

MASTER'S THESIS

A ROMANCE FOR THE AGES: AN EXAMINATION OF FEMALE KINSHIP ON *BROAD*

*CITY*

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## CHAPTER ONE

On May 18, 2015, rapper, Nicki Minaj and singer, Beyonce Knowles released the music video for their song “Feeling Myself” (Nostro, 2015). In the music video, Minaj and Knowles are shown dancing in the bathroom, putting on makeup in the mirror, and lounging on pool floats together, as friends do. Alexi Mattel (2015) of *MOBO* describes the scene, “Yes, the two are fierce but they also have moments of laughing and just goofing around... it makes everyone either want to be them or be their best friend.” Following this release, Minaj posted stills from the video with the caption, “When u and bestie know y’all poppin. #FeelingMyself #FeelingMyselfVIDEOonTIDAL” and the Internet lost its collective mind (Bell, 2015; Cummings, 2015; Dunlap, 2015; Thompson, 2015). There were articles ranging in discussion from the political importance of Nicki Minaj and Beyonce Knowles as best friends to listicles describing why “Beyonce and Nicki are #FriendshipGoals defined.” This positive representation of two powerful women as best friends was welcomed into popular culture.

Minaj and Knowles’ friendship is situated in a year where female friendship dominated popular culture. From Taylor Swift and her #SQUADGOALS to shows like *Broad City*, positive and powerful representations of female friendship have become popular culture mainstays. Since 2015, there has been a cultural fascination with these female friendships. What is unique about these representations is that they are focused on the ways that these women lift one another up in their respective industries. From shows like *Grace and Frankie* to media representations of celebrity female friendships, it seems like these friendships are en vogue.

I argue that this recent increase in the popularity of female friendships calls for further scholastic investigation. Thus, this project takes a scholastic examination of female friendship through a kinship lens. Kinship is an often overlooked area of research in communication and rhetorical studies. The concept originated in anthropology over 40 years ago, and has since been adapted by other disciplines. Traditionally, kinship has been used to examine the relationships between non-blood related people who form familial relationships out of necessity and choice (hooks, 2002; Stack, 1974). In other words, kinship studies examine the friends who become family. In this project, I examine the way female friendship is enacted on television. Thus, this project examines the relationship between the main characters of the female-centered show, *Broad City*. *Broad City* is a comedy show that airs on Wednesday nights on the cable network, Comedy Central. The show follows two best friends, Abbi and Ilana, on their (mis) adventures through New York City. Abbi and Ilana's flawed characteristics and questionable morals provide much of the show's comedy. The true moral compass of the show is Abbi and Ilana's unwavering love for one another. These two best friends are willing to go through any wacky situation for the other, reserving judgment. The ease that Abbi and Ilana interact with one another makes their friendship feel real and lived-in. The following research questions will guide this project:

RQ1: How does the relationship between Abbi and Ilana exemplify or challenge romantic friendship?

RQ2: How do television series that are female-friendship centric liberate women from the confines of traditional notions of female friendship?

In order to answer these questions, this project continues as follows. First, I provide a rationale for the use of *Broad City* as the text, including information about the two lead characters and the premise of the show. The second chapter discusses the literature surrounding kinship and third wave feminism which reveals the necessity for this study. Chapter Three focuses on the theoretical orientation I employ to analyze the kinship relationship between Abbi and Ilana. In Chapter Four, I provide my analysis of *Broad City*. In the Fifth and final chapter, I discuss the conclusions and implications of the project.

### **Justification**

In 2015 amidst all the attention paid to female performers and their ‘Best-Friendships’ with other female celebrities, entertainment writer, Emily Witt (2015) asked, “Are female friendships the new power couples?”. The question allowed readers to subconsciously juxtapose the image of female celebrities with the image of the previous notion of a “power couple”-- rich and well-known heterosexual partners, such as Jay-Z and Beyonce or Kanye and Kim. While feminists and other historians would always claim that female-female friendships have been crucial to the social support of women and their socio-political status, the increase in the high-visibility of these relationships has demanded consumers of popular culture pay attention (Plank, 2015). Through shows such as *Parks and Recreation*, *Broad City*, and *Orange is the New Black* and movies like *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Pitch Perfect*, there is an increasing number of

examples of ultra-supportive BFFs in the cultural zeitgeist (Witt, 2015). Thus, I outline the cultural significance of the prevalence of female friendship in popular culture. Through this discussion, I also set up the project's importance from a scholastic perspective.

Examples of powerful female friendships can be found in both the fictive world of Western culture as well as in real-life celebrity friend duos. Female friendships, such as Amy Poehler and Tina Fey, Taylor Swift and posse, Anna Kendrick and Aubrey Plaza, and Jennifer Lawrence and Amy Schumer are all examples of celebrity friendships that have gained media attention as of late. In addition to the media attention on their friendship, Tina Fey and Amy Poehler have also written publicly about their friendship in their respective books. For example, in her book *Yes, Please*, Amy says of Tina (2014):

When we are together I feel strong and powerful. Maybe too powerful. (I tend to show off and run my mouth a little bit). (p. 230)

Other female celebrity duos have also discussed how their relationships have brought them through their toughest times, and have been their biggest source of career support in interviews and on their social media pages (Rees, 2015).

In addition, there are plenty of articles that provide examples of female celebrities discussing their friendships. For example, there are countless articles written about Taylor Swift and her friends or interviews wherein she speaks of her friends (Mapes, 2014; Oglethorpe, 2014; Witt, 2015). Through her interviews and social media presence, Swift has made it known that one of her biggest sources of support and inspiration come from her friends, and she likes to

reciprocate this love. Speaking of her friend Ella, musician Lorde, Swift says “...you can either be afraid of it [female friendship] because it’s so powerful and strong, or you can go stand near it, because it’s fun and it makes you brighter” (Mappes, 2014). Swift is often photographed having lunch with friends or throwing baby showers for friends like Jaime King, whose child is Swift’s godchild. Additionally, Swift is the most popular user on the social network, Instagram, with 46 million followers. She has surpassed the likes of Kim Kardashian, who previously held the title. While Kardashian mostly posts photos of herself and occasionally of her family, Swift’s Instagram focuses on her female friends (Moraski, 2015). The prevalence of Swift’s girl posse on her Instagram has certainly gained the attention of other Instagram users, starting the hashtag trend #squadgoals, which is shorthand for aspiring to have a friend group like hers (Cosmopolitan, 2015). Swift’s Instagram focus on her female partners has left many women (young and old alike) aspiring to have a similar relationship with their own female friends, as evidenced by her popularity on the site. Given the varied of examples of these impactful female friendships, then as scholars it is pertinent to further investigate their cultural impact.

Media critics and popular culture enthusiasts alike are well aware that female friendship has had a place on television for many years. The female friendships on shows like *Laverne and Shirley*, *I Love Lucy*, *The Golden Girls*, and *Girlfriends* have provided interesting and complicated representations of female friendship that have resonated with the American public for many years past the finales of each respective show. However, the focus of these relationships between the women was often less on the friendship itself, but on how these women

navigated their heterosexual relationships. A poignant example of this is the show, *Sex and the City*, a show that celebrated the friendship between four women, but whose storylines always focused on heterosexual love and the pursuit of it (Winch, 2012).

In recent years the construct of female friendship has again risen to prominence. This popular culture fascination and celebration of female friendship has been bolstered by the aforementioned celebrity female friendships. Currently, female friendships are no longer relegated to the sub-plots of romance, but have become their own kind of romance (Witt, 2015). Put another way, the focus of these on-screen friendships are instead on the friendships themselves rather than heterosexual relationships. The dynamic relationships that can be seen on shows like *Broad City*, *Shameless*, *Parks and Recreation* provide audiences with examples of supportive friendships that are not tied to traditional gender roles in the way that heterosexual romances in television are (Witt, 2015). The romantic friendships seen between Leslie and Ann (*Parks and Rec*) or Abbi and Ilana (*Broad City*) are never constrained by professional advancements or jealousy. Rather, the women build each other up and are better with one another, than without. For example, when Abbi gets to display her artwork at a “show” (which turns out to be a sandwich shop), Ilana is the first to cheer her on. Abbi follows Ilana on endless wacky adventures, no matter how strange or extreme they may be.

It is important to differentiate between the aforementioned female-centered comedies or feminist television shows/films and television shows/films that demonstrate kinship. In 2011, there was an influx of female-driven and female centered comedies, such as *GIRLS*,

*Bridesmaids*, and *New Girl* (Tully, 2013). Each of these shows gained critical acclaim and made the names of their creators and stars household names (Lena Dunham, Kristen Wiig, and Zooey Deschanel, respectively). While it can be argued that these shows are feminist and focus on female friendship (that is not my purpose here), many of the conversations center and focus on the women's love lives. The friendships in these shows and films are still a by-product of the primary goal for the women, which is to secure or maintain a heterosexual relationship (Plank, 2015).

In contrast to the focus on character's love lives, media depictions of female friendship are also often demeaned by a focus on jealousy and cattiness between two women. For example, the friendship between Jess (of *New Girl*) and her best friend is a sub-plot that is often demeaned to catty fights about material objects. Kristen Wiig's character in *Bridesmaids* is jealous of her friend, Lillian's new relationship with another bridesmaid, and the way her life is changing with her upcoming nuptials. With the cultural shift from female friendship as a sub-plot or plot device to female friendship as the center of television shows, it is imperative for scholars to understand why this shift occurred and how it has changed our cultural assumptions about female relationships.

These strong female relationships are occurring during a larger cultural shift in marriage. Today, only about 20 percent of Americans ages 18–29 are married, contrasted with nearly 60 percent in the '60's (Traister, 2016). The fact of the matter is simple, American women are waiting longer than ever before to get married (Joiner, 2013). Where the emphasis before was on

gaining emotional support from a male significant other, women instead find and share this intimacy with one another. Romantic friendships go beyond typical friendship or roommate boundaries. Women in these relationships share bills, support each other through their biggest life events (i.e. childbirth, job promotions, the death of a parent), and they do this without hesitation (Joiner, 2013). The relationships between these women are not ones formed out of single-dom convenience, but are thoughtful, loving relationships. For example, *Grantland's* Rachel Syme (2014) describes Abbi and Ilana of *Broad City* as “intoxicated by (and often in) each other’s presence, full partners in crime and life”. Again, this type of relationship can be seen between Meredith Grey and Cristina Yang in *Grey’s Anatomy*, a show that has not only surpassed the golden 100 episodes of television, but has produced 200 with ease (VanDerWerff, 2013). These two doctors struggle through medical practice only with the aid of the other. To restate my point, romantic friendships between women have become the cultural norm in television in the past few years.

Now, female centered friendships can be found on various television networks ranging from HBO (*Girls, Doll and Em*) to Comedy Central (*Broad City*). *Parks and Recreation, Grace and Frankie, Grey’s Anatomy, Orange is the New Black*, and *Bones* all air on the popular streaming service, Netflix. Thus, due to the rise in popularity of female-friendship centric shows, there are multiple platforms where these relationships are available for viewers who are interested. While lamenting the separation of BFF’s Meredith and Cristina on *Grey’s Anatomy*, Rachel Syme creates a list of the “best female friendships on today’s TV shows” (2015). Syme

states that “...luckily, there are still plenty of other shows out featuring strong, supportive bonds between women that are helping to fill the void left by Mer and Cristina” and then proceeds to list 7 shows currently on air featuring strong female friendships (2015). Five to seven years ago, this list would not have even been possible due to the lack of mediated representations of supportive female friendships. Thus, it is important to study the cultural shift surrounding female relationships.

