



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Not at all Frilly, Frothy, or Fluffy:
Constructions of Young Adult Femininities
in *My So-Called Life*“

Verfasserin

Julia Kalchhauser

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2008

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 343

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Betreuerin:

Ao. Univ.- Prof. Dr. Monika Seidl

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to utter my most hearty thanks to all my family who encouraged and supported me throughout my studies by assuring me that I am going the right way. These are and will be the most important people in my life and I hope they are aware of that.

Secondly, I want to say a big thank you to all the people who accompanied me through my years of study, people from within the university surroundings as well as from without. A person from within the university field to whom I am extremely grateful is Professor Monika Seidl, who I greatly respect for her charming way of making students believe in their own abilities.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to know Albert and Bill that without their help the creation of this thesis would have taken considerably longer. Thank you for not giving up on me!

Foreword

“The common-sense equation that women are women because they are women is in fact an empiricist illusion.” (Ang and Hermes, 1991:314)

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Method of Analysis.....	4
3. Feminisms.....	5
3.1. The movements' beginnings.....	5
3.2. Coexisting forms of feminism.....	7
3.2.1. Liberal Feminism.....	7
3.2.2. Radical Feminism.....	8
3.2.3. Socialist Feminism.....	8
3.3. Two opposing types of Feminism.....	9
3.3.1. Postfeminism.....	9
3.3.1.1. Men: Supporters of Postfeminism?.....	13
3.3.2. Third Wave Feminism.....	14
3.3.2.1. Victim Feminism vs. Power Feminism.....	16
4. Adolescent Girls – A Difficult Way Towards Womanhood.....	19
4.1. Psychological Phases of 'Cutting the Cord'.....	20
4.2. Generational Conflict within Families.....	21
5. Popular Culture.....	24
5.1. Americanization through Popular Culture.....	25
5.2. Feminisms and Popular Culture.....	27
5.2.1. Postfeminism in Popular Culture.....	31
5.2.1.1. The 'girl-phenomenon'.....	32
5.2.2. Third Wave Feminism in Popular Culture.....	35
5.2.3. Gender, Identity and Gender Identity in Popular Culture.....	36
5.2.3.1. Traditional/Mainstream Femininity vs. Alternative Femininity.....	40
5.3. Television	40
5.3.1. Women's Genres.....	42
5.3.2. US - American TV-Series.....	44
5.4. Representations/Constructions of Femininities on TV.....	45
6. Analysis.....	48
6.1. Object of Analysis: Teen Series.....	48
6.1.1. My So-Called Life.....	48
6.1.1.1. Why the Series did not succeed.....	48
6.1.1.2. Main Characters and Setting.....	49
6.2. Close Textual Analysis of My So-Called Life.....	51
6.2.1. Angela's Quest for Identity	51
6.2.1.1. Spoken language.....	51
6.2.1.2. Angela's Voiceover	67
6.2.1.3. Analysis on a Visual Level.....	81
6.2.1.3.1. Body Language.....	81

6.2.1.3.2. Costumes/Styles.....	82
6.3.2. Generational Conflict.....	94
6.3.2.1. Mother – Daughter – Relationship	98
6.3.2.1.1. Spoken language.....	99
6.3.2.1.2. Angela's Voice-Over.....	103
6.3.2.1.3. Non-verbal language	105
6.3.2.2. Father – Daughter – Relationship	110
6.3.2.2.1. Spoken Language.....	111
6.3.2.2.2. Angela's Voice-Over.....	112
6.3.2.2.3. Non-Verbal Language.....	115
7. Conclusion.....	118
8. Bibliography.....	121
8.1. Primary Source (+ Source of all Screenshots).....	121
8.2. Secondary Sources.....	121
8.3. Works Not Available.....	125
8.4. Further Reading.....	127
9. Appendix.....	130
9.1. Listing of Screenshots.....	130
9.2. Episode Guide.....	131

1. Introduction

Different images of modern femininities are made omnipresent through the media. One could argue about whether these images influence the way women construct and re-construct their own ideas of femininity or if it works the other way around or even in both directions

While feminist activists were rather present in the public in the decades that count as revolutionary in many diverse ways, one could nowadays sometimes even be misled into thinking that women do not need feminist activism anymore since they have already achieved everything the early movements worked for. That this assumption does not match reality becomes clear if one takes a closer look beyond the surface of a society in which women and men might appear to be equally treated.

In this thesis I will try to point out the difficulties women have due to certain disadvantages regarding the professional life as well as the personal by presenting current views held in feminist movements and their goals. Furthermore I will show how femininities are constructed in a television drama from the 1990s, a time that was rather turbulent considering the relationship between media and feminisms. My aim is to find out how far previous feminist activism affects identity development and the depiction of femininity of the character of a fifteen year old girl.

Since mass media such as television are the main source for my analysis in the practical part, I will shortly introduce the reader to what I consider important about popular culture in general, and about US-American television in particular after having briefly outlined two conflicting feminist movements and their points of argument.

The role mass media play in modern societies has been increasing considerably. In times when media devices such as television or the internet seem to count among the most important sources of information, it makes sense to question the images conveyed through such media. Or as Fenton (109) asserts: "Society has become subsumed within the mass media. It is no longer a question of the media distorting reality; rather the media has become reality [...]". These media-constructed images could be interrogated from very different sides depending on where the main interest of the researcher lies.

Nowadays people are almost constantly exposed to mass media or popular culture products, be it through commercials on screens while waiting for the subway or by being exposed to bad music on someone's mobile phone on the bus. This often involuntary exposure to various kinds of media is nicely summed up by Ang and Hermes (322) arguing that “since people living in (post) modern societies are surrounded by an ever-present and ever-evolving media-environment, they are always-already audiences of an abundance of media provisions, by choice or by force”. Since I am a woman myself living in a modern twenty first century society, I am almost constantly exposed to mass media products, most of which have their origin in the United States of America. Taking this into consideration, I found it justified to take a closer look at how exactly women are portrayed in popular culture and, specifically, in television drama. To use Johnson's words, it is crucial that we “recognize that pop culture is a ubiquitous part of our lives” and therefore has to be “address[ed]” and that a “reading practice that attends to its contradictions in content, in its role in our lives, and in its attitudes towards feminism” (Johnson, 20) needs to be developed.

Another main focus of my analysis will be to detect factors responsible for identity construction in adolescent girls. Identity is very much determined by gender. The connection between media, gender and identity becomes obvious when one thinks about how the media convey images of gender roles. These images, or ideas, being a great part of most people's everyday lives, most probably affect constructions of identities, or to agree with David Gauntlett (1), “it is highly unlikely that these ideas would have no impact on our own sense of identity”.

I considered content analysis as the method for analyzing my chosen TV-series, but concluded that it would most likely not be the best approach for answering my study questions concerning how women, and gender in general, are represented in 1990s teen drama series. What is basically understood as content analysis in feminist studies is the comparison of representations of men and women in particularly gendered roles. The outcome would be a mere listing of instances but, according to Dominic Strinati (193), it would lack any sort of explanation “about how and why representations occur in the ways they do”. Other questions that are equally important to be answered are:

[...] where do cultural representations come from?; how do the different types of representation to be found in various media fit together?; and how and why do representations change over time? (Strinati, 195)

Lotz (11) agrees by arguing that content analysis, being a quantitative measure, would certainly be “ill-suited for determining what meaning audiences make or what such character categorizations might mean to viewers”, which is what I am interested in.

In the practical part of this thesis I will try to answer questions such as the ones stated above as sufficiently as possible.

2. Method of Analysis

As a method for my analysis I have chosen a close textual analysis of the narrative, which will be divided into three parts. The word 'textual' should not mislead to a presupposition that analysis will only take place on the level of the script, but it should be kept in mind that the whole series is regarded as constituting a media text. Therefore, the word "text" gains meaning by including not only the spoken part of the episodes but also every other little details that are possible in television that together make up the whole media text. Or, as Bignell (86) puts it, a text is "an object such as a television programme, [...], considered as a work of meaningful signs that can be analyzed and interpreted".

One part of analysis will concentrate solely on the spoken part, the dialogues that make up the greatest part of the script. Therefore, scenes will be selected which could be significant for detecting gender identity construction through the way Angela speaks, or what she speaks about to whom in which circumstances.

Another part of analysis focuses on another verbal aspect: the narrating voice-over by the main character Angela. The main questions that will lead this part of analysis will be the one about the significance of which character traits might be supposedly regarded as being typically feminine.

The third and last point of analysis will deal with the nonverbal aspects of the narrative, ranging from important use of camera positioning and/or movement to choice of costumes and style of female characters to instances of nonverbal behavior such as gestures and facial expressions of the main characters.

The main points of focus of all three parts of analysis will be, first, the way femininities are constructed and/or represented to the viewer and in how far these can be linked to either one of the feminist theories introduced in the first sections, and, second, the difficulties a young girl experiences in constructing a suitable identity while fighting all the problems that typically occur in adolescence, and, third, how these difficulties are connected to great conflict between generations within the family.

3. Feminisms

3.1. The movements' beginnings

If the demand from feminism had to be limited to one head note, it would most probably be “equality of opportunity” (Coppock et al., 9). But, of course, it is not as simple as that, since equality was, and still is, demanded on different levels of society. As will be outlined in this short overview, the equality that is asked for ranges from fields of private and domestic matters to educational opportunities, as well as from personal to public and political opportunities.

First wave feminism refers to the women's movement that started as early as the late eighteenth century with representatives such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who complained

that enforced self-indulgence and restricted physical activity damaged the health of middle-class women, while dependency, over-protection and isolation curtailed their personal liberty and limited their powers of reasoning. (Coppock et al., 9)

Many women were not satisfied with being expected to care for the well being of the family and therefore wanted to be given an opportunity to prove that they were good for more than just motherhood and marriage.

The suffrage movement was called into existence and fought both actively and publicly for women's right to vote. The movement succeeded as the Representation of the People Act and following feminist campaigns “gained the vote on equal terms with men” (Coppock et al., 10) in 1928. The illusion that the right to vote would change women's lives for the better soon disappeared and women started to turn to other political campaigns in order “to challenge patriarchy and capitalism” (Coppock et al., 11). These politically active women were made fun of in the public media as abnormal and hysterical man-haters.¹

After the Second World War, the social policy of Britain once more emphasized women's traditional roles such as “homemaker and childrearer” (Coppock et al., 12). Due to an increase in patriotic voices and the need for economic enhancement, many

¹ See Coppock et al, 11.

feminist movements were repelled and it seemed necessary to rely on cheap and “virtually unprotected women's labor” (Coppock et al., 12). Though they were paid for the work, their tasks were nothing more than the work they had to do in their homes, which ultimately led to a new dissatisfaction amongst middle-class women.

In the 1960s, an image of the ideal woman and wife was made more and more public through the increasing usage of media of different sorts. Betty Friedan was one of the first women who, in her work from 1963, voiced complaint about “the limitations placed on women by patriarchal ideologies, gender stereotyping and shared assumptions about 'femininity'” (Coppock et al., 12). Even though education was still seen as the main solution, there were women, mainly housewives, with very different backgrounds of education who shared the thoughts expressed by Friedan. What followed were women of the second wave fighting for equal rights and wage equity while terms such as “gender” and “sexism” worked as key categories” (Heywood and Drake, 23). Again the fighting led to success, as three important acts that guaranteed women more opportunities and personal freedom were established in Britain between 1967 and 1975.²

Though Heywood and Drake (23) mention that second wave feminists “often worked in black, gay, and New Left movements,” one reason for the need of a new movement is the often mentioned absence of minority voices within the second wave. Particularly African American women often felt left out, which might be one reason for a high percentage of African American women among third wave activists.

The third wave “continue[s] [the above mentioned] struggles” (Heywood and Drake, 23), but since the world has changed within those thirty years that lie between the founding of the two waves, it is only natural that the issues have changed as well.

For a further division among different contemporary forms of feminism on a more political level see the next subchapter in which I am going to briefly explain the differences between what are called liberal, radical and socialist feminism.

² See Coppock et al, 13. The Abortion Act 1967, the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

3.2. Coexisting forms of feminism

Experts distinguish between three types of feminism, all practiced simultaneously. The focus of the active feminists is what differentiates the liberal feminism from radical and from socialist feminism. Each of these three types implicate “different ideologies” (Van Zoonen, 35) whereby the above given terms arose. In the following subchapters I will briefly outline how and why these forms are different by referring to Van Zoonen's classification.

3.2.1. Liberal Feminism

Activists who count themselves among liberal feminists usually advocate that “general liberal principles of liberty and equality” (Van Zoonen, 35) should be possible for women as well. “Sex role stereotypes, prescriptions of sex-appropriate behaviour, appearance, interests, skills and self-perceptions are at the core of liberal feminist media analyses” (Van Zoonen, 35). As far as the media are concerned, liberal feminists see them as “socialization agents” (Van Zoonen, 35) who repeatedly teach children which sex roles are appropriate and “symbolically reward them for appropriate behaviour” (Van Zoonen, 35). Liberal feminism argues for the equation of women and men via allowing women to hold equal positions in society and the workplace, resulting in a more balanced distribution of power. Van Zoonen (36) considers this aspired “role reversal” as problematic since it “create[s] a new stereotype of ‘Superwoman’,” which was not a realistic option for women. Another negative consequence of the partly-achieved equality in the workforce is the general decrease of value in certain fields in which women are now more strongly represented. As an example, Van Zoonen mentions journalism in the United States, where women are becoming more and more a majority in top positions, leading to a “decline in salaries and status for the field” (Creedon, quoted in Van Zoonen, 36). Needless to say, this is not what liberal feminists wanted when they worked hard for equality.

Regarding the matter of gender identity construction, which is of great importance for this thesis, liberal feminism considers the two canons (the feminine and the masculine) as normalities which simply have to be learned to be accepted, while radical feminism, on the other hand, is convinced of “the essential nature of these differences” (Van Zoonen, 39) and any transgression or abnormality are considered exceptions.

3.2.2. Radical Feminism

Activists from what is called radical feminism generally see patriarchy as the reason for women's oppression and their low position in societies. The abuse of women by men is one of the main concerns of radical feminism, which transformed previously private topics to highly discussed political ones; topics such as “sexual violence, wife battering, incest, pornography, and more recently, sex tourism and trafficking in women” (Van Zoonen, 36). Radical feminists see an improvement only if women create their own “new and legitimate spaces for the feminine voice” (Van Zoonen, 38). This strategy worked quite well in a field such as women's writing but failed in other fields of the media, such as film.

According to Van Zoonen (36), in a radical feminist future “men can have no place,” which makes the whole aim quite unrealistic and unattractive to a broad range.

3.2.3. Socialist Feminism

Women active for socialist feminism try not to focus on only one aspect of women's position and instead try to connect diverse reasons in order to account for women's oppression. Thus, “socialist feminism does not focus exclusively on gender [...] but attempts to incorporate an analysis of class and economic conditions of women as well” (Van Zoonen, 38). In connection to the media it is “the way in which ideologies of femininity are constructed” which is a main concern to socialist feminists. Part of their solution is shared with liberal and radical feminism's ideas: the plea for reforming “mainstream media as well as [for] producing separate feminist media” (Van Zoonen, 39). What sets socialist feminism apart from the former two is “an awareness of the middle class bias of that strategy, [...] and the acknowledgment that at the same time structural changes in the organization of media labour are necessary” (Van Zoonen, 39).³

To sum up this subchapter, I would like to draw specific attention to gender identity construction in the media and to how this is viewed differently by the three different divisions in feminism.

Liberal and radical feminists do not agree when it comes to the social value of femininity. While the former spurs women on to achieve a certain sameness in order to

³ For information on liberal, radical and socialist feminism see Van Zoonen, 35-39.

become equal, the latter wants women to be proud of being different than men and to fight for a “social revaluation of femininity” (Van Zoonen, 40). For Van Zoonen the importance of gender construction in the media lies somewhere else:

The issue then, is no longer how to promote a certain type of femininity as in radical feminism, or how to dismiss femininity and masculinity altogether as in liberal feminism, but rather to analyze how and why particular constructions of masculinity and femininity arise in historical contexts, how and why certain constructions gain dominance over others and how dominant constructions relate to the lived realities of women and men. (Van Zoonen, 41)

When it comes to defining the importance of media, liberal, radical, and socialist feminists agree that “media are [...] the main instruments in conveying respectively stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women and femininity” (Van Zoonen, 41). Each of the three forms of feminism contends instead the remittance of women's real lives. The media deliberately does not reflect certain aspects of women's lives out of fear of unpopular decisions. But these unpopular aspects are a greater part of women's lives than some unrealistic images ever will be.

3.3. Two opposing types of Feminism

3.3.1. Postfeminism

The term postfeminism has its source in the media, where it came into usage in the early 1980s. Many critics and cultural studies experts can not agree upon an exact definition of the term. The question whether it merely represents a phenomenon initiated by the media or “a valid movement” (Gamble, 43) will most probably remain unanswered. Writers, as well as feminist theorists, often find themselves involved in debates about the problem of finding a suitable definition for the term. What is widely agreed upon is that, in general, “postfeminist debate tends to crystallize around issues of victimization, autonomy and responsibility” (Gamble, 43).

Postfeminist writers, though they would probably never put that label upon them and their work themselves, do not want women to be regarded as victims who are not in control of their lives, but rather they prefer a liberal lifestyle which includes men and does not have what they would call the negative stigma or "the ideological shackles of a hopelessly outdated feminist movement" (Gamble, 44, referring to the second wave). Opponents of this phenomenon, such as writer Tania Modleski, claim that postfeminism is a backlash to the goals previous feminist movements have achieved, that it takes women back to a "prefeminist world" (Modleski quoted in Gamble, 44). This argument, though, is overstated, since what women identified with postfeminism argue for is not the general state of women before the first or the second wave, but rather a loosening of some of the movements' principles. Katie Roiphe, for instance, claims that the second wave created an image of women as passive, innocent, and delicate creatures, victims of rape or sexual harassment. She attacks the second wave, accusing it of having brought back an image which was already what women in the 1950s tried to discard.⁴

Another point of critique by postfeminists is their claim that the feminist movement, as it existed in the late 70s and early 80s, had come to a dead end. Women of younger generations felt alienated by the constant representation of women as victims and, according to Rene Denfeld, the whole movement steered towards "complete irrelevance" (Denfeld quoted in Gamble, 47).

Taking into account all of the critiques of the postfeminist phenomenon and its claim that feminism had already achieved most of its goals, it seems rather ironic

that the proclamation of 'post-feminism' has occurred at precisely the same moment as acclaimed feminist studies demonstrate that not only have women's real advancements been limited, but also that there has been a backlash against feminism of international significance. (Coppock et al., 3)

These words by Coppock et al. show how widespread the phenomenon of postfeminism has become, that it is not just a small or nationally limited phenomenon that will one day disappear by itself.

Another popular figure of postfeminism besides Rene Denfeld and Katie Roiphe is Naomi Wolf, who agrees with Susan Faludi that the postfeminist phenomenon was a consequence of men defending their masculinity against radical feminist activism. Wolf

⁴ Compare Gamble, 46.

furthermore states that the negative image of the feminist movement in the popular media was its own fault. According to her, “feminism [...] has been disastrously redefined in the popular imagination as a massive “No” to everything outside a narrow set of endorsements” (Wolf quoted in Gamble, 49). In her book *Fire with Fire*, Wolf argues that the power that the feminist movement fought for was there all along and all it needed was to be taken by the women. Gamble doubts that this would have been as easy for women who did not belong to the white middle-class. Women who “are black, or poor, or subject to an oppressive political, military or religious regime” (Gamble, 49) would most possibly never have the opportunity to join that 'power-taking' educated elite. At this point one could easily argue that postfeminist writers contradict each other repeatedly. Thus, the limited accessibility of the second wave was highly criticized by Denfeld, who feels that academic members of the feminist movement were responsible for its frequent use and need of academic theory, which Wolf confirms by referring to the movement's language as an “exclusive and elaborated professional jargon” (Wolf quoted in Gamble, 51).

Germaine Greer, an important figure of the second wave, also wrote a book as a reaction against postfeminism, siding rather with the third wave movement. In her book *The Whole Woman* (1999), she accuses postfeminism of being highly superficial:

Its assurance to women that they can 'have it all' – a career, motherhood, beauty, and a great sex life – actually only resituates them as consumers of pills, paint, potions, cosmetic surgery, fashion, and convenience foods. (Greer quoted in Gamble, 51)

Greer also points out that postfeminism is very much aimed at the individual improvement of particular women and thereby it neglects the well-being of other women at the same time. She promotes the thought of a wider range, since “the exercising of one person's freedom may be directly linked to another's oppression” (Greer quoted in Gamble, 51). Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2) seem to share this opinion as they state that “postfeminism is [...] antithetical to [...] an open society” and they even go as far as to accuse postfeminists of “confusing self-interest with individuality”.

According to opponents of the postfeminist phenomenon, it is not a movement because, on the one hand, it never had political ambitions and, on the other hand, it is not capable

of staying in motion; being a media-originated phenomenon, it is unable to find its way out of the blind alley it is stuck in.⁵

It might be true that the popular form of postfeminism is more widely accessible than other feminist movements since it renounces theoretical language and is presented in media of all kinds. Nevertheless, it cannot be a real solution to “take one's own privileged position as representative” (Gamble, 53) and thereby come to the conclusion that feminist movements such as the third wave are no longer needed.

The new image of women as 'superwomen who could easily combine motherhood, an extraordinary career, a happy family life, and, above all, maintain a physical beauty and attractiveness through the help of new cosmetic and medical technologies was displayed in all kinds of media as normal or average since the late 1980s. This put women under an immense pressure as they tried to live up to that ideal, having been informed that it was the norm. But this was not the only reason why so many women were still unhappy without really knowing why.

Those women who thought that the previous feminist movements achieved equal opportunities for men and women when it comes to rearing a child without sacrificing a career were then disappointed because plans did not work out the way they were supposed to. These women were easily attracted to the advantages of postfeminism, which conveyed that it was perfectly okay for women to just be loving mothers and wives. Geneva Overholser divides those women into two groups: “those who tried to combine work and domesticity but feel that both love and their families have suffered 'because they set too high a priority on self-satisfaction'” and those who followed “the career path 'only to discover that work wasn't so great after all'” (Overholser quoted in Coppock et al., 5). Coppock et al. (5) remark that this was no surprise since not even 'superwoman could do all the work required when running a household and a family, in addition to the demands of the workplace.

Tasker and Negra conclude the very core of the problem they have with postfeminism as follows:

Feminist critique fundamentally emphasizes the operations of power, whether economic, social, ideological, or representational. Postfeminist

⁵ Cf. Gamble, 52-53.

culture, with its enhanced but particularized female visibility, in no way invalidates this task. (Tasker and Negra, 16)

In her chapter on women's liberation, Greer lists several errors in the economic and social systems of our society. According to her, “childcare should be seen as a career option” (Greer, 322), whether this refers to biological mothers or to persons from outside the family who wish to do that as a profession. As far as the phenomenon of postfeminism is concerned, Greer points out that

A 'new feminism' that celebrates the right (i.e. duty) to be pretty in an array of floaty dresses and little suits put together for starvation wages by adolescent girls in Asian sweat-shops is no feminism at all. (Greer, 320-321)

3.3.1.1. Men: Supporters of Postfeminism?

Another group of people who willingly welcomed postfeminism were men. After almost a century of active feminist movements, men felt like they had to suffer for women to feel better. Coppock et al. (6) state that many men not only felt that feminism had turned them into “second-class citizens” but also that they had been “emasculat[ed] by the hands of [totalitarian] feminism”. Through the inauguration of 'special advantages' for women such as the International Women's Day or special discounts, for instance, on entrance fees to nightclubs, or specially reserved parking lots at shopping malls or parking garages, men soon felt neglected.

In her book *The Whole Woman*, Germaine Greer argues that so-called triumphs of previous feminist movements, such as the Sex Discrimination Act, were even used against women in certain cases:

If you want one level of a carpark to be for women only, you have to say so clearly and obviously, and crash down comes the act. This is anything but an unintended consequence. It is obvious from the wording, that all parts of the act applying to sex discrimination against women 'are to be read as applying equally to the treatment of men', that the act was designed to be a protection against any pressure for reverse discrimination. (Greer, 301)

Some men even started to utter doubt about “the validity of feminist claims regarding the nature and extent of rape and domestic violence” (Coppock et al., 6) which resulted in the argumentation of women writers, such as Faludi, saying that neither is feminism

“passé”, nor has it “failed” but that it will have to go much further. Opponents of postfeminism feel that postfeminist women have joined men in that “undeclared war against women”⁶ (Coppock et al., 6).

Coppock et al. (7) claim that it was a deep “frustration or disillusionment” that had led to a “collective resistance” against feminism, which then constructed postfeminism. From then on feminists were not only not thanked for what they had achieved so far but they were even accused of being the reason for the many problems women were facing recently.⁷

3.3.2. *Third Wave Feminism*

This currently much discussed movement was founded in 1992 by Rebecca Walker, daughter of the well-known feminist Alice Walker. She published an article in an American feminist magazine as a reaction to a very public case of sexual harassment in the workplace. In her article, she clearly states that she does not define herself as a postfeminist but that she is the third wave.

She then founded the non-profit organization Third Wave Foundation which aims at spurring on young women to participate in feminist activism. In their work *Third Wave Agenda*, Heywood and Drake quote the foundation's mission statement in which it describes itself as a “multiracial, multicultural, multisexuality [...] organization devoted to feminist and youth activism for change” (Heywood and Drake, 7).

Third wave feminism is a term which obviously refers to its predecessor the second wave in the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century. Writers claiming to be representatives of the third wave regard it as very important not to be mistaken for postfeminists. The third wave emerged as a reaction against the media-centered phase that was called postfeminism in the early 1990s. Ever since the term 'third wave was coined, there has existed an ongoing critique by opposing critics who blame the third wave of being simply a renewal of the second wave, thus having no specific goals exclusively entitled to this movement.

⁶ This is also the title of Susan Faludi's book, 1991.

⁷ See Coppock et al., 8.

In their foreword to *Third Wave Feminism and Television*, Hammer and Kellner note that the term “describe[s] contemporary versions of feminisms” while it is still “highly contested and has been employed to describe a number of diverse feminist and anti-feminist theories and practices” (Johnson, ix).

In their collection of essays, Heywood and Drake try to clarify the goals of the third wave, which will be illustrated on the following three pages of this thesis, and exemplify why this movement is different from the second wave and therefore cannot just be called a reenactment of the former. The authors exemplify how omnipresent issues of feminism are in women's everyday lives and why they themselves find it very important to draw a distinct line between the second and the third wave.

Third wave feminists see this 'new' wave as building on certain issues that were already important for the second wave but, in contrast to previous waves, focusing now more on difference. Whereas the second wave predominantly concentrated on the improvement of white, middle-aged, middle-class women, the third wave focuses on “the multiple, constant shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity” (Heywood and Drake, 3). The authors argue that they themselves grew up with the second wave and that the third wave constitutes a handover of feminist values to the younger generation, which has to adapt in order to compete with contemporary cultures.⁸

Third wave feminists feel at ease with contradiction since they

seek and find [...] languages and images that account for multiplicity and difference, that negotiate contradiction in affirmative ways, and that give voice to a politics of hybridity and coalition. (Heywood and Drake, 9)

In order to further stress that the third wave movement is not strictly accessible to a certain group of women but to a far wider range of people, the editors of *Third Wave Agenda* quote Gloria Anzaldúa, who states in her foreword to *This Bridge Called My Back* that

[W]e have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we-white black straight queer female male – are connected and interdependent. (Anzaldúa, quoted in Heywood and Drake, 13)

⁸ Compare Heywood and Drake, 1-3.

