

ANCIENT ARCHETYPES IN MODERN MEDIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
GOLDEN GIRLS, LIVING SINGLE, AND SEX AND THE CITY

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ANALYSIS OF *GOLDEN GIRLS*, *LIVING SINGLE*, AND *SEX AND THE CITY*

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Recombinant television, a common television practice involving recycled, prepackaged formulas, updated to create programming that is perceived as novel, impacts more than industry processes. While the industry uses recombinants to reduce risk by facilitating aspects of production and audience affiliation, the inadvertent outcomes include a litany of narratives and characters that influence our worldview. As did the myths of earlier oral societies, television serves as one of our modern storytellers, teaching what we value and helping us make sense of our culture. This study focuses on how the prevalence of recombinant television limits portrayals of women and the discourse of feminism in three popular, female cast American sitcoms.

This study comparatively examines the recombinant narratives and characters in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*. While these programs are seemingly about very different modern women, older White women in suburban Florida; twenty-

something African-American women in Brooklyn; and thirty-something, White, professional women in Manhattan, respectively, the four main characters in each show represent feminine archetypes found throughout Western mythology: the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother. First, a content analysis determines if a relationship exists between the characters and archetypes. Then, a comparative textual analysis reveals the deeper meanings the archetypes carry. Finally, a comparative narrative analysis examines the similarities and differences among the series.

The findings reveal that a relationship exists between each modern character and her corresponding ancient archetype, reflecting particular meanings and discourses. The iron maiden archetypes, for example, generally bring forth a feminist discourse, whereas the child archetypes exhibit traditional values. While the sex object archetypes are self-absorbed, consumed with their own beauty and sexual conquests, the mother archetypes seek psychological wellness for themselves and those around them, generally providing much of the emotional work for the group. As reflected in these popular U.S. television series, the similarities among the archetypes and narratives depict limited views of women's lives, while the variance indicates differences among age, race, and class demographics. These recombinant portrayals of ancient archetypes as modern women suggest that our understanding of women's lives remains antiquated, reductionist, and conventional.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I belong to a generation who grew up on television. We never knew a world without it, unlike our parents' generation who remember their families' first black and white set. As a child, I remember *Romper Room* and *Sesame Street*. With *Romper Room*, I waited eagerly for Miss Lois to greet me personally. My favorite part of *Sesame Street* involved the pride I felt when I quickly identified that "one of these things was not like the others." At the end of the show, I'd excitedly shout out the letter and number that had brought us *Sesame Street* that day. Before walking to elementary school, I remember staring glassy eyed at the *Flintstones* while eating my morning cereal. I watched *One Day at a Time* and tried to emulate the good daughter, Barbara, and found it curious how her parents' divorce coincided with that of mine.

In junior high, I certainly wanted my MTV and remember many a summer afternoon hanging out with friends, ordering *Domino's* pizza, and watching actual music videos. I also watched *Who's the Boss* and identified with the tomboy, Samatha Micelli, and in high school my favorite characters included Mallory Keaton and Denise Huxtable. As an undergraduate, my roommate and I were addicted to *Days of Our Lives* and I remember thinking it was interesting that soap operas were targeting younger audiences. The soap opera was no longer just for housewives, but also for college students with free time in the afternoon. I watched *thirtysomething* and *Mad About You* dreaming of the

perfect partner. After college, shows such as *Seinfeld* and *Friends* were popular, portraying the lives of peer groups as the new family unit. Later, Carrie Bradshaw showed us a new meaning of thirty-something - single and fabulous?!¹ Time and again television seemed to change as I did. "I couldn't help but wonder,"² if I had grown up on television or if television had grown up with me, and more importantly what I had learned from those viewing experiences. Despite some critics who say television is a mindless and frivolous wasteland, I believe television programs reflect a particular worldview, say something important about American culture, and need critical exploration. These many years of television viewing primed me to think deeply about the meanings produced by, and reflected in, T.V. series.

Today, I usually watch television programs that tell stories about women's lives. As a fan of many shows targeted to, and cast with women, I notice similar characters reappearing. The most pronounced group of characters I see recurring on television involves a quartet of women. Within this grouping, there is 'the smart one,' 'the sexy one,' 'the naïve one,' and 'the motherly one.' In this dissertation, I argue that the similarities among characters are no accident and are important to understanding our culture, not only because of their prevalent re-productions, but also because the variations among these representations point to significant cultural differences in society.

¹ "Single and Fabulous?" is the headline from *New York* magazine in season 2, episode 4 of *Sex and the City*. An unflattering photo of the character Carrie Bradshaw appears on the cover. She had been led to believe the headline was to read "Single and Fabulous!" – exclamation point not question mark.

² "This phrase comes from *Sex and the City*. The lead character, Carrie Bradshaw, uses this phrase before she asks the main question of her newspaper column. These ponderings are the driving focus of the episode.

The programs examined in this dissertation are *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*; and each includes a quartet of women characters. While these shows are seemingly about very different modern women (older White women in suburban Florida, twenty-something African-American women in Brooklyn, and thirty-something, White, professional women in Manhattan, respectively), the four main characters in each show seem to represent four ancient feminine archetypes found throughout Western mythology: the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother. This dissertation closely examines the three series, using content analysis to establish if a relationship exists between characters and archetypes as well as comparative textual analysis to discover the deeper meanings archetypes carry and to explore the stories being told about women on television. I believe these characters represent ancient, Western archetypal patterns of the feminine, and the narratives consistently illuminate prevailing U.S. views of women's lives and interests, particularly notions of femininity, feminism, family, and friendships. I examine the differences among the archetypes and series, to reveal popularly accepted cultural perspectives on age, race, and class. The following section discusses how I came to discover these ancient archetypes as well as their prevalence in modern mass media. This is followed by a rationale for this study.

Archetypes and Their Prevalence

*I'm a bitch, I'm a lover, I'm a child, I'm a mother,
I'm a sinner, I'm a saint, I do not feel ashamed.
Meredith Brooks – Bitch 1996*

The song *Bitch* was popular around the same time I was introduced to Julia T. Wood's *Gendered Lives* in a gendered communication course at Saint Louis University.

In this text, Wood (1997) describes four stereotypes of women in the workplace: the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother. The iron maiden is defined as unfeminine, independent, ambitious, competitive, and masculine or similar to men. The iron maiden in the work force is generally the woman who rises through the ranks in male dominated professions. She is often portrayed as the lyrics above state – a bitch. The sex object characterizes women solely by their sexuality; and appearance counts more than intellect. Women as sex objects are hyper-sexualized and expected to conform to heterosexist norms of beauty. Flight attendants and hostesses are jobs that have the sex object built into the job requirements. The child represents women as less competent decision makers than men in the workplace. The child's work is trivialized and undervalued leading to decisions being made for them by men or patriarchal institutional policies. Finally, the mother provides comfort and support to co-workers. In addition, and despite her professional title, the mother's duties might involve fixing coffee, acting as secretary, and planning social events. Administrative assistants incorporate these maternal expectations. Three-fourths of women in the workforce inhabit this type of job (Wood, 1997).

After reading about these workplace stereotypes, I began to see them everywhere, particularly in media representations of women. Encountering the ubiquitous nature of these similarly patterned portrayals of women made me curious about their origins. I found the archetypal representations of the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother can be traced at least as far back as Greek and Roman personifications. Finally, I discovered these patterned portrayals illustrate ancient and familiar archetypes.

Psychologist Carl Jung (1959) described archetypes as primordial types existing in the collective unconscious and expressed through myth and fairytale. Debra Merskin (2008) suggested, “Myths are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.” As our modern mythmaker, television, its programming, and in particular, *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*, function as storytelling vehicles mythologizing about our contemporary world through their narratives.

Jung identified how the concept of archetype operates through myth, believing that stories, about our origins, lives, loves, and loss, are expressed through archetypes (Walker, 2002). Other scholars described archetypes as inferences “from a vast range of symbols and images which appear to have some common property, or shared characteristics, which allow them to be traced back to simpler yet stronger signs” (O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery, & Fiske, 1994). These archetypal representations remain ubiquitous, reoccurring in modern media and often found collectively in ensemble casts. Archetypal characters are re-presented in ways that seem normal and natural to audiences. With the rise of modern media, female archetypes are found not only in musical lyrics, as the Brooks’ (1996) lyrics above, but also in films, such as *Mona Lisa Smiles* and *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*,³ and in literature, such as the American classic *Little Women*. The archetypal patterns also appear on

³ The *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* is a popular fiction title as well as a film. The author, Ann Brashares, announced the last book of the series in January 2007. The film, *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2*, debuted in theatres August 2008.

television programs, in genres such as dramas, dramedies,⁴ and parodies such as *Sisters, Related*, and *Desperate Housewives* respectively. Since television sitcoms, more than other forms of media, cast women as lead characters (Dow, 1996), these archetypal depictions can often be found on the small screen. The archetypes also inhabit “reality” series such as *How to Get the Guy*, which, because of its “reality” status reinforces the naturalization of these representations.

Wood (1997) spoke of these representations only in regard to stereotypical roles of women in the workforce. However, these patterns are prevalent in modern media representations and additionally are historically reminiscent of mythological goddess. Familiar to Western audiences, the iron maiden is the symbolic equivalent of Artemis, the goal-oriented, confident, and independent goddess, the embodiment of feminist ideals. She does not need, or particularly want, a man in her life (Bolen, 1984; Downing, 1981).

The sex object can be traced back to the goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite. For Aphrodite women, power comes from their sexuality. Success is measured by beauty and sexual conquests. Superficial appearances define this lustful archetype. Women depicted as sex objects embody Aphrodite’s desire for sensual pleasures. Sex object archetypes are captivated by their own beauty and powerful sexuality (Bolen, 1984; Downing, 1981).

The child embodies the characteristics of Persephone. This goddess is the passive, compliant child who allows others to act for and upon her. She represents the girl who is waiting to be transformed and rescued by others. Persephone has a limited

⁴ These are comedic dramas. The term was first used to describes programs such as *Ally McBeal*.

understanding of her strengths and desires, unlike the iron maiden and sex object goddesses. She is sweet, naïve, and innocent (Bolen, 1984; Downing, 1981).

Finally, the Mother represents Demeter, the maternal goddess. Women represented as Demeter provide material, psychological, and spiritual nourishment for those around them. While it is not necessary to be a biological mother, the roles of caregiver, supportive listener, and sympathetic advisor are the most significant for women who embody this maternal goddess (Bolen, 1984; Downing, 1981).

I argue that similar archetypal patterns are found in *Golden Girls* (1985-1992), *Living Single* (1993-1998), and *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), reflecting the ancient archetypes of the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother through these modern television characters. In addition, I analyze how the characters function within and among the series, and explore the narratives for modern discourses about women's lives. As mentioned above, archetypal representations exist in every culture. However, their articulations must be culturally specific to make the characters interesting and relevant to modern audiences. It is important not only to identify these patterned portrayals, but also to contextualize them by asking what they teach us and how they shape our understanding of the world. Furthermore, in the following chapters, I examine how television, particularly female targeted and cast sitcoms, portray women and explore how feminine ideals and feminist understandings are presented to American culture.

Rationale

While some scholars might question the importance of studying television characters, I believe it is difficult, and possibly dangerous, to discount the significance of

this work given our media-saturated society and the role media play in perpetuating ideological narratives. While one might argue that the representations of iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother merely provide balance for dramatic and comedic effect, the consistent, persistent, and corroborated portrayals over time and across media, have long-term, accumulating effects that can both define and constrain ideas about women (DeFleur & Dennis, 1994). These limited representations contribute to society's (mis)understanding of women's roles and value, and thus hinder further advancements toward equality (Faludi, 1991). Feminist scholars readily acknowledge the effects these narrowed representations/understandings have on women and girls' body image (Wolf, 1991, Bordo, 1993; Kilbourne, 1999), sexual relations (Steinem, 1983), and inequitable division of labor in the public and private spheres (Mainardi, 1970; Waring, 1997). Sociologist, Michael Messner (2002) described how the media's often hyper-sexualized and/or infantilized portrayals of women athletes trivialize their participation and achievement in sports. In addition, Goudsmit (1994) argued that stereotypical representations of, and biases toward, women contribute to the misdiagnosis of women's stated problems as being "all in her head" (p. 7). Benedict (1992) and Caputi's (1987) indictment of how the press covers sex crimes demonstrates how narrow representations of women affect victims of sexual assault by blaming the victim. Intersect these effects with race (hook, 1986; Roberts, 1997) and class (Bettie, 2003), and the disparities increase.

On a panel at the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language and Gender (OSCLG) conference in 2006, three speakers demonstrated how adherence to

archetypal representations of women limits success in the workplace (Mancl, 2006), ability to talk frankly about reproductive healthcare (Shenoy, 2006), and agency in human rights issues (Albazaz, 2006). At first glance, these three presentations might seem denotatively disconnected, but connotatively they reflect how real women's experiences are influenced by archetypal understandings of women. Shenoy (2006) even acknowledged the connection to ancient Hindu mythological goddesses. I argue the prevalence and persistence of these archetypes in the media, across time and distance, contribute to the internalization of narrowed understandings of women and their abilities.

Feminist scholars continue to critique and challenge the inequitable experiences and representations of women. Part of this work involves dismantling hegemonic beliefs about gender to reveal the social constructions at work that disempower women. Since many of these archetypal characters still thrive in modern media, the work of analyzing mediated representations is important, not only to understand the effects, but also to change the social discourses about women. This dissertation confronts this challenge, by exposing archetypal patterns in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*, revealing the variance among them that point to differences in cultural experiences among the character demographics, and analyzing the discourse surrounding femininity and feminism. These programs were chosen because they provide diversity among age, race, and class. Specifically, I conduct a content analysis to demonstrate the relationship between archetypes and characters in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*. In addition, comparative textual analysis of the characters and narratives is conducted to explore deeper meaning among the archetypes and series. Through this critical

examination, the current study contributes to the literature in television studies and feminist scholarship.

In the following chapters, I closely examine archetypal patterns present in television representations and how these images function in ideological ways. In Chapter II, I describe recombinant television; expand the discussion of archetypes and stereotype, including their function in the media; discuss literature on women's talk as it relates to the dialogue of the women in each series; review cultural studies scholarship that has influenced television studies; and finally provide a historical understanding of the feminist movement, its representations in the media, as well as popular culture portrayals of women and feminism. In Chapter III, I describe the research methods employed in this dissertation, including both content analysis and comparative textual analysis. In Chapter IV and V, I discuss and analyze the findings. Chapter IV focuses on the archetypal characters, whereas, Chapter V concentrates on narrative themes. Chapter VI summarizes the findings and emphasizes the broader implications. Suggestions for future research are also included in this final chapter.

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter brings together many ideas to situate this study. The following section explores the proliferation of television's use of patterned formulas and characters. It describes the culture industry's use of stereotypes and archetypes. The distinctions between archetype and stereotype are illuminated. I include a brief section on women's talk and its particular function within television series. The influences of television studies and the ideological import of television in the public sphere serve as both the theoretical basis of and justifications for this study. Feminist theory also provides a theoretical and historical framework to situate the dissertation within the third wave of the women's movement. In addition, a discussion of gendered representations in the media presents the ways in which women and feminism have been depicted. The chapter concludes with four research questions and a brief rationale for each.

Recombinant Television, Stereotypes, and Archetypes

Recombinant Television

In his book, *Inside Prime Time*, Todd Gitlin discussed what he calls "The Triumph of the Synthetic" in television production (1983, p. 63). Gitlin (1983) claimed that network executives have an extreme aversion to risk and therefore take the safest route in program development. He stated, "The safest, easiest formula is that nothing succeeds like success" (p. 63). Common practice must then involve recycling

prepackaged formulas to avoid or reduce financial risk and fill airtime. Included in these synthetic re-productions are spin-offs, copies, and recombinants. Spin-offs capitalize on the appeal of a successfully established television series by developing a new series around a popular character from the former, “spinning” this character off and expanding independent storylines. Spin-offs are character driven, and television producers and advertisers believe they assume less risk by developing a series around an already recognizable character. Whether spin-offs actually are more lucrative than newly developed programming has not been proven systematically, but those in the business who believe “the single most important factor in series success is the appeal of its major characters” (Gitlin, 1983, p. 67) bank on the triumph of the spin-off.

While the spin-off employs the use of a successful character, copies reproduce a particular formula. Television professions regard almost all programming as imitations of something else. Gitlin (1983) concluded, “The entire history of art is rife with imitation” (p. 70), and television and “the present-day culture industry has erected an apparatus for the mass production of self-imitating artifacts” (p. 71). Gitlin asserted that writing for television is more of a craft than an art. Similarly, Gendron (1986) described Adorno’s criticism of jazz and other popular music as interchangeable parts that are easily re-useable, replaceable, and reproducible, void of any real artistic depth. In the mass-produced culture industries, including books, popular music, and movies, “imitation runs rampant, but in television the process was raised to self-parody by the economics of competition” (Gitlin, 1983, p.71). Networks would copy nearly any series that achieved success. While there is some cache in being first, once this imitation becomes parody of

itself, the genre or formula would lose its appeal. Gitlin suggested that the “jiggle” genre with Charlie’s Angels as the genre’s originator is a prime example of the downside to rampant imitations (p. 63). Another difficulty of the copy involves determining what the appeal of the formula is and reproducing it in the right balance. While television producers continue to copy other successful series, Gitlin asserted,

More clones end up in speedy demise than network executives like to think. Television audiences spot a copy when it is hurled right between their eyes. Clones beg for comparison and usually suffer by it. But they are easy to conceive, they do not stretch the imagination, and they keep the assembly line moving. (p. 75)

In only slight contrast to the clone or copy, Gitlin (1983) described the recombinant as a recombination of elements to create something “new.” This recombination includes characters and/or genre splicing. One example of genre splicing could include the dramedy, which is a combination of a comedy and a drama as mentioned above. One benefit of recombinant programming is that while the series may very well be a copy, the recombination of characters or formula often passes as novel. In addition, recombinants serve as a sort of industry “shorthand” that facilitates pitching, production, casting, and audience following. Gitlin confirmed,

Recombinant talk is splendidly practical, too, providing signposts for rapid recognition, speeding up meetings, streamlining discussion about cultural goods that might otherwise seem elusive, unwieldy, hard to peg. Meetings have to be brisk, for the mass-cultural assembly line has to keep moving. (p. 77)

The need to cut costs and reduce risks drives the use of recombinants.

Beyond practicality, Gitlin (1983) and Sontag (1981) asserted that recombinant thinking deeply pervades Western culture and thought. Gitlin explained that capitalism needs novelty, or at least the perception of novel for the continuous consumption of consumer products. He warned,

The inseparable economic and cultural pressure for novelty must co-exist with a pressure toward constancy ... manufacturers want to deploy their repertory of the tried-and-true in such a way as to generate novelty without risk. The fusion of these pressures is what produces the recombinant style, which collects the old in new packages and hopes for a magical synthesis. (pp. 77-78)

Recombinant thinking does not have to be negative. Sontag (1981) noted that this type of thinking allows one to categorize and compare one experience with, and as a variation of, another. Koestler (1975) argued that this type of thinking, applying one idea in an alternative context, produces much of the creative scholarship in academia. He stated, "The creative act ... does not create something out of nothing: it uncovers, reshuffles, combines, synthesizes already existing facts, ideas, faculties and skills" (p. 120). Gitlin, however, reiterated "that recombination as such brings forth a hundred or a thousand banalities for each new synthesis, and in the process degenerates into mechanical juxtaposition to suit the rhythm of consumption and fashion in a consumer society" (p. 78). Gitlin made it seem as if successful recombinants are rare. Given the culture in which American television is created, it seems we should expect this kind of recombinant fusion, and often.

Stereotypes

The term “stereotyping,” appropriated from the language of printing by Lippmann (1922/1965), describes a way of classifying groups of people by very simplified and generalized characteristics or traits. Cultural studies research has examined the ways stereotypes are used in mass media representations of gender, race, and class to connect and reflect ideas of ideology and hegemony (Hall, 2003; Kellner, 1995; O’Sullivan et al., 1994). Television often uses stereotyping within programming. Butsch (2003) discussed the use of the White working-class buffoon stereotype viewers have seen in Ralph Cramden of the *Honeymooners*, Archie Bunker of *All in the Family*, Homer Simpson, and most recently Doug Heffernan of *King of Queens*. A beautiful and sophisticated female partner generally accompanies this working-class buffoon character. This seems like a very successful recombinant form to follow.

Butsch (2003), as well as Gitlin (1983), asserted that this stereotype is used because novel program development is costly and networks are extremely resistant to risk. That being said, *All in the Family*, created by Norman Lear, was lauded for its progressive treatment of feminism and racism. *All in the Family* might have been that one in a hundred recombinant that was actually innovative, although it is unclear if the Archie Bunker character served as the buffoon racist or working-class hero. In addition, the character of Edith, Archie’s wife, does not fit more current versions of this working class buffoon and his beautiful, domineering wife. One might think about how this change produces different meanings among the characters and within the *All in the Family* series.

Producers revamp tried and true hits essentially by re-employing the similar characters and genres updated to prevailing social and cultural values of the time. Scholars (Butsch, 2003; Gitlin, 1983) suggested this is done because of the time pressure not only to pitch shows to executives, create scripts, and cast actors, but also to connect with viewers to attract and maintain large coveted audiences to sell to advertisers. Not only is the use of stereotypes in recombinant programming financially safe, but also it often reinforces the dominant ideology of a White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal society.¹ The prevailing understandings in the White, working class recombinant sitcom depict working class men as incompetent and in need of supervision, thus legitimizing his lower class status (Butsch, 2003). With regard to personal, heterosexual relationships, the working class male buffoon is portrayed as the likeable, but inept partner and/or father figure, incapable of cleaning up after himself or looking after children, thus reinforcing gender and class expectations. This male buffoon representation does not empower women. Rather, series that employ this stereotype punish the female character counterpart for her poor partner choice. She is frequently constructed as the neurotic, nagging, domestic shrew who bullies and manipulates her husband like a domineering tyrant. This fits well with the hegemonic forces at work to maintain the status quo power structures and women's position as the natural guardian of the private sphere.

When networks do break with traditional and/or stereotypical programming, their reasoning generally stems from economic needs rather than social concerns (Zook, 1999). In her discussion of the FOX Network, Kristal Zook (1999) suggested that the only

¹ bell hooks uses this expression "White supremacist capitalist patriarchal society" to acknowledge the intersections of race, class, and gender.

reason novel programming targeted toward African Americans became visible in the early 1990s was because the struggling network decided to attract the underserved urban markets instead of fighting for a share of the big three ABC, CBS, NBC. FOX's "narrowcasting" developed programming that targeted Black viewers and attracted advertisers wanting to reach Black consumers. Increased Black authorship and representations on television were short-lived. As FOX became more successful, executives shifted toward wider (Whiter) audiences to bring in bigger advertising dollars (Zook, 1999). With cable television increasing its market share by incorporating this narrowcasting or fragmented audience philosophy, broadcast networks continued to target large audiences, and thus FOX succumbed to this pressure to gain more market share.

Programs such as *In Living Color*, *Martin*, and *Living Single* were not only Black cast shows, but also produced by African Americans (Zook, 1999). The FOX network gave many of these producers the autonomy to create their own visions as well as the power to hire writers and directors. Still, recycled successful formulas appeared to quickly attract audiences to familiar characters. FOX's novel narrowcasting was not immune to these recombinant techniques. It would seem that even with that autonomy, producers needed to be able to use the industry shorthand to successfully get a series to air. In many ways, *Martin*, could be seen as the recombinant of the working-class buffoon with racial changes and cultural updates. Bolen (1989) might assert that these working-class characters are actually archetypal representations that could be traced back

to Greek mythology of the cast off son who is not appreciated in a masculine hierarchal society because he does not value or desire the material success of the patriarchy.

Archetypes

Jung (1959) introduced the idea of archetypes in the field of psychology. He described archetypes as primordial forms that exist in the collective unconscious and are expressed through myth and fairytale. He stressed that archetypes are frameworks or structures, not specific content. Archetypes are latent, pre-existing patterns of behavior. In the world of television, these archetypes manifest as the broad blueprint of the recombinant characters that have become commonplace in the media. These character types are not stereotypes in the way that stereotypes are often negative, specific, and historical, but instead are fluid and shifting. While Jung asserted that archetypes are “empty and purely formal” (p. 79), they are imbued with meanings that are often taken-for-granted and rarely interrogated.

Bolen (1989) asserted that archetypes “evoke feelings and images, and touch on themes that are universal and part of our human inheritance” (p. 6). Bolen also suggested that these shared understandings of our human experiences are conveyed through archetypal stories. If we think about television as a modern day storyteller, then it makes sense that producers of television and other media would use evocative archetypes to capture audiences. In addition, the lack of interrogation allows the patterns to persist and become naturalized within the cultural norms, thus ringing true to our understanding of human nature (Bolen, 1989; Hall, 2003).

According to Jung, archetypes exist outside of the material world and in the collective unconsciousness. Archetypes are not individualized understandings, but primordial forms and basic structures that are collectively held within every culture. Each culture's ideological social, economic, and political systems can be projected on to an archetype. These archetypes placed within a hegemonic system can then become stereotypes.

Stereotypes are overly simplistic, one-dimensional, and generally negative types that are used to define an entire group. While stereotypes can change over time, they generally become concretized within specific cultural contexts. Ramirez Berg (2002) asserted that stereotypes are the sum of "category making" (or archetypes) plus ethnocentrism and prejudice used by in-groups to characterize, and thus marginalize, out-groups (p. 15). Stereotypes relate to power relations among particular groups. If marginalized groups are examined throughout the history of the United States, there are similar archetypes used to categorize different groups, thus creating negative stereotypes that are used to justify historic and institutionalized oppression. For example, the stereotypes of the Asian American Fu Man Chu, the African American buck, the Latin American bandito, and the Native American bloodthirsty savage are all derived from a masculine archetype. While the archetype is the general pattern or form here, the stereotypical representations are negative and one-dimensional portraying these figures as hyper-violent, hyper-sexualized, and uncivilized. These negative representations were, and still are in some cases, used to create fear among White Americans to justify exclusion, exploitation, enslavement, seizure of property, and extermination. Feminine

stereotypes such as the African American jezebel, the Native American princess, the Latin American Harlot, and the Asian American dragon lady are derived from the sex object archetype. While Aphrodite, the Greek mythological embodiment of the sex object archetype, has both good and bad qualities, the racialized stereotypes focus on the negative and are used to oppress these marginalized groups (Bogle, 2004; Feng, 2002; Feng Sun, 2003; Kilpatrick, 1999; Ramirez Berg, 2002; Takaki, 1993). While the media often employ stereotypes, particularly of its villains, they also tap into these archetypal patterns that are easily recognizable and reflect them back to audiences in much of their programming.

While Jung discussed archetypes in terms of a collective *unconscious*, and Bolen reflected upon how real women embody goddess characteristics in their lives, this dissertation understands archetypes as part of a collective media conscious, and the archetypal television portrayals as an ideological reflection of modern women's experiences. The term archetype represents the broad patterns of typical characters that have become commonplace in the media. These character types are not stereotypes in the way that stereotypes are often negative, specific, and historical, but instead are fluid and malleable. These archetypes, while not as one-dimensional as stereotypes, still carry cultural ideology in their representational forms.

The ideology embedded in these archetypes embraces narrowed understandings of women that can limit their perceived value in society, seemingly diminishing the need for equity. I argue the most prevalent archetypes of female characters on television include the sex object, the iron maiden, the child, and the mother as mentioned above. Some of

limiting notions about women present in these archetypes include: for the child, women as weak, dependent, and passive similar to the idea of women as chattel or property; for the sex object, a woman's power is derived solely from her sexuality; for the iron maiden, her masculine manner at best allows her success within patriarchal structures or ridicules her as unfeminine; for the mother archetype her identity is wrapped up in the care for others at the expense of self. These continuous and repeated representations can contribute to society's understanding of women. The media portrayals are examples of the perpetuation of these archetypes only redesigned for the present. This dissertation goes beyond a discussion of women's representations in the media. Instead, I argue that television characters and programming about and targeted to women represent gendered expectations of females and can limit the discourse in their lives and contribute to, along with other influences, a climate that undervalues women's experiences, thus disempowering them. These types of media representations say something about women's place in our culture.

