Keep It Right - *Homeland*: The Female Body, Disability, and Nation

Joelle Rouleau
University of Montréal, Canada

Abstract: This article will look at how *Homeland*'s main character, Carrie Mathison, is used as a metaphor for the current cultural state of fear in the post-9/11 United States by demonstrating the effects of internalized sexism and ableism within the representation of a disabled woman's experience in the articulation of her gender, race, disability, and sexuality.

Keywords: feminism, disability, *Homeland* (TV series)

Introduction

This article will consider Episode 1 of the first season of *Homeland* (entitled "Pilot"), which premiered on October 2, 2011 in the US. *Homeland* is set in the anti-terror movement, where terrorists present a menace to homeland security.[1] This article explores constructions of race, gender, and dis/ability in a reflexive analysis of the series that interrogates these identity categories and reconceives normativity in relation to the body, asking what it means socially to "be normal." In this paper, these norms are understood as being inscribed in discourses – the means of representation coding our experiences of the world in order to structure and share them to a larger scale (Hall, 1997).[2]

To further develop a thesis, this analysis will start by pointing out some key moments. The series opens on the lead character, Carrie Mathison, driving a car in the streets of Baghdad. In the first three minutes of the show, she defies her boss, trespasses illegally on a local prison, and interrogates a prisoner who is awaiting execution. Mathison bribes the inmate into revealing some clues about the next terrorist attack on American soil and creates a diplomatic crisis when she is discovered in the prison – because of which, she is forced back to Washington to do administrative work, isolating her from her contacts.

Ten months elapse, taking us through the opening credits, where we meet again with Mathison in a completely different setting. Here, we are introduced to her within the private sphere. We witness her rushing to get ready in her empty but disorganized house that is decorated with cardboard boxes full of paperwork. An over-the-shoulder shot takes us to her bathroom where she changes and cleans her genitals – a simple act that is sexually coded and emphasized by the fact that she only goes home to do so. Mathison then dresses quickly in a suit and leaves her home. When in contact with other people, she is depicted as the outsider. Her boss notes the fact that she is habitually late (thus separating her from her peers) and introduces the subject of their urgent meeting: Nicholas Brody, an American soldier taken hostage eight years before in Iraq, has been found alive in Afghanistan.

Mathison is visibly shocked where the rest of the agents applaud and rejoice. She recalls her discussion in the Iraqi prison 10 months earlier and confides in her closest friend and supervisor, Saul, explaining that the Iraqi prisoner she interrogated disclosed that an American prisoner of the war had been "turned." She is convinced that Brody is this American traitor and she decides, despite a warning from her mentor, to pursue her intuition and investigate him. Ten

minutes into the series, we have an incredible terrorist plot with no narrative basis except the intuition of a woman that the audience has been led to believe is not entirely well suited to her job or status. This tension is formally elaborated through a constant alternating editing, building Mathison and Brody's identities in different spaces simultaneously.

Nicholas Brody's character, on the other hand, embodies the white, able-bodied, male, marine hero of a long-lasting war – far from being believed to be a potential terrorist. We first see him in captivity, being discovered in a hidden trap somewhere in Afghanistan. His first words in the series are "I'm an American," reinstating his heroic identity. We follow him through his naturalization steps, under both strict military surveillance and the multiple cameras of every American news channel. His heroic character is built on a foundation of post-traumatic stress disorder, which locates him and Mathison in a kind of binary opposition – as this article will further explore.

This paper argues that in *Homeland*, the body of main character Carrie Mathison is used as metaphor for the current cultural state of fear in the post-9/11 United States by demonstrating the effects of internalized sexism and ableism within the representation of a disabled woman's experience.[3] Internalized oppressions (e.g., ableism) are those that are culturally coded as character traits or specific to a particular gender, race, or ability/disability (Hall, 1997). Mostly, they are oppressions entangled within a society or a culture without being criticized or even acknowledged. This article will discuss the ways in which the articulations of Mathison's gender, race, disability, and sexuality locate her in a specific intersection, explored via how she dresses, speaks, and acts and in relation to Brody's gender, race, disability, and sexuality. Here, articulation is understood as the recognition of the particularity of each oppression as well as interactions among them, which are specific to her character, and their effect. As Slack explains,

"Articulation is, then, not just a thing (not just a connection) but a process of creating connections, much in the same way that hegemony is not domination but the process of creating and maintaining consensus or of co-ordinating interests" (1996, p. 114).

