

**Creativity Within Constraints: Encoding,  
Production, and Representation in *Battlestar  
Galactica***

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Using the lens of feminist production studies, I examine the television show *Battlestar Galactica* through interviews with show creators to explore the contexts of production. Writers, actors, and producers experience constraints on their creativity. Media producers encode meaning into the texts they create and form their own understandings of social issues and stories. I examine the day-to-day processes and constraints operating in the work lives of television creators as well as their political and social goals for the show. I pay particularly close attention to their understanding of intersecting areas of identity, such as race, sexuality, and gender. My analysis is situated within production studies, postfeminist media theories, and science fiction scholarship.

**Keywords:** media encoding; production studies; science fiction television, *Battlestar Galactica*; postfeminism

## **Dedication**

For Mum.

And for all the women in my life who taught me that every little girl flies.

It took time, but I've made it here with your love and support.

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## Chapter 1.

### ***Battlestar Galactica* in Context**

Our popular culture holds meaning and value for all of us. It is part of the way we create meaning for ourselves. Television audiences find meaning in the media they consume. But meaning-making practices also happen on the other side of the screen, between the writers, actors, and producers of television shows. In studying culture and society, we study how people make meaning for themselves and the things they find important. Television, as an aspect of popular culture, is one of those ways we make sense of and find meaning in the world. Television lets us think about society or even teaches us about society. It can let us think about each other and ourselves. When television is limited, when representation is limited to a certain kind of person or a certain kind of story, it limits our understandings and what we think is possible. When television gives us options and shows us different people in different roles it can expand the horizons of its audiences. Popular culture is an integral part of how our society negotiates identity. It is a space that both reflects how our world operates and suggests new options. Popular culture exists to be consumed as part of our economic system, but it has social implications beyond just consumption. Media representation matters to audiences and it matters to media producers.

With his Encoding/Decoding model, Stuart Hall (1980) outlines the different ways meaning can be created, both in the production (encoding) and viewing (decoding) of media texts. Hall argues that meaning is made not only by audiences, but by those who create cultural texts. Another important observation by Hall is that those who produce media, the encoders are also decoding their own understandings of media messages. Numerous studies since Hall's original model have looked at the decoding of media texts, starting with Brunson and Morely's 1980 *Nationwide* study. Communication

scholars have generally focused less on the roles, experiences, and perceptions of the various stakeholders involved in the production of television.

Researchers have focused both on ownership of media companies, and audiences' understandings of media and popular culture, but less inquiry has been directed at the encoding process. The context of media production, the encoding process, is an integral part of how meaning is created and shaped in our society. Production studies is an area where researchers examine this critical space between ownership and audience. Production scholars investigate the meaning-making practices that creators of media engage in during the process of producing film or television. Caldwell (2008) highlights that producers are also audiences.

We seldom acknowledge the instrumental role that producers-as-audience members play; or, the ways that the industry serves as cultural interpreter. Film/video makers are also audiences and film/video encoders are also decoders. (Caldwell, 2008, p.334-335)

Media production is a cycle, as creators both produce and consume media, therefore participating in both sides of the encoding/decoding divide. Both Hall's emphasis on encoding and Caldwell's emphasis on the cyclical nature of societal meaning-making can be used to examine the production of media texts.

In this project I look at science fiction television. The images and narratives present in science fiction can defy norms. Science fiction is a space in popular culture where the rules are slightly different, for example where disbelief is suspended, where we can imagine the future. There is a potential to tell more radical stories or depart further from the social norms of society (Luckhurst, 2005; Sobchack, 2002). Yet science fiction is always a product of its time and place of production and as such can also be a place that re-inscribes the status quo. Scholars like Ben-Tov (1995), Inness (1999) and Tulloch and Alvarado (1983) argue that science fiction stories are not just fantastical imaginings, they are stories about our political systems and anxieties about new technologies, social change, race, gender, class, and religious conflict.

My site of study for this project is the science fiction television show, *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*), which aired between 2003 and 2010 on the Syfy (SciFi)<sup>1</sup> network. In communication terms, the team behind *BSG* worked on the front lines of the encoding of meaning in media texts (Hall, 1980). NBC Universal, Syfy's parent company, approached showrunner and executive producer Ron Moore to remake the 1978 series only months after 9/11. Ron Moore saw an opportunity to tell difficult stories where the good guys are not always good and no one has the right answer to all of the questions. If science fiction in the 1960s, like *Star Trek*, was about imagining better (utopic) worlds, this iteration of *BSG* is very much dystopic. There is not necessarily a right or wrong in this fictional world and survival is the only thing that matters. Moore's *BSG* aligns with this dystopic, desperate characterization and as a product of its time, became intricately tied to the societal questions and political climate that characterized the years immediately after 9/11. Moore described his characters as "deeply flawed people, who make morally ambiguous decisions all the time" (Moore).

*Battlestar Galactica* is written as a microcosm of western society. The roughly 50,000 survivors of a nuclear attack by the Cylons, a robotic race created by humans, some of whom now look human, on the twelve planets the humans called home continue to survive on a fleet of spaceships, protected by a lone military spaceship, the *Galactica*. The ensuing stories focus on the heavy issues one might expect from a story about the end of a civilization. The show presents a gender-neutral society in which both military and government positions are held by men and women, they explore stories about race through the conflict between humans and Cylons, and they tell stories about what actions a resistant, smaller, military power takes in order to fight an occupying force.

The show features a diverse cast of characters, both military and civilian. Admiral Adama, played by Edward James Olmos, is the grizzled commander who had been at the cusp of retirement when the attacks came. A carousing, smoking, drinking, top gun fighter pilot is Kara Thrace (Katee Sackoff) known as her call sign Starbuck. Karl Agathon (Tahmoh Penikett), known as Helo, a self-sacrificing support pilot who gave up

<sup>1</sup> Originally the network was "SciFi" but it rebranded partway through the series in 2009. I use Syfy throughout this work in order to retain a clear distinction between the Syfy network and the concept of science fiction (often shortened to scifi).

his seat to save a few more civilians, and eventually made his way back to the fleet, along the way falling in love with one of the enemy, a Cylon called Sharon (Grace Park). One of the differences between the original and the new series is the expanded role of the civilians, who make up the bulk of the rag tag fleet the *Galactica* protects. In the first series (1978) the civilian characters did not have as significant a role in the stories as they do in the new (2003) series. In this series there are equally as interesting characters on the civilian side, including President Laura Roslin (Mary McDonnell), who at the beginning of the show was the Secretary of Education. A genius with no moral code, Dr. Gaius Baltar, who harbours hefty worries that others will find out the role he played in the attack, rather than any guilt at his part in it. None of these characters are “the hero” but they are familiar to us. While the characters fill some of the same roles we are used to seeing on television, especially on the military side, they are slightly different. The president is a woman who is never questioned solely on the basis of her gender, the carousing top gun fighter pilot is also a woman. The colour of the actors’ skin is never used to denote differences in race, ethnicity, or experience. Instead those stories are all told through the different “races” of the Cylons and the humans.

*Battlestar Galactica* has been the subject of minimal academic study, with most work focused on textual analysis and audience interpretation. Potter and Marshall’s (2008) edited volume, for example, included analysis of the portrayal of race and gender in the show, including Kungl’s (2008) study of Starbuck’s character and the discourse around the choice to make her a female character in the reimagined series. Similarly, Sharp (2010) discussed narratives of colonialism and captivity through Starbuck’s storylines. Scholarly research tells an important story about decoded meanings from the texts, but returning to Stuart Hall’s (1980) argument, both the creation and consumption of media texts include moments of meaning-making. With this project I analyze the production and encoding side of the creation of meaning in *Battlestar Galactica*. Through this analysis I tell a story about how media images are produced, and what levels of meaning and influence can happen in the production stage.

*Battlestar Galactica* was filmed in Vancouver as an international co-production, with oversight and control in Los Angeles and production based in British Columbia. Many of the actors and crew, are Canadians. Vancouver’s history as a film industry hub

includes a number of science fiction shows, from *X-Files* (1993-2002) to the *Stargate* (1997-2007; 2004-2009; 2009-2011) franchise. These shows have given Vancouver a reputation as a place conducive to creating alien worlds and telling stories set in spaceships. Peirse (2012) describes Vancouver's filming environment as attractive to American productions for many reasons.

In the past two decades, the province of British Columbia (and in particular, Vancouver and its surrounding environs) has increasingly been turned to as an alternative shooting location for American film and television production. The attractiveness of Canada's west coast is due to, among other things, the weakening Canadian dollar in the 1990s, lower basic costs, production subsidies, the diversity of locations available, Vancouver's proximity to Los Angeles...and the implementation of various domestic tax credits. (p.90)

In particular, Vancouver has become a popular shooting location for science fiction and fantasy film and television. Tinic (2006) illustrates how the British Columbia tourism campaign "Supernatural British Columbia" originally meant to convey the variety of beautiful landscapes in the province came to be "closely associated with the fact that Vancouver was the production home of nine of the top American "supernatural" television series" (p.154) in the mid 1990s. The range of shooting locations within a reasonable distance from the city, as well as the gray, cloudy winters have both contributed to the appeal of the city for shooting these types of shows. Baltruschat (2010) maintains this is also due to a trend in international co-productions, which tend to focus on "global stories" (p.31) that lack location markers or cultural distinction, traits distinctive to the science fiction genre. This locational ambiguity is often a product of the trade agreements in place for such co-productions.

My goal with this project is to contextualize the production of *BSG*. I examine intentions, what goals those making the show had and why. My research adds to the understanding that television is the result of individual actions, understandings, interactions, and intentions. I challenge the assumption that science fiction is automatically progressive because it questions current realities. By understanding barriers we can better understand how we can make our television more inclusive and progressive. My goal is to illustrate the part of the individuals working on the ground to bring their ideas and stories to screen. In other words, my goal is to look for new ways of

explaining why the images on our screens are important and what is missing from what we see.

My research is a production study using interviews with key players in the production process, including Ron Moore and other writers, producers, and actors. I examine the day-to-day processes and practices that resulted in the text of *BSG*. I use a feminist lens to examine and better understand the production of race, sexuality, and gender in the text of my analysis.

In chapter two I conduct a literature review on production studies and in particular, feminist production studies. This review also includes elements of scholarship on postfeminism, from Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2007, 2004), feminist media studies, and science fiction scholarship. Another area I examine is a number of interdisciplinary studies of *Battlestar Galactica*. This show-specific academic inquiry is a phenomenon in science fiction, fantasy, or “cult” shows, best exemplified by “Buffy studies”. Buffy studies, scholarly work examining *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, is a type of aca-fan inquiry. The term aca-fan is one that scholar Henry Jenkins (1992) uses to bring together academic inquiry with fan pursuits, resulting in a more nuanced understanding of fannish activities, content creation, and understanding of media texts. This chapter grounds my work in debates and traditions within production studies as it exists currently.

Chapter three is my methodological introduction. I explain the selection of *Battlestar Galactica* as my site of study and the appropriateness of semi-structured interviews. I pay particular attention to how other production scholars have contextualized their studies of the work of actors, writers, and producers in other similarly structured projects. This chapter also details challenges inherent to the structure of the project.

I begin my analysis of how production worked on *Battlestar Galactica* in chapter four. In this chapter I analyze the work of writers and actors, looking at how they understand the context of their work and how they interpret fan reactions to the text. This chapter introduces elements of the production process, from the network to the key players, and day-to-day processes involved. This chapter is grounded in the work-lives of the interviewees and focuses on examples of individual acts and collaborative acts

which contributed to the creation of narratives and images presented during *Battlestar Galactica*'s four-season run. This chapter describes showrunner Ron Moore's original goals for the show as well as how *BSG* fits into the science fiction and television landscape. The goal of this chapter is to provide an understanding of how production worked on *BSG* and what level of influence day-to-day factors and events had on the process.

In chapter five I describe and analyze the ways creators understood their contributions when it came to producing race, sexuality, and gender on *Battlestar Galactica*. This chapter addresses popular and academic praise for the show's politics of representation and its reputation as a space of cultural critique. In this chapter I analyze actors', writers', and producers' understandings of race, sexuality, and gender on the show, illustrating moments of agreement and disagreement on each of these topics. This chapter illustrates the collaborative nature of authorship and creation on the show, underlining that just as audiences can have mixed decoded understandings or meanings from a text, so too can creators. Different parts of the show, different narratives or plotlines can have different meaning and impact on creators as well as audiences. My goals with this chapter are to challenge and complicate some of the offered explanations from interviewees and analyze which of the show's successes could have gone farther.

In the conclusion, chapter six, I sum up my observations and synthesize the main themes that emerged from analysis of the interview data. I emphasize that the negotiations and collaborations between *BSG* creators were complex and ongoing. Creators all brought their own understandings and experiences to both the production of the show and the interviews. I also outline avenues for future research in feminist production studies. Television remains a subset of popular culture rich in implications for societal meaning-making and the production of onscreen representations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this thesis appear in Chow-White, P.A., Deveau, D., & Adams, P. (2015). "Media encoding in science fiction television: *Battlestar Galactica* as a site of critical cultural production." *Media, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 37(8) 1210-1225.

## Chapter 2.

### Creativity Within Constraints

In this chapter I bring together three areas of literature to situate and explain the context of this project. Through looking at production studies, postfeminist theories, and trends in science fiction scholarship I aim to present my analysis in a way that combines these intersecting themes. My research contributes to the production studies field and is informed by the current television landscape and the understandings of the science fiction genre. I identify limitations of the existing literature and use this space to perform my analysis.

I offer an overview of production studies research with specific focus on feminist production studies. With this overview I outline the field of research in production studies, discuss major divisions in research designs, and illustrate different areas of focus. I outline the difference between above- and below-the-line work and the importance of writers, producers, and actors, as well as discussing methods of feminist production studies and the culture of production. I also offer an introduction to relevant theoretical groundings in postfeminism, work on *Battlestar Galactica (BSG)* as well as trends in science fiction scholarship. This work forms the literature background for my analysis of the *Battlestar Galactica* production process.

Production studies emphasize the importance of the contexts of production behind the scenes in the creative industries. Scholars in this area of media studies seek to identify what impact constraints on creativity have and to illustrate the role individuals have in representing and recreating our world through commercial popular culture and the meaning-making involved in that process. Banks (2009) argues academics who study cultural images and narratives from a position of cultural distance and privilege often are not aware of the context behind the scenes in the production process.



Production scholars endeavour to fill this gap in understanding with an analysis of context. In their introduction to *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (2009), Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell discuss the necessary interconnections between capitalism and creativity that situate producers of television in a place of “creativity within constraints”. While the actors, directors, writers, and producers who make television have a degree of creativity, that creative freedom operates within a space of constraint – mitigated by time, money, corporate control, and advertisers, amongst other considerations.

Television and film production scholars study the contexts in which so much of our popular culture is developed and created. This context is vital to understanding why and how these images come to be such a pervasive influence within society. Banks (2009) puts emphasis on the idea of convergence present in this field. She argues that studies of production, industry, and text are intertwined in such a way that to understand them is to study all aspects of this part of our culture. Production studies is a varied field in which many different aspects of the contexts of production are examined. The images we encounter every day in our lives are deeply important to how we collectively interpret and make meaning as a culture or as a society. When people talk about the media’s portrayal of women, or the media’s depiction of feminist narratives or representations, it can be hard to separate the entity from its components – in this case real individual people working within a system to create these images and narratives.

By examining the unseen context behind our television shows, we can better understand why and how images come to be created. As well, we can better understand practical constraints, such as those broadly discussed by Havens and Lotz (2012) who emphasize constraints produced by time, ownership, money, but also the opportunities present within creative work. The variation in subject matter within production studies only adds to the complexity of the phenomenon at the heart of the main question of the field (or even of cultural studies more generally). If we think about studying a cultural text, there are multiple vantage points from which to examine this integral industry; a difficult web to unravel at the best of times.

