

# Shameless Sociology



# Shameless Sociology:

## *Critical Perspectives on a Popular Television Series*

Edited by

Jennifer Beggs Weber  
and Pamela M. Hunt

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Shameless Sociology: Critical Perspectives on a Popular Television Series

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For Nathan, my partner in crime. – Jennifer

For Perry and Grace. – Pam



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## INTRODUCTION

PAMELA M. HUNT  
AND JENNIFER BEGGS WEBER

*shame*

noun:

a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt,  
shortcoming, or impropriety  
a condition of humiliating disgrace or disrepute  
something that brings censure or reproach

*shameless*

adjective:

having no shame; insensible to disgrace

(Merriam-Webster 2019)

### History of *Shameless*

*Shameless* is an American dramatic television series adapted from a British show of the same title. The program will soon air its eleventh and final season. *Shameless* premiered in 2011 on the Showtime network and is the longest-running scripted series in Showtime's history. The show is loosely based on the childhood of the British version's creator, Paul Abbott, whose own sister—much like the character Fiona—helped raise the children when Abbott's mother left the family (Young 2007). Abbott reports that his childhood home was always filled with chaos and that he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age 23 (akin to Ian), yet one of his teachers took notice of his brilliance (similar to Lip) (Young 2007). The series has received critical acclaim. In 2014, *The Atlantic* called the series “poignant as well as funny.” *Shameless* has garnered over 40 award nominations since its debut, including fourteen Primetime Emmy nominations (Grant 2018). Joan Cusack won a Primetime Emmy in 2015, and William H. Macy has won the Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Lead Actor in a comedy series three times.

*Shameless* follows the Gallaghers, a White working-class family living in a South Side Chicago neighborhood. The patriarch of *Shameless* is

Frank Gallagher. An alcoholic con man, Frank is manipulative—a trickster who is shifty, clever, and a harbinger of chaos. Frank is selfish, narcissistic, deceptive, and often pretends to care for others to get what he wants. His wife and matriarch of the Gallagher clan, Monica, is bipolar and an addict. She comes in and out of their lives as her whims and needs suit her, often stealing from her family, typically to buy drugs. All of the Gallagher children (there are six: Fiona, Lip, Ian, Debbie, Carl, and Liam) are crafty, unapologetic survivors. Indeed, a major theme in the series lies in the schemes they use for subsistence and the crafty attempts they make to get what they want. They rarely differentiate between moral and immoral means to get by, and though they despise his attempts at charisma, the Gallagher kids obviously learned a significant amount of their clandestine ways from their father. The fuel for these behaviors lies in something else they inherited from him—the belief that the system is rigged, and therefore, any and all means of resourcefulness are acceptable. This is where the notion of “shamelessness” in the series emerges.

Other characters support and intertwine with the Gallagher clan. Indeed, their South Side neighborhood is populated with a host of quirky individuals. Veronica Fisher and Kevin Ball, best friends and fictive kin, live two doors down. Mickey and Mandy Milkovich, a brother and sister from a home even more broken than the Gallaghers, come to play significant roles in the lives of both Ian and Lip Gallagher. Karen Jackson, Lip’s first true love, and her agoraphobic mother, Sheila become central characters in many of the Gallagher family plots. There’s also Svetlana Yevgenivna, the tough and smart Russian prostitute who becomes Mickey’s wife, then later part of a “throuple” with Kevin and Veronica. Sammi Slot—the long-lost daughter of Frank—makes her appearance in Season 4. And, Jimmy/Steve, Fiona’s love-interest from Season 1, makes multiple reappearances throughout the series, seemingly reimagining his identity every time.

But, the power of the series rests mostly in the ways in which each despicable, shameless act is located in relatable challenges. Unemployment, hunger, eviction, and broken water-heaters are things many Americans deal with on a daily basis. Moreover, each character is at one point both hateable and likable. Consider Monica: like Frank, she is also cunning and self-centered. But, most of the time, Monica exudes a sweet and innocent demeanor, pulling at viewers’ heartstrings. In the rare times that she spends with her family, she plays the protective mama-bear role just enough to make viewers almost pity her. Or, Carl, the second-to-youngest Gallagher kid: Carl engages in some of the most criminal acts in the series. He hits people with a baseball bat, attempts to kill his cousin with rat poison, robs his foster parents, burns down a Native American sweat lodge, and straps

heroin to his adolescent cousin's body to assist in the traffic of the drug. On the other hand, throughout the series, we see Carl tending to others and fighting for justice. He tries to find a new liver for his father, takes in dogs who are sentenced to be euthanatized, and chases down local delinquents in order to apprentice becoming a police officer.

