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Hello, happy Sunday. I hope that you're having a beautiful day and I hope that you're having a beautiful weekend. Today we're going to be looking at another media analysis video. I told y'all I'd try to get a sitcom in soon. Today, let's look at a very fun show with a very stressful, often frustrating example of non monogamy.

I think the US sitcom Superstore is actually a good case study of problems that can come up when people try to treat non monogamy like a purely intellectual exercise. of just like, "What's happening in here feels messy and confusing and upsetting, and I don't like it. So let's shut that down, get a clamp on it. And if I can just think hard enough, I will figure it out", you know? and that can create very real problems, that can create very real harms, when we are only acting from up here and not enough from in here. So this is a good example of that. I'll show you what I mean. Let's get into it.

Superstore is a workplace sitcom about employees at a fictional big box store – think Walmart in the US, or here in Germany there's Kaufland oder Globus – big ass store, sells everything, usually not fun to work there. And the show actually uses this setting to have some pretty interesting conversations about unions, about class consciousness, about the struggle of essential workers during and after lock downs. I think it's pretty powerful to have a show come on, at night after people get home from work, that's kind of encouraging labor organizing. it's not exactly an anti capitalist show, I'm not gonna go that far, it is still trying to sell you stuff constantly. But for a major network primetime TV show, it takes more risks than most.

Which brings me into season six. They have a non monogamy arc. It involves two main cast members, Garrett and Dina, who go through periods of hooking up with each other on the show. They're pretty good friends, on and off friends with benefits. Garrett is a generally very relaxed and chill guy. He goes with the flow about things, not trying to move up the ladder at work and overdo it for a company that exploits him, but he's trying to do just enough to get by and be good to his friends. He's a fan favorite on the show.

Dina in many ways is polar opposite. She's pretty intense and militant. She loves rules. She loves hierarchy, which comes into play later, she has fought to climb the corporate ladder. And by season six, she is co-manager of the store. So she does love being in charge. But she's also fiercely loyal and protective. She is a great friend, she volunteers to have her friend's baby as a surrogate just kind of on a whim. She also

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deeply loves animals. And that's how she meets her boyfriend, Brian, a veterinarian and they bond over bird facts.

As a side character, we don't really see a lot of Brian, but he seems to be a generally nice guy and their relationship appears to be happy. And Brian is not a point of tension with Garrett. So just setting the tone for like, even though Garrett and Dina have had this long, sensual, sometimes romantic history together. There is no stress, there is no hiding that from Brian, there is no problem in paradise so to speak.

It becomes clear, though, that Garrett and Dina still have some heat between them, right? There's still something there. And that leads to this absolute mess, that is Dina and Brian trying to open their relationship to include Garrett. It's very well intentioned. Thanks, I hated it. And before we get into the messiness, there are some parts that kind of work – emphasis on kind of.

WHAT (KIND OF) WORKS

So what I do appreciate is there's no cheating.

(Dina and Garrett almost kiss)

Dina: I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. I'm with Brian. I'm very happy with Brian.

Garrett: I'm happy with Brian too. I love Brian.

This might seem like a low bar to clear, and it is in real life. But on TV? TV and film writers, They love drama, right? That doesn't happen here. Everybody here is nice. Everybody here wants to try to do right by each other. And I really appreciate that.

Dina: So I'm just gonna call Brian and tell him everything.

And she doesn't deny wanting to get closer to Garrett again, right? She is transparent with her boyfriend. She renegotiates with Brian first instead of doing whatever she wants and trying to figure it out later. I really am a huge fan of that intentionality.

After the near kiss, Dina clearly starts reading up on polyamory, learning as much as she can.

Dina *(to Cheyenne)*: We are adults in a complex relationship where I am the hinge between a romantic primary and a sexual secondary.

Its very much like, "I just learned this term and now I'm excited to teach you about it" kind of thing. But hey, we love the learning. Everybody starts somewhere.

The show also has multiple entire scenes with people sitting down to discuss the boundaries of their relationship. They're very cringy scenes, over the top played for

laughs, But the show demonstrates how much talking really goes into a change like this. that you don't just jump into it without thoughtfulness. and that is much appreciated.

The characters also openly talk about STIs and sensual safety without any shame or stigma. It is a medical issue not a moral one and I love seeing that on screen right that said, Dina is still very Dina about it and she brings it up like this.

