Shameless Television: Gendering Transnational Narratives

Beth Johnson (b.l.johnson@leeds.ac.uk) and Laura Minor (meljm@leeds.ac.uk)

School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

Abstract

The UK television drama Shameless (Channel 4, 2004-2011) ran for eleven series, ending with its 138th episode in 2011. The closing episode did not only mark an end, however, but also a beginning - of a US remake on Showtime (2011-). Eight series down the line and carrying the weight of critical acclaim, this article works to consider the textual representations and formal constructions of gender through the process of adaptation. Paying close attention to the structural elements of recaps, voiceovers, and final sequences of *Shameless'* first series, while drawing on the work of feminist narratologists and transnational TV theory, we argue that the examination of gender in narrative reveals differing cultural values between the UK and US.

Keywords

Shameless; gendered narrative; transnational; television; feminist media studies

Introduction

First airing on Channel 4 in January 2004, the British TV show Shameless was set on "the Chatsworth", a council estate situated on the outskirts of Manchester in the North of England. The show dominantly followed the Gallagher family and local community - a dysfunctional collective who, as the show's title suggests, are unashamedly working/under class and

unapologetic about their lifestyle. Four years after it was broadcast, British journalist Decca Aitkenhead of The Guardian (2008) wrote of its originality, noting that:

> When Shameless came out in 2004, it was so unlike anything we'd seen before that Abbott is widely talked of as a genius. His series [...] defies every genre or convention of contemporary television – yet commands equal enthusiasm in media boardrooms and Mancunian council estates.

Aitkenhead's reference to the critical praise for the industrial, social, and political environments in which the show was created, set, and received are significant here in that for our purposes, the authenticity of Shameless and its remake 'over the pond' rely upon a careful, close, and convincing cartography of its locale.

The US remake of the show, which began in January 2011, operated as a deliberate digital and visual echo of the first UK episode, replicating 1:1 almost shot-for-shot. However, Shameless US goes on to deviate from its source material, most extensively after season one. Housed on the premium cable channel Showtime, the US version follows the Gallagher family in Chicago's Canaryville neighbourhood on the South Side of the city. Though geographically Chatsworth and Canaryville are worlds apart, socio-politically both are similar, positioned as problematic, post-industrial landscapes that situate Shameless in a particular social milieu.

For the British show, the Mancunian locale was important, as was the knowledge that for the first three series Shameless was filmed on a real council estate in West Gorton, only two miles from Manchester City Centre. This 'real world' positioning can be usefully compared to its American counterpart. As Anne Sobel noted in the Huffington Post in 2011:

> The South Side of Chicago is one of the most absurdly neglected areas of the city […] People in power simply can't be bothered to funnel resources into a region that doesn't have obvious economic advantages, and so the vicious cycle of poverty continues. The South Side doesn't prosper, so it can't prosper.

Though much of the US remake is filmed in Los Angeles, the significance of the Chicago locale is clear and points to a thoughtful and transnational concern for 'cultural proximity', something that Joseph Straubhaar (2007: 26) understands in relation to 'audiences prefer[ing] television programs that are as close to them as possible in language, ethnic appearance, dress, style, humour, historical reference, and shared topical knowledge'.

This similarity in socio-political tone (at least in relation to place), conceals a distinct difference in modes of authorship employed in the British original and US remake of the show. The UK series was (at least initially) a product of single authorship by the critically acclaimed and BAFTA winning television writer, Paul Abbott. Abbott both created and wrote most of the seven-hour long episodes in series one. This single authorship can be seen in contrast to the remake which, in line with US tradition, was a collaboratively authored project from the off. While Abbott agreed to be an executive producer for the remake, it was John Wells (renowned executive producer of ER and The West Wing as well a successful screenwriter, director, and performer) who developed Abbott's original serial and acted as the principal 'showrunner' and key executive producer.

It has not gone unnoticed by us, however, that Shameless has been conceived and translated, in both instances, by male writers who continue to be landmark 'auteurs' and 'showrunners' in the contemporary televisual landscape. While these auteurs have produced (and continue to produce) significant representations of gender in their series, female-authored drama has been marginalised in discussions of transnational and quality TV, despite there being a distinct

female authorial presence in US TV drama as of late. For instance, Jenji Kohan (Orange is the New Black, Weeds), Lena Dunham (Girls), Shonda Rhimes (*Grey's Anatomy, Scandal*), Michelle Ashford (Masters of Sex), and Jill Soloway (Transparent) have created hit dramas in America, displaying the growing power of women in TV. As Zeba Blay argues in 'How Feminist TV Became The New Normal':

> When "Girls," and "Scandal" debuted three years ago, they were each weighed down with the responsibility of being the sole representatives of larger ideas. "Girls" was seen as trying to represent the definitive 20-something female experience, while Kerry Washington was the first black female lead on primetime in 40 years […] But today, there has been an explosion of series with complex female leads, adding variety and diversity to a TV landscape (2015).

In the contemporary televisual landscape women, often complex, contradictory, and compelling, tell their own stories so - as Blay points out here - the burden of representation is slowly, but surely, being lifted from the shoulders of female stars and writers. This change has also been evident in the UK via Julia Davis (Nighty Night, Camping), Phoebe Waller-Bridge (Fleabag), Ruth Jones (Gavin & Stacey, Stella), and Caitlin Moran (Raised by Wolves).