While I argue these archetypes, or aspects of them, are prevalent throughout popular culture, Kaler (1990) asserted that *Golden Girls* was the first to portray the "pattern of the complete woman – the four dominant stages of a woman's life—as virgin, spouse, mother, and wise woman" (p. 49). These stages reflect the child, the sex object, the mother, and the iron maiden respectively. Kaler used Jung's "quaternity" to describe the four character representations that make up the psychological pattern of "completeness" (p. 49). Kaler also described earlier television shows such as *Gunsmoke* that used a "triad-plus one formula," with three men and one woman. Similarly, the cast

of *Seinfeld* was not complete without Elaine Benes (Julia Louis-Dreyfuss). While we think of *Seinfeld* as truly innovative television (and it was in some respects), there were still recombinant aspects at work. Kaler explained a complex use of the Jungian quaternity in *MASH*. Kaler (1990) described Margaret “Hot Lips” Houlihan as maintaining “all four phases of women simultaneously: daughter to Colonel Potter, temptress to Hawkeye and Burns, mother to Radar and her patients, and wise woman to her nurses and BJ” (p. 50). The multiple archetypes activated in Houlihan’s character reflect Bolen’s (1983, 1989) discussion that many archetypal traits exist in individual men and women. These archetypal qualities are activated (or can be activated) at different times in individuals’ lives (Bolen, 1983, 1989). Kaler (1990) attributed *MASH*’s 13-year success (plus syndication) to the employment of this Jungian quaternity, asserting that its success resulted from its representation of a “psychological pattern of completeness” (p. 49) that viewers are comfortable with because it does not seem to disrupt the natural order of things. Kaler (1990) asserted that we are comfortable and familiar with these portrayals not only because of their prevalence, but also because they represent “the right mix of archetypal patterns” (p. 49) that viewers recognize subconsciously. According to Kaler, Jung’s quaternity represents patterns of the complete personality. While Jung would argue these archetypes are inherently a part of our personalities, I assert that the prevalence of these archetypes over time, and across various media, socially construct these patterns as natural. This dissertation does not seek to reconcile whether archetypes are inherent in our psyches or cultural

manifestations; rather, it searches for the meanings embedded in the media representations of the archetypes.

The idea that these ancient archetypes remain relevant in modern media representations of women is what is significant. A thorough investigation of these characters, the narratives surrounding them, and their discourse is necessary to understanding the attitudes toward and about women as well as the climate of femininity and feminism in our society today.

The following section includes a brief discussion of women's talk to provide context for understanding how the prevalence of women's communication in the series functions as a way of community building as well as consciousness-raising.

Women's Talk

When archetypal characters appear in the ensemble casts it is interesting to examine how their communication works within the television series because this talk can be seen as reflective of mainstream discourse of femininity and feminism. While Bonnie Dow (1996) asserted that the dialogue in *Designing Women* reflects a form of consciousness-raising, it might be beneficial to first examine what scholars have said about the way women communicate.

Most scholars agree that language is a social and symbolic process that reflects and sustains cultural norms (Barthes, 1972; Kramarae, 1981; Lakoff, 1975; Wood, 1997). Wood asserted that "masculine and feminine styles of communicating [embody] two distinct speech communities" (p. 166). She suggested that men and women are socialized into these particular gendered communities. Wood (1997) maintained that gendered play

of children cultivates distinct communication communities. Boys' games encourage them to use communication to assert themselves, compete, and attract and maintain attention, whereas girls' play involves cultivating collaborative and cooperative interaction. Communication is the objective of girls' play, not external rules or goals. For girls it is important to maintain relationships through communication, thus paying attention is important. Thorne (1993) described these phenomena in her ethnographic study of children's play in elementary schools. Both Thorne (1993) and Wood (1997) acknowledged these are normative patterns and that there are often negotiations of these generalizations. Thorne (1993) asserted that these negotiations are easier for girls than for boys, which is consistent with Wood's suggestion that boys' main directive is "don't be female" (p. 131). Masculine talk stereotypically involves exerting dominance, independence, and even status in a direct and forceful manner (Kramarae, 1981; Wood, 1997).

The goals of feminine speech include maintaining relationships through talk that is generally inclusive, supportive, passive, and private (Kramarae, 1981; Wood, 1997). Kramarae (1981) asserted that women's talk is generally silenced in the public sphere. This lack of public voice can be seen in government, as there are only a few women in political positions, and in media, as television nightly news anchors are mostly men and women are still too often portrayed as the sexualized object or sidekick. Television programming such as *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* are useful sites for the exploring gendered representations because these series center around the lives of women.

Other scholars (Houston, 1985; Scott, 1995; Allen, 2002) challenge assumptions about feminine communication styles as reflecting White, middle-class patterns. Houston (1985) argued that Black men and Black women's communication styles are at a level of parity. While Scott (1995) asserted the function of communication for Black women is to build and maintain a sense of community, she found that Black women's talk was direct, assertive, and honest in a blunt kind of way. Scott (1995) asserted that code switching for Black women, back and forth from Standard English to a "Black woman's voice," allowed Black women to move across cultural borders. The terms "girl" and "look" mark a switch that not only asserts identity as a Black woman and membership in that group but also "marks a particular ideological position through an articulation of consciousness about that position." Scott called this "a Black women's voice" (p. 136).

The function of talk on *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* is an important cultural artifact to study not only because the shows based around the dynamics of talk among its characters, but also because this talk contains ideological assumptions about femininity, feminism, identity, and race. This talk deepens the political import of the dialogue. The discourse occurring in the public sphere through television programming validates the need for scholarship in television studies. The following section explores the many influences of television studies and describes how these areas contribute to the present study.

Television Studies

The legitimacy of television studies has been debated since the invention of the medium. Much of the early research centered on the view of television as a social

problem (Newcomb, 1994). For many years, scholars ignored television for its low culture aesthetic and early studies focused on negative effects such as violence against children. Television studies arose as an academic endeavor out of four major fields: 1) literary studies, 2) film studies, 3) the Frankfurt School, and 4) cultural studies (Newcomb, 1994), briefly described below.

Literary studies focuses on the meanings derived from texts. It influences narrative theory in that it examines the rhetorical structures of the story. At the end of the 1960s, literary studies began to turn its focus from canonical literature to popular entertainment. Concurrently many conventional structures, such as patriarchy and racism, were questioned and challenged (Newcomb, 1994), thus creating avenues for feminist examinations of popular culture. Another area Newcomb described as a contributor to the rise of television studies includes film studies. Newcomb suggested that because of film's status as a fine art, critics and scholars considered the medium worthy of study from its early days. Once scholars began to examine popular films, and this was not without opposition, the transition to television was inevitable for exploring popular entertainment as a cultural influence.

The Frankfurt School consisted of critical thinkers such as Horkheimer and Adorno, who believed that mass-produced cultural products serve to control and dominate the masses. They coined the term "culture industries" to describe the institutions that produced the standardized goods of the mass media (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972/1944). For Adorno, the term "popular culture" masked the power and influence the culture industries and their commodities had over consumers (Witkin,

2003). To many, popular culture connotes entertainment and triviality. Witkin (2003) asserted that the term popular culture also suggests that it arises from the people as opposed to being produced in large corporations. In Adorno's view, popular culture is not an expression of individuals or communities, but serves to manipulate consumers in the interest of the producers and the marketplace. While Adorno disliked much of popular culture, paradoxically, he and the term culture industry, gave these popular artifacts the weight needed to describe their influence on society, thus demonstrating the need for intellectual scrutiny (Witkin, 2003).

Adorno and Horkheimer (1972/1944) argued that we receive much of our knowledge and understanding about the world through the culture industry's filter. The "reality" we are shown presents a particular view that maintains status quo power relations. Those in control of the technical means of production create a reality that normalizes the domination of the mass audience while claiming that the standardized productions are based on consumers' needs. Critics of the Frankfurt School challenge that Adorno and Horkheimer overestimated the conspiratorial intent of the producers while underestimating the audience as passive, uncritical consumers. In spite of these challenges, the Frankfurt School remains relevant and influences many scholars, particularly those interested in critical and cultural studies.

The work of British cultural studies includes scholars such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. Williams (1965) defined culture as a whole "way of life" that expresses meanings and values through the artifacts and institutions in everyday interaction. Television and its programming make up a big part of our modern way of life. Williams

also asserted that patterns and relationships among and within these artifacts were useful in cultural analysis. The reoccurring archetypes found in television representations of women, for example, reveal central ideas about gender in American culture, while the inconsistencies of these archetypes point to specific cultural disparities or possible ruptures in the conventional understanding of gender.

The interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation incorporates something from each of these. Literary studies provides an avenue to focus on narratives, whereas film studies draws on examining popular visual media. The Frankfurt School influences the critical nature of this piece as does cultural studies. In addition, cultural studies allows for the study of the values and meanings embedded in popular texts that have become a part of our everyday lives through television.

Hegemonic and Ideological Functions of Television

Newcomb (1994) asserted that Marxism and structural anthropology also influence cultural studies. Marxism scrutinizes the economic structures that form the material “base” of society. Structural anthropologists examine the “mental structures” that are common across cultural and geographical boundaries (p. 5). While Gramsci (1929-1935) criticized Marxism for its narrowed focus on the material base, he asserted that the ideology embedded within the ‘superstructure’ was also powerful. Ideology involves the taken for granted knowledge, notions and characteristics particular social groups deem normal in their culture. This knowledge often serves the interests of ruling classes (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972/1944). Gramsci’s notion of hegemony referred to the idea that dominant social classes exert social and cultural control over underclasses to

maintain the power of economic resources and political structures in society. Similar to Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), hegemony embodies the notion that social institutions such as the media function to maintain hierarchical power structures by reproducing a common sense understanding of the world so that those in subordinate classes are complicit in their own submission while sustaining the interest of the dominant classes. These dominant forces are powerful because they are made to seem normal and natural—reified over time, often through media, in their reproductions and repetition. Unlike Althusser's ISAs, Gramsci asserted hegemony is not fixed — it is open to challenge, debate and revision. It is not a closed system. There are fractures in which competing or oppositional positions can challenge dominant ideologies. This resistance exposes the unnaturalness of these normalized assumptions. Here again, media play a role not only in the reinforcement of dominant ideology, but also its disruption and resistance.

Michel Foucault (1980) conceptualized dominant ideology and power slightly differently. He emphasized the role of discourse in the maintenance of hegemony. Foucault used the term power/knowledge to describe the relationship between these ideas and saw ideology as embedded in discourse. Foucault argued that knowledge is not only a form of power, but also that power is mired in the production of knowledge in particular historical moments (Foucault, 1980). Foucault asserted that power operates at all sites of social interaction, not simply in a downward linear fashion. He stated that humans, as social beings, are complicit in power relationships as both oppressors and oppressed. In addition, Foucault contended that knowledge is produced through

discourse about particular topics. The study of discourse about feminism, for example, would include 1) statements made about feminism, 2) rules about particular ways of talking about women or feminism, 3) subjects who, with expected characteristics, personify the discourse, 4) knowledge about how feminism obtains authority, 5) institutional practices, and 6) acknowledgement that new conceptions of feminism will arise and influence and/or change prevailing ones (cited in Hall, 2003). Foucault (1980) argued that discourse both constructs and constrains knowledge about the topic. Without denying a real, material existence, Foucault suggested that knowledge only has meaning within the discourse about it and this discourse occurs in multiple sites, including popular culture.

Hall (1980) concurred:

Reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse. Discursive 'knowledge' is the product not of the transparent representation of the 'real' in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions (p. 169).

Television serves as a production site of "specific articulation(s) of language on the 'real'" (Hall, 1980, p. 170). What we know to be real about women and feminism exists in part through mediated messages. This 'knowledge' becomes more real or truthful when presented through multiple sites, including media, and specifically through programming by and about women. Gitlin (1986) asserted that television is "the principal circulator of the cultural mainstream" (p. 3). Hall (1980) asserted that some

representations are so pervasive within a particular culture that they appear normal and “conceal the practices of coding” (p. 170). When this naturalization occurs, the encoded meaning has “achieved equivalence” with the decoded meaning (Hall, p. 170). Thus, messages, ideas, and ideology are encoded at the production level, but these messages are always produced through discursive codes, which are then decoded by audiences again through culturally bound codes. When this “achieved equivalence” occurs, it is unlikely that viewers would have an oppositional or negotiated reading of the text. Hall (1980) described three decoding positions: preferred, negotiated, and oppositional. They are defined below.

Hall (1980) identified three decoding positions or ways audiences create meaning from particular texts: the preferred or dominant, the oppositional, and the negotiated. The preferred reading appropriates the “dominant-hegemonic position” (p. 174) and reflects “achieved equivalence” (p. 170). A preferred reading takes on the meaning intended by the creator of the message. An oppositional meaning occurs when the preferred message is understood, but then re-coded through an alternative perspective. For example, Kellner (2003) suggested that a preferred reading of *Die Hard* involves audiences finding pleasure in the restoration of the state, patriarchal order at the resolution of the film. In contrast, Fiske observed an oppositional reading of this film when individuals at a homeless shelter cheered at the destruction of authoritarian structures and characters during the film (Fiske, 1993; Kellner, 2003). Negotiated readings operate with a mixture of dominant and oppositional understandings. Negotiated readers accept the authority of the hegemonic meanings in a broad sense, but allow situational exceptions that illuminate

contradictions in the dominant discourse (Hall, 1980). Hall (1980) claimed that audiences invoke the negotiated position most frequently. While this dissertation does not include an audience analysis, it is concerned with the encoded character development, the functions of these similar personas, and the polysemic nature of reading television narratives.

While literary studies, film studies, the Frankfurt School, and, most prominently, cultural studies, influence this current inquiry, feminist theory also plays a central role. In addition to the above-mentioned influences of television studies, Newcomb (1994) asserted that feminist theory is central to television studies for two reasons. First, feminist theory calls into question dominant and patriarchal understandings of societal norms. This includes media representations that might reflect normalized values. Second, television is sometimes considered a feminine medium, not only because of its presence in the private sphere, but also its “consumer-targeted content” and its “open, unending narrative strategies relates somehow to feminine experience” (Newcomb, 1994, p. 5). These open-ended strategies are similar to the feminine form Rogers (1991) discussed with regards to soap operas created specifically for women. Whether or not television is truly a feminine medium is not the focus of this dissertation. The series examined in this study typify programming targeted to women. Each encompasses four female leads and is meant to reflect aspects of single women’s lives. It is too simplistic to suggest that simply because these series have female casts, the shows must necessarily embody feminist thinking. Quite the opposite, these series need scholarly attention to

scrutinize the multitude of meanings embedded within these texts that are possibly masked as feminist because the programs are about women.

For these reasons, the following section explores feminist theory and the women's movement. An historical overview of the feminist movement provides context of the various ideological fractures among feminist thinking. Ideological fractures can be seen in the different archetypes that are called upon in rhetorical representations. The privileging and/or ridicule of certain archetypes can legitimize particular interests over others (Dow, 1996). In addition, representations of women in popular culture are explored, followed by research questions and rationale.

Feminist Theory, Waves of the Women's Movement, and Popular Culture

This dissertation uses a feminist theoretical frame to explore three female cast sitcoms, *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*. This feminist frame is applied to the literary studies focus on the narrative structures, film studies influence of texts in visual popular entertainment, critical and contextual approaches of the Frankfurt School and Cultural Studies examinations of "how ideology is produced and functions" within these television series (Brown, 1990, p. 403).

The following section includes an historical overview of the three waves of feminism in order to provide an understanding of the fractures that exist within and among each wave. This background information includes insights on how feminism struggles to construct and maintain a public image and voice. In addition, it paves the way for the analysis and discussion of television representations of feminism.

In a general sense, feminism has two components. It is a theoretical perspective that understands gender as central to the organization of society and a social movement that seeks equitable treatment of, and opportunities for, both sexes. Many feminist scholars (for example Lorber, 1991; Steeves, 1987; van Zoonen, 1995; Wood, 1997) asserted that sex role differences are attributed to the social construction of gender, not innate biological differences. Most feminist scholars, and in particular, Lorber (1991) see gender as a phenomenon that is socially constructed rather than biologically determined. The idea that gender is a learned behavior, socially constructed through interactions, one's social location, and a multitude of experiences means that it is not fixed by one's biology, even if sex has its own influences on the construction of gender. Therefore, historical, cultural, and economic factors have a great influence on gender roles and expectations. These social roles and expectations for women have historically served the maintenance of patriarchal power structures. Feminists continue to critique these power structures in order to change existing inequities for women and all marginalized groups. Feminism, however, is not simplistically monolithic, and within each wave of the feminist movement, competing fractures and agendas exist regarding the direction of the movement. The following section weaves together prevailing U.S. feminist thought among the three waves of the women's movement and describes mediated representations of feminism within each wave.

The First Wave

This overview provides an abbreviated understanding of the women's movement in an attempt to demonstrate the multiplicity of feminism. In its brevity, this discussion

does not take into account many other nuances within and between the three waves of feminism. In addition, describing feminism as three distinct waves continues to be debated within feminist circles. The three waves discussed here are U.S. focused, and included to sketch some of the competing beliefs and viewpoints of feminist thinking.

Within and among each wave of the women's movement there exist theoretical fractures in feminist thought. The first wave of the women's movement extended from the mid 1800s through the early 1920s and revolved around abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and temperance (Campbell, 1989). Women and African Americans shared struggles of inequality while they worked together to achieve parity with White men (Wood, 1997). Even though a strong connection between abolitionist efforts and women's rights existed, racial divisions caused strife within the first wave, especially when the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gave Black men the right to vote and excluded women. This racial divide could be seen not only in the expectation that Black women walk behind White women in demonstrations, but also in broader social and racial justice agendas of suffragists such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell (Campbell, 1989). Racial struggles within the feminist movement still exist, and the criticism of the modern women's movement as an exclusively White and privileged interest group remains a central divide within feminist thinkers today (The Combahee River Collective, 1977; hooks, 1989).

Two distinct branches of feminism emerged during the first wave of the women's movement: liberal and cultural. Liberal feminism holds that men and women are generally "alike and equal in all important respects" (Wood, 1997, p. 74) and therefore

deserve equal opportunity and access. In the case of first wave feminism, this included securing the right to vote. Liberal feminism focuses on rational logic and changes through established systems. It takes a non-essentialist approach and seeks change through patriarchal channels, such as established institutions and legislation. Cultural feminism maintains that men and women are different and that disparate privileges and opportunities should be granted to each. The essentialist belief that women are more moral and nurturing prevailed among cultural feminists. Cultural feminism embodies the ideal of traditional femininity and celebrates domestic roles. Cultural feminists of the first wave believed that their moral superiority and concern for others entitled them the right to vote (Wood, 1997). Cultural feminists involved in Temperance and Maternal movements embodied the mother archetype.

One major obstacle to women's participation in feminist movement involved lack of access to the public sphere and public speaking opportunities. Women who were allowed to speak publicly were often ridiculed and would spend a significant portion of their speech simply justifying their right to speak publicly as a woman since the conventional wisdom was that she was unfeminine and immoral for speaking out (Campbell, 1989). Much of the mainstream press coverage during the first wave framed women working to earn the right to vote in derisive ways, making scathing comments about their agenda, intelligence, and especially their un-femininity (Campbell, 1989; Israel, 2002). The unfeminine representations of public speakers kept many women out of the movement, especially those aligned more closely with cultural feminism.

Characterizations of women as unfeminine reflect commonalities with the iron maiden archetype.

Although the ideologies of cultural and liberal feminism hold conflicting views, these groups managed to work together to achieve women's suffrage. The focus on suffrage instead of broader issues and inequalities, the political climate of the time, and the inability for first wave feminists to secure a place for women's voices in the public sphere hindered further gains. Change can best be achieved through common objectives and understanding. With a fragmentation of ideological values and fewer commonly shared goals, the first wave in the women's movement quieted until the 1960s.

The Second Wave

Second wave feminism emerged as other counter-conventional ideologies were also being challenged through the civil rights and anti-war movements in the 1960s. Post-World War II propaganda persuaded women to return to the private, feminine, domestic sphere allowing men to regain their position in the paid labor market. Banished to the private sphere, women of the second wave still struggled to find a public voice. In 1963, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published. This pivotal book described how suburbanization left many White middle-class women isolated and unfulfilled. While this book is criticized for its exclusionary focus on White, middle-class women, it helped reinvigorated the modern women's movement. The fragmentation that existed in the first wave between the basic ideologies of cultural and liberal feminism survived. However, it seems as though cultural feminism served as backlash to any feminist agenda within this second wave by the liberal feminists who

were able to obtain a voice in the public sphere. For example, cultural feminists who valued motherhood and domestic life were sometimes excluded from liberal feminist agendas. Still other fractures surfaced in the second wave.

Radical feminism grew out of New Left politics, which focused on “protesting the Vietnam War, racial discrimination and governmental abuses” (Wood, 1997, p. 79; Howell, 1990). Many women who participated in New Left politics were outraged by the overt sexism present within a politic that promoted and preached equality. Women working side by side with men to fight inequalities discovered their participation was often relegated to servicing the men’s ‘real’ political work by making coffee and food or typing and copying flyers and speeches instead of writing and presenting them (Wood, 1997).

Black women experienced similar discrimination working in the Civil Rights movement. This discrimination was compounded by their exclusion from the mostly White, middle class focus of the women’s movement. Black women found separatist approaches to be inadequate and impractical because they excluded men, particularly Black men and the struggle for racial parity. (Combahee River Collective, 1977). Steeves (1987) and van Zoonen (1995) also asserted that the separatist approach of radical feminism is ineffectual because of its inability to promote change and its exclusion of men. In addition, Steeves (1987) and van Zoonen (1995) as well as Black (hooks, 1989) and Latina (Anzaldúa, 1990) scholars criticized liberal and radical feminisms’ focus on the privileged White, middle class, and capitalist perspective,

advocating for a socialist feminism that concentrates on exposing economic disparities as well as racial and patriarchal.

New feminisms continued to emerge. Other feminist scholars, within this second wave, started to reveal the multiple inequities of race, class, and sexual orientation (Anzaldúa, 1990; Hill-Collins, 1989; hooks, 1989, Roberts, 1999; Mink, 1998). Lesbian feminism as well as Womanists emerged during this second wave of feminism. Lesbian feminists center much of their agenda on basic civil rights that are afforded to heterosexuals, and explicitly exclude homosexuals, such as insurance coverage, housing and property, and marriage (Van Gelder, 1984; Wood, 1997). According to Wood (1997), Womanists included women of color who define themselves by race and gender. They critique White middle-class feminism for its exclusion of their experiences. Womanists seek to educate others about the intersections of gender and racial oppression. Others (Anzaldúa, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1997, Frye, 1983; Hill-Collins, 1989; Lorde, 1984; Roberts, 1999; Mink, 1998) and in particular hooks (1989) challenged all sites of oppression.

Press (2000) described the development of feminist communication theories by exploring women's roles in the public sphere. She stated that women's participation within the public sphere brought issues of public and private life to the forefront of public discourse. These issues include domestic violence, welfare, abortion, sexualities, and child and elder care. During the second wave, the media both ostracized and incorporated feminism in part by controlling the way some aspects of feminism were represented publicly. On the one hand, media were able to erode feminism by negatively

portraying some of the more extreme and visible representatives of radical feminism, and focusing negatively on the sexuality of some leaders such as Andrea Dworkin and Kate Millet. On the other hand, the media needed to embrace feminism because of its growing acceptance. Therefore, the media presented a version of feminism that seemed less threatening to mainstream power structures – liberal feminism, which seeks access through established institutions without dismantling the power structures. While this type of liberal feminism allowed some women to access to masculine privileges, it failed to offer a much-needed critique of oppressive racial, social, and economic inequities embedded in established institutionalized patriarchal systems.

While the preceding discussion does not represent all variance, criticisms and nuances of the feminist movement, it provides a wide-ranging overview of the mainstream, and sometimes competing, feminist thinking that contribute to the diverse women's movement. This dissertation extends the discussion of feminism and its media representations by claiming that by maintaining fractures and/or promoting specific agendas, media serves to control the discourse surrounding feminism, ultimately weakening and depoliticizing feminist efforts. The various fractures in feminist thought are sometimes maintained through archetypal characters' portrayals.

The Third Wave

Distinct and different conflicts exist within and between the waves of feminism. Race emerged as a central conflict within the first two. Still, other tensions within the second wave included differences such as gender, sexuality, and class. While these many divisions existed within the second wave, what is most often presented in the media

involves liberal feminism, focusing on White, middle-class, heterosexual, women. Lesbian and socialist feminisms simply have not been compatible with broadcast commercial television's goals of reaching large audiences (Raymond, 2003; Messner, 2002; Dow, 1996).

When the third wave surfaced is debated. Siegel (1997) viewed the defeat of ERA and the Reagan-Bush era as the major setbacks within the second wave that lead to the emergence of the third wave. Katie Roiphe, influenced by conservatism of the times, is often seen as one of the faces of the third wave. Her privileged background allowed her access to media, which has made her and her backlash more visible. Although some scholars (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Wood, 1997) believe Roiphe's feminist backlash should not be confused with third wave feminism, her visibility in the media certainly contributes to the discourse of feminism.

Scholars (Heywood & Drake, 1997; Lotz, 2001; Orr, 1997; Siegel, 1997; Walker, 1992) asserted that the third wave emerged, not in this conservative backlash, but from the multicultural conflicts within the second wave and the critique of the second wave for its White middle-class, and growing institutionalized academic, agendas. Lumby (1997) believed that second wave feminists' failure to acknowledge their own power and privileged positions within established institutions contributed to the divisions between the second and third wave. Others (Steeves, 1987; van Zoonen, 1995) contended that socialist feminism, planted firmly in the second wave, addresses these issues with a grassroots, activist approach, which they say is lacking in the mainstream third wave.

Another major distinction between second and third wave feminisms involves generational differences. These differences include not only age cohorts, but also when one's feminist consciousness is (or was) raised (Orr, 1997; Siegel, 1997; Siegel, 2000; Karlyn, 2003). Siegel (1997) stated, "age may be less important in shaping political outlook than the historical moment at which one enters the movement" (p. 55). Siegel (2000) attributed some of the third wave's alienation from the second wave to its inability to speak to sexuality, motherhood, and romantic love in a way that is useful to third wave feminists, who have been born into a world where the accomplishments of the first and second wave were already a given. Third wave feminists are indebted to the activists who came before them, who broke down patriarchal boundaries. However, third wave feminist thinking complicates the binary of patriarchy and views identities and perspectives as shifting and ambiguous. Third wave feminists must balance the many contradictory tensions internalized in their individual perspectives. Therefore, third wave feminism is often seen as a series of lifestyle choices. Heywood and Drake (1997) stated that the lives of third wave feminists "have been shaped by struggles between various feminisms as well as by cultural backlash against feminism and activism, we argue that contradiction marks the desires and strategies of the third wave" (p. 2). The authors commented further,

Young feminists who grew up with equity feminism, got gender feminism in college, along with poststructuralism, and are now hard at work on a feminism that strategically combines elements of these feminisms, along with Black feminism, women of color feminisms, working-class feminism, pro-sex feminism,

and so on. A third wave goal that comes directly out of learning from these histories and working among these traditions is the development of modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity, and the creation of a coalition politics based on these understandings...as different strains of feminism and activism sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third wave lives, our thinking, and our praxes: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid kind that perhaps we need a different name altogether (Heywood & Drake, 1997, p. 3).

A significant critique of third wave feminism involves its focus on individualized concerns. Personal narratives pervade popular and scholarly literature about third wave feminism. Rebecca Walker's *To be real: Telling the truth and changing the face of feminism* and Barbara Findlen's *Listen up: Voices from the next feminist generation* represented third wave feminist theorizing as well as accentuated the multiplicity of positions with which their contributors identify (Siegel, 1997). This focus on individual, multi-perspective voices and experiences contributes to the critique of the third wave as having no collective feminist or activist agenda. Whereas many second wave feminists became aware of the feminist consciousness through grassroots organizations, many third wavers have their feminist awakenings in institutional spaces. Because the academy serves as a space of consciousness-raising for many third wave feminists, Siegel (1997) believed that these personal narratives of the third wave are embedded with second wave theoretical frameworks. She stated, "second wave theory enables a third wave

epistemology ... the narrators fluently and casually draw on theoretical formulations to explain and make sense of their everyday existence” (p. 62).