This paper argues that these articulations make Mathison the moral gatekeeper of American white supremacist cultural hegemony,[4] deployed and reinforced within Stuart Hall's regime of representation (1997). Hegemony requires that ideological assertions become self-evident cultural assumptions. This regime refers to, as Hall (1997) explains, the framework in which "representation connects meaning and language to culture / uses language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people" (p. 15). Therefore, Mathison's character becomes the link between culture and meaning: there is a cultural state of fear post 9/11 that she embodies through her gender and her disability, and her actions are set up to counteract those fears and prevent any other attacks from being made.

Furthermore, it is imperative to apply the regime of representation as a critique of ableism, wherein disability is discussed but only as something to overcome or be erased (Palmer, 2011) in order to preserve the symbolic order of white ableist heteronormativity.[5] The symbolic order refers to a concept developed by psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan, who argued that the symbolic order structures social conduct. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey demonstrated that the symbolic order in classical film is obtained by condemning deviant conduct (often, the woman is deviant through her sexuality, and her domestication via marriage or her death brings

back the symbolic order). In this article, the symbolic order of white abeist heteronormativity refers to multiple concepts articulated together, exemplified by the tension between Occident and Orient – between "white Americans" and "Arabs"; the implied deviance of Mathison's mood disorder; and finally the compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness working together to "(re)produce the able body and heterosexuality" (McRuer, 2010, p. 97). Moreover, this analysis will consider the ways in which *Homeland* portrays the female body as a metaphor for the United States' homeland, strategically deploying gender and disability to symbolize state security against racialized and ethnicized invaders. It will look at how the main characters of the series, Carrie Mathison and Nicholas Brody, are formally depicted and constructed as binary oppositions of each other in relation to gender and abilities.

The analysis will first look at how gender and disability are constructed in such a way as to deploy Mathison as a contemporary re-articulation of the hysterical woman. Secondly, it will look at how the representation of disability in popular culture nourishes the idea of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality as discussed in queer and disability studies (Butler, 1993; McRuer, 2010; Rich, 2004) by building a tension between gender and disability within the concept of normalcy (Davis, 1995). These questions will be addressed in the second section of this article.

Invisibility and Transcendence of the "Hysterical Woman"

Carrie Mathison refers to herself as having a "mood disorder," which it is implied would threaten her position at the agency were it to become well known. In the first 10 minutes of the show, we see Mathison take some kind of green pill hidden in an aspirin bottle. Ten minutes later, her secret is discovered by Maxim, Virgil's brother, both being her two closest allies in her illegal investigation of Nicholas Brody. From this discovery and onward, we know Mathison has a secret, and we are led to doubt her ability to act and think "sanely." While this secret could compromise her job, we also understand that it's making her good at it. A precisely gendered and ableist scheme of power relations is now set, which locates Mathison in a complex relationship to other characters.

She is the only woman in her surroundings and she is thought to be "crazy" because of her pills. First, her action of taking the secret pill is marked as suspicious when Maxim and Virgil find the pill and start inquiring about its content. Thus, to keep her social status, she must pass as able-bodied or "supercrip." Tanya Titchkosky, in Withers (2012), defines "supercrips" as people who can avoid:

"Attending to disability by attending fully to their ability to participate in society, as normally as possible … [who] ultimately and inevitably signify having a 'positive effect on others,' 'contributing fully to the community,' and 'maximizing their potential.' . . . The stories of the abled-disabled demonstrate that even disabled people are able to fit in and take up an appearance, which shows that their conduct is undoubtedly oriented to an unquestioned normalcy. Through this way of conceptualizing disability, disability becomes the space in which the value of normal shines forth without ever having to be directly spoken of, and disabled people are held to be asserting their individual ability (value) when they can be seen as oriented to serving this normal order" (p. 69-70).