Just like the characters and their storylines, *Shameless* is both good and bad. It is both flawed and hopeful. In the chapters that follow, authors critically analyze the multifaceted ways that the Gallaghers are both loved and hated, and how *Shameless* simultaneously challenges and reinforces stereotypes, accurately and erroneously portrays the working-class, and often illustrates the harsh realities faced by working-class American families without suggesting solutions. The goal of this book is to address and explore these complexities.

## Overview of Book

### *Part 1: Social Class*

#### *Dominant Hasslin' and Subordinate Hustlin': A Content Analysis Using the Generic Processes that Reproduce Inequality*

Hilling, Andro, and Cagwin conduct a content analysis and apply Schwalbe et al.'s (2000) generic processes of inequality to themes and incidences in the show.

#### *Shamefully Shameless: Critical Theory and Contemporary Television*

Leonard and Martinez analyze the extent to which the show emancipates (as the media portray it does) working-class families on television. The authors interrogate the assertion that *Shameless* has reinvented working-class television. Using critical theory, authors expose the limits of the show's ability to contradict popular narratives around the working-class, poverty, and the processes of gentrification.

#### *Learning and Coping: The (Mis)Education of Lip Gallagher*

Piatt and Akbar write of the ever-present reality that social class remains a significant obstacle to enrolling in, staying in, and graduating from college. They use the case study of Lip, the prodigal son of the Gallagher family, to demonstrate this. Piatt and Akbar also discuss the elusive topic of what happens during a low-income student's time on campus. In the end, the authors suggest TRIO programs (federal programs designed to increase higher education access for economically disadvantaged students) can make the difference for first generation, limited income students like Lip.

*Shameless, Single Parenthood, Low-Wage Work, and Initiatives to Help Families in Need*

Radu, Fluegge, Brown, and McManus Rodriguez examine the challenges faced by families in modern times, including the decoupling of marriage and family, as well as economic barriers for low-income families, be they single parented or otherwise structured, and the struggles that children encounter in families with low parental involvement. The authors argue that *Shameless* illustrates these difficult realities, but the series stops short of suggesting solutions to the ills of its characters. The authors then suggest several programs to promote child well-being.

## ***Part 2: Race***

*The Shameless (and Race-less) Gallaghers*

Martinez-Cola uses instances in *Shameless* to argue that stereotypes about white people in the media, even when seemingly-damning, have very little negative consequences for the lives of white people in America.

*Shamelessly White: Shades of Whiteness and Anti-Black Racism in Popular Media*

Wyatt argues that although the show humanizes poor whites, it does so to the detriment of racial minorities, particularly Black Americans. To better understand how popular media is conveying contemporary stereotypes of Black people, he conducts a comparative analysis of the shows *Shameless* and *The Chi*.

## ***Part 3: Sexualities and Gender***

*Shameless Sexualities: The Incompleteness of Queer Acceptance as Depicted in a Popular Television Show*

Flockhart and Reiter analyze the use of humor and disdain for effeminacy by *Shameless* characters as examples of the incompleteness of queer acceptance in the U.S. The authors argue that the series simultaneously provides a diverse depiction of the modern queer experience and reinforces homophobic attitudes.

*“Another Skanky ‘Hood Girl’”: Intersections of Class & Gender on Shameless’ South Side*

Weber and Parsons explore the gendered, class-based expectations that the women on *Shameless’* South Side face. Challenging claims that the series offers displays of female empowerment via their brazen and unapologetic

sexual availability, the authors demonstrate how the show works to reaffirm and maintain sexualized stereotypes of poor and working-class women.

*Pregnancy and Paths to Financial Freedom: A Tale of Two Gallagher Sisters*

Welch and Murray compare the pregnancy experiences of the two female siblings. They examine how individuals make choices regarding parenthood. Specifically, they discuss common debates within American culture regarding women's rights, motherhood, abortion, and family values using a fresh perspective, through the eyes of the Gallagher sisters.

***Part 4: Social Psychology, Deviance, and Risk***

*"Nobody f\*\*ks with the Gallaghers!": Identity and The New American Family in Shameless*

Schmidt and Miller argue that *Shameless* illustrates the ever-changing nature of family as an institution. Additionally, these authors examine just how powerful and unbreakable the Gallagher family identity remains throughout the series, despite constant unrest, instability, and the frequent wish by some members to disidentify with it.

