QUUER REPRESENTATIONS IN CARTOON NETWORK'S *STEVEN UNIVERSE*: ENCODING GENDER-SUBVERSIVE SIGNS IN CHILDREN'S ANIMATION

ASYRAF SYAHIR BIN MOHD NAJIB

CULTURAL CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
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ASYRAF SYAHIR BIN MOHD NAJIB

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QUEER REPRESENTATIONS IN CARTOON NETWORK'S *STEVEN UNIVERSE*: ENCODING GENDER-SUBVERSIVE SIGNS IN CHILDREN'S ANIMATION

ABSTRACT

This research is conducted with the premise that Cartoon Network's *Steven Universe,* utilizes its fantasy-themed narrative to enable the encoding of gender-subversive meanings in the connotative layers of the visual and verbal signs of the animation. The reality, as constructed in the animation, is hypothesized to be able to accomplish performative functions in subverting intelligible gender identities through its multi-layered sign systems. Understanding that *Steven Universe* is an animation intended mainly for children, the author believes that the interplay of genderqueer meanings in the cartoon, is a phenomenon worth paying attention to. Consequently, to analyse subversive visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*, the author proposes the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative-Performativity. The model employs a synthesized framework between Semiotics and Gender Performativity. Findings have ultimately confirmed the initial hypothesis that *Steven Universe* encode gender subversive meanings into its visual and verbal signs through the signification of queer concepts.

Keywords: Semiotics, gender performativity, Steven Universe, subversion, connotation

QUEER REPRESENTATIONS IN CARTOON NETWORK'S *STEVEN UNIVERSE*: ENCODING GENDER-SUBVERSIVE SIGNS IN CHILDREN'S ANIMATION

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan atas premis bahawa *Steven Universe*, sebuah animasi Cartoon Network, telah menggunakan naratif bertemakan fantasi bagi membolehkan makna-makna *gender-subversive* dikanunkan dalam lapisan konotasi tanda-tanda visual dan lisannya. Realiti yang dirangka dalam animasi tersebut dipercayai dapat mencapai fungsi subversif dalam pembentukan identiti gender; melalui satu manipulasi sistem tanda yang bijak. Oleh kerana *Steven Universe* adalah sebuah animasi kanak-kanak, kajian ini percaya bahawa perihal penggunaan pertanda-pertanda *genderqueer* dalam kartun tersebut adalah satu fenomena yang wajar diberi perhatian. Justeru, bagi menjalankan analisa ke atas tanda-tanda visual dan lisan yang subversif dalam *Steven Universe*, kajian ini mencadangkan penggunaan model *Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative-Performativity*. Model tersebut merupakan satu sintesis 2 kerangka teori; antara teori Semiotik dan *Gender Performativity*. Secara amnya, dapatan kajian mengesahkan hipotesis awal kajian bahawa makna-makna *gender-subversive* dapat dikanunkan dalam tanda-tanda visual dan lisan *Steven Universe* melalui signifikasi konsep-konsep *queer* pada lapisan maknanya.

Kata-kata kunci: Semiotik, *gender performativity*, *Steven Universe*, subversi, konotasi

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For a better tomorrow; for a blessed today.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Children's animation is nearly as old as the introduction of the television itself (Holz, 2017); whereby it has been a pervasive force since its introduction. Over the years, children's animation has evolved in terms of production qualities and contents. That being said, the contents of children's animation has continuously been criticized to be homogeneous and hegemonic (i.e. white and heteronormative); as they are lacking in the cultural representations of non-dominant cultures. To note, cultural representation refers to the medium or process through which meaning, associations, and values of a particular social system (racial, gender, religious, etc.) are socially constructed and reified by people in a shared culture (Hall, 2011). Thus, as questions on cultural representation are raised to contest the homogeneous and hegemonic nature of children's animation, more creators have stepped up to represent marginalized and minority culture (i.e. gender, racial, and religious minority) in media (including children's animation).

In recent 21st century, as what Dunn (2016) would term as the "queer renaissance" of children's cartoons; creators of children's animation have started to be more bold in representing queer cultures in their works. Issues, characters, and themes, pertaining to the queer, which are usually considered as taboo and deviant, have started to be explicitly represented in a number of children's animation – one of it being Cartoon Network's *Steven Universe*. Rebecca Sugar, the creator of *Steven Universe*, visits the idea of sex, gender, and sexuality; and invites viewers to reconsider their perception of sex, gender, and sexuality, through the narratives of *Steven Universe*. Sugar does so by encoding queer ideas into the visual and verbal signs of the cartoon. Understanding this notion, this paper principally aims to study queer representations in Cartoon Networks' *Steven Universe*; and the gender-subversive ideas embedded in the visual and verbal signs of the cartoon.

1.1 The Pervasive Nature of Children's Animations

While the supposed forefront role for children's animated television programmes (or cartoons) has always been deemed to be amusement and entertainment, studies on the subject matter have revealed that children's animated television programmes have had, and still have, profound impacts on the process of socialization in children. To define, socialization is the process in which individuals conform to, adopt, and internalize the norms, values, and roles of society (Kornblum, 2012). According to Uzniene (2014), media (including animations) plays an integral part as an agent of socialization.

To state that cartoons impact children's socialization process refers to how cartoons may alter how children see themselves in society, what socio-cultural values would they adopt, and how they learn to react to socio-cultural stimuli around them. Uzniene (2014) argues that children could subconsciously form a myriad of different ideas (whereby these ideas can either be accurate or misconstrued) on their surrounding social constructs by observing the social reality as portrayed in cartoons. Hence, in principal, establishing media as a significant agent of socialization, establishes children's animations (and the ideas embedded within them) as pervasive.

Contextualizing the pervasive nature of children's animations into the sphere of *Steven Universe* as a queer cartoon, this paper believes that the representation of queer culture in *Steven Universe* (as do other queer contents) could reconstruct viewers' perceptions on sex, gender, and sexuality. Consequently, the representation could deconstruct the polarization of society into a set of predetermined social boundary between male and female; and introduces fluidity in gender roles and expressions to children. In this sense, *Steven Universe* advocates viewers to reconsider the rigid formation of gender dichotomy between male and female; as well as the othering of the queer, using the pervasive nature of children's animation.

1.2 The Queer Renaissance: A Brief Look

The "queer renaissance" depicts a changing trend in the representation of queer characters in children's cartoon. Shows like *Avatar: The Legend of Korra*, *Adventure Time, Clarence,* and of course, *Steven Universe,* are beginning to bring queer characters and relationships into their worlds; albeit the queerness of these shows is mostly confined to homosexual relationships and is often put in ambiguity (Dunn, 2016).

In *Avatar: The Legend of Korra*, the show ended with Korra (the main character of the series) and her female friend, Asami, walking hand in hand into a portal to the spirit world[1]. The scene supports the ambiguously foreshadowed romance between the two female characters; leading to discussions on Korra's sexuality. While the implicitness in the scene might be unconvincing for some audience, creators of the show, Mike DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko later confirmed that the relationship is romantic and not platonic; and they never intended for the scene to be implicit. DiMartino (2014) in his blogpost wrote that, "Our intention with the last scene was to make it as clear as possible that yes, Korra and Asami have romantic feelings for each other. The moment where they enter the spirit portal symbolizes their evolution from being friends to being a couple." The scene thus, is a significant move in bringing a marginalized sexual identity (bisexuality) into children's cartoon.

In *Adventure Time*, queer themes are strongly represented through its anthropomorphic fantasy characters. Most of the characters are fluid in presenting their gender identities and desires. For example, the character Lumpy Space Princess is voiced by a male voice actor with a deep masculine voice in addition to its drag-like demeanor. The show also hinted history of a gay relationship between its two female characters, Marceline and

[1] Spirit World is a realm with magical spiritual beings in the Avatar universe.

Princess Bubblegum, in the episodes "What was missing" and "Sky Witch". According to Barber (2015), the voice actor of Marceline, Olivia Olsen, revealed that Pendleton Ward (the creator of *Adventure Time*) has even confirmed to her that the two characters had dated in the past. In the final episode, "Come along with me", the two characters engaged in a kissing scene; confirming all implicit hints from previous episodes. Another example of queer representations in *Adventure Time* would be the gender fluidity of BMO, an agender robot who frequently changes his/her pronouns between "he" and "she" and having other characters refer to him/her as both a "lady" and a "boy".

In *Clarence*, LGBT representation has been liberal. In the episode "Jeff Wins", it was revealed that one of the show's main characters, Jeff Randell, have two mothers (whereby one is more feminine and the other is more masculine). In the episode "Neighbourhood Grill", the show has featured the tres francais double-kiss on the cheek between two male characters to imply gay relationship. Rothbell, one of the writers for *Clarence* has revealed that the two characters were supposed to kiss on the mouth; but the network decided to downplay the scene into a more ambiguous gesture (Bobb, 2014).

But even when the scenes have been downplayed or are in ambiguity, the depictions of queer themes in these shows are a huge change from how queer themes was depicted in the earlier years of cartoon. Before the queer renaissance, queer acts, characters, and/or relationships were mainly used to evoke humour, like the infamous cross-dressing scenes in Warner Bros' *Bugs Bunny*; or were shown to be dangerous, like the depiction of the villain, Him, who explicitly embodies male sissyhood in Cartoon Network's *The Powerpuff Girls*. Inarguably, queer scenes were rarely depicted for its political agenda prior to the 21st century.

In 2013, the queer trend in children's cartoon was further shifted with another radical move in the "queer renaissance" with the premier of *Steven Universe*. Cartoon Network's

Steven Universe breaks the traditional implicitness of queer themes in children's cartoons by explicitly exploring queer experiences in its plot, characters and general theme. The show radically presents diverse queer elements through its fantasy-themed narratives by being willing to give voice to other, less often represented queer identities (Dunn, 2016).

1.3 Steven Universe and the Gem-filled Universe

Steven Universe is a coming-of-age children's animated television series under Cartoon Network; a television channel under Cartoon Network Inc. that primarily broadcasts children's shows (mostly animated programmes). The show was created by Rebecca Sugar, a bisexual[2] 31-year-old (as of 2018) American-born creator, producer, screenwriter, storyboard artist and songwriter. Sugar's *Steven Universe* premiered on the 4th of November, 2013, as Cartoon Network's first animation to be created by a sole female creator; and has entered its fifth season on the 29th of May, 2017.

Set in the fictional town of Beach City, the story revolves around the life of Steven Universe: a half-human, half-Gem boy, who grows up trying to figure out his identity and destiny alongside his friends (and mother-figures) – Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl. In the reality whereby Steven's story is being told, humans co-exist with an interstellar race of sentient rock beings called Gems.

Traditionally, the Gems are a highly hierarchical and type-specific race. Their roles in society is determined and characterized by the type of gemstones (which is analogous to the human brain) that they have. For examples, Jaspers and Amethysts are warriors; and Pearls are servants. Additionally, regardless of gem-type, Gems generally possess the ability to fuse, summon weapons, shape-shift, and project holograms. It is also important

[2] Sugar came out as bisexual in San Diego Comic Con in 2016. Her sexuality is worth mentioning in this paper to better understand the queer perspective in *Steven Universe*.

to note that the Gem's physical forms are mere projections from their gemstones which can be altered every time they reform; and since the physical forms of Gems are mere projections, Gems are sexually monomorphic; meaning that they are inherently asexual (except for Steven).

The plot of *Steven Universe* follows the story of Steven as he explores his life as the first human-Gem hybrid, a millennia after a war between Homeworld (the original planet of the Gems) and the Crystal Gems (rebels from Homeworld). Steven came into existence when Rose Quartz (Steven's Gem mother and leader of the Crystal Gems) ultimately decided to give up her physical form to give birth to Steven; bringing him into existence through the inheritance of her gemstone (which ceases her own existence); thus, rendering Steven technically motherless as he was growing up. Steven's journey of self-discovery was hence, made complicated through the shrouds of mystery that follow him regarding who Rose is, what the Gems are, and what (and who) he actually is. To note, the question of self-discovery and identity in *Steven Universe* is often interweaved with queer themes and the idea of marginalization.

Understanding the background of the cartoon, Dunn (2016) argues that *Steven Universe* provides viewers with a unique framework to investigate how queer identities and experiences work by relying on a fantasy theme in defining its sets of narrative rules, images, and possibilities. The elements of fantasy in the cartoon lift the physical constraints that often restrict queer representations in realist media; and open up narrative possibilities for multilayered metaphors and symbolic representations of queer identities, experiences, and relationships in the children's animation.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

At present, there is limited scholarly attention given to Cartoon Network's *Steven Universe*; despite the cartoon being a critically acclaimed children's animation that centres upon the theme of queer identities. According to Ewart (2015), the cartoon is one of the very few children's cartoon so far (the other being *The Legend of Korra*, *Clarence*, and *Adventure Time*) that openly adopts queer theme in mainstream media. What makes the phenomenon interesting is the fact that receptions towards the cartoon have either been positive or neutral; despite the taboo that it should have carried with it. To note, this paper maintains a neutral position in the gender politics; and mainly focuses on understanding the unique phenomenon made possible by *Steven Universe,* academically.

As argued by Dunn (2016), a possible explanation to the highly visible queer themes in *Steven Universe* to even be able to be aired in mainstream media, is its tactful use of fantasy-themed narratives. In other words, the fantasy-themed narratives of *Steven Universe* enabled Sugar to craftily encode queer concepts and meanings in the visual and verbal signs of *Steven Universe*.

Studying this phenomenon is thus, highly significant since they have opened possibilities for creators to explicitly include queer themes that may carry subversive performative acts in children's animation. To note, performative acts refer to actions that produce a series of effect in constituting the identity it is purported to be (Butler, 1990 & 2011). Of course, the claim that the cartoon carries subversive performative act is also a foundational claim that this paper intends on proving later. For that matter, a research that employs semiotic analysis to study gender-subversive visual and verbal signs in Cartoon Networks' *Steven Universe* is to be carried.

1.5 Research Objectives

This paper is primarily concerned with the queer meanings encoded in the visual and verbal signs of Cartoon Network's *Steven Universe*. Thus, in order to elucidate the direction of this research, this paper has drawn 3 research objectives, as follow:

1. To identify visual and verbal signs with subversive meanings in *Steven Universe*.
2. To identify the queer concepts signified through the subversive visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*.
3. To interpret how *Steven Universe* is able to use the signification of queer concepts into the visual and verbal signs to achieve subversive effects.

1.6 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this research, this paper outlines 3 research questions that this research aims on answering, as well as the general strategies employed in answering them. The research questions are as follow:

1. **RQ1:** ***What are the subversive visual and verbal signs in Steven Universe?***

   The first research question aims to identify the visual and verbal signs used by Sugar to encode gender-subversive meanings, and understand their patterns. To answer this research question, this research shall employ a semiotic analysis, and examine the expression planes of selected signs. The expression planes of these signs shall later be categorized to find common patterns of occurrences.

2. **RQ2:** ***What are the queer concepts signified in the subversive visual and verbal signs of Steven Universe?***

The second research questions aims to identify the queer concepts and ideas signified in selected visual and verbal signs of *Steven Universe*. To answer this research question, this research shall employ a semiotic analysis, and examine the content planes, as well as the context plane, of selected signs. The queer concepts shall later be categorized to find common patterns of occurrences.

3. **RQ3:** ***How is Steven Universe able to use the signification of queer concepts into the visual and verbal signs to achieve subversive effects?***

The third research question aims to interpret how signifying queer concepts into the content planes of visual and verbal signs can actually achieve subversive effects. To answer this research question, discussions from past literature shall be drawn to compliment the answers from research questions 1 and 2.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Based on the research questions, this paper intends on employing semiotic analysis to study a number of selected visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*. To define, Semiotics is the study of signs and meaning-making in society (Bignell, 1997). In the context of this research, the visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*; as well as the intersemiotic relationship between the two, shall be analysed to understand the queer concepts encoded in them.

Also, since the discussions of this paper heavily focus on the discourse of sex, gender, and sexuality; and their intended deconstructions in the show, relying solely on semiotics will be insufficient. Consequently, this paper shall have to rely on Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity to support its discussions. A synthesized

framework between semiotic analysis and gender performativity would thus, enable this paper to answer its 3 research questions.

1.7.1 Semiotic Analysis

Since this paper is primarily concerned with the structure (visual and verbal signs) and meanings of *Steven Universe*, a structuralist approach to semiotic shall be appropriate.

Sign is a fundamental concept in semiotics that is derivative of Saussurean dyadic model of sign. Only by understanding sign conceptually, shall the discourse to other semiotic concepts be opened. According to Eco (1979), a sign is not merely a physical entity with a fixed semiotic entity; but it is always an element of an *expression plane* (equivalent to Saussure's *signifier*) that is conventionally correlated to one (or several) element(s) of a *content plane* (equivalent to Saussure's *signified*). Eco's concept of signs, thus, brings forward two ideas: 1) the physical entity is the concrete occurrence of the expressive pertinent element; 2) a sign is the meeting ground for independent elements from two different systems of two different planes that meet on the basis of correlational coding (Eco, 1979). When two independent functives (expression and content) from two continua enter into a mutual correlation (via a semiotic code), a sign is thus realized.

Sign (n): **Code** k (**Expression** X + **Content** Y),
whereby X and Y can be arbitrarily related to form (n) within the rules of k.

Diagram 1.1 Formation of Sign

In a broad cinematic context, a cinematic scene would generally contain various signs from multiple modes: index, icon, and symbol, and of different sign-systems. To define, an iconic sign is a sign in which "the signifier represents the signified mainly by its similarity to it; its likeness"; an indexical sign is a sign "which measures a quality not because it is identical to it but because it has an inherent relationship to it"; and a symbolic

sign is an arbitrary sign whereby "the signifier has no direct nor indexical relationship to the signified, but rather, represents it through convention", (Monaco, 2000, p.164).

Having signs from multiple modes and sign-systems would consequently create high intertextual and intratexual dimensions within a cinematic text; enabling superelevation of codes to occur and thus, signifying connotative meanings. To define, connotation is the meaning on the second order of signification; commonly associated to sociocultural contexts and circumstances (Chandler, 2012). Based on the notion of intertexual and intratexual relations, Monaco (2000) provided a useful concept in understanding cinematic connotations; that, audience's sense of cinematic connotations depend on the understanding of syntagms and paradigms of a scene; a concept adopted from the Saussurean concept of syntagmatic and associative axes.

To define, syntagmatic relations refer to the intratextual relations of a signifier to other signifiers that are co-present within the text; while paradigmatic relations refers to the intertexual relations of a signifier with signifiers which are absent from the text (Chandler, 2012). Diagram 1.6 illustrate syntagmatic-paradigmatic axes:

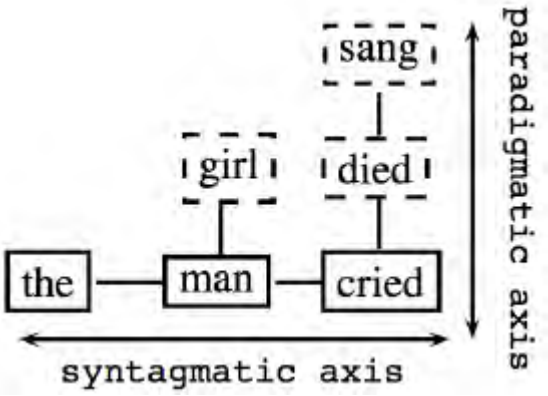


Diagram 1.2 the Syntagmatic-Paradigmatic Axes

Thus, in understanding meanings in *Steven Universe*, this paper intends on exploring a syntagmatic-paradigmatic approach. For visual signs, paradigmatic relations of cinematic

signs can be identified through understanding its use of trope (Monaco, 2000); while syntagmatic relations of cinematic signs can be examined through its use of montage and *mise-en-scene*. To define, trope is the use of figurative language via words, phrases, or images that creates new relationships between the elements in a content plane and an expression plane (Miller, 1991; Monaco, 2000). Additionally, *mise-en-scene* refers to the visual compositions of a cinematic frame; while montage refers to the sequencing of filmic shots (Chandler, 2012).

For verbal signs, paradigmatic relations can be identified through diction and tone; while syntagmatic relations can be identified through word order, as typically done with Structural Linguistics. To define, diction is the choice of words and style of expression that an author makes; and tone is define as the attitude that the author applies to his/her writing (Strunk & White, 2000). On the other hand, word order is defined as the order of syntactic constituents of a language (Tomlin, 1986).

Additionally, the notion of intersemiotics deals with the circulation of meaning between sign systems; that one sign system includes reference to another sign system to complete the process of meaning making (Aktulum, 2017). Based on the idea of intersemiotic relationship, to disregard the relationship between sign-systems in deriving meaning will result in inaccuracy. Thus, for an animation like *Steven Universe,* that moves its narratives through multiple sign-systems, disregarding intersemiotics will inarguably result in errors when engaging in the process of meaning derivation.

Unsworth (2006) proposed that the dynamics of language-image interactions in the process of meaning-making occurs as: ideational concurrence, complementarity, and connection. Ideational concurrence refers to the notion that the image and text provides equivalent relations in meaning; ideational complementarity refers to the notion that the sign systems provide different representations of meaning but complements each other in

completing the overall meaning; and ideational connection refers to the connection between text and image through reporting and conjuctive relations (Unsworth, 2006).

Discussions on past literature pertaining to Semiotics shall be done in Chapter 2; and the operationalization of the semiotic concepts in this section shall later be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.7.2 Gender Performativity

Additionally, Butler's Gender Performativity is significant in providing social context to the study.

Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity asserts the claim that gender is not an inborn natural facticity but rather, a social construct created from social and cultural conventions via repetitive performative acts (Butler, 1990). In simple words, gender is a *doing*, not a *being*; it is not something one *is*, but rather, the effect of what one does, acts, and performs repetitively. Essentially, the concept of repetitive performative acts is the foundation to performativity.

However, performative acts that conventionally create gender identities are not formed merely based on unregulated descriptive features of human experience. Butler (1990) argues that the performative acts are regulated by the heterosexual matrix of intelligibility (which this paper shall later term as heteronormativity); ultimately determining the "reality" of sex, gender, and sexuality. To note, the matrix of intelligibility refers to "the system of compulsory heterosexuality and the discursive categories that establish the identity concepts of sex" (Butler, 1990). This "reality" would then be passed down as a natural inner truth, whereby they are anticipated, repeated and internalized to maintain intelligible identities. Diagram 1.4 illustrates the construction and maintenance of intelligible identities based on Gender Performativity:

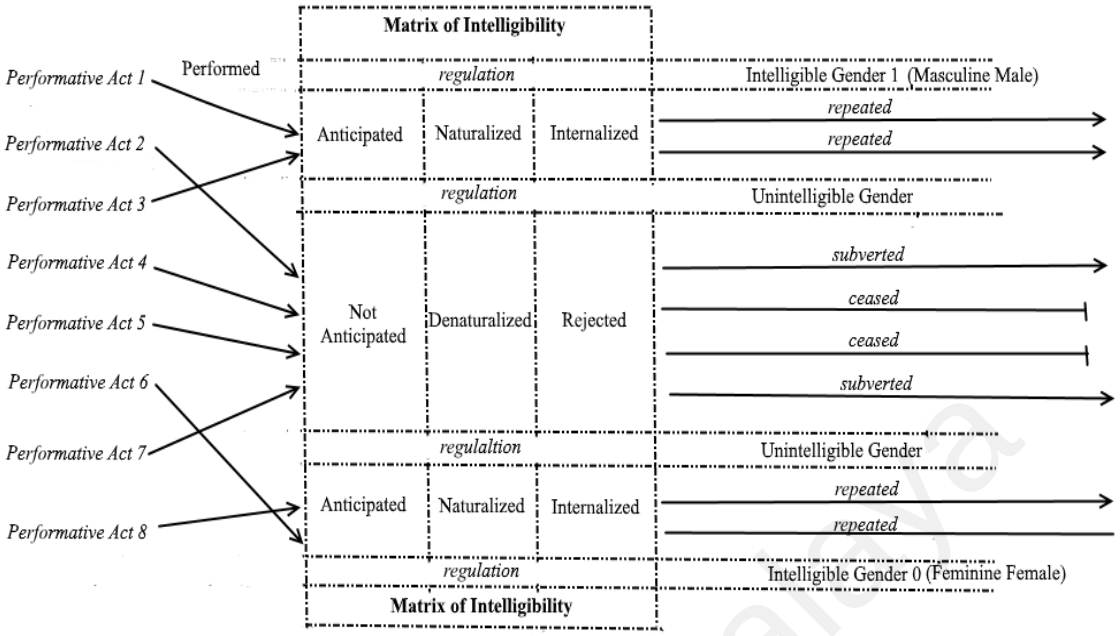


Diagram 1.3 Construction and Maintenance of Intelligible Identities

Understanding the performative nature of gender, Butler also opened the discourse on subversion. Is it possible for subversive performative acts to be performed? Would the performance of subversive performative acts thus, be able to separate gender identity from sexual orientation, physical sex characteristics, gender roles, and gender expressions as instituted by the conventional sociocultural laws, governed by heteronormativity? In other words, is it possible to *do* gender, sex, and sexuality, differently?

Subversion is the displacement and resignification of naturalized and reified notions of gender identities and desires; often via drag and parody (Butler, 1990). Butler (1990) argues that subversion does not aim to abolish the normative gender identities of masculine male and feminine female. However, subversion merely aims to acknowledge the possibilities of unintelligible gender identities that "already exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible", thus, have been conventionally considered as "unnatural" (Butler, 1990).

That being said, Butler has stressed on the difference between performativity and performance whereby performativity is not merely a doing that is theatrical but it is a doing that creates effects. To say that gender is performative indicates that the actions done produce a series of effects that consolidate the impression of an identity (Butler, 2011). Thus, is subversion possible in *Steven Universe*? When the fantasy-themed narratives create new sociocultural laws that does not reflect the reality of our world, would the actions be performative; or merely a performance within the boundaries of theatrical hypotheticality?

To answer, this paper proposes the idea of connotative-performativity.

1.7.3 Connotative-Performativity

Connotative-performativity establishes the notion that performative acts have undergone a signification process; whereby the content plane of a layered sign-function is performing a performative act rather than the performed expression plane of a sign-function. Consider the following diagram:

<table>
<tr><td>Performance</td><td colspan="2">Expression</td><td>Content</td></tr>
<tr><td>Performative Act</td><td>Expression</td><td>Content</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Diagram 1.4 Connotative-Performativity

Based on Diagram 1.3, the performative act is embedded within the second order signification, rather than in the first order signification. Since *Steven Universe* is multilayered in meaning, breaking down the connotative layers (i.e. the content planes) of signs in *Steven Universe* would allow the establishment of real sociocultural laws that has been represented and connoted in the show; enabling the cartoon to be evaluated from a performative angle.

1.8 Significance of Research

This research is significant for 4 primary reasons:

First, it presents empirical evidence to substantiate the claim that *Steven Universe* contains representations of queer culture and ideas in its narratives. While critics have agreed that *Steven Universe* does represent queer culture, a proper research is yet to be done to validate the claim empirically from a semiotic viewpoint.

Second, it enables semioticians to identify patterns of subversive visual and verbal signs used in queer cartoons (i.e. in *Steven Universe*). By understanding the patterns in *Steven Universe,* semioticians may predict similar patterns in other queer cartoons.

Third, it provides a direction for semioticians to study cinematic texts from a performative angle. This research attempts to synthesize semiotic analysis with gender performativity through the idea of connotative-performativity. A success in the study shall pave a methodological direction for semioticians to study cinematic texts through the synthesis of semiotics-performativity.

Fourth, it allows policy-makers to make appropriate decisions on televising *Steven Universe*. By establishing *Steven Universe* as a queer cartoon, and identifying queer ideas signified in the cartoon; policy-makers may take appropriate actions on broadcasting, censoring, or banning the cartoon (and other queer cartoons) from their channels. Should respective policy-maker agrees with the gender politics in *Steven Universe*; televising should continue. Contrastingly, should respective policy-maker disagrees with the gender politics in *Steven Universe*; televising should discontinued or be controlled.

1.9 Organization of Study

This dissertation is organized into 5 chapters. The first three chapters focus on conceptualizing and contextualizing the study; the fourth chapter focuses on presenting and analyzing the data; while the fifth chapter focuses on interpreting the findings and concluding the paper.

Chapter 1 provides the background of the study, emphasizes on the statement of the problem, discusses the theoretical framework, highlights the research objectives, and poses the research questions.

Chapter 2 two reviews related past literature pertaining to semiotics, gender performativity (the queer), social constructionism, socialization, media effects, and the narrative paradigm.

Chapter 3 explains how the data are collected and analysed by discussing the proposed model for this paper comprehensively.

Chapter 4 provides this paper with the data and their analysis; based on a thematic discussion.