Dina: Seriously, Garrett, this is gonna be awesome. I'm gonna let the doctor know you're back in.

Garrett: By doctor, you mean Brian...?

Dina: No, no. Dr. Hartshorn. Yeah, I ordered you a physical and full panel of STI tests. You can pay me back later. – *(on phone)* Hey, Hartshorn, he's back in – *(to Garrett)* you're gonna have to fast on Tuesday.

You're so close... and caring about polycule health is an objectively good thing. Right? she is just not collaborative, not team spirited about it. there is no trust of Garrett to do it himself. There is no, "what is a good day for you? let me coordinate" . she just tells him how it's going to be. And that's unfortunately, how things play out in bigger and bigger ways. So that brings us to the end of the things that I can compliment. Let's get into what I think their mistakes are and what I think we can learn from them.

(opens energy drink) I'm clearly needing some fuel to get through this next part.

THINKING INSTEAD OF FEELING

So as I alluded to before, I think the biggest thing plaguing the entire dynamic is the chronic habit of intellectualizing emotional challenges. We see this the most with Dina she's like regularly trying to talk herself out of how she feels.

Cheyenne: Oh my god, are you jealous?

Dina: What? No, I'm dating Brian.

Cheyenne: I don't know, you and Garrett have been hanging out a lot lately. So it feels like you guys like-like each other.

Dina: No, we don't like-like each other. Because we're not 12 year olds at archery camp.

If she asserts that something is a certain way, she asserts "there's no emotion here, So maybe I can will it to be true" is kind of the vibe. saying things that are kind of emotionally dishonest, but with the hopes of feeling in charge of the situation. And to be fair, we do see Garrett fall into a similar trap.

Garrett: What? No, there's no feelings.

He moves forward with this idea that "I don't have feelings" as if that's a binary, you either do or don't have feelings. What feelings? Maybe he doesn't want the role that Brian has in her life. Amazing, right? They're not in competition. And, he can still want to be treated well, can still care for someone deeply as a friend, can still, feel vulnerable and nervous and unsure of how things will go. You can have a range of feelings.

So they're all up here with it. And look, there's definitely a cognitive element to things, an organizational aspect, you're dealing with multiple people multiple calendars. We are Google Calendar nerds. And, there is a difference between going to your brain to solve a logistical problem versus going to your brain to escape an emotional struggle. And I really only see the latter happening in this show.

As far as Brian goes, we don't actually get a whole lot of insight into his feelings, into his emotional world. And I think this is an interesting path for them to take. Often when there is a primary relationship in non monogamy on screen, the primary couple are the main characters. So for this show to position the hinge and the secondary as the show's main characters, I found that to be kind of compelling.

But in terms of how Dina and Garrett want to run away from the stress of it. I think we've all been there, right? But the problem with shutting ourselves down, trying to snuff out the stress with intellectual answers, One: It means we'll probably shut out other people's emotions too. If I'm refusing my own feelings, then I definitely don't want to hear about yours. But two: it also doesn't make them go away. And we see this with Dina and her jealous reaction about Garrett talking to other women.

Garrett (*to customer*): Oh, you know what? I'll take care of this for you. Why don't you just pick out a different size?

Dina: Trying to get her into something more form fitting? Man, customer service is just your own sick little candy store, isn't it?

Garrett (*to customer*): And bereavement cards are on aisle three. I'm sorry about your sister... (*to Dina*) What was that? Did you really think I was flirting with her?

Dina: Well look like there was less blood in your face. It had to go somewhere.

Oh, I hate it. Okay.

Cheyenne: Dina, a lot of people have questions about this email you sent.

Lynn: "Due to recent complaints, employees at customer service are here by off limits in regards to flirting and or dating".

Dina: Which concept are you fuzzy on?

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Nope. Remember, she's a boss. She's a manager and he's a floor worker and so she actually winds up leveraging her power over her employees to control who Garrett can interact with. no, no, no, no, you are just in the wrong, there is an objective answer here, you are wrong.

She doubles down. she will not entertain any conversation that makes her feel vulnerable in this moment. So she latches on to control. While we can empathize, we do not tolerate harm. so "I get why you're doing this, but baby you got to stop. because please, you running from your feelings is now making everybody miserable."

Jonah: What? Wow. An open relationship?

Now, did you think that with all of this happening in public that we weren't going to be getting some gossip?

Jonah: That's pretty cool. Actually, you know, it's very modern.

