

Bones – Little Space for Gender Stereotypes?

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Introduction. The media

This debate starts with the premise that “culture is learned”. It is held that “Cultural beliefs and practices are usually so well learned that they seem perfectly natural, but they are learned nonetheless” (L. Andersen, Francis Taylor, 2005). The process of learning culture is commonly known among sociologists as “Socialization”, and the “Agents of Socialization” are those institutions in charge of communicating and shaping societal values and expectations, whatever they are referring to (our ideologies, our sense of fashion, chosen careers, and so on). As Ortega-Gutiérrez points out, it has been thought for a long time that the school and the family were the two exclusive agents of socialization (Ortega-Gutierrez, 1996). But along with these traditional actors, the media now plays an active role in the spread of cultural values (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948, Ortega-Gutierrez, 1996).

Karl Erik Rosengren notes in *Media effects and Beyond: Culture, Socialization and Lifestyles* that “(...) the relative importance of different agents of socialization has changed (...) For instance, the relative importance of school as an agent of socialization will be reduced, in that substantial parts of formal and informal socializations will be taken over by the mass media (...)”. He argues that “the role of the family may well be reduced (...) since the agent of socialization will often be television distributed by the various TV sets of the family (...)” (Rosengren, 1994).

The socio-cultural influence of mass media communication has been object of research and debate since the early 20th century. There are three theories “of obliged reference in any study of the media” (Lucas et al., 1999): *social cognitive theory*, *cultivation theory* and *uses and gratifications theory*. By and large, the last one makes an allusion to the fact that the audience is an active agent and takes the initiative in integrating and interpreting the messages of the mass media. As Elihu Katz highlights, *uses and gratifications theory* is focused on what people do with the media instead of what the media do to people (Katz, 1959). On the contrary, *social cognitive theory* and *cultivation theory* corresponds to the analysis of mass media contributions to audience’s conceptions of the surrounding reality. In this sense, Morgan *et al.* note that “Television is a centralized system of storytelling. Its drama, commercials, news and other programs bring a relatively coherent system of images and messages into every home” (Morgan et al., 2008). An audience who is exposed to the media from infancy absorbs from television specific images and messages that can become part of their personal set of beliefs, values and ideologies. Karen E. Dill explains how audience learn about what other people are like through certain representations of the world offered by tv shows or movies (Dill, 2009).

It is important to emphasise that, regardless of the more or less active role played by the audience, there is one unquestionable premise: with every show, with every serial, television is transmitting particular –and complementary- messages, definitions and visions of the world and

its social order. While aspects such as selective attention and perception, group or individual interpretation and different cultural backgrounds and personal experiences should not be dismissed, this essay cannot be confined to audience reception studies. Instead, it concentrates on the messages transmitted by *Bones* - particularly those regarding gendered ideologies and stereotypes - independently of the “naturalization” or “internalization” effect that they may cause - or not - in spectators.

Gender and the Media: the particular case of TV

The link between media and gender issues are central to this work. Rhodes synthesizes in one sentence the importance of analyzing the interconnection between them: for “those interested in social movements in general and the women’s movement in particular” attention must be given to how “the media choose to present (or not to present) (...) the women’s movement” (Rhodes, 1995). The media is a key tool of the spread of culture that influences the public and private spheres (Walter, 2010) and plays a crucial role in shaping public consciousness and policy. Following this line of thought, Krijnen, Alvares and Van Bauwel highlight the importance of the media when researching gender topics:

Contemporary transformations in society and politics illustrate the workings of a gendered machinery where notions of femininity and masculinity are altered. Such transformations are particularly visible in communication and media institutions, which provide a crucial research space for “doing” and “undoing” gender. (Krijnen et al., 2011)

Calvert, Casey et al. also emphasize the importance of the interconnection between the media and gender concepts and indicate that “media may be powerful agents in constructing and representing gender and television is an arena both for the construction of stable notions gender (through stereotyping and generic convention) and a site where more contradictory, paradoxical versions of gender can be exhibited and discussed” (Calvert et al., 2007).

Among all the existing forms of mass communication media, television has been chosen in order to illustrate the role of the media as an important vehicle of knowledge, information and entertainment. In 1978, Fiske and Hartley accounted for television’s centrality to our culture by comparing it with the language: “taken for granted but both complex and vital in an understanding of the way human beings have created their world” (Fiske and Hartley, 1978).

Later, in 1983, Donna J. Hess and Geoffrey W. Grant highlighted in their article, “The Use of Mass Media in Sociology Curricula”, works as those of Light and Keller (Donald Light and Keller, 1982) or McDonald and Godfrey (McDonald and Godfrey, 1982) so as to illustrate the potential influence of the televised depictions of reality. They claimed, at the time, that “It is almost commonplace today for introductory sociology textbooks, as well as other texts in sociology and women’s studies, to assert that the mass media, and television in particular, have become a major agent of socialization in modern society” (Hess and Grant, 1983).