Representatives of the third wave, especially in the 1990s, are very eager to distance themselves and their work from postfeminism. Sometimes the two terms postfeminism and third wave are used for the same movement, which is a grave error according to those who define themselves as third wave since what they regard as postfeminism is “a backlash culture” (Heywood and Drake, 15) to what the second wave had already achieved thirty years earlier. According to third wave feminists, what they regard as postfeminism is “fundamentally conservative and reductive in its thought” (Gamble, 52).

That third wave feminism stresses difference is also the main topic of Siegel's article in Heywood and Drake, where she constantly reminds the reader of the fact that what holds true for one individual might not be valid for another. She mentions Steinem, a famous writer in the second wave who said that “words and consciousness have forged ahead so that reality can follow” (Steinem quoted in Siegel, 60) and Siegel points out that those active in the third wave have to ask repeatedly “Whose consciousness? and Which reality?” (60) since the universal pronoun 'we' used by so many writers is always difficult to define. Siegel (61) warns other writers such as Wolf, Roiphe, and Denfeld to use a generalized 'we' “because feminism speaks to itself differently at different times and in different locations”. Nevertheless, Siegel (62) admits that if there has to be one collective term that defines 'we' it must be the “group called “women” ”.⁹

3.3.2.1. Victim Feminism vs. Power Feminism

As mentioned above, the third wave is a movement that is not restricted to the white, middle-class, heterosexual, female founders to which the word 'feminist' is often linked. Therefore some feminists who had problems with the term preferred to call themselves womanist instead. Another reason for the rejection of the term 'feminist' by a younger generation is the negative connotation that Siegel (63) calls “the radical-lesbian-man-hating-militant stigma”.

Moreover, Siegel claims that many young activists avoid the “f-word” because they do not want to be regarded as victims simply by virtue of being women. Heywood and Drake (2) complain that some conservative postfeminist critics link the so-called “victim feminism” to the second wave and the “power feminism” to the third wave. But

⁹ Cf. Siegel, 57-62.

as Heywood and Drake (3) point out, these two “waves of feminism are neither incompatible nor opposed,” rather the third wave continues where the second wave had its boundaries by always acknowledging that contradiction does not necessarily have to be a bad thing. Contradiction then only affirms the various aims of women who live in different situations and different cultures.

An important figure in contemporary feminist theory is Naomi Wolf who is, among others, quoted by Siegel:

[...] “victim feminism” [...] casts women as sexually pure and mystically nurturing, and stresses the evil done to these “good” women as a way to petition for their rights. The other, [...] “power feminism”, sees women as human beings – sexual, individual, no better or worse than their male counterparts – and lays claim to equality simply because women are entitled to it. (Wolf, quoted in Siegel, 68)

The problem with new labels such as “victim feminism” and “power feminism” is that, according to Siegel, the author creates a picture that she actually argues against, “an image of an atomistic difference-feminism” (Siegel, 68). Siegel suggests that Wolf did not consult the work of feminist theorists who are especially known for their work on the resistance to the “victim mythology” on the one hand or, for example, African American historians on the other hand. This lack of research Siegel (69) can only account for by her assumption that Wolf and her fellow colleagues want to “differentiate their work from a demonized straw woman named feminist theory”.

What is important for the progress of the third wave is the motion from one decade into the next, which, according to Siegel, is only possible with the theory that constantly “strives to reimagine the differences that exist between us” (74). This is another point of complaint about postfeminism made by third wave representatives. They are of the opinion that “postfeminist” does not describe a movement but often merely a moment that is “no longer moving” (Siegel, 75) and therefore can not be the best attempt to improve women's situations throughout a period of time.¹⁰

In order to conclude this chapter it can be said that without doubt women are given more rights and opportunities than decades ago and therefore it might seem appropriate

¹⁰ See Siegel, 68 ff.

in some fields to declare that the two sexes are treated equally. Nevertheless, what has to be remembered at the same time is the fact that, when it comes to the professional level, women are far from being equal to men, since “the principal jobs in business and organizations are no doubt protected by a 'culture of men' at the top” (Gauntlett, 5) which has great impact on women's lives.

4. Adolescent Girls – A Difficult Way Towards Womanhood

When girls become teenagers they often enter a difficult phase in their own and their parents' lives. Yet they are still dependent on the protection and care of their parents, especially their mothers, but at the same time they start longing for independence and an ability to take more things in their own hands. On the one hand they do not want to be regarded as children anymore, while on the other hand they are also not completely confident with being called a woman. Eliacheff and Heinich therefore argue that adolescent girls find themselves in a cleavage being both attracted and rejected by the thought of crossing the line from childhood to the status of being a woman.¹¹

¹¹ Cf. Eliacheff and Heinich, 201.

4.1. Psychological Phases of 'Cutting the Cord'

The different phases that adolescents, no matter if male or female, have to go through on their way towards a self-determined and consolidated adult are divided into five tasks by Ava L. Siegler, who defines these five developmental tasks as essential steps from childhood to adulthood, and therefore argues that most adolescents run through them. The first of these tasks is the separation from old ties, which can be old friendships but also the separation from the limited view of one's parents as parents only, and the initiation of regarding one's parents "as real people with both strengths and weaknesses" (Siegler, 16). The second task is the creation of new attachments which usually are formed with peers of the adolescent's own generation. Third comes the establishment of a mature sexual identity and sexual life whereby the teenager senses him/herself "as a sexual being and [...] begins to pursue love for the first time" (Siegler, 17). The fourth task is the formulation of new ideas and ideals whereby the adolescent starts developing his/her own opinions and often starts questioning his parents' values and norms which have been the standard before. The fifth and last task is the "consolidating character," which only means that after the person has gone through the former four tasks he/she has matured a great deal and learned so much that in consequence he/she "will be able to function as a capable and productive adult" (Siegler, 17). These five tasks delineated by Siegler are common rites of passage in developmental psychology. In the textual analysis of *My So-Called Life* which follows in the practical part of this thesis, all of these five tasks will be detectable in the protagonist's character, Angela Chase. That character was immensely popular among teenage girls who could easily identify with "the apparent process of intense self-creation and experimentation" and who also experience difficulties "as they struggle with ambivalence toward their encroaching womanhood" (Murray, 36).

Fend's study about self-reflexion and self-assertiveness in adolescents leads to the conclusion that the latter of the two is much more distinct in girls than in boys, which makes it easier to understand why this is such a difficult and irksome phase for girls. Fend concludes that the biological changes in that time give reason to try to generate a new picture of oneself. Through this new definition of one's self the whole surrounding social network often changes as well, which means that not even the natural closeness to the parents has to be re-shaped but also that the relationships to people of the same age receive a new status. The evaluation of one's own person is therefore constituted by a

new evaluation and importance put on their own attractiveness and re-positioning in a newly formed network of peers.¹²

At this point I would like to introduce the term “subjectivity” and define how I will use it furthermore. I refer to Samantha Holland (26), who in turn refers to McRobbie, by making clear that there is a difference between subjectivity and identity, even though they “overlap and affect each other”.

Subjectivity includes our 'sense of self', our innermost feelings and sense of who, and what, we are. Identity is the persona we adopt in response to our subjectivity when we are in a social context. (Holland, 26)

To what degree this subjectivity can be discursively constructed by a person or influenced by our own action is still something that feminist studies try to find out.¹³

In her article on adolescent subjectivity Susan Murray refers to Jackie Stacey, who claims that it is extremely important for adolescent girls to have an ideal which, on the one hand, they realize is different from themselves, yet they also need to be able to identify, since

identification is an exceedingly apt act for teenage girls who are in the midst of creating their own sense of self in relation to the shifting expectations of adolescence, both in terms of their previous identity as 'girl' and their future identity as 'woman'. (Murray, 43)

To conclude this sub-chapter I refer once again to Grotevant and Cooper (31), who make a quite general statement by pithily pointing out that it is “the barriers and bridges across family, peer, school, and other social worlds that must be navigated and negotiated” which make adolescence such a troublesome period of life, not only for the teenagers but also for their environment.

4. 2. Generational Conflict within Families

Usually the relationship between a woman and her little daughter is a very close and special one. Even in contemporary societies, where more and more fathers theoretically are given the opportunity to stay at home with the children while the mother continues working, these cases seem to be rare exceptions. Therefore it is only natural for the

¹² See Fend, 112-113.

¹³ Cf. Holland, 30.

mother to have a more intimate relationship with her daughter due to the time they spend together every day in the first, very important, years of childhood. And the closer such a relationship is, the greater are the grounds for conflict when the girl reaches an age where she has to detach herself from her mother in many different respects in order to start developing an independent self. In the past lies the familiar togetherness and the protection of the family, while ahead lies the great unknown, where new and interesting relationships are opening up. The girl has to cut off too close ties in order to move forward in her development and her own life on a different level of her own generation.¹⁴

Usually the relationship between a woman and her little daughter is a very close and special one. Even in contemporary societies, where more and more fathers theoretically are given the opportunity to stay at home with the children while the mother continues working, these cases seem to be rare exceptions. Therefore it is only natural for the mother to have a more intimate relationship with her daughter due to the time they spend together every day in the first, very important, years of childhood. And the closer such a relationship is, the greater are the grounds for conflict when the girl reaches an age where she has to detach herself from her mother in many different respects in order to start developing an independent self. In the past lies the familiar togetherness and the protection of the family, while ahead lies the great unknown, where new and interesting relationships are opening up. The girl has to cut off too close ties in order to move forward in her development and her own life on a different level of her own generation.¹⁵

Many of the conflicts between adolescents and their parents arise due to the insecurities the teenager experiences on her way of finding or defining and re-shaping her own identity. Identification “is a complex process that crosses both gender and generational lines” (Siegler, 56) which involves constant shaping and re-shaping of one's personality and character. Adolescents “review and revise” their “identifications and disidentifications of childhood” (Siegler, 57), which can happen either consciously or unconsciously. During this process parents' personalities will be critically analyzed by teenagers in order to decide for themselves if and how much of these personality traits they want to take over from their parents. Formerly idealized parent figures might

¹⁴ See Eliacheff and Heinich, 31-32.

¹⁵ See Eliacheff and Heinich, 31-32.

become de-idealized by their teenage children, which is a painful process for the parents but necessary for the adolescent's independence.¹⁶

That the adolescence of a family member provides prolific grounds for conflicts within the family is a matter of fact. But to think that a family with less conflict is proof of parents with better education strategies would be a mistake. Studies have shown that adolescent girls even profit from a certain amount of conflict. As Von der Lippe (38) points out, “a positive relationship between personality development and interpersonal conflict in girls has been noted”. The profit the adolescent receives from conflicts depends on the conflicts' “magnitude, their resolution, and particularly on the emotional context in which they are resolved” (Von der Lippe, 39).

Grotevant and Cooper conducted studies on family communication and linkage between interaction of parents and children and adolescents and their peers. They observed that gender differences were visible in “different patterns of parent-adolescent interaction” and they supposed that perhaps some parents intentionally challenged their daughters in order to “counteract the traditional feminine gender role pressures for them to express nurturance and connection but not assertiveness or conflict” (Grotevant and Cooper, 9). Although quite a few specific studies about adolescent-parent conflict have been carried out, there is still a wide field of unexplored psychological issues. Anna Louise Von der Lippe notices that

Questions of the trajectories of female personality development, the salience of the mother-daughter dyad and the family's functioning as a complex system are in need of much further research. (Von der Lippe, 55)

¹⁶ Cf. Siegler, 56-63.

5. Popular Culture

Since my object of analysis is a TV-series which, without doubt, counts as a part of popular culture, I insert at this point a chapter offering an overview of popular culture in general, and of American popular culture and the connection between feminisms and popular culture, in particular. In order to demonstrate the great significance popular media has gained in our society, I would like to quote Natalie Fenton who states the following:

Contemporary mediated culture [...] is no more than a constant recycling of images previously constituted by the media. [...] popular cultural signs and media images increasingly dominate our sense of reality and the way we define ourselves and the world around us. (Fenton, 109)

The immense progress that mass media experienced over the last decades resulted in a new definition of “contemporary culture as visual culture” (Pajaczkowska, 223). The range of access to various forms of culture has become less limited and thereby blurred or almost erased class distinctions. These were crucial in the early stages of radio and film technology when, due to high prices, access to such devices in the private sphere was reserved to people from the upper classes only.

At a time when television was a new technology, it was considered to “belong outside the home” since it was put in a category that was “masculine” (Hole, 284), technology being, as it was, not linked to the feminine. The growing popularity of television led to more programs available at more hours every day which then led to a “decentralizing of TV” (Hole, 284). In contemporary modern cultures, watching television can be seen as a background activity, rather than “an attention grabbing special event” (Hole, 185). Nowadays the use of media is “an integral part of the routines and rituals of everyday life, [...] constantly interrelated with other activities such as talking, eating, or doing housework” (Ang and Hermes, 322). People do not pay much attention to a lot of media anymore, or at least they do not do so consciously.

What developed throughout the twentieth century is a mass media where image took over the importance of the written word, whereby the culture has become “increasingly televisual” (Pajaczkowska, 224). New mass media which combine word and image, such as the internet, emerged and spread extremely rapidly, providing individuals with

the opportunity to be consumers of “information, entertainment, merchandising or games” (Pajackowska, 224).¹⁷

Nevertheless one should not underestimate the effects of media on individuals in their everyday routines. Ang and Hermes believe it a fact that

media consumption is a thoroughly precarious practice, structured not by psychological or sociological predispositions of individual audience members but by the dynamic and contradictory goings-on of everyday life. (Ang and Hermes, 307-308)

5.1. Americanization through Popular Culture

As I have mentioned before, the TV-series I am going to analyze was produced in the United States of America, which is why I find it important to provide an insight into a debate that has been going on for quite a while. Critics argue for and against the effects they believe American mass media has on the majority of countries it is exported to.

Due to the fact that most products of mass culture consumed in the western world have their origin in the US, America has come to be named as “the home of mass culture” (Strinati, 22). For cultural studies experts but also for people who are just critics of mass culture and/or America, that process of Americanization menaces not only “aesthetic standards and cultural values, but [...] national culture itself” (Strinati, 22). As early as the 1950s and 1960s and coming especially from British writers and critics, among them Orwell and F.R. Leavis, Americanization was blamed as the embodiment of “what was most dangerous in the development of modern industrial society” (Strinati, 24). One of the main concerns was that Americanization was “levelling-down” (Strinati, 24) British middle-class. According to Leavis, “mass society as involving mass production and standardisation, generate[d] an almost irrepressible shift to a mass culture dominated by the mass media” (Strinati, 24).

Other critics felt that messages of popular culture should not be received from outside the social groups that the messages are created in since it is those “social conditions [...] and thus [...] the ethos which essentially characterises a social group” (Hoggart, quoted in Strinati, 28). It was also Hoggart who sensed a danger of exploitation and manipulation of the younger working-class people through American pop culture

¹⁷ Cf. Pajackowska, 223-225.

products, such as “the cheap and brutal crime novel, 'milk-bars' and juke-box music” (Strinati, 28). Products such as these mentioned above could easily be assigned to contemporary equivalents, which could also be accused of having bad influence among teenagers of today. Nowadays, one could just as well find instances which give reason for accusing young people of trying to live in a reality they know from American TV programs which most certainly do not conform to most European cities' realities. Again, “the influence exercised by Americanised imagery and consumerism” (Strinati, 29) could be blamed. What I think is memorable is the fact that when Booker lists the many negative impacts of Americanization in Europe, what he puts next to “rebellion of youth, [...] collapse of authority, the loss of Empire, the breakdown of the family, the growth in crime” is “the 'feminisation' of British culture” (Booker, quoted in Strinati, 30). It may be true that the feminist movements, especially those of the twentieth century, had their beginnings in the US, but I still can not understand how by any means the above mentioned negative effects can be linked to the higher awareness of feminisms within a culture.

But not all of the critics from Britain regarded the Americanization that was happening through the spread of popular culture as something negative. Some associated positive aspects with America, such as “democracy, modernity, rationality and science” (Strinati, 31) which were similarly brought to Europe. Scientist T.H. Huxley, for instance, welcomed innovations coming from America since he saw “no real benefit in trying to preserve social and cultural forms which were in decline” (Strinati, 31). Others responded to the critique uttered by Orwell, defending American crime novels. Worpole argued that this special kind of fiction, which others called 'trash-literature',

in the 1930s and 1940s [...] gave male, urban, working-class readers access to a language, a style and a subject matter that was more realistic, more relevant to their own lives, their own conditions and circumstances, more like the way they spoke and thought and dealt with other people, and which were not available in the literature written by and for the English upper and middle classes. (Strinati, 32)

White came to the same conclusion after studying the London's working-class. He agreed with Worpole by stating that early gangster films from America, which were popular in Europe, gave young working-class males the feeling of being of importance. It helped them to “see themselves as heroes rather than bystanders, the subject of life rather than its object” (White, quoted in Strinati, 33). In the 1970s and 1980s, critics

such as Hebdige were of the opinion that what happened in Britain was not merely a copying of the styles shown in American popular culture, but that the consumption of “styles in images, clothes and music” was done in an “active, meaningful and imaginative fashion, one which transforms the meanings of Americanisation and converts them into distinct subcultural tastes” (Strinati, 35).

Hebdige attributes the main reason for the huge difference of opinions on Americanization by British intellectuals to a “contrast between elitist and populist evaluations” (Strinati, 36), where the former group looks down whereas the latter look up to the changes Americanization brought to Europe.

The debate shortly outlined in this sub-chapter took place a few decades ago and I suggest that meanwhile the significance of the impact of American mass culture on Europe has increased tremendously.

5.2. Feminisms and Popular Culture

Many approaches to popular culture have been made in the past and those having the politics of feminism as the main interest were soon subsumed under the term “feminist media studies” (Fenton, 104). The idea of one universal truth that is to be witnessed in the media changed towards a subjectively received construction of reality. The aspects of the media in which feminist studies were most interested in, according to Fenton, were those of women depicted or actively involved in “production, [...] textual representation, [...] and reception” (Fenton, 104).¹⁸

Textual representation can be analyzed according to various criteria such as “the percentage of women in the cast,” with a special focus on the roles played by women and whether these are negative stereotypes or “positive role models” (Gallagher, 58). Furthermore, it should be noticed whether women are sexually exploited due to the way they are treated in programs and, last but not least, the social pertinence of the content should be observed.¹⁹

As far as the branch of production is concerned, studies carried out in the 1990s show that the percentage of female employees responsible for media production in the

¹⁸ Cf. Fenton, 104.

¹⁹ See Gallagher, 58.

broadest sense was considerably lower than that of male co-workers. Not only were fewer women employed in the field of media production but they also often occupied low-paid jobs such as those with administrative functions. Therefore, Fenton (105) argues that the whole industry of media production certainly was “male-dominated”. The facts Fenton lists in her article give reason to conclude that the outcome of media production would therefore be an image of women constructed by men, an image repeatedly accused of being “both an under-representation and misrepresentation” (Fenton, 106). The feminist movements of the second wave already aimed at “gender equality” (Fenton, 106), as becomes visible in an early article by Busby, who wrote in the *Journal of Communication* in 1975 that

roles of males in the mass media have been shown to be dominant, active, authoritative, while females have been shown to be submissive, passive and completely contented to subjugate their wills to the wills of the media males. (Busby quoted in Fenton, 107)

Some critics, Tuchmann²⁰ among them, suggest that what mass media provide is merely a construction and reflection of a society's “social values” (Strinati, 182). What is presented by the media then is not how a society really is but rather the ideal, how it wishes to be. What Tuchmann calls “symbolic annihilation” (Strinati, 182) is just the outcome of women being represented in derogatory ways, for instance being depicted as “working women who are [...] condemned” or “as child-like adornments who need to be protected” (Strinati, 182). Tuchmann based her claims upon a survey of American popular culture, mostly press and television, between the 1950s and the 1970s. Whenever women were shown, they were employed in professions that were always on the lower end of a system's hierarchy, for instance, they were never represented as doctors but always as nurses, never as lawyers but as secretaries. Strinati (184) therefore concludes that “men and women have been represented by the mass media in conformity with the cultural stereotypes which serve to reproduce traditional sex roles”. Here Gauntlett (43) would probably agree, since he asserts that studies of television programs from the 1970s showed that “the women's movement had been largely ignored by television”, having portrayed women predominantly as married housewives if they were shown at all.

²⁰ Cf. Strinati, 180 ff. referring to Tuchmann.

What Greer similarly complains about girls' magazines, Strinati (184) claims for television, as he states that “women, their lives and their interests are not being accurately reflected”.²¹

In the second half of the 1970s, certain genres of the wide range of media products, for instance “soap opera and romance” (Fenton, 108), were called women's genres since they were seen as having women's experiences as a central theme. Writers such as Modleski and Hobson claim that those forms of television, usually found in daytime programs, were obviously linked to “patterns of female domestic labour” and at the same time “providing company and combating the isolation experienced by women at home” (Fenton, 108). Fenton points out that mass media is only one of many institutions which have shaped the experiences of women and therefore should not be given more importance than necessary. People do not always tend to take media as their reality but, nevertheless, reality is constructed through representation. In order to find out on which level the construction happens, on the production level or on the receiver level, it is essential to look at “the way meaning is made” (Fenton, 110) by studying the audience of mass media products, which would far exceed the scope of this paper and therefore is better left to the experts.²²

The roles women were given in television programs have changed considerably since the 1970s; women are much more visible and they embody “strong and independent female heroines” (Hole, 282) who appear to work against previously established stereotypes of femininity. These new roles allowed the female viewer to identify with characters different from the traditional image of women as wives and mothers.²³

And even though gender representations were becoming less stereotyped and more equal, Gauntlett (58) states that in 1990s TV “the majority of lead characters were [...] male”.

Feminist critics complained that the picture of women created by the media was full of “unrealistic messages” and that, if not done thoroughly enough, the equation of male and female characters would only have the effect of defining “maleness as the goal for women” (Fenton, 107) which clearly cannot be the solution. Hence, in order to avoid

²¹ Compare Strinati, 180-184.

²² See Fenton, 110.

²³ See Hole, 282-283.

such negative effects, media products would have to be developed as well as produced by women themselves.

Writer and critic Tania Modleski argues that “gender is fundamentally significant for the study of popular culture” (Strinati, 189). She claims that “a feminist critique” (Modleski quoted in Strinati, 190) of mass media is self-evident since the way people think and feel about cultural products, such as television, is tightly linked to what is considered as feminine. What she complains about is the fact that mass culture is often connected to the feminine whereas “high culture is identified with the masculine” (Strinati, 190). She goes even further than that, allying with Booker in chapter 3.1., by presuming that critics of high culture are afraid of “the audience becoming feminine” since they blame audiences of mass culture to be “passive and vulnerable, and prone to consumerism” (Strinati, 191), which seem to be seen as rather feminine qualities.²⁴

The matter of gender and gender identity is a very important and at the same time a very difficult one since its meanings are “socially and culturally constructed rather than biologically conditioned” (Strinati, 200). According to Stacey, who is referred to by Strinati, gender analysis is becoming more and more important in cultural studies because it stresses not only “the more powerful role of producers as opposed to consumers in the making of popular culture” but also “the active reception practices of men and women which are conducted with reference to the unequal power relations between them” (Strinati, 217). Therefore the role of the passive consumer that was ascribed especially to females has to be challenged for at least two reasons: first, because “the active role” (Strinati, 217) females have in consumption is understated, and, second, because consumption should not inherently be equated with subordination. To underline her arguments, Stacey sums up:

the meaning of femininity within cultural production [...] is not synonymous with the uses and meanings of commodities to consumers. [...] women are subjects, as well as objects of cultural exchange, in ways that are entirely reducible to subjection. (Stacey, quoted in Strinati, 217-218)

In order to demonstrate that television programs produced in the 1990s had established models of male and female gender roles that were “not-particularly-offensive” (Gauntlett, 59), David Gauntlett takes the sitcom *Friends* as an example to draw

²⁴ Cf. Strinati, 189-191.

attention to a new treatment of gender roles. While the three female main characters are all “clearly feminine” they are, according to Gauntlett (59), “sufficiently intelligent and non-housewifey”. Here I cannot agree completely with the expert since, in my opinion, one of the three women (Rachel) is portrayed as constantly being occupied by finding the right man, while another of the three (Monica) is repeatedly shown to be addicted to cleaning, and the third woman (Phoebe) embodies the stereotype of the dumb blonde. But, of course, what has to be kept in mind is the fact that this program was designed to be a comedy and these usually employ certain stock characters which are built on typically gendered stereotypes.

5.2.1. Postfeminism in Popular Culture

In their book *Interrogating Postfeminism*, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra²⁵ claim that the “limits of [...] gender equality enacted within contemporary popular media culture are profound” (Tasker and Negra, 1). As already mentioned above, the media do not only reproduce women as objects of consumerism but also as subjects with a high purchasing power.

The afore mentioned connection between feminism and the rather negative connotation of the “f-word” highlights the low status of feminism in contemporary popular culture. Feminism is made 'the other'; in popular culture it is often “constructed as extreme, difficult, and unpleasurable” (Tasker and Negra, 4). According to these two professors of film and television studies, feminism plays a significant role in contemporary culture and it is postfeminism which tremendously afflicts “a clear sense of what media studies does when feminism is acknowledged and academic approaches are mainstreamed” (Tasker and Negra, 5-6). Postfeminism seems to promote a high acceptance and encouragement of difference but, instead of drawing this difference into political view, just as feminism used to do, now in popular culture it becomes more and more commodified as the great interest in women as consumers of popular media culture proves. Postfeminism appears to construct femininity in the form of young, vital, and modern women who have to reload an exhausted and insecure culture plagued by moral ambiguity.²⁶

²⁵ Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra are professors of film and television studies at the University of East Anglia.

²⁶ Compare Tasker and Negra, 8-9.

Taking the high recurrence of makeover shows in British as well as in US television as an example, Tasker and Negra sum up the differences between postfeminist protagonists and their converse: “[...] the postfeminist heroine is vital, youthful, and playful while her opposite number, the 'bad' female professional is repressive, deceptive, and deadly” (Tasker and Negra, 9). Thus, it is transmitted that postfeminism is the 'new' thing that is 'in', while feminism is old and outdated. Through these given specifications, postfeminist texts heavily rely on the “anxiety of aging at work” (Tasker and Negra, 11) which is transparent in many representatives of the so-called “chick-lit”, bestselling literature about young, urban, successful women whose main priorities are finding a suitable man with husband potential and spending spare time in beauty salons and high priced gyms.

Since the greatest part of popular culture media products consumed throughout Europe comes from the United States of America, it is only natural that when the outcome of postfeminist traces in such products is explored “an American 'we' is presumed to be general” but also that a “broader understanding” (Tasker and Negra, 14) is necessitated.

A critic who sees the whole debate around postfeminism somewhat alleviated is Amanda Lotz, who, in her work *Redesigning Women: Television after the Network Era*, claims that in many series from the 1990s “both feminist and antifeminist attributes could be identified” but that what others called postfeminism is not detectable to such a great extent anymore since “the valence of narratives about women and work shifted again” (Lotz, 174).

