

Man Up: Gendered Representations in *Halt and Catch Fire* and *Silicon Valley*

MELISSA VOSEN CALLENS

AMC's *Halt and Catch Fire* and HBO's *Silicon Valley* are two television series set in the context of the technology (tech) industry. Because the series are set in different decades (mid 1980s and mid 2010s) and in vastly different locations (Texas and California), it should be no surprise that *Halt and Catch Fire* and *Silicon Valley* represent gender differently. In addition to variances in setting, there is also a variance in genre. *Halt and Catch Fire* is an hour-long drama on a cable network, and *Silicon Valley* is a half-hour comedy on the premium cable channel HBO. Despite these differences, a feminist reading and comparison of the two reveals surprising and disconcerting similarities; both series reflect a continuing and alarming trend—the perpetuation of certain gender-role stereotypes in the field of computer science.

In both series, the narratives repeatedly reinforce the belief that female characters need to “man up” in order to be successful in the industry. This paper explores how the representations of female characters reinforce patriarchy, with a focus on physical appearance, communication styles, and the ineffective use of humor. After a side-by-side comparison of the two series, readers will see that *Halt and Catch Fire* does a better job overall challenging hegemonic gender-role stereotypes and advancing positive representations of women in the tech industry. Before analyzing these two artifacts, however, it is important to examine the history of women in the field of computer science and their subsequent portrayal in popular culture.

The Popular Culture Studies Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1&2
Copyright © 2016

Women in Computer Science and Pop Culture's Gaze

Despite the recent push to recruit women in STEM-related fields, like computer science, the number of women is still alarming low. In fact, the number of women in computer science has been declining. In 2010-2011, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, women earn just 18% of undergraduate degrees awarded for computer science; in 1984, the year in which the first season of *Halt and Catch Fire* takes place, this number was around 37% (Snyder and Dillow).

There are many ideas theorizing why there is a lack of interest and why this drop took place. Steve Henn, National Public Radio, believes the idea that computers are for boys became a narrative sometime in the 1980s when the computing boom started. Known as the best-selling personal computer of all time, the Commodore 64, the hardware centerpiece of the second season of *Halt and Catch Fire*, was marketed almost exclusively to boys (Henn). Henn also cites movies like *Weird Science*, *Revenge of the Nerds*, *War Games*, all of which were about computers and how an “awkward geek boy genius uses tech savvy to triumph over adversity and win the girl.” He notes, “[...] it became the story we told ourselves about the computing revolution” (Henn). While there are a plethora of additional 1980s movies that feature boys interested in computer science or science in general— *Can't Buy Me Love*, *Sixteen Candles*, and *Revenge of the Nerds II: Nerds in Paradise*—it is much harder to find movies in which young women are interested in similar topics. The message in the 1980s was clear: boys played with computers and engaged in science-related activities, and girls did not. Although not as prolific, this trend continues today, with movies such as: *Transformers* (2017), *The Social Network* (2010), and *Project Almanac* (2015).

Not seeing girls play with computers in marketing campaigns for computer-related products and women work with computers both in real life *and* in popular culture can be detrimental. In both cases, the lack of

diversity can cause women to question whether or not the computer science industry is right for them. According to Virginia Vailan, “When women and men think they belong and have a good chance of being successful, they are, not surprisingly, more interested in a field” (229). When young girls fail to see successful women in the tech industry, it influences their own interest in the field.

Many academics have studied the effects of the portrayal of STEM-related fields in popular culture and its relation to gender. In their review of relevant literature, Sapna Cheryan, Allison Master, and Andrew N. Meltzoff note that they believe women’s choices on whether or not to pursue computer science and engineering fields “are constrained by societal factors, particularly their stereotypes about of the kind of people, the work involved, and the values of these fields” (6). These stereotypes are created and disseminated in popular culture, like in the films referenced by Henn and the television shows discussed in this article. In her book *Sexing Code: Subversion, Theory and Representation*, Claudia Herbst summarizes, “In an absence of an iconography that depicts empowered women developing digital tools, women’s role in the defining of software cultures is diminished” (123). The way in which women are depicted in technology-related fields—and their striking absence—has had a lasting impact on the industry.