Female friendship centric shows came onto the scene with the rise in female-driven comedies, and drove past them to make their own mark. But the increase in intimacy and seriousness of the friendships has led me to turn to kinship literature. As I will argue in the literature review, there is a historical understanding of female friendships that can be used to understand this new, mediated version of intimate female relationships.

Now that I have established the prevalence of female friendship in popular culture, I discuss the presence this topic has in scholarship. While kinship is not widely discussed or really discussed at all, my topic has place in rhetorical scholarship. There is an already existing focus by communication scholars on popular culture scholarship. From Helene Shugart to Bonnie Dow, rhetorical scholars turn to media to explain cultural phenomena ranging from food politics (Bruner & Hahn, 2015; Dow, 2001; Schell, 2015) to gender (Greene & Meyer, 2014, Shugart, 2008; Sloop, 2000). Thus, popular culture scholarship is accepted and expansive. My analysis of *Broad City* will extend this wealth of literature in a way that has yet to be explored.

Further, there has been an increasing trend in rhetorical media studies on the ‘bromance’ (Alberti, 2013; Boyle & Berridge, 2014). ‘Bromance’ is the scholarly term for close male friendships. What sets the bromance apart from traditional male friendship is that males discuss their feelings with one another, go on “man-dates” (also known as hanging out with each other in public), and do other things that are often gendered as “female” in Western culture. In his essay on bromance, Alberti discusses masculinity and homoeroticism. He highlights how men in movies about bromance are struggling with identity in the rigid construction of masculinity. Further, he goes on to discuss the anxiety homophobia produces when the males engage in genuine affection for each other, and how this anxiety is used as comedic relief (Alberti, 2013). Boyle and Berridge (2014) take a different approach. These authors use the prevalence of the bromance film in our culture to contrast with the lack of representation that female friendships receive in film. My work will continue Boyle and Berridge’s aim to understand representation of and identification with female friendships. My work will go a step further, providing examples of these friendships on television shows.

Alison Winch writes of the rhetorical power of ‘girlfriend films’, which she says offer “guidance and an affirmative female space for its consumers...cementing friendships among women” (Winch, p. 70, 2012). She discusses how these films not only serve as an example for women on how to carve out female-centered space in their lives, but also are a site at which women gather to enjoy each other’s company and to share experience (Winch, 2012). Examples of the ‘girlfriend films’ that Winch cites include the *Sex and the City* films, *The Women*, *Bride*

*Wars*, and *Baby Mama*. Winch's work moves feminist media scholars to an understanding of how female-centered film or 'girlfriend' movies create a space for dialogue among women about friendship. It is from this point that I will continue my work. Winch's essay focuses on movies created largely by and for second wave feminists, and my work focuses on television shows created by and for third wave feminists. Similar to Winch, I argue that romantic friendships on television carve out a space for women to talk with and about their close friendships.

### ***Broad City***

*Broad City* became a cult phenomenon in its first season bringing 1.3 million viewers in for the season finale (Framke, 2015; Syme, 2015). In January of 2016, the show will air its third season. The show features characters Abbi and Ilana, two "hapless, pot-smoking, sexually experimental, swearing, struggling, inseparable young gal pals running amok on the streets of modern-day New York City" (Syme, 2015, n.p.). Each episode, Abbi and Ilana get into new and more ridiculous situations that still somehow ring true to real life for many millennial women. As Framke of *The A.V. Club* states, the "attention to detail is what makes *Broad City* feel as lived-in as it does" (2015, p. 4). The show features characters that are relatable and reflective of the "real world". The show features "people of varying races, genders, socio-economic backgrounds" and it does this in a manner that is not "self-congratulatory" (Framke, 2015, p. 5). The diversity on-screen combined with the relatable nature of the characters have brought the millennial audience something they never thought they would see on television-- a show reflective of their own lived reality (Hope, 2016).

## **CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In order to conduct my analysis, I first explicate previous research on kinship. Next, given the third wave politics of the lead characters, who also function as the show's writers- it is imperative to understand the third wave movement and how the movement functions. Through the use of the existing literature, I form a working set of criteria for female kinship. Further, I describe the ways third wave feminists enact their politics. Based upon previous literature, I argue that female kinship or romantic friendship is a key academic concept that is absent from rhetorical studies. Thus, this thesis creates an academic space for the discussion surrounding the rhetorical strategies that make up female kinship.

### **Kinship**

Kinship is a term that has long been used in scholarship to describe and understand bonds created and maintained through "descent, marriage or adoption" (Horowitz, 2005, p.1). This term, which has also been used in literature and social science studies encompasses the ways that human form familial bonds. In social science, anthropologists were some of the preeminent scholars to further delve into and define kinship. The evolution of the term 'kinship' has occurred both through the growth and changes experienced by the anthropological field as well as through the adoption of the term into other fields of study (Gender studies, African American studies). Through my research, I have found that rhetorical studies and consequently the communication discipline could greatly benefit from including and developing an understanding of kinship in order to uncover rhetorical phenomena present on female-centric television shows

and films. I suggest that it is necessary to gain an understanding of kinship from multiple disciplines in order to understand its rhetorical function. In order to support my claim, I provide an understanding of kinship through examples in various literature bases.

Like much of feminist thought, kinship functions both theoretically and pragmatically. Each respective academic discipline conceptualizes kinship differently based on the focus of their fields. For example, feminist anthropological scholars argue through a theoretical framework that family kinship (blood related kinship/biological kinship) is the root of the sex/gender divide, in both research and American culture (Lewin, 2006). In *Communion*, bell hooks takes a pragmatic approach to describe the way that friendship between women, also known as romantic friendship, functions to “ensure that the woman who does not find a perfect mate will still know true and abiding love” (hooks, 2002, p. 217). Put another way, kinship does not only help scholars understand the impact that female kinship has on the larger American culture, but it also provides a definitional meaning for the close and supportive relational bonds that women form with one another. This supportive system functions to provide women with the space to achieve self-actualization and agency (hooks, 2002). The theoretical and pragmatic understandings of kinship function together to provide an understanding of the cultural structures in Western culture that oppress and marginalize, as well as show cultures and groups that have been empowered through kinship bonds. In the following paragraphs, I will provide a more definitional understanding of kinship as well as examples of both conceptualizations of the term.

Kinship can generally be understood as “a set of practices of various kinds...that emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency, which may include birth, child rearing, relations of emotional dependency and support, general ties, illness, dying, and death” (Butler, 2002). The definition that is used for a study on kinship is dependent on the discipline that the scholar is working within. For example, a traditional anthropological scholar would likely focus on the familial and consanguineal (also understood as blood relations) kinship that prompts individuals to form relationships with each other. This definition of kinship is used theoretically to compare cross-cultural forms of marriage and family (di Leonardo, 1991).

Feminist anthropologists also function under a theoretical understanding of kinship. For example, feminist anthropologists suggest that in order to displace the cultural assumptions surrounding kinship and cultural family structures, the kinship links between friends and other non-blood related relationships must be studied, arguing that these relationships require and often mirror the same amount of work and support a traditional family does. However, Rawlins (1981) explains that studies of these relationships are “virtually nonexistent in the social sciences” (p. 343). Rawlins has observed some similarities between the two types of relationships, arguing that kinship between sexual partners and platonic ones are similar in two major ways. The first is due to the generous amount of emotional energy required to sustain an intimate relationship. Second, both types of relationships relieve loneliness, leading to personal happiness for both partners (1981, p. 343). The theoretical research on kinship done by feminist anthropologists created a base of knowledge on female relationships, specifically non-sexual

kinship relations. Next, I discuss how the pragmatic understanding of kinship has grown over time.

Currently, much of the research on kinship functions within a pragmatic paradigm. That is to say that kinship literature explains that kinship relationships are often necessary relationships that allow marginalized persons to challenge hegemonic cultural systems. Carol Stack was the preeminent scholar on pragmatic forms of kinship with her study on African American kinship bonds. She argues that in contrast to the individualistic nature of American culture, Black families often bond together in order to provide kinship and support to each other. Due to the history of Black oppression in American culture, many friendships in African American communities are formed based on the “ability of the two individuals to help each other.” To further explain, the success of a friendship is based on how much friends can provide for on another; it is a relationship based on the trading of goods and services (Stack, 1974). If a pair of friends continually support and provide for each other, they are given familial status and called “sister” or “cousin”, and treated as such in each other’s family (Stack, 1974, p. 58). These individuals come to rely on each other heavily, until the relationship no longer provides an equal trade of support. When this happens, the friendship ends abruptly and without much second thought. However, once a friend has reached “kinsman” status within the family, it is not uncommon for them to still remain close with other family members of the former friend (Stack, 1974). The ability to abruptly end friendships is due to the extensive familial network that is formed in African American communities.

The family structure in African American communities differs from that of the “traditional” American family. One of the major differences is that Black families are matriarchal (Stack, 1974). These matriarchs not only make sure that the house is cared for, but they often help raise children while parents are out working. These kinship relations provide strong support for the child and parents. The family kinship extends beyond grandmother/mother/father relations, however. Aunts, uncles, and cousins are heavily involved in the lives of their family kin, further extending community and care for one another. This kin network is “more enduring because all of an individual’s essential kin are recognized as having some duties toward him/her and some claims on him/her” (Stack, 1974, p.61). By having support from so many relatives, African American kinship provides a vast community that allows individuals to overcome the racist and classist cultural systems in place in American culture.

Another way that individuals use kinship to support one another against hegemonic cultural systems is through female kinship, also known as romantic friendship. Romantic friendships are platonic relationships between women who often cohabitate and provide the same support that a sexual partner would, such as emotional support. These partners go through major life events together and know each other intimately. The notion of romantic friendship stems from the ‘Boston Marriages’ that were so prevalent in the Victorian Era.

During the Victorian Era, a Boston Marriage “fostered...the heady and exciting new ambitions of the early generations of professional women ... it was many things to many women: business partnership, artistic collaboration, lesbian romance. And sometimes it was a

friendship nurtured with all the care that we usually squander on our mates” (New Rep quoted in Angelowicz, 2012). These relationships were free of the burdens of a heterosexual relationship like childbirth and rearing. These friends shared household duties equally and supported themselves (Rothbaum & Brehony, 1993). It is often noted that Boston Marriage was also a result of the taboo of opposite sex friendships before marriage. These relationships allowed women to have a supportive partner without jeopardizing their chances of finding a mate.

In recent years, the term Boston Marriage has morphed into romantic friendship. The term has come up recently in many articles (Angelowicz, 2012; Joiner, 2013; Kennedy, 2001) in order to describe the relationships that have become more frequent among millennial women. This modern relationship implies something more than a friend; someone who goes to family functions with you, and holds your hand through break ups (Joiner, 2013). These women not only live together, but they cook meals together, share friends, and throw parties as a pair. They know the intimate details of each other’s lives, and many of them have no interest in living with a significant other (at least any time soon). These relationships are fulfilling in ways that one with a significant other or a “regular” friend is not (Joiner, 2013). Romantic friendship allows women the space to work on self-actualization, without the burden of loneliness or lack of love and care. Similar to Boston Marriages, romantic friendships are often comprised of women who work full time and are fully invested in their careers.

bell hooks writes extensively on the subject of romantic friendships in her book, *Communion*. She argues that romantic friendships challenge the traditional notions of

heterosexism and patriarchy through exemplifying relationships that are meaningful, intimate, and supportive without the need or desire for that relationship to be sexual (hooks, 2002). hooks recognizes that it is difficult for romantic friendships to gain the respect of straight or gay persons in American culture because the relationship is asexual. The patriarchal structure of Western culture often causes women to enter heterosexual relationships, where they may never receive the love and support they need from a partner. Even with the strides made toward gender equality in recent years, women still do more house work and child rearing than their male counterparts, even though it is more common than not, for both partners to be in the workforce. These extra tasks take time away from women that could be spent developing their interests, professions, and working on their own mental, physical, or emotional health. Romantic friendships do not put this burden on women, and allow them instead to participate in a loving relationship that sustains them.