The range of multiplicity of media products that are concerned by postfeminism is a very wide one, but due to the focus of this thesis the main interest will be put on television series, though advertisement would certainly be an extremely interesting and rich subject for analysis.

5.2.1.1. The 'girl-phenomenon'

As shortly mentioned before, the matter of age and aging is of great importance in texts that would be considered by critics to be postfeminist. Grown women of an age up to forty are treated and constructed as 'girls'. Postfeminist culture uses the “girl [...] as a representational sign” which proclaims that “girlhood is [...] for everyone” (Tasker and

Negra, 18). No doubt many of the images constructed by postfeminist culture are almost irresistible, as Tasker and Negra have to admit, which accounts for the vast target audience of such media products.²⁷

This promotion of the girl-status applied to women is harshly criticized by Greer, who states that

originally feminists expressed dislike of the word 'girl' for much the same reasons that black men refuse to answer to 'boy'. An adult woman is called a 'girl' in order to emphasize her inferior status. (Greer, 314)

Greer furthermore points out various instances in which grown women working in subordinate positions, for example as secretaries or cleaning personnel, who are then referred to as 'girls' mostly by their superiors. The fact that the word 'girl' has acquired the functions of a cuss word or an insult when used for men acting not 'manly' enough is worthy of consideration. But it does not even have to go that far. Feminists simply refuse to apply the term 'girl' to grown females since they want to be recognized as “mature and empowered individuals” which in turn “devalued” the “meaning and importance” (Holland, 38) of the term 'girl'.

In *My So-Called Life*, Angela's mother Patty refers to herself as a girl once in order to feel closer to her teenage daughter and vice versa. Referring to night when the two of them will probably be alone, she says to Angela, “it's just us girls tonight” (Episode 1), probably in order to resemble days from the past when she was much more involved in her daughter's life and also to remind her of being just like a 'girlfriend' to her and not only her mother. Used in this way, the word is supposed to create conspiratorial intimacy between the two but, of course, it does not work since, like most teenage girls, Angela is not particularly keen on 'hanging out' with her mother.

There is a whole branch of commerce making a great deal of money by thematizing 'girls' issues', namely the extremely wide-ranging division of magazines designed for teenage girls. In the late 1990s Greer examined some of the most popular of these magazines in Britain and she came to the conclusion that what these papers wrote about was not what girls at that age needed. Instead of encouraging their own styles and ideas it was rather predetermined how these girls should act in company of boys, how they

²⁷ Compare Tasker and Negra, 18-21.

should dress, what make-up to wear, and how they should behave in order to have chances at the most popular boys. Viewed from the point of view of an adult woman, Greer utters her indignation:

What do they care if our daughters refuse to eat healthy food, slobber their bright faces with make-up and hang around bus-stops in the hope that they will get to share an alco-pop and cop off with a boy? (Greer, 316)

What Greer seems to be most upset about is the little resemblance such magazines have to reality. She argues that reality is less desperate since girls in schools are interested in science, they play sports and they are active in drama and dance workshops. Most magazines, however, did not mention any of these activities.

To come back to the notion of 'girls' in the 1990s, it is unavoidable to mention the pop group the Spice Girls, five adult women who wanted to spread the message of 'girl power' throughout their songs. Many writers²⁸ point to the Spice Girls as the main outcome of public postfeminism. Greer (318) quotes Charlotte Raven on the Spice Girls: "The boys want to fuck them, the girls want to be them and feminists want to hail them as the feisty new exponents of that post-oppression jive". Holland concludes what it was that was criticized by many feminist activists about the Spice Girls' supposedly positive feminist message:

[...] their cries of 'girl power' did not link to wider feminist issues and were about individualistic, atavistic self-fulfilment rather than 'the common good', thus placing them firmly within the establishment status quo they claimed to be fighting. (Holland, 38)

That the media which advance such phenomena are omnipresent is only one reason why it is even more important for young girls and women to make up their minds and to have their own opinions. Greer also doubts that it is easy for teenage girls not to be exposed to the superficial values that are spread by the media.

The propaganda machine that is now aimed at our daughters is more powerful than any form of indoctrination that has ever existed before. Pop is followed by print is followed by video and film. (Greer, 318-319)

Therefore, postfeminism has great chances to be very popular with big masses since it looks quite attractive from the outside and it is supported by all kinds of popular media.

²⁸ Compare Gamble, 43 and Greer, 317 ff. and Holland, 38.

5.2.2. *Third Wave Feminism in Popular Culture*

According to the contributors of *Third Wave Feminism and Television*, what Third Wave Feminists want to accomplish is to “challenge cultural studies to seriously engage popular TV shows too often trivialized as guilty pleasures and set aside” (Johnson, ix).

The editor herself, Merri Lisa Johnson, argues that what leads to a character or series on TV as being regarded as “feminist enough” (Johnson, 2) is highly dependent on the very situation the viewer is in. She complains that for conservative critics television is a device which fosters its audience by “teaching [...] violence and promiscuity” (Johnson, 2), whereas for the more progressive cultural studies experts it cannot be progressive enough. She defends television by claiming that it often has a significant social role. For teenagers from more rural areas “television can be the sole window into big-city subjects like homosexuality, singlehood-by-choice, multiculturalism, and [...] existentialism” (Johnson, 3). TV offers its viewers pleasures that have been discussed by feminist critics at large. The charge made by opponents of the pleasures offered by television is that these are “lurking and lulling women into false consciousness, complicity with patriarchy, masochistic submission” (Johnson, 5). Those opponents argue for “correct pleasure” (Johnson, 5), though Johnson admits that she is not able to define what correct pleasure really is other than the opposite of “masochistic pleasure” (Johnson, 6). By referring to cultural and literary critic Terry Eagleton, Johnson (8) sums up that “the feminist subject matter of television is precisely the pleasure quotient that guarantees third wave feminists' participation in an otherwise patriarchal media culture”. According to Johnson (10), most of contemporary television is rather “feminist-friendly”, nevertheless the pleasure that women experience when watching television is deeply linked with the previously learned submission to already “existing power structures and limited female imagery”. Johnson asks herself and her readers what it means for women to like television in a time when feminists harshly criticize such cultural sections of being sexist. Moreover, she argues that it is somewhat acknowledged

that incremental shifts in power may be the most we can hope for, and that the kinds of pleasure available to women in the current media culture include the pleasures of oppositional reading as well as the pleasures of seeing feminist concepts dramatized on television. (Johnson, 11)

Johnson describes the attitude of third wave feminists as more relaxed and less serious when it comes to stereotyping of gender roles. What they want to come to are different conclusions achieved at through “a thoroughgoing acceptance of skepticism and critique as the givens of [their] approach, joined with a desire to go beyond them” (Johnson, 13). Johnson accurately formulates the task third wave feminist media critics wish to accomplish as they want to discover

some as-yet-unformed level of discourse, drawing on the intersectionality of black feminism, the subversive identification of queer theory, and a post-sexual revolution longing to locate unexpected conclusions in feminist media theory. (Johnson, 13)

According to Johnson, it is not necessary any longer to point out repeatedly how sexist most shows on television are because that is a fact that is not shocking any more. At the same time she admits that there still is a need of work towards consciousness raising and “instilling critical media literacy” (Johnson, 14). There is no doubt about the danger of 'postfeminist' images of female action heroes which pretend an equality that does not yet exist. Johnson (15-16) mentions other third wave feminist critics who promote an “acceptance of [our] darker drives, an indulging in fascination with imagery that queers gender, decenters heterosexuality, and valorizes the erotic”.²⁹

It is important not to mistake the act of liking television with “being duped by it” (Johnson, 22) and what third wave feminist media critics will keep working on in the future is the “pleasure and danger of women's relationships to television” (Johnson, 22), since the relation between these two has not been settled yet.

5.2.3. Gender, Identity and Gender Identity in Popular Culture

I would like to open this chapter with a quote from Susan Bordo, who pinpoints the naturally given importance of diverse gender identities nowadays. She points out that “in a culture that is in fact constituted by gender duality [...] one cannot simply be 'human' “ (Bordo quoted in Ang and Hermes, 320). Since both men and women are human in the first place, one could argue that they have more things in common than they have not. Or, as Gauntlett (3) describes the difficult task, “women and men may 'feel' equal, but at the same time are aware that this is not entirely accurate”.

²⁹ Cf. Johnson, 14-16.

A good starting point for this chapter would probably be to try to define what is generally regarded as femininity, how gender itself is and can be defined and constructed. Therefore, it is important to mention that it is somewhat problematic to argue that all women share the same gender, that of femininity. As several critics have pointed out, the group 'women' is not a homogeneous and unified mass to which the same attributes apply. Ang and Hermes refer to Nightingale, who clearly points out that

the qualities that divide women, like class, ethnicity, age, education, are always of less significant [sic] that the unifying qualities attributed to women, such as the inability to know or say what they want, the preoccupation with romance and relationships, the ability to care for, to nurture others. (Nightingale, quoted in Ang and Hermes, 314)

Van Zoonen (33) defines gender in media studies as “a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds and our experiences of them”. According to Gauntlett (10), femininity is no longer regarded as simply “the state of 'being a woman'” but it is more commonly seen as “a stereotype of a woman's role from the past”.

Van Zoonen summarizes how radical and liberal feminism see gender: “an inevitable consequence of sex differences, consisting of two binary and universal canons of behaviour” (Van Zoonen, 39). She sums up the presumption coming from these two forms of feminism as follows:

Femininity is supposed to be composed of emotionality, prudence, cooperation, communal sense, compliance, etc. Masculinity supposedly is its opposite: rationality, efficiency, competition, individualism, ruthlessness, etc. (Van Zoonen, 39)

Identity is one ingredient which cannot be neglected when one speaks about gender constructions in connection to modern media since “media and communications are a central element of modern life, whilst gender and sexuality remain at the core of how we think about our identities” (Gauntlett, 1).

Trying to define what identity is and how it is understood nowadays is a difficult task. Grotevant and Cooper (7), for instance, observe that certain aspects that make up one's identity can be “chosen (for example, one's occupation)” or less voluntarily “assigned [...] (for example, gender, ethnicity, adoptive status)”. The assigned aspects may constrain one's opportunities in life, “for example, through racial discrimination or gender stereotyping” (Grotevant and Cooper, 7).

Susan Hekman devoted one volume to solving this task though she asserts in the very beginning that some questions will most probably remain unsolved or some solutions may create ambiguity. Like other critics to whom I have referred, Hekman (1) also points out that in the age of third wave feminism “‘woman’ as a universal identity [...] is no longer a viable basis for feminism”. Hekman presents her own concept of identity:

Identity is necessarily defined by two opposites: sameness and difference. To declare that something or someone has a particular identity is to claim, simultaneously, that it is identical to the other entities that possess that identity and that, as a particular thing, it possesses unique qualities, that is, an identity. (Hekman, 5)

Hekman briefly points out the differences that former feminist movements made when it comes to identity. Activists in the first wave held it very much as Plato did by claiming that “sexual differences were [...] superficial rather than constitutive” while women involved in the second wave rather “emphasized and valorised” (Hekman, 6) differences between males and females. What they had in common was a “unified concept of sexual/gender identity”, which then, in turn, became a problem to activists in the third wave where “differences among women have come to the foreground” (Hekman, 7). All these differences in defining differences lead to many new and important questions such as : “Are our identities constructed or essential? Do we discover them or become determined by them?” (Hekman, 7). It is exactly this “multiplicity of feminine identities” that has become one of the main concerns of third wave feminists and Hekman tries to find a middle course as she invites “all of us to experience our identity as *ours*, a continuity over time, something that places us in a particular time and place” (Hekman, 8).

Now women do not have to stick to one general category of 'woman' but they can choose from a variety of identity constructions in order to find one that suits them or to construct one they feel comfortable with. It is also that category of 'woman' which especially third wave feminists rebel against, since that category usually excluded women who were not “privileged white, middle-class” (Hekman, 11), which automatically steers the problem in a political direction. Here Hekman (16) refers to Susan Bickford who argues that “the postmodern definition of identity as a fiction (constantly under construction, fluid, provisional, and contingent) is a political liability

rather than a solution”. Furthermore, she notes that “identities carry [...] constraint and oppression, but also a source of criticism and action” (Hekman, 16). Bickford does not deny that identities are created but she highlights that they are “active rather than passive, a matter of agency rather than subjection” (Hekman, 16-17). Hekman continues by clarifying what she means when she says that identities are actively and repeatedly constructed:

Although I may know, [...], that my identity is constructed from the mix of elements in my particular society, I do not, and, I think, cannot, experience my identity as this fluid construction. [...] I must know myself as a stable self, [...] as the deep self who makes choice possible. (Hekman, 18)

The problem that arises through constructing diverse identities and then “proclaiming an identity [...] leads to the fixing of that identity” (Hekman, 20), whereby it would then lose its fluidity. In order to solve the problem of how modern feminism should regard the crisis of defining identity, Hekman (21) asserts that an identity's “social construction” should be at the center of a new pattern of thought and what should be remembered is that “socially constructed selves are not social dupes, but agents who act and resist”.

The conclusion that can be made according to Hekman (24) is that the definition of identity will remain a very delicate task since “any definition will erase differences within the category that is constructed” which furthermore means that every individual's identity is unique.

Given the prospect of this thesis, I have concentrated on identity in connection to gender in general and femininity in particular, but, of course, I have to mention that these gender related issues are not the only ones determining people's constructions of identities. As Gauntlett points out, there are other factors just as important, such as “education, urban or rural residency, cultural background, access to transportation and communications, criminal record, persecution or refugee status” (Gauntlett 13) and last but certainly not least, ethnicity. It can also be said that the media provide representations of genders that are more complex than they have been in the past and “the images of women and men which it [the media] propagates today may be equally valued, but remain different, and diverse” (Gauntlett, 90).

5.2.3.1. Traditional/Mainstream Femininity vs. Alternative Femininity

It is a difficult task to try and define femininity, for there are probably as many different femininities as there are women. According to Samantha Holland (35), if femininity is seen as “a concept [...] there can be no one definition” and “feminine behavior is a task of imitation”. Yet, there is the notion of a 'traditional', or 'mainstream' femininity, which label women as feminine when they are “sweet and nice” (Holland, 39), vulnerable and giggly and they embody the current beauty ideal. In her study on 'alternative' femininities Holland interrogates young women about femininity and asks them what or who they would consider traditionally feminine. Many participants mentioned Marilyn Monroe, Pamela Anderson, or Princess Diana. Each of these women did embody a certain beauty ideal, but not all of them are considered role models by the participants in the study. But not only a perfect body and pouting lips like those of Pamela Anderson were regarded as markers of 'traditional' femininity but also the “images of modern womanhood” and “wealthy, fashionable, 'jet-set' princess” (Holland, 42) that Princess Diana embodied were mentioned. But what was mostly mentioned when asked to define traditional femininity were “fluffy, frilly, frothy” (Holland, 38-48) clothes.³⁰

Even though many young women nowadays refuse to construct what Holland has called a 'traditional' femininity for themselves, that does not mean that all the rituals or things that are considered as traditionally feminine are rejected as well. Participants in Holland's study who considered themselves as being rather alternative feminine said that they do like to use make-up or perfume or that they like wearing exclusive underwear without having to consider themselves as vulnerable and available objects.³¹

5.3. Television

Put very generally, the reasons for watching television are manifold. For many it is just a biding of time when they do not have anything else to do. For some people, like for Johnson, watching television is a “stress relief, a small gesture of control over [...] time and mind” (Johnson, 4).

Simply because television has become such a permanent installation in most of our lives, which is often viewed negatively by psychologists and other scholars, I would like

³⁰ See Holland, 39-44.

³¹ Cf. Holland, 43-45.

to quote Johnson here, who promotes a positive image of television, especially in connection to women and feminism, by stating that

watching television after work is not merely the cultural trap of alleviating the on-the-treadmill quality of life under patriarchal capitalism. It can be a genuinely feminist activity that allows women to pause and reflect on their own fears, anxieties, and desires mid revolution. (Johnson, 17)

Furthermore Johnson claims (19) that media culture will gain importance in debates about gender and sexuality through the employment of “reading television as theory”. To her, television is nothing else but a way in which “our culture talks to itself about itself” (Johnson, 19).

Sonia Livingstone begins her article, which basically concentrates on audience reception, by listing some quotes by researchers all concerned with the matter of television. One of those quotes says: “Television viewing is constructed by family members; it doesn't just happen” (Lull, quoted in Livingstone, 285). Lull made this proposition exactly twenty years ago and I would argue that in the meantime quite a lot has changed. Watching television as an active and conscious activity is rarely practiced anymore. Mostly people are so used to a television running somewhere in the background that they do not even bother to turn it off when being occupied with something else. Some people would probably even admit that having the turned on television as background noise somewhat calms them down after a stressful day. Then the kind of program that is on is not as important as the fact that someone can be heard talking to someone about something.

After all, television is a business designed to make profit and therefore it has to be kept in mind that “textual negotiations of femininity, feminism, and family” in drama series are highly influenced by “network executives' perceptions of female audiences' narrative desires” (Lotz, 121). Lotz (175) again highlights the importance of money in the television industry by stating that “every programming shift in the U.S. system of commercial television can be understood as a marketing strategy to some extent” and this has to be remembered when thinking about the conception of certain TV shows.

5.3.1. *Women's Genres*

This short section is closely linked to the section on gender in popular culture, but is designed to point out in more detail why supposedly feminine genres are so popular among women and what effects they might have on women's identity constructions.

One genre that is supposedly feminine is that of romance, in written form or as television programs. The article by Livingstone concentrates on women's retelling of romantic television and their deviations from the real plots. As one reason for the popularity of such a genre, Livingstone refers to Beer, who says that a genre such as romance “absorb[s] the reader into experience which is otherwise unattainable. It frees us from our inhibitions and preoccupations by drawing us entirely into its own world [...]” (Beer quoted in Livingstone, 297).

Many critics carried out studies of so-called 'women's genres' of popular culture. Among the most highly discussed of such genres are soap operas, women's or girl's magazines and romance novels, as well as television dramas such as *Dynasty* or *Coronation Street*. According to Van Zoonen (43), who refers to Ferguson, these genres “create a 'cult of femininity' and heterosexual romance that [...] set the agenda for the female world”. Van Zoonen (43) was not the first writer who asked herself why such genres are so popular among women and how they are used by them to “give meaning to their daily experiences”. These among many other questions posed by experts lead to somewhat precursory studies, for example by Modleski, Radway, or Livingstone. In the case of teen drama, a genre that *My So-Called Life* conforms to, which works with the narrative technique of providing voiceovers by the main character in order to create an “emotional realism” (Murphy, 170), some critics ascribed the series to the women's genres. A justification for that is the belief that the aforementioned emotional realism is more “an interpretive fiction” that viewers “construct in the process of meaning making” than a “property of the fiction” (Jenkins, quoted in Murphy, 170). According to Murphy, who then quotes Jenkins, this is

a gendered process of reading in which women are more likely to '[enter] directly into the fictional world, focusing less on the extratextual process of its writing than on relationships and events'. (Jenkins, quoted in Murphy, 171)

In order to understand the complex ways in which viewers interpret what they see, it is necessary to look at the motive the viewer has for watching a certain show. Where lie the spectator's preferences in character traits, who is the character most allied with? Livingstone (300) points out that “viewers talk of recognizing the realism of characters, considering them 'just like us', empathizing with their circumstances” in order to “play with [...] contrasts and choices offered”. Livingstone (301) continues by claiming that traditional scholars and researchers regarded “realism and pleasure” as two opposing factors. Both might be a reason for a genre's popularity. Here Livingstone does not agree, since she believes that “the pleasures of recognition and validation of one's own everyday experiences” are one reason for women being attracted to genres such as television drama. The issues dealt with are not as extreme and unrealistic as those in some soap operas and thereby give more women the chance to identify with a character. Another reason for the popularity of drama might be the “fascination [...] that we can see 'how the world works' in lives other than our own” as David Gauntlett (2) points out. TV drama shows its viewers how friendships are shaped, how neighbors behave or how “lovers interact” and thereby become “main reference points” (Gauntlett, 2) in people's choice of behavior.³²

Sonia Livingstone refers to Modleski's study on soap opera viewers by simply concluding that the motivation for watching a daytime soap opera is different from that of watching a drama series. Thus, “the pleasures of daytime soap operas [...] depend not on action but on reaction and interaction” (Livingstone, 301). A woman's pleasure is also somewhat different than that of a man, which has been defined as being “one of fragmentation and fetishization of the female body” while women viewers are rather indwelt by “a holistic one of reading the person and being sensitive to unspoken feelings” (Livingstone, 302).³³

Ang and Hermes (309), who refer to the findings of Modleski's study on soap operas and its female spectatorship, note that what soap operas show are not just stereotypes of women that already exist but that “a symbolic form of feminine identity” is actively produced “by inscribing a specific subject position [...] in its textual fabric”. Thus, the female viewer is given the opportunity to identify with a subject position in order to construct meaning of the text.

³² Cf. Gauntlett, 2.

³³ See Livingstone, 300-302.

Or, as Lotz claims,

the range of female centered dramas that greeted audiences in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century began to address the diverse needs and pleasures of female audiences [and they] [...] face more options than in previous eras. (Lotz, 180)

Most modern women probably do not have a problem with certain genres being supposedly feminine as long as this labeling is not used to degrade a program's quality.

5.3.2. *US - American TV-Series*

As is the case with most popular culture and mass media, most TV-series popular in Europe are produced in the United States of America. Taking into consideration the size of the population that owns a TV-set and therefore is able to receive TV-series in their home, it becomes clear that television is a huge industry. Some of the biggest cable TV networks produce most of the most popular and successful TV-series.

When talking of a genre such as the television drama series, one can differentiate between three kinds. Anthologies are series that have closed stories that differ from episode to episode but happen within the same frame. Series with closure have episodes which employ the same cast, which develops over time, but at the center of each episode stands one problem or case that has to be solved and therefore is closed within each episode. Serials rely on the slow development of the cast from one episode to the next and “stories continue across many episodes” (Douglas, 11) which encourages viewers to return to the program.³⁴

The serial has acquired a cheap reputation since it is often associated with soap operas, which are regarded as productions of low quality due to “the heightened melodrama, [...] the stereotypical characters, [and] dialogue that lacks subtlety” which usually are a result of the “speed with which episodes are produced” (Douglas, 10).

Among all TV serials, drama is probably the form that experienced the greatest development in the last thirty years which alludes to its extreme popularity. Andrew Crisell (115), who lays out TV drama's origin and history, states that “between the late 1970s and the late 1990s, series increased from 47 to 63 per cent of all British TV

³⁴ Compare Douglas, 9-11.

drama”. According to Douglas (2), TV drama series are so popular because they mirror “complex and wrenching problems in contemporary societies – such as racism, sexism, violence, spirituality, and sexual identity”. Douglas compares the TV drama to people who become friends with the viewers, sharing their secrets and dreams with them and visiting them week after week in their most intimate surrounding, the home. In contrast to the cinema experience and big screen, “television [...] [is] not an escape, not fantasy, but the fabric of daily life” (Douglas, 13). She also argues that TV drama is extremely enthralling because it has “the effect of people talking to you” (Douglas, 14). In the case of the kinds of TV-series which even have a characters' voice employed as a narrator giving insight into very personal thoughts or otherwise hidden knowledge, this can be taken literally: the character actively speaks to the spectator.³⁵

Whereas the episodes of some TV-series are built around a specific conflict which requires the main characters to “take immediate action”, family dramas usually “rely[ing] on conflicts between characters rather than outside provocations” (Douglas, 20).

5.4. Representations/Constructions of Femininities on TV

At this point I would like to provide some opinions on gender identity constructions on television as detected by feminist writers, most of which I have already introduced in the previous sections. This section gives a general overview of how gender identity is displayed and conveyed on television and how these constructions should be contested and criticized by users and consumers of such media products.

I agree with Van Zoonen (43), who points out that “media texts are inherently 'polysemic' and construct diverging and sometimes conflicting articulations of femininity”. Ang and Hermes (309) seem to agree with Van Zoonen as well, as they claim that “media representations and narratives *construct* a multiplicity of sometimes contradicting cultural definitions of femininity” which then can be chosen from in order to find a suitable subject position to make sense of a media text. Simply put, this means that, in the end, it depends on the audience of a media product in order to construct an “articulation[s] of femininity”; whether this may be the preferred one by the producer or not probably depends on the audience's social backgrounds.

³⁵ Such series are, for instance, *My So-Called Life*, *Scrubs*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Grey's Anatomy*;

Van Zoonen (45) regards gender as something that is not fixed and stable but “varies according to specific cultural and historical settings”. Furthermore she argues that since women “establish[ed] and express[ed]” different feminine identities in different social situations, the media can be helpful when used to “pick up and try out different feminine subject positions” (Van Zoonen, 48), if sometimes only in women's fantasies.

Agreeing with Van Zoonen on the multiplicity of gender constructions, Ang and Hermes (316) also claim that a person whose biologically defined sex is female does not necessarily “have a pre-given and fixed gender identity as a woman” but “an individual's gender subjectivity is constantly in process of reproduction and transformation”. Hence being a woman may feel different in different situations for different individuals. Moreover, “in everyday life gender is not always relevant to what one experiences, how one feels, chooses to act or not to act” (Ang and Hermes, 320). Consequently, what has been regarded as “traditional femininity” has become “redundant” (Gauntlett, 10). Women rather have the opportunity to consciously choose to be feminine as one of many choices available, which they might sometimes do in order to achieve certain reactions³⁶.

Gender is not only constructed by the media in so-called women's genres, but there are many stereotypical constructions of masculinity in the media as well, for instance in “sports programmes, war movies, Playboy and Penthouse” (Van Zoonen, 49), just to mention a few. According to Van Zoonen (49), it is by staying rather invisible that masculinity has been able to hold its power, since it is constructed as “normal and universal”, which in turn automatically presents “the feminine [as] deviant and different”. But this does not mean that gender determines the choice made in media consumption, rather that “it is in and through the very practices of media consumption [...] that gender identities are recursively shaped” (Ang and Hermes, 318). In order to attain “gender-specific” meanings, media texts have to be consumed in specific historical situations. Ang and Hermes (323) claim that feminist media studies are going in the right direction “by adopting a more profound sense of gender skepticism, thereby eradicating any pre-given guarantee for female unity”. This diversity Ang and Hermes speak about is also clearly incarnated by third wave feminism's ideologies.

³⁶ See Gauntlett, p.11 referring to suggestions made by magazines such as Cosmopolitan.

Since I deal with television drama series from the 1990s, Amanda Lotz's article is very useful as it treats drama series from that time which have women at their center. The series discussed by Lotz, having women in their thirties in the major roles, are all aimed at a fairly older audience than the teen series I am going to analyze. Considering these series, Lotz (171) asserts that "the range of representations and stories available for female characters and audiences" changed considerably in the late 1990s. In the introduction to her and David Lavery's book, Michele Byers (2) also claims that "MSCL emerged at a time when girls were moving in the center of public culture, after so long being relegated to the margins" which would match Lotz's findings. Taking into account the young age of the female main characters in teen series, it cannot automatically be assumed that the same findings that Lotz detected for family drama also apply to this genre, being rather new in the 1990s. Yet, what the protagonists do have in common is an imperfection not often found before in female lead television roles. The young women, or girls, represented in the teen drama I focus on are not the perfect beach beauties who do not have to worry about money, the right fashion style, or the latest trends from the make up industry, unlike hit series such as *Beverly Hills 90210*, the newer *The OC*, or MTV's latest hit, the reality show *Laguna Beach*. The latter are all examples of series about privileged high school kids on the sunny shores of California. Here, the class factor certainly does make a difference. The girls in *My So-Called Life* have the "imperfections characteristic of humans rather than role models" (Lotz, 173), which enables the more average young viewers to identify with the characters.³⁷

What was also striking about the new wave of teenage heroines within the media culture in the 1990's was their articulation of "new incarnations of feminine adolescence" and the "way they highlight the performative – rather than natural – nature of girlhood" (Byers, 3).