Stereotypes can have a profound effect. In their study, Sapna Cheryan, Victoria Plaut, Caitlin Handron, and Lauren Hudson asked college students to read a fabricated newspaper article about computer scientists that either described them fitting current stereotypes (as identified by college students in a previous study) or not fitting stereotypes. Women who read the article where computer scientists no longer fit stereotypes expressed more interest in the field than those who read the article that largely drew on stereotypes. The current image of the field is not one that women seemingly want to join. Unfortunately, in *Silicon Valley* and *Halt*

and *Catch Fire*, some of the representations of female characters may be off-putting to female viewers.

Methods

Seasons one and two of *Silicon Valley* and *Halt and Catch Fire* were screened and analyzed using feminist rhetorical criticism. These two shows were selected for two primary reasons: 1) their recent popularity, as both were renewed for third seasons, and 2) both series' creators have expressed either an interest in highlighting the lack of diversity in the tech industry and / or creating strong female characters. Mike Judge, creator of *Silicon Valley*, has repeatedly responded to criticism regarding the lack of female characters in his show, arguing, "We're taking jabs at them [tech companies in Silicon Valley] for it. It is different than endorsing it, I think" ("Mike Judge"). In a 2014 interview, *Halt and Catch Fire* showrunner Jonathan Lisco stated that he wanted Donna to be a strong, successful woman. He mentions, "We've invested a lot of time in the relationship of [Gordon and] Donna and making her a formidable character in the engineering and in the intellectual IQ level. We don't want her to be an accessory to Gordon's egomania" (Ng). In the same interview, Lisco's colleague, Chris Rogers, said he saw Donna as the anti-Skyler White, a female character that was independent and not portrayed as a wife standing in the way of her husband's dreams (Ng).

According to Sonja Foss, "Feminist criticism involves two basic steps: (1) analysis of the construction of gender in the artifact studied; and (2) exploration of what the artifact suggests about how the patriarchy is constructed and maintained or how it can be challenged and transformed" (169-170). In the remainder of this paper, the artifacts and the construction of gender within each artifact are analyzed. Following the critique, broader cultural implications of these representations are offered.

Episodes were screened multiple times and detailed notes were taken. Through these multiple screenings, three themes were identified related to representation of female characters: the absence of traditional markers of femininity in female characters, including those related to appearance, the communication styles of female characters, and the ineffective use of humor to encourage change within the industry. Through both series, these representations reinforce patriarchal culture and perpetuate gender-role stereotypes, which is particularly troubling given the lack of women in the STEM professions, specifically the computer science industry.

The Artifacts and Their Female Characters

Silicon Valley

HBO's *Silicon Valley* follows a group of programmers who develop incredibly fast compression software that has the potential to revolutionize the music, television, and movie industries. Throughout season one and two, Richard Hendricks and his five male friends work to secure funding for the app they call Pied Piper. Monica, a technology venture capitalist's head of operations, is the only female character that gets a noteworthy amount of screen time. Early in the series, Monica's boss offers to fund Pied Piper, solidifying her significant role on the show and her relationship with Richard's team. Throughout season one, she becomes both a confidant and advisor to Richard, and at one point, a love interest.

In season two, the group hires an engineer named Carla, a welcomed addition to the cast and one requested by fans. When the audience meets Carla, the touch-in-cheek dialogue appears to question and mock gender inequality in the real Silicon Valley. The dialogue between Carla and Jared, Pied Piper's head of business development, attempts to poke fun of Silicon Valley executives who seem to know little to nothing about recruiting and hiring women.

Halt and Catch Fire

In *Halt and Catch Fire*, the first few episodes of the series focus on a fast-talking, charismatic salesperson by the name of Joe MacMillan. McMillan convinces Gordon Clark, husband to Donna Clark, to reverse engineer his former employers' personal computer. With this proposition, Giant, a Cardiff Electric personal computer, is created. In addition to Donna, Gordon, and Joe, the show shadows Cameron, a software developer that Joe recruits, and immediately sleeps with, from a local college. The focus of the entire series shifts, however, to Cameron and Donna in season two. At the end of season one, Donna leaves her job at Texas Instruments to work with Cameron. Together, they form their own pre-internet gaming company, Mutiny. Other than Donna and Cameron, there are no other female characters in *Halt and Catch Fire*, other than minor characters cast as wives or secretaries.

The Stereotypical Female Hacker: Loss of Traditionally Feminine Traits

In *Silicon Valley*, the writers do little to challenge viewpoints and stereotypes related to women in technology-related fields. In *Halt and Catch Fire*, particularly in season two, the writers do a better job creating characters that defy stereotypes, but still fall prey to a common folly: one of their primary female characters is a caricature of female computer scientists. Two of three female characters discussed in the essay lack many traditional markers of femininity, in addition to communicating in a more masculine manner as well.