While there is not much written in rhetorical studies on kinship, there is a small segment of rhetorical scholarship that discusses the rhetoric of love. In his 2008 essay, *For the love of rhetoric, with continual reference to Kenny and Dolly*, Joshua Gunn writes that when there is no promise of a sexual relationship, “rhetoric is the promise of unity through consubstantiality”; he draws this conclusion from invitational rhetoric (p. 140). For Gunn, love does not describe an essentially sexual relationship; it describes a way that rhetors can reconcile differences by choice. For him, rhetoric and its uses have been misconceptualized as solely persuasive. He goes on to say that the rhetor that is a lover “treats her counterpart as equal and... is willing to risk

self-esteem in the promotion of a loving and cooperative rhetorical encounter” (Gunn, 2008, p. 142). The implications of Gunn’s conceptions of love and rhetoric demonstrate that love is not always romantic or sexual; sometimes love is about equality or relationships that are useful.

Moving from Gunn’s conceptualization of invitational rhetoric as a theory of love, I explain the ties between female kinship and third wave feminism. As I will explain, this type of friendship seems well suited to the type of feminist politics the world is seeing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Women have embraced these supportive relationships and are consequently creating media that reflects their romantic friendships. These relationships are reflected in the television, movies, and blogs that are prevalent in the 21st century. In order to understand the cultural impact that kinship has on media consumers, I first explain third wave feminism, beginning with its historical roots and ending with its tenets. I turn to a discussion of third wave feminism here because it allows me to address both the rhetorical themes and technological medium that is at work in my chosen texts. In short, a third wave of feminism is occurring and is often defined by ambiguous sexual and gender identity, mediated texts, and female-centric plot lines.

### **Third Wave\* Feminism**

Women of the United States have only been a part of its democracy for 95 years. In order to gain the constitutional right to vote, women fought, picketed, and starved for over two decades to be a part of the American electorate in 1920 (it is important to acknowledge that women of color still struggled to earn the right to vote for years after this). Although suffragists (also known as first wave feminists) did not stop fighting to expand and protect their rights, the

suffragist movement experienced significantly less media attention after the right to vote was<sup>1</sup> achieved. It was not until the late 1960's until the movement rose to cultural prominence again. It was during this time that the second wave movement became a political force. To continue, the women of the second wave movement sought to further women's rights in our nation in terms of equal pay for equal work, access to abortions and contraception, fighting discrimination in the workplace, and ending traditional gender roles that consigned women to the home. Second wave feminists used "consciousness-raising" in order to establish and maintain connections between groups of women (Yu, 2011). Consciousness-raising was mainly achieved during this time through meetings where women in the same community would gather to share and discuss the ways that sexism and gender discrimination had plagued their lives. It was through these conversations that women formed bonds and learned the language necessary to continue the revolution. Second wave feminists taught women that "the personal is political" and this self-knowledge lead many women to the understanding of their own oppression (Yu, 2011). This rhetorical strategy continues on into today—a time that many have termed "third wave feminism".

While the consciousness-raising strategies of the second wave activists were taught and recognized to be political, the representations of 'liberated' women on television were not viewed with the same political power. For example, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was a

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<sup>1</sup> \*I acknowledge that the "wave" metaphor is complicated and often problematic due to the false divisions it implies between the three major time periods of feminist movement. While there are differences between each time, the divisions are far less distinct than this metaphor implies. However, I have used the metaphor due to its widespread use within academe and popular culture.

television series starring a young, professional woman. Mary Tyler Moore was a was smart and capable woman, living a lifestyle outside of the televisual norm for women of the '60's. Many reactions and discussions surrounding Mary Tyler Moore centered around her feminist 'lifestyle', and not of how the representation of her work-life was political action itself (Dow, 2002). Popular conceptions of shows with feminist leads are understood from the perspective of 'lifestyle feminism' or a feminism that is lived, but not considered politically viable. Lifestyle feminism is also problematic because it shows lived feminism as white, middle class, and heterosexual (Dow, 2002). This trend continued into the 1990's with shows like *Ally McBeal*, but in the past five years, there has been a shift in the way popular culture conceptualizes female-centered and female-driven media.

The work that second wave feminists did in the 1960's and 1970's helped to establish the culture that we currently live in, where young women and girls are far less constrained by gender hierarchies than their mothers were. For example, gender-based workplace discrimination is illegal and abortions are legal. Women now have more control over their bodily autonomy than their mothers did. However, in some key ways, third wave feminists formed their movement in contrast to the ones that came before.

Perhaps the most influential critic of the second wave movement is Rebecca Walker. Walker, raised by prominent second wave activist- Alice Walker, called attention to the white, classist, heteronormativity that plagued the second wave (Gillis & Munford, 2004). She criticized the lack of diverse representations within the movement, and stated the need for the

inclusion of intersectionality within the feminist movement. In 1991, Walker wrote an essay formally outlining her frustrations with the previous generation's movement. The essay ended with the statement, 'I am the third wave' proclaiming the birth of a new movement for young women who were ready to continue the work of their mothers on their own terms (Walker, 2011). To continue, I will further explain the tenets of the third wave movement. As I will argue in the thesis, because of the timing of the shows used for analysis, these rhetorical tenets are important to our understanding not only of the shows but of the kinship exemplified in the shows.

Third wave feminists are unique from their predecessors in a few key ways. The first is their heavy use of popular culture to raise consciousness among women, especially young women (Sowards & Renegar, 2004). While many second wave feminists, such as Kate Millet, certainly recognized the power of the media in shaping their message and rallying their followers- the relationship between second wave feminists and the media was a complicated and often draining one (Poirot, 2004). For third wave women who have been raised in a culture consumed by popular culture, there is little separation between the movement and media. Third wave women create media that reflects their own lives. Through these such popular culture texts, young women are able to see themselves reflected on various outlets such as television, film, music, and feminist blogs. Third wave feminists recognize the importance of the accessibility of these texts, as well as the amount of exposure women in the movement have to them. Third wave feminists recognize that it is not an attainable expectation for all members of a movement to

consume academic texts, and additionally that popular culture texts speak to women (and men) in ways that academic ones do not (Sowards & Renegar, 2004).

Since the birth of the third wave movement, there has been a steady incline of television and movie characters that show women and girls in empowered, multi-dimensional roles. As Sowards & Renegar (2004) state, “television shows and movies that include characters like Buffy expose viewers to new ideas of female empowerment, and such shows are increasingly common and popular among female (and sometimes male) audiences” (p. 544). The power of self-identification with strong female popular culture icons allows women to celebrate their own qualities and understand their faults.

This exposure to feminist characters has influenced a generation of young women who now write, produce, and star in their own television shows. It is due to this exposure that the Western world is experiencing a distinctly pro-feminist moment in popular culture. As the *Telegraph* reported in 2014, “Feminism has always been combative but in 2014, perhaps for the first time, it became cool” (Vincent, 2014 n.p.). Something that has been influential in this change is the unique ways that third wave feminists ‘do’ activism.

For example, in addition to co-opting mainstream media in order to spread feminist values and ideals, third wave feminists form community and initiate change through the Internet. This differs from their predecessors, who did not have access to a platform anything like the Internet. Through the use of blogs and Internet sites, third wave feminists are able to break barriers between states and nations (Garrison, 2000). For example, Garrison (2000) states that

“democratized technologies become a resource enabling young women to get information to other women, girls, and boys...” and that they are a “...means for developing political consciousness and a space that can legitimate girls’ issues” (p. 152). The Internet “serves as one place of clustering... a nodal point, for a movement that does not appear collective or unified” (Garrison, 2000, p. 153). This is a space available to young feminists who want to discuss and share the feminist messages they have digested from viewing popular media infused with feminist ideas; it serves as a place to explore. While the Internet is a popular medium for feminist conversations and consciousness-raising, television and movies are another medium used to foster these conversations (Shugart, 2001). For example, Helene Shugart (2001) examines the television show, *Ally McBeal*, in order to understand the mass-mediated dissemination of third wave feminist messaging.

To continue, another distinction that can be made between third and second wave feminists is the integration of intersectionality into the philosophy of the third wave (Martin, 2009). Intersectionality is the idea that people have multiple identities, and that these identities should be embraced. It is the notion that people should be treated equally no matter of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class, ability, and any other identity that a person recognizes within themselves (Snyder, 2008). Third wave feminists ardently believe in embracing this multiplicity of identities within feminists and that all voices are equally important within the movement, even if this means that the movement will at times be contradictory (Snyder, 2008). Additionally, the embrace of intersectionality by third wave feminists is

implicitly tied to the consciousness-raising tool adopted from the second wave feminists. Women are encouraged to speak of their intersectional identities, encouraging other women to do the same, changing the narrative of what it means to be a feminist.

This attention to intersectionality has also led to an acceptance of personal identities that have previously been seen as oppositional to the feminist movement. For example, you can be “religiously devout or into sports or beauty culture and still be” a third wave feminist (Snyder, 2008, p. 180). These apparent contradictions can be found in a multitude of mediated texts.

Being vigilant about acceptance of intersectional identities also means increasing the visibility of people of color (POC), LGBTQ persons, and women of the global south as important to the movement. Feminists of the third wave have made a conscious effort to distance themselves from the “white feminism” of the second wave (VanNewkirk, 2006). Third wave feminists also focus on issues such as immigration, environmentalism, and LGBTQ rights with as much vigor and importance as they do fighting for reproductive rights and paid maternity leave.

Another vital tenet of the third wave manifesta is its rejection of traditional dichotomies of sexual orientation and gender binaries. Accompanying this acceptance of gender and sexual fluidity is a stance of sexual empowerment for third wave feminists. As Leslie Heywood (2006) states in her encyclopedia of third wave feminism, third wave feminists “make desire a priority...without ever losing the ways that desire can be manufactured, commodified, and used against them” (p. 88). Said another way, third wave feminists embrace female sexuality and sex

positivity, but are not blind to the ways in which their sexual desire and objectification have been and currently are still is often used to discriminate against them. Many (straight) third wave feminists are also aware of the way that traditional dating rituals still affect the way that they date, and whether or not they wish to get married. The third wave recognizes that there is not one “black and white” truth in terms of sexuality, but instead call for the use of “intriguing shades of gray” when it comes to the acceptance of different sexual behaviors and actions (Morgan, 1999). This “gray space” also applies to the ways in which third wave feminists view sexual orientation and gender identity. It is from the tenets explained above combined with the current prevalence of feminism in popular culture that female kinship was able to grow within the movement.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical concepts that guide the analysis of this thesis. First, I explain the reasons that critical rhetoric is fundamental to media feminist scholarship. I then discuss the necessity for inclusion of invitational rhetoric in order to analyze the relationship between the characters on *Broad City*. Finally, I describe the texts used for analysis. Through this theoretical orientation, I will be able to explicate an answer to the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the relationship between Abbi and Ilana exemplify or challenge romantic friendship?

RQ2: How do television series that are female-friendship centric liberate women from the confines of traditional notions of female friendship?

#### Critical Rhetoric

McKerrow and McGee started the conversation surrounding critical rhetoric in the late 80's and early 90's. In his seminal text, *The "ideograph": A link between rhetoric and ideology*, McGee discusses the fragmentation of Western culture arguing that "rhetors make discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence" (McGee, 1990, p. 267). These 'scraps and pieces of evidence' should be collected from all types of texts including popular media. McKerrow adds to McGee's argument by criticizing the previous focus in communication scholarship on formal speeches. He adds that by limiting our study to one type of discourse, we are essentially "...accepting only certain individuals as the authorities who can speak" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 92).

