective boost that compensates irrationally, within the logic of the show, for the characters' feelings of marginalization" (Hilderbrand). Songs are frequently used as apologies to an almost transactional nature, with Santana even noting at the end of the domestic abuse awareness episode "Choke": "We're really proud of you for sticking up for yourself and getting out. And we *owe* you a song" (3.18, emphasis mine). *Glee*'s issues of the week aren't resolved because it makes logical sense for them to be, but because you *feel* that they are, as the characters engage in "psychological change through song and dance" (Lippman-Hoskins 118).

While this rampant moralizing often comes off as maudlin, *Glee* counterbalances its sentimentality with snarky asides and cleverly-worded insults. Glee's tongue-in-cheek metatextual awareness that New Directions is "America's number one destination for cheap,

sappy moralizing" (3.18) offsets the actual sappy moralizing depicted, providing humour while mitigating the show's pedantic tone. Yet this "tonal variety" (Hunting and McQueen 294) provides its own challenges, as the sentiments of affirmation *within* the show are often contradicted by selective othering *by* the show. Similar microaggressions may be focalized and problematized in one episode, only to be ignored and used for humour in another, resulting in a dissonance between how the characters treat each other and how the camera treats the character. In the case of Coach Beiste, the messages sent about his/her character often belie the acceptance depicted within the text.

Shannon Beiste is introduced in the first episode of *Glee*'s second season as the new football coach for McKinley High, where her size and job position frame her as both a hapless villain and an easily targeted outsider. Beiste is first presented as an abstract threat before she is shown onscreen, in a scene where glee club leader Will Schuester and cheerleading coach Sue Sylvester rail against their budgets being slashed to redirect funds to athletics. The camera rapidly cuts between Will, Sue, and Principal Figgins, before panning left to show Beiste sitting in the chair next to Will, her actual introduction positioning her as a physical embodiment of this threat that is amplified by her large size. After Beiste justifies the cuts as likely to bring in more alumni donations, Sue, played by 6' Jane Lynch, points at her and petulantly asks "Who's this?". Beiste stands up to introduce herself, and immediately clarifies the spelling of her name.

Figure 16: Shannon Beiste facing off against Sue Sylvester. (2.1)

Beiste initially comes off as an exaggerated version of Sue: she is larger, has a deeper voice, presents and moves more masculinely than Sue, and she coaches a more esteemed team than Sue. Masculine body language and presentation convey a "position of secure dominance" (Devor 53), and facing off eye to eye (fig. 16), Beiste conveys an embodied superiority that Sue

cannot physically contend with. Sue is habituated to being the most powerful woman at McKinley, exerting dominance as much with physical intimidation as with her notoriously sharp tongue. Sue's approach to gender non-conformity is vexed and somewhat fickle. Jason Jacobs describes Sue as a "disorienting character whose ostensible heterosexuality is persistently undermined by her own self-consciously queer presentation as unfeminine, asocial, and unnatural" (Jacobs 340). Yet at the same time she is personally responsible for some of the most virulent homophobic, transphobic, and gender-policing comments throughout the series, and her immediate assessment of Beiste is that a "female football coach [is] like a male nurse—sin against nature" (2.1).

Sue recruits Will into a campaign to "topple" Beiste (2.1) by reframing Beiste as the ultimate threat to the glee club's survival. Sue seeks to regain her power by surmising that the very characteristics that grant Beiste power—her size and association with masculinity—are emotional weak spots prime for psychological warfare.

> *Sue*: But I know gals like Beiste. Her high school life must have been miserable. She's oversized, humorless, refers to herself in third person as an animal—this kind of abuse and teasing will bring back all these childhood memories, and she'll be shaken to her core. (2.1)

Glee's adult characters are often the ones to play the voice of reason in conflicts between students, but this emotional maturity is notoriously absent when the lesson of the week necessitates inter-adult antagonism. Kelly Dillon notes that "the teachers and adult characters are just as likely to participate, initiate, and be bystanders to bullying behavior" (50). With Will's complicity, Sue orchestrates juvenile pranks meant to provoke Beiste into a public spectacle of frustration and intimidate her into leaving McKinley.

Beiste approaches Will and Sue's table in the staff room during lunch, and after she asks if she can sit with them, Sue responds that the empty seats are "currently being occupied by [her] ghost friends… hideous, lonely faculty members who met with an early death from good old-fashioned schoolyard bullying" (2.1). The exclusion emphasizes that her body is not physically welome to take up space, but Sue's overt reference to bullying is meant to evoke Beiste's presumed history of being exclusion and ridicule, and emotionally return her to a place of adolescent insecurity. While she is clearly hurt, Beiste recognizes what Will and Sue are trying to do, and confronts Will:

> *Beiste*: You think it's easy being a female football coach? Being different? You think I don't get this everywhere I go? Everyone told me that Sue was the school bully and that you were really cool. I see they got the last part wrong, huh? (2.1)

Beiste using the specific language of herself "being different" situates her within *Glee*'s "conflicted textual politics of difference" (Hilderbrand). Collective and individual marginalization "operates as a central trope in *Glee* as the marginalization of the New Directions by their peers is mirrored in the personal narratives of each New Directions member, all of whom are presented to be 'different' in some way" (Lippman-Hoskins 115). Beiste's reminder to Will that he has a reputation of being "really cool" and that she, like the glee kids is "different" situates the injury and her resulting pain within *Glee*'s pattern of antagonism and resolution.

Will's antagonism towards Beiste sprung from her initial positioning as a threat to the glee club's survival through her possession of institutional power, rather than any overt or intrinsic dislike or judgment of Beiste as a person. Will's recognition that he has hurt Beiste's feelings serves as an impetus for his own development, and in Beiste's subsequent attempts to appeal to his empathy, she frames his antagonism towards her as bullying that derives from prejudice. *Glee* positions empathy as situational, needing to be drawn out by an external moralizing force, with someone's own personal vulnerability only realized in the episode's resolution. As Will notes in his apology to Beiste,

> *Will*: I guess we kicked off this year thinking that all of us in the Glee club weren't outcasts anymore and I thought we'd be turning kids away. And then when no one signed up for the club, I realized we were still at the bottom. Outsiders. And that's how I made you feel. I'm sorry. (2.1)

Will's newfound acceptance for Beiste, which he incorporates into his later lessons for students, is based on his own feelings of being "at the bottom," despite the fact that Will himself is only constructed as an "outsider" because of his involvement in the "supposedly 'lame' New Directions" (Lippman-Hoskins 115). *Glee* depicts New Directions as a "tribe made up of battle-wounded losers and social rejects" (Cherjovsky 215), who can only find resolution through self-acceptance and collective support. Yet viewers are "encouraged to see each character as a unique individual who faces particular challenges because of her/his individual traits, forsaking any contextualizing of their existence that takes into account structural determinants" (Dubrovsky

98). Beiste's outsiderness is rooted in actual systemic prejudices and cultural constructs that require women to "take up as little space as possible" (Hartley 247), put tall women on a "pedestal of intimidation that they didn't create themselves" (Cohen 161), and put forward a very narrow definition of femininity. Even as the show seeks to prove that Beiste is *more* than her appearance, it still puts forward her appearance as something that needs to be looked past because it is inherently unappealing or intimidating.

Shannon Beiste's specific combination of traits fills a gap in *Glee*'s purposely diverse cast. Establishing her as innately "other" ensures that she will face ostracism and discrimination by her colleagues and students, and as the "real work of McKinley High takes place outside the classroom" (Lesley 5), their eventual acceptance of her serves their character developments as much as it humanizes Beiste for the audience. Her role in "Audition" not only introduces the intrinsic tensions of her character—a large woman with a masculine occupation whose tough exterior eclipses a soft, feminine interior that she desperately wants to be recognized—but it also re-establishes Will as the show's chief moralizing force and voice of reason, and his acceptance of and respect for Beiste enables him to impart the lessons he has learned onto his students.

"She Put Being Husky to Good Use": Fueling the "Musculine" Body

The physical size of Beiste's body compounds with multiple characteristics that construct her embodiment as excessive, crass, and out of control. She has a notoriously large appetite, and is regularly shown ravenously devouring comically huge meals (fig. 17). Her consumption of food is most commonly remarked on by her colleagues with a mix of awe and visceral disdain, as if what, how, and how much she eats is not only perplexing, but viscerally repulsive and completely unfathomable to those fuelling smaller bodies.

Figure 17: Beiste talking to Emma (foreground) while eating a "turducken." (3.7)

She is most commonly shown picking away at a whole rotisserie chicken in the staff lunch room, and when Will asks if this is a daily occurrence for her, she replies that she actually eats "a whole chicken at every meal" (3.2). She eats what McKinley faculty member Shelby Corcoran refers to as an "enormous bowl of disgusting creamy pasta" (3.3) because she is "carbo-loading… to keep [her] strength up" (Beiste in 3.3), and a few episodes later, she explains her reasons for eating a turducken to Emma and Will:

> *Emma*: What is that animal you appear to be so noisily enjoying?
>
> *Beiste* [motioning with her fists]: A chicken stuffed in duck jammed in a turkey. A turducken. It's like a barnyard in a bite. I've been exhausted lately and I'm trying to eat as much protein as I can to keep up my strength. (3.7)

Though both Emma and Shelby overtly regard her eating habits with polite repulsion, Beiste rarely shows offense towards these comments, and unflinchingly devours mass quantities of food with shameless abandon. Sonya Brown notes a pattern within *Glee* of associating its fat female characters—such as glee club members Lauren Zizes and Mercedes Jones, and cafeteria server Millie Rose—with "quantities of food or food with low nutritional value than others, so that despite the message that fatness should be acceptable or at least not a reason for bias against a woman, the suggestion throughout the series is that fatness is a solvable problem that is suitable for repeated humorous use" (142). Beyond the amount of calorie-rich food Beiste ingests, the actual manner in which she eats continually constructs her as crass, and unconcerned with appearing delicate. She picks at large chunks of greasy meat with her hands, shovels pasta into her mouth, chews and talks with her mouth open, and in an attempt to romance Will in the season four episode "Shooting Star," serves him a dish of pasta that she "boiled…in the hot tub

in the training room" because it "just gives it the perfect al dente" (4.18). In contrast with Will's love interest and on-and-off partner Emma Pilsbury, who is petite, daintily feminine, and obsessed with cleanliness, Beiste's eating habits establish what she puts into her body as being just as sloppy and unkempt as she herself is: she is not only fuelling her body's mass, but also its unruliness.

Kathleen Rowe conceives female unruliness as an act of defiance, noting that "Among those deemed in need of social control, [relaxation] signifies 'looseness' or 'sloppiness.' The body that 'refuses to be aestheticized,' that does not control its 'grotesque, offensive, dirty aspects,' can thus communicate resistance to social discipline (Fiske 97)" (Rowe 52). Shannon Beiste's self-consciousness over how her body is perceived contrasts her unself-conscious comportment, oblivious to the grotesquery of her appetite and table manners, which enables it to be played for laughs. Both Kathleen Rowe and Susan Bordo connect a woman's "unwillingness to control her physical appetites" (Rowe 31) with increased sexual appetites. Yet Beiste's unruly consumption of food emphasizes her sexual undesirability, her hunger reinforcing her comportment as masculine. Bordo notes that "Men are *supposed* to have hearty, even voracious, appetites. It is a mark of the manly to eat spontaneously and expansively" (108). After Beiste transitions, Sheldon notes that "the best thing about being a dude" is that chicken grease gets stuck in his stubble: "If I lick my lips like this, I'm tastin' it all day" (6.9). The statement, accompanied by shots of Sheldon shoveling chicken into his mouth, and a close-up of him licking his lips, showcasing the chewed chicken bits on his tongue, is still seen as repulsive by Sam and Rachel, yet Shannon Beiste's obliviousness to the grotesquery of her appetite and table manners translates, as Sheldon, into even more freedom around his appetite.

The excess of Beiste's body is often drawn on as a source for comedy. Shannon Beiste is portrayed as "overweight" but "not obese" (Cherjovsky 217), and while her girth is presented as muscularity rather than fatness, it is still regarded abjectly. In relation to an ideal body, "fatness emerges as a degenerate space of over-consumption and laziness" (Gullage 3), but Beiste is continually emphasized as active rather than lazy. Her exaggerated consumption of carbs and protein is seen as necessary fuel for her size and strength rather than wasted calories destined to generate adipose tissue, but this overfeeding nonetheless actively pushes her body beyond the spatial limits of womanhood.

In contrast to fatness, which is characterized by a lack of willpower around cultivating smallness, and is seen to render the female body as simultaneously "more-than-woman" and "less-than-woman" (Hole 318), muscularity is seen as *deliberately* going too far and pushing the body beyond the category of woman. Williams and Bendelow note that

> …one of the main attractions of body building is that it holds out the possibility of challenging conventional notions of the "weak feminine body": a challenge that, ironically, is hampered by the fact that in adding muscular bulk, women body builders run the risk of being denigrated for going "too far" and looking "too masculine." (76)

Beiste's body is conveyed as muscular, but the actual musculature of her body is not visually emphasized, and is instead constructed primarily through discourse. Beiste's cultivation of muscularity does not manifest in bulging definition, but rather as solid mass that leads to the nickname "Shannon the Cannon" (2.14), and conveys her body as what Yvonne Tasker defines as "musculinity," which is "the way in which signifiers of strength are not limited to male characters" (149).

While Shannon Beiste deeply desires for her inner femininity to be recognized, she articulates this firmly within the context of wanting her interiority to be seen, rather than attempting to change her body to code more femininely. Her muscularity (and thus musculinity) contribute to conveying her large body as a useful one, rather than a wasteful one. In "A Very Glee Christmas," Beiste poses as Santa to gently inform Brittany that Santa cannot grant Brittany's Christmas wish of her paraplegic boyfriend Artie being able to walk again, after Puck rationalizes that Beiste has "the perfect Santa body type" (2.10).

Figure 18: Beiste, dressed as Santa, talking to Brittany (2.10).

In a heartfelt conversation with Brittany, Beiste, still in character as Santa (fig. 18), reveals her own complicated girlhood embodiment through a depersonalized anecdote about a girl who was "a little husky" and wanted to "look more like the other girls":

> *Beiste*: She wasn't asking to be pretty or nothing. But she just didn't want to stick out so much. Santa just couldn't do it. So instead Santa gave her patience. And later on, that girl was glad that Santy didn't give her what she had asked him for. She put being husky to good use. (2.10)

Beiste's camouflaged reflection on her girlhood embodiment establishes her body as having always stuck out because she was a large, unattractive child, unable to be ornamental but at the same time, an unavoidably visible spectacle. The use of "husky" in particular emphasizes mass rather than makeup, and that Beiste's muscularity is the result of putting her unavoidably large body "to good use" emphasizes that large bodies are ultimately more purposeful than they are decorative, but that if Beiste were not athletic, her body would automatically be less useful to her and less valuable to society.

Beiste references participating in weightlifting, mud-wrestling, and kickboxing, and once mentions that she has "punched a charging hippo square in the face" (4.18). Yet at the same time, Dot-Marie Jones' numerous sports injuries likely limit the extent to which she can visibly exemplify this athleticism[18]. Jones' injuries are imparted onto Beiste's body, and in season six, Sheldon mentions that his "knees have been shot since [his] bullridin' days" (6.9), and later cautions football player and glee club member Spencer against over-exerting his sprained ankle by displaying his own "damage," which assistant coach Sam characterizes as looking "like a jacked-up C-section" (6.11). It is interesting that these injuries are only brought up after Sheldon transitions, but as Shannon, Beiste's athleticism is also referenced in present terms, emphasizing that she is still *capable* of inflicting damage, even if she chooses not to. Yet at the same time, the references to sports injuries only heighten the construction of Beiste's large body as one that is so useful that s/he has actually *used up* its capacities.

Even though she is rarely shown onscreen being athletic, Beiste is constructed as active because if she wasn't, the default position for a large body is fatness, and its accompanying signifiers of "over-consumption and laziness" (Gullage 3). Yet even as Beiste's large appetite is

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18 Before her acting career, Jones competed professionally in shot put, arm-wrestling, and bodybuilding (*Glee* Wiki, "Sheldon Beiste"), and suffered eleven knee injuries in her career that actually lowered her height an inch from her original 6'4" ("Dot Jones," *Wikipedia*).

seen as necessary to fuel her large body made useful through athleticism, she is still seen as excessive, as women are "forbidden to take up space (by being large of body) or resources (by eating food ad libitum)" (Brown in Hartley 61). The amount of body that Beiste possesses and the numerous visual depictions of her fuelling it and frequent verbal references to its capacities forefront her body as the chief factor in how others perceive her, and within *Glee*'s structure of moralizing, present her body an inherent obstacle that others must look past to truly see her. As Katherine Hobson notes, "Dressing in gym clothes, with a larger physical body, and deeper voice than other feminine characters, Beiste's femininity and heterosexuality are in a constant state of suspicion" (99). Shannon Beiste's ultimate desire is to be seen as *more* than her body, but she is overwhelmingly aware that she "can be a little intimidating sometimes" (2.6), and troublingly, that the burden is on her to prove that she's otherwise.

Masculine Exteriority and Feminine Interiority

According to Alexandra Howson, bodily signifiers "tell a story about sex, about whether a person is male or female. In addition, we assume a corresponding set of capacities, behaviours and characteristics associated with gender, or masculinity or femininity" (Howson 50). Shannon Beiste's gender presentation is an awkward mix of masculine practicality and feminine adornment: polo shirts, athletic shorts, and knee-socks emphasize her body as active and masculine, and her pearl earrings and trademark lipstick convey a desire to be seen as feminine without compromising her mobility, physicality, and authority. Talia Mae Bettcher notes that "female and male modes of clothed presentation" act as a "referential structure" to what genitals a person has, and as such, their presumed sex (330, 329). The lipstick and earrings root Beiste's large, masculinized body in an intrinsic *femaleness*, and as such, do the work of "accurately" conveying Beiste's sex—and when Beiste re-emerges as Sheldon, their absence is the most notable change in his dress style. Yet as accessories, they have no relation to Beiste's actual *body*, implying that even though Beiste has a duty to convey her assigned sex and gender identity through gender presentation, her figure and frame are still unsuited to feminine ornamentality. Anne Hole notes that "fat women are denied the possibility of playing with gender, or masquerading as feminine" (318). Beiste's gender presentation is not presented as an elegant and deliberately performative androgyny or gender-fluidity, but rather limited by the twin constraints

of her large body being "excluded rather than excused" from feminine fashion (Hole 319), and the pressure of "correlation between gender presentation and genital status" (Bettcher 331).