Dress and Appearance

In both series, two of the three major female characters are presented in alternative, masculine dress. This is a representation seen time and time again throughout popular culture, suggesting to viewers that in order to be successful in this environment or to simply fit in, women need to look a certain way. These representations, void of many female signifiers, reinforce the idea that male signifiers are the norm. Away from Hollywood and in the real Silicon Valley, it has been reported that some females do adapt a more masculine persona in order to fit in. Herbst writes, “In addition to dressing and behaving in a ‘male’ way, women also report feeling engendered male or neutralized” (21). The representations in *Silicon Valley* and *Halt and Catch Fire* are ultimately detrimental, however, because it prevents many women, who have traditional markers of femininity, from “seeing” themselves in this industry. These representations also fail to encourage companies to create a more welcoming culture for more women, suggesting women must adapt to this “bro culture.”

In *Silicon Valley*, when Jared meets Carla, he mutters, “I love *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*” (“The Lady”). While funny on the surface, her character does mirror female leads in the movies *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and *Hackers* as well as the television series *Halt and Catch Fire*. This is such a common representation that *The Simpsons* poked fun of it in their latest season in an episode called “The Girl Code,” in which Lisa changed her appearance after she starts coding and developing an app. The continued absence of traditionally feminine markers of appearance in popular culture suggests to female viewers that in order to be successful in this industry, they must be willing to lose some (or all) markers of femininity in appearance. Ironically, when female characters are not masculinized, they are typically over sexualized, like Abby on *NCIS*. In popular culture, the representations of female computer scientists are polarizing.

In *Halt and Catch Fire*, Cameron's physical appearance is also similar. Cameron wears her hair short (although longer in season two) and dresses alternatively and often in a masculine manner, including military-inspired jackets and white "wife beater" tank tops. Her appearance also perpetuates the notion that feminine markers must be forfeited to be successful as a programmer. Donna, on the other hand, looks nothing like Cameron and Carla. Donna does not fit the mold often cast for women in the tech industry. She would not be described as a punk, goth, or masculine. She is a brilliant programmer, who retains many of her feminine signifiers. She also has the most conflicts with male colleagues and subordinates of any of the female characters. Despite Cameron's stereotypical look, seeing both Cameron and Donna, two very different women successful in the same field, is quite positive and powerful.

Communication Style

In both *Silicon Valley* and *Halt and Catch Fire*, the women are not only expected to dress in a way that mirrors their male colleagues, but they are also expected to use language that mirrors their male colleagues as well. In some instances, the women are unfamiliar with the language; in other instances, the language, although familiar, is degrading and hurtful. Despite demeaning language, female characters are repeatedly expected to embrace this language in order to fit in, and in some instances, prove their worthiness.

From the start, it is clear that Carla fits in well at Pied Piper because she is able to speak the language of her male colleagues. She jokes with Jared, unbeknownst to him, about wanting to invite her friend Cuntly to the house. When Jared asks her not to call her friend Cuntly, as that violates the company's new harassment policy, she gives him a stone-cold stare and states, "I feel like it kind of violates my rights... as a woman" ("The Lady"). This leaves Jared speechless and perplexed, causing him to retreat. It is here the writers of *Silicon Valley* are attempting to poke fun of

real-life tech companies, and their inability to communicate with women and create appropriate policies in the workplace.

In this episode, Carla takes back the word cunt, a word traditionally used by men, and one that is often used to degrade women or other men that are considered to have feminine traits. In her study, Karyn Stapleton explains that male respondents identified the word cunt as more acceptable for men to use than women. She also notes that the word cunt tends “to be used only in the context of all-male interaction (a phenomenon described by nine men)”, thereby marking the term as specifically masculine (31). The way in which Carla uses the word cunt, pointing out how ludicrous it is the company just now, after hiring a woman, established an anti-harassment policy, allows her to challenge her male colleagues. At the same time, the fact that she must use the patriarchal language of the industry in order to be successful and accepted is paradoxical and unfortunate.