Critical rhetoric uses multiple texts in order to make arguments about dominant cultural norms and ideologies.

Critical rhetoric changed rhetorical scholarship from the more traditional form, which analyzed and critiqued public address, to instead, critiquing hegemonic cultural systems that marginalize. Critical rhetoric is different from previous conceptions of rhetoric, in that it is the inverse of traditional rhetoric. Much of the rhetoric we know “examines speeches of those who caused grave injustices and altered history as a result. For more traditional scholars, the critique of power illuminates how power functions, how it controls” (Ono & Sloop, 1995). Said another way, previous forms of rhetoric focus on singular texts, revealing how an individual orator uses their rhetoric in order to persuade others. Inversely, “critical rhetoric does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent” (McGee, 1990, p. 267).

McKerrow also called for scholarship that examines mediated texts. He makes the argument that not all Western citizens have access to the speeches that the current scholarship focuses on, and so we must study the ways that popular media influences us. For example, McKerrow (1989) explains the benefit of analyzing popular media:

*Facts of Life* may never aspire to inclusion in the ‘canons of oratorical excellence,’ but it may have more influence on a teenager’s conception of social reality than all the great speeches by long-dead great speakers. To ignore ‘symbols which

address publics' in all their manifest forms has, as its ultimate consequence, the perpetuation of sterile forms of criticism. (p. 91)

Critical rhetoricians recognize the ways that mediated texts influence public thought and opinion.

Sloop and Ono took critical rhetoric further through their work on vernacular discourse. They wrote that critics must analyze vernacular discourse because it “disallows hegemonic constructs of marginalized communities by revealing the ways in which vernacular discourses are always in process” (1995, p. 26). This type of rhetoric describes the discourse used in everyday speech. Sloop and Ono argue that by studying vernacular discourse, scholars can better understand the rhetoric of the oppressed (1995). It is through vernacular discourse that the critical rhetorician can make political statements about a text. Additionally, it is through a critical rhetorical approach that a critical rhetorician is able to problematize common cultural assumptions and norms (Sloop, 2012).

John Sloop (2012) uses a critical rhetoric approach when examining the discourse surrounding Olympic athlete, Caster Semenya. He does so in order to challenge the commonly held assumptions of gender by Westerners in the news media, but also in professional athletics (Sloop, 2012). In order to create a “contemporary snapshot of contemporary understandings of gender,” Sloop compiled news articles from the time the doubts about Semenya’s “real” gender began (2012, p. 84). He followed the coverage, gathering articles that her parents were interviewed in, articles where her Olympian peers were asking to weigh in, and importantly, articles where journalists repeatedly questioned her gender identity. Sloop then read through the

articles, highlighting themes that emerged from the texts. Sloop categorized the themes he found four categories; Semenya as male, Semenya as female, Semenya as hermaphrodite, and last- the power of ambiguous silence (2012, p. 84-90).

In each category, Sloop argues its relevance to the construction of gender in Semenya's case, using quotes from the text to do so. Finally, Sloop discusses the implications of each theme, and how it speaks to larger Western cultural understandings of gender. Ultimately, Sloop asserts that the way Semenya is treated by the media regarding her gender, provides insight into Western conceptions of gender. Thus, a critical rhetoric approach is appropriate for this study because I am examining multiple texts in order to examine mediated constructions and understandings of female kinship, which involves elements of gender and sexual identity.

Another piece on Caster Semenya, by Stephanie Young (2015), serves as an exemplary essay that uses critical rhetoric. In *Running like a man, sitting like a girl: Visual enthymeme and the case of Caster Semenya*, Young argues that although scholars have investigated many aspects of the Semenya case from varying perspectives (feminist, gendered, critical race), none have examined how Semenya responded to the rhetorical situation created by the mediated discourse surrounding her body (2015, p. 332). Thus, she argues, it is necessary to observe the way that Semenya "attempted a visual enthymematic response to the exigency created by the media scrutiny of her sex identity" (Young, 2015, p. 332). In order to come to this conclusion, Young explored the cultural context surrounding Semenya's gender identity investigation by the IAAF. She explains her method for gathering texts:

I argue that global news sources that incorporated, framed, reproduced, and circulated responses from fans and other athletes; explanations of IAAF policies; statements from medical experts; and representations aligned to historical constructions of women in international sport. (p. 334)

Young collected artifacts that show the entire rhetorical situation that prompted Semenya to respond to questions and accusations surrounding her gender and sex. By including artifacts beyond the media coverage of the event, Young was better able to demonstrate how audience perception and other factors listed above also influenced how Semenya was prompted to respond.

The final example of a critical rhetoric approach is an essay written by Bryan J. McCann (2015) titled, *On whose ground? Racialized violence and the prerogative of “self-defense” in the Trayvon Martin case*. In this essay, McCann (2015) argues that the discourse surrounding the Trayvon Martin case adopted and embraced “war on crime” rhetoric, as opposed to the formerly used rhetorical tradition of Black self-defense, thus putting Black violence at odds with the aims of society (p. 480). McCann examined both activist rhetoric and mainstream media outlets in order to make this argument. Employing critical rhetoric as previously discussed, McCann gathered:

mainstream news coverage of the case, including televised content from ABC News, Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC....print sources including *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Slate*, and several local Florida newspapers...texts from key

advocates involved in the controversy, as well as the conservative websites Sad Hill News and The Daily Caller, which played a significant role in bolstering advocacy for George Zimmerman. (p. 482)

As you can see, McCann used a plethora of resources available to him, as well as the general public in order to provide a full understanding of the Martin case. By ensuring that all chosen sources are available to the public, McCann is clueing into the ‘vernacular discourse’ of the audience. Through this collection of sources, he is better equipped to understand and argue how or why the rhetorical tradition of Black self-defense was abandoned, and what gave rise to the public’s adoption of the “war on crime” rhetoric. Although I am not examining news accounts of female kinship, I am still influenced by critical rhetoric approaches such as these because I am examining multiple texts and piecing together fragments of different shows to get a complete understanding of kinship.

While many critical rhetoricians do use this theory to examine gender and sexuality issues, I argue that there is additional scholarship that will allow me to do a more specific analysis of these shows and their portrayal of intimate female friendships. In order to better examine the love and mutual commitment present in kinship relationships, I turn to an invitational rhetorical literature base.

**Invitational Rhetoric**

Invitational rhetoric, first theorized by Foss and Griffin in 1995, is a theory of rhetoric that conceives of rhetors who seek to understand one another in an effort to learn about the others' position. Invitational rhetoric is based on the premise that the Western conception of "rhetoric has been defined as the conscious intent to change others" and inherent in this desire to change others, is a desire for power over another individual (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 2). Invitational rhetoric was developed as a theory to resist this patriarchal way of understanding rhetoric. Foss and Griffin describe two ways to enact invitational rhetoric; offering perspectives and the creation of external forces that allow rhetors to present their positions (Foss and Griffin, 1995, p. 8-10). Invitational rhetoric has not always be seen as effective rhetoric due to the rhetor's refusal to engage in combative language or persuasion; it allows rhetors to maintain their own self-worth (Foss and Griffin, 1995). Invitational rhetoric attempts to create a rhetorical situation in which all voices are valued and all persons engaged have agency.

Foss and Griffin's theory of invitational rhetoric challenged the way feminist rhetorical scholarship has been done for decades; therefore, it is not surprising that invitational rhetoric has a range of critics and critiques within the scholarly community. A dominant critique of invitational rhetoric is that it is essentialist and rests on "gendered dualism," expressing that *all* persuasive rhetoric is patriarchal and therefore oppressive and invitational rhetoric is feminist and liberatory (DeLaure, 2008, p. 7, emphasis mine). Bonnie Dow (1995) adds her concern that Foss and Griffin generalize the term feminism, which is problematic due to the intentionally

polysemic nature of the term to include a diversity of genders and gender theory. To use invitational rhetoric as intended, the authors would need to acknowledge the problematic nature of essentializing all women as one way and all men as another. Further, painting any and all rhetors that use persuasion or argument to solve a problem seems to be antithetical to the goals of invitational rhetoric.

There have been updates to invitational rhetoric that make it a more viable theoretical approach. For example, Gunn envisions invitational rhetoric as a theory of love. He states that through this conception of rhetoric as love, rhetors are able to “reverse this difficult alienation by finding common cause or interest” (Gunn, 2008, p. 148). Additionally, through understanding invitational rhetoric as a theory of love, scholars can examine and understand the ways that rhetors create a rhetorical situation without judgment, that is full of mutual respect. Further, DeLaure (2008) states that invitational rhetoric is “... potentially valuable because it broadens our perspective of what kinds of communicative actions can be considered rhetorical and turn our attention to processes rather than end product” (p. 6). This argument juxtaposed with Gunn’s understanding of invitational rhetoric as love, provides space for the study of friendship, which is why it is appropriate for this project. Invitation rhetoric provides a way to examine the ways that Abbi and Ilana interact with one another. Further, this project uses invitational rhetoric in order to understand how *Broad City* invites the audience to see Abbi and Ilana’s relationship as liberatory.

Another example of a study that takes an invitational rhetoric approach is Jill Swiencicki's (2015) essay, *Rhetorics of invitation and refusal in Terry Tempest Williams's The Open Space of Democracy*. In her essay, Swiencicki argues that by studying the refusal stage of invitational rhetoric (the stage where invitations to listen have been turned down), are just as revealing and important as the invitation itself. She argues that previous conceptions of invitational rhetoric are oversimplified, putting invitational rhetoric into a binary construction (Swiencicki, 2015). In order to use invitational rhetoric as she sees fit, Swiencicki examines the invitational exchange as a strategy in an "ecology of actors and processes working on a political problem", thus separating the previous conflation of agent and theory, that as she says, conceptualizes the refusal to engage in invitational rhetoric as the fault of the theory, rather than the individual's choice (2015, p. 155). By pairing invitational rhetoric with the ecology of rhetoric, Swiencicki provides a more pragmatic use and understanding of invitational rhetoric. Swiencicki illuminates another example of how well invitational rhetoric can work when paired with another rhetorical theory, often weakening the critiques leveled against it. This is why combining critical rhetoric and invitational rhetoric is appropriate for this project. In the following section of this project, I outline my procedures for analysis.

### **Texts Used for Analysis**

In this project, I watched the first two seasons of *Broad City* as the primary texts; I purchased each season on DVD. *Broad City's* two seasons have 10 episodes each, which originally aired on Comedy Central. Each episode of the series lasts 22 minutes each. I watched

the episodes of each respective show in chronological order; during which, I remained open to the texts and what they revealed. I then organized the themes. While watching *Broad City*, I took note of the ways the two characters interacted with each other; writing down relevant body language, discussions, and settings. With a critical approach in mind, I did not rely on the show as the sole text; I also included articles written about the show and its creators. Additionally, I looked at the various plots, dialogues, and scenes within the show in order to analyze the show through a critical lens.

Due to my critical approach, I conducted a close textual analysis of the show, remaining open to any themes that emerge. I took note of any conversations between Abbi and Ilana that demonstrated their care for one another and Ilana's sexual attraction to Abbi. I also took note of any discussions by any secondary characters about the relationship between Abbi and Ilana. When reading articles about Abbi and Ilana, I noted discussions of how the two work together and how their friendship is or is not reflected on the show. Through this critical approach to invitational rhetoric, I was able to illuminate the answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the relationship between Abbi and Ilana exemplify or challenge romantic friendship?