Mathison can pass because her disability is mostly an invisible one. She also embodies the "supercrip" by virtue of the fact that her disability is the key to her passing: it's what makes her able to work and think as she does. Later in the episode, Virgil confronts Mathison with the pill, having discovered that it is clozapine, an antipsychotic used with patients who are "unresponsive to conventional neuroleptics" (CPS, 2001, p. 376). He asks her if she's "crazy," to which she replies that she's dealing with it:

> Virgil: Just tell me I'm not out here risking federal prison on behalf of a crazy person.
>
> Mathison: I am crazy.
>
> Virgil: It is not funny. If anybody at the agency finds out about this. . . .
>
> Mathison: I've got a mood disorder, okay. . . .
>
> Virgil: I looked it up Carrie! Clozapine is an antipsychotic!
>
> Mathison: I'm dealing with it. I've been dealing with it since I was 22.
>
> Virgil: Does Saul know?
>
> Mathison: God no. No . . . nobody does. Don't act so shocked, I mean, it can't come as a complete surprise.[6]

These examples serve to define Mathison as deviant and demonstrate how she navigates her marginalization.

Homeland's diegesis is strategically constructed so that the spectators know from the narrative that Mathison is dealing with a mood disorder that can be referred to as "crazy," as Mathison points out in this dialogue. As feminist film studies theorist Teresa De Lauretis (2004) explains, narrativity is a mechanism of coherence (p. 266). Therefore, it contributes to the depiction of the "crazy" woman audio-visually but also spatiotemporally.

First, internalized sexism mostly manifests itself through Mathison's work. The most obvious example of such is when she approaches Saul in a sexually suggestive way demonstrating how, as a woman, her primary weapon against oppression is through her body via men's sexual satisfaction. Moreover, her disability locates Mathison as weak, feeble, and irrational (for example, when Virgil describes her as being "intense" or when she reacts very emotionally to David telling her what to do). It is interesting to notice that the characteristics she displays are socially undesirable and mostly associated with femininity – again, her gender and disability enact these intersections of oppressions.

Her ability to transcend her gender issues is only available to her as a white woman; she is the only white woman directly involved in the investigation, in opposition to Saul and David, who are her ethnicized and racialized male counterparts, and Brody, the white male terrorist. In the following section, this analysis focuses on her sexuality being used as a weapon within a

masculine industry, complicated by the construction of mental health/disability through the archetype of the hysterical female.

Gender and Disability in Popular Culture

In *Homeland*, this construction of Mathison's gender and disability to create the archetypical hysterical woman reinforces the ableist and sexist regime of representation in popular culture. Mathison is portrayed as an archetype of the hysterical woman, and her gender and her sexuality enable her to act as the gatekeeper of morals and white heteronormativity in popular culture. The hysterical woman archetype, as embodied by Claire Danes' portrayal of Mathison, has a very long history in film and media (Doane, 1988), but she is also important in the history and development of allopathy. Since the 17th century, women have been pathologized as "neurasthenic" and "hysterical" (Foucault, 1976). The commonly held belief informing medical science was that women were mentally more fragile than men and therefore unable to participate fully in social life.

As mentioned, irrationality and vulnerability are seen as undesirable and often associated with femininity and feminine sexuality. Mathison's sexuality must be passive in order to be non-threatening to her male counterparts (Doane, 1988). In *Homeland*, Mathison's gender and disability construct her as being both irrational and vulnerable, and these characteristics therefore serve to justify her irrational behavior and sexuality. As alluded to previously, Mathison embodies this hysterical woman partly based on her promiscuous sexuality. When it comes to women, this promiscuity can be associated with having mental health issues – or, more specifically, with hysteria and Freud's definition of what this type of diagnosis implies for female sexuality (Heath, 1992, p. 51), such as sexual desire, insomnia, irritability, and a tendency to cause trouble (Maines, 1999). When Saul discovers Mathison's illegal monitoring of Brody's house, Mathison attempts to protect the investigation from being shut down by stating that she would do anything to prevent him from reporting her, clearly implying a sexual offer. He rejects and shames her paternalistically, marking her sexuality as a main weapon in her battle to gain and maintain power.