In addition to joking with Jared, Carla immediately starts razzing Dinesh and Gilfoyle, tricking them into thinking she makes more money than they do because she knows it would bother them. Her trickery works because the two soon file a complaint with Jared about their new “hostile” work environment. Carla’s razzing of Dinesh and Gilfoyle solidifies her position in the company. This exchange demonstrates that she belongs in the culture they have created, how inappropriate it may be. If Carla had not acted in this manner or felt uncomfortable with this type of work environment, she may have found herself without a job. The “sexist, alpha-male culture that can make women and other people who don’t fit the mold feel unwelcome, demeaned or even endangered” (Cain Miller). While Carla’s story is one of success, as she eventually becomes a valued member of Pied Piper, it is only a success because she must succumb, accept, and make, sexist remarks herself.

In her *New York Times* piece on the culture of many start-up companies, Claire Cain Miller notes the problematic nature of how many

of these companies, like Pied Piper, are started. She writes, “The lines between work and social life are often blurry, because people tend to be young and to work long hours, and the founders and first employees are often friends. And start-ups pride themselves on a lack of bureaucracy, forgoing big-company layers like human resources departments” (Cain Miller). Policies protecting employees from harassment are often absent, much like with Pied Piper. In this regard, *Silicon Valley* seems like an accurate representation of tech start-up companies, but this representation is still problematic, as it further perpetuates the notion that women do not belong in this industry.

In *Halt and Catch Fire*, the viewer sees some of the difficulties of being a woman in the computer science industry, particularly for women in charge and for those that refuse to abandon their feminine traits. For example, when Donna and Cameron attempt to secure financing from an investor, Donna is asked if she has or wants children. The investor argues that it is his business, as he “needs to know that [they’re] fully committed, even over biological imperatives” (“New Coke”). Upon leaving, Cameron lamented that the investor did not want to hear about their goals or future plans, but rather, he wanted an Adam’s apple (“New Coke”). As women, they were expected to have and talk about their children, but these same children were considered a detriment to their work as engineers.

Nurturing

According to Barrie Gunter, traits such as “nurturance, dependence, and passivity are typically classified as feminine, while dominance and aggression are generally considered as masculine” (29). Female characters, particularly those with traditional female signifiers, are expected to exhibit nurturing characteristics, something their male colleagues are not expected to display. If these female characters fail to nurture, they are often criticized. Despite this expectation, when female characters *do* exhibit nurturing characteristics, it often leaves them in

problematic situations. In some instances, nurturing is an inappropriate response to the given situation, even detrimental to their work. In certain situations, it can also cause them to be viewed as less than their male counterparts. This is often the case for Donna in *Halt and Catch Fire*.

Throughout season one, Donna is frustrated with her husband and his inability to complete projects. Donna, who works for Texas Instruments, is also a computer programmer and is considered by many to be a more successful programmer than her husband. She is even responsible for some of the engineering in regard to Gordon's project, as she saves work after a power surge. Unfortunately, in season one, she is not depicted as brilliant, but rather as a nagging wife, who isn't nurturing or supportive. While she ultimately saves Gordon's work, she is cast as a villain of sorts to antihero Gordon—as a woman emasculating her husband. Because she is cast as a villain, and not a supportive, nurturing figure, audiences had a difficult time connecting with her.

Other popular shows on AMC have done the same to their strong and brilliant female characters: Skyler White in *Breaking Bad*, Betty Draper in *Mad Men*, and Lori Grimes in *The Walking Dead*. All three of these characters were met with audience distain. The female lead as unintended villain has become such a pattern that Anna Gunn, the actress who played White, penned in op-ed article for *The New York Times* on the subject. Gunn argues that while Skyler, like her husband Walt, is morally compromised, she wasn't "judged by the same set of standards as Walter" (A21). Murder after murder, many fans stood by Walt, while criticizing Skyler—calling her a bitch and shrew. Donna is also portrayed as the woman standing between a man and his dreams, but the narrative changes in season two.

After her professional split from Gordon, in the first episode of season two, Donna finds herself falling into the role of supervisor, and in some cases, work mother, because of Cameron's refusal to take charge and share some of the leadership responsibilities. The situation clearly

frustrates Donna, as this path is a path she was used to travelling with Gordon. She proclaims to Cameron, “I don’t want to be the mom here. Look, I do that at home. I came here to do what I love, and I don’t love dealing with the power company. [...] And I don’t love playing wet-nurse to a bunch of coders who act more like kindergartners” (“SETI”). Because of her female signifiers, she is expected to nurture.