³⁷ Cf Lotz, 171-173.

6. Analysis

6.1. Object of Analysis: Teen Series

The 1990s marked the beginning of a somewhat new genre in television, namely the teen series. “Witty, knowing and slightly mawkish,” these series are characterized by “a sense of community based on generation; a blunt, somewhat melodramatic use of emotion” (Davis & Dickinson, 1), and the examination of problems most teenagers are faced with sooner or later in their adolescence. Most of these programs center around one teenage main character and his or her everyday problems with growing up, with having trouble at home or at school, with having fun with friends, and so on. Since young adults are a very important target group, especially for afternoon television programs,³⁸ these series were produced in order to entertain the audience. By resembling normal average kids, the main characters made it rather easy for young viewers to relate to their problems and to build up an intimacy which led to a kind of addiction to watching the show regularly; this was, of course, the producers' intention.

6.1.1. My So-Called Life

My So-Called Life (MSCL) consists of only one season of nineteen episodes³⁹, each about forty three minutes in length, and was first aired in 1994 and early 1995 in the USA. About one year later, the series was first aired on a German private TV channel, RTL2.⁴⁰

6.1.1.1. Why the Series did not succeed

The American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) aired the series, which was written by Winnie Holzman and produced by Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick, who had already done the successful show *thirtysomething* together. The program was designed to be continued, which is why the last episode ends with a cliffhanger, but never made it to a second season due to several reasons. Sources on the internet claim that the ratings for the show's first appearances on TV in the USA were supposedly quite low while

³⁸ Cf. Davis & Dickinson, 2, referring to and quoting from Gauntlett and Hill.

³⁹ for a detailed listing of the nineteen episodes see the appendix of this paper

⁴⁰ for further information on airings of the show see the official website <http://www.mscl.com/msclontv.html> (accessed on 8 April 2008)

other, more reliable sources state that the program received “ratings of eleven million viewers per week” (Capsuto, 300). The program earned many positive reviews in the press, “often named by critics as the high point of teen television of the 1990s” (Davis & Dickinson, 8). Critics were probably impressed by its authenticity and by the performance of then still very young actress Claire Danes, who received a Golden Globe for her part. Some online sources claim that Danes refused to continue playing the role of Angela Chase. The most probable explanation of the series' cancellation suggests that it was one of the first programs of that format aiming at a particular target audience whose importance and consumer power was possibly not detectable by the network's bosses, who might have decided differently if they had foreseen the wave of successful teen TV programs that was to come.⁴¹ On the Internet a wide fan base initiated the campaign Operation Life Support which was aimed at preventing the series' cancellation. Unfortunately for these fans, the “effort [...] was ineffective, but it was a groundbreaking campaign that would serve as a model for every demonstration of fan support that would follow” (Murphy, 175).

6.1.1.2. Main Characters and Setting

The series evolves around Angela Chase, a fifteen year old girl in her sophomore year in highschool who lives with her parents and younger sister in a house in Three Rivers, a fictional suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Angela is what could be described as a normal teenage girl who is on her way of finding out who she is becoming and thereby trying out different constructions of identity valid for herself, which results in changes in her life, such as having a new best friend and trying to distance herself from her childhood bonds. Being exposed to many difficult aspects of growing up, she needs to find values that she can accept as her own and not just those that she is expected to respect.

She befriends Rayanne Graff, a girl who could not be more different than Angela in every possible aspect. Most of the time the two girls are accompanied by Rickie Vasquez, an interesting character since he does not seem to be like most boys at that age, either regarding the way he dresses or the fact that he wears eyeliner and is comfortable hanging out in the crowded girls' room between classes. According to Byers (3), the series was regarded as being “particularly strong” regarding the different

⁴¹ for more information on the show's origin and production see article by Murphy.

varieties “of points of identification for viewers” that it offers “because of the relative diversity and 'outsider' status of many of its core characters”. Byers (3) furthermore notices that “the presence of characters who broke the white, middle-class, and heterocentric landscape [...] offered both moments of pleasure and recognition for largely ignored parts of the viewing audience”. Davis (137) also remarks about the final episode of *MSCL* that it “opened up extra-diegetic avenues for spectatorial dreaming and fantasy [...]”.

The audience does not know much about what happened before in Angela's life, but it appears as though her life is in the process of beginning to change as the series begins. Other characters having somewhat important roles regarding Angela's development are Sharon Cherski and Brian Krakow, both friends that Angela has known since early childhood because they are neighbors of the Chase family. s, since there are many things she questions and she declares to have fallen in love with a boy from school whom she does not even know. His name is Jordan Catalano, and he is two years older than Angela because he was kept back in school. He is the embodied cliché of the perfect hero for an inexperienced fifteen year old girl: handsome, apparently inapproachable, drives a car, and plays in a band.

Angela's parents, Patty and Graham Chase, seem to lead a quite uneventful marriage; both work in the printing company that Patty took over from her father.

Other characters having somewhat important roles regarding Angela's development are Sharon Cherski and Brian Krakow, both friends that Angela has known since early childhood because they are neighbors of the Chase family.

Most of the scenes take place either at or in front of the Chase's house or at several different locations in or on the premises of Liberty High School.

MSCL was one of the first (if not the very first) series in which one of the characters, usually the main character, gives insight into thoughts and emotions by commenting on things other people do or say. In voice-overs, Angela reports on what goes on in her mind as if writing it into a diary, though we never actually see her keeping a diary. Through this technique of narration, a closeness to the character is created and the viewer is thereby “invited to identify” (Bignell, 99) with (usually) the main character,

which also “contribute[s] to a level of emotional realism” (Murphy, 165). This gives viewers the advantage that they know more than most other characters within the series. But it also creates advantages for the producers of a program, since, as Bignell (99) points out, this technique is only one of many clever “strategies of viewer involvement [which] contribute[s] to hooking the viewer into television narratives”.⁴² In her article on the narrative strategies in MSCL, Caryn Murphy (168-169) recalls the series writer Winnie Holzman who said that “the voiceover is intended to function as an inner voice that the viewer is allowed to overhear [...], rather than a guiding voice that is speaking directly to the audience”. Nowadays many series use this technique, not only to provide deeper insight but also often for humorous purposes⁴³.

6.2. Close Textual Analysis of *My So-Called Life*

6.2.1. Angela's Quest for Identity

6.2.1.1. Spoken language

In the first few episodes Angela's character is constructed as a very insecure one, as if just stepping out of childhood and into puberty. She doubts almost everything her parents say and at the same time trusts everything her new best friend Rayanne says. Such trust in a new best friend is something very natural at her stage of development. Siegler explains that

often, it is a “best friend” or “pal” who steps into this void, stabilizing the early adolescent's sense of insecurity, mitigating his estrangement with new companionship, and substituting for the parents' support and affection with his own. (Siegler, 20)

Now, it could be argued about whether Rayanne is a good substitute for Angela's parents or not, but since the choice of friends is Angela's decision alone it is also up to her to find out how far Rayanne can step into that “emotional void left by the diminished power of the parents” (Siegler, 20).

The fact that Rayanne is constructed as being far more mature and experienced than Angela first becomes clear in the opening episode, at the beginning of minute nine,

⁴² Compare Bignell, 96-99

⁴³ As is the case in popular series such as, *Grey's Anatomy*, or *Scrubs*, for instance.

when Rayanne draws Angela into the girls' room and not even asks but simply states: "You wanna have sex with him." Instead of denying the blunt statement, and in order to have more time to figure out how she could possibly escape an answer without looking stupid to her new best friend, Angela pretends not to have any idea whom Rayanne is talking about.

Angela's answer reveals that she probably has not even thought about having sex with anyone yet, as she sounds a bit confused: "I just like how he's always leaning. Against stuff. He leans great. Well, either sex or a conversation. Ideally both." In this respect Rayanne's character is constructed as being fairly straightforward even when very private issues, such as sex, are concerned. Angela's answer leads to the assumption that she has never had sex before and therefore is probably rather scared of the thought itself, which puts her in distress, as is clearly mirrored in her face.



Screenshot 1: Rayanne and Angela in the girls' room (E1, 09:03)

The fact that from all boys in school it is Jordan who catches Angela's attention, which results in her strong emotions for him, is not very surprising. She could have chosen a boy more intelligent than Jordan, someone who did not have to repeat two whole years in school, or she could have chosen someone who does not have a certain reputation of being in a band, frequently cutting classes and using every break for smoking cigarettes.

But from all boys in school she chooses Jordan to be the object of her first love. According to Siegler (16), it is easier for teenagers to fulfill the task of “creating new attachments” when such new bonds are built to people who heavily contrast with the familiar. It is common that the “good girls” develop infatuations with the “wildest boys” with the worst reputations since it makes it easier for the teenagers to end their dependency on their parents.⁴⁴

Studies have shown that adolescents begin to differentiate more intensely between who they are on the inside and how they appear on the outside, and that they are able to make a clear distinction between what they are and what they want to be.⁴⁵ This surfaces in being constantly concerned about what other people think of oneself, how they see a person, and often also taking certain actions specifically to make an impression on others.

Angela's constant self-conflict, caused by her insecurity over her own personality, her developing sense of self and her bewilderment of what that self actually is, is nicely illustrated in a conversation she has with her teacher, wherein she says:

It just seems like, you agree to have a certain personality or something. For no reason. Just to make things easier for everyone. But when you think about it, I mean, how do you know it's even you? (E1, 15:00)

This passage nicely demonstrates how insecure Angela is about her own self, about her own identity. In order to point out once more how important the issue of identity is in adolescent development, I quote Grotevant and Cooper (6), who assert that “the construct of identity stands at the interface of individual personality, social relationships, and external context, and has major implications for optimal adolescent development”. Angela appears to know only what she does not want to be and what is not part of her identity but she seems very insecure about who she thinks she is on the inside, or, even better, who she is becoming and whether that collides with expectations from the surrounding world.

What Fend calls a heightened self-assertiveness in adolescents manifests in the search for one's real self, which may be burrowed due to the inconsistency of previously

⁴⁴ See Siegler, 20-21.

⁴⁵ Cf. Fend, 100.

acquired roles or behaviors in certain situations.⁴⁶ By uttering doubts about one's person like the one above Angela makes clear how unsure she is about her "real self".

Angela's different expectations regarding sex are another way of constructing her character as a great deal more inexperienced and well-behaved than Rayanne. When their friend Rickie asks them "If you were about to do it, okay, what would you want the other person to say, like, right before?" Rayanne knows that she has a certain reputation to keep and suggests answers such as "This won't take long" or "Don't I know you?". Angela, being the endlessly romantic person who always wants everything to turn out perfect, says: "You're so beautiful, it hurts to look at you," which sounds very unrealistic and like something out of fairy tales. This comment by Angela could be argued to be one of a traditional feminine woman, since being hopelessly romantic and naïve are traits usually ascribed to 'traditional' femininity.⁴⁷ According to McRobbie, girls in the early 1990s were no longer "victim[s] of romance" as they once had been when she carried out her first study of girls' magazines in the 1980s. About this new female subject position, McRobbie claims that

She is no longer a slave to love. She no longer waits miserably outside the cinema knowing that she has been 'stood up'. [...] She no longer lives in absolute terror of being dumped. She is no longer terrified of being without a 'steady'. (McRobbie, 164)

Angela does not seem to have abandoned all of these romantic views McRobbie talks about. It is true that, once she has a boyfriend (if one could even call it that), she is very much afraid of being dumped but, on the other hand, she develops personal strength which then leads to her decision to stand in for her own wishes and not give in to what he wants, even if that means that she will be without a 'steady' from then on.

McRobbie (173) argues that since girls were more detached "from the poles of identity provided by romance," they had to construct new and different feminine subject positions that were "less stable". Femininity was thereby no longer regarded as "the 'other' of feminism" but instead it had to include "those 'structures of feeling'" that were a result from second wave feminism's political discourse.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Compare Fend, 104.

⁴⁷ See Holland, 7 ff.

⁴⁸ Cf. McRobbie, 172-173.

Nevertheless, this cuteness and romantic innocence Angela reveals most probably make up a great part of the realness of the series that many fans could personally relate to, according to Caryn Murphy's account of fan involvement.

In the second episode, Rayanne asks Jordan for a fake ID for Angela. Rayanne, Rickie and Angela are at the Chase's house to plan an evening which is to include Jordan's visit to bring the ID. Angela is extremely nervous because of the prospect of seeing him in a private context for the first time and probably also speaking to him. She admits that her mind is almost constantly preoccupied with thoughts about him as she says: "[...] that's so unfair. How come I have to be the one sitting around analyzing him in like microscopic detail and he gets to be the one with other things on his mind?" (E2, 17:42). By asking this question, Angela only points out what is commonly known. Women tend to analyze each and every detail of someone's behavior or utterances and this attention multiplies the stronger the emotions for this person are. Fend (106) confirms this by asserting that a considerable increase in self-reflexion is visible in girls at the age of fifteen and sixteen. Girls tend to reflect much more intensely about themselves and concentrate more on their inner life than boys do.⁴⁹ Thus, girls with an infatuation for a boy they do not even really know are also not uncommon.

As the family eats dinner, Patty utters her thoughts about changing her hairstyle. Angela immediately says: "No mom, don't! [...] just 'cause I changed my hair doesn't mean you should" (E2, 20:30). Debold et al. speak of the mother daughter relationship being the first competitive relationship the daughter experiences. Daughters learn from their mothers how to be attractive through inner and outer qualities and thereby how they can compete with other women.⁵⁰

Angela is aware of the fact that her fantasies about boys, and love in general, and Jordan Catalano in particular, might be unrealistic, which she admits in the second episode (28:30) shortly before she is about to meet Jordan in front of Brian's house at night. She explains to Rayanne and Rickie that she is afraid of destroying fantasies of him by meeting him in reality, and that she needs her fantasy to "get through the day". Debold et al. claim that girls are confronted with love stories from very early on by the media, mostly by TV or even in children's films of Walt Disney's stories and fairy tales, for

⁴⁹ See Fend, 106-107.

⁵⁰ See Debold et al., 55-56.

example. Widespread Anglo-American romantic images of women, such as Mary Poppins, conveyed to girls from early on what it means to be a woman. Needless to say, such images are always culture specific, the example with Mary Poppins aiming especially at the western media culture. Therefore it is only natural, according to Debold et al., that young girls and women tend to idealize romantic relationships and at the same time the girl's self-confidence and their ability to act and react decline.⁵¹ In the case of Angela's infatuation with Jordan, this is clearly visible in the ways she behaves when he is around. She feels small and unnoticed, and she almost does not dare to look into his eyes or even speak to him. By generating an image of Jordan that does not really comply with his character, Angela's imagination makes Jordan into something that he absolutely is not. Murphy (168) confirms this by stating that it is this “established tension between who Jordan is and who Angela thinks he is” which continues throughout most of the nineteen episodes.

By trying to cling to a fantasy rather than experience reality, Angela shows that maybe she is not so sure about wanting to grow up so fast and experience everything that goes along with a mature relationship to a man. This is one of the few passages where she hints at her preference to remain a child a little longer and to watch things from a distance rather than being involved personally. Rayanne, on the other hand, does not understand this at all. She has more experience with men and is of the opinion that what Angela wants is Jordan Catalano's mind and body. She regards it as a waste of time to wait and dream about him any longer when she could just as well have him in real life. Her reaction gives the viewer reason to suspect that she never had a romantic love relationship but that most of her affairs with men focused on the physical. Her limited view of the whole affair is also expressed through the way she speaks to Angela. She does not suggest that Angela loves Jordan or dreams about him, but simply that she 'wants' him, which is automatically associated with wanting someone's body rather than his or her company in general.

Another instance of Angela's fairytale-like expectations of love becomes obvious in the beginning of episode seven, when in her voice-over she explains how she had always imagined her first love to be like. She thought she would fall in love “nursing a blind soldier who was wounded in battle” or perhaps while “rescuing someone in the middle

⁵¹ Cf. Debold et al., 118-119.

of a blizzard, seconds before the avalanche hits” (E7, 01:30). These utterances prove how inexperienced Angela is in real life when it comes to a romantic relationship. She is despairing about not having a love life at the age of fifteen. This, once again, does not conform with what McRobbie found out about the new subject positions of teenage girls, not making their own senses of identity dependent anymore on whether they have a boy or not. She calls this an outdated “passive stereotype of femininity” (McRobbie, 164).⁵² It seems as if Angela only needs more time to realize that she herself is a worthy person, with or without a boyfriend.

In the next episode (*Guns and Gossip*), Angela is upset over a rumor about her going around school, namely that she and Jordan have had sex. Again Rayanne is the one who tells her that this might even be a positive thing since the rumor could help Angela “get to the next level with Jordan” (E2, 06:13). But Angela simply cannot understand why anyone would write something like this about her since it is not even close to the truth. Angela, already being in a phase of constantly worrying about the impression she makes on other people, cannot just ignore such a rumor.

In episode five (*The Zit*), Angela, Rayanne and Rickie find a poll, designed by “hormonally-challenged boys” (Camille, E5, 13:55), which lists the top forty sophomore girls from Liberty High School according to bodily or personality characteristics. Angela is not on the list, which, on the one hand, is comforting since some, if not to say most, of the categories are rather sexist, reducing those girls to physical attributes. But, of course, on the other hand, it puts Angela in an outsider position from which she feels completely invisible, boring and unnoticed by the rest of the school. This is, of course, not a desirable position for a fifteen year old girl. She says “things like this make me sick. Stop reading it, it's stupid. I mean, it's less than stupid. Who asked them? What gives them the right to decide,” (Angela, E5, 05:09) and then she is interrupted by Rayanne. The commentary by Angela could be read as a healthy amount of self-esteem, that she knows that she is not worth less just because she is not on some list set up by pubertal boys. But her strong reaction against it also shows that maybe she does care. Perhaps she does not want to “not get noticed”, to “blend in”, as Rickie describes her appearance, which is desirable for him, since he always sticks out as being different himself. Angela wants to be noticed for the person she is and the fact

⁵² Cf. McRobbie, 164.

that she is not on the list and that she has a pimple on her chin make her feel small and ugly. Instances like these that come from the outside are often painful but unavoidable in adolescent girls' lives. Murray (43) also states that “a teen girl must adapt quite quickly to the ever-tightening boundaries that are being placed on her still-forming sense of self as a female in a patriarchal society”. So although Angela knows very well that such a list has no meaning for her future or her developing identity as a becoming woman, at the moment she feels almost discriminated by the values that seem to be most important to the male world. Her absence from that list increases the insecurity about her own person and identity.

Angela's former best friend Sharon is on the list under 'best hooters', which makes Angela envious since her breasts have not yet developed as much as Sharon's. About this problem, Debold et al. state that some girls in puberty anxiously wait for their breasts to grow and for their hips to acquire a round and feminine shape while others desperately hope for the growth to stop.⁵³

Lesa Lockford (7) seems to agree with Debold et al. as she argues in her work on performances of femininity that “while a cultural mandate for women's gender performances exists, the competent performance of this feminine ideal is frustratingly difficult if not impossible,” which is why so many feminist activists incessantly try to encourage women to “challenge and counter the cultural mandate” by establishing individual female self-performances. Furthermore, regarding television shows, “the storytelling capabilities [...] would be inhibited if their female characters must all fit some ideal type” and it would anyway be “impossible to determine what might constitute this ideal” (Lotz, 19). By presenting Angela at the side of such contrasting figures like Rayanne or Sharon, *MSCL* manages to draw attention to the fact that people simply are different and viewers will have to figure out for themselves how to define their own ideal.

Even the scandalous Rayanne, who definitely is not among the most popular girls in school, is on the list. She is listed under “most slut potential”. The fact that she is outrageous with joy over that title says a lot about her self-perception and confidence. She likes the reputation she has in school because, as low as it might be, it still gives her

⁵³ Cf. Debold et al., 295.

a great deal of attention and makes her a more interesting person, if only for those who created the list.

As Angela sits in class (presumably history), they watch a speech by Malcolm X on racism in society. He asks:

Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? [...] Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose, and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head, to the soles of your feet? [...] (Malcolm X, E5, 22:20)

The speech continues about racial issues, but by what he said in the reprinted part above it could as well be a speech by Naomi Wolf asking female society who taught them to let themselves be reduced to their appearances by industrialized western societies who depend on women's beauty market.⁵⁴



Screenshot 2: Model on woman's magazine cover (E5, 13:25)

Wolf (12) argues that there exists a universal “quality called beauty,” but that the manner in which it is defined in contemporary Western societies is “determined by politics”. Furthermore, a “culturally imposed physical standard” (Wolf, 12) is distributed through mass media and “at once, the diet and skin care industries became the new cultural censors of women's intellectual space” and “the gaunt, youthful model

⁵⁴ See Wolf, 17.

supplanted the happy housewife as the arbiter of successful womanhood” (Wolf, 11). This supermodel she refers to also plays a role in the fifth episode of *MSCL*, where she appears even twice. First she is seen on the cover of a woman's magazine belonging to Patty, who probably only bought it to collect ideas for the fashion fundraising she is going to take part in.

About the model on the cover Patty says: “this girl....is everywhere. Perfect face, perfect body. I hate her” (Patty, E5, 13:20). This reaction by Patty fits perfectly into what Wolf reports about research that was carried out shortly before *The Beauty Myth* was written. She claims that such research

consistently shows that inside the majority of the West's controlled, attractive, successful working women, there is a secret “underlife” poisoning our freedom; infused with notions of beauty, it is a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control. (Wolf, 10)

Issues such as the fear of aging are also taken up in the same episode. Patty is just another proof for women not being completely satisfied with themselves no matter what age they are. Although she is a successful working mother, she still worries about not being attractive anymore to her husband.

That Angela might have a great deal of her self-doubt from her mother is a conclusion one could come to when considering that it is often Patty who is worrying about her attractiveness and youthfulness. She is definitely having problems with growing older, as she often conveys to her best friend Camille. One of these instances is in episode seven, when Patty believes that she might be pregnant due to the absence of her period. She has a conversation with Camille, who tells her that it could also be “pre-menopause”, which Patty then compares to “pre-death”. Quite obviously this is not something that Patty has considered before and it puts her into a kind of crisis, since she begins thinking of herself as being old at forty. She says to Camille: “We end up looking like Germaine Greer on the back of that book” (E7, 14:10). From her tone it is clear that this prospect is not a positive one, but the fact that she mentions the popular feminist activist might give a hint of her own past. It implies that she read Greer when the book came out, which furthermore implies that she was and/or is interested in feminist writing, which can then be attributed to the fact that a woman who is old enough to have participated in feminism's second wave activism wrote the script to the series. The

answer by Camille: “I plan on looking like Tina Turner when I’m fifty”, shows that strong and as very feminine regarded women can also be desirable, even if they are past that age boundary that seems to dominate the notion of beauty and attractiveness in Western societies. That the two women are even shown talking about this matter with such an implied background knowledge shows what McRobbie (158) calls a “dramatic realignment between feminism and the lived experience of femininity (and its textual representations)” which was still going on while she was writing the book.

The comment made by Patty, comparing menopause to something as dramatic and total as death, also highlights how common it was in the 1990s and even more so today that many women define their own femininity only through their body. The main goal for women in Western societies is to maintain a youthful body which defies all signs of aging. Holland argues that women are “not only expected to discipline their unruly bodies to achieve slenderness” but that “women often experience their bodies as ‘out of control’ through menstruation, pregnancy and the menopause” (Holland, 32).

One of the passages that adds a little mystery to the series, one that is only imagined and does not really happen in *MSCL* is in episode five, when Angela is in the girls' room observing her zit as all of a sudden the model from the magazine cover appears beside her. She is constantly telling Angela what a lucky girl she is since her hair is easy to control and she does not have to bother about dark circles under her eyes since she gets a good night's sleep every night after not having to go out with a boyfriend. This sequence is what Angela would probably wish the model to say to her if she really met her although even then it would be very hard to believe since everyone envies her because of her looks. Debold et al. as well as Wolf see a great danger in the prominence of today's beauty ideals and the risks that women take in order to come as close as possible to that ideal. They risk their lives and try to look great in order to receive the love, security and fulfillment they long for. A new haircut, a diet, a fitness program or a new lipstick – these are all small steps on the way to the object of desire that women want to become.⁵⁵

The model next to Angela embodies the beauty ideal that is promoted not only by the print media, as already mentioned before but also by digital mass media products, such as television shows and commercials. These images are what contribute to 'average'

⁵⁵ Cf. Debold et al., 291-292.

girls' insecurity about their physical appearances. They tend to believe that they are only worth something when they look like one of these cover girls. They believe that this and only this is what men find attractive and, in order to find a man one day, they will have to resemble these images.

Episode eleven (*Life of Brian*) is told very much from Brian's point of view, giving his thoughts for a change by having his voiceover instead of Angela's. That Brian has a heavy crush on Angela was hinted at in many preceding episodes, but in this one it is the first time that he admits it in his voice-over. By the things he comments on the viewer learns that he and Angela are very much alike in how they think about people and how they act when confronted by the one object of their attention. While they are at the school's 'World Happiness Dance', Angela once again tries to ignore the fact that Brian is in love with her since to her he is just the annoying neighbor who is good when a favor is needed but otherwise merely an uninteresting geek. When she is alone with him, she acts in a way like Jordan does when he is alone with her. They both probably know of the other one's infatuation but try not to make it too obvious that they do know about it by acting stupid and asking stupid questions, such as in the following conversation between Angela and Brian:

Angela: "What did Rickie want? [...] What did you say to him?"

Brian: "Nothing. I just said it was better that maybe he didn't hang out with us."

Angela: "What?"

Brian: "I thought that might be awkward or whatever, so-"

Angela: "Rickie's my friend"

Brian: "He's my friend, too. It's just – what if we – I don't know, if we wanted privacy or something?"

Angela: "Why would we want privacy?" (E11, 36:46)



Screenshot 3: Angela and Brian at the 'World Happiness Dance' (E11, 36:46)

Angela should know already that Brian has a crush on her and that, by doing things such as going to that dance with him, she gives him hope for more than just a friendship. Nevertheless, she tries to ignore his crush because it makes her uncomfortable. She does not hesitate to ask Brian for help, whether it is for a project in school, for a place to arrange a secret meeting with Jordan, for help breaking into school at midnight on Halloween, or for having someone to drive her to this dance. That this is not fair to him at all does not come to her mind even for a second, which implies her naivety and her being constantly occupied by things that affect her own life rather than someone else's. About half a minute after the conversation above, Angela blames Brian of being “so heartless” for having disappointed Delia, a girl who obviously likes Brian very much. All the while she does not once think about Brian's feelings and about her being heartless numerous times by not recognizing how important she is to him and that he would do almost anything for her if she only asked him to. At the very end of that episode she apologizes to Brian for having ruined his night and admits that it was all her fault. So, at least she notices that other people have feelings too, even if it is Brian. I believe that at that moment she really is sorry, but that will not prevent her from unconsciously hurting Brian's feelings again in the future episodes. In episode thirteen (*Pressure*) she wants to ask Brian if she could borrow his bike and then even remarks

aloud that she should not always ask things from him because it just is not fair. She admits that it is totally selfish of her (28:30) and that she will not do it ever again. Of course, Brian would not be Brian if he would not give his bike to her anyway.