Beiste's own body is portrayed as so unattractive, inherently masculine, and unsuited to feminine ornamentality that shots of her in traditionally feminine attire, such as lingerie, a cheerleading uniform, and a ballet leotard and tights are played to the audience for laughs, even as they form the backbone of that episode's moral lesson. Kyra Hunting and Amanda McQueen note that *Glee* uses humour to "mitigate the 'after-school special' elements of many of the episodes," and while this humour "pushes against the show's own sincerity by mocking many of its own narrative terms" (294), it also results in a perplexing dissonance between its overt and covert messages. In the season two episode "Never Been Kissed," football players and glee club members Finn and Sam use Beiste's image as a way to "cool themselves down" during make out sessions with their respective girlfriends Rachel and Quinn, who Finn describes as being "the only two girls in high school that won't put out" (2.6). While the actual *use* of Beiste's image to halt sexual arousal is ultimately chastised, the cinematic gaze on Beiste still renders her body unappealing and heavily contradicts the narrative tone that establishes these "cool-down" fantasies as damaging, privileging a heterosexual male gaze even as it problematizes it.

Finn's suggestion that Sam should visualize "a buzzkill—you know, something that is totally *not* hot" is quickly juxtaposed against a shot of Beiste taken from the waist down, heatedly lecturing Artie while waving a jock strap in his face, before Finn jokingly comments that "when the Beiste gets all fired up, her underpants go up her butt" (2.6). The camera then cuts back to Beiste, who unselfconsciously picks at her wedgie while continuing to rant, intertwining her perceptibly aggressive relational style with her crass engagement with her body.

A subsequent scene cuts between shots of Sam and Quinn making out, and Sam's cool-off fantasies of Beiste. In the first fantasy, the camera blurrily zooms in on Beiste's face, before zooming out and regaining focus to show Beiste standing outside the gym showers, dressed in a black silk negligée, and violently hacking at an unspecified hunk of meat with a cleaver (fig. 19). The shot then rapidly cuts between close-ups of Beiste's butchering, Beiste's face snarling at the camera, and Sam's face as his arousal dwindles. But after Quinn breathily commands Sam to say her name, the first fantasy proves insufficient and Sam mentally replaces her with a shot of Beiste slamming a locker door to reveal herself in a cheerleading uniform, harshly repeating Quinn's command. The fantasy is so effective that Sam finds himself breathing out Beiste's

name instead of Quinn's. The cool-off strategy spreads virally throughout the glee club, and is eventually adopted by Tina, who when advised by her boyfriend Mike during an in-school makeout session that they should "probably cool off" (2.6), envisions Beiste dressed in a pale pink leotard and tutu, performing basic ballet stretches against a barre while smoking a cigar (fig. 20).

Figure 19: A lingerie-clad Beiste hacking up meat in Sam's "cool-off" fantasy. (2.6)

Figure 20: Ballerina Beiste smoking a cigar in Tina's "cool-off" fantasy. (2.6)

While "Never Been Kissed" establishes clear boundaries between reality and fantasy, each has a notable impact on the other, and the intersection of these creates constructions about which bodies need to be contained, which bodies need to be protected, and which bodies are viewed as so undesirable that they are considered available for public use. In order to respect their girlfriends' boundaries, Finn and Sam transfer that controlling gaze onto the body of another, less desirable woman, and use her image to their own benefit. Beiste's actual body is portrayed as inherently unappealing and "the abject of femininity" (Hobson 101), but the

fantasies themselves manipulate her body beyond its actual presentation to something even more grotesque by juxtaposing her body, which "does not make sense in a normatively dichotomized gender structure" (101) with hyper-feminine clothing and stereotypically unfeminine actions like cigar smoking and butchering meat.

The camera's gaze and narrative context presents these hyper-feminine outfits as being absurdly out of sync with Beiste's body, putting forward that any aesthetic manifestation of her femininity would be humourously revolting. They are arranged on her body and filmed in a way that renounces the possibility of any positive sexual gaze upon Beiste's body, and are relatively modest in comparison to how the teenage girls on *Glee* dress, evidenced by the contrast between Beiste and Quinn wearing the same outfit and making the same command. Beiste is simply too large to fit into femininity and therefore, the idea of her trying to fit herself into it by donning an "aesthetic that would appeal to a heterosexual male audience" (101) is absurd in its failure even though she is not actually putting these outfits on her real body.

When Will discovers what's going on and lectures the glee guys that they need to stop, Sam counters that the fantasies are "not personal," and that "it's not like we're actually, you know, making fun of her to her face" (2.6). Reducing Beiste to an image that can be depersonalized and employed for personal benefit divorces her external signification (her body and demeanour) from the person who actually walks around inside that presentation and has to live with the stereotypes imposed on her because of it. Will retorts that "Of course it's personal! Look, Coach Beiste is like us, like glee club—she's an outsider at this school. No one appreciates her or her talent, because they've decided that she's too different," noting that he is "ashamed" of them for "hurt[ing] someone who was a great addition to this school" (2.6). Will again invokes the trope of "different like us" that forms the backbone of *Glee*'s moral lessons, collapsing Beiste's otherness under the umbrella of difference. Will's sympathetic rhetoric ignores the very social norms that construct large bodies as unattractive and unfeminine, and the gendered power dynamics that enabled Sam and Finn, as conventionally attractive heterosexual white men, to feel they had the right to claim ownership over Beiste's image to begin with.

The episode does not challenge cultural norms of desirability and what is considered feminine, but instead frames the cool-off fantasies as another "hurtful" action. Even as the guys realize their wrong, their actions ripple throughout the school until Beiste confronts Will about why his glee club kids have been "mouthing off" to her and asks him to "be straight" with her:

Will: This is really awful. And I don't want you to take it personally. I mean, they're just kids. You know how they can be.

Beiste: Just tell me.

Will: I guess. it's become sort of a thing that when the kids are making out and they sort of want to cool off a little, they think of you. In compromising positions.

Beiste: Like what?

Will: Like in lingerie. Coach, don't take it personally.

Beiste: I do take it personally, Will. I take it very, very personally. (2.6)

The actual act of fantasizing is formatted by *Glee* as a trigger for Beiste's own anxieties about how she and her body are perceived. When Will confronts Beiste while she is packing up after resigning from McKinley, he offers up that "the kids feel awful" as a half-hearted apology. Beiste instead rebukes him, commenting that it isn't enough that the kids "respect her" by noting "Isn't that just what every girl wants to hear from a guy?" (2.6), and reorienting the hurt away from the actual action that provoked it. Beiste reframes the conversation around her own insecurities, rooted in the real-life evidence that her body not only fails to provoke desire, but it actually repels and arrests it. Beiste bears the burden of recognizing that her body is perceived a certain way, and articulating that she is otherwise:

Beiste: I'm not gay, you know. I know I can be a little intimidating sometimes, but deep down inside where no one can see, I'm just a girl. Am I nuts that I just want to be reminded of that sometimes? (2.6)

Will is only able to support and understand Beiste within the context of his own experience. He views them both as being outsiders who are "scarred by high school" and as teachers, are "stupid enough to come back here and relive that pain everyday" (2.6). His naive suggestion that Beiste go on a date to affirm her femininity is met with Beiste's reminder that her dating experience had done the opposite and made her feel like a fetish object: "Last date I went on, the guy was a freak. All he wanted to do was wrestle" (2.6). Will continues to offer suggestions until Beiste confides in him:

Beiste: I've never been kissed, Will. It's the simplest thing. A kiss. It's a doorway to everything else, you know? Promise, hope of a future with someone. What

> does that say about me? I'm forty, and I haven't even taken those baby steps yet. (2.6)

While Beiste puts forward to Will and the audience that she deeply craves to be seen as an attractive and desirable *girl*, the episode skirts over any deeper meaning behind this. Beiste is granted access to sexual maturity through a chaste kiss from Will (fig. 22), who self-congratulatorily comments "And now you've been kissed." Their kiss does not derive from passion or attraction on Will's end, but the physical act itself is seen as enough sexual validation to overwrite Beiste's hurt at being found sexually abject by teenage boys.

Figure 21: Will kisses Beiste after telling her she is pretty "inside and out." (2.6)

The episode's message about age-appropriate sexual activity ultimately contrasts how the camera views these characters. The fact that the students are using sexualized images of Beiste (which are in turn presented as sexually repellent) to curb their own burgeoning sexual desire to a level more age-appropriate for them only serves to remind her of how her own inexperience is abnormal for someone of her age. The show contrasts Beiste, desiring yet undesirable, against Quinn and Rachel, who are viewed by their boyfriends and the camera as sexually appealing, yet abstain from explicit sexual contact. Beiste's undesirability actually reinforces Quinn and Rachel's desirability, and emphasizes the value of their chastity through their abundant and unquestionable ability to arouse their partners.

Women are supposed to render themselves desirable for the male gaze, but withhold access to their bodies. The value of chastity—within *Glee* and the world at large—rests on the premise that it is something a woman must protect. However, in this narrative the woman is already proven desirable: she retains the knowledge that if she wanted to, she could unleash

herself and let someone in. In contrast, for those whose bodies are not positioned as sexually desirable within the world of a text, or to the male gaze in general, their involuntary celibacy is evidence of a failure on their part to properly incite a male sexual gaze.

Even as the episode overtly conveys that Shannon Beiste is a heterosexual woman who wants to be seen as desirable and attractive, the camera still operates on a hegemonic gaze that renders impossible the idea that the audience could visually see her as attractive. Beiste's ultimate wish is for her feminine *interiority* to be recognized, and while I do not want to position aesthetic femininity as a prerequisite for that or even something Shannon Beiste desires, the actual visual tension between her large stocky frame and the feminine artifice jokingly displayed on it is never fully addressed. The use of the fantasies is problematized and moralized, but there is no resolution for their effect on either the audience or the teens who employ them. The injury becomes rooted in Beiste's own engagement with her body, and is ultimately assuaged by an external act that symbolizes male approval, and resolved by a sincere apology and a confession that a lesson is learned. The kiss is the first step in Beiste's acceptance of her own, but the outer "lesson" of the episode is for the glee kids (and by proxy, the audience) to recognize that despite Beiste being "hard and tough on the outside," she is in fact "the opposite on the inside" (Finn in 2.6).

In typical *Glee* fashion, the episode closes with the glee guys serenading Beiste with a mash-up of "Stop in the Name of Love" and "Free your Mind" to "apologize for hurting [her] feelings" (Sam in 2.6). The performance is prefaced by a verbal appeal for Beiste's forgiveness, where they invoke that week's musical assignment of a mash-up to convey their newfound understanding of Beiste as "hard and badass on one hand, soft and girly on the other" (Artie in 2.6). Beiste is initially sceptical, her facial expression hard and defensive, and outwardly maintains this expression throughout the majority of the dynamic performance, but afterwards tearfully comments, "That was really good. I liked it. Thank you," before standing to be enveloped in a group hug.

While realizing their act was hurtful is correspondent with the realization that Beiste was *able* to be hurt, it is only after hurting Beiste's feelings that the boys realize that she does have a feminine side, and in recognizing this "softness," Beiste's emotions become something to protect. For Beiste's interior femininity to be recognized, she must de-emphasize her visible body—her frame, her size, and her physicality—and emphasize her emotions. Puck prefaces the

songpology by saying that the glee guys "hope it makes you smile, because when you smile you're pretty, and it lights up the room" (2.6). While the smile indicates the apology was accepted, linking the smile with Beiste being "pretty" makes beauty contingent on an expected emotional response, and likewise connects femininity with small, contained movements.

"Mrs. Cooter Menkins" and *Glee*'s Toxic Paradox of Heteroromantic Attainment

The public lesson that Shannon Beiste is ultimately hard on the outside and tough on the inside establishes a firm and persistent boundary around how she is viewed for the majority of the series. In order for Beiste's femininity to be recognized and respected, she must constantly remind audiences that she is more than her appearance. In "The First Time," she attributes her propensity to tear up during musical performances to the fact that she is "such a girl" (3.5). Katherine Hobson notes that as Shannon Beiste "embodies many masculine characteristics and roles," she provides a "different construction of queer-femininity on *Glee*" (Hobson 99). While the duality of masculine exterior and feminine interior complexifies, troubles, and indeed, *queers* conventional notions of femininity, the validity of this femininity is ultimately signified by Beiste's explicit desire to be loved within a traditional framework of heterosexuality, even as she understands that she is "kind of a specific type" (2.6). Throughout her character's journey and development, Beiste's large body and masculine exteriority are presented as an immutable obstacle that can never in and of itself be recognized as feminine, corresponding with the historic precedent that the tall female body is "unambiguously lacking femininity, therefore at risk of social and sexual repugnance" (Rayner et. al 1079). Instead, that femininity must either be emphasized by Beiste's own endeavours to make her feminine interiority visible, and eventually gain external male approval that is seen to transcend her outward appearance. Her entire sexual identity as Shannon Beiste is contextualized within her belief that she specifically needs a *man* in order for her to truly "feel like a girl" (Beiste in 3.5).

Twice in the narrative, Shannon Beiste refutes an open assumption that she may be anything other than straight, and in "Never Been Kissed," connects "not being gay" with an innate need to be seen by men as feminine (or more specifically, as "just a girl"). When Artie, acting as an impromptu agony aunt for Beiste's sexual confusion in "The First Time," leaves space for her to articulate her own sexual identity by asking if she has "just never found the right

person," Beiste rebukes him to emphasize, "Guys. I like *guys*. And no, I haven't found him" (3.5).

Heteronormativity ultimately hinges on male desire and "requires women to dress, move, speak, and act in ways that men will find attractive" (Devor 51), and the "narrow definition of femininity and womanhood is [seen as] beyond [Beiste's] reach" (Adler). But at the same time, her desire to fit into hegemonic femininity takes some of the onus off her to assert her own sexuality, and she positions herself in a constant state of waiting. A middle-aged female virgin who, above all else, wants to be seen as a "girl," Beiste waits forty years to be kissed before essentially prostrating herself before a pitying male colleague, and ultimately she waits for a man to pursue her overtly.

Season three introduces uber-masculine football recruiter Cooter Menkins as a love interest for Beiste. In his early appearances, his genuine displays of attraction to Shannon actualize Will's well-meaning but platonic assurance that she is "a beautiful, amazing woman whose heart is just too big for most men to stand" (2.6), manifesting heteroromantic attainment as the natural conclusion of Beiste's inner femininity being recognized first by her colleagues and students. Cooter is persistent but respectful in his pursuit of her, offering concrete proof that a man can find her attractive even though she doesn't "look the way pretty girls look" (Beiste in 3.5). Even when Cooter overtly states, "I want to take you out on a date. A real, honest-to-god, sit-down date, where you dress up like a lady and I dress up as a gentleman," Beiste assumes that someone has "put [him] up to this" (3.5), though she accepts his flowers and seems to silently agree to the date.

Two episodes later in "I Kissed a Girl," Beiste realizes that she is not being held back from a relationship with Cooter by her undesirability, but rather by her own hesitance and self-consciousness. She comments to Will and Emma, "Our connection is so amazing. We have so much in common. I really feel like I've met my match" (3.7), yet cutaway scenes show only the two lifting weights together, their companionship still physically platonic. Over the course of the episode, it's revealed that Beiste's definition of "doing stuff" (3.7) is different than Cooter's, and that perhaps Beiste does not understand what is involved in Cooter's idea of an "adult" relationship. Without telling Shannon, Cooter starts dating Sue, who identifies him as having been her "regular booty call since the late 1990s" (3.7). When Beiste encounters the two at a restaurant, Cooter expresses this:

> *Cooter*: Shannon, I didn't think you were interested. I mean, every time I gather up the courage to ask you out on a date, we end up lifting weights at the gym or at a protein seminar. Last time I said to myself, dangit, Coot, you just gotta make a move. And so I tried to hold your hand, and you punched me.
>
> *Beiste*: It was a reflex. I thought you were trying to steal my class ring.
>
> *Cooter* [shaking head]: I like you, Shannon. And I like hanging out with you. The truth is, I can't tell what's going on with us. I'm not looking for a buddy. I'm a grown man. I need more than that. (3.7)

While Beiste has repeatedly expressed a desire for her inner feminine "soft side" to be recognized and appreciated, she does not know how to translate that to her physicality and relate to another person tenderly. Beiste and Cooter are both large people with husky voices, and an interest in football and in strengthening their own bodies, and Beiste finds it easier to relate to Cooter as a peer with similar interests. Beiste desperately wants to be seen as a *girl*, and in doubting Cooter's attraction to her in "The First Time," comments that Cooter is "the kind of man that could have any pretty girl he pointed at," to which Cooter comments, "I don't date girls. I just date women. Beautiful women, like you" (3.5). Both Will and Cooter affirm that Beiste is an adult *woman* rather than a girl when seeking to comfort her, yet Beiste does not know how to see herself within the script of adult heteroromantic relationships, and instead focuses on an extended feeling of outsiderness that she has felt since her actual chronological girlhood.

Heteroromantic courtship is a game Shannon Beiste does not know how to play, a game she has only seen from the sidelines, and a game that Sue can play masterfully. Cooter is portrayed as the epitome of masculinity, but this love triangle essentially renders him an object tossed around between two tall, masculine women who desire him. Sue has repeatedly manipulated her own sexuality for personal gain, views men as status objects, and is used to getting her way, but Beiste is emotionally invested in Cooter, only newly aware of her specific desirability, and imprisoned by historically viewing herself as an underdog.

Beiste's "win" of Cooter is ultimately conducted by baring her emotional vulnerability (though without sacrificing her own identity). She states, "If I had to bench-press a wildebeast just to prove to you how much you mean to me, I would do it. I would do anything to win you back, Coot" (3.7). Three episodes later, Beiste casually announces her and Cooter's elopement and her new symbolic identity as "Mrs Cooter Menkins" (3.10), implying that in the span of the

past three episodes, Beiste and Cooter have gotten together, and in figuring out how to have an adult relationship, expedited it towards the ultimate signifier of heteronormativity: marriage.

Unfortunately, Cooter's role as a mutually-requited romantic lead for Beiste and their momentary heteroromantic bliss is undercut by the bizarre creative decision to write Cooter as an abuser barely half a season after he is introduced. *Glee* transmits a positive message by building Beiste up as a woman who deserves love and acceptance, only to brutally dismantle it just as quickly in a half-hearted attempt to teach a lesson about domestic violence. In an episode aptly named "Choke," Beiste shows up at school with a black eye, and her excuse that it was a gym accident is disproven by cutaway scenes during an ill-advised performance of "Cellblock Tango" that show Beiste serving Cooter dinner, flashing forward to an uncontextualized shot of Cooter throwing a tantrum while Beiste quietly cries in the foreground (fig. 22).

