

IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A TELEVISION CHARACTER

Sabrina the Teenage Witch, *The Boy Season*, season 2 episode 6

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Author Note

This is an ideological analysis of a television show. The context of this episode deals with gender and relies on stereotypes to create the identity of the woman turned into a man by a spell. Gender may be discussed, along with the physical attributes of the actors portraying the role. No offense is meant when discussing or dissecting the idealizations or stereotypes used in this character analysis. All theories discussed originated from the Appalachian States COM3300-106 MASS MEDIA & SOCIETY (FALL 2018).

Thesis

The topic of this analysis covers the stereotypes that categorize heteronormative gender identity in a high school setting to reveal the idealizations that make high school relationships difficult and educational. We then determine how Sabrina, the teenage witch, has perpetuated societal norms expected in this relationship structure.

This analysis will be conducted by examining key proponents that construct gender identity, both in terms of stereotype and societal expectations, while also examining the witch culture of which Sabrina is also a part. In witch culture, monogamy is not the norm; polyamory is considered “healthy and liberating” and is the norm. This was explained in season three and later, as she entered college, and was a topic further discussed in the reboot series created from a recently published graphic novel based on fan fiction.

A member of witch culture Sabrina uses magic, in the form of a boy brew, turning her into a male. This power does not change her mind which is female. What stereotypes will she use to portray a male figure?

The topic of discussion in this character analysis will be costume (female), costume (male), vocalists, dialect, representation of gender (positive or negative), theme songs or entrance music, plotline, cultural representation, reference to other jobs, and setting locations.

Sabrina the Teenage Witch, The Boy Season, Season 2, Episode 6

In this episode of Sabrina, the Teenage Witch, Sabrina and her boyfriend, Harvey, decided to take a break and see other people after a year of an exclusive relationship. Sabrina is afraid that Harvey will take this opportunity to find a new partner; she is worried and employs the help of her aunt Hilda Spellman to teach Sabrina how men think. The solution is to create a potion that will turn Sabrina into a man. With Hilda's help, Sabrina creates a week's worth of the boy brew and infiltrates boy time. As a boy, Sabrina helps fix a car, play fights with other boys, burps loudly, does not take notes in class, goes on multiple dates with a different woman, and is caught crying by another male. This episode revolves around stereotypes. Sabrina is unaware of how to act, so she reverts to the implications of what a high school male figure looks like. Parallel to Sabrina's experiences as a male, Hilda also uses the boy brew to scare off an unaware, unwanted suitor. As a male, Hilda is a biker stereotype with a large potbelly. Hilda gets in a physical altercation with the prospective mate, using harsh and emasculating language, only to become friends with the suitor as he stands for her honor.

Methods

This character analysis will use characteristics that have been portrayed as stereotypes in the production of The Boy Season and the reliance on culturally constructed idolizations of masculine and feminine characteristics. Sabrina interacts and perpetuates stereotypes in the following categories: costume (female), costume (male), nonverbal gestures, vocalists, dialect, representation of gender (positive or negative), theme songs or entrance music, plotline, cultural representation, reference to other jobs, and setting locations.

Costume

Costume (female)

In season 2, episode 6, The Boy Season, there are 12 costume changes. Nine of these costume changes were done under the female identity. In this episode, compared to many others, her feminine attributes are displayed more prevalently. She wore six blouses of pink, lavender, purple, and floral patterns. These blouses were sheer cut and showcased her cleavage. Five of the blouses were paired with skirts and one with pants. She wore two shirts that were also tight of light colored earth tones, and a turtleneck that is used several times in scenes that took place in a single day. The turtleneck was very tight yellow and received positive comments in character interaction. In this episode, the temperature of the outdoor environment was not discussed, but many of the older characters wore heavy jackets under dusters.

One may assume by these characters that it is a cold season. However, Sabrina is not seen as portrayed as a female wearing a jacket, presenting the feminine clothing, wearing clothing that would not be suitable for the weather, compared to others interacting inside the same environment.

The portrayal of female costume changes was three times more often to take place. Identifying a stereotype that females are more aesthetically inclined, that their outfits are essential, and the identity of the character is represented through the costume variety. This character development can be seen as the title seen over nine seasons consists of her changing costumes from high school student, Audrey Hepburn mimicry, to formal wear, to a silly costume. This is also an ability showcased as she often is not satisfied with a costume and will change it using her magical ability. Somehow, she matched another student on that particular day or used a

boy brew to change quickly into a asking the girl Harvey was interested in before he could make a move.

