

How the Gender Binary is Reimposed on Gender Non-Conforming Identities in *Are You The One?*: A Mediated Discourse Analysis of Identity Construction in Reality Television

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Abstract

This study explores the construction of gender non-conforming identities in Season 8 of the reality television dating show *Are You The One?* (*AYTO*). This season features an entirely queer cast and includes two participants, Kai and Basit, who identify as gender non-conforming. I demonstrate how Kai and Basit's gender non-conforming identities are negotiated with, and sold to, the audience. Reality television serves as a vehicle for neoliberal discourses that allow shows to realize specific social goals (McCarthy 2007). *AYTO* Season 8 develops a social goal of queer acceptance (Section 3.3), and in order to achieve this goal, the *AYTO* production team emphasizes the normative potential of Kai and Basit's gender non-conforming identities (Irving 2008). I utilize methodological practices from the disciplines of ethnography of communication (Sections 4.1 & 4.2) and mediated discourse analysis (Section 4.3) to analyze how repetitive stylistic actions, which are co-constructed by the participants and production, link Kai and Basit to masculinized and feminized personae. I argue that the construction of Kai and Basit's gender non-conforming identities is constrained by both the influence of production and the limits of linguistic tools in a heteronormative society (Jones 2019). Kai and Basit become reintegrated into the gender binary as dialectical registers of masculinized and feminized gender non-conforming identity that are intelligible to both the *AYTO* community of practice and the audience.

Keywords community of practice, dialectical registers, gender non-conforming identity, indexicality / indexes, mediated discourse analysis, neoliberalism / neoliberal selfhood, performance, performativity, persona, reality television, speech events, style, transnormativity

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1. Introduction

“Ethnographies of production must recognize the fundamental relationship between the production of texts, the construction of identity, and the connections between production cultures and the larger cultural worlds in which they are embedded.”

- Mark Allen Peterson, *Anthropology and Mass Communication*

Reality television claims access to the social world of the audience and subsequently claims the power to depict it (Couldry 2009). When people enter into mediated reality, their identity claims become imbued with significance (Couldry 2009). While audiences of reality television shows acknowledge that the actions of participants are manipulated, the fact that this manipulation is hidden from the audience allows reality television to exist as “complete knowledge” (Rose & Wood 2005). Therefore, regardless of the extent to which the actions of reality television participants are manipulated, the participants’ actions still have the power to represent the social world (Couldry 2009). In this paper, I will analyze the construction of gender non-conforming identities¹ in Season 8 of the MTV reality television dating show *Are You The One?* (*AYTO*). Season 8 of *AYTO* features an entirely queer cast and includes two participants, Kai and Basit, who identify as gender non-conforming. I will consider how Kai and Basit’s gender identities are negotiated with, and sold to, the audience. I will then be able to reflect on the power reality television has to situate gender non-conforming identities within the social world of the audience.

In Section 2, I introduce theories of performativity, performance, and style to provide tools for conceptualizing identity construction in sociocultural linguistics. I will then introduce the concepts of neoliberalism and transnormativity to ground language use in the dominant ideologies that identity construction cannot be removed from. In Section 3, I will place Kai and Basit’s portrayals on *AYTO* in MTV’s history of LGBTQ+ representation. I will then discuss how analyzing queer identity construction on *AYTO* requires both theories of identity construction (Section 2) and the perspectives of reality television scholars (Sections 3.2 & 3.3). In Section 4, I define my three-pronged methodological approach to my analysis: defining the *AYTO* participants as a community of practice, identifying three types of speech events that the participants engage in (monologue, dialogue, and situated activity), and developing a mediated discourse analysis approach to study speech events in a reality TV context. In Section 5, I analyze how Kai and Basit’s narratives are contrasted in *AYTO*. I show how the repetitive stylistic actions of Kai, Basit, and the other participants, which are edited and mediated by the *AYTO* production team, become enregistered as

¹ I will use the term “gender non-conforming” throughout this paper to refer to the gender identities of Kai and Basit. “Gender non-conforming” is an umbrella term that refers to people “who do not identify and/or present in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category” (HRC Foundation). Please note that Kai and Basit do not use the term “gender non-conforming” to identify themselves. I have employed the use of this umbrella term to refer to Kai and Basit because they both do not define their gender neatly within the gender binary. In Section 3.1, I describe Kai and Basit’s identities using the terminology they utilize in the show.

personae. I argue that Kai develops a masculinized ‘player’ persona, while Basit develops a feminized ‘diva’ persona. In Section 6, I argue that the construction of Kai and Basit’s gender non-conforming identities, and subsequent enregisterment as personae, reimpose the gender binary on Kai and Basit. Finally, I will demonstrate how media can assist and amplify the development of new masculinized and feminized gender non-conforming registers that are intelligible within a neoliberal society.

2. Identity Construction in Sociocultural Linguistics

2.1 Performativity, Performance, and Style

In order to interrogate how gender is negotiated in reality television, we must first understand how gender is constructed in everyday interactions. Gender becomes reified in society through repeated acts, both linguistic and non-linguistic, that pull from dominant social ideologies; individuals repeat stylized acts until these acts culminate in an appearance of a natural discursive framework of both sex and gender (Butler 1990). In this theory of *performativity*, a person becomes a “subject” through repeated identification with the “normative phantasm of sex” (Butler 1993). Individuals gain gendered intelligibility if they continuously utilize practices that place them in relation to dominant ideologies of sex and gender, while simultaneously reaffirming that these ideologies reflect natural phenomena. Therefore the gender binary, or the idea that we live in a world of two sexes with a binary system of gender presentation to match (Garfinkel 1967), exists only because of daily gendered practices that both constitute, and are constituted by, dominant social ideologies.

Goffman (1973) introduced the idea of *performance* by arguing that all human interaction requires individuals to engage in performances that abide by social norms. In every interaction, individuals manipulate their manner to communicate an idealized identity that fits the specific context and the set of observers (Goffman 1973). In my analysis, I will use Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity and Goffman’s (1973) theory of performance in tandem. The relationship between the two is co-dependent, as performativity provides performances with discursive idealities, and performances are a vehicle for the daily negotiations of “naturalized” sex and gender (Ylivuori 2022). Individuals engage in daily performances that continuously construct their identities in numerous different contexts, while simultaneously referencing and shaping their “naturalized” sense of sex and gender (Butler 1990).

Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have provided theoretical tools to utilize the theories of performance and performativity in the specific contexts of interaction. Gender identity is an emergent feature of interaction, and is constructed using the discourse available in the given situation (West & Zimmerman 1987, Nentwich & Kelan 2014). Bucholtz & Hall (2005) define identity as a culmination of our stylistic choices in every interaction. *Style* is the situational use of linguistic resources, in tandem with material objects (Queen 2015), to negotiate one’s place in the local communicative context as well as society in general (Podesva et al 2002). For this study, a localized perspective takes into account the context of each speech event and how it impacts performance, as well as the discursive strategies available within the *AYTO* community of practice

to negotiate gender locally. A societal perspective connects language use to larger ideologies and frameworks that ground speakers in the social world. Specifically, I look at how language in *AYTO* is packaged by both the participants and the production team in order for the participants to gain ontological security in the age of neoliberal selfhood (Zimman 2019).

2.2 Neoliberalism and Transnormativity

In Section 2.1, I explained how institutions like the gender binary only exist because of daily gendered practices in communities and society at large (Butler 1990). When individuals adhere to institutional rules by using language that pulls from seemingly natural frameworks (Butler 1990), they gain ontological security, or a sense and projection of innate selfhood (Giddens 1984). An individual's sense of gender, including trans and non-binary reworkings of traditional gender, is a matter of continuous interactional work to create something tangible (Giddens 1991). The rise of neoliberalism has both accompanied and amplified the need for subjects to have habitual, describable, and consistent identities in order to gain ontological security. *Neoliberalism* is the name given to the dominant form of Western economic practices popularized in the 1980s. Neoliberal policies are based on the idea that human well-being can be best advanced by the maximization of individual entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework (Harvey 2007). Neoliberalism is not just an economic policy and never has been (Harvey 2007); neoliberal governmentality forces individuals to discipline their own livelihood, with the assumption that they are doing so to achieve happiness and fulfillment (Inoue 2007). In the age of neoliberal selfhood, individuals, especially the socially vulnerable, are rewarded when they concretely define their identities without dismantling social institutions (Inoue 2007). Neoliberalism is flexible; it can contort to fit new identities (Springer 2016), while still maintaining realities that are cornerstones to our sense of ontological security (i.e., the gender binary).

For example, gender nonconforming and transgender individuals are often expected to legitimize their identities in relation to homonormative and transnormative expectations (Crowley 2022). *Homonormativity* is the term given to queer practices, representations, and politics, supported by neoliberal frameworks, that do not contest dominant heteronormative² assumptions and institutions, but rather uphold and sustain them (Duggan 2003). *Transnormativity* is an ideology that provides trans identification, experience, and narratives with a “realness” (Johnson 2016). This “realness” is often only realized when a trans person effectively transitions from one “socially knowable sex” to another (Nicolazzo 2016). Transgender individuals who undergo biomedical transitions are more likely to be seen as upholding heteronormative institutions and reflecting a

² Heteronormativity refers to the dominant gender and sexuality norms that privilege heterosexuality (Warner 1991). These dominant norms, which dictate social roles and codes, sustain a patriarchal and heterosexist system (Butler 1990, Marchia & Sommer 2019).

“socially knowable sex,” and are therefore assumed to embody the most legitimized form of transgender existence (Catalano 2015)³.

Transnormative standards are created and/or sustained by mediatized representations of transness. Jones (2015) looks at how two transgender vloggers, both of whom have medically transitioned and utilize gender norms, construct “expert personas” on YouTube. By simply having a platform and the ability to share their experiences with a wide audience, the vloggers frame particular practices as more legitimate than others and play a role in producing an ideological discourse of what is normative for trans people (Jones 2015). In *AYTO* Season 8, Kai and Basit’s language practices are legitimized by their platform and the social goals of the show (Section 3.3). Kai and Basit practice *self-determination*, which is the individual’s right to identify their own gender identity (Zimman 2018, 2019). Edelman & Zimman (2014) discuss how transgender individuals practice self-determination by developing strategies for appealing to neoliberal sensibilities in gender-affirming ways, such as describing their bodies with pairings of gendered terms that contradict one another. However, Edelman & Zimman (2014) argue that the transgender participants are ultimately subjected to the limits of these gendered terms, even when the terms are used in ways that subvert heteronormative expectations. Gender non-conforming individuals are framed as the determiners of their own identities in practices of self-determination, but this neoliberal agency obscures the fact that linguistic agency isn’t, and has never been, an equally distributed resource (Zimman 2018,2019). Kai and Basit are reliant upon linguistic agencies and tools that are deeply rooted in heteronormativity and therefore limit gender non-conforming expression. I will show how heteronormative standards of masculinity and femininity infiltrate gender non-conforming representation on *AYTO*.

3. Identity Construction in *Are You The One?*

3.1 *Are You The One?* and MTV’s Role in the History of Televised Queer Representation

Are You The One? (*AYTO*) is an American reality television show that aired on the network MTV from 2014-2019. The premise of the show is to help people who struggle with relationships find their ‘perfect match.’ Before the start of the show, the contestants are paired into ‘perfect matches’ by ‘dating experts.’ The contestants get ten chances, over ten weeks, to identify the perfect matches at the weekly ‘match-up ceremony.’ If the group succeeds and identifies all of the perfect matches by week ten, the contestants split a cash prize of up to one million dollars. All of the contestants live together in one large house for the duration of the ten weeks. The first seven seasons of the series featured heterosexual couples composed exclusively of cisgender men and women. The eighth season of the series, which I will focus on in my analysis, featured a cast of sixteen ‘sexually fluid’

³ Cromwell (1999), Rubin (2003), Pusch (2005), and Zimman (2012) provide more information on the prevalence of the transnormative assumption that biomedical transitioning legitimizes trans existence.

individuals whose perfect match could be *any* of the other fifteen contestants. The cast consisted of seven cisgender women, seven cisgender men, and two gender non-conforming individuals. I will focus on the storylines of Kai and Basit, the two gender-nonconforming individuals, to analyze how their identities are constructed on the show. Kai is a white transmasculine nonbinary individual who has chosen to medically transition. Basit is a Black and gender non-conforming individual who classifies their gender as ‘fluid.’ The season aired in 2019 from June 26 to September 9. All of the cast members were in their early to mid-twenties at the time of filming. The show was completely filmed and edited before it aired on MTV.