Also in episode eleven Angela meets Jordan at the school dance and they stand opposite of each other outside the gym hall. Jordan's friends have gone ahead while he waits in order to have a moment with Angela. Their faces come closer but instead of kissing her, Jordan asks her why she is the way she is. She wants to know what that is like, how she is, but, of course, instead of answering he turns away and leaves. This feeds her insecurity about herself since his question could be meant both positively and negatively. The way she is to him is the thing that matters most to her at that time and knowing how he sees her would probably help her very much with knowing how to be in front of him. This scene nicely corresponds to what Fend says about youths and their heightened self-attentiveness. Without the important feedback from the outside, from friends or parents, youths run the risk of getting entangled in false estimations about themselves.⁵⁶ Therefore it is crucial for them to get objective opinions now and then in order to acquire a more unbiased reflexion of their own person. Angela does not get such an objective answer from Jordan which, of course, gives her reason to mistrust herself and her behavior even more when it comes to the interaction with him.

In episode thirteen (*Pressure*) Jordan makes clear that he does not want to wait forever until he can have sex with his girlfriend. Angela is still so overwhelmed about actually being his girlfriend that she could possibly live for years with kissing only without getting bored or wanting more. She likes Jordan very much but is afraid to tell him that she might not feel ready yet to have sex for the first time. Being an insensitive young boy with lots of experience, he would probably never guess the dilemma in which he puts Angela by pressuring her into 'doing it' with him. The establishment of one's mature sexual identity is what Siegler defines as the third developmental task of adolescence. She points out that "sexual identity is a complex psychological process that takes place over many years" and thereby is "formed and re-formed throughout infancy and childhood, and then transformed in adolescence and adulthood" (Siegler, 24-25). Being only fifteen, Angela is in the midst of adolescence, which explains why she has not yet defined a mature sexual identity for herself. She may feel an urge to share a certain

⁵⁶ See Fend, 102.

intimacy with Jordan but the dispassion with which he treats what is supposed to be an important step in any girl's life simply makes her feel uncomfortable and misunderstood.

While Angela is at their doctor to get a flu shot, she asks the doctor if she could tell her what is normal regarding percentages of girls her age. Once again, she is not self-confident enough to just admit that she is not ready and that it does not matter how many other girls already have sex at the same age as long as she knows that she does not want to. She wants to be normal, not to stick out, not be a kind of freak who others could make fun of. Instead of assuring Angela that it is natural to wait until she feels ready for it, the doctor only advises her to use protection. This does not help Angela with her problem at all. Statistics would probably not have helped her either because at the time of the series' production about one third of adolescents, boys and girls, have already had sex by the age of fifteen.⁵⁷ But since Angela is not able to make the doctor understand what she is aiming at, she does not receive the answer and guidance she was hoping for.

On Friday night Jordan comes to pick up Angela because he wants to take her to an abandoned house he knows where young couples go to have some privacy. Angela is still very unsure about what she wants to happen, so she tells her dad that maybe she should not go after all, suggesting that they might want her to stay and spend the evening with the family. Her father fails to sense that something is bothering her and thinks that he is doing her a favor by letting her go. As Jordan and Angela finally have a room to themselves at the abandoned house, Angela tells him that she has to go and gives him a false excuse. She skips school the following Monday because she is too embarrassed to see him after having backed out.

According to the findings of McRobbie, girls' relationship towards sex in the 1990s had changed considerably from what she had found a decade earlier. Although, as I mentioned before, she found out that the "conventional romance" had disappeared from girls' magazines, at the same time new spheres regarding "sexual and social relationships" (McRobbie, 166) were opening up.⁵⁸ She claims that

⁵⁷ Compare Siegler, 26.

⁵⁸ See McRobbie, 165-166.

Girls are encouraged to think clearly about whether or not they want to have sex with their partners. They are given all the available information about contraception, about protection from AIDS, and about how to make sense of love. (McRobbie, 166)

In Angela's case not all of the above mentioned things were, in fact, given. The doctor, obviously a person of trust, does indeed remind her about protection, but she fails to sense Angela's insecurity about the whole affair. Still, the fact that Angela decides against having sex with Jordan confirms her belonging to the generation McRobbie writes about, since she proves that her own sentiment towards something is more important than pressure from the outside.

On the day she skipped school to avoid Jordan, she visits him in the afternoon to apologize for having lied to him. Jordan is so upset that he does not really let her speak. He says that it is a normal thing to have sex, it is just what people are "supposed to do" (E13, 32:00), unless they are abnormal. These words coming from his mouth confirm Angela's fears of not fitting in if she does not what is expected of her.

In the end of that episode, Jordan comes over to bring back Brian's bike, which Angela had left at his place. They have a short conversation in which Angela compares having sex with driving a car. She says:

It's sort of like when you were letting me drive your car. And I loved it. It made me feel powerful – but also really terrified, like I wasn't ready - for that much freedom (E13, 42:13).

With this nice simile, Angela admits that she does not yet feel sexually mature, that the construction of her mature sexual identity is not yet fully accomplished. After their short dialogue it is clear that they have just broken up.

In the sixteenth episode (*Resolutions*), the viewer witnesses how much Angela has matured in the last few episodes. Since the break up of their short relationship, she is rather relaxed in Jordan's company and she does not take everything he says as seriously as she used to. In this episode, Jordan realizes that it is wrong if Angela is doing his homework while they are not a couple anymore and so he starts working with a tutor who turns out to be Brain Krakow. Nevertheless, Angela offers to help him further since she would not mind spending time with him, whereupon Jordan replies that she could have sex with him if she wanted to. A few episodes earlier Angela would have reacted

completely differently to such a direct suggestion by Jordan but now she can only laugh at his blunt offer.

In episode seventeen (*Betrayal*) Angela hears from Sharon that Rayanne and Jordan “supposedly did it” in his car the night before and that Brian had witnessed it. Angela does not believe it at first and thinks that Sharon made it up because she is still jealous of Angela's and Rayanne's friendship, which is, of course, totally unrealistic since Sharon had many friendly talks with Rayanne even when Angela was not there. But when Rickie confirms the rumor, Angela knows that it must be true since Rickie would never lie to her. The fact that Angela is so deeply hurt by what Rayanne did is not only a result of her not yet being over Jordan at all but also the experience of being gravely disappointed by the person she probably trusted most. She cannot understand how the two of them could do such a thing when it did not even mean anything to either of them. Rather, it was a sort of coincidence, both of them being drunk and at the same time at the same place, and Angela was even the one thing they could talk about since she is the connecting link between the two.

6.2.1.2. Angela's Voiceover

Since *MSCL* is a show that was created to present “adolescence from the inside, from what it feels like to be an adolescent” (Herskovitz in Cohen, Rich and Rubiner, quoted in Murphy, 166) voiceover is used to present an “insider's perspective”, which, in Angela's case, “sets her character apart from previous televisual teens as dark, multifaceted, and painfully emotional” (Murphy, 167). Angela's narration in the form of her voiceover is “unreliable because she is recording subjective experiences rather than objective truths” (Murphy, 169), which contributes to the effect that the viewer is more likely to understand Angela's actions since she reveals all her insecurities and fears through her voiceovers. According to Bell (151), it is this narrative technique which “realistically illustrates the confusion, and naivety of [...] adolescent protagonists who are struggling to make sense of their lives”.

The very first voice-over by Angela happens already at the very beginning of the first episode, and functions as a sort of introduction for viewers to get to know who they are watching and what she is up to:

So I started hanging out with Rayanne Graff. Just for fun. Just 'cause it seemed like if I didn't, I would die or something. Things were getting to me. Just how people are. How they always expect you to be a certain way, even your best friend. (E1, 1:08)

Already these introductory lines reveal some of Angela's insecurity about her own person, she feels the pressure to behave according to other people's expectations. According to Debold et al. young girls observe the surrounding culture as well as grown women in order to learn what it means to be a woman.⁵⁹ Since the development and construction of identity “embodies a person's central values, definition of relationships with others, and conceptualization of one's connection with [...] her community and social institutions” (Grotevant and Cooper, 7), Angela is still at the very beginning of defining her own identity as a young woman due to her indecisiveness regarding the aspects mentioned. The pressure she feels coming from her surrounding world for her to define the above mentioned values and relationships does not make an untroubled existence possible.

By best friend she refers to Sharon, her neighbor and childhood friend from whom she is slowly growing apart as she spends more time with Rayanne. Angela appears to be very shy and introverted and she seems to be trying to figure out particularly what it is that is expected of her and whether she wants to comply with it in the first place. Later on (2:00) she observes that “boys have it so easy” since they do not have to pretend things that are not true. For example, as Angela points out, it is expected of her, and girls in general, to pretend they do not notice that the boys are noticing them. This certainly is something that girls are taught; it is not a natural behavior that simply is acquired, but rather needs to be learned, most probably by imitating others. Boys, on the contrary, are not told to watch girls in a way that they will not notice, which raises the question of why girls have to pretend anything at all? Why is it not just accepted the way they are and what would happen if they would not follow these ‘rules’?

In their book from 1994 Debold et al. refer to psychological studies⁶⁰ which confirm that adolescent girls suffer more from depressions, insecurity regarding their appearance, eating disorders, stress and other symptoms than boys of the same age.⁶¹

⁵⁹ See Debold et al., 183.

⁶⁰ Studies were based on questionnaires given to mothers and their teenage daughters in which they were asked to evaluate and categorize the frequency of thoughts containing doubts about oneself.

⁶¹ See Debold et al., 32.

The first action that Angela takes towards creating a new identity for herself is dyeing her hair red after Rayanne told her that it was “holding her back” and Angela realized that Rayanne was “not just talking about [her] hair, but about [her] life” (E1, 03:07).



Screenshot 4: Angela dyeing her hair in a “Crimson Glow” (E1, 03:11)

According to Murray (41), Angela's change of hair color is “a physical manifestation of her desire for agency in the creation of her new persona”. By performing this cosmetic change, Angela affiliates to a long tradition of women changing their appearance as an expression of “transform[ing] the female identity” (Murray, 41). Murray states that, within the series, characters of authority are afraid that this act is the result of a problem that is troubling Angela or that she is simply wanting to attract attention, while in fact what Angela wants is to make “an initial step toward controlling the direction of her life” (Murray, 41). By changing one's appearance, the expectations of others within the social network alter as well, which then leads to being conceived differently by other individuals. This, in turn, “destabilizes the idea of a fixed identity” (Murray, 41). For Angela this act is an important turning point in her adolescence. From then on she appears to be living through most of the phases that adolescents encounter on their difficult way towards defining a an identity construction that holds true to them.

In her voiceover, Angela openly admits her insecurity of herself as she says things like: “I've never had an actual boyfriend. I don't know if that's normal or not.”(E2, 04:50) She

is so very concerned with her own personality, her own identity which she cannot quite define yet, that all she really wants is to be average. To be normal would often be considered as something boring and/or negative but, in Angela's case, as well as in the case of many fifteen-year-old girls, being normal is something that is aspired. What most of these girls regard as normal is what they know from friends or often they learn it from girl magazines. The problem of such magazines and their depiction of youth and beauty has often been criticized by several feminist writers, such as Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* or Angela McRobbie and her account of the content of such glossy magazines produced for teenage girls.

Within the series are many scenes that nicely demonstrate what Siegler (17-19) calls the first “developmental task of adolescence”, namely the separation of old ties. Thereby, teenagers start cutting off their childhood bonds sooner or later. Usually these are child-parent bonds, which are no longer wanted, but in Angela's case these also involve her ties to her old friends, to whom she no longer feels very close. Whenever one of her childhood friends, Brian or Sharon, comes up to talk to Angela in school, she starts feeling awkward because she does not know how to behave since she feels as if she is another person with her new friends than the person her old friends believe to know. She confirms this by saying

What I, like, dread is when people who know you in completely different ways end up in the same area [...] you have to develop, this like, combination you, on the spot. (E2, 13:10).

Probably Angela feels as if these old friends could easily destroy her newly built outward personality which she embodies when she is with her new friends, which is, in fact, not that different from her old self. But when it comes to measuring her own personality, Angela is very critical.

The first time it is Angela who is speaking of ‘wanting Jordan’ and not Rayanne, who always alluded to the physical part of a romance that Angela was after, is when Jordan comes up to talk to Angela in the school hallway. She just had a difficult time with being judged by others because of a rumor that was not true and according to which she had sex with Jordan. Now everything seems to be going well again. In her voice-over she says:

“[...] I knew that my life would never be the same. I knew then that the rumor was right. Not in actuality, but in my heart. Because at that moment I would have done anything I wanted him so much” (Angela's VO E3, 29:55).

Here she seems to deflect the fact that reality does not have much in common with her fantasy about Jordan but that now she would be ready for that reality. Of course, Jordan would not be a seventeen year old boy if he did not ruin her good inner feeling by saying something really stupid which undoes the hopeful atmosphere at once.

The fifth episode starts with Angela seeing Sharon with her new boyfriend in school. This creates in Angela a feeling of ugliness and not being attractive. To make matters even worse, Angela has a pimple on her chin (the episode is called *The Zit*), which she is constantly trying to hide with her hands. In her voice-over, she comments that Sharon's life was developing in a “natural, healthy way” while her own life was “clogged” (Angela's VO, E5, 01:55), a word play referring to her clogged skin having resulted in a pimple. Sharon is what one could call very consistent with the images of beauty and attractiveness displayed by the popular media in the 1990s in the US. She has long hair, a great body, perfect skin, and dresses in a way that attracts members of the other sex. The study by Fend has also proven that the status of the pubertal development is not the reason for psychic problems in adolescents but that the relative developmental condition, meaning how far someone is developed in comparison to classmates or friends is of much greater importance.⁶²

McRobbie notices a different tone in girls' magazines from the 1990s compared with those from the 1980s, which she made a study about. She surveyed *Just Seventeen*, one of the bestselling teenage magazines in Britain by that time and thereby notices that in the early 1990s “femininity does indeed emerge as an altogether less rigid category” (McRobbie, 165). She admits that it still contains the same most important points in teenage life, such as “the pursuit of identity (in beauty), the achievement of success (through fashion consumption) and search for some harmony or stability (through happiness)” (McRobbie, 165). Even though the language and vocabulary of the magazine has gained self-esteem in comparison with its predecessor Jackie, McRobbie (165) criticizes the still prevalent “pressure to adhere to the perfect body image as a prerequisite for the success in love which is equated with happiness”. This can be taken

⁶² See Fend, 110.

over to Angela's situation in which she equates having a maturely developed body with having a life that develops in a natural and healthy way.

Debold et al. confirm that from very early on girls learn about the great value that is put on appearance. This learning process is often a painful one since it is often triggered by disappointments and rejection.⁶³ The cognition of a society's value system happens early in girls' lives, sometimes already in kindergarten. They notice that females are evaluated according to their attractiveness and that appearance is also the most important factor defining someone's popularity.⁶⁴

In US high schools this value system is made visible through the special interest groups that students can choose from. The fit and popular girls usually join the cheerleader's team while the somewhat unobtrusive girls join clubs such as the chess club or the team from the school's newspaper or they play an instrument in the school's orchestra⁶⁵. A girl's chances to be recognized and popular among male students is therefore considerably higher when she is good looking and hanging out with the right (meaning also popular) people. Angela does not really fulfill any of these conditions and the fact that she spends most of her time in school with Rayanne and Rickie does not help her situation.

The act of dating is also something that follows an extremely fixed cultural concept in the United States. No matter which American TV series one watches, it seems as if dating is the number one priority of girls starting at the age of seven or even below. Little children in elementary school are so manipulated by their surroundings, whether these are the media or older siblings, that they do not simply have friends anymore but they define one person as their girl- or boyfriend. In Europe this distinction is not made as early as in the US even though children become more and more influenced by the media and tend to copy the American model. In many American films it is purported that it is almost the most important thing in highschool to be asked on a date for the prom night. Girls who do not have a date on that special evening are devastated and automatically feel ugly and unwanted. But that the question of whether they have a date

⁶³ See Debold et al., 293.

⁶⁴ Compare Debold et al., 294.

⁶⁵ *MSCL* contradicts this stereotyping by depicting Sharon Cherski as the pretty cheerleader who is not only popular among boys but also plays the clarinet in the school's orchestra, as we see in episode five.

or not does not change anything about the personalities they are is only seldom mentioned in any of these series or films.

The fact that many supposedly perfect girls are not at all happy because of other reasons than just their bodies should be stressed in mass media products. Many people who are unhappy about their bodies think that their lives will automatically be perfect if only they lost a little weight or if only their breasts were bigger and their noses smaller. That this usually is not the case, since these changes on the surface do not usually solve a person's real problems, is often intentionally omitted in the media.



Screenshot 5: Angela embarrassed about the pimple on her chin (E5, 03:28)

Debold et al. claim that through their intellectual abilities young girls start seeing themselves through the eyes of others and internalize the male standards of female beauty. Then they start evaluating their own bodies just as boys would do. Debold et al. furthermore argue that regarding this fight about the other sex's attention girls and women are not only the victims but the executioners of this excessively practiced beauty cult at the same time.⁶⁶

In their book Debold et al. report women's memories from their time at school. Some remember that in the breaks they held little beauty contests where the girls' legs were

⁶⁶ Cf. Debold et al., 296.

evaluated by the others regarding shape and general impression. In a country where going to pageants, where young girls are dressed up like little dolls by their mothers, is a popular sparetime activity, it is no surprise that being beautiful is sometimes equated with being a better person.

Angela is not very confident about her own body. After gym class she compares hers to the other girls' bodies and is embarrassed. In her voice-over she says: "The worst feeling is suddenly realizing that you don't measure up" (Angela's VO, E5, 15:25). She finds that she does not commensurate with the beauty ideal that is constantly displayed in the mass media. She also feels less attractive just because her breasts are smaller than those of others at her age. According to Fend, Angela's behavior is very typical for adolescent girls who tend to always remark on whether they are early, normal or late developers in comparison to their surrounding social network. Adolescents with a higher degree of self-reflexion tend to evaluate such differences more critically than those with less self-reflexion.⁶⁷

At the end of episode five Angela seems to have learned the lesson about the beauty myth. After having had a difficult time at school feeling ugly and unattractive, she finally seems to have found out the mystery behind inner beauty. In her voice-over she says:

Sometimes it seems like we're all living in some kind of prison. And the crime is how much we hate ourselves. [...] when you really look closely, people are so strange and so complicated that they're actually beautiful. Possibly even me. (Angela's VO, E5, 43:08)

According to Bell (150), these words demonstrate that Angela "begins to understand the difference between internal and external standards of beauty" and indeed the topic is not at the center of any of the following fourteen episodes.

In episode six, *The Substitute*, Angela is confronted with a substitute teacher in her English class, Vic Racine. He is important in Angela's character development since he is the one who tells her to start questioning things. She describes him to her parents as an adult she can "look up to, finally" (E6, approx. 29:00). Of course, her parents are also adults she can look up to but that is much harder to admit to one's own parents. Adolescents need role models that are not their parents and for Angela Mister Racine is

⁶⁷ Cf. Fend, 110.

such a role model in the beginning of the episode. In terms of Siegler's five developmental tasks of adolescence, Angela is fulfilling the fourth (formulating new ideas and new ideals) by rebelling against rules set up by former persons of authority, in this case the school's principal. She is very excited about having something her generation can fight for, since anti-war-protests are not taking place at the time and therefore Angela is more disappointed when her parents tell her that it was not right to copy and distribute the essay collection from literature class against the school's permission. Siegler claims that all adolescents have to go through a phase in which they start to "form their own identity, [...] relinquish[ed] their attachment to ideas and ideals that their parents hold dearly" (Siegler, 29) since their "ideological rebellion will lead them to follow an independent course" (Siegler, 30). McRobbie (166) also finds a change in the various constructions of femininities in girls' magazines in the 1990s towards more "bold, assertive and ambitious" images of girls and young women who no longer have to "relinquish their femininity to achieve 'equality' ". By standing up against the prohibition, Angela refutes former traditional images of femininity which portrayed women as shy and meek beings who lack the capacity to utter their own opinion.

In the end of that episode Angela finds out that, after all, Mister Racine is just a normal person as well who has his own private problems and who is not at all as perfect as she believed him to be.

The ninth episode is called *Halloween* and the whole episode revolves around that festivity. Angela does not want to wear a costume to school and therefore she does not. Some students at school are dressed up, as well as some teachers. Angela mentions her insecurity about her own identity once more in her voice-over. She says: "I should have worn a costume. But who would I be?" (E9, 04:32). On the one hand she refuses to risk making a fool out of herself by wearing a costume to school, but on the other hand she sees the opportunity of taking on someone else's identity which is, of course, very tempting. The fact that she does not even know who she would like to be suggests that she has not yet spent much time thinking about her role models or about who she wants to be in the future. Some time later she ends up wearing girl's clothes from the 1960s that Rayanne brought to school for her.

In the twelfth episode (*Self Esteem*) Angela cannot concentrate on her teacher in class since her thoughts about kissing Jordan in the boiler room every break are heavily

distracting her. In her voice-over she explains that her whole life has become divided into kissing and not kissing. She goes on mentioning that she feels like a criminal since she has missed several geometry reviews which she would actually need desperately, but the time spent with Jordan is just much more important. So she tries to be invisible in class and she remarks that it is amazing how easy that is. She just stays in the last row and lets “the boys shout out the answers, which they will, even if they're wrong”. Then she adds: “Boys are less afraid - of being wrong”(E12, 11:10). Debold et al. remark that psychological studies have proven that before puberty girls are generally psychically healthier than boys. Once puberty has set in, however, this situation reverses itself.⁶⁸ Girls at that age often lack self esteem and do not feel comfortable speaking in front of many people, even if these are students they know. Stemmer-Beer also claims that this difference of behavior is the result of different modes of education between boys and girls. While boys are usually raised in an approving environment which encourages them to speak their mind and to try new things, girls are often treated differently by their own mothers, mostly probably not even consciously. Girls are not supported without adding doubts of their capability which, of course, are often just the uttered worries from a mother about her daughter. These subliminal doubts lead to girls not being as confident in their own skills as boys of the same age are.⁶⁹

For Angela, getting attention from Jordan Catalano, her only interest in the last couple of months, is changing everything. The fact that she is able to meet him every break in the boiler room to kiss him is so important that she even accepts his suggestion of not telling anyone about them. Obviously he is not willing to fully commit to her in front of his friends, let alone people he does not know.

⁶⁸ See Debold et al., 34.

⁶⁹ Cf. Stemmer-Beer, 14-17.



Screenshot 6: Angela, happy to meet Jordan in the boiler room (E12, 18:27)

When Rayanne hears that, she scolds Angela for letting Jordan control her and she warns her not to get hurt since she is not someone who can “handle the boiler room” without getting emotionally involved. Angela knows perfectly well that she is already far too emotionally involved, but since this is a great success for her she does not want to do anything that could risk her relationship to Jordan. As Rayanne and Sharon tell her to be careful to not get hurt by Jordan since she deserves much better, Angela is upset and defends his behavior by saying that he does want to be seen with her or otherwise he would not have asked her to come to a bar on Friday night, which is a lie, of course. The fact that Angela lies to her friends only to defend what she and Jordan share is not a sign of a well-developed self-worth. She lets him have all the advantages of meeting her for the pleasure of making out, while he not only does not commit to her, but he also insists she not tell anybody about them. If Angela were a few years older she most probably would not follow his humiliating commands. But since she is extremely unsure about her own attractiveness, she plays along since she fears that if she does not she will not have anything of Jordan anymore. Fortunately, this fear vanishes in the course of the episode and Angela realizes that Jordan has to make at least a small commitment if he wants their little adventure to continue.

When Rayanne hears that, she scolds Angela for letting Jordan control her and she warns her not to get hurt since she is not someone who can “handle the boiler room” without getting emotionally involved. Angela knows perfectly well that she is already far too emotionally involved, but since this is a great success for her she does not want to do anything that could risk her relationship to Jordan. As Rayanne and Sharon tell her to be careful to not get hurt by Jordan since she deserves much better, Angela is upset and defends his behavior by saying that he does want to be seen with her or otherwise he would not have asked her to come to a bar on Friday night, which is a lie, of course. The fact that Angela lies to her friends only to defend what she and Jordan share is not a sign of a well-developed self-worth. She lets him have all the advantages of meeting her for the pleasure of making out, while he not only does not commit to her, but he also insists she not tell anybody about them. If Angela were a few years older she most probably would not follow his humiliating commands. But since she is extremely unsure about her own attractiveness, she plays along since she fears that if she does not she will not have anything of Jordan anymore. Fortunately, this fear vanishes in the course of the episode and Angela realizes that Jordan has to make at least a small commitment if he wants their little adventure to continue.

When Sharon, Rayanne and Angela get to the bar on Friday, Jordan ignores Angela and she tells the two girls that he is probably busy and that she does not want to interrupt him in his pool game. As the girls finally do persuade her to go over to him, she does so and immediately regrets having come at all since he is very rude to her. It is clear that he is not comfortable with her being there, since he did not ask her to come in the first place. Jordan seems to have two personalities: a nice one that says that he was hoping to find Angela in the boiler room, and a rude one that says mean things in order to keep his cool attitude in front of his friends. Once again, Rayanne proves how important Angela is to her and tells Jordan that he is making a mistake if he believes that Angela will wait for him forever. Rayanne herself has built a protection shield around her feelings long ago so she does not get hurt by boys easily and she does not want to see Angela suffer, knowing as she does that Angela has no experience with boys and therefore is likely to have her heart broken. On the next Monday, Angela is in the boiler room again because Jordan has left a note in her locker asking her to come. She takes him to task and asks why he is adorable when they are alone but acting as if he does not know her in public.

But, of course, being a boy of his age, and being highly insecure himself, he has nothing to say, so she leaves.

In the end of this episode, Jordan realizes, through a sonnet by Shakespeare, what it is that he likes so much in Angela and he finally overcomes his coolness and pledges himself to their relationship by taking her hand in front of half the school.

At the very end of *Pressure* Angela has learned that she should listen to her inner voice even if that is against all odds or statistics. She says:

People always say you should be yourself, like yourself is this definite thing, like a toaster, or something. Like you can know what it is, even. But every so often I'll have like a moment, where just being myself, and my life right where I am, is, like, enough. (E13, 44:35)

So, in a way she has recognized that being herself is okay, that she does not have to resemble every other average fifteen year old girl. She realizes that it is right to do what one really feels even if decisions might hurt oneself temporarily. And she also agrees with the point of view I have presented in this thesis, that an identity, a person's personality, is never a fixed, stable, definite thing, but rather a fluid construction always subject to change, shaped and re-shaped, either consciously or unconsciously, probably for one's whole life.

At the very beginning of episode sixteen (*Resolutions*), which is set around New Year's Eve, Angela decides not to “get so caught up in [her] own thoughts“ (E16, 01:30) in the future. So she is actually aware of the fact that she is thinking way too much about things that might not be worth thinking about in such great detail. Maybe this resolution also implies that she will try to take things more loosely and not to worry about herself and her life all the time, which has already gotten much better within the last few episodes. Murphy (169) links the “decline of the voiceover narration device over the course of the series“ to the pressure that the series writers received from the ABC network, whose programming directors criticized it for focusing too much on teenage girls and demanded that it should fit the genre of family series. According to Murphy (169), it is very much due to the decrease in frequency of voiceovers that “has effectively made Angela into a less introspective, and more active character”. Funnily enough, about one minute after Angela's first thought, or voiceover, she utters the doubt

that not thinking so much might make her become a “shallow person“ and therefore she would have to rethink her previously uttered resolution.