Indeed, since 'television, as an industry and as an object of study, has been gendered from the start' (Imre, 2009: 392), it is our goal to analyse how these important shifts in contemporary TV have impacted gender (and vice versa) in Shameless and its US remake. Through the examination of narrative in both shows, we explore how plot structure has been affected by the shifting masculine/feminine dichotomy in TV. This article therefore argues for the comprehensive examination of gender in narrative and how this has been translated through the transatlantic, two areas that require further exploration in current TV scholarship. As we

contend, combining a feminist narratological perspective with transnational television theory has rarely been undertaken in feminist media studies, and approaching TV translations via this framework can enable us to understand how cultural differences between UK and US television operate in 21st century texts. When offering an overview of issues and debates in feminist media studies, Kaitlynn Mendes and Cynthia Carter (2008: 1701–1718) argue that in the field of TV studies researchers have primarily used ethnography to explore gender, as well as production contexts, television genres, the representation of women from ethnic minority groups, and men/masculinity. Many facets of TV have been the focal point of gender studies, but narrative has been side-lined in the process. As such, we contribute to the field of feminist media studies by arguing that it is an important component of television in revealing how different cultural settings affect gender.

More specifically, we examine how Shameless UK is a British 'new'[i] social realist narrative interested in women, class, and community and consider the ways in which this has been adapted into a 'quality' American drama that focuses not only on 'difficult' men, but 'difficult' women, too. By exploring the techniques, methods, and cultural exchanges that inform these processes, we argue that transatlantic TV narratives shift their gendered modes depending upon the country they have been produced in. The masculine-feminine hybridity in contemporary TV, we argue, counteracts Fiske's argument that shows produced for masculine audiences 'are structured to produce greater narrative and ideological closure' (1987: 198) while shows for feminine audiences 'resist narrative closure' (179). Such binaries, dependent upon male critical voices, are complicated by contemporary transnational TV remakes, which we argue make visible the growing complexity of gendered narratives.

In a special issue of Continuum focusing on transnational television remakes, Claire Perkins and Constantine Verevis argue that three focalizations emerge:

> The first centres on the specifically political effects and implications of socio-cultural remapping […] A second focalization shows how socio-cultural remapping in television remakes creates and comments upon specifically generic effect […] The third point of focalization to emerge from the collection's study of socio-cultural remapping centres on the issue of cultural value (2015: 680-1).

These three components incite 'transtextual interpretation' (682) which we address throughout this article. More specifically, we argue that narrative has shaped constructions of gender through the process of adaptation. From Shameless UK to Shameless US, this has been carried out via three separate but distinct components: cultural value (quality TV), generic difference (quality drama vs. social realism/sitcom), and the political effects of socio-cultural remapping (both in terms of place and time).

This discussion of remakes inevitably raises further questions: 'What does the process of "Americanization" entail? And what might the particulars of a remade series tell us about the differences between American and British producers and audiences?' (Lavigne and Marcovitch, 2011: xiii). In this article, we analyse transnational ties by questioning whether Shameless UK and Shameless US conform to a narrative model that privileges male characters and audiences over female characters and audiences. In doing so, we outline the inherent national differences between both countries and consider how their representations of gender are affected by specific national contexts.

Vital to this exploration is Teresa de Lauretis' breakthrough feminist analysis of gender and narrative. In Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (1984), she argues that the classical Oedipal trajectory is the very essence of narrative. More broadly, de Lauretis contends that gender is encoded in the formal structures of narrative, that men are culturally constructed as mobile characters, and that immobile characters are morphologically women. Susan Lanser

has also spoken of the importance in reading gender at a structural level. She writes that 'with a few exceptions, feminist criticism does not ordinarily consider the technical aspects of narration, and narrative poetics does not ordinarily consider the social properties and political implications of narrative voice' (1992: 4). De Lauretis and Lanser specifically refer to the narrative strategies of film and literature here, but gender and/in narrative has also been a prominent dimension of TV studies. This is arguably because, as Brunsdon and Spigel argue, 'television scholarship has become an increasingly interdisciplinary endeavour, and feminist-inspired work on the medium has encouraged methodological elasticity as scholars search for ways to understand television's numerous (and rapidly changing) cultural forms' (2007: 11). Indeed, because television studies has always been interdisciplinary, we use concepts from film and TV to theorise narrative. As Modleski (1997: 20) states:

> Too often feminist criticism implies that there is only one kind of pleasure to be derived from narrative and that it is essentially a masculine one. Hence, it is further implied, feminist artists must first of all challenge this pleasure and then out of nothing begin to construct a feminist aesthetics and a feminist form. […] Feminist artists don't have to start from nothing; rather, they can look for ways to rechannel and make explicit the criticisms of masculine power and masculine pleasure implied in the narrative form.

Alongside television theory, we use de Lauretis' analysis of feminism, semiotics, and cinema to challenge the notion that 'there is only one kind of pleasure […] derived from narrative'. An interdisciplinary endeavour, this article uses multiple concepts to assess how Shameless operates because, as Modleski suggests here, we need new ways of thinking and looking to account for the complex combination of masculine and feminine pleasures in contemporary TV narratives.

