ABSTRACT

ALISON RODRIGUEZ. Transgressions at the Dining Table: Family and Gender Roles in Cult TV. (Under the direction of Professor Devin Orgeron.)

Historically, the most common representation of the American family on television has been homogenous. Most television families, throughout a variety of genres and through the decades, fall into the category of an idealized white, middle-class, monogamous, and heterosexual family. This type of family has been presented not only as normal, but as an ideal goal to achieve in the pursuit of the American dream. I examine the representation of the American family in relation to family and gender roles in *Dexter*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Preacher* in the context of cult television. Although I draw from multiple scholars to determine a definition for cult television, I rely heavily on a textual definition of cult television, informed by an audience definition. I perform a textual analysis for each series, informed by genre studies. Since most of the scholarship on television families has excluded direct discussion of cult television, examining *Breaking Bad* as cult television is a unique way to encompass several genres and explore the shows’ transgressive qualities as a generic form.

These three shows offer complex representation of family life in contemporary America and have unique scenes that expose many subversive qualities of the idealized family; these scenes occur specifically at the dining table, an under-examined domestic location in television studies. Although these cult television shows portray the traditional white, heterosexual, middle class family, they suggest this family is unattainable. Through a larger understanding of family representation in television history, definitions of cult television, and textual analysis informed by genre studies, I argue that these shows, through sequences at the dining table, depict Americans’ pursuit of the unreachable family ideal as an unavoidable precursor to transgressions of family and gender roles that go against this status quo. This ultimately results in a breakdown of the family.