Figure 22: Cooter's abuse is revealed to the audience in a flashback. (3.18)

When Beiste first confesses that her black eye was indeed from Cooter, she attributes it to her own failure to "do the dishes" after he had bugged her about it "all weekend" (3.18), narratively attributing his actions to an unspoken desire for her to fit into the role of a subservient wife. To its credit, the show does not place any blame on Beiste for being unable to meet this ridiculous standard, but it also addresses domestic violence "with less emotional depth than an NBC 'The More You Know' 15-second spot" (VanDerWerff). Within the show, Beiste's own acceptance of herself in the face of Cooter's affection is discoloured by the reveal that the only man who loved her cannot give her the relationship she deserves, and Beiste fears leaving Cooter because, as she states, "I don't think anybody else is ever going to love me" (3.18). *Glee*'s only way to convey her as desirable is for her to achieve male approval within the text itself, by a man

who ultimately abuses her. Even after Beiste leaves him, she does not have any resolution with her own sexuality, nor is a healthy, reciprocal relationship depicted as an option for her.

Katherine Hobson notes that while the other characters "are quick to rush her to judgment and push her to leave, they do not account for the complexity of her bodily experience" (102). However, the positioning of Beiste as the target of physical abuse is specifically rooted in the tension between her bodily size and strength, and how she polices the capabilities of her own body in order to emphasize her feminine interiority. After new swim coach Roz Washington calls Santana out for joking that Beiste's black eye is evidence that "Mr. Beiste went all Chris Brown on Mrs. Beiste," Santana counters that it would be implausible, stating that "We obviously don't think that Beiste was hit by anybody. I mean, look at her. She's a wall" (3.18). Even as Roz seeks to help Beiste and teach the glee girls a lesson about the seriousness of domestic violence, she is still confused as to why Beiste didn't physically defend herself:

> *Roz*: Sweetheart, you're as big as a house. Why didn't you just turn around and kick his ass?
>
> *Beiste*: I'm not a violent person. (3.18)

While they approach it from different angles—Santana through mockery, and Roz through sympathy—both women invoke Beiste's strength and size as proof that she should be able to defend herself. Santana's and Roz's metaphors dehumanize her by likening her to inanimate objects (and more specifically, building structures), but they also emphasize that Beiste's size and strength should technically give her an advantage against physical abuse. However, Beiste's own values, dislike of violence, and fear of losing the only man to express interest in her preclude her from accessing that bodily strength. Again, the writing of Cooter as an abuser at this point in the narrative emphasizes his psychological power over her soft interior. Beiste so desperately wants to be seen as a woman, and from her perspective, the only way she can do this is by downplaying a body that she cannot escape from.

Defending herself against Cooter would bring attention to her size and strength, and destabilize the feeling of being a girl that she feels she can only achieve through his approval. If she overpowers him, it changes their dynamic, and she no longer occupies the "woman's role," and she risks losing him. Beiste is overwhelmingly aware of her body's strength, and while she repeatedly references taking part in activities that employ it, those activities are all compartmentalized into the space of athleticism, spheres where violence is regulated, allowed,

and consensual. Beiste's brawn is a positive attribute, but it is also a burden: she knows that were she to fully unleash her body's full capacity, she would be capable of damage, and that as she is seen so overwhelmingly for her body, she also bears the burden of having to disrupt stereotypes about it. For her interior femininity to be visible, she must de-emphasize her body.

After Beiste finally leaves Cooter two episodes later, she appears primaily as a supporting character in seasons four and five, having served the necessary narrative role in disproving stereotypes about her specific identity for the benefit of the audience and other characters. Her only real character development occurs in the season four episode "Shooting Star," where she confesses a long-held attraction to Will over a comically faux-romantic Italian dinner in the locker room inspired by *Lady and the Tramp*. Shannon comments to Will, "I want you to be *the* man in my life. For the first time since we've known each other, we're both single" (4.18). Will's gentle rejection of her is articulated in the context of him and Emma having gotten back together. While Shannon is heartbroken and embarrassed, Will's explanation that he and Emma "are back together" (4.18) skirts over the question of whether he would be attracted to or interested in her in other circumstances. Will ends the episode by helping Shannon sign up for online dating, but she has no further love interests, and her character arc stagnates awkwardly with no conclusive resolution of her desire to be seen as a sexual being.

"America's Newest Male, Sheldon Beiste": Retconning Interiority and Rewriting the Body in Beiste's Transition

Glee's sixth and final season ran for a short thirteen episodes (in contrast to the usual twenty-two), and in those episodes, it sought to wrap up a number of pre-established plot lines and find resolution for its established characters. However, *Glee* also took its truncated sixth season as one last opportunity to throw in even more moralizing plot lines, with even less time to wrap them up. Under these circumstances, the show introduced a new plot line for the character who had been presented to the audience as Shannon Beiste for four seasons, and in the third episode of the sixth season, Coach Beiste reveals to Sue and Sam that [he] had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, and would be "legally transitioning from a woman to a man" (6.3)

through testosterone injections, top surgery[19], an implied phalloplasty[20], and changing his first name to Sheldon.

Sheldon's transition is presented mostly as aesthetic and medical, following the stereotype of mainstream trans narratives (and in particular, those written produced by cisgender people) overwhelmingly focusing on bodily changes. *Glee*'s writing of Beiste's transition invokes the idea that only through surgery and hormone therapy can Beiste fully become a man, but its actual depiction of these processes is overly simplistic, and heavily medicalized. In announcing his transition, Beiste's first move is to hand over a letter from his doctor containing an "assessment that patient Shannon Beiste meets all the necessary criteria for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria" (6.3), before Beiste explains his own feelings of dysphoria in more affective terms.

> *Beiste*: I've felt like this my whole life. Growing up, I was really confused, I thought I was just a tomboy. So I got into sports, I started coaching football, and I wrestled hogs in my free time, but no matter what I did, I never felt at home in my own skin. I never felt like my body fit who I was on the inside. I don't hate being a woman, and I don't regret the things I've been through because they've made me the person I am today. A person strong enough to go through with this transition. I gotta do it for my own piece of mind, I gotta get my body in alignment with how I see myself. (6.3)

In this speech, *Glee*'s writers overwrite all previous characterizations of Shannon Beiste, who had heretofore been portrayed as "an untraditional-looking cisgender woman who wanted to feel beautiful, who wanted to feel like a normal girl, who struggled to get the love and acceptance she craved as a woman" (Fisher).

While having verbally expressed desires to be seen as a woman does not automatically negate the possibility that Beiste may have in fact identified as male the entire time, rewriting Beiste's recounting of his own childhood to incorporate feelings of dysphoria does not only "promote a misogynistic message that Coach Beiste really isn't and never was a woman who should be respected and treated like any other" (Adler), but also discounts the importance of the

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19 "Top surgery" is a commonly used term to describe a double mastectomy used to create a chest that appears "male."

20 After Beiste begins describing the physical steps of his transition, Sue cuts him off and asks him to "spare us the details of the literal sausage-making," implying that Beiste may also be getting phalloplasty.

feminine interiority that Beiste had previously struggled to have recognized. By retconning Beiste's articulations of femininity throughout those four seasons as a mask for his true gender identity as a man, *Glee* bulldozes the meaning behind his struggle for acceptance when Beiste was presented to the audience as a woman and the writers "pretty much [throw] all his previous character development out of the window" (Rude).

This retconning also rewrites the signifiers of Dot-Marie Jones' body in portraying this character. While Beiste is fictional, s/he is portrayed by a real person, and every stamp of meaning on Beiste's body is also imparted onto Dot-Marie Jones'. Jackson Adler notes that:

> …when the writers of *Glee* decided to make Coach Beiste their token transman, it undermined her character arc and a powerful lesson about sexism and bodyshaming… I felt insulted for the actress, because it is her own body that is on display and is argued about in the episodes in which she stars. I felt awful for every woman and girl, and those raised as such, who has ever faced bodyshaming. (Adler)

While Jones noted an initial hesitance about playing Beiste as transgender, over a desire not to disappoint "the big girls who are tomboys and they're straight" (qtd. in Mink) and who saw Beiste as a role model for being "a big girl [who] was okay with it" (qtd. in Votta), she was impressed by the script itself and began to view herself as responsible for "a whole other demographic that I don't wanna let down" (qtd. in Mink). The problems of a cisgender woman playing a transgender man are myriad and have been better addressed elsewhere, but writing this character as trans in *Glee*'s last season in what Parker Molloy describes as "a contrived gesture of desperation for a show that has simply run out of gas," and handing Dot-Marie Jones the responsibility of representing a group of whom she herself is not part of is a heady responsibility. Adler notes that "even though the writing quality of [Coach Beiste] is incredibly fickle, [Dot-Marie Jones] commits beautifully to every moment," a task the actress also took up playing Sheldon Beiste in season six in the face of a limited, shallow script.

In an episode unsubtly titled "Transitioning," Beiste returns to McKinley after a three-episode absence physically embodying the new identity of Sheldon Beiste, noting in a voiceover that he "took some time off to let [his] outsides catch up with [his] insides" (6.7). In costume, Jones' curly, now shoulder-length hair is straightened and tucked back to appear more masculine, her jaw sprinkled with stubble, and her breasts seemingly bound. Gone are the

lipstick and pearl earrings that signified Shannon Beiste's feminine side, and while Sheldon is later shown wearing the polo shirts, athletic shorts, and tube socks that visually defined Shannon Beiste in seasons prior, "Transitioning" introduces him wearing the more formal and unambiguously masculine outfit of a denim button up, a Carhartt jacket, full-length khaki slacks, and a tie (fig. 23).

Figure 23: Sam (l) and Sue (r) flank the newly-transitioned Sheldon Beiste. (6.7)

If we suppose that *Glee* incorporated a transgender character in the final season in order to tick a box of moralizing, the fact that Coach Beiste was specifically chosen to take on this plot arc comes off as reductive and contrived. On an external level, Beiste is already masculine in build, presentation, and comportment, and as Sue notes upon learning of Beiste's transition, "it's not that big of a stretch" (6.3) for Beiste to completely live as male. On an internal level, it's "wildly out of character" (Rude) and completely rewrites Beiste's expressed feminine interiority in previous seasons. As Shannon Beiste had already been viewed as masculine by virtue of her size, movement patterns, and dress, there is very little visual work for the show to do to successfully convey Sheldon's gender and body as male. That in and of itself draws immensely on stereotypes that large bodies are inherently masculine, that gender identity corresponds with the gendered signifiers of one's body outside of the sex assigned at birth, and that being able to pass as the sex and gender with which one identifies is an essential component to a "successful" transition. Sheldon Beiste faces discrimination being an openly transgender man, but his maleness is not for a moment contested, questioned, or demeaned the way Shannon Beiste's femininity had been. And despite confirming, pre-transition, that his doctors believe his

transition will not change his attraction to men, Sheldon's identity as a specifically *gay* man is eclipsed for the remainder of season six, thus negating any discrimination that Sheldon could face as a trans man within a transphobic normative gay male culture, and as a man whose actual bodily characteristics might fall out of the canon of what is considered sexually attractive to a normative gay male culture.

Sue characterizes Beiste's announcement of his transition as a new addition to "every conceivable version of a gay man coming out" (6.3), but Sheldon Beiste's attraction to men—now reconfigured as homosexuality rather than heterosexuality—is mostly silent, the focus being on his gender for the remainder of the show, and of him constantly asserting a rather hegemonic masculinity. The quick mentioning of Sheldon Beiste's gayness seems more like a half-hearted attempt at continuity rather than a factor in how his character is presented and considered in the remaining episodes. Shannon Beiste's attraction to men was much more about fitting into heteronormativity and in "validating Beiste's womanhood" (Fisher) by positioning her opposite a man than it was about the actual desire towards men. Shannon's attraction to both Will and Cooter stemmed more from feeling like they "made [her] feel like a girl" (4.18) than any interest in who they actually were as people. Sheldon Beiste's masculinity does not need to be validated by a male sexual or romantic partner, ultimately sending a message that femininity is dependent on male sexual approval, while masculinity is strong enough to stand on its own, or more or less rests on approval for other men. Men grant masculinity *and* femininity.

After *Glee* officially "say[s] hello to Sheldon Beiste" (6.7), the episode proceeds in *Glee*'s typically moralizing fashion: Beiste is crushed to find his car vandalized by New Directions' rivals Vocal Adrenaline, who have scrawled "Coach Tranny" on his windshield in shaving cream, and littered the hood with jock straps, and he must then balance his own happiness and relief at "finally being who [he] has always wanted to be" (3.7) against the discrimination he faces living openly as a transgender man, and feeling like an outsider. After a heart-to-heart with Unique, a Black transgender girl[21] who had been featured in seasons 3-5 as a glee club member, and who comes back in this episode seemingly for the express purpose of

21 In addition, as Mey Rude notes in an article published on queer women's site *Autostraddle*, Sheldon Beiste's narrative of acceptance ignores the fact that *Glee* already had an established trans character in Unique, a teenage Black trans girl who had been the target of "many casual transphobic jokes and slurs by nearly every character in the show" (Fisher), but without any significant attempt by *Glee* to problematize these actions as damaging and transphobic.

furthering Beiste's character development, Sheldon confesses that while he is relieved at "finally being who I've always wanted to be" (6.7), he is unprepared for the dissonance between his own relief and how he is treated as an openly transgender man. While in the grand scheme of things, having one's car defaced is relatively minor when compared to the actual acts of trans-antagonism faced by trans individuals, often on a daily basis. Writing this act as the primary injury in "Transitioning" is indicative of *Glee*'s desire to address as many social issues as it can, but with the bare minimum of effort, and it individualizes a network of violence against trans people that is deeply institutionalized and well outside the scope of being remedied with a moving song and dance. The episode's final scene simultaneously imparts a lesson of tolerance on the kids who defaced Sheldon's car and offers Sheldon acceptance as his "true self" through a a whopper of a performance in which Sheldon is surprised by Unique serenading him in front of a 200-person transgender choir who embrace him as he tears up. After the end of "Transitioning," Beiste is relegated back to a supporting character, with only cursory mentions of his transition that do not distract from the other characters' featured story arcs.

I do not want to imply that a binary transgender identity is an uncomplicated one, or that the visual reconciliation between Beiste's size and his gender that occurred when he started presenting as male overwrites the dangers and prejudices faced by transgender individuals, something that is only barely hinted at in the show. But by writing Beiste as a trans man in season six, Shannon Beiste's complex balance of gendered signals and characteristics—firmly identifying as a woman and wanting her femininity to be recognized and valued without compromising her embodied traits that were coded as masculine and enjoyment of her body's physical capabilities—become streamlined into a male identity. Shannon Beiste's assigned sex was at odds with her size and height, and her interior femininity and vulnerability was at odds with her strength, muscularity, and fashion sense, but her overall story arc—however shoddily written—was ultimately one of her embracing and accepting these characteristics in the face of antagonism. The overwhelming focus on the Sheldon's physical transition both immediately visible (his fashion changes, his quick-sprouting facial hair) and implied (the impacts of surgery and hormone therapy) seeks to quickly reconcile his body and his gender to fit into a binary norm. As with the Shannon Beiste that was portrayed for four seasons, the emergence of Sheldon Beiste in season six ultimately functioned to use Dot-Marie Jones' body as a tool to teach a lesson about tolerance to more normative characters.

That's a Wrap

Through its overarching gloss as a show that celebrates difference, *Glee*'s inclusion of Shannon Beiste seeks to debunk stereotypes about what it means for someone who is assigned female at birth to have a large body. Yet Shannon's body is ultimately constructed as an obstacle, and the moralizing acceptance for who she articulates herself to be revolves more around looking *past* her body, rather than embracing it and expanding constricting notions of femininity to make room for women with large bodies. As such, Shannon constantly bears the burden of managing her external perception by de-emphasizing her body, and repeatedly articulating a feminine interiority until she receives external validation. Even more, these affirmations are either belied by patchy writing decisions that later negate or dilute them, or a cinematic gaze that contradicts its narrative message.

Finally, in its aim to teach an emotionally resonant lesson about trans acceptance, *Glee* ended up "promot[ing] a misogynistic message that Coach Beiste really isn't and never was a woman who should be respected and treated like any other" (Adler), contradicting the very lessons it had emphasized with Shannon Beiste in the previous four seasons.

Chapter Three
"A Child Trapped in the Body of a Woman Trapped in the Body of a Man Trapped in the Body of a Bigger Woman Trapped in the Body of a Kong": Miranda Hart's Navigation of Size, Space, Slapstick, and Stereotypes

Bearing the tagline "Miranda Doesn't Fit In" (Hart in Armstrong 18), the BBC sitcom *Miranda* (2009-2015) stars 6'1" comedian Miranda Hart as a version of herself. *Miranda*'s eponymous protagonist is thirty-something and single, comes from an upper middle class background, and lives above the joke shop she purchased with her inheritance. Miranda's size is comedically drawn upon in regular "gags about [Hart's] height and imposing physique" (Armstrong 18), including the recurring nickname "Queen Kong." Hart herself notes that "When you are older, bigger and tall, you can use your frame for comic effect both personally and professionally" (*Is It Just Me?,* "Bodies"). More than just not being able to "fit in" to physical and social spaces because of her body, Miranda is unable to properly fit into her *own* body, and is sometimes even unable to *control* it. Her comportment is often unruly: her clothes fall off in public, she is uncoordinated and trips often, she strikes awkward poses that either emphasize her size or comedically attempt to minimize it, she gets stuck in small spaces, she has a large appetite, and she habitually lies when nervous and spontaneously bursts into song. Seemingly naive about sex and dating, Miranda often comes off as desperate for male attention, yet chafes against her mother's fanatical pressure for Miranda to get married.

In the third season, Miranda's friend Tilly not-quite-jokingly characterizes her as "a child trapped in the body of a woman trapped in the body of a man trapped in the body of a bigger woman trapped in the body of a Kong! No, seriously. There's loads of you in there!" (3.4). While Tilly's remark is meant as a routine jab at Miranda's size, with every label meant to be at least a mild insult, her layering of Miranda's comportment positions her as a Russian nesting doll of meaning, encompassing a multitude of signifiers for the large female body. Her size leads her to be mistakenly called "Sir," and others frequently use her large frame to imply that she is failing at femininity. Miranda is portrayed as an oversize child, a woman who grew into her body but not into the styles of embodiment befitting adult maturity, and is unable to convey her body in a "sexual light" (1.2). As Bridget Boyle notes, Miranda's "actual physical shape—tall, larger-

than-television-standard—presages what we assume will be a deliberately unsuccessful performance of heteronormative femininity for comic purposes" (87), yet her actual performance of her body sashays around these preconceptions, polyphonically debunking and reasserting them. Hart's size is also thematically drawn upon in her other appearances, including the 2015 stand-up special *My, What I Call, Live Show*, the 2015 comedy-thriller *Spy*, her essay collection *Is It Just Me*?, and her role as midwife Chummy in BBC's period drama *Call the Midwife,* where her clumsy engagement with her large body fades as Chummy vaults into heteroromantic bliss with a local constable.