Among third-wave feminists, a disconnection exists from any one strand of feminism from the second wave because the concepts of feminist and feminine were generally presented as opposing and mutually exclusive. Campbell (1983) reflected this strife when she states, “The inability to reconcile personhood and womanhood is the ideological dilemma at the core of feminism” (p. 101). According to Campbell (1983), womanhood embodies a more traditional concept of femininity, whereas personhood symbolizes those qualities that are often associated with masculinity and feminism, such as strength and independence. This struggle has been present in all three waves. Third wave feminists want to break down these dichotomous socially constructed categories and individually define feminism. While third wave feminism is steeped in contradiction, it celebrates individual perspectives within a collective movement (Walker, 1995; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). Many scholars acknowledge the difficulties in creating a collective agenda through individualistic standpoint narratives (Orr, 1997; Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Karlyn, 2003), but they also recognize that knowledge is partial and that there are multiple ways of knowing. They find value in the everyday experiences (Collins, 1989) and believe these perspectives should not be dismissed. In addition to third wave feminism valuing of individual experiences, Baumgardner and Richards (2003), advocates of a strong third wave agenda, argued that feminism exists everywhere, and in particular, through popular culture.

Third Wave Feminism and Popular Culture

Third wave feminism occurs, although not exclusively, through and within popular culture, “where young women are refashioning feminism toward their own ends” (Karlyn, 2003, p. 3). Karlyn (2003) stated that third wave feminists focus on individualistic concerns and new communication technologies. The Riot Grrrl movement, for example, emerged out of the punk scene in the early 1990s, challenging male dominated punk rock. The Riot Grrrl movement, as well as other musical tours and mediated endeavors such as zines, the Internet, and magazines such as *Sassy* and *Bitch*, rebelled against the language that oppressed them, re-appropriating words such as “girl,” “slut,” and “bitch,” making them powerful expressions of third wave feminism (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000).

Karlyn asserted that “popular culture infuses the world in which today’s young women live, and the face of feminism today, for better or worse, is being written across media culture” (2003, p. 2). Lumby (1997) agreed,

If feminism is to remain engaged with and relevant to the everyday lives of women, then feminists desperately need the tools to understand everyday culture. We need to engage with the debates in popular culture rather than taking an elitist and dismissive attitude toward the prime medium of communication today (p. 174).

Karlyn suggested that third wave feminists create, change, and perform their identities through the consumption of mass media. In order to understand the future of feminist

movement she asserted the popular texts that young women consume need scholarly exploration. Karlyn (2003) stated,

In third wave feminism, popular culture is a natural site of identity-formation and empowerment, providing an abundant storehouse of images and narratives valuable less as a means of representing reality than as motifs available for contesting, rewriting and recoding (p. 8).

Merskin (2006) discussed similar uses of the Internet for girls. According to Merskin (2006), girls are actively disrupting the dichotomous representation of “good girl” versus “bad girl” and they are creating a new and different identity called the “Jammer Girl.” This “Jammer Girl” creates a positive image of a healthy, activist female, challenging the commercialized and unrealistic ideals of beauty. While there are many positive aspects for third wave feminism advocates, the individualized focus, in addition to the many contradictions, complicates the progressiveness of the movement.

While the first wave struggled to find and maintain a public voice, representations of feminism in the second and third wave were, and still are limited. The public face of feminism for the second wave focused on (White, middle-class, heterosexual) liberal feminism’s struggle for equal access to patriarchal structures. Representations of the third wave reinforce the ideas that feminism is dead and/or a very individualized, and sometimes consumeristic, set of lifestyle choices. When only one fracture of feminism dominates the public sphere, collective action becomes difficult and limited. Finding commonalities among oppressed peoples can affect change. Maintaining divisions and divisiveness prohibits that change and promotes the status quo. Studying media

representations of feminism and femininity is important in examining how resistant messages can enter the popular discourse. The next section looks specifically at constructed representations of feminism in popular culture texts.

Media Representations

Karlyn (2003), Moseley and Read (2002), and Lotz (2001) analyzed a 1998 *Time Magazine* cover with a headline that asks “Is Feminism Dead?” The cover featured Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan, and Gloria Steinem as faces of American feminists in black and white contrasting those images with a full color shot of Calista Flockhart (the actress who played one of the most popular female television characters of that year, Ally McBeal) as representative of the new face of feminism. While the cover caused much debate, Moseley and Read (2002) suggested that, despite popular press opinion, the character of Ally McBeal embodied feminist qualities. The authors set up their argument in contrast to previous scholarship that depicted characters such as Bridget Jones and Ally McBeal as the ‘anti (feminist)-heroines of the nineties’ (2002, p. 233). Moseley and Read (2002) distinguished their analysis from earlier research that measured feminism by the character’s focus on career versus personal life, by asserting that it is not the conflict of career over personal life that marks one as feminist, but the struggle to hold them in balance together. Moseley and Read explored three key tensions about women characters: 1) feminism and femininity, 2) fantasy and reality, and 3) public and private. The authors asserted that Ally McBeal (the character and the show) blurred the lines between these tensions, creating a feminist sensibility that represented these tensions as

“mutually pervasive and impossible to separate” (Moseley & Read, 2002, p. 247). This reflects the conflicting and contradictory convictions of third wave feminism.

Wilcox (1995-97) explored three television series that presented female and male leads as a couple in work and romance. The author conducted a textual analysis of *Remington Steele*, *Moonlighting*, and *Lois and Clark*. In each series, the female lead holds an official position of authority over the male character (as the supervisor or through having more experience and/or seniority). The author contended that, although the female characters may demonstrate strength and independence, the male characters are constructed as superior. This demonstrates that although women are achieving more prominent roles on television, they are ridiculed within the show for their failure to see that their male counterparts play the ‘real’ hero, and the females’ contributions are belittled.

Karlyn (2003) asserted that popular culture serves as a natural site of empowerment for third wave feminism. In her exploration of the *Scream Trilogy*, Karlyn demonstrated how girls are empowered by these films’ rejection of femininity. Karlyn (2003) suggested that young women identify with the female characters in *Scream* and asserted that those who are not engaged with, and knowledgeable of, popular culture and its consequent influences and abuses, fail to achieve any empowerment within the film. The *Scream* characters who lacked popular culture knowledge are killed off and those who critically engage with the popular texts can resist its influences and create their own stories (Karlyn, 2003). This reflects the importance of young women’s real life need for critical consumption of popular media.

In *Prime-Time Feminism*, Dow (1996) traced portrayals of feminism on television sitcoms from 1970 – 1995. Dow demonstrated the complexity of the shows and characters to illustrate how they embodied feminist ideals as well as succumbed to dominant patriarchal forces particular to the time and context of the shows. Dow began with *The Mary Tyler Moore Show (MTM)* (1970-1977). She argued the most progressive moments of *MTM* involved the character Mary Richards' occupation as a production assistant, a job usually reserved for men. Mary Richards (Mary Tyler Moore) was not the first single working-woman on television; however, she was the first who had a career, not just a job that was a prelude to finding the right man and getting married. This challenged feminine expectations about women at the time. Other sitcoms on the air around the same time featured women as husband hunting, incompetent but charming, and/or as widows or mothers (Dow, 1996).

Dow (1996) argued that while *MTM* disrupted the notion of women's desire to have children, the show kept the idea of family intact through the family Mary Richards created at the news station. For its time, *MTM* embodied a liberal feminism that was palpable to the broader American public, but subverted a more progressive feminist agenda. This portrayal highlighted the tenets of the second wave's White, middle-class, liberal feminism that strove for equal access and opportunity among men and women. However, this access and opportunity was generally limited to White middle class women (Dow, 1996). Mary Richards embodied the middle-class feminine ideal. She was attractive, heterosexual, and served as the caregiver for all in her newly created work family. So while *MTM* challenged notions of women in domestic spheres, the show still

showed women doing most of the nurturing within the family of the public sphere (the workplace). Patriarchy still structured this workplace family. Even though Mary Richards was allowed access, she was not able to challenge institutional structures (Dow, 1996).

MTM did prove to be progressive in another way. This involved Mary Richards' life in her private sphere. Dow (1996) asserted that the female community created around Mary's apartment with Rhonda (Valerie Harper) and Phyllis (Cloris Leachman) (in the first few seasons), served as a consciousness-raising space. However, because this consciousness raising was always relegated to the private sphere, it never really challenged patriarchal structures. Mary Richards could identify sexism, but in her role as the good girl (the dutiful wife, mother, and daughter to the men in the show) she did not act on it. The progressiveness of *MTM* is seen as lifestyle choices. As positive as those choices may be for women, they are tempered by the lack of structural challenges (Dow, 1996). In addition, Dow argued that by highlighting liberal feminism, the goals of broader social justice issues, such as racism and poverty, were further marginalized.

In Dow's (1996) examination of *One Day at a Time* (1975-1984), a show about a divorced mother and her two daughters struggling to make it on their own—'one day at a time,' she described major feminist themes such as independence, self-actualization, and fulfillment. Dow asserted that *One Day at a Time* illustrates television's appropriation of radical feminism's critique of patriarchy by filtering it through liberal feminism's focus on individual choices and solutions. Dow (1996) stated that Ann Romano (Bonnie Franklin) not only noticed sexism (as did Mary Richards), but also talked about it and

lived a life affected by it. The character of Ann Romano desired autonomy, economic independence, and an equalitarian relationship. However, the political import of these desires was mitigated by the show's individualized focus on the personal psychology of Ann Romano and other characters.

Dow (1996) asserted that *Designing Women* (1986-1993) portrayed the most progressive feminist agenda of all the shows she examined. In this sitcom, four women made up the main characters. They included Julia Sugarbaker (Dixie Carter), Suzanne Sugarbaker (Delta Burke), Charlene Frazier (Jean Smart), and Mary Jo Shively (Annie Potts). The show highlighted their interactions at the workplace. Even though *Designing Women* presented working-women, this show magnified the femininity of the characters and their work. Each character wore the latest feminine fashions and together they ran an interior design firm out of the Sugarbaker's posh Atlanta home. The office looked more like an upscale living room than a place of business, which provided the perfect setting for the female (and feminine) interaction (Dow, 1996). The characters represented the four archetypes examined in this study. Dow (1996) described Julia as, "a widow in her late forties and the senior member of the design firm, intelligent, elegant, and opinionated, often displaying her indignation about some social issue" (p. 106). This description embodies the archetype of the iron maiden and "elegant" points to her upper class status. Dow's description of Suzanne, Julia's younger sister, embodied the sex object archetype. Suzanne was depicted as an egocentric former beauty queen. Dow stated that Suzanne functions as the narrow-minded opposite to Julia's feminist political agenda. Suzanne provided comic relief in the form of self-absorption and feminist

backlash. Charlene represented the child. She is described as “intellectually unsophisticated” and naïve, but also “friendly and trusting” (1996, p. 106). Charlene was the laughable conventional character, who also served as the comic relief for the feminist tensions discussed on the show. However, Dow (1996) commented that, although Charlene was portrayed as less sophisticated, she “often makes insightful comments about human nature” (p. 106). This is certainly true of the child archetype. Finally, Mary Jo is defined as the “everywoman” (p.106). In the case of *Designing Women*, Mary Jo was a thirty-something single mother who is intelligent and attractive, but also insecure as she struggled to make her way in the world. In this study, I have called this archetype the mother, but the everywoman designation that Dow (1996) used also works well.

Designing Women revolved around the talk of the four women. Dow argued that this talk “parallels the essential process of consciousness-raising” (1996, p. 108). Dow defined the function of consciousness-raising as “the realization of the political status of women as an oppressed group and the ways in which sexual politics governed their lives” (p.108). Despite the acknowledgement that the women of *Designing Women* did not always create an “atmosphere of equality,” their conversations “function to create a woman-centered analysis of sexual politics, the ultimate goal of consciousness-raising” (Dow, 1996, p. 109). Each character brought her personal experiences to the dialogue. These experiences are framed by their character’s archetypal personality. While Charlene (the child) related her experience to the frivolous, and Mary Jo (the everywoman/mother) connected with her personal struggles and care for others, it is almost always Julia, the iron maiden archetype, who informed the dialogue on a broader

political level (Dow, 1996). This, I assert is the function of the iron maiden in shows such as *Designing Women*.

In Dow's discussion of *Murphy Brown* (1988-1992), she contended that the show functions as a parody of feminism, a cautionary tale about the cost of being a feminist. This constructs Murphy's iron maiden archetype into a buffoon character. Dow (1996) argued that the buffoon representation trivializes feminism. She suggested that this trivialization reflected the backlash against feminism prevalent at the time. Finally, Dow's examination of *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman*, a drama that breaks the sitcom pattern of her analysis, described Dr. Quinn's portrayal as having an explicit liberal feminist agenda, but this agenda was tempered by romanticized portrayals of motherhood.

This dissertation builds on Dow's discussion of *Designing Women*, by extending Dow's (1996) idea that the main characters represent and frame discourse based on their personalities. I argue that the main characters of *Designing Women* represent ancient archetypes and that these archetypes portray patterned qualities. I contend that if these archetypes are present in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*, they will each bring forth a specific discourse regarding femininity and feminism. The success of the show's archetypal characters resonates with audiences because of their consistent and continuous presence in popular culture. One could argue that the use of these archetypes is simply a function of the fast-paced, low risk world of syndicated television, but a closer examination is necessary to reveal the underlying meanings reflected by the archetypal characters present in the series.

Research Questions and Rationale

RQ1 – Do the four archetypal patterns of the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother exist among the four main characters in each series? Are *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* recombinant series?

This question provides a starting point for a systematic and replicable way to ascertain if these archetypal patterns are re-presented in the series. The dissertation project needs to first establish that the archetypes actually exist in some form within the series.

RQ2 - What are the similarities and differences among the archetypes in each series? How do the archetypes function within each series? Is one archetype's perspective privileged in particular narratives? If so, what does this privileging say about womanhood and feminism?

Third wave feminism esteems individualistic interpretations. Therefore understanding how the different characters represent specific values might indicate how a particular perspective is positioned within culture. For example, Dow (1996) asserted that *Murphy Brown*, although touted as a feminist show, served more as a cautionary tale about the cost of feminism rather than a show promoting feminist ideals because *Murphy Brown*, the title character, is portrayed as the feminist buffoon rather than the wise women. In contrast, *Designing Women*, a show popularly viewed as feminine (not feminist), is able to bring forth many feminist issues through the wise woman, iron maiden archetype, Julia Sugarbaker. These archetypes not only provide balance among the characters and narratives present in a television story, but also specific archetypes possibly create a narrative space for feminist discourse.

RQ3 – Are there similar narratives among the series? Are there narratives that are unique to each series? What do these stories communicate about the age, race, and class differences among the casts?

These questions serve as the over-arching theme of this dissertation. Karlyn (2003), Merskin (2006) and others suggested that third wave feminism occurs within and through popular media. *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* were popular television programs that each aired five years or more and targeted women specifically. These programs aired on primetime from 1985 – 2004. This provides an extended timeframe to examine (if and) how narratives are maintained and changed over time. The analysis of unique or differing narratives points to socially constructed differences among age, race, and class among the characters. Because the shows are similar in their format, these variations might represent significant social and historical understandings of the differences among particular demographics.

RQ4 – How does talk function within each series? What does this talk convey about age, race, and class differences among the characters?

Since the shows focus on the talk among the characters, a discussion of the communicative function seems necessary. Language is a socially constructed, symbolic process that reflects and maintains cultural norms (Barthes, 1972; Kramarae, 1981). Identifying how the communication works within the series might illuminate broader cultural meanings.

The following chapter presents the methodologies used to address the above research questions: a content analysis and a comparative textual analysis. The content

analysis serves to answer RQ1. The textual analysis allows for a deeper exploration of the archetypes, narratives, feminist discourse, and use of talk in, and comparatively among, the series, to respond to the remaining research questions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methodological approaches employed in this dissertation. The content analysis used to answer RQ1 determines if the ancient archetypes exist within the modern character portrayals. This quantitative approach systematically establishes a starting point for the comparative textual analysis. The textual analysis allows for a deeper exploration of the meanings embedded within and comparatively among the characters, the narratives, and the series.

Content Analysis

This dissertation examines three television sitcoms from three separate decades. RQ1 asks if the archetypal patterns of the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother exist among the four main characters in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*. To answer this, I conducted content analyses of the first season of each series. While content analysis is used in many disciplines, historically and currently, this method is often employed many mass communication research. Modern uses of content analysis began with the rise of mass produced newspapers, and spread to radio, and eventually film and television (Krippendorff, 1980). According to Klaus Krippendorff (1980), “content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (p. 21). Berelson (1952) defined content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative descriptions of the manifest

content of communication” (p. 18). Kerlinger (2000) described content analysis as a systematic, objective, and quantitative method for examining communication phenomenon. The use of a content analysis for this study serves as a systematic and replicable way to demonstrate if these archetypal patterns are re-presented in the characters of the series. In addition, content analysis establishes a starting point for the broader inquiry and deeper textual analysis of this dissertation by providing descriptive parameters that can be used to compare characters across series to begin answering RQ2.

Wimmer and Dominick (2003) clearly delineated the steps for conducting a content analysis: 1) formulating the research question, 2) defining the population and selecting a sample, 3) articulating the unit of analysis, 4) operationalizing the categories of content to be analyzed, 5) train coders and check inter-coder reliability, and 6) code, analyze, and draw conclusions from the collected data. While step one is already established, steps two through five are explained below. Step six is addressed in the results and discussion chapters. While I provide quantification of the results from the content analysis, I also provide qualitative examples from the texts to illustrate the way the archetypes materialize in these programs.

Sample Selection

Golden Girls, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* were chosen for several reasons. First, each series has four main female characters: Dorothy Petrillo Zbornak (Bea Arthur), Rose Nylund (Betty White), Blanche Devereaux (Rue Mclanahan), and Sophia Petrillo (Estelle Getty) starred in *Golden Girls*; Khadijah James (Queen Latifah), Synclaire James (Kim Coles), Maxine Shaw (Erika Alexander), and Regine Hunter (Kim

Fields) acted in lead roles in *Living Single*; Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), Charlotte York (Kristen Davis), Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon), and Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall) headlined *Sex and the City*.

Second, the series were seen as groundbreaking: *Golden Girls* for its prominence of older women in primetime; similarly, *Living Single* was a part of FOX's narrowcasting, reaching African American audiences with Black actors and producers; and *Sex and the City* for its frank and explicit discussion of sex by and about women.

Third, these series were selected for their popularity and longevity. *Golden Girls* ran for seven seasons, *Living Single*, five, and *Sex and the City*, six. Each series can still be seen in syndication today. Lastly, these series span nearly 20 years, with first seasons overlapping the last of the previous or picking up the following year. If these series are recombinants, then this demonstrates the persistence of these archetypes in American popular culture.

The complete first season of each series were selected as the population for the content analysis. Only the first season is included in the population for content analysis portion of this study because this is when the creators establish the characters. After that, and despite the little development because of the episodic nature of television sitcoms, the characters' personalities are basically set. From the first seasons there are 25 episodes from *Golden Girls*, 27 episodes from *Living Single*, and 12 episodes from *Sex and the City*. In order to have a sufficient number of observations, I took slightly more than a 20% sample from each series. To achieve this sample size, I employed a systematic sampling technique. Krippendorff (1980) stated that in content analysis where

texts appear regularly, systematic sampling is favorable. I included the pilot episode in all series and every fifth episode of *Golden Girls* and *Living Single*, and every fourth episode of *Sex and the City*, since it had shorter seasons. Time constraints prohibited the use of the entire population. I analyzed episodes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 from *Golden Girls* and *Living Single*, and used episodes 1, 4, 8, 12 from *Sex and the City*.

Unit of Analysis

In this content analysis there are two levels of units of analysis. The first one involves coding specific instances (i.e. dress, demeanor, and dialogue by and about the characters) within an episode. The second involves identifying the dominant archetype per character per episode. The latter is used as the unit of analysis in reaching an acceptable level of inter-coder reliability. A graduate student and I did all the coding. While inter-coder reliability was high using the former unit of analysis, there were times when coders did not have the same number of instances, meaning that one coder might have coded the dress of a character, as well as her comments as one instance where the other coded it twice. And while coding dress per scene and dialogue separately seemed like an easy fix, coding lines of dialogue proved more difficult to be exact. For example, a character such as Rose on *Golden Girls* might have a series of inane lines that are interrupted by a cynical comment about Rose's foolhardiness by Dorothy, then followed by more of the absurd from Rose. This complicated the way coders categorize the scene. The whole scene could be coded as one mark for Rose as the child, **or** one as Rose for the child archetype and one for Dorothy as the iron maiden archetype, **or** one per line of dialogue for Rose's comments as the child plus one for Dorothy as the iron maiden for

her cynicism, or all lines for Rose as the child since Dorothy's line was pertaining to Rose's childish behavior. As the dialogue complicated matters of coding the characters, the coders decided that dominant archetype per character per episode would serve as the unit of analysis used to reach inter-coded reliability. I include details on coders and inter-coder reliability following the next section.

Coding Categories

This study examines four archetypes: the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother. As discussed in Chapter 2, the archetypes harken back to the goddess of Western Greek and Roman mythology. The archetypes are operationalized for this project based on how Bolen (1984) and Downing (1981) described the manifestation of the mythical representatives in real women's lives.

The iron maiden archetype

The iron maiden is the personification of the Greek goddess of the hunt and the moon, Artemis, (Bolen, 1984; Downing, 1981). This archetype embodies an overall masculine style. She might wear a business suit and have sharp, blunt, and shorter hairstyles. She is cynical, competitive, sometimes abrasive and mean-spirited, and often antagonistic toward men. Her viewpoints might be considered feminist or just plain bitchy. The iron maiden values women's right to be equal. She typically works in a male dominated profession and achieves high status. Although she may desire a romantic partnership, she is independent and does not need a man in her life or finds romantic love impractical and/or incompatible with her career ambitions and independent needs.

The child archetype

Persephone, the maiden goddess is eager to please, passive, and compliant (Bolen, 1984). The child archetype incarnates a classic to ultra feminine style. She might be dressed in skirts and girly accessories such as bows, ribbons, or flowers. Her hairstyle might be longer and flowing to indicate her femininity. She might wear pearls, symbolizing traditional values. White and light colors surround her. She is prudent and conventional. She is seen as prim, puerile, and simple. The child is portrayed as dumb and immature, although sometimes she makes surprisingly profound statements as children sometimes do. She is naïve and her comments are usually silly or ridiculous. The child believes deeply in the romantic love of fairytales at the expense of reality. She desires romantic love above most other goals. Her career is much less relevant in her life than love.

The sex object archetype

Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty reigns over women's sensual desires (Bolen, 1984). The sex object archetype flaunts an overtly sexual style. Her dress and demeanor are alluring. She is concerned with the male gaze and does what is necessary to get that attention. She is sensual and superficial; the objects around her are lavish. The sex object takes great pride in her sexual experiences. Money, power, and sex are more important than love or commitment. She derives power from sexuality and believes women should use their sexuality to get what they want. The comments made by and about her are mostly sexual and/or shallow. She brags about her sexual exploits and finds pleasure in her physical appearance. Everything about her is provocative and focused on

getting the male's sexual attention. Her sexual appetite is insatiable, and she constantly wants a new man, conquest, or sexual experience in her life all the time.

The mother archetype

The mother archetype is the most difficult to define for this study because, in two of the series, the characters are childfree. In her discussion of *Designing Women*, Dow (1996) used the term "everywoman" to describe this re-occurring archetype. This designation works well when discussing characters who are not biological mothers. In this case, the mother archetype or everywoman, is the center of the group or the star vehicle of the show. Bolen (1984) described this maternal archetype as a seeker of psychological wellness for herself and the other characters. This archetype performs much of the emotional work for the group. The stories she tells reflect the complexity of the world, not the absurdity as the child's stories would exhibit. The mother archetype is more neutral on issues, as she constantly questions, contemplates, and over-analyzes the dilemmas in her life as well as in others. She generally provides emotional comfort and support for those around her.

Coders and inter-coder reliability

Two coders compared all the episodes in the sample and reached 100% inter-coder reliability for the dominant archetype per character per episode. The author trained one coder and together coded all sample-selected episodes. While the second coder was fairly familiar with each series, she was only superficially aware of the present study. The coders received definitions of the archetypes as explained above and independently conducted a two-episode test, asked questions to clarify the archetype definitions and unit

of analysis complexities discussed above. Then both researchers independently coded the remaining episodes in the sample using full-page tables to track the instances of archetypal behavior in a single episode. Where characters embodied qualities of different archetype equally, the character was given a dual archetypal designation and these variances among the archetypes and the series are investigated in the textual analysis.

Textual Analysis

The textual analysis portion of this dissertation expands Dow's (1996) rhetorical analysis of five prime-time television series. Dow (1996) described rhetorical analysis as an argument brought forth to interpret meaning in polysemic texts. She argued that television serves a "distinctive rhetorical function in defining feminism" (p. 6).

Television texts serve a discursive function. I conducted textual analyses on *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* to answer research questions two through five, which address more discursive functions and latent meanings within the texts.

Since I am conducting an analysis of television texts, access is generally not a problem (Stokes, 2003). All seven seasons of *Golden Girls* are available on DVD and were analyzed. Only one of the five seasons of *Living Single* can be purchased on DVD, while seasons two through five were recorded from the syndicated version on the Oxygen Network. The entire *Sex and the City* series (seasons 1-6) is available on DVD and included in the study. This textual analysis provides a non-intrusive way to understand the meanings created within the texts. Examples were selected from several episodes to illustrate recurring themes. The selection of these series offers a sample of American women of different ages and races across a twenty-year time frame. *Golden Girls* ran

from 1985 – 1992 on NBC and is still in syndication on Lifetime network. *Living Single* was a part of FOX's narrowcasting programs from 1993 - 1998 and remains in syndication on the Oxygen network. *Sex and the City* arose from HBO's original programming in 1998. HBO produced new shows for six seasons, ending in 2004, and sold edited versions for syndication on TBS and WB (now CW). These series allow me to discuss not only the similarities and differences among the character types, but also discourse about race, age, feminism, and femininity among the series.

I chose situation comedies for several reasons. First, while much of media content uses recombinant characters and narratives so that audiences can easily relate to the characters, find them likable (or unlikable), and follow storylines, sitcoms, unlike films, have an opportunity to develop these characters more fully in subsequent seasons (after success is proven). However, I argue that producers often overdevelop the stereotypical behaviors of characters, possibly indicating the necessity of balance among the characters. Second, television's presence in the home increases individuals' awareness of and/or familiarity with the series, characters, and discursive themes. In addition, the long-term and continuous run of the shows has a great impact on shaping and influencing viewers' perceptions of what it means to be an individual in American culture over time (Tichi, 1991).

Golden Girls, *Living Single* and *Sex and the City* were selected for their inclusion of four female leads as well as their broadcast success, measured by length of time on air. *Designing Women* was not included although popular around the same time as *Golden Girls*, because of Dow's (1996) excellent exploration. This dissertation expands on

Dow's (1996) analysis of *Designing Women* by discussing the significance of the archetypes within the series. While Dow (1996) noted many parallels in the feminist discourse on *Designing Women* to the women's movement and attributes most of the political and public agenda to the iron maiden character, Julia Sugarbaker, she does not discuss the significance of the archetypes within the series as this study addresses.

