

RECONCILING IMAGES VIDEO STUDY - SESSION 5, "Nanette"

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GOALS: To consider how LGBTQ people have been presented in television and movies, how this has impacted American popular culture, and how Christians act or react.

EXPECTATIONS: Respectful, thoughtful conversation. You can attend one or all sessions, as these are independent. Kids are welcome but parents should use discretion as some of the movies/TV shows deal with adult themes. Bring a snack to share - each week we'll ask one person to bring a more substantial main dish.

SESSIONS	MOVIE/EPISODES (rating, hh:mm)	MAIN DISH
Sunday, July 28, noon	Philadelphia (PG-13, 2:05)	_____
Sunday, August 4, noon	Queer Eye: God Bless Gay (TV-14, 0:51)	_____
Sunday, August 11, noon	The Matthew Shephard Story (TV-14, 1:34)	_____
Sunday, August 18, noon	One Day at a Time (TV-PG, 1:30)	_____
Sunday, August 25, noon	Hannah Gadsby: Nanette (unrated, 1:09)	_____

NANETTE (Unrated, stream on Netflix)

Comedian Hannah Gadsby's breakout special is a raw, real look at drawing strength from brokenness and rebuilding oneself. Gadsby talks frankly about sexism, homophobia, and other tough topics.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (before show)

- Introductions - who we are, main dish volunteers
- Thoughts? Follow-up from previous week?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (after show)

- Where were you most comfortable and most uncomfortable during this show? Why?
- Why do we sometimes simplify people to one aspect of their lives, such as being gay or being a good cook? Do we do this to ourselves? To others? Do we internalize others' simplified impressions of us.
- At one point, Gadsby says, "There's too much hysteria about gender from gender normals." What does Gadsby mean? Is this an accurate observation? Is conversation about gender among the LGBTQ+ community different? Is the church context different from general society, and should it be?
- Gadsby talks about different kinds of humor. When can humor be helpful? When is it not helpful?
- How does it feel to be the object of jokes? Gadsby specifically takes cracks at straight, white males. Is this unusual? Uncomfortable? Do you have experience being the object of jokes? How did it feel?
- Talk about the difference Gadsby suggests between humor and story.
- Gadsby says her retelling of her coming-out story as humor fused with her memory of it, adding "You learn from the part of the story you focus on." Reflect on this in your own life.
- Gadsby fuses stand-up comedy with storytelling, humor with anger, lowbrow comedy with highbrow philosophy. What elements give this presentation particular punch?
- "Self-hate is a weed that is planted from the outside," Gadsby suggests, often when we are children. Is church sometimes a venue for planting doubt or self-hate? What could we do differently?

BETH'S NOTES ON NANETTE

How does Hannah present herself? What about her is “this situation?” What marks someone as visually lesbian/gay/queer/LGBTQ+? Are these cues more about sexuality or gender?

Why does she feel tense in a small town, but make it seem silly and cute?

“Wasn’t a great ‘letter’ to receive.” [Gadsby riffing about when she realized she was “a little bit lesbian.”] When do straight people know that they’re straight?

Leaving hometown for being gay as a choice, which was a crime in Tasmania until 1997. Turns it into jokes about Mardi Gras and potatoes and genetic pools.

How are gay men seen as more problematic than lesbians? Why is “a little cuddle” either less offensive to some, or even fetishized by those who oppose human/civil rights for LGBTQ+?

Mardi Gras and Pride parades as “flaunting their lifestyle,” “busy,” “dancing,” “partying,” “loud,” “intense,” “spectacle,” “flag too shouty and assertive,” “waving in my face.” Are these real critiques of Pride? Do her jokes on this topic play more into celebrating Pride in her own way, or into not liking Pride as a concept? Who do we usually hear making similar jokes?

“I’m not very good at gay.” How do gay people feel pressure to conform to subculture norms?

“... self-appointed spokes-people...” “Not enough lesbian content ... I was on the stage the whole time; I didn’t even straighten up half way through.” How does every subculture police their community members? Is she mocking LGBTQ+ culture or trying to expand the LGBTQ+ culture? Is it an inside joke?