In order to explore the importance of gender and narrative in contemporary television, we examine how Shameless UK and its American remake 'begin' and 'end' their first series as beginnings and endings are often associated with the complex dynamics of gender and desire. Susan Winnett, for example, compares beginnings and ends to the 'dynamic patterns' of 'birth and breast feeding' (1990: 143), inherently female acts, whereas male narratologists typically suggest that beginnings and ends possess 'images of detumescence and discharge,' inherently male acts (1990: 144). More specifically, we pay close attention to the structural elements of recaps, voiceovers, and final sequences in *Shameless'* first series to outline television's 'changing cultural forms' (Brunsdon and Spigel, 2007: 11) because, as previously noted, the beginning of Shameless US' first series is largely faithful to Shameless UK's plot structure. This focus on paratextual elements is significant because these devices function both as part of the narrative and work to structure and frame the narrative, operating, as Jonathan Gray notes to 'subtly inflect public understanding of an ongoing and open text' (2010: 81).

Opening Shameless

To explore the ways in which narrative functions, we need to start at the beginning – not at the beginning of the "story", but at the beginning of the episode. This typically consists of the title sequence, the recap, and the opening itself. Jason Mittell argues that television pilots 'teach us how to watch the series', and therefore must be '*educational and inspirational'* (italics in the original, 2015: 56), but we argue that pre-narrative devices should, too, as audiences may not choose to watch a TV show from its inception and therefore need to be taught what a show's genres, themes, and styles are at the beginning of every episode. Pre-narrative devices are also significant because they implicitly illustrate the gender dynamics of a TV show.

Shameless UK begins with a male voiceover – that of Frank Gallagher, the irresponsible patriarch of the family. As Allrath, Gymnich, and Surkamp write, 'most instances of voice-over narration involve a homodiegetic narrator' (2005: 14-15), and Frank is clearly a homodiegetic narrator as he is a 'character on the story level' who provides a voiceover. Though we cannot identify who he is on-screen, 'oral and visual narratives attach to the body - and hence to performed sex, gender, and sexuality - in overt ways' (Lanser, 1999: 179). While Frank's maleness is overt, so is his subjectivity. Slurring his words with warm enthusiasm, Frank provides a monologue that serves to "set the scene" of the Chatsworth Estate in the title sequence. As Glen Creeber writes 'Shameless immediately informs us that its narrative perspective is both unstable and unreliable, articulated through a narrator who is so much part of the community of which he speaks that he is clearly unable to be objective about it' (2009: 432).

Frank is the omniscient narrator but, by addressing us at the beginning of every episode, he is also very much a part of our community. He affects our expectations – but female characters do not remain stagnant, immobile, and invisible as a result. This is most obvious after Frank's introduction, as Shameless UK introduces a heteroglossic dimension through multiperspectival narration. That is, there are many characters who provide voiceovers after the title sequence - at the beginning of an episode and the end of said episode, including: Frank (David Threlfall), Fiona (Anne-Marie Duff), Veronica (Maxine Peake), Steve (James McAvoy), Lip (Jody Latham), and Debbie. While Frank is awarded narrative control as he opens and closes the first and final episodes of series one (as well as providing the title sequence's voiceover), Fiona, Veronica, and Debbie are also given the privilege of opening the narrative, and with there being seven episodes in series one, they actively control the opening of half the series episodes.

While narratologists such as de Lauretis focus on the female character's 'threat […] to man's vision,' her 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and her 'luring of man's gaze into the "dark continent"' (1984: 110) in classical Hollywood narratives, the voiceover does not affect the "look" or the "gaze." Her emphasis on viewing film narratives underestimates the affective power of the voice. Fiona, Veronica, and Debbie's voiceovers serve to highlight the unreliability of the "hero" Frank, but also the unreliability of their own narrations – each and every character in Shameless is embroiled in their own selfhoods. As Gymnich writes, 'the textual arrangement of focaliser(s) and narrative voice(s) may challenge existing power structures by privileging the perspectives and voices of those narrators/characters whose views tend to be neglected […] in a particular cultural context' (2013: 705–715). This is doubly true for Shameless, which provides voices for both the working/under class and female characters within the show, thereby layering multiple voices to challenge existing power structures. Here, Shameless UK chooses to complicate notions of authorial power typically ascribed to men.[ii]

There are also other factors that affect the beginning of television narratives. As Mittell notes, television has 'adopted a number of strategies outside the core storytelling text to help manage memories. Most contemporary series air a brief recap before each episode to summarize key events "previously on" the series' (2015: 187). Although Mittell goes onto discuss how recaps can change the way audiences 'consume and comprehend' (2015: 187) episodes, he overlooks how these narrative devices are framed by non-diegetic voiceovers. While seemingly inconsequential, these voiceovers are significant because they are typically what the audience first hears in audiovisual texts. For instance, it is hard to imagine The Walking Dead (AMC, 2010-) without the deep, baritone voice of the narrator and his opening line: "Previously on AMC's *The Walking Dead".* Interestingly, this pre-narrative voiceover is distinctly male, and opens other AMC dramas such as Breaking Bad (AMC, 2008-2013), as well as network dramas such as 24 (Fox, 2001-2010). There are, however, exceptions to this

rule. Gossip Girl (The CW, 2007-2012), Ally McBeal (HBO, 1997-2002), and Sex and the City (HBO, 1998-2004) use female voiceovers to introduce recaps. This is arguably related to the show's genres, politics, and key demographics – these dramas are typically perceived as "feminine" shows, whereas Breaking Bad, and 24 are typically perceived as "masculine". Recap voiceovers are largely dependent on the rigid gender binaries imposed by television networks, but as a product of American television that is not explicitly gendered through genre, how does the adaptation of Shameless begin its episodes?