When Saul rejects Mathison's attempts to gain security and cuts off communication with her, she is then depicted as entering into an irrational, emotional state. She listens to loud jazz music, takes a pill, and tries unsuccessfully to calm down. The camera movements in this scene could also be described as hysterical. As Doane (1988) puts it, hysteria condenses where paranoia decomposes (p. 198), and here, we have access to more narrowed shots picturing Mathison constantly within frames (the frame of her bed, the frame of her closet, the frame of her door). The frames contribute to this idea of constraining her – hysteria condenses her emotions as well as her body into narrative and cinematic frames. The camera frantically follows Mathison's actions. Frustrated, she begins to repeatedly change her clothes, intermittently trying to calm down, and finally leaves the house for a nearby bar where she attempts to seduce a stranger. This precise action reminds us of the beginning of the episode, where Mathison comes home in the early morning, changes out of evening clothes, cleans her genitals, and dresses in clothes more suitable for office work. Her promiscuous sexuality can be understood as a direct effect of her emotional reactions, which leads us to understand it as related to her mental health issues, a work tool, or both; but it is difficult to imagine that her pleasure factors highly.

Her interaction with Saul leads the spectators to understand that she uses her body and her sexuality to achieve her goals (in this case, to prevent him from denouncing her) but that she is at once revered and detested for this. Earlier in the episode, Saul had gotten Mathison entry to Brody's debriefing, asking her, "Will you behave yourself?" Not too long after the alleged meeting, David and Saul have a paternalistic conversation about Mathison, helping us understand the structure of the power relations taking place between the three of them:

> David**:** You kicked Carrie Mathison into my debrief this morning, I'm curious – was it her request or yours?
>
> Saul**:** Hers. Frankly, I'm surprised you didn't assign her yourself. She is the only one in the section who's ever been to Iraq.
>
> David**:** It's not her résumé I have a problem with, it's her temperament.
>
> Saul**:** What happened?
>
> David**:** She turned a routine follow up into a cross-examination. She kept trying to connect Brody to Abu Nazir. It's always Nazir with her.
>
> Saul**:** I won't deny, she can be a little obsessive on the subject.
>
> David**:** Is there something I should know Saul?
>
> Saul**:** Not that I'm aware of.
>
> David**:** Because the last time I heard her like this, she bribed her way into an Iraqi prison, causing an international crisis.
>
> Saul**:** I appreciate your concerns. Carrie has learned her lesson. We both know how good she is.
>
> David**:** What did I tell you when I agreed to give her one more chance?
>
> Saul**:** You said only if I agreed to do the babysitting.
>
> David**:** I said it would end badly – for both of you. You've got a big blind spot where she is concerned. Trust me, I did too. Now my wife lives in Palm Beach and I only see my kids twice a year.[7]

This exchange implies that David and Mathison have a history together that led David's family away. It then confirms Mathison's representation of the hysterical woman, as dangerous and fatale. If Saul were to accept her sexual offer, his safety would be compromised.

Later, in the bar, her interaction with the stranger can be understood in the same manner: when Mathison is about to leave with her conquest, she is enlightened by watching the finger patterns of the jazz musicians playing. This triggers a memory of Brody's right hand during his

television appearances. The space in the bar is organized in order for us to understand Mathison's observation; a television showing news coverage of Nicholas Brody is located close to the live musicians. Her sexual behavior, directly linked to her disability and gender, is the first reason for her presence in this bar, and it is her presence in this space that enables her to understand that Brody's hand movements are potential evidence that he is attempting to make contact with terrorists. Her deviant sexuality is producing and reproducing the American cultural anxiety and puritanism about women's sexual freedom, upholding American cultural hegemony. Her sexual agency literally serves to protect and reinforce Brody's cultural identity and thus the American cultural identity as a whole.

Naturalizing Mathison or Using Her as a Weapon?

Often in media representations of the hysterical woman, the ultimate goal is to naturalize the subject. Strangely enough, in *Homeland*, the dialectic is different; if the goal were to identify Mathison as a hysterical woman, it would then follow that the entire series is set upon naturalizing her by either normalizing her or killing her – a consequence that has been specifically applied to deviant characters such as women, homosexuals, queers, or "freaks" in traditional Hollywood cinema (Russo, 1987). Here, Mathison's hysteria is the key to the premise; neither her death nor her naturalization would prevent the United States from being attacked. Thus she requires her specific disability and gender and the interaction of these in order to successfully conduct an investigation that undermines the terrorists' plot.