Hart's tallness is unusual for a female sitcom lead, but the largeness of her body situates her within cultural and comedic tropes surrounding fat bodies, where "Large, audacious women are often constructed as comic spectacles, the target of our laughter and the butt of the joke" (Stukator 197). Miranda's bodily unruliness often ventures into the realms of grotesquery: she farts and overeats, and the size and fleshiness of her body are often viewed and referenced abjectly, especially when her clothes come off. Yet these signifiers are sporadically reiterated and destabilized as Hart alternately frames her body as "grotesque (in the Bakhtinian sense) and sexy, ungainly and adept, often in a single episode" (Boyle 87). Miranda's trips and pratfalls are portrayed as predictable and inevitable, but just as consistent are her moments of triumph, as she asserts her worth and joyously leaps, gallops, and dances across the screen.

Miranda's accidental mishaps and exuberant physicality make a further spectacle of her already-spectacular large female body, heightening its visibility. Writing about action heroines, Dawn Heinecken notes that "As the 'star' of the series the female hero not only assumes the central role but destroys conventional ideas of the female body as passive, as to be looked at, as controlled by men. The female hero *takes up space*" (21). While Miranda is far from an action heroine, her constant physical presence onscreen defiantly occupies space, putting her body front and centre and demanding for it to be seen.

Beyond her large body, Miranda televisually takes up space. Hart centres the narrative of *Miranda* around its titular character[22], who is in every single scene and regularly breaks the fourth wall to address the viewer, both in brief asides in scenes with other characters, and in solo scenes where she directly speaks to the camera as if the viewer is a friend just hanging around.

22 In pursuit of clarity, *Miranda* in italics refers to the television program, Miranda unitalicized refers to the character Miranda Hart plays in *Miranda*, and Hart will refer to Miranda Hart herself in her context as a writer, actress, and comedian.

While the narrative and visuals are overwhelmingly centred around Miranda (who, aside from her love interest Gary, is always the largest person onscreen), the show also has a distinctly polyphonic tone, and Miranda's physical appearance is regularly cut down by her friends. But even as other characters verbally mock or deride her, Miranda herself always has the last word, and refutes almost every slight against her, whether as an aside to the camera that notes her offence and objection, a confrontational rebuttal to her accuser, or occasionally a spontaneous oration to the world at large.

Miranda the television show navigates a combination of creative control mixed with the depiction of an uncontrolled body, as Hart herself is the main writer for every single episode. Just as Miranda the character is unable to control the movement of her body, Hart the actress has significant control over the representation of her own body. The signifiers of Hart's body—child, man, woman, bigger woman, and Kong—bounce around as much as *Miranda*'s lead character, reiterating comic stereotypes of the large body while simultaneously destabilizing the notion that they are absolute, and as Bridget Boyle states with specific reference to Hart, "connoting multiple possibilities for the female comic body" (87).

Slapsticking It to the Man: The Comedic Female Body

Stylistically, *Miranda* fits pretty firmly into the sitcom genre, though Hart notes that sitcoms "are a deeply complex beast" (*The Best of Miranda*, "How It All Started"). Episodes are around thirty minutes long, move quickly, and are relatively self-contained. In "Take Me Seriously. Now Laugh at Me!: How Gender Influences the Creation of Contemporary Physical Comedy," Bridget Boyle characterizes the "atomic unit of theatre" as being "the movement of a man in empty space. If something different occurs— 'the next act is a woman'—attention must be drawn" (79). As *Miranda* is filmed live in front of a studio audience, the movement in empty space exists on two levels: Hart's navigation of her body on an open studio set, and the way this movement is framed onscreen within the still frame of a standard multi-camera sitcom set-up. Rather than the director gearing the frame around the positioning of Hart's body, which in turn fragments and reconstructs the body, Hart uses the frame as a blank canvas, filling it with varying arrangements of her body and indeed, using the frame as a stage to highlight the movement of a body in empty space. The stock nature of the frame emphasizes the unusualness of Hart's body: she rarely has head room, especially in two-shots with other characters, and the

expansions and contractions of her body are forefronted when she moves across a still frame (fig. 24).

Figure 24: Miranda and Stevie noting that they've gone "really low and really close," with Miranda commenting that she looks like "a giraffe at a watering hole." (4.1)

However, the comedic female body is always marked as specifically *female.* Boyle continues that a female comedian's "gender has made a statement before the gag as it were, whether the gag is verbal or physical. Such a statement instantly renders her less able to be taken seriously, as both her work and her judgment are qualified by gender" (79). Female comedy is therefore always centred around the body: the very femaleness of the body draws attention to itself as "other," as if a non-male body can never be anything but an anomaly. According to Alison Ramsay, "the opposition between comic performance and what is coded as appropriate feminine behaviour continues to inscribe humour as a masculine practice and fuel perceptions of women as inferior doers of comedy" (373). Linda Mizejewski notes that conventionally attractive female leads in romantic comedies aren't particularly "known for their own wit but for their performances of witty comic scripts" (1), which renders the female body something to be humourously *acted upon* by others, rather than the comedy initiating from her own body.

For the female comedian[23] to make her body the *subject* of comedy rather than the *object*, she must not only forefront her body but actively distort it, both in her arrangement of her own

23 The word "comedienne" could be used just as easily as "female comedian" to refer to women who do comedy, and indeed "comedienne" is used in many of my sources. However, I feel that using "comedienne" as a separate word that specifically refers to comedians who are female posits the isolated word "comedian" as being male by default. For the purposes of this thesis, I have decided to use the word "comedian" to refer to a person of any gender who performs comedy, and qualifying it with "male" or "female" when relevant.

body and her movement of that body through space. Helga Kotthoff notes that "It was not regarded as well behaved for women to play the clown and fool around. Comedy plays with distortion of the body, and grimaces distort the face. All this was incompatible with a societal politics of femininity, which required women to be pretty, modest, and decent" (qtd. in Ramsay 373). As the subject of comedy, the female comedian is deliberately *asking* the audience to laugh at her. A woman making her body the subject of comedy plays out in two main ways, both of which are heavily employed in *Miranda.* The first is that the body physically *acts* itself out humourously, and the second is using the signifiers of a body, particularly in relation to supposed "flaws," to provoke humour.

Conventions of normative femininity dictate that a woman needs to "contain herself, to keep her arms and legs close to her body and take up as little space as possible" (Hartley 61). Alison Ramsay notes that "As a comic form which is first and foremost of the active body, slapstick can be said to present a very particular challenge to the female comedy performer. Based on boisterous physicality, heightened pretend violence and frequent use of sight gags and pratfalls, it represents a double affront to the norm of passive femininity" (373). To *make* her body funny, a female comedian must deliberately contort it in ways that defy the bounds of how women are encouraged to contain their bodies. Physical stunts are often portrayed onscreen as the results of clumsiness but are in reality engineered with great physical adeptness. In slapstick, the body is at once controllably and uncontrollably in motion, putting forward that a woman is both unable to control her body and contain it within the norms of feminine stillness, but also that the performer is *choosing* to control it in a way that counters how it is expected to behave.

Juxtaposed against the pretty heroines of romantic comedy, Mizejewski notes comedians such as Lily Tomlin and Carol Burnett, who not only "write and perform their own comedy," but owe their success in part to their willingness to "be funny-looking" (1). A woman must *make* herself look strange or grotesque in the doing of comedy, but also directly engage with any strangeness and grotesquery of her own appearance, as women are far more likely than men to be judged for their supposed physical "flaws," and men have been historically "more likely to take on the physical grotesqueries of comedy, where the funny-looking body and face are assets" (21). If a woman's appearance does not fit into the narrow canon of what is considered aesthetically pleasing to a normative male audience, then she must answer for that, by highlighting her appearance as deviating from normative prettiness. According to Ted

Scheinman, many studios assume that the average straight male viewer "will connect with a female character through either arousal or disdain." Kathleen Rowe notes that televisual unruliness delineates "new ways of thinking about visibility as power. Masquerade concerns itself not only with a woman's ability to look, after all, but also with her ability to affect the terms on which she is seen" (11). The female comedian is demanding to be seen on her terms, though often those terms reiterate the rigidity of cultural beauty norms even as they seek to destablize them.

Kristen Wagner notes that in early twentieth-century theatre, female comics "frequently made the 'flaws' in their appearance a central element of their acts… comediennes saw their lack of physical beauty not as an impediment but as a source of comedy" (qtd. in Boyle 83). "Looking funny" is both an act and a state of being: using the body in comedy makes it unfeminine, but by already being seen as unfeminine, a woman's funniness is more likely to be taken seriously. The positioning of a woman's body in comedy is heavily situated in a binary between "pretty" and "funny," and the "self-conscious dichotomising of the performances of beauty and comedy places the female comic body in a double bind. If she is beautiful, she cannot be funny; if she is not, funny she may be, but how seriously can she be taken as a woman?" (Boyle 83).

In her essay collection *Is It Just Me?*, Hart reiterates that everyone has a "body bane," the "bit which makes us feel slightly less lovely about ourselves than we otherwise might" ("Bodies"), and Hart pinpoints her height as her own "body bane." In *Miranda*, Hart's tallness is positioned as her primary physical flaw, carrying with it a number of significations, many of which are verbally called upon by her friends in mockery. Tilly regularly refers to Miranda as "Queen Kong" and variations thereof, Miranda and Stevie affectionately dole out size-related jabs at each other as a part of their regular rapport, Miranda's mother Penny regularly "mocks Miranda's physical presences and unmarried status as an inept gender performance" (Boyle 87), and Clive, in a mock-eulogy, describes Miranda as being "warm, because she carried that extra little bit of weight. She was a sweaty woman—but nice!" (2.2). Even Gary, who never mentions Miranda's size as negatively influencing his attraction to her, casually notes that the restaurants profits have gone down "ever since [Miranda] went on a diet" (1.5).

The large body is considered ripe for injury because it already exists outside signifiers of femininity, daintiness, and delicacy, and as such is seen as less worthy of protection from harm. It is also seen as being more susceptible to injury because there is more of it to injure, and a

larger target to hit. In an article on short, plus-size comedian Melissa McCarthy, Ted Scheinman touts McCarthy as having "crafted a comic persona that makes it okay to brutalize a woman onscreen—and not only okay, but somehow glorious, a proud and beautiful thing." Scheinman notes that "McCarthy calls the bluff that slapstick has always put forward where women are concerned: the threat of violence in a world free from consequences." Scheinman situates McCarthy as a disruption to the historic trend of slapstick to "[flirt] with the notion of inflicting serious pain on the dainty female body without quite allowing it to happen," and while McCarthy's employment of slapstick does indeed disrupt notions of what the female body can handle (as does Hart's), neither woman's body is considered dainty to begin with. (Hart and McCarthy actually star as best friends and colleagues in the 2015 comedy-thriller *Spy*, which both employs and satirizes stereotypes around the large, unruly body.)

Scheinman contrasts McCarthy against "actresses seeking paying jobs as sex objects [who] are concerned first and foremost with image maintenance," citing that McCarthy's "head-on, balls out" approach to slapstick is "not a fat thing; it's a fear thing." Yet the only thing that frees McCarthy from the pressure to be feminine is that feminine delicacy was never offered to her in the first place, nor would it be the default position for Hart. The large body is useful in slapstick *because* of its largeness: big enough to take a hit, abundant enough to be out of control, and fleshy enough to overflow its boundaries. The notion of their bodies as excessive is inseparable from their utilization of them in physical comedy.

Unrestrained Joy, Unrestrained Limbs: Controlling the Uncontained Body

Louise Peacock notes that while visible pain is a central element of slapstick, it is "unusual to see female performers of slapstick either as the aggressor or the victim" (173). In *Miranda*, Hart "routinely falls over and off things but she rarely seems to be hurt and the pain she suffers is nearly always self-inflicted, a result of her clumsiness and inability to control her own body" (173). Even as Hart's comedy (and thus her clumsiness) is intensely physical in its performance across the screen, the tumbles themselves function more symbolically than effectually. The only real injury Miranda sustains onscreen is from sliding into a ball pit at a children's indoor activity park (3.3), and occurs primarily to necessitate an awkward appointment at the osteopath. Each fall—and they are almost always public—represents a visible failing of the body: in being a large woman, Miranda has already failed to "produce a body

which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine" (Bartky 79). In being unable to control that body, she fails doubly at wielding it properly, and in further contorting it to minimize the amount of space she occupies. Miranda's clumsiness draws attention to the presence of her body as not just a spectacle but as a malfunctioning spectacle. Each trip or fumble is a step in a cycle of insult and recovery, but the irony is that the recovery never fully succeeds. In "Date," this is exemplified when, after tripping over a cardboard box while attempting a more feminine walk, Miranda jumps up to defensively claim, "It's all about the recovery, isn't it?" (1.1) and promptly trips over another pile of boxes (fig. 25). Her assertion that her height "doesn't mean [she] can't be feminine" (1.1) is disproven by her inability to manifest it, "failing" again at a gendered comportment meant to appear naturalized.

Figure 25: Miranda trips on a pile of boxes while trying to make a sophisticated exit from her shop. (1.1)

Miranda's physical command of her body is inconsistently applied, but consistently inappropriate to the situation at hand, unable to manifest aggression in a situation that requires it, while simultaneously resorting to it as a way to assert power over others, and accidentally hitting others without meaning to. While most of Miranda's injuries are self-inflicted, she is also shown injuring others (though without severe onscreen evidence of damage), whether deliberately or accidentally. The season two episode "Before I Die" uses a repeated gag of Miranda trying to elegantly sweep out of a room, but instead knocking over others each time, their bodies passively tumbling to the ground like dominoes. In a self-defence class she attends in "Dog," Miranda is recruited by the instructor to play an attacker in a headlock demonstration, and immediately flops back in terror on the mat as soon as he begins the move. Despite having shown no evidence of

being able to *deliberately* harness her body as a threat against the rather buff instructor, Miranda is pigeonholed as being "perfect to practice on—you're more of a mugger than a muggee" (1.6). Ralph Keyes notes that "Tall women quickly discover that smaller people of other sexes assume them strong" (138), and the other class participants enthusiastically volunteer to role-play the headlock with Miranda, racing forward to tackle her to the mat in rapid succession.

Even when her movement seeks to contain her body by folding it up into the smallest use of space possible, her body is represented as failing. In the episode "Teacher," Miranda and Stevie attend an adult education French class taught at a local primary school, and upon entering the classroom, Miranda notes that the only available chairs are child-size, which she describes as "God's way of telling me not to bother" (1.2). 5'1" Stevie fits in easily, but Miranda is forced to squish herself in awkwardly. When the teacher of the class is revealed to be Miranda's dreaded middle school teacher, Miranda panics and announces that she's going to escape "before he can see me" (1.2). However, when she goes to stand, her attempt at covertly leaving the class is foiled when she horrifyingly discovers that she is stuck in the chair, and after almost hitting a few classmates with the chair while trying to escape (fig. 26), spends the next minute awkwardly trying to make verbal excuses for the predicament. Her strategy, while hardly opaque, is to convey the chair as a sartorial strategy, noting that "it's practical fashion—you can sit down wherever and whenever you so need to do" (1.2).

Figure 26: Miranda explains her new chair-based fashion line. (1.2)

Iris Marion Young notes that "feminine bodily existence is also self-referred to the extent that a woman is uncertain of her body's capacities and does not feel that its motions are entirely under her control" (150). Under Young's conception of the uncontrollable female body, the woman contains her body because she is unsure of its capacities and her control over them, yet

Hart's uncontrollable body is decidedly uncontained. Miranda is not portrayed as being fully in control of her limbs, yet she moves anyway, and her movement patterns are often depicted as deliberate choices that make her life more fun. As Boyle notes, Miranda's "bumbling inability to deal with inanimate objects is juxtaposed with sudden lightness, as she dances, leaps and occasionally gallops through the world" (87). After fumbling a flirt with Gary, Miranda turns to the camera and comments "Luckily, I enjoy living alone" (1.1), with the camera cutting to a flashback shot of Miranda bouncing around her apartment in a velcro bodysuit, trying to catch a number of projectile tennis balls with the surface of her body. She also advocates galloping as a way to "make commuting fun" (1.3), spontaneously performs desktop karaoke during an interview, dances spasmodically, and has absurd physical competitions with Stevie that include a contest to pop the most bubble wrap by rolling across it, and a kangaroo hopper race across a floor riddled with tacks. As much as Miranda's body is verbally disparaged by others, and her loose embodiment is conveyed as being her greatest source of embarrassment, she also embraces it as an instrument that generates delight.

Miranda's symbolic arrested development is conveyed as a refusal to grow up, and an inability to master the expected grace of mature womanhood. In "The Dinner Party," after she spends two days attempting to be "a functioning adult in a mature relationship" (3.3) with new boyfriend Mike Jackford, Miranda reaches a breaking point at the titular dinner party and proclaims:

> *Miranda*: For the last two days I've tried to be a grown up but I have no interest in abiding by the adult rulebook. I want to do fun things that make me happy which by the way, for the record, include making vegetapals. Meet Mr. Butternut. You might call me a child. Good. For if adults had even the slightest in-the-moment joy of a child then frankly the world would be a better place. (3.3)

Even though her movement and demeanour are conveyed as being childlike, her size means that she can never fully re-embody childhood. Writing about short women and consumer publics, Anu Valtonen characterizes the short female body as "*remaining* a girl. It is a story of a female consuming body that has failed in the culturally important process of growing up" (207, emphasis in original). Valtonen, who identifies herself as being five feet tall, goes on to note that her experience of being visually read as a child and thus infantilized "displaces [her] body from

the category of adulthood, which in Western understanding is *the* category that occupies power" (208, emphasis in original). Height is tied into a cultural narrative that bodies are ultimately expected to literally grow *up*, and failing to do so renders one's embodiment physically outside that which is recognized as adult. Yet on the flipside, tall people break past the visual category of child while still chronologically children, and as Arianne Cohen notes in *The Tall Book*, "Many tall kids experience a distinct loss of childhood," and their "small-and-adorable years [are] a fleeting experience" (78, 77).