Allrath, Gymnich, and Surkamp argue that '[o]ccasionally […] TV series feature an on-screen heterodiegetic narrator who, in spite of not being part of the story, is intermittently visible to the viewers while narrating and, thus, is both acoustically and visually present' (2005: 14-15). Showtime's Shameless is one of the few TV shows that features an on-screen narrator who is also a part of the story world, therefore being both heterodiegetic and homodiegetic. Through this, the show eschews traditional recap voiceovers usually heard on American TV dramas. Rather than have an unknown voice actor introduce episodes of Shameless, a character from the show appears on-screen, typically in their "natural" setting. This character then addresses the audience, breaking the fourth wall to present what we missed on last week's Shameless.

Significantly it is usually Frank (William H. Macy) who introduces the episode; in series one he opens six episodes out of a possible twelve. One comical example is the framing of "Three Boys" (1:5), which begins with Frank sitting up in a hospital bed, a tangled mass of tubes and wires wrapped around his head as he attempts to answer our unspoken questions about his state: "Here's what you missed on Shameless last week. I got really drunk… I'm, I'm not sure what happened after that". Like Shameless UK, this creatively complicates notions of objectivity and subjectivity, but more importantly, these pre-recap voiceovers affect how we

respond to the story. Robyn Warhol (2003: 89) has analysed what “feminine” and “masculine” responses to narratives are, and argues that:

> Just as the good-cry text encourages its engaged reader to rehearse (rather than purge) effeminate emotion through tears, the antieffeminate serial moves its readers' bodies to a state of "manly feelings”, that is, of the thrill of adventure offset and undercut by the containment of feeling the serial form […] affords.

Mittell believes that complex narratives marry ‘the effeminate affects of sentimentality and weepiness with the masculine responses of heart-pounding thrills and rational puzzle-solving’ (Mittell, 2015: 187). However, the opening of Shameless US does not marry these responses; instead it promotes the ‘masculine responses’ of ‘rational puzzle-solving’ by providing pre-narrative clues. For instance, two episodes after “Three Boys” (1:5) we find out why Frank is lying in the hospital bed. Similarly, Lip (Jeremy Allen White) introduces the episode “It’s Time to Kill the Turtle” (1:8), and when introducing the recap, we see him sitting on a bench, his hands cuffed while he smokes nonchalantly. Four episodes later Lip is almost charged with stealing a car - and we see him sitting on the very same bench. This forces audiences to create connections between episodes and focus their attention not only on male characters, but on the masculine responses of ‘puzzle-solving’ (Mittell, 2015: 187). Indeed, Fiona (Emmy Rossum) opens one episode of Shameless US (“Frank Gallagher: Loving Husband, Devoted Father”, 1:7), but the narrative dominance and narrative intrigue rests with male characters. Structurally, the opening of each episode invites identification with the active male character – it is he who is placed at the forefront of the narrative.

How, and why, does the opening of Shameless US differ from Shameless UK’s gender inclusive approach? Fiona opens one episode in Shameless US, while female characters open three out of a possible seven episodes in the original. This is arguably because, where

Shameless UK is dominantly concerned with narrative voice, Shameless US places more emphasis on the spectator's visual engagement with a character on-screen, and, as the above examples show, it is Frank Gallagher and Lip Gallagher who hold the visual attention. This focus on Frank and Lip is because Showtime has 'built its reputation for quality programming through a series starring some of the most significant independent film actors' (Gillan, 2014: 92). In this case it is the visibility of star William H. Macy that is clearly important to the broadcaster's brand. Most famous for his Oscar nominated role in the Coen brothers' film Fargo (1996), Macy has been positioned as a 'serious' actor whose image enhances the prestige and quality of Shameless US. The visibility of physically attractive actors such as Jeremy Allen White, who plays Lip, are also important to the show's growing audience base. While, on the surface, the desirable male body can be understood to cater for feminized audience tastes, this article is concerned with what is underneath the 'shiny' surface. Masculine pleasures are layered underneath feminine pleasures, thus highlighting the complexity of contemporary TV narrative form.

By contrast, Paul Abbott's concerns lie with class and community in Shameless UK as there are a plethora of voiceovers that are clearly demarcated as different members of the family/community. This is not only reflected in the politics of Abbott, but the politics of Channel 4. As a public service broadcaster, Channel 4 must: 'Be innovative and distinctive. Stimulate public debate on contemporary issues. Reflect cultural diversity […] Champion alternative points of view. Inspire change in people's lives. Nurture new and existing talent' (Channel 4, 2015: 7). Shameless UK's main focus is 'champion[ing] alternative points of view' and 'reflect[ing] cultural diversity'. Though Shameless has been compared to social realist texts which typically focus on 'a crisis in masculinity' (Lay, 2002: 104), as Lez Cooke argues, from the 1990s onwards 'female characters were a least equal to their male counterparts and often more interesting' (2003: 187) in British television drama, with

Abbott's diverse outlook and 'contemporary social realism' (2009: 423) subverting generic convention. US television, by contrast, is arguably concerned with individuality and masculinity, as it is male-centred and male-authored television that has been perceived as 'quality' television in recent years.

