



# DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Gender Benders in Manolos?“

Verfasserin

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt: A 343  
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt: Anglistik und Amerikanistik  
Betreuer: Priv.-Doz. Dr. Stefan Brandt

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all, I would like to thank Professor Dr. Stefan Brandt, advisor of my diploma thesis, for his help, patience and guidance during the development of the project. Then, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my parents and grandparents, who have always supported me, which I have really appreciated wholeheartedly. Moreover, I thank all of the special people in my life not only for the inspiring discussions, but also for motivating me to proceed and finish this thesis. Finally, I would like to thank Sonja Trattner and Anna Fill for their counselling.

This project would not have been possible without your support.

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## Introduction

This thesis deals with the representation of feminine gender roles in the popular culture TV series *Sex and the City*. It will be shown in which way the series transports liberal, post-feminist values on the surface but eventually consents male hegemonic, heteronormative gender roles. *Sex and the City* is not only one of the most successful TV programme but also a very complex and multi-layered text, which “can be read in many different ways” (Tukachinsky in Metz 1) – I choose a post-feminist reading. However, the multitude of ways of interpretations might be a reason for the series’ outstanding success which eventually lead to six seasons and two films. Not many TV-shows have had an impact on their audience in a way *SatC* did, as will be shown in the course of the thesis. Therefore, *SatC* offers a fruitful basis for investigating the production and acceptance of gender norms in popular culture.

The HBO-show was broadcasted from June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1998 until February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2004 and ended with 94 episodes in sum. It is based on Candance Bushnell’s novel of the same title, although the book only created the framework for the characters and the basic constellations. With nominations for more than 50 Emmy Awards and 24 Golden Globe Awards, the series was the first one ever to take honours in the category ‘comedy series’. In 2008 and 2010, film sequels were shown in cinemas and a spin-off called *The Carrie Diaries* will be aired in 2012 (IMDB). The TV-show was created by Darren Starr and executive produced by Michael Patrick King, Cindy Chupack, John Melfi, Jenny Bicks and, also, Sarah Jessica Parker, who plays the protagonist of the series.

Parker embodies the role of Carrie Bradshaw, a columnist living in Manhattan, New York City. She observes and writes about the dating habits of modern, urban singles while being part in this world. As the rules of prototyping suggest, she is friends with other single ladies of which each represents a certain (stereo-)type of woman.

One of them is the pragmatic lawyer Miranda Hobbes (*Cynthia Nixon*), who can be described as an independent female character who promotes third wave feminist values. Utterances like “[a] thirty-four-year-old guy with no money and no place to live, because he’s single, he’s a catch. But a thirty-four-year-old woman with a job and a great home, because she’s single, is considered tragic” (Sohn 87) reflect her anger against men and her sensibility for gender specific inequalities.

Contrarily, there is the character of Charlotte York (*Kristin Davies*), art dealer and later housewife, which represents conservative, upper class ideals. Charlotte believes in the

myth of stereotypical real love and a chivalric execution thereof. Throughout the series, she often stresses that “women really just want to be rescued” (Sohn 45) and advises her friends to behave passively, which is quite the opposite of Miranda’s ideology.

These characters are completed by Samantha Jones (*Kim Cattrall*), who is not only the oldest character, but also the most experienced and open-minded one, ideologically rather liberal and post-modern with an Lyotardian ‘anything-goes’-moral when it comes to (sexual) relationships. Samantha performs a male sexual habitus which is based on one night stands and struggles for power, as will be shown. When it comes to relationships, she cannot open up and therefore avoids them. It is never told whether this attitude has been influenced by an incisive experience in her past or if it is mere conviction.

Carrie Bradshaw (*Sarah Jessica Parker*) is the narrator of the show. In contrast to the three other characters, which can be categorised stereotypically, Carrie embodies the average woman. On the one hand, the character offers the audience a character full of flaws and rough edges with whom they can identify with. On the other hand, she is the type of woman the audience would like to have as a best friend, which again strengthens the bonding between the character and the viewer. Although her wit, beauty and amiability evoke the impression of a strong character, the audience also becomes witness of her deep falls and self-insecurities when it comes to men.

Sohn (36) concludes that “[o]n *Sex and the City*, you’ve got a group of characters who live in a world that the audience participates vicariously. [...] People watch the show and think, yeah, that’s me. That’s my situation”. Furthermore, she writes that the authors were inspired by events they themselves have actually experienced, which is the reason why they have been able to produce a show that has the ability to trigger strong processes of identification within the audience members. Hence, the authenticity and imitation of real life seduce the audience to identify with the characters - a fact that can become a tool of power, as will be shown in this thesis.

Since this series is designed for a vast audience, it will be interesting to see how it might have shaped the audience’s view on gender roles, feminism and queer culture. Furthermore, the series is very multi-layered and offers many different types of reading – including, for example, diverse interpretations ranging from anti-feminist to post-modern feminist. Therefore, *Sex and the City* can answer many questions concerning modern view on gender.

With the help of post-modern feminist tools, three episodes of this show will be analysed to find out how gender is constructed, how it is represented and thus interpreted by

the audience. In my analysis, I will demonstrate that the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis allows the combining of several post-modern concepts to shed light on the construction of gender from diverse angles, finding an answer for the question of how postmodern cultural texts like *Sex and the City* influence the reader and shape their view on gender and consumerism.

Before starting the analysis, the diverse ways of understanding feminism need to be explained. This is of high importance because it occurs quite often that labels are mixed up, misunderstood and thus misused. For this reason, I will briefly outline the history of feminism and explain contemporary feminism(s). Then, I will proceed to the intellectual basis that shall be used for the feminist media analysis, which is Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which says that gender is not innate, but a socially acquired construct. In my opinion, this helpful theory allows modern feminists to analyse gender from another angle. In this section I will acquaint the reader with the genesis and the definition of performativity as well as explanations of the concepts 'subject', 'anti-essentialism' and 'identity'. Subsequently, I will show how this theory is of practical use by introducing the post-modern feminist tool *Camp*. This tool offers Butlerian post-modern feminists a possibility to deconstruct gender and prove its 'constructedness'. It will be shown that in a series like *SatC*, the application of *Camp* can offer fruitful ways of gender deconstruction.

TV series offer a production of meaning and interpretation which can shape the word view of the audience. As the aim of this paper is to analyse the reader-response to the depiction of gender roles in *Sex and the City*, I will also turn to film studies and give an introduction on the mechanisms of how the audience produces meaning. In this context, stereotyping has to be mentioned as well, as it influences the audience and shapes their view on men, women, hetero/homosexuality, etc.

In the analysis part of the thesis I will use the aforementioned methods to show how gender roles are constructed and how they can be deconstructed and discuss their underlying meaning. Furthermore, I will investigate how the audience interprets the presented roles of gender and women. It will be questioned, whether the series actually aligns with the assumption that the characters are "Gender Benders in Manolos" or whether they are not. Although *Sex and the City* is said to be liberal and open-minded, I will argue that the series basically reproduces male hegemonic, anti-queer, conservative gender structures.

Subsequently, I will proceed in the following manner to substantiate this hypothesis: Three episodes of the series will be analysed, each dealing with one important aspect. At first, it will be analysed how gender is presented to the reader – and, how it is 'bent'. Then, I will

use the concept of Camp to show the constructed nature of gender. Finally, I will focus on the modes of stereotyping which are present in *Sex and the City* and how it seduces the reader to accept conservative gender roles. In sum, I will show how the post-modern cultural text *Sex and the City* influences the reader and shape their views on gender and the image of women.

## 1. Post-modern Feminism in Popular Culture

### 1.1. The Genesis of Feminism

*Sex and the City* is a contemporary product of popular culture. In order to understand how the image of women in series as such is produced and interpreted, the feminist aspect has to be taken into account. This thesis makes use of feminist film studies analysis, so it is of importance to understand the genesis and definition of the different types of feminism. This knowledge is necessary to grasp the concept of post-modern feminism, which will form the intellectual basis of this thesis.

So – how can feminism be defined? Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered with one sentence. Many intellectuals have tried to determine this concept, and I found the following definition helpful: According to Barker (68-69), feminism can be “understood both as a diverse body of theoretical work and a social and political movement”. This influential cultural phenomenon tries to define and ameliorate the political, economic and sexual position of women in a society which is dominated by a male hegemonic rulership. Barker furthermore explains that the underlying consensus is the fact that women are subordinated to men and that power relations are installed in a way that women are kept under the glass ceiling. This is a central theme in modern feminism, which is still reproduced and visible in modern popular culture – for instance, in TV series like *Sex and the City* (*SatC*). In order to deal with contemporary feminism, one has to go back to its roots to comprehend its essence.

The history of feminism has not been linear. Basically, it has evolved in the form of three major waves from proto-feminism to post-feminism. Influenced by a new economic world order at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, first wave feminists achieved their aims of enfranchisement, equal education and the legitimation of property rights for women. Still, as important first wave feminism might have been, it had several flaws: Feminism was white and middle class and therefore did not accredit the heterogeneity of womanhood (i.e. class and race). After a conservative backlash in the post-bellum Western world, second wave feminism emerged at the end of the 1960s. Whereas the socio-economic environment showed a trend of

a backlash, feminist literature and philosophy began to flourish and produced benchmarks such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). The agenda of this wave listed issues like free contraception, equal payment or equal education, alongside concerns like reproduction, sexual violence and domestic labour (Gillies et al 1). Furthermore, the female body and its representation in the media became matters of discussion (Walters 108-110).

Second wave feminism had a strong effect on society and changed woman's position for the better. Nevertheless, the 1980s marked a step backwards again, as the feminists' goals seemed achieved for many women. In her book *Backlash* (4), the feminist writer Susan Faludi explains that Reagan's "war on women" triggered this step back with cuts in welfare for women, a new misogyny in popular culture and a stronger anti-abortion current. This environment was the very cradle of post-feminism; a concept which on the one hand is frequently mentioned in popular culture, but on the other hand often misinterpreted and misunderstood. Therefore, the next section shall try to explain the character and definition of post-feminism, and, eventually, post-modern feminism.

## **1.2. Defining Post-Feminism**

After having given a brief overview of the definition and history of feminism, it is necessary to understand the term 'post-feminism' in order to deal with the theory which will be used in this thesis.

Basically, any feminist action after the second wave can be classified as being post-feminist. A common definition of post-feminism has been given by Susan Faludi (37), stating that post-feminism was a devastating reaction against the achievements of second wave feminism. She furthermore explains that it was an "ironic, pseudo-intellectual critique on the feminist movement rather than an overtly hostile response to it" (Faludi 38). Conclusively, there seems to be a crucial difference between second wave feminism and post-modern feminism.

Post-feminism has to be put in the context of our current reality of the contemporary neo-liberal, late-capitalist society which is strongly influenced by consumerism, individualism and, most importantly, post-modernism. The latter shall be defined more precisely. This era developed in the early 1960s, after modernist shocking revolutionary acts had become canonized and accepted. The French philosopher and literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard summarises that post-modernism stems from a crisis of knowledge in the Western world, which is expressed "as incredulity towards metanarratives" and what he calls "the

obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation” (Lyotard xxiv). According to him, post-modernism means a collapse of metanarratives, that is the universalist truth for the generations preceding ours. He furthermore explains that postmodern popular culture is a kind of an ‘anything goes’ culture in which taste is irrelevant and money the only sign of value. There are no universal truths anymore, but rather the dominance of capitalist values; it is defined through loss of value and basis – a development which also can be found in feminist studies, such as the loss of the subject and identity or anti-essentialism (cf. Storey 147-51). Lotz writes that

Post-feminism is a new form of empowerment and independence, individual choice, (sexual) pleasure, consumer culture, fashion, hybridism, humour, and the renewed focus on the female body can be considered fundamental for this contemporary feminism. It is a new, critical way of understanding the changed relations between feminism, popular culture and femininity. (In Adriaens 2009)

This assumption differs very much from the second wave’s agenda. In contrast to the latter, the subject has become anti-essentialist in terms of identity and gender. Whereas second wave feminism was based on structuralist dichotomies such as man/woman or homosexual/heterosexual, post-feminism has dissolved these allegedly innate attributes; it pleads that women have to recognise their “own personal mix of identities” (Adriaens 2009). In order to fit the neo-liberal wish for individualism in society, universal identities which were used in the past waves needed to be dissolved.

However, post-feminism must not be seen as homogeneous movement such as second wave feminism was. Post-feminism can be divided into two different strands: third wave feminism and post-modern feminism. These two strands co-exist, but they have completely different agendas. Sarah Gamble says that there has been a generation conflict between the second wave feminists of the 1970s and the early 1980s and the younger third wave feminists: “[T]he primary difference between third wave and second wave feminism is that third wave feminists feel at ease with contradiction“ (52). This fact is reflected by the diversity third wave feminism embraces: Issues like non-heteronormative sexualities, Black feminism, etc. are acknowledged by this wave (which has not been the case in the second one).

According to Mikula (70), this wave emerged in the early 90s and “is characterised by its acknowledgement of diversity within its own ranks and its rejection of the possibility of a single feminist stand-point”. The non-judgemental thought of feminism can be problematic as well: Feminism loses its critical edge, it lacks definitive boundaries and it is too inclusive to criticise. If any experiences or point of view are included, how should one argue against ambivalent issues? Opposition originates from principles, and if there are none it is

impossible to maintain one's position. Nevertheless, according to Snyder (193) "third-wave feminism potentially offers a diverse, anti-foundationalist, multi-perspectival, sex-radical version of feminism that could move American feminism beyond the impasses of the 1980s and 1990s". Therefore, it can be summarised that third wave feminism is a dynamic (although problematic) concept which acknowledges the diversity of different female experiences and does not regard equality to be achieved yet.

Whereas the third wave acknowledges the fact that women have not reached equality and fulfilled the agenda yet, post-modern feminism declares feminism (in the sense of the second wave) to be dead. The famous women studies scholar Alison Piepmaier paraphrases this difference as follows: "While the third wave says, 'We've got a hell of a lot of work to do!' post-feminism says, 'Go buy some Manolo Blahniks and stop your whining'" (Piepmeier). It becomes apparent that there post-modern feminism differs crucially from third wave feminism, although they are both labelled as 'post-feminism'.

Post-modern feminism aims at foregrounding the identity of the subject, not their gender or sexuality. Therefore, gender categories become obsolete and have to be deconstructed in order to achieve equality, as the act of gender dissolution would also dissolve the powers and forces working on such categories. Ziauddin & Van Loon (144) write that "post-modern feminists are not interested in creating or rediscovering 'authentic' female expression, but in showing that social construction of gender involves power relations". This rather theoretical position has challenged many critics to reject post-modern feminism, amongst other points of criticism like the erosion of female solidarity, which was a cornerstone of second wavers (Niehsler 20).

Yet, I argue that post-modern feminism offers more possibilities to change patriarchic structures than third wave feminism can, which for me personally is a rather fuzzy sequel of the second wave. Whereas post-modern feminism offers ways of deconstructing gender and thus power inequalities, third wave feminism does not have a coherent agenda and, as mentioned above, lacks a critical edge. It tries to combine too many different aspects that it has lost its focus. I think that post-modern feminism is a more intellectual and forward-looking concept (especially with regards to queer issues) than third wave feminism, which is stuck with the second wave and their essentialism. This is the reason I decided to choose post-modern feminism over third wave feminism as my ideological basis for this thesis. However, third wave feminism cannot be left out, as will be seen in the analysis.

This section has shown that the boundaries of gender have been blurred in our post-modern society and has raised the question of which effect this has on the individual. If there

is no basis for gender, how can the concepts ‘woman’ and ‘gender’ be defined? One possible approach to this problem would be Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, which will be explained in the following part.

### **1.3. Is Gender Anti-Essentialist? Judith Butler and Performativity**

The past sections have outlined how feminism has evolved from proto-feminism to post-modern feminism. This diachronic progress has been accompanied by theoretical approaches, and I would like to explain at this point how Butler’s theory of performativity has developed.

Historically seen, the concept that gender is performed and not innate was no invention of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: In the 1920s, Joan Rivière’s “Masquerade of Femininity” was published, in which Rivière compares the performance of a gender to wearing a mask: “[W]omanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask; [...] how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and ‘masquerade’. They are the same thing” (Rivière in Craft-Fairchild 51). The idea that gender can be seen as a role and not as an essentialist biological factor was perpetuated by Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Other Sex* (1949). De Beauvoir claims that being a woman is a construct created by a male hegemonic society to limit female power and produce examples in which women become objects of male desire (cf. Haas 19). According to Beauvoir, it is never possible to become a woman, as being a woman can only mean to perform a certain set of gender acts which construct the role. The above-mentioned quotation that “one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman” foreshadows the theory of performativity.

Then, in 1990, the famous post-structuralist and feminist philosopher Judith Butler published her challenging book *Gender Trouble*, which uses this anti-essentialist position to deconstruct gender categories. Sönser (27) explains that “Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) has defined the field. [...] *Gender Trouble* is a work of feminist theory”. This book can be categorised a blend of historian Foucault, psychoanalytic Lacan, deconstructive operations of post-modern feminism (Elliot 212-220). Alongside Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Butler’s work builds a cornerstone of gender studies and queer theory. Nevertheless,

Butler (in Sönser 31) explains that “I’m a feminist theorist before I’m a queer theorist or a gay and lesbian theorist”.

As delineated above, Butler did not create this concept, but combined several already existing ideas which finally brought her theory of performativity into existence. In her work, Butler has made two main points: Firstly, that sex, gender and identity are interrelated in a way that the dynamics of social life have to be seen as a challenging mixture of identities, reality and sexuality; that the woman has to be deconstructed as a category of identity and that it is necessary to demonstrate that an individual is not simply masculine, feminine, straight etc. Secondly, Butler provides a perspective of gender which allows the point of view that gender is enacted in repeated cultural performances, that there is no innate identity and even a refusal of such alike. In sum: Gender is anti-essentialist and reproduced by repeated performances.

In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), she questions “several categories that serve as markers of personal identity and as organising principles for politics – biological sex, polarised gender, and determinate sexuality” (Meyers 112). Gender identity constructs a gendered body which reproduces heteronormative sexuality. By repeating and imitating cultural gender acts the individual supposes that their gender was innate. Yet, Meyers (112) states that

[G]ender is a discursive effect; it is neither a biological nor a psychological necessity. Gendered behaviour – that is, enactments or prescribed corporal styles – is ‘performative’, for it creates the illusion of primary, interior gender identity. This illusion conceals the political underpinnings of gender identity, namely, male dominance and heterosexism.

Therefore, Butler puts forward the idea that it has been taken as a ‘truth’ that gender is a necessity to the individuals of society, but in fact she states that patriarchy seems to have used these stable dichotomies as political tools to sustain the world order and preserve the existing power relations. Post-modern feminism aims at dissolving these power relations by rendering a nullification of gender.

In this context, the body is the place where “gender takes place”. According to Foucault, “the body is the inscribed surface of events” (Byron & Sneddon 119). The body functions as a medium for inscription. The author of these inscriptions is History, which labels us according to the current truths and the *zeitgeist* of an era. Therefore, if the inscriptions (i.e. gender) should be destroyed, “the medium itself must be destroyed” (Meyers 113). In order to do so, one has to question the notion of the *subject*.