## 2.1. Studying Television Production

I arrived at production studies at the end of my undergraduate honours research project that included a discourse analysis of science fiction television shows. While this project, and content analysis more broadly, is important work, I found myself with many questions about what the creators' intent had been during the production process. What was the process of authorship like? What factors influenced the finished products I was interpreting and analyzing? The field of production studies was a logical choice to try and answer these questions in that it emphasizes the importance of the context of production, behind the outward products of creative industries, or texts. One could also talk in a more political economic sense, and many scholars do, about the interconnections between capitalism and creativity that take place in the film and television industries. Production studies looks more closely at what happens in this culture of creativity within constraints in which the majority of our mainstream popular culture is created and delivered back to society. I find this space between the study of cultural artefacts as texts, and the study of the impact of ownership, to be one that can merge these two sides. It is a way to examine how the everyday work of people has a major impact on the way we see and interpret society through television. Production studies necessarily complicates the direct line of thinking between ownership of media and media messages, and accounts for the human element, the actions of everyday people and artists who create the popular culture we then consume.

One can trace much of the main justification or line of inquiry in production studies to Stuart Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model. While content analysis, discourse analysis, and audience studies focus on the act of decoding media, production studies occurs within the act of the encoding process. These moments of meaning-making on the part of creators make up the processes through which the images audiences receive (and decode) on their screens are encoded, created, are located and emerge. Production studies sits here, at the encoding process of how media creators participate in their own acts of meaning-making in the production and interpretation of their own work. Caldwell (2008) argues that film and television are local cultures despite the heavy influence they face from large economic processes.

Film and television, in other words, do not simply produce mass or popular culture (a much-studied perspective for over seven decades), but rather film/TV production communities themselves are cultural expressions and entities involving all of the symbolic processes and collective practices that other cultures use: to gain and reinforce identity, to forge consensus and order, to perpetuate themselves and their interests, and to interpret the media as audience members. (Caldwell, 2008, p.2)

This argument serves as both a definition of, and justification for, production studies and locates the field within the cultural entity of the community of television production – not isolated, nor operating within a vacuum, but entwined also with the culture in which it emerges.

Production Studies covers a wide range of different aspects of the production process. As within productions themselves, the major division amongst production scholars exists between work done “above-the-line” and “below-the-line.” Above-the-line work is what most people with casual interest in television would be familiar with – these are studies about the work of writers, actors, executive producers, directors, showrunners – people who make relatively more money for their work and whose names are more likely to be recognized in affiliation with a specific production. Below-the-line work is the technical labour, the offshore labour, and the unnamed labour that goes into the production of a television show. These are the makeup artists, the costume designers, the production assistants who stand in the rain for twelve hours at a time, the work for hire and the people whose names the average consumer or fan of television would not know. While both are rich sites of study, my research is on above-the-line work.

In terms of the practical aspects of studying the work of these individuals, whether above- or below-the-line, the major challenge with production studies is access. Production communities are often secretive or insular by design, either to protect intellectual property or privacy of those involved. Once access has been gained, there is much to be learned about the roles of actors, writers, and producers in creating television. Researchers can ask what types of political or ideological imperatives might end up being translated into television narratives through the strength of personality of individuals like the showrunner, executive producer, actors, or writers.

Television narratives are created by many individuals working towards a common goal. Haven and Lotz (2012) explain that

unlike in previous eras of cultural production, in which individual creators could develop novels, paintings, or sculptures on their own, the contemporary media industries require many workers doing specialized tasks. (p. 132)

The current system of television production is characterized by a complicated and collaborative notion of authorship and creation, where questions of who owns the stories, who creates the stories, and who is responsible for shaping the stories are determined by legalities of ownership. Havens and Lotz (2012) focus their analysis on the role of industry executives, underlining that the role of the industry executive is to keep in mind the potential commercial success of a program and that often this can conflict with creative risks. The extent to which network control interacts with creative discussions in an often changing (and challenging) question for researchers. It is the sprawling nature of the collective authorship of television that makes production studies such a wide-ranging field of research.

Within production studies there is a plethora of options in terms of research focus, contributing to the wide range of studies and methods in the field. The challenge for designing my project in this field was to find a model of the best option for the research I planned. D'Acci's (1994) work was an excellent example in this case. D'Acci (1994) performed an in depth study of the television show *Cagney and Lacey* in which she delved into a host of aspects of production and content analysis. D'Acci used the show to write about American television's place in the cultural process of meaning-making, especially in terms of women and femininity, for specific meanings at specific moments in history. This kind of work is time consuming and involves a very high access barrier. D'Acci had access to several areas of the production, from network meetings, to set visits, and a host of interviews with creators. The in depth analysis of a singular production offered by D'Acci appeals to me. It seems the most comprehensive way for someone not in the industry to gain an understanding through immersion in a willing production, examining the process from start to finish. While unfortunately out of the scope of this project, this seems the best way to pick up on the nuances of a particular production.

Production scholars design studies focused on above- or below-the-line creators or centred on issues that span both. Caldwell (2008) has researched the work culture of both above- and below-the-line agents within production. Caldwell's work is far reaching, from explorations of codes and actions within the industry (career capital, trade rituals, imagined communities, mechanics of the industry) to the role of above-the-line "creative" and theories of authorship. He has analyzed the negotiated role of academic fieldwork and production identities, as well as the importance of the role of writers in shaping discourses and understandings of the role of television in society (2009). Banks (2009) meanwhile, has focused on the way gender interacts with production in terms of specific roles within production, from both sides of the line. In particular she has offered a feminist production studies, a method focusing on interrogating power and cultural capital, femininity and feminism in production communities, an area she sees as frequently overlooked in media industry research. Others, like Mann (2009) have illustrated the impacts of different industry norms on practices and content. Mann's work has included examinations of the role of the showrunner in managing franchise brands and series continuity, aspects of the redefinition of television authorship. While production studies covers a wide range of workers and topics, to determine the way images end up on our screens, talking to those producers above-the-line has the most impact in terms of examining the power structure and flow of ideas on a television set.

The film and television industry that produces so much of what influences people in their daily lives and in their understanding of society is a vital area of inquiry. Because well known players in the industry are so influential and because they are so difficult to gain access to, there is such an aura of untouchability, glamour, or mythologizing of this area of our culture. It is also an industry that is used to and incorporates media scrutiny into their ways of doing business. Film and television creators are used to spin and used to portraying carefully crafted images to those who ask questions of them. These points all underscore how important it is for this area of inquiry to be explored by academics asking and analyzing nuanced questions.

The many points of the process of production can make it difficult to focus a project in order to illustrate a specific aspect or tradition of thought. Audiences often think of actors as the face of a production, it is their images after all, that we see on

screen as the most visible aspects of representation and storytelling. But, there are other considerations at play here. Does one look at the writers who pen the lines that are then spoken? Or at the network representatives who perhaps have an impact on setting the tone, in cancelling or renewing a program, or in setting down what subjects can or should not be touched upon? Do we look at more systemic issues within the structure of Hollywood – who gets what job, whose work is valued, whose work is devalued, and whose work is transient? The breadth of research that falls under the umbrella of production studies here is telling as to how complex these issues are. While exploring the divides between above- and below-the-line work is vital to understanding the greater structure of the production machine, it will not be the focus of my further research at this point. As with many disciplines, specific lenses can be applied to narrow and focus the research.

For my research I have adopted the lens of feminist production studies in order to interrogate *Battlestar Galactica*. Feminist theory is a lens to apply to any aspect of production studies. It has its own tradition and body of work, studying the ways in which gender (and other considerations) specifically interact and intersect with the act and process of producing television. This theoretical move allows me to critically challenge assertions made by interviewees about intersecting aspects of identity on the show. It allows me to focus on a specific aspect to focus my analysis down from the range of options available to a production scholar. It also allows me to contribute to a limited sub-field of production studies in a meaningful way.

As Banks (2009) argues, intersections of femininity and feminism in production communities are frequently overlooked in media industry research. This creates a problem when academics or consumers seek to understand the ways in which feminist themes and women are represented in media texts. When dealing with intersecting values and aspects in society, one cannot simply gather information and analyze all aspects of the ways in which societal meanings are re-inscribed throughout the production process. Banks' version of feminist production studies takes into consideration not just general dynamics of this type of cultural production, but also the specific interactions of power and influence on multiple levels. For Banks (2009), the

study of production is the study of convergence. The industry and the texts that the industry produces are always intertwined.

The culture of television production works in several ways to enforce industry norms and the status quo (Lotz, 2009; Havens and Lotz, 2012). Part of this, feminist analysts of the community and the products it creates argue, is that the culture of production works to create a limited scope for women within the industry, as well as their representation by the industry. Production scholars have detailed these aspects throughout the different areas of the field. Mayer (2011) in particular, has focused on the importance of examining the way gendered work interacts with the industry divide between above- and below-the-line work. Mayer (2011) pays attention to various aspects of 'production' not normally included in production studies analysis, including factory workers who produce actual television sets. Stahl (2009) and Banks (2009) also touch on considerations in terms of gendered labour below-the-line.

In our current political and social environment, where we are bombarded with images and narratives about women, women's bodies, and places in society, the process and context of creating on screen narratives is more important than ever. Television scholars across the board, from hooks (1996), Newcomb (2005), Orter (2009), to Sullivan (2009) touch on representation in television as vital to our understanding of society, and our ways of working through the world. Feminist production studies scholars, such as Banks (2009) and Mayer (2009), provide insight into many aspects of the context of production. Yet this research can be expanded to include many more considerations, of genre, platform, of who and what it takes to create a more feminist media sphere on television. It is vital that feminist inquiry be directed within production studies in order to gain insight and understanding into the processes which create the media, which in turn influences society.

## **2.2. Cultures of Production and Representation**

Production culture refers to ways of doing things in the film and television industry. These traditions, norms, and industry logic have built up alongside the history

of television. This culture of production informs the background of almost every area of the film and television industry, which Havens and Lotz (2012) refer to as “industry lore.”

Industry lore can have significant consequences for enabling certain kind of texts and viewers, while disabling others. Here we see the ideological implications of media industry practices and the real power in the circulation of culture that industry executives can exercise. (Havens and Lotz, 2012, p. 138)

The power in the production of media texts lies with the circulation of cultural norms. Norms are the standard ways of doing things, the ways of working that continue unquestioned because they are the way it has always been done. Feminist media studies allow an avenue for interrogating these norms and representations, which often limit or re-inscribe particular roles and representations. This leads to questions as to what impact the culture of production has on finished products – does this largely white, male culture contribute significantly to creating a limited scope for women and people of colour on mainstream television? Analyzing the intersections between feminism, feminist representation, and the television production process offers an opportunity for explaining these questions in academic inquiry.

McRobbie (2004, 2007), Gill (2007, 2007a), and others emphasize the prevalence of a postfeminist sensibility that permeates today’s mainstream popular culture. This sensibility is related to the culture of production in terms of who works, whose ideas are supported or heard, and therefore whose views are reflected in the finished media projects. The question for production scholars though, is how this gets translated, or re-translated, relayed through the media from producers, to audiences and back to producers.

There are two main ways to pursue this type of analysis, illustrating how production culture is formed and operates to impact representation. The first method is a content analysis of the makeup of the industry in question. Through looking at who works in which roles helps researchers to infer whose voices are heard the loudest or clearest in the industry. This type of big-picture analysis of the accessibility of the industry informs part of the nexus of what makes it into television narratives and who plays a role in their creation. The second method is the type of research I will be doing, interviewing those who work in television production. This type of research paints a more



in depth picture of what the processes involved in production are as well as what those who work in the process think of culture and context of their work.

As an example of a big-picture analysis, Smith et al (2013) issued a content analysis of 500 films released between 2007-2012, examining the number of women employed in both on screen and behind the scenes roles. They found that overall women are “grossly underrepresented on screen in 2012 films. Out of 4475 speaking characters on screen, only 28.4% on film are female” (p.1). Furthermore the study found that “only 16.7% of the 1228 directors, writers, and producers are female across the 100 top-grossing films of 2012,” (p.1) with women accounting for only “4.1% of directors, 12.2% of writers, and 20% of producers”(p.1). Smith et al (2013) also note that there were no significant changes in representation behind the camera throughout the five years examined in the study. Smith et al (2014) expanded their work with a study of portrayals of gender, race, and LGBT status in films from 2007-2014. While these numbers are for film and not television, the industries are interrelated to such a degree that they serve to illuminate patterns in the makeup of production communities. From this we can infer how the culture of production is translated into media texts.

Studies using interviews rather than content or broad representation studies like Smith, et al (2013, 2014), use a deep analysis to evaluate the industry, rather than a broad examination. The depth of an interview-based analysis allows researchers to gain insight into the minds of the decision makers and look at ways that day-to-day decisions behind the camera result in big differences on screens. My research project is an interview-based production study rather than a content analysis. In my methods section (chapter three) I expand on my rationale for using this form of methodology.

The science fiction genre has been studied extensively. As science fiction explores themes drawn from our concerns imagining our society in new and different contexts, there is much to analyze when it comes to this genre. Key to science fiction scholars like Luckhurst (2005) and Sobchak (2002) (and others) is the element of suspension of disbelief, which allows science fiction worlds to be ones where issues are examined at a critical distance. This critical distance can present new options and new understandings to audiences and producers alike. Science fiction’s critical distance has

not only allowed for the telling of different stories, but academic inquiry into why this is possible and what it brings to the genre and its audience. For example, there is a strong body of scholarship examining the specifics of women in science fiction, how their roles differ from or reinforce the images and narratives we are used to from other genres. Women's roles in science fiction are often lauded as a progressive space, but it is less often that we ask if this is always true. Larbeleister's (2002) history of women in science fiction texts puts concerns into a long-term context. Inness (1994, 2004) has also examined women's roles in science fiction across a range of shows and contexts to draw broad themes and observations. Other scholars have examined singular media texts, such as Amy-Chinn's (2006) look at gender and sex work in the television show *Firefly*.

Academic inquiry is somewhat common when it comes to genre shows. These cult shows inspire a certain level of attachment and engagement unique within film and television. Matt Hills (2008) argues "films are variously 'cultified' in coffee-table guides to cult film; in academic writings...and talking head DVD extras; in film reviews; in assorted marketing and promotion" (p.451). Cult television encompasses a range of shows in the science fiction and fantasy realms. The science fiction and cult genres have not only inspired explorations of themes in academic work, but some individual shows have inspired their own brand or field of scholarship.

Well known for this phenomenon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has inspired its own field of "Buffy Studies," a scholarly community complete with journals (including for graduate and undergraduate students) and conferences. While not all shows inspire such a depth of scholarship based on their themes, content, and fans, many of the shows that have done so can be described as cult, niche, and often science fiction. *Star Trek* has a long history of scholarship since it first aired in 1966 as does *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Moore's reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* has also had its fair share of scholastic inquiry. *BSG*'s dystopic themes, comments on the human condition, representations of race, and norm-defying female characters have all be at the centre of academic inquiry in this field. Kungl (2008), Mainon and Ursini (2006), and Sharp (2010) have all examined the role of fighter pilot Kara Thrace, also known as Starbuck. While Marshall and Potter (2008) offered an overview of major themes, along with Nishime's (2011) examination of race in the show. All of these works offer an analysis and

interpretation of the show itself, and as such are limited in the conclusions they can draw about the impact or reasoning of the choices involved in crafting the narrative.

Like many iterations of Buffy studies, for the most part scholarship on *BSG* has focused on critical readings of the content of the show, with a few studies of fan reactions or application of specific theoretical backgrounds to readings of the show. Much Buffy studies type scholarship integrates reception studies with a close reading analysis often only offered by audiences who are extremely invested in the show they are analyzing. This literature serves to focus areas of my analysis but does not inform my observations to a large extent. The majority of this type of research focuses on analysis on the decoding side of the television equation, while my work is focused on the encoding of meaning in the production process. I also hope to draw conclusions relevant outside the niche market of such studies, relating the experiences of those who have worked on *BSG* (as well as other shows) to the culture of production at large.