It is not enough, however, to assume that series featuring female leads bring forth a feminist agenda, as Dow (1996) demonstrated with *Murphy Brown*. The particular messages within texts need to be examined for how they might shape, reflect, and challenge feminist thought. Television might reflect, if not shape, public discourse and understanding of many issues. Knowledge created through media messages reflect "how human beings understand themselves in our culture and how our knowledge about the social, the embodied individual and shared meanings come to be produced in different periods" (Foucault cited in Hall, 1997, p. 43). In addition, Foucault argued "all discourses construct subject-positions, from which alone they make sense" (Foucault cited in Hall, 1997, p. 56). He stated, "These subjects have the attributes we would expect as they are defined by the discourse" (Foucault cited in Hall, 1997, p. 56). Foucault asserted that subjects personify, and are subjected to, the discourse. In the case of discourse about women's lives, including issues of femininity and feminism, I assert that the archetypes present in the three series are the expected characters/subjects that produce the surrounding narrative discourse.

Cultural narratives, which are often told through the media in our electronic world, are sometimes described as similar to the myths prevalent in oral cultures. Myths

explain how broader societal norms are constructed and normalized. They teach individuals how to live according to, and within, these broader expectations (Campbell, 2001). Campbell (2001) posited that myths exist to explain the world around us. Myths call for a deeper awareness of how we participate in our lives, teaching us how to live, from birth to death, in this world. Campbell suggested that myths are signposts along the way that not only train us, but also help us search for the deeper significance in the meaning of our lives, allowing us to discover who we are. Although Campbell did not analyze popular television narratives, television does serve this mythical function for many in the modern world.

Campbell emphasized the pedagogical aspect of myths, affirming that myths provide models for a particular society. And as society changes, new sets of metaphors appear in the cultural narratives not only to update the traditional, but also validate and maintain certain societal values. This is why the twenty-year time frame of the three television series is important to examine, and quite possibly another reason why we continue to see recombinant series in television programming. Campbell (2001) suggested that individuals have to find the aspect of myth that aids them in conducting their life within the culture. While Campbell looked for over-arching commonalities, Doniger explored instances of difference. Doniger (1998) challenged Campbell for what she calls his “static monomyth” (p. 64) approach and cautioned against reductionism and essentialism (which she finds in Campbell) through rigorous comparative analysis of myth within, and across, cultures. In addition, Hall (1975) stated, “the really significant item may not be the one which continually recurs but the one which stands out as an

exception from the general pattern” (p. 15). Doniger (1998) looked to those moments of difference to describe significant distinctions among different societies.

I incorporated Doniger’s (1998) comparative mythological analysis to examine the similarities and differences among the three series. Doniger stated, “human experience is inherently narrative; this is our primary way of organizing and giving coherence to our lives” (1998, p. 56). Doniger suggested that myths (as narratives) contribute to the discourse of many human experiences. These narratives are shared among groups of people to describe their culture. Many of these narratives are told through the media, and particularly television. Doniger (1998) suggested that, when examining the same myth across cultures, the specific deviations and omissions point to cultural variance. In the case of this dissertation, the variance might point to differences across time and/or characters’ demographics.

The examination of the three television series begins with what Hall (1975) called “a long preliminary soak” (p. 15), in which I immersed myself in the material. The “long soak” occurred through regular and repeated viewing of these series in first-run and syndication production. After the deep soak, I became intimately familiar with the texts by watching them closely, taking notes, and summarizing each episode. I specifically looked at the plot and resolution of the episodes and described how the characters function within the narrative (Stokes, 2003). I examined the texts for explicit and implicit statements made about feminism and femininity, as Foucault suggested. From this detailed reading of each episode, similar themes and narratives emerged. Once I found a critical mass of themes or narratives within the series, I carefully re-watched

episodes containing these themes, detailing character behavior, dialogue, and outcomes, drawing out comparisons among the characters, series, and resolutions to answer research question three. The discussion and evaluation of research question four occurred more peripherally within the detailed readings of dialogue.

Contextualization is a key component to cultural studies research. Doniger (1998) asserted scholarship needed not only comparisons, but also contextualization. She insisted that phenomenon be contextualized both within the bounds of the culture and also within the particular historical moment. Foucault also advocated for historical grounding. I provide social, historical, and political background, contextualizing the time frame of each show by examining these popular sitcoms to see how the narratives fit or challenge the prevailing social and political climate of society at the time of their original air-dates wherever possible.

As mentioned above, this dissertation is more than a content analysis of the representation of women in each of the series. While the content analysis serves as a starting point for providing descriptive definitions of each archetype and demonstrating archetypal prevalence in each series, the comparative textual analysis offers a more in-depth exploration of the series (Doniger, 1998). This textual analysis reveals both latent and manifest meanings embedded within the texts (Hall, 1975). Similarities among the characters in each of these series are interesting, but the differences might reveal significant discursive distinctions among the demographic groups presented. The narrative function of these programs addresses what stories are important in women's lives. Although many of the episodes of the three series are not produced by women, the

characters in many ways serve as the storytellers, therefore the narratives seem as if they are not only about women, but also being told by them. This type of comparative textual analysis of the narratives, within *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*, describes the qualities of the individual characters as well as the reoccurring themes within the texts. Thus, the goal of this analysis is not only identifying and describing these ancient archetypes in television programming starring women, but also the implications these archetypes have for society's views about women in modern American culture.

The next chapter discusses the results of the content analysis. In addition, Chapter IV expands on the content analysis findings by providing a deeper textual analysis discussion of the archetypal characters and the meanings created within and among the series. Chapter V provides a discussion of narrative themes among the series.

CHAPTER IV

ARCHETYPAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Content Analysis Results

Research Question #1 asked do the four archetypal patterns (iron maiden, sex object, child, and mother) exist among the four main characters in each series? Using definitions of the archetypes described in Chapter III to categorize the characters of each series, I determined that the answer to RQ1 was that there is indeed a relationship between characters and archetypes in all three series. The characters in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single* and *Sex and the City* seem to be reincarnations of similar archetypes, which reflects Gitlin's (1983) notion of the ubiquitous nature of recombinant characters. While each series was lauded as original programming, these recombinant characters indicate otherwise.

Golden Girls

In *Golden Girls*, Rose embodies the child archetype in six of the six episodes coded. While Rose occasionally was sexual or demonstrated nurturance, the overwhelming characteristics conformed to that of the child archetype. Blanche, on the other hand, embodied the experienced sex object in six of the six episodes. Comments made by, or about, her often referenced her many sexual exploits. While Blanche and Rose fell neatly into the prescribed archetypes, the Dorothy and Sophia roles were harder to characterize. In this series, Dorothy plays the divorced daughter of the 80 year-old

Sophia. In this sample, Dorothy dominantly represents the iron maiden archetype in four of the six episodes coded. In the remaining two episodes, Dorothy embodied the characteristics of both the iron maiden and the mother equally. Although not a male dominated profession in US culture, Dorothy is the only character who has had a long-term career as a high school teacher. Sophia's role, especially in the first season, is smaller than the other women's and so there is less text to code for her. Sophia embodies the iron maiden archetype in two of the six episodes due mostly to her sharp-witted one-liners. In the remaining four episodes, Sophia embodies both the iron maiden and the mother archetype.

Living Single

In *Living Single*, Synclaire represents the child archetype in six of the six episodes coded. Her long, curly hair with colorful headbands, full, flowing, flowery dresses, and her wide-eyed expressions are unmistakable as the child archetype. In addition to her appearance, Synclaire's dependence on Khadijah for work and a place to live, her silly comments, and her hopeful outlook on life correspond to her role as the child archetype. Regine embodies the sex object in five of the six episodes. Her role in the sixth is too small to make any archetypal determination. Regine, although portrayed as the sex object archetype, has fewer sexual encounters than the other characters in this series as well as the sex object archetypes in the other series. Her sex object status stems mostly from her superficial focus on appearance above substance, her need to be desired by men, and her belief in the magnetism of her own beauty. Max symbolizes the iron maiden archetype in four of the six episodes. In one episode she embodies the iron maiden and

mother equally and in the other the iron maiden and sex object. Max's career as a lawyer and her antagonism toward men reflect her iron maiden archetype. Khadijah represents the mother archetype in two of the six episodes. In the remaining four episodes, she embodies the mother and iron maiden archetypes equally. As the owner of a popular, African American magazine, Khadijah exemplifies both the mother archetype, as the conveyer of culture and provider of jobs, and the iron maiden as she is her own boss.

Sex and the City

In *Sex and the City* the characters distinctly fall into the archetypes. Charlotte, with her prescribed romantic ideals of love and marriage, her prim and proper demeanor, and her ultra feminine style place her neatly in the child archetype. Samantha portrays the sex object archetype with a zealously never quite seen before on television. She loves her body and indulges its every desire. Miranda personifies the iron maiden archetype. As a lawyer she is in a highly masculine profession. She dominates the men she dates and is cynical of their affections. Carrie, with her voice-over narrative, serves as the primary storyteller in this series, and the mother archetype. She is the center of the series and provides much emotional support to the other characters. As a journalist, her advice extends beyond her group of friends to her loyal readers.

Extended Examples from Content Analysis Sample

Golden Girls

The characters are established immediately in this series. In the first scene of the first episode, Dorothy enters complaining about a new generation of students where she teaches. Her grumblings reflect the cynical, self-righteous tone of the iron maiden

archetype. Rose is upset because there are too many sad people where she works and Dorothy reminds her that she works in grief counseling. Rose's lack of common sense marks her as the child archetype. Blanche's entrance signifies her as the sex object archetype as she is wearing a fur, representing her upper class status, and has cucumbers on her eyes, to maintain her youthful appearance. Blanche states provocatively that she doesn't "need them on her thighs" implying that her thighs are as lovely as ever. Not only are the characters established immediately, but also markers of age pervade this series. For example, in the first episode, Dorothy says, "I would kill to be 40 again." She continues, talking about how, when with a group of 20-something teachers at work earlier that day, she had forgotten that she was older than the other women. Later, when she got in her car and looked in the mirror, Dorothy said she didn't recognize the person staring back at her. Rose responds with a stupid question, "Who was it?"

When Sophia first appears in the scene, she is met by Dorothy who shouts curiously, "Ma?" as in what are you doing here. Sophia is literally the mother of Dorothy and in some episodes they share sweet sentimental moments as mother and daughter. Later in the series, although not in this sample, Rose and Blanche also describe Sophia's role as motherly. While Sophia's representation does not always fall neatly into the mother archetype, she embodies the ethnic mother stereotype from the old country, complete with stories from Sicily that begin with, "picture this ... Sicily 1920-something ...," her pocketbook secured tightly to her arm, a slap on the back of the head if you have done something wrong, and enough Italian cooking to feed an army. For example in season 1, episode 10 when it is suspected that Sophia might be having a heart attack, she

continues to offer the doctor food that she has spent the day cooking (and eating). “You hungry? ... You want some food?” she asks the doctor. Sophia not only wants the doctor to eat, but she also wants to see his delighted expression about the food’s good taste. When Sophia does not fit into the mother archetype, she generally becomes the iron maiden archetype. This is due mostly to her quick-witted, sarcastic, comedic remarks about herself and others. For example in the first episode, Sophia says Blanche “looks like a prostitute,” calls Blanche’s boyfriend a “scuzzball,” and tells Rose to “get a poodle” to cure her loneliness.

In other episodes, Sophia marks herself as old literally or by describing the way her body does not function as it used too. In season 1, episode 5, Sophia states, in response to Dorothy suggesting she should see a doctor because she looks pale, “I’m an old white woman, you want color, talk to Lena Horne.” In season 1, episode 15, Sophia informs Rose that the man in her bed is dead. Rose questions Sophia in disbelief. Sophia responds, “You don’t think I’d recognize death? I lived in a retirement home, death visited more often than children.” Sophia moves beyond the mother archetype because her age allows her the freedom to step out of rigid mothering roles set for women. She can be flippant and funny instead of nurturing as the role dictates.

However, Sophia is not without nurturing abilities. There are many scenes when she and Dorothy play cards or have a tête-à-tête where Sophia offers comfort and advice to her daughter. The real twist here, which explains Dorothy’s embodiment of the mother archetype combined with the iron maiden in two of the six episodes, is when Dorothy sometimes has to play the parent to her aging mother. For example in season 1, episode 1

Dorothy has to pay for the cab Sophia took from the retirement home. Sophia states, “I’m a totally independent person. I need \$67.” In season 1, episode 5, Dorothy and the doctor are talking about Sophia’s health as if she were not there, Sophia says “What am I two-years-old? I don’t know my own symptoms? I lived in this body since I was born if something goes wrong, I’m the first one to hear about it.” Because age and aging are such prominent features in this series, a distortion of archetypes occurs. Even with these disruptions, Dorothy, Blanche, Rose, and Sophia represent the archetypal patterns of the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother respectively. While *Golden Girls* offered viewers portrayals of women beyond their thirties, the repetitive nature of these archetypal mediations still only provides a limited, and sometimes caricature, representation of women on television.

Living Single

In much the same vein as *Golden Girls*, the characters on *Living Single* represent the four archetypes described in this study. In this case, disruptions to the archetypes reflect notions of race instead of age. While style is important in *Golden Girls*, the clothing and hairstyles of the women on *Living Single* visibly mark their representative archetype as much as their interactions. The first episode of this series clearly portrays the four characters as the four archetypes. For example, in the first scene of episode 1 Synclaire sits at her desk wearing an oversized urban beret with a rim. As she answers the phone in a strange British accent, Khadijah questions her use of this accent. Synclaire responds by stating, “I’m making them think we’re international.” Khadijah’s questioning resembles that of a mother with a teenage daughter, who has recently

acquired the style and persona du jour of her peers. This very first scene sets up the dynamic between the child and mother archetypes. Khadijah, as the mother archetype, supports Synclaire by employing her as the secretary at the office of the urban magazine, *Flavor*, owned by Khadijah. *Flavor*, a magazine about urban, African American culture contributes to Khadijah's standing as the mother archetype. Through this magazine, Khadijah carries and conveys a sense African American culture in New York. This magazine gives Khadijah a voice to provide advice and solace to the Black community. As Regine, who works at an upscale boutique, enters the scene, she wears a short black skirt, a low cut cream shirt with sheer sleeves, and high heels. She brags about her new man stating, "good news ... couldn't wait for you to get home to rub your noses in it ... the stretch limo outside belongs to my new boyfriend." She continues talking about how she and her boyfriend were going out for lunch, but "never made it out of the limo ... he ate caviar from my cleavage and we drank champagne from my shoes." Regine, the sex object archetype, does not stop there. She says, "he could be the one ... he is fine, educated, wealthy, and a has butt with dents on the side with the promise of power." Khadijah admonishes Regine, "you need to start looking beyond the man's wallet." This monologue and exchange explicitly portrays Regine as the sex object and Khadijah as the mother archetype of the series. In her first appearance, Max embodies the iron maiden archetype when she walks in the apartment with a swagger, and boasts, "my look and my law were fierce ... don't touch me unless you want to get burned." She has short, angular braids and often wears a suit (although the short lengths tend to sexualized her). In addition to her shortened masculine name, Max carries a brief case to signify her

powerful position as a successful lawyer. When discussing her divorce case, another main character Kyle Barker (T.C. Carson) says he feels sorry for the husband in the case. Max responds by stating, “someone’s got to protect women’s rights,” reflecting the iron maiden archetype as the carrier of feminist agenda.

Later in this same episode, Synclaire finds out that Regine’s new man is married. Like a child, Synclaire cannot contain herself and blurts out this secret to Regine. To comfort Regine, Khadijah puts her arm around her and says, “Look ... listen, as much as I love to be right, and you know mother does love to be right. I wish I was wrong this time, but girl, the man is married.” The use of “look” and “girl” here are indicators of the way language marks their racial identity as Black women. In this particular case, “girl” is used to mark solidarity among the women, whereas “look” acknowledges that the position that Khadijah is taking with Regine might cause strife (Scott, 1995). In this scene Khadijah not only calls herself a mother, but also provides consolation, which is representative of the mother archetype. In the last exchange between Khadijah and Regine, Khadijah advises Regine, “You have to start taking care of yourself.” Regine says, “you’re right, Khadijah.” Khadijah responds to the camera, “Mother always is.” Again Khadijah refers to herself as mother, although her character embodies the mother archetype; it also exemplifies the iron maiden as Khadijah is often seen as the voice of reason among the group. This representation of the strong, independent, but nurturing mother is reflective of the Black mother’s need to be self-reliant and stoic in order to prepare herself and her children for the harsh realities of racial oppression. hooks (1993) says this “strong black women is practically deified in black life” and “makes care for

material well-being synonymous with the practice of loving” (p. 233). Khadijah’s representations of the mother archetype are intersected by race¹, which compel her to embody both mother and iron maiden archetypes. Markers of race appear in the language and cadence of the characters’ speech as well as upon the body.

In this series, when the iron maiden archetype is intersected by race, as in the case of Max, the archetype becomes hyper-sexualized. Max’s suits, while representative of her high-powered position in the masculine domain of law, are often so short that her power seems derived from sexuality as it would be for the sex object archetype. This is an example of Max’s embodiment of both the iron maiden and the sex object archetypes. Another example of the iron maiden archetype acting in a sexualized way occurs in season 1, episode 15. Max is so consumed with her man du jour that she leaves the Christmas celebration to have sex with him. And while she dominates the men she has relationships with, Max objectifies herself, as well as men, in a sexualized way. These disruptions to the classic archetypes in *Living Single* reflect notions of race, specifically the strong, independent mother and the hyper-sexualized black body. hooks (1992) connects this idea of the hypersexual woman of color to the colonization of the Black body. This body is seen as a site for exotic, other worldly, and primitive pleasure. Sexualizing Max, who shows many characteristics of the iron maiden archetype, diminishes the power, strength, and independence this archetype typically characterizes.

¹ While all persons and characters are gendered, raced, and classed, the use of race in this dissertation generally refers to Blackness.

The sexualization in this series turns this character from a feminist iron maiden to a sex-crazed buffoon.

Sex and the City

Since this show revolves around sex (hence the title), all of the characters are sexualized even though they fall neatly into the archetypal patterns. Carrie represents the mother archetype, as she is not only the voice over narrator, but also an advice columnist, offering counsel to many loyal readers. In the first season, many of the episodes begin with "Once upon a time." The narratives revolve around social and sexual relationship mores that Carrie grapples with while doing "research" for her columns. For example, in season 1, episode 1, Carrie ponders whether women can have sex like men -- that is without feeling emotionally involved. Carrie is the central character who connects all the other characters in this series. The other characters often seek out her opinion for solace and guidance, particularly Charlotte the child archetype. For example in season 1, episode 8, Charlotte contemplates about having a three-some with her boyfriend, Jack, and confides in Carrie about the dream she had. Carrie advocates, "Dreams are a good way to experiment." When Charlotte asked, "Do you think it means I should do it?" Carrie responds, "It's your call, but don't do it just to make Jack happy." Charlotte suggests, "but maybe it will bring us closer" and Carrie responds, "Sweetie, don't you think it's weird you are thinking about sleeping with someone you don't know, to get closer to Jack?" To this, Charlotte queries, "but how well do we ever know the people we sleep with?" In a voice over, Carrie describes Charlotte's character, "that was the thing about Charlotte, just when you were about to write her off as a Park Avenue

Pollyanna, she'd say something so right on you'd think she was the Dali Lama."

Charlotte interrupts this narration asking, "Do you think my hair is too shiny today?"

And Carrie in a voice over states "and then she'd say something else." This exchange establishes the characters of Carrie and Charlotte as the mother and child archetypes respectively. While Carrie offers comfort and advice, Charlotte asks absurd questions that make her look silly and naïve.

Charlotte embodies the child archetype in other ways as well, specifically through her controlled sexuality. Even though she was seriously thinking about having a three-some with her boyfriend, sexual experimentation is out of character for Charlotte. This is confirmed in the same episode when Carrie asks in a voice over, "if Charlotte was actually considering a three-some who wasn't?" meaning that if the sweet, proper, naïve Charlotte would consider this, it must be conventional. Charlotte finds herself in other uncomfortable sexual situations as she tries to negotiate the narrow boundaries between the good girl who "plays by the rules" and an adult single woman living and dating in Manhattan. For example in season 1, episode 4, Charlotte's boyfriend wants to have anal sex with her. Again she confides in Carrie for advice. In a hilarious cab scene with the four women, all the archetypes weigh in on the subject. Carrie, the mother archetype, arranges to pick up the others because Charlotte "needs all the girl support" she can get. Miranda, the iron maiden archetype, states, "it's all about control ... if he goes up there either he'll have the upper hand or you will ... the question is if he goes up your butt will he respect you more or less ... that's the issue." For the iron maiden archetype, the issue is not about sex or romance; it is strictly about power. Samantha, the sex object

archetype, chimes in, “Front, back, who cares a hole is a hole ... this is a physical expression that the body was designed to experience and p.s. it’s fabulous.” For Samantha everything is about sexual pleasure. Charlotte ends this exchange still confused, “what are you talking about? I went to Smith,” implying that this is not proper talk for her genteel upbringing. Ultimately Charlotte decides that she cannot be “the up-the-butt girl” because “men don’t marry the up-the-butt girl ... whoever heard of Mrs. Up-the-Butt ... no, no, no ... I can’t, I want children and nice bedding.” While Charlotte’s embodiment of the child positions her as prudent and uptight sexually, her decision not to compromise for the man’s desire demonstrates real strength in understanding what is right for her, even if her reasoning is lacking.

In opposition to Charlotte’s sexual prudence, Samantha embodies the sex object archetype with fervor. In addition to the cab scene, Samantha constantly and explicitly describes her sexual exploits. For example in season 1, episode 4, Samantha is sleeps with the chef of a new restaurant her public relations firm is promoting. In the morning after the restaurant opening, Samantha calls Carrie to tell her, “I am so fucked ... I mean literally ... I have been fucked everyway you can be fucked.” Carrie stops her for a moment chiding, “If you keep talking like that I’m going to have to charge you by the minute.” Samantha continues, “him on top, me on top, me on my side ... on his side, on his face ... have you ever done that? ... Do it immediately.” Samantha’s character is so essentialized as the sex object archetype that even when she thinks she is in love with a man in season 1, episode 12, she has to break it off because his penis is not big enough to pleasure her.

Miranda Hobbs is the quick-witted, sarcastic, and often pessimistic, cynic of the group, especially when it comes to love. She is also ambitious and driven when it comes to her career. Miranda is the epitome of the liberal feminist career woman, often pointing out the double standards between the sexes and offers legal assistance when necessary. She believes in equal opportunity for men and women, but through the already established patriarchal structures. Miranda does not believe in the fairy tale of happily ever after and does not want or need a man to complete her.

Miranda is seen as sexually unappealing for a three-some in season 1, episode 8 when the other women exclude her from their choice of sexual third. This notion of the sexually unappealing iron maiden pervades each series. This is significant in that it reflects real life backlash of feminist criticisms that only sexually unattractive women believe in feminism because they are unable to get a man. Miranda, especially in this first season, wears big masculine business suits, has stark red hair, and a blunt cut. In one scene, this suit comes complete with a man's tie. In this same scene in season 1, episode 4, Miranda says in response to Carrie's concern about her new relationship, "It's not like we're throwing out our schedules." For the iron maiden archetype, this means that career concerns always trump matters of the heart.

The archetypes of the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother appear in all three series. Miranda from *Sex and the City*, Max from *Living Single*, and Dorothy from *Golden Girls* represent the iron maiden archetype. It is through the iron maiden archetype that a feminist perspective can be embedded within the text of the program. Depending on how the characters are represented, this feminist perspective can

be privileged or trivialized. If the iron maiden is portrayed as the buffoon, as is the case in *Murphy Brown*, according to Dow (1996), the feminist perspective serves as a cautionary tale rather than a progressive agenda. On *Living Single*, Max's hypersexualized role also reduces the impact of her feminist politics. Miranda's feminism remains strictly in the ideology of personal choice. Dorothy, arguably the most feminist character, extends her feminism to broader social issues.

Samantha, Regine, and Blanche embody the sex object archetype in *Sex and the City*, *Living Single*, and *Golden Girls* respectively. Although each of these characters owns her sexuality, this archetype has little substance beyond sex. Charlotte, Synclaire, and Rose's portrayals of the child archetype degrade women to little girls. This is most prominent with Synclaire and Rose, and the discourse of these two characters is often discounted even if they are saying something significant. Charlotte's portrayal of the child archetype is slightly more complex, which provides this character with more import than the other child archetypes. Finally, Carrie, Khadijah, and Sophia portrayed the mother archetype. While Sophia is reduced to the comedic stereotype of the ethnic mother, Khadijah embodies the strong independent mother common in notions of the Black family. Carrie, as the mother archetype, serves as the connecting character in a series that values the camaraderie among the group. While the idea of family among the four characters is important in each series, the use of insult of humor in *Living Single* and especially *Golden Girls* disrupts the notion of female solidarity, which is the most progressive outcome of *Sex and the City*.

While each series was praised as groundbreaking and innovative, the recombinant nature of the archetypal representations prove otherwise. While *Golden Girls* brought older women to primetime; *Living Single* broke many racial barriers in television; and *Sex and the City* portrayed the very intimate lives and friendships of women; their archetypal representations limit the diversity in women's roles in the media. As television serves as our modern storyteller, reflecting hegemonic norms and values, these limited representations contribute to society's understanding of women's roles, and thus, hinder further advancements toward diversity and equality. These results, from a limited first season sample, provide a starting point in which to examine these series further. Having demonstrated that the archetypes are present in each series, I use a textual analysis of the archetypes throughout the length of each series and a comparative narrative analysis to explore particular themes within and among the series.

Comparative Textual Archetypal Analysis

This section expands on the archetypal roles of each character throughout the duration of each series. It provides a deeper understanding of how the archetypes function within each series. In addition, this section provides a comparative analysis of the particular archetypes and narratives among the three series.

The Iron Maiden Archetype

The characters of Dorothy Zbornak, Maxine Shaw, and Miranda Hobbes, from *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* respectively, embody the iron maiden archetype. Within the three series, the iron maiden archetypes have very similar roles. They are masculine, perceived as ugly or at least less attractive than the other characters,

independent, sometimes bitchy, and bring forth the most feminist perspective of all the other archetypes.

Golden Girls

Dorothy, played by the statuesque and husky-voiced Bea Arthur, is so unmistakably masculine that she is often compared to men. For example, after Dorothy has benign growth removed from her foot in season 1, episode 18, Rose describes her as the “big ugly man with a limp.” In season 2, episode 20, Rose is creating a documentary for a class project. Throughout the episode, Dorothy receives comparisons to Fess Parker, a former actor who played Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, and Senator Eugene Smith in the *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* series. In season 6, episode 12, Dorothy’s brother, Phil, dies. Throughout the series Phil’s masculinity is questioned as he is married to a welder and he likes to cross-dress. At the funeral, Phil’s wife, Angela, dresses Phil in women’s clothing for all eternity. Slightly confused by Phil’s dress and seeing the statuesque presence of Dorothy, the priest questions Dorothy’s sex, as he is unsure if she is a man or a woman. In season 7, episode 24, the four women attend a high school reunion, even though none of them attended this high school. The women choose nametags from the no-show table. When Sophia realizes her name-tag reads, “Myron Zucker,” she says, “Here Dorothy trade with me.” In addition to Dorothy’s masculine appearance, this character’s masculinity is displayed through the harsh, acerbic tone, and her perceived unattractiveness.

The other women in the house often make Dorothy the bud of their jokes about her lack of a sex life. While Dorothy does date periodically throughout the series, her

lack of romantic life also reflects her independence. This independence comes through in her strength to take a stand against things she thinks are unjust. In season 1, episode 19, Dorothy and Rose decide to install new plumbing in the bathroom. When Lou, the plumber, brings the new toilet in he laughs at Rose and Dorothy chiding, “going into your feminist phase a little late in life ... ladies, the installation of the toilet is a delicate procedure. It takes schooling, a trained technician, it takes a man, for god sakes!” Dorothy insists, “We’re going to install it ourselves. Women are capable of more than just cleaning these things.” The plumber refuses to haul the toilet into the bathroom. He taunts, “You want to play plumber? Why don’t you play moving man too,” and leaves the toilet in the living room. Dorothy slams the door in the plumber’s face. The episode is a comedy of errors, but resolves with Dorothy and Rose installing the toilet. Dorothy and Rose feel so proud and want everyone to admire their accomplishment. As Dorothy and Rose boast, Sophia remarks, “Knock it off. It’s water not oil.”