Season 8 of *AYTO* received critical acclaim for its queer representation and earned a GLAAD Media Award in 2020 for Outstanding Reality Program (Daw 2020). This season is a part of a long history of groundbreaking LGBTQ+ representation on MTV. Each season of *The Real World*, which aired on MTV from 1992-2019, featured at least one queer person (Singer 2008). The third season of *The Real World*, airing in 1994, featured Pedro Zamora, a gay man with AIDS who openly spoke about his experiences while on the show (Nussbaum 2024). Scholars have studied the cultural impact of this season, with Peter Singer (2008) going as far as to argue that Pedro Zamora’s appearance on *The Real World*, which he believed personalized and humanized homosexuality to mainstream America, is what helped end Bill Clinton’s “Don’t ask, don’t tell” military policy. Since the early 2000s, MTV has also included “gay” or “lesbian” episodes in most of its dating shows (Gray 2009). *AYTO* Season 8 was not out of the ordinary for MTV and was perhaps a part of its thirty-year-long positioning in reality television.

3.2 Performance and Performativity in Reality Television

Reality television permits exciting analysis because while it mirrors the identity games of daily lives, the people in question are put under extraordinary, and filmed, circumstances (Bondebjerg 2002). The camera incites performance (Butler 1993), and this cannot be ignored in how we conceptualize identity construction on reality television. Gator & MacDonald (2015) propose three levels of observation that reality TV contestants are aware of. They are:

1. Directly observed by other contestants on the show
2. Directly and indirectly observed by the production crew
3. Indirectly observed by the audience

Each level of observation will influence the performance (Goffman 1973) of the participant. The participants are adjusting their manner of behavior not only for their fellow participants, but the indirect/direct eyes of production and the indirect eyes of the audience. The three levels of constant observation will also determine how participants pull on their embodied ideas of gender (Butler 1990); the participants may describe or construct their gender in ways that are atypical of unmediated interaction. At the same time, identity construction is not only a matter of the speaker using discourse to communicate who they are, but a co-construction with the perceiver (Calder & Steele 2024). While the participants are negotiating their gender with their fellow participants, the

production, *and* the audience, the producers are utilizing their own embodied ideas of gender to first perceive Kai and Basit's identity, and then create a final packaged result. Editing places the power of speech *and* silence in the hands of production (Gator & MacDonald 2015). The editors control whose language is used and in which context, and this mediation of the participant's language is critical to how gender identity is constructed in *Are You The One?*.

3.3 Selling Gender Diversity in a Neoliberal Framework

Reality television cannot be viewed as merely trivial entertainment (McCarthy 2007); the language of reality television participants is imbued with significance and given the power to represent and negotiate the social world that the audience exists in (Couldry 2009). McCarthy (2007) argues that reality television serves as a vehicle for neoliberal discourses that can be packaged and sold to an audience. Reality television requires participants to demonstrate their sense of neoliberal selfhood by coherently and consistently placing themselves within the social worlds of the audience (McCarthy 2007). Reality television also incites highly emotional performance; on shows like *AYTO*, the production team sequesters participants, organizes long shoots, and provides participants with large amounts of alcohol while encouraging a party atmosphere (Murray 2011). On top of this, dating shows subject the participants to highly personal evaluations from both the other participants and the audience (Gray 2009). How the participants recover from moments of heightened emotion supplements the construction of their consistent identities (McCarthy 2007). The producers and editors are telling a narrative of identity and relationships (Keating 2013), and a narrative of neoliberal selfhood is what sells best. The participants gain ontological security by placing themselves within institutional frameworks that the audience has access to, and then undergo highly emotional moments that allow them to reaffirm their identities in the face of hardship (McCarthy 2007).

The question becomes: what is the narrative the producers of *AYTO* Season 8 are telling, and how does this narrative use gender non-conforming identities to maintain neoliberal ideals? Promotion for the season begins to answer these questions. MTV's YouTube channel posted a video titled "Are You The One? Season 8 Cast on Making TV History, How To Be An Ally & More" on June 30, 2019, four days after the premiere of the show. In the video, Basit claimed that "there has never been a show that I have seen that focused on the dating experiences of LGBTQ+ people" (MTV Reality 2019). The video also featured the cast explaining how to be an ally to the queer community. This video presents the show as both groundbreaking and in line with queer politics, specifically a form of queer politics that normalizes queer individuals. Similarly, NPR released a podcast in July 2019, after five out of the twelve episodes of the season had aired, featuring Kai discussing their experiences with the show. Kai claimed that their biggest motivator for doing the show was "queer and trans visibility" (WAMU 2019). They noted a lack of "authentic representation" for queer people in reality television and claimed that *AYTO* portrayed "authentic queer relationships as is" (WAMU 2019). This emphasis on authenticity, and the idea that no reality television show has represented "authentic" queer relationships before, does two things. It once

again positions MTV's decision to create this season as groundbreaking, while simultaneously legitimizing the portrayals of the participants.

While I am not claiming that the *AYTO* producers had poor intentions in creating this piece of media, it is still extremely important to recognize that the producers and editors are the ones with the power to manipulate the perimeters of this queer representation and its connection to intelligible queer politics (Gator & MacDonald 2015). In a season of all 'minorities,' Kai and Basit become the 'token minorities' (Gator & MacDonald 2015) because of their gender identities. Typically, token minorities are included on reality television to appease audiences (Gator & MacDonald 2015), but Kai and Basit have narratives that instead drive the show; in a season that is advertised in the language of markedness, it is now a privileged position to be the marked identities. Pedro Zamora was one of many queer people cast on *The Real World*, but his story was especially marked because of his AIDS diagnosis. Zamora was a vehicle for acceptance created by MTV, and while there were indisputably positive impacts that came from this representation, MTV simultaneously received attention, higher ratings, and subsequently financial benefit (Singer 2008). In a neoliberal society, emphasizing the normative potential of transness and queerness serves as a successful strategy to counter the marginalization of trans and queer individuals (Irving 2008). By emphasizing the normative potential of the most marked identities on *AYTO* Season 8, MTV can once again benefit from the goal of acceptance.

AYTO Season 8 has become imbued with social purpose, and as the audience pulls symbolic references from the participants to understand the queerness being performed and how it connects to the social world (Bondebjerg 2002), the role that the production team plays in orchestrating this representation has to be looked at critically. The audience, including myself, will never know how Kai and Basit are utilizing language without intervention. We only have access to how their language is framed by the producers and other participants. I am interrogating the end result of their identities, *not* Kai and Basit as individuals. However, to an audience of a show imbued with the social purpose of creating "authentic" queer stories, Basit and Kai *as individuals* become expert personae of gender non-conforming identity. Similar to how the trans vloggers in Lucy Jones' (2015) study constructed expert personae and articulated what was then perceived as an "authentic trans self" (Section 2.2), Kai and Basit are positioned to do the same by defining their identities for a large audience and urging the audience to support queer people and queer relationships. But while the trans YouTube vloggers edited and uploaded their own videos and therefore controlled their narratives (Jones 2015), Kai and Basit's expert personae are packaged by the *AYTO* production team. Therefore, every action that constructs Kai and Basit's identities cannot be removed from the social goals of the *AYTO* production team *and* how these goals become intelligible in a neoliberal society.

4. Methodology

4.1 The *Are You The One?* Community of Practice

I am defining the group of contestants on *AYTO* Season 8 as a community of practice. A community of practice is a group of people who share in a set of social practices with a common goal (Scollon 2014). Wenger (1998) defines three dimensions of a community of practice: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. The people in a community of practice are mutually engaged in a set of practices whose meanings they negotiate with one another (Wenger 1998). In *AYTO*, the participants' practices are dictated by contexts that are set up and controlled by production. These practices come with not just a stated goal, but relations of mutual accountability that tie the participants to a joint enterprise (Wenger 1998). To win the money, *each* person must find their perfect match. If one participant veers from this goal, it impacts the entire community of practice. As the participants engage in practices to achieve this shared goal, they develop a shared repertoire. While the *AYTO* participants are a diverse group of people from many different backgrounds, they develop their own set of meanings in their constructed context. Furthermore, sociolinguists have argued that the community of practice approach is necessary to address issues of gender and its pervasiveness in daily practice (Bucholtz 1999). There is a continual construction of gender within the *AYTO* community of practice that coincides with the ongoing construction of local identities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992).

4.2 Speech Events

A speech event is roughly defined as activities that are governed by rules or norms for the use of speech (Hymes 1972). Each speech event has a general purpose of communication, the same general topic throughout its duration, the same participants, and the same setting (Saville-Troike 2002). The context of speech, and its mediation, determine how speakers manage dominant discourses of femininity and masculinity as they produce a gendered self (Hall 2003, Butler 1990). Speech events are therefore useful in analyzing how speakers establish their identity within this unique localized context (Hall 2003). I have identified three types of speech events that the participants of *AYTO* engage in⁴:

1. Monologue: When the participants go into a separate room to speak directly to the camera. I will refer to this room as the 'diary room' (DR). Monologues make up 46% of the show's speech events. Monologues can often be heavily prompted and/or scripted (Queen 2015).

⁴ See the appendix (Section 7) for a breakdown of how I determined what constitutes a speech event and how I calculated the percentages of each speech event.

2. Dialogue: When the participants are speaking to one another while in the house or on a date. Dialogues make up 30% of the show's speech events. Dialogues are often heavily edited, making conversational turns impossible to take at face value (discussed further in Section 4.3).
3. Situated Activity: When the participants engage in a required, formalized event. Situated activities make up 24% of the show's speech events. Similar to dialogues, situated activities are heavily edited.

Speech events are not simply accompanied by verbal interaction, but also shaped by it (Duranti 1988). The show might dictate the types of speech events that the participants engage in, but the language of the participants determines how production interweaves the speech events. The interplay between observed interaction (dialogue and situated activity) and monologue is what constitutes the unique reality TV viewing experience (Coudry 2009). The production team has full control over what speech events become interpreted together. Therefore, I argue that reality TV language cannot be observed effectively without a mediated discourse analysis approach.

4.3 Mediated Discourse Analysis

Mediated discourse analysis (MDA) differs from other discourse analysis approaches because it looks at the relationship between discourse and action, and how this relationship is located at the nexus of social practices, social identities, and social goals (Norris & Jones 2005). Importantly, the focus is not on how discourse is a matter of social action *through* discourse, but on what the role of discourse is *in* action (Norris & Jones 2005). MDA asks two questions:

1. What is the action going on here?
2. How does discourse figure into that action?

(Scollon 2001).

In MDA, language, gender, and social action are co-dependent; language's relation to gender is dependent on the relation of language to social actions (Ochs 1992). If we think of actions as always having a gendered force in the world (McElhinny 2003), MDA is essential to studying how each action shapes local and societal configurations of gender and then how these actions culminate in the appearance of a natural framework (Butler 1990).

MDA utilizes not simply action, but *mediated* action, as its unit of analysis to address how all actions are mediated through cultural tools (Jones 2014, 2019). A mediated action "is the real-time moment when mediational means, social actors, and the sociocultural environment intersect" (Norris & Jones 2005, 5). MDA provides a way for researchers to understand how mediation, objects, language, and actions intersect at the nexus of multiple social practices and social histories (Norris & Jones 2005). I am placing actions within social practices (speech events), analyzing how

the social practices are interwoven by the *AYTO* production team, and then considering the relevant social histories that constitute the sociocultural environment that actions and social practices cannot be removed from. MDA addresses how social discourses (i.e., neoliberalism) and social frameworks (i.e., the gender binary) circulate through all moments of human action (Scollon & Saint-Georges 2011).

The editing and interweaving of the participant's speech events is a crucial component of my reality television-based MDA analysis. The *AYTO* production team ultimately determines how social histories and social practices are packaged and then perceived. This makes the *AYTO* production team a critical part of the community of practice. Every action that the audience engages with is co-constructed by the participant *and* the *AYTO* production team. In my analysis, I will consider how the participants negotiate gendered identity via action while under the three levels of observation (Section 3.2). At the same time, I will consider how the producers and editors manipulate the participants' negotiations of gendered identity by editing actions and interweaving speech events to develop a coherent narrative with a specific social goal (Section 3.3).

5. Analysis⁵

In this section, I describe the narratives the production team develops in their packaging of Kai and Basit's actions. In Section 5.1, I argue how Kai and Basit's introductions in Episode 1 begin the 'branding' of their identities. In Section 5.2, I explore how Kai and Basit are initially contrasted in Episode 1 via stylistic actions⁶. In Sections 5.3 and 5.4, I will show how repetitive stylistic actions link Kai to a 'player' person, and Basit to a 'diva' persona. I will then show how these personae are linked to masculinity and femininity, respectively. In Sections 5.5 and 5.6, I explain how the show ends both Basit and Kai's storylines, and how these endings allow Kai and Basit to become intelligible to a neoliberal society.