Nowadays, television continues to be one of the most ubiquitous and easily accessible modes of communication and “therefore an incredibly important medium to understand and study” (Gorton, 2009). Following the same line of thought, Jeremy G. Butler claims that television is “the predominant meaning-producing and entertainment medium of the past 60 years” (Butler, 2006).

In this article, the TV series *Bones* is examined under the conceptual frame of gender portraits and the media. Its main focus is the examination of the specific personalities of Temperance Brennan (a forensic anthropologist) and Seeley Booth (an FBI agent); and, to a lesser extent, the interaction among the main feminine and masculine characters working together as a team. At this point, it is important to clarify that this essay does not pretend to inquire into every gender issue that may arise in the relationships developed in every single episode between the protagonists of the show and the guest characters. Its aim is in trying to identify whether *Bones* entails - or not - a step away from the stereotyped discourses of gender presented by the media.

With nearly 11 million viewers (USA 2010) and currently in its sixth season (premiered on September 23, 2010), the TV Series *Bones* seems to offer, at first glance, a refreshing and encouraging trend regarding gender representations. The show is inspired by real-life forensic anthropologist and novelist Kathy Reichs who also produces the series. Kathy Reichs is the author of the bestselling Temperance Brennan novels and, in fact, the central character and the TV show's title borrow the name of the books' heroine, Temperance “Bones” Brennan. Temperance (Emily Deschanel) is the team leader of the fictional Jeffersonian Institute in Washington D.C. The show revolves around the exceptional abilities of Brennan to solve Federal legal cases by examining the human remains of potential murder victims “when the remains are so badly decomposed, burned, or destroyed, that CSI gives up” (FOX, 2010b). While most people cannot handle Brennan's intelligence, her drive for the truth or the way she flings herself headlong into every investigation, Special Agent [Seeley Booth](#) ([David Boreanaz](#)) of the FBI's Homicide Investigations Unit is the exception. As well as Booth, Brennan is most comfortable with her equally brilliant colleagues at the Jeffersonian.

It is interesting to see how male and female characters all constructively work as a unit to keep each other afloat, instead of confronting each other in an attempt to demonstrate that their “masculine or feminine” point of view is the one that best works. It is through this balance that *Bones* shed a different light on gendered stereotypes in our society. This discussion will centre upon an analysis of the first five seasons in order to discover whether such a claim can be upheld in relation to *Bones*.

Gender portrayal in TV series

As it has been stated, the TV series *Bones* has been chosen for analysis because it seems to be one of the most evolved TV series concerning the stereotypical gender portrayals of both men and women.

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There are undoubtedly a great number of TV series that still reproduce a traditional masculine perspective. The fact that TV reflects and reinforces certain social values has already been mentioned, and in a society in which men still dominate TV production processes it is not difficult to find narratives that privilege a masculine perspective. It has been argued that male professionals working on TV (producers, camera operators, etc.) “objectified women’s bodies and limited the range of roles in which women appear, whereas men have been represented more broadly” (Calvert et al., 2007). In the same book - *Television Studies: The Key Concepts* -, Calvert, Casey et al. talk about the different portrayals of men and women that can be found in “the television world”:

Men are more likely to be seen in jobs or careers, to inhabit a wider range of roles, occupational and otherwise, to be spread across a larger age range and to be seen in more body shapes. Many programmes and advertisements surveyed showed women as either overwhelmingly domestic creatures (housewives, mothers) or as sexual prizes and accessories to men (bodies to sell products, assistants to male authority figures). (Calvert et al., 2007)

There are many TV series that correspond with the previous statements concerning the preponderant “male gaze” in the industry of TV. The action genre is a good example. This genre became most popular from the late 1970s through to the end of the 1980s. As Michael Hardin notes ‘The plots tend to be superficial vehicles for the action, which generally entails the “good” male protagonist fighting, either with fists or guns, against their “evil” adversaries.’ (Hardin, 2003). TV series as *Knight Rider* (1982-1986) or *The A-Team* (1982-1987) can be included within this genre. Even though from the 1990s onwards a “model of equal, if somewhat different, genders appeared in many other shows (...) including *ER*, *Dawson’s Creek*, *Frasier*, [and] *The West Wing*. Nevertheless we can also note many series (...) may have an ensemble cast of equals but are still often seen to revolve, first and foremost, around one or more male characters.” (Gauntlett, 2008). Similarly, it seems that contemporary TV is beginning to offer more complex concepts of men, women and their social roles but some archetypal gendered patterns are still clearly recognizable on many TV shows. Films adaptations such as the British *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (originally a novel by Helen Fielding) or the American TV series *Ally McBeal* have generally been considered within the academy as a clear triumph of the feminist movement but, other authors, as Kristyn Gorton argues that “*Ally McBeal’s* success (...) demonstrates the continuing salience of the demands of second wave feminism on modern women.” (Gorton, 2007b). In *Rewriting Democracy: Cultural Politics in Postmodernity* Gorton reaffirms her previous argument:

Characters such as *Bridget Jones* and *Ally McBeal* appear to have few goals beyond finding a man who will play Darcy to their Elizabeth. Such pop culture representations testify to the media’s power to give an impression that “grrrl power” is causing a real social transformation when in fact the same problems and the same statistics persist. (Gorton, 2007a)

Michael Allen, in his analysis of *CSI*, supports the same ideas and notices how particular conventions restrict female characters to female roles. Furthermore, he specifies that stories of family life seem to be more important and appear more often in the female characters’ line of arguments: “Both the female CSIs participate as fully in the workplace as their male colleagues but, in keeping with the culture’s construction of femininity, family plays a far more important role

in the lives of Catherine Willows and Sara Sidle than it does in the lives of Gil Grissom, Warrick Brown or Nick Stokes.” (Allen, 2007)

Following the same reasoning, Alice Silverberg, who is Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science at the University of California and a consultant for the CBS show *NUMB3RS*, expresses her concern about the depiction of female mathematicians in this TV series. She comments that ‘Many professors I’ve talked to (...) would prefer that the character Amita’s role were more “The Grad Student” and less “The Love Interest”’ (Silverberg, 2006). In fact, in her article “Alice in *NUMB3R*land” she puts forward that her main objective in becoming a consultant for the TV Series was to improve the portrayal of the female scientists, inasmuch as they are usually depicted more as sex objects than as scientists.

The depiction of men and women on TV is still fairly typical and stereotyped (though not as markedly as in earlier years). Nevertheless, the fact cannot be ignored that there are some exceptions to the notions expressed above. TV series such as *Murder, She Wrote* and *Fringe* could be largely considered a great success with respect to the egalitarian representation of both men and women. For instance, *Murder, She Wrote* was first aired in 1984, surviving for 12 seasons “in an era obsessed with wealth, youth, upward mobility and physical beauty when you’d think a pensionable, small-town female lead was hardly a recipe for ratings success” (Barlow, 2010). At that time, when older women were – and still are (Weitz, 2010, Sullivan, 2010, Lee et al., 2006) – underrepresented on TV and only appeared in minor roles, Ms. Jessica Beatrice Fletcher character meant a good role model for the representation of the women’s cause on TV. She travelled all around the world, she did exercise regularly, she was –and she felt herself- attractive (in fact multiple episodes showed her having suitors and dates), she hardly needed assistance of a man to “do it yourself” tasks, “played video games, went fishing (...) Heck, she even wrestled with killers.” (Barlow, 2010). But aside from all the anterior positive traits it has to be also emphasized that she coped very well with her investigative work. Annette Barlow remarks that Jessica was always a step ahead of the small-town policeman and her advice gets to be indispensable for her male colleagues. (Barlow, 2010). Writers as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers brought to life female detectives in crime fiction from the 1920s onwards. But in the TV world, detective fiction was still considered to be a men’s world. In 1984 (*Murder, She Wrote* premiere), few female detectives had featured as the sole protagonists of TV crime/detective series (i.e. Anne Francis in *Honey West*, Stephanie Turner in *Juliet Bravo* and Jill Gascoine in *The Gentle Touch*).

As far as *Fringe* is concerned, we still can find the archetypical depictions of male “mad scientists”. But this TV show also features a tough, brave, resolute and brilliant female FBI agent: Olivia Dunham. Moreover, Olivia (Anna Torv) is also a sensitive woman, a feature that she makes use of very often to solve her cases. Sensitivity has never been seen as a positive and valuable trait (Evetts, 1997, Helgesen et al., 2010); rather it is a very well-worn argument to undervalue women in certain occupations. With respect to this particular issue, the analysis of Anita Sarkeesian

concerning an episode -*The Cure*- in which Olivia receives the disapproval of her male boss for being “too sensitive” is especially interesting:

Her response is a wonderful example of push back on the traditional gender norms that are often used to trivialize women in the workplace. She replies by informing her boss that “men always say that about women they work with” and goes on to explain that her use of emotions is what makes her a good detective. Instead of succumbing to his critique and “toughening up” she refuses to let the standard unemotional, unattached mode of working in a traditionally male environment change the way that she best does her job. (Sarkeesian, 2010)

In *Bones* happens quite the opposite. Temperance Brennan (the lead female character) lacks social and emotional skills and she is constantly reprimanded by her peers because of her “insensitive” behavior. Then it can be noted that *Fringe* and *Bones* are offering a contradictory message about the use of emotions in the workplace. Such a contradiction is also depicted in *Bones* TV series itself between Seeley Booth (the lead male character) and Brennan. Booth often makes use of his intuition, sensitivity and faith to solve murders but when he is told to be “all about emotion and feeling”, he overtly rejects such “feminine” traits. In this case, Booth is communicating a gendered observation of sensitivity since he is forever encouraging Temperance to be more sensitive but, on the contrary, he feels upset when his “well-developed emotional side” is insinuated.