In her work on moral development, Carol Gilligan argues that men, or those with masculine traits, are more concerned with issues surrounding justice, whereas women, or those with feminine traits, are more concerned with issues surrounding care and responsibility. Because Donna refuses to play the role of work mother (and Skyler as a dutiful wife), their characters are often met with distain because they are not fulfilling societal expectations. Their refusal to nurture in a traditional-sense is seen as black mark on their character. When they do nurture, however, they are either ridiculed or taken advantage of in some capacity. With Cameron and Carla, because they adopt more traditionally masculine traits, the expectation to nurture in the workplace is not necessarily as strong.

Some may suggest it is Cameron’s immaturity that causes her to refuse to take on duties other than coding, to take on any sort of leadership role, but it is clear that Cameron fears she too will be viewed in the same light as Donna. She knows that women in leadership roles are often viewed as bitches or shrews, not simply strong. If they do exhibit any feminine characteristics, they are also expected to nurture. She is fighting to fit in with her employees, even in the early boom of this industry. Her behavior, as well as Carla’s, is an example of how these women adapt in order to survive in a patriarchal culture.

Interpersonal Relationships

Often, in popular film and television, female characters have little to no contact with one another. When they do, it is to discuss men. In *Halt and Catch Fire*, however, this is not the case. Despite their differences, and

there are many, most of the scenes between Cameron and Donna are focused not on a love interest or children but work, passing the Bechdel Test handily, a test that measures if female characters talk about topics other than men to each other. While Cameron is involved with Joe in season one, and Donna is married to Gordon, their relationship centers on work, not the men in their lives. In addition to romance not being the focus of the female characters' conversations, Donna breaks the mold in regard to other stereotypes of women in STEM. In her findings, Steinke reveals that depictions that reinforce traditional social and cultural assumptions of the role of women in STEM were often found; most were single and did not have children (51). Donna, however, is married, and has two children.

On the other hand, when women in STEM are involved in relationships, they are often romantically involved with their male co-stars, making the romance a large part of their characters' stories, like Cameron and her relationship with Joe in season one of *Halt and Catch Fire*. In her analysis of popular films featuring women scientists and engineers, Steinke explains that romance is a dominant theme in many of the films that featured female scientists and engineers (49). Many female characters were romantically involved with one of the male primary characters in the films she studied. In season two, Cameron and Joe stop seeing each other, and Donna and Gordon's relationship becomes less important to the storyline.

Throughout the first few episodes, Cameron and Donna continue to clash, but at the same time, have fantastic collaborative breakthroughs. This partnership is surprising, however, given their history together and how they often were at odds in season one. In their first heated exchange in season one, Cameron asks Donna if she has every "worked this close to metal." Donna scoffs and replies, "Well, FYI, I am also an engineer with a degree from Berkeley who's not only created my share of code, but given birth to two real humans" ("Close to the Metal"). This is a theme with Donna. She wants to be respected as an engineer and as a wife and mother.

Despite the tension between Donna and Cameron in season one, Donna helps Cameron recover her lost work, but Cameron does not change. In the first two episodes of season two, Cameron hires two people without consulting Donna, and she also chastises Donna for creating a chat function in their gaming community. In season two, Cameron continues to make irresponsible and rash decisions as well as make snide comments toward Donna, while Donna continues to do significant damage control.

Old Habits Die Hard

Beyond the main characters described in this piece, both series have very few additional female characters. Not only is the lack of women in these shows problematic, but so is also the lack of diversity in the roles that are cast. Female characters are often love interests or in supporting roles, such as administrative assistants. The female characters with smaller roles in *Silicon Valley* perpetuate some of the other common stereotypes of women in the tech industry.

We see a smattering of women at Hooli, the megacorporation that is clearly a parody of Google. Most of those women, however, are either in the background, pictured in a large group of engineers, coders, designers, and lawyers, or are assistants to Hooli administrators. Most get very little screen time. On the other hand, it is important to note that there are several females in *Silicon Valley* that hold advanced, prominent positions in the business side of the technology industry: Monica's boss in season two Laurie Bream and porn website CEO Molly Kendall. Yet, Pied Piper and the programmers they meet with from other tech companies are almost, alarmingly, all male. For example, End Frame, the company that attempts to trick Richard into sharing his algorithm, is 100 percent male.

Satirizing Silicon Valley or Perpetuating Sex Role Stereotypes: The Use of Humor

The writers of *Silicon Valley* use satire to argue that conditions in these tech fields are appalling, and often degrading, toward women.

