

Feminism in Self Mirror Image of Shonda Rhimes

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Abstract: Shonda Rhimes, American drama creator, is a leading figure in Hollywood feminism whose works consistently tell female stories and focus on women's living world. This paper studies the correspondence among female characters and the evolution of feminist thoughts and the feminist characteristics in Shonda Rhimes' works, where she completes her exploration of self-feminist expression. On this basis, this paper focuses on the reasons for the formation of feminist ideas in his works.

1.Introduction

As one of the 100 most influential people in *Time* and the 50 most influential women in business in *Fortune*, Shonda Rhimes has won the Emmy Awards, the Golden Globe Awards, the Peabody Awards, the Diversification Award of the American Directors' Union, the Lifelong Achievement Award of the American Writers' Association, the Annual Award of the American Film Society, and the Dubos Medal of Harvard, Radio Hall of Fame... This American drama creator with countless glories is Hollywood's greatest black female representative.

"I'm a good storyteller. I don't care who understands it. I've always been talking nonsense," Rhimes said straightforwardly. "Storytelling has gone deep into the marrow of my bones and rooted in my brain. My brain naturally tends to be half-truths and my brain favors fiction. It's just like flowers all facing the sun, and like the way writing with my right hand."^[1] However, from her works, it is not difficult to conclude that her self-talk is hidden beneath her fictional stories, and the commercial meaning of her works is actually the projection process of her self-image. Rhimes takes her own life experience, emotional and psychological experiences as narrative objects, observing and experiencing social life in her own way. The characters she has created have different occupations and different personalities, but the spiritual cores tend to be consistent: feminism. Feminism in Rhimes' works reflects both the evolution of feminist thoughts and their individual distinctions. Otherwise it can be said that she accomplishes her self-talk with the help of various schools of feminism. This phenomenon not only reflects the time requirements of the rise of feminist thoughts in American TV dramas, but also concretely embodies the author's representation of American TV dramas.

2.The Change of Female Characters and the Evolution of Feminist Thoughts in Rhimes' Works

According to Lacan's Mirror Theory, "In the mirror stage, the relationship between infants and their images is an imaginary one." "The mirror image of a baby is just an ideal self or fictitious self before social contact and language use."^[2] When Rhimes was three years old, she completed an integrated understanding of herself through the food room on the basis of the Mirror Theory, which then was her initial impulse to choose to engage in film and television. She has never stopped exploring herself in the world she created. Out of obsession with rebuilding her own world, she seeks her own possible identity in the imaginary world as a creator, and has the initial happiness by acquiring innumerable fictitious selves. In this process, the fictitious self is undoubtedly the best interpretation of feminism.

On the other hand, the feminist movement has flourished up to now, and has gone through three periods: universalism, differentiationism and post-modernism. Correspondingly, different schools have explained the sources and solutions of women's unequal status through different methods. As a result, many feminism schools emerged, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism and so on. There are skillful connections between these female roles created by Rhimes and the evolution of feminist thoughts. Her fictitious self interprets feminism from different perspectives.

2.1 Liberal Feminism

This is the earliest and longest-lasting genre of feminism, whose core advocates equality between two sexes. "Women are eager to win a place for themselves in the linear time of planning and history."^[3] Rhimes' fictitious self starts from this point, which shows that female roles strive for equal work rights, economic rights and political rights with men. "Refusing to accept that attribute which is incompatible with the history of participation due to customarily being regarded as female or maternal." 错误!未定义书签。

It all started with her three films, Rhimes' first work, in which she was the creator. *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* (1999) is a biographical film of Dorothy Dandridge, a famous black female star in the 1950s. Dorothy herself is the first black actress to be nominated for the Academy Awards and a typical representative of liberal feminism. Rhimes was fortunate to write for liberal feminism in her first screenplay and declare war on racism. The film was a great success and won the Emmy Awards for five statues and one Golden Globe Award. In contrast, *Crossroads* (2001) and *The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement* (2004) were not successful. However, *Crossroads* (2001) focuses on the friendship among three women, while *The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement* (2004) is entangled with the choice between the throne and love, indicating that Rhimes' creation of liberal feminism has not ceased.

By 2005, creator Rhimes took over *Grey's Anatomy* as creator, her first debut in the field of American TV drama, where the "rationality, justice, equality of opportunity and freedom of choice" advocated by liberal feminism has been vividly demonstrated by shaping a group of female surgeons in the TV series. However, gender discrimination of surgeons is a series of more serious occupational problems. Traditionally, women's physical strength and psychological endurance are not as good as men's, whereas surgery is a kind of profession required a combination of mental and physical strength. Therefore, men have the edge over women due to their much more rationality and insensitivity, which is not shared by Rhimes. In the TV series women are as rational as men, both sides have equal opportunities, and even women are more competitive.