In a more serious story line in season 5, episode 1 and 2, Dorothy complains that she has been ailing for five months. She says she “can’t speak, can’t get out of bed, it’s too difficult to raise my arm.” Several doctors run tests and tell her she is not sick, then refer her elsewhere. The different doctors tell Dorothy she is “getting old,” or needs to “see a psychiatrist.” The most condescending doctor, Dr. Budd, suggests Dorothy, “Take a cruise, see a hypnotist, change your hair color.” Dorothy feels no one believes that she is really sick. The doctors make her feel as though she is making up symptoms. Dorothy’s experiences are reflective of Goudsmit’s (1994) study of the misdiagnosis of females’ ailments. Goudsmit asserted that doctors misdiagnosed female patients

assuming that the symptoms are “all in her [the patient’s] head.” In addition, Goudsmit argued that because of misdiagnoses, female patients were also offered ineffective treatments.

Frustrated, Dorothy turns to her neighbor, pediatrician, Dr. Harry Weston,² because she knows he will at least listen to her. Dr. Weston believes Dorothy and refers her to a trusted doctor in his medical center, Dr. Chang. After reviewing her medical history and running a few tests, Dr. Chang diagnoses Dorothy with chronic fatigue syndrome. Dorothy is simply relieved to know that she is not crazy, but can actually name what has been ailing her, even though this debilitating illness can only be managed, not cured. While dining with Rose, Blanche, and Sophia to celebrate her diagnosis, Dorothy states, “I can’t tell you what a relief it is to just be sick, not sick and crazy, and to know what I have and that there are a lot of other people with the same thing.” During this dinner celebration, Dorothy notices Dr. Budd eating at a nearby table. Dorothy approaches,

Dr Budd ... you probably don’t remember me, but you told me I wasn’t sick. Do you remember you told me I was just getting old ... Well I’ll tell you, Dr. Budd, I really am sick. I have chronic fatigue syndrome. That is a real illness. You can check with the Center for Disease Control.

Dr. Budd starts to respond, but Dorothy continues, “Well I’m glad, at least I know I have something.” Dr. Budd tries to excuse himself from the conversation. Dorothy says, “Not so fast. There are some things I have to say. There are a lot of things that I have to say.

² The character Dr. Harry Weston (Richard Mulligan) also starred in two *Golden Girls*’ spin-offs: *Empty Nest* and *Nurses*.

Words can't express what I have to say, what I went through, what *you* put me through."

Dorothy begins to tear up, and again Dr. Budd tries to end the exchange. Dorothy commands, "Sit. I sat for you long enough" and continues,

I came to you sick, sick and scared, and you dismissed me. You didn't have the answer and instead of saying, 'I'm sorry I don't know what's wrong with you,' you made me feel crazy, like I had made it all up. You dismissed me. You made me feel like a child, a fool, a neurotic who was wasting your precious time. Is that your caring profession? Is that healing? No one deserves that kind of treatment, Dr. Budd, no one. I suspect that had I'd been a man, I might have been taken a little bit more seriously and not told to go to the hairdresser.

This exchange is significant because it reflects gendered issues with regards to women's ability to make informed decisions regarding their bodies and their health. When health care professionals discount women's knowledge about their bodies, their agency decreases.

Dr. Budd tries to defend himself from Dorothy's attacks, but his wife, sitting across from him, tells him to "Shut up!" Dorothy persists,

I don't know where you doctors lose your humanity, but you lose it. If all you doctors, at the beginning of your careers, could get very sick and very scared for a while, you'd probably learn more from that than anything else. You better start listening to your patients. They need to be heard. They need caring. They need compassion. They need attending to. You know, someday, Dr. Budd, you're

gonna be on the other side of the table and as angry as I am, and as angry as I always will be, I still wish you a better doctor than you were to me.

Dorothy returns to her table feeling “better than I have felt in a long time.” She raises her glass “to my friends who made being sick a little easier because they cared.”

While many episodes of *Golden Girls* deal with illness and/or have political import, this one seems to be explicitly feminist. Differential treatment of female patients has long been a feminist issue. Feminist scholar, Goudsmit (1994) examined several cases of misdiagnoses and differential treatment between male and female patients. She discovered that women were seen as weak or hysterical. In one of the studies (Ayanian & Epstein, 1991) Goudsmit examined, she found female patients with more severe symptoms of heart disease were under-diagnosed and offered fewer procedures, such as by-pass surgery. Goudsmit (1994) also stated, “the assumption that the cause is psychological or psychosomatic tends to stop practitioners from checking for other contributory factors, and this may lead to errors ... inappropriate treatment, and to a great deal of unnecessary suffering” (pp. 7-8). Dorothy’s criticism of her treatment is more than substantiated, as this type of stereotypical treatment could be deadly, not just for women, but also for the elderly. This episode epitomizes a political stance, expressed in *Golden Girls* through Dorothy, the iron maiden archetype.

Living Single

Max of *Living Single* is similar to Dorothy in that she is often referred to as masculine, ugly, or evil by the other characters, specifically Kyle and Regine. Kyle and Max have an on and off, love and hate, friendship and romantic involvement. Their

banter is insulting, but often playful, instead of hateful, partly because it supposedly hides and/or represents their true passionate feelings for each other. In season 1, episode 3, Kyle knocks at the door of Khadijah, Synclaire, and Regine's apartment, and Max answers and informs, "Khadijah, you have a big ol' head of broccoli at the door" making fun of Kyle and his dreadlocks. Kyle says he is in such a good mood that even the sight of Max will not ruin his day. Max questions, "what doctors discover a cure for ugly?" Kyle retorts, "No, baby you just gonna have to wait." In season 1, episode 9, Khadijah is leaving for a dinner date, and Max reminds her to "bring me home a doggie bag." Kyle remarks, "They named a whole bag after you." In season 2, episode 16, Kyle and Regine are writing a screenplay. Kyle says, "It needs a villain ... Maxzilla, the shrew." Throughout the series, Max tells Kyle to "be a man!" Kyle once responds, "If I was half the man you are, I might be willing" (S1, E11). Referring to Max as masculine is not limited to just her repartee with Kyle.

In season 3, episode 16, Max wants to borrow the dress Regine is creating, as the costume designer for a soap opera. Max begs saying she needs it for a reception at the mayor's mansion, where people such as the district attorney, JFK Jr., and RuPaul will be there. "I mean you don't want me to be out-dressed by a drag queen?" Regine walks over to Max and takes her hands, stating in an affected tone, "That's not a fair comparison. RuPaul is more feminine." In season 3, episode 15, Regine says to Max, "You look like a virus with braids." Max responds, "You look like a leprechaun with a weave." This kind of banter occurs throughout the series among all of the characters, although it seems more prominent between Kyle and Max and Max and Regine. In

another example of Max's masculinity, Regine, describing how no man can resist her, states, "If Max had two-percent more testosterone she would be hitting on me." In season 5, episode 10, Synclaire pretends to be a man and she mimics Max's behavior.

Unlike Dorothy of *Golden Girls*, Max's independence involves more of a stubborn, selfish need to be right than any real feminist perspective. Her feminist stance is reduced to one-liners and self-aggrandizing. Her law is always "fierce," and others should watch out unless they "want to get burned." In season 4, episode 2, Max runs for City Alderwoman. When Khadijah interviews her for *Flavor*, Max's responses are less than substantive.

Khadijah: One of the biggest problems in the school district is speeding in school zones. Now, as alderman, what would you do about it?

Max: Children are not speed bumps!

Khadijah: And?

Max: And ... next question.

Khadijah: Graffiti. Now your opponent, Malava, favors an increase in police controls. See now that can lead to higher taxes. Now what do you propose?

Max: It's time to win back our walls!

Khadijah: How?

Max: Dedication, perseverance, and a word I'm not afraid to say – sweat!

Khadijah: You know, Max, when you answer these questions, it's ok to actually say something.

Max: Well, Khadijah, look that's my secret, my press conference proved I know how to talk to the voters. I mean, what you say isn't near as important as the rhythm ... Next question!

Khadijah shaking her head in disbelief: Crime?

Max: Not on *my* streets!

Khadijah: Education?

Max: Books are silent friends.

Khadijah: Employment?

Max: Work works!

Khadijah ends the interview and decides to endorse the third party candidate, Perez, in *Flavor's* local politics section. Khadijah, the mother archetype, carries more of a feminist agenda in this series than Max, the iron maiden archetype. While this seems contrary to the iron maiden archetype, it does reflect a common understanding of the strong, independent, Black mother in many Black and African American communities (hooks, 1993).

In addition to Max's inflated feminist stance and self-importance, this self-proclaimed "proud freeloader," has a gluttonous appetite for food, her work, and sex. Max can be seen rummaging for food in her neighbors' home, eating M&M's in her cereal, devouring a slab of ribs at a barbeque, and drinking blue Kool-Aid out of the pitcher. Max's insatiable appetite is a major part of her character. This gluttony contributes to Max's portrayal as unflattering and masculine because she is not delicate; and it can be seen in her romantic life as well. Max's on-screen kisses are ravenous. She

seems to devour her men as well as her food. Throughout the series, Max's character becomes more hyper-sexualized. She is gluttonous in her consumption of men. Max's hyper-sexualized representation and comedic gluttony reduce her ability to carry a real feminist agenda.

Max's work comes first in her life as she sacrifices many relationships and the love of her life, Kyle, in season 4, episode 27, when she uncompromisingly stays in New York as he leaves for his new job in London. Max boasts of her work and courtroom strategies, although she is more vibrato than substance. In her romantic relationships, Max is in control, seemingly unemotionally attached. In season 3, episode 17, Max and Kyle break-up for the first time. She tells him, "You let your emotions get involved." Kyle replies, "Excuse me 'Tin Man,' I have a heart ... what do you care about?" Max quickly rattles off, "Food, shelter, my career, and good sex," although it is clear she cares about Kyle too. When Kyle asks if she needs a ride, Max refuses the offer and says, "I'll be taking a cab." Even in the series finale when Max and Kyle reunite, Max cannot admit her feelings for Kyle in a loving way. Kyle says, "This is either the cruelest trick the cosmos have ever played or proof positive we are destined to be together." Max responds, "No, Kyle, we are *doomed* to be together."

Sex and the City

Similar to Max and Dorothy, Miranda Hobbes, of *Sex and the City*, is the quick-witted, ill-tempered, sarcastic, and often pessimistic, cynic, especially when it comes to love. While Miranda is not seen as masculine or unattractive as are Max and Dorothy, she is mistaken for a lesbian by a co-worker in season 1, episode 3, not chosen by her

friends for a hypothetical three-some in season 1, episode 8 (discussed above), and told she acts “like the guy” (S3, E4) in her relationships. In season 1, episode 2, Miranda calls herself “the intellectual beard” while dating a man who is obsessed with models. “So obviously not a model,” as described by her date’s friend, Miranda’s appearance lacks a “supermodel” quality. In this same episode, Miranda points out that “the advantages given to models and beautiful women in general are so unfair it makes me want to puke ... we should just admit that we live in a culture that promotes impossible standards of beauty.” While Miranda begins to critique the unobtainable and possibly dangerous feminine beauty expectations, Carrie reflects, “Yeah, except men think they are possible.” This statement deflects a broader social critique and reinforces the idea that beauty ideals are expected of heterosexual women who desire male partners. Then Charlotte says, “I don’t know. That no matter how good I feel about myself, if I see Christy Turlington ... I just want to give up.” Miranda scornfully concludes, “well I just want to hold her down and force feed her lard, but that’s the difference between you and me.” And the discussion of beauty standards resolves into personal mockery, representing Miranda’s bitchiness instead of feminist critique.

Miranda, like her iron maiden counterparts, is also ambitious and driven when it comes to her career. It is interesting to note that both Miranda and Max are lawyers. The Harvard Law graduate earns partner status at her law firm in season 3, episode 9. Miranda is the epitome of the liberal feminist career woman. She often points out the double standards between the sexes and offers legal assistance when necessary; but as seen above, her critiques, similar to Max, usually do not go beyond the superficial, and

rarely challenge patriarchal institutions. Most reflective of her iron maiden archetype, Miranda maintains rigid boundaries for herself, especially when it comes to affairs of the heart. Miranda does not believe in the fairy tale of happily-ever-after and does not need a man to complete her or for any reason. In season 1, episode 9, Miranda introduces Charlotte to “the rabbit,” a vibrator that Miranda is more in touch with than any man who came before (no pun intended). In season 4, episode 4, Miranda implements a sex strike, turning to chocolate instead of men. Romantic and sexual entanglements do not motivate Miranda; she seeks pleasure through her work accomplishments.

As Miranda prides herself on her work achievements, she is often frustrated when the other women only want to talk about their romantic and sexual escapades. For example in season 2, episode 1, Miranda tries to engage the other women with talk of her new palm pilot. As Miranda tires of the other’s trivial conversation during brunch one morning, she admonishes them,

O.K. That’s it. I’m outta here. All we ever talk about is Big or balls or small dicks. How does it happen that four such smart women have nothing more to talk about but boyfriends? It’s like seventh grade with bank accounts. What about us, what we think, we feel, we know, Christ, does it always have to be about them? Just, you know, give me a call when you’re ready to talk about something besides men for a change.

Miranda storms out of the coffee shop and wanders the streets alone. However, at the end of this adventure, she runs into an ex-boyfriend (with the girl he left Miranda for) and hides. Miranda is then ashamed of her rigid expectations about how long it should take

to get over a man. This episode resolves with Miranda waiting for Carrie at the coffee shop, where Miranda allows her friend the space and time to reflect upon her relationship with Big and her newly single status. Endings such as this are common in *Sex and the City*. They emphasize the importance of the women's friendship, which are imperative in the characters' lives, yet, in this case, discount the significance of Miranda's critique.

Miranda does not want to be defined by, or dependent on, a man. When Miranda purchases her apartment in season 2, episode 5, she is bombarded with questions about whether or not there is a man moving in with her and if the money for the down payment is coming from her husband or her father. Her response to all of these questions is simply, "Just me." While talking with the other women, Miranda claims, "I'm telling you, if I were a single man, none of the would be happening ... I've got the money. I've got a great job and I still get, 'it's just you?'" Miranda expresses her frustration with the mainstream perception of women needing to be taken care of by a male figure. In addition, this quote reflects the differential gendered treatment of men and women.

While taking measurements of her new apartment, Miranda encounters her new neighbor. As the neighbor welcomes Miranda to the building, she recounts a story of the last tenant.

So glad to have a young person moving in, brings a little life to the place. Ruthie (the former tenant) kept pretty much to herself – never married (hushed tone). She died in there you know ... it was a week before anyone realized she passed, rumor has it, the cat ate her face ... So, just you?

Overall this episode challenges the notion that a woman needs the support of a man, as Miranda has the means to take care of herself, although the import is minimized by the cautionary tale told by her new neighbor. Miranda panics about being alone and ends up in the hospital. At best, this episode demonstrates the importance of the friendships among the main characters, but discounts women's ability to be happy, independent, and single.

In season 2, episode 8, Miranda first meets Steve, the noble bartender, when he pours her a glass of wine, while she grumbles about Carrie, who according to Miranda, "just dropped your [Carrie's] life and ran over to his [Mr. Big's]," instead of meeting Miranda as they had planned. Miranda and Steve go back to her place for a sexual tryst. As Steve is dressing to leave, he asks if he could call her. Miranda, while nonchalantly smoothing on lotion, believes they should just call it what it is ... "a one night stand." Instead of saying good night, Miranda says "great sex" as Steve leaves her apartment. In this scene Miranda stays true to form with the cynicism, with regards to romantic affairs, of the iron maiden archetype.

The following day Steve convinces Miranda to allow him to meet her later. After Miranda humiliates Steve in front of her friends, she sees Big entering the restaurant to meet Carrie. So surprised that Big actually followed through on one of his commitments to Carrie, Miranda lets down her guard and decides to believe, if only for a moment, in the (*Sex and the City* modern girl's) fairy tale. Miranda races out of the restaurant and chases Steve in the rain telling him she can believe in him and take a chance on love.

This is the first time Miranda allows herself to open her heart and it is her first serious relationship of the series.

It is not all happily-ever-after for Steve and Miranda. Their relationship suffers because of the different career ambitions, economic status, and commitment to the partnership. In season 2, episode 9, Miranda and Steve struggle with boundaries and schedules. In season 2, episode 10, Miranda asks Steve to attend a work event with her, but he has to wear a suit, which as a working-class bartender, he does not own. As they shop for a suit, Miranda offers to pay, but this only frustrates Steve. In the store, Steve charges part of the suit, writes a check, and pays cash for the balance. Steve is uncomfortable with his inability to pay and will not let Miranda contribute, even though she has disposal income. Their class differences contribute to their break up.

While getting pedicures with her friends, Miranda contemplates, “When single men have a lot of money, it works to their advantage, but when a single woman has money, it’s a problem you have to deal with. It’s ridiculous. I want to enjoy my success not apologize for it.” Later Steve arrives at Miranda’s door in a t-shirt and jeans saying that he returned the suit. Steve tells Miranda that she deserves someone “on her level.” Miranda, fighting back tears, angrily says, “So I’m being punished for being successful” and slams the door.

This episode and others demonstrate how successful women do not have the same power and advantages in relationships that successful men are afforded. In season 3, episode 12, Miranda decides to go to a speed dating function. As the men sit down and talk with Miranda, they rattle off their accomplishments. As soon as Miranda mentions

she is a lawyer, the eyes of the man across the table gloss over. No one is interested in hearing about her successes, much less dating her. Ultimately, Miranda lies and says she is a flight attendant; and suddenly the man across the table is intrigued. As soon as Miranda has a job that is deemed feminine, as thus socially acceptable for a woman to occupy, then she becomes more attractive to the opposite sex.

Miranda's character does develop throughout the series however. While she learns to love, Miranda remains in control of her life and her relationships. Steve and Miranda get back together and break up periodically throughout the series. They support each other through Steve's new business venture (S5, E5), Miranda's mother's death (S4, E8), Steve's testicular cancer (S4, E8 & 9), Miranda's pregnancy, as well as share custody of their son, Brady. In the final season, Miranda decides that she loves Steve. Over "three dollar beers," Miranda asks Steve to marry her, after the two of them list all the things they don't want in a relationship. Although it is difficult for her to open up to this, when she does, Miranda finds a rich life full of love, not only with her new husband, Steve, but also their child and her new mother-in-law. On the one hand, Miranda remains cynical. While looking for a wedding dress, she demands "no white, no ivory, nothing that says 'virgin.' I have a child. The gig is up." On her honeymoon, Miranda is uninterested in what she considers the "artificial" expressions of romance. She tells Steve, "I can't have sex anymore. I have a brain. I am not the honeymoon type." On the other hand, Miranda softens throughout the series, learning to be vulnerable and open to love in her partnership with Steve. For Miranda, having a baby brings her character the most growth, as others depend on her. As the independent career woman, Miranda's

lifestyle threatens patriarchal norms. As the married mother, Miranda falls in line with patriarchal expectations. While I do not believe Miranda's feminist perspective is reduced with this softening of her character, the perception of her might seem less threatening.

The Sex Object Archetype

The characters of Blanche Devereaux, Regine Hunter, and Samantha Jones, from *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* respectively, embody the sex object archetype. These characters are hyper-sexualized, superficial, and consumed with their own beauty. They connect beauty and sex with power.

Golden Girls

For those who do not remember *Golden Girls* well, when I mention the series and the sex object archetype, they are often shocked. They do not quickly connect a series about older women with sexuality, most likely due to mainstream narratives about the mature female body. They have forgotten the Southern beauty and charm of Blanche Devereaux. Blanche works in an art gallery and believes she is as lovely as the exhibits. It seems every other line out of Blanche's mouth involves self-admiration or sexual innuendo or both. For example, In season 1, episode 21, Blanche says she "treats her body like a temple." Sophia mocks, "Yeah, open to everyone, day or night." This type of ribbing is common among the four women in *Golden Girls*. Blanche compares herself to one of the *Charlie's Angels* stating, "I was once told I bore a striking resemblance to Cheryl Ladd ... but my bosoms are perkier." Dorothy scoffs at this remark, "Not even if you were hanging upside-down from a trapeze!"

Blanche sees herself as the most beautiful and sophisticated of the group. In season 2, episode 20, she says to Dorothy and Rose, "I couldn't go on if I looked like the two of you." In the same episode Blanche considers cosmetic surgery after attending a class reunion where many of her classmates have had "work done." She decides against plastic surgery because the doctor "looked at my body with desire." She says, "if I could land myself a doctor, I'd wait and have him pay for it ... besides, as long as I have the three of you to grow old with, I'll always be the youngest, and the prettiest, and the most desirable."

Blanche expects the other women to tell her how beautiful she looks. While deciding what to wear, Blanche asks, "Sophia, by placing this pearl necklace between my bosoms, does it make me look like I'm a sex-starved slut who is in need of a man to bed?" Sophia quickly responds, "Yes!" "Good, then pearls it is," concludes Blanche. In another episode, Blanche inquires, "What do you think of my new dress? Is it me?" Sophia describes the dress, "It's too tight. It's too short and shows too much cleavage for a woman your age." Dorothy interrupts, "Yes, Blanche. It's you."

In addition to Blanche's beauty, her sexual exploits are also extravagant. She had so many sexual partners that she wore red to her wedding. Blanche says, "Oh please, it's bad enough hearing all those snickers as you walk down the aisle, but me in white, even I couldn't keep a straight face." In season 2, episode 9, Blanche announces that she "pretended to be a virgin half a dozen times." In speaking of her sexual experience, Blanche says,

My first was Billy. Oh, I'll never forget it! That night under the dogwood tree, the air thick with perfume, and me with Billy. Or Bobby? Yes, that's right, Bobby! Or was it Ben? Oh who knows, anyway, it started with a "B."

In talking about one of her current male conquests, Blanche says, "He is so sophisticated and charming and rich and handsome. He fairly screams Blanche. At least, he will when I'm through with him." In season 6, episode 14, Blanche's gay brother, Clayton, returns to Miami with his boyfriend. Blanche, still uncomfortable with his sexuality says, "My goodness, what would the neighbors think if they saw two men lying in my bed?" Sophia quips, "They'd think it's Tuesday!"

Blanche connects attractiveness with power. As she ages, Blanche is afraid of losing her beauty because she sees it as a loss of power. Season 2, episode 1, Blanche thinks she is pregnant. While she and Rose have a frivolous discussion of the color of the pregnancy test, Dorothy brings the conversation back to the matter at hand, "Who is the father?" As Blanche looks through her date book, unsure of who the father might be, she says, "Well, that was a particularly active time for me. You know I was looking quite stunning. I had just had my teeth bonded and I was really irresistible." Blanche returns from the doctor even more distressed than upon discovering, through the home test, that she was pregnant. She locks herself in her room while Dorothy and Rose try to console her by saying the baby will be fine because it will have three mothers. As Dorothy and Rose argue over which university the baby will attend, Blanche interrupts, "I'm not pregnant. It's worse, much worse." Rose thinks Blanche is dying and nervously rattles on,

I'm sorry. I'm sorry for thinking all those bad things about you when I thought you were pregnant, like what a SLUT you were for sleeping with all those men. Things only a tramp would do. But, now that you're dying, please forgive me, Blanche.

Blanche dismissively interrupts again, "I am not dying, but I might as well be. It's menopause. Well, I wish I could die because as far as I'm concerned this is the end of my life."

Dorothy, Rose, and Sophia take Blanche to see a psychiatrist because of her dramatics. When the doctor questions Blanche about why she thinks her life is over, she responds, "Because it is. Because it means I'm old. Because it means I'm not a real woman anymore." The doctor interjects, "All it really means is that you no longer are able to bear children." Blanche reproves,

Oh it means much more than that. I just don't know how it happened. You know, only yesterday I was Magnolia Queen. You're a man. You don't understand. You don't get old and lose your appeal. Look at Mr. Cary Grant. Now he can have any woman he wants and he's in his 80s. Just show me a woman in her 50s who can do that!

The doctor interprets, "It's not just menopause. It's what it represents to you – growing older. And growing older represents a loss of attractiveness." The doctor questions Blanche, "Is that all there is to you – sex?" Blanche retorts, "Yes!" The doctor persists, "Men only value that in you?" Blanche replies, "Well, they used to. Now my only hope is to become an intellectual and find a retired Jew."

When Blanche returns home from the psychiatrist, Dorothy reiterates what the doctor has told Blanche, “You have to find all the other things you are ... It [menopause] makes no difference at all in your life whatsoever. It’s just a concept, not based on reality.” Here Dorothy describes how menopause is socially constructed as negative or a loss in women’s lives. Nineteenth century physicians saw menstruation as a disabling and restricting eternal wound. This type of understanding about women’s bodies still lives with us today. Dorothy describes how women are blamed “for being crazy when we get them [periods] and crazy when we don’t.” Dorothy explains to Blanche that she did not see menopause as “having anything to do with my [Dorothy’s] sexuality.” The episode resolves with Blanche coming to terms with menopause because “beauty like mine cannot fade overnight” and her friends “helped her get through ... right there throughout it all.”

Living Single

Regine, the sex object archetype in *Living Single*, is actually the least sexed character within the series, but falls into the sex object archetype because of her superficiality, narcissism, and vanity. Regine is often called a “diva.” Both Blanche and Regine view men as a means to a more affluent lifestyle. Unlike Blanche’s characterization of a hyper-sexualized southern belle, Regine’s behavior is more affected. Regine’s trademarks include her ever-changing wigs, “smooches,” her signature farewell, and her squeal of exclamation, “ahh, sookie sookie now.” In season 1, episode 17, Khadijah is throwing a party to thank her *Flavor Magazine* advertisers. Khadijah describes the party as a simple, casual affair. Regine convinces Khadijah to let her plan

the party. Khadijah agrees, “You got \$200.” Later Regine describes her plans, “How ‘bout this for the buffet table, an ice swan, surrounded by calla lilies, a dozen white doves.” Khadijah reminds, “You got \$200.” Regine cajoles, “Khadijah, this party is an extension of you.” Khadijah responds, “I don’t recall any ice swans where I’m from. And if you take a closer look, underneath all those wigs, you’d find your roots.” Affronted, Regine retorts, “I am everything I pretend to be.” This exchange dramatizes Regine’s brazen pretentiousness as she desires to be seen as urbane and sophisticated.

In season 2, episode 24, a toy company makes a doll in Regine’s likeness. The Shirene Doll has “six inter-changeable wigs” and says “smooches.” It is discovered that the Shirene Doll is highly flammable and her wigs easily catch fire, just as Regine was imagining all the ways she would spend her royalties from Shirene. Regine says she had cut off her family when she thought she was in the money. Regine tries to renounce her background as she cultivates a diva façade for herself to meet the “right” men – rich and handsome. Khadijah tells her, “You're gonna have a hard time finding a man. You're a snob from the projects!” In many ways, Regine appropriates Helen Gurley Brown’s Cosmo Girl style and performs an identity that reflects money, sexuality, and through this sexuality, power (Ouellette, 1999).

Regine’s superficiality can be seen in many ways in addition to her dating choices and denial of background. Regine is a gossip and in need of admiration. In season 1, episode 13, Kyle falls in love with Stacey (Nia Long) who is really just looking for a physical relationship, but Kyle wants more. While the women talk about Kyle, Regine says, “I can’t believe you all going on and on about Kyle and you haven’t said boo about

my holiday wig ... He is in love and no man can think clearly when he's in love, I should know. That's when I get the big money gifts." Regine dances around the kitchen as if she has won the lottery. Max responds, "Every time a word comes out of your mouth, you set the sisterhood back 100 years." Regine says, "Well, Max, next time you marching for women's rights, look up, I'll be in the box seats, with a fur on my back and a man on my arm." In season 3, episode 9, Scooter, Khadijah and Regine's long-time friend, proposes to Khadijah. Regine only focuses on the ring stating, "two-carat ... very persuasive ... for three carats, I'd marry damn near anyone."