5.1 Defining Identity and Developing a Brand: Kai and Basit's Introductions

Within the first ten minutes of Episode 1, both Kai and Basit provide monologues to define their gender nonconforming identities. Because the rest of the cast is assumed to be cisgender, no one else receives screen time to explain their gender identities. Example 1 shows how the audience is introduced to Basit via monologues, dialogues, and imagery⁷:

⁵ My goal in my analysis is not to argue against queer representation in media or critique anything Kai and Basit, or any of the other cast members, said or did. Instead, my goal is to analyze how gender non-conforming individuals present their social selves (Barbee & Schrock 2019) and how others impose identities onto them, while simultaneously considering how this is mediated. It is important to reiterate that this analysis is not meant to devalue any of the linguistic choices Kai and Basit make to construct their identities. There is a history of normativity and authenticity being weaponized against trans individuals (Konnelly 2021), so I adamantly do not seek to add to the idea that there is any 'right' way to be gender non-conforming and/or transgender.

⁶ 'Stylistic action' is a term I am using to emphasize how mediated actions become linked to style (defined in Section 2.1). Every mediated action is a stylistic choice the participants make within the community of practice that is then manipulated by the production team.

⁷ See appendix (Section 7.1) for a description of transcription symbols and conventions.

Example 1: (Episode 1, 1:56-2:16)

1 BASIT (DR): My gender is *fluid*:

CUTS to multiple clips of Basit dancing and then swimming

CUTS to diary room

2 BASIT (DR): Am I a girl or a boy? Yes. No. Both. *Neither*

CUTS to house

3 KARI: [So if you don't mind me asking –

4 JENNA: [What are your preferred pronouns?

5 KARI: Yeah your preferred [pronouns

6 BASIT: [Yeah um,

7 BASIT: They/them is like really cool it means that you're thinking about it, but honestly my preferred pronoun is Basit

Basit explains their gender identity in monologues, and these monologues are intentionally paired with imagery of them dancing and (dramatically) swimming. Basit's action of defining their gender identity is therefore linked to imagery that it otherwise would not have been (I will further discuss the impact of these actions in Section 5.2). Immediately following their monologue in Line 2, Kari and Jenna ask Basit what their preferred pronouns are. This dialogue establishes that asking for preferred pronouns is a standard that the *AYTO* participants follow, but the show only includes Kai and Basit providing their pronouns (Kai provides theirs in Lines 12 & 16, Example 2). The rest of the participants' pronouns are therefore assumed along with their assumed cisgender identities. The action of Kari and Jenna asking for preferred pronouns in Example 1, and the dialogue in lines 13-15 of Example 2, mark Basit and Kai along with their introductory monologues.

Basit and Kai's introductory monologues and dialogues are performances (Goffman 1973) with the specific social goal of making themselves intelligible to both their potential love interests and an indirect audience. When addressing the indirect audience, monologues are the most conducive to what I am calling the 'branding' process. Gershon (2016) argues that individuals must 'brand' themselves when applying to jobs in the age of neoliberalism. Individuals must convince a potential employer that they are a predictable and coherent self to secure employment. *AYTO* is a job interview of sorts; reality shows can now propel contestants into influencer fame and/or get them more roles on reality television shows. Branding oneself is also becoming increasingly common in mediatized spaces, specifically social media, with individuals feeling pressure to develop a 'consumable package' (Kanai 2017) that represents a pre-established identity that is supported by the institutionalized norms of the platform (Haimson & Hoffman 2016)⁸.

⁸ Social media branding is a burgeoning topic. See Dame (2016), Wortham (2018), and Jacobsen et al (2022) for more examples of how gender and queerness is packaged and consumed on social media.

Basit’s developing ‘brand’ becomes evident if we consider their self-identification in the promotional YouTube video (Section 3.3). In the video, Basit said:

“If you were to ask me are you a boy or a girl, I would say neither and both”

(MTV Reality 2019)

While the delivery is reorganized, the self-definition parallels Basit’s monologue in Line 2. Consistent packaging of language creates predictable identities that the people tasked with evaluating the participants’ influencer and/or future reality TV star potential (both the production and the audience) can consume (Gershon 2016). Furthermore, in the process of validating their selfhood, individuals must construct the coherence of their identities through explanations that either use the language of expected categories or address their disidentification with expected categories (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 2008). Basit makes their gender intelligible by disidentifying with binary terms (“boy” and “girl”) and using the legitimized label “fluid.”

Kai utilizes the same strategies. In the promotional YouTube video,⁹ the NPR podcast,¹⁰ and Example 2, Kai pairs the term “transmasculine nonbinary” with a statement that makes it clear they do not seek to reduce their identity to “male.” Kai and Basit use the language of the binary to remove themselves from the binary (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 2008), while also using queer identity labels to appeal to a legitimized queer lexicon (Crowley 2022). Kai and Basit’s consistent branding links the show’s goal with Kai and Basit’s (assumed) goals: Basit and Kai make themselves intelligible as a brand, while also aiding the production team in furthering the goal of groundbreaking queer acceptance (Section 3.3). *AYTO* relies on Kai and Basit to become mediatized manufactured products (Agha 2011): the marked identities that ground the ‘making history’ goal (Section 3.3). Simultaneously, Kai and Basit gain ontological security by communicating their sense of selfhood and relating their selfhood to the heteronormative social world (Dame 2016). Kai and Basit continue ‘branding’ themselves throughout the show. Kai establishes a consistent transition narrative (Section 5.3), while Basit establishes a consistent desire to be accepted for their gender identity that, oftentimes spectacularly, defies transnormative assumptions (Section 5.4).

Similar to Basit, Kai is introduced via layers of speech events: monologues interwoven with initial dialogues focused on pronouns. However, one important difference is the inclusion of another contestant, Jenna, commenting on Kai’s attractiveness. The editors chose to couple actions by Kai, Basit, and Jenna in order to introduce Kai’s position within the *AYTO* community of practice:

Example 2: (Episode 1, 4:45-5:46)

1 KAI:	You are beautiful
2 BASIT:	Thank you

⁹ The YouTube video was posted on June 30, 2019 and is titled “Are You The One? Season 8 Cast on Making TV History, How to Be An Ally & More” (first referenced in Section 3.3).

¹⁰ The ‘NPR’ podcast was posted on July 22, 2019 and is titled “MTV’s ‘Are You The One?’ And The Future Of Queer Representation In Reality TV” (first referenced in Section 3.3).

3 KAI: Hi, [what's your name?
4 BASIT: [You too actually
5 KAI: What's your name?
6 BASIT: My name's Basit
7 KAI: My name is Kai

CUTS to Jenna watching from the kitchen and talking to a group of participants

8 JENNA: Blondie is cute. Kind of androgynous

CUTS to Basit and Kai

9 BASIT: You are so cute
10 KAI: *You're* so cute
11 BASIT: Okay

CUTS to diary room

12 KAI (DR): I biologically was female, ((a picture of Kai pre-transition is shown on the screen)) but when I was born nobody consulted me and was like hey, uh, do you like this name, does this gender feel right for you? All of a sudden it like clicked for me that the box wasn't locked, like I could step outside the box and be like oh okay wait like I'm allowed to choose

CUTS to house

13 BASIT: What are your pronouns?
14 KAI: He/him or they/them
15 BASIT: Lit

CUTS to diary room

16 KAI (DR): I am a queer, transmasculine nonbinary human who has chosen to medically transition. Nonbinary means that I don't prescribe to either male or female, I'm somewhere in between

CUTS to Jenna talking with the same group of participants from Line 8

17 JENNA: He's honestly my snack
18 AASHA: Who?
19 NOUR: <WH He's so hot WH>
20 JENNA: He's so hot
21 AASHA: What are we talking about?
22 JENNA: Um he's so hot [he's totally my type he's so androgynous
23 AASHA: [Which one
24 NOUR: Yeah

CUTS to diary room

25 JENNA (DR): Oh my god, I want, *I want* him. He kind of reminds me of Justin Bieber {LG} in the sexiest way

In Line 1, Basit is associated with the typically feminine term “beautiful” via Kai’s action. In Line 8, as the camera cuts to Jenna observing Kai and Basit’s interaction from a distance, Kai is associated with the gender-neutral term “androgynous” via Jenna’s action. Through actions, participants utilize terms they have access to, regardless of the constraints societies impose on the discourse surrounding specific terms (Jones 2019). Jenna uses the term “androgynous” because it is the available term to describe someone whose appearance is not strictly masculine or feminine¹¹. Interestingly, in Line 22, Jenna chooses to pair “androgynous” with he/him pronouns. By using the term “androgynous” to signal her attraction to Kai while pairing this adjective with the direct index (Ochs 1992) “he,” Jenna’s action connects the two and links them both to attractiveness. Sexualization in a recognizably nonbinary fashion is difficult (Barbee & Schrock 2019), and this is perhaps why Jenna’s sexualization of Kai in Example 2, and all sexualizations of Kai throughout the show, are always gendered. Regardless, Example 2 sets a precedent: androgyny is positioned as something worth sexualizing, while it is subsequently associated with masculinity (via Jenna’s action in dialogue) and transmasculinity (via the coupling of Kai’s monologues with Jenna’s dialogues). So, while Basit is described as “beautiful” (Line 1), Kai is linked with a transmasculinized, and sexualized, “androgynous” (Line 22) within the same set of speech events. Within the first ten minutes of Episode 1, who has access to ‘androgyny,’ and who doesn’t, is becoming clear.

In Example 2, Jenna utilized the direct index of “he” to establish a link between androgyny and masculinity. A *direct index* is an index that has an established link between the linguistic resource and social meaning (Ochs 1992). Personal pronouns directly index the gender of the individual in reference. An *indirect index* is an index that forms a constitutive link between the linguistic resource and social meaning. Indirect indexes are indirectly associated with men or women, and/or masculinity or femininity (Ochs 1992). The meaning of an indirect index depends on the local and societal context of its use (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Direct and indirect indexes are first used by participants in stylistic actions. The production team then combines the stylistic actions into coherent styles to construct something that exceeds the meaning of the separate signs (Zimman 2017). Coherent styles can only be developed in relation to other possible styles, and the social meaning signified by a style must contrast with other social meanings (Irvine 2001, Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Since Kai and Basit are the only gender non-conforming participants, their respective styles become linked to one another’s, and this link can be used by the *AYTO* production team to tell engaging, and contrasting, narratives within a neoliberal framework (Sections 5.5-5.6, 6.2).

Episode 1 is the beginning of the establishment of Kai and Basit’s contrasting *personae*, or ideological social types that are linked with recognizable ways of being and speaking (D’Onofrio

¹¹ The Human Rights Campaign defines “androgynous” as “identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine” (HRC Glossary of Terms, 2018).

2020). Personae form when the culmination of repetitive stylistic actions becomes culturally enregistered. *Enregisterment* is defined as the process whereby signs (i.e., direct/indirect indexes used in action) become recognized as linked to distinct “registers,” or “stereotypes” (Agha 2006). If a style is enregistered, it becomes linked to a register that can be detached from the localized context (Agha 2005). Every action the participants co-construct with the *AYTO* production team binds them to the larger social world; the intelligibility of Kai and Basit’s styles is dependent on the social-semiotic landscape of the audience and the *AYTO* production team’s knowledge of that social-semiotic landscape (Eckert 2019). Therefore, as Kai and Basit become enregistered as personae, it determines the social roles available to them within the community of practice (Queen 2015), and how the *AYTO* production team can make their social roles coherent to the indirect audience. In *AYTO*, Kai becomes linked to a ‘player’ persona, while Basit is linked to a ‘diva’ persona. In Sections 5.2-5.4, I show how the personae are developed and/or linked to the gender binary via stylistic actions. In Sections 5.5-5.6, I will demonstrate the specific social roles that Kai and Basit assume within the mediated community of practice.

5.2 The Kai and Basit Contrast

In Episode 1, the audience sees Kai and Basit’s first experiences with dating and how these experiences are evaluated by other participants. Towards the beginning of the episode, Kai and Jenna have a conversation that ends with them kissing. Example 3 is Jenna’s monologue that production included after the kiss:

Example 3: (Episode 1, 15:53-16:03)

JENNA (DR): This is my first, uh, experience with a trans person and it doesn’t feel any different. It’s just a person, just a human being, nothing different. I just think he’s sexy

This short monologue establishes two things: that Kai’s transness does not make them any different from the cisgender people Jenna has had romantic and/or sexual experiences with, and that she considers Kai attractive. It is important to remember that with all monologues, participants are typically prompted on what to say (Section 4.2). There is a strong chance Jenna was asked to comment on her experience with a trans person. Whether or not production prompted her response, the production team has indicated to the audience that Jenna’s lack of romantic or sexual experience with trans people is relevant to her attraction to Kai.