An important theorist concerning this notion is Julia Kristeva. She formed the idea that the subject needs an 'object', a 'not-me' in order to be able to establish itself. Inner and outer constraints produce a binary distinction which stabilise the subject. In case of a disruption, it has to change, which proves that there are no internal, fixed parameters (cf. Meyers 1997). The psychoanalytical philosopher Michel Foucault also pleads for a deconstruction of the subject to undermine structures of power (Haas 15), and Butler follows this concept. With the dissolution of the subject, identity becomes obsolete and so does gender. Teresa de Laurentis (in During 83) states that the deconstruction of the self is attended by the dissolution of the concept of female oppression. So, if there is no innate gender, how has society been able to create this 'truth' and distinguish between the categories? According to Meyers (119) "[w]ords, acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance [...]. Such words, acts and gestures are performative". An individual is simply a body lacking any innate values, but performing identity on its exterior surface. Anything the individual claims, believes, wishes to be is performed by themselves. Butler explains the notion performativity as follows

Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, and constrain the gendered subject and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be foregrounded. (Sönser et al. 27)

As can be seen, gender is an act of ongoing, repetitive performance. To a certain degree, these repetitions are carried out on a subconscious level – the individual cannot reject or choose them as they wish, because they are a product of their age. Yet, the process is dynamic and does - on principle - allow change.

Moreover, performativity is more than the mere performance of i.e. gender acts; it has to be pointed out that the terms performance and performativity cannot be used synonymously. Judith Butler clarifies

[It] can be concluded that the part of gender that it performed is the truth of gender; performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice' [...]. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake. (Sönser et al. 27)

According to this, the individual performs a role within a certain framework of social constraints – the individual can inscribe on their body whatever they wish, but they will

always be only one individual within a society and have to subject themselves to the dominating conventions and rules of that time.

Having mentioned the phrase “dominating conventions”, the concept of hegemony has to be explained at this point. According to the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, this concept is used as a method to analyse in which way culture and power are interrelated. He was concerned with the question why social groups consent to obey other social groups and how domination arises from this. This consent is based on shared values, beliefs and meanings. Hegemony hinders certain social groups to act revolutionary and enables the ruling group to sustain their power (cf. Longhurst 73). Although Gramsci focused on class and economy, this concept can be applied in a feminist contest as well: It could be argued that women consent to patriarchal hegemony. This longterm project of patriarchal power domination can only be undermined by a lack of female consent and a change of values.

In sum, the theory of performativity is not a new concept, but has evolved over decades. It constitutes the theoretical basis of post-modern feminism and queer studies, which co-exists with third wave feminism. According to Butler’s theory, subject does not exist and the individual does not possess any innate attributes; but are exterior factors given by society in which the individual does have the possibility to perform certain acts consciously. In a feminist context, this means that adissolution of gender roles allows women to free themselves from oppression and power mechanisms which they are subject to, because a nullification of gender also produces a nullification of power. Post-modern feminism has created several tools to conduct this, as will be shown in the following section.

## 1.4.Camp: Why Post-Modern Feminists Make Use of Gender Parody

This section will combine the prior sections, that is feminism, post-modern feminism and Butler's theory of performativity to show how post-modern feminists can benefit from a tool based on gender parody. In the analysis part, I will use this tool to show in which way gender roles can be deconstructed with the help of parody.

As already mentioned, one possibility to apply post-modern feminism on literature, music etc. is *Camp*. Susan Sontag's essay *Notes on Camp*, published in 1964, builds the intellectual basis of the method - I will interweave her essay's statements with the analysis at a later point.

Since the 1960s, *Camp* has changed from being an apolitical movement to political one and entered academia. It can be used as a way to perceive art, literature, film, fashion, etc. Moreover, it functions as a tool for feminists to deconstruct gender roles. Today, it can be used as Lenzenhofer explains that

Camp offers a way to interpret popular culture in a post-feminist way. Camp realises theoretical concepts of feminine constructions, especially the subversive repetitions which come along with Drag and Masquerade. (In Haas 157)

Fundamentally, the actual concept *Camp* stands for exaggeration, especially in combination with the aesthetics of homosexual subculture (transvestites, drag queens, cross-dressers). Campers reproduce clichés, but at the same time these clichés are deconstructed and criticised as sexist stereotypes. Lenzenhofer (cf. Haas 157-178) sees *Camp* as a political and theoretical tool which can be used in a postmodern context, especially in regards to feminist discussions about deconstruction and performativity of gender and gender identity. It can be defined as a typical characteristic of postmodernism, in which the link between postmodernism and feminism creates postmodern feminism.

It has now been explained in which way the method is used and what can be achieved with its help, but how can it actually be applied? Pamela Robertson (159) explains that

Camp's attention to the artifice of these images help undermine and challenge the presumed naturalness of gender roles and to displace essentialist versions of an authentic feminine identity [...] the very outrageousness and flamboyance of Camp's preferred representations would be its most powerful tool for a critique, rather than mere affirmation of stereotypical and oppressive images of women.

I would like to explain what is meant by that with the help of an example that is drag queens. Basically, drag queens are (often, but not necessarily homosexual) men who dress up as women. The female counterpart would be a drag king, that is a woman dressing up as a man.

Often, heavy make-up, bright wigs and pompous clothes are worn by members of this discourse group to emphasise their artificial ‘femaleness’. The aim is not an authentic, female appearance, but an exaggerated one. Butler (Sönser et al. 165) states that

Drag is the postulate against naturalisation, normalisation, norm, originality of gender and gender binarity and of homosexuality, as it repeats gender parody and imitation, which reflects the imitating representation of gender and by that unmasks it.

Quintessentially: A man who dresses like a woman can disrupt the existing dichotomy of gender with the help of exaggeration thereof and therefore can challenge traditional views on gender. Hence, Camp can be actively used to overdo a gender performance in order to parody it to show that gender does not exist. In a feminist context, I understand it as a resistance against gender norms. As for the audience, they might be baffled by such disruptions and question their own attitude towards gender roles.

The word ‘parody’ has been used quite frequently in the past paragraphs. Because of the high importance of this concept, it shall be defined thereafter. Judith Butler mentions a few important concepts which are linked to this phenomenon: (Gender) imitation and parody, and additionally, pastiche and mimicry.

Imitation is the umbrella term, the other concepts are different types of the same category. Their distinctive factors can be measured by their extent of activeness and their political statement. Mimicry is a possibility for women to knowingly reproduce and superficially accept feminine roles in the system which is dominated by a male ruling class in order to point out problems and inequalities. By knowingly putting on a mask and exaggerating femininity, the phallogocentric order, which is said to produce such femininity, is exposed as a discursive construct and open for the critique and change (Haas 160). Parody in turn is a more active process and possesses a satirical element, yet it is also political. Pastiche can be defined as a type of intertextuality which combines cultural texts, but lacks a political message.

The difference between parody and pastiche, according to Hutcheon (38) is that “parody is transformative in its relationship to other texts, [whereas] pastiche is imitative”. In other words, parody is the most productive, public form of imitation. Therefore, one should not see *Camp* only as a post-modern pastiche, but also point out its potential of parody and the implied subversive critique of post-modernity. Pamela Robertson says that “doubly coded in political terms, it both legitimates and subverts which it parodies (Robertson 4).

The most relevant concept for the course of this thesis, parody, does not assume that an imitation of an original takes place, but that parodic identities reproduce the constructions of ‘the original’ in an unconventional way and thus prove that our habits and gender roles are

performed. Hence, if a drag queen imitates the outward appearance and the habits of women, his ability to do so shows that women themselves only imitate the socially acknowledged role of ‘women’ (“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman”). Butler summarises that drag queens “imitate the myth of originality themselves” (Nicholson 338); they destabilize existing gender myths. Moreover, she writes that “it seems crucial to resist the myth of interior origins, understood either as naturalised or culturally fixed. Only then, gender coherence might be understood as the regulatory fiction it is – rather than the common point of our liberation” (Nicholson 338).

By this, she refers to her theory of performativity, which says that gender is anti-essentialist and, moreover, that gender is fluid. Again, she is able to defend her theory that the common notion of gender does not exist. Therefore, Judith Butler emphasizes the meaning of parody in feminist politics in order to dismantle gender as a cultural construct and to demonstrate its performativity (Haas 159).

As the theoretical approach has been outlined now, I would like to explain how this tool has actually been used in the past in a post-feminist context. Madonna, for example, has always been a Camp-icon and has presented herself in a gender-bending manner to the public, especially in the 1980s. According to Schwichtenberg (7), Madonna’s “post-modern strategies of representation question the underlying ‘truths’ of gender and by means of the deconstructivist performance of Camp, brings the notion of gender to a collapse”. Douglas Kellner (Sönser et al. 134-135) even speaks of the ‘Madonna Phenomenon’, which

bears traces of modernist and post-modernist elements, it is [...] designed to break down boundaries and create innovative forms. What is post-modern in Madonna’s work are arguably her uses of Camp, simulation, and pastiche; her breaching existing boundaries of sex, gender, and race; her disruptions of cultural hierarchies based on high/low distinctions; her activism in behalf of an array of political causes [...], and women’s rights; and her staging of multiple subject positions, rendering herself an exemplary ‘transformer’.

He labels her as a cultural icon who uses clothes and fashion for her purposes. However, Kellner (Sönser et al. 135) also argues that this obsession with fashion can become a fetish and that her representation of women liberates, but at the same time objectifies them. It has been criticised that her representation of feminine gender roles is ambivalent; whether she deconstructs gender types or emphasises them. The line between feminism and objectification might not be easy to draw. Second wave feminism made use of such binary codes, whereas post-modern feminist *Camp* dissolves these dichotomies and therefore renders them invalid.

By playing with different types of female representation and roles of femininity, Madonna also shows that a monolithic concept of ‘woman’ does not exist, but instead there is

a myriad of identities and personalities (Haas 162). This gender parody has been pointed out to be very Butlerian, as E. Ann Kaplan (156) explains

Butler's notion of challenging binary constructs through parodic play with gender stereotypes in many, trans-sexual and carnivalesque reversals is attractive. In many ways Madonna would seem to precisely embody what Butler believes is the most useful future strategy to avoid oppressive binary 'engendering'.

I will explain what is meant by that with the help of an example. In the singer's music clip *Justify my Love* (1990), Madonna is lying in bed with a man, then the scene changes and she is kissing an androgynous person (02:00), who suddenly turns out to be a woman and the man from the first scene is watching them. There is a fluent representation of gender identities throughout the whole music clip. At 4:07, drag kings and queens enter the scene and ridicule gender roles with their overrepresentation of either femininity or masculinity. Even Madonna herself uses such exaggeration, as she parodies the feminine icon Marilyn Monroe with her blonde hair and her red lips. For this reason, her performance can be interpreted as the one of a *faux queen*, a woman who dresses like a drag queen. I will return to this issue in topic 4.3, as this effect was used in an episode of *SatC* as well, and I will discuss this issue in more detail in the course of the analysis.

However, Madonna is not the only singer who disrupts gender norms as outlined above - in recent years Lady Gaga has become an important part of contemporary popular culture. Her song *Born this Way* deals with non-heteronormative sexual orientation, but, as the title already foreshadows, is of essentialist nature. To "be born this way" stands in harsh contrast to the theory of performativity – born this way in comparison to "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman". Nevertheless, the song also implies that gender roles are acquired, as she sings "My mama told me when I was young/ We are all born superstars/ She rolled my hair and put my lipstick on" (Lady Gaga 2011). In my opinion, Gaga emphasises that we are given certain gender roles by society (represented by the mother), so our outward appearance will fit our sex. We are made women – which does correspond to Beauvoir's quotation. In general, the song promotes homosexual orientation and acknowledges the multiplicity of gender roles. Therefore, it can be categorised as post-modern feminist, or rather: queer. Plus, of course, does she make intense use of parody.

On a visual level, campy attributes can be found as well. In the music clip (Lady Gaga 2008), Gaga and her background singer of mixed genders are all very slim and their costumes resemble each other. I read this as an emphasis on the body, or better: The androgynous body without any outward indicator for gender. In her *Essay On Camp*, Sontag(1966) explains that "the androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility". She continues

explaining that “Camp taste draws on a mostly unacknowledged truth of taste: the most refined form of sexual attractiveness [...] consists in going against the grain of one's sex”. Hence, with the act of undoing gender and setting androgynous representation thereof as the norm, she parodies it and makes use of Camp, because she “goes against gender’s grain”.

In a further scene she is dressed up in a tuxedo wearing a skull-mask, while a man wearing the same outfit is standing next to her. The only difference concerning appearance is that Gaga wears a wig with a ponytail. Interestingly, the man simply stands in an upright position and does not move, therefore is in a passive role, whereas Gaga touches her crotch and tries to seduce him. By doing so, she undermines conventional gender behaviour and, just as Madonna did in her music clip, blurs the categories – and does all of this in the realm of pop music. In his article “Lady Gaga, Balls-Out: Recuperating Queer Performativity” (2009), Alexander Cho interprets her self-presentation as follows:

While it may be simple to dismiss her outright as a bit of normative pop fluff, this, I argue, misses the point. In fact, Lady Gaga makes a very explicit attempt to shrewdly, purposefully—even politically—expose the nature of our fascination with pop icons by making it her mission to foreground the artifice of her own performance.

This assumption leads us to the following question: Which effect does this have on the audience; can recipients read her political message transported via this “normative pop fluff”? Perhaps another example to outline this problem is Lady Gaga’s song *Pokerface* (2008). The viewer of the music clip is overwhelmed by the overrepresentation of femininity (she wears an extremely blonde long wig, fake lashes). If they do not question the lyrics or the visual presentation, the audience will accept heteronormative gender roles and especially a very sexualized feminine stereotype embodied by Gaga. Actually, the song is about a hetero/bisexual woman having phantasies about women – and Gaga parodies feminine gender attributes by exaggerating them with ridiculous make-up and her artificial hair-do. Hence, just like the other examples, the audience is confronted with the idea that gender norms and heteronormative sexuality are mere conventions and neither innate nor essentialist. It has to be questioned whether they (can) interpret the cultural texts in this way or if they simply consume it – but I will try to answer this problem at a later point of the thesis (cf. section 4.3.).

To put it briefly, Camp is not only about men dressing up as women, or women dressing up as men: It rather means the causing of confusion, the use of exaggeration, of parody. As another example taken from the popular media, the women from *SatC* are often compared to drag queens, as their performance of femininity exhibits Camp-character.

Moreover, what *Camp* does is that the images which are imposed on women are accepted just in order to reflect them in an exaggerated style with the aim of subverting them (Haas 168).

So, *Camp* has become a useful method to interpret popular culture and phenomena thereof. This is important because, due to the ‘loss of the subject’, it was unclear what post-feminism had been doing. However, post-modern feminism, which deals with the performativity of gender supply solutions to solve the hegemonic inequality of women. By revealing the performativity of gender it gives us the opportunity to unmask the construct, as *Camp* does it (Haas 177).

To conclude, the application of *Camp* based on Butler’s theory of performativity offers a myriad of fruitful ways of interpreting popular culture from a feminist perspective. Its aim is to parody and thus show that gender is only a construct, a repeated performance which allows change. As touched upon above, the question of how the audience responds to such parodic gender representation has been left to form the theoretical basis for my media analysis. The next section shall shed light on the cultural mechanism of this problem.

## **2. The Audience and Popular Culture Media**

The aim of *Gender Benders in Manolos?* is to perform a feminist film studies analysis; I have explained the first part of this phrase, feminist, in sufficient depth by now. Therefore, the following section shall offer an introduction to the second part of the phrase, film studies. Here, three issues have to be explained. Firstly, reader-response theory shall be introduced in order to outline the mechanism between the producer of a text and the audience, which is of utmost importance for the analysis. Secondly, I would like to address to stereotyping and how feminists can make use of its deconstruction, as this practice constantly reoccurs in contemporary media. Finally, I will present the TV series *SatC* to the reader, to give an outline of the story, the reception and the problematic hegemonic value it possesses.

Before discussing reader-response theory, it is important to limit and define the realm in which the analysis, the production of meaning and the interpretation take place in this case being popular culture. This concept has already been referred to several times in the course of this thesis, but shall be defined at this point as this issue will be dealt with in more detail in the following sections. As a subcategory of culture, the purpose of popular culture is “to identify a form of culture that is opposed to another form” (Edgar & Sedgwick 285). Each group in popular culture claims an individual form of their own subculture, being either related to folk culture, mass culture or high culture. Therefore, the point of view might vary,

which results in a multilayered approach of defining this concept. Nevertheless, it is true for any subtype of popular culture that it either refers to individual artefacts, often referred to as 'texts' (i.e. a song or a television show) or to a group's lifestyle, and are bound to the patterns of how the artefacts are used, interpreted and worked with (cf. Edgar & Sedgwick 285).

The latter aspect leads to the following issue: The place, where popular culture is negotiated. Basically, this mechanism is twofold, in as much as the audience act as producers as well as consumers - so they do not simply consume culture in a passive mode, but also produce it (as in the case of folk culture). In addition to this productive element, people are the decoder of this culture. They possess the ability to use systems of codes to interpret and understand a text and, more importantly, put them into a personal context. This fact is crucial, as it enables the audience to produce a resistance to the interpretation of the culture that is in the interest of the ruling class (cf. Edgar & Sedgwick 286).

Furthermore, the reader combines production of cultural meaning or its interpretation with leisure and a pleasure-seeking approach. This is exactly the point why TV series like *SatC* offer such a potential of analysis, as they have been produced by popular culture and have become popular culture again, with the reader consuming it for their entertainment. Yet, hegemonic propagation and mechanisms of power such as gender roles are reproduced and can (or will) influence the audience (cf. Edgar & Sedgwick 286). The question is to what extent or how the reader will accept such roles imposed on them. The next section will outline the mechanisms of reader-response more closely.

## 2.1. Reader-Response in Popular Media

In the past sections, I mentioned the terms ‘reader’ and ‘text’, which might seem slightly confusing as I referred to (the audience of) music clips and series. It has to be explained that, in the field of cultural studies, ‘reading’ is used as a synonym for the practice of interpretation and a ‘text’ can be any discourse or social practice (Brooker 187). According to Brooker (187), the “terms are themselves used to refer beyond the literally textual to social processes and institutions which if not seen as text themselves are understood to be accessible only through semiotic or textual material”. This practice implies the ‘constructedness’ of our society, which can only be accessed and decoded by the individual through a sign system to produce meaning. Therefore, reader-response theory (or reception theory) focuses on the audience, or more precisely: “The role of the actual audience in the process of meaning-making in the media”, so the aim is to “understand the personal meanings that individuals make of mass media in texts in relation to their lived social systems and experiences” (Ott & Mack 222).

