

Beyond the Binary:
Representing Gender and Sexuality on Screen

Television Representation

Emma Deckers

Cultural Event Concept and Aim

“Beyond the Binary: Representing Gender and Sexuality on Screen” is a program designed to explore the multifaceted ways contemporary television shows portray gender and sexuality, while also highlighting the interwoven themes of identity, community, and resilience.

Addressing Annick Mantoua, the director of Pakhuis de Zwijger, directly, envision a space where we critically examine how shows like *POSE*, *Ted Lasso*, *Orange Is the New Black*, and *Euphoria* challenge traditional norms and roles, offer nuanced representations of diverse identities, celebrate varied experiences, and address the struggles and triumphs of characters navigating complex identities.

In today’s rapidly evolving social landscape, understanding and embracing the spectrum of gender and identity is more crucial than ever. Television, as a powerful cultural force, has the potential to shape perceptions, promote inclusivity, and foster empathy. Our program aims to harness this potential by providing a platform for open dialogue and critical analysis.

Why is this important for a general audience? Because these stories are not just about representation; they are about lived experiences. By examining the characters and narratives within these shows, we can gain profound insights into the daily challenges faced by women and LGBTQ+ individuals, the importance of allyship, and the power of community in fostering resilience. We aim to create a space where viewers can connect with these stories on a personal level, promoting understanding and challenging prejudice.

Ultimately, we want the audience to leave “Beyond the Binary” with a deeper appreciation for the diversity of human experience and a renewed commitment to creating a more inclusive and empathetic world. We hope viewers will reflect on their own biases, consider how they can be better allies, and recognize the importance of celebrating individuality. Our goal is to spark conversations that extend beyond the screen, inspiring positive change in our communities and promoting a more just and equitable society. We aim to demonstrate that through nuanced and authentic representation, we can dismantle harmful stereotypes and gender roles and create a world where everyone feels seen, safe, valued, and empowered.

Proposed Screening

Starting with *Ted Lasso* (Season 3 Episode 9, 21:41-30:42) to kick off the screening on a more positive and uplifting note, as this scene showcases vulnerability, team unity, and acceptance, setting a hopeful tone for the screening. Next, we continue with *Orange Is the New Black* (Season 1 Episode 3, 2:28-3:51 and 15:44-16:45), which transitions smoothly into exploring individual struggles and identity. Sophia Burset’s story deepens themes of acceptance and introduces themes of trans identity and the challenges faced within the prison system, adding impactful depth and complexity. Following that is *POSE* (Season 2, Episode 9, 23:44-27:21 and 28:34-29:54), where the focus is on community, (trans) identity, and resilience, as these scenes highlight the strong bonds and friendships within the ballroom.

community. Showcasing their strength, support for each other, and the celebration of identity in the face of adversity. Finishing with multiple scenes from *Euphoria* (Season 1 Episode 4 7:51-9:52), where we dive deeper into personal exploration and identity through Jules' journey of self-discovery, relationships, and the complexities of gender identity, which adds nuance and introspection, and ending on a more dramatic and intense note in *Euphoria* (Season 1 Episode 4 30:30-30:55, and Episode 6 13:48-14:30 and 22:34-27:20), as these scenes explore harmful relationships, (sexual) assault, power dynamics, toxic masculinity, and emotional turmoil, providing a stark contrast to the earlier scenes and prompting reflection on the intricacies and complications of human relationships and the treatment of women.

This screening order aims to create an emotional arc, beginning with positivity, progressing through individual and community struggles, and culminating in complex relationship dynamics. The ultimate goal is to engage the audience with diverse stories and perspectives, sparking meaningful discussions and fostering empathy.

Proposed Guests

My first proposed guest would be Dr. Allard R. Feddes, a professor in the Department of Social Psychology at the University of Amsterdam. He focuses his research on group dynamics and how they can influence the way we behave, feel, and think towards one another. Furthermore, how on “the development of intergroup prejudice and stereotyping, [and] discrimination” (University of Amsterdam 2025). His insights on how the group dynamics shown in the chosen series help or undermine the gender and sexuality stereotypes portrayed in the series and seen in real life.

My second proposed guest is Aleid van den Brink, a former CEO of Blijf Groep, an organization focused on preventing violence against women, and now a GREVIO member who monitors the implementation of the Istanbul Convention to combat and prevent violence against women and domestic violence (Boes 2024). Her insights and experience on these delicate topics will be valuable and impactful in helping gain a deeper understanding of the epidemic of violence against women and how this is represented within TV.

My third proposed guest would be Halina Reijn, a Dutch actress, director, and producer who aims to create works that showcase the feelings and thoughts of women and how they navigate and operate in a patriarchal world (ELLE Canada Magazine n.d.). She has firsthand insight into creating content that sparks conversations about women’s freedom and sexuality, and how this can inspire women to become free of guilt, shame, and societal expectations.

Discussion topics/questions

1. In what ways can TV shows challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, and what are the potential benefits of doing so?
2. How can the media industry address the issue of tokenism and ensure that representation is both meaningful and genuine, rather than merely performative?
3. How can TV shows strike a balance between representing diverse experiences and avoiding harmful stereotypes or tropes?
4. What impact does the representation of gender and sexuality in TV have on young viewers, and how can shows promote positive messages and role models?
5. What are some of the biggest challenges in creating authentic and diverse portrayals of gender and sexuality on screen?
6. How can TV shows address intersectionality and represent the lived experiences of individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups?
7. How can TV shows create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming viewers?
8. What are some common misconceptions about gender and sexuality, and how can TV help dispel them?
9. How can TV shows address issues like homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination in a way that is both informative and informing?
10. How has the representation of gender and sexuality in TV evolved over the last decade, and what impact has this had on society and vice versa?

These questions will spark discussions covering a wide range of topics, perspectives, and potential improvements related to the chosen themes of gender and sexuality. They will explore how art imitates life and vice versa, and what we can learn from the shows about our lives, choices, thoughts, and feelings, as well as the society in which we live. The shows can teach us things about ourselves that we did not know or were too afraid to acknowledge. They can also help us gain insight into the lives of others who experience different realities from ours, provided they are produced responsibly and accurately. Ensuring that is a crucial point that will be explored through these questions.

Bibliography

Boes, Sandra. "Webinar Geweld Tegen Vrouwen - Nederlandse VrouwenRaad." Nederlandse VrouwenRaad -, January 7, 2024. <https://www.nederlandsevrouwenraad.nl/agenda/seminar-geweld-tegen-vrouwen/>

ELLE Canada Magazine | Beauty, Fashion and Lifestyle Trends & Celebrity News. "Babygirl

Filmmaker Halina Reijn Made an Erotic Thriller for All Women | ELLE Canada

Magazine | Beauty, Fashion and Lifestyle Trends & Celebrity News," n.d.

<https://www.ellecanada.com/culture/movies-and-tv/babygirl-halina-reijn-director-interview>

University of Amsterdam. "Diversity and Inclusion." University of Amsterdam, February 11,

2025. <https://www.uva.nl/en/news-events/press-office/uva-experts/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-and-inclusion.html>