Chapter 5 comprises of the summary of the findings, how the research questions were answered, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

1.10 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter has given a general overview of the study. By highlighting the background of the study, this paper is able to present the problem statement; which subsequently, rationalizes the research questions and objectives posed in this study. Additionally, a general overview of the theoretical framework was also presented to provide a proper conceptualization of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is written with the purpose of developing, discussing, and criticizing theories and key concepts used in this paper. The discussions is vital in answering the research questions. This chapter shall discuss the following topical concepts:

2.1 On Semiotics & the Sign Systems

2.2 On Gender Study: Examining the Queer Perspective

2.3 On Social Constructionism

2.4 On the Socialization Process: Children, Gender, and the Media

2.5 On Media Effects

2.6 On the Narrative Paradigm: Examining Fantasy

2.7 Conclusion of the Chapter

2.1 On Semiotics & the Sign Systems

In its most basic definition, semiotics is defined as the study of signs and meaning-making (Chandler, 2012). And because the subject matter of "signs" can refer to almost anything, semioticians used to vary in what the study of semiotics would involve (Chandler, 2012). In Jakobson's (1990c) definition, linguistics deals with verbal signs; and semiotics deals with all signs other than verbal. However, Eco (1979) defined semiotics in a broader sense, in which "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign" (p. 7). Eco's definition would include linguistic systems and non-linguistic systems (i.e. images, sounds, etc.) as part of semiotics.

Due to the broad concept of semiotic, semiotic has been used to analyse different modes of sign-systems: from advertisements, to movies, to performances, to music, and to any possible carrier of meaning. And regardless of the modes of sign system, the basic to a semiotic approach would include understanding signification process; via examining Saussure's proposed signifier and the signified (Mitry, 2000).

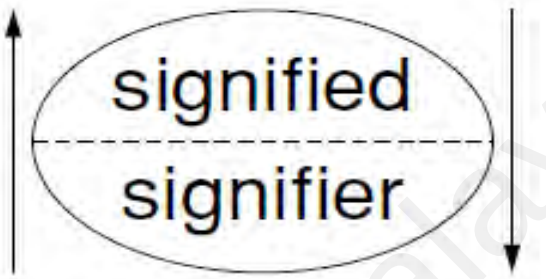


Diagram 2.1 Saussurean Model of Sign

While Saussure (1983) argues that both signifier and signified are non-material, Jakobson (1990a) regards the signifier as the external and perceptible part of a sign. The signified is nonetheless, still largely accepted as a non-material value whereby Eco (1976) defines it as "a mental image, a concept and a psychological reality" (pp. 14-15). As exemplified by Chandler (2012), the word 'open', when engraved on a signage in front of a local store, is a sign consisting of:

i) A signifier: the word 'open' on a signage;

ii) A signified concept: that the store is open for business.

Additionally, Saussure (1983) argues that the relationship between a signifier and signified is relatively arbitrary. The arbitrariness that Saussure proposed suggests that the relationships between signifiers and their signified are ontologically arbitrary; but they are not necessarily socially or historically arbitrary (Chandler, 2012). In other words, from a philosophical viewpoint, if the entity signified as "beauty" has been called "full" as its signifier, it would not make any ontological difference. Drawing upon the idea that

signifiers and signified are not socially or historically arbitrary, the triadic concept of signs as proposed by Peirce is worth discussing.

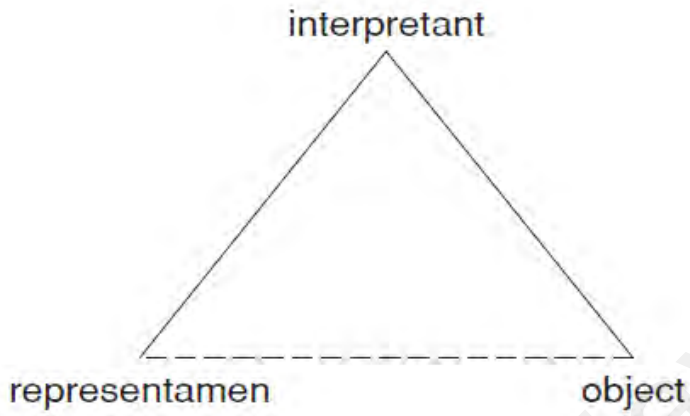


Diagram 2.2 Peircean Triadic Model of Sign

Peirce (1931-58) proposed a triadic model of signs, consisting of representamen, the object and the interpretant. The representamen is equivalent to Saussure's signifier while the interpretant is roughly equivalent to the signified (Chandler, 2012). However, the interpretant has a quality unlike that of the signified: it is the sense made of a sign by an interpreter (Chandler, 2012). The addition of the interpretant into the sign system creates a sense of relativity for the signs and its meaning rather than Saussure's arbitrariness.

Based on the triad, Peirce proposed the trichotomy of signs which classifies signs into three modes: icons, indexes, and symbols. The trichotomy of signs has been adopted into various structuralist approach to semiotics (Chandler, 2012).

2.1.1 Structuralist Approach to Semiotics

Structuralism has a heavy influence on the foundational concepts of semiotics. A structuralist approach to semiotics generally involves identifying the constituent units in a semiotic system, the structural relationships between them, and the relation of the parts to the whole (Chandler, 2012). Saussure (1983) proposed that the process of meaning-making is determined by its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. By this statement, syntagms and paradigms offer structural context for meaning to occur. Chandler (2012)

asserts syntagms and paradigms act as the structural forms for signs to be organized into codes. In other words, the structure of any sign (consisting of signifier and signified) can be broken down into semiotic units, consisting of syntagms and paradigms; enabling meaning to be studied.

The paradigmatic analysis deals with the horizontal selection in which absences from a specific paradigm of a particular text is intertextually examined. This idea stems from Saussure's (1983) argument that signs take their value within the linguistic (or non-linguistic) system from what they are not. In a linguistic system, the signifier is manifested in the forms of word choices or diction; while in a non-linguistic system, like the visual system, the signifier is manifested in the choice of images. Chandler (2012) argues that paradigmatic analysis involves "comparing and contrasting each of the signifiers present in the text with absent signifiers which in similar circumstances might have been chosen, and considering the significance of the choices made" (p. 88). In other words, paradigmatic analysis ultimately revolves around analysing oppositions (presence and absence) and contrasts for a selected signifier within the paradigm of a sign.

Jakobson (1990d) argues that oppositions and contrasts can be examined through semantic binary oppositions. Barthes (1967), Leymore (1975), and Lyons (2001) extends the idea of binary oppositions by introducing logical contradictory and logical contrary. Logical contradictory refers to two exclusively oppositional terms (i.e.: dead versus alive; whereby not bad is semantically equivalent to alive); and logical contrary refers to two terms which has been graded on the same implicit dimension (i.e.: bad versus good, whereby not bad is not semantically equivalent to good) (Chandler, 2012). The introduction of logical contrariness moves paradigmatic analysis from absolute binarism. To further move away from absolute binarism, Greimas (1987) introduced the Semiotic Square in which the relations are extended to complementarity, contrariety, and contradiction.

In later developments of the study of signs, Monaco (2000), extended the contrastive features of paradigmatic relationship through examining tropes – mainly on metonymy and synecdoche. The contrasts in Monaco's paradigmatic analysis maintains the concept of absences; but moves away from the binarism in a Jakobsonian concept. Inarguably, semioticians have developed various approaches to study paradigmatic relations of a sign, but the conclusive foundation remains that, paradigmatic relations is based upon oppositions and contrast in a semiotic selection.

Additionally, the syntagmatic analysis deals with the vertical combinations of signs intratextually. According to Chandler (2012), structural semioticians engage in syntagmatic analysis through studying the elementary constituent within the text (or the syntagms) and the relations between one constituent to another. Saussure's structural approach aims to reveal the combinational convention underlying the production and interpretation of a particular text (for verbal signs, the combinational convention would be grammar) (Chandler, 2012).

While a Saussurean approach to syntagmatic analysis mainly focuses on the temporal or sequential relations, Jakobson (1956) suggested that syntagmatic analyses have to examine both the temporal and spatial relations of signs. Temporal relations within a syntagm generally focuses on what comes before and after a sign (Chandler, 2012). For example, temporal relations looks into the linearity of a grammatical pattern within a linguistic system (Saussure, 1983); or the montage of a visual cinematic (Monaco, 2000). On the other hand, spatial relations focuses on the simultaneity of signs within a syntagm that is not bound to sequential relations (Chandler, 2012). For example, spatial relations looks into the *mise-en-scene* of a visual cinematic (Monaco, 2000). Conclusively, the selection of one syntagmatic structure over another within a text changes the meaning of a particular sign.

2.1.2 Linguistic Structure for Meaning Making

Definitively, the study of semiotics has its roots in linguistics; whereby linguistics is considered part of semiotics. In applied linguistics, employing semiotics in discourse analysis is regarded as a stylistic approach.

To define, stylistics is the application of linguistic study to the analysis of a style (Leech & Short, 2010); in which style refers to an author's lexical choice (diction), sentence structure, and sentence arrangement. Putting style in the context of structural semiotics, sentence structure and arrangement are part of the syntagmatic dimension; while diction (i.e. use of figurative language) is part of the paradigmatic dimension. In this paper, past literature pertaining to phrase structure rules, word order, and diction shall be reviewed.

Phrase structure rules was first introduced by Chomsky (1957) in breaking down the constituents of language into lexical and phrasal categories to examine constituency relations. Phrase structures are usually represented in a parsing tree or a syntax tree as illustrated below through Chomsky's famous sentence "*Colourless green idea sleep furiously*":

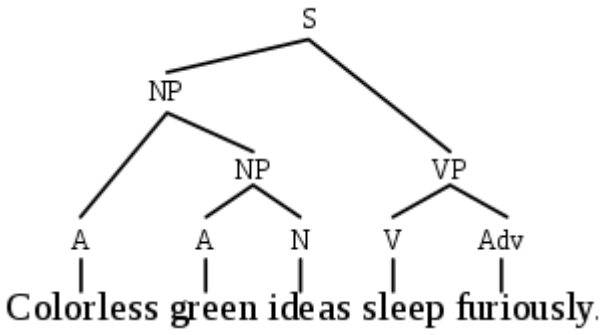


Diagram 2.3 Syntax Tree

On the other hand, word order refers to the order of syntactic constituents of a language (Comrie, 1981). Understanding phrase structure rules will enable this paper to break down the constituents of a sentence in examining word order.

Kohne, Pickering, and Branigan (2014) conducted an experimental research to examine the relationship between word order and sentence meaning in German. In their study, they examined how message encoding is mapped onto syntactic encoding. In addition, Nicoladis and Rhemtulla (2011) studied how children order words grammatically to determine their semantic/syntactic roles; in which they validate that the grammatical choices made by children in terms of word orders are impacted by the semantic intents of the children.

Additionally, Offringa, Stanton, Hauser, and Gardner (2018) examined choices of word order in health messages pertaining the phrases of "fruits and vegetables" versus "vegetables and fruits". Offringa, et.al. (2018) argued that the dominant usage of "fruits and vegetables" over "vegetable and fruits" may lead people to favour of fruits over vegetable; based on the psychology of word order. Conclusively, the word and phrasal order within a syntactic structure play a semantic role in a text.

Pertaining to paradigmatic analysis, diction is most significant to understand style. To define, diction is the distinctive vocabulary choices and style of expression of a writer or a speaker, within a particular discourse (Crannell, 2000). By 'vocabulary choices', diction would include all parts of speech within the English language (since the text studied in this paper is in English): nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, articles and interjections.

Arpinar-Avsar, Girgin, and Bulgu (2014) studied the lexical choices in describing female athletes in the Turkish language. Their paper examines the preference between the near-synonymous Turkish words: *kadın* and *bayan* (the corresponding English words of: 'woman' and 'lady') in the case of describing females athletes. The paper provides the contextual basis on how lexical choice plays a significant role in the gender discourse. Additionally, Phelan (2014) examined narrative communication as an author's

deployment of voice in generating particular responses in readers. In his paper, voice is defined as the synthesis of style (diction and syntax), tone (a speaker's attitude toward an utterance) and values (ideological and ethical). Phelan's paper provides a basis on how authors manipulate voices (which include diction) in generating intended responses from the audience.

In addition, Lowry and Naser (2010) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the lexical differences between the commercials of presidential winners and losers. The study identified the difference of group-directed lexical choices for the winning campaigner versus self-directed lexical choices for the losing campaigner. The paper provides the basis on how lexical choices affect the semantic context of a particular text. Conclusively, previous literature pertaining to diction provide this paper with the proper substantiation and angle to examine the paradigms of the verbal system in *Steven Universe*.

2.1.3 Denotations, Connotations, and Myth

In their most basic sense, denotation is commonly defined as "the definitional, literal, obvious or common-sense meaning of a sign"; and connotation is commonly defined as "the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign" (Chandler, 2012, pp. 137 – 138). While the definitional dimension of denotation and connotation may appear simple, the discourse on the subject matter from a semiotic viewpoint requires an extensive review.

Raising the issues pertaining connotation and denotation, Barthes (1967) argues that the dyadic model of signs as proposed by Saussure focuses too much on denotations and undermines the complexity of connotations due to its foundational grounds of linguistics. To Barthes (1967), denotations are merely a more dominant form of connotation. Dominant connotation leads to the naturalization of a particular signifier-signified relationship into a denotative form. Consequently, an illusion, that denotations are purely

literal and universal in meanings, which are not bound to socio-cultural ideologies, is produced (Barthes 1974, p. 9). In actuality, denotations are merely socially accepted connotations. Hence, to learn the denotation of a sign leads to the positioning within an ideology since denotation is in fact, a dominant connotation (Silverman, 1983).

Additionally, connotations and denotations are also categorized by their level of representation or levels of meaning (Chandler, 2012). Hjelmslev (1961) argues that different orders of signification leads to differential level of meaning. Pulling in the idea from Hjelmslev, Barthes (1977) proposed that the first order of signification is the denotative meaning; and the second order of signification is the connotative meaning.

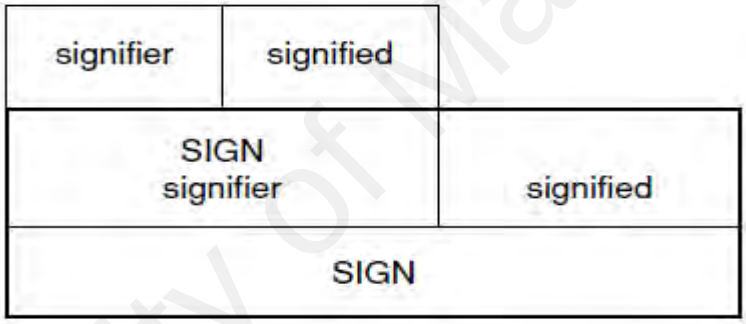


Diagram 2.4 Order of Signification

Based on the above diagram, on the first order of signification, a sign consists of a signifier and a signified; leading to its denotative dimension. On the second order of signification, the sign consists of the denotative sign which functions as the signifier, and a signified; producing its connotative dimension. Additionally, substituting the form of the signifier while maintaining the signified can also generate connotations (Chandler, 2012). Thus, Chandler (2012) argues that the use of tropes and the manipulation of style and tone also generate connotations since they involve the manipulation of the signifier.

Additionally, if one sign-function is able to layer on another sign-function, it is possible that a sign-function may adopt multiple connotative codes (which Eco actually defined as subcodes); and thus, giving it more than one meaning on different connotative layers. According to Eco (1979), a sign may also adopt two different connotative codes

on one same layer; giving a sign two connotations whereby one connotation does not act as the functive of the other. Diagram 1.3 illustrates the format for a double connotative coding:

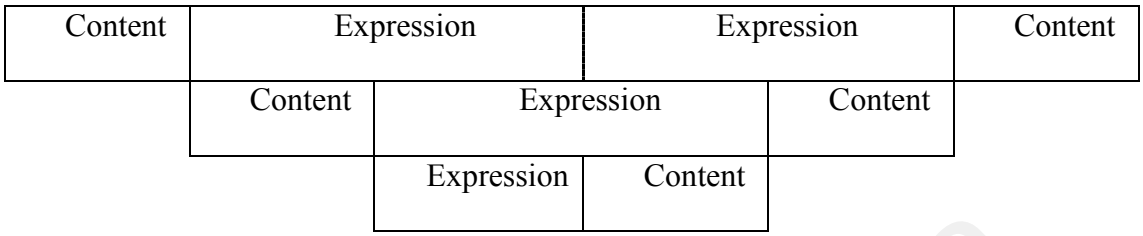


Diagram 2.5 Format for a double connotative coding

What Diagram 1.4 shows is basically that a sign-function can connote more than one meaning; and thus, an element from the expression plane can establish relationships with more than one element from the content plane.

Adding on to the concept of order of signification, Barthes proposes the concept of myth as a form of higher order signification. Barthes (1991) defines myths as dominant ideologies that emerged and institutionalized through a higher order of signification. He argues that myth is a form of metalanguage (Barthes, 1957; Hjelmslev, 1961), which exists as 'a system whose plane of content is itself constituted by a signifying system' (Barthes, 1967, p. 90). Through myths, cultural experiences are given sense by the expression and organization of shared ways in conceptualizing an idea (Lakoff & Johnson, 2007). The mythological or ideological order of signification reflects major (culturally variable) concepts regarding particular worldviews like gender, race, nation, objectivism, freedom, etc. (Chandler, 2012).

Barthes (1974) claims that myths are the ideologies and cultures of the bourgeoisie that has been accepted as nature. Thus, the function of myths is to naturalize what is cultural, by making dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes, and beliefs become natural, normal, self-evident, and timeless (Chandler, 2012). Putting the idea of myth in

the perspective of gender, Chandler (2012) argues that gender discourse is among the many 'explanatory' cultural frameworks that has been accepted by cultural semioticians as myths. The understanding of gender 'naturally' emerged through a systemic expression and organization of shared beliefs on the subject matter. Thus, in analysing signs pertaining to the dominant ideology of gender, the concept of myth is inevitable.

2.1.4 Intersemiotic Relationship

Although the concept of intersemiotic relationship can be traced back to Jakobson's (1963) intersemiotic translation, later developments in the study of semiotics have identified that meaning is created through the interaction of multiple modes of semiotic systems rather than a single semiotic system. The interaction of multiple semiotic systems is called intersemiosis or intersemiotic relationship. To define, intersemiotics refers to the "circulation of meaning between different sign systems; for example, the image includes reference to the text, and the text referring to the image." (Gignoux, 2005, pp. 98-99).

In regards to intersemiotic relationship, Royce (1998) proposed the idea of Intersemiotic Complementarity between linguistic mode and images. Royce's framework aims to examine how the linguistic system semantically complements the visual system and vice versa, in producing meaning in a single text. And since Royce adopts a social semiotic approach in his framework, the Hallidayan (1994) three metafunctions which consists of the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions was used as the basis of analysis. For his analysis of ideational meaning, Royce adopted the categories of lexical cohesions identified by Halliday and Hasan (1985) consisting of intersemiotic synonymy, metonymy, repetition, hyponymy, antonymy, and collocations. For his interpersonal meaning, Royce (1998) examines Modality and Mood between the text and reader. For his textual meaning, Royce (1998) examined layout, information value, framing, salience, reading paths and intervisual analogy.

Adopting Royce's approach to intersemiotic relationship, O'Halloran (2005) studied mathematical discourse in examining how the expansion of meaning through the processes of re-contextualizing and co-contextualizing occur across language, symbols and images. In her study, ideational meaning is examined based on Intersemiotic Ideation; interpersonal meaning is examined through intersemiotic negotiation and appraisal; and textual meaning through intersemiotic identification and mixing.

Additionally, Unsworth (2006) proposed a theoretical framework, which he coined as Intersemiotic Ideational meaning, to study the intersemiotic relationships between a linguistic system and visual system in producing meaning. Unsworth's (2006) intersemiotic ideational meaning occurs as ideational concurrence, complementarity, and connection. Ideational concurrence refers to the notion that the image and text provides equivalent relations in meaning; and can occur in four situations: redundancy, exposition, instantiation, and homospatiality (Unsworth, 2006). Redundancy occurs when the image and text and redundant to one another; exposition occurs when the text and image are of the same level of generality; instantiation occurs when one sign-system instantiate another, and homospatiality occurs when two sign systems co-occur in a spatially bonded entity (Unsworth, 2006).

Additionally, ideational complementarity refers to the notion that the sign systems provide different representations of meaning but complements each other in completing the overall meaning; and can occur in two situations: augmentation and divergence (Unsworth, 2006). Augmentation occurs when one sign system extends the meaning of another; and divergence occurs when the content of a sign system opposes another but is significant in providing a complete meaning (Unsworth, 2006).

Apart from that, ideational connection refers to the connection between text and image through reporting and conjunctive relations; and can occur in two situations: projection

and conjunction (Unsworth, 2006). Projection occurs through the quoting or reporting of speech and thought; and conjunction refers to the connection of image and text in terms of causal, temporal, or spatial relations (Unsworth, 2006). The following diagram summarizes Unsworth's intersemiotic ideational meaning:

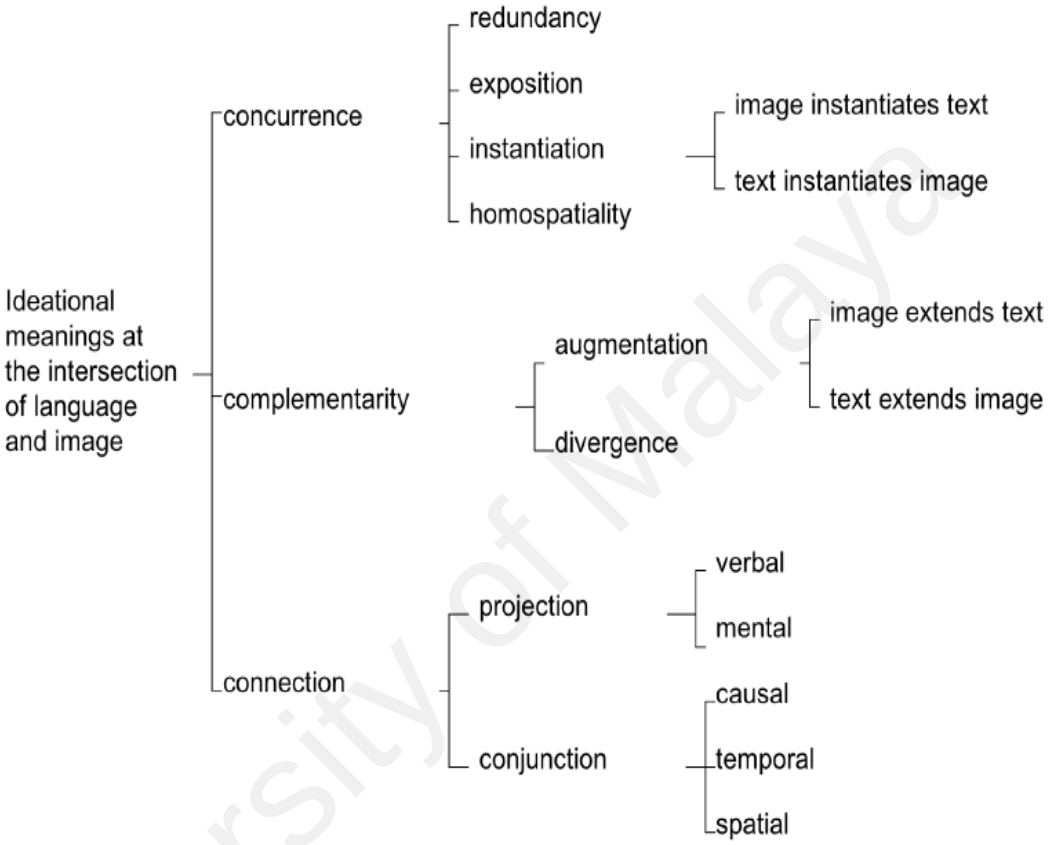


Diagram 2.6 Unsworth's (2006) Intersemiotic Ideational Meanings

To note, this paper shall adopt Unsworth's Intersemiotic Ideational Meaning in analyzing the intersemiotic relationships between the verbal and visual elements of *Steven Universe*. This paper believes that in analyzing meanings in animation from a semiotic viewpoint, excluding intersemiotic relationship will create a big loophole in the analysis since animations generally utilize multiple semiotic systems to create meaning.

2.1.5 Semiotic Analysis on Films and Animations

Throughout the years, a large number of studies have been done on films and animations using a semiotic approach. While this paper understands the inherent differences between the sign systems used in films and animations, the paper believes that the semiotic approach to films is applicable to animations, and vice versa. This notion is argued based on the shared utilization and manipulation of the cinematic signs in films and animations. This section shall review prominent theoretical frameworks in semiotic approach to films; and recent studies on films using semiotic approaches.

Metz's (1974) film semiotics explores the semiotic approach to films using the concepts of structural linguistics; in which he later developed the previously discussed *grande syntagmatique* in analysing film structure semiotically. Additionally, Eco's (1976) *Articulation of the Semiotic Code* used Metz's film semiotics as a fundamental concept in developing his own framework. Eco (1976) argues that cinematic codes utilized triple articulations which consist of figures, signs, and elements. Triple articulation uses kinesics in identifying temporal units, in addition to the conventional linguistic axes of paradigms and syntagms. These articulations are found in various cinematic codes in order to communicate the combinable elements found in films. Eco (1976) listed codes in a cinematic context as: perceptive codes, codes of recognition, tonal codes, codes of transmission, iconic codes, iconographic codes, codes of taste and sensibility, rhetorical codes, stylistic codes, and codes of the unconscious.

Additionally, within the context of structural semiotic approach in films, Monaco (2000) proposed a framework which utilizes Saussurean syntagmatic and paradigmatic analyses in analysing films. The paradigmatic analysis would examine the use of trope for a cinematic sign; and the syntagmatic analysis would examine the montage and *mise-en-scene* of a film. Monaco (2000) argues that signs in a cinematic context, filmmakers generally utilize indexes in suggesting meanings. For that matter, to understand the

meaning in a film, the paradigmatic analysis of a film should examine synecdoche and metonymy since the two tropes provide connotative context to a sign. Additionally, Monaco (2000) argues that syntagmatic analysis of a film should examine its modification of space and time through visual composition and filming sequencing.

As semioticians move towards the conceptualization of a more socially oriented semiotic analysis, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) proposed a semiotic approach to films based on Hallidayan systemic functional analysis. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), thus, argues that meaning can be derived by looking into the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of a multimodal text. Ideational metafunction examines the way experiences are encoded visually through narrative and/or conceptual structures; interpersonal metafunction examines patterns of interactions between participants of a semiotic mode; and textual metafunction examines representations and communicative acts that interrelate with one another to form a text (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Maier (2009) conducted a study on 12 film trailers using Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2001) multimodal framework and Labov's (1972) Model of Narrative Structure in examining how visual features enter into multi-layered relationships with verbal and aural signs in creating persuasive evaluative meanings. In her study, Maier (2009) attempted to show how evaluation is visually expressed through a combination of communicative means specific to filmic texts: close-up shots, camera movements, captions, transitions and special effects. She also attempted to examine how the promotional purpose of film trailers in persuading viewership is achieved through a continuous shift of evaluative perspectives occurring during the intersection and interaction of the three semiotic modes. The study by Maier, although directed at film trailers rather than films themselves, provide the basis on how multiple semiotic modes interact to form meaning in a cinematic context.

Willis (2009) engaged in a semiotic approach to the film *Juno* in examining how the ideological concepts of girlhood, sex, and sexuality are signified in the film. He proposed the notion of Juno, the main character, as the signification of the amalgamation between two conventionally dichotomized notions of ‘‘femininity” in modern American context. Operationally, Willis (2009) explored the cinematic text in relations to the semiotics of girlhood in order to examine the salience of dominant cultural discourses of femininity and sexual subjectivity in the movie.

In addition, Hossain and Fu (2016) conducted a study on Hayao Miyazaki’s animated films in which they engaged in a semiotic approach to examine the signification of female protagonists, *shojos*[3], and flying images in the animations. The study by Hossain and Fu focuses on how the signified images of *shojo* protagonists in Miyazaki’s animations perform subversive acts by breaking traditional Japanese gender codes and conventions. Hossain and Fu (2016) examines the denotation and connotation in the verbal and visual elements of nine Miyazaki’s films: *Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbour Totoro*, *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, *Porco Rosso*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away*, *Howl’s Moving Castle*, and *Ponyo*, and how they construct gender subversive meanings in the films. The study by Willis, as well as Hossain and Fu, provides a basis to how semiotics can be used to explore gender discourses in films and animations.

Additionally, Tseng and Bateman (2011) conducted a study on Cristopher Nolan’s *Momento* in examining how the unconventional sequencing of narratives are tied by cohesive semiotic cues. The study operates through the approach of socio-functional semiotics which utilized Kress’ and Van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2001) social semiotic framework, an extension of Metz’ (1974) *grande syntagmatique*, and Halliday’s and

[3] Shojo is the term used for young girls in Japanese.

Hasan's (1976) concept of semantic cohesion. The study provides this paper with the idea that concepts from social semiotics and structural semiotics may be associated in developing an operational framework.