So while the short female body is forced to *remain* a girl, the tall female body is unable to physically manifest girlishness. As such, Miranda's juvenile behaviour renders comedic on her large body, the joke landing in the fact that she has both *not* grown up and grown up *too much.* While Miranda regularly likens her shorter friend Stevie to a child, Miranda's inner child is not visible on her body, but rather bursting out of her, and her enthusiasm for childlike activities is often overwhelmed or prohibited by her size. In "The New Me," Miranda opens the episode by noting that her bed broke from "too much action," which a quick flashback then reveals to be Miranda exuberantly jumping on her bed while trying to catch snacks in her mouth before it cracks and collapses (2.1). After a series of mishaps, which include being mistaken for an employee at the bed shop, Miranda ends up bringing home a princess-themed child's loft bed, complete with a slide, a ball pit, and curtained turret over the ladder that she claims will make mornings a "total joy," despite the shop assistant clarifying that they're "great for kids" (2.1). The "total joy" of a fun bed prioritizes the emotional experience over the impracticality of fitting a tall body into a twin-size loft bed, and the credits roll to Miranda, Stevie, and Penny hanging out on various parts of Miranda's new bed to the tune of "It's Raining Men."

Tall women in particular burst through *girl* and into *woman* before being truly ready, but the crux of the matter is that their bodies don't stop there, and continue to grow *past* the visual category of woman, into something beyond. As Anne Hole notes, the large female body is simultaneously "more-than-woman" and "less-than-woman," having "overflow[ed] its allotted space in signification that cannot be confined to the category of woman" (318). Having extended past the bounds which delineate the amount of space a woman is allowed, a woman's size then becomes associated with masculinity, as largeness as viewed as not only more common among men, but more permissible. When invoking Miranda's height in mockery, a number of jabs and insults imply that she is inadequate in her womanhood, likening her both to being male, and to

categories of "other," and in doing so, seek to dilute Miranda's sense of being a woman by implying that she cannot properly occupy that category.

Within minutes of the first episode's opening, Miranda is called "Sir" by a man delivering a package to her joke shop. She notes, with a cocked eyebrow and a slow blink, that "It's fine when they're not really looking, notice the height, call me 'Sir', look up, 'Oh sorry, *madam'*—he looked straight at me, still thought 'Sir' was the right option" (1.1). Aaron Devor notes that when discerning a stranger's gender, "a single strong visual indicator of maleness tend[s] to take precedence…over almost any number of indications of femaleness" (48), with Miranda's height signalling male more than her other characteristics. After Miranda gripes to Stevie about "how could a *man* think a woman is a man?", Stevie unzips Miranda's sweatshirt and suggests that she "get [her breasts] out" (1.1), placing the onus with Miranda to emphatically convey herself as female. In the third season, Miranda's mother even notes to Miranda's new boyfriend Michael that her daughter "has great childbearing hips, and in the right wedding dress, wouldn't look like a transvestite" (3.2), and Miranda is similarly offended when a random customer mocks her karaoke choice of Lisa Stansfield's "All Woman" by following up Miranda's sung lyrics of "I may not be a lady…" by tacking on "…but from a distance I can pass as one" (2.3). The offence of being mistaken for a man, or even worse, a "transvestite," positions trans women as the ultimate other against who Miranda can assert her femininity: her height might convey masculinity, but she is otherwise "all woman, Monday to Sunday inclusive" (2.3). Masculinity and being less-than-woman are asserted as insults against Miranda because they are simultaneously true and *not* true: her height renders her body less explicitly feminine, but Miranda herself is put forward as unequivocally female.

Big One and Small One: Miranda and Stevie's Double Act

Miranda's onscreen interactions with her much shorter friend Stevie invoke height visually and discursively. A common sight gag that gets exaggerated as the series goes on is both women drinking tea from mugs that are comedically out of proportion with their body size, building to a crescendo in the third season when Stevie drinks from a polka-dot mug the size of her head, while Miranda sips from a doll-size tea cup.

While their friendship is characterized by its "warmth and heart" (*The Best of Miranda*, "Series One, Episode One: Date"), Stevie directly insults Miranda's appearance more than any

other character, though Hart notes she had to "work on the tone of Miranda and Stevie lovingly teasing rather than ever being offensive to each other. It was a celebration of women and all their marvelous forms, not an attack" (*The Best of Miranda*, "Series One, Episode One: Date"). Stevie affectionately refers to Miranda as "my enormous colleague" (1.6) and "my massive friend" (3.5), and when Miranda refers to a luncheon with her boarding school friends as "what us *elegant* girls about town do," Stevie laughingly retorts "Don't you mean *elephant* girls?" (1.1). Miranda targets Stevie's shortness as much as Stevie targets Miranda's tallness. Stevie's height-related remarks towards Miranda imply that Miranda is failing at womanhood because she is too tall to be feminine, while Miranda's jabs at Stevie pinpoint her shortness as an infantilized characteristic. Miranda compares a huffed-up Stevie to "strutting like a toddler modelling Baby Gap" (3.5), responds to Stevie's reminder that Miranda has to shop in "specialist clothes shops" by reminding Stevie that at least she "can get on all the rides at Thorpe Park" (1.1), and when Stevie comments that they "are grown women," Miranda retorts back, "Well, *one of us* is grown" (3.4).

Both women regularly partake in silly competitions from eating contests to bubble-wrap bursting races to vying for the same man's attention, and alternately use their specific physicality to their own advantage. Miranda has a habit of pushing over Stevie when she finds her irritating, Hart extending her arm straight out sidewise while a seemingly-immobilized Sarah Hadland thunks straight onto the floor (fig. 27).

Figure 27: One of many scenes of Miranda tipping Stevie over. (1.1)

Stevie regularly asserts herself as being more desirable than Miranda (with the specific recurring reference to her having "the *allure*"), and Stevie is more socially adept, coming out on top of almost every verbal argument. Yet Miranda's response is to consistently assert her own

physical superiority in the capacities of her body: regardless of her inability to manage her own body or verbally assert herself, she can still get her way by pushing others around. Miranda's height enables her *physical* power over Stevie sheerly by virtue of being larger, but Stevie also regularly pulls it out as an emotional weak spot, discursively bringing it up as a negative.

The comedic interplay of Miranda and Stevie's height disparity, which was a deliberate casting choice[24], is heavily employed in the season one episode "Dog." Miranda and Stevie discover a handsome customer has left his wallet behind, and using clues from the contents of his wallet, embark on competing missions to woo the customer. When Miranda posits that "maybe he left it for [her]," Stevie bursts into laughter and explains:

> *Stevie*: You know, I'm not being rude, but if someone's choosing between us, I mean come on, they'll choose me. You know, I'm not being rude, but you know, you're just a bit unusual. No, I'm not being rude—he'd have to get to know you to find you attractive. (1.6)

After pointing out that "saying 'I'm not being rude' before something rude doesn't make it not rude," Miranda squares off against Stevie with both of their hands on their hips, and commenting "Oh, feeling small?" (1.6). Stevie's response is to pull over a cutesy child-size chair and stand on it, raising her overall verticality so that she is looking down on Miranda.

When "wallet guy" returns to the shop, Miranda intercepts Stevie's attempts to hand him the wallet by physically grabbing it, resulting in a tug-of-war over the wallet between both women with Miranda looming over Stevie. While Miranda wins and is the one to hand over the wallet, Stevie steps forward to flirt and Miranda automatically pushes her backwards, awkwardly mimicking Stevie's flirty movements. Later on, after they both notice that "wallet guy" has a dog, Stevie re-enters the shop with a Great Dane in tow, ostensibly adopted as a wooing tactic. A flabbergasted Miranda notes that "it's lucky you got a small one so you could keep it to yourself—put a saddle on that, you could ride it!", and when "wallet guy" comments that he might see Stevie at the dog park, Miranda steps up and adopts her own dog, a tiny Chihuahua named Titan who is small enough to fit under Miranda's jacket. In contrast to their normal dynamic, a group of teenage boys come over to coo at Titan, while shooting Stevie's Great Dane a look of disdain, the size of each woman's dog overriding their actual appearance.

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24 In an interview with *Radio Times*, Hart notes, "I knew I wanted the actor who played Stevie to be short. I love the comedy of height incongruity. That's where height is a huge advantage—it makes slapstick comedy seem more natural" (Hart in Armstrong 18)

"She's Not Obese - It Was Panning!": Fatness and Food

Beyond her height, the show highlights Miranda's largeness in other ways. In the first episode, Miranda reluctantly states her dress size as a "Ten…ten-ty," before whispering "I'm a size twenty" (1.1). Hart's stated dress size puts her into the plus size category[25], and "Date" also sees her mention having to shop in "specialist clothes shops" like "Big and Long" (1.1). However, Hart wearing a UK size twenty at 6'1" manifests much differently on her body than it would proportionally on a much shorter woman. The characterization of Miranda as fat—and it should be noted that the term is mostly used as a pejorative—draws much more on her dress size, and the sheer amount of body she possesses than it does relate to her proportions. Miranda's discursively-ascribed "fatness"[26] plays into a convention that any large woman, regardless of the actress's actual fitness and diet, must be constructed as a lazy overeater in order to explain her body as deviating from expected slenderness.

While Hart's use of her body in *Miranda* plays into conventions of the use of fat bodies in comedy, adding in (and occasionally substituting) the dimension of height, simply placing her in the "fat" camp of women's bodies ignores the fact that her body looks very different from most "fat" bodies normally displayed on television. This is likely due to the fact that tallness and fatness are normally conveyed as mutually exclusive characteristics, as if it is only slightly permissible for a woman to be fat or to be tall, but to be doubly so is an even bigger violation of gendered body norms. Hart's body stands out as unusual through the juxtaposition of her with the other female characters, all of whom are petite and blonde, including Miranda's mother Penny.

Penny's criticisms of her daughter's body frequently characterize her as fat or obese, as well as commenting on Miranda's seemingly ravenous appetite. In "Je Regret Nothing," following up a statement that Miranda weighed ten pounds at birth, Penny comments:

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25 A UK size 20 corresponds roughly to a US size 16 or 18.

26 While I embrace the term fat as both a joyful claiming of one's plumpness, and as a neutral descriptor of bodies that are large, fleshy, or a combination of the two, I am hesitant to apply it to Miranda Hart's body as an objective signifier. This hesitance doesn't preclude it being applied to tall bodies at all, but rather I seek to emphasize that height needs to be accounted for in how we discuss bodies, and how we delineate *what* fatness is, without demonizing it as a characteristic. Discourses of fatness are embedded in euphemisms with women of any size using it to disparage others' bodies as well as their own, yet mainstream "uplifting" depictions of bodies that are *actually* fat avoid the word vehemently, going instead for curvy, voluptuous, or plus size.

Penny: Will you stop wallowing like an oversized walrus?

Miranda: Walruses are already oversized!

Penny: That's my point, you're massive! Like the day you were the day I pushed you out through my— (3.4)

Unlike Stevie's jabs, Penny's criticisms of Miranda's size rarely mention height specifically, which draws attention to a crucial difference between how height and weight are regarded: weight can go down, height can't. The cultural condemnation of fatness plays into a narrative of personal improvement, that weight exists to be lost (regardless of how that actually works out on individual bodies), and the failure to do so "is seen as a moral or mental flaw" (Hole 319). Penny berating Miranda for her weight ultimately boils down to a desire to change her, supposedly for the better, and incorporating Miranda's height (which, after her father appears in the second season, does not seem to come from either side of the family) would target the unchangeable. So long as she sees Miranda's size as a failure to regulate her own appetite, Penny can hold onto the belief that a better, slimmer daughter lies within the daughter she is constantly disappointed in.

The characterization of Miranda as fat in the season three episode "It Was Panning," which takes its name from Miranda's retort when she is shocked to see herself panned to at the end of a walk and talk news feature on obesity, is contingent on the show having discursively positioned her as such. Penny calls her an "obese destitute" and a "fat temp" (3.1), and leverages Christmas celebrations and the continued existence of Miranda's shop as a supposed motivator to convince Miranda to go on a diet and attend Eaters Anonymous. Even Stevie advises that Miranda "should detox—you're obsessed with food!" and Gary offers to make a "sugar-free beetroot cake" (3.1), but Miranda's horrified reaction at having been supposedly been labelled obese is visually belied by her rampant indulgence in food in the episode. When Miranda later runs into the reporter (Mike Jackford, who she ends up dating), he confirms that it *was* panning and that from his perspective, Miranda is "lovely," which causes Miranda to giddily exclaim "Stevie! It was panning, I'm not obese!" (3.1), and Penny is so thrilled that she includes it in her Christmas letter. The characterization of Miranda as "not obese" still enforces *obese* as a negative category, it's just one that Miranda is spared from being included in.

Miranda having a large appetite also is a common theme throughout the series, and it is addressed with varying levels of celebration and humourous chastising. When eating out with her

boarding school friends, Miranda's shameless appetite stands out against her friends' restricted diets:

> *Tilly*: Gosh, oh, would *love* a pizza, yum—better not. Tricolore salad, please.
>
> *Fanny*: Oh dear—adore a spag bol. Oh no, be good, Fanny, be good. Um, the niçoise for me, please.
>
> *Miranda*: Oh dear lordy—um, well—oooh, ogle the lasagne, look at the lasagne—just the lasagne please, Clive.
>
> *Clive*: Certainly, Queen Kong. (6.1)

The representation of Miranda as having a large appetite simultaneously critiques women's tendency to shame themselves (and others) around food, and utilizes the idea of a woman overconsuming for comedy. According to Laura S. Brown, "Fat oppression carries the less-than-subtle message that women are forbidden to take up space (by being large of body) or resources (by eating food ad libitum)" (qtd. in Hartley 61). Miranda's large appetite is seen as directly correlated with her size, linking fatness with an "uncontrolled hunger, unbridled impulses, and uninhibited desire" (Stukator 199). Susan Bordo states that in a culture that overwhelmingly encourages women to "live in a constant state of denial" through dieting, "food is a perpetually beckoning presence, its power growing ever greater as the sanctions against gratification become more stringent" (103). Showcasing Miranda's gleeful and unrestrained consumption of food onscreen demonstrates the unruly behaviour by her visually stuffing her face, not just symbolically violating norms that woman should not eat too much, but in the process of her eating, indelicately engaging her body in demonstrably graceless consumption.

In *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*, Kathleen Rowe notes "That the unruly woman eats too much and speaks too much is no coincidence; both involve failure to control the mouth" (43). Miranda explicitly hasn't "been blessed by the goddess of socializing" (Penny in 1.6), and has a habit of "lying to impress" when she "get[s] nervous socially" (Miranda in 1.1), running her mouth into often absurd tales like having two children named Orlando and Bloom who froze to death (1.1), planning to "breed horse-dogs" (3.5), or being unable to attend a party because she's "baking a hedgehog for [British politician] Tony Benn's anniversary" (1.5), and she spontaneously bursts into song whether one is playing or not.

"If Any Boom-Boom Flesh Appears": Dressing and Undressing the Unruly Woman

The unruliness of Miranda's body spills out in ways beyond her mouth. Miranda's size makes it difficult for her to find clothes to begin with, and she notes that "Just because people are taller or bigger than average, why do we have to shop in patronizingly-named places?" (1.1), but she is also portrayed as being unable to properly manage how her body is clothed.

In "Date," Miranda aims to find a feminine outfit in a larger size to wear on a date. With no luck at the patronizingly-named "Big and Long," Miranda inadvertently wanders into a drag shop called "Transformers," noting, "I'm looking for something flattering for me, and *really* feminine. This might sound ridiculous, but I often get called 'Sir'" (1.1). The shopkeeper reads Miranda as a man looking to dress in women's clothing, commenting on her "lovely, shapely, ladylike curves" (1.1). His height-based reading of Miranda as a lady*like* man attempting to "pass" as female through drag constructs her femininity as a costume. Miranda then returns to her own shop clad in a purple sequinned evening gown with billowy chiffon sleeves (fig. 28), which causes one of her customers to mistake her as a drag queen, commenting, "It's amazing, it's so feminine. I mean seriously, you could *pass*" (1.1).

Figure 28: Miranda shows off her new date night outfit. (1.1)

Even misunderstanding the queer sense of passing (that is, being correctly read as the gender one is performing, usually in the context of transitioning individuals), Miranda is thrilled to "pass," feeling like she has been awarded access to the heterofemininity she so desperately craves. In this moment, Miranda feels like she has adequately conveyed her femininity, but it is again ultimately conveyed as a failure of communication, her body coding her femininity in such an over-the-top manner that it crosses territory into maleness. Talia Mae Bettcher notes a "referential structure… whereby female and male modes of nakedness are replaced by female

and male modes of clothed presentation respectively" (329). Unlike Brienne and Beiste, Miranda's liminality of gendered signifiers is not constructed as a deliberate adoption of a masculine aesthetic, but as a double-bind. Even in feminine attire, Miranda's tall body reads not necessarily as *presenting masculine*, but as actually having male genitals, wherein lies Miranda's frustration as she lividly remarks, "I wear normal every-day clothes; I get called 'Sir.' I actually make an effort; *I am a transvestite!*" (1.1).

The shop assistant and the customers' readings of Miranda as "gorgeous and feminine" but "for a *man*," as Miranda exclaims irately, place her body in the space between established genders of male or female, her shape coding female while her height codes male. Both men—who are themselves coded as gay through flamboyant speech and mannerisms—recognize that Miranda *wants* to see herself as a "lady" and compliment her as being "naturally very feminine," yet it is their reading of her as having specific genitals that ultimately causes offence. Bettcher argues that "the very referential system through which the intimate boundaries are constituted requires a binary: without the possibility of misrepresentation, there could be no possibility of correct representation" (331). Throughout "Date," Miranda's *body* is itself constituted as failure of femininity, rather than her presentation having failed to sartorially communicate femaleness. On the tall body, gendered cues that normally code female (such as flowery t-shirts, a feminine haircut, and women's jeans) can be overshadowed by height and cause the body to be read as male, as evidenced when Miranda is called "Sir" by someone looking right at her.

Later in "Date," Miranda joins her friends Tilly and Fanny as they try on wedding dresses, and after being again called "Sir" by the sales assistant, demands to try on a dress. However, the only dress available in Miranda's size is a frilly princess gown with puffy sleeves that she horrifyingly characterizes as looking like she's had a "chiffon-based anaphylactic shock" (1.1). Miranda's size bars her access to the more elegant gowns that her friends try on, and her performance of femininity is again exaggerated to the extent that it fails. Bridget Boyle notes that "Some female physical comedians go one step further, re-performing their gender so that they are, in effect, women playing men playing women" (80), but the joke in "Date" is that even as Miranda attempts to materialize normative femininity, it reads on her body as costumey and unsuited to her.