If this analysis is extended beyond the first episode of *Homeland* to include a macroscropic view of the entire series, it becomes evident that there is a connection to both tragic endings available to hysterical women. In Season One's ending, Mathison is controlled and treated medically for her mental health issues (later identified as a bipolar disorder), locating her within the scope of naturalization. She is taught to behave according to certain standards of normalcy: she eats well, sleeps well, takes her medication, and avoids participating in stressful work situations. When she finally learns that her "delusions" were actual facts and that she was correct in following her hunches, she makes peace with her pathologized behavior and tries to reintegrate into a more socially acceptable way of life. At the end of Season One, while Mathison knows that she is leading a good investigation, she is also convinced that she is leading a destructive way of life. She wants to get better and to "learn to be normal." However, the CIA still needs her knowledge, and moreover, it is her "dangerous" delusions that allow for the continuation of the investigation into Abu Nazir (the series' equivalent of Osama bin Laden).

Season Two locates a stabilized but still fragile Mathison – who, at this juncture, is no longer a CIA agent – into a very complicated plot, where Brody turns out to be a new informant in the war on terrorism. At the end of this season, almost all the characters die in a terrorist attack with the exception of Brody and Mathison. Although her sensitivity is back and her out-of-control mood disorder reappears, Mathison is still alive. Her own "normal" state (as characterized by mental health issues, which is depicted as abnormal by other characters throughout the episodes) is the main reason why she can lead the investigation and continue to find clues that will help prevent the next attack.

Season Three literally uses Mathison's disability as a weapon against the "Middle East." The narrative of this season works primarily to blur the lines surrounding Mathison's behavior

and response to the CIA's investigation into the bombing of Langley. In terms of her gender, she's now pregnant with Brody's baby, a difficult reality she is unable to deal with. The ending of this season marks a very important step regarding Mathison and Brody's relationship. While he dies (his death consolidates a CIA plan to take over the government in Iran), Mathison lives. She does not want her baby, but it is too late for her to take action. These observations help us to understand how both disability and gender interact in *Homeland* to display a complex representation of disability in popular culture.

The Male Gaze and the Ableist "Stare"

This representation of the disabled woman supports two types of gazes as defined by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey and disability theorist Vera Chouinard: the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) and the ableist gaze (Chouinard, 2012). The former refers to the woman as spectacle in classical Hollywood cinema, wherein female characters are portrayed as to-be-looked-at. According to Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane, the woman is the object of scopophilia (the desire to look), thus gendering the roles of the spectators: men are the beholders of the gaze, the active heroes, whereas women are the obstacles to men's quests. To overcome these difficulties, men must either tame women or kill them. Sarah E. Chinn (2004) builds on this paradigm in her discussion of "the look" (p.196), wherein desire and desirability are constructed through who is looking, who can look, and who is and is not being looked at.

In disability studies, the ableist gaze, or as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997) calls it, "the stare" (p. 26), objectifies people with disabilities and deems them vulnerable, pitiful, and endangering to the abilities of others. Vera Chouinard argues that the ableist gaze is a direct consequence of the concept of compulsory able-bodiedness as developed by Robert McRuer (2006). It is this ableist gaze that subjects the disabled character to her cinematic fates: she is either someone to overcome or someone to kill in order to protect able-bodiedness, thereby allowing for the continued subjugation of disabled subjects under the dominance of an objectification by the able-bodied. Nicholas Brody's character is constructed in such a way as to amplify Mathison's disability. Our first introduction to Brody is via footage of his "liberation"; found in a hidden closet, dirty and with very long hair and a beard, his first lines in the episode proclaim that he is American. Before he arrives in the United States, we follow his journey back. He is shown showering, shaving, and receiving a haircut. This process delineates the binary opposition between Orient and Occident, savage and civilized, dirty and clean (Hall, 1997). Moreover, when viewed in comparison with the depiction of Mathison's hygiene at the beginning of the episode, it becomes clear that this scene acts to further binarize able-bodied male and disabled female, between the active soldier held captive eight years in Iraq and the suspended, and therefore more passive, CIA agent having sexual intercourse with strangers to cope with emotional stress.