RQ2: How do television series that are female-friendship centric liberate women from the confines of traditional notions of female friendship?

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *BROAD CITY*

In her essay titled, “How to be Friends with Another Woman,” Roxane Gay (2014) outlines what she has learned about female friendship over the years and how to maintain a successful relationship with another woman. She writes,

Abandon the cultural myth that all female friendships must be bitchy, toxic or competitive. This myth is like heels and purses--pretty but designed to SLOW women down....A lot of ink is given over to mythologizing female friendships as curious, fragile relationships that are always intensely fraught. Stop reading writing that encourages this mythology. (p. 47)

In this project, I have analyzed one text that offers viewers a break from the mythology and reaffirms the power of female friendship. *Broad City* shows a powerful relationship between Abbi and Ilana; the two women uplift and empower one another. This chapter examines this relationship through three specific themes- care-giving, eroticism, and intimacy. I do not pretend to be isolated or unique in my claim that Abbi and Ilana offer an intense model of female friendship. It is hard to find an article about *Broad City* that does not focus on the unbreakable bond between Abbi and Ilana (Garber, 2016; Paumgarten, 2014; Syme, 2015). However, what I offer here, through an analysis of the first and second seasons of the show, is that Abbi and Ilana’s relationship also provides a model of female kinship. In what follows, I lay out these three themes of kinship, care-giving, eroticism, and intimacy, and argue that this model of

kinship demonstrates that forming and maintaining a romantic friendship is in itself a political act.

### **Care-giving**

Friendship scholar, William K. Rawlins argues that “The middle class pursuit of upward mobility moves people farther from their parents and scatters siblings around the nation” (Bellah et. al., 1985 cited in Rawlins, 1992). These changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have altered the family structure. The care-giving that was once provided for women by family members has been replaced by friends. These friendships, through support and nurture, have turned into romantic friendship. Women who are in romantic friendships have taken over the duties and bodily knowledge, such as medical or emotional care, that was once reserved for family members or significant others and perform these duties for each other. I argue in this section that Abbi and Ilana demonstrate these physical and emotional behaviors that are reminiscent of care-giving in the kinship literature. Abbi and Ilana fulfill the role of “mother, sister, father, brother” for one another. The idea that they can replace a typically biological relationship is shown by the show to be completely natural. It is this legitimization that encourages viewers to see a kinship relationship as significant, intimate and, even, political.

Whether it is through a comforting reassurance or caring for one another when they are sick, Abbi and Ilana fulfill the kinship concept “obligation to support and nurture”- which establishes “security in the face of change and challenge” (Lasser, 1988, p. 180). Abbi and Ilana’s care-giving behaviors reinforce the strong kinship bond between them, and in particular,

the fact that they are both women connects to scholars' articulation of kinship. When discussing romantic kinship of the 19th century, Carol Lasser (1988) asserts that:

Sisters expected from each other mutual care and intense love. They turned to each other in times of distress as well as success, looking for solace as well as celebration, and monetary as well as spiritual assistance. (p. 165)

Audience members see this mutual care and intense love illustrated in several ways in Abbi and Ilana's relationship. First, this is done through their focus on each other's bodies and health care-giving. Second, they demonstrate care-giving through mental and emotional support. Next, Abbi and Ilana provide care-giving through their mutual support of their goals and aspirations. Penultimately, Abbi and Ilana use humor as spiritual assistance. Last, Abbi and Ilana strengthen their kinship through financial care-giving.

For example, in *Broad City's* second season, Ilana lovingly watches over Abbi before, during, and after she has her wisdom teeth removed. Due to the anesthesia used in the procedure, Ilana must ensure that Abbi gets home safely and takes her pain medicine. When Abbi falls in a pit and sprains an ankle in the episode "The Matrix", it is Ilana who seeks help. She first gives Abbi two joints and tells her to smoke them for the pain. She then gives her nuts and figs for "sustenance" and a lanyard for entertainment. This clearly demonstrates Ilana's concern for Abbi's well-being while she is away finding help. Further, Ilana says that she wishes they had their phones so she could Facetime her while she is looking for help. Ilana does not want to leave Abbi's side because she clearly believes that only she can ensure Abbi's health and safety. This

medical care is reminiscent of something a biological family member would provide. But, as this analysis will point out, this type of care-giving is typical for Abbi and Ilana's relationship.

In a heroic moment at the end of the first season, Abbi saves Ilana after she has a life-threatening reaction to a food allergy. Abbi carries a passed out Ilana outside of the restaurant for an ambulance to pick them up. The dramatization of this event demonstrates that the show's creators (Abbi and Ilana, in real life) wanted to emphasize how far Abbi and Ilana will go to ensure the other's physical safety and well-being. Abbi does not simply call an ambulance and wait for it to arrive, she picks Ilana up and carries her out of the restaurant all the while saying "Ilana, I got you girl!". This refrain of "I got you girl" calls attention to the sense of duty that Abbi feels in regard to Ilana's health. Abbi illustrates a responsibility and dedication to Ilana's health that is normally reserved for biological family members. The show provides many opportunities for the women to care for one another in ways that are typically reserved for and seen as familial responsibilities. As a result, the show, and Abbi and Ilana make "normal" and significant kinship relationships.

Second, in line with previous conceptions of care-giving, Abbi and Ilana support each other emotionally. When Ilana's grandmother dies, Abbi attends her Shiva. Ilana is clearly comforted by Abbi's presence. During the ceremony, Abbi describes how Grandma Esther inspired her to live her life to the fullest. Abbi tells Ilana's entire family that she "pegged" Jeremy the night before and Ilana weeps, showing her gratitude for Abbi's thoughtful words. Abbi knows that sexual exploration and living life to the fullest are both things that would bring

comfort to Ilana, and her willingness to share this (something that would typically make Abbi cringe) illustrates just how deeply she cares for Ilana's happiness.

Both women embrace their role as the other's emotional support system. For example, when Abbi is complaining about the fact that the first person she is allowed to train at the gym she works at (an aspiration of hers) is her vile roommate, Bevers, Ilana listens carefully. She reminds Abbi that training someone has been her dream and encourages her to embrace this opportunity by rubbing some Purell in her moustache so she does not smell him. Abbi and Ilana know how to provide care for each other emotionally through words of encouragement and support. The emotional support that Abbi and Ilana provide for each other is shown in multiple instances on *Broad City*. This pattern of support suggests to viewers that emotional support is a way to build female kinship. It also normalizes being emotionally open with friends, inviting viewers to do the same in their own friendships. support. This instance is important because Abbi knows that she can rely on Ilana to help her get the money. Abbi does not call her parents or a significant other to get advice about what to do or for financial support. She knows that Ilana will know exactly what to do in order to save Abbi's job.

A third way that Abbi and Ilana demonstrate care-giving for one another is through the knowledge and support of one another's goals and aspirations, which range from sexual desires and fantasies to career dreams. Thus, it is no surprise that when Abbi ruins her first chance of being a trainer by destroying a mirror at the gym, Ilana comes to help Abbi scrounge up the money to fix the mirror so she does not lose her job. In the end, Abbi is able to pay for the mirror

and keep her job, thankfully due to Ilana's thrifty ways. Ilana relishes in her ability to aid Abbi in this time of need.

Finally, in another act of care-giving, Ilana gives Abbi the power of attorney in her will (which is written on a napkin). Ilana tells Abbi that she gives her this responsibility because she trusts her to "find her killer" after she dies. She also tells Abbi that she is looking into some mutual funds and is "having some valuables appraised". Abbi laughs and tells her to let go of her dream of getting rich off of her Beanie Babies collection. It is worth examining this scene in the episode "St. Mark's" for two reasons. The first is that power of attorney is a legal duty typically reserved for either a family member or a long-term significant other. Through this act, Ilana demonstrates previous notions of care-giving because Abbi has taken over the role of her primary family. Thus, she is dependent on her for legal care while she is alive, and trusts Abbi to do right by her after she is gone. A second reason to consider this scene is Ilana's giving of her worldly possessions to Abbi. Even though the viewer and Abbi might both find Beanie Babies to be trivial possessions to leave to someone, it is clear that Ilana believes them to be of great value. According to Lasser (1988), it was common for women in 19th century kinship relationships to make financial commitments to one another in order to maintain kin bonds. Thus, Ilana wants to leave her most prized items to Abbi in order to ensure her future financial security after she dies because she cares deeply for her.

**Eroticism**

Abbi and Ilana are “very probably the loves of each other’s lives” (Freidman, 2014). Thus, the relationship between them is often erotic in nature. Interestingly, romantic kinship scholars do not define romantic kinship in a sexual or asexual dichotomy. Rather, they recognize that these relationships are more complicated than that; through conceptualizing romantic kinship instead on spectrum of sexuality, scholars are better able to understand the diverse ways that the ties that women make with one another can enrich their lives (Lasser, 1988). The eroticism between Abbi and Ilana is enacted in two ways; through frank sex talk and Ilana’s sexual advances toward Abbi. The way that Abbi and Ilana discuss the body, sex, and bodily functions evokes thoughts of eroticism. Further, the understanding of Abbi and Ilana’s relationship as sexually ambiguous, troubles the current understanding of women through a heteronormative lens and female friendships as strictly asexual.

First, Abbi and Ilana frequently engage in discussions about the body and sex. The discussions between them are more graphic, blunt, and honest than discussions between female friends on television have been shown previously. They go far beyond what is considered normal ‘sex talk’. Their frank discussions range from sexual advice to describing off beat sexual observations and fantasies, however Abbi and Ilana’s conversations surpass these fairly typical conversation points. For example, the two discuss their porn watching habits in detail. Ilana even goes so far as to describe the entire Colin Ferrel sex tape to Abbi in an episode. Ilana has no qualms sharing her desire to “see a mangina from behind” with Abbi. Likewise, Abbi is proud to

tell Ilana that she finally masturbated “above the covers” for the first time. These examples and others like them serve as a framework for Abbi and Ilana to “share passion and intimacy” with one another (Lasser, 1988, p. 164). Through these discussions, the audience is invited to view sexual desire and eroticism as a normal aspect of a romantic kin relationship.

*Broad City* falls into a complex and important history of erotic and sexually ambiguous female friendships, when describing the romantic friendship between two suffragists, Lillian Faderman writes that the “emotional, playful, and erotic...demonstrate that their relationship transcended...their mutual political interests” (Faderman, 1999). Put another way, the way the erotic was used between two women elevated their relationship beyond that of typical friendship exposing a much deeper connection. Abbi and Ilana’s unabashed sharing of the intimate details of their sexual thoughts, experiences, and practices juxtaposed with a lack of judgment in regard to these stories, demonstrates the way that erotic passion is enacted between them and further normalized on the show.

To continue, the eroticism between Abbi and Ilana is further demonstrated through blunt sex advice and encouragement. Abbi shares all of her sexual adventures with Ilana; despite the often controversial nature of her exploits. For example, in the episode “Knockoffs”, Abbi is propositioned by a sexual partner to “peg” him (when a woman penetrates a sexual partner with a sex toy). Unsure of what to do, she calls Ilana for advice. Ilana, who is portrayed as the more sexually liberal of the two, encourages Abbi to peg Jeremy by saying “Bitch you know. You wouldn’t have called me if you didn’t.” Abbi knows that no matter how extreme or taboo the

sexual experience, Ilana is there to listen and encourage without judgement. In the episode “The Last Supper”, Abbi tells Ilana that she has just “peed out a condom”. Interestingly, Ilana is not upset or grossed out by the fact that Abbi has had a condom in her vaginal canal for days; she is upset that Abbi did not use a condom with her most recent sexual partner. The eroticism shared between them is so common that Ilana feels entitled to tell Abbi that she will be enforcing the “strictest of condom policies” on Abbi, and that Abbi must send Ilana a picture of “every dick you are about to host wearing a condom.” Eroticism, and Abbi and Ilana’s reliance on it, is another way that they express care, concern and intimacy, further illuminating “the power of the erotic” to bring them closer as kin (Lorde, 1984, p. 59). Even though Abbi does not agree with Ilana’s condom policy, she is clearly relieved to be able to share this intimate detail of her sex life with her. Ilana’s acceptance of this horrifying experience allows Abbi to return to enjoying dinner. This scene shows a level of comfort with and support of female sexuality between Abbi and Ilana. There is not “over-sharing” between Abbi and Ilana when it comes to sexual experiences, Abbi and Ilana support one another as sexually autonomous beings.