Some scholars contend that this form of programming has had a profound effect on viewers. Kies argues that 'series that feature masculine characters for straight male audiences are "quality" televisual offerings; what is not "quality" are series that traditionally target female audiences' (2016: 200). Dominated by male authors, showrunners, and characters, 'quality' TV in the 21st century focuses on masculinity via a range of textual and extratextual avenues, with dramas such as Mad Men (AMC, 2007-2015), The Wire (HBO, 2002-2008), and The Sopranos (HBO, 1999-2007) forming a crucial canon. These series explore multi-textured masculinities that have been the subject of recent scholarly books (see Albrecht, 2015 and Lotz, 2014) and have come to characterise 'quality' TV. Despite the complexities surrounding masculinity on television, it is representations of hegemonic masculinity - white, middle-class males and their anxieties - that are seen as profound and progressive, contributing to the perception of 'quality' as a complex genre. Preserving and perpetuating a masculine taste culture, Nygaard and Lagerwey (2017: 108) argue that networks developed these programs to encourage male viewership.

This has also not gone unnoticed by other critics and scholars. Helen Piper (2016) recently discussed the problems surrounding 'quality' TV and its masculine properties outlined here, pointedly analysing the use of local/national space and place in Sally Wainwright's British crime drama Happy Valley (BBC One, 2014-) to divert attention away from 'difficult men' in American television. Piper goes onto suggest that series focusing on self-destructive men, such as True Detective (HBO, 2014-), have 'made their name internationally by being successfully marketed as exceptions to the daily flow of broadcast or network television, the

antithesis of its mixed generic menus and routine sociability, and of its 'feminized', populist and everyday output' (163-183). Despite what Lara Bradshaw (2013: 161) notes as Showtime's pushing 'against the dominant trends of 'quality television's' preference for male-centred programmes', the first season of the US remake heralds Macy as its definitive star and as such it is Frank/Macy's voice and image that is privileged. As Jonathan Gray argues in his discussion of paratextual materials, posters can 'play a key role in outlining a show's genre, its star intertexts, and the type of world a would-be audience member is entering' (2010: 52), and in Shameless US' season one poster it is Frank/Macy who is positioned front and centre, stood on a table above the rest of his family.

Indeed, differences in UK and US gender politics have dramatically affected Shameless UK and its remake, particularly the masculinisation of American television that has occurred over time. Brett Mills (2012), when examining forums dedicated to Life on Mars (BBC One, 2007-2007) and its US remake (ABC, 2008-2009), contends that while British-ness and American-ness are 'seen to be different in terms of representational strategies and television conventions, the ways in which each society has changed over the last three decades means that it is seen that it will be possible to adapt one of the key narrative components of the programme'. This change in society is reflected in the monumental transformations TV has undergone from 2004-2011, when Shameless UK aired, with the 'argument over television's changing cultural status from feminine to masculine [...] reflect[ing] ideological issues regarding the legitimization of commercial television in the digital era' (Strangelove, 2015: 71). The feminisation of Shameless UK and the masculinisation of Shameless US reflects television's 'changing cultural status', with transnational TV narratives demonstrating how important representations (such as gender) have shifted and been adapted globally over the years. As we argue next, however, Shameless US complicates the masculinisation of TV in its narrative.

Closing Shameless

After examining the beginning of *Shameless'* narratives, we must now look towards the end. For feminist narratologists such as de Lauretis, endings are significant because the Oedipal narrative trajectory is dependent on a form of closure which reinforces the formation of the heterosexual couple and masculine maturation (1984). Robert Scholes is one scholar who reinforces this notion, as he maintains that the basic structure of narrative is akin to sexual intercourse: 'we see a pattern of events designed to move toward climax and resolution, balanced by a counter-pattern of events designed to delay this very climax and resolution' (quoted in Lauretis 1984: 108). De Lauretis, in response, contends that 'those of us who know no art of delaying climax […] may well be barred from the pleasure of this "full fictional act"; nor may we profit from the rhythm method by which it is attained' (1984: 108). Here, de Lauretis wittily points out that man has predicated narrative on his own sexuality, thereby structuring and perpetuating a masculinist, narcissistic model of storytelling. In other words, female pleasure is absent from narrative. She further argues that, along with this masculine structure of narrative, 'the female position, produced as the end result of narrativization, is the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image in which the film, as Heath says, "comes together"' (1984). These two arguments suggest that the climactic moment of a film, as well as the position of women at the end of a film, cooperate on a structural and textual level to construct a wholly masculine conclusion.