How do we expect jokes and comedy to fix or solve social problems? “...

A responsibility to help lead people out of ignorance ...”

Are there certain stories we are all expected to have and cherish or giggle about in life? First days of school? Birth stories? Graduation stories? Success stories? Heartbreak stories?

Was considered enough “lesbian content” before “slacking off,” when she told jokes about “homophobia” and meeting a man who had almost beat her up, calling her “f*cking f*aggot ... f*cking freak,” until it is revealed that Gadsby is/was “a girl.” Man apologizes by saying he wouldn’t “hit a girl. ... What a great guy ... I left him there, people. Safety first.” We laugh. She’s still telling that joke to us. Why? **Are some of us laughing for different reasons? Are we laughing at an ignorant man? Are we laughing at or with Hannah? Are we laughing at the “self-appointed spokespeople” who police us for cultural content? Are we laughing at ourselves? What kind of “aha” moment do we have?**

Centerpiece of old show, which she’s still telling, is coming out to her family, her mother in particular. “Why did you tell me that? That’s not something that I need to know. I mean, what if I told you that I was a murderer?” Gadsby says “It’s still funny,” with a warm smile and her hand over her heart. Is it funny to compare an LGBTQ+ person to a murderer? **ouch**

How is “coming out” an ongoing process throughout life, fraught with enough tension to avoid and lie out of (even silly) fear, not a one-time event that can be quickly passed?

“... lesbian enough ...” **How else have we seen members of the same community judge each other as lacking? In the church?**

“I cook dinner way more than I lesbian.” Is she asking us why being LGBTQ is such a big deal? Or is she telling us part of the answer is the amount much pressure is on tiny parts of LGBTQ people everyday? How do each of our identities operate similarly? On which topics in life do we put the most pressure, so expect them to be important parts of identity?

How is the misogyny of asking all women to smile, laugh, lighten up, stop taking everything so seriously, learn to take a joke, stop being so sensitivity, etc., connected to thinking negatively of lesbians as well? Is gender deviance, away from aesthetically catering to men, considered negative, regardless of sexual attraction? Why isn't it ok to be serious in the face of jokes, mocking, or humor that one doesn't find funny?

Is it funny that people do joke that those being serious need to have sex, specifically with a penis? If the same thing is only directed at women by men, not directed at gay men, is it because their main flaw is seen as failing to be real men who are aggressive, tough, and cracking jokes at others expense? Is failure to be “a real man” or “a real woman” viewed differently? Is this a rape joke?

Why does Gadsby say she is questioning leaving comedy? Healthy to reassess. Wants to stop with self-deprecating humor.

“Do you understand what self-deprecation means when it comes from somebody who already exists in the margins? It's not humility. It's humiliation. I put myself down in order to speak, in order to speak permission to speak. And I simply will not do that anymore, not to myself or anybody who identifies with me.” Is this the first very serious moment?

“You owe it to your community to come out as ‘transgender.’” A joke about “gender not-normal.” Does Gadsby come close to deprecating trans communities?

“Too much hysteria around gender from you ‘gender-normals’. You're a bit uptight, calm down.” How does it feel to be told to relax when a dig has been taken at you?

“How about we stop separating the children into opposing teams from day dot? How about we give them a good seven to ten years to consider themselves on the same side?” How much of this show is about gender, being a woman, and being marginalized for reasons other than sexuality? Is she busting myths only about sexuality?

“I identify as tired.” Gadsby is not smiling or laughing now.

How much energy does it take of Gadbsy to be mistaken for a man, even briefly? How much energy does it cost her to make jokes about it? Why would it be worse to mistake a man for “madame?”

Are we laughing at those who get gender wrong? Are we laughing at the human discomfort of trying to operate across a cultural boundary? How do different members of different communities get served differently? Are we laughing at straight, white men and their difficulties being seen as a sub-category rather than a universal,

neutral, over-arching experience? Do straight, white men enjoy being the punchline of a joke? Does anyone? How do we move past our defensiveness? Should we? Do these jokes encourage or discourage us to examine our own cultural specificity?