Next, Abbi and Ilana’s pursuit of more traditional, romantic partners is always relegated to sub-plot on *Broad City*. Abbi and Ilana’s ambivalence towards being in a serious, monogamous, romantic relationship is important for a few reasons. The first is that the show demonstrates that for both Abbi and Ilana, their romantic friendship is enough to sustain their need to have a loving, intimate relationship that is emotionally fulfilling. Second, it further troubles the heterosexist assumption that all women should and do desire to be in romantic

relationships. *Broad City* shows that a romantic friendship is powerful and positive, liberating women from the notion that the desire to be in a romantic relationship is the norm.

For example, Abbi is awkward around guys and does not seem to have much luck in love. Instead of constantly pursuing a new romantic partner after the demise of the last, she is happy and content being single because Ilana fulfills her emotional needs. Second, despite the fact that Ilana is in a long-term polyamorous relationship with a man named Lincoln, she has no interest in labeling their relationship beyond that of “purely physical”. Even though Lincoln is clearly a large part of Ilana’s life, spending time with both she and Abbi (he has even become one of Abbi’s friends) Ilana does not wish to ascribe to traditional conceptions of relationships. In line with her relationship status as polyamorous, Ilana is shown dating other men and women throughout the show. Ilana’s sexuality and her openness to new relationships is portrayed as more political. She knows that she and Abbi have a passionate and loving relationship, so she feels free to explore sexually. She rejects the societal pressure to conform and be in a long-term relationship, and she is able to do this through the shared eroticism between she and Abbi. For example, in the episode “Stolen Phone”, Ilana decides that she and Abbi should go to the bars to meet “some dudes IRL”, instead of trying to get to know the men she is talking to, she spends her time telling the men she meets about Abbi and showing them pictures of her. She does not seem to care if she meets someone to go home with or not, she is more invested in spending time with and talking about Abbi. Additionally, when Abbi starts going on a rant about feminism

Ilana says to her “this is the Abbi that I know and I fell in love with and am obsessed with”. Ilana is completely satisfied with the romantic friendship between she and Abbi.

In a revealing scene in the episode, “Citizen Ship”, Abbi tells Ilana that she thinks that Lincoln is either her “boyfriend or her best friend.” When Ilana tries to explain that they are not together, Abbi argues that they spend a lot of time together (like a couple). Ilana becomes increasingly distraught by this and slaps Abbi saying “you are my best friend!” Here, the show illustrates two things to the viewer. First, it shows that Ilana is ardently against being in a relationship. Second, this shows that the thought of Abbi and Ilana’s ‘best friendship’ being threatened by a relationship is upsetting to Ilana. Immediately after Abbi utters the implication that someone else is Ilana’s best friend, she reacts violently. Additionally, Lincoln’s presence is always shown as a bonus to Ilana, never as something she desires. For example, in “Hashtag FOMO” Ilana, Lincoln, and Abbi are all party-hopping together. When Lincoln exits without saying good-bye, Abbi seems concerned for Ilana acting with empathy. However, Ilana is unaffected by his exit, explaining that he does it all the time. Being with Abbi is all she really cares about because their relationship is fulfilling enough to ensure that Ilana is happy.

Abbi and Ilana’s romantic friendship is reflective of the relationships between the suffragists of the 19th century, who recognized the limitations that heterosexual marriages placed on female activists. To further explain, suffrage leaders such as Carrie Chapman Catt and Susan B. Anthony, often wrote of the ways in which 19th century wifehood and motherhood were not compatible with the cause (Faderman, 1999). However, women like Anthony and Catt did not

live lives that were absolved of emotion and passion. Romantic friendship was widely accepted as “affection surpassing the love of men” (Faderman, 1999). These women chose romantic friendships over heterosexual bonds because they knew that “female couples made less emotionally torn suffragists because they were not distracted by wifely duties...” (Faderman, 1999). These suffragists argued that without these romantic friendships, women would have never gained the right to vote, stating that the intimacy and emotional support provided by these relationships allowed them to endure after years of discouragement. In line with this literature, the plot lines on *Broad City* do not show Abbi and Ilana as ‘losing out’ due to their choice to remain steadfast to their romantic kinship. Put another way, Abbi and Ilana are never shown to be missing out on a part of life because they have chosen each other in lieu of a more traditional conceptualization of a relationship. When Ilana’s grandmother dies, she has Abbi to attend the Shiva with her. Ilana is there to celebrate Abbi’s work accomplishments with her. Ilana attends a work party with Abbi, and Abbi meets up with Ilana and her mom when she is in town. The lack of negative repercussion for Abbi and Ilana for choosing each other, further destabilizes the stereotype that women who chose female kinship are lonely, unfulfilled, or wish their lives were different than they are.

Next, the eroticism between Abbi and Ilana is further established through Ilana’s sexual attraction to Abbi and her pursuit to be physically intimate with her. Throughout the show, Ilana frequently references her desire to make out with Abbi, see her naked, and include her in sexual acts with Lincoln. Ilana does not try to mask or hide these feelings of erotic love. Rather, in line

with previous kin studies, she makes clear her “intense and emotionally laden” feelings toward Abbi (Lasser, 1988, p. 170). Ilana demonstrates this erotic love in various ways throughout the course of the show. To illustrate this trope, one of Ilana’s greatest sexual fantasies includes Abbi. In the episode “Fattest Asses”, Ilana tells Abbi that she would be down to participate in an orgy with Abbi in a nonsexual way, “just for the Arc de Triomphe and that’s it”. When Abbi inquires further, Ilana explains that the Arc de Triomphe is a sexual position where “...two dudes go down on us, this is how I picture it. And they're butt to butt and then you and I do Oprah hands.” It is clear to the viewer that Ilana does not perceive anything uncommon about her desire to be physically intimate with Abbi.

Although there are many instances where Ilana makes sexual advances toward Abbi are serious, there are also instances where they are less so. In the cold open for episode two of season two, Ilana tells Abbi that there are Milk Duds in the bottom of her popcorn bag just to get Abbi to dig around in the bag, which is placed on Ilana’s crotch. In this instance, Ilana’s trick on Abbi is reminiscent of something a 13 year old boy would do to a crush. It invites the audience to perceive Ilana in the same way; as a woman with a crush but in this instance it is on another woman. *Broad City* illustrates that communication between female friends can include elements of sexuality and flirtation, which is in line with 19th century romantic friendship (Faderman, 1999). Thus, Ilana’s actions destabilize norms surrounding mediated female friendships.

Further, Ilana frequently pursues ways to include Abbi in her sex life. Intriguingly, we are introduced to Abbi and Ilana’s relationship through the erotic lens in the very first scene of

the show. Ilana's first attempt to share erotic passion with Abbi is seen when she makes a video call to Abbi while she is having sex with Lincoln (one of Ilana's sexual partners). Other attempts to include Abbi in her sex life include Ilana trying to hold Abbi's hand while making out with Lincoln and holding one of Abbi's paintings while hooking up with Lincoln. Further, Ilana becomes increasingly jealous and angry when she finds out that Abbi has made out with a woman before they met because Ilana assumed she would be Abbi's first female kiss. When presented with Ilana's erotic desire, Abbi neither accepts or rejects these propositions. Significantly, this reinforces the conceptualization of romantic friendship as neither sexual or asexual. The way Abbi and Ilana present this eroticism to the audience allows them to perceive and understand the relationship as polysemous.

Finally, in the episode "St. Mark's", Ilana informs Abbi (and consequently the audience) that she conceptualizes her and Abbi's relationship as "husband and husband". While arguing about who is going to die first, Ilana says "no, the husband always dies first" which Abbi responds by asking if that makes her the wife. Ilana says that no, it makes her the other husband. Ignoring this strange conception of marriage that Ilana has set up, what is important to understand is that Ilana considers Abbi to be her life partner. She expects to die with Abbi by her side; that their kinship will last until death do they part. Ilana illustrates this expectation throughout the show in conversations with Abbi. While Abbi and Ilana are going through the previously mentioned bucket list, one of Ilana's items is to be held in Abbi's arms. She tells Abbi that she is "the love of her life". Through the conceptualization of their relationship as "husband

and husband” and Ilana’s statement that Abbi is the love of her life, she enforces the erotic love shared between them to the viewer. They are not simply “Best friends forever” or lesbians. Abbi and Ilana are able to avoid the normalizing function of being put into the categories of either straight or gay, their relationship is way more complicated than that.

Abbi and Ilana’s erotic passion complicates conceptions of both romantic relationships and female friendships. Abbi and Ilana’s relationship creates space for a different kind of romantic relationship. In the past, romantic relationships were understood as a sexually intimate partnership between a man and woman. As our culture progressed, this understanding widened to include queer relationships as well. A key, defining factor in the conceptualization of romantic relationships was that the relationships were sexual in nature. For centuries, women have been taught that their romantic relationships with men were the only way to fulfill their need for emotional intimacy and erotic passion (hooks, 2002). However, as Abbi and Ilana’s relationship demonstrates, “friendships between women are often the deepest and most profound love stories” (Rapp, 2012). Even though Abbi and Ilana are both sexually intimate with other partners, these relationships do not satisfy all of their needs. As Ann Friedman puts it (2014), “Abbi and Ilana are more obsessed with each other than they are with men”. For example, Ilana is consistently intimate with the character, Lincoln, but she never enters a relationship with him. I argue that this is because her relationship with Abbi fulfills the erotic need traditionally filled by a romantic partner. Because Ilana is shown as content and fulfilled without a stable relationship, the show suggests to viewers that female kinship is enough. The romance between

Abbi and Ilana is the great romance of their lives; there is no need to seek another partner to provide for them emotionally.

The way that Abbi and Ilana's relationship is presented to the audience troubles previous notions of female friendship in two ways. First, Abbi and Ilana's erotic intimacy inspires the audience to understand female friendships on a spectrum between asexual and sexual, which is in contrast to previous conceptualizations of female friendship. The varying representation of eroticism between Abbi and Ilana create space in the media for the diverse ways that "potentially sexual elements" have "shaped and enriched" female kinship throughout time. In agitating the cultural norms surrounding portrayals of female friendship, Abbi and Ilana replace "the dominance and elitism that characterize most human relationships with intimacy, mutuality, and camaraderie" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 570). Put another way, Abbi and Ilana empower viewers to enact romantic friendship as it suits them, rather than ascribing to strict cultural standards.

Finally, in contrast to past representations of female friendships as secondary to women's romantic relationships, Abbi and Ilana's relationship is the heart and center of *Broad City* (Friedman, 2014; Syme, 2015). As Elizabeth Plank (2015) explains, men are able to enjoy popular culture representations of their friendships with other men that are positive, working in supportive teams. For women these representations are harder to find. Film and television representations of female friendship portray women as in competition with each other or obsessed with finding romantic love with a heterosexual partner (Plank, 2015). Thus, Abbi and

Ilana's female kinship disrupts the notion that all female friendships are filled with jealousy and cattiness. This representation of female kinship is liberatory for [female] viewers because it recognizes what this audience already knows, that female kinship is the "bedrock of women's lives" and provides intellectual and emotional sustenance (Traister, 2016). The audience is invited to recognize the way that female friendship can allow women to focus on building one another up, aiding in achieving their goals.