Traditional approaches of such media effect research assumed that every reader was the same and simply “a vessel ready to receive media messages” (Ott & Mack 222), furthermore the messages encoded by the producers had only one way to be decoded and this was determined by them. Then, in the 1970s (Bonfadelli 173), the first scholar to establish a theory differing from this approach was Stuart Hall. He claims that it is impossible to communicate without the operation of a code, that is “a set of rules that govern the use of visual and linguistic signs within a culture”. Basically, the production and understanding of meaning functions in the same way as language production and understanding does.

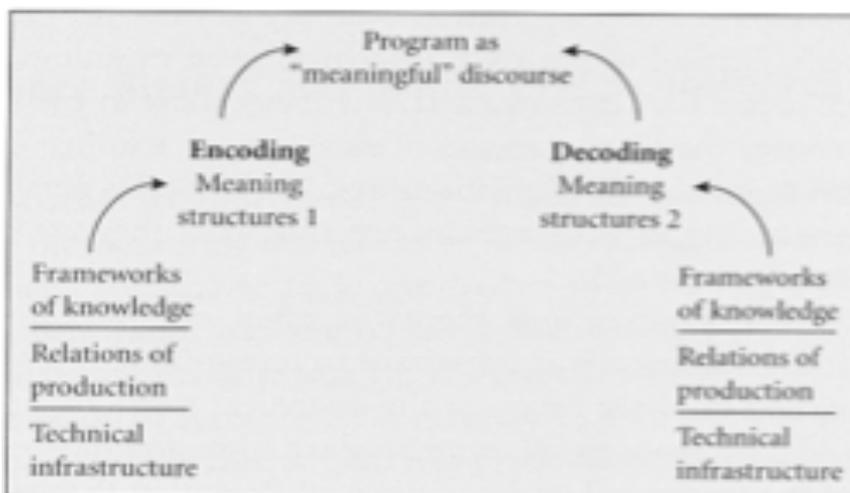


Figure 1 – Ott & Mack 224

It can be concluded that the same processes take place on both the side of the decoder as well as the encoder. As this theory focuses on the reader, Hall offered three possibilities to actively generate meaning for the audience. The first way of reading is preferred reading, which is the way of reading that is intended by the producer, that “*this* understanding of race and gender reinforces systems of unequal social power which in turn support media industries” (Ott & Mack 225). It goes without saying that the media industries help reproducing hegemonic ideology such as heteronormativity. The second option to decode a text is oppositional reading, which must not be used as a synonym for misunderstanding. Contrarily, it means that the reader rejects the meaning of preferred reading. Preferred reading and oppositional reading constitute the two extreme forms of interpretation and occur rather rarely in such a pure form. Therefore, negotiated reading makes up the majority of audience reading strategy. The audience decode the text in a preferred reading manner, but add personal experiences and worldviews, thus *negotiate* the values and meanings. Yet, meaning or interpretation can always be individual and can vary, therefore is polysemic (cf. Bonfadelli, Ott & Mack).

Essentially, the entire reader reception system can be exemplified with a case that has already been mentioned in an earlier section: Madonna. The ‘text Madonna’ can be read in several ways, that is men could interpret her performance as a feminine stereotype whereas young women might decode this text as a brilliant performance of feminist independence (Bonfadelli 173). This example shows that there is a multitude of different ways to decode a text. Hall’s categorisation of the different types of reading can be shown as well: The preferred reader would regard a song like *Justify my Love* (1990) merely as a popsong to be enjoyed. On the contrary, the oppositional reader would reject a song like this as they boycott mainstream songs and prefer independent music. The negotiated reader, in turn, might accept the mainstream nature of the song and its shallowness on the surface, but reject the real content. Or, to give a further example, they could dislike the song but sympathise with the non-heteronormative aspect of the music clip.

However, as already mentioned, the production of meaning in reader-response theory cannot be generalised and is always individual; “interpretive communities allow us to conceive of the audience not as a passive mass ready to absorb singular ideological messages, from media texts, but rather as an active group of diverse people who ‘read’ texts according to their social positions and lived experiences”, as Ott and Mack (237) put it.

Therefore, a media analysis has to acknowledge the fact that the object of

investigation interacts with the audience on two levels: Firstly, they are absorbed and received by the audience; secondly, they are used and acquired by the audience. This means that the reader cannot only refer and interpret the text, but also integrates it into their lives by transferring it to their social discourses. Individuals use films and TV-shows to create their identity (which also means that they reject and thus abject certain things, in Kristevian terms, in order to create such a one). The text offers the reader certain possibilities of operation guidelines (Mikos 23) – which proves that TV-shows do have a direct influence on the subjects of a society. It can be concluded that gender roles, which are produced in a series like *SatC* and the interpretation thereof can shape the image of gender in our real lives.

The same is true for the image of consumerism; we are given a scheme, a role model, with which we can measure our moral of our habit of spending money. If a series which reaches a broad readership suggests that it is ‘normal’ and accepted to possess a vast collection of designer shoes, the perception of consumerism might change. The same is true for having a high number of sexual partners, lifestyle issues such as eating out, going out and social issues such as the way we lead friendships. Many influences on the individual might happen on a subconscious level, but many are also conscious, if one picks up pieces of conversations in which young women advise each other with phrases like “Samantha from *SatC* would behave like this and Charlotte like that”. So, the influence is massive – the proportions of a series as influential as *SatC* are even more immense.

In sum, I have outlined how the reader is offered multiple ways to decode texts produced within popular culture. The audience decodes certain operation guidelines from texts and implements them into their lives. In turn, media production will create material which is based on reality. This means, that text and audience (re-)influence each other perpetually. Regarding the production of media from such a perspective, the tool ‘film’ can be used to shape our image on the world. It can also be misused, i.e. to sustain hegemonic structures. One of such perils is stereotyping, which shall be the topic of the following section. As this thesis focuses on feminist film studies, I will now turn from general media studies to this field of analysis and explain the term ‘stereotyping’, which will be important for the course of the analysis, as stereotyping can change our attitude towards certain groups and can confirm and reconfirm traditional values according to male hegemony. Especially in a series like *SatC*, the audience might be seduced to imitate a character and a stereotype – which can have fatal impacts on their behaviour, and if we multiply this case, on society. As can be seen, stereotyping is a powerful and very dangerous tool.

## 2.2. Stereotyping: Effects and Perils

Stereotypes can be found in almost any mainstream films; they are familiar to any individual. Unfortunately, such stereotypes are of perfidious nature, as they trick the audience to believe and accept values which in fact reproduce hegemonic structures – on a level, which is subconscious for the majority of the audience. Especially feminists have argued that stereotyping produces anti-feminist mechanisms, as will be explained in more detail in this section.

Feminist media scholars understand media texts as products of sexist social systems, and they look especially at the ways in which male hegemonic systems of power inform the creation of media texts (Ott & Mack 180). With the help of deconstruction, feminist analysis offers possibilities to reveal gender binaries and show that unequal gender representations are still reproduced. As media representations influence the way we perceive the world, it is of utmost interest of feminist scholars to dismantle such patriarchal structures in order to find a possibility to change this perception (cf. Ott & Mack 191-192).

One of these representations subconsciously affects our way of judgement and interpretation, that is: Stereotyping. According to Ott and Mack (180), “a stereotype is a misleading and simplified representation of a particular social group”. I would explain a stereotype as a predefined image with a consented meaning which is shared by all members of one (or more) culture(s). By this I mean that some of these images are deeply rooted in our cultural knowledge, such as the stereotype of the good-natured housewife. Almost any prime time sit-com which is focused on a family includes this stereotype, i.e. Marge from *The Simpsons*, Debra from *Everybody loves Raymond* or Olivia from *The Waltons*, to give just a brief list. These representations of women correspond to the Victorian Age icon of the Angel of the House with her selflessness, high moral values, non-resistance; their representation of the passive, the domestic. I have to point out that, although almost two hundred years have passed since then and the course of history has undergone crucial structural changes in society (i.e. feminism), this stereotype is still reproduced and does not deviate immensely from the Victorian image.

However, this process of stereotyping bears the risk of solidifying certain images, which presents a serious danger to the audience’s perception of the world. Ott & Mack (181) explain that “stereotypes, however inaccurate, form mental shortcuts that allow us to quickly make snap judgements about individuals”, furthermore that a kind of vicious circle exists: The ‘kernel of truth’ which is said to be in every stereotyped character. Interestingly, this is why

they are dangerous; they create a world and a character which sounds plausible but at the same time transports inaccurate assumptions and false traits. In this thesis, I will argue that the alleged gender bending, superficially liberated, pseudo-feminist series *SatC* in fact sustains male hegemonic power dominance. What happens then is that the audience accepts these stereotypes and imitates them, which in turn again feeds the media stereotype which is taken from everyday life.

It can be left without saying that this process prevents change, the change feminists have been fighting for decades. Although stereotyping lies in our nature, it should be avoided and interpreted consciously, as it still reproduces racial, sexual and misogynic values (Ott & Mack 181). In his article “The Mass Media Pressure Theory”, Bapanga writes that “the media have an obligation to provide society with reliable, accurate, reflective image of their society to dispel the growing trends of stereotypical images often portrayed”. According to him, there seems to be a trend towards stereotyping, which would mean that negative values are represented and reproduced more often<sup>1</sup>.

In the media analysis, I will deconstruct the stereotyping of the characters as well to find out which (feminist or gender) values are transported in the series. This procedure is strongly intertwined with gender parody such as the aforementioned concept of *Camp* which uses stereotypes in order to ridicule them to show the performative nature of gender.

Having given the theory and tools I will now present the text to be used for this thesis before starting the analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Following this idea, it could be concluded that our current society undergoes a conservative backlash.

<sup>2</sup> I have to clarify that I will not focus on Big's and Carrie's relationship in this paper, because it would go

### 3. Portraying Modern Women's Life: Sex and the City

*Never in an American film or TV series has a sophisticated girl talk been more explicit, with every kink and sexual twitch of the urban mating game noted and wittily dissected.*  
(Holden in Arkass & McCabe 3)

Before I will begin with the analysis I would like to explain more about the series itself. The introduction gave a brief overview, here I will go into more depth and discuss the series' composition and criticism. Concerning the former, the series consists of 94 episodes with a running time of thirty minutes each. The audience is guided by a narrator, Carrie Bradshaw, who comments on the course of the episode. Basically, the internal structure of each episode is built up in the same manner: Every episode deals with one special challenge the characters are confronted with and each of the characters has her personal story and way of treating the given issue. One example for this structure would be the episode *Boy Girl Boy Girl*, in which each character has to overcome a gender-bending related personal challenge. Charlotte, for example, learns to accept her male side whereas Carrie reconfirms her heteronormative sexuality. As this example shows, the reader is always given several approaches for each issue and is able to decode as they please.

Nevertheless, the episodes are bound to each other due to the main strand of narration, which runs throughout the entire six seasons. Actually, Carrie wishes a certain Mr Big (*Chris Noth*) to have a fulfilling relationship with her, but for several reasons their amorous attempts never work out or are delayed until the finale of the series. During the phases in which Carrie and Mr Big do not have a couple status, she experiences diverse adventures in the single world with her friends, who share similar problems with men as she does. Isbister (7) compares the series to a "postfeminist fairytale" which

indicates uneasiness with popularised images of women, caught between traditional and contemporary ideals of femininity, exposing the uncomfortable relationships between feminism and femininity as well as heteronormative discourses.

Although the series is said to convey emancipated values, in the end, Carrie is only looking for her 'knight in shining armour' and her personal 'happily ever after'. One more indicator for the fairytale structure of the programme is Carries repeated voiceover-intro, i.e. beginning the first season's first episode with "once upon a time" (Di Mattia in Akass & McCabe 17). This fairytale element is openly mentioned by Carrie, when she poses the following question:

What if Prince Charming had never shown up? Would Snow White have slept in the glass coffin forever? Or would she have eventually woken up, spit out the apple,

gotten a job, a health-care package, and a baby from her local neighbourhood sperm bank? I couldn't help but wonder: inside every confident, driven single woman, is there a delicate, fragile princess just waiting to be saved. (Sohn 25)

With liberation on the surface, admirable job positions and perfect make-up in their faces, the characters are all only on their quest for "Mr Right". Just as fairy tales and romance novels, the episodes of *SatC* have been criticised for being entrapping for women, as will be shown.

Also the stereotyping suggests misogynic values that sustain male hegemony, as Carrie always chooses the man who sustains male hegemonic dominance embodied by Mr Big over man such as Aiden, with whom she have an on-off relationship starting in season three. Aiden possesses the attributes the "post-modern man" who negotiates male hegemonic structures and seeks equality for women; however, lacks the power and egoism a "patriarchal" man is equipped with. Oppositional to her strongly promoted independence, she gets rescued by Mr Big<sup>2</sup> in the end, thus gives him all the power and apparently consents to pre-feminist narratives. Therefore, Isbister (11) concludes that the show displays

Carrie's postfeminist dilemma of both pursuing relationships of equality (which apparently lack the passionate romance of traditional fairy tales) and knowing that she is not prepared to accept the inequitable conditions of traditional relationships.

According to this observation, I assert that the series consist of two levels which work like poles against each other and confirm Isbister's idea. Whereas the main story sustains male hegemonic structures, the episodes themselves promote post-modern feminist, liberal ideas. In my opinion, this constellation seduces the female reader to think that they consume a feminist text, although, on a sublevel, they are infiltrated by anti-feminist narratives<sup>3</sup>. In the end, heteronormativity and the passivity of the female characters are established, and the basic story line does not differ from any 'disneyesque' fairy tale.

Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that the series' episode level has offered the female reader possibilities to renegotiate her view on sexual issues. No TV series before *SatC* dealt with (especially female) sexuality as well and as much in an open way as this show did. On the episode level, it also promotes non-heteronormative sexualities by not only integrating homosexual men in a very visible way, but also celebrating their lifestyle. This combination of female sexual and queer liberation might be a reason for the immense popularity of the

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<sup>2</sup> I have to clarify that I will not focus on Big's and Carrie's relationship in this paper, because it would go beyond its scope.

<sup>3</sup> Following Hall's reception theory, the reader is the decoder of the values transported via the series and can choose to read this text in a preferred, oppositional or negotiated manner. In the end, it depends on the individual reader if they interpret *SatC* as a fairy tale, a post-feminist dilemma, a feminist text, mere comedy or a blend of the mentioned possibilities.

series, it “has taken advantage of the narrative possibilities afforded by queerness”, Gerhard (37) states. Queerness and post-modern feminism are important trends in popular culture and media; a combination thereof is one of the reasons for the series’ success”.

In general, it can be concluded that *SatC* is a post-feminist product of popular, post-modernist culture which reproduces certain (often stereotyped) gender roles and images of women which can be decoded by the audience in a multitude of ways. Yet, although the series promotes post-modern feminist values on the surface, it is based on existing, anti-feminist fairy-tale narratives. Eventually, dichotomies such as male/female or active/passive as well as heteronormativity are always (re-)established. I agree with Metz (3) in her claim that “only from the outside *Sex and the City* seems to celebrate women and queer life but that at a closer look *Sex and the City* turns out to be misogynistic and homophobic“. This point of view is also shared by Robert Hanks (in Akass & McCabe 13) who states that “underneath the modern exterior its view of sexual relationships seems dreadfully old-fashioned”. Hence, the characters do cling to patriarchal order on a sublevel while talking about sex and a liberated lifestyle on the surface. This contradictory discourse will be addressed in the media analysis, in which I will make use of the tools I have explained in the past sections.

In this context, it has to be explained that films and TV-shows are no singular occasions, but are interwoven with the structures and functions of social communication, they are elements of the history of communication and media. So, they have to be put into the medial context of the series. Each piece of media has to be seen not only in the light of the contemporary social, and cultural developments, so to speak the ‘Zeitgeist’, but also in the one of the history of that type of media; their technical and aesthetical developments and the associated type or style of narration (cf. Mikos 259).

However, *SatC* was neither the first, not the only series in the 1990s which focused on the post-modern woman. Together with programmes like *Ally McBeal*, *Will and Grace* and *Ellen*, the image of the classical series which implies a family as the nucleus of the storyline became challenged (cf. Spangler 2003). Series as such deviated from the heteronormative structures and shed light on groups that had not been given any attention before in prime time television, that is female singles as well as homosexual men and women. Although *SatC* follows the classical Hollywood tradition of TV-sitcoms about single girls in the city (such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* or *Rhoda*), it developed its own, characteristic style and therefore differs from the run-of-the-mill TV-show. As the Rom-Com-essence of the series would suggest, humour is also very important, Woody Allen’s oeuvre has influenced the series.

Margo Jefferson goes so far as to say that *SatC* changed generic expectations, because

“there are no securely happy endings” (Akass and McCabe 12). I have to correct Jefferson at this point, because this assumption is only true for the episodes, whereas the main strand of narration does end fairytale style ‘happily ever after’.

I think that a decent share of the series’ success was brought by the honesty with which the women are portrayed and also the bitter realism of relationships between men and women (or men and men/women and women). Moreover are the characters shown with a full personality that of course also includes negative traits; discussing abortion and having two characters admitting to already have done such a procedure is not a usual topic in mainstream, US-American TV-shows.

This definitely differs from other series and allowed coming cultural texts such as *Bridget Jones* to also show the weak points of the “glamorous single girl in the city life”. Parody, I will argue, is of great importance as it functions as a political tool – often hostile against queer/feminist issues.

#### **4. Analysing Sex and the City**

The theoretical basis for the analysis has been supplied by now, so I would like to turn to the practical part in which the aforementioned ideas shall be applied to a piece of film. In this case, I will use three episodes of *SatC*, each focussing on one certain aspect. My research question will focus on the explanation of how postmodern cultural text *SatC* influences the reader and shapes their view on gender issues.

As this thesis is rather interdisciplinary and I have already touched upon several different approaches and theories, I would like to make my procedure a bit clearer with the help of an example. If we compare this analysis to a building, then the ground this house stands on would be cultural studies and film studies. Judith Butler’s theory of performativity forms the foundation – every other brick is built on this very theory. The first storey can be compared to the methods, that is Camp and the use of stereotyping. The second storey includes aspects which are important, but only complement the analysis: Cinematic composition, camerawork, socio-cultural contexts. The effect on the audience constitutes the roof of this building, which will be the core of investigation. In order to be able to build a proper roof, every other level has to be taken into account.

The procedure of the analysis will be conducted in the same manner. Each episode’s basis will be Butler’s theory of performativity; yet, they will differ in realisation. The first

episode, *Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*, will deal with how gender and sexuality is performed in this series. Furthermore, I would like to observe how post-modern or third wave feminist stereotypes are reproduced, or whether the opposite is the case and patriarchic stereotypes are reproduced.. After having discussed how gender roles are constructed, I would like to show in the episode *The Real Me* how they can be deconstructed and what post-modern feminist benefit can be achieved by doing so. Camp and gender parody will form the tools with which I will proceed in this case. The last episode “*All That Glitters*” shall make use of a critical observation of prototypes in order to find out in which ways they can be interpreted or were intended to be interpreted.