In another study, Toh (2014) engaged in a semiotic approach towards examining character development in the anime *Inuyasha: Swords of an Honourable Ruler*. Toh (2014) focused on the appraisal and gestural perspectives of the character *Sesshomaru* in exploring his character development. Operationally, Toh (2014) adopted Lim's (2004) Integrative Multisemiotic Model (IMM) which has been developed into an IMM for anime analysis. According to Lim (2004), the IMM functions as a meta-model for the analysis of a page or frame which examines the use of both language and pictures as semiotic resources.

In other words, the IMM enables the analysis of different semiotic modes in one framework. In Toh's version of the model, Toh (2014) has integrated methodologies of Martin and White's (2005) appraisal framework, Lim's (2011) gesture framework, and Tan's (2005) analytical framework for analysing intersemiotic meaning potential in television advertisements, into one operational framework. Martin and White's (2005) framework is used for verbal analysis, Lim's (2011) framework is used for visual analysis; and Tan's framework is used for visual-verbal intersemiotic analysis. The following figure displays the Integrative Multisemiotic Model as used by Toh (2014) in his study:

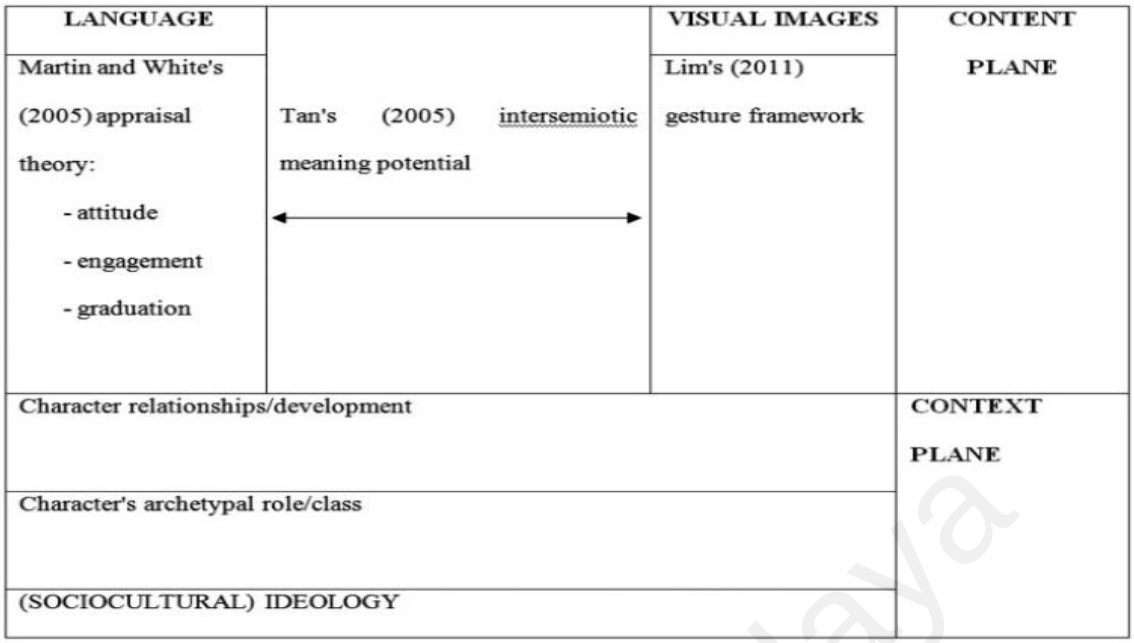


Diagram 2.7 Toh's (2014) version of IMM for anime analysis

The study by Toh provides this paper with the foundation to developing an integrated Multisemiotic Model of its own; which focuses on queer discourse in a cinematic. Toh's (2014) adaptation of Lim's (2004) framework is thus, a crucial literature from the aspect of semiotic for this paper.

Having discussed Semiotics on 5 interrelated discussions, this paper shall now discuss queer perspectives in understanding the sociological context of the topic.

2.2 On Gender Study: Examining the Queer Perspective

To understand Queer perspectives, this paper shall first review the key influences in the emergence of this (often intimidating) theory and its definition; before examining relevant concepts for this paper. Reviewing the discourse that help conceptualize *the Queer* is significant in understanding the fundamentals of determining *the Queer*. Hence, the question that ensue now would be: what is "Queer", and what is "Queer Theory"?

The meaning of the word *queer* has historically undergone a considerable amount of change (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013); that it becomes problematic to define it. As an identity signifier, the term was originally used as a derogatory slur for homosexuals

(Sullivan, 2003); before experiencing its transvaluation into a positive marker of difference (Hall, 2003) by LGBT-rights in the US. The transvaluation of the term can be said to symbolize the radical call of fluidity in the queer discourse. And due to the transvaluation, the word *queer* has later become a positive umbrella term for all non-heteronormative identities (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013); creating its associative meaning with LGBT discourse. That being said, queer discourse is not equivalent to gay and lesbian discourses (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). One can be a homosexual but still align with heteronormative values and vice versa (Anderson, 2014). Jagose (2010) brings the notion of being queer to another extent whereby he argues that to be queer is to refuse any identity marker; although the very argument is ironic in itself since refusal of any identity would paradoxically leads to the refusal of *being* queer.

Over the years, queer discourse has expanded to include non-monogamous relationships (Warner, 1999), asexuality (Cerankowski & Milks, 2010), the transgendered (Valentine, 2007), and other sexually marginalized identities and behaviours. Although queer theorists refuse to give a conclusive definition to the word to maintain its fluidity, the central point of the Queer can be observed in its concerns with the non-normative. Thus, as Sewell (2014) argued, to be queer is to align oneself with the marginalized and the non-normative; a notion that this paper agrees and shall adopt in order to avoid over-dilution in the meaning of the word in the context of this paper, despite understanding the significance in maintaining the fluidity of its meaning.

Queer theory emerged out of liberal ideas of equality; building upon feminist and other liberatory political movements, that pursued questions regarding identity categories and how power is distributed among and between them (Watson, 2005). It developed out of the influences from early themes of feminist thoughts that centred upon criticisms towards the dominant theoretical frameworks in Sociology, the distinction between sex and gender, and the rejection of essentialism and fundamentalism (Chafetz, 2004; Andersen,

2005). The feminist response towards traditional androcentric epistemologies leads to the systematic and critical re-evaluation of Sociology's core assumptions on gender, from an alternative lens that is free from phallocentric biases (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2001). This systemic re-evaluation later, leads to the emergence of interests in studying the Queer phenomenon by various scholars.

Arguably, among the most influential feminist theorists that helped shape the conceptual groundwork for queer theory in the early 90s would be Teresa de Lauretis, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Butler (Watson, 2005). Lauretis (1991) explored the production and circulation of gender hierarchies in society. Butler (1990; 1993) explored the idea of performativity and repetition in gender, sex, and sexuality (a concept which shall be discussed in an elaborated manner in the next section). And Sedgwick (1985; 1990) explored the idea of individual experiences pertaining to desires, sex, and sexuality as non-monolithic.

Observably, Lauretis, Sedgwick, and Butler were highly influenced by Foucault's (1978; 1989) poststructuralist thinking, particularly in his genealogical critique towards essentializing and naturalizing identities, bodies, and desires. Foucault (1978; 1989) in his writings argue that identities are culturally and historically constituted. Identities were attached to individuals, and consequently, the individuals were then constituted as an object of knowledge through cultural and historical conventions (Foucault, 1978; 1989); an idea which has become the theoretical basis to queer theorists. Extrapolating the ideas from these theorists (who never claimed to be queer theorists), queer concepts can therefore, be regarded as centering upon the re-evaluation of sociocultural assumptions on identities in resisting essentialism. Rosenblum (2009) iterated that queer is the detachment from identity and normativity; and it is not confined to exclusive challenges towards heteronormativity (although heteronormativity is one of the normativity that

queer aims to challenge in the light of gender identity). Thus, as previously mentioned, queer theory focuses on examining the marginalized and the non-normative.

This paper believes that an extensive review on the relevant concepts in the queer discourse will enable this paper to grasp a greater understanding on the concepts of identity and gender. For that matter, it is necessary to further discuss the topic from 4 specific discourses: the theory of gender performativity, conceptualization of heteronormativity, cultural assumptions on gender; and queering the text and gender subversion.

2.2.1 A Critique on Gender Performativity

The work of Judith Butler on Gender Performativity has been one of the forefront theoretical underpinnings in challenging and reshaping sociological assumptions pertaining to the politics of gender and identity. The theory has been pivotal in Gender Studies; especially in feminist and queer studies. As stated by Hey (2006, p.441) "Butler's work has profoundly reshaped how we come to think about gender". Fundamentally, Butler (1990) asserts the claim that gender identity is not an inborn natural facticity but rather, a social construct created from social and cultural conventions via performative acts.

To provide context to Butler's work's, performativity in a Butlerian sense is a derivative of John Austin's work on performative utterances; a linguistic concept which examines linguistic declarations that change the social reality that they are describing (Austin 1962; Butler 1996, 112). Reconceptualising Austin's linguistic concept, Butler (1996, p.112) argued that in the context of gender, performativity refers to "the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed".

Butler (1990) proposed the idea of performativity as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time

to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p 43). Performativity thus, presents a becoming subject that is produced discursively, rather than emerging from an internal essence (Bunch, 2013). In can conclusively be argued that gender performativity emerged as a prominent gender theory due to its ability in providing an alternative framework in examining gender as a social construct through recurring discursive imitation and repetitive practice; an approach that boldly contests against traditional naturalistic and essentialist viewpoints (Butler, 1993). Additionally, Butler's performativity also opens the political discussions of gender subversion (which shall be discussed in the next section). Nevertheless, while the theory of Gender Performativity has been critically acclaimed by gender theorists and is pivotal in reshaping the study and understanding of gender, Butler's theory is not void from criticisms and alleged contradictions.

Morison and Macleod (2013) argue that despite the rich theoretical language provided by Butler, Butlerian theory is difficult to apply since it does not provide an operational framework for actual analysis of language use in context. From *Gender Trouble* to *Bodies that Matter*, Butler mainly focuses on developing the theoretical foundations for her discursive concept of gender without a light on operationalization. Only after fifteen years since the publication of *Gender Trouble* that Butler (2004), in her work *Undoing Gender*, applied the notion of performativity empirically in analysing sex reassignment and intersex subjects (Morison & Macleod, 2013).

Hence, due to the absence of operationalization from Butler's own works in her earlier writings, analysts have found it difficult to apply her complex theoretical framework; leading to the abundance of different methods of operationalization that may or may not contradict with Butler's original theorization. Additionally, the difficulty in reading Butler's writings and theorisation has also led to the abundance of interpretations (and misinterpretations) of her theory; in which the multiple interpretations indirectly

contribute towards further complications in operationalizing the applications of Butler's performativity theory (Hey, 2006; Segal, 2008; Cadwallader, 2009).

One of the most commonly discussed issue within Butlerian theoretical framework that faced multiple interpretations is her idea of performativity versus performance; an issue which this paper finds crucial to be reviewed. In her earlier works, Butler adamantly distinguishes the notion of performativity from performance; whereby she claims that "the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake" (Butler, 1993, p. 234). She asserts the idea that gender is not merely a performance that "a prior subject elects to do" but it is a doing that "constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express" (Butler, 1991, p.24).

In a Butlerian context, the term performance would thus, imply a deliberate enactment or doing; while the term performativity refers to the constitution of regulatory notions and their effects (Brickell, 2005). In this sense, no subject would precede or enact the repetition of norms; rather, the subject would only be the effect of their compulsory repetition (Lloyd, 1999). Thus, this notion reiterates Butler's idea that there is no doer behind the deed. To Butler (1990), the option is not whether to repeat or not; but how to repeat gender. Having said that, while critics are aware of the distinction between the two concepts, the question that ensue would be: what is preventing performances from acting performatively? Despite the conceptual differences, is it really impossible for performances to act performatively? In addressing this issue, Langellier (1999) argues that "performativity relies upon performance to show itself" (p. 136). To Langallier (1999), performances provide the context in making the questions of embodiment, social power relations, and political effects, concrete and accessible.

In other words, performances present the performative effects of a culture; and enables analysts to access the analysis of performativity. Performativity is only discussible when

it rests on performances (Langallier, 1999). Additionally, Lloyd (1999) argues that Butler's use of drag as an example of performativity in *Bodies that Matter* also raises criticisms on her performance versus performativity concept; since drag in itself is a form of performance. Butler's use of drag (and other transgressive performances) as an illustrational example, indirectly links discourses of performance to performativity (Hood-Williams & Cealy Harrison, 1998). In this sense, Pilgrim (2001) argues that part of people's identity will always be performed.

In response, Butler (1999) states that her lack of clarity in explaining the concepts of performativity versus performance leads to the blurring of one concept into another. That being said, following the criticisms and views from critics and other gender theorists, Butler (1999) in her later works agree that performativity and performance are interrelated despite being fundamentally different; and the two concepts can co-occur without overlapping one another conceptually. It is based on this co-occurrence of performativity and performance that this paper shall carry the concept of performativity.

Additionally, another issue that stemmed from the notion of performativity versus performance in the Butlerian context is the issue of agency and subjectivity. Agency has been a central focus in the criticisms of Butler's work (Cadwallader, 2009), in which agency in Butler's performativity has been criticized to be conceptually ambiguous, especially in her earlier writings (Brickell, 2005). Brickell (2005) argued that her ambiguity in agency problematizes her notion of subversion; a core concept that this paper shall discuss in a section of its own.

Based on Butler's theorization, subjects are the effects of discourse, rather than the causes of discourse (Salih, 2006). In a Butlerian context, gender is therefore, not shaped by the subject, but rather shapes the subject (Hey, 2006). The concept is a derivative of a Nietzchian position that supports the theorization that "there is no 'being' behind doing,

acting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction imposed on the doing—the doing itself is everything" (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Thus, if a subject is merely the effect of and is shaped by discourse, then how is agency possible? Contrastingly, if agency is not possible for the subject, then how is resistance and subversion possible? Due to this ambiguity in agency, Butler's performativity has faced criticisms of being contradictorily advocating either voluntarism or determinism (Webster, 2000; Brickell, 2005; Cadwallader, 2009).

Rothenberg and Valente (1997) argue that the contradiction emerged from a paradox between her adoption of Derridean citationality, a non-volitional theory of subject formation, and her sustained attempt to create a volitional politics of gender through performativity. In simple terms, the contradiction comes from the juxtaposition between the theory and politics of Butler's gender performativity. As stated by Lloyd (2007):

> Some interlocutors, … regarded Butler as legislating a voluntarist (even hyper voluntarist) politics where subversive gender identities could be fabricated and reshaped at will; where subjects could deliberately make 'gender trouble'. Paradoxically, others argued that performativity was a form of determining where, depressingly, subjects were inextricably locked into oppressive relations of power but unable to change them. (p.57).

In response, Butler (1995, p.45) argued that "the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency". As stated earlier. Butler (1990) argues that the option is not whether to repeat or not; but how to repeat gender. In a sense, performativity captures the paradoxical notion of gender as being constitutive, creating the illusion of a fixated repetition; but in reality, gender requires continual maintenance (Hey, 2006).

And as mentioned by Morison and Macleod (2013), the constant shift in gender discourses from imperfect mimesis shall allow different subjectivities to operate in the continual maintenance of gender. From one viewpoint, it is arguable that the shift will

inevitably come from a volitional politics of gender through "momentary discontinuities in specific performances of gender" (Morison & Macleod, 2013, p.10). In other words, the compulsion to repeat performatively does not undermine agency; but it is the pre-requisite of agency. Salih (2006) supported Butler's notion by stating that the forcible compulsion to recite gender grants the subject the possibility of subverting the law against itself. Coming from a Foucauldian position, "construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency" (Butler, 1990, p. 147). In a Butlerian context, resistance is therefore only possible from within the constituted discourses that already exists; and thus, agency in performativity lies within the paradoxical undertaking of constituted gender.

That being said, Butler's vague conception on the idea of subjecthood in performativity still raises questions of agency in her theorization. As Brickell (2005) argued, if subjects are understood as mere effects of performativity who do not do gender as such, it is difficult to fathom how they are capable of precipitating subversive action. Thus, while this paper agrees with Butler's idea that agency in performativity lies within the paradoxical undertaking of constituted gender, the question that troubles Butler's conception of *Gender Trouble* is: how and when does the effects of discourse (the subject) at one point of their constitutions, achieves agency? And how is their agency possible without achieving subjectivity?

Observably, in Butler's (1993) later responses, her theorization in *Bodies that Matter* suggests that at some point of the subject being shaped by discourse, the subject then achieves its agency to shape discourse. From this observation, while understanding Butler's Nietzchian position on the idea of subjecthood, this paper argues that at one point, the constituted subject achieves its subjectivity to shape discourse that would later shape other subjects. Hence, this paper proposes the idea of *subject-discourse constitutive loop* in the constitution of a subject, in order to make sense of Butler's alleged

contradiction between voluntarism and determinism. Subject-discourse constitutive loop is the idea that discourse indeed shapes the subject into its subjectivity; which in turn, leads to the materiality of the subject to shape the very discourse that constituted it in the first place. The discourse shaped by the materialized subject will then shape and constitute other subjects. It is based on this argument that this paper rejects the ideas of complete voluntarism and determinism in Butler's performativity; and argues that while performativity works through constitutive process, agency lies within its constitution. To deny its constitutive nature shall deny its citationality; and to deny its volitional nature shall deny its political agency.

2.2.2 Conceptualization of Heteronormativity

One of the key conceptualization in the queer theory is heteronormativity. While the concept generally refers to the idea of heterosexuality as a taken for granted idea of social normalcy and naturalness (Martin, 2009), this paper believes that reviewing past literature on heteronormativity is significant since the model developed in operationalizing connotative-performativity will utilize the idea of heteronormativity in its analysis. To note, heteronormativity is not a concept confined to only the regulations of normative sexual practices, but it also regulates social practices outside of and within the bounds of sexuality (Jackson, 2006). The normative assumptions in heteronormativity reflect the maintenance of cultural, legal, and institutional practices; and thus transcends from the confinement of sexuality in its discourse (Kitzinger, 2005).

Fundamentally, scholars have conceptualized heteronormativity as a set of overlapping processes that functions on the legal, cultural, institutional, discursive, and interpersonal/interactional levels; that produce and reproduce heterosexuality as normative, and its conjecture of two complementary genders as normal, natural, and ideal (Averett, 2016; Jackson 2006; Kitzinger 2005; Schilt &Westbrook, 2009). In other words, the discourse on heteronormativity is not equivalent to the discourse on heterosexuality;

rather, it also includes the notion of gender binary and the issues ascribed to binarism and sexual imposition from a heteronormative sphere. That being said, Marchia and Sommer (2017) argue that, despite the general notion of heteronormativity being extensively used in the academic discourse of gender, definitions and conceptualizations have varied across different theorists of gender due to multiple frames of conceptual origins. Understanding this issue, this paper believes that a clear conceptualization of heteronormativity is crucial to avoid misreading on the findings of this paper.

The term heteronormativity was academically popularized by Warner (1993) in *Fear of the Queer Planet*; whereby the concept contextually refers to the enforced normativity of heterosexuality towards the queer community. It is noticeable that Warner's original coinage mainly focuses on sexual norms; setting the perimeter of its conceptualization to sexuality. While this paper does not in any way dispute over its original conceptualization, it is arguable that heteronormativity has developed conceptually. In understanding the different conceptual developments pertaining to heteronormativity, this paper shall trace the roots of this concept before its popular academic coinage, as explored by Marchia and Sommer in their paper, *(Re)defining Heteronormativity*.

Marchia and Sommer (2017) identified four main gender theorists who have shaped the conceptualization of heteronormativity in four different spheres of understanding, namely: Michel Foucault (1978), Adrienne Rich (1980), Judith Butler (1990), and Gayle Rubin (1984, 1993). The four theorists are identified by running multiple systemic readings from a sample of 58 articles (Marchia & Sommer, 2017). It is to be noted that the four theorists do not necessarily use the term heteronormativity in their respective works; but contributed to the different spheres of conceptual understanding of heteronormativity for other theorists.

Foucault (1978) in his seminal work *History of Sexuality*, deconstructs the idea of sexuality as innate and argues its construction as relational. He proposed the idea that heterosexuality is a social norm; and the normative position of heterosexuality is constructed via power relations (Marchia & Sommer, 2017). Foucault (1978) writes that normative heterosexual position has become ‘‘a policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses’’ (pp. 24–25). Noticeably, Foucault (1978) maintains the position taken by Warner, whereby the idea of heteronormativity focuses on sexuality. Heterosexuality is presumed as the default based on power relations, and non-heterosexual identities are therefore, othered.

Rich (1980) pioneered the notion of *compulsory heterosexuality* in her writing. She proposed the idea that heterosexuality has been made socio-culturally compulsory, and has been imposed upon women through patriarchal norms (Marchia & Sommer, 2017). While Rich’s writing explored a new dimension by highlighting gendered lesbian experience, this paper believes that its focus made it too context-specific; and excludes male, and non-lesbian experiences in her conceptualization.

Additionally, Butler (1990) in her critically acclaimed work, *Gender Trouble*, adopted a Foucauldian position on a deconstructionist approach towards sexuality; but includes the idea of gender and desires in her theorization. Butler (1990) introduced the idea of *heterosexual matrix;* a discursive sociocultural framework which naturalizes and stabilizes the heterosexual norms of society. Noticeably, Butler deviates from other theorists through her stronger emphasis on discursivity. Through the notion of heterosexual matrix, she contributed to the idea that the normative positions of both gender and sexuality rely on one another within a patriarchal and heterosexist system in imposing normalcy of a taken for granted power structure (Marchia & Sommer, 2017).

In consequent, gender performances, sexuality, and desires that deviate from hegemonic masculinity and idealized femininity are considered abnormal under the matrix which constructs these norms (Butler, 1990). It is worth noting that Butler's (1990) writing examines patriarchy as an integral component of the socially inherited heterosexism, which would in turn, lead to asymmetrical gender binary. Observably, Butler's emphasis on gender relations in discussing heterosexual norms opens the discourse of heteronormativity to extensive gender discussions.

Rubin (1984) argues that gender and sexuality mutually construct the privileges in sexuality and gender. While Rubin's ideas share similarities with Butler's, she differs by viewing patriarchy as the primary organizing principle. Table 2.1 presents the summary of conceptual frameworks on heteronormativity by Marchia and Sommer (2017):

Table 2.1 Marchia & Sommer's (2017) summary of frameworks on heteronormativity

Theorist(s)	Year of publication	Conceptual framework	Contribution to heteronormativity	Divergence
Foucault	1978	Deconstruction of sexuality	Heterosexuality is presumed social norm	Primarily concerned with heterosexism, does not address gender directly or gender-specific manifestations of heterosexism
Rich	1980	Patriarchy and deconstruction of compulsory heterosexuality	Heterosexuality is compulsory, and has been 'imposed' on women through patriarchal norms of society	Locates the lesbian experience as intersectional to expose how male/female socialization creates heteronormativity, as well as how lesbian oppressions differ from male homosexual oppression
Butler	1990	Patriarchy and deconstruction of sex, gender, and desire as categories	Patriarchy constructs the very categories of male/female, as well as heterosexual/non-heterosexual. This construction imposes normative behavior	Deconstructs gender and sexuality categories to demonstrate how their construction relies upon each other to prescribe and police social norms
Rubin	1984, 1993	Patriarchy and deconstruction of separate but intersecting sex and gender systems that are manifested under patriarchal power	Gender and sexuality are two distinct areas of inquiry; however, they intersect as social manifestations of patriarchal oppression	Does not deconstruct the categories of gender and sexuality, nor views either one as the predominant source of heteronormativity. Views gender and sex as policed through patriarchy on one single hierarchy of social relations

After reviewing thoughts from contemporary gender theorists and the summarized origins of heteronormativity, this paper believes that the ideas from the four theorists are not divergent in nature, as believed by Marchia and Sommer (2017); but their ideas converge into a developed contemporary idea of heteronormativity. Thus, heteronormativity in the context of this paper can generally be defined as: the system of regulation and maintenance of sex, sexuality, gender, and desires through the normalcy of heterosexuality, and its intersectionality with asymmetrical gender binary and patriarchal power hierarchy; on the legal, cultural, institutional, discursive, and interpersonal/interactional levels.

2.2.3 Subversion through Parodic Representation in the Media

Central to Butler's idea of gender performativity is her political conceptualization of gender subversion. Subversion can be defined as the displacement and resignification of naturalized and reified notions of gender identities and desires (Butler, 1990). However, Brickell (2005) argues that Butler has been ambiguous in how subversion actually occurs; due to Butlerian adoption of a Nietzchian position on subjecthood. However, this paper has earlier suggested the idea of *subject-discourse constitutive loop* to answer this issue. Additionally, Butler has also been criticized of not providing a clear conceptualization in explaining the mechanisms of subversive workings (Brickell, 2005).

A few key words (italicized, which does not necessarily explain the mechanics of subversion) has been extracted to conceptualize subversion from the excerpts of Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* (1991), and *Bodies that Matter* (1993):

> Sex, "released from its naturalized interiority and surface, can occasion the *parodic proliferation* and subversive play of gendered meanings" (Butler 1990, 33).

> "Which possibilities of doing gender *repeat* and *displace* through *hyperbole*, *dissonance*, *internal confusion* and *proliferation* the very constructs by which they are mobilized?" (Butler 1990, 31).

> "The *parodic replication* and *resignification* of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original" (Butler 1991, p23)

> Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioural conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of the *parodic inhabiting of conformity* that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into *hyperbole*, a *rearticulation* of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it. (Butler, 1993: 122)

From the excerpt, a few keywords can be identified in which Butler uses to relate to subversion: parody, proliferation, displacement, hyperbole, dissonance, and resignification. Since it was argued that there is no proper conceptualization in explaining how the mechanics of these processes work to subvert gender, this paper shall focus on the idea of parody; contextualize and conceptualize it, in order to provide a focus to subversion. Additionally, parody is one of the process that Butler discusses more thoroughly in her writings in regards to subversive acts.

Hutcheon (2000, p. xii) defines parody as "a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference than similarity" that highlights "the tension between the conservative effect of repetition and the revolutionary impact of difference". Pertaining to parody, Butler (1990, 1993) holds the position that parody can make the politics of gender visible through the manner it denaturalizes culturally embedded gender practices. And due to this clearer stance on the relationship between parody and gender subversion, a number of past studies on parody of gender in the media are reviewed.

Pullen and Rhodes (2012) conducted a study on one *Futurama* episode, *Raging Bender*, in which they examine the paradoxical undoing of gender that parody makes possible. The study generally examines how media cultures provide a critique of patriarchal gender relations in organizations, through Butler's concept of performativity and parodic subversion.

In another study, Tyler and Cohen (2008) conducted a study on a British television series *The Office* in examining the normalization of asymmetrical gender relations through parodic representations in the series. They identified the sitcom as a "parody of gender performativity" which "can be read as a popular cultural text that exemplifies many of the critical insights, as well as some of the limitations, of queer theory" (Tyler & Cohen, 2008, pp.113-114). In a sense, the study highlights how parody in the series has the ability to make traditionally performed roles of gender appear ludicrous.

In addition, Rhodes and Pullen (2007) conducted a study on the American cartoon series *The Simpsons* in examining the parody on the grotesque male body, and on the patriarchal managerial position as portrayed by the character Mr Burns. The study provides insights on how parody works to highlight the fragile image of masculinity on the highest position of power in Springfield.

To conclude, the studies on *Futurama*, *The Office*, and *The Simpsons* provides a basis on how parodic contents in the media can be examined to understand subversion. This paper believes that despite the criticisms on Butler's concept of performativity and subversion, Butler's framework is relevant and suitable to be used in answering the research questions posed within this paper.

2.3 On Social Constructionism

Due to the heavy reliance of this paper on Butler's gender performativity, this paper believes that discussions on social constructionism is inevitable since gender

performativity is drawn from constructionism. That being said, defining *social constructionism*, as most social constructionists would agree, is not an easy task. Burr (2003) stated that the term social constructionism has developed into a term that represents a variety of ideas of the same principle. These ideas include critical psychology, discursive psychology, Foucaldian discourse analysis, deconstruction, post-structuralism and constructivism; making a single definition difficult.

However, should social constructionism be traced back to its earlier stage of development, social construction, as proposed by Berger and Luckman in *the Social Construction of Reality* (1989), can be defined as the process whereby human beings continuously create, through their social actions and interactions, a shared reality that is experienced, habitualized, and institutionalized as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful for societies. Diaz-Leon (2013) argued that social constructionism is not to be confused with anti-realism (which argues that external reality is only hypothetical). Social constructionism should be considered as a *realist* account of human reality: that external reality exists but the reality is determined by social processes, rather than natural or biological properties; a stance that this paper would adopt. Additionally, drawing in ideas from Burr (1995, 3-8), and Lock and Strong (2010, 6-9), this paper identifies five tenets that can refer to social constructionism:

1) Social constructionism views knowledge, which is contextually defined as the accumulated and passed on understanding of reality in societies (Berger & Luckman, 1989), to be sustained by interactions and social practices between individuals.