### **Intimacy**

Ilana: "I'm your main squeeze?!" Abbi: "Yeah, you're my favorite little jewie this side of St. Louie". From the familial relationship they share to their knowledge of each other's sexual fantasies, I have explained how Abbi and Ilana are intimately knowledgeable of each other's lives. In addition to this intimacy, Abbi and Ilana are also well-informed on each other's bodies and how they function. As I explain below, the two know exactly how the other functions physically. The intimacy between Abbi and Ilana, the characters, are reflective of the Abbi and Ilana, who are the creators of the show. This is made clear through countless interviews, where the "real life" Abbi and Ilana described the friendship between their characters as a heightened version of their actual friendship (Hope, 2016; Page, 2016; Syme, Jan 2016). The intimacy the two share is shown through bodily knowledge and close physical proximity.

Although Abbi and Ilana do not live together, negating any bill sharing or house work, their consistent the inordinate amounts of time spent together makes up for their lack of shared space. The close proximity of space that Abbi and Ilana share with each other is demonstrative of

the kinship concept of “access to the total person”. In their book, *Boston Marriages*, Rothblum and Brehony (1993) describe this concept through a narrative. The authors describe “access to the total person” as a pair of kin who frequently spend the night at the other’s house, talk daily, and spend insurmountable amounts of time together. For example, Abbi and Ilana are often shown in each other’s intimate space, either at one of their apartments together or walking around New York City. The lack of physical closeness they would gain from living together is made up by the fact that the two constantly communicate through video calls sessions. During these calls, Abbi and Ilana discuss anything that pops into their mind such as Abbi’s interest in finally buying her own weed or her musings about the potential greatness of a section of Disney World dedicated to cereal. Thus, this shows how Abbi and Ilana have complete access to each other’s thoughts. They always know what the other is doing and what they are thinking about.

Further, when Abbi does things without telling Ilana, Ilana becomes distraught and gets “FOMO” (fear of missing out). The show suggests that Ilana expects to be included in all of the intimate aspects of Abbi’s life. In the second season episode, Hashtag FOMO, Abbi gets her nose pierced without telling Ilana. Ilana says that now she’s going to “have FOMO for the rest of her life” and that while she’s at work Abbi should “try not to pierce her pussy”. Both comments exemplify how irritated Ilana is to be left out of an opportunity to experience something new with Abbi. In the same episode, Ilana discovers that Abbi has a drunken alter-ego called Val. When Ilana sees Abbi perform at a bar as Val, she is absolutely astounded and her FOMO is “through the roof.” Abbi and Ilana’s “mental and emotional energies” are focused on each other

(Garber, 2016). Thus, Ilana cannot fathom that there is a part of Abbi's life that she is not aware of suggesting that the intimacy between the two is vital to their romantic friendship.

In the episode "Hurricane Wanda", Ilana goes where no friend (that I know) has gone before. When Abbi goes to the restroom and is unable to flush her poop due to a power outage, she calls Ilana into the bathroom because she is really embarrassed. To make matters worse, it is during this time that Abbi sees her crush, Jeremy, walk into her apartment. Ilana knows how huge Abbi's "boner" for Jeremy is, so she agrees to "take care of it." Ilana scoops the poop out of the toilet with a shower cap and sneakily disposes of it in the hall trash chute. Considering disposing of another person's bowel movements is usually reserved for mothers and their offspring, this scene makes clear how far Ilana is willing to go for Abbi in order to ensure her happiness, and further that their intimate bonds are much deeper than those of a traditional female friendship.

While this physical intimacy is certainly indicative of the female kinship shared between the two women on the show, Abbi and Ilana's intimate knowledge of each other allows them to support each other off screen as well. In the following section, I provide examples of the "real life" Abbi and Ilana's intimacy. While conducting an interview with Rachel Syme, in real life, Abbi shares that the relationship between them comes before anything else. She says, "if Ilana doesn't like something and I can sense it, I'll say I don't like it, too, so one of us doesn't look like the bad guy" (Syme, 2015). Together, the friendship between these two *broads* creates a

shield against an industry that vies to portray female partnerships in stereotypically gendered ways.

Another example of kinship-as-shield-against-sexism is found in an interview discussed in *The Daily Life* (2016, Feb. 14). In the interview, Abbi and Ilana discuss the multiple times that they have been asked sexist questions, and as the two talk, it is clear that they are on the same page. They mock those who ask the questions by finishing each other's jokes. When responding to a question about what is the difference between their show and the HBO show *GIRLS*, Abbi says "you have the one show about vaginas" and Ilana follows with "...and then there's that other show with the other talking and walking vaginas" (Moran, 2016). They are totally in sync when it comes to defending their show and commanding respect from the comedy industry. They both reject the sexism in their industry and work together to protect each other from insidious ways that it often tears female creators apart. This is significant because it illustrates the way that female kinship can empower women to enact "genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters" (Lorde, 1984, p. 59). Abbi and Ilana use their intimate bonds in an effort to change the way the comedy industry talks about women and their work.

Further, the known intimacy between Abbi and Ilana was what lead to Comedy Central picking us the show. In the previously mentioned Grantland article, Comedy Central's Ken Alterman describes his reasoning for picking up *Broad City*:

When they came to us, they had a script, and that script needed work... but we never had any concerns about what we bought. We bought *them*, what Abbi and Ilana are when they

are together. What they have is basically impossible to manufacture. They have an organic, very innate, primal dynamic, and it's obvious to anyone. They are irresistible. (Syme, 2014)

What Alterman is describing is the romantic friendship shared between the two creators. What is significant is that the intimacy shared between Abbi and Ilana is clearly visible to those that surround them. They embody the intimacy that they recreate on the show.

Like their characters, Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer have an intimate knowledge of each other's personalities and quirks. In a YouTube interview for *Complex* magazine, Abbi and Ilana are asked to identify with other famous television duos, such as Carrie and Samantha of *Sex and the City* (Complex, 2015). Most answers come quickly to them, without disagreement making it clear that the intimacy shared between them is reflective of popular culture representations of a married couple. When they are asked which of them is Walt or Jesse from *Breaking Bad* they have to consider who is secretly more dark inside, Ilana immediately points at Abbi and then they both laugh. It is clear to the viewer that the two women are in-sync. They understand and accept each other's shortcomings. Neither Abbi nor Ilana are offended when the other calls attention to their flaws.

During an interview with *Vulture*, Abbi and Ilana describe how the intimacy between them affects the way that interact and love each other. In the interview, Ilana is describing how the character, Ilana's, sexual love for Abbi came to be on the show. In the interview Ilana describes a kinship relationship without naming it. She says (2015):

I'm very much, like, a lover. I don't know, I think it's a form of friendship, just me complimenting Abbi and her just wishing it were sexual. My friends are the sexiest people I know, right? They're the smartest, coolest, hottest people I've ever met. So I think it's a mentality of fucking your friends. And also, like, big deal...

Ilana describes the often polysemous nature of female kinship. The relationship can be many things; it is a relationship that is created between the two women involved that can be asexual or sexual at different times in the relationship. Labeling the relationship as sexual or asexual relationship is not what is important. The intimacy and love is what matters most in romantic kinship, which Abbi and Ilana invite the audience to see the ways in which they develop and enact love.

Further, when *Broad City* first began as a web series, Abbi and Ilana were broke but driven. They often describe their work ethic similarities and support as the reason that the show became what it is today. In one interview Abbi says (Syme, 2015):

I think it's why we were drawn to each other in the first place. Even when we were just making a web series, we were both like, 'We want to be successful with this.' We didn't have any money. We printed everything at Kinkos ... It was so bobo. We would meet in diners just like this one to write and cast the webisodes, we would have real business meetings about it.

They took each other and their work seriously, even if initially, no one else did. The drive each had fostered a space that allowed them to complete the webisodes and the drive to get the show

picked up by a network. Ilana describes this same phenomenon when talking about creating episodes together. She says that the two are “content generators” and that they had no desire to create for anyone else, but each other (Syme, 2015). The kinship created between these women provides them with a space to create and care for one another despite money problems or rejection. In these instances, Abbi and Ilana demonstrate the female kinship concept of “commitment to personal growth” (hooks, 2002, p. 213). Despite the hardships they faced trying to get their show on air, Abbi and Ilana remain steadfast to each other and the work they create.

Finally, it is clear that the show’s themes and reliance on female friendship resonates with audiences. As I argue, this is evidenced through the ways viewers discuss the show with each other. This intimacy affirms viewer’s own intimate friendships. The comments sections of article written about the show are full of these affirmations. For example, in a *Jezebel* article written about the forthcoming third season, multiple users shared how Abbi and Ilana’s relationship is reflective of their own. User Rihannaistheonetrue says, “...the ONLY representation of women I actually identify with on TV. PRAISE *BROAD CITY*” (Hope, 2016). User Awkward turtle follows with, “There’s a variety of reasons why this show feels like it’s about me and my best friend, but this trailer just sealed the deal with the ‘Oh I know you from her Instagram’ line. Because this JUST happened to me and my bff. YASSSSSS” (Hope, 2016). There are more comments that followed describing similar identification with the characters and most importantly, Abbi and Ilana’s friendship.

To conclude, it is important to understand the implications of the intimacy shared between Abbi and Ilana. Through their intimate bonds, Abbi and Ilana were able to create a rhetorical “safe space”, where they were they invited their viewers to understand their romantic friendship. Through the responses above, it is clear that the viewers did in fact identify with Abbi and Ilana’s portrayal of their female kinship. I argue that this is in part due to the rise in single women in America (Traister, 2016). More than before, single women are disinterested in finding a romantic mate and are instead, investing their time in long-term female kinships. This often occurs when women tire of the heterosexual bonds offered by male partners (hooks, 2002). Through their intimate relationship, Abbi and Ilana were able to develop their career in a way that would have been made significantly more difficult if they were engaged in the duties of a heterosexual marriage (child-rearing, tending house).

Romantic kinship serves women in a variety of ways and Abbi and Ilana are not exempt from this. For example, Lasser (1988) describes the ways in which the intimacy between two women in a romantic friendship functions to embolden women in the public sphere.

She says it softens the often hard “realities of isolation in daily life, reinforced shared gender identities, promoted cooperation...and strengthened networks among women working women. (p. 165)

For Abbi and Ilana, this is certainly true. From the extreme amount of time the two spend video calling each other to the knowledge of each other’s thoughts and bodies, Abbi and Ilana have helped each other grow intrapersonally. The ways that they can uplift and empower one another

is largely due to the intimate knowledge each has of the other. The intimacy that Abbi and Ilana share allows them to grow together in equality, immune to the powerful ways that patriarchal, heterosexist culture works to bring women down.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

By analyzing *Broad City* through an invitational and critical rhetoric lens, it is evident that the characters' romantic friendship on the show invites its viewers to participate in a liberating female relationship. The relationship that Abbi and Ilana present on and off screen provides an example of romantic friendship that feels real and lived-in to viewers. These two have been lauded time and time again by journalists and audience members for the way that their relationship portrays a female friendship that is relatable. In the following section, I discuss the major findings and implications of this project. First, I discuss what the present study reveals about romantic kinship through answering my research questions. Second, I discuss the way that *Broad City* has begun to unravel false tensions between the second and third wave feminist movements. I next outline the ways in which Abbi and Ilana's relationship and the humor used on *Broad City* is explicitly political.