Scholes' description of narrative shares similarities with Robin Nelson's characterisation of the 'flexi-narrative' – 'the fast cut, segmented, multi narrative structure which yields the ninety second sound and vision byte currently typical of popular TV' (1997: 24). Though Nelson points out that this is not a new concept, he stresses that flexi-narratives possess an intensity that stems from the rapid and continuous cuts between narrative threads:

> Once the strands of the narratives are established, it is possible to cut to the high points in the action of each, thus keeping up - if not always at fever pitch - the dramatic temperature. [...] [A]ll but the most dynamic or dramatically intense moments of a story can be omitted (38).

Nelson's phrasing here is significant as 'cut[ting] to the high points' to maintain 'dramatic temperature' allows audiences to experience 'dynamic or dramatically intense moments'. This is reminiscent of the 'climax and resolution' Scholes argues is ingrained in the very structure of narrative. That is, it is a masculine model predicated on masculine pleasures.

While it can be argued that television's complex narratives ebb and flow like the rhythmic structure of desire proposed by Scholes, the dénouement of television dramas complicates the climactic 'full fictional act' typically seen in classical Hollywood cinema. In television narratives, each series never fully 'comes together' because, as Burkead writes, 'to speak in terms of a final, climactic stage of a television series or serial is truly antithetical to the medium' (2013: 51). TV endings consistently raise further questions. Season one of Shameless US, for instance, leaves the following questions unanswered: What will Sheila (Joan Cusack) do when she finds out about Karen (Laura Wiggins) and Frank? What will happen with Ian (Cameron Monaghan), Mickey (Noel Fisher), and Kash's (Pej Vahdat) love triangle? Is Steve (Justin Chatwin) gone for good? Structurally, the show disavows closure through its open-endedness; we are not 'barred from the pleasure of this "full fictional act"' (de Lauretis, 1984) because there is no ending to this 'full fictional act'. While it could be argued that states of heightened tension are indicative of melodrama and feminized audience tastes, in Shameless US the significance of Showtime being situated as the 'natural' home for the show – a cable channel essentially owned and controlled by the CBS Corporation (which has only three out of fifteen women on its Board of Directors and no women at all amongst

its Executives) - means that the focus on the gendered body rather than on the body-politic of the show, is structurally undercut.

It would, however, be unfair to judge Shameless US on its basic narrative skeleton, as the last episode's portrayal of gender is particularly complex ("Father Frank, Full of Grace", 1:12). After following conventions of the romantic plot through Fiona and Steve's relationship, Shameless concludes by deferring the traditional heterosexual union, instead favouring female friendship. Rather than presenting a typical "will they or won't they?" situation, it is instead a "will she or won't she?" situation as Fiona must decide whether to run away to Costa Rica with Steve or stay with her family. While she initially goes to the train station to meet Steve, she changes her mind and returns to Chicago to accept a job from her new friend, Jasmine Hollander. Though we do not hear their conversation, we see Jasmine clutch Fiona to her chest, and in the final shot of season one the camera pans over the city of Chicago – the symbol of a new beginning. This is potentially transformative, an example of 'writing beyond the ending', or in this case, 'filming beyond the ending', which is a metaphor for narratives that represent new possibilities for women (Blau DuPlessis, 1985: x).

Shameless UK, however, differs in its structural approach because, as Nelson asserts, 'in terms of dramatic form, Shameless resembles a sitcom as much as a mini-serial drama' (2007: 45). The ending of Shameless UK's first series is exemplary of this, but it predominantly displays qualities of the sitcom. According to Larry Mintz: 'the most important feature of sitcom structure is the cyclical nature of the normalcy of the premise undergoing stress […] and becoming restored' (1985: 114-115), that is, it is predominantly episodic. In both versions of Shameless there is a complex blending of episodic and serialised storytelling that bear similarities to Trisha Dunleavy's definitions of the 'series' and the 'serial'. As she argues (2009: 51):

> The serial story unfolds in a sequential, usually linear, fashion, with each episode contributing new developments and often ending in some kind of cliffhanger […] and can be either 'open' (potentially never-ending) or 'closed' (resolving within a limited number of episodes).

Series, by contrast, have story arcs that continue, but 'the convention is to resolve at least one "story-of-the-week"' (51). Shameless UK, though a hybrid of the two, conforms to the 'series' in its desire to 'resolve' the "story-of-the-week". Like Nelson's 'flexi-narrative', this traditional form of narrative transition could be seen as masculine because this restoration is synonymous with the 'full fictional act' de Lauretis criticises (1984: 108).

The sense of 'satisfaction' we experience through the "story-of-the-week" is doubly evident in the first series as it ends on a two-part story arc. This indulgence culminates in Shameless UK's last episode "Dead (Part 2 of 2)" (1:7) as we see a familiar state of return and restoration typically seen in the sitcom as Steve, after wishing Fiona a happy 21st birthday, shows her a house that he has bought for her – quickly burning it down for the insurance money. As the house alights, Steve, Fiona, and Veronica laugh at the scene. We are reassured by the smiling faces of each character as Shameless UK celebrates the coming together of the community and the breakdown of the nuclear family. This is an example of TV's postmodern 'turn', with Paul Abbott taking inspiration from his previous TV series Clocking Off (BBC Two, 2000-2003) which 'reworked social realism for a new conjuncture and a new "postmodern" television audience of the 1990s' who preferred fast paced narrative forms like the 'flexi-narrative' (Cooke, 2005: 189). Shameless, too, reworks the genre - there is a postmodern irony in the first series' 'happy' ending – which is anything but this - that complements Channel 4's reputation as an "alternative" broadcaster.