### **2.3. Feminist Production Studies and this Project**

Throughout this review of the production studies field I have focused primarily on above-the-line creators in television production. This group will also form the object of my analysis throughout the project. My focus on above-the-line creators in this review relates to my interview subjects who are actors, producers, writers and the showrunner for *Battlestar Galactica*. This is a conscious choice based on the scope of the project as well as the time and resources available. Banks (2009) argues that

Feminist production studies offer a method to interrogate power and cultural capital, femininity and feminism in production communities frequently overlooked in media industry research. (p. 88)

For Banks, this argument underpins her focus on below-the-line production workers, rather than above-the-line authors and actors. However, with my work on above-the-line producers in this project I also interrogate power. In today's television production there is still a strongly felt lack of women as authorial and authoritative positions. Through this project I work to examine the ways that gender and power work in above-the-line creative roles in the case of *Battlestar Galactica*'s production. I highlight the ways in

which the people involved in production understand issues and their role in producing stories relate to their position and understanding.

This literature review touches on several aspects I bring together within this project. The use of science fiction and *Battlestar Galactica* scholarship informs considerations of genre and form, while the understanding of the prevalence of a postfeminist sensibility throughout television sets up the magnitude and importance of this analysis. Production studies forms the bulk of this review as it is the primary methodology and tradition at work in this project. It is imperative that feminist inquiry be directed at television and specifically television production in order to more clearly understand the processes that leave us with a particular form of discourse throughout our popular culture, which is precisely what this project will do. There is a gap when it comes to critically examining women in science fiction shows. While science fiction scholarship tends to see the space as progressive for women, this literature does not interact with the postfeminist discourses offered in other areas of popular television. This produces a limited vision of what the ideal woman is like as a science fiction character. With my research I hope to fill in this gap by looking critically at the differences in the ways interviewees understood women on their science fiction show.

Production studies, postfeminist theory, science fiction studies and critical work on *Battlestar Galactica* provide a theoretical background for my project. They also inform my research questions. With this project I hope to answer a number of research questions in two main areas. The first category involves the general day-to-day efforts of television producers. What is the process behind the scenes? What are the challenges or constraints that limit the creative agency of writers, producers, and actors on the set of a television show? The second category revolves around specific aspects of representation on television. What were the goals involved in the production of *BSG* when it comes to representing race, sexuality, and gender? Were these goals met and how do actors, writers, and producers characterize their output, success, or understanding of these areas? Were there divergent readings of the show's work in these areas, or did those interviewed tend towards a collective reading or understanding of these areas? In order to answer these questions I analyze interviews with producers, writers, and actors on the show.

## Chapter 3.

### Examining Production on *Battlestar Galactica*

#### 3.1. Project Outline and Goals

My site of study is the science fiction television program *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*). Specifically I analyze interviews with *BSG* creators conducted by Dr. Peter Chow-White between 2007 and 2009 during the production of the series in Vancouver, BC. As production studies scholars often note the difficulties of gaining access, these interviews are a unique and rich source of data on which to base my television production analysis. They also offer insight into the particular considerations of science fiction television. Science fiction is a genre where it is possible to tell new stories or shed light on old stories, while stepping back from the constraints of the world as we know it. It is this suspension of disbelief that enables science fiction to be a place where writers take risks, using thick metaphors for contemporary situations. Storytellers also try to extrapolate from current problems, ideas, or issues to take their audience through narratives that parallel our own (Luckhurst, 2005; Sobchack, 2002). This freedom that producers of science fiction television have to imagine futuristic worlds where things can be different (but often are not truly different) makes science fiction a rich area of study, not just for people's attitudes towards technology, but our interactions with each other and our society.

A reimagining of an already respected series from the 1970s, Ron Moore's *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) is a show that has engaged, at least to some degree, with gender, race, and sexuality over the course of its four seasons. The show tells stories of a world which includes women in military combat roles and in high level politics. The producers' attempt to depict diverse or multi-faceted women characters and the attention given to questions of representation makes *BSG* an ideal site of study for this research.

While much has been written about the reception of the show, audience interpretation, and textual analysis, my research will focus on the people behind the production of the show. The motivations and understandings of the writers, producers, and actors, as well as how they see and understand their interaction with the text and its context, will be my main focus.

My goal is to explore how those involved in *BSG*'s production articulate their views on issues that are important to both their industry and society as a whole. I will present these views in context of my analysis. This being said, my presentation of the evidence is based more upon highlighting the experiences of those in the industry, interpreting and contextualizing their understandings within the current literature in order to add to the field of knowledge in these areas.

My research focuses on questions about the encoding process: What different kinds of impact do production agents have on the creation of the show and how do they understand their goals, contributions, and negotiations within the process? What practical aspects or day-to-day processes in their work-lives contributed to the images and narratives produced for their audience? And what kinds of political or social goals did those working for the show have during its production? Overall I examine the critical agency of the media practitioners involved and the effects of the nature of creativity within their operating constraints. I treat *BSG* as a site of cultural commentary and an opportunity to view the practices of meaning-making behind the cultural politics of race, gender, and sexuality in television.

*Battlestar Galactica* is understood as a site of critical inquiry and as a science fiction television show that addressed race and gender issues through its narrative. An international co-production, while the show filmed locally in Vancouver, BC the writing and executive producing staff were based in Los Angeles. With the relatively small size of the Vancouver production industry, the interviewer used informal networks to gain access to this large media enterprise in an industry known for its insular and somewhat secretive nature. As the literature in this field illustrates, access can be one of the major challenges to production studies scholars (Orter, 2009; Caldwell, 2006). In this case the heavily localized nature of this production allowed access via informal networks

throughout the greater Vancouver community. The show's status as a popular niche market cable channel show, as well as its critical success and the presence of a charismatic showrunner, Ron Moore, at the helm made it a worthy object of study.

## **3.2. Interrogating Television Production**

A major divide between strategies in production studies projects is apparent from the literature review. Scholars consistently choose to focus on either above-the-line (writing, producing, acting) or below-the-line (lighting, makeup, costuming) work. While I discussed the distinction earlier, my project focuses on above-the-line work. I focused my research on the direct narrative impact that producers, writers, and actors have. My interviewees all fall within the categories of writers, producers, and actors on this production. Recent production studies by Saha (2012) and Lotz (2004) have established that these categories of media practitioners bring varied sets of complex politicized motivations to their work and their understandings of race, sexuality, and gender. The following section details specific strategies for studying these above-the-line practitioners.

### **3.2.1. Above-The-Line: Television Authors**

Television scholarship increasingly focuses on authorship through the role of the showrunner, a position that combines the roles of writer and executive producer. Mann (2009) argues that there has been a redefinition of TV authorship over the last decade. She does so by drawing attention to the 2007 Writers Guild of America strike, in which several issues and definitions of authorship were up for negotiation and re-definition. Mann (2009) emphasizes the importance of a then-emerging role of the showrunner, a sort of brand manager of a television franchise. Television programs are often written collectively, or by rotating writers. Therefore the role of the showrunner is to maintain an overall look and feel for the show, creating a grand arc of narratives and vision. This allows other staff writers to fill in the specific content of episodes or smaller story arcs. Mayer (2011) describes the role of television authors as content-creators in her discussion of the broad label "producers". The showrunner is part writer, part executive producer, and they lead the creative process on a production. This marks a change in

the attribution of television authorship. While your average television viewer in the past would not necessarily associate one person or one voice with a program, now the showrunner is the popular model for television authorship. Mann (2009) and Cornea (2009) echo this statement in underscoring the importance of the showrunner.

This move towards the increasing importance of the authorial voice of the showrunner has had some impact on the perceived quality of television according to some scholars. Nelson (2007), writing about the differences between British and American television, argues that there is a pervading tendency within the industry to value film more highly than television. The prevalence and importance of the showrunner in the current climate mitigates this difference to some degree. Feuer (2007) for example, highlights “the stature given to Aaron Sorkin as a TV-outsider auteur” (p.156) and his subsequent contribution to the critical acclaim granted to *The West Wing* (1999). It is not coincidental then that the increase in the importance of the authorial voice and control of the showrunner comes at a time when television shows are being acknowledged to have similar, if not more, cultural value than film in the North American context.

The showrunner is an increasingly interesting concept for questions of television production, authorship, and representations as it puts much of the responsibility for a production on a single person, who is then under the supervision of network executives. While not solely responsible for the entirety of the show’s content, these individuals are in charge of managing the overall image, story, and branding of the program, a point emphasized by Caldwell (2008). Stahl (2009) similarly emphasizes the redefinition of authorship into ownership. The importance of the showrunner elevates the responsibility of one author and minimizes the work of other writers who work on the individual episodes. These high profile authorial voices become an essential part of the “brand” of the show and are often integrated into the marketing of television shows. The showrunner often pens the ‘show bible’, a document that outlines important consistencies, considerations, and plot arcs that writers must adhere to while working on the show. The show bible is not an entirely new tool, at least for the science fiction genre. Davies (2007) outlines the role of Gene Roddenberry on the original *Star Trek* series from 1966.



The originator of the idea of *Star Trek* is still universally acknowledged to be Gene Roddenberry, although he wrote comparatively little of it...he was responsible for the Star Trek 'bible. (p.177)

The idea of having such a document and a showrunner has become more common throughout the North American television landscape. Ron Moore developed such a document for *Battlestar Galactica*, which I use in my analysis.

While the showrunner is responsible for the overall look and feel of a show, they do not write all of the episodes. The majority of television shows today operate with several different writers contracted for a specific number of episodes on a rotating basis. This collective authorship has an impact on continuity and variation of representations in story, character, and plot. As Davies (2007) argues,

The production line has to be kept going and there is little time for frequent false starts and revisions. In television, the writer, or more accurately in American television, the team of writers, is the crucial and precious, because constantly necessary, source of raw material: the major source of value. (p.177)

Tight deadlines also play an integral role in the atmosphere of television production, impacting decisions, writing style, and continuity. Time can compress workflow, as everyone on a production is answerable to the network. A significant constraint on the production is everyone's responsibility to deliver the show to the audience on time.

Writers, whether staff or showrunners, are the subject of much attention within production studies. They have arguably the greatest impact on the types of stories told through television and the ways in which these stories are handled. It is not uncommon for writers to fulfill other roles on a production, from producers to directors. While showrunners are often described as a combination of writer and executive producer, other writers on any given show could also hold producing credits on the project. The writers interviewed for this project, Ron Moore, Jane Espenson, Bradley Thompson, and David Weddle, all held producing credits on *BSG* at points within their work on the show.

In film, Wasko (2003) describes the role of the producer as several complex and sometimes competing roles.

A producer typically guides a film through development, pre-production and production, acquires a script, selects talent, secures financing or convinces a studio to fund the film. However, there are many kinds of producers, including executive producer, line producer, associate producer, and co-producer. Sometimes a producer's credit is given to a power player who contributes in some way to getting a project off the ground. (p.24, 2003)

The prominence of the producer is similar in television, though many scholars choose to emphasize the expanded role of the showrunner as writer and producer, as most important. Dunne (2007) for example, writes that "the marriage of writer and producer is key in producing the one-hour drama" (p.99). Producers play critical roles in any production, but their involvement can be varied in expertise, responsibility, and importance.

### **3.2.2. Above-The-Line: Television Actors**

The other major above-the-line group I consider in this study are actors: Who they are, how they interact with their characters, and how they are chosen to tell the stories written for them. Actors interpret the words they are given and provide emotional connections. They are often called upon to explain their characters' actions, motivations, and feelings in interviews and behind the scenes clips that serve to further fill in or explain a television world. Not only acting but the process of casting actors to populate a television show that have their own politics, in terms of what types of actors are imagined for the role and those who are ultimately chosen.

Actors' influence on the shows they work on varies. Their influence can depend on the extent of collaboration welcomed by the production and the 'star power' of the actors involved. While many consider actors deeply involved in the process of bringing life to characters and narratives, a further examination of the production process reveals that the influence of actors on character choices are for the most part completely determined before the actor appears on film or reads the lines. Pearson (2010) examined the differences between the influence of major actors on various *Star Trek* franchises and other actors who portray characters of relatively less importance and found what many would expect to see. Actors who portrayed the captains, William Shatner (Captain Kirk), or Sir Patrick Stewart (Captain Picard) had far greater agency in

adding elements to their characters than other members of the cast. Similarly, Wasko (2003) argues:

While actors and actresses have played an important role in the industry's evolution, their involvement in the film business has shifted over the years. On the one hand, actors sell their labor to producers in a market just as other workers do. However, as many film theorists have discussed, the nature of actors as unique "stars" presents some interesting dynamics that differ from other Hollywood laborers. (2003, p.44)

Throughout the industry and throughout production studies, it is generally acknowledged that 'star' actors have a unique level of power within a production, as the face of the show to its audience. Therefore they often have relatively more power in the grand scheme of things, compared to other actors and below-the-line workers.

Actors then have the most (or any) ability to contribute to their characters, in terms of direction, development, and actions when they have a well-recognized or high impact name, when they are well known or well respected within the industry. The aspects of a character that are most noteworthy for this type of research are the decisions that go into the choice of actors and how characters are brought into being by the actions of those with the power to make decisions. When it comes to specific questions about the overall role of actors in production, an investigation of the casting process is a high impact realm of questioning. What goes on behind the scenes in choosing the way a cast is going to look, what considerations are at play in terms of race, gender, or other intersectional considerations is often somewhat visible through the casting of a show. How actors play their characters is one of the last stages in creating the look or feel of the text.

### **3.3. Project Methodology**

My goal for this research is to examine the critical agency of media producers in the encoding process of *BSG*, from practical constraints to social and political goals. I want to examine their intentions in terms of what they hoped to bring to this work and in what ways. In order to accomplish this, I analyze semi-structured interviews with major

players – actors, writers, and producers – in the production of *Battlestar Galactica*. Long form semi-structured interviews were the best option for this research as it allowed the interviewer to touch on major issues and areas of inquiry. This format also allowed research subjects to bring their own lived experiences and expertise in their professional lives into the conversation. As I am primarily looking at their intentions and their understanding, this is a logical and fitting methodology.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe the qualitative, in depth interview as an attempt to gain understanding of the world from the point of view of the subjects. Long form, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewees to participate in the construction of knowledge and understanding by interacting with the interviewer in a way that allows them to share their experiences. The purpose of the in depth interview is to find knowledge within the parameters set up by the researcher (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). As Lofland et al (2006) argue, qualitative researchers both have their own understandings of the world and want to examine others' understandings to form a greater analysis.

Another reasoning behind using qualitative interviews as a tool to access the perspectives of others is described by Patton (1990).

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...we cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions...the purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. (p.278)

These reasons, especially the pursuit of examining intentions, are what makes in depth interviewing the correct choice for this type of production study. Patton (1990) goes on to argue that the interviewer's aim must be to enable the interviewee to "bring the interviewer into his or her world" (p. 279). By entering the world of the interviewee in this way, the researcher can gain access to a wealth of understanding otherwise hidden or unavailable. In this study the exchange of understanding is critical to gaining insight into the way television is made and how actors, writers, and producers conceptualize their role in societal meaning-making.

The interviews I examine in this study were collected by my senior supervisor, Dr. Peter Chow-White, over the phone and in person in locations across Vancouver between 2007 and 2009. The interviews focused on the encoding process. Topics included the day-to-day work lives of the participants, as well as their own understandings of the show's goals when it came to portrayals or discussions of race, gender, and other major social issues. The goals driving these interviews were multifaceted. From broad questions of what production on the show was like, to specifics about the political goals of those making the show. Overall the questions were focused to understand the motivations, negotiations, and critical intent that operated to encode this television text.

This minimal risk research plan was approved by Simon Fraser University's Office of Research Ethics (study number 2015s0158). All interviewees consented to their names being used to report on the interview data, which allows for an opportunity to analyze interviews alongside direct references to the show, events, and episodes. Writers were free to talk about their involvement in specific episodes or scenes (except for when they held themselves back from talking about episodes which were yet to air at the time of interview). While this was helpful in terms of relating interviewee's specific examples to the show's text, it was also necessary in terms of the people interviewed. For example, I would not be able to write about the experiences of the showrunner if consent to name had not been acquired, as Ron Moore is the only showrunner on the show.