#### **Major Findings**

Romantic friendship or female kinship is a deep, enduring relationship between two women. Throughout this study I characterize female kinship as a sexually ambiguous relationship (between women) that is intensely intimate and exceeds the expectations of a "regular" friendship. Romantic friendship is fulfilling in many ways and challenges the notions of heterosexism by allowing women to transcend the traditional boundaries of female friendship. For example, these women often share living spaces, are intimately knowledgeable of each

other's lives, know one another's family members, travel together, share friends, and many other things that are typically categorized as things that one would do with a romantic partner. In having a life partner who shares life's responsibilities without the heterosexual burdens such as childbirth and rearing, women have the time and space to develop their passions, careers, and to work on self-growth. Traditionally, women have not had this space to develop previously; kinship has been a key element in changing that. Thus, kinship has led to the personal liberation of many women, who now remain single.

In answer to RQ1, the relationship between Abbi and Ilana on and off screen exemplifies female kinship in profound ways. The representation of their relationship on television is one that moves the study of both kinship and invitational rhetoric forward.

RQ1: How does the relationship between Abbi and Ilana exemplify or challenge romantic friendship?

RQ2: How do television series that are female-friendship centric liberate women from the confines of traditional notions of female friendship?

In regard to RQ2, Abbi and Ilana's female kinship redefines how female friendships can be portrayed on television. The way the show presents the ambiguous sexuality and eroticism between Abbi and Ilana is unprecedented on television, however, sexual ambiguity in female relationships not novel. For example, Boston Marriages were often characterized as sexually ambiguous, and feminists of the past who have formed relationships with other women have also had similar relationships. What is new to kinship studies is that Abbi and Ilana bring this type of

relationship to a mainstream audience with *Broad City*. In doing this, the two women have created space for more fluid and less binary relationships, free of the constraints of heteronormativity, or the cultural assumption that everyone is straight. Additionally, the erotic tension between Abbi and Ilana created and maintained through their frank sex talk and Ilana's sexual advances toward Abbi create yet another space that empowers women to create kinship bonds on their own terms, free of heterosexual pressure. Dow (2011) and others have argued that television is created with a heteronormative audience in mind. This project suggests that this is changing. The portrayal of a nontraditional television relationship invites the audience to examine, reflect, and identify with Abbi and Ilana's kinship.

This project uses invitational rhetoric and critical rhetoric in order to illuminate the rhetorical implications of romantic friendship. As outlined in the literature review, invitational rhetoric is a way for rhetors to create a safe communication environment where they can present and share their ideas without the intention of persuading the other person in the interaction. Abbi and Ilana create this safe environment on *Broad City* between one another and their audience. They do this by rooting their relationship in "reciprocity and respect" and neither of the women enact persuasive tactics in order to get the other to understand their worldview. If Abbi is not into what Ilana is presenting, Ilana simply moves on. Further, neither Abbi or Ilana the characters nor Abbi and Ilana in real life urge the audience that their brand of relationship is best implicitly or explicitly. Instead, Abbi and Ilana present their ideas through the actions of a loving and intimate relationship.

Another important implication of the romantic friendship between Abbi and Ilana is demonstrated through the way the show characterizes the false tensions between the second and third wave feminist movements. They do this through Hillary Clinton's cameo in the third season. While the show brings forth third wave sensibilities, friendship and female support are rooted in second wave ideals. In the third season episode "2016", Ilana spends a day volunteering for the Hillary Clinton Presidential Campaign. When Abbi comes to the campaign office to visit Ilana, Clinton walks in. Abbi and Ilana proceed to lose their minds; there is an entire 15 second clip of them just stuttering over themselves and freaking out due to Clinton's presence. Clinton's appearance, in addition to Abbi and Ilana's clear reverence and support for her, is interesting due to Clinton's characterization as a second wave feminist. Second wave feminists are known for their activism in the realms of women in the workplace, abortion rights, and pay equality (Yu, 2011). During the movement, second wave feminists were ardently against and distrustful of mainstream media, which makes Clinton's appearance doubly compelling. While on the one hand this is a clear move by Clinton's campaign to win over young millennial women. Matt Wilstein (2016) of the *The Daily Beast* explains this by Clinton's need to use more non-traditional outreach because "A recent poll found that millennial women back Sanders over Clinton by a 2-to-1 margin."

Another way to read Clinton's appearance on the show is Abbi and Ilana's desire to bridge the gap between second and third wave feminists. Enacting a third wave feminist view that all powerful women are important, no matter how they may enact their politics differently.

Hillary Clinton embodies second wave belief and practices. Clinton takes to the political stage in order to fight gender inequality and injustices, in contrast to Abbi and Ilana's third wave media approach to feminist activism. This inclusion is an indispensable way that *Broad City* has created mediated unity against the previous false dichotomies drawn between the second and third wave movements. Following this discussion of the ways that *Broad City* has carved out new spaces in television for women, friendship, and the feminist movement, I turn to the limitations of this project and conclude with suggestions for future research.

Through the invitational rhetoric used between Abbi and Ilana, these women have created a television show where the friendship between the women is itself political. The representation of Abbi and Ilana's friendship as political is enacted in two ways. First, the political nature of the friendship is demonstrated through the character's actions. Second, the political nature of their relationship is revealed through *Broad City*'s use of humor as a joyful act. In third wave fashion, Abbi and Ilana's politics are demonstrated by presenting their friendship as a rhetorical safe space, where they can empower each other and other women on the show. They do not bicker, they do not tear other women down. Additionally, the show's actors and writers, Abbi and Ilana have woven their third wave politics into not only the friendship, but the everyday actions and interactions with other characters in the show. For example, when Abbi and Ilana interact with other women, they are never catty or bitchy. As discussed in the literature review, this is demonstrative of the third wave tenet of using media in order to spread a feminist message and reach a wide swath of audiences.

To continue, the political nature of Abbi and Ilana's relationship is demonstrated further through the use of humor and joy on the show. Abbi and Ilana create intimacy through their use of humor. While spiritual assistance is found in kinship literature, it is not talked about in regard to humor. Humor as spiritual assistance is an addition to existing kinship literature. On the show, Abbi and Ilana never stay upset about something for long; they do not bemoan a date gone wrong or the loss of a job. Instead, they confer with one another about the happening and by the end the two are making light of the situation with jokes and teasing. More *broadly*, the joy shared between Abbi and Ilana on the show is used in a way that empowers young viewers to embrace their 20s despite the prevalence of sexism in American culture. As Arielle Bernstein (2016) writes, "Ilana's dirty swagger is especially vibrant and joyful and comes out of left field in a culture where girls and women aren't expected to be particularly happy at being a woman". Abbi and Ilana still call out sexism and recognize it as harmful, however, they are still delighted to be women. Ilana embraces her polyamorous, bisexual identity on the show without a discussion or a 'coming out' episode. In doing this, the show presents to the viewers that Ilana's sexual identity is not going to be a defining aspect her persona. Instead the show chooses to focus on Ilana's fierce embrace of feminism and her unapologetically joyful nature.

Finally, in line with 19th century romantic friendships between suffragists, Abbi and Ilana's romantic friendship has created a liberating and lasting relationship that was previously absent from television. The way that Abbi and Ilana embrace each other as life partners juxtaposed with the representation of Abbi and Ilana as fulfilled, happy women invites audiences

to reject the cultural pressure to place more importance on long-term, monogamous relationship with a significant other. Abbi and Ilana's romantic kinship is liberatory in the way that audiences are invited to embrace relationships in their own lives that they see reflected by Abbi and Ilana. Additionally, it is worth considering that more American women are single than ever before in our country's history (Traister, 2016). This combined with the rise in cultural clout that female friendship has gained over the past year, reveals that it is not impossible that *Broad City* is reflecting a very real, lived reality for many women.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Moving from major findings, I argue there are a few limitations of this project and room for future research. The primary limitations of the present study are the demographic makeup of *Broad City's* stars. While the show does have a range of diverse, multidimensional characters, Abbi and Ilana are white, middle-class, able-bodied, young, urban dwellers. While these are all different issues of representation, the central issue is a lack of diverse representation in the two lead characters. By centering the project on a single text, where the primary characters are white women, there leaves a lack of nuance to this study. In order to make more conclusive arguments about how female kinship functions for women more generally, it is important to analyze shows that feature characters who are not a part of the ruling class in terms of race. Further, if the study were to include analysis of other shows that have more diverse lead characters, there would be a better understanding of how different groups of women may or may not enact kinship, and whether the ways kinship is enacted differ from Abbi and Ilana's relationship.

Additionally, although discussions and representations of female friendship have grown recently in popular culture, almost all of the representations and discussions are centered around young women. *Broad City* is no exception. *Broad City*'s focus on young female kin relationships leaves a false impression that these types of relationships are only occurring when women are young. However, based on some kinship literature and through reading comments left by fans on *Broad City* articles, it is clear to me that this notion is a farce (hooks, 2002). These relationships are not only happening between young women; women of all ages can and do form this intimate, lasting bond of kinship between one another. Thus, a larger project might examine shows that center around women who are past their 20's such as *Grace and Frankie* on Netflix or *Playing House* on USA.

In order to conduct this research, I have provided literature on both critical and invitational rhetoric. While not directly applied as method, the combination of these rhetorical methods allowed me to conduct a different kind of analysis. Put another way, critical rhetoric moved me away from the need to analyze a singular speech, while invitational rhetoric allowed me to focus on community and the process of Abbi and Ilana's connection to each other and the audience. Both of these methods allow a rhetorical scholar to examine texts that might not be considered part of the rhetorical canon, yet are both academically and culturally rich.

Next, I offer my suggestions for future research. I argue that there are three areas of research scholars should examine in order to expand the usage and understanding of kinship within rhetorical studies. First, there is a need for further scholarship on the sexual ambiguity

that exists in female kinship relationships. The sexually ambiguous nature of Abbi and Ilana's relationship is representative of the ways that kinship literature describes these female-female relationships (i.e. *Boston Marriages*). It is important to further this line of research because this sexual ambiguity seen on *Broad City* disrupts previous notions of friendship, allowing a more fluid and nuanced understandings of friendships that exist "in real life".

On the note of "real life" friendships, these depictions are nearly absent from rhetorical media studies. By ignoring "real" relationships and focusing solely on media depictions of real life contexts, scholars are missing a mass of information about female kinship. It is not enough to understand how the rhetoric of a television show or movie is understood from a scholarly level anymore. With the access to the internet and consequently to blogs and comments, scholars are able to actually understand what audiences think about the media scholars are analyzing. Through comments, blogs, and other social media, scholars can see how people process and react to specific media texts.

More generally, there is a need for more scholarship on friendship from a rhetorical perspective. One show scholars might examine is *Togetherness*, for the male friendship between two of its lead characters. As I discussed in my justification, kinship studies are rarely used in the communication field, and absent from the rhetorical perspective. As demonstrated in this project, kinship studies can help scholars uncover the complicated ways that relationships between intimate partners function. Kinship studies are an important way to provide a nuanced media analysis for rhetorical scholars.

In sum, this project has examined the female friendship on the show *Broad City* through the lens of kinship. I employed critical and invitational rhetoric in order to reveal the ways in which Abbi and Ilana enact the kinship qualities of care-giving, eroticism, and intimacy. Ultimately, I found that Abbi and Ilana's romantic friendship provides a liberatory model of friendship that is not constrained by traditional conceptions of friendship as asexual. Through romantic friendship, viewers are invited to pursue relationships that allow them to create change and grow in ways that were previously only reserved for men.

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