The use of “he’s” here, coupled with Jenna mentioning Kai’s transness, once again associates Kai’s attractiveness with transmasculinity via a direct index. Emphasis is also placed on this direct index, as it is the final utterance of the speech event, or at least the utterance that the editors chose to end the speech event with. After the monologue, Kai and Jenna are shown going to the ‘Boom Boom Room,’ the aptly named designated room for sexual intercourse. Shortly after Kai and Jenna have sexual intercourse, Kai is shown flirting with another participant, Remy. Example 4 includes a

brief dialogue between Kai and Remy, and then a monologue where Remy refers to Kai as a “player:”

Example 4: (Episode 1, 20:26-20:35)

1 KAI: And I can't help the fact that I'm on testosterone and extra
horny
2 REMY: {LG}

CUTS to diary room

3 REMY (DR): Kai has this player energy, that I just kind of like, vibe
off of

In this example, production took the action of Remy referring to Kai as a “player” and used it in the first episode to begin to establish Kai’s narrative. Remy has the authority to refer to Kai as a player, as he claimed earlier in the episode that he has slept with over nine hundred people. The show provided Remy with the platform and authority to refer to someone else as a “player,” and then utilized it for Kai’s storyline.

As the show is pre-recorded before editing (Section 3.1), the production team knows what is going to happen. In Example 4, the production team is using the label “player” as a tool in their mediation of Kai’s action in Line 1 to suggest that Kai’s self-proclaimed horniness from higher testosterone levels is linked to Kai’s “player energy.” By pairing this dialogue and monologue, the production team establishes that Kai takes testosterone, which has made them hornier, and this horniness has made them a “player.” This is therefore the first instance where the term “player,” in reference to Kai, is operating as an indirect index for masculinity, specifically transmasculinity. It is important to make clear that this indirect index was a co-construction; the language is Kai and Remy’s, but the indirect index is a product of the mediation of Kai and Remy’s actions.

Basit’s narrative in Episode 1 directly contrasts Kai’s. In Example 5, Basit is on a date with another participant, Kylie:

Example 5: (Episode 1, 37:08-38:27)

1 KYLIE: Honestly on a serious note, I have never dated somebody that
is ... similar to you
2 BASIT: I would [be shocked if you did {LG}
3 KYLIE: [And –
4 KYLIE: Shut up ((playful tone))
5 BASIT: I mean who else is like me like
6 KYLIE: Hey that’s a fact okurr {LG}

CUTS to diary room

7 BASIT (DR): Being pansexual, I’ve stayed very guarded because when a girl
or a female identifying person ... finds out that you are

attracted to other men, they immediately are like, mm that sounds like you're just gay, which is a tired idea

CUTS to date

- 8 BASIT: I do perform in drag,
9 KYLIE: Okay
10 BASIT: My drag name is Dionne Slay.
11 KYLIE: Ooh Dionne [Slay! Okay
12 BASIT: [She is a hoot and a holler and she turns every
party
13 KYLIE: I can't wait to meet Dionne Slay
14 BASIT: You may meet her soon
15 KYLIE: I hope I do
16 BASIT: How do you feel about that? I feel like it's a – a vibe for
sure
17 KYLIE: I like it, no I like it I really do I'm very intrigued and
I'm – I've wanted something different and this is that
different – cuz I, I don't judge I don't give a f – do
whatever the fuck you want!
18 BASIT: That means a lot, that means a lot.
19 KYLIE: Hey I told you I'm accepting. You just got to be willing, to
let it down
20 BASIT: You might be the one though [you might be the one, you might
be the one
21 KYLIE: [Hey you might be the one

CUTS to diary room

- 22 KYLIE (DR): I feel extremely special. Our communication and everything
we have is so genuine and it's real. Basit is amazing and
we'll see what happens

The establishment of Basit's narrative in Example 5 parallels Kai's narrative in Episode 1. In Examples 3 & 4, Kai's gender identity is linked to their sexuality and their desirability within the community of practice. In Example 5, Basit's sexuality is connected to their gender identity as well. However, while Kai has received ample sexualization of their gender identity in just the first episode, Basit's gender identity appears to be a hurdle to their sexuality. Basit is posited as different, whereas in Example 3, Kai was posited as adamantly *not* different. While Jenna claimed that being with Kai didn't "feel any different," Kylie had never dated someone similar to Basit (Line 1, Example 5). The question is: who fits into the homonormative history of discourse, and who doesn't? Duggan (2003) argues that representations that succeed in a neoliberal framework do not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions, but uphold and sustain them (Section 2.2). While Kai is treated as no different from a cisgender person, Basit *is* different from a cisgender person, and understanding

them is something that must be learned. For Basit to become acceptable to a neoliberal society, as Kai already is, Basit must be made intelligible and understandable. I will explain how Basit becomes ‘acceptable’ within a neoliberal framework in Section 5.5.

Example 5 also sets up what I am referring to as Basit’s ‘diva’ persona¹². Divaspeak, or language that allows a person to develop a ‘diva’ persona, includes praising oneself, presenting each statement as the truth, ‘stealing the show’ (drawing attention to oneself), and being image-conscious (Podesva 2007). The ‘diva’ persona is also tied to femininity, and divaspeak therefore evokes femininity despite its user (Podesva 2007). In Basit’s introductory monologues (Example 1), they are shown dramatically describing their gender identity. Basit held out the term ‘fluid’ for emphasis (Line 1) and gave a vague and emphatic explanation of their gender (Line 2). Both of these monologues indicate Basit’s desire to ‘steal the show’ by emphasizing the uniqueness and spectacular nature of their gender identity. The production team’s action of interweaving the monologues with dramatized imagery of Basit elevated Basit’s ability to ‘steal the show’ and drew attention to the emphaticness of their gender. With the knowledge of their introductory monologues in mind, the audience interprets this dialogue between Basit and Kylie.

In Example 5, I have identified two primary examples of Basit utilizing divaspeak. In Line 5, Basit praises themselves by distinguishing themselves as different from everyone else. This utterance could also be interpreted as ‘stealing the show,’ as Basit turns Kylie’s comment in Line 1 into a compliment about themselves. In Line 12, Basit refers to their drag persona, Dionne Slay, as a “hoot and a holler and she turns every party.” Basit is praising themselves while utilizing the direct index “she” to refer to Dionne Slay. While Dionne Slay’s she/her pronouns are something Basit continually embraces as an aspect of their identity, it does associate Basit with a feminine gendered pronoun, emphasizing both their ‘diva’ persona and feminine gender presentation. Example 5 is a continuation of Basit’s branding that posits them as a unique and spectacular member of the community of practice who is deserving of acceptance.

5.3 Kai Becomes the House Player

In Section 5.2, I demonstrated how Kai and Basit’s narratives are contrasted beginning in Episode 1, and how this contrast is supported by developing personae. I will argue that Episode 2¹³

¹² I am not seeking to associate Basit’s ‘diva’ persona with negative connotations. I am utilizing the language and terminology Podesva (2007) used in his study of Heath, a gay man who he argued constructed a diva persona via linguistic resources. However, the ‘Black diva’ stereotype has a history in reality television that has been harmful to depictions of Black femininity (Tyree 2011, Ward 2015, Dash 2018). The devaluation of Black femininity is a pattern across reality television, so while the ‘gay’ diva register is certainly different from the ‘Black diva register,’ it is important to note that Basit cannot use queer registers without these registers becoming linked to their Blackness and Black femininity.

¹³ Kai is featured in the majority of Episode 2’s speech events (56%), which demonstrates how important Kai’s developing ‘player’ persona is to the *AYTO* community of practice. For further reference, Section 7.2 provides a breakdown of the percentage of speech events for all twelve episodes of the show.

is when Kai's 'player' persona, and simultaneous sexualization, becomes enregistered within the *AYTO* community of practice via repetitive stylistic actions.

At the beginning of Kai's storyline in Episode 2, Kai delivers monologues about their transition and how they are going through a "teenage puberty." These monologues are interwoven with Kai flirting with numerous participants:

Example 6: (Episode 2, 10:45-11:13)

1 KAI (DR): I am newly into my transition, and with that starting to take testosterone, and I'm stoked about the fact that my voice has dropped, that's awesome, my jawlines gotten squarer, but I'm also going through like, teenage puberty as an adult

CUTS to Kai flirting with Jenna

2 Kai (DR): {LG} ((blushes)) Um... there's a reason why teenage boys are horny all the time

CUTS to Kai flirting with multiple participants

Example 6 continues Kai's transition narrative and links it to imagery of hypersexuality. Example 6 also reiterates that Kai is biomedically transitioning, which has been an important part of Kai's branding since Episode 1. While Kai does not identify as a trans male, Kai fits into transnormative expectations that might be more legitimate, and subsequently desirable, to the other participants and the audience. Kai is medically transitioning, has undergone gender-affirming surgery, and is presenting in a masculine manner (Zimman 2012). Basit, however, is not medically transitioning and does not use identity labels that evoke masculinity or femininity. So, while Kai is seemingly transitioning from one 'socially knowable sex' to another (Nicolazzo 2016), Basit is not transitioning and is identifying with the absence of 'knowable sex.' Kai and Basit's gender also cannot be removed from their race. Steele (2022) argues that any form of normative gender, i.e., the Western gender binary, does not include people of color. Gender non-conforming people of color are constantly forced to work against the effects of a gender binary that is rooted in histories of white supremacy (Steele 2022). What is normative is not accessible to all (Konnolly 2021), which neoliberal agency and self-determination obscure (Section 2.2). Therefore, Basit couldn't access normative gender even if they wanted to. In addition, Kai's access to normative gender cannot be removed from Kai's developing 'player' persona.

Example 6 sets up the speech events that unfold in Example 7. In Example 7, Kai and Remy have sexual intercourse in the Boom Boom Room, while Kai's current romantic partner, Jenna, is sleeping. Throughout this interaction, Jasmine, another participant who saw Kai and Remy go into the Boom Boom Room together, provides four monologues (Line 5-8) in which she evaluates Kai's actions:

Example 7: (Episode 2, 20:18-21:19)

1 REMY (DR): Game recognizes game, and I see him and I'm just like ... you
little player bitch

CUTS to Jenna sleeping

2 REMY (DR): {LG} Um ... cheers to me

CUTS to house

3 KAI: Do we need to block it like we did before. Or what like *I*
did before. Close it

CUTS to Jasmine and Aasha watching Kai and Remy enter the Boom Boom Room

4 JASMINE: I'm not a ho like that

CUTS to diary room

5 JASMINE (DR): Kai you just left the Boom Boom Room with Jenna? and now
you're going with Remy?

CUTS to Kai and Remy having sex

6 JASMINE (DR): Twice ... within two hours?

CUTS to Jasmine listening at the door of the Boom Boom Room

7 JASMINE (DR): I feel you if that's what you want to do, but don't get
yourself too caught up in them Boom Boom Room feelings,

CUTS to Jenna sleeping

8 JASMINE (DR): you still have to find your potential match in this house

CUTS to Kai and Remy coming out of the Boom Boom Room

9 KAI (DR): What happened with Remy ... I had a need and I fulfilled it
{LG}

In Line 1, before Kai and Remy have sexual intercourse, Remy once again uses his own player authority to classify Kai as a “player.” Furthermore, Remy calls Kai a “little player bitch,” modifying “player” to emphasize the slyness of Kai’s actions. In Line 4, as Jasmine and Aasha see Kai and Remy enter the Boom Boom Room, Jasmine refers to Kai as a “ho” and distances this label from herself. In Line 8, Jasmine introduces the audience to the idea that what Kai is doing is becoming a house-wide issue. The *AYTO* community of practice has the shared goal of finding the eight perfect matches (Section 4.1). If one participant deviates from this goal, it can risk the outcome

for the entire community of practice. The *AYTO* production team could have chosen to only include monologues from Remy and Kai to supplement this storyline, but instead chose to also include multiple evaluative actions from Jasmine. This indicates that reprimanding Kai is valuable to Kai's narrative.

Example 8 is an interweaving of monologues and dialogues that tells the story of what happened the morning of the next day:

Example 8: (Episode 2, 23:45-24:45)

1 KAI: I said it yesterday, I'm like oh I'm sorry I took my hormo— hormones I'm fucking horny and I wanna find some dick {LG}

2 REMY: I was – I was like ((sniffs)) someone's horny, I [can smell it {LG}

3 KAI: [You did you sniffed it out!

CUTS to diary room

4 BRANDON (DR): Kai, to be honest, great guy, but I can see right through him

CUTS to house

5 KAI: I was drunk and vulnerable and you found me!

CUTS to diary room

6 BRANDON (DR): This dude is a player like, everybody is falling for his bullshit but honestly I see right through it

CUTS to house

7 KAI: I spilled my coffee on the ground damn it

8 KAI (to Jenna): Hi

9 JENNA: Better clean yourself up

CUTS to diary room

10 KAI (DR): So I gotta talk to Jenna, I still care about her and I understand her and I know that she's like thinking herself in circles, I'm just hoping that she's willing to hear me out. I don't know I wanna resolve what happened last night that's – that felt icky, I don't mm

CUTS to house

11 KAI: I have to clean up my mess figuratively ... and physically

CUTS to Kai and Jenna having a conversation

12 KAI: I was a ho @
13 JENNA: Yes you were

The dialogue between Kai and Remy in Lines 1-3 once again links transmasculinity with hypersexuality. This is followed by monologues from Brandon, a participant who is completely removed from the situation and serves as a random evaluation of Kai. In Line 6, Brandon uses the term “player,” a term the audience has now heard Remy use twice, to negatively evaluate Kai. Brandon’s use of “player” is critical, as it shows how this indirect index (Section 5.2) is now a relevant linguistic tool to orient Kai within the community of practice.