Regine disassociates herself from "the projects" where she grew up as well as from her mother. Regine's mother is an obnoxious loud mouth, who dresses loudly as well. She embarrasses Regine with her dress, demeanor, and constant questioning about "when you gonna meet a man and put some beans in that oven?" In season 2, episode 13, Kyle is up for a promotion for recommending that his firm consider an African mutual fund. Kyle's supervisor, Lawrence, suggests Kyle's dreads are not corporate enough and advises him to change his hair. Kyle struggles with this decision stating that his hair is "an expression of his culture." While Khadijah states she would not change her appearance, which is why she works for herself, and Max unsupportively says, "Kyle, you're a stockbroker, you're a sellout either way," Regine has no problem transforming her appearance for those she wants to impress. While this episode speaks to African Americans' resistance to denying their heritage and assimilating to mainstream White culture, Regine has no qualms with this transformation. Kyle confronts the partners at his firm and declares confidently, "I will not violate my personal integrity ... my hair is part

of my heritage and a statement of pride.” None of the other bosses had a problem with Kyle’s style, except Lawrence. Lawrence, who is Black, says he was only trying to help. Kyle replies, “that is the saddest part, you actually believe that.” It is disappointing to Kyle and the other characters that one would have to deny who they are to get ahead. While Regine was proud of Kyle for standing up for himself, she still suggests that she would change her identity to be accepted, to please someone else’s expectations, and/or to get what she wants. Regine kowtows to whatever she believes will make her seem the most desirable to others. She cooks for men because she says good food is a “man trap.” Although Regine is a “strict vegetarian” she often cooks meat for her boyfriends.

Regine’s careers are also reflective of her superficiality. For the first half of the series, Regine works in a high-end clothing boutique. In season 3, episode 5, the boutique changes to a discount retailer (and Regine’s mother’s favorite store). Later in the episode, Regine accepts a position as a costume designer on a soap opera. Also in the series, Regine works as a stylist consultant to both Max and Khadijah.

Although Regine remains narcissistic, her character is not without growth over the course of the series. Regine’s confidence is shaken when she decides to get a breast reduction in season 2, episode 11. She describes her breasts as “one of my greatest aspects ... they are what make me a diva.” Soon after the breast reduction, Regine dates Darryl (Heavy D), a man she would normally consider beneath her. The other characters like Darryl because he is down to earth. Khadijah calls him “a rare brother” because he just wants to “treat Regine as well as I can for as long as she’ll let me.” Later, Regine breaks it off with Darryl because he is not ambitious enough for her.

With her confidence back, Regine dates Keith, an artist who she describes as “handsome ... cool ... kind ... strong and his paintings sell for quite a bit of money and he ain’t dead yet” (S3, E21). Regine’s mother finds Regine and Keith on the rooftop having sex (S3, E26); while this causes some conflict between Regine and her mother, it also brings about a more mature acceptance of the other. In season 4, episode 3, Regine breaks-up with Keith for not paying enough attention to her at one of his art exhibits. This marks a real turning point for Regine as she is without a man, and a job; the soap opera she worked on was cancelled.

Regine decides to get into style consulting and event planning. In season 5, episode 7, while trying to get a job coordinating a charity event, Regine meets Dexter, a formerly heavy-set philanthropist. Regine cannot stop telling Dexter the truth. She even says, “heck you can call me Nay Nay if you want,” her childhood name from the projects. In order to book the job and spend time with Dexter, Regine says she will take 15% off the lowest bid. When Regine receives the budget, she realizes it is not enough money to plan the event. Regine is distraught because she wants to tell Dexter the truth, but she also wants to impress him. While talking with Khadijah, Regine states,

You know that all my life I’ve done whatever it takes to get the man. But with Dexter I was completely honest. He asked me if I’d ever been to Italy ... you know I have a dozen patented responses to that question, some of which have me descended from Venetian royalty, but what did I tell him? No. And get this I said he could call me Nay Nay.

Khadijah acknowledges Regine's feelings, "Damn girl, you are sprung!" and encourages her to "dig deep into that diva bag of tricks ... and go get that man." Regine does not want to trick Dexter, but she manages to put together the event on a very small budget by placing high quality champagne labels on cheap bottles, hiring her friends to work the event, and requiring the servers to move quickly through the crowds so that the food last longer. When Dexter is about to kiss her, Regine confesses. Dexter already knows and he is still impressed with her. Regine leaves the series three episodes shy of the finale after Dexter proposes. In the final episodes, Regine is off happily living with Dexter. Regine's growth is more than just about finding love; it is about being true to who you are, where you come from, and accepting that, and being accepted by others. The little diva, Regine, learns this important lesson.

Sex and the City

One of the most progressive aspects of *Sex and the City* involves the explicit discussions of sex throughout the series. While sex is an inherent part of this series, the sex object archetype intensifies this discourse with wild stories of her sexual exploits. Like Blanche in *Golden Girls*, Samantha has a series of one-liners and one-night stands that solidify her as the sex object archetype. She epitomizes the sultry sex goddess. Samantha, like her sex object archetype cohort, considers herself the most beautiful creature walking the earth. In season 1, episode 2, the four women are sitting around discussing Miranda's latest date, the modelizer. As Charlotte begins to critique her appearances, she says, "I hate my thighs." Miranda commiserates, "Well, I'll take your thighs and raise you a chin." Carrie contributes, "I'll take your chin a raise you a hmm,"

taking a bite of Chinese food and pointing to her nose. The three women look at Samantha, who is violating girl culture by not commiserating about disliking a fragmented body parts (Coward, 1985). They press Samantha for her body confession and she says, “What! I happen to love the way I look.” Miranda retorts, “You should. You paid enough for it.” Samantha counters, “Hey. I resent that. I don’t believe in plastic surgery. Well, not yet.” Later in the same episode, Carrie meets Samantha at a fashion show. In a voice over, Carrie states, Samantha “never missed a fashion show. She was one of the only people I knew who thought proximity to beauty made her feel more attractive. In season 4, episode 2, Samantha decides to have nude pictures of herself taken. She announces, “This is not about a man’s approval. This photo is just for me, so when I’m old, and my tits are in my shoes, I can look at it and say, ‘damn I was hot.’” When the other women chide her about the photos, Samantha declares, “Look, I like my body. I’m getting these pictures taken. What’s the problem?” Carrie admires Samantha’s confidence in her body and applauds, “No problem. You’re my hero. I can’t even say yes to being in some charity fashion show.”

Samantha’s confidence extends beyond her appearance to her sexual adventures. Samantha sleeps with more than 40 partners throughout the six-year series, including a woman, and of course herself. Not only are these sexual escapades numerous; they are also audacious. Samantha confirms, “There isn’t enough wall space in New York City to hang all of my exes. Let me tell you, a lot of them were hung.” In season 1, episode 2, Samantha dates Barclay, a man who videotapes the models he has sex with. When Samantha beds Barclay, she requests that he give her the same consideration as the

models, as she thinks she is just as beautiful. This conquest proved to Samantha that she is just as camera ready as any model. Samantha sleeps with 20-somethings as well as 70-somethings and every age in between. She has sex with her realtor, Charlotte's doorman, a college student, a firefighter, a trainer, a dildo model, a farmer, the delivery guy, her assistant (right after she fired him), and a wrestling coach. In season 4, episode 8, while dating this coach, who Samantha imagines will be flexible enough to try many positions, she loses her ability to have an orgasm. This has never happened to Samantha before as she explains, "I'll admit I have had to polish myself off once or twice, but yes, when I RSVP to a party, I make it my business to come" (pun intended here).

Early in season 6, Samantha meets Smith Jerrod (formerly Jerry Smith an actor who Samantha renames for his career). Smith becomes one of Samantha's great loves. He is young, patient, and kind. He respects Samantha and supports her through her breast cancer, despite her desire to run away from him. The combination of Smith and her breast cancer allows Samantha to open herself up to more than just physical intimacy. In season 6, episode 11, Smith and Samantha are walking down the street, when Smith tries to hold Samantha's hand. Samantha is so uncomfortable with this intimate act that as she tries to avoid it, she falls into a grate in the sidewalk, hurting her foot. When Carrie inquires about what happened to her foot, Samantha explains, "It's Smith's fault. He did something to me that was so perverse ... he tried to hold my hand." When Smith tells Samantha how much he missed her while he was on location, he tries again to hold her hand. Samantha says she's "not that kind of girl." Smith rebukes her and as he declares

his feelings for her, he holds out his hand. Samantha accepts his hand this time, “but only until my foot heals” she reasons.

Although Samantha does find love with Smith at the end of the series, her character’s desire for sex has not diminished (except in the few breast cancer episodes). Samantha’s sexual drive is sometimes compared to that of a gay male in drag. In season 2, episode 9, Samantha runs into a former boyfriend, now a drag queen who emulates her. This comparison points to how when people live out sexualities and/or sexual desires that are beyond the mainstream boundaries, their identities often get reduced to only their sexuality. This is true for Samantha throughout much of the series, as it is for many gay men and lesbians in their daily lives.

The Child Archetype

The characters, Rose Nyland, Synclaire James, and Charlotte York, portray the child archetype in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*, respectively. The child archetype is portrayed as the wide-eyed, naïve, simpleton, who is often ridiculed by the other characters’ jokes. At times, the child archetype points out the profound absurdity of life just as a youngster might. With regard to sexuality, the child archetype is seen as a prude.

Golden Girls

Rose Nyland, the Minnesota native, represents the child archetype in *Golden Girls*. Rose tries to see the bright side of everything and looks for the good in people. She likes to be helpful, even though the other characters find her exasperating with her

long-winded, usually pointless, stories of St. Olaf, the small, droll Minnesota town where Rose grew-up, married, and raised her children before moving to Miami.

In season 1, episode 20, Blanche takes a psychology course to finish her degree. After failing the midterm exam, she seeks help from her professor. Instead of assistance, Blanche's professor offers to give her a passing grade for sexual favors. This quid pro quo is an unmistakable example of sexual harassment even though most cases are much more nuanced. After Blanche tells Dorothy and Rose what happened at school, the others share their stories of sexual harassment. Dorothy clearly explains. "What he did is sexual harassment. He can NOT get away with that." As the iron maiden archetype, Dorothy puts a name to the professor's behavior and insists that Blanche report this violation. Dorothy retells how when she first started teaching, her principal harassed her and she reported him immediately. Dorothy states, "I spoke out and because I did a lot of other women didn't have to go through the same thing." This discussion and Dorothy's contribution are examples of the consciousness raising that Dow (1996) contends occurred in *Designing Women*. Similarly, the iron maiden character here moves the discussion beyond personal experiences to more political social issues as did Julia Sugarbaker, the iron maiden character of *Designing Women*. Rose, the child archetype, recounts a much less politically charged sexual harassment story.

Rose narrates, "Nils Felander attempted to harass me repeatedly." Blanche asks, "What do you mean attempted?" Rose continues,

He worked at Lars Erickson, a drugstore and tackle shop [in St. Olaf]. He was a soda jerk. Now that I think about it he was the town jerk. Every Saturday

afternoon, I'd go in and have a sundae. Well ... Nils would arrange the ice cream scoops in an obscene way.

Blanche and Dorothy roll their eyes at Rose and her story, but Rose resumes, "I could never prove it because by the time I would take it home to show my father ... the evidence had melted. To this day every time I pass an ice cream parlor or a tackle shop, I blush." This exchange demonstrates the ridiculousness of Rose, her story, and her hometown as well as the disenchantment others have in Rose's stories and her storytelling ability. The other characters often tell Rose to "shut up." This abrasive verbal silencing reduces much of Rose's discourse. In season 2, episode 8, Rose, Dorothy, and Blanche become stranded on an island during their vacation. When they realize they are going to be rescued, Rose merrily acknowledges how special it is that they were all together. Blanche and Dorothy, tired of Rose's "Pollyanna" ways, exclaim in unison, "Shut up Rose!" To this, Rose replies, "I'm glad everything is back to normal."

Rose does not develop much throughout the series, her ridicule and St. Olaf stories become a significant, expected, and exaggerated part of the show through finale. Rose's childlike stupidity pervades the series. In season 3, episode 5, Rose volunteers with the Sunshine Cadets, a girls' organization similar to Girl Scouts. As Rose enters the home in her yellow Sunshine Cadet uniform, she informs Blanche and Dorothy that she is "concerned about nuclear war." Dorothy mocks, "And just yesterday her biggest concern was, 'is Bubbles, the chimp, traveling with Michael Jackson against his will.'" Rose's concern with nuclear war stems from letters several of her young cadets wrote about the

fear they have of the devastation it could cause. Dorothy acknowledges, "This is not so uncommon. Kids hear about nuclear war on T.V. They read it in the papers. It's part of their lives. They can't help but think about it." Rose decides to write a letter to Gorbachev and Reagan because she "always believed you can fix a problem no matter how big it is, if you just put your mind to it."

Later in the episode, the Russian ambassador visits to tell Rose, "Premier Gorbachev read Rose's letter and would like to meet with her. He was quite moved by her letter. He wished to extend an invitation to her and her family to visit Moscow and discuss nuclear disarmament and world peace." Immediately before the press conference Rose is supposed to attend, Dorothy and Blanche discover that Gorbachev believes that Rose is a child "based on her letter, we figure nine or ten." To save themselves the embarrassment, they decide to let one of the Sunshine cadets read the letter, but Rose decides she cannot let that happen because "a Sunshine cadet never lies." Upset by these events, Rose states, "This is the worst day of my life ... I made a total fool of myself in front of the press. I'm the laughing stock of the entire country. What am I going to tell my mother?" Dorothy responds, "Your mother is from St. Olaf, she'll understand." Rose continues to berate herself, "I'm just stupid. I'm a dimwitted, dumb, simple-minded, Grade A, Minnesota chucklehead." While Blanche and Dorothy try to console Rose, they do not disagree. The episode ends with Dorothy saying, "It's a shame more people don't think like nine-year-olds." If this episode focused on Dorothy and nuclear disarmament, it most likely would have been developed into a more political stance. However, because the episode involves Rose, the real issue is reduced to a joke about Rose's naïveté.

Rose is sexually active in the series, yet her sexuality is seen as prudish. In season 1, episode 2, Rose reveals that she has not had sex in the 15 years since her husband died. This episode, aptly titled “Rose the Prude,” focuses on Rose’s decision to have sex with her new boyfriend. The episode resolves with Rose coyly admitting she decided to have sex. While sex for the child archetype has rigid boundaries, in a marital relationship, the sexual experiences of the child archetype are frequent, adventurous, and extraordinary. In season 2, episode 23, Dorothy’s son-in-law’s infidelity drives the narrative of the show. Rose recounts how one night when Charlie, her late husband, did not want to have sex, she thought he was cheating on her. Dorothy and Blanche, confused as to how Rose would jump to such conclusions, question Rose’s assumption. Rose discloses that she and Charlie had had sex every night for the first 18 years of their marriage. Blanche, the sex object archetype is astounded by this revelation states, “No offense, but I find that story a little hard to believe ... you don’t even like talking about sex.” Rose responds, “It’s been my experience that those who talk about sex, don’t do it very often ... Charlie said that’s why we didn’t have headaches and we both had really shiny hair.” Blanche, shocked that Rose has had more sex than her and offended by Rose’s comments, storms out of the room. Later in the episode, Rose reveals that she and Charlie had sex every night from “seven until midnight,” every morning from “five to seven,” and “until noon” on Sundays. To this admission, Blanche, defeatedly responds, “Good lord, no wonder you still mourn that man.”

This notion of the sexually inexperienced good girl becoming the sexual vixen in sanctioned (i.e. marital) relationships pervades the idea of the virgin/whore dichotomy

that plagues women and girls' understandings of their own sexuality. Sexuality is socially constructed. Heterosexuality is compulsory and women's sexuality is seen as something for the male's pleasure. Women and girls are taught to be provocative, but inexperienced; seducers, but fend men off. At very young ages, girls are getting these mixed messages. They are taught sex is sinful, dirty, and immoral and then told to save it for someone they love. It is difficult for women to learn to enjoy their sexuality for themselves after receiving these harmful messages. Girls need to be taught that sex is a natural part of our human condition and should learn to respect their bodies and desire pleasure for themselves, not just their partners.

Living Single

Synclaire James of *Living Single* also embodies this child archetype. Synclaire is inexperienced, ludicrous, and acquiescent. She tries to keep peace and please everyone. Her signature "woo woo woo, woo woo woo" signifies how she provides comfort to those around her. Similar to Rose Nyland of the *Golden Girls*, Synclaire tries to see the positive side of things. Also curious, both Synclaire and Rose are from Minnesota. Minnesota connotes a midwestern innocence and simplicity that is somehow lost in the bigger, more dangerous cities of Brooklyn and Miami. Synclaire and Rose seem inherently connected to this connotation.

Synclaire is a struggling actor who works for her older and wiser cousin, Khadijah. Throughout the series, Synclaire tries on many accents and personas in preparation for her floundering acting career. Synclaire is incompetent with her job at

her cousin's magazine and unsuccessful with her acting aspirations, and the other characters find her not only silly and naive, but also stupid.

In season 1, episode 2, as Max and Regine argue about dating the same man. Synclaire, thinking she is pointing out something illuminating, states, "Hey, both you guys are dating guys named Charles." Khadijah expectedly responds, "You just determined to be a step behind, aren't yah?" In season 2, episode 16, when the other characters invest their money with Kyle, Synclaire decides she want to put her money someplace safe like a pyramid scheme or keno." While this might be a critique regarding the risks of the stock market, coming out of the child archetype, it is simply foolishness. At *Flavor*, Synclaire shreds important documents, files things "emotionally," and consults with the many trolls on her desk. In season 2, episode 16, coinciding with the 1994 Major League Baseball salary cap strike and Bobby Bonilla's guest appearance, Synclaire rallies her co-workers to strike against Khadijah, who rarely has enough money to keep the magazine running. Eventually Khadijah gives in to their two percent increase in salary demands. Later Synclaire apologizes, "Sorry I had to go against you. I had to stand up for myself. I learned that from you, you know?" Khadijah accepts this, "You're family, but if you would have held out, I'd had to throw you out." In season 3, episode 6, Synclaire spends the money Khadijah needs for a copier on Harvey Kitel acting lessons. Later that same season, episode 12, Synclaire loses a part on a commercial for Afro-sheen because she was "not ethnic enough." The part went to a "white girl with a curly perm."

The notion of a reduced number of Black roles in show business, as well as actors settling for stereotypical parts, or being told, as is the case here with Synclaire, that they

are not “Black enough” is an important critique of the industry. Filmmakers such as Robert Townsend and Keenan Ivory Wayans, and Spike Lee parodied the blaxploitation of Hollywood with poignant, biting, and at times humorous criticisms of the industry. The use of the child archetype to carry this critique does not provide the weight and seriousness needed.

The futility and foolishness of Synclaire can also be seen in how other characters respond to her. Like Rose, Synclaire is told to “shut up” throughout the series. This silencing demonstrates the other characters dismissal of the child archetype and her sunny outlook as well as the insignificance of the child archetype’s contributions to the social discourse of the series. In season 1, episode 1, Regine’s date stands her up. Three hours later, while Regine eats a box of chocolates to console herself, Synclaire comments, “You know, Regine, I don’t think he’s coming.” To this, Regine barks, “Shut up!” In season 1, episode 2, Regine complains to Khadijah about Max going out with her ex-boyfriend while they eat breakfast in the kitchen. Happily, Synclaire bounces in, “Mornin! I just had the best night’s sleep. No coffee for me, thanks. Don’t need it.” Again Regine responds sneeringly to Synclaire, “Shut up!” Regine is not only dismissive of Synclaire, but she also wants everyone to focus on her.

Regine is not the only character to admonish Synclaire. In season 3, episode 1, Regine has moved out of the apartment after a fight with Khadijah. Synclaire says she is having “separation anxiety” because Regine has left. Regine invites everyone except Khadijah to a party at her new apartment. Synclaire inappropriately comments on how Khadijah has nothing to do that evening because she was not invited. Overton,

Synclaire's boyfriend throughout the series says, "Sometimes I really love your wide-eyed innocence." Synclaire finishes his statement, "and sometimes you wish I'd shut up." Overton confirms, "Yeah, that's right."

Similar to Rose of *Golden Girls*, Synclaire is optimistic with regards to her love life and prudish sexuality. The other women try to teach Synclaire about dating. In season 1, episode 3, Max and Regine offer Synclaire romantic advice while trying to set Synclaire up on a date. Regine tells her to listen, laugh, and point out her chest, while Max tells her to dominate the conversation. Khadijah tells her not to let anyone tell her what to do, while demanding Synclaire zip up her jacket so she shows less cleavage. Max and Regine decide to spy on Synclaire's date, and Khadijah joins them. When Synclaire confronts them she says, it is like she has "three mothers" and tells them to leave. When Synclaire returns from her date, Khadijah says, "You know I don't appreciate you going off on me, but I'm glad you stood up for yourself ... don't push it alright, you know you ain't too big yet." This demonstrates the mother/child dynamic between Khadijah and Synclaire. This mother daughter dynamic is seen throughout the series and will be discussed more fully below.

Synclaire is wildly optimistic about love. She says, "Love is a magical thing" in response to Khadijah sleeping with her long-time best friend Scooter and "I believe in love" in reference to Kyle and Max's affair. Khadijah questions, "Why do we even put ourselves through all this nonsense for people we don't even care about anymore?" Synclaire brightly responds, "cuz deep down there's a little love left," while Regine cunningly says, "It's all about playing the game" and Max declares, "We don't feel better

until they feel worse.” Synclaire has one love throughout the series, Overton. Overton is as wide-eyed and simple as Synclaire. They make a good match. In season 1, episode 3, Overton meets Synclaire for dinner after he calls the pager service of Synclaire’s original date. Synclaire gives Overton a kiss goodnight on the cheek and Overton says he is romantically six months ahead of schedule. Synclaire and Overton officially start dating in season 1, episode 18. In this episode, Synclaire questions, “What’s more important than friendship?” as she struggles to make sense of her relationship with Overton. Regine and Max, archetypally respond, “money” and “power,” respectively. When Kyle convinces Overton to date another woman, Synclaire realizes she is in love with Overton and finally tells him.

In season 2, episode 9, Max and Regine discover that Synclaire and Overton have not consummated their relationship and they are mystified by this revelation. While Max and Regine pressure Synclaire to have sex with Overton, Khadijah tells her to do what she is comfortable with; ultimately, after a series of comical, sexual mishaps between Synclaire and Overton, they decide to wait. In season 2, episode 18, Synclaire and Overton sleep together on their year anniversary. After this, the comments made about Synclaire and Overton’s sex life reflect the high frequency of their encounters. This parallels the idea of sex for the child archetype in the sanctioned relationship, in this case a long-term commitment, is ardent, adventurous, and permissive. Although Synclaire at times learns to stand up for herself and her circumstances change (i.e. she gets married), her character scarcely develops beyond the child archetype.

Sex and the City

Charlotte York portrays the child archetype. Of the three child archetypes, Charlotte grows the most throughout the series. In season one, she appears as the sexually rigid, romantic optimist. Charlotte imagines her life to resolve like a fairy tale – happily-ever-after. The philosophy behind her plan involves the idea that “most men are threatened by successful women, if you want to get these guys, you have to keep your mouth shut and ‘play by the rules’” (S1, E1). While many have their own personal rules/boundaries with regards to dating and sex, Charlotte’s rules seem to be not only not based in the reality of her life, but also imposed by outside, antiquated social norms about feminine expectations. In season 1, episode 10, Charlotte and company attend a baby shower. While there, Charlotte discovers that the pregnant friend has stolen the name Charlotte wanted for her own daughter, Shayla. This disruption in Charlotte’s perfect plan upsets her. In a voice over about Charlotte, Carrie reflects, “That night Charlotte got out her wish box, where she kept reminders of all the things she hoped for in life: a gift for Shayla [a pink pillow with her name on it], a townhouse in the city, a beach house in East Hampton, her dream man” [a photo of JFK Jr.]. As Charlotte rips the pictures the voice over states, “It is very strange when the life you’ve never had flashes before you.” This voice over illuminates Charlotte’s naïve expectations about the world.

In season 2, episode 8, Charlotte states, “people do live happily ever after,” after retelling a story about a friend’s friend whose romantic life turned magical. Miranda angrily denounces the story’s veracity as an “urban relationship myth ... unbelievable fairy tales concocted by women to make their love lives seem less hopeless.” In season 2, episode 10, Charlotte weighs in on Miranda’s new dating dilemma – Miranda makes

more money than Steve. In response to the other women saying it should not be an issue, Charlotte states, “Yeah, but it’s normal for the guy to make more money.” This antiquated belief stuns the rest of them. Charlotte continues, “You’re talking about differences more than a difference of income. You’re talking about a difference in background, education. This guy is working class.” Uncomfortable with the idea of calling someone working class, Carrie states to Charlotte, “Honey, it’s the millennium, we don’t say working class.” As they sit in their pedicure chairs while others wait on them, Charlotte, pointing out the obvious, replies, “but you’re trying to pretend we live in a classless society ... and we don’t,” motioning toward the pedicurist with her head.

Charlotte, unlike the other two child archetypes, is not seen as dim-witted, therefore, her discourse carries more weight. In the series’ *Kiss and Tell* book, Sohn (2004) reflects on Charlotte’s character: “When it comes to Charlotte, people tend to have strong opinions. Because she so often espouses a traditional view of men, marriage, and commitment, those who agree with her cheer her on – while those who disagree with her want to throw things at the television.” The discourse that Charlotte brings forth in this series reflects patriarchal gendered expectations and it is rife with contradictions about femininity, independence, and feminism. In season 3, episode 1, Charlotte proclaims, “Allow me to get right to the point, guys. After careful consideration, I have decided that I am getting married this year,” despite the fact that she is not seeing anyone. While Charlotte is hell bent on finding a husband, she throws a “used date party” only to have the man she was attracted to go home with the one who had throw him away (S3, E 2), dates a man who licks her face (S3, E5), has sex with a man who yells out “you fucking

bitch, you fucking whore” as he orgasms (S3, E6), and reads *Marriage Incorporated: How to Apply Successful Business Strategies to Finding a Husband*, deciding to enlist the help of married friends to help her meet men, only to be propositioned by one of the husbands. In an interview with Kristin Davis who plays Charlotte, Sohn (2004) reported that Davis was uncomfortable with the idea that a woman should use this type of book. Davis stated,

It was difficult for me to do the lines where Charlotte talks about the book that’s supposed to teach women how to find husbands. I don’t believe in that *Rules* kind of thing, and I think it’s a toxic message to be putting out there in the world. But once the writers said, ‘We’re going to build it up that you are looking at marriage like a business, and then it’s going to blow up in your face,’ I was all right with it. When a person gets fixated on one goal, it never works.

While the above idea sends a positive message, the episode does not come with a warning label on it and Charlotte’s (not Kristin’s) message gets through unexamined. Shortly after Charlotte employs her new business techniques to the dating world, she meets Trey, who seems like the prince she has been waiting for all of her life. After the disillusionment, Charlotte’s character grows.

While Charlotte, who is still playing by the *Rules*, dates Trey, she decides not to sleep with him until they are married. In season 3, episode 8, Charlotte states, “I read that if you don’t have sex for a year, you can actually become ‘revirginized.’” The others are not only horrified by this statement, but also wonder why anyone would want to do such a thing. In season 3, episode 9, Charlotte, in her desperate attempt to marry, asks

Trey to marry her and then regrets it, “There was no kneeling, there was no ring, no nothing. This is an awful engagement story. What am I supposed to tell my kids – ‘Well mommy really wanted to get married, so daddy said, ‘Alrighty.’” And this is the start of Charlotte’s fairy tale unraveling. After Charlotte and Trey marry, they struggle with sexual dysfunction, infertility, and Bunny, the mother in-law.