While working with interview data where the interviewees are identified could be a potential source of challenges, overall being able to identify them added immense value to the project. Though possible that some interviewees could be less likely to speak their whole truth because of the public nature of their work, I doubt that attempting to maintain confidentiality would have assuaged this much. Because of the close nature of the film and television industry in Vancouver and the uniqueness of the show, the characters and plotlines are extremely recognizable. This is especially true when talking about the types of female characters on the show, or when you have actors playing multiple roles, as is the case with the Cylon characters. If researchers had attempted to

keep interviewee's identities confidential the research would not have been as effective, understandable, or successful.

There are a number of limitations when it comes to delving deeper into the production process by interviewing media producers. While one cannot be sure as to what, if anything, was held back in discussions, overall the interviewees appeared to remain fairly candid with the researcher. They offered discussions of their own analysis of their work and the text itself. The interviews were longer form (in depth) and many interviewees met more than once with the researcher, either over the phone or in person. Though it should be noted that to some degree actors (and sometimes writers, showrunners) are asked to do similar work in promoting their shows through marketing and interviews with the popular press. This contributes to the challenge of interviewing elites in the industry, as they are aware of and most likely spinning their answers in some way. Challenges associated with interviewing elites are well known in production studies as well as in qualitative interviewing more generally. Mikecz (2012) argues that "researching elites hinges on the willingness of respondents to talk and to open up" (p.482). For these reasons the interviews, as with any qualitative interview data, was treated carefully, with a grain of salt, in order to give an honest and rigorous treatment to the data.

While I did not take part in the interviews themselves, I analyzed all the interview data collected. Interview transcripts were imported into qualitative research software, NVivo and coded along the lines of social themes (gender, women, politics, female characters, race); production-process specific themes (network, television, production, casting); groups or subjects (actors, writers, showrunner); and show-specific terms (Cylon, fan reactions, science fiction). These nodes were then examined and organized into discussion areas used for analysis.

There were challenges associated with using an existing dataset for my analysis. Having not been involved in the interview collection there were instances where I would have inquired a bit further into specific areas. Similarly, the interviews were all conducted in the process of filming the show, so certain plot points or examples were not discussed with all participants. Some interviews occurred during production of the last season, at

the height of both public interest and secrecy. The range of access within the production as well posed certain challenges, with only some actors, writers, producers agreeing to be interviewed. A unique challenge to some of the momentum of the project was the 2007 (Nov 2007-Feb 2008) Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike, which interrupted the interview data collection process. The writers' strike halted production completely in the middle of the finale (fourth) season.<sup>3</sup> A further challenge or limitation is the necessary exclusion of below-the-line workers in the interview data collection process. The scope and access of this project necessitated including only above-the-line roles in this research, but a wider project may have benefitted from including others as well.

Despite the challenges, the interviews I analyze in this project contain a wealth of information, from day-to-day processes to analysis of the social issues addressed on the show. Interviewees were generous with the explanations of how the production process worked on *Battlestar Galactica* and were willing to address the tough issues brought up, to varying degrees. Many brought years of experience on other productions to the table and were able to describe differences and similarities between *BSG* and other Canadian and American television shows.

Using this methodology to analyze interviews with above-the-line agents, the next two chapters address day-to-day or practical aspects of production and intersecting themes of identity in terms of race, sexuality, and gender. In chapter four I focus on the day-to-day influences and considerations on the show. In chapter five I build on this understanding to look at broad themes of gender, race, and sexuality addressed in the show as discussion points. Both are informed by the interviews, the show bible document, and to a much lesser degree, the text of the show itself.

<sup>3</sup> Banks (2010) work on the 2007 WGA strike focuses on the impact of showrunners and the loyalty of their fans, as having a major impact on its resolution. She argues that the increase of DVD behind the scene extras have made writers and showrunners more visible to the fans, which in turn fosters connection with the audience. This resulted in increased audience pressure to resolve the strike.

## Chapter 4.

### Producing *Battlestar Galactica*

In this chapter I detail the context of *Battlestar Galactica* and explore the processes and people at work behind the scenes in the production of the television show. The major groups of influencers I include here are the showrunner, the writers, the actors, the fans, and the network. Examining the day-to-day decisions, workflow, and interactions that are a part of the process of television production sets the stage for an in depth analysis of the treatment of three major social considerations in chapter five. Chapter four isolates the main forces at work in the show's production, using examples from interviewees illustrating the factors that had varied levels of influence on points in the production process.

*Battlestar Galactica* producers, writers, and actors played roles in shaping the text according to their own understandings and day-to-day meaning-making practices involved in their work lives. These individuals have their own ways of interpreting and understanding the text as they worked together to create it. Referring back to Caldwell, they are both impacted by and play a role in impacting media images. Using this understanding, in this chapter I answer process questions about influence, order, and impact on the production process. I ask how budget and time constraints impact creativity and production. How do practicalities of coordinating many different contributing departments impact writers especially? And how does collaborative authorship affect the images and narratives that make it to the screen? Then, I identify key players and points of contention within the television production apparatus at work in this show. Finally, I identify major themes brought up across interviews with different groups or types of creators in order to illustrate the main ways in which these individuals think about or contextualize their work within the production of the television show. In



this chapter I argue that day-to-day production constraints have a tangible impact on the encoding of meaning in television texts.

#### **4.1. *Battlestar Galactica*: In popular culture, science fiction, and television**

The goal of this section is to provide a basis of understanding of *Battlestar Galactica* as my site of study. The show exists within the contemporary television landscape and the study of television has its own set of considerations. This overview in turn will illustrate why *BSG* is rich in examples through which to examine the intersections of these different factors. *Battlestar Galactica* aired on the Syfy cable network in the United States (on Space Channel in Canada). It began with a two-part miniseries in 2003, followed by a four season regular series, which began airing in 2004. The show was a ‘reimagining’ of a short-lived series of the same name in 1978. Showrunner (executive producer) Ron Moore, who had worked on various iterations of the *Star Trek* franchise, had a vision for the creative direction of the show, an approach he called “naturalistic science fiction.” Moore described this approach as writing characters that “are all deeply flawed people...who make morally ambiguous decision all the time” (Moore). This more complicated universe than typically portrayed, in Moore’s view, included less jargon and a realistic feel, as the characters “struggle towards the light” (Moore). The feel of the show would be a departure from some of the overplayed visual aspects and heavy-handed narratives of some television science fiction.

Moore believed his naturalistic approach to science fiction would allow *BSG* to address current political and social issues in a way that the audience would really relate to, as opposed to getting caught up in the trappings of more fantastical science fiction. Stories about real people, with real struggles, would be the hallmark of the show, rather than aliens or technical explanations. So while *BSG* exists within the science fiction tradition, in many ways it was designed to challenge the genre. Many interviewees echoed this sentiment when they were asked how they would describe *BSG* to a potential viewer. Many said they would encourage non-science fiction watchers to give it a try.

As previously established, science fiction scholars have understood the genre as reflective and explorative of our own politics, struggles, worries, and anxieties within the critical distance offered by a suspension of disbelief (Ben-Tov, 1995; Inness, 1999; Sobchack, 2002; Tulloch and Alvarado, 1983). While Moore designed *BSG* as a departure from the look and feel of science fiction in some ways, he retained the use of critical distance to include political and social commentary. Many of the interviewees spoke at length about the metaphor of science fiction being a useful tool with which to explore elements of our society without “handing people a moral cheat sheet” (Espenson).

*Battlestar Galactica* is a science fiction genre show, but it is also a part of the greater context of mainstream popular culture and television. Many feminist cultural scholars, such as Gill (2007a), McRobbie (2004, 2007), and Gill and Scharff (2011), have argued that our current array of television options is characterized by a postfeminist sensibility both damaging and widespread. Gill (2007a) defines postfeminism as a “sensibility that characterizes increasing numbers of films, television shows, advertisements, and other media products” (p.148). This sensibility, Gill (2007a) elaborates, includes:

A tendency to entangle feminist and anti-feminist discourses. Feminist ideas are at the same time articulated and repudiated, expressed and disavowed. Its constructions of contemporary gender relations are profoundly contradictory (p. 163).

For this project I am defining postfeminism as Gill does, from a critical, pro-feminist perspective as a sensibility that entangles pro-feminist and anti-feminist ideology, which can also serve as a specific type of anti-feminism.

Beginning with Gill's themes of entanglement of pro-feminist and anti-feminist ideas in postfeminist popular culture, we can look at the increasing sexualisation of women's bodies and popular culture in general (2007, 2007a). Gill (2007) uses this term to refer to the problematic and “extraordinary proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality across all media forms” (p. 256). Gill (2007a) and McRobbie (2007) see this as not just a popular culture problem, but also as a political problem. In her analysis of the television show *What Not To Wear* (2001), McRobbie (2004) identifies important

elements of class warfare and symbolic violence in the way that popular culture often serves to reinforce stereotypes of femininity and beauty

This new kind of sophisticated anti-feminism has become a recurring feature across the landscape of both popular and political culture. It upholds the principles of gender equality while denigrating the figure of the feminist. (McRobbie, 2007, p. 179)

Gill (2007), McRobbie (2004), and Press (2011) mainly use their analysis of the sexualisation of culture to refer to shows such as *Sex and The City* (1998-2004) and a slew of makeover shows in the realm of reality television. This analysis can, and should, be applied to science fiction. A similar postfeminist sensibility is pervasive in contemporary television and can be found within science fiction television. This is especially visible when you consider the sexualisation of women's bodies in many science fiction texts.

*Battlestar Galactica* is an example of a dystopic science fiction text, which lends itself to a certain kind of narrative form. Themes of utopia and dystopia are extremely popular in all sorts of fiction, but they are especially pronounced in science fiction. A classic example is Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*. The *Star Trek* stories exist within a utopic society with no need for money or intra-Earth conflict. Dystopia is the opposite. Everything has gone wrong and characters struggle to survive in hostile situations, making morally ambiguous choices because they have to.

*Battlestar Galactica* is a post-9/11 television show, which contributes to its dystopic nature. The characters on *BSG* are trying to pick up the pieces after a catastrophic and unexpected attack while dealing with a range of almost impossible questions. The show takes every opportunity to reinforce that the society is in a tough position. The characters have to make decisions to destroy compromised ships carrying civilians, they deal with an overwhelming lack of hope, the implementation of martial law, and the restriction of abortion rights all in the name of surviving as a species.

The turn towards dystopic science fiction has come hand in hand with an increase of postfeminist depictions of women. There is a much more limited vision of women on television as society becomes more dystopic and pessimistic in imagining the

future. Therefore, dystopic science fiction and postfeminist representations in television are symptoms of the same sensibility and part of the same problems with how we represent women on television. Science fiction is a part of popular culture where the rules are slightly different, and the potential for more radical stories is greater and yet it often re-inscribes traditional and status quo notions of gender, gender roles, and femininity.

There is a rich body of research about women in television, and science fiction television in particular. For example, Amy-Chinn (2006) uses feminist and postfeminist theories in her analysis of sex work on the show *Firefly* (2002-2003). She concludes that while attempting to reframe popular television characterizations of the prostitute with the character Inara, the show did not fully succeed as it “draws on the patriarchal and colonialist discourse to re-inscribe the body of a woman of colour as a site of white (predominantly male) hegemonic privilege” (p.175). Inara is one of three main female characters on the show, a mechanic and a warrior being the roles of the two other characters. Though *Firefly* only aired for one season, it was an extremely popular ‘cult’ show whose influence is still strong with science fiction producers and audiences.

Another show with lasting impact and influence on the science fiction television genre is, of course, the *X-Files* (1993-2002). The *X-Files*, which also filmed in Vancouver, is another show that has been the subject of academic discourse and inquiry. Badley (2000), for example, focused on the female character of FBI Agent Scully in terms of a postfeminism similar to Gill’s analysis. Badley’s main criticism of the *X-Files* stems from the series’ failure to adequately address issues that it had the potential to address, noting that “while the series deconstructs television stereotypes, it remains indifferent to the issues that it raises, or the ideologies it appropriates” (p.69). As a science fiction show, the *X-Files* differs from other examples as it is written to exist within our world, rather than an imagined one. In this way Badley is able to discuss the positioning of Scully by the writers according to her establishment as a character who by virtue of her age (generation X) has benefitted from, but was not a part of the second wave feminist movement.

Furthermore, Badley (2000) explores the dynamic of the relationship between the two main characters in the program, Scully and her male FBI partner Mulder, which she says “challeng[es] traditional gender roles as portrayed on television” (p.63). The positioning of Scully (female) as the skeptical, rational doctor and lawyer in contrast to the way that Mulder (male) is positioned as non-rational and intuitive, Badley argues, works to subvert traditional gender roles on television. This survey of other shows in the genre illustrates that while many science fiction television programs can appear pro-feminist, a closer reading often reveals subtle anti-feminist themes, posing problematic contradictions. While these are just a few examples of the range of television programs *BSG* exists alongside, they help set the stage for my analysis.

*Battlestar Galactica* exists at an intriguing juncture within this matrix of contemporary television, postfeminism, and dystopic themes amidst the history and tradition of science fiction. It is a dystopic science fiction television show that deals with representations of race, gender, and sexuality. Understanding these background factors within contemporary popular culture and science fiction sets the stage for an examination of the processes at work in the production of *BSG*. The next section will do so by illustrating the experiences of the individuals and groups involved in the production of the show.

## **4.2. The Scene Behind the Scenes**

Television production is a space of constraints and agency. It is a creative endeavour firmly bound by time, money, and competing influences. Television production is an art but also a business and as such is bound by accountability to management and oversight by those higher up in the parent company.. Those involved in the day-to-day processes of producing television work in a creative industry but are bound by certain limits. This section examines the categories of individuals at work in this production chain. The showrunner, the writers, the actors, to a limited degree the fans, and the specter of oversight that is the network all play a role in encoding and decoding meaning.

Each group of interviewees emphasized a different aspect of production. Executive producer and showrunner Ron Moore talked about budget and time constraints. The writers interviewed focused on constraints such as what props or locations they could get for a scene, or what actors they could afford. While actors mainly talked about constraints resulting from collaborative authorship (many different writers, directors, and an ensemble of different actors), they sometimes disagreed with a line or a direction. These are all elements of the day-to-day work of television production that have an impact on what we see as an audience. In order to find out more about these interactions and considerations I will detail the individual responsibilities and typical tasks these differing groups dealt with during the production process. From there I will highlight major recurring themes discussed by the interviewees.

#### **4.2.1. The Showrunner**

The showrunner is ultimately responsible for the look and feel of the show and its continuity. The showrunner is the lead writer on the project and other writers defer to them as the ultimate authority on decisions or conflicts within all parts of the production. At the beginning of this chapter, I outlined the goals Ron Moore had for his reimagining of the 1978 *Battlestar Galactica* series and in chapter three I described the role of the showrunner as integral to the production of contemporary television programs. Cornea (2009) highlights the importance of the showrunner as a guiding figure for the whole production, a role that combines features of writer and executive producer.

In 2002, Universal (Syfy's parent company) asked Ron Moore to develop a show based on the original *Battlestar Galactica*. What he saw in the 1978 pilot was an opportunity to tell an emotionally charged and hard-hitting story. Moore saw potential in *BSG* to tell a science fiction story with "a deeper resonance" than before. *BSG* could be used to tell stories about the struggles with the limits of democracy and between security and freedom. Moore thought *BSG* could be written as a microcosm of society, having faced their own 9/11 attacks on "an even grander scale" (Moore).

From the very beginning Moore had social and political goals for *BSG*, but maintained that the show would not pretend to have all the answers. Moore made

several decisions that had a huge impact on the ethos and direction of the show. Most often discussed was this decision to make a key male character from the original series a key female character instead (more on this in chapter five). He detailed a series of rules in the show bible, setting the tone for the entire series. Caldwell describes the show bible as an integral part of productions where collective authorship prevails. The showrunner can use the show bible to ensure that writers are working from the same understanding of the characters' backstory and guidelines. This is the method that Moore used to guide his writers through the production.

