It is 1976 at exactly 7:30pm; you turn the dial on the TV set to CBS as you sit in front of your 18” television screen and you begin to hear the open music to *The Muppet Show*. You delight in watching the muppets come alive on the television screen. You have already watched *Sesame Street* earlier in the day but this, this is just icing on the cake as you watch, at night, your favorite characters. Every week for the next five years you watch your favorite stars from radio, television, and the big screen make guest star appearances and you enjoy every moment. As you grow up while watching *The Muppet Show*, you being to understand some of the satire that is presented on the screen as your level of comprehension begins to expand and mature. The characters on the screen begin to take a new shape, form, and level of depth as you begin to look at them as characters in the real world with their own unique quirks and personality.

This is how Jordan Schildcrout looked upon the characters in *The Muppet Show*; he believed he saw in them a little something of his self. In his article, “The Performance of Nonconformity on *The Muppet Show* – or, How Kermit Make Me Queer” he explains how, in his opinion, the characters on the screen did not appear to conform to the social standards and statuses of the day and began to see how the muppets pushed the boundaries of society, in that they included everyone without prejudice or bigotry. It was
through watching *The Muppet Show* that Schildcrout believes made is easier for him to come to terms with being gay.

Schildcrout begins detailing the evolution of Jim Henson from *The Jimmy Dean Show* up to the creation of *The Muppet Show*, and Henson’s desire to bring his creations, his muppets, to the world. It is in these first few pages of Schildcrout’s article we begin to view these muppets as more than just felt creations, but as living and breathing people or creatures. These muppets have their own unique story, history, personality and flaws, much like the viewers who tuned in each night to watch their antics. It is at this point in the article that Schildcrout begins to dissect *The Muppet Show* and the muppets themselves as he reveals what he believes are the race, gender, and sexuality overtones that are prevalent throughout the show’s series.

On the first issue of race, the various characters in *The Muppet Show*, according to Schildcrout, are predominately white and play up the various racial and ethical stereotypes such as Japanese Samurai or Italian Gangsters. Another distinction concerning race is the fact that the majority of the human guest stars that appeared on the show were also white. The fact that a majority of the characters are not human and exhibit many different colors is recognized by Schildcrout. However, he does not change his contention that the characters are white. According to Schildcrout the racial breakdown of the muppets are 90% “white” compared to the 10% that are considered minorities. As for myself, I do not agree with Schildcrout’s opinion that the muppets exhibit white culture, especially given that the puppeteers who operated the muppets were not all white. To assume a particular racial agenda, given that the majority of the
muppets themselves are animal, mineral, vegetable, etc., is a flawed notion and one in which I see no merit.

The second issue in Schildcrout’s article is gender and his contention that the majority of the characters is male or exhibit masculine stereotypes. Schildcrout points out that, in his opinion, roughly 99% of the muppets are “male”, while on the other hand 50% of celebrities that appeared on the show were female. Schildcrout uses these figures to point out that while almost all of the muppets are male, they book mainly female celebrities, which would conform to the masculine and gender concept that Schildcrout exerts in his article. While I agree there are only two actual female characters, Miss Piggy and Nurse Janice, the notion that a singing rock or a swaying palm tree is male by proxy is another flawed notion. Schildcrout does not explain what standard or definition he uses to determine the gender of the muppets. It is almost as if one should assume that if a muppet does not have a high pitched voice nor has, what one would assume to be breasts, then that character must be male.

The final issue in Schildcrout’s article has to do with sexuality in The Muppet Show and his contention that some of the characters exhibit what he considers to be homosexual behaviors or tendencies without being explicitly gay. The first muppet Schildcrout examines is Miss Piggy. While it may be accurate to say that she exhibits the stereotypical diva or drama queen persona, Schildcrout believes there is more lurking behind her haughty exterior. Schildcrout contents that Miss Piggy exhibits the same attitude and mannerism as does a drag queen, pointing out that; on the one hand, she has a sweet and cooing voice while trying to get what she wants, but resorts to a masculine baritone when demanding. Schildcrout also asserts that since the muppeteers who
preformed Miss Piggy’s actions were male this only confirms, in Schildcrout opinion, that Miss Piggy is a drag queen. Again, to assume that a woman who exhibits masculine tendencies is really a drag queen or because a muppet was being controlled by a different gender does not in any way serve as evidence for a muppet’s sexuality.

The next muppet that Schildcrout looks at is the Great Gonzo and the fact that his is the only character on the show that is truly different than the rest. Every muppet has a unique look or appearance to them, but you generally know what they appear to be such as animal, a piece of furniture, or something from nature. Gonzo, on the other hand, has no clear distinction and represents the vast “other” that is prevalent in society. According to Schildcrout, Gonzo is the show’s homosexual character in that he is the “other” and in many cases he is placed in situations in which a female lead or character would have been the “proper” or obvious choice. Schildcrout’s examples are skits in which Gonzo dances with other male characters or is featured in scenes with celebrities in which they sing with or to him romantic songs that would be generally sung to a female muppet. While I would agree that given Gonzo is a unique character and could very well be a symbol of the “other” in society, I do not agree with his contention that this or the examples he uses for his evidence makes Gonzo a gay muppet. Because a character is placed in a comedic role in which their gender is used as the shtick does not in any way suggest homosexual behavior. After all, by this same definition or standard Robin Williams and Nathan Layne must be gay given the roles they played in the Birdcage.

Jim Henson and his creations have delighted the world for over fifty years and during that time the muppets have educated and entertained viewers. To Jordan Schildcrout, the muppets and The Muppet Show did more than just entertain, they also
brought out that it was ok to be different and unique. For Schildcrout, *The Muppet Show* taught him it was ok for him to be gay; that in the world of *The Muppet Show*, everyone was accepted, no matter how society looked upon being different. While I may not agree with Schildcrout’s assertions that the muppets expressed any racial, gender, or sexual overtones in *The Muppet Show*, Schildcrout himself did see these issues while watching *The Muppet Show*, and if that helped him to come to terms with the various issues he faced in his life growing up, who am I to say that he is wrong? After all, we can find what we are looking for in *The Muppet Show* and perhaps that is the true genius of Jim Henson.