However, Miranda is also shown to have difficulty keeping her clothes *on*, and her accidental disrobing is a common motif. In the first episode, she is shown at a club wearing

elastic-waist trousers that fall down while she is dancing, followed by an awkward attempt to pull them up while continuing to dance. When she attempts to take off just her top at a garden party, she ends up pulling her shirt off as well. In "Dog," Miranda and Stevie get trapped inside a park after the gates are locked, and while Stevie and both dogs are able to squeeze through the gap in the gate, Miranda is unable to fit through. In a bizarre attempt to decrease the amount of space she takes up, Miranda removes her jacket and top, only for Gary to come upon her stuck halfway through wearing only a bra. Trying to cover up her mishap, Miranda explains:

> *Miranda*: No, I'm fine. This is planned. I was thinking, what would this gate look like with a bust of me on the side of it, like a prow of a ship? I think it would look good—nay, excellent. (1.1)

The motif of Miranda straight-up *losing* her clothes continues throughout the series, when her dress gets stuck in the back of a cab as it drives off, leaving her running down the street in a bra and tights to both her own embarrassment and the horror of her friends. Bettcher notes that "differential structures" of nudity "provide[] for the possibility of female 'toplessness' and 'bottomlessness' and hence affords nakedness twice over" (326). As "*naked* is defined relative to *clothed*" (322, emphasis in original), the construction of Miranda as specifically *half*-naked (as her friend Fanny notes) is always rooted in the process of the clothes coming off. The most "private" parts are always covered up by bras, underwear, and tights, and as such Miranda's disrobing constitutes more of a social violation than a decency violation.

The accidental disrobing signifies Miranda's inability to properly contain her body as a social faux pas while highlighting her inability to control it, a tendency that embarrasses her and horrifies her friends. When preparing to attend swanky rowing event Henley Regatta, Tilly and Fanny give Miranda a severe warning on how to behave:

> *Tilly*: Yes. A pretty little plea, oh lady o'head. Can we for once, please, at a social *occasioné*, not reveal our breasts?! The "chesticles."
>
> *Fanny*: You're always half-naked in public. You're Rafael *Nude*-al[27].
>
> [Tilly and Fanny give examples.]
>
> *Fanny*: It defo can't happen at Henley. Royalty present.

27 A play on tennis player Rafael Nadal.

> *Tilly*: Yes, Kong, if any boom-boom flesh appears, I personally shall put you in the river and fact, mug fact, there are pike. (1.6)

Tilly's reference to "boom-boom flesh" highlights the crux of why Miranda's accidental disrobing is so disdained. Miranda is not just inadvertently exposing her body in inappropriate situations, but exposing a body that is outside the norm of what is considered attractive. Miranda's specific references to her body's fleshiness establish it as grotesque and unusual, but simultaneously normal and average. She juxtaposes herself against other women who "don't have flesh that moves independently to their frame" (2.1), and when trying to cancel a gym membership, points to a slender gym patron and notes that "Gyms are not for people like me, they're for people like *her*—you stretchy freak!" She later refers to the gym patron as "a piece of lycra carrying a woman" and identifies herself as part of a majority paying for the gym's upkeep through their unused memberships, nothing that they "may not be the majority in terms of numbers, but pound for pound, there's more of us" (1.3).

Her flesh is viewed as something that ultimately needs containment, both by herself and others, with Gary's season three girlfriend Rose noting that for Miranda to wear a little black dress, she'll need "some Spanx—suck all this in, might need full-body ones" (3.2). Miranda tries on the dress, but after stage-whispering to Stevie that she needs a bigger size and carelessly placing the dress on a rack that gets wheeled away, ends up stuck in the middle of the trendy shop wearing only a bra and leggings (fig. 29), much to the horror of Stevie and Rose.

Figure 29: Miranda loses her dress in a trendy shop, much to the dismay of Rose (l) and Stevie (centre). (3.2)

After the shop assistant announces to the entire shop that someone has left their "clown outfit in the dressing room," Miranda grabs the microphone and rants to the entire shop that her

clothes only look big because "they're worn by the type of woman who sports something you might not have heard of—called flesh! That's flesh! Because we like something called cake! Cake!" (3.2). The announcement both reclaims the abjectness of her body while reiterating it, as Linda Mizejewski notes that "women who embody carnivalesque grotesquery [are scrutinized] in that woman's bodies are already under suspicion as contemptible; most likely this body is 'mocked because it does not comply with cultural codes of female beauty,' even if women audience members admire its indiscretions" (22).

Miranda's approach to intentional nudity, whether partial or otherwise, varies depending on the comedic circumstances. Ironically, in "A New Low," Miranda also notes that she has a "massive problem with nudity" (2.4), and nervously covers her body with a towel while changing in a swimming pool locker room, freaking out when a woman next to her strips completely. She cites nudity as an issue particularly in relation to her nervousness around consummating her relationship with Gary, and decides to "ring and say I want to be the life model for the art class. Well if I can get naked with a bunch-o-strangers, there'll be no shyness tonight. I will have claimed my nude-nisity" (2.4). Contrastingly, in "It Was Panning," after Miranda's shop has (momentarily) gone under, Miranda arrives at her new temp job wearing a professional pantsuit, only for it to get caught in the elevator and rip off at the knee. She pretends the wardrobe malfunction was intentional, citing a "very hot leg" (3.1), but then spends the episode trying to fit into a corporate environment and perform a confusing job. Frustrated with the office's dour atmosphere, Miranda stands up in a professional development workshop and orates to the room: "Have you ever walked past this meeting room and flashed during an important meeting? If not, *why not*?", announcing that she is "determined to get [her] beautiful shop back" (3.1). Miranda then struts out of the meeting, only to rush back and pull up her top as she presses her bust against the window (fig. 30).

Figure 30: Miranda flashing her temporary colleagues. (3.1)

The visual regularity of Miranda's accidental disrobing performs a second function, namely reiterating to the audience that while Miranda's frame leads her to being mistaken for male, she is, underneath her clothes, "all woman," relying on a set of secondary sex features to emphasize and validate her gender. Miranda Hart's large breasts are approached with a mix of playfulness and disdain, repeatedly mentioned both in relation to and outside the fleshiness of the rest of her body. Breasts function as a strong symbol of femininity, but Miranda's engagement with them is decidedly indelicate, conveying them alternately as unruly and inconveniencing globes of flesh, a source of entertainment, or a reminder of Miranda's womanness. While nervously fibbing to Gary that she is an Olympic gymnast, she comments that she wasn't "on telly much" because "I'm in the bustier section. Less televised. Only in widescreen. Gymnasts—busty, is the category" (1.1). In the final episode, Miranda notes checking off a bucket-list item of "hit[ting] the offender with [her] bosom" if she gets called 'Sir' (4.2), emphasizing them both as weapons and as symbols of femininity. Her mother calls them "The Mirandas," noting that "they move independently—she has the nipple equivalent of a lazy eye" (3.1).

Miranda's breasts are referenced both verbally and played with visually, even though they are never seen outside her bra (though Miranda is often seen in *only* her bra). Miranda notes to a stranger at a bar, "When I'm naked in bed and I roll over, my breasts clap" (1.5), a remark that is picked up on in "The Perfect Christmas" when her decision not to wear a bra while platonically sharing a bed with Gary results in an actual, audible clap, much to her embarrassment. Her comment to Stevie that "If I jogged without a bra it'd look like I was smuggling ferrets in my armpits" (3.2) is prefaced by an earlier scene where Miranda explains that she has to "hold them when running" while doing so (3.1).

Miranda's overall fleshiness is portrayed as grotesque and undesirable, but bustiness is a rare category of bodily abundance that is not only acceptable for women, but positioned as intrinsically feminine. The jokes around Miranda's breasts, and her overall enjoyment of them—she notes weighing them independently to see how much they cost to post, and decorating them to look like Irish popstars Jedward—emphasize them as a high signifier of femininity and sexuality, but also a strange indicator of sexual "looseness" through her playful engagement with them. In *Miranda*, breasts alternately function as a symbol of sexuality and womanhood, and as a bizarre arrangement of flesh that can on their own be unruly.

Flirting at Six Foot One

Miranda's size and unruliness are presented most notably as an obstacle to landing a man, something Miranda is alternately desperate for and immensely averse to. Miranda is shown throwing herself at almost any man who shows her attention, often to the effect of comic failure, but also notes, after being set up by her mother: "Why can't she hear I don't want to get married? I mean, everyone else knows I hate the idea of intimacy. I hate the idea of someone knowing everything about me" (1.5).

Her overbearing mother Penny expresses constant disappointment in her unmarried thirty-something daughter, often going to comically desperate measures to marry her off such as advertising her on the street, and suggesting on various occasions that she marry her cousin, a glue-sniffer who is "blessed groinally," or "the Middleton brother" (4.2). When Miranda *does* receive male attention, Penny is overjoyed and throws herself into helping Miranda sustain the relationship. In "What a Surprise," Penny petitions that Miranda, who has been called into police custody for impersonating a police officer, should be let go because "this woman has a second date tonight. *These* don't get second dates" (3.2), positioning her daughter as abject even as she advocates for her. Penny approaches her daughter with well-meaning disparagement, highlighting her low sexual capital while seeking to further it, and holding up marriage and heteronormativity as proof that she has succeeded as a parent and an opportunity to show up her friends who have more stereotypically successful children. When Miranda receives two simultaneous proposals towards the series' end, Penny is ecstatic and can't wait to lord it over "anyone who thought Miranda's only long-term relationship would be with Dairy Milk" (4.1).

Even as Miranda expresses opposition to her mother's goal of marriage, she seems to crave male companionship both affectively and symbolically, and her inability to achieve this is associated with her embodiment, and frequently used for comedy. Miranda notes directly to the camera, "Okay yes, I get in a dating state. But that's just boarding school for you. Starved of male company for years, still now when a bloke says hi, I think 'Nice spring wedding!'" (1.5).

Her lack of sexual and romantic experience and activity is regularly drawn on as a source of humour through their very mentioning, and used as comedic awkwardness when she tries to act sexually and have others see her in a "sexual light" (1.2). Her early observation that the chocolate penises sold in the shop are "quite realistic" (1.1), especially when juxtaposed against Stevie's ambivalent response and a desperate look at the camera seeking affirmation, infers that she has little, if any, hands-on experience with the actual organ. In the first episode, she mentions that her dinner date with long-term crush Gary is her "first one," before she embarrassingly corrects it to be "first one of the *many* others I've also had" (1.1). Her attempts to say the word "sex" aloud sound more like a nasal clicking noise, and Stevie regularly brags of her own possession of "the *allure*", in contrast to Miranda, who Stevie characterizes as "just very British" in demeanour (1.2), and "a bit unusual" in physical appearance (1.6). In "Before I Die," while registering for a parachute jump, she responds to the assistant's repeated queries about when she "last had intercourse" (in order to assure she would not be pregnant) by loudly declaring that she hasn't "had sex for three years" (2.2). The declaration interestingly juxtaposes a supposedly shameful period of celibacy against prior evidence that she had been sexually active before. In relation to Miranda's history of sexual experience, *Miranda* treads a strange line around what levels of sexual experience can be considered comically low for an adult woman, without fully conveying her as having *zero* sexual experience.

Miranda's height also specifically positions her as less feminine, and therefore less desirable in a heterosexual relationship. Arianne Cohen notes that "many social assumptions and needs are wrapped up in partner height" (165), and there is a "strong norm favoring men being taller in relationships that nearly all men and women endorse as ideal" (Salska et. al 206). Jo-Anne Rayner et al. note that the "association of femininity with heterosexual desire is expressed in statements about male partnering, social expectations that women should be shorter than men… References to 'normal' female height within this language suggest that 'tall' girls have failed femininity" (1082). In "Excuse," Miranda expresses how her height affects her dating life:

> *Miranda*: I mean, I hate to be anywhere that might involve flirting, which let me tell you, at six foot one, is not easy. No one's ever taller than me; I spend my time lowering the height with the forward knee bend. (1.5)

Miranda then demonstrates this pose (fig. 31) to Stevie and a customer, showing the irony that to lower her body's verticality, she must over extend it horizontally, which has its own challenges.

> *Miranda*: Trouble is your arms are disproportionally wrong, which is weird. And moving off becomes tricky. They'll ask me for a drink, I'll have to follow them to the bar like this. (1.5)

Figure 31: Miranda demonstrating her flirting pose. (1.5)

Not only is the "forward knee bend" visually perplexing, it also presents genuine challenges to movement, with Miranda prioritizing the minimizing of her verticality over her overall comportment. In dialogue, Miranda describes this position as if it actually makes her appear shorter, instead of merely lowering her head, but in actuality she just looks more like a tall body crumpled into itself, unable to properly support itself. The scene in the shop is meant to be humourous, demonstrating the bizarre yet hypothetical lengths Miranda is willing to go to lower her verticality (and as such appear shorter), but later in the episode, when Miranda ends up on an actual blind date with a considerably shorter man known as Dreamboat Charlie, she automatically drops her knees (fig. 32).

Figure 32: Miranda attempting to lower her height on a date with "Dreamboat" Charlie. (1.5)

Beyond his incompatible shortness, Charlie is portrayed as being not only an unsuitable match for Miranda, but a generally repulsive and off-putting person. Miranda's attempt to reduce her height problematizes her body as the one interfering in the ideal dynamic of a taller man and shorter woman, but the trainwreck of a date repositions Charlie as the offending party. Charlie immediately takes hold of Miranda's arm and makes loud kisses along it, creepily sniffs her as he attempts to push her chair in, notes that his nickname "Dreamboat" comes from the name of "a floating brothel" where he "went in with a few needs," and loudly propositions Miranda for a bit of "pumpy the rumpy!" (1.5) Despite Charlie being conveyed as unequivocally wrong for Miranda, he appears thrilled with the match and leeringly comments, "Blimey, Tilly got this right, what! She *knows* I fancy women I wouldn't necessarily beat in a fight" (1.5), fetishizing her size as beneficial to his desires, and following a cultural pattern of "placing very tall women on a pedestal of intimidation they didn't create themselves" (Cohen 161).

In *The Unruly Woman*, Kathleen Rowe relates the archetype of the sexually aggressive "woman on top," normally "characterized by excessive size, excessive garrulousness, or both" (37). While Rowe's "woman on top" normally refers to sexually dominance, Miranda's height positions her as literally "ris[ing] above" most men she encounters, and Miranda is thus "neither where she belongs nor in any legitimate position" (43). Miranda's size is again fetishized in "Let's Do It," where Tilly's lecherous and philandering fiancé Rupert "The Bear" aggressively comes on to her, claiming that "Sometimes a man needs a meat feast, rather than a lean chicken salad" (2.3).

The abhorrent unsuitability of Charlie and Rupert is contrasted against Miranda's two genuine love interests, Mike and Gary. Both men are handsome and close to Miranda's height[28], and neither man cites her size or appearance as negatively affecting their attraction to her. Gary is introduced in the first episode as being an old friend from university and Miranda's longtime crush, recently hired to work at the the restaurant next door to Miranda's shop after living in Hong Kong for a few years. Gary is portrayed throughout the series as being kind and affable, with Hart describing his initial characterization as "a foil for Miranda" and "a super nice guy" (*The Best of Miranda*, "Series Two, Episode Four: A New Low").

Miranda's relationship with Gary forms a will-they-or-won't-they dance across the entire series, the show presenting a number of obstacles to them actually getting together, from other partners, to nervousness on both sides, to just random series of mishaps. Their early attempts at dating inevitably end in disaster before they can get anywhere, and after Gary reveals in "A New Low" that he has married his friend Tamara so she can get a a green card, he and Miranda agree to just be friends. Yet in a pivotal moment of chemistry and being "on the brink" of a kiss, they reciprocally note that the attraction was due to her being "cutely vulnerable" and him being "manly and dominant" (3.1). While Gary is conventionally attractive, he appears to struggle almost as much with living up to the strictures of masculinity as Miranda does with femininity, alongside the pressure to establish himself as "man enough" for Miranda (2.4). Gary gets jumpy when he hears loud noises, and in "A New Low," Clive, Miranda, and Stevie giggle when he tries to assert himself as being "alpha male" (2.4). Gary responds by re-entering the shop dressed as a builder, speaking in a rough London accent and dipping Miranda expertly. Gary only seems self-conscious of his masculinity when his lack of traditional manliness is pointed out by others, but just as Miranda's size and clumsiness are not presented as being a deterrent to his attraction to Miranda, Miranda has little expectation for her partners to be uber-masculine despite playfully mocking Gary as being "nervous voting for *Strictly [Come Dancing]* and [being] scared of mice and geese" (S03E05).

In the third season, after deciding to just be friends, Miranda begins dating local reporter Mike Jackford, and Gary finds a young, petite girlfriend named Rose, who unlike Miranda is able to sit on Gary's lap and jog without a bra. Hart notes that her end goal of the third season

28 Tom Ellis, who plays Gary, is listed on IMDB as being 6'3", while Bo Poraj, who plays Mike, is 6'1".

was for Miranda and Gary to get together, but that she "had to keep them apart until the final episode of the series, and the only way to do that was to have them date other people" (*The Best of Miranda*, "Series Three, Episode Three: The Dinner Party"). Mike is presented as affable and a devoted boyfriend, whose interest in Miranda is presented plainly and completely apart from any external positioning of her as unattractive and oversized. He is shown to not only tolerate her quirks, but also finds her endearing, and takes the initiative to ask her out. Like Gary, Mike is presented as a neutral love interest, his relationship with Miranda standing completely apart from any external dubiousness about his attraction to her, even as her friends express doubt that he could generally be interested in her. After he asks Miranda out, Tilly surprisingly comments, "Sorry, confused—a man who's already spent time with you wants to see you again?" (3.2). Mike's neutrality—almost to the point of blandness—both differentiates him from the dichotomized representation of other men as being either out of Miranda's league, put off by her personality and lack of social graces, or appallingly inappropriate, but also enables Miranda's mishaps to stand out as the inability to properly navigate an adult relationship, without any real consequence of Mike losing interest in her. In "The Dinner Party," despite noting that "elegance in the world of romance eludes [her]," Miranda throws herself into "proving [her]self a good lady-woman for Mike" (3.4) by trying to fulfill a specific idealized role. Yet at the end of the episode, when Miranda bursts out that she's tired of putting on a façade, Mike gets up and exclaims, "These last two days I've been worried that you weren't who I thought you were because I was falling in love with you. Your ridiculous sense of humour and your smile and the way you bring me out of my boring shell… I love you, Quirky" (3.4).

The romantic triangle between Mike and Gary comes to a head in the final two episodes of the third season, when Miranda's inability to tell Mike she loves him causes her to realize she's in love with Gary. Over a succession of foibles, Miranda breaks up with Mike, and gets together with Gary only to realize that Gary has trouble vocalizing *his* feelings for *her*, and the episode culminates with Mike returning and appealing through the grand gesture of a proposal, which Gary counters with his own proposal (fig. 33).