Booth: the lead male character

From Docster’s point of view, the characters of *Bones* act in accordance with the standards that society expects from them. For her, “Agent Booth (...) lives up to the expectations that society has set up in relation to gender.” (Docster, 2008). With regard to this, several instances can be highlighted in which Booth’s behaviour fairly reproduces the typical traits of the “alpha male”. On the one hand, Booth is forever trying to be acquiescent to and over protective towards Temperance even though she makes very clear that she does not need it (1:15 “13.00-14.00”; 3:08 “05.00-06.00”; 5:04 “02.00- 03.00”). On the other hand, in *The Priest in the Churchyard*, Seeley himself shows to feel very uncomfortable and embarrassed when his friends, colleagues and Brennan suggest that he possesses well-developed sensitivity and intuition. As it has been previously pointed out, Seeley acknowledges that those qualities are considered to be feminine and therefore rejects them overtly (2:17). As the typical TV and film male hero, he is very athletic, and apparently sexually confident with women; he represents the strength and the control of a white, middle-class heterosexual masculinity in which there is no place for any suggestion of feminine qualities. This suggests how a strongly gendered observation of sensitivity and intuition still remains very present in *Bones*. Seeley tries to assert his manhood in more than one occasion: “Come on! Ceramics?, I’m not that kind of a guy, all right?, What do we say we go, you know, bowling, or to a firing range, or climbing a wall”. (3:10 “19.00-20.00”; see also 2:10 “31.00-33.00”; 4:01 “14.00-15.00”; 4:05 “41.00-43.00”; 5:02 “11.00-13.00”).

At first glance, with Booth portraying all those standards of masculinity to which men are said to aspire, it cannot be said that he poses a challenge to the hegemonic male. But, at least with

regard to the balance he achieves between his private and professional life, he may represent an exception to the stereotype. Concerning that balance, Rebecca Feasey in her book *Masculinity and Popular Television* argues that:

Police and crime dramas routinely show male police constables, detectives and special branch officers ignoring the needs of their family in favour of the force, sacrificing their personal life for the good of the wider society. In short, their success in the public sphere seems to demand a sacrifice in the private realm. (Feasey, 2009).

But as we have mentioned above, this is not exactly the case with Seeley's character. Booth is very devoted to the family and to his little child, Parker, placing his well-being and safety above all. Booth enjoys a good relationship with his son which he does not jeopardize by putting his profession first. In fact, Booth states in more than one occasion that he wanted to get married with his ex-fiancée, Rebecca. Nevertheless, the fact that Parker and Rebecca only appear in a few episodes could be circumscribed to the hypothesis specified by Michael Hardin in *Men & Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia*: "A less frequent and less compelling approach is the off-screen girlfriend or wife. The audience can be satisfied with the apparent heterosexuality of the hero, but the plot and male bonding are not interrupted by her presence." (Hardin, 2003).

Bones: Some Feminism Out There?

Although Dr. Temperance Brennan has never referred to herself as a feminist, there are several episodes in which she uses words such as "misogyny" and "objectification of women". It could be argued that she consciously fights certain harmful and stereotyped practices with implicit feminist reasoning. In an episode about children beauty pageants ("The Girl with the Curl") she strongly criticizes dangerous and oppressive beauty practices:

Temperance Brennan: Our society puts a premium on beauty. Common in declining cultures (...). You put your nine-year-old daughter in a corset, Ms. Swanson.

Seeley Booth: A corset.

Ms. Swanson: Yeah. Brianna ordered that off the Internet herself. And I didn't tighten it up very much.

Temperance Brennan: Did you ever think to tell Brianna... that she didn't need to alter her physical appearance in order to be loved? (2:07 "12.00-14.00")

Later on in the same episode she also regrets the fact that many women equal beauty with self-esteem and happiness and adds that great empires, like Rome, fell because of such superficiality and frivolity (2:07 "40.00-41.00"). In the very first season she does not mind at all telling out loud in the waiting room of a plastic surgeon that what he does is barbaric:

Temperance Brennan: Every culture nurtures ideals of beauty toward which people strive - fine! But in the future people will look back upon the surgical alterations of the nose or breasts or buttocks with the same horror that we regard the binding of feet or the use of bronze coils to extend the neck.

Seeley Booth: You want to speak up? 'Cause it's really hard to hear every word in this very, very quiet waiting room.

Temperance Brennan: It's barbaric! It's painful! It's wrong! This murder victim may never be identified because some glorified barber with a medical degree has the arrogance to think that he could do better than a millennium of evolution. (1:10 "12.00-13.00")

It is fair to point out that Temperance Brennan almost always receives support from her colleagues and partners when she deals with issues affecting women, even if she does it from an explicitly feminist point of view. When a fictitious producer of a show similar to *Girls Gone Wild* refers to Temperance as “a feminist crusader out to ruin all-American fun!” while getting too close to her, she punches him and states “Self-defense, he assaulted me”. Sully, her colleague and partner during the second season, simply responds “Yes, he did.” (2:13 “23.00-25.00”). Sully also endorses Brennan in a conversation with the same producer in which Temperance charges him with considering women not as humans, but as objects:

Producer: Now they all want to be a Hotty Body. Walk into a place and the shirts fly off, making what used to be a rush kind of, I don't know, mundane.