2) Social constructionism adopts a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge that normally operates within or as everyday social realities; e.g. the concepts of race and gender.

3) Social constructionism views the understanding and meaning-making of reality to be specific to culture and history.

4) Social constructionism views language as a central feature for social actions and can be the pre-condition of thoughts in many instances.

5) Social constructionism views essentialism, which is contextually defined as the belief that some phenomenon has an essence or inherent nature that makes it what it is (Harris, 2008), as a flawed concept.

Based on the definition and tenets of a constructionist approach, reality is regarded as mere human construction through social processes between individuals. While this paper does not contest against most of the tenets, tenet 5 shall be reviewed.

The constructionist Weltanschauung of reality questions the notion of essentialisms; leading to criticisms over its overemphasis on relativity (Gergen, 1999). According to Burr (2003), the extreme relativist position in certain constructionist approaches have led to the claim that nothing exists except as it exists in discourse; that the only reality that actually exists is the reality ascribed through the symbolic realm of language. The claim leads to the rejection of the material dimensions and objective truth in the natural world. The absence of objective truth in the constructionist arguments results in the ceaseless antimony between constructionist relativity and realism that has yet been resolved (Burr, 2003). In response to the overemphasis on relativism in social constructionism, Parker (2014) suggested the endowment of all things to having at least one of three *object statuses*: ontological, epistemological, and moral/political.

The ontological status of an object refers to the material properties for thoughts; its existence is independent of human thought processes and language (Parker, 2014). In other words, the ontological status provides crude physical properties for objects that are

untouched by any social processes; for example, the ontology of a river refers to the physicality of a river without any particular meaning.

The epistemological status of an object refers to the knowledge and meanings humans have ascribed to objects with physical properties via social processes (Parker, 2014). The epistemological status is the dimension of materiality that has entered discourse and given meaning via social interactions; for example, the epistemology of a tree refers to the knowledge that humans have ascribed upon the materiality of trees.

The moral/politic status of an object refers to the knowledge and meanings, human have ascribed to objects that do not possess actual physical properties (Parker, 2014). This dimension would refer to the epistemology of objects that would only come into being through discourse and language; for example, the concept of attitudes only exists because of its existence in discourse.

This paper finds Parker's proposal of object statuses to be of great significance in maintaining the empiricism of this paper while employing a constructionist approach.

2.3.1 The Sex/Gender Distinction in Constructionism

Sex and gender is said to be distinct; whereby gender is a concept that humans "do" or construct (Lucal, 2008). A large number of social constructionists argue that distinguishing sex and gender is significant in rejecting the biological essentialism and determinism that is usually ascribed to genders. Unger (1979) stated that the term gender refers to sociocultural and psychological aspects pertaining to the traits and characteristics of masculinity and femininity; while the term sex refers to the biological mechanisms of beings males and females.

Contrastingly, Butler (1990) argues that for the biological bodies to be comprehended as sexed or gendered, the sexed bodies will inarguably be stylized and performed based

on culturally ascribed markers of gender. Sex will indefinitely be communicated via culturally constructed bodily indicators. Butler (1993), thus rejects the idea by constructionist feminists that divide gender and sex into separate spheres for the argument that the materiality of the body always inscribes meaning through bodily actions. In addition, Maccoby (1988) believes that distinguishing the two terms is unnecessary since the biological and social aspects of sex always interact with one another.

Goffman (1977, 319) argues that even the division of bodies into the two sexes is the outcome of discourse and language; bringing the idea of social construction of sex into picture. In other words, separating sex and gender implies a biological basis for a behaviour that does not actually exist (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). Inarguably, this paper agrees that gender or "the social aspects of sex" is always influenced by its biological aspects; hence, putting the concepts of the gendered sex and the sexed gender into picture.

However, putting the politics of "sex versus gender" asides, treating the terms *sex* and *gende*r as interchangeable would blur the lines between the objective reality ascribed differently to sex (the biological aspect) and gender (the sociocultural aspect). Objective reality refers to the reality that has been habitualized, institutionalized and legitimized as the "truth" through social agreements (Berger & Luckman, 1989).

Consequently, adopting the idea that sex and gender are the same would contradict with Parker's object statuses that this paper adopts. This paper sees sex as an object with ontological and epistemological statuses of its own; and gender as an object with moral/political and epistemological status of its own. The two terms carry different statuses in their own contexts; even though the two concepts do share some aspects of materiality. Blurring the lines between sex and gender would thus, make it difficult to understand how gender and the epistemological aspects of sex are respectively constructed, despite their inarguable interrelationship.

2.3.2 Gender as a Social Construct

Gender is constantly constructed and reconstructed though human interactions and social processes (Lorber, 2003). While it is understandable that socially constructed does not necessarily equate to performatively constructed that Butler contends; in the context of this paper, the social processes and interactions that construct gender are considered as probable performative acts since it was argued earlier that performances and performativity can co-occur.

According to Maccoby and Jacklin (1991), children are socialized through sociocultural interactions throughout their life which leads to the construction of sex-appropriate gender attributes. When they mature as individuals, they would have internalized the dominant cultural gender ideology, develop gender expectations for self and others, and assume sex-congruent gender roles (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1991). Of course, whether one's biological sex and constructed gender is consistent is another question.

In regards to sex/gender consistency, Lucal (2008) holds on to the idea that individuals cannot escape from doing one of the two genders; implying binarism in gender, even for transgenders. For Kessler and McKenna (1978), just because gender features can be mixed together or that an individual can fluidly move between categories, it has not led to the transcendence or expansion of gender categories. Additionally, Freimuth and Hornstein (1982) believes that gender and its components vary along a spectrum of femininity and masculinity; implying that the spectrum of gender still operates within the polar opposites of femininity and masculinity.

While this paper agrees with the inevitability of polar opposites in gender, this paper holds on to the notion that the attributes of what society identify as feminine or masculine change across time and culture; parallel to the constructionist tenet which stated that

meaning-making of reality is specific to culture and history. In other words, what is distributed along the spectrum of femininity and masculinity at one given time or cultural context always undergoes change; but the spectrum will remain existent with two polar opposites. For example, an action considered masculine like wearing a *sarong* by males within the Malay community might not be considered masculine within the African American community. In another example, the colour pink which has been considered a feminine colour within the 21st century was actually considered a colour of masculinity in the 19th century.

Based on this argument, this paper postulates the idea that binarism, although it inarguably exists across culture and history, is a malleable concept that does not define a definite "truth"; and thus, can be deconstructed and reconstructed more symmetrically. Lorber (2003) exemplified this idea by raising the issue of changing gendered roles in the 21st century whereby more fathers are becoming caretakers, boys and girls are wearing unisex clothing, and men and women are working the same jobs; a phenomenon would not have happened 100 years ago. Ortner and Whitehead (1981) identified that different cultures adopt different cultural symbols to refer to different genders; implying that the understanding of gender is different across culture. Aydt and Corsaro (2003) found that gender identity is differently formed through a comparative analysis of gender segregation in children of different cultural backgrounds. In other words, the definitions of masculinity and femininity always change across time and culture; and this becomes a basis to prove the indefinite construction of gender spectrum and its malleability.

To conclude, this paper reiterates its stand that the opposites in the gender spectrum is a socially constructed phenomenon; and its reconstruction to obtain neutral and symmetrical distributions is possible.

2.4 On the Socialization Process: Children, Gender, and the Media

While the term *socialization* is not uncommon in the field of sociology, its use can be traced back to a complex history. In the 19th century, although the verb "socialize" and its cognate "socialization" have been used in various scholarly writings, the term has adopted varied contextual meanings by different authors (Clausen, 1968). Only in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the term began to be widely used in its modern sense (Clausen, 1968). That being said, like any terminology, the modern use of the term would still have slight variations in its context despite sharing the same principle concept.

According to Kornblum (2012), socialization is the process in which individuals conform to, adopt, and internalize the norms, values, and roles of society. Schaefer and Lamm (1998) defined socialization as "the process whereby people learn the attitudes, values, and actions appropriate to individuals as members of a particular culture". From the verbs used in the definitions, it is observable that socialization is seen as an active learning process. Even though the term socialization might posit the idea that society is the active participant in building upon the personalities of passive individuals, the foundation of socialization is not merely based on the plasticity and passivity of individuals in the face of social influences and experiences (Danziger, 1971).

This paper is not rejecting the idea that society plays an active role in the socialization process. This paper holds on to the idea that as much as society actively feeds individuals with social experiences, individuals are also actively processing the experiences they are fed with (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). In other words, members of a society have an active role in deciding whether they would accept or reject the ideas embedded within their social experiences. The active processing of one's social experiences shows that human beings are not mere biological beings; human beings are social beings who need social experiences to acquire culture and personality to survive (Macionis, 2007).

Understanding the basic concept of socialization, it is apparent that the theory opens up many possibilities for scholarly explorations on various different subjects. This paper believes that a thorough discussion on the socialization process will enable this paper to substantiate its claim on the subversive effects of *Steven Universe* on gender, sex, and sexuality. Thus, it necessitates this paper to examine socialization from 3 specific discussions that are related to this paper in the following sections: childhood socialization, socialization through the media, and gender socialization.

2.4.1 Childhood Socialization

The process of socialization occurs continuously throughout all stages of one's life cycle (Schaefer & Lamm, 1998). Erikson (1968) categorizes one's socialization process in 8 stages of psychosocial developments: infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, early adulthood, adulthood, and old age. Each of these stages comes with different psychosocial crisis that require further socialization process to resolve them (Erikson, 1968).

In this paper, childhood socialization refers to the socialization process during the stages from infancy to adolescence. This paper follows the notion that childhood is the period between birth and maturity; whereby those who are within that period have not yet acquired attributes of adulthood (Denzin, 1977). To Denzin (1977), the term childhood socialization contextually refers to social experiences and interactive relationships that endow a child with human qualities and natures.

Kerckhoff (1972) argues that the socialization outcomes in the early years are extremely significant to the directions of one's active roles in the socialization process later in life. Social experiences during the childhood years significantly shape a person's sense of identity, attitudes, and values in later stages of life. This is because a child is a social object without any intrinsic meaning (Denzin, 1997). The intrinsic meanings of a

child would only be formed through their social experiences. For that matter, childhood socialization is an extremely crucial process in defining a person as a social being in his/her later stages of life.

Various empirical studies have investigated the relations between childhood socialization and adult social development. A study by Montague, Magai, Consedine, and Gillespie (2003) reveals that parental socialization practices and childhood emotional inhibition of African American men (during their early childhood stage) positively correlates with attachment dynamics (during their later stage of life). In another study, Giuliano, Popp, and Knight (2000) find that the types of toys and games, gender composition of a play group, and size of a play group, during the childhood stages have strong correlations in influencing women's sports participation. Gupta (2006) in his study identifies that maternal employment and fathers' presence during the childhood years positively correlate with a man's household work performance during his adulthood.

Understandably, these studies are correlational studies; and correlations do not necessarily imply causal relations. That being said, they still provide a degree of substantiation on childhood socialization and its respective impacts on relationship dynamics, social involvement, identity formation, and value adoption in later life.

2.4.2 Socialization through Mass Media: System Mobility

Media innovations and increasing media consumption in the last 90 years has turned mass media into one of the most important agents of socialization (Schaefer, 2008). The invasion of mass media into the intimacy of home life has created a need to study its effects on child development (Bossard & Boll, 1984).

According to Kaiser Family Foundation, youths between the age of two and eighteen would spend an average of 5 ½ hours consuming media (MacPherson, 1999; Cornell, 2000, as cited in Macionis, 2007). Between the ages of six and eighteen, an average youth

would spend 15,000 to 16,000 hours for media consumption; a number higher that the hours spent in school (13,000 hours) (Schaefer & Lamm, 1998). Due to the high contact hours youths have with their "electronic babysitter", the mass media is considered the most controversial agent of socialization in the American society (Kornblum, 2012).

While this section intends on focusing on mass media as an agent of socialization, the systemic context of the process shall not be overlooked. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed the ecology of human development; that is "the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded." The ecological systems thus, examines individual-social environment interactions; and social environment- social environment interactions.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) identifies five environmental systems that an individual interacts with: the microsystem, mesosytem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, as exhibited in Diagram 2.7:

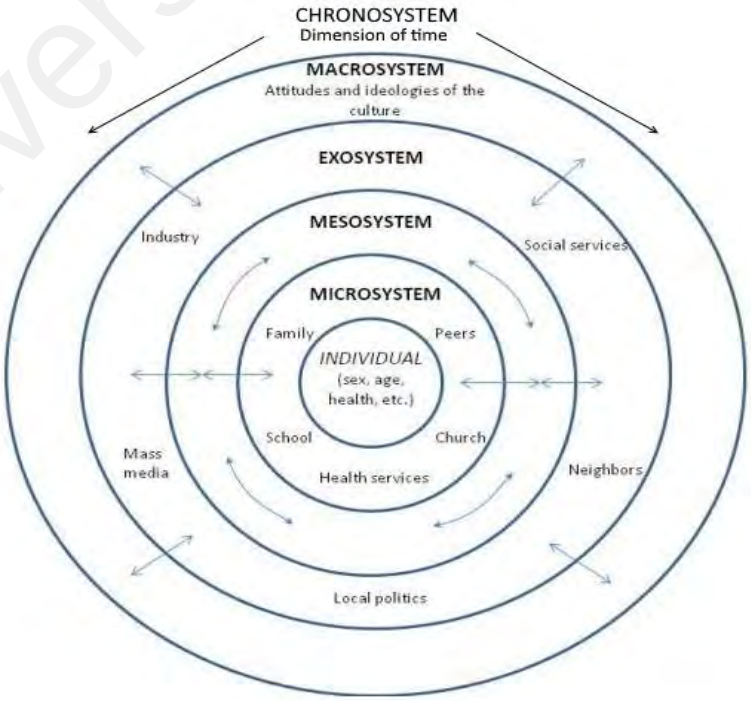


Diagram 2.8 Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecology Systems of Human Development

The microsystem is a pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a face-to-face setting with physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit interactions with their immediate environments (Bronfenbrennar, 1994). Examples would include familial institutions, peers, and religious institutions. The mesosystem is the interconnections and linkages between two or more settings within the microsystems (Bronfenbrennar, 1994). Examples would include the interactions between one's family members and peers.

The exosystem is the social settings that contain linkages and interactions between two or more settings whereby one of which does not contain the developing person but indirectly influences the processes within the immediate settings of the developing person (Bronfenbrennar, 1994). Examples would include the interactions between parents and their coworkers; parents and local politics.

The macrosystem is the sociocultural events and transitions that contain the overarching patterns of micro-, meso-, and exosystems, with reference to the developmentally-instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded within each system (Bronfenbrennar, 1994). Examples would include the values and attitudes of a culture. The chronosystem is the temporal dimension that contains changes and consistency in the characteristics of the developing person and his/her environments (Bronfenbrennar, 1994).

Traditionally, Bronfenbrennar proposes that mass media is placed within the exosystem; and the proposal is fitting to the time the ecological system was introduced. However, contemporary settings within the 21st century have displayed that mass media have played a larger role in a child's life. In a meta-analysis by Dubow, Huesmann, and Greenwood (2007), they discovered that the decreasing time children is spending on other

socializing activities, the amount of time they devote themselves to media consumption, and the lack of parental awareness and control over media exposure, make the interactions between individuals and mass media become more significant. Through observational learning and didactic learning processes, mass media is able to encode new cognitions or behavioural scripts to directly alter beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of children (Dubow, Huesmann & Greenwood, 2007). This is due to the notion that mass media provides windows into social worlds that most individuals would not have access to otherwise (Kornblum, 2012).

Observably, the effects of media on children almost have the same weightage of those from immediate institutions like family. As stated by Bossard and Boll (1984), children's attitudes, values, and beliefs can be formed and changed through the various exposures on adult and foreign cultures on television (since television is the media most consumed by children). Thus, reviewing the definitions given by Bronfenbrennar (1994) on each system, and considering the meta-analytic review by Dubow, Huemann, and Greenwood (2007), this paper concludes that the placement of mass media in an ecological system is mobile; and should not be strictly posited within the exosystem.

The justification comes from the notion that mass media may (or may not) directly impact a child's development and interactions with their immediate environments; a feature for microsystems. Thus, mass media possesses what this paper would term as *system mobility*, which enables it to shift from an exosystem to a microsystem. System mobility depends on how much and what kind of interaction happens between a child and socialization agent. In the case of mass media, system mobility makes it a more immediate agent of socialization in the digital age. Constructing the premise that mass media is able to shift from exosystems to microsystems is important to present *Steven Universe* as a pervasive force in subversive politics.

2.4.3 Gender Socialization: Examining the Lenses of Gender

For a paper that focuses on sex, gender, and sexuality; discussions on gender socialization is inevitable. According to Burr (1998), children gradually acquire the concept of gender as they grow up; suggesting that one's gender identity is not innate. At an early age, children would not be able to differentiate genders without being reinforced with sex-differentiated activities. Should gender identities be innate, then, reinforcements on sex-differentiated activities would be unnecessary. Maccoby and Jacklin (1991) argue that the acquisition of gender identities comes from differential socialization processes between the two sexes during their childhood.

The social environments would normally assign gender identities to infants on the basis of their genitalia (Danziger, 1971); setting different courses of socialization processes for the infants. Once genital identification takes place, which can come as early as after receiving results of sonograms or amniocenteses, parents would instantly refer to their babies using gender-coded languages (Coltrane & Collins, 2001).

The differential gender expectations known as the "pink and blue syndrome" can be seen in virtually all aspects of a child's material world (toys, books, clothing) and in almost all social interactions a child comes in contact with (parents, peers, teachers) (Spade & Valentine, 2008). Parents, media, peers, and teachers have been identified as the main socializers in shaping gender roles (Doyle & Paludi, 1998). Research into gender socialization processes has displayed that because boys and girls are treated differently and put into different learning environments based on their biological sexes, they develop distinctive needs, wants, skills, and temperaments (Coltrane & Collins, 2001).

That being said, although there is a distinction between sex and gender on a biological/social basis, one's gender identity will always have its influences from his/her

sexual identity. Should the socialization practices of gender remains, gender will always be sexed and sex will always be gendered; despite their conceptual differences.

In understanding this paper's view on the phenomenon of reciprocity between gendered sex and sexed gender, this paper shall discuss Bem's Lenses of Gender. According to Bem (1993), society has always been deeply ingrained with hidden assumptions on gender that systematically reproduce male power and dominance generationally[4]. The hidden assumptions are termed as lenses of gender. Bem (1993) argues that the lenses of gender shape how people perceive social reality (of gender identity) and material entities that constitute social reality (like gender inequalities in industrial societies). Bem (1993) identified 3 lenses of gender: androcentrism, gender polarization, and biological essentialism.

The lens of androcentrism refers to the hidden social perception that "males and male experiences are a neutral standard or norm; while females and female experiences are sex-specific deviation from that norm" (Bem, 1993). The lens of gender polarization refers to the hidden social perception that "women and men are fundamentally different from one another" and the perceived difference is "used as an organizing principle for the social life of the culture" (Bem, 1993). The lens of biological essentialism refers to the hidden social perception that rationalizes and legitimizes the other lenses by treating them as "natural and inevitable consequences of the intrinsic biological nature of women and men" (Bem, 1993).

Observably, the three lenses are among the fundamental ideas within society that create the dichotomy between male/masculinity and female/femininity; with female/femininity being treated as the other. And because the lenses are always cyclically

[4] To note, Bem's Lenses of Gender is considered as a feminist concept.

passed down from generation to generation through socialization practices, the notions of gendered sex and sexed gender always exist. Unless the lenses of gender are removed from society, gender, sex, and sexuality will always be socialized on the basis of sexual identities.

2.5 On Media Effects

Since this paper focuses on how media contents (*Steven Universe* in particular) subverts, understanding media effects on a theoretical foundation is vital. It is to be noted that the theories discussed in this section shall not be operationalized in any context; but the arguments posed within these theories are relevant in discussing the findings.

Inarguably, the shifting paradigms of media landscapes in today's world have brought about major impacts to individuals and society. McCullagh (2002) argues that escaping media messages in a media-saturated age is impossible. The accelerating production of information, and high degree of content exposure and consumption, interweave society with endless streams of endless media messages. And because the media constantly pervades society with media messages, members of society would turn to *automacity* or the automatic processing of information to adapt to our information-saturated culture (Potter, 2012). Automacity will thus, enable the media to exert its highly pervasive effects onto societies and members of societies with or without their conscious realization (Potter, 2012). McCullagh's and Potter's claims indicate that mass media, society, and individuals will inevitably influence each other.

2.5.1 Cultivation of Social Reality

The cultivation theory was proposed by George Gerbner in 1969 as a framework to analyse long-term effects of consuming and interacting with information systems intended for heterogeneous and anonymous publics (which he specifically focus on television contents; albeit this paper argues that it can be applied to any mass-mediated

communications). The theory focuses on the cultivation of shared attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values and contingences of human existence through media messages; rather than their direct effects on behaviours (Gerbner, 1969; Vu & Lee, 2013).

Based on this theory, Gerbner (1969) suggested that repeated exposure to consistent themes in television contents (a form of information system) over time, can cumulatively influence audiences' perception of reality. In other words, the more people spend their time living in the televised world, the more likely they are to align their social reality with the reality portrayed in the repeated themes on television. Diagram 2.4 illustrates the cumulative process in the construction of social reality through television viewing, as conceptualized by Hawkins and Pingree (1990):

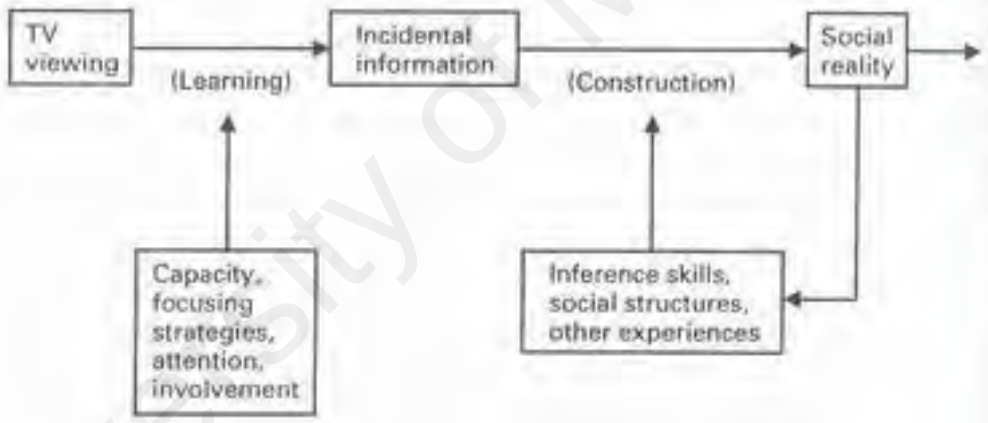


Diagram 2.9 Hawkins and Pingree (1990) Conceptual Model of Cultivation Theory

Diagram 2.9 shows that prolonged exposure to television contents leads viewers to construct and reconstruct social reality based on the information learned from television viewing. And since televisions are now available in almost every household, the media would dominate the role of institutional storyteller in shaping cultural mainstream that was once dominated by other social institutions like family and religion (Griffin, 2006; Gerbner, 1998). In other words, the construction of social reality in today's world is

heavily mediated and cultivated by mass communications. Images, themes, and values cultivated by the media are virtually inescapable for heavy viewers (Gerbner, 1998).

Based on the contents produced by the media, viewers would thus, construct shared attitudes and beliefs on a broad range of topics, such as political orientations, sex roles, aging, family relationships, environmental attitudes, science, health, religion, racial minorities, and occupations, etc., that they would consider as reality (Vu & Lee, 2013). It is important to note that the cultivation process is not bound to the modes of presentations of either fiction (soap operas, cartoons, etc.) or non-fiction (news, factual reports, etc.) (Gerbner, 1969). Rather, it focuses on the themes as a whole message system; be it fictional or non-fictional (Gerbner, 1969). Thus, while visual contents in a cartoon like *Steven Universe* might not actually show "reality", they do portray real themes in a system that reflect social realities.

That being said, Shanahan and Morgan (1999) argue that the portrayals of reality in television often do not reflect the real world. The world of television differs significantly from reality; and the distortion will influence the beliefs of viewers (Shrum, Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2005). In other words, television contents are claimed to create a false perception of reality. An example of this situation is observable in the study on mean world syndrome whereby violent contents in mass media is said to make viewers believe that the world is more dangerous than it really is (Gerbner et al., 2002); and Shrum's study on the cultivation of material values (Shrum et al., 2005).

Having said that, the claim of a false perception of "reality" indirectly suggests the idea of a universally-accepted human reality that is objective; despite the constructionist idea that realities are bound to specific cultures and history (Burr, 1995; Lock & Strong, 2010). While certain media contents might not be "a reality" to a specific cultural group, they might be true to members of another specific cultural group; no matter how remote a reality might appear. Based on this notion, this paper argues that media cultivation can

thus, construct, reconstruct, and facilitate the exchange of social realities from a culture and history to another; based on the dominant themes that are framed in the televised world. Following up on this argument, dominant cultures would therefore, possess the social power to impose the acceptance of their version of reality to heterogeneous publics through media cultivation.

2.5.2 Social Learning Theory

In understanding how children learn behaviours, values, and attitudes through the media, this paper believes that discussing Bandura's Social Learning Theory is significant. In 1963, Albert Bandura and Richard Walters proposed the Social Learning Theory which extends the traditional learning theories of discrimination learning, operant conditioning, and early social learning theory (Miller, 1983). The theory posits the idea that learning is a cognitive process that occurs in a social context (rather than the traditionally accepted behavioural process); and can take place via observations and direct instructions (Walters & Bandura, 1963). Bandura and Walters' shift from a behavioural perspective on learning to a cognitive one broadens the types of learning from trial-and-error learning to observational and instructional learnings (Miller, 1983).

The concept of observational learning is highly significant in understanding how beliefs are learnt and adopted. According to Miller (1983), observational learning is prevalent during one's childhood stages; due to a child's imitative nature. Bandura (2002) argues that a child is able to learn by simply observing social behaviours, extracting information from those observations, and making cognitive abstraction about the performance of the behaviour. While the observational learning may seem similar to operant and classical conditioning, observational learning differs in its fundamental features that a child needs not produce psychomotor output or undergo direct reinforcements for learning to take place (Miller, 1983).

Drawing its foundations from Miller and Dollar's theory of imitation (1941), observational learning focuses on the concepts of modelling and vicarious reinforcement (Walter & Bandura, 1963; Bandura, 2002). Bandura and Walters (1963) argue that a child can learn and acquire new behaviours by simply watching a model (which can be filmed, symbolic, or real model) perform or instruct a behaviour. Once the capacity for observational learning has fully developed, one cannot undo the information that has been learnt (Bandura, 2002).

Thus, based on a modelling process, a child observes a model, encodes information from it, and retains the information (Miller, 1983). From the child's observation of the modelling stimuli, Bandura (2002) also argue that the child can abstract general rules from observing specific behaviour. The abstraction of rules will lead to the emergence of complex new behaviours, formation of attitudes towards the behaviours, and ascription of values towards the behaviours. Additionally, a child also learns the desirability of the behaviour (vicarious reinforcement). In the context of media, Hanson (2014) stated that media contents contain a large scale of modelling stimuli for social learning to take place. Thus, by observing symbolic models in the media, children will inevitably learn behaviours, values, and attitudes as encoded by the content creator.

Contextualizing *Steven Universe* as the symbolic model, children may learn and adopt attitudes and beliefs on the social behaviours (pertaining sex, gender, and sexuality) as portrayed in the cartoon; as well as their desirability – reinstating cartoons as pervasive.

2.6 On the Narrative Paradigm: Examining Fantasy

The narrative paradigm is a communication theory by Walter Fisher that posits the idea that human beings are narrative beings who "experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends" (Fisher, 1987, p.24). It emphasizes and explores the rhetoric uses of narratives. Fisher's narrative paradigm asserts that all forms of human communications that appeal to reason can thus,

be fundamentally viewed as stories (Griffin, 2012). In other words, it is derivable that human beings are essentially both storytellers and products of their own storytelling. The reality as constructed by human beings are thus, essentially stories or narrations. That being said, the term narration in Fisher's narrative paradigm is broader than the generally accepted meaning of narration.

Fisher (1987) defined narration as "symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (p.58). It is due to this broader definition of narration that this paper takes narrative paradigm into account. Fisher's definition of narration or story does not differentiate narrations between fictions or non-fiction. Rather, it treats narrations (be it fictional) as a form of meaningful communicational process that conveys reasons and complex information through the use of symbols; a notion that is relevant to building *Steven Universe* as a meaningful form of communication. Any form of narration is meaningful communication.

Primarily, Fisher (1984) built his theory of narrative paradigm based on five tenets:

1) Human beings are essentially storytellers.

2) Human beings make decisions on the basis of good reasons, of which depends on the communicational situations, media, and genre.