Charlotte represents opposite aspects of each of the other characters in this series. She is the child archetype to Carrie’s mother archetype. Charlotte reflects the virtues of femininity in opposition to Miranda’s masculinity, especially with regard to work. Finally, Charlotte’s rigid sexual rules stand in stark contrast to Samantha’s liberal sexual freedom. In season 3, episode 16, Charlotte and Samantha clash over their differing sexual morals. Samantha cannot stop recounting her sexual adventures, while Charlotte and her new husband still have not had sex. While at brunch, Charlotte and Samantha quarrel and decide to take a break from the group for a while. Charlotte decides to meet her college sorority sisters for lunch, who view her as inappropriate for discussing her sexual needs, while Samantha is appalled at her new friend’s outrageous sexual behavior.

In an effort to work on their sexual relationship, Charlotte provocatively dressed, strips away her sexual pretenses and says to Trey, “Look at me. This is me. I’m not a Madonna, and I’m not a whore. I’m your wife and I’m sexual, and I love you.” After Trey and Charlotte have sex for the first time, Charlotte calls Samantha to give her the good news. While this episode demonstrates the pitfalls for women and the virgin/whore expectations placed upon them, future episodes reflect how Charlotte is most similar to her child archetype cohort with regard to sexual freedom in the sanctioned relationship,

once Trey and Charlotte resolve their sexual problems. For example, in season 4, episode 6, Miranda dates a man who licks her butt. While the women discuss how butt licking got on the sexual menu, Charlotte coyly chimes in about how she enjoys this experience. The other women stare in shock, and Charlotte says, “What? We’re married now.” Anything goes sexually in the marital relationship for the once prudish singleton. Again, the virgin/whore dichotomous expectations are portrayed and privileged.

While Charlotte personifies many traditional gender norms, she also symbolizes the views of feminism’s third wave. This third wave feminism for Charlotte, most prominent in opposition to Miranda’s more second wave liberal feminist approach, involves issues of choice, work, and family. In season 4, episode 7, Charlotte announces, “I’m thinking about quitting my job.” Genuinely surprised, Samantha inquires, “Did you get an offer from a better gallery?” Charlotte elaborates, “No, I mean stopping working all together,” nodding her head in affirmation. Carrie bewilderedly questions, “Really?” Charlotte confirms, “Yeah I’ve been driving myself crazy trying to get everything done and Trey suggested.” Miranda interrupts, “Trey suggested?” Charlotte qualifies her response, “Well he *mentioned* that *maybe* I might quit. I mean really I have just been driving myself crazy and for what – the gallery? What has the gallery ever done for me?” Charlotte had always been happy with her career. The gallery offered her stable and fulfilling work for many years. Carrie reminds Charlotte, “But you love your job?” Charlotte hedges, “I know but there is so much more I can do with my life?” Miranda queries, “Like what?” and remains quiet throughout the rest of this exchange at brunch. Charlotte lists the many things that would occupy her time,

Well, soon I will be pregnant and that will be huge, plus I'm redecorating the apartment and I always wanted to take one of those Indian cooking classes and sometimes I'll walk by one of those "Color Me Mine" pottery places and I see a woman having just a lovely afternoon glazing a bowl; that would be a nice change.

Realizing the ridiculousness of her last statement, Charlotte adds, "And I would like to volunteer at Trey's hospital and help raise money for the new pediatric AIDS wing." Carrie critiques these plans, "Well the cooking and the AIDS stuff is great ... but," Carrie's facial expression is a cross between yikes and pathetic "the Color Me Mine ... sweetie if I was walking by and saw you in there, I'd just keep on walking." Charlotte maintains, "Well that's what I'm thinking." Carrie, still unable to wrap her mind around this announcement, persists with her questioning, "Are you sure you're not just having a bad work week?" Charlotte assures, "No, that's not it. I'm quitting. That's what I want to do. Yep, I'm quitting." While Charlotte says this as a direct affront to Miranda, it elicits no response. Rather, Samantha warns, "Well, be damn sure before you get off the Ferris wheel because the women waiting to get on are 22, perky, and ruthless." This ends the conversation at the coffee shop, but Charlotte was not pleased with the response she received. This anger is mostly directed at Miranda, who barely said a word in the exchange.

The next morning, Charlotte calls Miranda. Angrily, Charlotte accuses Miranda, "You were so judgmental at the coffee shop yesterday." Miranda, taken off guard and unsure where this venom is coming from asks for clarification, "Excuse me?" Charlotte

continues, "You think I'm one of those women." Still confused about the accusations being leveled against her, Miranda questions, "What? One of what women?" Charlotte snidely responds, "One of those women we hate who just works until she gets married." Unsure how to respond, Miranda states, "It's 8:15." Charlotte demands, "That's not a response!" Miranda counters, "It's an 8:15 in the morning response." Charlotte spouts, "The women's movement is supposed to be about choice and if I choose to quit my job that is my choice." Incredulously, Miranda grumbles, "The women's movement? Jesus Christ I haven't even had coffee yet." Like a child stomping her foot, Charlotte insists, "It's my life and my choice." Trying to find the rationality of this exchange, Miranda states almost condescendingly, "Charlotte, this isn't about me. This is your stuff." Charlotte demands, "Admit it you were being very judgmental." Miranda refuses, "I'm dripping all over my bathroom and you're calling me judgmental and if you have a problem with quitting your job maybe you should take it up with *your husband*." Charlotte points out Miranda's tone, "See there it is – your husband. There's nothing wrong with having a husband." Frustrated with this ridiculous exchange, Miranda threatens, "I'm hanging up." Charlotte, more incensed, warns, "Don't you dare hang up and stop saying Charlotte like that. I am quitting my job to make my life better and do something worth while like have a baby and cure AIDS."

Dumbfounded by this hostile exchange, Miranda challenges, "Oh, you're gonna cure AIDS. Good for you, Charlotte. Just don't be too disappointed if all you wind up with is a pretty ceramic mug with Trey's name on it." "Take that back," Charlotte demands. Miranda exasperated states, "I'm hanging up." Charlotte begs, "Don't you

dare hang up. I'm interviewing girls to replace me and I really need you to get behind my choice." Miranda emphasizes, "*You* get behind your choice." Charlotte, trying desperately to believe herself, declares, "I am behind my choice. I choose my choice." Miranda finishes this exchange, chiding, "Charlotte, I don't have time for this. I have to go to work. Some of us still have to go to work." Charlotte, unconvincingly, proclaims, "I choose my choice. I choose my choice." This powerful and important exchange reflects some of the tensions between the second and third wave of the women's movement.

Miranda's contributions echo second wave liberal feminist beliefs that women should have equal opportunity and access in the workplace. Without this access to sustainable work, women are precariously dependent on men for their financial support. While Charlotte's comments about the women's movement espouse narrowly defined feminist views about choice. The idea of choice here is problematic given that these "choices" are only afforded to a certain privileged class of women. This same critique is true of access to the public working sphere of liberal feminism in the second wave, yet it is exacerbated by the idea of individualism and choice that pervades third wave thinking. Karlyn (2003) describes this tension,

Feminism has wrought massive changes in Western society, and its effects, especially on family and domestic life, have been complex. Whereas for previous generations of middle-class women, work represented a longer-for freedom to participate in public life, and family meant forced confinement within the private sphere, these categories for many young women today have come to mean the

opposite: work is a necessity, and family life (or their fantasies about motherhood and domesticity) and option or 'Luxury' that may appear frustrating out of reach (16).

What is most unfair about these conflicting beliefs is that all of the social pressures to meet feminine and feminist expectations fall only to women. These feminist critiques need to move beyond the ideology of personal access and choice. Instead of blaming the repercussions of previously hard fought victories, these feminist critiques need to challenge broader patriarchal structures, then there might be real agency for many. Gilligan (1997) suggested that this relational struggle among the women in feminist movement is not inherently problematic, but becomes so when these intra-movement critiques become a way to blame previous successes and/or prevent further or reverse radical social change. Steinem (1995) also reflected this notion when she states, "It will take awhile before feminists succeed enough so that feminism is not perceived as a gigantic mother who is held responsible for almost everything, while patriarchy receives terminal gratitude for the small favors it bestows" (p. xix). Charlotte in many ways blames Miranda who represents this gigantic feminist mother for disavowing her choice.

I argue that Charlotte's perspective is privileged in this episode for the following four reasons. First, immediately after this exchange, Miranda snaps something in her neck and requires medical attention. Second, while Charlotte interviews candidates for the job at the gallery, the one chosen as her replacement consoled, "My mom worked all the time. It would have been nice to have her around more." Third, as Charlotte leaves the gallery on her last day of work, she walks powerfully as she enters this new phase in

her life. Finally, in the last scene, Miranda calls in sick to work and enjoys the day off doing nothing. This privileging of Charlotte's position as representative of third wave feminism positions staying home with children instead of working outside the home as the favored choice. While this choice might be admirable (for those who are financially able to make it), women's long-term financial stability potentially becomes precariously dependent upon men.

The Mother Archetype

Sophia Petrillo of *Golden Girls*, Khadijah James of *Living Single*, and Carrie Bradshaw of *Sex and the City* represent the mother archetype. These characters are less literal representations of the mother archetype than are the other characters and their corresponding archetypes. This is true in part because two of the characters are not biological mothers and in part reflective of the intersections of age and race. The single most defining mother archetypal characteristic is their storytelling ability.

Golden Girls

As mentioned previously above, Sophia embodies the ethnic mother stereotype. A woman from the old country, with old school ways, Sophia is rarely without stories from the old country that begin with, "Picture this ... Sicily 1912 ...". For example, Sophia describes the advent of pesto. She states,

In Sicily, we never went to the doctor. We went to the Widow Caravelli.

Whatever you had, she had a cure. She was most famous for her green salve to cure ear infections. One day, she gave some to Salvadore, the village idiot. He misunderstood the directions and put it on his linguine instead of in his ear.

As Dorothy listens, she encourages, “Well, I guess if you're an idiot with a hearing problem, you do things like that.” Sophia embellishes,

Actually, it turned out ok. The stuff tasted great, so Salvadore decided to market it. At first, things didn't go so well. ‘Linguine with Ear Salve’ wasn't very appetizing, but once he changed the name to pesto sauce, it sold like hot cakes!

Dorothy admonishes her mother, “Ma, you're making this up!” Sophia excuses, “So what? I'm old, I'm supposed to be colorful.”

Also reflective of her old world charm is Sophia's ability to cook. Whenever Sophia cooks the other women swarm the kitchen to take in the aroma. As Sophia stirs a batch of her famous marinara sauce, she says, “If this sauce were a person, I'd get naked and make love to it.” Rose enters acknowledging the fragrant scent comments, “Mmmm, Sophia. The kitchen smells wonderful. Is it Chef Boyardee?” To this, Sophia responds holding a knife, “Stick it in my heart, Rose, it'll hurt less.

Sophia is often used as comic relief in an already humorous series. Most of her humor comes in the form of jokes about her age, including comments about bodily functions and lack of sexual encounters. While trying to write a novel, Blanche tells Sophia, “I have writer's block. It's the worst feeling in the world.” Sophia retorts, “Try ten days without a bowel movement sometime.” In another episode, Rose asks, “Sophia, why are you in such a bad mood?” Sophia snaps back, “Excuse me Rose, but I haven't had sex in fifteen years and it's starting to get on my nerves.” Sophia complains, “All you ever do is talk about your sexual problems! Well, what about my sexual problem?” Dorothy questions, “Ma what is your sexual problem?” Sophia responds, “I'm not

getting any.” These types of retorts about the aging body occur in every episode. When age intersects with the mother archetype in this case, Sophia’s portrayal is indicative of a broader social dismissal of seniors and particularly, older women. As an older woman, Sophia no longer has to conform to narrowly constructed roles for women. On the one hand, Sophia is freer to do as she chooses, and on the other, as displayed in her comparatively reduced role in this series, her value decreases. This freedom is not necessarily privileged as much as it is mocked and marked as old, or even senile.

Sophia also pokes fun at the other women in the series, most specifically Dorothy for her dull romantic life. Sophia teases, “What do you three have, a pressing engagement with a cheesecake?” Sophia often has one-liners either explicitly calling Blanche a slut or at least implying it. In addition, she ridicules Rose’s lack of common sense.

Living Single

Khadijah James is the mother archetype in *Living Single*. Although not a biological mother, she is the central character connecting all the women in the series and serving as a more symbolic mother to her younger cousin, Synclaire. She provides Synclaire with physical, emotional, and financial support. Synclaire lives with Khadijah in her apartment in Brooklyn. Although not always solicited, Khadijah gives Synclaire advice. Sometimes this advice is prefaced by “I’m not gonna tell you what to do ...” and then Khadijah proceeds to tell Synclaire what she thinks her cousin should do.

A true mother/daughter moment between Khadijah and Synclaire occurs in season 4, episode 24, when Synclaire marries Overton. Synclaire is dressed in her

wedding gown and Khadijah admires her in the mirror, smiling and crying like a proud mother. As Khadijah helps Synclaire with her veil, she says “Oh, you’re getting married ... and you’re leaving me with Regine.” Synclaire tries to comfort Khadijah, “Woo, woo, woo.” Khadijah whimpers, “No matter how much we say things won’t change, they will. You’ll call less and less and then the letters will stop.” Synclaire curiously inquires, “But I’ll see you when I come down from my apartment, right?” Khadijah pulls Synclaire’s veil over her and says, “Good-bye Synclaire James.” James is the name Khadijah and Synclaire share. It is a touching moment, depicting this mother/child dynamic between the two characters. Khadijah is also figuratively the mother of her magazine *Flavor*.

Khadijah runs her own magazine, which she refers to as “*My magazine ... gives voice to a community that might not otherwise be heard. Flavor magazine paints a portrait of the young African-American against a changing urban landscape.*” This magazine, Khadijah’s independence, and her self-proclaimed “lack of social life” position Khadijah as both mother and iron maiden archetypes. This portrayal is an outcome of race intersecting with the mother archetype. As mentioned, this image consistent with the strong Black mother, is prevalent in African American culture (hooks, 1993).

Sex and the City

Carrie Bradshaw represents the mother archetype as the narrator and central character who connects the other women in the series. While Carrie nurtures the her friends as well as her column readers, she also receives lots of encouragement and advice from them, particularly Miranda, but also Samantha if the issue at hand regards sexual mores. Carrie’s advice can be practical, sometimes simply providing an ear or serving as

a sounding board. Most important to her mother archetype status, Carrie is the narrator of this series. “Once upon a time, ... across town, ... and I couldn’t help but wonder” serve as her tag phrases as she situates the story. As narrator, Carrie has a privileged omnipresence. She maintains a more neutral position as the inquisitive reporter. Rather than taking a stance on any particular issue, Carrie interrogates it through the experiences of her friends. Khadijah, on the other hand pretends to be neutral and then tries to sway the others. This might reflect of Khadijah’s mother archetype intersecting with the iron maiden influence.

Charlotte regularly goes to Carrie for advice. In season 1, episode 8, she seeks Carrie’s advice about the three-some with her new boyfriend. In season 3, episode 1, as Charlotte drunkenly hangs over the edge of the Staten Island Ferry, shouting to the world that she will marry that year, Carrie buttons up Charlotte’s coat and holds on to her belt so she will not fall in the water, as Miranda sits idly by. In season 4, episode 7, Carrie cautions Charlotte about quitting her job. This child/mother dynamic between Charlotte and Carrie is prevalent throughout the series.

In season 2, episode 9, Miranda seeks consol about Steve asking her to be exclusive with him. In a very practical way Carrie offers her advice to her friend. She suggests, “Uh-oh. Time for the ol’ list.” Miranda questions, “What list?” Carrie enlightens Miranda, “Things you like about Steve. Things you don’t like about Steve. Then see which list is longer.” Miranda worries, “That seems so judgmental.” In good will, Carries reminds, “Miranda, you *are* judgmental. Try putting it to good use.” Carrie’s advice extends beyond her circle of friends to her avid column readers. Most

episodes end with Carrie's summation of the show's narrative question. For example, in season 3, episode 18, Carrie tells viewers,

Later that day I got to thinking about relationships. There are those that open you up to something new and exotic, those that are old and familiar, those that bring up lots of questions, those that bring you somewhere unexpected, those that bring you far from where you started, and those that bring you back. But the most exciting, challenging and significant relationship of all is the one you have with yourself. And if you can find someone to love the you you love, well, that's just fabulous.

While not all stories end on such a positive note, Carrie shares what she learns throughout each episode with the broader audience.

The following chapter moves beyond the archetypal characters and the particular meanings created by and associated with these portrayals to a discussion of narrative themes present in the series. These narratives include family and sisterhood, prostitution, crime and violence, heteronormativity, and patriotism.

CHAPTER V

NARRATIVE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Before embarking on the comparative narrative analysis, I would like to mention how setting contributes meaning to each series. Following that brief discussion, I examine reoccurring narrative themes among the series and provide analysis about the signification conveyed within these texts. The narrative themes on television reflect not only an understanding of women's lives, but also broader social issues. The themes I discuss include: family, prostitution, crime, heteronormativity, and patriotism.

Setting

Golden Girls is the story of four older women living together in Miami. All the characters except Dorothy are widowed. Dorothy, the iron maiden archetype, is divorced, which fits the notion that, as a strong "masculine" figure, she cannot keep a man. Most of the action on *Golden Girls* takes place in the kitchen of a sprawling suburban home. The four women often share their episodic problems in the kitchen while eating cheesecake. The cheesecake becomes a part of the narrative, in a way a character itself, and many references mention the abundance of cheesecake in the refrigerator.

The four women bond over cheesecake, while they solve the problems of the day. In season 1, episode 25, the women flash back to their first shopping experience, shortly after they first met and moved in together. At the grocery store, they argue over the

others' strange and extravagant purchases. Upon their return, the three decide that if they cannot agree on simple things such as the groceries, they must not have anything in common and should not live together. As Rose begins to put a cheesecake in the refrigerator, Blanche asks, "What's that?" Rose explains that she has a love for cheesecake. Blanche interrupts, "What kind?" Rose responds, "Chocolate." And Dorothy concludes that their love of cheesecake could keep them together, "I think this could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship." These women consumed over 100 cheesecakes during the course of this series.

The narratives of *Living Single* occur mostly in the living room of the Brooklyn, NY apartment shared by Khadijah, Synclaire, and Regine. Max lives on her own in an apartment across the street, although she often overstays her welcome at the others' home. Max's background as the child of professional, upper-middle-class, parents provides her with more financial privilege than the other women. Unlike *Golden Girls* and *Sex and the City*, *Living Single* has two additional male characters who are in and out of the apartment and each other's lives regularly. The roles of the additional male characters in this series reflect the long-standing contradictions of parity among Black men and women with regard to race and the struggles against Black men and women with regard to gender (Combahee River Collective, 1977).

The setting for *Sex and the City* is different. The women on *Sex and the City* live separately. Their central meeting place is a diner-like coffee shop. In addition, Manhattan is as the main setting, as the women frequent the most popular bars and restaurants on the island. Instead of cheesecake the women of *Sex and the City* indulge in

cocktails, most commonly the Cosmopolitan. These characters are out on the streets taking up a very public space.

In a broad way, the differences among settings reflect the social changes in women's roles. The four women in *Golden Girls* would have come of age in the 1950s when stereotypical roles for White, middle-class women were in the home. In addition, the Florida city of Miami is indicative of the nearly 40% increase in the senior population during the 1980s, according to the Florida Demographic Summary. The setting for *Sex and the City* challenges the usual concept of women's space, as well as the idea of setting for a sitcom. The four women of *Sex and the City* consume the very masculine and public spaces in New York City, and Manhattan is even considered the fifth character in the series.

Class issues also manifest themselves through setting. In *Golden Girls* and *Living Single*, the women share their homes and expenses. This is a necessary condition and reflects the struggles of our aging population, in particular older women without spouses, as well as young independent women newly out on their own, specifically those who are one generation out of poverty. While the women of *Living Single* live in Greater Metropolitan New York, like their *Sex and the City* counterparts, their Brooklyn address suggests a more diverse and less affluent demographic. After decades of urban decay, in the 1990s, Brooklyn experienced a revival in its neighborhoods from those fleeing the high prices of Manhattan as well as a growth in diversity among its residents. In her book, *Bachelor Girl: A 100-Year History of the Single Girl*, Israel (2002) emphasized the significance of New York City as a hub for single women to make their own way over

the last century. The use of New York City in two of these series reinforces Israel's findings, as the women in *Living Single* and *Sex and the City* reflect the importance of NYC as a place of opportunity for female singletons.

Family and Sisterhood

Family and sisterhood is a dominant theme in these sitcoms. The four characters in *Golden Girls* have each been married and raised a family of their own. Blanche, Rose, and Sophia are widowed and Dorothy is divorced. Sophia and Dorothy are related as mother and daughter respectively. Other than Dorothy and Sophia the women of *Golden Girls* met later in life when Blanche posted an ad at the grocery store for roommates. Throughout the series these four women live in the same suburban home in Miami, Florida. None of the women of *Living Single* is married at the start of the series. Khadijah and Synclaire are cousins. Khadijah and Regine grew up in the same neighborhood, which is often referred to as "the projects" in the series, and their mothers remain friends as well. Khadijah and Maxine are friends from college. Khadijah, Synclaire, and Regine live in the same apartment and Maxine lives across the street, but comes and goes as she pleases in the others' apartment. Max has her own key and often mooches food from the others. Regine views Max as the unwelcome guest. In *Sex and the City*, none of the four women is married at the beginning of the series. It seems the four characters of *Sex and the City* met in their professional lives in New York City. They do not seem to have any childhood or school connections. Miranda went to Harvard Law School and Charlotte went to Smith. Samantha is around eight to ten years older than Carrie, Miranda, and Charlotte.

While there are only a couple of blood ties among characters in these series, the peer group provides the familial relationships, thus creating a new meaning of family in each series. In addition, there are distinct differences among the notion of family within the series. In *Golden Girls* the narrative ploys set the women against each other. While this series is more issue oriented than the other two, the basic repetitive plot involves a disruption in the friendships/familial relationships and is resolved with the preservation of the relationship at the end of the episode. In *Living Single*, there are lots of intra-group conflicts, but they are more a demonstration of group dynamics than plot momentum. This conflict serves to provide humor as the characters are often “playing the dozens.” Playing the dozens is a term to describe an element of African American oral tradition. It is an one-upmanship of insults exchanged light-heartedly (Smitherman, 1977). Labov (1972) calls this “verbal dueling strategies.” This dueling demonstrates solidarity among the characters unlike the disruption that is created in *Golden Girls*. Playing the dozens was initially a masculine verbal challenge game, in many ways reflective in the masculine domain of Rap music. The way the women of this series incorporate this masculine style of communication is also indicative of Queen Latifah’s foray into the Hip Hop industry. In *Sex and the City*, where there are no familial relationships, conflict among the characters is far less prevalent than in *Golden Girls* or *Living Single*. Even though the characters of *Sex and the City* might have a difference of opinion in answering the driving question of the narrative, this is rarely used as a disruption/resolution of the friendship narrative ploy as in *Golden Girls*.

Golden Girls

An alternative to the nuclear family ideal among the four characters can be seen from the very first episode of *Golden Girls*. In this episode, Blanche considers a marriage proposal. Unbeknownst to Blanche, the man who proposed is a bigamist, and the wedding is canceled because of his arrest. This episode examines issues of being alone, finding love, and the meaning of family. Rose says that they are all alone, kids leave and husbands die, while Blanche admits she can't be without a man. The conclusion of the episode revolves around the four women re-defining the idea of family and understanding that they are not alone, but in this together. The mutually supportive and loving relationships among the women challenge traditional notions of family for women later in life. Blanche says, "You're my family now and you make me happy to be alive." In season 2, episode 11 "Twas the Nightmare Before Christmas," the four women are making plans to spend Christmas with their respective families. On the way to the airport, the four characters are held up in the Grief Counseling Center where Rose works. When they finally manage to get themselves free of the hostage situation, they find that all the planes have been grounded due to severe weather conditions – magically a white Christmas in Miami. The four characters end up at a small diner on Christmas Eve where they relieve the owner for a couple hours while he spends time with his family. The owner cannot believe that the women are not related. He says, "the way you were teasing and talking with each other I thought you were all family." The conclusion of the episode, and consensus of the group, is that despite not being able to visit their families, "we're all with family."

Whether the foursome is fighting over a man (S1, E3; S2, E5; S2, E14; S3, E14; S4, E1; S4, E15; S7, E19), other familial relationships (S2, E7; S3, E9; S4, E22), a job (S2, E9), or a bowling game (S1, E7), the resolution to the episode is consistently the preservation of the foursome as a beneficial family unit. This idea of family is reinforced in flashback episodes (S1, E25; S2, E17; S2, E25, S5, E25/26) as well. In season 3, episode 25, President George H.W. Bush plans to discuss family values on his trip to Miami and needs to meet with an exemplary family. Making sure the foursome does not pose a threat to the President, the secret service inspect their residence and conclude the foursome would serve as a fine example of family for the President to visit.

In season 7, episodes 23 and 24, Rose, Blanche, Sophia, and Dorothy attend a high school reunion pretending to be people who actually graduated from that high school. As Dorothy, masked as “Nancy,” is crowned queen of the reunion, Rose falls to the ground, clutching her arm. When the four arrive at the hospital, the staff will not allow Blanche, Sophia, and Dorothy to see Rose because they “are not family.” To ease their worry about Rose, Blanche, Sophia, and Dorothy sing songs from a musical Rose wrote. As they are singing inappropriate lyrics in the hospital waiting room, Rose’s daughter Kristen arrives. Kristen, distraught by her mother’s illness and angered by the jovial singing of Blanche, Sophia, and Dorothy, does not allow them to visit with Rose. When Rose requests to see “my girls,” Kristen discovers that these women have made plans to take care of each other emotionally, physically, and financially. With this knowledge, Kristen finally accepts Blanche, Sophia, and Dorothy as her mother’s family. This two-part episode resolves with the women promising to have their heads

cryogenically preserved when they die so that they can all be together again. This episode reinforces the idea that even though these characters are not blood relatives their connection to, and care of each other reflects bonds that are at least as strong as traditional families.

Living Single

While there is much conflict among the characters in *Living Single*, this conflict does not usually drive the narrative of the show as it does in *Golden Girls*. The playful exchange of insults does not disrupt the relationships among the characters of *Living Single*, but actually serves to mark identity and demonstrate a level of closeness, camaraderie, and respect among the characters. While there are episodes where the narrative involves conflict among the main characters, most of the time, this conflict simply serves playful banter. However, when the conflict is external, the characters really come together to support and protect one another, like family would do. In Season 1, Episode 23, U.N.I.T.Y (based on Queen Latifah's 1994 Grammy award winning hit song), the four women crash their neighbor's (Kyle and Overton) poker party where Kyle's co-workers as well as his superior, Lawrence, are present. Kyle's boss Lawrence, acting like a stereotypical sexist jerk, hits on Regine. While Regine finds Lawrence's attention flattering, this concerns Kyle because he is worried about his chances for a promotion. Kyle warns Regine not to do anything that would jeopardize his chances of promotion. And Regine laughs off Kyle's warnings.

After Regine and Lawrence's first date, Regine pacifies Kyle's concerns by telling him that the two of them had a wonderful time and that Lawrence was a "perfect

gentleman.” While at work, Kyle encounters Lawrence talking disrespectfully about his conquest of Regine. Kyle decides not to challenge Lawrence because his concern about his promotion outweighs Regine’s reputation at first. During the next poker game, the women interrupt the party again. Lawrence responds to this interruption, “I did not come here to get whacked by these bitches.” Kyle stands up for the women and says to Lawrence “you got a jacked up attitude, man get up outta my house.” This exchange reveals that Lawrence had degraded Regine, and Kyle apologizes for not standing up for her earlier. While Lawrence holds the power to promote Kyle, he will not allow this type of disrespect toward his friends. Kyle is not concerned about his promotion because he is “bringing in more accounts than anyone.” Max offers to be his lawyer even though Max and Kyle are often ribbing each other. Max says she can represent him and despise him at the same time. The episode ends with Kyle saying, “when we’re playing, its cool.” This episode parallels Queen Latifah’s song U.N.I.T.Y. This song critiques the disrespect of women, particularly in rap music’s exploitation of women in lyrics and video images. This episode demonstrates, how among the group, this type of playful banter is “cool” because they know when it comes down to it, they have each other’s back, like family. However, when these derogatory remarks come from outside the group, this behavior is unacceptable. The ideas about family in *Living Single* are impacted by race. While Kyle’s boss Lawrence is Black, there are still understandings of familial relationships that are specific to African American communities, in particular the idea of extended bonds and group preservation.