Costume (male).

Male costumes were much less likely to be presented favorably, with less variety. Each consisted of the same features: jeans (too baggy), two shirts, one long and one short, a flannel, and high-heeled boots. The three costumes were different, but they all followed the same characteristic guidelines.

Here are some reasons why: The multiple layers were most likely used to conceal her feminine features. Three layers of shirts and jackets were used to conceal her breasts, and the baggy pants to mask her hips and legs. The high-heeled shoes were an attempt to make Sabrina taller than the females she/he was taking on dates. (They should have had her not wear the heels when in female form to differ her height between changes.)

The most substantial change between the two characters is the hair length. Sabrina had long, straight blond hair that reached the small of her back. Jack, her male identity's hair was cropped short in a bowl cut, straight, and with bangs. This change happens magically and reverts to its natural length after the two-hour spell wears off.

Vocalics

In vocalization, Sabrina shows the differences between her male and female forms. As a female, Sabrina speaks at a high tempo. She speaks very quickly, which can be linked to cultural issues. A higher tempo may mean that one is trying to get across a point before it can be shut down or that they want their point to be seen as valid or relevant. When Sabrina is Jack, she/he speaks very slowly; this may, in cultural identification, show that, as a male, he is not worried about being taken seriously or fearing the opportunity of being taken away.

The resonance of voice is different from the two, as well. Sabrina's voice is high and has little accented vocal qualifiers. She uses her natural voice. As Jack, Sabrina deepens her resonance, creating a more nasally back of the throat pitch. This deeper Resonances is met with an altered pitch range, articulation, tempo, and rhythm control. Jack speaks slowly and does not finish his words or accents them as he should. This makes him seem less intelligent, slow, and stereotypical "bros, bro."

Dialect

In the episode The Boy Season, Sabrina changes to a boy; as a woman, she uses a standard dialect and seems to pertain to formal conditions. She does not curse, objectify physically, and has a confident demeanor. When Sabrina changes to a boy, she alters the dialect. She uses words that would not be commonly utilized in her vernacular and uses some boarish phrases such as: "My man!", " Customizing some wheels,", "Mark your territory," and "You call that a burp." This altered dialect is effective because they are based on stereotypical constructed of juvenile boy conversations. These scenes and conversations take place as "the boys" work on an old car that they want to fix.

Gender (Positive Negative representations)

The representations of gender in this show have always been positive female and negative male portraits. This comes to no surprise; the show depicts a coven of witches who are centuries old raising their flowering demonic charge. The show is decidedly for a female audience.

In this show, these witches are all powerful. There is not a challenge they cannot beat, create, or spell their way out of. These women are wise, fierce, and loving. One of the biggest

challenges they face is annoying vice-principals that have fallen in love with them, or other relationship problems.

Their antagonists often are men, just plain, mortal men or men from magical worlds. In this episode, the premise is that Sabrina wants to go into a man's head to see if she is still relevant in a romantic capacity. The parallel story with her aunt, Hilda, is the same. She is having problems with a man who cares dearly for her, but she can not stand him. They go through trouble and tears to defeat these men and create the world they want, which they succeed in.

Men are viewed negatively. Sabrina's vocalics and dialog express this, but the show's history also does this. Men are not only the antagonists in most situations but are also slow, dumb, and inattentive in most situations. Harvey plays on the sports team and is portrayed as a monkey. He has limited thought processes and is motivated by carnal needs, such as eating.

Discussion

In The Boy Season, Sabrina's character depicts the challenges of two genders. This is portrayed in many ways, from kinesthetic reactions to the same stimulus in different gender characterizations to costumes, vocalics, and introductory music and a big burp whenever she becomes a male. Sabrina is very comfortable with herself as a woman but is the idealization of a high school girl. She goes, does her homework, and juggles a life of friends, responsibilities, and witchcraft. Many of these conventions rely on the stereotypes that make some popular and others not in high school.

Conclusion

This episode is an excellent example of characterization and the uses of stereotypes to depict an ordinary reality by the use of the male figure transformation. The whole episode is trying to explain what it is to be a man. Sabrina attempts to understand their motivations and why

they act the way they do. To keep her cover, she relies on social conventions that she has interacted with, mainly the foolish machinations of the pubescent boy. Jock, farts and burps, as well as fascination with motor vehicles, women, and food, are all topics broached in this episode, which relies on stereotypical reactions to the world. They are attempting to reach a real-world audience, so they use the cultural understanding we already have to express the character change and the realistic attempt at portrayal.