

# Individualism in the 2010's hit Adventure Time

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## INFORMATIVE ARTICLE

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In this article, I will explore themes of individualism and freedom in the 2010 TV series *Adventure Time*.

Individualism is defined by freedom and the principle of being independent in who you want to be. For me and the audience this theme is shown throughout the series; with examples of a same sex relationship, a character whose identity shifts between male and female, as well as a male character using feminine products like makeup to express himself.

The show's central ethos revolves around ideas of self-acceptance and personal freedom, whatever that may be defined as. There are many examples in each season where characters find themselves, and don't allow societal stereotypes to affect them. This is a new, and key view that is seen within younger generations of today who have a more liberal perspective on society.

In recent years, the generation of teenagers and young adults are redefining concepts



of gender and pronouns. This movement has led to more and more teens exploring their identity.

Since 2010, *Adventure Time* has portrayed a character who fluctuates between female and male pronouns and never speaks on their gender. This character's gender seems to be fluid, which played a key part in raising present-day teenagers with such understandings of gender freedom.

Even though it has never really been addressed, meaning we don't know if the writers are trying to intentionally give the younger generation someone or something to look up to, I do believe this character was made for this purpose.

This show was first released alongside the rise of new and improved social media platforms. However, this unique and unusual children's TV series, as discussed in an article by Juliet Kelber, that contains



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these important topics, weren't yet spoken about online.

The show has aired a handful of 'Fionna and Cake' episodes, in which all the characters are gender-swapped. It shows them changing appearances and mannerisms to better fit stereotypes of the other gender.



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In a New Republic article, they speak on the lesbian relationship portrayed in this show stating: 'It has also developed a deeply nuanced, dynamic group of female characters—Princess Bubblegum, the ever-

sophisticated creator of the Candy Kingdom and scientific mastermind; Marceline the Vampire Queen, a punk rock half-demon and resident badass; and Susan Strong, a super-buff but gentle cyborg.'

By showing a strong female cast and characters as the show's leaders, young girls are taught that you can still be a strong and independent woman within a male heavy society.

Although it has never been confirmed by the show-writers themselves, both fans and the actors understand that there is a lesbian relationship between the two characters. This was unusual during the time that the series was released in, but it was, more importantly, released in a childhood show that was incredibly popular. It normalised same sex relationships to the generation by showing new and unique relationships.

The show itself has always been perceived as somewhat out of the ordinary for a children's show set in the 2010s. But these new concepts were just beginning to be coined around that time. Therefore, *Adventure Time* was the right fit for such developments in the representation of society for children. This, by presenting new age ideas so that children can learn about freedom of expression from a series that had the reputation of also being individual.

The series also creates space for men that use makeup to 'feel pretty'. Therefore, portraying healthy masculinity within a world where toxic men are in charge.

This can be linked all the way from contemporary appreciation for drag in 2023, feminine men wearing makeup, to the 1970s rockstar era, or to the new romantics where makeup was considered powerfully masculine.

An example being the rock band 'Kiss' who were idealised for, not only their music, but their unusual looks due to their heavy eyeliner. They broke down stereotypes but ultimately it can be seen as more of nuance than positive masculinity.

This theme was seen throughout a couple of different episodes, first within season 4 episode 17 and then again in season 5, episode 18, where Jake the Dog is shown putting on makeup instead of helping his friend Finn, as it is his way of making himself feel pretty.

This adopts more of a positive and healthy way for young boys to express themselves through makeup and to make them feel less anxious of adopting more feminine

stereotypes. Not only can we see the character actually applying the makeup, but also, how happy he is with it on. Overall breaking down the distinction of what is acceptable behaviour within gender identities.

This show uses its popularity to speak on ideas that were not normalised in children's shows during the time it came out. It links the view on individualism to each of the main characters as they go through struggles to find themselves whilst supporting the rest of the protagonists.



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