The show bible, authored by Moore, is a sixty-page document that details the rules of the show. Moore provided a copy to the researcher as part of the interview process. This document details the history of the humans and the Cylons, as well as containing key character biographies. It outlines storylines, points of tension and conflict, a sketch of the season one story arc, and details about the ship itself (from officers aboard to how it flies and what weapons systems it has). This document is a key contribution to the look, feel, and continuity of the show, to which the writers constantly referred while working and in response to the interviewer's questions.

#### **4.2.2. The Writers**

Writers are central to the production process. Their words are spoken by the actors to tell the story of the episode, season, and series. The *Battlestar Galactica* writers interviewed were adamant that there was no typical day at work for them, but they spoke about the types of days they would have depending on what stage of production their scripts were in. Their days might involve working with other writers, solitary writing time (either at home or in the production office), or being on set as the episode is shot (sometimes for very long days). Interviewees maintained that there were no typical days, but spoke of the process for the season, as well as individual episodes.

The writers interviewed outlined the flow of the writing process on *BSG*. Typically staff writers meet to sketch out the season, with showrunner Ron Moore detailing an outline for what the arc of the season is going to be. From there certain plot points are mapped out and the stories are "broken" out into assignments. After this season

sketching and breaking of stories, the writers often write in isolation. The writer(s) assigned to an episode write a “story document”, a three-page summary and explanation of the main story and the secondary story for each episode, which goes to Moore for notes. After these notes, the writer gets a go-ahead to begin writing. After a few drafts, the final draft is approved by Moore and sent off to the network and other concerned departments (wardrobe, props, location, sets) who also return notes on them. Once it is approved to shoot, the writers’ day then changes again, with staff writers travelling from Los Angeles to be on set as the script is shot in Vancouver (scripts written by freelance writers would be supervised by a staff writer at this stage). At this point in the cycle there can also be rewrites depending on how things are working out or last minute changes from the actors or directors (addressing last minute problems with the script). The script is then shot and goes to editing.

Throughout all their interviews, writers maintained that a number of people have input on the script. While an individual or team of writers are credited as the writer for a particular episode, others have significant impact on the script. The showrunner has a role, as do other writers, representatives from departments (costuming, makeup, props) with logistical or budgetary concerns, the network executives, and the availability of actors or shooting locations. Actors themselves may have input on decisions their characters are making and directors all have input. All this occurs before the episode enters the editing process to be fitted to a forty-two minute format for broadcast. These notes connect the disparate aspects of production to the process of scriptwriting, with each point of input focusing on a different aspect, from the big picture to the minutely practical. Writer Jane Espenson noted that talking through the script at different parts of the process was both helpful and revealing in terms of the practical aspect of telling these kinds of long-form, science fiction stories. While writers focus on plot and character, practical concerns come into play when talking with department heads who need to know what the characters are wearing or what the set should look like. Actors then bring script concerns back to character and motivation. While this is an outline or sketch of the process at work behind the scenes it does not detail the process from the perspective of those below-the-line creators that the writers mention as part of their processes. This is a limitation of the interview data I have to work with. I struggled with how to bring in considerations from outside the immediate understanding or experience



of the interviewees in this project. Ultimately I am not able to add a greater understanding of the socio-historical context at work when it comes to these interactions, as my work remains focused on the above-the-line creators who populated the interview data I had access to.

Unlike writing a book in which the whole story is told through words, the world of television includes a host of other factors. The look and feel of the characters, the sets, the location, the clothing, are not all created within the mind of the reader, but have to be created onscreen for the consumption of the audience. Therefore it makes sense that a script is not everything (though of course it is extremely important) and a production is not just reliant on the pictures or feelings that the words evoke, it has to be realized within the time and budget available to the production.

Writer Jane Espenson described the benefits of her position as co-executive producer on the show in addition to her writing credits. Espenson had previously been writing for the show and was promoted in 2008. She detailed the difficulty in writing a single script located within the larger arc of the season and the show. Because of the shooting schedule for television shows, often scripts are written before the previous episode has been shot (or that script completed). Writers have to be clear with their continuity and work within these constraints to produce a manageable and sensible script for their assigned episode. As a long-time writer for television, Espenson confirmed this was part of almost every show on the air – a constraint that writers must learn to work within, or else not succeed.

*Battlestar Galactica* is a production that benefitted from many of the same writers remaining with the project throughout much of its run. The writers interviewed made special note of the enjoyment they took in writing for actors whom they described as high quality performers who improved over the course of the show's run. According to writer Bradley Thompson,

All our actors give us a tremendous response. When you write for [Aaron Douglas] you know you're going to get even more than you expect and that's true with just about everybody on the cast. When you write the most obscure line of subtext, you'll see it in Katee Sackoff's eyes...and you're just going "that's amazing." It's true of just about everybody. Tricia [Helfer]

is amazing and she's gotten nothing but better since day one, she will just break your heart being this evil creature, you know? (Thompson)

Other writers, Espenson especially, spoke about getting to know the voices of their actors. She described that one of the goals of a writer is to “capture the voice of the character” (Espenson) to successfully write their dialogue and bring life to the scene. The writers were able to tailor their words to the actors they were writing for, contributing to the high quality of the show and its critical acclaim

### **4.2.3. The Actors: Cylons and Humans**

In any production, actors are the only ones who have the opportunity to think solely about character. This leaves them in a unique position to bring insight and understanding on a micro level about individuals' experiences in a multitude of situations. There are two main elements to examine in the role of actors in the production process. The first aspect is the casting process. The second is the role of actors in making meaning in the development and actions of their characters.

The actors interviewed spoke about the casting process. Actor Grace Park in particular illuminated elements of what a casting call looks like as well as who is usually considered for what type of role, whether calls are “open to all ethnicities” or not (expanded discussion in chapter five). Actors spoke both about their experience auditioning for *BSG* and different shows, as well as comparing the casting process in Los Angeles and Vancouver. Amongst the actors interviewed, many noted that the part they played in *BSG* was not the part they had read for originally. For example, Brad Dryborough, who plays Lieutenant Hoshi, had read for many different parts, and while the casting agents and producers liked him, they did not find a role for him in the first season and a half. Grace Park initially read for the role of Starbuck. According to Grace Park, both Katee Sackoff and herself had originally wanted each other's role.

While well-established American actors Mary McDonnell and Edward James Olmos were cast as the star-power leads, many of the other actors were Canadian. These local actors had mainly had small parts working on other regular shows (Dryborough, Penikett) filmed in Vancouver around the same time, such as

*Supernatural*, *Smallville*, and *Stargate*.<sup>4</sup> This tendency also put them in the position of not necessarily trying for the show because of any particular appeal of the subject matter, but because, as Grace Park put it, the role was recurring.

Actors sometimes have ways of influencing the production other than just with their acting. Many actors interviewed for this project had nuanced and full understandings of both the social and political goals of the show (from the show bible) as well as the motivations and understandings of their characters. Brad Dryborough and Paul Campbell noted that the actors with more seniority on the show and in the industry in general, like Mary McDonnell or Edward James Olmos, had more leeway to have significant impact on the direction of their characters (intentions, motivations, specific lines, continuity), or the story of any given episode. This was particularly true in terms of McDonnell's protectiveness of her character (expanded on in chapter five) and in Olmos' increased influence as he also moved into a directorial role in later seasons. Some actors had more input than others. Pearson (2009) talks about this in her work about the role of actors in narrative creation. She corroborates that while any actor can have influence on the direction of a script, it tends to be those actors with more star power and confidence who make waves when it comes to standing up to directors, writers, or producers.

The influence of star power actors was noticeable on *Battlestar Galactica*. Grace Park observed Mary McDonnell sending "pages and pages of notes to the writers of how to really subtly shift things" when it came to the progression of her character. Writers Weddle, Thompson, and Espenson also described Mary McDonnell and Edward James Olmos as actors who had significant impact on their characterization. McDonnell and Olmos were involved in the practice of clarifying and modifying their actions and motivations during the writing and filming process. Bradley Thompson (writer) told us that McDonnell has:

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that many of these 'regular shows' are also science fiction. Since the X-Files filmed in Vancouver in the 1990s many other well known science fiction shows have also called Vancouver home.

A very strong sense of who she thinks Laura Roslin is...and you have to listen to her because nine times out of ten she is absolutely right about that stuff, and it's stuff you haven't thought about because you're thinking globally and she's been thinking about the character for the last four years. (Thompson)

Jane Espenson also spoke about Mary's involvement in the development of her character, especially in terms of "protecting the strength of that character" (Espenson). Within the range of actors interviewed, there were clear differences in amounts of agency (or perceived agency) when it came to influence on the script. Not all actors feel the same sense of control over their characters that interviewees speak of McDonnell or Olmos having. The other actors seem to admire and look up to McDonnell's methods, in that she expects to have that kind of dialogue. Grace Park attempts the same level of agency while Brad Dryborough feels very little sense of agency in this regard. So while actors in general can influence the script or the show overall, they illustrate differing levels of constraint and agency.

*BSG* actors expressed strong connections with their characters. Levine (2001) argues the impact actors have in making meaning through their characters is tied to actors' conceptualization of their characters as living beings, or referring to their characters in the first person (as "I"). Of the actors interviewed, Tahmoh Penikett did this the most when talking about his character, Helo, and especially Helo's romantic relationships on the show. In describing Helo and Sharon's relationship, he often referred to "Sharon and I" or "our child" in talking about the characters' daughter Hera, who was born in late season two of the show. This is just one example of the depth of the relationships actors on *BSG* demonstrated with their characters in terms of portrayals and the creation of meaning during the encoding process of the show's production.

The Actors interviewed were very interested in discussing the meaning and intentions of *BSG*. It was clearly something they had thought a lot about throughout the course of working on the show. Interviews with actors revealed that they were actively involved in the meaning-making of the encoding of the show. From interviews it was also clear that they drew meaning from this process for themselves as they grounded their understandings of their characters in aspects of their own lives and experiences. Though

many of the interviewees spoke of collaboration, there was clearly a hierarchy. Some were more able to speak (or felt more able to speak) than others as, ultimately, the power of decision-making rested with Moore (though he was supervised by the network). The actors appeared to be less tied to the show bible than the writers, or at least had not wholeheartedly accepted it in the same way. The actors interviewed were keenly aware of the general precarity of their jobs and in tune with power hierarchies on set. Many gave the impression that they respected ability of the better known actors to voice their opinions to the writers and producers.

#### **4.2.4. The Fans: Online Access and Understanding**

When asked about the influence fans had on the show during its four seasons, the interviewees responded along a continuum from no influence to fairly significant influence. I speculate this range has to do with the different possible ramifications for admitting influence. Actors were more likely to attribute some influence to the fans, while the writers largely dismissed or downplayed them. I speculate that writers would avoid talking about influence of fans to avoid accusations of stealing ideas, or diminishing the integrity of their writing in that way. Thompson and Weddle noted, however, that it is nearly impossible to avoid all fan reaction to a show that inspired such a dedicated fan base.

Brad Dryborough was the interviewee who felt the most strongly that the fans had had an impact on the direction of the show, at least in season four with the romantic storyline between his character, Lieutenant Hoshi, and Alessandro Juliani's character Lieutenant Felix Gaeta.<sup>5</sup> Dryborough saw fans as a convenient way to get focus-group type reactions while the show is airing. He commented, "I don't know that it necessarily directs the show, but I think it might inform" (Dryborough) especially in the case of this romantic storyline, which takes place late in the series when the show had not yet addressed LGBTQ+<sup>6</sup> relationships. For Dryborough, it was also a good way to find out

<sup>5</sup> A more significant examination of this influence is undertaken in chapter five.

<sup>6</sup> LGBTQ+ is an inclusive term which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\*, Queer, and other identities that fall under the banner of the queer community.

what parts of the plot needed more explanation, or where more hints were needed for the audience.

Actor Tahmoh Penikett allowed less impact to the fans' online responses. Penikett addressed popular fan discourse that credits his character's continued role to fan response and fondness for the character who was originally scheduled to die for good during the miniseries in 2003. Penikett noted that the fans' involvement in his continued employment "is the number one question I get asked all the time," and while he credits the fans at least in part, he also refocuses the idea onto showrunner Ron Moore, saying that he is "a brilliant man who saw a great opportunity for a storyline" (Penikett).

The writers interviewed were the least likely to say that blogs or online fan chatter had an impact on the directions the show took. Bradley Thompson said that he does answer online questions sometimes and noted that his girlfriend would often read the blogs and sometimes bring certain things to his attention. David Weddle similarly noted that Ron Moore and his wife were "active on the blogs" to a degree (Weddle). Reasons for not engaging with the online chatter ranged from simply "not enough time" (Thompson), to not seeing engaged fans as representative of the whole audience (Weddle). Though he said he found it "incredibly satisfying and fascinating to see people who have dissected...all the minutiae of your episode," Weddle emphasized that the ones discussing this online are "a small percentage of people who are so motivated that they are going to sit and write about the show in great detail" (Weddle). For Weddle it was not wholly worthwhile to try and cater to this relatively small group of people.

#### **4.2.5. Talking about talking back to "The Network"**

One of the major day-to-day constraints that the creators talked about throughout the interviews were the notes on the script that writers receive from a range of contributors during the process of getting a script ready to shoot. While interviewees spoke of notes from other writers, the showrunner, actors, departments, and budgets, the notes from the network were in a category of their own. The Syfy Network, a subsidiary of NBC Universal, is the managing overhead for *Battlestar Galactica*, and the

ultimate authority on what storylines they are willing to pay for. Both writers and actors knew of and referenced certain instances of notes that changed the direction of an episode as well as notes that Ron Moore or other writers fought in order to protect episodes or part of episodes they saw as particularly important to keep without network changes. Interviewees commented that many notes in the beginning of the series' run were about the darkness of the subject matter or lack of light-hearted moments within the show. Despite the subject matter at hand, the characters on the show being the only survivors of a massive genocide, the network wanted the show to not always concentrate on the tragedy and impossibility of the situation in order to make the show more appealing to a wider audience. Actor Tahmoh Penikett said there were more notes at the beginning of the show but afterwards the network relaxed a bit. Penikett speculated that the consistent ratings, dedicated niche market, and fan base contributed to the network being more comfortable with the way the show was being run.

Many writers and actors agreed that Syfy was quite lenient or light with them in terms of how many notes were given overall throughout the series. Bradley Thompson, a writer who has worked on many other shows during his career, noted that writers on other shows, "can get just literally buried in notes" but that Syfy "has been extremely light with him" (Thompson). Thompson's writing partner, David Weddle, attributed this in part to the impact that cable has had on the television landscape, in that Syfy does not have to concentrate on getting the largest audience, or lower their product to "the lowest common denominator", instead the niche market in which Syfy competed allowed the production to become somewhat liberated from many mainstream network television concerns.

Addressing notes from the network was largely showrunner Ron Moore's responsibility. While writers would receive notes from Moore about their scripts, it was Moore who received and addressed notes from the network on any of his writers' scripts. Moore described "collisions" as he called them, being important parts of the process when it comes to scripting any series. Ron Moore offered an example of a negotiation with executives at Syfy. In one scene Moore intended to show Adama and Roslin smoking pot. The network refused to allow it, even after Moore offered a number of concessions provided it could still be evident that the characters were actually getting

high. When the network again refused to approve the scene, Moore stepped up his negotiation,

And I just lost my cool and started yelling at them through the phone and cursing at them and it scared them, totally shocked them. And they said “well let’s see how that looks in dailies”. And that’s the last conversation I had about it. So at some point you do have to throw a fucking fit. (Moore).

While this disagreement had the potential to pose a significant standstill, Moore notes that for the most part the process is more collegial. Moore argues that “you truly have to pick your battles,” commenting that not all notes received from the network are destined to disrupt creative vision. Often there are ways to address the concerns raised by other parties and maintain the creative direction of the episode. This is most often how conflicts are resolved, through strategic negotiation with agents at different production levels having significant say in how the final product is shaped.