In Example 6, Kai’s flirting was implied to be, by both Kai and the production team’s action (via the interweaving of flirting with monologues), a direct cause of their transmasculinity. This is followed by Example 7, where Kai’s flirting leads to them having sexual intercourse with Remy, and Remy once again refers to Kai as a “player.” Finally, in Example 8, production chose to follow the dialogue of Kai and Remy joking about how Kai’s transition has made them horny with a monologue of Brandon referring to Kai as a “player” while using he/him pronouns. The term “player” is consistently linked with the use of the direct index of he/him pronouns and/or Kai’s biomedical transition narratives (Examples 4,6-8), and this firmly establishes the label “player” as an indirect index to transmasculinity within the *AYTO* community of practice. Furthermore, Kai refers to themselves as a “ho” in Line 12 and talks about cleaning up their “mess” in Line 11, subsequently corroborating the other participant’s evaluations of them.

Kai’s storyline in Episode 2 ends with a situated activity. In Example 9, the house has a therapy session, where a relationship therapist comes to the house to discuss any issues the participants are having. During the session, Jenna brings up the topic of open relationships. Kai begins the discussion by justifying their ability to pursue multiple people at once:

Example 9: (Episode 2, 28:00-28:37)

1 KAI: Again that’s like an opinion thing because someone can be enough for me and like I can still explore other options physically
2 JASMINE: I feel like if – if I’m with you and I feel the need to like have an open relationship or be with somebody else I’m not in love with you but, like I feel like in order to be in love I want to look at you and be like, I don’t feel the need to want anybody else but you
3 JENNA: Amen
4 DR.FRANKIE: So we haven’t mastered a monogamous relationship yet and already we’re thinking about open relationships can you imagine that shitshow?

5 JENNA: Yeah come on let's start with square one okay

CUTS to diary room

6 JENNA (DR): Honestly like give me a year with Kai and I'll show him that I am enough and he doesn't need an open relationship

In this example, both Jenna and Jasmine devalue Kai's ability to explore polyamorous relationship styles. Jenna and Jasmine's reduction of polyamory to an inability to respect one's partner is unsurprising, given that polyamorous relationship styles do not fit within the community of practice's shared goal of finding the perfect matches. The important takeaway of Example 9 is Dr. Frankie's support of Jenna and Jasmine's evaluative actions. The meaning ascribed to an individual's social existence is not confirmed without evaluations from others (Agha 2006). In *AYTO*, the production team relies on the participants' evaluative actions to co-construct identity. In the development of a persona, evaluation is key, and this has been clear with prior evaluations from Jenna (Examples 2 & 3), Remy (Examples 4 & 7), Jasmine (Example 7), and Brandon (Example 8). However, in the context of a situated activity where a 'relationship expert' helps the participants with their relationships, the authority of Dr. Frankie's language is valued over everyone else's. In Example 9, Kai's tendency to explore multiple relationships with multiple houseguests, which has caused other participants to label Kai with the indirect index "player," is now legitimized as problematic behavior (a.k.a. a "shitshow") by a relationship professional.

The indirect index "player" is utilized by participants to evaluate Kai. The *AYTO* production team then interweaves these evaluative actions with Kai's transition narratives and imagery of Kai's hypersexuality in order to link Kai's transmasculine identity with Kai's social role within the community of practice. Kai effectively becomes the "player," and this persona cannot be removed from their transmasculinity. The potential harm of Kai's transmasculinized 'player' persona is then legitimized by Dr. Frankie's linguistic authority.

5.4 Basit and the Undesirability of Queer Femininity

I will argue that Episode 3 is when Basit's 'diva' persona, and simultaneous desexualization, becomes enregistered within the *AYTO* community of practice via repetitive stylistic actions.

At the beginning of Episode 3, Basit and Jonathan are having a conversation about Basit's needs in a relationship. Basit has previously expressed interest in Jonathan, but Jonathan has yet to show interest in Basit. Example 10 includes dialogues of this conversation interwoven with monologues from Jonathan:

Example 10: (Episode 3, 4:13-5:03)

1 BASIT: Based on my dating past, I can't really like mess with like that hyper-masculine idea anymore. I need someone who is completely comfortable with me being me

((Jonathan is shown looking at Basit and saying nothing))

CUTS to diary room

2 JONATHAN (DR): Back home, when getting to know someone like Basit who is non-binary, I would never *ever* make a move to take it to the next level, it's just never like aroused me in like a sexual way

CUTS to house

3 BASIT: If I can't wear my glitter purple blanket skirt like you know what I mean, I then I'm not being me

((Jonathan is shown looking at Basit and saying nothing))

CUTS to diary room

4 JONATHAN (DR): I feel out of my element. I ... don't come from an area that's like has a huge queer LGBTQ+ scene, *but* I came into the house wanting to learn

CUTS to house

5 JONATHAN: You have so much to like, prove to the world and like ...

6 BASIT: I have so much to give to the world, I don't have anything to prove to anyone, but I have so much to give the world

In Example 10, Basit's divaspeak (via dialogue) is coupled with Jonathan's desexualization of Basit (via monologue). This is in direct contrast to how Kai's 'player' evaluations are coupled with their sexualization. There are two prominent examples of divaspeak. In Line 6, Basit counters Jonathan's comment in Line 5. In doing so, they present their statement as the truth and praise themselves while doing so (Podesva 2007). Second, in Line 3, Basit comments on the importance of their "glitter purple blanket skirt," suggesting that their clothing, and consequently image (Podesva 2007), is critical to their identity.

In Lines 1 & 3, Basit talks about their needs in a relationship. Immediately following both of these utterances, Jonathan is shown looking at Basit and not responding. The audience does not have access to the conversational turns that took place, so it is unclear whether or not Jonathan responded to these utterances. Showing Jonathan's silence is an action of production, but it *becomes* Jonathan's action as well, whether or not it actually happened. Both of these actions of silence are paired with a monologue of Jonathan expressing his lack of sexual interest in "someone like" Basit. Despite how the unedited conversation went, the audience is shown an awkward interaction that amplifies Jonathan's disinterest in Basit. Basit's utterances are first met with awkward silence and

then mediated by Jonathan’s desexualization of Basit via monologue. In Line 2, Jonathan specifically notes that “non-binary” individuals have never “aroused” him in a “sexual way.” In Example 10, the editing of dialogues and the inclusion of Jonathan’s monologues link Basit’s divaspeak *and* gender non-conforming identity to desexualization.

Jonathan’s evaluations of Basit are the only tangible and consistent romantic connection that Basit is shown to have throughout the entire show. This puts a lot of weight and meaning on Jonathan’s evaluative actions. At the same time, Kai is flirting with, and is seemingly appealing to, most of the other participants. This parallel sends a specific message to the audience that cannot be ignored. The devaluation of trans feminine people, or any gender non-conforming person who utilizes elements of femininity, is transmisogyny (Serano 2016). *Transmisogyny* is steeped in the assumption that femininity, and femaleness in general, are inferior to masculinity and maleness (Serano 2016). Scholars have documented how hegemonic masculinity infiltrates masculinities in queer communities; oftentimes, queer men have a predisposition towards gay men who prioritize “fitness” and hypermasculinity, while simultaneously devaluing effeminate gay men (Baker 2003, Clarkson 2006). With heteronormative masculinity being prioritized in queer communities, queer femininities are frequently held accountable to the standards of heteronormative femininity. Queer people are subsequently denied the ability to use femininity as a tool for creating subversive responses to gender norms (Hale & Ojeda 2018). Basit cannot project femininity without it limiting them to heteronormative femininity. Furthermore, white hegemonic masculinity has the power to maintain gender norms in spaces where it might otherwise be challenged (Hale & Ojeda 2018). Kai is a white person who is performing acceptable masculinity and is therefore maintaining dominant gender norms without intending to.

Following Jonathan’s initial desexualization of Basit in Example 10, Jonathan tells Basit that they should ‘match-up’ with another participant, Danny, instead of Jonathan. This is followed by Jonathan justifying his disinterest in Basit via monologue:

Example 11: (Episode 3, 26:03-26:29)

JONATHAN (DR): I do connect with Basit on every single level except for sexual or romantic. I’ve never dated a feminine person before, except for ... a 100% female. I don’t know how to train my mind into liking that

In Example 11, Jonathan refers to Basit as “feminine.” Although divaspeak, which Basit used in Examples 5 & 10, evokes femininity (Podesva 2007), this is the first time any of the participants has referred to Basit using the direct index “feminine.” But this is not all Jonathan does in this action. Jonathan also clarifies that he only dates people who are “100% female,” and then goes on to say that he doesn’t know how to train his mind into liking “that,” with the demonstrative pronoun “that” referring to someone who isn’t “100% female.” In this utterance, Jonathan dictates who is qualified to utilize femininity (cisgender women) and begins a pattern of using the demonstrative pronoun “that” to refer to Basit’s gender expression. In Example 11, the use of

“that” becomes an indirect index for femininity, but femininity with an asterisk, or what I will refer to as a ‘false femininity.’

After the monologue in Example 11, Basit and Jonathan enter into an argument via dialogue. Example 12 begins with a monologue from Danny, who is shown to overhear the argument between Basit and Jonathan. In Line 2, Basit accuses Jonathan of being in “puppy love” with Justin, a cisgender male participant who happens to fit the heteronormative standards of masculinity that Jonathan values as attractive. The dialogue continues with Jonathan and Basit arguing about whether or not Jonathan prioritizes physical appearance in his attraction to potential matches:

Example 12: (Episode 3, 26:57-27:52)

1 DANNY (DR): I think that what’s really happening is that Jonathan is not
as ... *woke* as Basit is

CUTS to house

2 BASIT: I know you’re maybe in some puppy love right now with Justin
but like –

3 JONATHAN: Justin has absolutely nothing to [do with this conversation

4 BASIT: [I don’t ... okay

5 BASIT: I’m gonna call bullshit. Everyone in this house knows damn
well that you had your eyes on Justin before y’all even
spoke words to each other and then you *made* [your decision
based on physical attraction ...

6 JONATHAN: [I did –

7 JONATHAN: I [didn’t make my decision on physical attraction

8 BASIT: [And wait ... uh you definitely did

9 BASIT: I asked you is physical attraction most important to you and
you answered yes

10 JONATHAN: Physical appearance to me is very important because I –

11 BASIT: I can tell I can tell

12 JONATHAN: Wh- is very important –

13 BASIT: I can tell

14 JONATHAN: What you’re failing to realize is –

15 BASIT: What I’m failing to realize

16 JONATHAN: What you’re failing to realize is when I say physical
appearance, is someone who is concerned about their *health*

CUTS to diary room

17 BASIT (DR): He’s using the physical attraction as a like barrier to keep
me on the other side of a connection with him and that
barrier makes me uncomfortable

Because of the *AYTO* production team’s action of coupling Danny’s monologue in Line 1, in which he refers to Basit as “woke,” with the dialogue from Lines 2-16, Jonathan’s treatment of

Basit in the dialogue is equated to his lack of ‘wokeness’¹⁴. Whether or not Danny intended to do so, he has linked Basit’s identity to ‘wokeness,’ via his own action and the production team’s action. This term illustrates an ongoing phenomenon that began in Episode 1: Kai’s identity is something that can be understood without learning new pronouns or language, and is subsequently not “any different” (Example 3) from cisgender identities, while Basit’s identity requires a level of ‘wokeness’ to understand. Basit’s identity is attached to ideas and discourses (evoked by “woke”) that are separate from their actual physical reality, turning Basit into an abstraction similar to the abstraction Jonathan created in Example 11 by referring to Basit’s gender identity as “that.” Basit is even further abstracted by Jonathan’s utterance in Line 16. When Jonathan claims that he prioritizes “health,” not “physical appearance,” in his attraction towards others, he distances himself from transmisogyny and instead links his lack of sexual interest in Basit to physical health and therefore pulls on the history that ties together fitness and masculinity as aspirational within the queer community (Baker 2003). Jonathan utilizes terms of physicality to describe his attraction to Justin, while he utilizes terms of abstraction to describe his lack of attraction to Basit.