Figure 33: Miranda in the restaurant, surrounded by (from left) Charlie, Stevie, Penny, and Tilly, with her two potential fiancés, Gary and Mike, on bended knee. (4.1)

The final specials, which aired over the 2014/2015 holiday season, showcase Miranda's agonizing qualms over which man to pick, torn between Mike's devotion and promise that he "know[s] how happy you'd make me, and I'd treasure you forever" (4.1), and Gary being "the love of [her] life" (Stevie in 4.1). Both men ultimately place the decision with Miranda (albeit for a brief slap-fight between after Mike calls Gary pathetic), and Miranda's choice of Gary results in a relatively uncomplicated and lust-fuelled rush to consummate their relationship, momentarily waylaid only by Stevie's obliviousness to their evening plans being more intimate than their latest instalment in "snack Olympics." After Stevie fails to catch a hint, Gary loads her up with her purse and jacket like a coat rack and carries her out of the apartment, and he and Miranda rush into the bedroom to have sex.

The lack of visible onscreen intimacy beyond kissing leads to the presumption that the events themselves went smoothly, in distinctive contrast to previous romantic mishaps. The morning after, Miranda appears in the doorway, Gary's plaid shirt draping off her shoulders, and says seductively notes to the camera, "*Everything*'s changed" (4.1). Despite the fact that Miranda Hart and Tom Ellis are relatively similar in size, the shirt is distinctly oversized on Miranda. Gary appears shortly after to wrap his arms around her from behind, affectionately walking them over to the counter to make tea (fig. 34).

Figure 34: Gary and Miranda the morning after. (4.1)

The size similarity gives Miranda an avenue to fit into heteronormativity without her size being presented as either a symbolic or literal obstacle, or visually disrupting the heteronormative expectation that a man must be taller than his female partner. Ralph Keyes notes that "Pairings of tall women and smaller men have always been a source of public curiosity. Equating size with strength as we do, it's impossible to see such a couple and *not* wonder who dominates whom" (139-140). While Miranda's femininity is still viewed as suspect because of her tallness in relation to the overall population (and particular, to other woman), Ellis's height at 6'3" downplays Hart's tallness as a factor that could significantly influence their relationship's power dynamic, and neutralizes any potential gags in relation to size difference, but also de-emphasizes Gary's tallness by having Miranda still be relatively close to his size. Likewise, though Miranda had been previously shown wearing a plaid shirt very similar in style to Gary's, explicitly positioning it as not only being *his* shirt, but also oversized on her situates it within a trope of masculine clothing being permissible on women so long as it reinforces heterofemininity by firmly establishing it as belonging to a male partner, and especially as a follow-up to heterosexual intercourse.

Alluring and Maturing

Beyond resolving the longstanding sexual and romantic tension between Miranda and Gary—though they briefly break up only to spontaneously marry at the episode's end—the last special, "The Final Curtain," depicts a strange yet designedly uplifting conclusion to Miranda's quirks and embodiment. Throughout the episode, and amidst a series of flashbacks to the series' recurring gags, Stevie, Tilly, and Penny note that Miranda's behaviour has changed: she forgets

to eat, considers a bouncy house too childish, smoothly pronounces the word "sex," dons a giraffe onesie out of worry Gary will be too attracted to her in her normal garb, "drink[s] her fruit friends," refrains from pushing Stevie over when she irritates her, and gracefully avoids tripping over a pile of boxes. Her friends worry that the deviation from her usual behaviour is a sign that she's "depressed," "losing it," and that "Kong seems wrong" (4.2), and hold an intervention with a therapist. Miranda rebuffs the intervention, deliberately telling off her mother as being "scared that I'll grow up, because then you won't have a project to distract from your marriage" (4.2). Frustrated with her friends criticizing her for *deviating* from the behaviour they had continually mocked her for, Miranda rises for a final monologue:

> *Miranda*: But what I do know is this: since I split up with Gary, I finally worked out who I am. And there may be no more pushing off the stool, or no more fruit friends, but I'll always gallop with gay abandon, and I'll always find a euphemism in anything. I'll always sing if someone inadvertantly speaks song lyrics, and I'll always love the word plunge. And that's not being a child! It's just sometimes the world needs to be jollied. And Stevie, as for saying that Gary might find me attractive being a bold claim, well, I've also realized that women like me can be sexy. It's just that the world might never affirm it, so it takes us a little longer to realize it. (4.2)

Miranda's sexuality and maturity are positioned as inevitable goals, her awkwardness and childishness only temporary roadblocks to fulfilling the ideal life trajectory of a heterosexual woman. Every other character in *Miranda* has their own flaws aside from regularly disparaging Miranda, but it is only when Miranda matures that theirs stand out, as if Miranda was the barometer against which they judged themselves to be normal. *Miranda* neatly concludes with Miranda and Gary's wedding, affirming Miranda's femininity and desirability while at the same time positioning marriage and heterosexuality as essential to those things being recognized. Aside from her unaddressed weight loss between seasons three and four, Miranda's actual body does not change, and in her rush to interrupt what she thinks is Gary's wedding to another woman, races towards the chapel holding her breasts and farting.

Boyle notes that in *Miranda*, Hart "puts on the mask of beautiful/ugly/good/bad/lover/other, and by the very act of her 'disguise,' stakes a claim for her own, undisguised body, as being worthy to be taken seriously and thus to be seriously funny" (87). Hart's manipulation of

corporeal unruliness engages her body as "a fleshy vehicle" (4.2) that, in its daily routine, alternately manifests grotesqueness, clumsiness, self-assuredness, the ever-coveted *allure*, looseness, agility, shame, delight, and most comprehensively, failure and triumph. Hart demonstrates the manifold states and patterns of being for a female body, rooting them in her own corporeality as a woman who is both unremarkable and spectacular. Miranda the character bridges the "historic binary of 'pretty' versus 'funny'" (Mizejewski 6) not by framing her body as delicate and consistently appealing, but by physically throwing herself into its crudeness and grotesqueries and *still* advocating for her worth in the face of derision, and Hart as writer, creator, and performer orchestrating *Miranda*'s polyphonic tone and empowering her large body to physically, visually, and narratively take up space.

Conclusion

Such Strange Heights

There is a strangeness in writing intimately and intensively about someone else's *real* body in its mediated representation, and in particularly focusing on one trait that people have sought to be seen as more than. There is a strangeness in problematizing the intrusive gaze on female bodies as a core aspect of your work, only to actively invoke that gaze as a core aspect of *doing* that work. I would like to say that there is no way for it *not* to be weird to write about a celebrity's body, but perhaps I was determined to *make* it weird, and to be continually conscious that these three actresses likely did not put their bodies onscreen with any consideration that a Canadian grad student would spend two years comprehensively studying them.

Even as the process of writing critically about these texts became increasingly natural, I want to momentarily sit in this strangeness, and to consider the signifier *tall* outside my own conclusions. There is so much more that a thesis on gender and height could have encompassed, and once upon a naive time, I had planned for it to, not knowing how much I could write on three television characters. This particular thesis ultimately came down to Brienne, Beiste, and Miranda being the three most notably and naturally tall women on television I was aware of. And so, it begs the question, why are *these* three characters the most visibly tall, and why are they written the way they are? That's ultimately what I sought to explore with this thesis, yet even as I notice a bevy of overlapping themes and messages across texts and genres, I still feel hesitant to use them as conclusive statements about what tallness *means*.

So before I wrap up the analysis detailed over the past 100-odd pages, I want to take a moment to briefly consider not *what* it means for a woman to be tall, but *why* it means something at all in the light of its other possible meanings.

The Measure of a Man

CelebHeights.com is a bizarre corner of the internet that more or less does what it says on the tin. The heights of various celebrities are not just listed, but are also debated in almost exhausting detail as commenters try to pinpoint a celebrity's height within fractions of an inch. Posters will try to determine a celebrity's height by examining pictures of them with celebrities of known heights, and through attesting to their own encounters with celebrities at fan

conventions, paying particular attention to shoe heights, posture, and time of day. (Height decreases throughout the day as a person's spine compresses from gravity, and "max morning height" is often held up as the purest measurement.)

While the site's home page emphasizes that it's "light hearted in tone," the comments on each page showcase a veritable battleground of measurable masculinity, posters often determined to pinpoint which celebrities they are—or even *could be*, with the right circumstances—taller than, to often-dizzying minutiae. As a 2015 profile of the site by *BuzzFeed* notes, "The height issue seems to be, well, heightened, for men. The most hotly contested celebrities on the site are all men" (Notopoulos). One of the most notably debated celebrities is American actor Jake Gyllenhaal. The quest to determine which fraction of an inch he stood between 5'11" and 6' was even a subject of the podcast *Mystery Show*, where on behalf of her friend David, host Starlee Kine sought out Gyllenhaal himself through various investigations. The show concluded with Gyllenhaal confirming by phone interview that despite previously claiming to be 6' even, he was "actually five-foot-eleven and one half of an inch" (qtd. in Kine), which David determined as "the *best* possible answer…Because it's *so* easy for him to say 'Yeah, I'm happily six feet'…So I admire that in the spirit of our inquiry, which was to get some hard facts, that Jake Gyllenhaal gave up that half-inch of significant digit" (qtd. in Kine).

Figure 35: Jake Gyllenhaal (left) gets measured by Conan O'Brien (centre) and Starlee Kine (right). (Team Coco)

Yet despite Gyllenhaal's own attestation, the debate on *CelebHeights* continued, and Kine ended up measuring him live on *Conan* (fig. 35), concluding with the help of 6'4" Conan O'Brien that Gyllenhaal was indeed 5'11.5". Gyllenhaal's *CelebHeights* profile now lists him as 5'11.25", commenters drawing on the *Conan* video as a reference while considering its

inaccuracies: Commenter Johno notes “the swaying and twisting of the metal meaure” (sic), and commenter 007 “used [Gyllenhaal’s] eyebrows as a line to create a parallel line from his top of the head to the tape.” Commenter Aaron Zamora pushed the combined obsession with accuracy and superiority even further, asking CelebHeights’ site manager Rob Paul if there was “any chance of [Gyllenhaal] measuring 5'10 3/4 or 5'10 7/8? Or what do you believe that is the shortest that jake can be measured as ?” (sic). Before revealing his height to Kine, Gyllenhaal mused on the meaning of height itself:

> I will say that I’m taller than my sister—she’s three years older than me, so she had a good head start but I caught up and got taller…*But*, as any younger sibling will tell you, they always sorta *feel* taller than you. It really is about what we project onto other people. There are days where I’m sure I seem taller than I am, and there are days where you wake up and…you’re shorter, I think. (qtd in Kine)

Even amongst the technicalities of *measuring* height, the *meaning* of height is ultimately the projection, and that in turn makes people feel a certain size.

Even on a female celebrity’s CelebHeights page, the conversation drifts back to masculinity, such as a debate over how tall Gwendoline Christie would be if she were male (the rough conclusion, summed up by commenter Allie, is that “6'3 Gwen = 6'8 man”). Commenter Ice notes that “the reason why she is the most impressive looking 6’3 person on this site , is because , Ill guarantee you , no man who Rob took a picture with and is listed as 6'3 measures as high as 6'4.5 straight out of bed . If so , he would claim AT LEAST 6'4 , and Rob would also list him as that” (sic). And in response to Christie’s noted pride at her height, commenter Alex states, “Hoping still growing? LOL What's her problem? She's a kind of a freak, she's tall as me, and she's a woman LOL Really rare see a woman so much tall, would be like 200 cm or so for a man.”

I suppose, then, that the answer to “Why does height mean something for women?” is that it *means something for men*, sometimes to an almost fanatic extent. Parody website *ClickHole* spoofed the phenomenon in an article titled “6 Short Male Celebrities to Give You A Fleeting Sense of Superiority - Will the deceptive height of these Hollywood hunks make you feel like a big man? Find out!” The listicle included 5’6” Tom Cruise, and *Harry Potter* star Daniel Radcliffe, who is “only a scant 5’5” - it’s easy to let yourself believe he’s still just a scared little boy, and you’re a big strong man.”

The symbolic counterpart and statistical opposite of being a tall woman is being a short man. In *Size Matters: How Height Affects the Health, Happiness, and Success of Boys—and the Men They Become,* Stephen S. Hall notes that "the fear of remaining forever below average carves one of the deepest furrows in the otherwise hardscrabble surface of a man's emotional and psychological life" (5). When I first conceived of this project a few years ago, a cursory literature review on gender and height turned up Hall's book, published in 2006. Nothing on tall women; yet an entire book on the agony of a boy's body not living up to the strict delineations of embodied masculinity. Hall notes that "Given this universal longing to be tall, and given the emotional distress that short stature can cause, it's surprising how relatively little attention we pay to the subject of growth" (10). Yet Hall's focus on shortness is exclusively male-centric, and while he notes that even though he does not want to "minimize the importance of size issues for girls" (10), he primarily considers girls in relation to their ability "confer dominance on certain boys in the volatile society of developing adolescents" (11).

While I do not want to minimize the challenges that come with being a short man in a society that valourizes male tallness as an arbiter of dominance and masculinity, it's hard not to interpret Hall's words as ultimately reinforcing the importance of hegemonic masculinity. Rather than problematizing *why* we view tallness as an essential trait of manhood, Hall instead bemoans shortness as a disruption to those specifically short men achieving the physical peak of male superiority. Hall's emphasis on "the otherwise hardscrabble surface of a man's emotional and psychological life" (5) pinpoints male shortness as an issue not because it is inherently defective, but because the cumulative ridiculing of shortness causes men "emotional distress," and *that*—the disruption of the male body as superior because the male *mind* is superior—is what constructs short men as being less masculine.

There are certainly advantages to being a tall woman. Aside from the general perks of having a longer body—reaching things up high, seeing over crowds—they mostly come down to power, which has been a central concept in this thesis. I titled this thesis "Upwardly Female" as a play on "upwardly mobile" because I like puns. Yet in a strange significance, it acknowledges the way that tall women fit—or don't fit—into a gendered hierarchy. Moving *upwards* from the supposedly-inferior box of "female" is seen as progress, and in its transgressiveness, a threat that needs to be squashed, contained, or suppressed to maintain male superiority. Yet moving *downwards*—or more accurately, failing to have properly moved upwards in the first place—is

not seen as transgressive, but *re*gressive. Men's height matters because men are supposed to care about power, seen primarily as a competition *between* men over who is most masculine and dominant, with the main role of women is their ability to "confer dominance" onto men (Hall 11).

Tall Tales

In *The Tall Book*, Arianne Cohen notes that when female tallness is appealing or attractive to men, it's positioned as not just an anomaly, but a fetish. As Janet Mereweather comments, men make assumptions about tall women "because of their physicality, and they become the objects of sexual fantasy. And they become sort of fetishized by men who have these domination fantasies" (qtd. in Cohen 172). The term *macrophilia* specifically refers to the sexual fantasy of giantesses, often displayed in pornography "with the male playing the 'smaller' part—entering, being dominated, or even being eaten by the larger being" (Wikipedia, "Macrophilia"). In much more G-rated territory, Kathleen Rowe pays particular attention in *The Unruly Woman* to Miss Piggy, who "rises a full head above" Kermit the Frog, expressing "dominance over the apparent leader of the Muppets," in a trope of "the woman on top" that is "central to a larger tradition of female unruliness" (26). Yet, as Rowe notes, "Kermit's masculinity—even in his courtship of Miss Piggy—is never the focus of our attention" (26). Even as the size disparity is constructed by both parties—and by their puppeteers—Miss Piggy is positioned as the unruly 'other' in this situation, juxtaposed against the neutrality of Kermit's "unobtrusive" gender (26).

Miss Piggy—an anthropomorphized creature made of felt and voiced by a man—is the most *un*real female figure mentioned in this thesis, yet the unruliness of her largeness is strangely reminiscent of the most *real* discourse mentioned in this thesis, Jo-Anne Rayner et. al's study of the "institutional authority of medicine to determine the 'abnormality' of tall stature in women" (1079), a discursive tradition that has the very *real* effect of altering the growth trajectory of actual tall female bodies. The biomedical construction of the tall female body as "abnormal, an 'impaired body', unambiguously lacking femininity" (1079) flows into Miss Piggy's signature "tension between two precariously combined qualities: an outrageously excessive, simpering, preening femininity and a wicked right hook" (Rowe 27).

When female tallness is specifically and visibly characterized as *abnormal* it's almost instinctive to just consider everyone else below a certain eye level as *normal*, but this runs the

risk of eclipsing *shortness*—and in particular *female shortness*—as its own specific category with its own specific signifiers. Anu Valtonen, writing from her own positionality as a very short woman, notes that "The routinized practice to openly comment on body height seems to concern those bodies that do not conform to normalized height standards" (209), particularly noting that being "likened to a child" effectively "summarizes the basic agency for a short woman" (207). Valtonen's article—which, like *Size Matters*, I found early in my research process—serves as a reminder that tallness does just define itself against *average*, but against the other exceptionalities of heighted experience, each category inviting a wealth of further critical attention.

This detour to other possibilities of what tall *could*—and even does—signify outside my research on these three cultural texts brings us back to the work itself, and the signifiers noted, unpacked, and examined throughout. In relation to my findings, I have use the following signifiers to characterize tall female bodies: ugly, undesirable, abject, grotesque, unruly, masculine, unfeminine, "more-than-Woman," "less-than-Woman," deviant, freakish, non-conforming, failed, flawed, "matter-out-of-place," liminal, other, oversized, excessive, intimidating, threatening, powerful, strong, and transgressive.

My only absolute conclusion is that there is no way that these characteristics are objective. It's worlds away from Keyes' list of adjectives commonly applied to tall women: Amazonian, majestic, queenly, regal, statuesque, stunning (117). Yet both sets of signifiers are moveable and even transformative, a duality that opens the door to reclaiming what has been disdained, and questioning what has been valourized. Miranda Hart's list of the "pluses and minuses to being tall" in her essay collection *Is It Just Me?* contains the *exact* same items on each list, only spun differently. Item number eight, "People will describe you as 'statuesque'," can "make you feel rather marvellous and regal. Not to mention highly valuable, much-admired and timeless, like a Greek goddess." But being called statuesque can also make you you "worry [it] might be a euphemism for 'absolutely bloody massive, moss-encrusted and cracked, like a ropey statue in a municipal park'." In the end, the stories we tell about tall bodies are just that: stories, made up to make meaning.