The first thing the viewer hears in the following episode (*Betrayal*) is Angela's voice-over in which she admits how much she loved Jordan, that he had possessed every part of her thoughts and her heart but that, finally, she is over him. She starts dancing on her bed in her pyjamas conveying a state of having been literally freed from some burden. In her voice-over she adds: “It was like Jordan Catalano had been surgically removed from my heart. And I was free” (E17, 02:38). That what she thinks is not totally true becomes clear in the first scene where Jordan comes into view. As soon as Angela spots him she goes to another boy she knows to talk to him about something that she is not even really interested in.



Screenshot 7: Angela, talking to Corey (E17, 07:49)

While talking to that boy, Corey, her eyes slip past Corey to look at Jordan twice, only to assure herself that he is watching her. In her voice-over she then admits that she really wanted to listen to what Corey was telling her and that it was not just because Jordan was watching. If that was the case she would not have to mention it at all, but since she does it is clear that this was the real reason.

6.2.1.3. Analysis on a Visual Level

6.2.1.3.1. Body Language

What contributes a great deal to the reception of Angela as such an innocent and insecure person are her habits such as always touching her hair in situations where she feels uncomfortable or nervous or letting her gaze drop to the floor when she feels that someone important, mostly Jordan, could be watching her. All of a sudden she talks differently, she starts smiling for no reason and she says things that she normally would probably never say, especially things that do not make any sense. According to Samantha Holland (12), this behavior is a sign of the “femininity masquerade” that is put on by the girl, meaning the usage of “all the trappings of traditional femininity” such as “the adoption of coquettish feminine wiles” which are highly visible in Angela's behavior whenever Jordan is close by.



Screenshot 8: Angela's unconscious habits when she feels observed by Jordan (E1, 14:19)

The only reason why she had to say anything in the first place was because she answered a question from the teacher unconsciously aloud. Something she rather would have only thought came out loud because of her constant distraction of her thoughts, her constant daydreaming about Jordan.

6.2.1.3.2. Costumes/Styles

In the beginning of the series Angela is presented as being still more a little girl than a young woman which is made visible through her clothes. In the first episode she is wearing long cotton dresses that either have long sleeves and, if not, she wears a long sleeve shirt underneath in order not to show too much skin. These clothes look like it is still her mother who decides what she wears to school and not as if they were her own choice. The example I have chosen for the picture below shows an extremely boring dress that is not just out of fashion nowadays but surely was not very fashionable in the middle of the 1990s when this was shot. The style is conservative and almost guarantees that whoever wears that dress will not be regarded as an independent woman but rather as a little girl that needs protection.



Screenshot 9: Angela in a quite unimpressive dress (E1, 11:22)

The first time Angela starts to wear something that looks more like the clothes of a grown-up is when she is going to *Let's Bolt*, a club to where Rayanne wants her to come in order to meet Jordan. Because she lied to her parents about where she is going, Angela leaves the house in her usual understated trousers and flannel shirt. Then, in the bushes in front of the house, she changes into a tight dress with thin straps in black and a belt. She even applies make-up, which we have never seen her do before. The new outfit makes her appear much older and thereby probably more attractive to a boy who

is two years older than she. At their first encounter, she made a fool of herself by having worn a long-sleeve girl's dress with which she fell in some mud and ruined her look. With the new outfit she hopes to make an impression on Jordan and she probably also hopes not to stick out of the crowd in the club as being the youngest and most innocent. The obvious outward change is a sign of her search for a new personality that combines her inner feelings with her outward appearance. About this Stemmer-Beer states that it is only natural for pubertal girls wanting to appeal to boys not wanting to compete with them. They start decorating themselves more feminine, trying out make-up and dressing more feminine and also so-called 'girls' talk' becomes extremely important.⁷⁰

With the new outfit Angela puts on before she goes to the club with Rayanne she seems to be trying to find out what it means to be feminine and how she could permute that for herself. The body plays an important role in identity construction as Holland (31) claims, it “can be used to further a person's passage into the sort of life they desire (for example, through clothing [...]), making the body part of an ongoing 'identity project' ”.

According to Murray (44), who refers to Barbara Hudson, “the discourses of adolescence and femininity are subversive of one another, creating a set of conflicting expectations for the teenage girl”. Adolescence is supposedly regarded as “a masculine construct” since it is the embodiment of acts of rebellion and resistance which collides with a patriarchal society's expectations of a “feminine, demure (perhaps even silent) young woman” (Murray, 44). The incongruity of these two signifiers often redounds to a girl's insecurity and uneasiness due to the gap between wanting to define their own feminine identities and at the same time trying to correspond to “cultural expectations” (Murray, 44).⁷¹

⁷⁰ See Stemmer-Beer, 18.

⁷¹ Cf. Murray, 43-44.



Screenshot 10: Angela's new outfit, secretly put on (E1, 31:46)

In her chapter on “changing modes of femininity” Angela McRobbie (157) expresses her disagreement with Faludi, who claimed that women were experiencing a “backlash [...] after a short period of gains” in the early 1990s. Neither does McRobbie proclaim “a narrative of progress”, but rather she argues that there has been a dramatic “unfixing” of gender positions. In her 1994 book McRobbie (157) claims that “there is now a greater fluidity about what femininity means and how exactly it is anchored in social reality”. Taking this position, with which I am in agreement, into consideration, it becomes more difficult on the one hand to fulfill such cultural expectations, which Murray defined above, but on the other hand the society's tolerance is different as well, which then makes it easier for young girls to be accepted just the way they are. Angela, it seems, is not sure yet if she would be fully accepted if she would act according to her emotions, so she still tries to play the role of someone who she thinks would be more acceptable in certain situations.

From the beginning, the characteristic differences between Angela and Rayanne are supported by Rayanne's extravagant style. The clothes she wears do not look as if it was her mother who told her what to wear to school; rather she has a very extreme and unique style. Holland and the participants of her study would certainly not call

Rayanne's appearance 'traditionally' feminine, but rather alternative, being almost the opposite of 'mainstream'. But in contrast to Angela, who certainly does not look like a 'traditionally' feminine teenager in this scene either, Rayanne seems at least to have thought thoroughly about what she wears. In her case, since we get to know her character better, the way she dresses even seems to be a statement against everything that is considered the norm. Holland (37) confirms that “to explicitly render femininity [...] is arguably no less of an on-going learning process for girls and women”.

By the way she dresses it is almost impossible to put her into one specific drawer of characters. She is not the shy one, as Angela is, who does not yet seem to care about fashion, yet neither is she the 'girly' type, such as Sharon, who seems to put great value on fashion and on other people's opinion about one's style and whose greatest ambition it is to be voted into the cheerleader's team. The superficiality of the 'girly' girl is usually associated with the superficiality that the phenomenon of postfeminism displayed throughout the media in the 1990s.

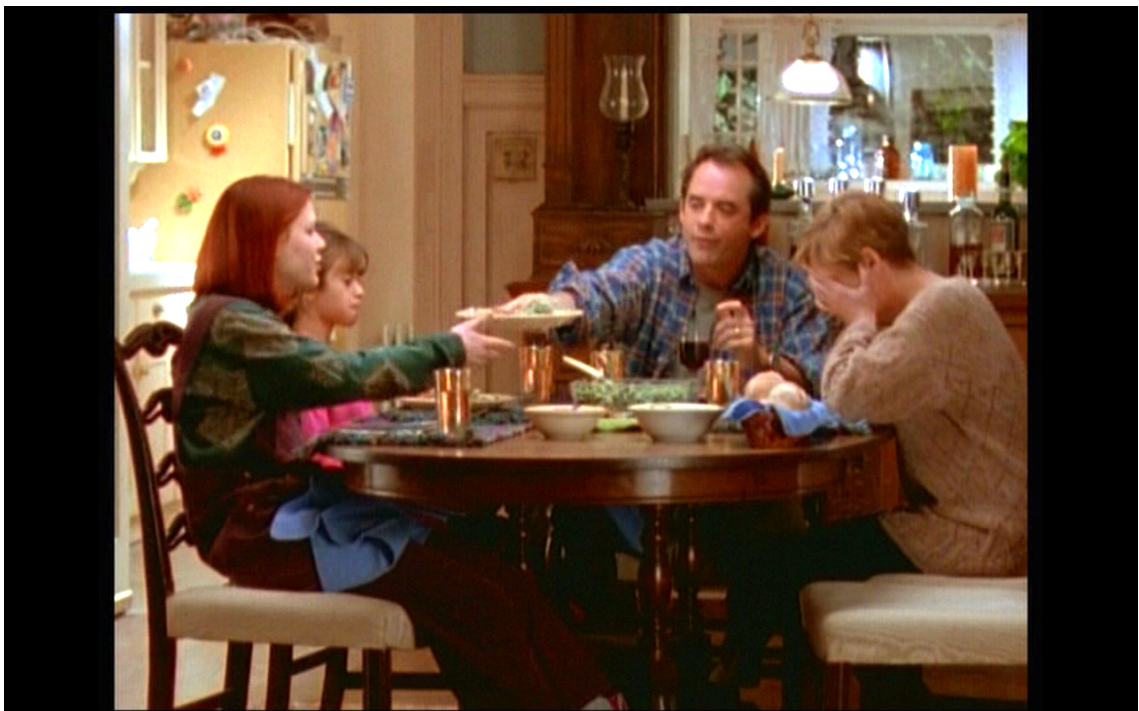


Screenshot 11: One of Rayanne's many headstrong styles (E1, 25:40)

On one hand, some parts of Rayanne's style remind of the 'girly' character type, for instance her short tops that provide an exposed part of her belly. But on the other hand she diminishes that impression by simultaneously wearing a baseball cap and a long coat, which completely interfere with the 'girly' style.

In episode three the Chase family have dinner together and the parents are worried because a gun went off in school. No one was hurt but still Patty and Graham are very concerned. Patty criticizes US society by asking how it could come as far as that so that parents have to worry about their children being shot in school, which supposedly is a safe place. The camera shot of their dinner table is striking because of Angela's appearance. She wears her purple dungarees which intensify her perception as a child. Her feet are dangling in the air which normally only children's feet do since they cannot reach the floor. In this scene Angela hardly looks older or bigger than her little sister Danielle.

By picturing Angela as a little girl rather than a rebellious teenager, the need for protection is enforced since children are the weakest members of a society and therefore have to be protected. With violence being brought into schools, parents become helpless for not being able to secure their children's lives. McRobbie (155) shortly mentions the “extreme anxiety” that overcomes her every time she is on her way to pick up her fifteen year old daughter in the early hours of the morning after she has been to a rave. McRobbie (174) furthermore mentions that the form of youth cultures “accounts for the [...] fear and powerlessness experienced by conventional 'moral guardians' and also by parents” since they are in an outsider position from which they feel helpless.



Screenshot 12: The Chase family at their dinner table (E3, 07:16)

As always, the mother is the one who worries more than the father. Mothers are frequently portrayed as being overprotective and often worrying for no reasons. In our case it is Graham's part to calm Patty down and to tell her not to go crazy and that taking Angela to school everyday could most certainly not be a solution. Once again, Graham is on Angela's side since he knows that she would probably feel like dying of embarrassment if her mom really did bring her to school every morning.

The difference between Angela and Rayanne is exactly mirrored in the difference between their mothers. They meet at a parents' meeting in school and afterwards start talking to each other about their daughters. Rayanne's mom Amber resembles Rayanne not only in her blunt language and crazy style but also in the way she moves and acts. While she is the more attractive person who knows about her attractiveness and seems to like to play with it, Patty is the more conservative type in her rather dull and unspectacular clothes that promise to always keep up her respectability.



Screenshot 13: Rayanne's mother Amber talking to Patty (E3, 18:18)

Amber jumps onto a little wall to sit on it and then lights herself a cigarette while talking to Patty, who later describes Amber not as a woman but as “a forty year old girl”. This scene shows how much young womens' behavior, attitude and style depend on what they see everyday at home and how well their relationship is to their mothers.

Rayanne's behavior is incorporated by the influence her mother has had on her and her personality development.

Another case where Angela is in stark contrast to another character is in episode five, when she and Sharon are in the girls' room at school. The poll with the top forty sophomore girls just came out and they both feel uncomfortable about it. Angela because she is not on the list and Sharon because she is on it.

In her loose and rather boyish clothes Angela feels comfortable enough in school since it does not reveal too much of her body shape. Sharon, on the other hand, is a totally different type, always made up, wearing tight jeans and using the break for fixing her hair style. In contrast to Angela, Sharon could be called a 'girly' girl combining many of the traits that are commonly ascribed to 'girlies', such as wearing make-up, nice and cute “frilly dresses” and “girly things like daft hair bobbles” (Holland, 48) but just because she rather embodies the 'traditional' femininity “does not mean that she is any more feminine” (Holland, 37) than other girls, in this case Angela.



Screenshot 14: Angela and Sharon in the girls' room (E5, 12:02)

Clothing is an important tool when it comes to representing one's femininity. Gaines, who is quoted in Holland, asserts that “costume delivers gender as self-evident or natural then recedes as clothing, leaving the connotation ‘femininity’ (Gaines, quoted in

Holland, 15). Holland furthermore agrees that women's clothes say very much about their personalities and that a resistance to the mainstream is often expressed via clothing. Thereby she also admits that such resistance “cannot take place if the person in question has no idea what those fashions are” (Holland, 16).⁷² So Angela probably does know what is fashionable but maybe does not feel like wearing anything too feminine since she does not at all feel comfortable with her own body. Funnily enough, Holland (18) mentions a few pages later that “feminism [...] became associated with the policing of women and a frumpy, ‘un-sexy’, unadorned style of dungarees”. Here I will not risk an over-interpretation of what might be a coincidence, having Angela depicted in corduroy dungarees and a wide flannel shirt.

The body language of the two girls shown in the screenshot above is very distinctive in signifying insecurity in the one girl and the knowledge of being pretty in the other. The contrast between their outward appearances also implies a different degree of maturity, since it is also mentioned shortly before that Sharon does have a boyfriend while Angela never had had one.



Screenshot 15: Angela made-up, waiting for Jordan to come by (E7, 32:04)

In episode seven (*Why Jordan Can't Read*) Angela expects Jordan to stop by at their house to meet her parents (approx. 32:00). All of a sudden she is completely made up,

⁷² See Holland, 14-16.

her hair is done nicely, she put on make-up and she wears a dress and even jewelry. This is the first time she appears to be very conscious about how she looks and how she is perceived by others. She wants to make the best impression possible.

If Angela's appearance in this screenshot is compared to her in screenshot 9, an immense development can be detected. According to Holland (44), “a person's external appearance is commonly thought to provide information about their internal self” which would then lead to the assumption that Angela's femininity has matured and developed as well, since here she is willing to “engage in [...] the rituals of feminine beauty” (Holland, 45), such as wearing make-up, having done her hair in a more laborious fashion than usual, and even wearing jewelry, which is a very rare occasion. Holland differentiates between the 'doing girl' and the 'resisting girl', depending on the likeliness with which girls practice traditional feminine behaviors. It is completely common that “women may move between and beyond the two at different points in their lives” (Holland, 45), meaning that just because Angela is more the 'doing girl' as depicted in the screenshot above does not mean that she will not be a 'resisting girl' already in the next scene. This is a result of the continuing “discourse of femininity” (Holland, 45) and the different relationships that girls or women have towards it at different points in time and in different situations.⁷³

In the tenth episode (*Other People's Daughters*) Angela wants to join Rayanne's birthday party but her mother would rather she attend a party she is throwing for her parents at their house on the same evening. As she enters Angela's room to look for her, she sees her in a very colorful 'hippie-style' outfit that certainly is not what she wants her teenage daughter to wear to a party with her parents and many of their friends.

⁷³ See Holland, 44-45.



Screenshot 16: Patty skeptically looking at Angela in her hippie outfit (E10, 29:11)

Patty: “That is what you choose to wear to your grandparents' anniversary party?” Angela knows that she is not allowed to go to Rayanne's party since her mother has told her before that she will have to stay at home; nevertheless, she is planning to go. Patty is not only disappointed about the style because it is her young girl she is looking at and not some kind of hippie at a rock concert, but also because she knows that this is the result of Angela being heavily influenced by Rayanne's mother Amber. All of a sudden Angela is interested in tarot cards, and karma, and in an outfit that looks more like that of an anti-war protest student in the late 60s and early 70s. All of these reactions could be assigned to Siegler's (28) developmental task of “formulating new ideas and new ideals”. She mentions that adolescents aspire to find their “own place in the world, [they] may seek out another religion, repudiate [...] [the parents'] poiltics [...] or vigorously challenge you about virtually everything you believe” (Siegler, 28). Now while Angela does not seek out another religion she does show a great interest in the esoteric world that Rayanne's mother seems to believe and live in.

McRobbie (159) writes about how certain subcultures come to be revived again and again. About the youth's subcultures of the 1980s and 1990s she says, for example, “hippie culture, with the new interest in vegetarianism, the environment and peace,

proved ready not just for revival but for a permanent place in this 'endless' youth culture”.

Since this scene is the only one showing Angela dressed like a hippie, her attempt is hardly taken seriously; it is all just too obviously an attempt at rebellion against her own mother.

In episode seventeen (*Betrayal*), after Angela has found out about Rayanne and Jordan having had sex together, she wants take to revenge on them. When she comes to paint the drama scenery after school she looks very different than usual. Not only does she wear lipstick and eyeliner but she also has braided her hair in the front, just like Rayanne wears hers. She believes that the only reason such a thing could happen between the two people she cares about most is because they must think that she is that innocent little girl whom they could fool like that. By showing up made up completely differently, she tries to show that she could also look older and more attractive if she wanted to. We have already agreed upon the fact that “femininity is learnt behavior” (Holland, 36) that must not always happen on a conscious level. In addition to be learned, this behavior is also “recreated every day of a woman's life through her interaction with men and other women” (Holland, 36). In this scene Angela seems to construct a femininity for herself which seems inauthentic, compared to her usual appearance and behavior. She uses what Holland (36) calls “exaggerated 'feminine' behavior, such as pouting” or “the batting of eyelashes”. Angela tries to kiss Corey just to prove that she is not that shy and innocent little girl. He rejects her since he senses that something is not right due to the behavior that is very strange for her and then Rayanne is already there to talk to her.



Screenshot 17: Angela's new style (E17, 37:28)

According to Holland (36), who then quotes Wilson, such exaggerated traits as mentioned above “highlight the elements of masquerade present in 'femininity', the constructed nature of gender and the ways in which cultural products and behaviours form a 'false identity on the surface'” (Wilson, quoted in Holland, 36). Such 'false identities' are usually easily detected when one knows a person's character and usual behavior.

Rayanne tells Angela that she is not the only person who got hurt by their mistake since all that she lost was a selfish lousy friend (herself) and a guy she never really had, whereas Rayanne lost the best friend she ever had and thereby lost everything. Afterwards Rickie explains that he does understand what happened since he thinks that Rayanne always wanted to be like Angela and that Rayanne's tryst with Jordan was evidence of that. He then compares Angela's situation to the one she put him into a few minutes earlier when she kissed Corey, whom Rickie has had a crush on for quite a while, as Angela fully knows. All of a sudden she realizes that what she did was almost as bad as what Rayanne did.

6.3.2. *Generational Conflict*

As the label “Teen TV” already gives away, most of these series in this genre are concerned with the problems of teenagers. These problems often include those that arise at home from a tension that exists between the parents and the developing teenagers, who want to be recognized as adults already in order to have all the advantages that come with that status. At the same time they cannot deny the fact that they still are dependent on their parents, not only financially but also emotionally. Angela's character is a valid example of “the unstable nature of teenage girls' identity during a time of shifting expectations, bodily transfiguration, and intense socialization” (Murray, 38), which are just a few of the many points that create turmoil in the girls lives and furthermore provide enough reasons for conflicts between the teenager and the parents.

In their article on individuality and connectedness in adolescent development, Grotevant and Cooper refer to Diana Baumrind, who delineates three styles of parenting: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. While in the first and the last control basically flows in only one direction, from parent to child in the first and vice versa in the third, authoritative parenting involves a flow in both directions, a “give-and-take between parents and children” (Grotevant and Cooper, 5). According to Baumrind, “authoritative parents listen to their children, recognize their individual and developmental characteristics, and see parenting as a two-way process” (Grotevant and Cooper, 5). Angela's parents in *MSCL* clearly are parents of this type. They try to be responsive in every way they can even if that sometimes means that they have to change their own habits in order to adjust to their teenage child who needs them in that difficult period in life.

Many young people have their parents as role models when it comes to specific achievements in life, but certainly not every teenager feels the wish to become just like her parents. Debold et al. declare that it is common for boys to take after their fathers and for girl's to try not to take after their mothers at all.⁷⁴ Even though daughters recognize the traits that they share with their mothers they have a “passionate desire” (Debold, 55) to not become like them.

⁷⁴ See Debold et al., 55.

The relationship of daughters with their fathers is of a completely different texture which has many diverse reasons as will be pointed out in a later section.

Conflict between two different generations often arises because of different circumstances and different expectations. In MSCL Angela's mom Patty is often reminded of herself as a girl and then tells about how things were so different then. She feels confronted with problems that did not exist some decades earlier. As she hears about the gun that went off in school she states her disappointment in contemporary society.

How about just a place where they could live, and walk to school, and become grownups without having to worry about guns and AIDS and serial murderers. That didn't use to be exotic. That wasn't the province of the rich. We all had that. Why can't they have that? (Patty, E3, 07:35)

Societies change as time goes by and this fact is often hard to accept for parents determined to protect their children. Those children growing up in these changed cultures and societies do not recognize the change since they do not know how it was before; they therefore tend to play down the dangers their parents talk about. Patty speaks of the nostalgia that she feels when she thinks about her own youth when life was a great deal less dangerous. People usually move to suburbs in order to have more space in the form of an own house with maybe even a small garden. Another main reason for leaving a city is the safety issue. If the gun went off in some school in Harlem no one would probably make such a big deal out of it simply because the expectations would be different. The tolerance for a violence potential would probably be higher just because people are more accustomed to it and therefore have different expectations.

In addition to many situations where Angela's parents are reminded of their own youth, there are several topics within the episodes that seem to involve both adolescents and adults. Murphy proposes that these similarities seem to hint at the fact that some of the difficulties people have to face in adolescence will return or never become redundant in their later lives as adults as well.⁷⁵

After having had her parents pretty much cut out of most of her private life for months, Angela suddenly starts speaking voluntarily to them about her feelings and worries. Her

⁷⁵ See Murphy, 167.

parents have already been joking about how little they actually know about what is going on in their daughter's life, since they have not even really had a chance to meet Jordan Catalano, who definitely is the person Angela spends most of her time with in episodes twelve to fourteen. So it is even more surprising when Angela tells them about the problem she has with Rayanne since the night she was brought to hospital after having consumed too many pills and alcohol, and the strange feeling she has about Rayanne being the new singer of Jordan's band. Her parents are almost in shock because of so much trust and personal information, for a change.

The one person that is closest to her when it comes to discussing problems usually is Rayanne, her best friend. But since this problem involves Rayanne, Angela has to talk to someone else and so turns to her parents for advice. But she does not really need advice; she just wants someone who will listen. Therefore she gets up immediately after having said what she wanted to say without giving their parents the opportunity to comment on anything. As soon as she has left the room and her mother speechless, her dad Graham says to his wife: "It's okay, She'll ignore you for another month just to make up for it" (E14, 29:12).



Screenshot 18: Angela, letting her parents in on her thoughts (E14, 28:37)

In the beginning of episode fifteen (*So Called Angels*), which is set around Christmas, Angela asks her parents why the family never goes to church and if they believe in God.

Patty and Graham act as if they were caught a bit off guard, stammering explanations, arguing that they are not that religious but, of course, they believe in God. On Angela's quest of finding out who she really is, no doubt, belief is one very important matter. Faith and religious belief are probably those things that adolescents inherit from their parents, most of the time. In order for Angela to decide what she does or does not believe in, it is crucial for her to first find out about her parents' beliefs. Patty asks Graham, without their daughters hearing them, if he would go to church with them, for she wants church to become a "part of the girls' lives" (E15, 05:40). Graham takes on a somewhat defensive attitude and they cease talking about it for the time being. Later in this episode he is forced to go to church in order to pick up Angela, who was brought there by the police because they found her in the abandoned warehouse. In the basement of the church they give out food to the hungry. So the circumstance is a rather complicated one, but at the end of the episode the whole Chase family, and Rickie and Brian, remain in the church listing gratefully and peacefully to the choir, knowing that they are very fortunate compared to other people.

Episode eighteen (*Weekend*) is told from Danielle's perspective. Being Angela's younger annoying sister, this is the first time the viewer is presented her opinion and thoughts, which mostly concentrate on their neighbor Brian Krakow.

Rayanne finds a pair of handcuffs in Patty and Graham's bed and attaches herself to the bedpost. As Angela comes into the room she is not surprised since she assumes that the handcuffs must belong to Rayanne or to a friend of hers. Rayanne tells her that she just found them on the bed of Angela's parents which is quite a shock for Angela. Even though she probably knows that her parents still are sexually active she does not want to imagine them using toys like handcuffs. She energetically denies that the handcuffs belong to her parents. After all these are her parents, the people that raised her, people of authority she respects, making it more difficult for her to accept them as the grown up marriage partners they are just as well. Angela is right that the handcuffs do not belong to her parents, they are Camille Cherski's, but she loaned them to Patty and suggested that she take them on their weekend in the mountains.

6.3.2.1. Mother – Daughter – Relationship

That the relationship between mothers and daughters can be a very complex and often complicated one is explored at length, among many others, by Elizabeth Debold et al. in their book about the revolution that takes place between the two family members during the girl's adolescence. Debold et al. link the main reason for these complications to the relative powerlessness of women in a patriarchal society, which collides with their instinct of wanting to protect their daughters and thereby need to force limitations upon them which in turn transforms the mothers into traitors in their daughter's eyes.⁷⁶ On the one hand mothers have always been the closest confidants to the girl's but on the other hand they are also the ones who have to set limits to the daughter's freedom in order not to worry about her all the time. That a delicate balance between too many limits and too few has to be found is also argued by Siegler (73), who claims that too many “can produce defiance, evasion, or rebellion”, while too few are not very helpful either because the adolescent may feel “wild and ungoverned, as [s]he struggles for self-control”.

Stemmer-Beer also argues that for the daughter her mother is the very beginning of her feminine self. Thereby the daughter goes through phases of seeing her mother as anything between a role model, an ideal they wish to imitate to absolutely rejecting everything the mother stands for.⁷⁷ Stemmer-Beer furthermore states that the role and the responsibilities of the mother have changed considerably in the last centuries. While a hundred years ago the mother's only function to her daughter was that of being the biological mother, nowadays she has to fill the additional positions of being the social and ethical mother who functions as governess and educator at the same time. In addition to being a mother, many women of today are wives or partners who then have to step into the role of the comrade, the equal worker, the lover, and the seductress who is ready anytime.⁷⁸ With these high requirements it is more than difficult to be an expert in each and every of the aforementioned areas. Contemporary women often do not have the time to be there for their children in every dimension they would like to be. Most contemporary societies are not very friendly to these ideals and do not offer women many ways of combining all the diverse parts they have to take.