*Excuse is the Refuge of the Moral Coward: The Gallaghers' Use of Techniques of Neutralization to Justify Their Behavior and Manage Shame*

Hunt explores society's connotation of shame—a self-conscious moral, role-taking emotion—and its connection to deviant behavior. She analyzes the way in which the characters rationalize their deviant behaviors, and thus, manage the experience of shame by using justifications such as Sykes and Matza's Techniques of Neutralization. She then argues that cultural expectations demand accounts of deviance from some groups, while allowing others the chance to deviate without explanation.

*Urban Hustling, Emotion Work, and Reflexive Modernity: Managing Risk in the Television Show Shameless*

Keren analyzes the stories, narratives, and actions of the expert risk managers in the series. He examines the concept of risk, specifically with regard to the concepts of "hustling," "edge work," and "emotion work."

### ***Part 5: Gentrification***

#### *“Gentrify This!” A Critical Analysis of Gentrification in Season 5 of Shameless*

Jordan explores the notion that gentrification can apply not only to neighborhoods and housing districts, but to individuals. He uses the case of Lip to illustrate the positive and negative components of gentrification.

#### *Gentrifying the Gallaghers*

Applying gentrification to the Gallagher children, Pitts points out that despite the fact that social mobility is not common in the real world, almost every member of the Gallagher tribe climbs the social and economic ladder during the course of the series. Pitts contends that *Shameless* makes a realistic case for character gentrification as the Gallagher children move from a bunch of shameless hoodlums to a law-abiding, middle-class family.

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**PART ONE:**  
**SOCIAL CLASS**

# DOMINANT HASSLIN' AND SUBORDINATE HUSTLIN': A CONTENT ANALYSIS USING THE GENERIC PROCESSES THAT REPRODUCE INEQUALITY

ALEXIS P. HILLING, ERIN ANDRO,  
AND KAYLA CAGWIN

Social inequality is a persistent phenomenon within society and a central focus of broad inquiry among social scientists. Inequalities research considers the multiple forms and intersections between social structures such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. Scholars have shown how these intersections of social inequality are reproduced in the media (Netherland and Hansen 2016; Oxendine 2019; Trolan 2013). In addition, researchers have explored the mechanisms and social processes that generate and maintain this inequality (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018; Foster and Hagan 2015; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe et al. 2000). Since society is structured to perpetuate inequalities, examining how the media is a part of the reproduction of inequality provides an accessible way to analyze these structural forces (Kellner 2003).

Focusing on the interactional maintenance of inequality, Schwalbe and colleagues (2000), in their meta-theory, propose four “generic processes in the reproduction of inequality”: othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the reproduction of inequality by applying Schwalbe and colleague’s (2000) meta-theory to *Shameless*. Throughout the series, the Gallagher family and other characters are in a constant struggle against poverty and for the power and resources held by individuals in the wealthy dominant group. In an attempt to overcome the persistent inequality facing them, characters engage in innovative tactics such as: differentiating themselves from others deemed inferior, finding alternative ways of earning a living and bettering their status, and working to maintain the boundaries in place between them and those of higher status. In this chapter, we begin by reviewing the literature on generating and maintaining social inequality

with a specific focus on three of the four generic processes that are most applicable to the show: othering, subordinate adaptation, and boundary maintenance. Our goal is to show how these abstract theoretical processes in the reproduction of inequality are clearly and concretely demonstrated in *Shameless*. While the majority of research on social inequality emphasizes the macro-level, we add to this literature through our focus on the interactional-level and by demonstrating how the inequality present in society is also reproduced within media.

## Literature Review

While the prevailing level of analysis in inequalities research is at the structural and institutional level, many researchers have explored how micro-level interactional processes manifest into various forms of social inequality (Anderson and Snow 2001; Ridgeway 2019; Scarborough and Risman 2017; Schwalbe 2016). Heavily rooted in the interactionist tradition, Schwalbe et al. (2000) argued for the value of qualitative work that moves past understanding instances of inequality typically defined as “structural.” After extensively reviewing a broad body of qualitative inequality research, Schwalbe et al. (2000), noticed that four mechanisms of inequality (othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management) were present in all studies across small groups, organizations, communities, and societies.