“Just jokes. Just jokes.” “It’s just locker room talk.” Is it ever just these?

“Laughter is the best medicine,” is a joke, but releasing tension is good for humans, including if you laugh together with other humans. At the expense of which other emotions?

“Laughter connects us. Tension isolates us.” Do these seem absolute or true or false?

“A joke is two things: a set-up and a punchline. ... Essentially a question with a surprise answer ...” “I make you all feel tense and then I make you laugh.” Have we?

When she was a child, humor was a “survival tactic.” The tension didn’t need to be invented, she was the tension. “I’m tired of tension. Tension is making me sick.” Gadsby is still telling some jokes. How do we feel laughing after recognizing a genuine tension increase?

Feels “low-brow” relative to “high art.” Are we just rolling in our own muck? Gadsby is still telling some jokes. Is she encouraging us to stay in the muck with her? Why?

Gadsby is still telling jokes about mental health, medication, and suffering with creativity. Why? What is useful about this; what is negative about this?

In which ways is sensitivity an asset to humans?

Gadsby says comedy leaves out the end of the story, context, and details in order to keep tension and end on a laugh. As when her mother apologises for pressuring her child due to good intentions of protection. Gadsby still cracking jokes, with finger guns.

“Comedy suspends me in a state of perpetual adolescence. The way I’ve been telling that story is through jokes instead of stories. ... I froze an incredibly formative experience at its trauma point, and I sealed it off into jokes. ... was not sophisticated enough to undo the damage done to me in reality. Punch lines need trauma.” Did we recognize trauma before she named it?

“I didn’t come out to my grandmother last year, because I’m still ashamed of who I am. ... I need to tell my story properly.” How do each of us have stories that we tell as jokes, rather than learning from the tension by focusing on it, processing it, experience it?

Are the other LGBT comedy elements we’ve seen, also backed by the cultural trauma that is rarely addressed, because it is uncomfortable to sit with serious hurts? How often do we try to make ourselves more comfortable by joking? How have the other pieces shed glimmers of tension/trauma in between kind, funny, silly, or sweet sentiments?

Still a few jokes about art and networking and fame. Ninja Turtle jokes. Taylor Swift and Mylie Cyrus in virgin or a whore dichotomy. Plenty of art jokes. Is she still managing tension of us, rather than giving us the endings with which to sit?

“Is misogyny a mental illness? Yeah, it is, especially if you’re a heterosexual man. Because if you hate what you desire, do you know what that is? F*cking tense!” Is presented as a punchline, but is it a serious point with which we should sit?

Gadsby is still making jokes about a prominent artist, Picasso, saying he should burn every woman after their relationship. Jokes that he was a “great guy.” Jokes about “making art great again.” Are these ironic? At whom are we laughing? What happens to our tension when she mentions the same artist raping an underage girl? Whom are we deprecating when we laugh that Cubism is more important than intense misdeeds? Whom is deprecating when we are asked to “separate the art from the man?”

How does turning punchlines against women instead of men (as in the example of Monika Lewinski) relate to societal power structures? Did Gadsby let sexual assaults by a man in power be a punchline or the tension without an ending? Is obsession with reputation at the heart of which behaviors we expect or accept from whom? How much similarity exists between many of the examples of predators listed? Is Gadsby telling us jokes? What is her tone now? Will she help us out of the tension she has raised about reputation being more important than humanity? How does a focus on reputation, rather than humanity, relate to the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ communities and individuals?

“Look, I am angry. I apologise.” Is this her maintaining her reputation and self-deprecating, or her managing the reputation and experiences of others in the face of tension? Why does she relieve tension at this point? Who do we in life allow to be angry and hurt in public life? At whom are we laughing right now?