... That we weren't going to be getting some well intentioned, terrible advice from monogamous people?

BAD ADVICE FROM FRIENDS

And so here we see their coworker Jonah swooning at the concept.

Jonah: Dina, sorry, I just gotta say, the open relationship. I'm impressed. You know, it's very progressive, very European.

So there's this thing that liberals will do, which is – speaking of intellectualizing things – they'll put polyamory or non monogamy up on this pedestal of like, "you win at being the most progressive." "Modern", he even says "European". which: Americans, can we not? you know what else is European? Colonialism. okay. I'm not gonna go off on a tangent with that. All that to say, he supports it in theory, hypothetically, as an idea. but the minute he considers what it might feel like, we get this reaction.

Jonah: Yeah, yeah. No, I mean, I get it. when there's history and feelings involved. You don't want to have to share her with some other dude.

The disgust on his face. This is too real. Even the people who are trying their best. They are just going through their own thing or projecting their own stuff. They are coming with sort of monogamous-focused advice. And a great example of monogamous-focused advice comes from their other co worker, Cheyenne.

Cheyenne: Come on, just admit it, you're jealous.

Dina: I guess I have been spending more time with Garrett and I don't know, I liked it. I like him.

Cheyenne: Oh, well. That's great. Oh, but yeah, probably confusing.

She does a bit better, trying to get Dina in touch with her feelings. We love that. Thank you. That's sort of what I've been saying all along. You know, I'm just gonna let this whole clip play through because like, I don't, I'm just gonna let it play through...

Cheyenne: In 10th grade, I was caught between Bo and this guy Darius that he used to freestyle rap with

Dina: what did you do?

Cheyenne: I told Bo how I felt and then he took a poo in the backseat of Darius' mom's station wagon... I'm just saying that you should tell Garrett how you feel because maybe he feels the same way. And if he's not willing to take a crap in the backseat of Brian's car, then there's no decision to make.

So I do like Cheyenne. I really do. I think this advice starts out kind of nice, like, "talk about it", you know? but then it just nose dives into the solution of "one person has to win". it often comes back down to "the way out of your struggle, is monogamy". Or "maybe this isn't for you, because you're struggling." when struggle is inherent to being a person and being in relationships with people in any way. Monogamous people struggle all the time, and no one says "maybe monogamy isn't for you". please seek out non monogamous friends, even if it's just one or two to start with, that can make or break how doable this feels. Because we don't exist in a vacuum. And if everyone around you is pushing you in one direction, it makes it very hard and very lonely to do something different.

WHAT IS ROMANCE?

But coming back to this story. Cheyenne does bring up an interesting question. What is romance? Okay, so she doesn't literally ask that. But in her little story about shitting in cars, she treated it like the most loving, grand romantic gesture. which shows how relative the concept of romance is, that what's disgusting or horrifying to one person is deeply moving and thoughtful to another. And this question gets more directly brought up and confronted between Dina Bryan and Garrett.

Dina: I want to make sure it's clear. I save the girlfriend stuff for [Brian]. That means no sleepovers. No nonsexual kissing and no stargazing unless it's for navigational purposes.

"Only if we are out at sea or lost in the forest, can we both look up together at night," you know?

Dina: All hangin' and bangin', and none of that annoying relationship stuff. Think about it. If I get into a fight with my stupid sister, I'm not gonna bug you with that. I'm gonna bring that to QB-1 here.

Now, is listening to someone about their sister, is emotionally supporting them, something only a romantic partner can do? Garrett's been her close friend longer than she's even known Brian. he's already for years been hearing about that stuff and supporting her. So if he does that again, now is that considered cheating? Often when people are feeling more secure, then they realize, "oh, I actually don't care if you do that action anymore", right? Which reveals it wasn't the action keeping you secure. It was the sense of stability in the relationship, that now you feel secure in that, so you're not trying to control all the tiny little behaviors over here because this feels safe. I'm not criticizing that they were trying to find the line. I do want to encourage questioning of why is that where it is?

TRYING TO CONTROL

So let's talk about control, and trying to control others, because that's not just a one off bad day. Dina and Brian are very controlling throughout this whole process, especially her. First they just bring up the topic to Garrett like this.

Brian: And we've decided...

Dina: We're gonna have an open relationship!

Garrett: what?

Dina: you're gonna be our side piece!