⁷⁶ See Debold et al., 68 ff.

⁷⁷ Cf. Stemmer-Beer, 16.

⁷⁸ Compare Stemmer-Beer, 25-26.

In *MSCL* Patty is a working mom who leads the family business in which she employs her husband. Nevertheless she remains the boss of the company and at one point realizes that her husband is not happy in what he is doing. As a consequence she goes so far as to actually fire him, hoping this will lead him to doing something that he is really interested in. Amanda Lotz who writes about “female-centered dramas” states that there were more than twenty series competing for audiences in the mid 1990s. She says that

all these dramatic series – with their empowered and fantastic heroines, depictions of single career women, flawed yet authentic professionals struggling with family commitments and occupational demands, and even the continued success of characters depicting a more traditional femininity – indicates unprecedented possibilities for female characters and audiences [...]. (Lotz, 3)

Unfortunately, Lotz does not mention *MSCL*, but I would argue that Patty is a authentic depiction of a woman who does care for her family and always tries to find the right way to solve problems while, at the same time, being a professional who not only must struggle with problems of the business itself but also with a dominant father who always lets her feel his disbelief in her capability of leading such a company.

6.3.2.1.1. Spoken language

In episode two, Angela's mother, Patty, mentions to Graham (E2, 22:25) that she thinks that Angela has a crush on her neighbor and childhood friend Brian Krakow, and that a biology project is just a pretense for spending the evening at Brian's house. Patty connected all the little cues she received from her daughter and the conclusion she arrives at is somewhat logical. Of course, she could have never known the real reason for Angela's visit at Brian's, which is an arranged meeting with Jordan, since Angela never tells her mother anything about the really important things that are occupying her mind all the time.

Another factor that clearly demonstrates Angela's search for her own individual identity is the act of coloring her hair in the very first episode. It is important that she did not ask her mother for permission because then it would not have the same effect of doing something that was out of the mother's knowledge. It is an act of detaching herself from the role model her mother once has been for her as a little girl. Stemmer-Beer argues that this detachment in puberty is of extreme importance in order for the daughter to

create her own identity. If she does not get the chance to do so in puberty, this desire will be postponed to a later rather inopportune moment. It is a confine against the mother's authority, her expectations, commands and limitations which all contribute to the daughter's own identification.⁷⁹

When, for a change, Angela is not angry at her mom, her mom repeatedly tries to confide in her, to build up a relationship that is more that of two friends than that of mother and daughter. She even says so explicitly in episode two when she asks Angela for her opinion about getting her hair cut or not, she says: “[...] seriously, should I? Cut my hair? I mean, pretend I'm not your mom.” (E2, 22:57). Of course, Angela cannot or does not want to pretend her mom is not her mom since she wants to maintain that mother-daughter relationship which is important for girls growing up. I think that girls who always have had a friendship with their mothers rather than an authoritative child-parent-relationship will start missing someone who points out boundaries, someone whom they really respect.

The first time Patty hears about Jordan Catalano is from Amber, Rayanne's mom. On the one hand she is hurt not to be as well-informed about her own daughter's life as the mother of a friend she hardly knows. On the other hand, she is worried about her daughter and insecure about how to deal with the situation. Graham immediately rejects Patty's query if they should confront their daughter with questions about her love life. As he says, he does not even want to know and Patty is sorry to assert that even if their daughter does not have sex with this boy she “obviously has some sort of secret life completely apart from us [parents]” (E3, 20:00).

When Patty decides to talk with Angela about the whole Jordan affair she comes into her room and sits down on her bed. She starts talking about knowing what Angela is going through and that she should always remember to use protection. Debold et al. mention that it happens quite often that mothers falsely interpret their daughter's desire as lust and then usually advise them to hold back and keep waiting until they know that they are ready.⁸⁰ Angela is extremely embarrassed by the talk and begs her mother to stop by mentioning that she is not even close to having sex. She continues by saying: “Mom, you couldn't possibly understand or help, so please. I don't mean to hurt your

⁷⁹ Compare Stemmer-Beer, 107.

⁸⁰ Compare Debold et al., 260.

feelings, but just please.” Patty hugs her daughter and answers: “I’m here if you need me. You know that” (E3, 29:00). Debold et al. confirm that many mothers know that it is not possible to always offer their children the optimum so they just do whatever it is that they can do themselves.⁸¹ This is exactly what Patty is doing here. She knows that she probably cannot help her daughter much because there is nothing that she could do to help without embarrassing her daughter at the same time. So what she can do is tell her that she is always there for her if she does need her help. She probably also prefers her daughter to come to her with problems than to go to someone else like Amber, for instance.

In the fifth episode (*The Zit*), which is mostly concerned with beauty and its definitions, Angela does not want to do the mother-daughter fashion show because she thinks that she is ugly and she does not want to embarrass her mom by revealing what an ugly daughter this beautiful woman has. Angela is very sad as she tells her mother that she knows that she is ugly by the way she looks at her (E5, 30:05). Debold et al. state that adolescent girls strive to integrate the image of the beautiful woman into their plan for life and usually are not happy about it. Unfortunately but necessarily, they have to confront difficult questions of power, violence, economic impact, sexual attraction, and so forth. Angela (E5, 30:25): “ [...] you expect me to be beautiful, because you’re beautiful”. Young women have to find their identities in a world in which most women are rivals in matters of beauty.⁸² Very often mothers are the only persons who can honestly assure their daughters that they are fine just the way they are. Mothers are also the ones who are very much responsible for a good self-esteem of the daughter by assuring her again and again that she is a special person no matter what the beauty industry defines as the ideal. In a conversation with Graham, Patty later tells him the problem she has with their daughter and then asks: “You think there’s anybody in this world who really believes that they’re beautiful?” (Patty, E5, 33:00). By uttering this question she pithily gives words to an unspoken truth that is one of the great problems in contemporary societies. Not even those people who make their living because of their looks are completely satisfied with themselves. As Patty later admits to Angela, she never enjoyed being pretty when she was still young and now she regrets that. She wants Angela to enjoy what she really is (E5, 41:00), meaning that she should not chase some beauty ideal defined by society but simply enjoy the qualities she already has.

⁸¹ See Debold et al., 61.

⁸² Cf. Debold et al., 293.

At the end of episode seven, Patty wants to cheer up her daughter after Jordan fails to show up at the house on the previous evening. She brings ice-cream up to her room but Angela tells her initially: “Mom, if you care about me at all do not attempt to cheer me up, 'cause it's not possible” (E7, 42:00). Again, for no real reason, Angela takes the ‘you-don't-understand-me-anyway-attitude’ that is found so often between adolescent daughters and their mothers. Patty manages the situation cleverly by talking about her own worries instead of trying to find out what is on her daughter's mind. By confiding in her daughter about her speculations – later proved incorrect – about being pregnant, she gives Angela the chance to view her mother as a kind of friend who lets her in on her own personal problems. They talk and laugh more like two good friends than mother and daughter.

In episode ten, Angela and Patty are discussing why Angela is not allowed to go to Rayanne's birthday party. The conversation turns into an argument as Angela tells her mom to “stop being so hypocritical” and that she should just admit that she hates Rayanne and therefore does everything possible to keep the two separated. Patty admits that she does not like Rayanne and that she certainly does not think that she is the right friend for Angela. Of course, the only thing Patty achieves thereby is that Angela does not care about her mother's party anymore and immediately leaves for Rayanne's.

Later that evening, Angela and her mom return from the hospital where they brought Rayanne after her breakdown and stay outside the house a while before they go back in to the party guests. Patty tells Angela about the roommate she had in college who was very much like Rayanne and who had died after overdosing on drugs during a party . Patty tells her daughter that she is simply constantly worried about her when she knows that she is with Rayanne. Angela asks her mom just to trust her, since that is the only thing she can do at the moment. Patty assures her that she does trust her. She has seen before that her daughter is not someone who does stupid things just because she sees others do them. She also knows that she can be proud of the intelligent daughter she has raised who does not drink till unconsciousness at parties. This is one of the rare moments of the series in which mother and daughter are really close and seem to understand each other even without words.

In the fifteenth episode, Angela wants to invite Rickie and a girl whom she knows has nowhere to go for dinner at their house. Her mother says that this would not be possible

and that she and Graham told the police about the abandoned warehouse where all those runaway teenagers live. Angela is deeply disappointed by her mother since she thought that what she wanted to do was a good thing, for charity's cause, so to say. As her mother forbids her to go “back to that place” (E15, 31:00) because it simply is too dangerous, Angela feels mistreated and yells at her mom that she should not treat her “like a child” (E15, 31:27). She also feels betrayed by her parents since, after trusting them with the knowledge of Rickie's situation, they nevertheless proceed to tell the police about these kids, which most definitely puts all of them into trouble.

6.3.2.1.2. Angela's Voice-Over

A passage that expresses Angela's aggression against her mother is the family dinner when the voice-over explains: “Lately I can't even look at my mother without wanting to stab her repeatedly” (E1, 5:22). Why exactly she is so angry at basically everything her mother does and says is not clear. It does not necessarily have to be one specific reason that is unnerving Angela, but it might possibly be the general averseness to her mother. Stemmer-Beer confirms that daughters in puberty sometimes develop destructive powers, often leading to vehement discussions which combine oblitative hatred with brute revolt.⁸³ Our case with Angela and her mom is not such an extreme one, because after all it is a series produced mainly for teens and not a psychological case study.

But there are also moments in which Angela completely understands her mother and is not afraid to show compassion for her, for instance when she says: “My mother's adopted. For a while, she was looking for her real parents. I guess that's what everyone's looking for” (E1, 43:42). What she implies by saying that is that she to is looking for the real person in her mom, the person that is a successfully working, middle aged, married woman and not just her mother who decides what she is allowed to do. According to Stemmer-Beer these phases of doubt are necessary for young women in order to ask themselves the important question of who they themselves are. They certainly know that they are not and do not want to be their mothers, yet they are unsure about who they can be instead. In order to answer that question, girls undergo cycles of accordance with and objection to their mothers throughout their development. Stemmer-Beer states that phases of accordance often are the early years in a girl's life until about the age of ten, or

⁸³ See Stemmer-Beer, 41.

when the daughter is about to become a mother herself or is newly married. In contrast, phases of objection are usually the years of puberty, years of early adulthood and years in which the daughter is bringing up her own children.⁸⁴

The conflicts between mother and daughter are often about formalities such as styling or curfews or the first boyfriend. These are fights for formalities in which the daughter may or may not achieve an outer freedom but, Stemmer-Beer argues, the inner bond to her mother will keep on existing.⁸⁵

In the tenth episode, Angela experiences her own mom as being a daughter herself for the first time, as the grandmother, Vivian, comes for a visit. Patty throws a party for her parents' anniversary, which was not really her own choice and then she is somewhat disappointed and feels fooled when her mother tells her that her father will not be attending the party since he does not feel like it. Instead of telling her mother about her true anger about the whole thing, Patty just keeps on smiling and welcomes the other guests. In her voice-over Angela remarks: "Sometimes I think that if my mom weren't so good at pretending to be happy, she'd be better at actually being happy" (E10, 26:45). Angela knows her mom and therefore she also knows when her smiles come from the heart and when she is just smiling to please others. In her rebellious teenage time, Angela probably cannot understand why anyone should ever pretend to be something they are not just so that other people can be satisfied.

⁸⁴ Cf. Stemmer-Beer, 43.

⁸⁵ Cf. Stemmer-Beer, 101.

6.3.2.1.3. Non-verbal language

In some scenes Angela is actively constructed as the girl who clearly is not an adult, though she often wishes that she were. A good example of where she is clearly depicted as a child who still needs caring parents, and her mother in particular, occurs in episode one. The scene shows a fine example of the closeness between mother and daughter. Though there is a great deal of conflict between the two, especially in the girl's years of adolescence, the mother is a constant in a daughter's life. When everything falls apart, when things are problematic with the best friend, the boyfriend, in school or at work, when nothing seems to be going right anymore: the mother is always there with her consoling open arms.⁸⁶



Screenshot 19: Angela, consoled by her mother (E1, 44:26)

Being able to crawl into the parents' bed and be consoled by one's mother when everything goes wrong and when wants nothing more than to cry are certainly not things adults usually do. Thereby a stark contrast is created to the Angela we have seen minutes earlier wearing make-up and drinking alcohol with her friends while hoping to get into a club where she is not even allowed; now we see the child-like Angela crying in her mother's arms after apologizing to her for having had her hair dyed without having asked permission.

⁸⁶ Cf. Stemmer-Beer, 54.

At the end of episode three, the Chase family is in the kitchen in the morning before they go their separate ways. Patty utters her concern about the school not having found out whose gun went off and she adds: “It’s just so hard not being able to protect you” whereupon Angela answers: “Yeah, but you can’t”. Patty reaches out to touch Angela but then holds back and decides differently.

This gesture of withdrawing her hand nicely depicts that process that all parents have to go through but is probably more difficult for mothers who feel closer to their daughters. Patty knows that she has to let her daughter go, that she cannot and will not always be there to protect her, that eventually she will grow up and lead her own independent life.



Screenshot 20: Patty wanting to be close to her 'little girl' (E3, 43:02)

In the tenth episode (*Other People's Daughters*), Angela finally meets Rayanne's mother, Amber, who has heard a great deal about Angela due to Rayanne constantly talking about her. As Amber sees her for the first time, she immediately wants to give her a hug. Angela has not hugged her own mom for quite a while but she has no problem with Amber hugging her. To Angela, Amber is simply a woman who really understands young people like Rayanne and herself and does not waste their time by setting up useless rules. Instead, she reads her tarot cards for her, Rayanne, and Rickie while drinking a cocktail in the middle of the afternoon, supporting what she is doing by stating that “life was created to be lived” (E10, 06:00). It is less surprising that Angela is

deeply impressed by Rayanne's mother since, at this point in the story, she is only able to see the advantages of having such a 'cool' mom. But the consequences of Amber's lack of rules and limits will show in more or less all episodes via Rayanne's own behavior concerning alcohol and other drugs and her inability to say 'no' even when risking the partial loss of her tough reputation she has built around her character. These negative consequences of Amber's loose style of education towards her daughter are explained by Siegler as follows:

Without love, your teenager can never develop *self-esteem*; without understanding, [s]he can never develop *self-confidence*; and without standards, limits, and discipline, [...] adolescent[s] can never develop *self-control*. (Siegler, 74)

In her article on ego development and family communication, Anna Louise von der Lippe explores the connection between an adolescent's high or low ego level, meaning a mature and strong or rather weak and minor developed personality, and conflict within the family. The constant harmony displayed between Rayanne and her mother might lead to false conclusions concerning Rayanne's ego developmental level. Von der Lippe asserts that

girls may [...] profit from more challenging family environments. [...] mothers, who create more demanding, complex and tension-producing milieus may also be those who raise daughters to higher ego levels. (Von der Lippe, 43)

This leads to the conclusion that the harmony between Rayanne and Amber is one that only exists on the surface, due to permanent "avoidance of conflict [...] or pseudoresolutions" (Von der Lippe, 53). This surface-level harmony does not solve the daughter's problem of feeling not only neglected by her father, who left when she was little and to whom she has no real contact, but also uncared for by her mother, who prefers to go out herself instead of staying at home to prepare a nutritious meal for her teenage daughter. These issues are constantly pushed away by both mother and daughter and the daughter compensates them with drug abuse and short physical affairs.



Screenshot 21: Angela hugging Amber (E10, 05:43)

Debold et al. claim that it is perfectly normal for girls in their puberty to turn to other women except their own moms with their problems. They call them co-mothers⁸⁷.

Angela defends her own mother in front of Amber and her friends by pointing out that she did not have it easy since she was adopted and still has “these abandonment issues”. Via the tarot cards, Amber makes clear that not only Angela is the daughter hiding her “feelings like behind a mask” but that her mother Patty is a daughter just as well. This is nicely linked to the next scene which shows Patty and her mom coming home. Very soon it is obvious that Vivian (Patty's mom) is just as unnerving to Patty as Patty very often is to Angela. Debold et al. state that co-mothers are often very helpful in situations where mothers have difficulties treating their daughters due to the fact that they had never experienced such situations with their own mothers in a positive way. Daughters are usually very quick in finding out what these vulnerable spots in the mother's psyche are and co-mothers help daughters understand their own mothers in these respects.⁸⁸ This is what Amber does as she points out to Angela that her mother is a daughter as well and that what she said about hiding one's feelings like behind a mask suits not just the insecure girl Angela but her grown mother Patty as well.

⁸⁷ Co-mother is my own translation from German Mitmutter, Debold et al., 340-347.

⁸⁸ See Debold et al., 345.

To a certain extent Amber can be regarded as such a co-mother, but she does not fully conform to the descriptions by Debold et al. since they claim that co-mothers often are closely befriended not only with the daughter but also with the mother, which is not the case in *MSCL*.

Later on in the same episode, Patty asks Angela why she had to tell Amber that she is adopted. Given the very personal nature of that information, Patty obviously has a problem with Angela being so close to a person she has only met twice. The real reason why Patty is angry is probably that she is throwing a party for her parents' anniversary, which she did not want to do in the first place, and she now feels left alone with all the preparations. Of course, she is also hurt that Angela seems to prefer being at Rayanne's place than being at home spending time with her own mother and helping her decorate the house.

The positive feeling that Angela has when she is with Rayanne and Amber comes from a specific easiness in dealing with things. She is impressed by the way they live their lives together as a well-functioning mother-daughter duo. What she does not recognize at the beginning is that Rayanne also suffers a great deal due to the absence of her father, who only sends her some money for her birthday. We do see Rayanne having problems handling alcohol and other drugs, problems which psychologists surely could link to social abnormalities that she experienced throughout her childhood. Rayanne repeatedly states that she finds Angela's mom too stiff and hypocritical, but the viewers recognize rather quickly that, in fact, she misses the perfect family scenario in her own life. While Angela is constantly embarrassed about her own parents and angry about their rules it becomes obvious that Rayanne could have used more of such rules set up by her mother, since all the freedom she has as such a young person often puts herself in great danger.

In the twelfth episode (*Self Esteem*), Angela meets Jordan in the boiler room during school breaks so that they can 'make out'. This somewhat huge step, which had originally occurred at the end of the previous episode, is not explained, but something must have happened since the two of them come closer to each other than ever before. Rayanne even calls them a couple. That whatever happens between Jordan and Angela has great influence on Angela's general moods becomes obvious as soon as she comes home and smiles at her parents and gives them a lighthearted hug as a greeting.

Her parents just look at each other in total disbelief but are, of course, happy to see their daughter happy again after a long time of defiance and inexplicable anger. After she has left the room her parents comment on the rare character of the situation, as Patty says: “Okay now, I refuse to panic just because she's happy” and Graham: “Although it is alarming!”.



Screenshot 22: Angela, in an exceptionally good mood, hugging her mom (E12, 07:59)

6.3.2.2. Father – Daughter – Relationship

The relationship of a girl to her father is her first relationship to a man in general and therefore instructive for other relationships to men that are to come. Every following encounter with a man, whether he be a teacher, boss, friend or lover, will be unconsciously measured with the father's qualities by the daughter.⁸⁹

The way fathers treat their daughters is important for the expectations that the girl brings to the masculine world around her.⁹⁰ In this very special relationship between a man and a becoming woman, it can become obvious very early to the daughter that men and women are simply very different. Stemmer-Beer refers to studies by scientist and psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, who claims that men's and women's brains are fundamentally different, although this claim is highly contested in contemporary

⁸⁹ See Stemmer-Beer, 35.

⁹⁰ Cf. Debold et al., 333 ff.

sciences. If Baron-Cohen can be believed, it is men who have the ability to regard the world somewhat systematically while women tend to be orientated by emotions and empathy. By this claim, Baron-Cohen justifies his view of regarding women and men as different no matter if they had a gender-specific upbringing or education.⁹¹

The relationship Angela has to her father is different than that to her mother. She is hardly as aggressive towards her father and it seems as if she gives him more chances to understand what is going on in her life. This marks the complex relationship that young girls have to their fathers when they are about to develop from little girls into independent young women, a development which is often very hard for the fathers to accept.

6.3.2.2.1. Spoken Language

In the fourth episode after Angela has done everything she could to let her father feel that she does not need him anymore, she really disappoints him by making him believe she is at a concert which she was explicitly disallowed to attend. As it turns out, she did not, in fact, go to the concert, but still she had lied to her father and disobeyed him. He is deeply hurt and upset about her strange behavior and ignores her the following morning. All of a sudden she is really sorry about what she has done and admits to her mother: “Why can't he just say that instead of acting like I don't exist? Dad not even wanting to look at me is, like, the worst feeling” (Angela, E4, 31:00). Angela is almost crying as she says that and it is clear that she did not mean to hurt her dad but that she is simply trying to grow up by being more independent from her parents and by doing more things of her own accord.

In the same episode Patty is trying to explain to Graham why it is so important for Angela to act the way she does even though by acting that way she hurts her father. He says: “I don't wanna lose her”, whereupon Patty replies:

[...] but you have to. Just for a little while. You have to let her push you away and not punish her for it. All she's doing is pushing you off your pedestal, and she's right to do that, she has to do it. She's right on schedule she's not a thousand years late, like I am.[...] Stand your ground. And let her know that no matter how hard she pushes you away, you'll still be there. (Patty, E4, 40:55)

⁹¹ Compare Stemmer-Beer referring to Baron-Cohen, 15.

Whether it is a mother's instinct or just what Patty experienced herself in her complicated relationship to her father does not matter since what has to be kept in mind is that this series was partly designed to be watched by teenage, and possibly younger, viewers viewers, so it is no wonder that the episodes end with a kind of moral.

6.3.2.2.2. Angela's Voice-Over

Angela acknowledges that her relationship with her father has changed because her “breasts have come between “ (E1, 06:15) them. She wants to be recognized as the young woman she is becoming and not be seen as a little girl anymore. According to Debold et al., the physical closeness between a father and his daughter can become uncomfortable when the girl's body starts to develop into that of a woman. As girls get older they sometimes recognize that their fathers vehemently attempt to ignore the changes in their bodies. These bodily changes in their daughters are more easily accepted by fathers who tend to genuinely know their daughters rather than picturing them as stereotypically sweet and innocent.⁹²

Stemmer-Beer also mentions this difficult time in a father-daughter-relationship by simply stating that the father develops a timidity in his interaction with his daughter, being as he is unsure how to deal with his daughter's body turning into that of a woman.⁹³

In their book, Debold et al. refer to psychologist Terri Apter who carried out studies of daughter's relationships to both of their parents and thereby observed that, in their adolescence, girls start seeing and treating their fathers differently and often feel a growing misunderstanding and disinterest from their fathers in their own lives. In order to maintain an uncomplicated communication, fathers need to be happy about how their daughters really are instead of pushing them into the direction where our culture and society would push them.⁹⁴ If a father manages to do that, he often becomes the girl's new confidant, which is often difficult for the mothers to accept, having been somewhat substituted.

⁹² See Debold et al., 334-335.

⁹³ See Stemmer-Beer, 87.

⁹⁴ Cf. Debold et al., 337.

This confiding to her father is not clearly visible with Angela and her dad, though, if to her advantage, she cleverly reminds her father of the good relationship they have by asking him for permission to go out on a school night when she knows with certainty that her mom would not allow it.

That Angela regards her father as more of an ally than her mother becomes clear during a scene in the second episode. She has just come home from Brian's house, where she met Jordan to get the fake ID. The meeting did not go extremely well; though he tried to kiss her twice, she ruined the situation by chastising him for his bad behavior. As I have mentioned before, traditionally feminine girls are regarded as being “sweet and nice” (Holland, 39) but by telling Jordan that it is not right of him to kiss her while she is actually telling him something, and thereby rudely interrupting her, she is not being sweet and nice. Instead, she shows a great deal of courage and agency in that situation, particularly because she is aware of the risk of spoiling her first chance of getting involved with him.



Screenshot 23: Angela in a peaceful mood, with her dad (E2, 43:20)

In a way, she seems to be relieved that the first intended meeting has finally happened. On the other hand, she worries about Jordan thinking of her as a little child, since she does not act the way he expected her to. She runs into her dad, Graham, in their kitchen and he offers to warm up dinner for the two of them. As they sit and eat together, her

dad tries to find out if there is someone she likes and, if it is not their neighbor Brian Krakow, who it might be instead.

Graham tells her not to expect too much from boys her age since they often also do not know how to be what girls want them to be. He gives her reassurance that growing up is also difficult for boys. As a reaction, Angela is looking up to her dad literally but also metaphorically for trying to make her life easier by telling her that everyone has problems with growing up.

The fourth episode is titled *Father Figures*, so it is not very surprising that Angela comments on her father in her first voice-over.

When you're not sure you trust a person anymore, say a person you really trusted, say your father, you start wishing they'd do something, like, really wrong, just so you could be right about them. (Angela's VO, E3, 04:50)

Where that mistrust suddenly comes from is not really clear for the viewer, since previous events that would have given reason for mistrust are long forgotten and were never discussed. Two minutes later, Graham is in the living room with Patty as he states his concern about his relationship to his daughter. He says: "Something's not right between her and me. [...] she acts so [...] distant with this sort of silent contempt" (E4, 06:40). Patty, not taking his words seriously, simply replies that his daughter adores him and that his worrying makes no sense.

In the same episode, approximately five minutes later, Rayanne tells Angela that she finds her dad attractive. Angela does not know how to respond and her voice-over says: "When someone compliments your parents, there's, like, nothing to say. It's like a stun gun to your brain" (Angela's VO, E4, 10:00). A few years earlier Angela would probably have agreed with Rayanne about how great her dad is and that she is lucky to have a dad like him. But now, since she does not even really know who she is, she seems to know even less about the real persons that her parents are. There is so much to question that she simply finds it difficult to accept that someone else finds her dad great.

At night, when everyone is already in bed, Angela goes down to the living room again and rummages through her father's briefcase. She says in the voice-over: "I didn't know what I was looking for. Some kind of proof. Something that would make it make sense for me to hate him." (Angela's VO, E4, 20:20). So obviously she does not even know

herself why she is suddenly distancing herself from her dad. She is desperately trying to find a suitable reason for her withdrawal from his attention, which would make it easier for her to understand her feelings, to understand the situation she is in. Her father catches her going through his briefcase and she quickly disappears to her room after having mumbled some implausible explanation. Now her father is really hurt and wonders what he could possibly have done to deserve this negativity coming from his daughter all the time. According to Debold et al., this is a completely normal development. They argue that studies have shown that fathers and daughters who may have been rather close when the daughter is still very young will inexorably be drifting apart the older the girl becomes.⁹⁵ Graham will not settle for the problem just because this is natural. He will keep on trying to win back his daughter's attention and respect.

6.3.2.2.3. Non-Verbal Language

Angela is aware of the status she has for her father, who, in some respects, seems to be more comfortable than her mother with his daughter growing up. So, whenever she wants something from him which she knows her mother would certainly not agree with, she uses her femininity in order to play the nice behaving little daughter who likes her dad and thereby achieves what she wants, knowing that he is not inclined to say no.



Screenshot 24: Angela and her father (E1, 18:21)

⁹⁵ See Debold et al., 334.

By smiling at her father while asking for permission to go out on a school night, Angela not only tries to manipulate her father but she also tries to hide the fact that she lied to him about the reason for going out.