In Example 13, Basit responds to Jonathan’s rejection via monologues, which are interwoven with dialogues of Basit being comforted by other participants:

Example 13: (Episode 3, 29:03-29:37)

1 BASIT (DR): Jonathan’s rejecting me. I want him to see me in a way that is deeper than just like my clothes, my look my glitter my glitz my glam. To see me on like a real real deep level

CUTS to house. Basit is crying while being comforted by Kai and Remy

CUTS to diary room

2 BASIT (DR): I just want to feel seen and loved and accepted by everyone, and I’ve – I’ve never experienced that in my life

In the first monologue, Basit utilizes divaspeak by referencing imagery that constitutes their gender presentation (indicating they are “image conscious” (Podesva 2007)). Basit is linking the feminine elements of their gender presentation to this insurmountable “woke” (Example 12) identity that Jonathan has trouble finding attractive. In the second monologue, after the audience sees Basit cry, Basit emotionally relays a desire to be loved and accepted to the audience. Basit is legitimizing their identity through an emotional appeal (Reyes 2011), while reminding the audience of *AYTO*’s

¹⁴ The term “woke” entered mainstream vocabulary around 2014 (VanDreew et al 2025). The term was coined by Black civil rights activists in the 1960s to signify awareness of the systemic oppression of marginalized groups (VanDreew et al 2014). “Woke” reemerged in the 2010s with a new wave of civil rights protests. The term was used by people on the political left to draw attention to the history of systemic oppression of Black people and then all marginalized groups, but was quickly co-opted by the political right as a term to mock the language of social justice groups (VanDreew et al 2014). Danny’s use of the term “woke” in Example 12 ties Basit to the histories, ideologies, and political oppositions the term evokes.

goal of acceptance; Basit desires acceptance that they have never received because of their queerness.

In Example 10, Basit's divaspeak and gender non-conforming identity are linked to Jonathan's desexualization of Basit. In Example 11, Jonathan justifies their desexualization of Basit by turning them into an abstraction through the use of the indirect index "that," which I argued links Basit to false femininity. In Example 12, Jonathan and Danny's actions once again turn Basit into an abstraction to justify and/or explain Jonathan's desexualization of Basit. In Example 13, Basit utilizes divaspeak and diva imagery to link their developing 'diva' persona to Jonathan's lack of attraction and inability to accept Basit. *AYTO* interweaves Basit's divaspeak/diva imagery, Basit's gender non-conforming identity, and Basit's desire to be accepted (Example 13) with evaluative actions that desexualize Basit and/or turn Basit into an abstraction linked with false femininity. Basit's repetitive use of divaspeak and diva imagery in stylistic actions allows Basit to become the 'diva,' and this persona cannot be removed from their desexualization and false femininity.

Shortly after Example 13, the participants attend another therapy session with Dr. Frankie. In Example 14, Jonathan attempts to bring up the conversation he had with Basit about Danny:

Example 14: (Episode 3, 30:11-30:40)

1 DR. FRANKIE:	Alright so I want to hear, what's been going down, fill me in
2 JONATHAN:	Um, I just wanted to kind of touch on the conversation that Basit and I were having that Danny reminded Basit of his ex and I [wanted to know ...
3 BASIT:	[Their ex
4 JONATHAN:	Oh, uh, <i>their</i> ex
CUTS to diary room	
5 BASIT (DR):	I've made a couple of announcements saying that they/them is a preferred pronoun, when I hear people calling me he I can hear that they are still imposing what they think they see of me and not respecting how I see myself

In Line 2, Jonathan, with or without meaning to, uses the direct index "his" as a weapon against Basit. Jonathan's action of using he/him pronouns in the situated activity signals to the audience, and the rest of the participants, that Jonathan sees Basit as a 'man' acting with 'false femininity' that Jonathan identified in Example 11 by referring to Basit as not "100% female." The therapy session is integral to Basit's storyline in Episode 3, and this parallels the integralness of the therapy session to Kai's storyline in Episode 2 (Example 9). These two situated activities (Examples 9 & 14) are used to solidify both Kai and Basit's personae and their respective roles in the community of practice. In Example 9, the potential harm of Kai's 'player' persona is legitimized by Dr. Frankie. In Example 14, Line 5, Basit appeals to the legitimacy of their use of they/them pronouns by invoking their right to self-determination (Crowley 2022, Zimman 2018, 2019). Basit's desire to be "accepted" (Examples 13) and for people to respect how they see themselves (Example

14) develop Basit's social role in the community of practice. Jonathan's evaluative actions have linked Basit's 'diva' persona to a gender that is unintelligible in a neoliberal society. Basit can then serve as a vehicle for growth within the community of practice if their gender identity is made intelligible and is accepted by Jonathan. In Section 5.5, I explain how Basit's normative potential is achieved through stylistic actions that detach Basit's self from their gender identity. In contrast, Kai's gender identity was established as intelligible in a neoliberal society in Episode 1 (Section 5.2). Therefore, the conclusion of their narrative is based on their persona, not their gender identity. In Section 5.6, I explain how Kai's ending directly parallels Basit's ending. While Basit becomes a vehicle for growth, Kai becomes a vehicle for change.

5.5 Basit's Ending: Learning to Accept the "Costume" of False Femininity

In Section 5.4, I argued how Jonathan posited Basit as undesirable, and turned this undesirability into an abstraction linked to 'false femininity.' However, in Episode 4, Jonathan's behavior towards Basit changes drastically. To understand Jonathan's motivations, I look at the context of the episode. In Episode 4, the participants put on a 'queer prom,' in which the houseguests dress up in 'gender-bending' clothes and throw a party. In Example 15, Basit attends the prom as their drag persona, Dionne Slay, and receives a highly dramatized entrance:

Example 15: (Episode 4, 28:01-29:01)

Dramatic music begins to play. CUTS to Basit pretending to answer a phone in the diary room

1 BASIT (DR): Hello? Uh-oh ... okay, I'll alert the troops ... Dionne Slay is here y'all

CUTS to Basit entering the queer prom and a group of participants bow down to them

CUTS to diary room

2 MAX (DR): Dionne Slay just arrived to prom, and ... I'm not sure if I'm still breathing right now

CUTS to queer prom

3 BASIT: I did show up two hours late but you know what, a queen is never late

4 JASMINE: You look better than all of us

5 BASIT (DR): I'm feeling good about tonight you know the queers showed up the queers showed out. We've got, boys in wigs and dresses, we've got girls with bow ties and that is what queerness is

all about is expressing yourself in a way that has nothing to do with how people think that you need to be. You be you, you – you live *your* truth, okay? I sure am living mine

Basit relies on reality television means to create a dramatic reveal. Both Basit and the *AYTO* production team couple the monologues in Lines 1 & 5 with Basit’s entrance to the queer prom (where the other participants are shown bowing down to them) and the evaluations in Lines 2 & 4. In Line 2, Max legitimizes the spectacular nature and importance of Dionne Slay’s image via monologue, while Jasmine does the same in Line 4 via dialogue. No other participant received a multiple speech event interweaving of praise and attention at the queer prom, allowing Basit to effectively “steal the show” and reaffirm their ‘diva’ persona (Podesva 2007)

In Section 5.4, I argued that Basit’s ‘diva’ persona became linked to a specific social role within the *AYTO* community of practice: to serve as a vehicle for growth. In Line 5, Basit uses the ‘gender-bending’ in the queer prom to once again remind the audience of the show’s goal of queer acceptance. Basit is defining queerness as “expressing yourself in a way that has nothing to do with how people think that you need to be.” Basit is defining queerness as moving past normative expectations, but to remove queerness from normative expectations is to allow it to remain unintelligible in a neoliberal society (Section 3.3). I will show how *AYTO* reconciles Basit’s definition of queerness with a version of queerness that is intelligible in a neoliberal society in order to utilize Basit’s potential as a vehicle for growth.

A few minutes into the queer prom storyline, Jonathan and Basit participate in a joint monologue in Example 16 (Jonathan and Basit are both in the diary room):

Example 16: (Episode 4, 32:56-33:17)

1 JONATHAN: *She*, brought something out of *me*, that has never... been *seen* ...
2 BASIT: Oooh
3 JONATHAN: before
4 BASIT: Thank ya, [hallelujah can I get an amen
5 JONATHAN: [LG}
6 JONATHAN: And that is exactly what I’m looking for in a perfect match
7 BASIT: Aw, aw that’s so sweet I’m gonna have to relay the message to Basit because Dionne stays single, ooh

In Example 16, the joint monologue signals to the audience that Jonathan has a specific message he wants to deliver. In Line 1, Jonathan uses emphasis on the direct index “she” to indicate that he now accepts Basit’s femininity, which he just rendered false and undesirable in the last episode. In addition, Jonathan establishes growth by using the correct pronoun for the situation and effectively contrasting his misgendering of Basit in Example 14. Jonathan’s sudden interest in Basit, and his claim that Basit brought something out of him that had “never been seen,” is jarring. However, when we consider the levels of direct/indirect observation by production and indirect observation by the audience, it is less surprising. Reality TV subverts the idea of ‘saving face’ (Goffman 1967); typically, participants seek to save face, or protect their social value, with their

interlocutor, but while filming for reality television, it often becomes more important to save face with production and the indirect audience (Gater & MacDonald 2015). Participants save face by performing in ways that they believe will get them more screen time and/or allow them to be seen as socially appropriate by the audience (Gater & MacDonald 2015). Following Basit's dramatized entrance to the queer prom in Example 15, it is likely that Jonathan saw the queer prom, and the attention Basit received from it, as a chance to change his narrative and gain both more screen time and favor with the indirect audience. Jonathan observed Basit's role as a vehicle for growth within the *AYTO* community of practice and positioned himself as the person in need of growth. The day following the queer prom, Jonathan uses a dialogue with another participant, Brandon, to further his narrative of growth:

Example 17: (Episode 4, 51:04-52:03)

- 1 JONATHAN: Basit really like inspires me and like makes ... me like explore different parts of myself that I never really knew were there
- 2 BRANDON: No like I feel the same way with Basit like he makes me feel comfortable and he makes me feel open enough to express myself without being judged about it
- 3 JONATHAN: Yeah, so that's cool like ... they help me grow
- 4 BRANDON: The way you're using those pronouns today I was like dang you got that on point now
- 5 JONATHAN: Yeah
- 6 BRANDON: You've been practicing?
- 7 JONATHAN: No, I just, like I really did wanna learn. I didn't – I didn't know anything about that before coming here, and it was hard at first but I think I got it

CUTS to diary room

- 8 BRANDON (DR): I honestly feel like Jonathan and Basit could possibly be a perfect match because they do have a good connection aesthetically, mentally I can definitely see it because they're both very deep ... and sensual people

CUTS to house

- 9 BRANDON: Aspirations and goals and everything like that are all the same with us but, when it comes to that physical attribute they just don't turn me on in that way
- 10 JONATHAN: And there's very few people in this house that would do that, for me like I wouldn't be able to have fun like that with someone but also be romantically connected to them

In Line 1, Jonathan discusses how Basit “inspires” him and brought something new out of him, which reestablishes the narrative of growth he relied on in Example 16. In Line 2, Brandon

uses the direct index “he” as an (unintentional) weapon against Basit, similar to Jonathan’s action in Example 14. In Line 3, Jonathan uses the correct pronoun “they” in reference to Basit. This directly contrasts Brandon’s incorrect pronoun usage and once again indicates Jonathan’s growth from Example 14. However, in Line 7, Jonathan uses the demonstrative pronoun “that” to describe someone who uses they/them pronouns. Jonathan is still turning Basit and Basit’s gender identity into an abstraction linked with false femininity, and Brandon amplifies this abstraction. In Line 8, Brandon claims that Jonathan and Basit could be a “perfect match” because they have a good connection “aesthetically” and “mentally.” In Line 9, Brandon makes it clear that when it comes to the “physical attribute,” Basit is not attractive to him. Once again, Basit is specifically removed from sexual and physical attraction and referred to only with terms that indicate mentality and abstract ideas. And because of Jonathan’s use of “that” in Line 7, these abstractions are inseparable from Basit’s gender non-conforming identity and ‘false femininity.’

Basit’s complete detachment from language of physical attraction occurs at the end of Episode 4. Despite showing interest in Basit throughout the episode, Jonathan chooses Brandon in the match-up ceremony. In Example 18, Jonathan justifies his choice via a monologue:

Example 18: (Episode 4, 54:22-54:39)

JONATHAN (DR): I’m switching it up. Basit could be my perfect match, but right now I’ve got my eye on Brandon’s body, that takes a lot of work to look like that and anyone that like is willing to put in that much work just shows that in a relationship they’d be willing to put the same amount of work in so that’s how it stimulates me

Jonathan uses the situated activity to reposition Basit as undesirable and connects his argument back to physicality. In Example 18, Jonathan reuses the narrative that physical health and fitness is his top priority in finding a match (Section 5.4). Once again, Basit is contrasted to what Jonathan views as acceptable attractiveness; Basit violates standards of both normative masculinity and femininity.