The "stare" also operates to desexualize the disabled person, reinstating able-bodied heterosexuality as the norm. Sarah E. Chinn (2004) discusses how both gazes relate to sexuality and objectification and locate the disabled female body at the center of desire and repulsion, to be looked at and to be controlled (p. 197). In *Homeland*, Mathison's disability and sexual promiscuity endanger national security because of her role in the CIA's investigation of terrorist attacks. Her sexuality is expressed as a symptom of her disability, therefore locating her again outside of the realm of acceptable social behavior where she is expected to conform to the

stereotype of the desexualized, obedient, disabled woman. She acts as the gatekeeper of the nation through her sexualized and disabled body. With a concept like compulsory able-bodiedness, McRuer complicates the intersection of sexuality and disability, arguing that "both systems work to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality. But precisely because they depend on a queer/disabled existence that can never quite be contained, able-bodied heterosexuality's hegemony is always in danger of being disrupted" (McRuer, 2006, p. 97). Mathison's sexuality is not only a threat to the security of the state, it is a threat to the entire structure of able-bodiedness.

Sexual Opposition Between Mathison and Brody

While this essay focuses on the events of Episode 1, it is worth noting that from Episode 5 ("Blind Spot") and onward, Mathison and Brody develop a sexual relationship. At this point, her sexuality is again not related to pleasure but to work. She physically attempts to bring back Brody into the state, into the nation, by bringing him literally into her body. She has the responsibility to reintegrate him; it is her duty to respond to the terrorist plot as the sole moral guardian of the United States.

This representation of sexuality and disability as articulated in Mathison's character contributes to a broader pop-cultural representation of disability in which able-bodiedness and heterosexuality become compulsive, and a tension is created between gender and disability within the concept of normalcy. Signs of this are present throughout the episode as Mathison is pressured to become "normalized," in other words, able-bodied, feminine, with a sexuality used to defend the state, rather than for pleasure. This representation is reinforced by the antagonistic construction of Mathison and Brody's characters, set in opposition in order to reinforce this regime through their eventual sexual relationship. Mathison is deviant because of her gender and her disability, but this deviance can be reformed if she is the one to reform Brody.

Furthering this discussion of sexuality, Brody and Mathison's different situations also contribute to these binary oppositions. The violent sexual intercourse between Brody and Jessica (his wife) seems to act as a means of addressing the trauma of violence and torture that Brody has been subjected to and depicts the hero as having a troubled mind. This scene reinscribes the woman as the passive object, helping the post-traumatic stressed hero to reintegrate into the nation, through this expression of violent masculine sexuality. The white woman, again portrayed as the moral gatekeeper of white heteronormativity, complies with this role and refrains from objecting to it. At first, Brody's post-traumatic stress disorder can be articulated as a disability that affects his reintegration into the state, but in an effort to conform to masculine gender norms, he "mans up" and overcomes his disability in less than five episodes – the instant he meets Mathison at a veteran meeting and their relationship begins. Brody's experience of the post-traumatic stress disorder portrays him as vulnerable and, as the male character, having to overcome it through dominant and violent sexual intercourse.

This scene, as witnessed by Mathison (and by extension, the spectator) in her living room via camera system emphasizes the idea that this woman, as a CIA agent, has a more passive role than the male soldier. Furthermore, when Mathison confronts Brody in a routine debrief about Abu Nazir and the death of his fellow hostage, we begin to understand Brody's role in the terrorist plot. What the spectators see of Brody is significantly different from what is shown of

him within the diegetic world of the series: Brody is the hero of the social sphere, where Mathison's investigation is relegated to the private sphere. She acts out of her jurisdiction and everything else seems to contradict her story. Brody (who is male and passing as able-bodied despite clear signs of post-traumatic stress, which could also identify him as a "supercrip") is on display as a war hero in the public sphere, where the disabled female experience is of no one's interest; she is a failed CIA agent who did not prevent previous terrorist attacks on American soil. Her conversation with Saul leads the spectator into understanding her obsessive attitude toward her investigation:

> Mathison**:** I am just making sure we don't get hit again.
>
> Saul: I'm glad someone is looking out for the country, Carrie.
>
> Mathison**:** I'm serious. I missed something once before, I won't, I can't let that happen again.
>
> Saul**:** It was ten years ago. Everyone missed something that day.
>
> Mathison**:** Everyone is not me.[8]

Conclusion: *Homeland*'s Submission to the Regime of Normativity

Stuart Hall states that the regime of representation shows how normative characteristics are being produced and are producing shared meaning into popular cultures, (for example, using stereotypes to ridicule, simplify, and reduce individual differences to essentialized characteristics). In *Homeland*, this regime manifests itself through the representation of the disabled woman, inscribed by codes of shared meaning such as the hysterical woman. The articulation of race, gender, disability, and sexuality developed within this analysis display what Hall (1997) calls a power play over representation (p. 254). In *Homeland*'s regime of representation, disability is depicted as representing the able-bodied experience as necessarily existing in opposition to the disabled experience. In her article "Disability, Gender, and Difference on The Sopranos," Kathleen Lebesco (2011) considers the regime of representation as a key factor in the comprehension of normalcy. The conditioning of the ableist regime of representation serves to "conflate body ideals with our concept of what is physically 'normal,' increasing the number of people whose bodies are regarded . . . as socially unacceptable. . . . What is sorely needed is a representational universe that begins to approach the complexity and wealth of real corporeal difference" (LeBesco, 2011).

Inevitably, the regime of representation influences – and is influenced by – popular culture. Popular television series such as *Homeland* contribute to the general coding of dis/abled and gendered experiences. To extrapolate this thesis, Mathison becomes a bearer of white ableist American heteronormativity in the state of fear that has drastically changed the United States and the Western world in the post-9/11 era. This is evidenced in the show's depiction of the obsessive "24/7" news coverage of Brody's story, a phenomenon referred to by media and political science theorists as the "CNN effect" (Robinson, 1999). This concept postulates that the existence of a 24-hour international news channel could have a major impact on foreign policy and general opinion towards international relations. This effect is included in *Homeland*'s narrative, showing

masses of journalists and camera people filming every step of Brody's return to the United States. Lots of television screens are shown to emphasize this constant coverage, and these "on-the-spot" shots are even edited into the editing of the actual episode. However, Mathison's mental health issues, her tapping of Brody's house with cameras and microphones, and her theory regarding Brody's implication in the terrorist attack after years of torture and captivity in Iraq are considered justifiable, despite being extraordinary measures of surveillance. Her sexuality is used as a tool to get information for her investigation on terrorism and later as leverage to bring Brody back into the nation, symbolizing how compulsory heteronormativity must be respected in order to reinstate the moral order of American's hegemony over non-Western, non-white cultural invaders. Therefore, Mathison's white female bipolar disorder embodiment symbolizes the "unstable" American nation-state post-9/11 attack.

By presenting a complex intersection of race, gender, and ability within a mainstream popular cultural format, it seems *Homeland* is a missed opportunity for resistance in the representation of disability and female sexuality. In a television series where the main character is both female and disabled, we are given a rare representation of difference. However, the reinscription of harmful stereotypes around these identities unfortunately serves to contribute to the marginalization and oppression experienced by disabled women. By locating Carrie Mathison within the ableist and male gaze, creating a regime of representation wherein as a disabled woman she is expected both to conform to traditional, patriarchal notions of femininity and also to transcend these in order to maintain white cultural hegemony and reform the male characters, the show unfortunately reproduces the cultural context it could have challenged, which begs the question: Is there space for negotiation and resistance within the dominant cultural regime of representation or does the format of the latter automatically reinforce itself in order to maintain the forms of oppression that serve its hegemonic agenda?

Joelle Rouleau is a PhD candidate of the joint program in communication at University of Montréal. As an activist in queer, feminist and disability fields, she works on the articulation of differences in cinematic representations for which she develops an intersectional approach.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Julia Gruson-Wood. Edited by Kay Pettigrew and Oliver Fugler.

References

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender* New York: Routledge.

Chinn, S. E. (2004). Feeling her way: Audre Lorde and the power of touch. In B. G. Smith & B. Hutchison (Eds.), *Gendering Disability* (pp. 192-215). New Jersey: Rutgers.