Unfortunately, the humor is often negated, by the very roles in which their female characters are given. In an interview, creator Mike Judge reiterates that his series is satirizing the current working conditions in Silicon Valley and states, “I think if we just came out with the show and every company was 50 percent women, 50 percent men, we kind of would be doing a disservice by not calling attention to the fact that it’s really 87 percent male” (“Mike Judge”). T.J. Miller, who plays Erlich Bachmann in the series, echoes Judge’s statement, “We’re on the audience’s side. We’re on the side of the people who should be examining Silicon Valley and why there aren’t so many women, why it’s not very diverse.”

When the audience meets Carla, the touch-in-cheek dialogue appears to question and mock gender inequality in the real Silicon Valley. The dialogue between Carla and Jared pokes fun of Silicon Valley executives who seem to know little to nothing about recruiting and hiring women. This type of dialogue is peppered throughout season two. In the first season, there are virtually no women, except for Monica and a few very minor characters, and there was very little mention of women in general. Fans noticed and complained.

Although rhetorical critics such as Burke and Carlson have noted the use of comedic strategies, including satire, to encourage social change, these strategies are ineffective when the use of comedy is at the expense of the women in these shows. While there are clear moments *Silicon Valley* is satirizing current working conditions in Silicon Valley, the show misses its mark in other areas in season two. At one point in the series, Dinesh falls for a woman at a tech convention whom he thinks is an amazing coder (“Proof of Concept”). He later finds out that she has not done the

coding he finds impressive; rather, she had a man do the coding for her. At the end of the episode, Dinesh laments condescendingly— at least she knows how to tweet. Given the small number of women in the series to begin with, using one of the additional female characters to perpetuate the stereotype that women are incapable of coding, is unfortunate. The laughs at this character's expense reinforce gender-role stereotypes, negating much of the witty dialogue in the show.

"I am an Engineer"

There are other instances in which the satire calls into question the working conditions in Silicon Valley. During her interview Jared proclaims to Carla, "We would absolutely love to have a strong woman working here" ("The Lady"). Dumbfounded by Jared's statement, Carla retorts, "I am not a women engineer. I am an engineer" ("The Lady"). After the exchange, Carla looks at Richard and asks if Jared is just there to try and rattle her, another seemingly tongue-in-cheek reference to the interview process at some of the larger tech firms in Silicon Valley. Carla cannot believe anyone could be so inappropriate and awkward. Richard assures her that is just Jared's nature.

At first Carla seems annoyed, but like the audience, she also seems to be slightly amused by Jared's complete and utter awkwardness and decides to not pursue additional conversation on the subject. This awkwardness, and inability to create a work culture in which women are welcomed and embraced, is what Miller referenced in his interview. Miller quips, "We're trying to say isn't it strange — and what kind of culture do we bring these men up in, where they literally not only have awkward interactions with girls, and computers are their best friend, but they don't have any women to interact with?" (Silman). But Carla's dismissal of Jared's behavior, and our dismissal as an audience, ultimately excuses these conditions and behavior of executives in Silicon Valley.

Conclusion

Halt and Catch Fire is set years before there was much of a tech scene at all, making it impossible to compare it to *Silicon Valley* outright. As mentioned before, they are also two completely different television show genres. What is strikingly similar and important, however, is that both shows include representations of female characters that reinforce patriarchy. The representations in these shows matter a great deal because of their popularity and the fact the showrunners from both series assert they are trying to address some of the concerns surrounding the misrepresentations of women in this industry.

Halt and Catch Fire, particularly in season one, does use some of the tired tropes we have seen many times before: women as pragmatic dream-crushers of series' male antiheroes or women who are good with computers, but are only successful if they abandon many of their feminine traits. On the other hand, Donna is a very complex character and clearly breaks the stereotypical view of a female computer scientist. In addition, her relationship with Cameron is complex, and as stated above, nearly all of their scenes handily pass the Bechdal test. *Halt and Catch Fire's* season two was a vast improvement over the first; the writers seemed to have found a way, at least in Donna, to show the complex nature of that character and the many roles she plays in her life.

Fast-forwarding over three decades, one could applaud *Silicon Valley* for satirically addressing the gender inequity in the location of the same name. The witty banter between characters, particularly Carla and Jared, demonstrates how women are often treated and othered either knowingly or unknowingly in tech startup companies. Unfortunately, like *Halt and Catch Fire*, *Silicon Valley* also uses many of the same tropes seen in other shows, making many of the female characters into one-dimensional props for the male characters in the series. Even if writers wanted to accurately represent *the number* of women working in Silicon Valley, they could

have worked harder at representing those women in a more multi-dimensional manner, like Donna in *Halt and Catch Fire*. The women in smaller roles, such as Monica's boss or some of the female lawyers shown, are a nice addition, but these characters are rarely developed.