After Episode 4, Jonathan does not show any interest in Basit until Episode 7. In Episodes 5 & 6, Jonathan continues to pursue the hypermasculine cisgender men in the house, while Basit is not shown to have any legitimate connections with other participants. By the end of Episode 6, Jonathan finds out that none of the men he was interested in can be his perfect match. Without any other options, Jonathan becomes suddenly interested in Basit once again and begins to spend time with them. Example 19 is a dialogue between Basit and Jonathan in the beginning of Episode 7:

Example 19: (Episode 7, 9:17-10:08)

1 JONATHAN: When did you start like ... being who you are right now like your full self have you always been this like ((hand gesture))
 2 BASIT: Being who I am right now, I feel like I’ve *always* known

this person. It was moving to New York to where it was like I can finally be that bitch cause there's plenty of people around here who don't give a fuck who I am {LG} and I was like free, I was *free* to finally like ... explore every facet of myself. People have been talking a lot about layers but I feel like I'm a very layered ...

3 JONATHAN: {LG}

4 BASIT: [human being

5 JONATHAN: [You got all the layers

CUTS to diary room

6 JONATHAN (DR): You know as time goes on I'm noticing things about Basit that I did not notice on day one, and I just really did not allow myself enough time to realize that you know there is something underneath all of that sequins and glitter that I do find attractive

CUTS to house

7 JONATHAN: I'd like to explore you mentally before I even start exploring your body

8 BASIT: Well then hot damn bitch

In Line 6, Jonathan mentions potential attraction in reference to Basit for the first time. However, his attraction to Basit has a clear stipulation; Jonathan is beginning to find Basit attractive only after realizing “there is something underneath all of that sequins and glitter.” The action Jonathan takes in Line 6 reduces Basit’s gender presentation to the phrase “sequins and glitter,” which effectively turns Basit’s physicality into imagery. Basit’s gender presentation can be detached from themselves, and it is only by doing this that Jonathan finds Basit attractive.

Later on in Episode 7, Jonathan sets up an unofficial date for himself and Basit. In Example 20, Jonathan explains to Basit why he wasn’t initially attracted to them:

Example 20: (Episode 7, 30:15-30:50)

1 JONATHAN: So I just wanted to say I'm sorry. It's never my intention to hurt someone that I'm like willing to grow with and get to know. I feel like my issue coming in whenever I said I'm like not romantically interested or like I've never done that or, you know it's gonna take time like I was so distracted by the sequins and glitter and stuff that I didn't take time to look at what was underneath all that ... and like what's underneath all that is ... a beautiful person ... like I just ... I was distracted ... by someone else in the house and also by your

costume

2 BASIT: Costume

In this dialogue, Jonathan uses the exact phrase he used in the monologue in Example 19, “sequins and glitter.” In Section 5.1, I explained how consistent packaging of language creates a coherent brand (Gershon 2016). By using the phrase “sequins and glitter” again, Jonathan creates a consistent reason for his lack of attraction to Basit that is now intelligible within his growth narrative. The use of the same phrase also turns Basit’s appearance into a consistent image.

Jonathan then directly links Basit’s “sequins and glitter,” and the consistent image it evokes, to the indirect index “that.” The demonstrative pronoun “that” was established as an indirect index by Jonathan in Example 11 and used again in Example 17 to refer to someone who isn’t “100 feminine,” or exhibits a ‘false femininity.’ Jonathan is effectively turning Basit’s gender presentation into a facade; Jonathan has created a consistent image of Basit’s gender presentation and then linked that imagery to ‘false femininity.’ At the end of the utterance, Jonathan refers to Basit’s gender presentation as a “costume” and thus creates a new indirect index that links the imagery of Basit’s gender presentation to gender non-conforming identity and ‘false femininity.’ Basit’s gender presentation and Basit themselves are once again abstracted; Basit is perceived as using their appearance to negotiate a ‘false femininity’ that only exists outside of Basit as a “costume.” Basit’s use of this ‘false femininity’ is not only unauthorized by Jonathan (Example 11), but is now indicated to be both a facade and the root of Basit’s undesirability. Jonathan could only form an attraction by detaching Basit’s gender non-conforming identity from Basit’s physicality.

Shortly after the utterance in Example 20, production reveals to the audience that Jonathan and Basit are a perfect match. This is something *AYTO* has never done before, and it is an action that legitimates Jonathan’s growth and conditional attraction to Basit. Furthermore, at the end of Episode 7, their connection is cemented in situated activity. In Example 21, Basit and Jonathan lock in as a perfect match at the match-up ceremony. In Line 5, production includes a monologue from Danny as an action of legitimization from both the participants and production:

Example 21: (Episode 7, 35:23-36:02)

1 TERRANCE J: So – so Jonathan, what made you decide to dig into that bag
of tricks and pull out some really sweet things today
2 JONATHAN: Coming into this experience um, a person like me needed time
to grow ... and someone that has extreme patience, so I am
completely honored to be standing up here beside them
tonight and I genuinely feel ... happy about this connection
that we’ve created and, I’m happy that I’m right here
3 REMY: I – I see hearts I’m melting
4 TERRENCE J: Basit, Jonathan, lock in
CUTS to diary room

5 DANNY (DR): I think Jonathan has made an impressive amount of growth and I really like seeing him next to Basit

In Line 5, Danny corroborates the narrative of growth Jonathan constructed in Episodes 4 & 7 and supports Jonathan and Basit as a couple. Jonathan's 'acceptance' of Basit, which is legitimized and framed as positive by *AYTO* and other participants, simultaneously associates Basit with femininity, renders this femininity false and detached from Basit, and treats this false femininity as a barrier to physical attraction. In order for Basit to be a vehicle for growth, they had to become intelligible to Jonathan and to a neoliberal society. In Episode 7, Basit's gender, which violates transnormative assumptions, is detached from their physicality (via the participant's evaluative actions), and this detachment is legitimized by the *AYTO* production team. If Basit's gender non-conforming identity is detached from their physicality, this permits the perceiver of Basit's gender identity to place any normative assumptions they see fit on Basit. Therefore, Basit is still able to practice self-determination (Zimman 2018, 2019), but Basit's self-identifications are detached from a potential normative gender that exists "underneath all that" (Example 20).

5.6 Kai's Ending: Punishing Unchecked Masculinity

In this section, I demonstrate how *AYTO* used the unchecked masculinity of Kai's ever-evolving 'player' persona to turn Kai into a vehicle for change. By Episode 8, after many episodes of Kai exploring connections with numerous participants, Kai is caught between two potential perfect matches: Jasmine and Nour. During a party in Episode 8, Nour confronts Jasmine for having a sexual relationship with Kai. Throughout Episode 8, four participants evaluate Kai's behavior via monologues. I will include two monologues, Examples 22 & 23, in this analysis. In Example 22, Amber, a participant who was previously in a relationship with Nour, evaluates the situation:

Example 22: (Episode 8, 31:23-31:29)

AMBER (DR): Nour's definitely possessive and territorial. But, we all know Kai's a fuckboy so, you kind of set yourself up

In Example 22, Amber refers to Kai as a "fuckboy." Up until this point, the audience has only heard the terms "player" and "ho" used to describe Kai's hypersexuality. While "player" has become an indirect index linked to transmasculinity in the *AYTO* community of practice (when used in reference to Kai), "fuckboy" is a direct index to masculinity. The use of "we all know" in this utterance also presupposes that Kai's "fuckboy" label is evident to both the community of practice and the audience. In Example 23, Jenna evaluates the situation via a monologue:

Example 23: (Episode 8, 39:44-39:56)

JENNA (DR): This is what Kai does, he's a sweet talker and he makes you feel special and I hate that it's happening to Nour and I – I don't think Nour should be attacking Jasmine cuz ... at the end of the day we know whose fault this is

In Example 23, Jenna also uses the phrase “we all know” in reference to Kai. However, unlike Amber in Example 22, Jenna does not use this phrase to directly reference Kai. Instead, Jenna uses “we all know” to indirectly reference Kai. Amber's action presupposes a shared knowledge, between the participants, production, and audience, of Kai's “fuckboy” behavior, while Jenna's action presupposes a shared knowledge of Kai's behavior being a problem. The *AYTO* production chose to include monologues that evaluate Kai's behavior to develop a consensus, amongst the community of practice *and* the audience, of the harm Kai's ‘player’ persona is doing to the community of practice.

In Episode 9, Kai evaluates their *own* behavior via monologue. In Example 24, Kai explains why they pursued multiple people at the party:

Example 24: (Episode 9, 18:15-18:38)

Kai (DR): There are certain situations where I'm like I should probably walk away from this but I'm weak and I'm still gonna do it anyways. I like attention, okay? ((seven second cut to the party)) Hashtag fuckboy, whatever judge me for it, but also if you were in this house wouldn't you do the same thing too?

In Example 24, Kai uses the direct index “fuckboy” to refer to themselves. Specifically, Kai refers to themselves as a “hashtag fuckboy,” which connects back to Kai's branding (Section 5.1). Kai is not only utilizing a slang term, with gendered, heteronormative, *and* negative connotations¹⁵ (Brown 2015), but doing so in a way that specifically references images of social media branding. Furthermore, Kai directly appeals to the audience (“wouldn't you do the same thing too”), and in doing so, removes their behavior from themselves and places the blame for their actions on the situation. This action alters the “fuckboy” index. While the indirect index “player” indexes transmasculinity and is linked to Kai's narratives of transness and queerness, the direct index “fuckboy” is linked to masculinity, removed from Kai's selfhood, *and* specifically treated as harmful to the community of practice (via Amber's action in Example 22). Kai is the first to detach their persona from themselves, and a group of participants finalize this detachment via dialogue in Example 25.

¹⁵ The term “fuckboy” originates from African American English and was initially intended to refer to a man who “sucks” and is considered lame (Brown 2015). The term has since spread to white popular culture and is now used to refer to a “young man who sleeps with women without any intention of having a relationship with them” (Brown 2015). “Fuckboy” is linked to both masculinity and heterosexuality. Interestingly, a ‘Vulture’ article from 2019, titled ‘Why Aren't You Obsessed With *Are You The One?*’, refers to Kai as a “transmasculine fuckboy” (Skara 2019), which links Kai's transmasculinity to the direct index “fuckboy.” This is an example of how Kai's identity can be perceived and then packaged by viewers of the show.

Later in Episode 9, multiple participants speak to Kai about their behavior in an intervention of sorts. Example 25 begins with a monologue from Jenna where she comments on Kai's behavior (Line 1). Lines 2-24 feature an interweaving of monologues and dialogues:

Example 25: (Episode 9, 29:49-32:19)

1 JENNA (DR): Someone in this house is Kai's match and Kai has not been showing the best sides of himself recently. You can't come into a house ... of people with trust issues ... and give them a reason not to trust you

CUTS to house

2 JENNA: Justin you're looking what do you think

3 JUSTIN: Nour isn't alone in the way that she's feeling. Multiple people in this house have one very similar thing in common, how you make them feel. And at the end of the day is it all *their* fault?

4 KAI: Again guys?

5 JUSTIN: I just want you to take away from this conversation that p-

6 KAI: Something that I've already learned

7 JUSTIN: That multiple people are hurt by you

CUTS to diary room

8 JUSTIN (DR): Kai's been weighing his own personal gain over the emotions of others, from his relationship with Jasmine his former relationship with Jenna and relationship with Nour, when one doesn't give him what he wants he just moves on to the next. It's not right and I think that he knows it

CUTS to house

9 JUSTIN: This was just to bring something to light Kai

10 KAI: I get it!

11 JUSTIN: Do you get it though?

12 KAI: You're hurting me now too! You made your judgment and you're not letting me also speak for myself

13 BASIT: Can- can I just say one thing real quick? You're feeling a lot of defensiveness right now-

14 KAI: Well because [I feel like no one's hearing—

15 BASIT: [Wait can I – can I – can I get the full sentence out please?

16 KAI: Once again

CUTS to diary room

17 KYLIE (DR): I'm tired of Kai feeling attacked when it's just us trying to talk to you about certain shit. You come here because you want to be a better person you want to change, maybe you just can listen, hear people out because maybe we're actually speaking facts

CUTS to house

18 KAI: I am not dealing well with multiple people pointing at me right now please

19 BASIT: No one's trying to make you feel ashamed, we're not wagging a finger, we're saying that we know who the kind of person that you are—

20 KAI: <CRY I don't like just being put on the spot all the time I get that I know that I'm fucking up I'm trying, please just leave me alone for a second CRY>

CUTS to diary room

21 KAI (DR): <CRY Literally just all of my insecurities coming up all at the same time I have to be like okay well now I feel like very very exposed CRY>

CUTS to house

22 JUSTIN: The only takeaway that you need from this is that multiple people feel the same way ... and we all love you and we support you and we believe that you can change, and you can change your relationship with people in this house

CUTS to house

((camera pans to the expressions of Basit, Kylie, Justin, and Jenna))

23 KAI: <CRY I'm sorry. I'm fucking trying CRY>

24 BASIT: We know you are

In Line 1, Jenna reminds the audience of the joint enterprise of the community of practice (Section 4.1); Kai, like every participant, has to find their perfect match, and they can't do so if they have "not been showing the best sides" of themselves. In Lines 2-7, Justin discusses how Kai has been hurting the feelings of multiple people. In Line 8, production uses a monologue from Justin to remind the audience of the multiple people Kai has been with and legitimize the group's evaluations of Kai in the dialogue. In Line 17, production uses a second monologue from Kylie to demonstrate how Kai has refused to change their behavior to remind the audience that this behavior is consistent. In Line 20, Kai begins to cry after becoming overwhelmed with the conversation.