2.2 Radical Feminism

Originating from liberal feminism, radical feminism no longer pursues equality, but advocates the difference between hermaphroditism. To be precise, Addison Montgomery Shepherd, appeared in the second season of *Grey's Anatomy*, embodies the thought leap of Rhimes from liberal

feminism to radical feminism. After several episodes, Rhimes suddenly realized, “I find that I has endless stories to write for her. *Grey’s Anatomy* is about young people starting their careers. I realize that Addison can host a program about 10 years later --- what would happen if they don’t realize their dreams, or if they do so?” Thus, Addison becomes the protagonist of the derivative drama *Private Practice*. Addison grows up in a wealthy family, aloof and arrogant . With the departure of her husband and lover, she begins to stop relying on the patriarchal society and pay attention to the unique characteristics of women themselves, and becomes mature in a series of adversities.

Until in TV series *Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder*, the two characteristics of radical feminism are fully revealed. Both radical cultural school and radical liberal school belong to radical feminism, advocating the establishment of a “hermaphrodite” social picture, but the former believes that women are superior to men and that kindness and compassion in women temperament can soften male violence.

At the beginning of *Scandal*, Olivia Pope, the “gladiator in suit”, shows her charm in a bar interview in just two minutes. As the storyline unfolds, audiences find that Olivia has a keen intuition, a fast and effective way of thinking, a persevering character and a strong professional ability. This is an outstanding crisis PR specialist who can make the weak president becomes her lover, and outstanding talents becomes her subordinates, and she constantly inspires the people around her, receiving their heartfelt support. This has formed a typical representative of the ideal “hermaphrodite” in the radical cultural school, which combines masculinity and femininity, and puts more emphasis on female temperament. As a result, the patriarchal social system in which Pope lived is disintegrated by Rhimes.

In contrast, Annalise Keating in *How to Get Away with Murder*(2014) is a representative of radical liberals. She never regards the supreme authority of men as inherent rights. She has man’s rationality and logic, woman’s intuition and sensibility. She is articulate, unscrupulous, unique and fearless. In the face of anything, she always says, “I am on it.” Keating has probably manipulated everyone and the queen when it comes to getting her way: “I am on it”, when facing the psychological shadow of childhood; “I am on it”, when getting to know that mate is married to someone else and lover becomes the boss; “I am on it” even when betraying lover by all means to win the lawsuit; “I am on it” when being conspired with drug traffickers to earn high commissions; “I am on it” when dealing with her husband’s derailment, student murder, and the client’s stupid death; “I am on it” even when facing the police constantly sweating. Thus, the hardships of the world do not prevent her from attending classes for law school children. Annalise is not afraid to edit herself; to be unlikeable or be messy, ugly -- all of those things. The black female attorney and university professor, like her usual phrase “Let mommy take care of everything like she always”, takes care of everything with her absolute strength.

3.Feminist Features of Rhimes’ Works

The different stages of Rhimes’ works embody the feminist ideas of different schools. Thus, the evolution of her own feminist ideas is clearly presented: from gender equality to hermaphroditism, and to the elites in the workplace to the black female ethnic group. Rhimes’ thoughts on feminism gradually turn from muddleheaded to sober and then to radical thinking. The representation of feminist thoughts in different schools in her works is like her constant attempts to find a self-consistent way of expression. In other words, with the help of different perspectives, Rhimes has boldly explored women’s self-awareness in her works, focusing on women’s inner and emotional worlds. Thus, the change of female characters in her works not only reflects the evolution of feminist thoughts, but also has its own characteristics._

3.1Re-Positioning Women’s Social Role

Rhimes' works reposition the social roles of women, reflecting the more self-independent social status of contemporary women. Those well-paid and more respectable professions, such as doctors, PR crisis handler, attorneys, have become the stage for women to express themselves, and all these characters in her works are competitive and powerful, who are male managers, collaborators but not vassals of the male. Specifically, the female groups created by *Grey's Anatomy* and *Private Practice* are a group of surgeons, a profession that requires various operations on the human body. Rhimes makes female roles active and even overwhelming and stand up to male roles. The routine work of PR crisis handler and attorneys in *Scandals* and *How To Get Away With Murder* is about murder, money, rights, and even terrorism. Olivia and Annalise are not only like a duck to water, but also become the core of the team. In addition, the importance of women's social roles can also be seen in a large number of supporting roles. Bailey in *Grey's Anatomy* is both a strict teacher and a loving mother. Her strong strength makes her a legend in the internship; Liv, the wife of the President in *Scandals*, always regards her husband Grant as a child, so she runs for president and presides over the White House. Quinn, the newcomer, quickly grows up to be a unique technical staff. I have to admire Rhimes' boldness and she does not evade the ambition of women to engage in various difficult tasks to eliminate gender discrimination.