There are clearly important differences between Shameless UK and Shameless US. The introduction of character Jasmine Hollander in Shameless US adds a radically different dimension to the show in terms of gender and sexuality, as does the continuing shift in Fiona and Steve's relationship. By comparison, Shameless UK produces a version of the "happy" ending and is predominantly episodic in its closure. These differences are intimately related to the shows' country of origin, genres, and the time periods in which they were created. Paul Abbott's Shameless is considered 'both a sitcom and a mini-serial drama', but it is the sitcom that is particularly significant to the show's context. Although the genre has always been popular in the UK and US, Shameless is clearly concerned with the British mode of expression. As Barry Langford argues, 'it has been observed that the nature of British social experience - historically bound by particularly rigid and intractable class (hence lifestyle) structures - lends a particular intensity to sitcom's characteristic circularity' (2005: 21). Yet in Shameless the cyclical nature of the first series and the cyclical nature of the British class system do not 'bind' the characters. In fact, the false sense of security we find in Fiona and Steve's "happy" ending serves to highlight the breakdown of traditions in genre and in class, a postmodern reflection on TV and society.

Shameless US has sculpted this generic mode into a 'quality' US drama. Elke Weissmann asserts that 'UK programmes influenced discourses about the quality of US television output […] by offering socially relevant sitcoms which could be adopted, and by having produced key cult dramas that industry insiders, becoming increasingly reflexive, could refer to' (2010: 171). Shameless UK is both a 'socially relevant sitcom' and a 'key cult drama' that has been 'Americanized'. While Shameless US intertwines gendered pleasures, its implicit focus on masculine desires arguably stems from the evolution of cable television in 21st century. As Shameless US' focus on a traditional, masculine narrative structure is part of Showtime's strategy to continue producing quality TV, which over the years has been increasingly

concerned with multi-textured masculinities. It comes as no surprise then that underneath the surface, *Shameless'* structure favours male over female narration. However, its textual representations are at odds with this masculine structure, and it marries two gendered affects on two different storytelling levels. This is because, as previously noted by Lara Bradshaw, Showtime distances itself from the masculine and instead has 'narratives featuring middle-aged females and the contemporary issues that they face as women and mothers' (2013: 161), only in the case of Shameless, it is Fiona's struggle as a young, surrogate mother that is placed at the forefront of the first series dramatic narrative. Its complexity stems from these multiple layers of textual and structural storytelling.

Conclusion

Sue Thornham contends that 'a central concern within feminist media studies has been the narratives of femininity produced within cultural texts, and the ways in which these are bound up with, and in some ways construct, our sense of ourselves as women' (2007: 55). Identity, in feminist media studies, is key. While this remains crucial, we have examined the ways contemporary TV caters to male and female audiences rather than explore how Shameless has forged female identification(s) because 'narratology still largely proceeds as though it is women who "have" gender and men who are gender-free; very little work has been accomplished on the gendering of male writers, narrators, and characters according to the same intersectional principles that feminist narratologists have called on with respect to women's works' (Lanser, 2013). In analysing the ways contemporary television uses narrative – both structurally and textually - this article has outlined how a series 'made for' male and female audiences use strategies to appeal to varied audience tastes. Combining the works of feminist theorists from different disciplines rather than strictly working within TV

studies, this interdisciplinary approach has enabled us to see not only man as subject and woman as object, but the ways in which certain pleasures are buried deep within the text.

Shameless' subtle intricacies do not provide easy answers. Differences between both series do suggest, however, that gender has been impacted by stereotypes attributed to British and American media, as the very structure of Shameless US' first series focuses on male pleasures that stem from stardom and beauty, whilst Shameless UK's structure is deeply embedded within the British class system. Again, this is not to oversimplify British and American texts, if anything, it has proven that we should not judge television by what defines it nationally, but how its growing complexity potentially conceals convention and vice versa.

The feminine-masculine hybridity of contemporary TV narratives complicates this further. Though there are stereotypical differences between the two nations, Shameless US' narrative becomes more feminized as the show progresses. Showtime encourages us, for example, in season seven, to "go behind the scenes of Emmy Rossum's directorial debut" for episode 7:4, "I Am A Storm". Not only was this episode (which introduced a new transgender character) directed by Rossum, but it was also written by a woman, Shelia Callaghan, and had a female executive story editor, Dominique Morisseau.

The growing focus on Fiona over the previous seasons can also be evidenced in the increasing spotlighting of Fiona/Emmy in Showtime's official posters for Shameless – where she is at the forefront more than Frank – which suggests that whereas the selling point of Shameless US was once Macy, the focus has shifted to Rossum as the series have progressed. In December 2016 Rossum publicly entered a stand-off with producer Warner Bros. over salary parity with Macy for the renewal of the eighth season – one that was soon resolved. Here, the masculine approach 'quality' TV typically takes has been turned on its head by the production context of US TV and progressive gender politics. Indeed, the renewal of

Shameless US for an eighth season airing in 2017 speaks to and points toward a welcome and increasing divergence away from an overtly masculine 'quality' model. As was always the case, Shameless is again to be at the forefront on calling out inequality and has an audience who seemingly want what it is offering.