Brian: yeah

They're not asking, they are telling. there's no "What do you think Garrett?" let alone "how do you feel Garrett? What do you want Garrett?" there's none of that happening. This is not a collaboration, this is kind of being dictated to him. That look on his face is everything. because what they're doing and saying to him is not cool. And Brian is not blameless here. He sees nothing wrong with the two of them coming in as a unit and just telling Garrett what's what. And Garrett's rightfully a little confused, he is simultaneously hearing "Garrett, you matter to me. you matter to me so much, I'm going to reconfigure all of this, because this is worth fighting for." and in the same breath Dina is saying, "but you also don't matter that much. remember your place." that's not the warm welcome she thinks it is.

Garrett (*holding a stuffed bear*): Not sure what I'm supposed to do with this since I'm a grown man.

Brian: Well, it's actually more of a demonstration. You know, we checked out a lot of websites and they said it's really important to establish sexual

boundaries. so we will stick a thumbs up sticker everywhere you're allowed to touch Dina.

Just just just... like I'm... I might be traumatized from this scene, I'm not even kidding. Just... Just don't do this. I don't have profound feedback about this. Like, just don't do this.

Somehow, Garrett agrees to their terms. Some-crazy-how. But he obviously continues to feel weird.

Dina: Oh, make sure to text the group chain when you arrive.

Garrett: Are we sure that Brian needs to know the exact time that we're having sex?

Dina: Successful polyamory requires complete constant communication. Speaking of, I read your post coital report from last night, you didn't fill in "emotional state".

They try. they try. and then they fumble again, you know, because they're thinking too much rather than going with the feeling, of "this feels weird. What are other options?" And it's a great example of how, one: blanket consent is not a thing, right? You can't just say "oh, well, you said yes once upfront. So you automatically agree to all this other stuff". he's uncomfortable with this part, he should be able to push back on this part. But two: this kind of agreement can be coercive. this is a solid example of that, because he likes her, wants to get close to her. And he was told it's very black and white, "you have two options, right? Our rigid way or you get nothing". But is that binary accurate? Are those the only two options?

And we find out later, no, there are other options, Many of which might have felt more relaxed to Garrett, while also keeping Dina and Brian feeling secure. But if you know a person wants something and you say, "Okay, well, in that case, you got to let us control you". That's pretty gross to me.

OBJECTIFYING PARTNERS

Which brings us to objectification. They objectify the hell out of Garrett here. She calls him her side piece, her possession. And she even takes it a step further.

Brian: Technically I think he'd just be your side piece.

Dina: Well, what's my side piece is your side piece.

"Our" side piece, she says. To explicitly say this person is serving us as a couple. And it's not lost on me how loaded it is that she's bringing this dehumanizing attitude towards the only person in the mix who's both Black and disabled. She's really not

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thinking about how this is going to be received, about all of the ways that this could just double down and triple down on other harms he's experienced. It's like, "Dina, do you even like Garrett? because it kind of seems like you don't even like him, at least in this scene".

And it also seems like their approach to non monogamy is about value extraction, not relationship building. She wants to get what she wants. And she and Brian want this to serve their relationship and keep their relationship happy. It winds up putting the other person's safety as a secondary or tertiary concern. That's just going to cause harm. I've just never not seen that eventually cause harm.

And to be clear, we do know that Dina does care about Garrett, and we see that in other scenes, where she can be very warm, and loving and a solid good friend. And so I think this is a good example of how when there is that defensiveness about love, and trying to not feel love, she is now acting in a cold and even cruel way, even though she cares about him. because she's not in touch with that care. So her actions are not in touch with that care. Cold is cold, no matter how we get there. And the good news is we can also come out of it. It just requires a willingness to be uncomfortable, and a willingness to feel everything. And that can often be inconvenient, unpopular and very scary.

So again, If you relate to any of this, all of this? no shade. I have been there too. everything that I'm speaking about in any of my media analysis videos, it's because I'm like, "Oh, I've seen that" or "I've done that in some way". And so, we are very flawed people trying to navigate a type of dynamic that is not modeled for us in monogamous centered communities. We are modeled from a very young age, we are shown what monogamy could be or should be, we are not shown enough non monogamy. which is why I'm doing this media series. Because examples can only help. even if it's just an example of "I don't want that. I don't want to do that". That can be valuable too.

Thank you as always for helping me pay my bills. I hope you have a beautiful week and I will see you next time. Bye.

xxx