Temperance Brennan: Because you objectify them. You never see what makes them human.

Producer: Man, you have to spend all day with her?

Sully: Yeah, an actual woman. You ought to try it sometime. (2:13 “17.00-18.00”)

Temperance is an independent woman who makes it clear in several occasions that she does not trust and does not need to fit into traditional perceptions of gender roles. She does not want to be a mere companion, because she is well prepared to face any issue that arises in her life:

Sully: Excuse me? Uh, no. She's with me.

Temperance Brennan: Why are you winking? I'm not with... He's with me.

(2:13 “15.00-16.00”; see also 1:01 “01.00-02.00”, 1:13 “24.00-26.00”, 2:20 –about marriage).

Working as a Team

Until relatively recently the majority of women on TV were relegated to the traditional and caring roles of nurses, mothers, housewives and secretaries. In *Bones* this is not the case. Dr. Temperance “Bones” Brennan is well surrounded by a highly skilled and competent group of both men and women who work devotedly together to solve every case in which Booth asks for help. It is interesting to see how they all work as a unit to keep each other afloat and, what is more important, they do not do it –at least the majority of the time- under the ubiquitous influence of social expectations for men and women. Not only there is a fair balance between the so called feminine and masculine abilities within the team, but also, they are not always possessed by the gender to which such traits are “normally” ascribed. As Docster points out, “Whether it is Dr. Brennan, the beautiful scientist being a more masculine character because of her rationalizations, or Dr. Sweets, the psychologist, who is in a more feminine career, all of these characters shed a different light on gender roles in our society.”(Docster, 2008)

The episode *Aliens in a Spaceship* is a very good example of all these men and women working as a unit in harmony. Every member of the team turns out to have an indispensable and necessary ability in order to find Temperance and Dr. Jack Hodgins. Brennan and Jack are buried alive by “The Grave Digger” (a serial killer). During the whole episode they work together in order to escape from the trap without showing a single hint of stereotyped behavior. Instead of acting as the traditional damsel in distress, Brennan takes the control of the situation and helps Hodgins to keep calm (he is seriously injured). Neither does Hodgins act as might be expected of a man.

He shows his fears and anxieties about death to Brennan, a sensitivity that a man traditionally cannot afford even in such a situation. Contrarily, as William Marsiglio states, men “are expected not to cry or complain when they are troubled or injured. Reacting to their environment, they learn to manage the impression they display to others, so that others will not see any self-doubt, fear, or grief.” (Marsiglio, 2008). But this is not fulfilled in this episode since Brennan and Hodgins are rescued thanks to the precise and non-pre-determined use of their abilities; as Hodgins tells Brennan: “If you can perform surgery out of thin air, then I can pull a little thin air out of thin air.” (2:09 “31.00-32.00”)

It can be argued that it is difficult (though not impossible) to find gendered hierarchies in this TV Show. In the case of *Bones*, women are represented as the lead experts. This trend can be found more easily nowadays (*The Closer*, *Fringe*, *ER* and so on) than in the past, when women were more often shown on TV in a few roles such as housewives, mothers, nurses, etc., whereas men are found more in the world of things (technology, sports cars, etc.). Both Dr. Saroyan (the Head of the Forensic Division at Jeffersonian Institute and a pathologist) and Dr. Temperance Brennan show an excellent assertive ability as well as being determined, initiative and competent when guiding their team of scientific experts. Haran, Chimba et al. have pointed out that it could be due to the fact that *Bones* is “inspired by real-life forensic anthropologist and novelist Kathy Reichs” (FOX, 2010a) who is an authority on her field “and is a consultant on the series so this may account for the capacity of the series to maintain a woman scientist as an acknowledged authority. (Haran et al., 2008)

Biological Destiny. What does *Bones* tell us?

Some scholars and theorists have been sustaining for a long time –and still do– that men are more “naturally” wired to engage in logical thought, leading them to perform better than women in relation to scientific tasks, spatial calculations and mathematics. On the other hand, women are less critical, more intuitive and have a “natural” disposition to sympathize with people and to take care of the family and home. For instance, according to Simon Baron-Cohen “[t]he female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems.” (Baron-Cohen, 2003)

In *Reading CSI: Crime TV Under the Microscope*, Michael Allen’s analysis of Gilbert “Gil” Grissom (William Petersen) offers an example of the idea annotated above. Concretely, Allen annotates how the typical “mad scientist” is still conceived of and depicted on TV as being male: “In western culture “mad scientists” are almost always male and dedicated professionals and intellectuals frequently so. (...) Gil’s central trait of emotional repression/distance and the isolating behavior associated with it is often thought of as more typically male than female.” (Allen, 2007)