## 4.1. ‘Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl’

### 4.1.1. Plot Summary

Being episode number four of season three, it was first aired on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2000. *Nomen est omen* – the title of this episode already reveals its content. Furthermore, by repeating the title quickly several times the words seem to blur – which is exactly, what this episode deals with (Christian in Metz 2). I chose this episode because it discusses gender on two levels, which I call the cultural-theoretic level and the narratological level. The cultural-theoretic level deals with how gender is constructed; how the characters establish their own gender and identity. Secondly, the narratological level deals with the storyline and the practical benefit, or better the direct influence on the audience. I will argue that although this episode gives a strong impression of liberal, post-modern feminist values at the beginning, it returns to conservative heteronormative, stereotypical gender norms in the end. Furthermore, *Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl* echoes different voices concerning bisexuality and sexuality in general, which will be investigated as well. I will analyse the whole episode and “zoom” into scenes which are interesting for the following discussion.

As already mentioned, each episode is built around one central topic which influences the different strands of narration bound to each character. Carrie dates a younger man, Sean, whom she has a major crush on, but who turns out to be bisexual. She keeps on dating Sean, but is uncomfortable with his sexuality. As she has a bisexual encounter of her own, she decides that she is pro-heteronormativity and dumps him. In the meantime, the other main characters reach their own gender-limits and have to deal with different situations. Steve, Miranda’s boyfriend, accuses her of being the man in the relationship after not wanting him to

move in with her.

Therefore, she tries to follow stereotypical feminine gender roles; she tries to cook for him and participates in a “goddess”- dancing workout just to find the “girly girl” inside of her. In the end, she cries in Steve’s arms because she cannot accomplish the task of fitting into the gender role stipulated by society – and in fact becomes very feminine and vulnerable in this act. Charlotte, the most conservative woman of the clique, is pushed beyond her limits when an artist, Baird Johnson, asks her to pose for him – dressed as a man, a drag king. In the beginning this seems impossible for her, but she overcomes her convictions and lets him shoot photos of her. She finds out what type of man Charlotte would be if she were not a woman, but eventually returns to her feminine behaviour. Unsurprisingly, the character with the least problems concerning bisexuality is Samantha, who brings herself into a struggle of power by hiring a new, male assistant who does not obey her demands. In order to re-establish her power she fires him – and, also unsurprisingly, sleeps with him.

#### 4.1.2. The Representation of Gender in *Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*

*I feel we have dual powers within each of us.  
Men can be very female and women can be  
very male. Gender is an illusion  
(Baird in Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl)*

Like all of the other episodes and consistent throughout all seasons, *Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl* begins with the well-known opener. After this, the episode starts in the typical *SatC* manner: Using a voiceover, Carry introduces the main topic of this episode to the audience. In fast cuts, we see scenes of people experiencing mini-scenes, which connect to what Carrie is telling us. “We’ve seen pretty much all, [...]. It takes quite a bit to shock us” - the scene shifts to a nightclub in which the waitress serves naked. This intro is intended to prepare the viewer for the topic to be discussed in this episode. Furthermore, these scenes show pictures taken from daily New Yorker life without the characters appearing yet – which creates the effect that the reader can relate to the show more easily. They are shown everyday scenes in the street they can identify with, masking that this text is fiction and not reality. This masquerade is omnipresent in the whole series, for which reason interpretation and deconstruction can uncover an underlying subtext as will be seen.

Even the first moments of the series can show how perfectly this series serves as an

object of investigation for gender issues. All of the characters are invited to a photography exhibition in Charlotte's gallery, which is called 'Drag Kings – The Collision of Illusion and Reality'. In a typical camera angle, the American shot, they are positioned looking into the same direction, almost at the audience – they are discussing the photographs on the wall in front of them. In this scene, we see Samantha, Miranda, Carrie and Stanford, the latter's homosexual best friend. Miranda cannot believe that the models on the photographs are actually women and not men, as their outward appearance would suggest. Apparently, they find themselves in a gender bending exhibition that aims at dissolving gender roles.

Then, Samantha reckons "You know, women dressing as men is very popular at the moment". Within the short sentence, a lot about the gender-tenor of the episode can be told. I find it interesting that Samantha points that out for her, putting on a gender role seems to be simply putting on a different kind of clothes. This very anti-essentialist approach foreshadows that Butler's theory of performativity is omnipresent in (or at least in the beginning of) this episode. It shows that gender is constructed, and so is identity, as we need clothes, fashion; basically objects to create our personal entity on the surface of our bodies. Butler also regards gender as being a similar performance as fashion (Ott & Mack 211). In Foucaultian terms, gender and identity are inscribed on our bodies and this is transported by this line as well. Furthermore, the fashion and consumption aspect of gender is reflected in the phrase "at the moment". This phrase indicates that gender is repeated and therefore allows change if this is wished for and allowed by society, comparable to a new fashion trend.

The character goes on and smilingly admits that "being a Drag King would be fun". It needs an outstanding degree of sexual open-mindedness and a very liberal view on gender categories to be able to utter a statement like this. Again, the lightweight element that resonates in this line postulates the post-modern feminist attitude the series has, or seems to have. Again, the lifestyle element becomes transparent in this utterance, as constructing a new gender role for oneself is seen as "fun". In my opinion, in this series, the concepts 'sexuality' and 'consumption' are more congruent than one would assume. Samantha sees gender and sexuality, fashion and consumption as two channels which lead to satisfaction, and therefore she does not really distinguish. She believes that gender is totally anti-essentialist, whereas values like power and drive satisfaction matter to her. This is post-modern feminist as well as highly neo-liberalist, because in the end, money and achievement annul gender roles. This assumption aligns with Adriaens'(2009) conclusion that "[p]ost feminism can be situated within, and is closely related to, neo-liberal ideologies and shares the same late-capitalist values".

This behaviour and point of view manifests again at a later point of the episode, when Samantha hires a new assistant – a young man, who, unfortunately, lacks tactfulness with the clients. His boyish behaviour becomes unacceptable for her on a professional level; however, she finds his rudeness attractive. In the end, she signs him off with the words: “Well, the bad news is you’re fired, the good news is – now I can fuck you”. She then kisses him and pushes him on the desk. What follows is a struggle for the position, as neither of them is willing to give up their power. Carrie’s voiceover explains that eventually, “Sam, naturally, was on top”. On a meta-level, this sequence again shows how much Samantha’s character is connected to the concept of power.

In section 1.2, I mentioned Ziauddin & Van Loon’s (144) argument that “post-modern feminists are not interested in creating or rediscovering ‘authentic’ female expression, but in showing that social construction of gender involves power relations”. This assumption proves that Samantha represents the post-modern woman who deals with power, not gender. By using her power over her assistant, she can create an act of overcoming patriarchy as a woman, which can either be seen as third wave feminist, if one wishes to follow the assumption that women have to overcome patriarchy or, as just explained, post-modern feminist, if this act helps to nullify gender roles and shift the focus from gender to power.

In sum, the strand of narration bound to the role of Samantha foregrounds an individualism that puts power over gender. By dissolving second wave feminist dichotomies like active/passive, man/woman, gender is deconstructed. What counts for her are capitalist, neo-liberalist values – status and power are created with fashion and status. However, in “*All That Glitters*” I will demonstrate that this representation is not consequently reproduced throughout the series.

Returning to the Gallery-scene, the amusing discussion of gender, women and men continues. Miranda’s observation “Who would have known it would be that easy? All you need is some stick-on sideburns and a sock in your pants,” refers to the constructedness of gender and, by pointing this out, it is made visible for the audience. After this, Stanford says that he feels attracted to the drag king displayed in the picture, giggles and wonders if this made him a lesbian then. By this, norms of sexuality are being subverted. In my opinion, this utterance is quite shockingly queer for a mainstream TV series. With the use of parody and humour, such an assumption can be digested and accepted by the audience, because it is left to the reader what they make out of it. They can see it as a funny joke or an earnest criticism of labelling different kinds of sexuality. Within the first scene, the audience has already become witness of deconstruction of gender and sexuality.

The viewers can access this scene very easily, as they (most likely) know the characters and their backgrounds and understand their points of view. Although the content on the theoretical level might be rejected by some readers, it is wrapped up in a way even a rather conservative reader can digest. The light-footed approach to a rather unconventional topic is disguised by the amicable, chatty mode of conversation to which the preferred reader can relate to. Hence, the negotiated reader might reject Samantha's attitude, but accept the basic mode in which gender roles are dealt with. Moreover, one of the reasons why the series achieves such a broad viewership is the fact that it gives the reader several different proposals for the solution of a problem. Metz (6) explains that "[j]ust as the four girls represent four, more or less, different types of women, they pick up on different views on bisexuality. Thus, every viewer will be able to identify and to agree with one of the different views." With this technique, many aspects and ideologies can be integrated in and transported via the series and yet will not make the reader feel uncomfortable, as they can pick the ideology which suits them best.

Alongside the aforementioned neo-liberal and post-modern feminist viewpoint embodied by Samantha, the other characters represent certain ideologies as well, so I will continue with Miranda's story now. Miranda leaves the Gallery-scene to return home, where she finds her boyfriend Steve watching TV while having Chinese food. Instantly, she grabs the remote control and switches the channels how she pleases, reconfirming that she is the owner of this territory. She embodies the independent workaholic woman who has issues with commitment, which is the reason why she has a problem with Steve staying at her flat all the time.

I read her character as a representative for third wave feminism, because, although she pleads for equality concerning her position at work or her sexual open-mindedness, she still uses labels for genders, as will be seen. Although it seems as if she combined male and female attributes in her and would thus rather represent post-modern feminist, she keeps on being essential and differentiates between the sexes. This episode's obstacle to be accomplished by her is to overcome her rough, manlike behaviour and, in the end, re-establish active/passive, male/female binary codes.

Later that episode, there is a scene in which Miranda and Steve are lying in bed. The man is asleep and occupies most of its space. For this reason, Miranda cannot sleep and sits upright in bed. Visually, this scene represents Miranda's inner turmoil: Her partner takes up all the space in her life. She cannot be herself anymore, she has to subordinate – a circumstance which she cannot accept. In order to re-establish the power relations in her

relationship, she wakes him up and yells at him "You're on my side. My pillow – my guest pillow". She draws a distinctive line between his space and hers – between individuals of different genders.

Then, Steve asks her if he were allowed to move in - Miranda panics and shows that it is extremely hard for her to show commitment and to open herself. This point is interesting as Miranda's behaviour diverges from stereotypical feminine gender behaviour. Like a man, she keeps the rather emotionally needy Steve on the long arm. Her character definitely blurs gender attributes, but unlike Samantha, who has overcome labels and gender, Miranda's world view is still rooted in the difference between male and female. She is the one in charge of the decision, speaking in dichotomies: she is active, while he is passive. Interestingly, this power system is reproduced on a visual level as well, because Steve is shorter than Miranda.

Additionally, my assumption that Miranda is not post-modern feminist like Samantha can be substantiated by Butler, when she writes that considering women as a coherent category in fact creates women as coherent subjects and places them into a network of power in the first place (Ott & Mack 209). Miranda might be emancipated, but only in third wave feminist terms as she still uses labels and hegemonic gender/power relations. Nonetheless, seeing her resistance in the light of (second or) third wave essentialist feminist, it can be maintained that she is in favour of female emancipation.

Miranda's disruption of gender norms culminates in Steve saying "Jesus, Miranda, it's like you're the guy sometimes". Again, Miranda seems to violate gender norms, but the two characters still make use of such essentialist gender categories. It might be unfeminine for Miranda to behave the way she does, but she regards this accusation as an affront against her femininity – which she wants to keep sustained. Miranda aims at keeping her gender role; in the course of this episode she will even try to strengthen it. Although Miranda resists male hegemony in general, she cannot accept this accusation. Therefore, she experiences a personal feminist backlash and tries to become more of "a girly girl".

In order to become such a type of woman, Carrie and her participate in a so-called "goddess workout", which should help them to find their "inner goddess". The trainer of the course tells them "[L]et your inner goddess sing, all you have to do is let her out". Miranda is having problems with doing so, she cannot pop her hips in a feminine way how she is supposed to. On a meta-level, this course suggests that women have to dance and be sexy (for men) – this is supposed to create feminine fulfilment. In a certain way, this course represents society and the conservative values which are forced on women. Miranda is told to be more feminine, but she cannot fit into this role, for she is too emancipated. Therefore, she feels

guilty and reveals to the audience that woman is seen as a failure if she is not able to behave in stereotypical gender roles. Susan Faludi (in Haas 11) explains that “[w]omen seem to be punished by society for moving away from their biological destiny of reproduction towards a free, self-determined life”. Miranda is being punished by society for being emancipated and longing for equality – a negotiation of hegemonic powers is noticeable.

As Miranda “finds her inner humiliation” rather than her inner goddess in this workout, they leave. In a short dialogue with Carrie, Miranda admits that she will never be such a girly girl, to which Carrie responds “Thank God”. This ambivalence between being a girly girl and/or being an emancipated woman is a post-feminist dilemma – women have to embody both aspects, but if one becomes too prevalent, the post-feminist individual gets punished by society.

Interestingly, this is exactly what Miranda experiences when she returns to her silent flat without Steve. She misses him and wishes him back. In this scene, her vulnerability is displayed to the audience. Such weak moments add authenticity to the character. Akass and McCabe state that

that *Sex and the City* represents independent, sexually liberated women, who do not want to adopt traditional models of femininity anymore. Nonetheless, although they want to keep their independence, they (Samantha excepted) yearn for a solid relationship. (In Metz 8)

The turmoil Miranda finds herself in is the following: If she aims at having a relationship with a man, she has to obey to patriarchal hegemony more than she would have to without. Being in a relationship is at the price of female emancipation and power. Yet, she longs for it.

In an attempt to overcome this dilemma in which she has to change her emancipation for a relationship, she wants to surprise Steve with a cooked dinner. Once more the turmoil which has been outlined is prevalent, as she comes home too late and completely stressed out because of a conference call at work that took longer and caused her to hurry to the market afterwards. This scene represents the everyday struggle between being a girly girl, (or rather a Victorian ‘Angel of the House’) and an emancipated woman. By accident, she rips the shopping bags and the spaghetti sauce is spilt all over the floor.

MIRANDA. I can’t. I can’t do this.

STEVE. It’s no big deal. We’ll order pizza and...

MIRANDA. It’s a big fucking deal. I just spilt marinara sauce all over myself and you will be there to see that.

Being afraid of showing Steve her negative sides, Miranda cannot keep the image of the perfect woman upright with him living in her flat. However, as gender is an illusion, so is perfection. He tells her that he has flaws of his own and that he will accept hers. As she starts crying and Steve therefore hugs her, she admits "Crying on your shoulder – Jesus, I guess I really am a woman, huh?". By that, her struggle between male and female habitus is resolved. She acknowledges the fact that she can be a vulnerable, weak, passive woman as well. Patriarchal hegemony is re-established, as it took a man to solve her problem. The turmoil within her was caused by a man and resolved by a man. Apparently, this is rather passive than active. The final proportion of power is unequal – as it was in the beginning, although the other way around.

What is presented to the viewer is that a too high share of male power held by a woman cannot be tolerated in a relationship. In the beginning, Miranda rears up against this, but finally she gives in and accepts normative, conservative gender roles. For the majority of viewers, this male hegemonic "happy ending" works as a compensation for the strong feminist display of a single woman's power predominance at the beginning. The audience witnesses her negotiation of gender and power throughout the narrated time of a few days, which gives them guidelines for their own lives. Under the disguise of humour and, I daresay, pseudo-liberalism, the viewer is seduced to accept the values eventually presented in the episode. As I have already mentioned that films are affected by reality and affect reality, I regard this development throughout the episode as a reproduction of male hegemony. My hypothesis is that most of the viewers are not aware of this fact, which makes it even more dangerous.

Similar to this conservative backlash is Charlotte's experience with gender bending in "*Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*". At the end of the Gallery-scene, Charlotte admits that she is attracted to the exhibition's artist, Baird. The girls tell her to ask him out, but she has to admit that "You know me, I can never make the first move". The character Charlotte embodies conservative, upper class 'WASP' (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) values. In terms of ideology, she acts as a counterbalance to Samantha, as her beliefs are rooted in rigid, essentialist gender roles. This idea is shared by Loiré (45): "The programme appears also to be reflecting the older, purposely exaggerated conceptions of gender polarity epitomized by Samantha's machismo reversal on the one end and Charlotte's quasi-1950s female persona on the other".

In Charlotte's opinion, a man is the breadwinner, he is strong, tall and active. Contrarily, women should stay at home with their children, can admit weaknesses and have to

pamper their husbands. Later in the series, she will quit her job in order to become a proper housewife. In sum, Charlotte represents pre-second wave ideas. I will show how this point of view on gender is displayed in the series.

In this episode, Charlotte has to confront herself with her masculine side. Although being the most conservative one of the characters, she will transgress the boundaries of gender more than any other women do in “*Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*”. This circumstance is caused by Baird asking Charlotte to pose for her – as a man. “Girly girl” Charlotte replies that she is not butch.

BAIRD. You’d be surprised Charlotte. Every man has a female and every woman has a male inside of her. Even you.

CHARLOTTE. No, not me. I am really bad at math and I can’t change a tire to save my life.

With the words “come on, be a man” and his male skills of seduction he can convince her to model for him.

Charlotte apparently needs a distinction of her gender role to a male gender role in order to be able to sustain her femininity. In Kristevian terms, she needs to reject masculinity to establish her feminine self, in a certain way she has to abject it, “[t]he boundaries of the self are not firm or intact, therefore the subject constantly has to reject unwanted elements. Otherwise, it would not be able for us to establish an identity” (Meyers 117). By applying this concept on the scene, it can be argued that Charlotte’s identity is strongly based on her gender. Following this idea, I conclude that for her, gender is not only essentialist, but even pre-feminist “not to be questioned”.

Concerning the aesthetics of the scene, I have observed that Baird is represented as the tall, dark man who is not only in charge of the situation, but also holds the power. Charlotte, in turn, is not only physically at a disadvantage because she is shorter, but even if she were not, she is unapologetically changing the power relations. For her, it is normal and wished for that the man is the person who is in charge.

On a visual level, she is represented as a feminine, stereotypically weak woman. While Baird is wearing a black suit, she is wearing red lipstick, a white blouse and a skirt with floral prints that reconfirms her femininity. This changes completely in the next scene of Charlotte’s story-within-the-story, when she is dressed like a man and Baird, interestingly, wears a pink shirt. Unfortunately, Charlotte does not feel comfortable in this outfit, so she says that she “can’t do this”. Baird approaches her and explains “Forget Charlotte. You’re a man now. You’re a hot guy. You can get any woman you want. You’re rich, you’re powerful,

you eat guys like me for lunch”. Charlotte smilingly replies that she needs a bigger sock, then. After he put the sock into her trousers, she turns around and – very contradictory to her usual behaviour – kisses him. The scene fades out, so they most probably sleep with each other.

This scene is interesting on many levels. Firstly, I think that the power relation has to be analysed. In comparison to the latter scene, the male masquerade empowers Charlotte to behave like a man and take what she wants – a certain kind of behaviour her feminine woman self would never show. So, the masquerade, the parody, the surreal situation empowers her to abandon her conservative way of thinking.