The first mechanism, othering, can be defined as a process of differentiation and demarcation, which draws a line between “us” and “them,” establishing and maintaining social distance between groups (Lister 2004). The creation and classification of different identities as more or less powerful are included within the othering process (Ezzell 2009; Jensen 2011). When othering occurs based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, it creates stereotypes and expectations of people who are in that group. According to Lamont and Molnar (2002), these stereotypes lead to symbolic boundaries that are placed between groups of people, making it appear that there are significant differences. Once those socially constructed differences are emphasized, one group becomes oppressed under another (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Subordinate adaptation is the strategy that oppressed individuals use to cope with their inferior position in society (Schwalbe et al. 2000). When subordinates have been othered by the dominant group, they must find ways to adapt to their position in order to survive. Schwalbe et al. (2000) identify three subprocesses to explain how this is often achieved: trading power for patronage, forming alternative subcultures, and hustling

and dropping out. Through these mechanisms, subordinates adapt to the hierarchy of power; however, their emphasized difference and need for adaptation play a key role in the overall reproduction of inequality (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Trading power for patronage occurs when subordinates seek out compensatory benefits from their relationships with members of the dominant group (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Recent literature that has investigated trading power for patronage has focused on gendered examples and outcomes (Fenstermaker and West 2002; Risman 2004; Mathers, Sumerau, and Ueno 2018). Less research has focused on how those subordinated for their socioeconomic status utilize trading power for patronage to improve their lives and become economically and socially mobile.

Subordinates also adapt by forming alternative subcultures that contain differing hierarchies for prestige, power, and economic attainment (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Previous research has focused on examples surrounding alternative sexuality subcultures (McGrady 2016) and homeless populations (Snow and Anderson 1987). Few have considered how forming alternative subcultures might be executed to adapt to economic inequality. Further, when subordinates cannot achieve success under the norms of the dominant culture, they can also adapt by hustling or dropping out. Hustling refers to activities related to obtaining economic resources illegally or dishonestly, while dropping out refers to an individual or collective departure from interacting within the institutions of the dominant culture (Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Boundary maintenance is the third process through which inequality is reproduced. In order for inequality to be preserved, the symbolic, spatial, and/or interactional boundaries between dominant and subordinate groups must be maintained. The preservation of these boundaries allows dominant groups to protect their acquired material and cultural capital from subordinated groups (Schwalbe et al. 2000). A boundary maintenance framework has been applied to various forms of stratification that create an "us versus them" dichotomy. According to Schwalbe et al. (2000), boundary maintenance takes the form of three specific processes: transmitting cultural capital, controlling network access, and the threat and use of violence.

The processes of transmitting cultural capital and controlling network access overlap, as network access is in part controlled by the transmission of cultural capital (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Without these proper cultural credentials, it may be impossible to enter a network. This can be observed throughout a number of social institutions and organizations such as in higher education (Binder and Abel 2019; O'Shea 2016; Pascarella et al. 2004; Simon and Ainsworth 2012), management (Taylor, Gross, and

Turgeon 2018; Turgeon, Taylor, and Niehaus 2014), and even parental responsibilities (Hook 2016; Lareau 2011; Wyness 1997). For example, in higher education, Pascarella et al. (2004) found that first-in-family college students lacked the cultural capital of their peers, which led to disadvantages in preparedness and knowledge about higher education, degree expectations, and financial support. This lack of cultural capital led to lower graduation rates and varying post-graduation success (Pascarella et al. 2004). Further, research has shown that these networks are critical to the reproduction of inequality (Lareau 2011; Lutter 2015; MacMillan, Tyler, and Vignoles 2015; Traweek 1992; McDonald 2011).

While network boundaries are maintained through both ideological and spatial separations, individuals do step out of these boundaries. Elites view this as a problem and one solution is to inflict violence. This infliction of violence works to protect privilege and power, ensuring boundaries remain intact (Schwalbe 2000). Research has shown the threat and use of violence is a normal process of boundary maintenance in a number of institutions and groups (Cunningham 2013; Honeycutt 2005). Throughout the television series, *Shameless*, all three subcategories of boundary maintenance were observed. Controlling network access was a prevalent theme throughout the show. We often observed the Gallagher family attempting to obtain more cultural capital, with those in the dominant group continuing to restrict both access to cultural capital and network access. Overall, applying Schwalbe et al.'s (2000) generic processes framework to an analysis of *Shameless* offers fertile ground for the processual study of inequality, given the countless interactions between characters of different statuses.