3.2 Affirming the Legitimate Desire of the Female Subject

Contemporary women are no longer the object of desire to be watched under the "Scopophilia" and "Fetishism" pointed out by Laura Mulvey. They have legitimate desires as women. Rhimes uses gender relations to show that women can get a more equal and independent status in front of men. Love and marriage are not the only requirements of women for gender relations, and men are no longer the masters of discourse power in gender relations. In other word, the group of female roles created by Rhimes is fiercely competitive at all costs, for the sake of the career: Meredith must face Derek's death; Christina must face Burke's departure; Olivia must believe that Grant can't give her a marriage; Annalise can even kill her husband. "To some extent, the insufficiency of these emotional life also reflects the construction and elimination of gender under discourse power by female roles."^[4] This group of female roles created by Rhimes redefines the legitimate desire of female subjects in Western society, telling people what is beautiful and what is sexy. With the reception of Emmy Awards, Golden Globe Awards and other awards, this group of images has epoch-making significance.

3.3 Irony and Subversion of Patriarchal Culture

John Fiske once put forward the concept of "gender TV". In the definition, female TV is de-centralized. "Although there are many semantic interpretations of the primary text of TV, in the repeated TV series, it is still the process of naturalization of mainstream ideology; those women with masculine characteristics in TV series, targeted, acting decisively, knowing how to use their own strengths to achieve goals, are mostly female negative protagonists."^[5] In the nearly 30 years of development of American TV dramas, this situation has changed, and the diversity of female roles has been developed. Rhimes, on the other hand, devotes herself to the de-centralization of male roles. Her works are full of irony and subversion of the patriarchal culture.错误!未定义书签。 Specifically, she has feminized the main male roles. For Derek in *Grey's Anatomy*, Meredith is his savior. "I'm drowning. You save me." The man appears with embarrassment and is driven out of the house by Meredith after a one-night stand. As the "god of the operating room", he is attracted by the charm of the intern, "You're very aggressive. You keep me alive." After several weeks of competition with Finn, he has realized that Finn is the "better man" for Meredith. He says Meredith deserves a good man who will not disturb her life or hurt her. In spite of sadness, he chooses to let

her go. In the process of getting along with Meredith, Derek has always been the weak party. President Grant in *Scandals* is more vulnerable than Olivia. According to his wife, Grant is like a child, who spends his campaign with his female subordinates irregularly and wants to divorce his wife for the sake of true love. Obviously, Grant cannot compete with his wife Liv or Olivia. Another protagonist, Jack, has the mission to protect and love Olivia. In addition, Rhimes seems to use him as a “male” to consume, occasionally performing to meet the emotional sustenance of female audiences. Frank in *How To Get Away With Murder* is willing to do anything without caring about any danger.

4. The Reasons for the Formation of Feminist Thought in Rhimes' Works

Combining the ideas of different genres to shape the characters with their own characteristics, the feminist ideas in Rhimes' works reflect heterogeneity and diversity. The reason for this phenomenon is not only from the time requirements, but also reflects the pursuit of herself.

4.1 The Requirements of the Times: the Rise of the Feminist Trend of Thought in American Dramas

The rise of feminism is the product of social change. With the feminist movement sweeping globally, feminism is popular in Hollywood. The feminist works of Rhimes undoubtedly reflect the time requirements.

The rise of feminism in American drama began in 1998 with HBO's *Sex and the City*, which is about women's emotional life. This TV series not only expresses women's right to pursue love freely, but also declares that independent female characters are emerging. Since then, a series of dramas featuring women have continued to be broadcast, which the American media called it “the rise of feminism in prime time television”.

Feminism has grown at an alarming rate in American drama. If the female Utopia in *Sex and the City* is about the four older mature women who are worried about personal gains and losses in the love, marriage or family, then in *Desperate Housewives*, there are a group of housewives with a soldier's attitude, trying to maintain the perfect appearance, and fighting for the complete self in the surging tide. Besides, in *Girls*, the new generation of urban women who grow up in the feminist movement no longer need to rely on their hard-dressed appearance to maintain a “new woman” image, nor need to be self-defensive with a sharp temperament to fight at any time. Its ridicule and self-deprecation are the symptoms of modern women's natural self-confidence gradually endowed by feminism. As for the *Orange Is the New Black*, the conflict and evolution between individual women and group women are explored in a barbaric way of “de-masculinization”. In addition, even for traditional male-dominated episodes, the role proportion of female characters is increasing. Every female pirate in *Black Sails* has a self-consciousness far beyond the times, identity and male society. Due to the addition of two female scientists, *The Big Bang Theory* has broken the traditional model of geeks and brainless beauty, continuing to burst new spark. Marvel has introduced two independent dramas featuring women as the protagonist: *Agent Carter* and *Jessica Jones*. Under this pressure, *Game of Thrones* has pushed the female roles such as Cersei, Margaery and Sansa, who are far less politically competent in the original works, to the peak of power. In *Veep* and *House of Cards*, the battle between Hillary and Trump began a few years ago.