Chouinard, V. (2012). Pushing the boundaries of our understanding of disability and violence: Voices from the global south (Guyana). *Disability & Society* 27 (6), 777-792.

Compendium of Pharmaceuticals and Specialities (2001) (36th ed.). Canadian Pharmacists Association.

Davis, L. J. (1995). *Enforcing normalcy: Disability, deafness, and the body*. New York: Verso.

De Lauretis, T. (2004). Strategies of coherence: Narrative cinema, feminist poetics, and Yvonne Rainer. In E. A. Kaplan (Ed.), *Feminism and Film* (pp. 265-286). Oxford: Oxford.

Doane, M. A. (1988). Caught and Rebecca: The Inscription of Femininity as Absence. In Constance Penley (Ed.), *Feminism and Film Theory* (pp. 196-215), New York: Routledge.

Dyer, R. (1997). *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1976). *Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de savoir* [The history of sexuality: The will to knowledge]. Paris: Gallimard.

Garland-Thompson, R. (1997). *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring physical disability in American culture and literature*. New York: Columbia.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage/Open UP.

Heath, S. (1992). Difference. In Caughie J. and Kuhn, A. (eds) *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (pp. 47-106), London: Routledge.

LeBesco, K. (2011). Disability, gender and difference on The Sopranos. In Dines et al. (Eds.), *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A critical reader* (3rd ed.) (pp. 185-194), Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Maines, R. P. (1999). *The technology of orgasm:"Hysteria," the vibrator, and women's*

sexual satisfaction. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

McRuer, R. (2010). Compulsory able-bodiedness and queer/disabled existence. In Lennard J. Davis (Ed.). *The Disability Studies Reader* (3rd ed.) (pp. 383-392). New York: Routledge.

Mulvey, L. (1975). *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*. In Screen 16.3, 6-18. Oxford Dictionaries, Retrieved from http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/hysteria

Palmer, S. (2011). Old, new, borrowed and blue: Compulsory able-bodiedness and whiteness in *Avatar*. *Disability Studies Quarterly* Vol 31 (1). Retrieved from http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1353/1473

Rich, A. (2004). Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence. In *Journal of Women's History* 16 (1), 9-11.

Robinson, P. (1999). The CNN effect: Can the news media drive foreign policy? *Review of International Studies*, 25, 301-309.

Russo, V. (1987). *The celluloid closet: Homosexuality in the movies*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Withers, A. J. (2012). *Disability, Politics & Theory*. Winnipeg: Fernwood.

Endnotes

[1]Since before but much more reinforced after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, various legislation was passed in the United States in order to prevent any kind of bombing or assassination related to political terrorism.

[2]As Lennard J. Davis (1995) puts it, "We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavors to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. We consider what the average person does, thinks, earns, or consumes. . . . There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated" (p. 23). Judith Butler (2004) also describes a norm as "not the same as a rule, and . . . not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization. Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its operation" (p. 41).

[3]Regarding Carrie Mathison's character specifically, I strongly suggest looking into a Saturday Night Live sketch written about *Homeland*, focusing mostly on her gender and disability in order to be "funny." This sketch is an example of how sexism and ableism are internalized and accepted in order to make fun of and ridicule some identity traits (see NBC.com, Saturday Night Live, Season 38 Episode 1627 aired on November 11, 2012).

[4]Cultural hegemony is a concept defined by James Lull after Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Lull mentions that Gramsci's theory of hegemony, therefore, connects ideological representation to culture.

[5]Sarah Palmer cited McRuer in her discussion of Avatar, stating that "McRuer notes that definitions of able-bodiedness are articulated in negative terms as in 'free from disability' so that able-bodiedness is always dependent on disability in same way that heterosexuality is definitively dependent on homosexuality (385). While such a binary implies two choices, people are socially compelled to adhere only to one, rendering the expectation that everyone at all times desires to be able-bodied" (Palmer, 2011).

[6]*Homeland*, Episode 1 "Pilot," 00:42:50

[7]*Homeland*, Episode 1 "Pilot," 00:39:25

[8]*Homeland*, Episode 1 "Pilot," 00:44:00