On the contrary, beyond the reductionism of the biological determinism, there are other authors that include many other approaches for the scrutiny of the “female and male nature”. In her book, *Delusions of Gender*, Cordelia Fine develops a profound analysis of the theories that have

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emerged in our contemporary society to explain how gender is constructed. For instance, she dismantles certain versions of evolutionary psychology that promoted the idea that our brain has been designed by natural selection to keep humans alive in the environment “of our hunter-gatherer ancestors”:

But our brains, as we are now coming to understand, are changed by our behaviour, our thinking, our social world. The new neuroconstructivist perspective of brain development emphasizes the sheer exhilarating tangle of a continuous interaction among genes, brain and environment. (Fine, 2010)

Taking into account all these theories, as far as *Bones* is concerned there is an evident reversal of roles between the main characters (Brennan and Booth). During the whole TV show, Booth will keep teaching Brennan “sensitivity lessons”, whereas she will try to solve the cases –and her own life issues- with the use of anthropology, logic and reason. On the other hand, at least in accordance with those versions of biological determinism, it could be argued that Seeley and Temperance are behaving mistakenly since, for instance, there are many episodes in which Booth ends up telling Brennan that he only needs his intuition, sensitivity and faith to catch the villain - which is to say that he only needs his “female abilities”. The show subverts the typical notions of “sensitive femininity” and “rational masculinity” by attributing intuition to Booth and logic to Temperance:

Seeley Booth: But whose side are you on? Don't say the facts, because that just annoys me.

Temperance Brennan: You want us to base our actions on your gut again?

Seeley Booth: Yes. You have your shiny machines, I have my gut. (3:04 “33.00-34.00”)

As McCarthy James states, “Brennan is justifiably proud of her intelligence and her success, and in a rare feat for ladies on television, she is not shown to be a bitch for liking herself.” (McCarthy James, 2010). Smith also supports this line of reasoning and points out that she is treated with respect, without being sexually objectified at every turn and showing her “strengths and weaknesses which stress that she's a real person”(Smith, 2009b) Brennan subverts sex roles in describing herself as “the logical empiricist” and Booth as “the intuitive humanist” (4:01 “00.37-00.43”). This signals a separation from all those stereotypes regarding the 'innate' characteristics of male and female. Nevertheless, it is also important to emphasize that Temperance is subject to constant criticism for being *too* rational and analytical, either explicitly (1: 08, 2:19 “00.18-00.19”, 4:26 “08.00-10.00”, 5:06 “31.00-34.00”) or by means of the music and the co-star's – Booth- gestures (4:25 “14.00-16.00”, 5:07 “30.00-32.00”).

What is more, on some occasions she is not considered a real “girl” (2:14 “10.00-11.00”, 3:08 “00.00-00.33”). Haran, Chimba et al. also give an account of the latter by pointing out that in *Bones* (as well as in *Waking the Dead* and “in the earlier series” of *Silent Witness*) women are presented as being the scientific expert and men play generally the detective role, which “(...) reverses conventional stereotypes about gender, at significant cost to the female characters, but generally to the benefit of male characters. The abstracted women scientists are harshly judged

by characters within the narrative, when they demonstrate failures in empathy (...). (Haran et al., 2008)

In fact, the series features several episodes in which Brennan's friends and colleagues tries to "excuse" her lack of sensitivity by arguing that such a behavior is only due to her troubled upbringing: she is cold and distant only in order to protect herself and her armor from her real vulnerability. We are reminded of her fragility quite often, as in this conversation maintained between Booth and Dr. Sweets (the psychiatrist assigned to Booth and Brennan by the F.B.I.):

Dr. Sweets: Conclusion: Your feelings are not real and will fade away, like every other symptom of your coma. Now, I think you and I both know that Dr. Brennan's hyper-rationality is really just a cover for a very vulnerable and sensitive core.

Booth: Oh, great, so we're talking about Bones' brain, too, here?

Dr. Sweets: So, if you breach those defenses and it turns out you don't really love her... (5:01 "25.00-27.00"; see also, for example, 5:07 "29.00-31.00")

But it also can be argued that the plot tends to associate the rational and direct style of "Bones" with behavioral attitudes such as coldness and isolation. This kind of accusation falls within some author's critique, as that of Diana M. Meehan who has shown how on TV, "good" women are presented as submissive, sensitive and domesticated; ; "bad" women are rebellious, independent and selfish.' (Meehan, 1983). Furthermore, in relation to the specific representations of women in science, engineering and technology (SET) environments, Eva Flicker analyses 20 feature films and distinguishes six types of female scientist none of which carry positive connotations: "old maid", "male woman", "naïve expert", "evil plotter", "daughter or assistant" and "lonely heroine". (Flicker, 2003)