Neil Bozeman pointed out: “entertainment is the super ideology of all the words on television. No matter what the content is, no matter what angle of view it is, everything on TV is to provide us with entertainment.”^[6] From this level, we must adhere that the “entertainment supremacy” American drama takes pleasing audiences as its highest principle. Obviously, from the past to the present, and even to the future, main audiences are women. Therefore, American TV series should

be the medium that best reflects feminism. Its essential attribute requires it to cater to women's demand for visual pleasure and meet the requirements of the entertainment industry.

4.2 Self-Mirror: the Revelation of Authoritative Representation of the Creator

In the 1950s, François Truff declared the birth of the "Auteur". The core of the theory lies in three points: the director often directs the same subject or theme; the director's style runs through many works; the film can present the director's personal vision and values. The authoritative representation of the American drama creators in the Internet era is not to prove that TV series are an independent art as the theory of "Auteur", but a product of TV satisfying the needs of audiences of consumer society in the commercial era through self-expression. However, from the perspective of the creator herself, the pursuit of the personal vision and values in the TV series reveals a strong personal expression, and there is a certain degree of isomorphism with the form defined by the French "Author Theory" since its birth. The emergence of feminism in the works of Rhimes is actually the revealing of the authoritative representation. This long-term dedicated female TV creator, whose style runs through all her American dramas, creates each role as a mirror, which allows her to complete a new self-image one after another, thus expressing her spiritual pursuit and attitude towards the world.

Grey's Anatomy is the starting point of Rhimes. At this time, she has just been involved in the TV circle, and she is also an introverted and inarticulate person. She endows Meredith with her own personality: cleverness, diligence, compassion, bluntness, distraction, and indecision; according to the ideal herself, she has formed Christina who is fearless and persistent.

Compared with Meredith, Christina is more like an expectation of Rhimes' inner feelings. Because of the high degree of competition and urgency, this contradictory role avoids any concern and closes itself up, which is like Rhimes herself.

Addison is a mature projection of Rhimes herself. With the success of *Grey's Anatomy*, she has not yet completely transformed into the "Queen", but after experiencing some painful self-discipline, the self-confidence brought by success is filled with Addison. Rhimes wants to tell audiences how to choose and what to change when they are looking for a happy life, and to share their emotional changes with them. Even by this role, we cannot wait to see the future of Meredith and Christina.

Scandal began in 2012, when Rhimes was shining with the success of *Grey's Anatomy*. She has been surrounded by a group of gifted and like-minded talents, who are centered on Rhimes. In this case, Rhimes' "copy" appeared. At the same time, the ninth season of *Grey's Anatomy* in this year inevitably brought aesthetic fatigue to audiences with the decline of high ratings. Rhimes chose non-medical drama as a breakthrough for the first time, hoping to reshape brilliance in the new political drama, which required her as the core of the team to work together and efficiently. Therefore, in the TV series, Olivia strongly and forcefully injects a sense of urgency into the team with the attitude of radical feminism, requiring everyone to act at all times.

In 2014, the character of Annalise Keating appeared in *How To Get Away With Murder*. At this time, Rhimes had completed the nirvana of life. Since 2013, she has said "I am on it" to anything for a year: an unexpected invitation, "I am on it"; a fearful thing, "I am on it." This year's experience had made the original introverted woman fearless of this patriarchal society and become the real queen of life. Annalise Keating is the "Queen" of the legal drama, a criminal defense attorney with strong insight and fulfillment. "I can win because I have done my duty." This line is the biggest recognition of this role by Rhimes. She hopes to prove by Annalise that I am Rhimes, a unique, fearless, overbearing American drama "Queen".

5. Conclusion

The feminism in the works of Shonda Rhimes is not only in line with the times' requirements, but also closely related to her own life experience. As a result, while boldly shaping roles with the help of various feminist ideas, she stitches up fictional texts and real life with self-emotion, and constantly tries to shape self-consistent female images with uniqueness and autonomy. In August 2017, Netflix announced a multi-year contract with Rhimes for a total estimated price of \$100 million. I'm looking forward to her continuing writing on Netflix. What will the next episode look like when it integrates different feminist ideas and self-experience? Maybe, Shonda Rhimes will bring another surprise.

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