3) Human beings determine good reasons based on history, biography, culture, and character.

4) Human beings determine the narrative rationality of a narration based on its coherence and fidelity (the concept of narrative fidelity shall be discussed thoroughly in the next section).

5) Human beings experience the world as a set of stories from which they have to choose from; and thus, constantly construct and reconstruct their lives based on the stories they choose.

Observably, the tenets of narrative paradigm does not contradict social constructionism and performativity; and consequently, would support Butler's gender performativity. It defines the building block of social interaction as stories that encompass any media and genre. Putting gender performativity into context, subversive performative acts can ultimately be considered as subversive narrations.

2.6.1 Narrative Rationality of Fantasy-themed Narratives

While literary critics may argue over what texts can be regarded as "fantasy", the term fantasy can generally be defined by its element of "departure from consensus reality (Hume, 1984, p.8). In other words, fantasy is a genre that adopts narrative elements (characters, themes, plots, etc.) that deviate from social realities that humans agree upon. Hume (1984) provides an elaborated definition of fantasy that:

> Fantasy is any departure from consensus reality, an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations, from monster to metaphor. It includes transgressions of what one generally takes to be physical facts such as human immortality, travel faster than light, telekinesis, and the like. (Hume, 1984, p.21)

Hume's definition aims to counter the exclusion of fantasy as part of literature based on the absence of mimetic features in fantasy texts by literary theorists. She argues that fantasy is written with the purpose of changing givens and altering reality; out of play, vision, longing, or the need for metaphoric images to bypass audience's attitudinal defences (Hume, 1984).

On Hume's point regarding bypassing audience's attitudinal defences, this paper believe that the condition is accomplished through the establishment of high narrative rationality. According to Fisher (1984), narrative rationality refers to the quality of a narrative to be reliable, trustworthy, and desirable; to be logical based on the 2 standards: coherence and fidelity. In other words, coherence and fidelity in narrative rationality measure a story's truthfulness and humanity (Griffin, 2012). The following diagram illustrates narrative rationality and its components:

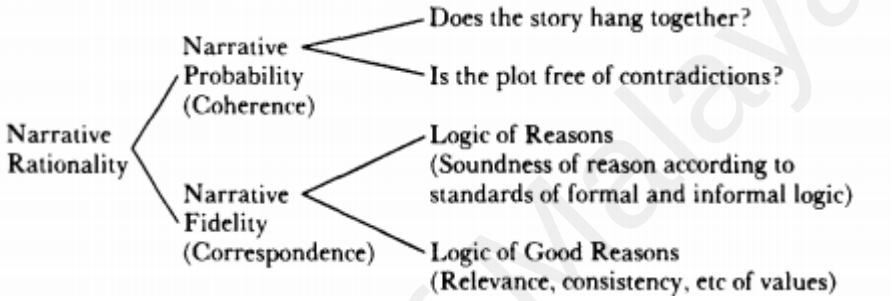


Diagram 2.10 Fisher's Narrative Rationality (1984), conceptualized by Warnick (1987)

In defining the components of narrative rationality, narrative coherence is the internal coherence between the plot and characters who act in a reliable fashion (Griffin, 2012); and narrative fidelity is the congruence between values embedded in a narration and what the audience regard as truthful and humane (Griffin, 2012). Putting fantasy into context, should the fantasy narratives possess low narrative rationality, the stories would have been completely unreliable and not trustworthy. But if the fantasy narratives possess high narrative rationality, the stories would be reliable and trustworthy.

Based on this logical sequencing, fantasy narratives would thus, be internally coherent, and the values in the stories would be congruent with audience's perceptions. The notion of value-congruence ultimately indicate that the metaphoric images used in fantasy narratives still adopt mimetic functions on human values even though the structural depiction is not mimetic in nature.

Understanding this concept is important in seeing fantasy as a symbolic mimesis of consensus realities that is reliable and trustworthy; a notion that is relevant in inferring the signification process that occur in the subject (i.e. *Steven Universe*) of this paper.

2.7 Conclusion of the Chapter

To conclude, this chapter has extensively discussed 6 concepts: semiotic theories, queer theories, social constructionism, socialization, media effects theory, and the narrative paradigm. The discussions in this chapter ultimately help to provide conceptual definitions and better understanding of the key concepts used in this paper. The theories and concepts reviewed aimed to provide a strong basis to the arguments that shall be laid out in later chapters of this paper.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is written to outline the research design used to collect and analyse data. Section 3.1 shall discuss the general research design. Section 3.2 shall discuss the framework adopted to select and collect data. And Section 3.3 shall discuss the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity which has been developed for data analysis; a model loosely adapted from Lim's (2004) Integrative Multisemiotic Model.

3.1 Research Design

This research utilizes textual analysis. According to Goebel (n.d.), textual analysis is typically used to "describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts". More specifically, this research is a qualitative textual research since the researcher is vested in the meanings associated with texts and structures.

In order to answer the proposed research questions, the researcher has decided to employ a synthesized framework between semiotic analysis and gender performativity. Semiotic analysis deals with the descriptive nature of this research while social analysis deals with the explanatory nature of the research. The findings of this paper shall be presented in a thematic analysis. To note, the operationalization of semiotic-performativity synthesis shall be thoroughly discussed under Section 3.3.

3.2 Framework for Data Collection

Since the total episodes that *Steven Universe* currently have until season 5 is 152, selecting 15 episodes would provide approximately 10% of the total episodes; an appropriate sample size for data analysis.

To note, Berger's (2002) Concept of Important Signifiers has been used as the selection criteria in setting a proper perimeter to the amount of data intended for analysis. According to Berger (2002), a signifier is considered important when they meet the following criteria:

a. It must have a physical form (it varies from words to utterance, images, gestures, scene, etc.).
b. It must refer to something other than itself.
c. It must be used and recognised by people as a sign.
d. It has meaning to the members of certain cultural group as it stands for issues in social discourse.

15 episodes with the highest numbers of important signifiers have been identified and selected based on the 4 criteria; and subsequently, specific scenes (containing important signifiers for the social discourse of sex, gender, and sexuality) from the 15 episodes shall be analysed using the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative-Performativity. Table 3.1 enlists the selected episodes and their basic descriptions:

Table 3.1 List of Selected Episodes from *Steven Universe* and their Synopsis

Ep.	Season	Title	Art Direction	Written and Storyboarded by	Air Date	US viewers (mil.)
35	1	Lion 3: Straight to the Video	Ian Jones-Quartey & Elle Michalka	Joe Johnston, Jeff Liu, and Rebecca Sugar	December 4, 2014	1.92
Steven discovers a pocket dimension in Lion's mane; and in there a tape from Rose to him.						
45	1	Rose's Scabbard	Elle Michalka	Raven M. Molisee, Paul Villeco, and Rebecca Sugar	March 9, 2015	1.22
Pearl takes Steven to a special place that belonged to Rose Quartz after Lion finds the scabbard for Rose's sword.						
49	1	Jail Break	Elle Michalka	Joe Johnston, Jeff Liu, and Rebecca Sugar	March 12, 2015	1.70
Trapped on the Gem Warship, Steven attempts to rescue the Gems, including two mysterious Gems named Ruby and Sapphire, from Peridot and Jasper's clutches.						
58	2	Sworn to the Sword	Ian Jones-Quartey & Jasmin Lai	Joe Johnston and Jeff Liu	June 15, 2015	1.98
Connie takes sword-fighting classes with Pearl in order to be the protector of Steven.						

Table 3.1, continued

Ep.	Season	Title	Art Direction	Written and Storyboarded by	Air Date	US viewers (mil.)
61	2	We Need to Talk	Jasmin Lai	Hilary Florido, Katie Mitroff, and Rebecca Sugar	June 18, 2015	1.73
After witnessing Steven and Connie fuse again, Greg explains to them how he learned about fusion from his time with Rose Quartz, hoping to pull it off himself in order to grow closer to her.						
64	2	Keystone Motel	Jasmin Lai	Raven M. Molisee, Paul Villeco, and Rebecca Sugar	July 14, 2015	1.73
While she accompanies Greg and Steven on a road trip to another state and a visit to a motel, Garnet's anger over what Pearl did in the previous episode causes her to split into Ruby and Sapphire.						
69	2	Sadie's Song	Kat Morris & Jasmin Lai	Raven M. Molisee and Paul Villeco	September 17, 2015	1.50
Steven helps Sadie with an act for the annual Beach-a-Palooza talent show.						
86	3	Mr. Greg	Joe Johnston & Jasmin Lai	Joe Johnston and Jeff Liu	July 19, 2016	1.55
In this special musical episode, after Greg suddenly comes into a great deal of money, he takes Steven and Pearl on a vacation to Empire City. However, Pearl is having trouble letting go of her resentment of Greg's relationship with Rose Quartz.						
93	3	Alone at Sea	Kat Morris & Jasmin Lai	Hilary Florido, Kat Morris, and Rebecca Sugar	July 28, 2016	1.32
Steven and Greg take Lapis Lazuli on a boat ride to help her recover from her trauma. However, Jasper follows them and confronts Lapis, seeking to fuse into Malachite again.						
109	4	Last One Out of Beach City	Kat Morris & Ricky Cometa	Hilary Florido and Lauren Zuke	September 8, 2016	1.31
Pearl offers to go with Steven and Amethyst to a rock show, deciding to get in touch with her rebellious side whilst trying to impress a woman who looks similar to Rose.						
117	4	The Zoo	Joe Johnston, Ricky Cometa and Elle Michalka	Lamar Abrams and Katie Mitroff	February 1, 2017	1.23
Steven finds Greg in Pink Diamond's "Human Zoo", and tries to look for a way out. This proves easier said than done as the humans there are guided through a strictly scheduled and regimented life.						

Table 3.1, continued

Ep.	Season	Title	Art Direction	Written and Storyboarded by	Air Date	US viewers (mil.)
138	5	Kevin Party	Kat Morris & Liz Artinian	Amber Cragg and Hilary Florido	December 29, 2017	0.77
Kevin is throwing a party and intends to invite Stevonnie. In doing so, he has to get Steven and Connie who are in quarrel to get back together.						
140	5	Jungle Moon	Joe Johnston & Liz Artinian	Miki Brewster and Jeff Liu	January 5, 2018	1.11
Stevonnie crash-lands on a jungle of an alien moon; and have to survive by themselves. They later discover that the moon orbits a former Gem colony.						
149	5	The Question	Joe Johnston & Liz Artinian	Miki Brewster and Jeff Liu	July 4, 2018	0.71
Ruby decides to explore her own life separate from Sapphire, and has a Wild West adventure as a lonesome cowboy with the help of Steven, Amethyst, and Greg. Although she has fun, she still misses Sapphire, and she returns to her with an important question to ask.						
151	5	Reunited (Part 1)	Joe Johnston & Liz Artinian	Miki Brewster, Jeff Liu, Katie Mitroff and Paul Villeco	July 6, 2018	0.97
The wedding of Ruby and Sapphire, with the Gems and several Beach City citizens in attendance, goes without a hitch and Garnet reforms. However, during the reception, Blue and Yellow Diamond arrive and awaken the Cluster. While the Crystal Gems, with the Cluster's support, fight the Diamonds, Steven tries to get them to listen to the truth about Pink Diamond.						

To ease data analysis, this paper shall codify selected scenes, containing important signifiers for the social discourse of sex, gender, and sexuality, from the 15 episodes. The codification format shall follow the following structure:

> [SU64iii]: in which SU stands for Steven Universe, 64 stands for the episode number, and iii stands for the scene number.

Diagram 3.1 Codification Format

3.3 Framework for Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, this research has developed the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity. In this section, this paper shall provide descriptive explanations to the operationalization of the model.

Fundamentally, the model integrates 4 semiotic theories and 1 social theory into a framework. The semiotic theories used are Saussurean Structural Linguistics (1983), Monaco's film semiotics (2000), Unsworth's Intersemiotic Ideational Meaning (2006), and Barthes' Theory of Myths (1991). The social theory used is Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity (1990). Each of the theory is relevant in operationalizing different dimensions of the model. Diagram 3.2 illustrates the proposed model:

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Semiotic Dimension</td><td colspan="3">Narrative (Sign-story system)</td><td rowspan="2">Expression Plane</td><td rowspan="4">Signs</td></tr>
<tr><td>Visual</td><td>Visual-Verbal</td><td>Verbal</td></tr>
<tr><td>Monaco's film semiotics (2000):
A) Paradigmatic
Tropes
B)Syntagmatic
Mise-en-scene & Montage</td><td>Unsworth's Intersemiotic Ideational Meaning (2006):
Concurrence
Complementarity</td><td>Saussure's Structural Linguistics (1983):
A)Paradigmatic
Diction
B)Syntagmatic
Phrase Structure & Word Order</td><td>Content Plane</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Textually Constructed Myth of Gender
(Parodical/Non-Parodical)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Social Dimension</td><td colspan="3">Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990)</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">Context Plane</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Socially Constructed Myth of Gender</td></tr>
</table>

Diagram 3.2 Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity

To fully understand the operationalization of the proposed model, this paper shall examine each individual component of the model and outline the sequential procedures to conducting a systematic analysis using the Model of Integrative Multisemiotic Rhetoric for Connotative Performativity.

3.3.1 Visual semiotic analysis

The analysis of visual semiotic elements uses Monaco's Film Semiotics (2000); which employs paradigmatic and syntagmatic analyses.

The first phase of the visual semiotic analysis will involve identifying the visual cinematic signs from relevant scenes of *Steven Universe*. Subsequently, paradigmatic and syntagmatic analyses shall be carried out. For syntagmatic analysis, this research shall examine the *mise-en-scene* and montage; and how they interrelate with a syntagmatic unit to provide context. Successively, for the paradigmatic analysis, this research shall examine the visual choices that create tropes; based on oppositions and contrast. From the analyses on the visuals in *Steven Universe*, possible meanings are derived.

3.3.2 Verbal semiotic analysis

The analysis of verbal semiotic elements employs Saussurean Structural Linguistics (1983) which analyses linguistic units through syntagmatic and paradigmatic analyses.

The first phase of verbal semiotic analysis focuses on identifying verbal cinematic signs from relevant scenes of *Steven Universe*. Subsequently, the next phase involves breaking dialogues into constituent linguistic units. For the syntagmatic analysis, this research shall look into the word order; and how they are sequentially and syntactically structured. For the paradigmatic analysis this research shall examine diction in individual linguistic units; based on oppositions and contrast. From the analyses on the dialogues in *Steven Universe*, possible meanings are derived.

3.3.3 Visual-verbal intersemiotic analysis

The analysis of visual-verbal intersemiotic relationship employs Unsworth's Intersemiotic Ideational Meaning (2006). The Intersemiotic Ideational Meaning identifies the interrelationship between visual and verbal signs as concurrence, complementarity, and connection. That being said, this research shall only focus on concurrence and complementarity in its analysis. Connection is excluded because it focuses on conjunctive relations (which this research does not).

The first phase of the visual-verbal semiotic analysis will involve a comparison between derived meanings from the visual and verbal analyses. Subsequently, the relationship between the visual-verbal signs that co-occur in a scene will be identified with either concurrence or complementarity. Concurrence occurs in four situations: redundancy, exposition, instantiation, and homospatiality; while complementarity occurs in two situations: augmentation and divergence (Unsworth 2006). Based on the intersemiotic relationship, this research shall be able to single out more accurate meanings from selected scenes; and understand the circulation of meaning between sign-systems.

3.3.4 Textually constructed myth of gender

The myth of gender is understood differently across different times and cultures because the signification occurs differently across different time and culture. This research believes that Rebecca Sugar has created a new culture and historical timeline in *Steven Universe* to textually construct its own myth of gender.

In identifying the textually constructed myth of gender in *Steven Universe*, this paper will examine the derived meanings from the visual and verbal analyses of gender-, sex-, and sexuality- related signs in *Steven Universe*. Should the signification be found to naturalize and maintain signs and codes as generated by the myths themselves, then it can be said to have textually constructed its own myth of gender through a higher order signification.

3.3.5 Socially constructed myth of gender

The socially constructed myth of gender refers to the contemporary understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality; as regulated by heteronormativity. In the context of this paper, heteronormativity shall refer to heteronormativity as discussed in Chapter 2: the system of regulation and maintenance of sex, sexuality, gender, and desires through the normalcy of heterosexuality, and its intersectionality with asymmetrical gender binary and

patriarchal power hierarchy; on the legal, cultural, institutional, discursive, and interpersonal/interactional levels.

The sub-dimension – socially constructed myth of gender, shall be used to provide a comparative ground for *Steven Universe*'s textually constructed myth of gender.

3.3.6 Gender performativity

Butler's (1990) Gender Performativity serves as the analytical lens for this paper to understand the social dimension of the research. In this paper, performative acts shall be examined through the meanings (the content plane) of its visual and verbal sign. The meanings shall be analysed on whether they reinforce or subvert intelligible identities.

Operationally, the first phase involves identifying the meanings of selected signs from *Steven Universe*, as well as the textually constructed myth of gender, through semiotic analysis. Subsequently, the connotations and textually constructed myth of gender shall be examined on whether they reinforce the socially constructed myth of gender or subverts it. Should there be elements parody (that it creates ironic critical distance and marks differences rather than similarities), the connotations and textually constructed myth of gender are said to be subversive.

3.3.7 Overall Process for the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity (SMMCP)

In order to clearly elucidate the general sequential process for the operationalization of Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity, consider Diagram 3.3:

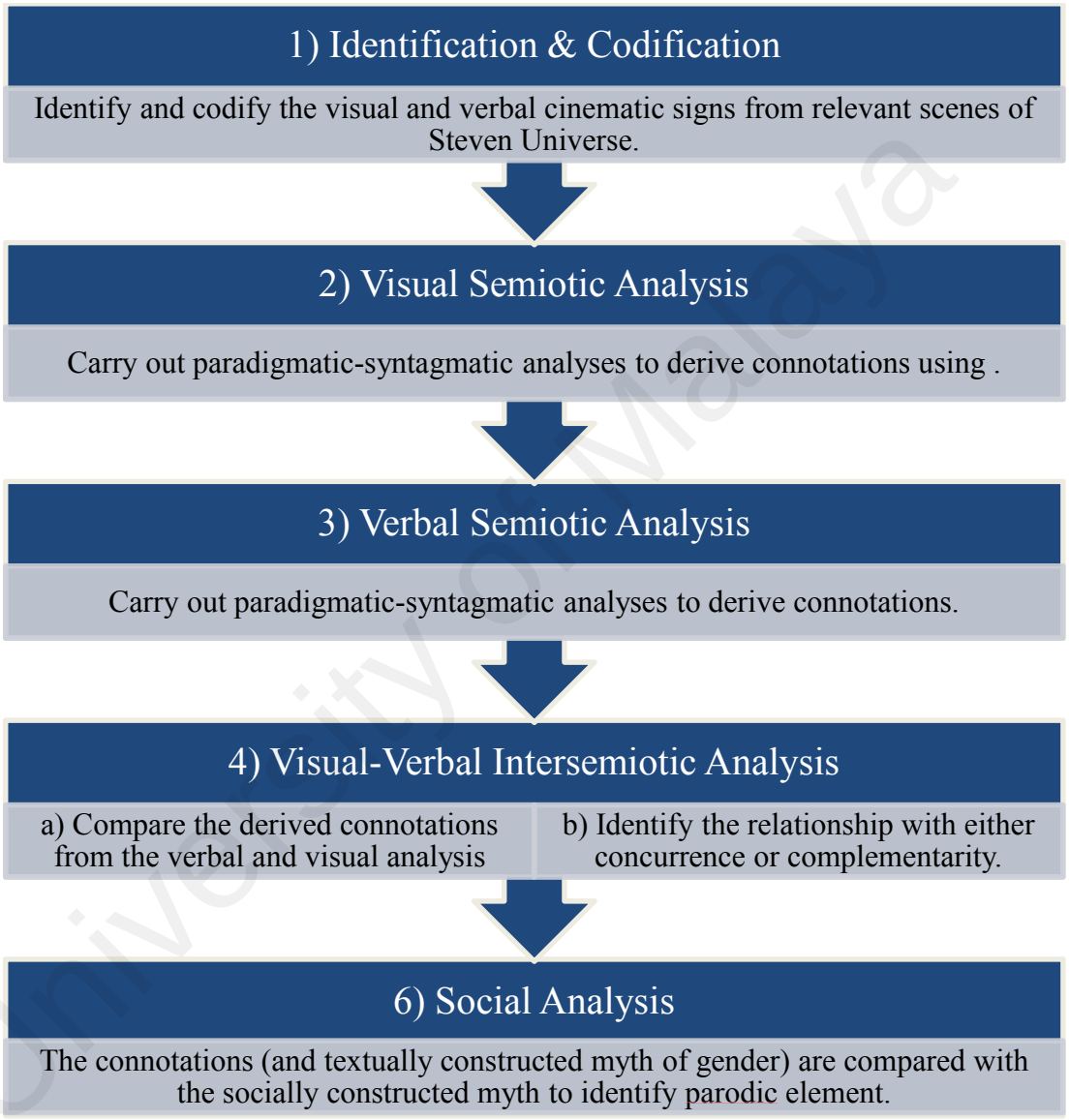


Diagram 3.3 Flow of Analysis based on SMMCP

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter is written for the purpose of answering the first and second research questions in this paper:

i. What are the subversive visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*?

ii. What are the queer concepts signified in the subversive visual and verbal signs of *Steven Universe*?

To answer the 2 research questions, this chapter shall analyse selected verbal and visual signs of *Steven Universe,* based on the conceptual framework explained in Chapter 3. This analysis of data shall be organized thematically, as follows:

4.1 Resignification of Binary Gender Expressions

4.2 Representations of Queer Relationships

4.3 Symbolic Representations of Trans Identities

4.4 Deconstruction of Normative Sexuality and Desires

4.5 Parodic Subversion of the Marital System

4.6 Fusion as a Symbol of Queer Experience

To note, the themes are derivative of concepts discussed in Chapter 2.

4.1 Resignification of Binary Gender Expressions

Binarism in gender is a classification system that puts gender into binary oppositions of masculine male and feminine female. This paper believes that the binary opposition in the gender spectrum is socially constructed; and its reconstruction is possible to obtain a more neutral and symmetrical distribution within the gender spectrum. Observably, Rebecca Sugar, through *Steven Universe*, attempts to accomplish this reconstruction and/or deconstruction. In this section, resignification of binary gender expressions shall be observed in 4 phenomenon: portrayal of gender neutrality in Steven's character, Connie's character development, the dynamics of Steven-Connie relationship, and the non-normative maternal role of Barb.

First, resignification of binary gender expressions in *Steven Universe* can be observed in the portrayal of Steven as a character. Steven is generally portrayed to sexually be a male character; but his gender expression fluidly moves within the gender spectrum. One exemplification can be seen in **SU138ii**:

Table 4.1 Exemplification 1

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU138ii (5.02 – 5.19)		Kevin: **You cannot just dump your emotional honesty face all over**, you're gonna freak her out. Steven: I just want us to talk again.

Table 4.1, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU138ii (5.02 – 5.19)		Kevin: Exactly, but look at what she's doing. Life is good. She's got a dog now.

To provide context to **SU138ii**, the scene ensues Steven's conflict with Connie; whereby Kevin attempts to advise Steven on proper actions to solve the conflict.

In **SU138ii**, Steven is portrayed to be in touch with emotions; a trait that would heteronormatively be attributed to femininity. The paradigmatic visual signs in **SU138ii**: pink shirt and tears, act as metonymical devices in establishing the idea of emotionality and normative femininity. This paper believes that the paradigmatic visual choices are deliberate to resignify pink and emotionality to be gender-neutral; in contrast to its usual attribution to femininity. The contrast creates ironic critical distance between Steven as a character, and heteronormative standards for males; thus, parodizes heteronormativity.

The temporal syntagm portraying the visual paradigm of Kevin's blue shirt also highlights contrasts. Steven's and Kevin's colour schemes syntagmatically contrast one another. Contextually, Steven's colour does not align with heteronormativity; while Kevin's colour aligns with heteronormative masculinity. Thus, their contrast creates ironic critical distance that foils one another. To note, this paper finds the *mise-en-scene* (spatial syntagm) to not contribute to subversive meanings.

Verbally, Kevin's dialogue in **SU138ii** is not coherent with resignification; rather, it reinforces heteronormative masculinity – that males should not exhibit emotions. The verbal paradigm "emotional honesty" that has been syntagmatically related to the negation "cannot"; suggests Kevin's dissenting view on portraying emotions. Additionally, the verbal paradigm "emotional honesty" has also been syntagmatically related to "dump"; in which "dump" carries a negative tone to the sememe "to dispose" in this context. While his dialogue does not specify his dissent as gender-based, an extrapolation from his general outtake on gender relations throughout the cartoon provides the circumstance for the suggestive association. This paper believes that Kevin's dissent act to foil and contrast Steven's gender-neutrality.

Intersemiotically, the verbal and visual sings in **SU138ii** creates ideational complementarity in the form of augmentation; in which the content planes of the signs extend the meanings of one another. Therefore, the connotations derived from **SU138ii** can be accepted. **SU138ii** is thus, considered subversive through Steven's gender-neutrality and Kevin's foiling; as they denaturalize culturally embedded gender practices.

Additionally, the exemplification of Steven's gender neutrality can also be observed in the contrast of Steven's character portrayal between **SU69vi** and **SU69vii** with **SU151i**:

Table 4.2 Exemplification 2

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU69vi (5.47 – 5.58)		(*Background Song*)

Table 4.2, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
		
SU69vii (8.39 – 8.47)	 	Sadie: Okay, just let me- Steven: Oh no, **you ruin my lipstick**! Never fear, Steven's here.
SU151i (0.34 – 1.12)		(*Song – Let's Only Think about Love*) Steven: Mom was a Diamond who invaded Earth, saw its beauty and its worth. Mom made an army and she fought herself; did that even end up mattering when she faked her own shattering?

Table 4.2, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
	 	Mom lived in hiding by the name of Rose with the friends she'd made and **the form she chose.** Now all that's left of her exists in me and I think that we can all agree that is a little bit upsetting.

In **SU69vi** and **SU69vii**, Steven is portrayed to express feminine-coded traits through his role as make-up artist; while in **SU151i**, Steven is portrayed to express masculine-coded traits through his shaving scene during *Let's Only Think about Love*. The mascara beauty brush, and lipstick in **SU69vi** and **SU69vii**, act as indexical visual signs to establish the metonymy of a traditional feminine role. Contrastingly, the shaving cream and razor in **SU151i**, act as indexical visual signs to establish the metonymy of a traditional masculine role.

The paradigmatic choice to have Steven handling mascara, beauty brush, and lipstick in **SU69vi** and **SU69vii**, does not align with heteronormative ideas that exclusively posit make-up artist as a feminine role. Sugar could have selected another character as Sadie's make-up artist; but Steven has been made the clear paradigmatic choice. Noticeably, **SU69vi** and **SU69vii** portray Steven's role as a make-up artist as an excitable role; without

a condescending tone via the paradigm of a smiling expression despite the 'gender misappropriation'. **In SU69vi**, the *mise-en-scene* (i.e. the spatial syntagm) contextualizes femininity via its hand props (i.e. mascara, beauty brush), pink hue, and pink curtains. In **SU69vii**, only hand props (i.e. lipstick) provides spatial syntagm to connote femininity.

Contrastingly, **SU151i** establishes Steven as a character who is not just comfortable with feminine traits, but is also not shy of masculine traits. **SU151i** is important to negate assumptions that Steven is the mere embodiment of a feminine male; which would defeat resignification of gender binary. The paradigmatic choice to have Steven handling shaving cream and razor aligns Steven with normative idea of masculinity. The *mise-en-scene* via props, the wording "Big Boy's 1st Shaving Cream", and the paradigmatic choice of blue for the colour of the razor ultimately creates the metonymy of masculinity.

Considering the connotative meanings from **SU69vi** and **SU69vii** with **SU151i**, this paper believes that the contrasts in Steven's portrayals of gender expressions (i.e. feminine and masculine) establish Steven as a gender-neutral character that deconstructs social expectations on traditional gender binary.

Verbally, the dialogue in **SU69vii**, "You ruin my lipstick" indicate Steven's pride in being the make-up artist for Sadie. The paradigm "lipstick" has been syntagmatically related with the possessive pronoun "my", instead of the article "the", connotes Steven's comfort in handling the lipstick. Additionally, the paradigm "ruin", which carries the sememe "to destroy", has been syntagmatically related to "lipstick"; to connote Steven's serious take on his role as make-up artist. No dialogue is present during **SU69vi**; hence, verbal analysis is irrelevant for the scene.

Consequently, this paper argues that the verbal expression in **SU69vii** extends the intended metonymical meaning of its visual signs; establishing an intersemiotic

relationship of ideational complementarity. The dialogue in **SU151i** (which is actually the lyrics of *Let's Only Think about Love*), does not appear to augment or diverge the connotative meanings of the visual expressions. Therefore, the intersemiotic relationship in **SU151i** is concurrence.