Secondly, it is interesting that, if Charlotte were a man, she would be a rich, powerful playboy. In my opinion, this is her exact WASP male counterpart, if speaking of class. She embodies what she is seeking in the other sex, and Baird shows her that she possesses these powers within her. Apparently, the conservative woman is told that she can liberate and emancipate herself because she has all it takes to do so within her. I read this as a proposal of solution for the conservative viewer to become more liberal (yet, it is rejected in the end).

Thirdly, the scene resonates homoerotic desire, as she is dressed as a man and kisses a man. Only for a few second does this homoerotic scene go on, before Baird (the actual man) tears of her fake beard and reinstalls the patriarchal hegemonic order. Active/passive, male/female dichotomies are re-established, alongside with heteronormativity.

At the end of the episode, we see Charlotte once more, this time at her flat, hanging up the picture of her posing as a man. Carrie’s voiceover explains ”She never saw Baird again. She was too embarrassed about how forward she’d been. She realised that she might have been that type of guy, but she’d never be that type of woman”. Again, although participating in the “gender bending rollercoaster ride” throughout the episode, the audience is fobbed off with conservative, non-feminist values again. At this point I would like to remark that, although this episode is all about bisexuality, none of the characters actually consents to this non-heteronormative orientation. It will be shown that, although Carrie does have an intense encounter with bisexuality in this episode, this assumption is true for her as well.

The first scene of her personal story begins with a date with a younger man called Sean. They meet for ice-skating. While Sean is actively moving over the ice, Carrie stands on the side, smoking a cigarette and wearing a short, bright dress. This scene is that exaggerated that it verges on parody – it is absolutely not common to smoke on an ice rink or while being bodily active. Furthermore, the way she is dressed is completely overdrawn. He then grabs her and they enter the rink. Carrie performs an extremely feminine role during this scene, as

she pretends to not being able to stand on the ice alone. Although Sean is younger than her, she imitates the role of a little, vulnerable girl in order to make him feel like a strong man who is in charge of the situation. Hence, Carrie's performance is hyper-feminine.

As they flirt and talk, he admits that he once had a relationship with a man. After this shocking information, Carrie discusses this issue with her friends (I will return to this scene at the end of this section). Back home, she uses this input from her private life to write a column about bisexuality. She is thinking to herself "If women can transform into men, and men can become women, and we can choose to sleep with everyone, then maybe gender does not even exist anymore?!". Eventually, she poses the question: "Has the other sex become obsolete?". By this, the audience is confronted with her thoughts and bonds with the character and is confronted with the fluidity of sexual roles.

The next night, Sean takes Carrie to a club filled with people younger than the protagonist. While they kiss each other, Sean takes a quick glance at a person in the back of the club. Carrie turns around and sees a man and a woman, thus asks him "Okay Mister, whom where you checking out? The guy or the girl?", apparently showing that his bisexuality still is a problem for her. It seems that her traditional way of thinking does not allow any space for a gender bending, sexual orientation. Sean replies "I was actually looking for the bathroom" and, then, "Carrie, I was looking at you. I'm with YOU". Anti-essentialist and post-modern feminist as his utterance may be, it does not quite convince Carrie.

For the viewer, a negotiation of values is taking place in the scene. Carrie ought to rethink her rather traditional, essentialist approach to gender while being confronted with Sean's liberal values. If we follow Butler's idea that only the expectation of gender creates gender identity (Ott & Mack 211), it becomes clear that Carrie in a certain way seems to want to believe in gender categories. Although she is offered a more liberal concept of a man who negotiates male hegemony, she cannot abandon her conservative values and thus perpetually recreates gender roles for herself and her "world". The viewer becomes witness of her negotiation and her inner turmoil, but also her rejection of Butlerian ideas.

At the end of this scene, Sean explains: "I've been in three major relationships, and one of them happened to be a guy. That's just me". Bearing in mind the previous points,, the meaning created here is one more evidence for Sean's anti-essentialist approach. For him, performed gender counts less than the individual belonging to the Foucauldian body. Similar to Samantha's ideology, individualism is foregrounded, whereas gender becomes obsolete. Even after they have slept with each other, Carrie seems uncomfortable with Sean's undetermined sexuality. The frequency and reoccurrence of her asking him about his

sexuality indicates that she might feel threatened by his liberal values. I argue that, in Kristevian terms, she has to abject his sexuality to keep hers stable. A move towards his ideology seems to mean a loss of her identity.

The main part of this episode begins in the last part of Carrie's story. Sean is taking her to a party. As they enter she asks him whose party this was after all. He answers that it was Marc's (his ex-boyfriend's) party, and if that was a problem for her. Under the disguise of pseudo-liberalism, she answers: "No, not at all", but the viewer knows exactly that this utterance does not align with the ideology represented by her character in the course of this episode.

Then, the audience is confronted with a rather unconventional scene: Sean introduces his ex-boyfriend her. This ex-partner is now married to another man and they have adopted a baby. Moreover, two women are displayed in the scene, and they are married as well. They tell Carrie that the two gay couples were two heterosexual couples a few years ago.

As a background information, Alanis Morissette has a cameo in this scene, playing Dawn, one of these non-heteronormatively orientated women. There are rumours that the singer might have had bisexual experiences in real life, but I could not find any concrete proof stating that this was correct. Yet, the audience might know about these rumours and connect their knowledge of reality with the fictional world presented to them in the show. Reality and fiction are being blurred, in the same manner as gender is.

After this greeting, Carrie and Sean enter the living room and a guest initiates the game "spin the bottle". At first, Carrie ridicules this game and jokingly admits that she was too old for this - but in the end she gives in. As the game proceeds, suddenly, the bottleneck points at her. At first, she does not realize this circumstance as she is lighting a cigarette, but as she does she seems quite shocked but since the bottle was spun by another girl she exclaims: "Oops, it's a girl, try again". Again, this does not accord with the open minded sexual thinking which is prevalent in the displayed discourse group. Dawn replies: "It's okay". In a voiceover, the viewer can share Carrie's thoughts, calling this situation "I was in Alice's sexually orientated confused wonderland". Clearly, the use of humour and parody are used to mask or diminish Carrie's ideological angst. Nonetheless, to keep up the perfect impression of post-modern liberalism, she gives in and gets kissed by Dawn. "Kinda like chicken", her voiceover adds (again, she uses parody, incidentally). As has been noted before, Carrie performs a pseudo-liberal attitude.

Throughout the series, Carrie wears very different types of clothes – she seems to masquerade as the person she would like to represent in a certain situation. Ranging from

boyish outfits over sporty clothes to decadent, glamorous dresses, she can adapt her role and identity to her present situation as she pleases. This habitus is true as well for her dealing with gender in the mentioned scene. Her environment suggests that bisexuality is the norm, so she obeys and performs the role of a liberal woman, who can behave bisexually when she chooses to do so. Although her beliefs are caught between second wave and the post-feminisms, she embodies Butler's theory of performativity in practice. Fashion, gender, identity, sexuality – all can be taken from the hanger and put back into the wardrobe as needed. Bruzzi mirrors this idea by writing that Carrie is a

composite of multiple, conflicting personae, a layered performance that comprises her romantic tendency, her child-like exhibitionism and her professional obligation to reconfigure herself repeatedly in her work, her column and the public domain. (Akass & McCabe 118)

Only her tendency to follow conservative gender norms and roles hinders her from being the perfect post-modern individual.

After the mentioned kiss, Carrie leaves the party. The audience becomes witness of her thoughts again, telling the viewer “that was the last time I’ve ever seen Sean. They could do whatever they want, but I’m too old to play that game. So I took my hot old fart ass home – that’s just me”. This utterance is interesting on four levels.

Firstly, she clearly has chosen not to belong to this discourse group; the outcome of her sexual negotiation seems to be a throwback to her pseudo-liberal, conservative values. The vehemence with which she tries to distinguish herself from “them” shows her process of abjection again. The bisexuals challenge her identity and therefore, she must reject them in order not to lose her own self.

Secondly, for the sake of her moral conflict, she makes herself believe that the reason why she does not have to confront herself with this issue is that she is too old. In my opinion, sexuality is not a matter of age, and if she were an emancipated, liberal woman, she could open up to a new form of sexuality, if she should choose so (like Samantha would). However, she blames the generation difference and not her incapability and ideological inflexibility.

Thirdly, Carrie uses parody to be able to negotiate a topic as delicate as bisexuality or the nullification of gender in a mainstream TV series. This technique seems to be a common attribute amongst such series, as Adriaens (2009) explains

that Post feminist media texts always imply a hint of irony, a wink of the eye to the audience. Though, the credibility and critical potential of these texts need to be questioned since humour and irony, exactly because of its ‘humour aspect’, may be taken less seriously.

This idea reflects my observations. In my opinion, the political potential of the matters

discussed in *SatC* is enormous, but due to the frequent use of humour the issues are parodied and sometimes even mocked.

Fourthly, the phrase “that’s just me” implies two elements. On the one hand, she uses it as a cheap excuse for not having to confront herself with liberalising the boundaries of her gender role. On the other hand, it shows that her post-modern individualism is foregrounded. I will discuss the meta-level of Carrie’s performance in more detail in the following part, in which I will analyse a scene from the middle of the episode.

In this scene, which takes place in a diner, all of the four characters are present. Throughout the series, they meet frequently at this restaurant to discuss their problems. On a compositional level, it glues the different strands of narration together, as for most part of the series the main characters have to deal with their own problems alone. It becomes a ritual throughout the seasons.

On a narratological level, Carrie asks her friends for their advice on how to deal with her problems. Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda will, according to their personalities, give different answers. The adept viewer will be able to estimate which character is going to hold which position. On a theoretical level, values are negotiated. Most of the time, Carrie is the one who presents her problem; by that she brings the reader into the discourse group. The viewer has strongly identified with her and her story because she shares her inner thoughts with them in the voiceovers. So, the audience becomes part of this “round table”. This idea is confirmed by the camera work, which uses close-ups on eye level. The voyeuristic pleasure of the reader is even exceeded by their participation. I argue that this is a reason why the series has been so popular: The viewing individual becomes friends with the characters.

Carrie offers her inner turmoil to the group. As already analysed, Samantha represents the post-modern feminist woman, Charlotte the non-feminist conservative and Miranda the powerful third-wave feminist. Carrie herself, in my opinion, represents the values of the majority of the readership: Liberal, but not too much, and when it comes to their own personal lives, rather conservative; even more so: a moral opportunist. According to the principle that homosexuality is perfectly normal, but they would never choose such a lifestyle.

CARRIE. He’s a bisexual.

SAMANTHA. Well I could have told you that. He took you ice skating for God’s sake...

CARRIE. The weird thing is that he was so open about it.

Samantha parodies Carrie’s problem and thus diminishes its critical potential right at the beginning. What Carrie does is to present her view on gender: In her worldview, bisexuals

exist, but they seem to have to hide it, just as the former New York mayor Giuliani's "don't ask, don't tell" campaign of the 1990s. By that, bisexuality becomes abjectified and something dangerous challenging heteronormativity. In the open minded world that is presented to the audience on the surface, bisexuality could never be such a problem. However, the conservative subtext cannot allow such a transgression of gender roles because it would destabilise patriarchal hegemony, which is, and I have already proven that, the actual ideology transported by the series.

Miranda agrees with Carrie that bisexuality is a problem for them. However, when Charlotte asks Carrie what she said to Sean, she admits that she told him that "it wasn't a problem. I panicked. He's such a good kisser". She avoids the seriousness of the topic by transforming it to a relationship problem; plus, she once more behaves pseudo-liberally.

Samantha then explains that today "all the kids are going bi". The meaning conveyed in this utterance is a relativisation of Carrie's values. Yet, she feeds Carrie's search for approval that bisexuality is a fuzzy concept not worth integrating in her lifestyle by stating that it was a problem of "today", implying that Carrie can always choose the excuse of saying that she was too old (instead of not liberal enough). Samantha then says that she is a "trysexual, I'll try anything once", making a post-modern feminist mockery of labels and counteracting Carrie's rigid norms of sexuality. Moreover, the idea of sexuality as a product of consumption can be detected in this utterance.

CARRIE. Maybe I do have a problem with this. I'm not even sure bisexuality exists, I think it's just a layover to gaytown.

MIRANDA. Or to Ricky-Martin-Ville.

SAMANTHA. You know, I think that's great. He's open to all sexual experiences, he's evolved, that's hot.

As can be seen, Carrie cannot accept the concept of bisexuality, no matter how hard she would like to perform so in order to impress a man. Jermin (65) also notes that "Carrie delivers some surprisingly conservative observations as she discusses Sam's revelation with her friends". Miranda parodies the issue while Samantha relativises it again and adds: "Don't worry about the labels". These lines can convince Carrie, although conservative Charlotte adds her opinion and explains that: "I am very much into labels. Gay, straight, pick a side and stay there".

It is remarkable that homosexuality is accepted by the conservative representative, but bisexuality is not. It appears that the gay lifestyle has become tolerated and integrated into popular culture to the extent that it is almost as *ex aequo* with heterosexuality. It seems that

acknowledged labels do not transgress any borders whereas a concept like bisexuality contains too much of the “unknown” to trust it.

However, this assumption has been pursued by David Greven, who questions the representation of “gay sensibility” and “queer life” in this episode. He argues that the series only superficially embraces these topics and eventually keeps them at its periphery. Especially in this scene, he writes, it constructs a “triumphant phobic parade of sex freaks”(45). The representation of homosexuality and bisexuality in particular is neither authentic nor very in favour of gay lifestyle, Greve claims. I agree with Greve that the way of representing bisexuality sheds a negative light on this sexual preference, but I oppose his opinion on “straight” gay issues, as the producers are homosexual and some critics go so far as to claim that the female protagonists symbolise gay men. I will not go into further detail at this point, because this issue will be discussed in the analysis of the episode “*All That Glitters*”.

In sum it can be observed that this scene reconfirms the values I have analysed beforehand. Furthermore, I have proven my argument that *SatC* is more pseudo-liberal than actually liberal and transports conservative, heteronormative values and gender roles in the end. Although the reader can choose from a range of values based on different ideologies, he or she is prone to accept the anti-liberal happy ending. I suspect that the post- feminist viewer is given what he or she demands: Under the mask of progressive thinking, male hegemony remains existent. The only character showing a liberal, post-modern feminist and progressive view on bisexuality and gender bending is Samantha. Yet, as her character does not actually function as a role model whereas Carrie’s does, her importance as transporter of ideology becomes diminished.

## 4.2. 'The Real Me'

### 4.2.1. Plot Summary

“Is this the real life, is this just fantasy?” - this question is the main issue of this episode, called *The Real Me*. In this episode, reality gets blurred on several levels; not only for Carrie and her friends, but also for the actress Sarah Jessica Parker and the audience. The concept ‘reality’ will be questioned alongside the ‘reality’ of gender and gender roles. It will be shown that, with the help of parody, gender can be deconstructed and reality as well as essentialism do not exist. Not only ‘the real’ will be challenged, but also the ‘me’ – what is identity in this context, what is identity in connection with gender. Unlike many other episodes, this one is rather focused on the characters themselves and not on men.

*The Real Me* was aired on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2001 and is the fourth season’s second episode. It begins with Carrie being asked to run as a model for a New York fashion show produced by an acquaintance of hers, Lynn Cameron. There, she should not participate as a model, but as a “real New York person with style” to run for a major fashion label. At first she acts coyly, but then accepts the offer. In the meantime, Samantha decides to get professional pictures of hers taken – nude, as one would suspect. Although it seems as if she wanted these pictures just for herself, it turns out in the end that she has been seeking male approval after all. As for Charlotte, she has to confront herself with a gynaecological problem, which seems to be a yeast infection at first. After a consultation with a different doctor, the diagnosis is a “depressed vagina”. In the course of the episode, she has to confront herself with her genitals and accept her female body. While the other characters struggle with themselves, their selves and the realities thereof, Miranda is being asked out by a “hunky” man at the gym who tells her she is sexy. She cannot accept this compliment - it confuses her because she sees herself more of a down-to-earth person who wins men over with her personality. After an auspicious date, she acquires the role of a sexy vamp, but overdoes it, for which reason the potential lover eventually rejects her.

### 4.2.2. Camp and Reality – the Deconstruction of Gender

After the opener, the episode begins with one of Carrie’s voiceovers, explaining that she finds herself in an in-bar called *Brasserie 8 ½*. The camerawork moves across the entire restaurant, presents the fine interior and the stylish people, and finally focuses on Carrie and Stanford standing at the bar. Everything in this scene is exaggerated – the lifestyle, the design,

and the character's outfits. Carrie is wearing a black dress with a white, bra-like element, a pearl necklace, a black and white bag and a massive, flowery hair decoration. Stanford, in turn, wears a pink, chequered suit and rather unconventional glasses. Carrie looks displaced, because, even though *Brasserie 8 ½* is said to be an in-bar, her clothes are completely exaggerated. Even in a constructed scene like this one, Carrie manages to create an unrealistic appearance. She produces herself so apparently, that the constructedness of her identity (and gender) becomes apparent –even to the preferred reader.

At this point, I would like to take up a concept that has been explained in the beginning: Camp. In her essay *Notes on Camp* (1964), Susan Sontag explains that “Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style - but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the "off" of things-being-what-they-are-not”. This assumption can be applied perfectly on the aforementioned scene. The campy vision of this scene allows the analyst to dismantle the meaning hidden behind the exaggeration. Carrie's outfit can be seen as a parody on this certain kind of lifestyle, or rather, how women behave in this discourse group. Her overdoing of fashion diminishes its value – the exaggerated performance of the gender role ‘woman’ is ridiculed.

Furthermore, I would like to add that Carrie's ultra-feminine outfit stands in stark contrast to the real actresses' sporty body. Watching the scene and seeing the skinny, muscular Sarah Jessica Parker wearing this girly, ridiculously overdone outfit, one association came to my mind: Drag queen. Plus, next to her, a homosexual man who heavily corresponds to the role of the stereotypical gay man. Both appear feminine and masculine at the same time.

Alongside the display of the constructedness of gender, the audience is also confronted with the constructedness of lifestyle in this scene, as the characters' casual conversation goes as follows:

STANFORD. Look at that one...Mary, hail a cab! Do you think he's a model?

CARRIE. A model what? A model citizen, a model home, a model airplane?

STANFORD. I think it's the dirty-haired Gucci guy, with clean hair.

CARRIE. Wow, He's so versatile. Why don't you go over and say hello?

This shallow conversation ridicules the use of small talk in such discourse groups. It alludes to the habit of this group and by exaggerating this shows its constructed nature. By using the “Camp vision” on the scene, it becomes clear that this upper-middle class lifestyle and the gender roles are criticized and parodied.