### **4.3. The Work of Production**

Three major themes around practicality and the process of producing *BSG* emerged throughout the interviews. First, there were no typical days. Second, the metaphor of science fiction and the show’s cable network allowed the show to tackle divisive issues. Finally, the production culture on *BSG* was collaborative in nature. These practical observations form the conditions under which the text of the show was produced.

Many interviewees spoke of not having a typical day, whether it was the actors’ shooting schedules or the dynamic nature of the ebb and flow of work for one actor on an ensemble show. The writers too had differing demands on their time and attention depending on what point in the process they were at, whether breaking a script, writing a story document, finalizing drafts, incorporating notes, or on set to see the episode shot. Daily differences and practical decisions had influence on the show’s production. Despite the seemingly dynamic and changing schedule or demands of filming such a show, the episodic nature of *BSG* allowed for a normalized process or workflow with a cohesive group working together to film the show.



The source of much of the critical and popular praise for *Battlestar Galactica* stemmed from the show's ability to address social issues without shying away from divisive or politically charged topics. Interviewees spoke of two major contributing factors here. The first was that what they described as the "metaphor of science fiction" acting as a buffer or critical distance from which to speak about certain topics. While interviewees referred to this metaphor of science fiction, it could also be explained through the conventions of genre. Neale (1980) defines genre as "instances of repetition and difference" (p.48) and it is these instances, codes, and expectations, which allow certain stories to be told in the science fiction genre. Interviewees also attributed the show's presence on cable network Syfy as a place where writers could take more risks than on a major network like NBC. Weddle (writer) spoke of the potentially controversial anti-Cylon terrorist plot in which the show's heroes (humans) used terrorist tactics against the invading Cylons in an episode that aired just a few short years after the events of 9/11. Actor Brad Dryborough also spoke of the terrorist plotline as well as the ways the show addressed abortion. Saying of controversial issues,

They present it as "here is a rational decision that we have to make, that because of our situation makes sense"...it doesn't make it right or wrong it just makes you think about the issue, as opposed to making a judgement on it (Dryborough)

Weddle, Penikett, and Moore also spoke of the show's presence on a cable network to be extremely important contributing factor to the types of stories they could tell.

Throughout the interviews it became apparent that those interviewed spoke highly of how well collaboration worked on *BSG*, with Penikett remarking that visiting directors found the level of collegiality on the production to be admirable. Grace Park and Jane Espenson both spoke of how open actors were to collaborating with writers, and vice versa. Espenson, a veteran of television writing, noting that *BSG* was quite sensitive to letting actors weigh in on script decisions as actors "have very good points, because they live with those characters" (Espenson). Grace Park spoke of everyone on the production having "grown together" as the show moved into later seasons. However the show was not entirely without conflict.

In this chapter I described the different groups at work in the production process on *Battlestar Galactica* and illustrated differences in understandings and emphasis placed by some of the key players. I did this while positioning *BSG* as a site of study within contemporary popular culture, postfeminist sensibilities, and science fiction. By looking at day-to-day elements of producing the show, this chapter provides a foundation of understanding from which to examine three main points of intersectionality – race, sexuality, and gender – in chapter five. The creators interviewed spoke about the roles they played in shaping the text and provided an understanding of their process of meaning-making throughout production. The roles of actors, writers, showrunner, as well as the network and the fans were all brought up in interviews as forces at work in the production process to varying degrees.

Interviewees spoke about three key themes, the lack of typical days in their jobs, the freedom both the metaphor of science fiction and the show's cable network afforded them to address controversial social issues, and the collaborative, collegial nature of the production on set. These are all elements that afforded the *BSG* production apparatus the ability to produce the show that they did. The creators played an integral part of shaping the text according to their own understandings and day-to-day processes of their work lives. The individuals involved spoke in different ways about the same forces at work and in turn they placed different levels of importance and meaning on these elements according to their own understandings. What was also clear though, was that the creativity of individuals was constrained at every intersection. There were varying levels of influence and power within a space described as collaborative.

The object of my analysis, the production community that created *Battlestar Galactica*, came together at a specific time in the television industry. The creators worked on a post-9/11 show that used a tumultuous political time to tell complicated and morally ambiguous stories that challenged dominant reactionary thinking. Syfy afforded *BSG* creators a space in which they could strive to appeal to a more niche audience than they would have had to at a larger channel such as their parent company, NBC. However, *Battlestar Galactica* was also produced at a time when television content was changing dramatically due to what DeFino (2014) refers to as the HBO Effect. Shows like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) set a new bar for television content, with *Battlestar*

*Galactica* fitting into that tradition and striving to live up to a new standard in quality television.

With an understanding of the work that went on behind the scenes to create the show, chapter five will address specific social issues the interviewees spoke about the show addressing in successful, unsuccessful, or somewhat unique ways. In chapter four I have established the practical and day-to-day constraints that impact the production of television narratives. Considerations like budgetary and time constraints, the input of departments like props or location, and the nature of collaborative television authorship must be examined in conjunction with intention and understanding on the part of producers in terms of on screen representations. In chapter five I build on this understanding of practicality by directly examining the production of representations of race, sexuality, and gender in *Battlestar Galactica*.

## Chapter 5.

### Tackling Race, Sexuality, and Gender in Television Production

In this chapter I examine three intersecting areas of identity dealt with in the narrative of *Battlestar Galactica*. The areas of race, sexuality and gender are drawn both from *BSG* scholarship (which influenced the formation of the interview questions) and from the interviewees' own answers. For example, much of the *BSG* specific literature centres on gender, largely through the character of Starbuck (Kungl, 2008; Sharp, 2010; Marshall and Potter, 2008). Academic discourses about race in *Battlestar Galactica*, such as Deis (2008) parallel the metaphor of the Cylon, while Nishime (2011) addresses the drawbacks to only looking at race through the metaphor of the Cylons. I begin by highlighting the major issues and politics of representation present in *BSG*, outlining the issues at play before moving into an in depth discussion of the production and representation of race, sexuality and gender within the show's four seasons. Chapter four focused on the day-to-day decisions and processes that impacted the meaning-making process. In chapter five I analyze how the production processes shaped the treatment of these intersecting areas of identity within the program. The issues in this chapter are drawn from themes that emerged from the interview data and previous literature. Informed by feminist production studies these issues were chosen for the importance given to them by interviewees as well as their resonance to concerns of the academic or scholarly study of contemporary television.

Three major themes emerged from the interviews. Discussions with creators vary in reaction, perspective, and depth. Overall the interviewees were willing to speak to the treatment of gender on the show (nearly all touched on it) and had clearly thought about it before, or at had least engaged with the show bible. Interviewees were much more reluctant to engage in discussions of race outside the main metaphor of the Cylon, which

more interviewees referenced as their way of dealing with racialized narratives on the show. Issues of sexuality came up only in one of the interviews, with actor Brad Dryborough, whose character Lieutenant Hoshi, was revealed to be gay late in the last season of the show. This part of my analysis isolates the main negotiations and points of contention in addressing race, sexuality, and gender in the production of *BSG*, illustrating the reasoning and contributing factors to the ways in which the production process facilitated or caused problems during negotiation and meaning-making processes behind these ideas and issues.

In many ways, the producers of *Battlestar Galactica* attempted to craft a gender-neutral society, creating a world where contemporary societal and racial biases, history, and understandings do not apply. The main source and standard for these ideas was in the show bible Moore created to facilitate a streamlined and unified vision of the world this story takes place in. Through this conceptualization the show speaks in metaphors about North American society. In their attempt to craft a progressive science fiction world many elements were at play and had varied impact. The resulting narrative is a combination of factors involving situated actors with varying degrees of agency in the production process. In what follows, I interrogate these assertions and evaluate their success.

## **5.1. Representation, Race, and Racial Metaphors**

When *Battlestar Galactica* was on the air the show received much popular praise from television critics and fans alike (Marshall and Potter, 2008). Audiences appreciated its female characters, its treatment of race in both storyline and casting, as well as simply the high calibre of the show. Scholars also reference *BSG* with praise for the show's treatment of representation (Marshall and Potter, 2008; Sharp 2010). In addition to crafting a gender-neutral world, another show goal (from the show bible and described in interviews) has been the creative openness and willingness to tackle tough social issues in a post-9/11 television world. *Battlestar Galactica*'s morally ambiguous storylines and racial metaphor of the Cylons versus humans narrative are often remarked on in discussion of the show.

Across the interviews with writers, producers, and actors who worked on *BSG* it is clear that those involved in creating the show viewed it as a space of cultural critique. Many interviewees reiterated the idea of science fiction as a place to tell stories about our society at arm's length and a way of letting the audience see a story in a new light and from a different perspective. The creators used metaphors as a way to engage with stories and questions about race and gender and to a lesser extent sexuality. Writer Jane Espenson clarifies by saying,

I think the thicker the metaphor, the more there are robots or monsters...the more you can get away with. In a way, sort of the more heavy-handed you can be, the more overt you can be, because people are distracted. (Espenson)

This narrative of the science fiction metaphor runs throughout the interviews. It is often held up as one of the main benefits of working in this genre, telling politically charged stories that you could not tell in a show set in the modern day.

Creators interviewed echoed aspects of the show bible while discussing race in *Battlestar Galactica*, agreeing that stories about race were told with the Cylons. Many interviewees understood the metaphor of the Cylon as standing in for all racialized conflict and racial stories, however some interviewees were less likely to engage with other readings of race in the show. Overall the actors interviewed were generally more open to seeing racial interactions or ramifications outside of the Cylon metaphor than the writers were. This was especially true in discussions of the casting process and the presence of a fairly diverse cast on the show. There are potential factors involved in this observation, though. For one thing, the writers interviewed were all white, while two of the actors interviewed were of non-white heritage (Korean and First Nations, respectively). In this case, the actors interviewed were both more used to dealing with implications of race in their lived experience and in the process of making television. Those crafting the universe, the writers, were more likely to think in terms of the frame of their world, with the Cylons standing in for the othered groups. Whether this is more to do with the writers' intentions to write "colour-blind" in accordance with the guidelines set up in the show bible, or that the actors' spend more time navigating race in the casting process, is not clear.

For the purpose of this project there are two main ways to evaluate race in television, through relations of representation and politics of representation. Stuart Hall (1996) describes a “relations of representation” comprised of two main elements. For Hall, access to the mainstream by artists and cultural workers of colour is as important as an active contestation of marginalization, fetishization, and stereotypical portrayals common to onscreen depictions of people of colour. The “politics of representation” on the other hand characterizes media and fiction as formative rather than expressive when it comes to social and political life. If the relations of representation are about our popular culture better reflecting our reality, the politics of representation are about how our art influences our society. Both the relations of representation and the politics of representation are at play in *Battlestar Galactica* and in my analysis. The relations and politics of representation are about access and image. Assessing who is on our screens only tells part of the story when it comes to societal ideas of race and representation. However, by looking at who has what role on our television programs we can illuminate part of this part of the story.

### **5.1.1. Actors on Race: Negotiating the Casting Process**

The first place I will start in examining the role of race in *Battlestar Galactica* is with access and contestation, two area firmly entrenched within the discussion of the relations of representation. The casting process is an area key to determining what roles are available to whom and why. The cast is face-value representation in any media text, who is on the show and who is left out of the show. But there is more to it than just that. Actors and the showrunner talked about the casting process and casting for representation. They spoke both generally about the casting process in Vancouver and Los Angeles as well as specifically about the casting process for *Battlestar Galactica* (though for many of the actors this process had taken place several years prior to the time of interview).

Ron Moore characterized diversity in casting as a priority for the production but doing so much of the casting in Vancouver caused him some concern. In terms of the process of casting background actors Moore spoke of it coming down to “who read well on the day” (Moore) and that the pool of potential background actors was limited, as

Vancouver's diversity or demographics are different than that of Los Angeles. For a production whose writers are based in Los Angeles and whose primary audience is American, this caused some shooting-locale based concern. Moore reiterated that his chief concern in casting is to find the right actor for the part but the effort to get a more diverse cast is always in the back of his mind during the process.

On screen diversity starts with the casting process. Grace Park, a Canadian actor of Korean heritage, shared her experiences of casting. Most importantly noting that if a casting call does not state ethnicity, it is assumed to be for white actors. However, some casting directors are more open to who they see read for each role. Park also noted that *BSG* was somewhat diverse overall in their casting choices but "not as diverse as a straight-up Canadian show" (Park). Tahmoh Penikett reflected favourably on the diversity of the cast as well. Actor Brad Dryborough was not cast the first time he auditioned, but was further along in the show. According to Dryborough, the character he was finally cast for was originally written as a Japanese woman (Lieutenant Hoshi). This is an example of what Moore was talking about in terms of trying to cast for diversity, but sometimes ultimately changing your mind according to who read well. In terms of formerly female Lieutenant Hoshi, it was not a priority of the production to keep a fixed idea of her in mind – unlike *Starbuck* or *Boomer*. This situation reads to me like for all the plans in the show bible for portraying women, ultimately it was not their highest priority. For whatever reason, they were not as committed as they thought to their goal of diversity in this instance. This is an important observation when it comes to issues of representation in popular culture. Gill (2007) argues that feminist media analysis begins with the importance of representation and uses this as a basis to "understand how images and cultural constructions are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression" (p.7). The casting of a white man in a role originally written for a Japanese woman in this instance illustrates the way that power and priority impacts representation and power.

Casting is an important area to interrogate when it comes to representation in film. bell hooks (1996) argues that casting is an area of film and television where it is much easier to go along with a "racist filmic legacy" (p.91) than to challenge it. In *Reel to Real* (1996) she uses both relations of representation and politics of representation to



argue the extent to which progressive representations are kept out of film and television. She argues that mainstream (and to a degree, independent) film and television are upholding the racist legacies and status quo whether overtly or covertly. It is not the only area that needs to be examined, but it is able to give a surface-level insight into the issue.

### **5.1.2. Writers on Race: The Cylon Metaphor**

The writers interviewed were most comfortable discussing race in terms of the Cylon metaphor. For them “race” on the show meant the conflict between the humans and the Cylons and to some degree they were resistant to other readings. Most writers referred to Ron Moore’s worldbuilding in the show bible in explaining this. For example, Weddle said “we play our universe as if there is no skin colour...the society is colour-blind in that sense. So we don’t really ever raise those issues that way” (Weddle). This was a popular way of thinking about race across all interviews, with some more willing to address other ideas of race and some only engaging with race through the metaphor. Weddle spoke further about the world having been built without the background of our history and our racial biases. The writers only wanted to engage with ideas usually associated with a racial narrative with the Cylons, who on our terms span a few different ethnicities but on *BSG*’s terms are only Cylon. This allowed the writers, they argued, to “throw it all in high relief so you can examine it in a fresher, clearer perspective” (Weddle).

Writers spoke in their interviews about the idea of writing “colour-blind” as a strategy for dealing with race in the show. Moore’s show bible sets up a world with a different history and different divides between people than in ours. This rationale is used to write according to guidelines that ignore understandings about race and racial considerations that are deemed not part of the world of *BSG*. This makes logical sense in the context of their world, but it is also indicative of a larger reluctance in television to address racial politics in North America. Writing with no consideration to what people will read into a scene can serve to reinforce contemporary or detrimental ideas about race, rather than causing them to go away.

There are problems with colour-blind or race-blind practices. For instance, Long (2011) argues that they can cause harm by ignoring representational politics that should be considered in the production process. The on-screen diversity in *Battlestar Galactica* is similar to the approach taken by prime time drama *Grey's Anatomy* (2005- ). Shonda Rhimes, the show's creator and showrunner has stated that race was never a casting consideration and that characters were not framed according to race within the series (Long, 2011). Long follows this observation by adding that race-blind casting is not always as progressive as it sounds because it "ignores intersectional specificities among groups of men and women and the systemic power relations through which these differential experiences are produced and maintained" (Long, 2011, p.1079). By writing race-blind, as the *BSG* writers did by using the Cylon metaphor, they are potentially eliminating considerations that should be taken into account, or perhaps accidentally reifying racial biases on screen. Colour-blind writing can leave space for problematic representations to remain as part of the narrative (Nishime, 2011; Nakamura, 2007).