In their pursuit to hire a woman, Jared offers the best line of all, unknowingly summing up the climate in tech startup companies that are heavily populated with male employees and Silicon Valley in general. He quips, "It's like we're the Beatles and now we just need Yoko." While we all can laugh at the joke—Jared is, after all, so pathetically likeable—it is seemingly true. In a world full of male engineers named John and Paul, a woman engineer is still often viewed as Yoko.

Works Cited

Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*. U of California P, 1984.

Carlson, A. Cheree. "Gandhi and the Comic Frame: 'Ad Bellum Purificandum'." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 72, no. 4, 1986, pp. 446-455.

Cheryan, Sapna, Allison Master, and Andrew N. Meltzoff. "Cultural Stereotypes as Gatekeepers: Increasing Girls' Interest in Computer Science and Engineering by Diversifying Stereotypes." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 6, 2015, pp: 1-8.
[dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00049](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00049). Accessed 10 Jun. 2015.

Cheryan, Sapna, et al. "The Stereotypical Computer Scientist: Gendered Media Representations as a Barrier to Inclusion for Women." *Sex Roles*, vol.60, no.1-2, 2013, pp: 58-71.

"Close to the Metal." *Halt and Catch Fire*. AMC. 22 Jun. 2014.

Foss, Sonja K. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. Waveland Press Inc., 2004.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice*. Harvard UP, 1982.

Gunn, Anna. "I Have a Character Issue." *The New York Times*, 23 Aug. 2013, p. A21.

Gunter, Barrie. *Television and Sex Role Stereotyping*. John Libbey & Company, 1986.

Henn, Steve. "When Women Stopped Coding." *National Public Radio*, 21 Oct. 2014, www.npr.org/sections/money/2014/10/21/357629765/when-women-stopped-coding. Accessed 11 Jun. 2015.

Herbst, Claudia. *Sexing Code: Subversion, Theory and Representation*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

"Homicide." *Silicon Valley*. HBO. 17 May 2015.

"Mike Judge: 'Silicon Valley' Not Endorsing Lack of Women." *Bloomberg Business*, 21 May 2015, www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2015-05-21/mike-judge-silicon-valley-not-endorsing-lack-of-women. Accessed 9 Jun. 2015.

Miller, Claire Cain. "Technology's Man Problem." *The New York Times*, 5 Apr. 2014, p. BU1. www.nytimes.com/2014/04/06/technology/technologys-man-problem.html. Accessed 15 Aug. 2015.

"New Coke." *Halt and Catch Fire*. AMC. 7 Jun. 2015.

Ng, Philiana. "'Halt and Catch Fire' Creators Pledge Tale of 'Combustive' Egos and the Anti-Skyler White." *The Hollywood Reporter*, 1 June 2014, www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/halt-catch-fire-creators-tale-708526. Accessed 16 Jan. 2016.

"Proof of Concept." *Silicon Valley*. HBO. 3 May 2015.

"The Lady." *Silicon Valley*. HBO. 18 May 2014.

"SETI." *Halt and Catch Fire*. AMC. 31 May 2015.

Silman, Anna. "'Silicon Valley' Star Blasts Tech's Women Problem: 'What Kind of Culture Do We Bring These Men Up In?'" *Salon Magazine*, 24 April 2015, www.salon.com/2015/04/24/silicon_valley_star_blasts_tech%E2%80%99s_women_problem_what_kind_of_culture_do_we_bring_these_men_up_in/. Accessed 10 Jun. 2015.

Snyder, Thomas D., and Sally A. Dillow. *Digest of Education Statistics 2011*. National Center for Education Statistics, 2012.

Stapleton, Karyn. "Gender and Swearing: A Community Practice*." *Women and Language*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2003, pp. 22-33.

Steinke, Jocelyn. "Cultural Representations of Gender and Science Portrayals of Female Scientists and Engineers in Popular Films." *Science Communication*, vol.27, no.1, 2005, pp. 27-63.

Valian, Virginia. "Interests, Gender, and Science." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol.9, no.2, 2014, pp. 225-230.