As the episode continues, Carrie and Stanford keep on performing their roles, when, Lynn, a friend of Carrie's, enters the scene and asks her if she would like to run in a New York fashion show she produces. Carrie declines the offer. After that, Lynn introduces her "boyfriend" Damien, explaining that "I use the term boyfriend loosely as Damien is clearly homosexual". In this discourse group, the homosexual friend is seen as a mandatory accessory and thus friendship as an act of consumption – the explanation thereof in such a way includes features of parody. So does her facial expression as well as her gesture – they are ridiculously overdone. Also the way she speaks ("You're fuckin' doing my show if I have to hunt you down, skin you alive and have one of the other models fuckin' wear you") makes use of exaggeration. This stereotypical correspondence to the cliché creates parody. This observation is also shared by Sontag, who writes that "[a]ll Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice". Thereby, a campy "smack" of parody can be detected in this episode.

It has to be added that this fashion show Lynn asks Carrie to participate in is a mixture of models and "real people", that is New Yorkers with style. As Carrie does not see herself as a model, she acts coyly about the offer. Stanford tries to convince her explaining that she "can't see what I see". Nevertheless, she acts reserved concerning this issue.

For the audience, this behaviour creates a confusion of realities. A certain unrealistic element resonates in this scene, because the actress Sarah Jessica Parker has worked as a model before, Carrie Bradshaw is dressed as a model (especially in this scene) and the character pretends not to be able to run as such. At this point, I would like to shed some more light on the concept "reality". In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Jean Baudrillard explained the theory of hyperreality. According to his theory, the 'real' is built upon a myth or a fantasy. To put it bluntly: The way Butler deals with gender can be analogically juxtaposed to Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality.

One example for his theory would be Disney World: The whole theme park has a real infrastructure, real jobs and real buildings, but actually it is entirely fake and artificial. It has been planned with the aim of evoking a fantasy that is the illusion of a medieval castle, which is only the mythologised version of the past. Conclusively, a myth is reproduced in order to create a neo-reality (cf. Smith & Riley 212-214). It is important to understand that Disneyland is an alleged reproduction of something that has never existed in this way – thus, it can be understood as a mere copy without any origin. Baudrillard calls simulation "the generation by models of a real without an origin or reality: a hyperreality" (Storey 152). The distinction between the real and the simulations implodes.

Post-modern society suffers from hyperrealism, which has the following side effect: “Hyperrealism also shows that people do not distinguish that much between fiction and reality” (Baudrillard in Storey 154). Documentary soaps seem to reflect reality, but in fact they are scripted and therefore fake. Still, the impression of realness has to be maintained for the audience. At this point, conclusions can be drawn from the series: Identity and reality are always simply a reproduction of something that has never had a true origin.

So, with her ridiculous outfit, Carrie copies a certain thing she believes exists – but imitates a concept of style, consumerism, gender, identity, etc. that has never existed in that way. This habit is perpetuated in cultural repetition, because due to the series’ broad viewership, it seduces the reader to copy again, or rather: The series produces models the audience can copy. Baudrillard calls that “the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV” (in Storey 153). To finish this excursus and return to the actual issue here: Hyperrealism means that reality does not exist, because we imitate a reality which has never existed and keep this process going on in our culture. A cultural artefact like *SatC* is not realistic, but as our alleged reality is said not to be realistic, it becomes credible again. The episode *The Real Me* plays with realities, as we have seen.

Even a preferred reader who is not acquainted with hyperrealism will be able to decode that this episode challenges their concept(s) of reality. The character is confronted with a type of reality that clashes with their knowledge of the world – which makes this strand of narration apparently unrealistic. In other words: Although the audience knows that a series like *SatC* (or any other film, book, etc.) is set in a reality of its own, this one is so constructed that it uses its credibility, or rather its “illusion of reality”. For this reason, I sense a touch of Camp in the elaborate play with different realities and the contradictions caused by the mixture thereof. These contradictions challenge the reader with the fact that he is shown an unreal world and make him aware of that. Consequently, the reader is put into the position of decoding the text as a parody on reality, or on what many people define as such.

However, we will now return to the course of the episode again: By the time this scene has ended, the audience knows about Carrie’s personal story in this episode. She will have to confront herself with her own identity and its boundaries as well as the type of reality she chooses. In the manner of the series, her problem becomes a matter of discussion during a lunch with “the girls”. There, she does not even make it a topic herself but just mentions Lynn’s proposal *en-passant*.

CARRIE. I do not belong on a runway, runways are for models not writers.  
 CHARLOTTE. What's the difference between strutting down a runway and the way you strut down Fifth Avenue?(...)  
 CARRIE. I just... I cannot imagine walking down a runway where all the people sit there and judge me.(...)  
 MIRANDA. But, you're not a model you're one of the real people.  
 CARRIE. Exactly and I don't want people to think that I can't see the difference between a model and me.

In this dialogue, the amalgamation of gender, identity and reality becomes apparent. Firstly, in terms of gender, Carrie behaves very feminine here because she does not really dare to break out of her passive, private (as in male/ female - active/passive - public/private) role. Although she enjoys her looked-at-ness in the other episodes, she is never in the situation of being judged that way – which is the reason why she declines the offer. Her construct of identity does not allow this performance of gender.

Yet, secondly, she eventually accepts the offer because she is given the clothes. In a certain way, she sells her beliefs for a means of consumption, that is fashion. She is not willing to give away certain aspects of her identity, unless the deal is acceptable for her. Carrie accepts the new role she is given as a model. Which leads to the third point: Reality.

Carrie will only *imitate* being a model. Models, in turn, are only imitating the model 'model'. Consequently, every 'real' model is a copy of the non-existent original model, which would put Carrie in the same position as Heidi Klum (who has a cameo in this episode). As the audience identifies with Carrie, they also stand *ex aequo* with Heidi Klum. It can be seen that this deconstruction of reality reveals that the audience is seduced to identify with Carrie and believe that if she as a "normal person" can be a model, they themselves can be one as well. On a meta-level, the reader is given the opportunity to be a hyperreal model.

As the scene at the lunch proceeds, the story turns away from Carrie and focuses on Samantha. She also seems to be in problematic situation concerning reality and identity: The character is on an organic-diet. The reason for this is that she plans to have nude photos taken of her. Samantha explains that "last night I could not stop thinking about a BigMac. I finally had to get dressed, go out and pick up a guy". Typically for her persona, she equates sexuality and consumerism. The abstinence of food can be substituted with sex and vice versa.

If Samantha did not want any advice or appraisal from the other women, she would not have brought this topic in. As usual, problems mentioned in this circle will be discussed.

At first, she is criticized for doing such a thing in order to please men. Samantha argues that she does this only for herself, an argument against which she has to defend herself for being a narcissist. In the end, she convincingly leaves the audience in the belief that these photos are only for herself. Interestingly, this attitude will change.

In the course of the episode, she shows the finished pictures to a frame seller and, against her statement, does seek attention for her naked body. As he refuses to pay attention to the pictures, she leaves the shop muttering the word “whatever”. In the end, she exceedingly over-tips a food-deliverer because he looks at her photo in the wall in her flat and exclaims: “Nice ass”.

On a meta level, this means that she tries to acknowledge her body and identity in society, but always needs male approval. This behaviour is rather untypical for Samantha, because, usually, she is the representative of post-modern feminist values. Although her approach might be seen as a resistance to male hegemony, her search for male approval constitutes a severe backlash; almost a betrayal of the feminism communicated on the surface of the series. The audience must not be seduced by Samantha’s role: Whereas she seems liberal and independent in the majority of the episodes, here, she can also transport anti-feminist values.

Or, from another angle, it could be said that Samantha finds herself in a dilemma of realities. She imitates the role of an independent woman, but, as this role does not exist, lacks a proposal for solution when it comes to the problem with men’s appraisal. Furthermore, her photos are nothing less but a simulation of reality as well – and in a few years, not even an accurate copy anymore.

In terms of the ‘Camp view’, it can be analysed that Samantha’s exaggeration of the search of male approval (when she explicitly points at her breasts and her bottom while asking the frame seller for the right frame) that it becomes humorously incredible. Her “putting-it-out-there”-attitude is too unrealistic, too nonconformist to be decoded as “normal” behaviour. Her role resembles an exaggerated femme fatale, but due to the extreme exaggeration a parodic effect is created. In terms of narration, her character often serves as comic relief and “the sex she has is put into a humorous light rather than an objectified spotlight“ (Kim 329), but this function might also seduce the audience to adopt conservative values in the end, because the severity of her character gets dismantled whereas the underlying message continues to be transported.

Charlotte also becomes prone to exaggeration in this episode. At the beginning of *The Real Me*, she seems to suffer from a vaginal yeast infection. The audience knows about that

because Charlotte asks Carrie for the number of the latter's gynaecologist. Typical for conservative Charlotte, she cannot speak about her problem openly, she would not even utter the word 'vagina' in public. The examination turns out to be unpleasant for her as well: Apparently, she does not have a yeast infection, but a hormonal imbalance, against which she receives a prescription for anti-depressants.

When Charlotte tells Miranda and Carrie about this therapy, she refers to it as a "vagina depression". The girls make fun of her with jokes like: "Why? It can't meet its deadline?", or: "it always wants to go to Krispy Kreme". At first, Charlotte reacts sensitively on these jokes, but then laughs with the others. Once more, the use of humour diminishes the political depth of this conversation.

Speaking openly about the female sexual organs is still a taboo in our phallogocentric society. From a feminist perspective, one could argue that this is the case because such liberation would equal the sexes and threaten the patriarchal order. Yet, I have to point out that, disregarding the hidden conservative values transported by the series, *SatC* opens up a space for topics like these to be discussed on prime time television. This assumption can be substantiated with Gennaro's observation (254) that *SatC* "provides the viewer with what are presented as real female conversations about issues of sex in a fashion that has typically been a place for female silence on television". Therefore, I claim that the series negotiates male hegemony as well if it tries to empower women by giving them the possibility to speak about gender-specific issues – such as their vaginas. I am aware of the objection that this approach could be part of a pseudo-liberal strategy to seduce the reader to accept all transported values (including the conservative ones), but I do think that the series has emancipated its audience in regards of these issues.

Returning to the scene, the conversation proceeds. Samantha enters the diner and shows her nude pictures to the others – including Charlotte. Whereas Charlotte cannot even pronounce the word vagina, Samantha thinks that having hers photographed is something natural. As they talk, it turns out that Charlotte has never looked at her sexual organs, because she admits that she finds "it ugly". The conservative representative rejects her biological essential sexual organs. Later that episode, she overcomes her fear and looks at herself with a hand mirror.

In Freudian terms, I would associate this idea strongly with a penis envy, which causes this "rejection of femininity" which, according to Freud, is a side effect of the oedipal development and the fear of castration. Her act of resistance could mean an act of maturation as a woman (cf. Schäfer 27). However, although I believe that a Freudian analysis of this

scene could bring interesting insights, it would go beyond the scope of this thesis and shall be left for further analysis.

Using the usual mode of conduction of this thesis again, it can be observed that Charlotte has changed her mode of reality. In her conservative value system, such an act of emancipation is not designated. Yet, the circumstances make her confront herself with her femininity, her gender (role), and she actually evolves in this episode. For the first time, she seems to accept her femininity, the act of looking at herself becomes an act of resistance against phallogentric order and the taboos connected to it. However, the mentioned use of humour with which this serious topic is presented to the reader creates a parody which conceals the political message, diminishes its liberal values, and fosters conservative values again. This presumption is confirmed by the compositional presentation, because when she looks at herself, she bends over too much and falls off the bed, in a humorous, exaggerated way. A real confrontation on a serious level is never given.

The last character's challenge is also interwoven with exaggeration. In *The Real Me*, Miranda has to find out that playing a role in order to please a man can cause the opposite effect. Her story begins at the gym. All covered with sweat, she finishes her workout on the treadmill. Compared to the usual, neat representation of stereotypical female New Yorkers, this time she does not correspond with this image. Miranda neither wears make-up nor a bra and her hair is unkempt. Suddenly, a tall, attractive man called Dave starts to chat with her. He seems to be impressed by her intent to run a marathon and admits that he could not do such a thing. As Miranda clearly seems uncomfortable in this situation because of her looks, she tries to escape the conversation with the words "well, have a good training then". Dave, in turn, asks her if this was the end and if they could meet for a date sometime. She seems immensely baffled by his offer, especially when he tells her that he finds her "very sexy".

Back home, Miranda calls Carrie.

MIRANDA. I was wearing no make-up and my Hanes three dollar old man's undershirt. I just can't believe a guy would think that I was sexy.

CARRIE. Ok, I'm hanging up now.

MIRANDA. No, I'm serious, smart yes, sometimes cute but never sexy. Sexy is the thing I try to get them to see me as after I win them over with my personality.

CARRIE. You win men over with your personality?

MIRANDA. They want you to be a model?

Miranda cannot accept the fact that a man would like her for her sportive effort and her naturalness. It is interesting that she does not feel entirely as a woman without make-up and a pretty outfit. This reflects the insecurity of real women, but Miranda's exaggerated reaction

that she cannot believe at all that a man could find her sexually attractive without her performing the normative gender role might foster conservative values. Although she is one of the most self-confident characters, she cannot accept this compliment. His offer does not correspond with her world view, her reality. This is the reason why it might be so hard to understand that a man could also like her as a human being and not only as the performance of a conventionally attractive woman.

However, she accepts his offer and they go out for a date. As they say goodbye, he kisses her, and after that says: "God you are so sexy". Miranda starts to laugh and jokingly hides her face with the palm of her hand. "You don't think so?", he asks, and then they kiss again.

These compliments seem to boost her self-confidence, because on their second date, Miranda does most of the talking. The scene starts with her pouring some champagne into a glass. In contrast to the scene at the gym, this scene is completely different in terms of composition. It is dark and sensual. Miranda is wearing a black cocktail dress that reveals a lot of her cleavage, her bare shoulders and arms, moreover she is wearing make-up and diamond earrings. "I like my life, I love my job, I love my friends, and I love meeting new people, like you", she says. Dave, who has been looking for a natural woman as it appears, does not know how to respond to this new identity of Miranda's. Her gestures and her outfit is exaggerated and ridicule the scene. What is more, the man is irritated by her ability to change roles that easily. Although gender and identity has been defined as a repeated performance, such a harsh change can cause confusion. Yet, it shows once again that gender and identity are only a construction, otherwise she could not have switched that easily.

Back in the scene, as she leans in to kiss Dave, he rejects her and takes a sip from his champagne. On a more abstract level, it can be assumed that the third wave woman can be sexually attractive even though she does not perform the role of a stereotypical, willing woman who consents to the existing male hegemony. Yet, male influence can cause a change of identity. It is interesting that she feels that she has to change and cannot accept his compliment. However, when she changes, he does not want her anymore.

In the last scene of Miranda's personal story, she accidentally meets Dave at the gym and asks him why he had not returned any of her calls. He explains that he thinks she was "a little bit full of herself" on their last date. Miranda panics and leaves. From a feminist perspective, it could be argued that the man was looking for a weaker woman, an individual to control, but as he finds out that the 'Angel in the House' has the ability to become a femme fatale, punishes her for this behaviour.

For the audience, the message that is delivered conveys that women are not allowed to be self-confident. They have to be ashamed for being a confident individual, punished for trying to be equal to a man. The way Miranda behaved at the second date was a male performance; she acted actively, outgoing, self-reliant. As patriarchy cannot accept such a performance, she gets punished and rejected. In my opinion, this is a clear re-establishment of male hegemonic values, because Miranda is not given any space to be confident. I am aware of the argument that Dave could have been irritated by her overdone femme fatale performance, which had a campy, humorous aftertaste. However, it cannot be left out that this rejection is an experience with which the audience can identify and therefore seduces the reader to adopt the conveyed anti-feminist values, that is that a woman gets punished for being self-confident and is better off if she accepts the hegemonic power relations.

While the other characters have faced their identity turmoil, Carrie's story has not been analysed in detail. As mentioned above, Carrie accepts Lynn's offer to run for Dolce and Gabbana. In the following scene, Carrie has to try on the outfits for the fashion show. An Italian, homosexual man called Oscar is to pick her clothes. Every character in this scene is stereotypical - Oscar and his male assistant perform stereotypical gay men. One evidence for the exaggerated, campy representation of allegedly gay behaviour is the way Oscar speaks. Instead of talking to Carrie like an adult would communicate with an adult, he uses a kind of infantile speech:

OSCAR. What's up love?

CARRIE. Oh, I'm coming.

OSCAR. Oh, me likey. Perfect in the bust and the waist. Turn, love. Do we likey? Oh, no likey de length have to take it up about four...

CARRIE. I know I'm short, I'm too short but I'm very, very comfortable in heels, honestly the higher the better so feel free to put me up in the big gal shoes.

OSCAR. Walk love, walk.

Similar to the scene in the bar at the beginning, this overuse of stereotypical elements, in this case the infantile language, functions as parody. This scene is surreal, artificial. Moreover, Carrie is not really accepted as a woman, but is talked to as if she were a blend of a little girl and a clothes-hanger.

Usually, Carrie consumes fashion, but this time, she is consumed by it. She loses her identity, because neither Oscar nor his assistant care for her as a person. Although she always gives away bits of her personality and tries to be funny, all she receives is a standardised dulcification of compliments. They even tell her to trot back the mini-runway she had to walk down to show them the dress. Again, this shows that she is seen as a mere body which can be programmed and performed the way the ones in power need it to be.

The dominant position of gay men in fashion, as depicted here, has been brought in connection to Camp by Susan Sontag (1966), stating that

[a]ristocracy is a position vis-à-vis culture (as well as vis-à-vis power), and the history of Camp taste is part of the history of snob taste. But since no authentic aristocrats in the old sense exist today to sponsor special tastes, who is the bearer of this taste? Answer: an improvised self-elected class, mainly homosexuals, who constitute themselves as aristocrats of taste.

So, Carrie obeys and does everything they ask of her instantly, because they are the bearers of taste and style. This could also be regarded from a religious perspective, the gay men being the priests, fashion being the belief, clothes the tin gods and fashionistas the followers. Again, this approach would be very interesting, but go beyond the scope of this thesis.

Therefore, I will now turn to the key scene of this episode: The fashion show. As mentioned in the beginning, Carrie never saw herself as a model, contrarily, she rejected this role. However, when she enters the scene, she behaves like one, with her sunglasses, her Starbucks-Coffee to go in one hand and her homosexual accessory Stanford by her side. Then she suddenly starts to giggle, turns to him and exclaims: "Stany, I'm a model!". They continue chatting in their typical exaggerated humorous way which parodies the image the audience has from the fashion world.

Being extremely confident, she asks an assistant where she should go, and he replies that she belongs to the "non-models". When she finds out that for example Fran Lebowitz is one of the other non-models, she freaks out and wants to leave. This reaction indicates that she has already identified with the role of being a model and that she has created a new reality in which this performance is possible. This other reality with which she is confronted now also confronts her with her false belief. Stanford achieves to calm her down by explaining that she might not be Heidi Klum, but one of the "real people".

After this, she is sent to the stylists. The audience becomes witness of her campy transformation, or better: Of the construction of a new gender performance. It will be clear what is meant by that in a few moments. The hairdresser backcombs her hair to a big mane and she is made up by a stylist. Until now, the audience still sees Carrie – probably a more styled Carrie than usual but it is still the character.