In an effort to investigate the impact of colour-blind writing, interviewees were asked to respond to an analysis of a scene in which Grace Park's Cylon character physically interfaces with a computer. Nakamura (2007) argues that the scenes had overtones of stereotypical representations of Asians and computers. The writers were reluctant to engage with this reading. Instead, writers spoke of Sharon's identity as a Cylon and that relationship to machines, rather than the actor's Asian identity. When showed Nakamura's critique in the interviews Weddle, Thompson, and Espenson tended to disagree with it. Weddle strongly disagreed, reiterating that the writers were working within a "colour-blind" society on the show, so Grace Park's identity did not come into play in their minds. Park also spoke about how she never felt that the writers suddenly wanted her to play up Asian stereotypes, instead racial stories were always told through the Cylon metaphor. David Weddle acknowledged the concerns expressed by Nakamura (2007) in her analysis of the computer scene and said that there is always a level of interpretation on the part of the audience that writers may not expect. In the writing process, he elaborated, individuals may not be aware of certain social prejudices forming in the writing of a particular scene. This illustrates a main problem with colour-blind writing, when you're not paying attention to how narrative intersects with race, you can end up causing more harm than good. There is a disconnect here, mainly for the

writers. The creative agents involved in telling these stories were so focused on seeing race through the metaphor of the Cylons that they were far less likely to recognize other racial readings and considerations.

Overall there are two main considerations in terms of race on *BSG*, in casting and the Cylon metaphor. Producers both tried to actively create a world in which there were many different races represented, while imagining a world where one racial divide or tension existed. Largely successful in telling stories about racial conflict through the Cylon metaphor, writing colour-blind may have caused some lapses in understanding in terms of representation and stereotypes in the show.

The Cylon metaphor became the chief way of understanding racial stories throughout *BSG*. Interviewees responded to questions about race on the show in terms of Cylon/human interaction, with Cylons standing in for all racialized groups in society. Others did mention that some of the colonies were discriminated against based on religious or occupational bias, but that they were trying to create a narrative that did not rely on a North American understanding of race. Weddle highlights Grace Park's character in this, saying that "racism and issues of dehumanization" (Weddle) are explained through the metaphor of the Cylon. When it is revealed at the end of season one that Grace Park's character is a Cylon "everybody turns on her" (Weddle). For Weddle, the issues of race here are all about Sharon's Cylon identity and not in any way about Grace Park's Asian identity. This theme is often reiterated throughout the interviews. Weddle goes on to expand on writing for Grace Park's character saying

We don't talk about her being Asian...it's never in my mind informed the character or the stories. We talk about her being Cylon and what that represents (Weddle).

Grace Park discusses the Cylon metaphor as well,

We would never think of robots as a race. But in our world of *Battlestar*, it's really a metaphor for all the different races or ethnicities. Or even any type of dividing line that people will find (Park).

Jane Espenson characterizes the Cylon metaphor as "this perfect mechanism already built to tell our minority experience stories" (Espenson). This narrative of metaphor is so

ingrained in science fiction as part of the genre, and in the worldbuilding of the show bible that it was accepted by most of the interviewees.

One of the divergent points of understanding many of the interviewees spoke about were the human/Cylon relationships that occurred throughout the show. Espenson compares Lee (white) and Dualla's (black) marriage to Helo (human) and Sharon's (Cylon) marriage, saying that Lee and Dualla's relationship was never thought of as a 'mixed marriage.' Helo and Sharon however were negotiating a mixed human and Cylon marriage (and not an Asian/First Nations) marriage. However, Tahmoh Penikett, who plays Helo, spoke of Helo and Sharon's relationship in terms of his own experience being "raised with two different cultures" (British and First Nations). He spoke about how his upbringing allowed him "a greater view of things and greater tolerance" (Penikett) and that this informed his character's relationship to Sharon and their child. Penikett described himself, his own mother (First Nations) and father (British) as a parallel example to Helo, Sharon, and Hera's family unit on the show.

The Cylon metaphor permeates the understanding of race in the *BSG* production process and allows the writers and actors to bring up and tell interesting stories about race, racialization, and (eventual understanding across difference and division. The ubiquity of this metaphor potentially had other influences on the meaning-making process during the show. Thinking about race just in terms of Cylons and humans leaves room for errors or oversights in the process of "colour-blind" writing.

## **5.2. Representing Sexualities in Space**

The relatively unaddressed and overlooked social issue or identity in the grand scheme of *BSG* is the lack of inclusion of LGBTQ+ (or queer) characters or stories. While the producer/showrunner Ron Moore re-imagined a *BSG* in which race and gender were prominently addressed in a progressive light, LGBTQ+ stories were relatively left out of the narrative. Through interviews, it is evident that this exclusion is largely based on production factors. Moore's show bible clearly lays out issues of race and gender but does not specifically have a goal for queer representation in the show. As a result this issue was not prioritized in the writing process. This is a plausible

explanation for why the queer representation in *BSG* comes in during later seasons. Other production factors also played a role.

When interviewed, actor Brad Dryborough (Lieutenant Hoshi) had some insights as to why queer characters were underrepresented and how he thinks some of the queer storylines could have been handled better. Hoshi is one half of the only LGBTQ+ relationship we see over the course of the show, between Hoshi and Gaeta in the second half of season four. According to Dryborough, he did not know until very late in the game that this was ahead for his character. Dryborough talked about how the relationship was not originally meant to involve his character but the writers' first choice actor Sebastian Spence, who played Lieutenant Noel 'Narcho' Allison was unavailable due to another television role. For Dryborough, had he known ahead of time, he would have made a few different choices in his characters' interactions with Gaeta in the previous episodes. The relationship scenes between Lieutenant Hoshi and Lieutenant Gaeta were also shot out of order, with their relationship revealed in a series of webisodes, titled "The Face of the Enemy," which aired in the break between the first and second halves of season four, but was shot after the conclusion of season four. The filming order, combined with actor availability contributes to the interpretation that this inclusion was an afterthought and not a priority for the series (which did show many heterosexual relationships). In Dryborough's opinion, the writers (and showrunner) realized that they had left queer characters out of the show up until this point and tried to course correct for this. For Dryborough, fan opinion and fan remarks about this oversight had an impact on bringing this relationship to the show. He spoke in his interview about people "always wondering online if Lieutenant Gaeta was gay" (Dryborough) before any of this particular plot was revealed.

For a show that is premised as a representative microcosm for society, the lack of queer characters, especially when so much was done in terms of racial and gender representation, is an oversight allowed by various production factors. Actor availability and the lack of clear goals in the show bible on this topic both contributed to the exclusion of LGBTQ+ stories from *BSG*, a show which did not shy away from relationships and sex in its storylines. Three characters out of the 50,000 survivors (not that we had detailed stories for each of them) are specifically noted as queer. Lieutenant

Gaeta (who is in the show throughout the four seasons but is not noted as queer until the fourth), Lieutenant Hoshi (introduced partway through season two, in a relationship in season four), and Admiral Cain (introduced in season two, revealed as queer in the separate *Razor* TV movie). In my view, since queer sexuality was not a priority laid out in the bones of the ethos of the show, it resulted in an oversight on the part of production. This combined with production factors such as actor availability, resulted in the exclusion of these storylines until the last season of the show.

My observation with this element is in the production factors that led to a less well-planned integration of issues of sexuality. Race and gender (while not dealt with perfectly throughout the show) were addressed in the show bible and therefore at the forefront of the minds of nearly everyone interviewed. Though this was not something delved into with all of the interviewees, its lack of inclusion in the forefront of creators' minds illustrates that things not purposefully put at the forefront of the minds of creators (in the show bible) may be left out of a production like this. This shows the importance of production factors in influencing onscreen representation in a concrete way. It also illustrates the importance in thinking about the ways in which writers have an influence on who is left out or excluded, not necessarily in a purposeful way, but in terms of who has a seat at the table, what they're aware of, and what they choose to prioritize.

### **5.3. Gender and “Gender-Neutrality” in *Battlestar Galactica***

Narratives are a product of the power politics of their time. Writers, producers, and actors who create science fiction stories are grounded in their own lives and understandings, so this is the world they reflect. But this is a surface definition and explanation used to excuse a limited type of thinking and working. While the critical distance afforded by the genre could be a place where representations of women are more progressive or inclusive, it is not always the case. In many ways today's science fiction is less progressive than in years past. Today's science fiction is no longer an exploration of a future utopia such as portrayed on *Star Trek: The Original Series* in the 1960s. Even today's *Star Trek* films are arguably less diversely cast, less dedicated to a progressive politics, despite social progress. In many ways the science fiction genre has remained full of possibility for progressive representation but not necessarily followed

through on that promise. In a political climate in which hard-won women's rights are under threat again and a media climate permeated with the postfeminist sensibility Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2007a) describe, science fiction has also become reflective of these troubling realities. This shift in the genre necessitates an examination of the way gender is represented in science fiction television shows.

Ron Moore made some conscious decisions early on in the production process, which stand out as progressive moves. Moore recast original (1978) male characters, Starbuck and Boomer as women, Kara Thrace and Sharon Valerii. Moore talks about how one of the first ideas he had for the new show was casting a woman in the role of Starbuck to create a different, fresher dynamic than the cliché version of military pilots. Reactions to the decision to cast Katee Sackoff in the role were varied and intense, with Dirk Benedict (2004) who played Starbuck in the 1978 series, blogging his indignation about the character's "castration". Kungl (2008) addresses this violent (online) reaction from Benedict and fans of the old show as directly related to changing a specific man's role to a female character instead of casting a woman in any role usually assumed to be male. Boomer on the other hand, was not a direct switching of a male character to a female one, but rather a minor decision to use the call sign Boomer as an homage to the old show for the entirely new character of Sharon Valerii.

### **5.3.1. Building the World of *Battlestar Galactica***

Part of Ron Moore's goals toward for the gender-neutral world was to set up strong mother and father figures as leaders for two different power types, Commander William Adama for the military and President Laura Roslin for the civilian government. While in the 1978 version of the show the civilian government was mostly inconsequential, the reimagined series gave the civilian government weight and direction in the form of Roslin. Throughout the show she is written as flawed yet hopeful, resilient, smart, and unafraid, a strong offset to the more traditional male military father figure found in Adama. Never is Roslin's leadership questioned because of her gender (though she is questioned on her decisions, experience, and actions).

Another aspect of the gender-neutrality established was established with Starbuck. Moore kept much of the rough and tumble, brash, unapologetic characteristics of the top gun fighter pilot, but cast Katee Sackoff in the role instead of a man. These decisions influenced others, such as referring to all superior officers as “Sir,” gender-neutral washrooms, and a writing ban on the word bitch<sup>7</sup>. These decisions, Moore argues, sets up the gender-neutrality of the *BSG* world and eliminated many of the “gender politics” or “collision points” that you would expect to find in another show.

The writers interviewed constantly refer to guidelines from the show bible when asked how gender was dealt with on the show. This illustrates the influence that Ron Moore’s policies had on the day-to-day working and understanding of the show and the world they were writing in. Jane Espenson said that “it seems to have been a very gender-equal sort of society” (Espenson) and that informed how she, and others, crafted the characters. After the show was set up by Moore and laid out in the show bible, there were boundaries to how the world functioned and in some ways the writers were constrained by this. They had been given a way to think about gender and they stuck with it, with very little variation from the guidelines.

Writers referred to Starbuck and Roslin as touchstone roles for women on the show. This was the lynchpin in how they understood women’s representation in the show overall. All of the writers interviewed spoke about writing for Starbuck. For Espenson, the appeal of Starbuck was in her practical strength in doing what needed to be done, even while in pain. For Weddle, Starbuck gave him creative distance to write stories about aspects of his military father. Writers such as Thompson and Weddle emphasized their focus on writing good characters. Character came first for them and then considerations of gender could follow. Starbuck’s character drew in David Weddle, thinking about military themes in a different way than if he had been writing for a male character. Thompson spoke of the importance of the work *BSG* does to show that women have as much physical power over the universe as men, as shown through the show’s military women and the independent actions of women throughout the show. Of

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, “Son of a Bitch” is still used as an insult or curse in the show, but Moore interpreted it as unrelated to the gender-specific insult that bitch is.



the writers interviewed, Jane Espenson appeared to have done the most independent thinking about questions of gender. Espenson's engagement on the topic makes sense given her background as a woman who has written on shows about women, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997) being the most prominent example. Overall, writers tended to tow the party line when talking about gender in *BSG*, with very few variations in opinions from those set out by Ron Moore, both in his interview and in the show bible.

### **5.3.2. Gendered Understandings and Protecting Characters**

While actor Mary McDonnell was not interviewed for this project, many other interviewees spoke of her influence on various aspects of the production. Other actors spoke of her care for Laura Roslin and her protectiveness of other female characters on the show. Writers like Bradley Thompson also spoke of Mary's protectiveness of the president, finding things the writers were not necessarily sensitive to, especially when it came to power issues for the women of the show.

Paul Campbell, who worked closely with McDonnell in his role as Billy Keikeya, the president's assistant, had the most to say about Mary's contributions to the show. He spoke of her biggest fight being to ensure that Roslin was the strongest female president she could be without playing into catty or bitchy stereotypical female political roles. McDonnell wanted Roslin to be seen as equal in all interactions and without compromising her or her character's integrity. Campbell also spoke highly of the show's portrayal of female roles, believing they kept the use of stereotypes to a minimum. Mary McDonnell, Campbell said, did a lot of work to make sure Roslin did not become a stereotype, pushing back to the writers against specific lines and actions. Tahmoh Penikett also had good things to say about the gender representation on the show. Penikett spoke about Katee Sackoff (Starbuck) as a role model for younger fans of the show, saying she sticks out as a powerful female figure in a television landscape that is lacking in that area. He echoed the ideas of gender-neutrality, repeating many of the same ideas the writers and Moore had spoken about.

The most dissident or questioning reading of the gender issues on *BSG* came from actor Grace Park. Park read the particular brand of gender-neutrality as an

aggressive or “agro” masculinity that failed to speak to a complete range of emotions and strengths of women. Park wanted more from the female characters on the show than just anger, or even just a specific type of anger. She speaks of a different type of female anger not accessed by the show, the anger of “when someone makes Mom angry,” and everyone in the house is “quaky” because they can feel it. She ties this monotone aspect to the anger on the show being a product of, or drawn from the circumstances – the society is at war throughout the whole series. This pervasive warlike atmosphere fed into the lack of femininity, or the overwhelming presence of masculinity in circumstances in which you protect yourself at all costs, including at the expense of your femininity or identity.

Grace Park also brought up some of the tougher issues, particularly from her characters’ stories. She spoke a lot about the ways in which her characters were victim throughout most of season two, with actions or plot happening to her rather than any of the Sharons having their own agency. A significant aspect of this for Park was a scene in which her character is imprisoned and threatened with rape during an interrogation. Park challenged some of the aspects of the scene as well as her character’s reactions in the aftermath. She also expressed concerns with the amount of violence perpetuated towards the female Cylons (“enemy”) in particular throughout the course of the show.

The negotiations around character actions in regards to gender spoken of by actors, writers, and the showrunner illustrate that the writers and showrunner were not always successful in their goals of gender-neutrality, despite the focus they put on that goal throughout *BSG*’s production. The negotiated course corrections offered by some of the more outspoken or respected actors on set in the filming process underscore that the work of television production is collaborative in nature, that different agents in the process are willing to negotiate and learn from one another throughout the length of production. However it also shows that there are different amounts of agency to do so offered by different agents, depending on job security, star power, and force of will.