Noticeably, Steven's portrayal of both feminine and masculine traits in **SU69vi**, **SU69vii**, and **SU151i** parodize social expectations imposed upon a sexually male person (i.e. to exclusively be masculine). Hence, the visual and verbal signs in **SU69vi**, **SU69vii**, and **SU151i** is connotatively-subversive.

In addition, resignification of gender expressions is observable in Connie's character development. The exemplification of this claim can be observed in the gradual character change from **SU58i, SU58ii** to **SU58iii**:

Table 4.3 Exemplification 3

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU58i (4.05 – 4.26)	 	(Song – *Do it for Her/Him*) Pearl: Remember, you do it for him and you would do it again. You do it for her that is to say you'll do it for him. Keep your stance wide; keep your body lowered, as you're moving forward balance is the key.

Table 4.3, continued

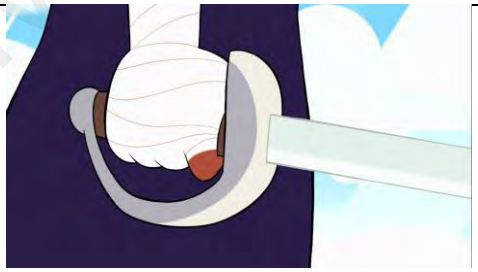
Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU58ii (4.27 – 4.57)	  	Pearl: Right foot, left foot. Now go even faster. And as you're moving backwards, keep your eyes on me. Connie: Keep my stance wide Pearl: Good Connie: Keep my body lowered Pearl: Right! Connie: As I'm moving forward. Pearl: Concentrate! Don't you want him to live?! Connie: Right foot, left foot Pearl: Yes! But put your whole body into it! Everything you have, everything you are; you've got to give on the battlefield.
SU58iii (5.42 – 6.15)		Connie: Deep down, I know that I'm just a human. Pearl: True. Connie & Pearl: But I know that I/you can draw my sword and fight. Connie: With my short existence. Pearl: Good.

Table 4.3, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU58iii (5.42 – 6.15)	 	Connie: I can make a difference Pearl: Yes, excellent! Connie: I can be there for him. I can be his knight. I can do it for him. Connie & Pearl: You do it for her. Pearl: Okay, now do that again Connie: Yes, ma'am! Pearl: You do it for her and now you say- Connie: I'll do it for him

To provide context, the **SU58i**, **SU58ii**, and **SU58iii** revolve around Connie taking up sword-fighting lessons with Pearl.

The temporal syntagm from **SU58i**, to **SU58ii**, to **SU58iii** exhibit different paradigms for Connie's attire. In **SU58i**, Connie is portrayed to be wearing collared tank top with a skirt. In **SU58ii**, Connie's outfit is changed to a t-shirt and an overall. Later in **SU58iii**, Connie's outfit is changed to a sword-fighting outfit. The gradual change in Connie's attire metaphorically signify her changing persona from what is socially expected of a lady, to what is actually capable of a lady; while maintaining a feminine demeanour.

Additionally, the spatial syntagms of bandages, sword, and fighting stance in **SU58iii**, build towards the metonymy of a resignified womanhood; that the idea of womanhood is not confined to the traditional idea of femininity.

Verbally, the lyrics in **SU58iii** exhibit the paradigm "human" rather than "woman" to be syntagmatically related to "just a". This word choice highlights human incapability, rather than focusing on gender; connoting gender neutrality. Additionally, the paradigm "knight" has been syntagmatically related to the possessive pronoun "his"; and attributed to Connie via the personal pronoun "I". Knights are traditionally assumed to be a male role; thus, Connie's undertaking of the role parodizes traditional dynamics of gender role.

Intersemiotically, the visual and verbal signs in **SU58i**, **SU58ii**, and **SU58iii** augment one another in connoting the idea of resignified womanhood. Connie's character development hence, parodizes what is heteronormatively expected of a woman's character by subverting traditional gender roles and expressions. Conclusively, the visual and verbal signs in **SU58i**, **SU58ii**, and **SU58iii** are connotatively-subversive.

Furthermore, resignification of binary gender expressions is observable in the dynamics of Steven-Connie relationship. One exemplification is in **SU58iv**:

Table 4.4 Exemplification 4

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU58iv (8.18 – 9.41)		Connie: I can **give you my service**. Steven: No, I don't want you to.

Table 4.4, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU58iv (8.18 – 9.41)	  	Connie: Steven, I'm doing this for you! **I need to be able to protect you**. Steven: But if you're the one protecting me, then who's protecting you? Someday soon, we're going to fight some really bad guys; and when that day comes**, I wanna fight with you – together**. So please, won't you **share** this jam with me? Connie: This is much easier. Steven: That's the idea. No matter what comes, **we do this together**. Pearl: Steven! Steven, don't interfere. She needs to take me on herself. Steven: Why? **We're a team**. She's the strawberry. Connie: And he's the biscuit. Steven: And that makes us, jam- Connie: Buds!

SU58iv depicts Steven and Connie working together to fend off against Pearl during a training session.

Visually, the prominent visual paradigms in **SU58iv** are Connie's sword and Steven's shield. In **SU58iv**, Steven and Connie simultaneously carry the roles of defender and attacker. Connie uses the sword both offensively and defensively; and Steven uses the shield both offensively and defensively. The fluid roles of Connie's sword and Steven's shield in their combative dynamics establish the synecdoche of Steven and Connie's fluid roles in their relationship.

Additionally, the spatial syntagm during Steven and Connie's charge towards Pearl in **SU58iv** portray symmetrical proxemics. Temporally, the shot was animated after Steven and Connie reached an agreement on their roles. The spatial and temporal syntagms in **SU58iv** thus, establish the symmetrical proxemics in **SU58iv** as a metonymy for proportional dynamics in Steven-Connie relationship.

Verbally, the paradigms "team" and "together" have been syntagmatically related to the pronoun "we" (referring to Steven and Connie) in **SU58iv**. Attributing "team" and "together" that carry the sememe of "close association" to Steven and Connie, establish collaborative dynamics instead of subservience in their relationship. Additionally, the syntagmatic relations between the pronouns in **SU58iv** exhibit a shift from singular pronouns (i.e. I-you and he-she) to plural personal pronoun (i.e. we) when Steven and Connie refer to themselves. The syntagmatic shift between pronouns signifies a changing dynamics in their relationship into a more collaborative one.

Intersemiotically, the visual and verbal signs in **SU58iv** augment one another to connote symmetrical dynamics between male and female. **SU58iv** resignifies traditional binarism via its representation of equal and collaborative dynamics in a male-female relationship over subservience; and hence, are considered to be connotatively-subversive.

Another observation on the resignification of binary gender expressions can be made on Barb's non-normative maternal role; observable in **SU69i**, **SU69ii**, **SU69iii**, **SU69iv**, and **SU69v**:

Table 4.5 Exemplification 5

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU69iii (3.46 – 4.02)	 	Steven: Barb, I knew you deliver mail; but I never know you deliver Sadie. Sadie: Yeah, **my mom's the mailman**. Barb: That she is! Best dang **mailman woman** around them on the force. At least until they **catch me taking from the lost mail bin**. But that's between us, eh?
SU69iv (4.36 – 4.57)		Barb: Oh look, it's your old **ballet outfit**. Steven: You were a ballerina?

Table 4.5, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU69iv (4.36 – 4.57)	 	Sadie: When I was like 10. Barb: Ooh, it's your swimsuit. She used to be a competitive swimmer. Sadie: For like a month, when I was like 11. Steven: Barb, what's this? Barb: Look! Look! Remember when I used to drive you to your **softball games**?
SU69v (4.56 – 5.04)	 	Sadie: I remember when you **punched the umpire**. Barb: **That's what he gets for trying to cheat my daughter out of a double**!

To provide context, Barb is Sadie's mother who is canonically described to be a single mother.

In **SU69iii**, **SU69iv**, and **SU69v,** the paradigmatic choices for Barb's visual features are inarguably masculine for a female character. Barb is depicted with short tomboyish hair, and a mailman attire consisting of shorts and shirt. The visual paradigms for Barb's appearance in **SU69iii**, **SU69iv**, and **SU69v** build towards the metonymy of non-normative gender expression.

Additionally, the notion of Barb's profession as a "mailman" is also indicative of non-normativity. Paradigmatically, Sugar selected mail delivery as her profession to negate stereotypical gender role for a woman.

In **SU69iv**, Barb is seen holding Sadie's ballet outfit, swimsuit, and softball uniform. The paradigmatic visual choices of a ballet outfit, a swimsuit, and a softball uniform signify Barb's gender neutrality in parenting, in the sense that Barb did not push Sadie into binary gender expressions: be it of femininity or masculinity. Rather, Barb's parenting provide gender neutral experiences for Sadie (from heteronormative standards); with ballet as a feminine experience, swimming as a neutral experience, and softball as a masculine experience.

Verbally, Sadie and Barb describe Barb's profession as a "mailman" in **SU69iii**. The deliberate paradigmatic choice of the word "mailman" instead of "mailwoman" negate the idea of gender binary in the job profession. Additionally, the choice of word "mailman" neutralizes gender ascriptions to not just the profession, but the morpheme "man" itself when Barb, a sexually female character, is ascribed to it.

In **SU69v**, Sadie's dialogue described a previous incident involving Barb punching the umpire of Sadie's baseball tournament. The dialogue establishes aggression in Barb's character; an attribute that is traditionally ascribed to masculinity. Observably, Sugar attempts to resignify aggression to a more gender neutral position; rather than having

aggressive behaviour normalized in males and masculinity. Using aggression in Barb's parenting style establishes Barb as a parent with non-normative maternal role.

Observably, the intersemiotic relations between the verbal and visual signs in **SU69iii**, **SU69iv**, and **SU69v** is complementarity. The meanings from the visuals augment the meanings from the verbal signs; and parodizes heteronormative expectations for a mother. Hence, **SU69iii**, **SU69iv**, and **SU69v** are connotatively-subversive for Barb's representation of non-normative maternal role.

To reiterate, the four phenomenon discussed in this section are: gender neutrality in Steven's character, Connie's character development, the dynamics of Steven-Connie relationship, and the non-normative maternal role of Barb.

4.2 Representations of Queer Relationships

Since the social aspect of the adopted model is based upon heteronormativity, queer relationships in this paper would refer to non-heterosexual relationships. That being said, the technicality of the lore in *Steven Universe* (i.e. Gem's sexual monomorphism) makes definitions of relationships in the cartoon difficult; despite critics claiming the cartoon to depict homosexuality. In answering this issue, this paper argues that sexual monomorphism in *Steven Universe* is a metaphor of queer identity. Consequently, this section shall examine four phenomenon in the cartoon: the symbolic relationship of Ruby and Sapphire, the symbolic relationship of Pearl and Rose, the symbolic relationship of Jasper and Lapis, and the symbolic relationship of Greg and Rose.

One of the most highlighted relationships in *Steven Universe* is of Ruby and Sapphire. To note, discussions on Ruby and Sapphire shall only focus on them as separate characters; and shall not focus on the fusion of the two, Garnet (except for **SU49iv** because the dialogues of Garnet in the episode refer to Ruby and Sapphire). Hence, this paper shall first observe **SU49i, SU49ii, and SU49iv**:

Table 4.6 Exemplification 6

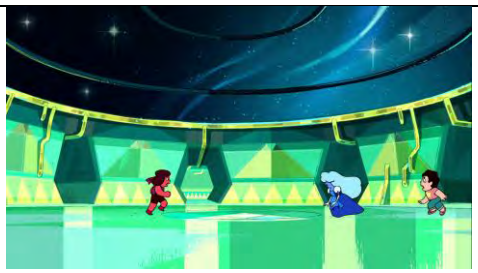
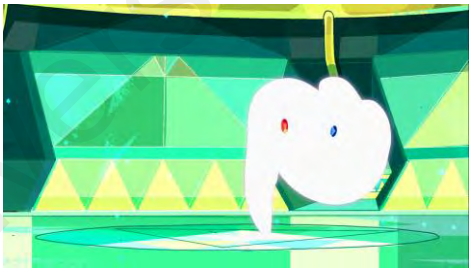
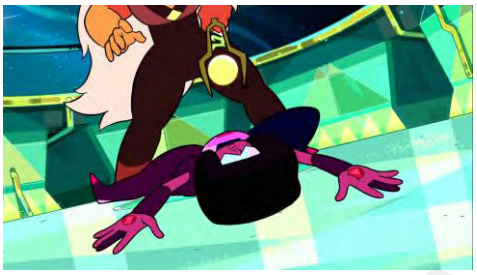
Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU49i (4.30 – 4.39)	 	Ruby: **Did they hurt you**? Sapphire: No, no, I'm okay. **Did they hurt you**? Ruby: Who cares? Sapphire: **I do**.
SU49ii (4.39 – 4.45)	  	(*Laughs*)

Table 4.6, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU49iv (6.03 – 6.21)	  	*Song – Stronger than You, cont.*) Go ahead and try and hit me if you're able. **Can't you see that my relationship is stable**? **I can see you hate the way we intermingle** but I think you're mad cause **you're single**. And we're **not gonna stop what we've made together**. **We are gonna stay like this forever**.

In general, Sapphire possesses more feminine traits through her appearance: a dress, long hair, and lady-like demeanour; while Ruby possesses more masculine traits: pants, shorter hair, and boyish demeanour. And despite the absence of sex, both Ruby and Sapphire appear to be sexually coded with more female-coded traits through their bodily figures and voices. For that matter, this paper argues that Saphhire is the symbolic representation of a feminine female while Ruby is the symbolic representation of a masculine female despite the two being part of the sexually monomorphic Gem race.

In **SU49i** and **SU49ii**, Ruby and Sapphire is portrayed to be running towards one another before hugging and kissing. The paradigmatic choices for their actions establish

the metonymy of deep affections between the two characters. The hug and kiss on the eye are deliberate visual choices by Sugar to negate impressions of platonic relationship between the two characters; and build impressions of a romantic one to the viewers. Hence, the depiction of two characters with female-coded traits of differing gender expressions is argued to symbolically represent a lesbian relationship between a masculine female (Ruby) and a feminine female (Sapphire).

Syntagmatically, the spatial and temporal syntagms do not contribute significant meaning towards the idea of lesbian relationship.

Verbally, the dialogue exchange between Ruby and Sapphire in **SU49i** also suggests a romantic relationship rather than a platonic one. The sentential paradigm "Who cares?" has been syntagmatically followed by the sentential paradigm "I do" to signify deep affection between the two characters.

Additionally, the lyrics in "*Stronger than You*" explicitly confirm Ruby and Sapphire's romantic relationship. In **SU49iv**, the lines "Can't you see that my *relationship* is stable" and "but I think you're just mad cause you're *single*" creates syntagmatic contrasts through the paradigms "relationship" and "single". Garnet syntagmatically relate "relationship" to the possessive pronoun "my"; and single to the pronoun "you" (referring to Jasper) to signify that Ruby and Sapphire is in a relationship.

The visual and verbal signs in **SU49i** and **SU49ii**, as well as the verbal signs in **SU49iv** thus, represents queer relationship. Ruby and Sapphire, and the depiction of their relationship parodize normative heterosexual relationship; and hence, is considered connotatively-subversive.

Another exemplification of Ruby and Sapphire's queer relationship is observable in **SU64i** and **SU64ii**:

Table 4.7 Exemplification 7

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU64i (3.24 – 3.41)	 	Ruby: She lied to us so we would form Sardonyx. She tricked us. Don't you feel used? Steven: Ruby, Sapphire Sapphire: You're choosing to take it personally. Ruby: It's fusion, Sapphire! **What's more personal to us than fusion**!
SU64ii (9.54 – 10.30)	  	Sapphire: You honestly think I'm not upset about what happened? I was just trying to do the right thing. Ruby: I know. You know what's nice about being **split up**? Sapphire: What? Ruby: **I get to look at you**. (*Laughs*) Sapphire: Be serious.

Table 4.7, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU64ii (9.54 – 10.30)		Ruby: **There's my laughie Saphie**. Sapphire: **You're embarrassing me in front of Steven**.

To provide context, the episode follows the story of a big fight between Ruby and Sapphire over Pearl's deceptive measures to fuse with them to form Sardonyx.

SU64i visually depicts Ruby and Sapphire as two separate entities instead of Garnet; and the two are unable to re-fuse due to their disputes. The visual depiction of Ruby and Sapphire as two separate entities signify a split-up between the two since Garnet is the symbol of their relationship. The paradigms of Ruby's frustrated facial expression and Sapphire's back-turn in **SU64i**, as well as the spatial syntagm of an empty double bed behind them, establish the synecdoche of relationship disputes.

Subsequently in **SU64ii**, Ruby is talking Sapphire into reconciling with her. The paradigmatic visual choices of Ruby pushing Sapphire's hair, Sapphire crying into the right hand of Ruby, and Ruby kissing the neck of Sapphire, establish the metonymy of a romantic relationship. The temporal syntagm of Steven blushing over the sight of Ruby and Sapphire's reconciliation further negates audience's interpretation of Ruby and Sapphire's relationship as platonic; and directs interpretation towards a romantic one.

Verbally, Ruby explicitly uses the word "split-up" to refer to their unfusing in **SU64ii**. Rather than "fight", "disagreement", "separation", or other verbal choices of the same paradigm, Sugar chose the word "split-up" since the word is usually ascribed to separation

in a marriage or romantic partnership. Thus, the paradigmatic choice "split-up" is deliberate to suggest disputes in a romantic relationship.

In **SU64ii** as well, the sentential paradigms "I get to look at you" and "There's my laughy Saphie" establish a flirtatious tone in their dialogue exchange. Additionally, the sentential paradigm "You are embarrassing me in front of Steven" implies that their actions and dialogues are supposed to be private; connoting romantic relationship.

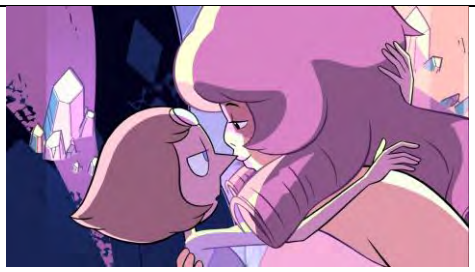
The verbal and visual signs in **SU64i** and **SU64ii** intersemiotically augments one another in signifying queer relationship. Consequently, the depiction of Ruby and Sapphire in **SU64i** and **SU64ii**, is connotatively-subversive for its representation of non-normative relationship.

Aside from Ruby and Sapphire, representation of queer relationships in *Steven Universe* can also be observed in Rose and Pearl's relationship. Similar to Ruby and Sapphire, the relationship between Rose and Pearl is difficult to define since the technicality of the lore in *Steven Universe* nullifies the concept of sex in Gem-raced characters. That being said, a similar logical reasoning can be derived on the based on the observation on the visual portrayal of the sex traits and gender expressions. Consequently, this paper shall examine the visual signs in **SU64i** (since the scene has no dialogues):

Table 4.8 Exemplification 8

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU61iv (3.52 – 4.29)		(*Music only*)

Table 4.8, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU61iv (3.52 – 4.29)	  	(*Music only*)

In general, both Rose and Pearl is observed to possess feminine traits through their physical appearances: Rose with her dress, long curly pink hair, pink lips and feminine demeanour; and Pearl with her ballet outfit and feminine demeanour. And despite the absence of sex in the Gem race, both Rose and Pearl are sexually coded with female-coded traits though their bodily figures and voices. Sexuality-wise, Pearl's attraction to Rose signifies homosexuality while Rose's attraction to gendered (Greg) and non-gendered (Pearl) beings signifies pansexuality. Thus, this paper argues that Pearl is the symbolic representation of a homosexual feminine female while Rose is the symbolic representation of a pansexual feminine female.

SU61iv depict Pearl suggesting to Rose into fusing with her to become Rainbow Quartz.

The visual paradigms of slow dance and affectionate eye contact between Pearl and Rose prior to their fusing in **SU61iv**, establish the metonymy of deep affection. Understanding that fusing is the ultimate connection between two Gems, this paper sees Sugar's choice of deep affection as the pre-requisite for Pearl and Rose's fusing, as a signifier to suggest non-platonic affection between the two characters.

Additionally, the spatial syntagms of pink and purple hues in **SU61iv** establish passion as the atmosphere during the scene; suggesting romantic relationship. Thus, the visual signs in **SU61iv** establish Pearl and Rose's relationship as a romantic one.

Another exemplification of Pearl-Rose relationship is observable in **SU45i** and **SU45ii**:

Table 4.9 Exemplification 9

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU45i (2.03 – 2.17)		Pearl: Oh, it's been ages. *(Startled)* What is it Steven? Steven: What was mom like? Pearl: **She was courageous; and brilliant; and beautiful**.

Table 4.9, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU45i (2.03 – 2.17)		Pearl: Sometimes, you look so much like her.
SU45ii (5.45 – 6.05)	  	Pearl: No, rose didn't have a lion; because if Rose had a lion, **I would have known about it**. Garnet: Rose kept many things secret; even from us. Pearl: **But not from me! I was the one she told everything**. Amethyst: Yo, you're not the only one who misses her! Pearl: **You can't understand how I feel! None of you had what we had**.

In **SU45i**, Pearl is seen to be reminiscing Rose after being asked to describe Rose's character by Steven. To note, the scene is played out after Rose's demise.

In **SU45i**, Sugar made the paradigmatic choice to depict Pearl blushing while describing Rose's character; followed by the temporal syntagm of Rose's portrait on the

wall. The scene establishes the metonymy of deep affection; directing audience towards interpreting Pearl's affection as a romantic one.

Additionally, **SU45ii** depicts Pearl's reaction towards knowing Rose's past possession of Lion. **SU45ii** portray the paradigms of Pearl blushing, tearing up, and getting angry over not knowing of Lion's existence and its relationship to Rose. The paradigmatic choices to depict a myriad of emotions signify strong affections Pearl hold towards Rose.

Verbally, the paradigmatic choices of "courageous", "brilliant" and "beautiful" in Pearl's description of Rose in **SU45i** signify Pearl's deep admiration towards Rose. The word "courageous" connotes character, the word "brilliant" connotes reasoning, and the word "beautiful" connotes physicality; signifying different levels of admiration Pearl has towards Rose.

Additionally, in **SU45ii**, the sentential paradigms "I would have known about it", "I was the one she told everything", and "None of you had what we had" establish the metonymy of jealousy that Pearl feels. Pearl's jealousy establish her feelings towards Rose as a romantic one.

Intersemiotically, the visual signs in **SU45i** and **SU45ii** augment the intended meaning in the dialogues. While **SU45i** and **SU45ii** merely signify affection, the notion that it occurs after Rose's demise connote a deeper meaning; that **SU45i** and **SU45ii** establish Pearl's inability to move on from Rose. Consequently, **SU45i** and **SU45ii** display dynamics in a queer relationship. The dynamics adds a sense of normalcy and familiarity in the viewing of queer relationships; that queer relationships face similar hurdles as socially normative relationships. This dynamics thus, parodizes the view that queer relationships is foreign from heteronormative relationship, and establishes the notion that queer relationships are as familiar and normal as socially normative relationships. For that matter, the visual and verbal signs in **SU45i** and **SU45ii** are connotatively-subversive.

Furthermore, the discussions on the symbolic representation of queer relationships in Rose and Pearl can also be examined in **SU86i**:

Table 4.10 Exemplification 10

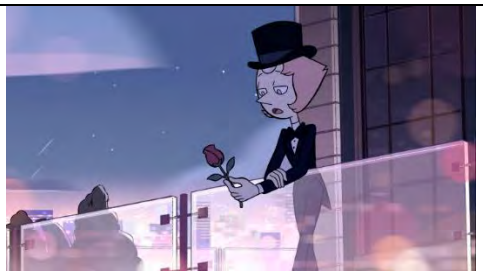
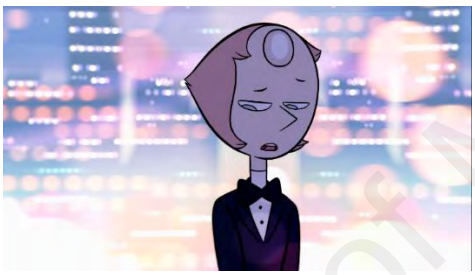
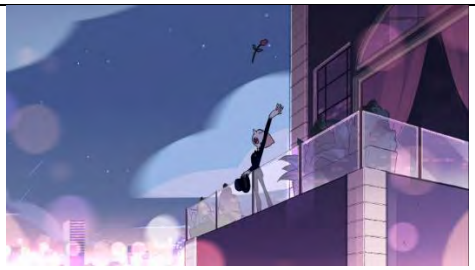
Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU86i (5.41 – 7.42)	  	(Song – It's Over isn't It? Pearl: I was fine with the men; who would come into her life now and again. I was fine, cause I knew that they didn't really matter until you. I was fine when you came and **we fought like it was all some silly game over her**, **who she'd choose after all those years**, I never thought **I'd lose**. It's over, isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it over? It's over, isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it over? **You won, and she chose you and she loved you; and she's gone**. It's over, isn't it? **Why can't I move on**? **War and glory, reinvention, fusion, freedom, her attention**. Out in daylight, my potential; bold, precise, experimental. **Who am I now in this world without her**?

Table 4.10, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU86i (5.41 – 7.42)	 	Petty and dull, with the nerve to doubt her. What does it matter? It's already done. Now I've got to be there for her son. It's over, isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it over? It's over, isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it over? **You won, and she chose you and she loved you; and she's gone**. It's over, isn't it? **Why can't I move on?**

To provide context, **SU86i** centres upon the song, "It's over isn't it?" which highlights Pearl trying to make peace with herself over Rose's demise, and Rose's choice of Greg over her.

This paper argues that **SU86i** presents the notion of unrequited love in queer relationships. In **SU86i**, the visual paradigm of a red rose establishes the metonymy of love. Subsequently, the paradigm of Pearl flinging it away, signifies Pearl's letting go of her love for Rose.

SU86i also depicts the visual paradigm of cloud formation containing Pearl, Rose, and Greg; narrating Pearl's unrequited love. The frame in this particular scene portrays cloud Rose holding cloud Greg's hands with cloud Pearl watching by the side. Pearl is also seen reaching her hands to the images formed in the cloud. Additionally, the sentential

paradigms in **SU86i**, “Who she'd choose after all those years”, “I never thought I’d lose”, and “You won, and she chose you and she loved you; and she's gone” establish the metonymy of Pearl’s unrequited love.

In **SU86i**, Pearl’s affection for Rose can be observed in the syntagmatic relations between the paradigms in the line, “war and glory, reinvention, fusion, freedom, her attention”. Sugar made the syntagmatic verbal choice to include war, freedom, and Rose’s attention in the same line; establishing Pearl’s high admiration of Rose, that Rose’s attention is on the same level as war and freedom in the eyes of Pearl.

Observably, the visual signs in **SU86i** augments the meaning of the verbal signs and vice versa. And from the visual-verbal signs in **SU86i**, a new layer to Pearl-Rose’s relationship can be derived: that Pearl highly admires Rose but her feelings are unrequited. The dynamics adds another facet of normalcy and familiarity in the viewing of queer relationships; that queer relations also face the issue of unrequited love. **SU86i** thus, parodizes the view that queer relationships is foreign from heteronormative relationship. Consequently, the visual-verbal signs in **SU86i** are considered connotatively-subversive.

Additionally, representation of queer relationships in *Steven Universe* is also observable in the symbolic relationship between Lapis and Jasper, in **SU93i** and **SU93ii**:

Table 4.11 Exemplification 11

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU93i (7.52 – 8.29)		Lapis: I’m really trying to enjoy it out here; but **I can’t stop thinking about being fused with Malachite**. How I used all my-

Table 4.11, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU93i (7.52 – 8.29)	 	-strength to hold her down in the ocean. How I was always battling against Jasper **to keep her bound to me**. Steven: But it's not like that anymore. You don't have to be with Jasper. Lapis: That's not it. **I missed her**. Steven: What? Lapis: **We were fused for so long**. Steven: But, she's terrible. Lapis: I'm terrible! I did horrible things.

In general, Lapis can be observed to possess more feminine traits through her physical appearance: a skirt, tank top, and girly demeanour; while Jasper can be observed to possess more masculine traits: pants and manly demeanour. Despite the absence of sex, Lapis can be observed appear to be sexually coded with female-coded traits though her bodily figures and voices.

Contrastingly, Jasper is more difficult to define since her physicality is coded with a combination of male-coded trait: bulky body, and female-coded trait: coarse female voice.

That being said, this paper argues that Jasper's sex is more symbolic of a bulky female since her physicality bulks up on the bust and the bum; as illustrated in Figure 4.1. This paper, thus argues that Lapis is the symbolic representation of a feminine female while Jasper is the symbolic representation of a masculine female.

Figure 4.1 Jasper with Lapis

In **SU93i**, the sentential paradigms "I can't stop thinking about being fused with Malachite", "I was always battling against Jasper to keep her bound to me" and "I missed her" establish the metonymy of toxic relationship between Lapis and Jasper. The contrastive paradigms of "bound" and "battling" against "miss" and "can't stop thinking" create the irony that direct audience's interpretation towards toxic relationship.