## Methods

To examine the presence of the general processes in the reproduction of inequality in the Showtime original *Shameless*, we conducted an in-depth qualitative content analysis. The sample consisted of two randomly selected episodes from Seasons 1 through 9. Three coders each examined three seasons (six episodes each). Together, we analyzed 18 episodes total across nine seasons (Table 1-1). Episodes from Seasons 1-8 were retrieved from Netflix, and Season 9 was retrieved from the Showtime streaming service.

The main goal of our study is to analyze instances of Schwalbe et al.'s (2000) broad processes. To accomplish this, we started our analysis by open coding all episodes for instances of othering, subordinate adaptation, and boundary maintenance. This was the process of organizing the data

(Corbin and Strauss 1990; Lofland et al. 2006). Once the data was organized, we focus-coded each episode for the presence of the three generic processes. Focus coding involves looking for specific themes in data and determining the patterns in those themes (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Hinojosa 2010; Lofland et al. 2006). Each coder noted examples of the processes, elaborating on the subcategories of each process, providing a description of the interaction and character quotes. Analysis included compiling codes in a Google sheet document and memoing the results. Finally, coders discussed all coding and memos to examine present themes and address similarities and discrepancies across episodes. We present the results of the analysis in the following section.

**Table 1-1: Season/Episode Numbers and Episode Titles in Hilling, Andro, and Cagwin**

Season/Episode	Episode Title
Season 1, Episode 3	Aunt Ginger
Season 1, Episode 8	It's Time to Kill the Turtle
Season 2, Episode 5	Father's Day
Season 2, Episode 10	A Great Cause
Season 3, Episode 2	The American Dream
Season 3, Episode 10	Civil Wrongs
Season 4, Episode 6	Iron City
Season 4, Episode 11	Emily
Season 5, Episode 2	I'm the Liver
Season 5, Episode 8	Uncle Carl
Season 6, Episode 1	I Only Miss Her When I'm Breathing
Season 6, Episode 10	Paradise Lost

Season 7, Episode 5	Own Your Shit
Season 7, Episode 12	Requiem for a Slut
Season 8, Episode 2	Where's My Meth?
Season 8, Episode 10	The Church of Gay Jesus
Season 9, Episode 2	Mo' White
Season 9, Episode 9	BOOOOOOOOOOOONE!

## Results

### *Othering*

Using *Shameless* as an example of popular culture, we can see manifestations of three of the processes proposed by Schwalbe et al. (2000) (othering, subordinate adaptation, and boundary maintenance). Schwalbe et al. (2000) describe othering as a process of inequality, making one group seem inferior, or “othered,” compared to another group. During the othering process, there is one person or group of people with more power and class standing, along with another person or group being oppressed (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Schwalbe and colleagues (2000) break up othering into three subcategories: oppressive othering, creating powerful virtual selves, and defensive othering.

### *Oppressive Othering*

One of the main storylines in Season 4 involves Lip’s girlfriend, Amanda, who is a member of a dominant group—the upper socioeconomic class. In Episode 11, she asks Lip to use his subordinate status and lifestyle—as a member of the working-class—to shock her wealthy parents. In an example of oppressive othering, Amanda believes that her parents will be upset, and in this assumption, the implication is that there is something inherently wrong with poor people and their experiences, and that they are inherently different from upper-class, wealthy people. When the parents finally make it to the Gallagher house, they are indeed horrified, and they do, in fact, engage in othering. They make it very clear that they are too good to be in this South Side Chicago neighborhood, and in this working-class home, with an economically subordinate group of people. Amanda’s parents refuse to eat the meal that Lip and the Gallagher family prepared.

After dinner, Amanda's father says, "This is not the kind of environment I want for my daughter." He asks Lip to stop dating Amanda and offers to pay him to end their relationship. He also informs Lip that Amanda is only dating him to upset her parents, implying that he and his family are too good to associate with people like the Gallaghers. By stating that the only reason their daughter would date a subordinate would be to spite her parents, this interaction illustrates that Amanda's father is aware of the inequality between the two families.

Even within an oppressed group, people often realize that their class standing influences the ways in which those in the dominant group will treat them. Sometimes, individuals in the oppressed group other themselves. For example, in Season 1, Episode 8, Lip and Fiona share an exchange about Carl. "Carl got invited someplace by some normal kids. Robbie Rebello's having a paintball party." Carl explains he cannot go because he cannot afford it. Fiona gives Carl her last \$35 to go. Carl is excited and Lip thanks Fiona saying "He really wanted to go. But knows we're strapped." Here, the reference to "normal" kids implies the difference between Carl and his peers even though they attend the same school and are of similar social class status. Overall, oppressive othering stems from the idea that wealthier, more educated, and powerful people are superior, and that someone without those benefits is not worthy of respect.