Marie-Laure Ryan notes in *Storyworlds Across Media* that "when a text mentions an object that exists in reality, all the real-world properties of this object can be imparted into the storyworld unless explicitly contradicted by the text" (35). If we replace the word *object* with

embodiment and *storyworld* with *character*, we can begin to understand the feedback loop between televisual bodies and real bodies, ultimately circling back to the falsehood of objectivity. The researching and writing of this thesis was a process that circulated through mediated bodies, real bodies, and my own embodiment. E.A. Grosz notes that "Every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence" (142), and I came into this thesis not without a blank slate and open question in my mind of what *tall*, as a signifier, *could* mean, but, as I noted in my introduction, filtered through a perspective garnered over years as a tall girl and woman watching television. In fact, the actual processes of understanding and creating media are enacted *through* the body: I observed the media through my eyes and ears, I created this thesis with my mind and hands, all while slouching the entirety of my tall frame over a keyboard, and moving my body to different locales where I could write while carrying the physical manifestations of this thesis (laptop, printed notes, books, writing instruments) on my back. Hans Belting notes that "bodies (that is, brains) serve as a living medium that makes us *perceive, project,* or *remember* images and that also enables our imagination to censor or to perform them" (306, emphasis in original).

And tallness, as a defining characteristic, cannot be separated from the *body* that is tall. As I continually unpacked the signifiers of tallness manifested in Brienne's, Beiste's, and Miranda's bodies, and considered the overarching themes within *Game of Thrones*, *Glee*, and *Miranda*, I also began consider a multitude of embodiments that I had not initially thought I would address in a thesis on *tallness* that even now, after writing about them, seem strange. Inhabiting a tall female body is ultimately rooted in inhabiting a *body* to begin with, and that I addressed embodiments such as nudity, clothing, eating, breasts, virginity, girlhood, and violence seems both far-reaching and natural. They're in the text and relate to that specific tall woman's body, so *of course* I'm going to write about them, yet determining their place in a thesis on tallness was fascinating in its trickiness. That these signifiers overlapped across such diversely genred text was equally fascinating, and in concluding this research, does lead to its own sense of these embodiments as immensely powerful, reflecting "those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine, in part, their value, their status, and what will be deemed their appropriate treatment" (Gatens viii).

And so this strangeness returns to the fact that the body is both *always* tall and *more than* tall, engaging in a discourse of what it means to be "more than" in the first place. If height

wasn't a signifier of masculinity and power, if masculinity and power weren't thought to be the exclusive domain of men, if sexual dimorphism wasn't seen as proof that men are more powerful, if male and female and masculinity and femininity weren't viewed as seemingly exclusive poles against which the other was defined, would it even matter if a woman was too tall? Would the concept of *too* tall even exist?

Average and *normal* are themselves impossible constructions that delineate ways in which a body should make itself normal, and in the specific case of the female body, forbid itself from taking up space. Yet as demonstrated by the fact that tallness is "exceedingly visible, defining, and above all unalterable" (Cohen 146) it is impossible for some bodies *not* to take up space. Even if we were to magically strip height of all its gendered signifiers, there would still be the fact that, to quote Morrissey, some girls are bigger than others. Even in my own positionality as a tall woman, it seems ridiculous to end this thesis by campaigning for media to include more unilaterally "positive" depictions of tall, large women in contrast to many of the "negative" signifiers I observed as attached to tall women *within* (and sometimes *by*) the texts I studied. I began this thesis by noting that a text being *unproblematic* was both a fallacy and a fantasy, and not a lens through which I wanted to examine these texts. I also began this work itself experiencing an almost visceral ache at seeing bodies that resembled my own readily disparaged within the text, yet there is now a strange detachment to their harshness even as I have developed attachments to these characters. Perhaps it's a numbness facilitated by extensive critical attention, but perhaps it's also reflective that the same signifiers can be both transgressive and restrictive. To make a long story short, tallness is both defining and undefinable, a concept and embodiment that will ultimately continue to take up space.

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Appendix A: Cast and Character Information

All heights and casting information from *IMDB*; heights in parentheses are from *CelebHeights*.

Game of Thrones

Character	Actor/Actress	Height	Description
Brienne of Tarth	Gwendoline Christe	6'3" (6'3.25")	A freelance swordswoman, daughter of Lord Selwyn Tarth
Renly Baratheon	Gethin Anthony	5'9" (5'9.75")	Younger brother of deceased king Robert Baratheon, aspires to the throne. Married to Margaery Tyrell, but in a secret relationship with her brother Loras. Murdered by a shadow assassin sent by his brother Stannis in Season Two.
Roose Bolton	Michael McElhatton	5'9" (5'9")	A minor lord in the North. Officially sworn to the Starks; secretly working for the Lannisters. Holds Brienne and Jaime captive at Harrenhal in Season Three
Sandor Clegane	Rory McCann	6'6" (6'5.5")	Known as The Hound. Previously served as a bodyguard to the Royal Family; travels with hostage Arya Stark in Season Four
Yara Greyjoy	Gemma Whelan	5'5.5" (5'5.5")	Only daughter of House Greyjoy, commands navies on the Iron Islands
Hot Pie	Ben Hawkey	5'9.5"	An orphan and originally a companion of Arya Stark; now works as a baker at an inn
Cersei Lannister	Lena Headey	5'5 1/2" (5'5")	Queen Regent of Westeros, mother of ruling King Joffrey Baratheon, widow of Robert Baratheon, sister and lover of Jaime Lannister
Jaime Lannister	Nikolaj Coster-Waldau	6'2" (6'1.5")	Son of Tywin Lannister, sister and lover of Cersei. Known as the Kingslayer after slitting the throat of previous King Aerys Targaryen seventeen years before the start of the series
Locke	Noah Taylor	5'8" (5'7.75")	A lackey in the service of Roose Bolton. Personally cut off Jaime's hand, orchestrated Brienne's fight against the bear
Podrick Payne	Daniel Portman	5'11" (5'5.5")	A young squire, previously in the service of Tyrion Lannister, and now in the service of Brienne of Tarth
Qyburn	Anton Lesser	5'5.5" (5'5")	A former Maester who travels with Jaime and attends to his wounds after his hand is cut off
Meera Reed	Ellie Kendrick	5'1" (5'1")	A swordswoman who travels with Bran Stark in the North

Character	Actor/Actress	Height	Description
Arya Stark	Maise Williams	5’1" (5’0”)	Daughter of Catelyn and Ned Stark, Lord of Winterfell. Has been travelling since her father was beheaded for treason at the end of Season One
Catelyn Stark	Michelle Fairley	5’5" (5’5”)	Widow of Ned Stark, mother of Robb, Sansa, Arya, Bran, and Rickon. Killed in Season Three at her brother Edmure’s wedding.
Loras Tyrell	Finn Jones	6' (5’11.25”)	Brother of Margaery, grandson of Olenna. Was involved in a secret same-sex relationship with Renly Baratheon before his death. Known as the “Knight of Flowers.”
Margaery Tyrell	Natalie Dormer	5’6" (5’6”)	Granddaughter of Olenna, sister of Loras. Widow of Renly Baratheon, marries Joffrey Baratheon at the beginning of Season Four.
Olenna Tyrell	Diana Rigg	5'8.5” (5’8”)	The elderly grandmother of Margaery and Olenna
Ygritte	Rose Leslie	5’6" (5’4.75”)	A wildling woman, from beyond The Wall

Glee

Character	Actor Info	Height	Character Information
Adults			
Coach Shannon/Sheldon Beiste	Dot-Marie Jones	6'3" (6'2")[29]	Football Coach (S2-6); marries and divorces Cooter Menkins in S3, transitions to male in S6
Will Schuester	Matthew Morrison	5'11" (5'11")	Glee club leader teacher at McKinley (S1-5), glee club Leader at Carmel High (S6); on-and-off relationship with Emma Pilsbury
Coach Sue Sylvester	Jane Lynch	6' (5'11.5")[30]	Cheerleading Coach (S1-5); McKinley Principal (S6)
Emma Pilsbury	Jayma Mays	5'4" (5'4")	Guidance Counselor at McKinley High (S1-5)**;** on-and-off relationship with Will Schuester
Coach Roz Washington	NeNe Leakes	5'10" (5'10.5")	Swim Coach at McKinley High (S3-S6)
Cooter Menkins	Eric Bruskotter	6'2"	Football Recruiter (S3)**;** Marries Shannon Beiste in S3
Shelby Corcoran	Idinia Menzel	5'4.5" (5'4.25")	Coach of Carmel High's Vocal Adrenaline (S1); coach of McKinley's second glee club the Troubletones (S3)
Principal Figgins	Iqbal Theba	(5.8.5")	Principal of McKinley (S1-5)
Millie Rose	Trisha Rae Stahl	(n/a)	Works at McKinley's cafeteria
Teens			
Artie Abrams	Kevin McHale	5'6.5"[31] (5'6.5")	Student at McKinley and Glee Club member (S1-5); Film Student in New York (S5-6)**.**
Blaine Anderson	Darren Criss	5'8" (5'7.5")	Student at McKinley High and New Directions member (S3-5)
Brittany S. Pierce	Heather Morris	5'8" (5'8")	Student at McKinley High, member of the Cheerios and New Directions (S1-5)
Finn Hudson	Cory Monteith	6'3.5" (6'3.5")	Student at McKinley High (S1-3); interim director of New Directions (S4). His death was written into S5 as a result of Monteith's death.

29 CelebHeights notes Jones' peak height as 6'3"

30 CelebHeights notes Lynch's peak height as 6'

31 Artie uses a wheelchair, and McHale, who is able-bodied, is only seen standing in dream sequences.

Character	Actor Info	Height	Character Information
Kurt Hummel	Chris Colfer	5’10.5” (5’9”)	Student at McKinley High and New Directions member (S1-3), co-leader of New Directions (S6).
Lauren Zizes	Ashley Fink		Student at McKinley (S1-3) and New Directions member (S2-3)
Mercedes Jones	Amber Riley	5’3"	Student at McKinley and New Directions member (S1-3)
Mike Chang	Harry Shum Jr.	5’11"	Student at McKinley and New Directions member (S1-3)
Noah “Puck” Puckerman	Mark Salling	6' (5’11”)	Student at McKinley, football player, and New Directions member (S1-3)
Quinn Fabray	Diana Agron	5’5.5” (5’5.5”)	Student at McKinley, member of the Cheerios and New Directions (S1-3)
Rachel Berry	Lea Michele	5’2.5” (5’2”)	McKinley student and glee club (S1-3); student at NYADA (S4-5), actress (S5), co-leader of New Directions (S6)
Sam Evans	Chord Overstreet	6'	Student at McKinley, football player, and member of New Directions (S2-5); assistant football coach at McKinley (S6)
Santana Lopez	Naya Rivera	5’5" (5’4.25”)	Student at McKinley, member of the Cheerios and New Directions (S1-3)
Spencer Porter	Marshall Williams	6'	Football player and student at McKinley (S6)
Tina Cohen-Chang	Jenna Ushkowitz	5’4.5” (5’1”)	Student at McKinley and member of New Directions (S1-5)
Unique Adams	Alex Newell	5’7"	Student at Carmel High and member of Vocal Adrenaline (S3); student at McKinley and member of New Directions (S4-5)

Miranda

Character	Actor/Actress	Height	Description
Miranda	Miranda Hart	6’1”	The lead character of *Miranda*, owns a joke shop in Surrey
Stevie	Sarah Hadland	5’1”	Miranda’s best friend, who manages her joke shop
Gary	Tom Ellis	6’3"	Miranda's longtime crush and love interest, who works as a chef at a restaurant near the joke shop
Penny	Patricia Hodge	5’6.5”	Miranda's overbearing and interfering mother
Tilly	Sally Phillips	5’4"	Miranda’s posh friend from boarding school
Clive	James Holmes	5’8”	The manager of the restaurant where Gary works
Mike	Bohdan Poraj	6’	A TV news reporter and Miranda’s love interest and boyfriend in seasons three and four
Dreamboat Charlie	Adrian Scarborough	5’4"	A friend of Tilly’s, who Miranda goes on a blind date with
Fanny	Katy Wix	5’8"	Another friend of Miranda’s from boarding school
Rose	Naomi Bentley	5’4"	A woman Gary dates in the third season
Jim	Dominic Coleman	5’11"	A regular customer at Miranda’s shop

Appendix B: Citation Index for Individual Episodes

Game of Thrones

Season	Episode	Original Airdate	Episode Title	Writer(s)	Director
2	**3**	15 April 2012	“What is Dead May Never Die”	Bryan Cogman	Alik Sakharov
2	**5**	29 April 2012	“The Ghost of Harrenhal”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	David Petrarca
2	**7**	13 May 2012	“A Man Without Honour”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	David Nutter
2	**8**	20 May 2012	"The Prince of Winterfell”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	Alan Taylor
2	**10**	3 June 2012	“Valar Morghulis”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	Alan Taylor
3	**2**	7 April 2013	“Dark Wings, Dark Words”	Vanessa Taylor	Daniel Minahan
3	**3**	14 April 2013	"Walk of Punishment”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	David Benioff
3	**5**	28 April 2013	“Kissed by Fire”	Bryan Cogman	Alex Graves
3	**6**	5 May 2013	"The Climb”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	Alik Sakharov
3	**7**	12 May 2013	"The Bear and the Maiden Fair”	George R.R. Martin	Michelle MacLaren
4	**1**	6 April 2014	“Two Swords”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	D.B. Weiss
4	**2**	13 April 2014	"The Lion and the Rose”	George R.R. Martin	Alex Graves
4	**4**	27 April 2014	“Oathkeeper"	Bryan Cogman	Michelle MacLaren
4	**5**	4 May 2014	"First of His Name”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	Michelle MacLaren
4	**7**	18 May 2014	“Mockingbird"	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	Alik Sakharov
4	**10**	15 June 2014	"The Children”	David Benioff and D.B. Weiss	Alex Graves

Glee

Season	Episode	Original Airdate	Episode Title	Writer(s)	Director
1	**8**	21 Oct. 2009	“Mash-Up”	Ian Brennan	Elodie Keene
2	**1**	21 Sept. 2010	“Audition"	Ian Brennan	Brad Falchuk
2	**6**	9 Nov. 2010	“Never Been Kissed”	Brad Falchuk	Bradley Buecker
2	**7**	16 Nov. 2010	"The Substitute”	Ian Brennan	Ryan Murphy
2	**10**	7 Dec. 2010	“A Very Glee Christmas”	Ian Brennan	Alfonso Gomez-Rejon
2	**14**	22 Feb. 2011	“Blame it on the Alcohol”	Ian Brennan	Eric Stoltz
3	**2**	27 Sept. 2011	“I Am Unicorn”	Ryan Murphy	Brad Falchuk
3	**3**	4 Oct. 2011	“Asian F”	Ian Brennan	Alfonso Gomez-Rejon
3	**5**	8 Nov. 2011	“The First Time”	Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa	Bradley Buecker
3	**7**	29 Nov. 2011	"I Kissed a Girl”	Matthew Hodgson	Tate Donovan
3	**10**	17 Jan. 2012	“Yes/No”	Brad Falchuk and Matthew Hodgson	Eric Stoltz
3	**18**	1 May 2012	“Choke"	Marti Noxon	Michael Uppendahl
4	**18**	11 April 2013	“Shooting Star”	Matthew Hodgson	Bradley Buecker
6	**3**	16 Jan. 2015	“Jagged Little Tapestry”	Brad Falchuk	Paul McCrane
6	**7**	13 Feb. 2015	“Transitioning"	Matthew Hodgson	Dante Di Loreto
6	**9**	27 Feb. 2015	“Child Star”	Ned Martel	Michael Hitchcock
6	**11**	13 March 2015	"We Built This Glee Club”	Aristotle Kousakis	Joaquin Sedillo

Miranda

Season	Episode	Original Airdate	Episode Title	Writer(s)	Director
1	1	9 Nov. 2009	“Date”	Miranda Hart (Paul Kerensa and Leisa Rea)*	Juliet May
1	**2**	16 Nov. 2009	“Teacher"	Miranda Hart and Richard Hurst (Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
1	**3**	23 Nov. 2009	“Job"	Miranda Hart and James Cary	Juliet May
1	**4**	30 Nov. 2009	“Holiday"	Miranda Hart, James Cary, and Richard Hurst (Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
1	**5**	7 Dec. 2009	“Excuse"	Miranda Hart and James Cary (Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
1	**6**	14 Dec. 2009	“Dog"	Miranda Hart and Richard Hurst (Paul Kerensa and Simon Dean)	Juliet May
2	**1**	15 Nov. 2010	“The New Me”	Miranda Hart (Tony Roche, Georgia Pritchett, Paul Powell, James Cary, Richard Hurst, and Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
2	**2**	22 Nov. 2010	“Before I Die”	Miranda Hart (James Cary, Richard Hurst, Paul Powell, Paul Kerensa, Jason Hazely, and Joel Morris)	Juliet May
2	**3**	29 Nov. 2010	“Let’s Do It”	Miranda Hart (Simon Dean, Paul Kerensa, Richard Hurst, James Cary, Paul Powell)	Juliet May
2	**4**	6 Dec. 2010	“A New Low”	Miranda Hart (Paul Kerensa, Paul Powell, Richard Hurst, and James Cary)	Juliet May
2	**5**	13 Dec. 2010	“Just Act Normal”	Miranda Hart (Georgia Pritchett, Paul Powell, James Cary, Richard Hurst, and Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
2	**6**	20 Dec. 2010	"The Perfect Christmas”	Miranda Hart (James Cary, Richard Hurst, Paul Powell, Paul Kerensa, Will Ing, and Dan Gaster)	Juliet May
3	**1**	26 Dec. 2012	“It Was Panning”	Miranda Hart (Richard Hurst, Georgia Pritchett, Paul Powell, and Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
3	**2**	1 Jan. 2013	“What a Surprise”	Miranda Hart (Richard Hurst, Georgia Pritchett, Paul Powell, and Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
3	**3**	7 Jan. 2013	"The Dinner Party”	Miranda Hart (Richard Hurst, Georgia Pritchett, Paul Powell, and Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May

Season	Episode	Original Airdate	Episode Title	Writer(s)	Director
3	**4**	14 Jan. 2013	“Je Regret Nothing”	Miranda Hart (Richard Hurst, Georgia Pritchett, Paul Powell, Paul Kerensa, and Rose Heiney)	Juliet May
3	**5**	21 Jan. 2013	“Three Little Words”	Miranda Hart (Richard Hurst, Georgia Pritchett, Paul Powell, and Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
3	**6**	28 Jan. 2013	"A Brief Encounter”	Miranda Hart (Richard Hurst, Georgia Pritchett, Paul Powell, and Paul Kerensa)	Juliet May
4	**1**	25 Dec. 2014	"I Do, But to Who?”	Miranda Hart	Mandie Fletcher
4	**2**	1 Jan. 2015	The Final Curtain	Miranda Hart	Mandie Fletcher