In the following scene, Samantha enters the backstage area because Stanford told her that Carrie needed her help. In terms of composition, at first the audience sees a round mirror in front of a very bright background. Slowly, we see Carrie's reflection moving her head from the outside to the centre of the mirror. She wears heavy, overdone make-up and an artificial, exaggerated hairdo. Together with Sarah Jessica Parker's slight masculine face features, her

appearance seems little feminine. While the audience is baffled by Carrie's transformation, we can see Samantha's reflection in the mirror. She, in turn, is wearing a red suit, ruby lipstick and a Marilyn-Monroe-like hairdo. Similar to Carrie's appearance, Samantha's performance is overdone and unrealistic. Interestingly, Madonna used to imitate Marilyn Monroe in the same manner in the 1980s – both use it for the purpose of gender parody.

After a short conversation, Carrie enters the stage and runs down the catwalk. She is wearing a black coat and extreme high heels – and looks like a tall transvestite. Suddenly, she trips and tumbles – they send Heidi Klum on stage as quickly as possible. In contrast to transvestite-Carrie, Heidi looks feminine and not like a drag queen. Due to the artificial performance of exaggerated femininity, the impression is evoked that they are bot women at all but only imitate women – like drag queens.

Expanding this thought, one could argue that Carrie creates the effect of women who imitate men who imitate women (faux queens). This observation has been made by several analysts. Merck (in Haas 168), for example, observes that Carrie's performance of the fashion victim as well as Samantha's sexual assertion challenge the critics to compare them to transvestites.

Especially because this is not the only scene in which Carrie or another character subvert gender roles. It has already been shown that "*Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*" features Charlotte as a transvestite. Or, to give further examples, in episode 3.06 (*Are We Sluts?*), Samantha walks past a row of transvestites wearing wigs, high heels and colourful, short dresses – which is exactly the way she is dressed. Furthermore, in episode 3.18 (*Cock-a-Doodle-Do*), Sam invites her three friends and the aforementioned transvestites to a party on her roof terrace and the interesting thing is that they all share the same performances. What is more, Carrie's over-the-top feminine behaviour is even ridiculed by one of the drag queens. In order to speculate about the purpose of such scenes and the effect on the audience, I would like to take a step back and look at this question on a more abstract level.

In context with drag, Judith Butler (in Nicholson 337) explains that it "fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive mode of gender and of the notion of a true gender identity". What Carrie and Samantha do is to perform a hyperreal, overdone gender role on the surface of their bodies with the aim of mocking the constructedness of gender roles. By this, they deconstruct normative gender performances and show that gender is a mere performance. Especially in post-feminism, Camp subversive repetitions can occur, which on the one hand shows the

constructedness of gender but on the other hand also demonstrates that change is possible (Haas 178).

One answer to the question of what effect the use of such gender deconstruction might have could be that it shall show that essentialist gender does not exist. Several times, the series demonstrates that gender can be bent and that a woman can perform the role of a man, a drag king, a drag queen, or which role else pleases her. In a certain way, the characters consume gender roles just as they consume fashion. Fashion and gender roles share the attributes that they are an imitation without an origin, thus are both hyperreal.

Unfortunately, I doubt that the uncritical, preferred reader will be able to interpret such scenes the way I have outlined here. I believe that only certain discourse groups such as transvestites, cross dresser, or “queerly educated” etc. possess a sensibility for images like these and read them as subversive. The displayed gender parody becomes obvious if one interprets it with the help of the concept of Camp; however, I think that, if the reader lacks this knowledge, he or she would not be able to decode this message as a politically fruitful gender parody and a feminist resistance against patriarchal power relations, probably not even against stereotypes.

Therefore, I will have to say that, because only a small group within the audience will be aware of the gender parody, the effect for the audience is not that crucial. Probably only in “*Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*”, when the transgression of gender roles is actually discussed in this episode, the audience might become aware of the topic. In any other case, I daresay that the effect is minimal because the signs are not obvious enough for the mass audience to be decoded as outlined.

Nonetheless, the episode *The Real Me* is still challenging for the audience. They have to confront themselves with the definition of reality, because the question of what is real is posed several times throughout this episode. Furthermore, they are asked to question gender roles, be it Samantha who behaves like a femme fatale, Charlotte who cannot accept her role as a woman, Miranda who exaggerates her role as a self-confident lady or Carrie, who negotiates with her gender identity and the boundaries thereof. The tools Camp and hyperreality have proven to be fruitful methods to analyse this episode.

Speaking of the values transported in this episode, it has to be pointed out that Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda undergo a feminist backlash and re-establish conservative power constellations again. Only Carrie is the one who shows signs of emancipated behaviour, from a post-modern feminist perspective she dissolves power relations by deconstructing (or reconstructing) gender. However, as already mentioned, I doubt that the

audience can read this message and therefore I have to speculate about the effect, which would be minimal. Conclusively, *The Real Me* does have potential for political feminist resistance, but unfortunately this message is too hidden for the mass to be decoded as such. Alongside with the three backlash-stories, I conclude that this episode, like “*Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*”, sustains existing hegemonic values under the disguise of a pseudo-liberalism - with a queer touch.

### **4.3. ‘All That Glitters’**

#### **4.3.1. Plot Summary**

This episode’s title consists of an abbreviation of the phrase “All that glitters is not gold”, taken from Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. It refers to the fact that several things in life may look shiny on the exterior, but are rotten on the inside – or simply different. The title suggest to take a deeper look on the characters’ lives and not to be blinded by their outward performance. Nothing seems to be as it appears – be it feminine performance, heterosexual relationships or homosexual behaviour.

Speaking of homosexual, Marge Simpson from the same titled series once said about *SatC* that “[t]hat’s the show about four women acting like gay guys” (Maddox 2004). I have shown that the program often broaches the issue of gender identity, but in this chapter, I would like to focus on how gender identities are stereotyped in the series. Furthermore, I will investigate whether Marge Simpson’s observation could have a point and in which way the protagonists are intertwined with the concepts and representations of male homosexuality.

To give a general overview of episode number fourteen of season four: Carrie is engaged to Aidan Shaw. While Charlotte tries to confront herself with the sad remains of her unfortunate marriage with the cold, upper class doctor Trey, Samantha opens up for a hotel owner called Richard and seems to lose her grip in this love affair. The only definite single is pregnant Miranda, who is not in a relationship with the child’s father, Steve.

“*All That Glitters*” begins with a hot night at a gay club after Carrie realises that Aidan would rather spend a night at home with a bucket of fried chicken than to go out with her. In the midst of half-naked men, a very attractive gay man called Oliver begins a conversation with Carrie. They plan to meet for a brunch. After a night out with her new gay friend she realises that she prefers her heterosexual, more convenient relationship with Aiden.

In the meantime, Charlotte gets to know a photographer from *House and Garden* magazine, who eventually takes pictures of her perfect home. This shooting triggers the separation of her and Trey as a couple, because he cannot stand this illusion of a marriage anymore. Miranda has an inconvenient encounter at the gay bar when she meets a young colleague. They agree on a deal that she will not reveal his sexual orientation and he will not tell anyone at the law firm that she is pregnant. Unfortunately, he breaks their deal, for which she – accidentally – breaks it, too. Interestingly, this incident acts as a liberation for both of them in the end. Samantha, in turn, is confronted with her feelings for a man. Being high on ecstasy, she tells him that she loves him during intercourse – to which he does not respond. She realises that, underneath her iron surface, she can fall for a man.

#### **4.3.2. Stereotypes and the City: Gender Identities and Their Effects**

The episode begins with Carrie sitting on the bed of her flat and skimming a magazine to find a stylish restaurant to dine in. Suddenly, Aiden enters the scene. He has been working all day renovating the flat next to Carrie's (they want to break the walls and have a bigger one). While she asks him about her idea for dinner, he takes off his shirt and presents his trained, male body. Aidan rejects her idea and prefers a night at home "watching the game, [having a] bucket of KFC". Carrie still wants to go out, be it with or without him. On a meta-level, this scene reproduces interesting stereotypes. Usually, in terms of dichotomies, women are passive and rather settled in the private. This scene, in turn, violates these attributes, because the male character wants to stay home. It has to be noted that Carrie's character shows the traits of an emancipated (single) woman and Aidan's the one of a rather conservative male. As she cannot convince her boyfriend to go out with her, she calls Samantha.

The visual representation of the following scene offers an object of investigation. The screen is cut into two halves, Carrie on the left side and Samantha on the right one. Both are sitting in bed, but Carrie wears a white, wide top and her room is bright whereas Samantha's flat is dark, and so is her dress. Actually, she has been waiting for Richard to call her, but as he has not returned her call for four hours, she consents to go out with Carrie. I found it uncharacteristic for Samantha to wait by the phone for a man, because this behaviour goes against the grain of her usual femme fatale image. With the help of conference channel they put Charlotte and Miranda in line as well.

The audience becomes witness of their conversation, each of them occupying a square on the screen. While Charlotte is reading the newspaper in her exquisitely furnished flat, Miranda has been sleeping with a book on her belly and is woken up by the call. Her hair is unkempt and her living room is lightly dimmed. Each character's outfit, situational occupation along with the intensity of light and the background match their personality, so the flat of the individuals let the audience know what type of person they might be. Even if a viewer had not seen any episode yet and knew nothing about the programme, they would have an idea of the character's persona.

*Per definitionem*, “[a] stereotype is a group-shared image of some category of people, a greatly oversimplified notion or belief about what individuals who are members of some group (racial, gender, ethnic, etc.) are like” (Berger 159). I sum up that stereotypes function as a set or a combination of certain signifiers which stand exemplarily for a fixed type of character. Although meaning is usually polysemic and negotiated by the reader, in this case coinciding interpretations are triggered within the mass of the audience. These “mental shortcuts”(cf. section 2.2) give the viewer a quick (yet judgemental) impression of what the character might be like. In the blink of an eye, the audience can decode that Miranda is pragmatic and Charlotte conservative, simply based on the visual representation. In my opinion, *SatC* makes heavy use of such stereotypical representations, which is neither a sign for quality TV nor does it produce any benefit for women or other groups suppressed by white, Christian patriarchy. Contrarily, stereotyping reproduces fossilised images of the way hetero- and homosexual men and women have to behave – which will be proven in the next scene.

The outcome of the conference call is a night full of dancing – and so the characters find themselves in a gay club. In an extremely stereotypical manner, the representation of male homosexual habitus is depicted. The pink light shines on the half-naked men's bodies, while they are flirting heavily and dancing to trashy pop music. The scene is loud, flashy and exaggerated - it is campy. In the midst of this crowd, the four female characters make their way to the bar. Similar to “*The Real Me*”, Carrie wears strong make-up and an overdone, pompous hairdo. She and Samantha could pass as drag queens in the dimmed light of the club.

Suddenly, a gay friend of Charlotte's, Anthony, comes along with his date, Gordon. As he mentions that his date works for *House and Garden* magazine, she becomes excited and says

CHARLOTTE. Oh my God, I love that magazine! I used to wear my mother's pearls and read through it when I was little.

GORDON. Me too!

This situation creates a comical effect, because the gay man admits to have performed the same behaviour as conservative Charlotte in her child years.

Juxtaposing gay gender performance and the represented female gender performance in *SatC*, "Marge's suspicion" can be substantiated. Maddox (2004) explains that in American screenplay writing theory, the rule was to "write black and cast white". This means that "you add style and cool to your white characters by writing as though they were black" (Maddox 2004). He applies this idea on the series and found out that *SatC* is written "gay male and cast straight female". Its gay director Darren Star is said to have produced the gayest series featuring straight female protagonists in the history of television. The women's habitus shows congruency to stereotypical gay male behaviour, that is "sex, shopping, gossip and bawdy humour"(Maddox 2004).

In an interview, Patrick King, the head writer of the series, undermines this hypothesis by saying that it hurts him if people criticise the show by comparing his female characters to gay men. He furthermore explains that

At one point, someone in the media actually said 'there are no women writers, there are just drag queens writing this with something up their ass.' And this was a woman writer! It's weird to have a whole thing sort of collapse when I'm working with women all day long, and it all is about gay men because Darren and I started writing it and we happen to be gay. (Lemay 51)

Although Sarah Jessica Parker herself says that this argument is simply an easy way to malign the show and that such criticism is non-feminist and homophobic, this has not stopped the critics (Lemay 52).

I believe that the hypothesis has to be given a thought, since even the visual representation of the four female characters resembles gay men's at times. If a skinny, athletic Sarah Jessica Parker wears exaggerated make-up and inauthentic, wig-like hairdo in the midst of a gay bar, she looks like a drag queen. Also Samantha's performance of femininity appears to be too artificial, because her ultra-feminine outfit appears ridiculous and campy. Similar to their gender performance in "*The Real Me*", they challenge the audience to rethink their actual gender. It can be concluded that not only their outward appearance, but also their sexual behaviour, their taste for fashion and their lifestyle resemble gay habitus.

If we assumed that Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda actually were gay men, the series' anti-feminism would become nullified. This presupposition would explain the fancy lifestyle, the sexual behaviour, the love for fashion and the strong, familiar friendship

between the characters. Moreover, following this idea, the queer elements would be explained, and so would be the gender bending. I even daresay that this might be a reason why the series appears to be so anti-feminist at times – because what is a feminist backlash for a woman does not have to be a negotiation of power for a gay men.

This aspect might offer even more potential to detect the *SatC* conservative tenor and the misogynist traits of the story. In his article “Sex and the City & Gay Male Misogyny”, Jones-Yelvington has also observed that the characters could be gay men disguised as women. A reason for this habit is that “Hollywood has used homosexuality as a marker for deviance or criminality”(Ott & Mack 201), which would explain the motivation for such disguise – while actual gay men would be judged, women are seen in a different light by society. In accordance to this, Jones-Yelvington (2012) writes that there has been “a long history in film and culture of gay men using women’s bodies to enact their own desires” in order to humiliate and destroy those bodies. This would mean that such a cultural product is based on the humiliation of female identity. As gay men often play a crucial role in the production process of such women’s series (that is not only *SatC*, but also *America’s Next Topmodel*, *Desperate Housewives* etc.), this influence definitely has to be taken into account.

Jones-Yelvington goes so far as to say that: “I think gay men need to be held accountable as both authors and consumers of women’s degradation”. Although I believe that this argument might be an easy scapegoat for the existing conservative, misogynist values in the programme, it at least offers a solution for the question why the characters behave the way they do. Jones-Yelvington might have a point by interpreting the gay production of straight female characters as a means of humiliation - it would explain the negative experiences they go through, the punishment for femininity, the patriarchal power relations, the feminist backlashes, the misogyny at times. Even more so, it would explain the hyperreal constructedness of women’s lives – because the female characters have not directly been created by women, but underwent a “filtering”. These homosexual male writers only produced hyperreal copies of female experiences – they performed being a woman, but did not put on the mask correctly.

The “gay-men-in-disguise” issue is substantiated in the following scenes. When Miranda and Samantha enter the shared rest-room, Samantha waits at the urinals and openly looks at the other men’s genitals. In the meantime, Miranda has an inconvenient incident when she meets a colleague from work, Max, at the basin. After Miranda says: “I had no

idea!”, Max answers: ”I had no idea that you were a gay<sup>4</sup> man either”. In the light of the aforementioned discussion, this utterance is quite interesting. I have already shown several times that humour is a means of diminishing the vehemence of political issues in the series.

So, if we interpret this message as intended as such without any parodic level, I read this as an evidence for Jones-Yelvington, Lemay and Maddox’s hypothesis. Furthermore, Samantha’s behaviour is too unfeminine and too “gay-male” to be interpreted as conventional female action. If the series plays so openly with this question, I agree that this must have a reason, that is: The producers do see the female characters as gay men. This issue will be discussed in more detail at the end of this section.

Also Miranda’s pregnancy or rather her attitude towards her pregnancy reflects misogynist values. The career woman who never wanted a child and later that episode even says that being an alcoholic was more accepted in a law firm than being pregnant, gets chastised for her promiscuity and, against her wish in the first place, becomes pregnant. Contrarily, Charlotte, who wishes for a child happens to be infertile. Both women are punished to a certain degree for their female bodily functions or their wish to be a mother. In my opinion, such representation can be interpreted as being in favour of male hegemonic power structures.

In “*All That Glitters*”, Miranda’s story culminates in an act of liberation for both Max and her, because she wears a dress that shows her augmented belly and he wears stereotypical gay clothes. It could be said that Miranda is given space to act out her femininity, which would be positive from a feminist perspective. However, if so, it has to be pointed out that the woman is shed in a positive light and the gay male is at least in the same position and never in a more negative one. Furthermore, coming out and being pregnant are juxtaposed and dealt with in the same manner.

The pregnancy issue, although the other way around, is also a problem in Charlotte’s story. Her stereotypical *WASP* marriage has not worked out for her the way she had hoped for, because at first Trey had sexual problems, then they found out that Charlotte is infertile and when she begins to file for adoption, Trey admits that he does not even want to have a child anymore. Therefore, the reason why their marriage is in the downgrade is their disagreement on the child-issue.

It is worth noting that in opposition to their stereotypical marriage and characterisation, Trey rejects the appropriate life plan. His knows the risk of his egoistic wish and pervades it, even though he is aware of ruining the marriage. Although the marriage is far

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the actress who embodies Miranda Hobbes, Cynthia Nixon, lives in a homosexual relationship. Similar to Alanis Morissette, this might cause a parodic effect for the knowing audience.

from perfect, Charlotte would keep going on with Trey if he gave her the consent for a child. On a meta level, the man hinders Charlotte to fully become a woman, he forces her to stay incomplete. This she cannot take, because Charlotte is inflexible when it comes to her conservative image of being a married woman. Therefore, she emancipates on the surface to free herself from Trey – which, basically, would produce a dissent to male hegemony. Problematically, this assumption proves to be incorrect, because her motivation seems to (exclusively) be the enablement of herself to finding another man who can make her a mother, thus a complete woman.

Finally, Charlotte consents to having pictures of her flat taken, but this decision will symbolically end their marriage. In the following scene, Trey enters the hallway of their flat; Charlotte is standing closer to the camera and arranges flowers. Her husband stands in the shadow, while she is positioned in the light and redecorates the decadent bouquet of the white peonies. This image conveys strong feminine connotations; the colour white (innocent), passivity, beauty. The gender stereotyping manifests even more: Trey is wearing a suit and comes home from work, whereas Charlotte has been at home and has fulfilled house wife tasks. Her stereotypical conservative lifestyle becomes apparent in this scene.

CHARLOTTE. They are coming at ten, so would you please move your stuff out of the guest room?

TREY. Are they photographing the guest room?

CHARLOTTE. I don't know. It does not look very good for us sleeping in different bedrooms.

Trey: No, no, it doesn't.

Although the couple has not spoken to each other in a while with each other and are virtually split up, Charlotte wishes to keep up appearances. Also Trey prefers to keep up his mask and pretend that the negative things which have happened between them do not exist. Yet, when she tells him that he has to be in the pictures with her, his reaction is not very positive. He asks: "Why?", and she answers: "Because they think we're the perfect couple". This untruth triggers their splitting up; Trey dissents to being in the pictures.