Additionally, during the utterance of Lapis' dialogues in **SU93i**, Lapis' facial expressions depict uneasiness; despite the dialogues indicating her longing for Jasper. Syntagmatically, the spatial syntagms in **SU93i** depict dark hue and bad weather; establishing a gloomy atmosphere during the scene. This paper argues that the visual and verbal signs in **SU93i** diverges with one another to create an intersemiotic irony that connote toxic relationship.

The representation of toxic queer relationship in **SU93i** is significant in presenting another dynamics in queer relationship. The dynamics adds another facet of normalcy and familiarity in the viewing of queer relationships; that queer relations also face the issue of toxic relationships. The inculcation of normalcy and familiarity through multiple

representations of relationship dynamics, parodizes the normative view that queer relationships is foreign from heteronormative relationships. Consequently, the visual-verbal signs in **SU93i** is considered connotatively-subversive.

Moreover, representation of queer relationships in *Steven Universe* is also observable in Greg and Rose's relationship. Different from the 3 exemplifications discussed earlier, the relationship of Greg and Rose is more complex since it involves a relationship between a Gem and a human; whereas the earlier exemplifications only focus on Gem-Gem relationships. Thus, a logical reasoning based on the visual portrayal of the sex traits and gender expressions of the two characters, as well as the consideration on the textual narrative shall be considered.

Consequently, this paper shall examine the visual and verbal signs in **SU61vii** and **SU61viii**:

Table 4.12 Exemplification 12

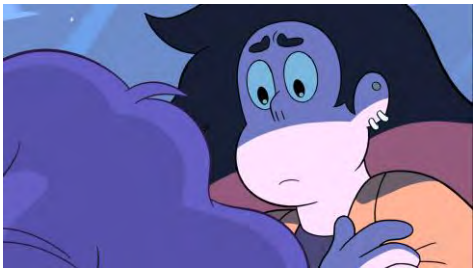
Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU61vii (7.56 – 8.22)	 	Greg: We- we **didn't fuse**. Rose: What? **We can't fuse. You're a human**. Greg: I know. That's the problem. **I'm just a human**. Rose: **That's not a problem**. I love humans. They're all so funny.

Table 4.12, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU61viii (8.54 – 9.39)	  	Rose: **I'm not a real person**. I thought- Haven't we? Is this not how it works? Greg: Oh boy. This is so weird. **You really are an alien**. Rose: Why are you laughing? Why are you crying? Greg: **How are we gonna make this work**? Rose: Fusion? Greg: No, us. **We're really really different**. Rose: What do we do now? Greg: **Let's just talk**. I barely know you.

Generally, defining Greg's sexual and gender identities is easy since he is canonically a male human. From the observations on his gender expressions and physical traits, Greg can be described as the representation of a heterosexual cisgender male.

In regards to Rose, this paper argues that despite earlier interpretation that Rose is the symbolic representation of a pansexual feminine female, in the context of his relationship with Greg, Rose connotes a different meaning. Rose's representation of multiple

meanings is parallel with the concept of double connotative coding; that one sign can maintain multiple connotative meanings.

It is important to consider the narrative paradigm that Rose is sexually monomorphic despite having feminine gender expressions; and is thus, non-normative in the eyes of Greg. Consequently, this paper argues that in context of Rose's relationship with Greg, Rose symbolically represents a transwoman. The argumentation comes from the notion that Rose do not originally have a female physical form; and chose to transition into it. Greg and Rose's relationship is therefore, symbolic of one between a cisgender heterosexual male and a pansexual transwoman.

To provide context, **SU61vii** and **SU61viii**, revolve around the plot of Greg attempting to fuse with Rose after discovering that fusion is the Gem race's ultimate form of connection; albeit resulting in his failure. It is important to note that Greg textually represents the "non-normative" in the "normativity" of the Gem-race.

In **SU61vii**, the visual paradigm depicts Greg kissing with Rose in his attempt to fuse with her; followed by his disappointed facial expression. Additionally, the sentential paradigms of "We didn't fuse" and "That's the problem" augments the atmosphere of disappointment established through the visuals. This paper argues that Greg's disappointment in **SU61vii** connote a subversive meaning.

In the context of Gem race, fusing is the normative method to connect with one another; and thus, Greg's inability to fuse connote his inability to connect normatively with his partner. Following this logical reasoning, the situation between Greg and Rose signify the notion of failed attempt to connect normatively (i.e. fusing) between a being of normative identity (i.e. Rose) and a being of non-normative identity (i.e. Greg).

The sentential paradigms of "You really are an alien", "How can we make this work?", and "We're really really different" in **SU61viii** establish Greg's realization of his non-

normativity to Rose, and Rose's non-normativity to him. Subsequently, the temporal syntagm ensues a visual paradigm of a hug between Rose and Greg, and the sentential paradigm "Let's just talk". Based on the paradigms of hugging and talking, **SU67viii** establish the metaphorical representation that the normative (i.e. fusion) is not the only way to connect; and that the non-normative (i.e. hugging and talking) can also achieve the end point in relationships.

Intersemiotically, the visual and verbal signs in **SU61vii** and **SU61viii** augment the meaning embedded in them. By presenting Greg as the non-normative, Sugar parodizes heteronormatively constructed myth of gender; and **SU61vii** and **SU61viii** are thus, connotatively-subversive.

To conclude the discussions in this section, this paper has examined four phenomenon pertaining to representation of queer relationships: the symbolic relationship of Ruby and Sapphire, the symbolic relationship of Pearl and Rose, the symbolic relationship of Jasper and Lapis, and the symbolic relationship of Greg and Rose.

4.3 Symbolic Representations of Trans Identities

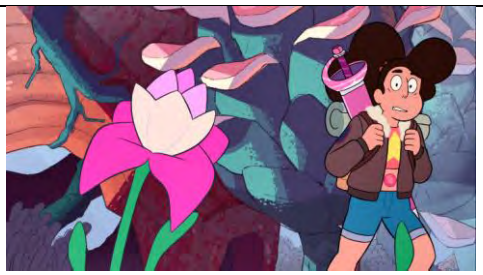
This paper argues that Rebecca Sugar attempts to achieve subversion through the symbolic representations of trans identities. To contextualize, trans identities refers to social identities with incoherence between assigned sex, and gender identities and expressions. In *Steven Universe*, Sugar has created many instances that defy sex-gender consistency. To prove this claim, this section shall examine two phenomenon in the cartoon: Stevonnie as a symbolic representation of trans identity; and Steven's gender-bending drag performance.

Firstly, the symbolic representation of trans identities is observable in Stevonnie. To note, Stevonnie is the fusion between Steven and Connie; whereby Steven is canonically known as a male and Connie is a female. While fusions between Gems would not incur

complications in defining sex since they are canonically asexual, the fusion between two sexed beings (of different sexes) would inarguably complicate identity definition.

To discuss, this paper shall examine the exemplifications in **SU140i** and **SU140ii**:

Table 4.13 Exemplification 13

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU140i (1.30 – 1.33)		Stevonnie: Okay, **we're** fine. **I'm** fine.
SU140ii (3.20 – 3.31)	  	(*Background music*).

To provide context to the scenes, **SU140i** and **SU140ii** centre upon the plot of Stevonnie's adventure to survive on an alien moon as they wait for Lars to rescue them.

In general, Stevonnie's physique portrays androgyny. Despite Stevonnie's representational age range of a young adult, their physical body does not depict dominantly male or dominantly female physique; except for the long ponytail which typically resemble female hair. Stevonnie has not developed bust and bum of an adult female; nor a more muscular build of an adult male. Therefore, Stevonnie cannot be deduced as either male or female, but rather, a non-binary character of a third sex.

In **SU140ii**, a significant visual paradigm is Stevonnie's facial hair. Understanding that Connie is part of Stevonnie, to have Stevonnie experiencing the growth of facial hair and its shaving, which is generally an exclusively male experience, provide Connie with transmale experience. From a similar angle, Steven's experience of having female hair as Stevonnie provide him with a transfemale experience. The facial hair in **SU140ii** thus, establishes the synecdoche of trans experiences that Steven and Connie are experiencing as Stevonnie.

Additionally, the paradigms of gender-ambiguous attire for Stevonnie provide transgendered experience for Steven and Connie during their fusion as Stevonnie.

Observably, Stevonnie as a character parodizes heteronormative sex and gender by symbolically introducing a third sex. The introduction of third sex using Stevonnie represents trans experiences in the cartoon. Thus, Stevonnie as a symbolic sign is connotatively-subversive.

To further discuss Stevonnie as the symbolic representation of trans experience, this paper shall examine **SU61i** and **SU61ii**:

Table 4.14 Exemplification 14

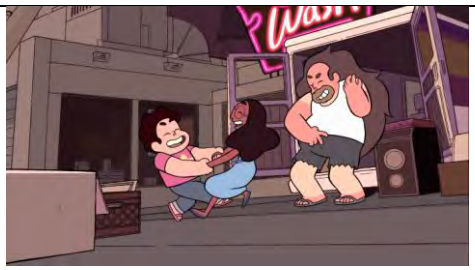
Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU61i (0.58- 1.09)	   	(*Laughs*) Steven: Come on-
SU61ii (1.10 – 143)		Greg: **You two can fuse**? Steven: Aah, yes? Greg: Th- that's incredible. Since when? Wait, how is this even possible?

Table 4.14, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU61ii (1.10 – 143)	 	Steven: The gems think it's because I'm half human. Connie: **Please don't tell my parents, Mr. Universe**. They don't know I've been doing magic stuffs with Steven. I can't tell them, they're not going to understand. I- Greg: Whoa, it's okay. **I might be the only human being on the planet who's going to understand**.

To provide context to the scene, **SU61i** and **SU61ii** portray Steven and Connie's accidental fusing in front of Greg; which happens to be Greg's first witnessing of Stevonnie

In **SU61i**, Rebecca Sugar chose the spatial syntagm of pink and white as the hue to syntagmatically relate with the paradigms of Connie's light blue dress and Steven's usual pink t-shirt during Steven's and Connie's fusion scene. The colour choices during this scene establishes the metonymy of trans experience since pink, light blue, and white are the colour for transsexual flags-:

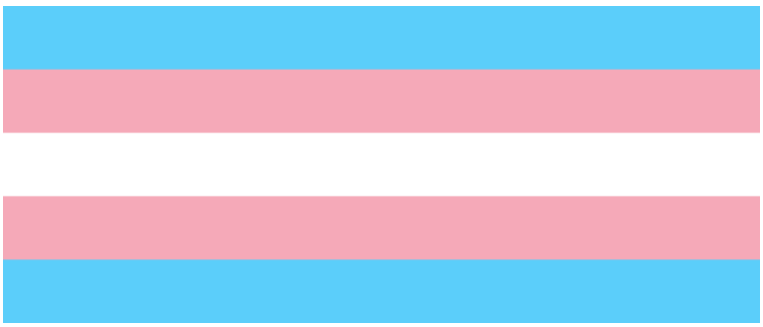


Figure 4.2 Trans pride flag by Helms (1999) (as cited in Fairyington, 2014)

While this small semiotic detail might not heavily impact the viewing of the cartoon, it adds a connotative layer in signifying Stevonnie as a symbol of trans identity.

Additionally, the sentential paradigms "Please don't tell my parents, Mr. Universe", "I can't tell them", and "They are not going to understand" by Connie **SU61ii**, establish the metonymy of social unacceptance by alluding queer references. Stevonnie is contextualized into an experience that should be "closeted" and incomprehensible by the socially normative society; (in this case, represented by Connie's parents). Plus, the visual paradigms in **SU61ii** concurrently augment the meaning of social unacceptance through Connie's and Steven's facial expression; providing context to the audience that Stevonnie is an experience that Steven and Connie are not comfortable sharing with others.

In addition, symbolic representation of trans experience in *Steven Universe* can also be observed in Steven's gender-bending drag performance in **SU69viii**:

Table 4.15 Exemplification 15

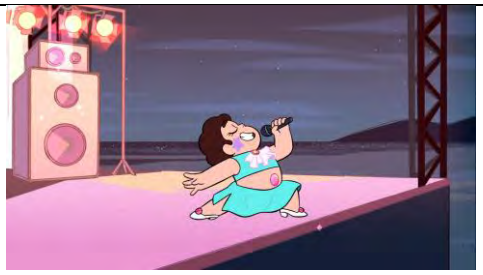
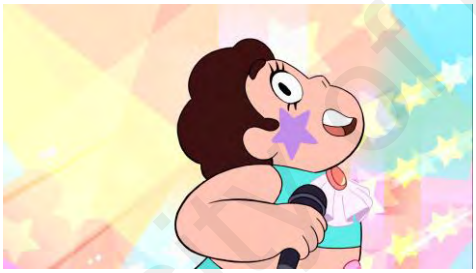
Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU69viii (10.23 – 10.55)		(*Song – Haven't You Noticed*) Steven: **I can't help it if I make a scene**. Stepping out of my **hot pink limousine**.

Table 4.15, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU69viii (10.23 – 10.55)	  	**I'm turning heads and I'm stopping traffic**. **When I pose, they scream and when I joke, they laugh**. I've got a pair of eyes that they're getting lost in. **They're hypnotized by my way of walking. I've got them dazzled like a stage magician** When I point, they look and when I talk, they listen. Well, everybody needs a friend And I've got you, and you, and you. So many I can't even name them! Can you blame me? I'm too famous!

To provide context, **SU69viii** portrays Steven taking Sadie's place as the mystery girl, to sing "Haven't You Noticed?" for the annual Beach-a-palooza talent show.

In **SU69viii**, Sugar made the paradigmatic choice to have Steven wearing Sadie's attire and make-up; establishing the image of drag during the performance. While audience would anticipate shock and disbelief from the crowd in **SU69viii**, the temporal syntagm

depicts otherwise; that the crowd supports and cheers for Steven's gender-bending performance. Through **SU69viii**, Sugar criticizes the notion of heteronormativity that alienates and ostracizes trans experiences (drag) as something peculiar and non-normative; it signifies that the problem does not lie in trans experiences but in how heteronormativity has dictated society to view trans experiences in a negative manner.

Additionally, the verbal signs during Steven's performance in **SU69viii** augments the meaning signified in the visual signs, that the scene ridicules how heteronormativity dictates the viewing of trans experiences as a negative one. The sentential paradigms "I can't help it if I make a scene", "I'm turning heads and I'm stopping traffic", "When I pose, they scream and when I joke, they laugh", "They're hypnotized by my way of walking", and "I've got them dazzled like a stage magician" paint the picture of how society would normally react to a trans person; that trans are typically viewed as a scene of peculiarity. Subsequently, the lyrics indicate how Steven, in the persona of drag, would react to such attention, with confidence and self-love.

Observably, the visual and verbal signs in **SU69viii** augments one another in establishing the criticisms towards the negative viewing of trans experiences. **SU69viii** thus, parodizes how trans experience is normally viewed by depicting a positive acceptance of drag performances by the general public, as well as a positive self-acceptance of trans experience. Based on this argument, **SU69viii** is considered connotatively-subversive.

To conclude the discussions in this section, this paper has examined two phenomenon in the cartoon pertaining to the theme of symbolic representation of trans experience: Stevonnie as a symbolic representation of trans identity; and Steven's gender-bending drag performance.

4.4 Deconstruction of Normative Sexuality and Desires

Normative sexuality refers to the attraction between a female and a male (i.e. heterosexuality). In the context of this paper, deconstruction of normative sexuality and desires refer to the subversion of social normalcy on heterosexuality.

This paper argues that *Steven Universe* creates the textual context that challenges the naturalist and essentialist views on heterosexuality, that heterosexuality is not an inborn natural facticity but rather, a social construct created from social and cultural conventions. In proving this claim, this section shall examine two phenomenon: sexual ambiguity in Greg and Rose's relationship, heteronormative absences in the Human Zoo, and insignificance of sexual definition between Pearl and Mystery Girl.

To examine sexual ambiguity in Greg and Rose's relationship, this paper shall be discuss **SU61vii** and **SU35i**:

Table 4.16 Exemplification 16

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU61vii (7.56 – 8.22)	 	Greg: We- we **didn't fuse**. Rose: What? **We can't fuse. You're a human**. Greg: I know. That's the problem. **I'm just a human**. Rose: **That's not a problem**. I love humans. They're all so funny.

Table 4.16, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU61vii (7.56 – 8.22)		
SU35i (10.08 – 10.43)	  	Rose: Steven, we can't both exist. I'm going to become half of you. And I need you to know that every moment you love being yourself, that's me, loving you and loving being you. Because you're going to be something extraordinary, you're going to be a human being. Greg: Hey Rose! Rose: Take care of them Steven.

In **SU61vii**, Greg attempted to fuse with Rose in his efforts to foster stronger interpersonal intimacy between him and Rose. And as observed in the visual and verbal signs in **SU61vii**, Greg's attempt was to no avail since he is "just a human". While the attempt failed, this scene is significant since it deconstructs the need of sexual definitions and sexuality in a romantic relationship between Greg and Rose. **SU61vii** depicts that Greg is

willing to disregard the social concept of the sexed body and sexuality, and opted for an asexual concept of fusion from the Gem race to connect with Rose.

In **SU35i**, the visual paradigm of Rose with a protruding belly establish the metonymy of pregnancy. This paper believes that the deliberate depiction by Sugar to visually portray a pregnant Rose is to negate any assumption of Rose conceiving Steven in methods other than pregnancy. What makes the visuals in **SU35i** crucial to be examined is the notion that pregnancy is generally accepted as the nature of a sexed body or more accurately, the nature of a female body.

Considering the canon that Gems are asexual beings, Rose's pregnancy raises the questions of sexual ambiguity and sexual fluidity of the Gem race. From one viewpoint, *Steven Universe* does not only deconstruct normative sexualities and the sexed bodies, the cartoon also deconstructs the notion of asexuality by breaking the normative definitions of asexuality. Consequently, by deconstructing the non-normative other, which in this context is asexuality, the cartoon forces viewers to reconsider their perceived notions of sex, sexuality, and the normative.

Additionally, the verbal signs in **SU35i** generally concur with the visual suggestion of Rose's protruding belly as a sign of pregnancy. In **SU35i**, Rose converses directly with Steven in the video recording; suggesting that the baby she is carrying is Steven. Thus, intersemiotically, the verbal signs in **SU35i** generally concur with its visual signs.

To iterate, this paper believes that **SU61vii** and **SU35i** parodize normative sexuality and desires by deconstructing normative sexual definitions; and subsequently, creating sexual ambiguity in Rose's and Greg's relationship. The notion of deconstructing asexuality in **SU35i** subverts the normative assumptions in heteronormativity that defines asexuality through the heteronormative definitions of the sexed bodies and sexualities. Hence, the visual and verbal signs in **SU65vii** and **SU35i** are connotatively-subversive.

In addition, the deconstruction of normative sexuality and desires can also be observed in the heteronormative absences in the Human Zoo in **SU117i** and **SU117ii**:

Table 4.17 Exemplification 17

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU117i (7.52 – 8.28)	  	Jay-Ten: The **choosening** is a very special event to us. Wy-Six: We're glad to have you with us. It's such a wonderful time. Greg: Glad to be here. The Voice: Let the **choosening** begin. U-12, please step into the centre of the circle. F-3, please step into the centre of the circle. **You have been choosened for each other**. Greg: Wait a minute**, is this some kind of a matchmaking thing**? (*Sigh*) There's always a catch to these utopias.

Table 4.17, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU117ii (9.38 – 10.05)	  	Wy-Six: I see. If that's how it's done on Earth, then **I choose Ga-reg** (Greg). Jay-Ten: And **I also choose Ga-reg**. Greg: Wait! I got a say in this too. You're all very nice and I'm flattered and yes, you get to choose whoever you want. But **I also get to say that I choose none of you**.

To provide context, the episode revolves around Greg's imprisonment inside an interplanetary zoo which houses a utopian society of human beings who are managed and cultivated by Blue Diamond and her court. Since Blue Diamond has no knowledge of the human social systems, the inhabitants of the zoo or the zoomans are managed through an entirely distinctive social system; which consequently, redefines and reconstructs all social constructs, including on the normativity of sex and gender. Thus, norms and social constructs in the Human Zoo are based on the assumptions and expectations of Blue Diamond and do not replicate norms and social constructs of humans on Earth.

SU117i and **SU117ii** depict the scenes in which a social phenomenon exclusive to the zoomans called "the choosening" is carried out. Based on the visual and verbal signs in **SU117i**, the choosening is a mating process between the inhabitants of the Zoo. The sentential paradigm "You have been choosened for each other" and Greg's "is this some kind of a matchmaking thing"; augmented by the visual paradigm of U-12 and F-3 kissing each other, ascertains that the choosening is a mating process. What makes the choosening worth paying attention to is not just the notion that it is a mating process; but the apparent absence of heteronormative norms during the scene.

In **SU117i**, the visual paradigm portrays the zoomans in the same attire, regardless of their sex and gender. Their attires thus, defy the conventions of binarism in the attires of men and women; and is reflective of the asexual nature of the Gem race.

Verbally, the verbal paradigms in **SU117i** portray that the zoomans are named without any ascriptions to gender or sex. Rather, their names are based on numbers and alphabets "U-12" and "F-3". Based on this verbal choice, the gender and sexual identities of the zoomans are not marked through their names and thus, deconstructs the heteronormative concept of binarism in identity markers.

Additionally, **SU117ii** depicts a scene after Greg explained to the zoomans that they should choose who they want to be with; rather than being chosen via the choosening. The visual paradigms in **SU117ii** depict that the zoomans, regardless of their apparent sex and gender expressions, wanted to choose Greg as their partner. Additionally, the sentential paradigms "I choose Ga-reg" and "I also choose Ga-reg" by Wy-Six and Jay-Ten respectively, also establishes the absence of heterosexuality among the zoomans. Therefore, it can be argued that the zoomans do not operate out of heteronormative expectations since their choices of partners disregard gender and sexual identities.

Consequently, **SU117i** and **SU117ii** parodize heteronormativity by depicting a society that is fully functioning without heteronormative norms and expectations. Sugar thus, connotatively subvert the normative by presenting the possibility of cultivating a fully functioning human race that operate without the needs of heteronormative norms to regulate social constructs and phenomenon. In other words, the heteronormative absences in the Human Zoo in the visual and verbal signs in **SU65vii** and **SU35i** deconstructs normative sexualities and desires; and can be considered as connotatively-subversive.

The deconstruction of normative sexuality and desires is also observable in the insignificance of sexual definition between Pearl and Mystery Girl; exemplified in **SU109ii**, and **SU109iii**:

Table 4.18 Exemplification 18

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU109ii (5.50 – 5.59)	 	(*Background music*)
SU109iii (10.09 – 10.35)		Pearl: I asked her about her hair. And then she asked about how I coloured mine. I told her, my appearance is just a conscious manifestation of light.

Table 4.18, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU109iii (10.09 – 10.35)		Pearl: And she said, "I know how that is", although, I highly doubt it. Oh, and then I added, by the way, I save your planet and your species, and you're welcomed. Amethyst: And, how'd that go over? Pearl: Not very well. She walked off after giving me some sort of code.

To provide context, Mystery Girl is a female human who has appeared in one episode of *Steven Universe*. In the episode (Last One out of Beach City), the plot revolves around the story of Pearl's attraction and flirtatious advances towards Mystery Girl.

In **SU109ii**, the visual paradigm of Mystery Girl's glance and smile; syntagmatically related to Pearl's blushing, establishes the metonymy of flirtatious advances. Although it can be argued that Pearl's attraction is normal due to the Gem race's asexual canon, Mystery Girl's (i.e. a female human) flirtatious response towards Pearl in **SU109ii** strengthens Steven Universe's political narrative that sex traits is not the determinant of sexual attractions.

In **SU109iii**, Sugar made the paradigmatic choice to have Mystery Girl handing Pearl her number; establishing a romantic and/or sexual dynamics between Pearl and Mystery Girl. Consequently, since the attraction is a sexual-cum-romantic one, the notion of

attraction regardless of sexual traits in the cartoon establishes a narrative that deconstructs the normative concepts of desires and sexuality that build upon biological essentialism.

To note, the verbal signs in **SU109iii** do not add to the meaning to the visual; and merely concur with the visuals. The notion that the attraction between the two characters puts aside sex traits and sexual definition is coherent with the deconstruction of normative sexuality and desires. Consequently, this deconstruction parodizes biological essentialism in normative sexuality and desires; and hence, indicate that the visual and verbal signs in **SU109ii**, and **SU109iii** are connotatively-subversive.

To conclude the discussions in this section, this paper has examined three phenomenon pertaining to the deconstruction of normative sexualities and desires: sexual ambiguity in Greg and Rose's relationship, heteronormative absences in the Human Zoo, and the insignificance of sexual definition between Pearl and Mystery Girl.

4.5 Parodic Subversion of the Marital System

Inarguably, marriage is one of the most socio-culturally significant recognition in a relationship between two individuals. As defined by Haviland (2011), marriage is a socially or ritually recognized union between two individuals (typically between a male and a female) that establishes interpersonal rights and obligations between the two individuals. While some cultures like America, Finland, and Denmark have granted marital rights to same sex couples; marriage is still generally regarded as a union of a male and female, and thus, placing it as a normatively heterosexual social experience. In this sense, marriage can thus, be regarded as a strong symbol of heteronormativity; which explains the strong rejection of same sex marriage from the heterosexual community.

Understanding the symbolic significance of marriage in a heterosexual relationship, this paper argues that *Steven Universe*, through Ruby and Sapphire's marriage, attempts

to deconstruct marriage as a social symbol of heteronormative recognition by parodizing its conventions.

To further discuss, this paper shall examine **SU149i**, **SU151ii**, and **SU151iii**:

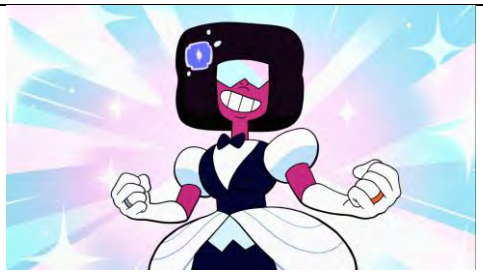
Table 4.19 Exemplification 19

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU149i (10.23 – 11.00)	  	Ruby: Sapphire, **will you marry me**? Sapphire: What? (*Chuckles*) Marry you? Ruby: Yeah. This way, we can **be together** even when we're apart. This time, being **Garnet will be our decision**. What do you say? Sapphire: Of course. Ruby: Yeeha! Sapphire: **I've been waiting to kiss your cute face**.
SU151ii (4.35 – 4.50)		(*Background music*).

Table 4.19, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU151ii (4.35 – 4.50)	 	
SU151iii (6.24 – 6.59)	  	Steven: **Ruby, do you take this gem to have and to hold on this and every other planet in the universe**? Ruby: **I do**! Steven: And Sapphire, do you- Sapphire: **Yes**. Steven: Didn't let me finish. Sapphire: I'm just very excited. Steven: **Then, by the power vested in me by the state of Delmarva, I now pronounce you Garnet**!

Table 4.19, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU151iii (6.24 – 6.59)		

In **SU149i**, Sugar made the paradigmatic visual choice to have Ruby in a cowboy attire and Sapphire in her usual dress during the proposal scene. By changing Ruby's attire to a cowboy attire and maintaining Sapphire's attire, the visuals in the scene establish the gender roles that each of the character assume: that Ruby assumes a masculine role; while Sapphire assumes a feminine role.

Additionally, in **SU149i**, Ruby's assumption of a masculine role is also made apparent through her stance during the proposal scene in which Ruby is on her knees; a stance traditionally assumed by the male counterpart of a marrying couple. On the other hand, Sapphire's assumption of a feminine role is made apparent through her stance in which Sapphire is the standing one; a stance traditionally assumed by the female counterpart of a marrying couple.

And similar to the dynamics of the visuals in **SU149i**, Ruby assumed the traditional masculine role by being the one to utter the performative line "Will you marry me?" while Sapphire assumed the traditional feminine role by being the one to either accept or reject the proposal.

Contrastingly, in **SU151ii**, the paradigmatic visual choice offers an interesting syntagmatic relations to the visuals in **SU149i**. In **SU149i**, Sugar created an ironic

syntagm through the paradigmatic visual choices of Ruby wearing a wedding dress and Sapphire wearing a tuxedo. In this scene, Sapphire assumed a masculine role while Ruby assumed a feminine role. The visual choices deconstruct the ascription of specific gender roles to Ruby and Sapphire; and thus, parodizes marital traditions that a dress should be ascribed to a feminine role and a tuxedo should be ascribed to a masculine role.

In **SU151ii** and **SU151iii**, the visual paradigms of Ruby in a wedding dress and Sapphire in a tuxedo, as well as the spatial syntagms of altar and wedding ring, establish the metonymy of marriage. Noticeably, Sugar selected traditional Christianity's symbols of marriage between a male and female to depict this scene. This paper argues that this deliberate choice of traditional Christian symbols aims to establish familiarity in the eyes of the audience; and direct their interpretation towards the normalcy of queer relationships.