There were two competing narratives expressed by interviewees – gender-neutrality and a pervasive agro-masculinity – setting up a conflict in how production agents viewed or understood gender. For some, the traditional masculine strength of

some characters, like Espenson speaks of Starbuck, was an example of the gender-neutrality of the show. While for others this is a typical instance of aggressive masculinity rather than a feminine strength or anger. One must question whether the writing of “strong female characters” and outlawing the term bitch from the show is enough to secure *BSG*’s place in a progressive narrative of women on screen in roles that challenge traditional representations. Perhaps it is enough for an intense, wartime story. But certainly there is always room for improvement, both within production and in looking forward to the next project. That Park was one of the only interviewees to speak about this shows a limitation to the strength of the ideas in the show bible. Moore’s guidelines were the chief considerations in setting up the interplay of these issues. As a result the creators did not offer much of a challenge to this way of seeing gender or gender-neutrality. Lacking a stronger diversity of views as well as a stronger diversity of female characters on the show illustrates the necessity of this line of inquiry. Women in above-the-line positions in production operate within a male-dominated industry by negotiation and consent in regards to power and narrative. This process is indicative of the work remaining to be done in popular culture representations of women and femininity.

#### **5.4. “Strong Female Characters” and Divergent Readings of Representation**

When talking about the show’s portrayal of women, many of the interviewees came back to the idea of strength. Whether it was strength through pain, or strength of character, strength in the ability to impact their world, the idea recurs. Present throughout the literature on science fiction and Buffy studies examinations of popular science fiction shows is the ideal female character. She’s often strong, brash, infallible, and praised for manifesting traits often ascribed to male characters in the genre. On the surface she seems to have escaped the conflicted portrayal of the postfeminist pop culture woman described by Gill (2007a) and McRobbie (2007). This is an important area of feminist analysis though, as I argue there is potential for this type of character to be extremely limiting for female representation in popular culture.

With the low numbers of women on screen, in leading, supporting, or even named roles (Smith et al, 2013, 2014), these women (or people of colour, or women of

colour) must act as all things to all people. But being an unfailing role model to everyone, or even every little girl is a staggering task, which sets unrealistic and unhealthy expectations and standards for every character, in a way that ends up not really representing anyone. Strong female characters are not allowed to fail. They are not allowed to show weakness, or cry, or make a decision the audience does not like. We hold them to impossibly high standards and, while it can be a good thing to show this one side of female power on television, where does that leave the other kinds of women who exist in this world?

The trope of the strong female character is particularly important in science fiction television and film. We expect all women to be Ellen Ripley (*Alien*) or Wonder Woman because in most cases the only other option is the girl in need of rescue. Plenty of women in science fiction are discussed as examples of strong female characters and plenty of (male) showrunners are asked about their motivations and praised for the specific strong ways they represent their women characters. Should Starbuck be the impossible standard, or can we understand something else through Boomer's selfishness? *Battlestar Galactica* has other female characters who exhibit other aspects of action and bravery. Flight mechanic Cally's panic at needing to protect her child results in drastic violence. Fighter pilot Kat's determination to do her job comes at the expense of her health and safety and eventually her life. Communications officer Dualla does her job until everything becomes too much to deal with. Her absolute hopelessness and heartbreak causes her to take her own life. When people demand stronger female characters, producers should hear a need for strongly written characters who are female, rather than a specific type of strength at the expense of a range of femininities. Television can be a place where women are presented as people as diverse as popular culture's representations of men's stories.

Science fiction can be a place of opportunity when it comes to gender representations, but we cannot dismiss the context in which these shows are being produced and viewed. As Inness (1999) argues, "because it thrives on alternative realities, science fiction at first appears to be a genre in which tough women might thrive. It is clear, however, that science fiction can also serve to re-inscribe the gender roles that it questions" (p.119). Because of the necessary detachment and suspension of

disbelief inherent to the genre of science fiction, there appears to be a natural closeness between critical thinking and science fiction. In distancing ourselves from the daily experiences of our lives, we can look more clearly at the images and representations we see in our popular culture and more fully recognize issues as a first step to forming ideas about how to improve upon them.

While not yet explicitly linked in the literature, the observations about female characters and *Star Trek* are representative of Gill's (2007) analysis of a postfeminist sensibility. For example, scholars examine gender in *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995) through the female characters Captain Kathryn Janeway, B'Elanna Torres, and Seven of Nine. These characters fit the category of strong female characters but scholars like Inness (1999) argue that the constant reminders of these characters' femininity erode their strength. Returning to Gill's (2007) observations, much of the work on *Star Trek* does parallel the entanglement of pro-feminist and anti-feminist themes that Gill talks about in other examples of popular culture.

It is interesting to look at the writing of women in *BSG* in light of ideas of postfeminism and strong female characters. Is it enough that Katee Sackoff's Starbuck and Grace Park's Sharon Valerii were purposefully changed from their 1978 identities and written as female? Starbuck exemplifies the masculine, traditional military hotshot persona, while also being manipulated into a simulation of motherhood at times during the show. Sharon chooses to balance her military role in protecting the fleet with protecting her own family. Grace Park's divergent reading of gender in *BSG* is particularly interesting here. While so many of the interviewees saw the portrayal of women as progressive in the way it was argued to be in the show bible, Park saw an erasure of women and femininity at the expense of a gender-neutrality that was much more aggressive and masculine. While the writers (Moore, Espenson, Weddle, Thompson) spoke of creating a gender-neutral society in the show, Park felt that the neutral was in fact masculine. Which again comes back to the portrayal of a certain type of strong female character leaving out the other ways to be a woman on the Galactica.

The key here is not to simply have strong female characters, but to reach a point whereby there are enough women in important roles on television where they can exhibit

different kinds of being. Women are diverse in their backgrounds, motivations, actions, outlooks, viewpoints, politics, and more. We should be writing diverse women rather than holding all women to unrealistic expectations of perfection. Represent women in all their differences and you will have a much more representative popular culture. The current state of television is an environment where we are hemmed in in terms of what gets made and whose stories get told. Fewer women on screen means we have fewer options for the types of people they represent, the types of stories they can tell, and the way they have to stand as role models. The strong female character is not allowed to fail because we need strong representations of women – but we also need role models who have flaws, who are not perfect, who are not always strong, who have room to fail and learn and grow from weakness. This is an area where both the literature and television are somewhat weak and in need of further feminist inquiry. My research here adds to the discourse on the types of women portrayed on television and the types of women held up as the standard for excellence in science fiction, a troublingly narrow type.

## **5.5. Metaphors, Political Goals, and the Show Bible**

The cultural distance between the world of the show and the lived world of production allowed the writers, actors, and showrunner of *BSG* to have room to explore divisive concepts and topics in their quest to create a naturalistic science fiction show with characters who felt real. Through my examination of production factors in the representation of race, LGBTQ+ identities, and gender on screen several things are clear. The issues that were addressed in the show bible from the beginning, in the planning stages of production, such as the race or gender narratives, were more likely to be addressed clearly and with purpose during the show. While those that were not clearly noted in texts like the show bible, like LGBTQ+ identities, were more likely to be affected by production factors in a negative way – pushed to the side, left out, or half-heartedly addressed. Interviewees spoke at length about several main points and within these topics largely came to similar conclusions.

When it came to discussing race through the metaphor of the Cylon, interviewees were far more likely to agree with the race discourse happening primarily in simple terms between the humans and the Cylons. They argued that the ethnicities of the actors on

the show did not inform any racial discourse, citing their strategy of race-blind or colour-blind writing. From writers to actors, they also largely subscribed to the concept of gender-neutrality present within the show, with the only real dissenting opinions offered by Grace Park, who questioned the gender-neutrality of the world, speaking of an aggressive masculinity applied across gender on the show. Interviewees spoke of the production influences, who had what types of power, where discussions were constrained by time or flow, or access to the right people at the right time, and the availability of actors.

A final major theme offered in the discussions highlighted in this chapter is that most of the interviewees strongly agreed that *Battlestar Galactica* did have social and political goals. They were there to make points about the strength of women, to tell stories about race, to tell stories about freedom fighters and occupied peoples, and what is acceptable to do in wartime. Tahmoh Penikett described the show overall as brave and raw, because of their unique position on television as a standout show. Grace Park in turn echoed sentiments of the show's goals. She emphasized that the goals were not overt, they were not there to give the answer but to ask questions, "to put a little light" (Park) on the issues of our world and have people really examine them. While in some ways progressive representation was limited, the show did ask questions, it did take risks, and it did try to speak to a progressive audience and have them take a look at the world in a slightly different way.

## Chapter 6.

### Conclusion: Looking Back, and Looking Forward

The negotiations and collaborations between actors, writers, producers, and the network on *Battlestar Galactica* were complex and ongoing. They involved social agents with a range of understandings, motivations, and intentions in the filming process. Television creators struggle with the moral and political nature of the stories they create within constraints of power, social structures, and a neoliberal economy. In doing so they actively participate in their own acts of meaning-making in the production process. *BSG* was an emergent field of practice where negotiations between the various cultural producers over media encoding were complex, sometimes contradictory, and revealing of the network of social relations which produce media.

Interviewees' responses on the day-to-day aspects of working in television production fell within three main themes. Interviewees spoke about the lack of typical days working in television. They confirmed the impact of the show's presence on a cable rather than a more mainstream network and the metaphor of science fiction resulted in some creative freedom to address controversial social issues. Creators also spoke of a collaborative, collegial atmosphere on this particular production. This atmosphere was not without conflict, though, with a hierarchy of opinions and a range of abilities (or perceived ability) to speak up. Well known star power actors were more likely to speak up on issues they felt important, due to increased power to do so and fewer concerns about job security.

Scholars and the interviewees for this project agree the metaphor of science fiction enables critical engagement with sensitive contemporary political and social issues by creating a cultural distance between the real world and the imagined world. The interviews I analyzed for this research show the degree to which various creators



were aware of this mechanism and used it to work on issues of gender, sexuality, and race, as well as the war on terror. This distance, while allowing creators more freedom to engage with current events and issues, like terrorism, also contributed to representations (or moments) blind to other interpretations. The colour-blind writing policies employed by the *BSG* writers can allow deeper implications of a scene to go ignored, or slip by without notice in the writers' room, while audiences may read it differently. Rigid adherence to the show bible limited individual engagement with these ideas, at least in the writers' room.

Writers, actors, and producers had roles in producing representation of race, sexuality, and gender on screen in *Battlestar Galactica*. I examined the ways that creators understood these three intersecting issues in the context of their collaborative authorship of the show. The production process shaped the way identity was treated in the show and the ways it was understood by creators.

There was the most variance in how writers, actors, and producers viewed the role of race in the show. Actor Grace Park and Tahmoh Penikett saw their characters and the show as opportunities to challenge and break stereotypes at the level of the politics of representation. Others interviewed were firm in their assertions that the racial stories were told through the Cylon metaphor, though they noted that there was also a concerted effort on the show to cast diverse actors for main and background roles throughout the four seasons.

Diversity in sexuality was largely left out of the progressive politics of the show except in a last season attempt to include a same-sex relationship between Lieutenant Hoshi and Lieutenant Gaeta. From the interviews this seems largely due to production factors, with some interviewees speculating that fans wanted to see such a relationship, which until then had been left out. Including LGBTQ+ relationships was not a core concern in the show bible, unlike racial stories and gender representation, which caused it to be marginalized in importance until the last season.

Interviewees agreed that those working on the show had a clear progressive and gender-neutral goals when it came to portraying the show's female characters, however there was some variety of interpretations on the show's success in this regard. For

Grace Park the gender-neutrality attempted through the writing came across as an aggressive masculinity for all characters, effectively disallowing women on the show from portraying a potential range of femininities, or expressing what she saw as feminine versions of anger or strength. A progressive representation of women was one of the show's goals. The show bible set out a gender-neutral world, varying levels of negotiation from actors like McDonnell and Park nudged this goal even further. Interviewees illustrated that a range of factors contributed to who felt they could speak up as well as who was most successful in doing so.

As is clear from the scholarship on this area, there is a common issue with progressive science fiction stories in that they have become almost locked-in to a representation of a certain type of strong female character who is not allowed to show weakness and ends up held to incredibly high standards by writers and audiences. This results in a limited rather than expanded understanding or imagination of women's roles in science fiction, television, and society. This is exacerbated by the lack of roles for a diverse range of women characters on television, as illustrated by the Smith et al.'s (2013, 2014) studies of the woeful state of diversity in the film and television industries. Park's ideas are an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to how television can or should go about representing women (or other marginalized groups in media). Her focus on a diversity of reactions, understandings, anger, and strength are key points when it comes to a more nuanced array of female characters on television.

Interviewees' responses were in line with Moore's attempt to create a naturalistic science fiction show with the writers creating stories that challenge and confront viewers' preconceived notions about war, terror, and resistance without providing easy answers. As Espenson puts it, "...you never feel like you have been handed a moral cheat sheet" (Espenson). From this research and analysis it is clear that the production process is a complicated one, involving many creative individuals actively negotiating meaning in a high pressure, and often hectic, process. Television production exists in a cycle of creation, interpretation, and re-creation in which we work to understand society further. Analyzing the production of television texts is vital to this understanding. If we are to examine what work television does to reinscribe flawed or problematic understandings of race, sexuality, and gender, scholars must continue to push for more critical and

nuanced investigations of the process of popular media encoding. My analysis of the production of *Battlestar Galactica* illustrates that the encoding process is very much a product of the people involved at the day-to-day level of production. Television creators of all kinds have so much impact in how and what representations or conversations happen onscreen, whether in science fiction or any other genre.

As is often the case when delving into a project of this size, there are even more avenues I could have explored with this research. My research is not a close reading of the text of *BSG*, though it does offer some insight from the text as the interviewees refer to it. Nor is it an exhaustive exploration of the ideas or understandings of everyone who worked on this television show, though key areas and players are represented. This research does not include the below-the-line crew members whose work is vital to the production of any television show. I do draw on important insight from the work of key players in the creation and longevity of *Battlestar Galactica*. My research provides insight into the encoding process of media production, illustrating key elements in the process of collective authorship and creation. I struggled with the limitations of my study and the dataset I worked with but am ultimately appreciative of what I was able to accomplish even with the limitations of my study. Television and the feminist analysis of popular culture is a pre-existing cultural forum where struggles continue to take place both on screen and in the thorough and critical examination of the processes involved in the production of these narratives.

While I am satisfied that I have answered the questions I had hoped to with an honest analysis of the data, this research has sparked even more questions. I remain interested in the encoding and decoding of media texts, as I remain interested in television production. I find myself wishing for more breadth and depth in this area. What could be learned from following a production over a longer period of time or from interviewing actors, writers, and producers both while they are involved in a project and after their involvement has ended? Would they be more candid? I am interested in the interplay between creators and audience, completing the cycle of encoding and decoding. Looking at the entire continuum between creation and reception would be extremely rewarding. There are more layers of conflict and collaboration, push and pull, acceptance and challenge in how television shows are made and understood than I

could explore here. However, a more thorough explanation of the encoding and decoding work that happens around television could bring even more insight to our understandings of our society and ourselves.

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## Appendix.

### List of Interviews

<b>Creator</b>	<b>Role(s) in Production</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Location</b>
Campbell, Paul (1)	Actor	Nov 2, 2007	Phone
Dryborough, Brad (1)	Actor	Sept 17, 2009	In Person
Espenson, Jane (1)	Writer; Executive Producer	Oct 2, 2007	Phone
Espenson, Jane (2)		Oct 16, 2007	In Person
Moore, Ron	Showrunner; Writer; Director; Executive Producer	Sept 7, 2007	Phone
Park, Grace (1)	Actor	Nov 9, 2007	In Person
Park, Grace (2)		Feb 26, 2008	In Person
Park, Grace (3)		Dec 8, 2008	In Person
Penikett, Tahmoh	Actor	Nov 8, 2007	In Person
Thompson, Bradley (1)	Writer, Executive Producer	Sept 21, 2007	Phone
Thompson, Bradley (2)		Oct 28, 2007	In Person
Weddle, David (1)	Writer, Executive Producer	Sept 18, 2007	Phone
Weddle, David (2)		Oct 28, 2007	In Person