What has Hannah Gadsby doing as she again takes us from giggles about straight, white men’s pain and gives us the end of the story, without a punchline, that focuses on her experience? Do we want her to return to managing our tension with a punchline? Should we have to hear about her pain and outrage? Who should bear the tension and responsibility for Gadsby not going to the hospital, or working in society to make others safe and heard, possess the humility to spare another humiliation?

How do we all show each other, over and over again, in most cultures, what we are worth?

Is Gadsby now asking for permission to hate straight, white men? How is her outrage, fear, and hurt different from the group(s) at which she holds these feelings? When is it okay to not manage social tension by pretending to be ok, to communicate grievances? Is she calling out other groups the way she has been hated? Does she use her fists? Does she refuse to stop violence witnessed? Does she not examine herself and her beliefs?

She makes one last joke about lesbian fashion, and announces it as such.

“I am not a man-hater, but I am afraid of men.” Is she tearful, stressed, adamant? How is this portion of the show different from even earlier serious bits of the show?

Who is she asking to manage the tension that results from the dangers of “being different?”

“To be rendered powerless does not destroy your humanity. Your resilience is your humanity. The only people who lose their humanity are those who believe that have the right to render another human being powerless. They are the weak.” How does this quote operate not just for trauma survivors, but for those asked to change the systems of thought and behavior that lead to violence and danger? Is this where humility comes in, instead

of allowing humiliation of those who are “different?” Does this fit with contemporary theories of defensiveness, fragility, and telling survivors to “lighten up?”

“When you destroy the woman, you destroy the past she represents. [referencing Picasso] I will not allow my story to be destroyed. ... [in order to] Feel less alone. To feel connected. I want my story heard.”

“Fear difference; you learn nothing.” What if we recognize that we are afraid, or feel a loss, and lean in to experience and learn through our discomfort?

“There is nothing stronger than a broken woman who has rebuilt herself.” [Cheers without a punchline!]

Then a joke about persecuting men, which turns out to be the last. “This is theatre, fellas. I have given you a taste. I have lived a life. The damage done to me is real and debilitating ... The only way I can tell my truth and put tension in the room is with anger. ... But anger, even if it is connected to laughter, is a tension. And it knows no other purpose than to spread blind hatred, and I want no part of it, because I take my freedom of speech as a responsibility, and just because I can position myself as a victim, does not make my anger constructive. It never is constructive. Laughter is not our medicine. **Stories hold the cure.** I don’t want to unite you in laughter or anger. I just wanted my story heard, my story felt and understood, by individuals with minds of their own. Because, like it or not, my story is your story, and your story is my story. I just don’t have the strength to take care of my story anymore. ... All I can ask is just please help me take care of my story. ... And that is the focus of the story we need: connection.”

How do brief, painful or silly previews of LGBT lives compare to all of the tension handled every day LGBTQ+ people every day?

What should humans do with each other’s tension, pain, and anger? What works to truly lighten our loads? Do stories hold the cure? How so? Through understanding? Listening? Connection?

Is anger ever constructive? Can anger do anything besides “blind hatred?” How did pain, fear, and anger make “Nannette” so full of tension and relief, genuine feelings, and human connection and understanding? Were those moments the most moving?

PARK’S NOTES ON NANETTE

How much does any one part of our identity identify us? (cooking / lesbian / etc)

Show gradually turns around midpoint to become more serious.

Hannah is from “bible belt” of Tasmania - 70% believed homosexuality should be criminal, homosexuality was a sin, homosexuals were heinous pedophiles. Hannah learned to be homophobic, and hated herself.

Self hate is a weed planted from outside.

“This is bigger than homosexuality. It is about how we conduct debate in public about sensitive things - we think it is more important to be right than to appeal to the humanity of the people we disagree with.”

“Anger connects strangers like nothing else.” ... but it is dangerous. It doesn’t relieve tension. Anger is a toxic, infectious tension.

“We have the sunflowers because Van Gogh had a brother who loved him. Through all the pain, he had a tether, a connection to the world. That is the focus, the story we need - connection.”