### ***Powerful Virtual Selves***

Schwalbe et al. (2000) argues that the power enjoyed by the dominant group comes from the perception of moral difference between people in a higher social class and people in a lower class. The dominant group cultivates powerful virtual selves to ensure that the oppressed group understands that the dominant group deserves the power to decide what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable or unacceptable (Schwalbe et al. 2000). This gives a "logical" reason as to why inequality exists between groups (Schwalbe et al. 2000). In Season 6, Episode 10, Professor Youens (a person from the upper-class) asks Lip (a person from the working-class) about the grades for the midterm exams in the professor's class. Lip, his teaching assistant, does not have the exams graded.

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Lip:              | Look I'm sorry, I didn't have time to finish your work, I was busy getting fired, kicked out of my room, and forced to write a 10-page essay on the dangers of drinking. |
| Professor Youens: | The department pays me to teach and grade students.  |



- Lip: Yeah, well, maybe they should be paying me since I'm the one doing it.
- Professor Youens: You're two or three advanced degrees away from that.

The two are participating in oppressive othering and creating powerful virtual selves. The implication is that there is something special about having those degrees that makes it morally different and more acceptable that the professor gets paid while Lip does not. It also allows the professor to directly exploit Lip for his labor even though they are essentially doing the same work.

In another example, in Season 8, Episode 2, Frank is on his way to an interview at “Lumber, Lawn, and Lighting” and is looking for a respectable outfit to wear. He knows that he cannot wear his usual disheveled and worn-out clothes. In Frank’s attempt to move away from his old, non-productive ways, he must dress the part. In doing so, he reinforces the ideals of the dominant culture: the people that deserve power and respect are employed, well-dressed, and productive members of society. Frank is trying to take on the persona that is cultivated by the powerful in order to justify their dominance. All examples include someone being othered as not fitting the image of a powerful person. For example, others do not have a PhD, they do not dress appropriately, and they do not own a private business. The implication is that these are traits that belong to the wealthy/powerful and if someone does not fit that image, they do not deserve to have power or respect.

### ***Defensive Othering***

One way in which oppressed people try to mitigate their status in a culture is to participate in defensive othering—the process lower status people use to distance themselves from other lower status people, artificially inflating their own status (Schwalbe et al. 2000). The oppressed people are trying to place their oppression on others in order to seem more similar to higher status groups (Schwalbe et al. 2000). An illustration of this is when Kev and Vee (neighbors and good friends of the Gallaghers) agree to foster children for the money they will receive from the government to care for the kids. During the process of trying to get the house ready for the foster children, Vee hides valuables while Kev questions what she is doing. She explains she is “hiding our silverware in case we get a thief,” implying that the foster children are different and less trustworthy than other working-class children. Kev and Vee are not upper-class characters on *Shameless*. However, they are distancing themselves from other lower social class

characters (children in foster care) by suggesting they have valuables that the foster care children would steal.

Another example of defensive othering is in Season 7, Episode 5 when Carl and Fiona see a new washer and dryer being delivered to "Frank's Home for the Homeless." Carl says, "Even the homeless get better stuff than us." This is a form of defensive othering because although the Gallaghers are class-subordinates, they still see others (e.g., the homeless) as "below" them. They are othering the homeless individuals and arguing that they do not deserve high-quality appliances. The implication is that the homeless are inherently different from Gallaghers. Throughout the series, othering is a trend among people of various statuses. The classification is typically based in power, education, and wealth. In other words, the same inequality processes seen in our society are also clearly reflected and reproduced in our popular media.

### ***Subordinate Adaptation***

The Gallagher's reconcile inequality through subordinate adaptation to cope with the poverty they encounter. According to Schwalbe et al. (2000), individuals in a subordinate status mitigate their circumstances by pushing against their subordinate label. Throughout the series, the Gallagher clan consistently participate in the three subtypes of subordinate adaptation to reconcile inequality: trading power for patronage, forming alternative subcultures, and hustling and dropping out.