Piper and Bradshaw's articles on quality TV and gender also embodies this shift as they reinterpret and reassesses the masculine approach to television that has permeated academic thought, while de Lauretis challenges this gendered approach in her earlier work on narrative. The growing number of female critical voices in the 'quality' debate, as well as the transition from masculine to feminine narratives in TV, indicates the need for further work on these topics to extend the ideas that have been presented in this article. Addressing narrative structure in tandem with gender allows us to look at what runs deeper in TV – what is seen as peripheral but is in fact fundamental, much like the voices of female stars, writers and scholars in the contemporary televisual landscape.

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Notes on Contributors

Dr Beth Johnson is Associate Professor in Film and Media Studies at the University of Leeds, UK. She is the author of Paul Abbott (MUP, 2013), and co-editor of the collections Television, Sex and Society (Continuum, 2012) and Social Class and Television Drama in Contemporary Britain (with David Forrest, Palgrave, 2017). She has published in Journal of British Cinema and Television, Critical Studies in Television, Angelaki and the Journal of

Popular Television. Her research interests include class, gender, place and activism on-screen.

Laura Minor is a PhD candidate and White Rose Scholarship holder at the University of Leeds, UK. Her PhD project is entitled Reclaiming Female Authorship in British Television Comedy, 2010-2016.

Teleography

Primary

Shameless. 2004-2013. Channel 4, January 13th, 2004.

_____. 2004-2013. 'Monica Comes Home (Part 1 of 2)', 1:6. First broadcast 17 February 2004 by Channel 4. Directed by Dearbhla Walsh, written by Paul Abbott, produced by Company Pictures.

_____. 2004-2013. 'Dead (Part 2 of 2)', 1:7. First broadcast 24 February 2004 by Channel 4. Directed by Dearbhla Walsh, written by Paul Abbott, produced by Company Pictures.

Shameless. 2011-. Showtime, January 9th, 2011.

_____. 2011-. 'Three Boys', 1:5. First broadcast February 6 2011 by Showtime. Directed by Mimi Leder, written by Alex Borstein, produced by Michael Hissrich.

_____. 2011-. 'Frank Gallagher: Loving Husband, Devoted Father', 1:7. First broadcast February 20 2011 by Showtime. Directed by David Nutter, written by Etan Frankel, produced by Michael Hissrich.

_____. 2011-. 'It's Time to Kill the Turtle', 1:8. First broadcast February 27 2011 by Showtime. Directed by Scott Frank, written by Nathan Jackson and Nancy M. Pimental, produced by Michael Hissrich.

_____. 2011-. 'Daddyz Girl', 1:11. First broadcast March 20 2011 by Showtime. Directed by Sanaa Hamri, written by Nancy M. Pimental, produced by Michael Hissrich.

_____. 2011-. 'Father Frank, Full of Grace', 1:12. First broadcast 27 March 2011 by Showtime. Directed by Mark Mylod, written by John Wells, produced by Michael Hissrich.

Secondary

24 (2001-2010, United States: Fox).

Ally McBeal (1997-2002, United States: Fox)

Breaking Bad (2008-2013, United States: AMC).

Camping (2016, United Kingdom: Sky Atlantic).

Clocking Off (2000-2003, United Kingdom: BBC Two).

ER (1994-2009, United States: NBC).

Fargo (1996, directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. United States: Gramercy Pictures).

Fleabag (2016-, United Kingdom: BBC Three/Amazon Studios).

Gavin and Stacey (2007-2010, United Kingdom: BBC One).

Girls (2012-2017, United States: HBO).

Gossip Girl (2007-2012, United States: The CW).

Grey's Anatomy (2005-, United States: ABC).

Happy Valley (2014-, United Kingdom: BBC One).

Mad Men (2007-2015, United States: AMC).

Masters of Sex (2013-2016, United States: Showtime).

Nighty Night (2004-2005, United Kingdom: BBC Two).

Orange is the New Black (2013-, United States: Netflix).

Raised by Wolves (2013-2016, United Kingdom: Channel 4).

Scandal (2012-, United States: ABC).

Sex and the City (1998-2004, United States: HBO).

Stella (2014-2017, United Kingdom: Sky 1).

The Sopranos (1999-2007, United States: HBO).

The Walking Dead (2010-, United States: AMC).

The West Wing (1999-2006, United States: NBC).

The Wire (2002-2008, United States: HBO).

Transparent (2014-, United States: Amazon Studios).

True Detective (2014-, United States: HBO).

Weeds (2005-2012, United States: Showtime).

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[i] The term 'new' social realism here is used in line with Glen Creeber's (2009) article in which he argued that the 'poetic realism' of *Shameless*, as seen through the unreliability of the narration and the stylistic flourishes that work to draw attention to the construction of the show, constitutes a new form of social realism.

[ii] For further discussion of female voices and characters in *Shameless* UK see Johnson, B. (2012) '*Shameless*: Situating Sex Beyond the City' in *Television, Sex and Society Analyzing Contemporary Representations*. London & New York: Continuum, pp. 3-16.