Production pairs this with Line 21, a monologue in which Kai is crying about their insecurities. The inclusion of Kai crying in a monologue, alongside the dialogues, signals and emphasizes Kai's acceptance of their punishment in the community of practice. Interestingly, while Basit's monologue of heightened emotional stress emphasized Basit's desire to be accepted and set up their potential as a vehicle for growth (Example 13), Kai's monologue in Line 21, and their apology in Line 23, indicate Kai's willingness to change and set up their potential as a vehicle for change. Both of these moments of emotional stress served as actions of crucial identity and persona construction for Kai and Basit (Section 3.3).

In Example 24, Kai seemingly embraced the "fuckboy" label. By the end of Example 25, they are emotionally apologizing for their "fuckboy" behavior during a group intervention. Kai's transnormative gender was legitimized from Episode 1, but their co-constructed masculinized 'player' persona, which evolved and became associated with the direct index "fuckboy," was treated as a problem in need of solving within the community of practice. For Kai to be accepted within the community of practice, their persona, which became linked with unchecked masculinity and hypersexuality, had to be detached from their selfhood. For Basit to be accepted within the community of practice, their gender identity, and its lack of normative potential, had to be detached from their selfhood.

6. Discussion / Conclusion

6.1 The Gender Binary is Reimposed on Kai and Basit

In Section 5, I argued that Kai's enregistered 'player' persona and hypersexuality became inseparable from their transmasculinity, and Basit's enregistered 'diva' persona became inseparable from their desexualization and 'false femininity.' *Appropriate use* in the process of enregisterment is when the effect indexed by the persona is "congruent" with the user (Agha 2005). *Tropic use* in the process of enregisterment is when the effect indexed by the persona is not "congruent" with the user (Agha 2005). Kai fits transnormative expectations by biomedically transitioning into a socially knowable "sex" (Section 5.3) and has developed a 'player' persona linked with transmasculinity. Kai's use of actions that index their 'player' persona is therefore appropriate use. Basit does *not* fit transnormative expectations, as they are not choosing to biomedically transition and identify with a socially knowable "sex," but still have a 'diva' persona linked with 'false femininity.' In addition, multiple participants use masculine pronouns to gender Basit, which reveals that they are still recognized by at least some of the community of practice as male (Examples 14 & 17). Basit's use of actions that index the 'diva' persona is therefore tropic use.

Additionally, Crowley (2022) and Steele (2022) have shown that there is an emerging common representation of "nonbinary" people as white, assigned female at birth, thin, and dressing in masculine-leaning styles. Kai's whiteness, thinness, and masculine appearance grant them access

to normative gender and subsequently appropriate use, regardless of whether or not they continue to use “he/him” pronouns. Therefore, Kai’s masculinized ‘player’ persona grants them access to normative attractiveness, while Basit’s feminized ‘diva’ persona bars their access to normative attractiveness. Furthermore, in Example 2, the term “androgynous” was linked to masculinity and used to describe Kai’s attractiveness. Kai has access to both the localized understanding of androgyny (via Jenna’s action in Example 2) and the burgeoning societal stereotype of nonbinary identity (Crowley 2022, Steele 2022). Kai’s access to normative masculinity, and Basit’s lack of access to normative femininity, negotiated their enregisterment within the community of practice and subsequently with the audience. The question becomes: why are Kai and Basit’s gender identities and personae predicated on their relation to the gender binary?

Gender non-conforming individuals attempt to exist in the absence of feminine and masculine signs, or to enregister somewhat of a “third option” (Zimman 2019). However, gender non-conforming individuals, and interlocutors who place evaluations on them, are reliant on the available tools in their sociocultural environment to construct identity. These tools come with built-in affordances and constraints (Jones 2019). When individuals, like Kai and Basit, take tools and recontextualize them by putting them into situations that conflict with their expected use, they still carry the burden of the histories and ideologies of these tools (Jones 2019). An index can only couple with social action if it is meaningful to an interpretant (Irvine 2001). If the *AYTO* community of practice, the production team, and the audience only have the tools to understand linguistic and non-linguistic indexes and actions in a heteronormative binary framework (West & Fernstermaker 1995), this limits how gender expression can be interpreted. Kai and Basit are therefore still enregistered in the social world via actions and signs pulled from the Western gender binary. The enregisterment of a “third option” is effectively resisted, and instead Kai and Basit become mediatized packages that reinvokethe gender binary.

6.2 Kai and Basit as Mediatized Packages

In Episode 1, Kai and Basit were marked as different from the cisgender participants and branded with definitions of their gender identities (Section 5.1). This linked their identities and stylistic actions to one another. In Sections 5.2-5.6, I demonstrated how Kai and Basit’s narratives are paralleled. As Kai and Basit’s identities and personae were formed throughout the show, they acquired social meanings in relation to one another *and* in relation to the gender binary. However, Kai and Basit’s gender identities are not only limited by cultural tools, but also by the mediation of their identities. The *AYTO* production team draws on the same limited, and always gendered (McElhinny 2003), cultural tools to create meaningful representations (Allen Peterson 2004). In Section 3.3, I discussed how these representations have to be intelligible within a neoliberal framework, as well as how neoliberalism can contort to include new identities, while still maintaining ontological points of reference (Springer 2016). As Kai and Basit become reintegrated into the gender binary via stylistic actions that are manipulated by the production team, Kai and Basit become victims of “image imprisonment,” or the reduction of complex identities into narrow,

understandable identity packages that can be legible and consistent with the show's financial and social goals (Finck 2018).

Kai is a transnormative/ nonbinary normative individual who has an enregistered 'player' persona linked to transmasculinity. Transmasculinity cannot be separated from the cultural limitations of heteronormative masculinity. Kai's 'player' persona was detached from their selfhood because it evolved into the masculinized "fuckboy" persona (Section 5.6). Kai served as a vehicle for change for the *AYTO* production. Kai has the ability, as a white person who is transmasculine and utilizes masculinity, to destabilize heteronormative masculinity within the queer community. Kai was punished by their fellow participants and the *AYTO* production team for practicing a masculinity that was deemed harmful to the community of practice.

Basit does not fit transnormative or nonbinary normative standards and has a 'diva' persona linked to 'false femininity.' As a gender non-conforming Black person who identifies as "fluid," Basit never had access to heteronormative femininity (Section 5.3). Basit's 'diva' persona *and* gender identity were detached from their selfhood to provide Basit with normative potential (Section 5.5). While Kai's self-determination was never questioned, evaluative actions from Jonathan and the *AYTO* production team allowed Basit's gender identity to become primarily negotiated by the perceiver. The perceiver can then make any normative assumptions they seek fit, which allows Basit, and anyone who identifies with the absence of "knowable sex," to be intelligible and acceptable within a neoliberal framework. Only then does Basit become a vehicle for growth in the *AYTO* community of practice.

This mediatized portrayal of Kai and Basit's identities provides an example of how gender non-conforming identity can be essentialized into new dialectical registers (Agha 2005); one register being the 'masculine' nonbinary individual, and one being the 'feminine' nonbinary individual. While the indexes and social actions used to signal these new registers of masculinity and femininity are not directly indicative of normative femininity and masculinity and are highly dependent on the sociocultural backgrounds of the individuals, they are nonetheless still reliant on the gendered tools that are available to us. New registers of gender non-conforming identity will be flexible and unpredictable, and will continue to subvert the possibilities of gendered expression, but will not be detached from the social values and limits of heteronormative masculinity and femininity. Media is made and consumed by the dominant "cisgender listening subject" (Calder & Steele 2024); modes of interpretation that are accessible to the majority of the Western world are dominated by ideologies that support and uphold heteronormative standards. If we don't interrogate the consumption of media, especially when so much social and political pressure is put on the "authenticity" of the representation (Section 3.3), then we allow a dominant heteronormative gaze to exist unchecked. As new registers of gender non-conforming identity form, and then become mediatized, it will be crucial to reflect not only on how femininity and masculinity are renegotiated but how the systems of value are reinstalled with them.

7. Appendix

7.1 Transcription Symbols

Symbol	Meaning	Comments
...	pause, untimed	
[overlap	
?	appeal	
.	terminative	intonation morpheme signaling finality (period)
,	continuative	intonation morpheme signaling continuation (comma)
:	elongation	indicates elongation of prior sound
–	truncated intonation unit	
wor-	truncated / cut off word	
<i>word</i>	emphasis	indicates an emphasized word
{LG}	laughter	
<WH WH>	whispered	indicating participant is whispering
<CRY CRY>	crying	indicating participant is crying while speaking
((WORDS))	comment	analyst comment on any topic
CUTS	camera cut	indicating when the camera cuts from one scene to another
DR	diary room	indicating when the speaker is in the diary room

(Du Bois et al 1983)¹⁶

7.2 Episodes and Speech Events

I define a speech event as every time the camera cuts from one 'location' to another. Therefore, each time the camera cuts from a dialogue or situated activity to a monologue, or vice versa, that indicates the end of a speech event. Oftentimes, a single interaction is *not* a single dialogue or situated activity, and instead becomes multiple dialogues or situated activities interwoven with monologues. Below, I include the title of each episode, the percentage of each speech event in the episode, and the percentage of speech events Kai and Basit are in. Kai and Basit are featured in a speech event if they speak and/or are referenced by other participants.

Episode 1: 'Come One, Come All Part 1'

Aired: June 26, 2019

Percentage of monologues: 50%

Percentage of dialogues: 33%

Percentage of situated activities: 17%

Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 23%

Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 19%

Episode 2: 'Come One, Come All Part 2'

Aired: June 26, 2019

Percentage of monologues: 48%

Percentage of dialogues: 30%

Percentage of situated activities: 22%

Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 56%

Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 12%

Episode 3: 'This Is Trash'

Aired: July 3, 2019

Percentage of monologues: 48%

Percentage of dialogues: 24%

Percentage of situated activities: 28%

Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 21%

¹⁶ I have modified Du Bois transcription symbols to fit this analysis. I have added the units 'CUTS' and 'DR' to indicate Reality TV elements. I am using the symbol '{LG}' for laughter instead of '@' to avoid any confusions with the social media development of the '@' sign.

Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 34%

Episode 4: 'We Come to Slay'

Aired: July 10, 2019

Percentage of monologues: 48%

Percentage of dialogues: 33%

Percentage of situated activities: 19%

Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 32%

Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 25%

Episode 5: 'There Was a Fivesome?'

Aired: July 17, 2019

Percentage of monologues: 42%

Percentage of dialogues: 32%

Percentage of situated activities: 26%

Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 10%

Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 12%

Episode 6: 'Hate to Burst Your Bubble'

Aired: July 24, 2019

Percentage of monologues: 45%

Percentage of dialogues: 18%

Percentage of situated activities: 37%

Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 21%

Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 11%

Episode 7: 'Red Flag Alert'

Aired: July 31, 2019

Percentage of monologues: 42%

Percentage of dialogues: 29%

Percentage of situated activities: 29%

Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 31%

Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 23%

Episode 8: 'This Sucks and Blows'

Aired: August 5, 2019

Percentage of monologues: 47%

Percentage of dialogues: 36%
Percentage of situated activities: 17%
Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 37%
Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 13%
Episode 9: 'Games Players Play'
Aired: August 12, 2019
Percentage of monologues: 42%
Percentage of dialogues: 41%
Percentage of situated activities: 17%
Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 46%
Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 10%

Episode 10: 'It All Comes Down to Jax'
Aired: August 19, 2019
Percentage of monologues: 46%
Percentage of dialogues: 30%
Percentage of situated activities: 24%
Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 14%
Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 16%

Episode 11: 'On to the Next'
Aired: September 2, 2019
Percentage of monologues: 46%
Percentage of dialogues: 25%
Percentage of situated activities: 29%
Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 18%
Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 6%

Episode 12: 'All or Nothing'
Aired: September 9, 2019
Percentage of monologues: 47%
Percentage of dialogues: 20%
Percentage of situated activities: 33%
Percentage of speech events featuring Kai: 5%
Percentage of speech events featuring Basit: 10%

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