#### ***Trading Power for Patronage***

Subordinate status sometimes requires seeking compensatory benefits from relationships with the dominant group (Schwalbe et al. 2000). While these relationships can fulfill material needs, they also perpetuate inequality between the groups. In *Shameless*, some characters take entrepreneurial incentives to trade power for patronage. By using their relationships as a form of hustling, they manipulate others to meet their own needs. This is especially the case with Frank. He creates a "Franks' Home for the Homeless" in Season 7, Episode 5. He gets the billionaire mogul/philanthropist Simon Epstein to invest in Frank's Home as part of Epstein's philanthropic efforts. Through this relationship, Frank and his other roommates receive a place to live with beds, new appliances, a TV, and other commodities. While Frank and his roommates have their material needs met for survival, Epstein can bolster his public image to maintain his majority group status. Though this is a short-term benefit for Frank and the

others, it ultimately benefits the dominant group by providing a humanitarian shield to their vast wealth and power.

Other characters use their intimate or romantic relationships as a method of trading power for patronage. While many characters do this in various ways, Fiona and Carl exhibit this behavior to better their class status. In Season 8, Episode 10, for example, Carl's girlfriend wants to get married, but Ian and Fiona discourage the idea. Frank disagrees with this saying, "Marry her. Hear me and heed me. Do not let that frothing piece of lady meat out of your sight. She has a trust fund. Get joint checking. And whatever you do, do not sign a prenup." Here, Frank encourages exploiting the benefits that follow relationships with those in the majority economic group. While these relationships can be symbiotic for all involved, they also perpetuate inequalities between subordinate and dominant groups due to the necessity of participating in them for those in the minority. Subordinated people entering these relationships allow material needs to be met at the cost of perpetuating their status and the larger system of inequality. The very need for exchange of monetary, social, or cultural capital highlights the lack of equality between the groups.

### ***Forming Alternative Subcultures***

When subordinates cannot participate in the culture of the dominant group, they adapt by forming alternate subcultures with differing hierarchies, forms of power, and ways of making a living (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Subordinate subculture norms are well represented throughout the *Shameless* series. We can see this through the ways that people react to the Gallaghers' and other characters' behaviors that would typically be seen as deviant. An early example in Season 3, Episode 2 involves Lip's time doing community service for a crime he has committed. He meets another young man named Grizz and they exchange stories about why they are doing community service.

Grizz:	Why they got you doing this man?
Lip:	B and E, theft and assault.
Grizz:	Nice!
Lip:	You?
Grizz:	Hit a kid with a brick. Kinda broke his face... At least there's always someone with some weed. You got any weed?
Lip:	10 bucks a joint.

In this exchange, they establish street credentials through the discussion of participation in illegal activities, leading the two to earn mutual respect and

trust with one another. After this conversation, a group of youth with a community service volunteer program then show up and Grizz and Lip make fun of them.

- Grizz: Is that the fucking cast of Glee?  
 Lip: Yeah, looks like a bunch of do-gooders.  
 Grizz: More like a bunch of gonna-get-their-ass-kicked-ers.

Together, they participate in othering the kids from the community service program, clearly members of the dominant economic group. Their exchange implies that voluntary community service is uncool whereas court-ordered service work is cool or normal within their own class-based subculture. While their actions preserve the hierarchy within their alternative subculture, it also maintains the divide between subordinate and dominant groups by highlighting their differences.

This theme echoes throughout the series. During Season 5, Episode 2, the neighborhood where the Gallaghers live is experiencing gentrification. A member of the dominant group attempts to purchase Sheila Jackson's house—where Frank is currently living—for double what it is worth. Frank is upset, proclaiming, “the man is moving in on our territory.” Frank argues that poor people will be pushed out of their own community by the dominant culture who do not welcome their lifestyles and values, but instead seek to change the neighborhood to their own standards. Frank expresses his outrage to others in the area stating, “I’m talking about gentrification my friends...they kick the homeless out of the park as if they don’t have a God-given right to sleep there.” Frank sees their neighborhood as the social location of the subordinate group’s subculture, where they can be distanced from wealthier people and live by their own norms. Unfortunately, this perpetuates the “us versus them” mindset. The need for alternate spaces for adaptive subcultures accentuates the perceived difference between groups, which ultimately widens the gap of inequality between them.

### ***Hustling and Dropping Out***

Another adaptation to the inability of subordinates to fulfill their needs to the standards of the dominant group is to hustle or drop out. Hustling occurs when subordinates operate on the margins of what is acceptable or even legal as defined by the dominant group, in order to survive (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Dropping out can range from not participating in conventional education or employment to forming countercultures that reject the oppressive norms of the dominant group

(Schwalbe et al. 2000). Both hustling and dropping out saturate the plots and storylines of *Shameless* as nearly every character in the series participates in one or both at some point through the following means: selling drugs and/or obtaining money illegally, exploiting their relationships with others for resources, and dropping out of conventional institutions.