Nevertheless, Brennan defends herself against the accusations made by her friends and colleagues (5:14 "40.00-43.00"). In this sense, it can be considered that the character herself – and, therefore, the TV show- achieves a good balance between the criticism of hyper-rationality and the recognition of that same hyper-rationality as necessary in order to fight certain socio-cultural conventions and beliefs (2:20 "32.00-33.00"). Haran, Chimba et al. comments on the latter:

For example, in *Bones* much is made of the "squints" supposed inability to relate to other human beings appropriately, but the humour this stereotype offers is nuanced by dialogue exchanges in which Brennan, for example, points out that a degree of abstraction is essential to the maintenance of her composure in the face of some of the horrific crime she investigates in the course of her career. (Haran et al., 2008)

The Ladies in Bones

In her article "Televism: The Competent and Awesome Ladies of *Bones*", Rachel McCarthy argues that "*Bones* is a rare show that consistently portrays their politically marginalized characters as competent, admirable, and worthy of respect and commendation". (McCarthy James, 2010). The role of the lead female character, Temperance Brennan has already been discussed, but what about her female peers, Ángela and Camille? Do they pose a challenge to traditional notions of

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femininity? It can be acknowledge certain situations in which they fail to provide with something different from the norm. This conversation proves the latter:

Angela: For once can you just pretend to be the girl?

Brennan: Why is everyone so anxious for me to be a girl?

Angela: Listen, go to the basketball game, let him show off for you and see what happens.

Brennan: I don't know, it sounds so passive.

Angela: Now you've got it. (2:14 "10.00-11.00"; see also: 1:09 "11.00-12.00")

Angela makes quite clear that she believes that to be a "girl" means to be passive and accommodating to men and their achievements and abilities. Nevertheless it contrasts with other circumstances in which Angela is offended because of certain assumptions made by her male colleagues:

Seeley Booth: Wait a second. That's Tripp Goddard.

Angela Montenegro: Tripp Goddard?

Seeley Booth: A motorcycle racer. I forget sometimes I'm talking to girls.

Temperance Brennan: That would explain the wrist and neck injuries on Zack's report. Have him confirm with dentals.

Angela Montenegro: Yeah, I don't appreciate the "girls" comment.

Seeley Booth: Tripp won a huge motorcycle race about two weeks ago.

Temperance Brennan: That fits time of death.

Angela Montenegro: That would have been the Super Grand Prix out in Virginia. Tripp won in the final two laps after some kind of accident took out the front runner. Girls, huh? (3:10"08.00-09.00")

Angela is the specialist in forensic facial reconstruction at the fictional Jeffersonian Institute and she is usually described as the emotional, empathic and intuitive part of team (3:01 "11.00-12.00"). But it has to be said that "her emotions don't consume her and become the defining features of her character" (Smith, 2009a). Angela is not all about her emotions, she is tough (3:04 "35.00-36.00"), a "free spirit" – as she herself and her friends define her- and, at the same time, she always reflects carefully on every important issue before making a decision (2:17 "40.00-42.00", 2:19 "39.00-41.00"). Moreover, she remarks, in several occasions that she is not anybody's property (4:01 "35.00-36.00"; 4:02 "01.22.00-01.23.00"), something her father corroborates with Angela's boyfriend, Hodgins:

Jack Hodgins: I figured I should ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage. As a sign of respect.

Angela's father: You're making a huge mistake, son.

Jack Hodgins: Marrying Angela?

Angela's father: No. If Angie finds out that a man... you... asked another man...me... for her hand or any of her other fine parts... horrible complications will ensue.

Jack Hodgins: I didn't think of that.

Angela's father: You could get us both killed.

Jack Hodgins: Okay. Good advice. (2:21 "28.00-29.00")

Camille Saroyan is authoritative, with professional success and a senior position at the Jeffersonian Institute, described by McCarthy James as "a good example of a woman of color in an authority position who doesn't fall into any angry/uppity black women stereotypes" (McCarthy James, 2010). She overtly fights specific assumptions and generalizations regarding such important women's issues as marriage or motherhood:

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Angela: You don't want kids?

Camille: Screaming, crying, vomit, other bodily fluids... Like a day around here. Not worth giving up this body for that. (3:12 "18.00-19.00")

Throughout the show, Cam can be found making statements as "'Women' is an unacceptable generalization' (4:01 "29.00-30.00") or insisting –together with Brennan- that Booth should not drive (rejecting, therefore, the commonly held assumption that men are better at driving). (4:01 "14.00-15.00", also "30.00-31.00")

To sum up, Angela and Camille are said to be "girls" by her male peers when they are compared to Brennan (3:08), though Camille always makes it very clear that she is not willing to tolerate sexist comments. Angela's character is the one that seems to offer a more obvious different female identity to Brennan and Camille. Nevertheless, when critical issues for women's cause arise (i.e. abortion) these two women demonstrate a complementary female identity to Brennan, that is, the one that overtly fights injustice and stereotypes whether anybody likes it or not. From Angela's open sexuality and "typically feminine" sensitivity, to Cam and her exceptional qualities as the head of the Forensic Division to Brennan and the independency in which she strongly believes, what these women represent is that different ways of living the feminine emancipation can work together. Despite of being so different, they all fight sexist tropes in their own way.