That fathers often function as a sort of mediator between conflicting mothers and daughters comes from their advantage of being above conflicts and thereby being able to view them with more distance and objectivity than those directly involved.⁹⁶



Screenshot 25: *Graham and Danielle, jauntily interacting (E4, 07:11)*

The fourth episode, called *Father Figures*, illustrates on the one hand Angela's cut-off from her dad, and on the other hand gives a good impression of how close she and her dad used to be when she was younger. The episode begins with a flashback, wherein we see a ten year-old Angela impatiently waiting for her beloved father to come home from work. As soon as she hears the turn of the doorknob, she runs down the stairs to fall into her father's arms as he comes through the door. The scene then switches back to the present, where Angela fails even to respond to her dad's greetings as he comes home. Upon entering the kitchen, where she and Rayanne are hanging out, he wants to kiss her cheek but she turns away, mumbling something about his whiskers being scratchy (E4, 03:08). Approximately five minutes later there is a scene with Angela sitting in the chair in the living room gazing towards the settee while her dad sits next to Danielle, his little

⁹⁶ Cf. Stemmer-Beer, 35.

daughter, and it is obvious that Angela is reminded of her own relationship towards her father just a few years ago.

The study by Grotevant and Cooper confirms Angela's behavior, as they observed that

Older adolescent girls, compared to younger girls, expressed both more disagreements and more compromises with their fathers, indicating their greater ability to negotiate disagreements by coordinating and integrating perspectives. (Grotevant and Cooper, 19)

In the same episode, Patty's father comes to the Chase house and Angela gives her grandfather a long and intense welcome hug. Both Patty and Graham stand in the background and look rather unbelievably since they were denied such physical closeness from their daughter for the last couple of months.



Screenshot 26: Angela hugging her grandfather (E4, 08:47)

For Angela it is easier to allow such physical closeness to her grandfather than to her parents since parents are usually the ones against whom teenagers rebel, not grandparents. Grandparents do not set up boundaries or rules; they are the ones who are mostly associated with good times, family holidays and happiness. Grandparents are also a reminder of someone's childhood, when they often take a very important position in a child's life. It is that child that the parents are missing because it is becoming an adult who strives for more and more independence. In one's grandparents arms, one can

just be this child once again even if one is not a child anymore considering the age. Patty and Graham envy Patty's dad for not having lost that connection to his granddaughter, for always being able to regard her as the little girl she once was.

7. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I hope I have made clear what it means to be feminist in a contemporary western society not only by pointing out older models of feminism but also by presenting various coexisting forms. The main goal of equality is probably the same even if other ideologies of feminist movements might differ considerably. I wanted to find modern feminism within my object of analysis, a TV drama, which was not as distinct as I expected it to be. To outline different versions of constructions of femininities was easier than defining hints of either third wave feminism or postfeminism. Therefore I would argue that none of the two is prevalent in *MSCL*. I would rather conclude that devices that can be ascribed to either of them can be detected within the series.

Since this thesis also focuses on identity development in adolescents, it should be clear that not everything holds true for identity construction and development in adults. To point this out I would like to insert a quote which pinpoints to the most essential factors when it comes to identity development:

identity develops over the life span as a process of active individual and social construction of meaning, linking the construction of individual narrative with relational negotiation. (Grotevant and Cooper, 30)

The time in Angela Chase's life that is presented in these nineteen episodes is one of drastic changes. The maturation she undergoes regarding the way she considers her own personality and that of people she thought she knew very well is immense. She learns to trust herself and her emotions and not to give too much for other people's opinions. I agree with the several writers⁹⁷ who have said that it would have been interesting to see how her character would have developed in later seasons, but unfortunately we will never find out.

By presenting a “range of female characters” (Lotz, 23), including many stereotypes but also roles that do not fit one specific stereotype, *MSCL* could be categorized as being rather more feminist than antifeminist.⁹⁸ Even though there are certain characters that

⁹⁷ See contributors in Byers and Lavery.

⁹⁸ See Lotz, 23.

could be labeled as stereotypes, such as Jordan or Sharon, most of the protagonists are what could be called outsiders that do not really fit into any pre-given drawer.

The question of how and if one could define gender identity is and probably will remain a very difficult one. Writers and feminist activists do not agree on whether there is something that can be called a female gender identity. In her book on the relation between poststructural feminism and postfeminisms Ann Brooks (22), for example, refers to Judith Butler, who “contests the 'reification' of gender implicit in the binary conception of masculine/feminine subjectivity and rejects any notion of feminine identity”. I do not agree with such a radical opinion, though I do agree with the argument that “gender is performative” (Brooks, 22) and constructed and therefore remains subject to change throughout a person's life.

A statement that deftly expresses the fluidity of one's own identity is the following:

“[...] being a woman involves constantly adjusting one's own image to fit time and place in an ever-evolving game of images;” (Winship about *Cosmopolitan*, in Gauntlett, 54)

I think that many of the things I said about identity and gender identity could probably be called common sense, yet I nevertheless think it is worthwhile pointing them out in order to draw attention to something that usually only happens subconsciously. The same holds true for the section on mass media. I am sure that each and everyone who uses mass media is aware of the many advantages it gives us in an era when time becomes more and more important and people have less and less of it. But I think most of these 'users' do not consciously realize how much power media has over the way we think about certain things. Media is able to manipulate the way we think, feel, act, or even talk when in company of others. This is why I think people should now and then be reminded of the fact that not everything they learn from the media should immediately be taken for granted without questioning its origin and validity.

By the time *MSCL* was aired in Austria, on a German private television channel, I was the same age as Angela in the series. I vividly remember that I could relate to almost anything she said or the way she felt and acted around people, always being so self-conscious and insecure about almost everything that concerns oneself. If I look at girls at that age nowadays, I do see an immense change in their confidence and their

interaction with others. The teenage girls of today seem to be much more aware of their own strengths and the distance due to respect of elders seems to have declined. So, one can see the positive things that have changed when it comes to adolescents of today, but there are always also negative examples that would not have existed in such a range fifteen years ago.

In this thesis I hope to have proven that adolescence always was and probably always will remain a difficult time for both teenagers and parents. The combination of important psychological as well as physical changes during that period requires strong characters or at least strong help from without in order not to lead to depression in the affected person. What is also necessary for young women are strong role models they can look up to, whether these are relatives or not, who assist in the important development of their own personalities and their self-defined embodiments of femininity.

At the end of this conclusion I would like to insert a quote that humorously sums up the everyday concerns of teenagers, as shown in *MSCL*, which might easily be classified as ridiculous by people who do not take adolescent's problems seriously.

[...] what was so winning about *MSCL*: its candor and gritty sense of adolescent realism... not to mention its focus on that major object of adolescent (and adult) focus of sense and self-worth and identity: hair. (Byers, 8)

Since having been in that situation of the insecure teenage girl myself, I do understand and can relate to most of Angela's problems, although now, from another perspective I do know that some of my fears were absolutely unfounded. But, in general, I believe that simply the fact that some problems are well-known and also well-investigated is of no help to the teenage individual, everyone has to go through that phase and find their own ways of coping with it.

8. Bibliography

8.1. Primary Source (+ Source of all Screenshots)

DVD: Willkommen Im Leben- Die komplette Serie. EuroVideo Bildprogramm GmbH, 2007.

8.2. Secondary Sources

Ang Ien and Joke Hermes. "Gender and/in Media Consumption". *Mass Media and Society*. Ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch. New York: Routledge, 1991. 307-328.

Bell, Barbara. "Holden Caulfield in Doc Martens: The Catcher in the Rye and *My So-Called Life*". *Dear Angela: Remembering My So-Called Life*. Ed. Michele Byers and David Lavery. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. 143-154.

Bignell, Jonathan. *An Introduction to Television Studies*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Brooks, Ann. *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Byers, Michele and David Lavery. Eds. *Dear Angela: Remembering My So-Called Life*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007.

Coppock, Vicki; Deena Haydon and Ingrid Richter. "Introduction: Locating 'Post-Feminism', Exploring the Myths". *The Illusions of 'Post-Feminism': New Women, Old Myths*. Ed. Vicki Coppock, Deena Haydon and Ingrid Richter. Basingstoke: Burgess Science Press, 1995. 3-14.

Crisell, Andrew. *A Study of Modern Television: Thinking Inside the Box*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Davis, Glyn and Kay Dickinson. Eds. *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*. London: British Film Institute, 2004.

Debold, Elizabeth; Idelisse Malavé and Marie Wilson. *Die Mutter-Tochter-Revolution*. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994.

Douglas, Pamela. *Writing the TV Drama Series: How to succeed as a Professional Writer in TV*. Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005.

Eliacheff, Caroline and Nathalie Heinich. *Mütter und Töchter: Ein Dreiecksverhältnis*. Düsseldorf: Walter Verlag, 2004.

Fend, Helmut. *Die Entdeckung des Selbst und die Verarbeitung der Pubertät: Entwicklungspsychologie der Adoleszenz in der Moderne*. Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1994.

Fenton, Natalie. "Feminism and Popular Culture". *Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. Ed. Sarah Gamble. London: Routledge, 2001. 104-116.

Gallagher, Margaret. *Gender Setting: New Agendas for Media Monitoring and Advocacy*. London: Zed Books, 2001.

Gamble, Sarah. "Postfeminism". *Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. Ed. Sarah Gamble. London: Routledge, 2001. 43-54.

Gauntlett, David. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2002.

Greer, Germaine. *The Whole Woman*. London: Transworld Publishers, 1999.

Grotevant, Harold D. and Catherine R. Cooper. "Individuality and Connectedness in Adolescent Development: Review and Prospects for Research on Identity, Relationships, and Context". *Personality Development in Adolescence: A cross national and lifespan perspective*. Eds. Eva Elisabeth Aspaas Skoe and Anna Louise von der Lippe. London: Routledge, 1998. 3 -37.

Hekman, Susan, ed. *Feminism, Identity and Difference*. Essex: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999.

Heywood, Leslie and Jennifer Drake, eds.. *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Hole, Anne. "Television". *Feminist Visual Culture*. Ed. Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2000. 281-293.

Holland, Samantha. *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity*. New York: Berg, 2004.

Johnson, Merri Lisa (ed). *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane puts it in a Box*. London: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2007.

Livingstone, Sonia M.. "Audience Reception: The Role of the Viewer in Retelling Romantic Drama". *Mass Media and Society*. Ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch. New York: Routledge, 1991. 285-305.

Lockford, Lesa. *Performing Femininity: Rewriting Gender Identity*. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2004.

Lotz, Amanda D.. *Redesigning Women: Television after the Network Era*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

McRobbie, Angela. *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Murphy, Caryn. " 'It Only Got Teenage Girls': Narrative Strategies and the Teenage Perspective of My So-Called Life". *Dear Angela: Remembering My So-Called Life*. Ed. Michele Byers and David Lavery. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. 165-178.

Murray, Susan. "Saving Our So-Called Lives: Girl Fandom, Adolescent Subjectivity, and *My So-Called Life*". *Dear Angela: Remembering My So-Called Life*. Ed. Michele Byers and David Lavery. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. 35-48.

Pajaczkowska, Claire. "Issues in Feminist Mass Media". *Feminist Visual Culture*. Ed. Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2000. 223-227.

Siegel, Deborah L. "Reading between the Waves: Feminist Historiography in a "Postfeminist" Movement". *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*. Eds. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 55-82.

Siegler, Ava L. *The Essential Guide to Adolescence*. New York: Dutton, publ. By the Penguin Group, 1997.

Stemmer-Beer, Roswitha. *Liebeskämpfe: Wie Töchter ihre Mütter abnabeln*. Herbolzheim: Centaurus, 2007.

Strinati, Dominic. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Tasker, Yvonne and Diane Negra. "Introduction: Feminist Politics and Postfeminist Culture". *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra. London: Duke University Press, 2007. 1-25.

Von der Lippe, Anna Louise. "Are Conflict and Challenge Sources of Personality Development? Ego Development and Family Communication." *Personality Development in Adolescence: A cross national and lifespan perspective*. Eds. Eva Elisabeth Aspaas Skoe and Anna Louise von der Lippe. London: Routledge, 1998. 38-60.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used against Women*. 1990. ed. London: Vintage, 1991.

Zoonen van, Liesbet. "Feminist Perspectives on the Media". *Mass Media and Society*. Ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch. New York: Routledge, 1991. 33-54.

8.3. Works Not Available

Anzaldúa, Gloria and Cherrie Moraga. Eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. 2nd ed. Latham, N.Y.: Kitchen Table Press, 1983.

Apter, Terri. *Altered Loves: Mothers and Daughters during Adolescence*. New York: St. Martin's, 1990.

Baumrind, Diana. "Effective parenting during the early adolescent transition". *Family Transitions: Advances in Family Research Series*. Eds. P.A. Cowan and A.M. Hetherington. Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1991. 111-163.

Beer, G. *The Romance*. London: Methuen, 1970.

Bickford, Susan. *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict and Citizenship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Booker, Christopher. *The Neophiliacs: A Study of the Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties*. London: Collins, 1969.

Bordo, Susan. "Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender-Scepticism". *Feminism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Linda J. Nicholson. New York and London: Routledge, 1990. 133-156.

Busby, Linda J. "Sex Role Research in Mass Media". *Journal of Communication* 25 (1975).

Capsuto, Steven. *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television, 1930s to the Present*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2000.

Creedon, Pamela J. Ed. *Women in Mass Communication: Challenging Gender Values*. London: Sage, 1989.

Denfeld, Rene. *The New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order*. London: Warner Books, 1995.

Eagleton, Terry. "The Ideology of of the Aesthetetic". *The Politics of Pleasure: Aesthetics and Cultural Theory*. Ed. Stephen Regan. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992. 17-31.

Ferguson, Marjorie. *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*. London: Heinemann, 1983.

Gaines, Jane. *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*. Eds. Jane Caines and Charlotte Herzog. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Gauntlett, D. and A. Hill. *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Bfi, 1999.

Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy: aspects of working-class life with special references to publications and entertainments*. (ed). London: Chatto & Windus, 1971.

Hudson, Barbara. "Femininity and Adolescence". *Gender and Generation*. Eds. Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava. London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1984. 31-53.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Lull, James. Ed. *World Families Watch Television*. Newbury Park: Sage, 1988.

Modleski, Tania. *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Nightingale, Virginia. "Women in Audiences". *Television and Women's Culture*. Ed. Mary Ellen Brown. London: Sage, 1990. 25-26.

Overholser, Geneva. *New York Times*, 19 September 1986, p. 30.

Raven, Charlotte. *Guardian*. 3 December 1996.

Seiter, Ellen; Borchers, Hans; Kreutzner, Gabriele; Warth, Eva-Maria; "Don't treat us like we're so stupid and naive: Towards an Ethnography of Soap Opera Viewers". *Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power*. Ed. Ellen Seiter, Hans

Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, Eva-Maria Warth. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. 223-247.

Stacey, Jackie. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Steinem, Gloria. *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983.

Tuchman, Gaye, et al. (eds). *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

White, Jerry. *The Worst Street in North London*. London: Routledge, 1986.

Wilson, Elizabeth. "Fashion and the Postmodern Body". *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*. Eds. Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson. London: Pandora Press, 1992.

Winship, Janice. *Inside Women's Magazines*. London: Rivers Oram Press/Pandora List, 1987.

Wolf, Naomi. *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How To Use It*. New York: Random House, 1993.

Worpole, Ken. *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading, Popular Writing*. London: Verso, 1983.

8.4. Further Reading

Barrie, Gunter. *Television and Gender Representation*. London: John Libbey, 1995.

Brown, Mary E. ed. *Television and Women's culture: The Politics of the Popular*. London: Sage Publishers, 1994.

Creeber, Glen. *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen*. London: Bfi Publishing, 2004.

Creeber, Glen. *Tele-visions: An Introduction to Studying Television*. London: Bfi Publishing, 2006.

- Dow, Bonnie J. *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement since 1970*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
- Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1991.
- Galician, Mary-Lou. *Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media: Analysis and Criticism of Unrealistic Portrayals and their Influence*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press, 1998.
- Kroeber, Karl. *Make Believe in Film and Fiction: Visual vs. Verbal Storytelling*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Lacey, Nick. *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000.
- Macdonald, Myra. *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*. London: Arnold, 1995.
- Martinson, Deborah. *In the Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction*. Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2003.
- Mittell, Jason. "Film and Television Narrative". *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Ed. David Herman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Modleski, Tania. *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Mumford, Laura S. *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon: Soap Opera, Women, and Television Genre*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Nava, Mica. *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*. London: Sage Publications, 1992.

Shary, Timothy. *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen*. London: Wallflower, 2005.

Spangler, Lynn C. *Television Women from Lucy to Friends: Fifty Years of Sitcoms and Feminism*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003.

Whelehan, Imelda. *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

Zillmann, Dolf ; Jennings Bryant and Aletha C Huston. eds. *Media, Children, and The Family*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994.

Zillmann, Dolf and Peter Vorderer. eds. *Media Entertainment: The Psychology of its Appeal*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000.

Zoonen van, Liesbet. *Feminist Media Studies*. London: Sage Publishers, 1994.

Zoonen van, Liesbet. "Feminist Perspectives on the Media". *Mass Media and Society*. Ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch. New York: Routledge, 1991. 33-54.

Ich habe mich bemüht, sämtliche Inhaber der Bildrechte ausfindig zu machen und ihre Zustimmung zur Verwendung der Bilder in dieser Arbeit eingeholt. Sollte dennoch eine Urheberrechtsverletzung bekannt werden, ersuche ich um Meldung bei mir.

9. Appendix

9.1. Listing of Screenshots

No.	Screenshot Title	Episode	Page
1	Rayanne and Angela in the girls' room	1 (09:03)	52
2	Model on woman's magazine cover	5 (13:25)	59
3	Angela and Brian at the 'World Happiness Dance'	11 (36:46)	63
4	Angela dyeing her hair in a "Crimson Glow"	1 (03:11)	69
5	Angela embarrassed about the pimple on her chin	5 (03:28)	73
6	Angela, happy to meet Jordan in the boiler room	12 (18:27)	77
7	Angela, talking to Corey	17 (07:49)	80
8	Angela's unconscious habits when she feels observed by Jordan	1 (14:19)	81
9	Angela in a quite unimpressive dress	1 (11:22)	82
10	Angela's new outfit, secretly put on	1 (31:46)	84
11	One of Rayanne's many headstrong styles	1 (25: 40)	85
12	The Chase family at their dinner table	3 (07:16)	86
13	Rayanne's mother Amber talking to Patty	3 (18:18)	87
14	Angela and Sharon in the girls' room	5 (12:02)	88
15	Angela made-up, waiting for Jordan to come by	7 (32:04)	89
16	Patty skeptically looking at Angela in her hippie outfit	10 (29:11)	91
17	Angela's new style	17 (37:28)	93
18	Angela, letting her parents in on her thoughts	14 (28:37)	96
19	Angela, consoled by her mother	1 (44:26)	105
20	Patty wanting to be close to her 'little girl'	3 (43:02)	106
21	Angela hugging Amber	10 (05:43)	108
22	Angela, in an exceptionally good mood, hugging her mom	12 (07:59)	110
23	Angela in a peaceful mood, with her dad	2 (43:20)	113
24	Angela and her father	1 (18:21)	115
25	Graham and Danielle, jauntily interacting	4 (07:11)	116
26	Angela hugging her grandfather	4 (08:47)	117

9.2. Episode Guide

No.:	Original Title	German Title	Length
1	My So Called Life (Pilot)	Im Disco-Fieber	46: 25
2	Dancing in the Dark	Spiel mit dem Feuer	45: 30
3	Guns and Gossip	Sex und Gewalt	45: 30
4	Father Figures	Zwei Überväter	45: 50
5	The Zit	Hässliches Entlein	45: 29
6	The Substitute	Ohne Hemmungen	46: 17
7	Why Jordan Can't Read	Im siebten Himmel	45: 28
8	Strangers in the Housewives	Was wirklich wichtig ist	46: 20
9	Halloween	Die Geister, die man ruft	46: 27
10	Other People's Daughters	Im Partyrausch	45: 40
11	Life of Brian	Wilde Herzen	46: 16
12	Self Esteem	Heimlichkeiten	45: 49
13	Pressure	Das erste Mal	45: 50
14	On the Wagon	Auf Entzug	46: 05
15	So Called Angels	Ein Hauch von Himmel	46: 54
16	Resolutions	Gute Vorsätze	46: 35
17	Betrayal	Sexaholics	45: 53
18	Weekend	Jeder wird mal erwachsen	44: 36
19	In Dreams begin Responsibilities	Aber erstens kommt es anders?	45: 20

Afterword

“Famous women and the representation of femininity in popular culture has a history of fascinated scrutiny [...] and the arguments about role models, negative messages, stereotypes, the 'beauty myth', and the perpetuation of gender roles and attitudes, have raged for decades.” (Samantha Holland, 2004:42)

Abstract (German)

Die Geschichte des Feminismus ist geprägt von Vorurteilen gegenüber den Aktivistinnen und falsch verstandenen Forderungen. Wer heutzutage Feministinnen immer noch als männerhassende Radikalisten sieht, hat die Entwicklungen und wahren Ziele des Feminismus nicht verstanden. In dieser Arbeit wird ein kurzer Abriss zweier wichtiger feministischer Strömungen, welche parallel während der 1990er Jahre stattfanden, präsentiert. Im Zusammenhang damit wird dargestellt wieviel dieser Strömungen in der Populärkultur dieser Zeit, speziell in Fernsehserien, sichtbar war.

Dass Massenmedien wie Fernsehen, Internet und Radio eine extrem wichtige Rolle für Weltanschauungen, Werte und Normen haben, ist wohl unumstritten. Dass diese Medien durch ihre gezielte Darstellung, oder eben Nichtdarstellung aber auch unbewusst wahrgenommene Wertungen senden, wird oft noch angezweifelt. Die Tatsache, dass immer mehr junge Mädchen und Frauen an einem krankhaften Selbstbild leiden, welches sich oft in Persönlichkeitsstörungen äussert, ist jedoch eine traurige Wahrheit. Durch die Medien werden Ideale verbreitet, welche kaum zu erreichen sind, und somit Selbstwertgefühl und ein gesundes Selbstvertrauen speziell in Menschen, die sich in der Pubertät befinden, stark negativ beeinflussen.

Speziell jugendliche Mädchen, die noch keine sehr stabilen Charaktere haben und noch dabei sind, herauszufinden wer sie eigentlich sind, ihre Identität noch nicht klar definiert haben, haben oft damit zu kämpfen, sich unter Druck gesetzt zu fühlen, einem bestimmten Bild zu entsprechen. Viele Mädchen revoltieren spezifisch gegen die Weiblichkeitsvorstellungen ihrer Mütter, indem sie sich so gegensätzlich zu derer Wunschvorstellungen präsentieren wie möglich. Dass die Beziehung zwischen Müttern und ihren pubertierenden Töchtern generell eine schwierige ist, beweisen zahlreiche psychologische Studien, die sich speziell mit dieser für beide Parteien schmerzhaften Abnabelung befassen.

Dass das was vor fünfzig Jahren noch als weibliches Ideal empfunden wurde heute nicht mehr als authentisch wahrgenommen wird, beziehungsweise, dass Weiblichkeit heute, so scheint es zumindest, um einiges vielschichtiger definiert werden kann, wird hier thematisiert, anhand des Beispiels der Angela Chase, Protagonistin in der Jugendserie *Willkommen im Leben* aus den 1990ern. Da diese Serie, so wie der Grossteil jeder in

Europa konsumierten Populärkultur, in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika produziert wurde, konzentriert sich auch die im theoretischen Teil erwähnte Fachliteratur auf Populärkultur und Feminismus in den USA.

Abstract (English)

Today's everyday lives are accompanied by various different kinds of mass media devices, such as radio, the internet, or television. Even simple minor acts, such as waiting for a train become acts of media usage, which often happens on a subconscious level only. Pictures and ideas transmitted through such media influence the way we regard and consider our norms and values which furthermore affects our perception of what is considered normal. The media propose a certain ideal of femininity and/or womanhood, which through its permanent recurrence becomes an aspired goal for many young women who have not yet a stable character and are still insecure about their own gender identity.

Gender identities are fluid constructions, subject to change throughout women's lives determined by many different factors such as age, class, social and educational background. Unrealistic stereotypes of the ideal feminine woman proposed by the media aggravate a healthy development of self-esteem in young women. This results in rather depressive adolescents burdened by eating disorders or other consequences of an attempt to comply with that ideal as closely as possible.

Although different feminist movements have different tactics in achieving their goals, they all do have in common the main goal, which is an improvement of women's situation in contemporary patriarch societies. Such movements strive for more equality between men and women and for a more realistic depiction of women in the media.

In this thesis different constructions of femininity are compared and their relevance to a character of a teen television series is presented. The picture people create of themselves is closely linked to their role models and people in their environment who have an immense impact on their identity development.

Adolescence is a difficult time for both children and their parents, yet it is also a very important time for a person's character building. Physical as well as psychological processes make adolescence such a difficult developmental stage for girls. Parents as well as children have to find a suitable way to manage occurring problems constructively in order to maintain a happy relationship towards each other. That the way young people look at their parents influences their own behavior also surfaces in

the common difficulties of generational conflicts within families. Different values and norms may collide causing feelings of being misunderstood on both sides. Especially the relationship a adolescent girl has towards her mother is crucial in the ongoing process of the girl's gender identity construction.

Curriculum Vitae

Julia Kalchhauser

1070 Wien

Tel: 0650/9564666

Email: nalujulia@yahoo.com



geboren am 8. Januar 1982

Ausbildung

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 2002-2008 | Studium an der Universität Wien (2003-2008 Diplomstudium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik); Erlangen des Diploms: voraussichtlich Herbst 2008 |
| 1992-2000 | BORG 23 Anton-Kriegergasse 1230 Wien. Abschluß: Matura mit Schwerpunkt Kunst und bildnerische Erziehung |
| 1988-1992 | Volksschule, 2393 Sittendorf |

Weiterbildung

- Hypnose und Manipulation
- Moderation
- Fotografie
- Rhetorik und Kommunikation
- Timemanagement

Alle Seminare organisiert und durchgeführt von der AkS –
Aktion kritischer SchülerInnen
(Sozialistische Jugend Wien)

Sprachen

- Deutsch (Muttersprache)
- Englisch (fließend in Wort und Schrift)

Grundkenntnisse in:

- Französisch
- Schwedisch
- Spanisch

EDV-Kenntnisse

MS Office, OpenOffice.org

Windows, Linux (Grundkenntnisse)

Auslandsaufenthalte

1994	3 Wochen Wales/Porthcawl: Sprachkurs
1998	2 Wochen Irland/Malahide: Sprachkurs
1999	2 Wochen Frankreich/Cannes: Sprachkurs
2001	9 Wochen Kuba: Sprachkurs
2001 - 2002	3 Monate Hawaii, USA: Volontariat

Berufserfahrung

Juli 1998	Ferialpraxis bei Billa Handelswarengesellschaft
1999-2000	• Redaktionelle/Journalistische Mitarbeit bei Radio Medienzentrum “Funkschatten“

(zu hören auf Radio Orange)
• Nebenjobs in der Gastronomie

Okt. 2000 Verkäuferin bei Häagen Dazs

**Okt. 2000-
Juli 2002** Call Agent bei DMB Marketingberatung
und für UTA United Telecom Austria

ab Apr. 2002 Tätigkeit in der Gastronomie