Participating in the sale of drugs is commonplace for the Gallagher clan. Lip and Carl participate in this form of hustling throughout the series. In the quoted conversation involving Lip and Grizz from the previous section, one of the (upper-class) community service volunteers, Casper, approaches Lip to buy drugs when he notices Lip and Grizz smoking marijuana. Lip hustles Casper by charging him \$20 a joint versus the \$10 he charged Grizz, a person whose economic status more closely matches his own. In Season 5, Episode 8, Lip needs money to stay in college, so he and Kev set up a drug dealing venture in an empty dorm room. Later, they attend multiple frat parties to sell joints. They know they can hustle the wealthier college students to spend more on the drugs because the upper-middle-class young people do not have access to networks to obtain it otherwise. In the same episode, Carl also becomes a drug dealer and is assigned a job to run heroin to Flint, Michigan. Frank convinces Carl to strap the drugs to Chuckie, his younger cousin, to transport them with less suspicion. Carl does this but when they encounter drug-sniffing dogs at the bus station, Carl bails, leaving Chuckie to be detained by the police. Here Carl is participating in hustling by selling drugs, and further, in using his young cousin as a prop in the hustle.

Hustling seems to be the most comfortable form of acquiring resources for the Gallaghers. It is a necessary tool and skill for them, and it is also how they have been conditioned to survive as members of the subordinate group. This becomes particularly evident with Lip and Fiona. When learning computer applications does not come easy to her, Fiona drops out to take a waitressing job at a sports bar where she endures sexual harassment. Fiona does take GED classes in Season 2 and attempts to better her career opportunities since her mother, Monica is back and taking care of her younger siblings. However, when Monica's mental health degrades rapidly, Fiona drops out again to resume hustling to keep the family afloat. Similarly, Lip is able to attend college and succeed in ways that align with the dominant group's values, as he is smart, scores well on tests, and shows academic promise. His teachers and partners encourage him to pursue college to improve his life chances. However, he initially resists this, as no one in his family has ever attended college. He views higher education as a waste of time that he could be on the streets hustling and selling drugs to support himself and his family.

Frank regularly drops out of society through drugs, alcohol, and homelessness. He rarely makes a living through conventional means, and instead hustles for money, usually to purchase drugs and alcohol. In Season 4, Episode 6, Frank dismisses a doctor who tries to warn him about the host of health issues he faces as a result of his addictions. Instead of allowing the medical institution to fix his ailments as someone in the dominant group would do, he participates in a Native American-style sweat lodge to rid his body of toxins. A more extreme example of dropping out occurs in Season 6, Episode 10 when Queenie takes Debbie (who is pregnant) and Frank (who is running from Carl's ex-drug lord, G-Dogg) to a hippie commune. Here, the characters drop out of society completely, both from the dominant group and their own subordinate group, no longer willing to subscribe to the norms of either group.

### ***Boundary Maintenance***

Schwalbe et al. (2000) assert that boundary maintenance is vital to maintaining the hierarchy of power and inequality. Throughout the entire series, the Gallaghers consistently participate in and experience boundary maintenance with elites, often finding themselves in situations where the borders of the structure meant to keep them outranked is tested in their interactions with other subordinates and elites. There are many examples of the three subtypes of boundary maintenance found within the series: controlling network access, transmitting cultural capital, and the threat and use of violence.

### ***Controlling Network Access***

Controlling network access was the most prevalent subprocess in *Shameless*, appearing in six of nine coded seasons. Controlling network access refers to the dominant group limiting access to key networks in which information is traded, decisions are made, and rewards are distributed to the subordinated group, ultimately leading to the reproduction of inequality. In Season 2, Episode 5, Fiona, the family matriarch, attends a wedding ceremony with a wealthy man who is unaware of her class status. Throughout the evening, Fiona attempts to transmit false messages of cultural capital via appearance and lies (e.g., stating that she attended Princeton). Her lies are soon uncovered when one of the members of the elite group corners her and exposes her lack of cultural capital, and assumes that Fiona is a sex worker. He then attempts to blackmail her warning, "How about you give me a taste, or I tell him the truth." Here, network access is