Verbally, in **SU149i** and **SU151ii**, Sugar maintains the same verbal structure of a Christian proposal and marriage vows to allude audience to marriage normativity. The deliberate paradigmatic choice to use typical dialogue structure in a Christian proposal and wedding vows points towards the idea of establishing familiarity and normalcy in queer relationships. Despite establishing the premise of the gem race as extra-terrestrial beings, Sugar maintains the verbal choices of "Will you marry me?", "Do you take", "I do", and "I now pronounce you" which are normally prevalent in typical Christian marriages.

In **SU151ii** as well, the parodic element towards the marital system can be observed in the verbal signs of the marital officiation by Steven who assumed the role of a minister. Observably, the words in the officiation are changed and recontextualized while maintaining the traditional structure. This paper believes that the changes to the words attempt to display flexibility and fluidity of the marital system; that it can be

recontextualize from its traditional structure to achieve the same social recognition in non-binary relationships.

Subsequently, in **SU151iii**, Sugar created another interesting syntagmatic relations through the paradigmatic visual choice of Garnet's attire. Understanding that Garnet is the union of Ruby and Sapphire, Sugar made the paradigmatic visual choice to have Garnet wearing an amalgamation of a dress and a tuxedo. This paper believes that the amalgamation of a dress and a tuxedo signifies non-binarism in Garnet's gender role. From another angle, the signification of non-binarism in Garnet's attire during the wedding also symbolize the notion that marriage should not be defined with binary gender roles; and that marriage as a social system should be gender fluid in its roles.

Based on the visual and verbal signs in **SU149i**, **SU151i**, and **SU151ii**, this paper finds that the intersemiotic relationship in the three scenes augment one another. From here, this paper argues that the parodic element of the scenes is established through the normalization of queer relationships. Sugar resignify the heretic notion that society generally posits upon queer relationship and draw the image of normalcy in the light of queer relationships through Ruby and Sapphire. In other words, the normal representation of Ruby and Sapphire's relationship via marriage parodizes the heteronormative notion that posits queer relationships as abnormal. Consequently, this paper believes that the visual and verbal signs in **SU149i**, **SU151i**, and **SU151iii** are connotatively subversive.

To conclude the discussions in this section, this paper has examined one phenomenon in the cartoon pertaining to the parodic subversion of the marital system: the marriage between Ruby and Sapphire.

4.6 Fusion as a Symbol of Queer Experience

Dunn (2016) in his paper "*Steven Universe, Fusion Magic, and the Queer Cartoon Carnivalesque*" argued that fusion is a representation of trans experience. To Dunn (2016), the notion that the bodies of the Gems are malleable, unfixed, and are able to combine, enables the fluidity of sex and gender akin to a trans experience. While this paper does not necessarily disagree with Dunn's analysis, this paper does not fully agree with it as well. By running through a careful analysis of different contexts of fusion in *Steven Universe*, this paper believes that fusion is a symbol of queer experience (which encompass trans experience).

Since to be queer is not really definable with a single identity marker, this paper believes that Sugar attempts to recreate a notion of indefinability in her concept of fusion to signify a wide array of queer experiential possibilities. In other words, fusion as a symbol is only definable by a range of experiences that is queer rather than a single queer experience (like trans experience). By using its fantasy-themed narrative, *Steven Universe* is able to symbolically encode multiple facets of queer experiences through the interplay of meaning in the notion of fusion. In substantiating this claim, this section shall examine two phenomenon in the cartoon: the symbol of homosexual intimacy through fusion, and the symbol of trans experience in Stevonnie.

Firstly, fusion as a symbol of queer experience can be examined in its symbolic portrayal of homosexual intimacy. While there are multiple instances of homosexual intimacy in the cartoon, this paper shall only focus on the fusion of Ruby and Sapphire as Garnet. Consequently, this paper shall be examining the exemplification in **SU49iii**, **SU49iv**, and **SU49vi**:

Table 4.20 Exemplification 20

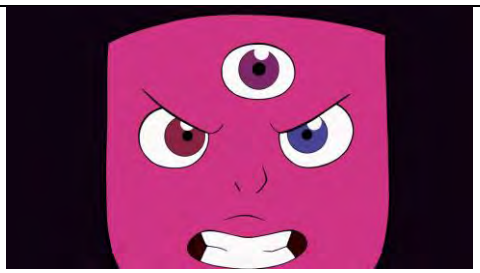
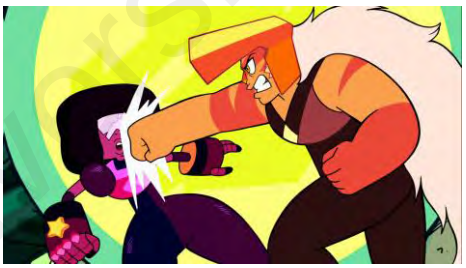
Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU49iii (5.44 – 6.02)	  	(*Song – Stronger than You*) Garnet: This is Garnet; back together. And I'm never going down at the hands of the likes of you because I'm so much better; and every part of me is saying go get'er. **The two of us** ain't gonna follow your rules; come at me without any of your fancy tools. Let's go, **just me and you**. Let's go **just one on two**
SU49iv (6.03 – 6.21)		(*Song – Stronger than You, cont.*) Go ahead and try and hit me if you're able. **Can't you see that my relationship is stable**? **I can see you hate the way we intermingle** but I think you're mad cause **you're single**.

Table 4.20, continued

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU49iv (6.03 – 6.21)	 	And we're **not gonna stop what we've made together**. **We are gonna stay like this forever**. If you break us apart we'll just come back newer and we'll always be twice the gem that you are.
SU49vi (7.00 – 7.30)	  	(*Song – Stronger than You, cont.*) Garnet: **This is who we are, this is who I am**. If you think you can stop me, then you need to think again; **because I am a feeling and I will never end**. And I won't let you hurt my planet and I won't let you hurt my friends. Go ahead and try and hit me if you're able. **Can't you see that my relationship is stable**? I know you think I'm not someone you're afraid of cause you think you see what I'm made of.

SU49iii, **SU49iv**, and **SU49vi** portray a fight scene between Garnet and Jasper during the song "*Stronger than You*". While the focus of this section shall be on the verbal signs, a few aspects of the visual signs are worth examining.

Firstly, the visual signs in **SU49iii** portray the paradigmatic choices of Garnet's eye colours: consisting of blue, red, and purple. The colour of Garnet's individual eyes symbolize the different constituents of Garnet: blue symbolizing Sapphire, red symbolizing Ruby, and purple symbolizing Garnet as her own separate entity. The notion of the third eye to be of Garnet's, symbolizes a third outlook as the outcome of fusion; indicating that relationships provide a new perspective rather than just a combined perspective.

In **SU49iv**, the visuals portray Garnet breaking a Gem destabilizer; a weapon used to destabilize the physical forms of a Gem (thus, forcing a fusion to unfuse) during her fight with Jasper. This paper believes that the scene is symbolic to Garnet being able to counter the factor of any instability to her fusion. The symbol that the Gem destablizer is broken by Ruby and Sapphire as Garnet signify the strong intimacy between the two.

In addition, the verbal signs in **SU49iii**, **SU49iv**, and **SU49vi**, which constitute the lyrics of "*Stronger than You*" is heavily significant in understanding fusion as a symbol of homosexual intimacy. In **SU49iii**, the syntagmatic relationship between the lines "the two of us", "just me and you", and "just one on two", signify the idea that Garnet is a single entity comprising of two individuals. In other words, the lines indicate that Garnet is the embodiment of a relationship rather than a person.

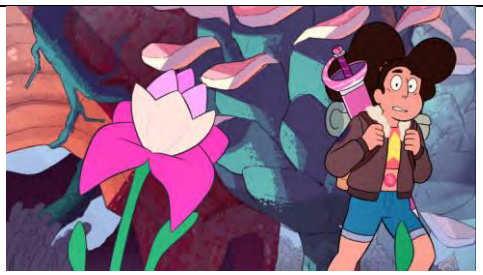
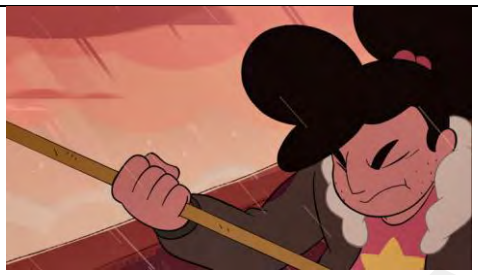
Additionally, sentential paradigm in **SU49iv** "I know you hate the way we intermingle" signifies that Garnet as a relationship, is an experience that Jasper is uneasy with. Indicating Jasper's hatred towards Garnet as a fusion, establish the idea that fusion is non-normative to Homeworld.

Furthermore, **SU49iv** and **SU49vi** also use the pronouns "I" and "we" interchangeably to signify the idea of union, singularity, and intimacy between two queer individuals when they fuse into a relationship. Rather than using only one pronoun to refer to Garnet, Sugar made the paradigmatic verbal choices of using both "I" and "we" as Garnet's personal pronouns. The sentential paradigm "This is who we are, this is who I am" in **SU49vi** puts the use of I and we in contrastive syntagm for the same denotative meaning to suggest a connotative equitability. Thus, this paper believes that this deliberate verbal choice is important to ensure that viewers view Garnet as both, a single entity and a union of two; suggesting Garnet as a strong symbol of intimacy between Ruby and Sapphire.

In general, the meanings of the verbal and visual signs in **SU49iii**, **SU49iv**, and **SU49vi** intersemiotically augment one another. Based on the analysis, Garnet as a symbolic portrayal of homosexual intimacy parodizes heteronormative assumptions that intimacy is not achievable in homosexual relationships. The scenes present homosexuality as an orientation that is able to achieve similar level of connection to that of a traditional heterosexual relationship. Therefore, the signs in **SU49iii**, **SU49iv**, and **SU49vi** can be considered as connotatively subversive.

Secondly, augmenting what Dunn (2016) suggested, fusion as a symbol of queer experience can also be examined in the symbolic trans experience of Steven and Connie as Stevonnie. To examine this phenomenon, this paper shall be discussing the exemplification in **SU140i** and **SU140ii**:

Table 4.21 Exemplification 21

Code (Time Code)	Visual	Dialogue
SU140i (1.30 – 1.33)		Stevonnie: Okay, **we're** fine. **I'm** fine.
SU140ii (3.20 – 3.31)	  	(*Background music*).

As previously discussed, in **SU140ii**, the verbal paradigms of facial hair and female hair, establish the synecdoche of trans experiences that Steven and Connie are experiencing as Stevonnie.

Additionally, the verbal signs in **SU140i** attempts to achieve the same contrastive syntagm as previously done with Garnet by making the pronouns "I" and "we"

interchangeable when referring to Stevonnie. In the context of Stevonnie, the interchangeability of the pronouns create the perception of a non-definitive identity in Stevonnie. The fluidity of the pronouns between "I" and "we", thus, symbolically represent the fluidity of identity in trans experience during fusion. By maintaining Stevonnie's pronouns as non-definitive, viewers will not be able to define specific identities to Stevonnie; suggesting a trans experience in the fusion of Stevonnie. Conclusively, Stevonnie as a fusion parodizes heteronormative identities by presenting a trans experience in the fusion. For that matter, **SU140i** and **SU140ii** are connotatively subversive.

To conclude the discussions in this section, this paper has examined two phenomenon in the cartoon pertaining to the notion of fusion as a symbol of queer experience: the symbol of homosexual intimacy through fusion, and the symbol of trans experience in Stevonnie

4.7 Conclusion of the Chapter

To conclude, this chapter has examined a myriad of visual and verbal signs in 15 episodes of *Steven Universe*. This paper believes that the thematic analysis of 21 different exemplifications of various scenes has answered the two aforementioned research questions. By running an analysis on the expressions and contents of the signs using the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity, the study was able to identify the visual and verbal signs in the cartoon as well as the queer concepts signified in them.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS

5.0 Summary of the Findings

This chapter is written with the purpose of providing the overall insight and interpretation on the results of the study. Thus, the objectives and research questions of the study shall be revisited. Subsequently, this chapter shall also highlight the limitations, and suggestions for future research; before concluding the paper.

To note, this paper has recognized 3 objectives of the study, which are: 1) to identify visual and verbal signs with subversive meanings in *Steven Universe*; 2) to identify the queer concepts signified through the subversive visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*; and 3) to interpret how *Steven Universe* is able to use the signification of queer concepts into the visual and verbal signs to achieve subversive effects. These objectives directly correspond to the research questions posed in this study, which are: 1) What are the visual and verbal signs with subversive meanings in *Steven Universe*?; 2) What are the queer concepts signified in the subversive visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*; and 3) How is *Steven Universe* able to use the signification of queer concepts into the visual and verbal signs to achieve subversive effects?

The following section shall summarize and highlight how the data, its analysis, and the literature review have fulfilled the objectives and answered the research questions of this study.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The significance of this study lies on the unique phenomenon that *Steven Universe* is able to accomplish. *Steven Universe*, as a children's cartoon, has openly adopted the themes of queerness and gender identities in mainstream media; themes that are still considered highly taboo in most societies. This paper believes that the phenomenon is made possible through the signification of queer ideologies into the visual and verbal signs within its

fantasy-themed narratives; with the aim to subvert the notion of intelligible gender identities and normative sexualities. In other words, the interplay of queer symbols and connotative meanings are enabled through a highly symbolic fantasy storyline. To prove this claim, this paper posed 3 research questions; whereby a synthesized framework between Structural Semiotics and Gender Performativity was proposed in answering the questions. Through the synthesized framework called the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity, this paper was able to identify connotatively-subversive signs; and consequently, answer the 3 research questions. The findings from the 3 research questions shall be presented in the following paragraphs:

5.1.1 RQ1: *What are the subversive visual and verbal signs in Steven Universe?*

In answering the first research question, a careful analysis on selected signifiers in 15 episodes of *Steven Universe* was carried out using the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity; as presented in chapter 4. The signs were examined based on its syntagms, paradigms, and intersemiotic relations in order to identify the connotative meanings of significant signifiers. From the analysis, this paper was able to identify various signs that can be considered connotatively-subversive. The signs were found to draw a similar pattern of signifiers that Sugar use to encode subversive meanings; and thus, are summarized in the following tables:

Table 5.1 Summary of Subversive Visual Signs

VISUAL SIGNS		
Types of Subversive Signifiers	**Signifiers**	**Textual Reference(s)**
Colour	Steven's pink shirt	SU138ii
	Contrast in Ruby's and Sapphire's colour schemes	SU49i, SU49ii
	Garnet's colour scheme	SU49ii, SU49iii, SU49iv

Table 5.1, continued

VISUAL SIGNS		
Types of Subversive Signifiers	**Signifiers**	**Textual Reference(s)**
Colour	Connie's blue dress	SU61i, SU61ii
	Garnet's eye colours	SU49iii
Composition	Pink saturation	SU61i
Hair and Attire	Connie's outfits	SU58i, SU58ii, SU58iii
	Steven's pink shirt	SU138ii
	Barb's outfit and hairstyle	SU69ii, SU69iii, SU69iv, SU69v
	Ruby's default attire	SU49i, SU49ii
	Sapphire's default attire	SU49i, SU49ii
	Ruby's cowboy attire	SU149i
	Saphhire's tuxedo	SU149ii, SU149iii
	Ruby's wedding dress	SU149ii, SU149iii
	Garnet's non-binary wedding attire	SU149iii
	Stevonnie's attire	SU140i, SU140ii
	Steven's drag outfit	SU69viii
	Uniform outfits of the zoomans	SU117i, SU117ii
Proximity	Steven's and Connie's dynamics	SU58iv
	Ruby's and Sapphire's physical intimacy	SU49i, SU49ii, SU64ii
	Rose's and Pearl's physical intimacy	SU61iv
Physical Feature	Ruby's masculine physical features	SU49i, SU49ii, SU64i
	Sapphire's feminine physical features	SU49i, SU49ii, SU64i
	Rose's feminine physical features	SU61iv
	Pearl's feminine physical features	SU61iv
	Lapis' feminine physical features	SU93i, SU93ii
	Jasper's masculine physical features	SU93ii
	Physical ambiguity in Stevonnie	SU140i, SU140ii
	Rose's protruding belly	SU35i

Table 5.1, continued

VISUAL SIGNS		
Types of Subversive Signifiers	**Signifiers**	**Textual Reference(s)**
Facial Expression	Steven's teary face	SU138ii
	Steven blushing	SU64ii
	Pearl blushing	SU45i, SU45ii, SU109ii
	Pearl startled	SU109i
Commodity	Blusher and mascara	SU69vi
	Lipstick	SU69vii
	Shaving cream and razor	SU151i
	Connie's sword	SU58i, SU58ii, SU58iii
	Bandages	SU58iii
	Steven's shield	SU58iv
	Sadie's plushies	SU69i, SU69ii
	Ballet outfit, swimsuit, and softball uniform	SU69iv
	Red Rose	SU86i
	Gem destabilizer	SU49iv
	Paper with phone number	SU109iii
Posture & Gesture	Connie's stance	SU58i, SU58ii, SU58iii
	Barb's masculine posture	SU69ii, SU69iii, SU69iv, SU69v
	Ruby's and Sapphire's proposal stance	SU149i
	Jasper's stance in proposing Lapis to fuse	SU93ii

Table 5.2 Summary of Subversive Verbal Signs

VERBAL SIGNS		
Types of Subversive Signifiers	**Signifiers**	**Textual Reference(s)**
Use of Pronouns	Interchangeability of "I" and "We"	SU140i, SU49iv, SU49vi
	"She" for Gems	Throughout the animation
Phrases indicating Relationship	Did they hurt you	SU49i
	Split up	SU64ii
	I was the one she told everything	SU45ii
	You can't understand how I feel!	SU45ii
	None of you had what we had	SU45ii
	Why can't I move on	SU86i
	Who am I now in this world without her?	SU86i
	I can't stop thinking about being fused with Malachite	SU93i
	keep her bound to me	SU93i
	I missed her.	SU93i
Gender Neutral Word Choices	Human	SU58iii, SU61vii
	Share, Together, Team	SU58iv, SU149i
	Names of the Zoomans	SU117i, SU117ii
Word Choices and Phrases with Masculine Markers	Be his knight	SU58iii
	Mailman	SU69iii
	Softball outfit	SU69iv
	Punched the umpire	SU69v
Words Choices and Phrases with Feminine Markers	Give you my service	SU58iv
	Ballet outfit	SU69iv
	hot pink limousine	SU69viii
Performative Utterances	Will you marry me; I do	SU149i
	Officiation of marriage	SU151iii

Table 5.2, continued

VERBAL SIGNS		
Types of Subversive Signifiers	**Signifiers**	**Textual Reference(s)**
Conceptualization of New Signifier-Signified Relations	Fusion	SU64i
	Choosening	SU117i

Based on Table 5.0 and Table 5.1, the study found 8 general groups of subversive visual signs in the episodes: colour, composition, hair and attire, proximity, physical feature, facial expression, commodity, and posture and gesture; and 7 general groups of subversive verbal signs: use of pronouns, phrases indicating relationship, gender neutral word choices, word choices and phrases with masculine markers, word choices with feminine markers, performative utterances, and conceptualization of new signifier-signified relations. A noticeable pattern on the connotatively-subversive visual and signs can be observed.

In terms of visual signs, Sugar generally subvert normative genders and sexualities by ascribing visual signs that are traditionally ascribed to masculinity to femininity and vice versa; especially in the groups of colours, physical feature, attire, commodity, and posture and gesture. This paper believes that the resignification attempts to create fluidity and malleability in signs that are usually gender-specific. In other words, Sugar managed to create gender neutrality through the detachment of the signs from their normativity. This finding is in line with the notion that the queer is the rejection of essentialism and fundamentalism (Chafetz, 2004; Andersen, 2005). Aside from that, Sugar also uses facial expressions, composition, proximity, posture and gesture, to suggest the type of relationships (often romantic ones) between characters without explicitly spelling out the relationship. These interplay of meanings and signs are important to highlight

heterosexuality as a taken for granted idea of social normalcy and naturalness (Martin, 2009). In other words, Sugar imply romantic relationships between her gender ambiguous characters to defy the notion of heterosexuality as natural facticity.

In terms of verbal signs, Sugar generally subverts normative genders through diction; particularly by using gender neutral language as well as using gender-specific languages to the opposite gender. This paper believes that the manipulation of diction aims to reassign neutrality to gender attributed words and concepts (like the concept of womanhood). This process of verbal subversion will thus lead viewers to reconsider the conjecture of two complementary genders as normal, natural, and ideal (Kitzinger, 2005). Additionally, Sugar also manipulates the use of pronouns in *Steven Universe*. Understanding that pronouns indicate identities (gender, singularity), the manipulation of pronouns is coherent with the idea that to be queer is to detach from identity and normativity (Rosenblum, 2009). Sugar also use and restructure performative utterances like the marriage officiation in detaching social concepts from normativity and specific identities. Furthermore, Sugar also conceptualize new signifier-signified relations to put subversive ideas into picture. By creating a new signification, Sugar is free to reconceptualise social concepts which are previously specific to heterosexuality and normative desires; as observed in the word “choosening”. Aside from that, Sugar used phrases typically ascribed with affection to suggest the type of relationships (often romantic ones) between characters without explicitly spelling out the relationship. Similarly, these interplay of meanings and signs are important to highlight heterosexuality as a taken for granted idea of social normalcy and naturalness (Martin, 2009). In other words, Sugar imply romantic relationships between her gender ambiguous characters to defy the notion of heterosexuality as natural facticity.

To reiterate, this paper has thus, answered the first research question by identifying subversive visual and verbal signs using the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity.

5.1.2 RQ2: *What are the queer concepts signified in the subversive visual and verbal signs of Steven Universe?*

In answering the second research question, the content planes (or the signified) of the subversive signifiers were examined using the proposed model; as presented in chapter 4. The Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity enabled this paper to derive the connotative meanings of gender-subversive signs through the categorization of 6 themes that encompass a number of queer concepts signified through the interplay of symbols and meaning in *Steven Universe*. The 6 themes were: 1) resignification of binary gender expressions; 2) representations of queer relationships; 3) symbolic representations of trans identities, 4) deconstruction of normative sexuality and desires; 5) parodic subversion of the marital system; and 6) fusion as a symbol of queer experience.

Through a careful thematic analysis, 8 specific queer concepts which have been previously discussed in Chapter 2, can be identified in the content planes of the subversive visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*:

i) Refusal of identity markers (Jagose, 2010); as exemplified in the interchangeability of the pronouns I and We.

ii) Deconstruction of gender binary (Butler, 1990); as exemplified in the ascription of traditionally feminine commodities (mascara, lipstick, and blusher) to Steven.

iii) Deconstruction of sex, gender, and desires (Butler, 1990); as exemplified in the absence of heteronormative desires of the Zoomans.

iv) Immateriality of the body (Butler, 1993); as exemplified in the trans experiences of Stevonnie.

v) Rejection of biological essentialism (Chafetz, 2004; Andersen, 2005); as exemplified in Rose's pregnancy.

vi) Rejection of heterosexuality as normative (Martin, 2009); as exemplified in Ruby and Sapphire's relationship.

vii) Rejection of patriarchy (Rich 1980; Butler 1990); as exemplified in the dynamics between Steven and Connie.

viii) Fluidity of gender roles (Lorber, 2008); as exemplified in Barb's assumption of both paternal and maternal roles.

The 8 queer concepts identified in *Steven Universe* indicate Sugar's conscious signification of queer ideas into the animation. Through the use of careful social, textual, and interpretive codes, Sugar is able to provide viewers with the context and circumstances to the relations between her signifiers and her intended signifieds (the queer concepts and ideas). The identification of the concepts confirms the hypothesis that *Steven Universe* manipulates the signification of queer concepts into the visual and verbal signs within its fantasy-themed narratives to subvert the notion of intelligible gender identities and normative sexualities.

Thus, to reiterate, this paper has answered the second research question by identifying 8 queer concepts from the content planes of the subversive visual and verbal signs via the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity.

5.1.3 RQ3: *How is Steven Universe able to use the signification of queer concepts into the visual and verbal signs to achieve subversive effects?*

The first research question answers the question of whether there are any subversive visual and verbal signs in *Steven Universe*; while the second research question ensue with answering the question of what subversive ideas and concepts are signified into the connotative meanings of the signs. Drawing upon the answers from the first and second research questions, the third research question attempts to answer the question of how signifying queer concepts into the meanings of dialogues and visuals of *Steven Universe* can actually achieve subversive effects. In answering the third research question, this paper shall draw its discussions from past literatures reviewed in Chapter 2, and relate to the findings from the data analysis; in order to interpret how *Steven Universe* achieve subversive effects.

In general, gender is socialized in children through various social environments in their lives; leading to the construction of gender and their understanding of it (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1991). While this paper understands that gender socialization happens through multiple social environments, it is undeniable that *Steven Universe* has provided an alternative social environment for children to understand the notions of sex and gender. By proving that Sugar has encoded queer concepts and ideas into the narrative of *Steven Universe*, this paper believes that *Steven Universe* has provided an alternative narrative (a form of social environment) that may distort the mainstream narratives which seek to validate the continuity of intelligible gender identities. In other words, because *Steven Universe* operates on a queer lens, the non-normative social environment provided by *Steven Universe* could create a distortion in the *subject-discourse constitutive loop* for subversive performativity to occur in children.

The queer lens in *Steven Universe*, thus, attempts to counter the thoughts and ideas embedded in the three lenses of gender identified by Bem (1993): androcentrism, gender polarization, and biological essentialism, by presenting a hypothetical sociocultural reality that does not operate on the three lenses of gender. Since children are essentially in their phase of primary socialization, which focuses on formations of initial attitudes and values of an individual (Kornblum, 2012; Lubbers, Jaspers, & Ultee, 2009; Guliaikhin, Galkin, & Vasil'eva, 2013), presenting a queer lens through the cartoon will ultimately influence children's attitudes and values on the notions of sex and gender as they grow up. Again, tampering the formation of attitudes and values of children on sex and gender through *Steven Universe* will create a distortion in the *subject-discourse constitutive loop* for subversive performativity to occur in children.

Additionally, despite the fact that the actual subversive elements of *Steven Universe* are on the connotative level, the visuals and dialogues do provide viewers with sufficient modelling for children to learn. As argued by Bandura and Walters (1963), a child can learn and acquire new behaviours by simply watching a model (which can be filmed, symbolic, or real model) perform or instruct a behaviour. Once the capacity for observational learning has fully developed, one cannot undo the information that has been learnt (Bandura, 2002). Thus, based on a modelling process, a child observes a model, encodes information from it, and retains the information (Miller, 1983).

In the context of *Steven Universe*, the visuals and dialogues have provided children with a queering model for children to learn queer behaviours. With the information attained from the hypothetical sociocultural reality in *Steven Universe*, children are cultivated with the reality ascribed by the cartoon. As argued by Gerbner (1969), repeated exposure to consistent themes in television contents over time, can cumulatively influence audiences' perception of reality. Thus, the consistent theme found throughout *Steven*

Universe can influence one's perception of reality on the notions of sex and gender; and ultimately enable subversion to occur.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

This study at present has a number of limitations. Firstly, the aspect of socially constructed myth of gender in the Structural Multisemiotic Model for Connotative Performativity is only defined based on conceptual discussions. Understanding that the understanding of gender differs across cultures, future research can consider conducting a survey to accurately define socially constructed myth of gender based on specific cultural contexts.

Secondly, only *Steven Universe* were examined in this study; and thus, discussions are limited to queer perspectives of the American culture. Future research can consider conducting a comparative study between different gender-subversive animations of different cultural contexts in order to understand different queer lenses in different cultures. Thirdly, this study does not examine semiotics systems other than visual and verbal semiotic systems. Future research can consider examining the sign-story system since the narrative of *Steven Universe* plays a huge role in enabling subversive meanings to be encoded.

Fourthly, this study only employs textual analysis in understanding the phenomenon. Future research can consider integrating a discursive approach which may include an interview with Sugar to provide better insights on the studied phenomena. Fifthly, this study only examined 15 episodes out of the total episodes of *Steven Universe*. Future research can consider analyzing more scenes and episodes to achieve a more accurate result.

Additionally, during the process of conducting the study, this paper identified that *Steven Universe* does not only attempt to subvert gender, but there are also subversive signs on the constructs of other identities like racial identity and religious identity. Thus, future research can consider conducting a study on racially subversive signs in *Steven Universe*; as well as religiously subversive signs in *Steven Universe*.

5.3 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter has summarized the findings of the study; and provided a thorough discussion on how the three research questions of this paper were answered. It has also put forth the limitations and potentials for future research. It is hoped that findings of this study and those of future research on *Steven Universe* and queer cartoons would greatly contribute towards the understanding of the queer phenomena in the media; and in turn, contribute to the scholarly understanding of social phenomenon in general.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS PRESENTED

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