Conclusions

This essay has discussed the question of whether female and male (American) characters of the TV series *Bones* are moving beyond traditional gender norms or not, and has argued that they transcend some of the most traditional gender disparities found within mass media presentation of gender. Booth frequently turns to his intuitive, emotional and even romantic side to deal with both personal and professional life (4:03 "41.00-43.00"). Brennan, on the other side, displays what has been largely considered the most representative features of the "alpha male"; she has a strong and independent personality, she is authoritative and, as McCarthy James notes: "Bones matches her male partner's strength on many occasions—she is well-trained in martial arts and often defends herself. Though he is typically masculine, she is sometimes the one who has to rescue him. She's an action star, too—not just Booth" (McCarthy James, 2010)

This article has given an account of the significant exchange of the typical masculine and feminine roles among characters. To explain such a reversal, two possible interpretations can be specified: firstly, *Bones* only portrays conventional archetypal roles but expresses them in different bodies. This raises the question: does *Bones* depict a woman acting like a "typical" male and vice versa? Is it liberating for women? If so, to what extent? Secondly, however, all the archetypes mentioned above are freely exchanged among all the characters with no gender pre-assumptions of any kind. From Jack Hodgins' crying (2:09 "38.00-40.00"), to the sweet and emotional Angela Montenegro being afraid of compromise (2:17 "08.00-10.00", 4:08 "34.00-36.00") to Camille Saroyan rejecting the idea of having babies (3:12 "18.00-19.00"), "all of these

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characters shed a different light on gender roles in our society. (...) The people in this show teach each other new things about life through the different cases that they encounter and it helps them to evolve into better people.” (Docster, 2008) Then it could be argued that, at least in that sense, *Bones* presents competent female characters –and men- who contest “sexist brigades” common to crime shows.

The show covers women’s issues as maternity, marriage and abortion. Whether Brennan’s progressive or Booth’s more conservative viewpoints prevail, the most important thing is that, whenever they emerge, we can distinguish very different perspectives and no taboos; there is no unilateral speech (see 2:02, 3:05). It can be argued that Temperance Brennan deals with issues that affect women, offering the female audience a positive role model. She defies social expectations for women: she is not only compassionate and caring but independent, determined and brilliant. Furthermore, she does not even need Booth’s help when physical dexterity and agility is required (though she always tries to use her intelligence in the first place just to avoid physical situations where she must be rescued). (2:01 “23.00- 24.00; 2:04 “03.00-04.00”).

Nevertheless, there is one area of *Bone*’s presentation of gender that is open to criticism: the appearance of the characters. All the feminine characters share the attributes of conventional beauty. They are all quite thin (extremely thin in Angela’s case as the show advances), tall and good looking, which reinforces unrealistic and biologically unattainable beauty standards which lead many women to harmful practices (Andrist, 2003, Dittmar and Howard, 2004, Katzmarzyk and Davis, 2001).

Haran, Chimba et al. have also noticed that:

With regard to film and television programs imported from the USA, even in the eponymous *Bones* (“*Bones*” is Temperance Brennan’s nickname in the show), the actor Emily Deschanel shares star billing with David Boreanaz who plays her FBI agent partner in crime-fighting. Further, his name appears higher up on the shared screen. (Haran et al., 2008)

In 1979, Erving Goffman highlighted a similar phenomenon in his book *Gender Advertisements* finding that in media advertisements “men tend to be located higher than women” and that was often a woman who was seen lying on a floor or on a bed. He also noted that “lowering oneself physically in some form or other of prostration” is “a classic stereotype of deference” (Goffman, 1979). It effectively could be said that in doing so, women are presented as inferior to men. In the case of *Bones*, however, it is worth commenting that, as had been claimed in this debate, Brennan is not a mere supporting character.

As regards the specific relationship between Temperance Brennan and Seeley Booth, as the show and seasons advance, both start opening their minds in order to understand the specific personality, behavior and emotions of each other. As Haran, Chimba et al. have specified, Booth and Brennan’s relationship

is a competitive one with each character repeatedly trying to demonstrate that their method of fact-finding is superior. There is continual readjustment as one or other gets the upper hand, leading to a situation of mutual respect that is occasionally undermined by mutual incomprehension of different worldviews. (Haran et al., 2008)

The alliance between Brennan and Booth gives a fresh spin to traditional gender roles. *Bones* offers almost no place for pre-assumed tasks, abilities or ways of behavior with respect to modern women and men. Its male and female characters all constructively work as a unit to keep each other afloat, instead of confronting. It is through this balance that *Bones* has brought to light a different way of depicting gender roles on TV crime drama shows.

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