Similar to his withdrawal of the promise that they would have a child in marriage, he now strips her of the possibility of presenting as a couple. Again, the use of his patriarchal power can affect Charlotte's life immensely and hinder her from achieving her goals. However, although she does not want to give up this marriage, she consents to his proposal and they file for divorce.

In a subsequent scene, the photo shooting takes place. Gordon and Anthony arrange the setting. Stereotypically, Gordon is wearing a pink shirt and exclaims that he loves the

china Charlotte is using for the scene and Anthony agrees. Images like these strengthen the cliché that homosexual men are into design and fashion and feed the stereotype of the feminine, gay man. Dangerously, such representation of clichés might seduce the audience who accept the reality produced in the scene and apply acquired social information on their own lives. Like a vicious circle, the mutual correspondence confirms and reconfirms values, alters and negotiates little.

As in the next scene: When Charlotte leaves the room with Anthony to talk with him, the latter gropes Gordon's bottom. I have asked myself why the producers would include such an image in the scene. This action encourages clichés against homosexual men, it emphasises for example their alleged promiscuity. A conservative viewer would have all of his prejudices reconfirmed. If it was for humour: Is this scene any humorous, or at least if it were, is it that humorous to include it and accept the negative effects that will be produced? In my opinion, such an action is shown on purpose – because it is a part of the stereotype. The producer's decision proves that *SatC* relies on stereotypes – a fact which, in my opinion, diminishes the political power of the series. The conservative basis of the show becomes apparent once more.

Returning to the scene, Charlotte takes a seat at her breakfast table to have the pictures for the magazine taken. Suddenly, Trey appears and positions himself right next to her. As he asks him why he does this he replies: "This is important to you. I, at least, want to do this". Both look uncomfortable and sad while being photographed, so Gordon kindly requests them to smile. Whereas Charlotte has no problems faking the wanted situation, Trey cannot put on a convincing smile. Carrie's voiceover explains: "Trey had moved out by the time the magazine was on the stands, but all over America, little girls in their mother's pearls saw the picture and thought: That's what I want".

In terms of stereotyping, the audience becomes witness of how stereotypes are actually produced. Charlotte was influenced as a child to become what she is now, although she has never entirely achieved this state - only on the surface. Now, she acts as a new role model for the next generation to be influenced by the same upper class gender stereotyping as her. In fact, this process is mere hyperreality: The original that this discourse group is seeking has never existed nor will it ever exist, instead the only possibility to achieve a thing alike is imitation and fake. Charlotte experiences that she can never entirely become a woman in the essential sense, analogically to de Beauvoir's assumption that it is never possible to actually become a woman, but only to perform it (cf. section 1.1).

As Charlotte's and Miranda's stories have been discussed, I will now turn to analyse Samantha's problem. In "*All That Glitters*", Samantha finds out that she is in love with an

affair of hers, Richard. She, who can always keep her cool and never has feelings for a man, falls for one. During the night in the gay club, Samantha consumes ecstasy, which is said to loosen the tongue and ignite sexual arousal. Therefore, she visits Richard that night and, accidentally during intercourse, tells him that she loves him – he does not reply. The next day she calls Carrie and tells her the story; however, she repeatedly blames the drug to have influenced her to say such a thing. According to her stereotypical role of a femme fatale, she cannot admit that there might be a kernel of truth in her utterance.

When she visits Richard in his office (they have work relations), she has to interrupt the meeting and ask if they could talk about what happened the other night. At first, Richard pretends not to know what she means, but when she utters the phrase, he replies that her situational, emotional commitment had only been caused by the drug and that he knows about this because he has already had such an experience. Samantha only says “Well, oh good, okay then”, and pretends that the topic has been completely discussed. Richard represents the stereotypical successful alpha male who knows what he wants – Samantha usually behaves identically. This time, one of the few moments in the whole series, she shows feelings, because her facial expression tells the viewer that she might mean what she had said. Also Carrie’s voiceover informs the audience about Samantha’s feelings: “Once Richard made it clear that her I love you didn’t matter, Samantha realised that she was secretly wishing it did”. Samantha opens up and shows the viewer that underneath her tough, masculine manner, she is only a woman with feelings.

Theoretically, what happens in this scene is that Samantha loses her power. While she is able to perform a male habitus (cf. section 4.2.2), the message of this episode suggests that she can never overcome her essentialist female character traits. Corresponding to the common cliché that women’s actions are based on emotion whereas male actions are based on the ratio, this scene strengthens the gender roles once more. Samantha, the only post-feminist character, cannot keep up her position of power and subordinates to a man. When L.S. Kim (329) writes in her article “Sex and the Single Girl” that Samantha “is a sexually free, sexually indulgent, smart, successful woman“ and “even if she is bragging, she represents woman’s full and passionate desire, unleashed and unpunished“, then I have to note that for the most part of the programme, this is true. However, I do have to emphasise that scenes like the aforementioned one (and, for example, her need for male appraisal in “*The Real Me*”) forms cracks in this stereotypical femme fatale image. Then, the tough post-modern feminist representative behaves contra-productively and subordinates to patriarchal power relations. In the end, she

reproduces the image of the passive, waiting woman instead of the demanding, passionate woman-in-charge.

Carrie's voiceover explains: "She wanted to tell him that it wasn't just the drug speaking, but she put her real feelings on the shelf". However, on the surface, she tries to sustain her femme fatale appearance, especially when he asks him: "Fuck you at my place around 8 o'clock?". By asking this, the following question arises: If Samantha is able to show such feelings and can switch to her femme fatale performance, could this mean that this is what she does continuously throughout the whole seasons? This assumption would undermine Samantha's political power, it might only be fake then. Hence, by constructing her character, her outward appearance might only be a fragmented performance of a strong post-modern feminist woman. Even more so, following this idea, one could argue that her whole performance is artificial and constructed and that she, in fact, only seems to be a liberated, post-modern feminist individual - which would strongly cut the series' potential of resistance against the existing hegemony and, once more, re-establish patriarchal values – and her stereotype.

However, Samantha tries to keep up her tough female performance. Usually, the girls ritually meet for lunch at a diner, as I have already mentioned, whereas this time, they stay at Samantha's place and watch gay porn Carrie was given by her new acquaintance. As they start the film, Samantha mumbles: "See, that's the way to do it. No I love you. Just good old - fashioned fucking". Vehemently, she tries to re-establish her wanted image and represses what has happened with Richard. If we assume that her open-mindedness which is shown throughout the series is always based on such counter reactions, we could deconstruct her character and analyse that she is only imitating liberalism, because performing as such constitutes a convenient way of saving her face.

Returning back to the scene, the women are still watching gay porn. Samantha, Carrie, Charlotte and Miranda regard this action as "big fun", but I question what is actually behind this. If we take up the hypothesis that the women on *SatC* are only gay men in disguise, such a behaviour indicates once more that these two discourse groups share too many similarities for this argument not to be taken into account. Of course, heterosexual women can watch gay porn and ridicule it, but in the context of *SatC*, there has to be more to it. Alessandra Stanley (2003) explains that

[t]he rakish sexual voracity of Samantha [hints] at the show's sexual inversion. Samantha has all the traits of a promiscuous gay man, thinly disguised as a P.R. woman. [...] And that duality also helps keep the show intriguing. At the very least, it doubles the audience potential.

So, Stanley's observation does not only sustain the idea that the female characters in *SatC* could be gay men in disguise, it also contributes one more aspect: That this duality, the interplay between heterosexuality and homosexuality combined into a piece of cultural text that can be decoded in a way homosexual men and heterosexual women can identify with. Even more so, this argument explains the programme's immense success, because it does not only appeal to one major discourse group, but two. The negotiated female viewer will decode the series as a show for women with female characters, whereas a gay male might interpret it as "written gay male and cast straight female". Therefore, I conclude that the female characters in *SatC* often slightly transgress borders, play with gender roles and confront themselves with queer topics because this discrepancy sustains both audience groups. The programme offers both groups to interpret as they wish and bond with the characters.

This delicate act becomes more prevalent in "*All That Glitters*". In the beginning of this section, it was mentioned that Carrie makes Oliver's acquaintance. In contrast to the usual 90s-cliché, flashy representation of homosexual men in this series, Oliver could "pass as a heterosexual". Unlike Stanford, his character does not feature such stereotypical gay behaviour. Also the way they meet has more of a heterosexual encounter than a homosexual male/heterosexual female. Oliver begins the conversation, orders her a drink and compliments her. When she brushes her hair out of her face during conversation, Oliver notices her ring and asks her about her engagement.

On the one hand, there is Oliver, the attractive, heterosexual-looking young man, who actually is gay, and on the other hand, we have Carrie, who is engaged. Both seem to admire each other, but they are both bound to their discourse groups. The audience gets the impression that the two individuals are attracted to each other in a certain way – one possible way of interpretation would be that if Carrie is only a gay man in disguise, Oliver and her would actually be flirting.

The non-conformity of their gay-man/heterosexual-woman relationship becomes even more apparent in the next scene. Quickly, the audience's suspicion that this relationship differs from the one between Carrie and her GBF (Gay Best Friend) is substantiated. In visual terms, the camera work shows images of New York and then zooms on a table of a chic pavement café at which Carrie and Oliver are having their brunch. In contrast to the dark atmosphere of the club, this scene is very bright, colourful, more innocent in terms of sexual connotation.

Directly when the viewer recognises Oliver, he asks Carrie: "Could you be more fantastic?", on which she replies: "And they say you can't meet men at bars!". Like during

their first encounter, they somehow are fake-flirting with each other, because their complimenting each other has become a running gag. However, this running gag feeds the idea that the story is constructed in a way that homosexual men as well as heterosexual women can access the scene in terms of identification.

Then, Oliver begins to talk about his boyfriend and asks Carrie about her engagement ring. The frequent viewer of the programme will know that the protagonist does not feel sure about Aiden as a husband and secretly still longs for a relationship with Mr Big. She replies: “He is very tall, and incredibly kind, and... handsome”, but her facial expression evokes the impression that she has to utter these words to convince herself into thinking that she believes what she is saying. The fact that it was Aiden, the stereotypical good guy from next door, gave her the ring and not her knight in shining armour, Mr Big, has done so becomes prevalent.

Suddenly, Stanford, wearing a neon-green suit, enters the scene. Here, the juxtaposition of the two gay men enables the audience to compare them. In contrast to the ridiculously stereotypical Stanford in his green suit, Oliver rather resembles a heterosexual man, not only on a visual level, but also in the way he moves, speaks, and behaves. Stanford tells Carrie that she behaves as if she were “sleeping with the beautiful man”, to which she replies: “The beautiful man is gay!”. As they converse, Stanford becomes envious of Oliver, because the latter seems to steal Carrie away from him. However, concluding this scene, I have to emphasise that once again, not only the audience is tricked into believing that the relationship between Carrie and Oliver is more than a usual friendship, but also Stanford mentions it. Hence, I have already shown several indicators that this episode seems to be double-scripted for two discourse groups, which explains the artificial feminine behaviour and the queer touch.

At a later point of “*All That Glitters*”, Carrie and Oliver visit a club together. When they enter, Oliver utters his full name and adds: “Plus date”. Carrie happily turns around and giggles: “I’m your date?”. As the evening proceeds, Oliver is flirting with other men and almost ignores Carrie, who becomes angry and tells him that she will leave because he abandons her. She tells him: “I’m leaving a fantastic man at home” and that she is not even sure why she is here. We can see that Carrie’s character is caught in the imbalance of her gender representation. Is she here because she is a heterosexual woman who tries to escape from her relationship that is not enough of a post-modern fairy tale to satisfy her or is he here because she actually embodies a gay man who is on a date with another gay man? Both

possibilities are plausible and are held open in this scene. They even kiss on the mouth to settle the differences.

Suddenly, Stanford appears and begins arguing with Oliver that Carrie is *his* “faghag”, and for this reason kisses him on the mouth as well. When it is visually made plain to Carrie that Oliver is definitely a homosexual man, she realises that her unconventional semi-relationship with Oliver does not offer her the possibilities she has secretly hoped for – as a woman. As a gay man in disguise, she becomes witness of her crush kissing another man, so both ways of interpretation result in the fact that she leaves. Back home, Carrie finds out that she prefers her heterosexual, conservative relationship with Aiden (representing the private) over the gender-bending, non-normative relationship with Oliver (representing the public). Hence, the values re-established in the end are the private, the hetero-normative, and the conservative ones.

I conclude from “*All That Glitters*” that Marge Simpson’s assumption that the female characters in *SatC* behave like gay men can be substantiated – to a certain degree. I cannot completely agree with Jones-Levington’s hypothesis that gay men seek revenge for the inequalities they have been confronted with for decades in Hollywood TV series and that they therefore “hide gay men” in female characters, moreover humiliate and degrade them as an act of revenge. Nonetheless, this hypothesis offers an interesting point of view in regards of the anti-feminism in the series: The female character’s behaviour might be ostracised by society because it seems non-normative and hyper-promiscuous on the surface, but applied on gay male individuals, it shows that this is usual habitus of this discourse group. I do not claim that this text should be read as “written gay and cast straight female”, but I argue that this perspective might offer an answer for the series’ anti-feminist transportation of values.

This assumption can be sustained by Stanley’s observation. I believe that her argument can be fruitfully connected to Alessandra Stanley’s idea that a blend of homosexual man and heterosexual woman within a character doubles the audience. Therefore, my conclusion for this issue is that the writers and producers intended a tightrope walk between female, straight individual and male, gay individual to reach a broader viewership. This might answer why the series has had such an impact on our society.

Summarising the other stories, we have become witness of anti-feminist stereotyping several times. At first, Miranda is punished for her independency by getting pregnant, although her circumstance has never been her wish. In a certain way, she is denied her liberal, third wave feminist lifestyle and forced to obey patriarchal structures in the end. Furthermore she has to struggle in her job because her pregnancy endangers her high position – she is

always caught between her wish to be successful in her position and her female side, that is her expecting. Miranda's situation stereotypically reflects the post-modern feminist dilemma, but in a way that I would regard as counter-productive, because the audience is not given any constructive solution. Similarly, Charlotte is denied her aspired gender role and hyperreal idea of Western world stereotypical product 'happy marriage' by Trey. She pseudo-liberates herself from the marriage, but not for her own benefit, as, I believe, a certain number of viewers might think, but simply to achieve her actual goal and become an upper class housewife.

However, Charlotte is not the only character who experiences a conservative backlash: Samantha, the post-modern feminist femme fatale has to confront herself with her feelings. Her emotions shine through and thus question her gender and identity performance throughout the whole series. I claim that scenes like these undermine the political potential of a character like Samantha, because they reveal that her act of performance is not authentic, but exaggerated and therefore, unbelievable. From this I conclude that her character cannot be trusted and her political potential becomes obsolete – for which the series has lost her “last, post-modern feminist woman standing”.

## Conclusion

This thesis is titled *Gender Benders in Manolos?*, and it has become apparent why the question mark has been used. From 1998 until 2004, the *SatC* was aired and has shaped the minds, world views and gender roles of a generation of young women. Until today, the series' impact has been massive. In the recently aired HBO-series *Girls*, which started in April 15<sup>th</sup> 2012, a character states the following: "I'm definitely a Carrie at heart, but sometimes Samantha kinda comes out, and when I'm at school I'm trying to put on the Miranda hat" (Season 1, Pilot), it is apparent that the influence of *SatC* still prevalent.

It has to be stressed that the series' discussion of queer, gender and feminist issues has given female characters a voice in prime-time U.S. television which has not existed before. However, beside this innovative approach to queer identity and female sexuality, it has become can be argued that the TV-programme *SatC* sustains male hegemonic power relations under the disguise of feminism and liberalism. Although throughout the series issues concerning homosexuality, women's independence and power as well as female friendships are discussed and appraised, eventually, heteronormativity is re-established and all characters are married or in serious relationships at the end of the last season.

The application of Judith Butler's theory of performativity enabled me to deconstructed the gender identities and dismantle the underlying power relations, as outlined throughout the entire thesis and discussed in detail in the media analysis of "*Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*". I have argued that the images of women are neither innovative nor do they shed positive light on independence, but are a product of a conservative subtext. The concept of *Camp* and *Hyperreality* have proven as useful methods to investigate the constructedness of gender and how these constructions can be used as tools of power. As shown in the episode "*The Real Me*", an illusion of resistance against hegemonic gender norms is presented, which has proven to turn out as a delusion of the audience. In "*All That Glitters*" I have argued that if the female characters in the programme were substituted for gay male characters, the uncommon feminine habit would be resolved. However, I concluded from this episode that the act of implementing gay lifestyle into the series might simply have the effect of doubling the number of audience.

In the course of this thesis, I have shown that the series reproduces and conservative gender roles although it pretends to convey post-feminist, queer-affine meaning on the surface. Due to the high likeability of the characters, the viewer becomes attached and identifies with them, for which they run the risk of reproducing the male hegemonic subtext.

Since Carrie contemplates: “I couldn’t help but wonder: inside every confident, driven single woman, is there a delicate, fragile princess just waiting to be saved?” (Sohn 25; cf. Chapter 3) and the resolution of the episode acknowledges this assumption, I have to sum up that the series seduces its viewers to adopt a certain set of values without being aware of it. This series is a product of post-modernity and consumerism, but moreover, it is a product of post-feminism.

Although male hegemony is negotiated in the series, it is always re-established in the end. Under the disguise of liberalism, the post-feminist viewer can sustain their conservative values and does not have to question themselves about gender identities and gender roles, as they are always resolved as heteronormative and non-transgressing in the end. The audience might rethink and scrutinise the concept ‘gender’, but they will never be put in the position of actually having to rethink their values since a conservative resolution is always given eventually.

Therefore, I conclude that this programme has shaped the post-modern images of women, gender, homosexuality, identity and consumerism until today and has tricked the viewer into accepting and reproducing male hegemonic dominance. *Gender Benders in Manolos?* - only superficially.

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## Abstract

Diese Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Repräsentation weiblicher Genderrollen und deren Effekt auf die Zuseher der HBO-Serie *Sex and the City*. Obwohl die Serie den Eindruck erweckt, eine Liberalisierung des Frauenbildes bewirken zu wollen, werde ich belegen, dass das Gegenteil der Fall ist und patriarchale hegemonische Machtverhältnisse reproduziert werden. Zu Beginn wird ein kurzer Überblick des Begriffes Post-Feminismus und Film Studies im Allgemeinen gegeben. Die folgende Analyse basiert auf Judith Butlers Performativitätstheorie, welche die Grundlage für die Konzepte der Stereotypisierung und Susan Sontags' Camp bildet. Mit Hilfe dieser Methoden werden die drei Episoden „*Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl*“, „*The Real Me*“ und „*All That Glitters*“ analysiert; Ziel hierbei ist es, Gender Performanzen zu dekonstruieren um die konservativen Werte der Serie aufzudecken. Darüber hinaus wird aufgezeigt auf welche Weise der Zuseher mit Identifikationstechniken an die Serie gebunden wird und welche Auswirkungen dies herbeiführt.

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