Sex and the City

There is rarely a mention of blood relatives in *Sex and the City*. There is only one episode (S2, E15) where a family member of any of the main characters has a speaking part. Executive producer, Michael Patrick King stated,

The biggest mistake ever was bringing Charlotte's brother on. It was good for the story because Charlotte got to say that line about Samantha's vagina being in the New York City guidebooks, and they got to have the beginning of their crisis.

But I realized when I saw a family member on the show that I probably never want to see another one because it can never live up to the audience's imagination of who these people are. How much do you really know your friend's family if you live in New York City? (Sohn, 2004, p. 55)

This quote demonstrates the laxity of the family unit for those urban professional transplants living in New York City. The need to create one's own family in this environment can be seen through the four characters of *Sex and the City*. In many cases, ideas about what constitutes family in *Sex and the City* are limited to the romantic ideal of a married partnership. Charlotte sees this romantic ideal and desires it uncritically. For Miranda and Samantha this married partnership and those involved in it are seen as the enemy. In season 3, episode 1, the four women go to Staten Island for the firefighter talent show. Charlotte gets drunk and decides she will marry that year. The next day as the four have brunch, the hung-over Charlotte asks, "Where is he?" Miranda responds skeptically, "Who, the white knight?" Carrie suggests that maybe the four of them are each other's white knights. While Charlotte at first thinks this comment is "depressing,"

the episode resolves with the four women being happy with being able to depend on each other. This idea of being each other's soul mates extends beyond this episode and by the end of the series Charlotte is the one suggesting that the foursome serve as the knights in shining armor for each other.

Family and the close sisterhood among the characters in *Sex and the City* continue throughout the series. In season 4, episode 11, Miranda discovers she is pregnant with her ex-boyfriend's baby and considers having an abortion, while Charlotte struggles with fertility issues in her new and fragile marriage. This causes tension between the two as they wrestle with their difficult and opposing life circumstances. In the last scene, the viewer assumes Miranda had an abortion. Samantha brings Miranda some tea to comfort her. Carrie has lemon strudel, and Charlotte unexpectedly brings flowers to offer her support of Miranda's decision. When it is revealed that Miranda is keeping the baby, Charlotte says, "Oh my god, we're having a baby!" This demonstrates how the women's lives are intimately connected in familial ways.

Other ideas about family are explicitly expressed in several episodes. The idea of family is firmly situated among the four women despite their relationship status. For example in season 2, episode 15, Carrie dates a short story writer, but instead of falling in love with him, she falls in love with his family. This dynamic, progressive, New York City family of writers welcomes Carrie with open arms, invites her to lecture at Columbia, as well as includes her in weekend brunches and shop talk. The episode resolves as Carrie realizes she has to break up with the family she has come to adore. As Carrie leaves the family home of her ex, she finds that she is not without family as she

stumbles upon her three friends dining together. As Carrie joins them, her voice over acknowledges her friends as a family unit and summarizes the episode,

The most important thing in life is your family. There are days when you love them and others you don't, but in the end they are the people you always come home to. Sometimes it's the family you're born into and sometimes it's the one you make for yourself.

In all three series the idea of family shifts from the traditional nuclear family to a female-centered group that provides much of the support, care, and nurturance needed. While *Golden Girls* uses disruption in this family dynamic as a narrative tool, the resolution is always preservation of the friendship, and this new family unit. The insult humor in *Golden Girls* reflects the conflict among the women, whereas the insult humor in *Living Single* demonstrates solidarity among the women, while marking their racial identity as African American women. Out of the three series, I argue that *Sex and the City* provides the most feminist notions of friendship and sisterhood, through this new understanding of family, because it does not pit the women against each other. The idea of setting women in opposite of, or in competition with for men, jobs, and resources, has plagued the women's movement. Therefore by showing women as constant companions, despite their differences, this series demonstrates a camaraderie and connectivity among women that seems missing in the splintered and individualistic third wave of feminism. While I do not think of *Sex and the City* as a particularly feminist series, its depictions of a strong, female, familial unit is one of its most progressive portrayals. *Golden Girls* shows viewers that women's lives are not without meaning after losing a husband in the

“empty nest” stages of life, and offers new ideas about life for newly single mature women with grown children. *Golden Girls* offers of view of what it means to grow older that is vibrant, sexual, and satisfying. *Living Single* demonstrates the need of solidarity not only among women, but also with men. While both *Living Single* and *Sex and the City* offer alternatives to marriage for the young urban professional, *Sex and the City* is more progressive not only because of the age of the women, but also because the series shows women in supportive roles without all the conflict and competitiveness of *Golden Girls* and *Living Single*.

Prostitution

While I thought the theme of family would be prevalent within all the series, I did not expect to see a narrative about prostitution appearing in two of the three series. Additionally, the storylines about prostitution were not solely connected with the sex object archetypes within either series. In season 2, episode 2 of the *Golden Girls*, Rose, Dorothy, and Blanche are mistaken for prostitutes while on their way to a dinner hosted by Burt Reynolds. Excluding Sophia, the other three decide to treat themselves to a night at a hotel. Blanche chose the hotel on Miami Beach because it was “in our price range, near the beach, and it had the most men hanging out in the lobby.” Unbeknownst to Blanche the hotel is actually a brothel. As the women sit in the lobby, three men in town for a clothing convention proposition them. As the women figure out what is going on, the police raid the hotel and take all of the hotel guests into custody. Dorothy tries to convince the police officer that they are innocent, that there has to be a mistake. Upon

hearing Dorothy's pleas, all the prostitutes in the lobby agree that they are innocent as well.

While in jail, Rose blames Blanche and her "overactive sex drive that got us into this." Blanche uses her feminine coyness to try to get the officer to release "three helpless females desperately in need of a big strapping man like yourself." Not only does the officer turn out to be a woman, but also it seems ridiculous to try to get out of a prostitution charge by propositioning a police officer. Dorothy convinces everyone in jail to leave her and her friends alone because she was in Attica. Another inmate doubts Dorothy's declaration, stating, "Attica is a male's prison," and Dorothy says, "I know I was there a year before they found out." It is interesting to note how the three characters stay within their archetypes even as they are all accused of being prostitutes.

In addition to these archetypal portrayals, age also plays a role. When Sophia comes to bail Blanche, Rose, and Dorothy out of jail, she says, "I can't believe these dumb cops would think anyone would pay money to sleep with you." This is suggestive of the idea that older women are unappealing sexually. Then, Sophia questions who will give up their Burt Reynolds ticket for her. When no one agrees, Sophia steals the tickets and leaves the others in jail. The episode ends with Sophia talking about all the famous people she met at the Burt Reynolds dinner. The other women are still angry and don't want to hear about it. When Burt Reynolds shows up to ask Sophia to lunch, he asks if the other women are the roommates she was talking about; and Sophia says yes and introduces them. Then Burt Reynolds asks, "Which one is the slut?" Simultaneously, Rose, Dorothy, and Blanche all respond earnestly "I am!" It is interesting to see how

Rose, Dorothy, and Blanche are eager to describe themselves as “the slut” given they were just released from prison because they were mistaken for prostitutes. This speaks to the idea that heterosexual relationships are often fraught with tensions of power, property, and payment.

There are two episodes in *Sex and the City* where Carrie is mistaken for a prostitute. In season 4, episode 11, Carrie is propositioned as she waits for Mr. Big in a hotel lobby, where they planned to meet to continue their affair. In this episode, the mistaken identity is a scene in passing to make Carrie storm out of the hotel; and as Mr. Big follows her, they run into Charlotte who is planning her wedding and austere disapproves of their affair. The second episode is discussed below.

While the prostitution example from *Golden Girls* serves as a narrative ploy and reinforcement of archetypal character patterns, in season 1, episode 5 of *Sex and the City*, Carrie actually interrogates the connection between sexually active single women and prostitutes by asking in her column, “Where’s the line between professional girlfriend and just plain professional?” This question is asked about Carrie’s acquaintance Almalita Amalfi (Carole Davis) who has a “dazzling sexual power that she exploited to her advantage.” Almalita did not work, but always had the most fabulous clothing, jewelry, and adventures that were provided by her many international boyfriends. This episode revolves around the idea of feminine power and is titled “The Power of the Female Sex.”

In this episode Charlotte, the child archetype, courts a reclusive painter, Neville Morgan (Charles Keating), to show at her gallery. The showing of this painter would be a real professional triumph for Charlotte; however she is concerned that Morgan is

“giving her a professional advantage because he finds her charming.” One evening, the four women sit around and discuss what this “professional advantage” might mean in relationship to sexual exploitation. True to archetypal form Samantha, the sex object, says, “women have the right to use every means at their disposal to achieve power.” Miranda retorts, “short of sleeping their way to the top.” Samantha disagrees expounding, “not if that’s (sleeping their way to the top) what it takes to compete.” Charlotte fears that this “professional advantage” is exploitation and worries about her meeting with Morgan at his country studio. Miranda, true to the liberal feminism of the iron maiden archetype, tells Charlotte that if Morgan “even suggests what you’re thinking, give me a call and we’ll sue the hell out of him. That’s the only proper way to exchange sex for power.”

Charlotte arrives at Morgan’s country estate, where he shows her his latest work. This work involves paintings of women’s vaginas. Charlotte, uncomfortable and surprised, can barely bring herself to say the word vagina, let alone cunt, which is the term both Morgan and his wife use. Charlotte develops the euphemistic phrase “C-U-Next-Tuesday” so the word does not have to cross her lips. Morgan describes his work, “the cunt -- the most beautiful force in the universe, the source of all life and pleasure and beauty.” Charlotte, calmed by Morgan’s description responds, “You’re right” as if this was the most simple and obvious statement she had ever heard. Morgan asks if Charlotte will pose for him. Only slightly reluctantly and definitely uncharacteristically, Charlotte agrees.

In the other story line of this same episode, Almalita contacts Carrie to meet her at Balzac, an exclusive new restaurant where Samantha and Carrie were unable to get into earlier that week. At Balzac, Almalita introduces Carrie to Gilles, French architect who is in town for a couple of days on business. As Carrie and Gilles walk home, he asks her if she will show him the town tomorrow. Carrie and Gilles spend a spectacular day together; Carrie believes they made a real connection. Despite Carrie's sexual rule of conduct ("I don't sleep with men I've only known a day"), she decides to spend the night with Gilles. Carrie wakes to Gilles kissing her goodbye "stay in bed, order room service, enjoy yourself ... I'll call you." As Carrie awakens she realizes they did not exchange any type of contact information. With this acknowledgement, Carrie sees an envelope Gilles left for her. She opens the envelope awaiting a charming note, only to find "thanks for a beautiful day" and \$1000 cash. When Samantha and Miranda join Carrie for a room service breakfast, she questions, "what exactly about me screams whore?" Miranda quips, "You mean besides the \$1000 on the end table?" Samantha asks, "What are you getting so uptight about, money is power, sex is power, therefore getting money for sex is simply an exchange of power." Miranda snips "don't listen to the dime store Camille Paglia." Then, Samantha says, "Men give. Women receive, it's biological destiny." To this Miranda angrily responds, "Hello! do you really want to be saying that? I mean that's actually the kind of argument men have been using since the dawn of time to exploit women." Carrie calms the argument by saying she is just "going to write it off as a bad date with a cash bonus." While Miranda brings up a very important argument

about biological determinism versus the social construction of gender inequities, Carrie quells this discussion and its political import.

Later in the episode as Samantha and Carrie try unsuccessfully to get into Balzac again, Almalita waves Carrie over to her table, where she is introduced to a new man, Mario, who has a “gorgeous placcio on the Grand Canal in Venice,” according to Almalita. Mario invites Carrie to spend time in Venice with the international jet setters as he puts his arm around her. Carrie thinks to herself,

I couldn't say I wasn't tempted. I realized that I could leverage myself like the human equivalent of a sexy junk bond. I'd parlay that \$1000 into a trip to Venice, a nice piece of jewelry, a rich husband, followed by a richer divorce.

Mario moves his hand down, across Carrie's *derrière*, and she sharply pulls his hand away, declines the invitation and walks away thinking, “just because Venice was sinking didn't mean my morals had to go down with it ... As far as Gilles and the \$1000, for better or worse, I had just established my rate for a one-night stand.”

The idea that the vagina is a dynamic life creating and powerful force is certainly a positive conviction encouraging women to own their sexuality, especially the child archetype, Charlotte, who in owning her sexuality displays the painting of her vagina in the gallery exhibition. Sexuality for the child archetype reflects virtue and purity. The child archetype's sexual experiences are generally the prerogative of her partner's pleasure. Therefore, her willingness to pose and display her vagina as painted by Morgan is a positive acceptance for Charlotte, acknowledging the power of her sexuality. As this episode reveres the vagina as strong and beautiful, it also reduces women's power to their

sexuality. While there is some critique by Miranda, the iron maiden, of biological determinism and the historical exploitation of women's sexuality, the privileged ending basically concludes that there is still a very blurred line between "professional girlfriend and just plain professional."

Crime and Violence

Each of the three series contains an episode where some sort of robbery occurs and the characters must deal with the consequences of this event. This might not have been apparent had it not been for the similarities among the responses. For example, Blanche and Regine, both the sex object archetypes, hide their jewelry in the freezer, believing that thieves would not look there. While Blanche's jewelry is a family heirloom and missing, Regine can't believe the burglar did not take her fake diamonds and states, "If they ain't fooling a robber in the dark, they ain't fooling anyone." Disappointed she continues, "I wear these everywhere." While the sex object archetypes in *Golden Girls* and *Living Single* focus on the jewelry, the variance in the episodes speaks to the differences in social class between Blanche and Regine as well as Regine's desire to be superficially seen as beyond her humble beginnings. In season 1, episode 8 of *Golden Girls*, an intruder burglarizes the home of Blanche, Dorothy, Rose, and Sophia, and each have different, yet archetypal responses. The plot of *Living Single* season 1, episode 4 involves Regine losing her driver's license and keys to a mugger on the street, followed by a late-night break-in of Khadijah, Synclaire, and Regine's apartment. In season 3, episode 17 of *Sex and the City*, Carrie wanders down an isolated street and has her purse, her jewelry, and her Manolo Blahnik shoes stolen.

While the plots and solutions are different, it is interesting to note, although not surprising, that each series includes an episode on the vulnerability of women to intruders or attacks. According to Estes (1992), the predatory, “dark man”¹ is a figure prevalent not only in fairy tales, but also common in dreams. Estes stated that this shadowy intruder is, “So common that it is remarkable if a woman has reached aged twenty-five without having such a dream” (p. 66). Israel (2002) discussed cautionary tales and singleton lore that were used to incite fear in women about their vulnerability, especially those who were seen as “flaunting it” (p. 123). Hollander (2001) described how our understanding about vulnerability is central to the ways in which gender is socially constructed. Sheffield (1987) argued that social control of women is manifested and maintained by a system of fear tactics she calls “sexual terrorism.” Each series is not without its own reminder of the vulnerability of women.

Golden Girls

The intruder episode in *Golden Girls*, titled “The Break-In,” serves as a character reinforcement as much as an intruder narrative. The episode begins when the four women arrive home from a Madonna concert to find that their home has been burglarized. Dorothy, the iron maiden archetype, reacts as the voice of reason and authority, as she begins to search the house and orders everyone else around and they immediately obey. Unaware if the intruders are still in the home, Dorothy says,

¹ “Dark man” denotes a shadowy stranger. Estes (1992) was not inferring race nor am I.

This is a .375 magnum, one of the most powerful guns in the world. It could blow your head off. The only problem is I don't know if I shot four rounds or five. So you have to ask, do you feel lucky, well do ya, PUNK?

Sophia concludes, "Go ahead make her day." When it is decided the intruders are no longer in the house, Dorothy, Blanche, and Sophia go about the business of checking the rooms for what was stolen as Rose stands frozen, still frightened about the night's events. Rose tells Sophia not to go to her room because "it could be dangerous." Sophia responds, "please I'm 80, bathtubs are dangerous." As the women discover what is missing, Blanche is only consumed with her mother's jewels being gone and threatens the harshest revenge against the robbers. Rose suggests that the intruders were looking for drugs. Dorothy snaps, "We have Maalox and estrogen - how many junkies have gas and hot flashes."

Rose finds no comfort in the other women's banter about what is missing or not. She states,

You know why this happened? It's because we're without men. I don't know what happens, or why. All I know is when I had a husband I didn't worry.

Maybe nothing happened to me because I had a husband, maybe not. All I know is [when I had a husband] when the lights went out I wasn't afraid.

Rose, the child archetype, responds fearfully about being comfortable as an independent mature woman.

Blanche, the sex object, only concerned with her precious gems, believes that "crime is caused by karma." She accuses the other women of bad energy because, with

all her southern glory, Blanche proclaims she doesn't "have that kind of energy."

Dorothy reproves Rose and Blanche's notions about crime and says, "It has nothing to do with karma. It has nothing to do with being single. It is about lousy locks on sliding glass doors and massive unemployment," bringing in broader social implications for crime occurring in their neighborhood as well as rebuking common notions of women's vulnerability. Later a security sales representative comes to the house to discuss anti-theft systems the women can install in the home. The sales representative uses fear tactics to scare the women into buying the most expensive system. To this Dorothy responds,

I'd rather be murdered - we are getting the basic system, not from you, but from your competitor because what you were trying to do is terrify us into spending more money than we have. Now get out of here before the victim of a violent crime is you.

Again this episode characterizes Dorothy as the iron maiden archetype, with her harsh words and strong tone, resisting being taken advantage of by the salesman. To reassure the other women Dorothy says, "It could be worse. We could each be alone, but we have each other." Rose still fearful says "It's better with men," reinforcing the idea that women are weak, vulnerable, and in need of male protection. Dorothy admonishes Rose telling her that being with a man is just "false security – life isn't worth living with this kind of fear."

Later Blanche accidentally sprays mace in her face, mistaking it for hairspray. Dorothy puts her foot down. "This is it," she says to Rose. "We've had it. No mace, no

tear gas, no grenades,” then Dorothy discovers Rose bought a gun for protection. Dorothy suggests Rose see a psychologist to help her with her fear. Upon returning from the psychologist Rose is still fearful. Sophia is irritated stating, “I hate psychologists. They blame everything on the mother – you heard him we’re afraid because our mothers taught us to be afraid.” While this statement begins to address gender socialization, it really just marks Sophia as the mother archetype. In Sophia’s limited role in this episode, her quips mark her not only as the mother archetype, but also as old. After Rose accidentally shoots Blanche’s antique vase, thinking it was an intruder, Sophia comments that she has lived “80, 81 years, survived pneumonia, two operations, and a stroke – one night I’ll belch and stab Mabel (Rose) here will blow my head off.” This small role might also reflect the reduced need older mothers have in their adult children’s lives.

The episode resolves with the police returning the stolen items and Rose being chased in an empty parking garage. Rose recounts,

There I was alone. I heard footsteps. It was my nightmare come true. I ran. He ran faster. He grabbed my arm and I turned around and dropped him. Kneed him right in the safe deposit box and dropped him like a sack of potatoes. I stood over him, looking at this pitiful creature and I thought I’m not helpless. I’m going to be ok.

Instead of being a cautionary tale about women’s vulnerability, the episode ends with Rose learning how to take care of herself, although it was only the parking attendant she assaulted. In addition, Rose’s silly overreaction to her fear, resulting in harming the innocent parking attendant, might also discount the significance of women’s vulnerability

and/or need for self-defense awareness. While “The Break-In” episode of *Golden Girls* gives a passing nod to the idea that the women have each other to depend on, the episode really focuses on the individual and archetypal character roles and responses.

Living Single

The intruder episode of *Living Single* (S1, E14 – “Burglar in the House”) centers on the need to build not only relationships among the main characters, but also in the broader community. The refrain of having to “protect ourselves” resounds throughout the episode in connection to purchasing a security system, the neighborhood watch, and police protection.

The episode begins with Regine entering their apartment distressed over having her purse stolen while coming out of the subway. When Kyle reminds Regine to cancel her credit cards, she tells them there is no need, as “the thug” will be arrested immediately because her cards are “maxed out and overdue.” Overton changes the locks for Regine, Synclaire, and Khadijah while they look over security brochures. Khadijah says, “At these prices, it’s cheaper to get robbed.” While this statement is similar to Dorothy’s above, the difference reflects the class issues in each series as does Regine’s credit card predicament. Dorothy’s statement is powerful and serves to put the salesman in his place. Khadijah’s response is about lack of financial resources to afford a security system.

Regine says she likes “having men around to protect us.” Max responds, “Why do you always look toward men to protect you. Criminals have guns ok. The only thing

that men have that we don't isn't going to stop a bullet." This statement marks Max as the iron maiden archetype who will not accept the inferior position of gender differences.

Khadijah remembering that they attended a neighborhood watch meeting earlier that year, questions what happened. Max states, "Nobody in the neighborhood watched a damn thing. That's what happened." Later that night Regine and Synclaire end up sleeping with Khadijah because they are scared. The three are in bed together when they hear noises, and then glass breaking in the kitchen downstairs. They sneak up on the intruder shouting, "Who is it? Who's there?" and the intruder runs away. Three phone calls later, the police finally arrive stating that they had "a pesky little homicide that required our attention first." The police finish writing their reports, but the women feel no safer. The four women, and their neighbors Kyle and Overton, stay at the apartment watching re-runs on an old black and white television set that was not stolen, while exchanging other stories about crime in their neighborhood.

Max, and Kyle and Overton, return to their own apartments. When Khadijah and Synclaire awake on the couch they hear noises in the kitchen. Assuming it is another break-in, they try to get out of the apartment, but Synclaire trips the alarm in panic before Khadijah can remember the code. As the alarms screeches, Regine runs out of the kitchen, Kyle and Overton come downstairs and Max calls to see if everything is ok. Khadijah responds to this false alarm, "this is crazy. I mean all these locks, all these bars, this arming and disarming, you all hidin' underneath my covers. I can't live like this!" Regine asks "how else we going to be safe?" Synclaire suggests they move to Minnesota. Khadijah resolutely states, "We ain't moving anywhere. We ain't going

anywhere. We're gonna stay right here and stop living scared." Kyle suggests, "You know what we all should do? We ought to get that neighborhood watch going for real." Regine agrees. "Yah I'm with you. Sign me up." Khadijah gets up and says, "I'm going to bed ... alone." As the three walk upstairs, they hear sirens. Max calls to say she is coming back over. Regine, Khadijah, and Synclaire sit on the couch listening to the sirens. As the scene fades out, their faces are distraught and the music ominous and melancholy.

Unlike the *Golden Girls*, this episode does not end with a positive resolution. Instead of having stolen property returned or feeling safe because you defended yourself, this episode ends with sirens howling in the background. The differences point to differences not only of geographical location urban versus suburban, but also class and race issues. In both episodes, the idea of living with such fear is crippling for the women. This is important to note because women, consciously or subconsciously, carry this fear with them all the time. This kind of fear constrains women's ability to move about freely.

Sex and the City

The burglary episode (S3, E 17) in *Sex and the City* is strikingly different from *Living Single* and *Golden Girls*. First of all, the mugging takes place on the street not in the home of any of the characters. Secondly, the theft only involves one character, Carrie. Finally, the episode revolves around the idea of karma more than violence against women or community violence. In the very first scene, the four women are eating Sushi when Natasha walks in the restaurant and snubs Carrie. Natasha married Carrie's ex, Mr.

Big; and Carrie and Mr. Big had been having an affair for several months. Carrie responds by going shopping.

After lunch I was so devastated by Natasha's withering look that I decided that my only recourse was to go shopping, but I took a wrong turn, looking for the right shoes and somewhere south of Halston Street I quite literally lost my direction.

As she approaches a guy coming toward her on the street to ask for directions, he points a gun at her and shouts, "Gimme your bag." Untroubled, at first, Carrie corrects him, "It's a baggette." "Lemme have it." Carrie thinks, "Fifteen years in New York and just when the city was getting safe, I was getting mugged." "Is this for real?" she inquires. "Your watch and your ring. Quick. And your Manolo Blahniks." Reluctantly, she gives the mugger her shoes explaining, "Please sir, they're my favorite pair. I got them half price at a sample sale." And the thief hurries off down the street. Carrie, distraught mostly over losing her "strappy sandals" enters a nail salon and shouts, "I've been robbed!" No one pays any attention to her, going about his or her business as if this were an everyday occurrence. The "George Clooney" looking detective, who is on the case, interviews Carrie regarding the mugging and flirts with Miranda when she arrives to comfort her friend, bringing shoes for Carrie to wear home. This flirtation leads to an exchange of cards and future date plans. Carrie says, "I get mugged and you get him. I guess that's my karma." Carrie attributes this whole incident to her affair with a married man.

Later in the episode, after being pushed down a flight of stairs by two college guys and unable to get a cab, Carrie is certain this is an "open and shut case of karmic

retribution.” To change her karma, Carrie tries contacting Natasha to apologize, while Natasha successfully avoids her calls. Carrie finally arranges a surprise meeting with Natasha and apologizes. Natasha does not let her off the hook that easily and says to Carrie,

Are you finished? I’m sorry too. Yes, I’m sorry about it all. I’m sorry that he moved to Paris and fell in love with me. I’m sorry that we ever got married. I’m sorry he cheated on me with you, and I’m sorry that I pretended to ignore it for as long as I did. I’m sorry I found you in my apartment, fell down the stairs, and broke my tooth. I’m very sorry that after much painful dental surgery, this tooth is still a different color than this tooth. Finally I’m very sorry that you felt the need to come down here. Now not only have you ruined my marriage, you’ve ruined my lunch.

The resolution to this aptly named episode (“What Goes Around Comes Around”) is that Carrie has set into motion a series of events that put the beautiful Natasha back on the dating market, “like single women in New York didn’t have it hard enough.”

The idea of karma does connect back to Blanche’s idea about why their house was broken into, but it also reveals the superficiality of Blanche, as the sex object archetype, and *Sex and the City* as a whole. While the episode dealt with Carrie being mugged, it did not address women’s vulnerability to crime in a big city like Manhattan. This series does an excellent job of keeping those types of issues to the periphery and focuses on interrogating questions of relationships, in this case “Is there such a thing as relationship karma?”

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is the idea that heterosexuality is so ingrained in our culture that we see it as the only “normal” option in a dichotomy of straight or gay. Rich (1980) suggested that this heteronormativity is so pervasive in our culture that it creates what she calls compulsory heterosexuality, leaving women with no options except to chose heterosexuality based on social, economic, and gender pressures. Compulsory heterosexuality ignores the existence of lesbianism even though there are various examples of intimate female relationships everywhere, including in these series. Rich (1980) argued that a more fluid understanding of sexuality would provide women with a range of options in which to pursue their sexual desires, and that these challenges to compulsory heterosexuality are necessary (Rich, 1980). The three series embody the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, despite some of the challenges suggested in *Sex and the City* as well as the fluid sexualities of real life stars Queen Latifah (Khadijah – *Living Single*) (Zook, 2003a) and Cynthia Nixon (Miranda – *Sex and the City*).

Sex and the City

Sex and the City would have to be the most sexually progressive of the three series. Despite this sexual progressiveness, *Sex and the City* still seems to promote a strictly heteronormative lifestyle, with homosexuality being its deviant opposite. *Sex and the City* embraces homosexuality, specifically with its inclusion of Stanford Blatch, Carrie’s gay best friend. Stanford and his many relationships assume center stage at times. Stanford’s relationships are seen as both strange and “too gay” as with his doll collecting boyfriend (S3, E5). Toward the end of the series, Stanford becomes more

serious and monogamous in his relationship with Marcus. There is even an episode (S3, E18) with three transgender, male-to-female, prostitutes who eventually befriend Samantha. While different sexualities are discussed and accepted, they are still seen as the aberrant or deviant form of sexuality, and in opposition to heterosexuality.

In season 4, episode 4, Carrie dates a younger man, Sean (Eddie Cahill), whose generation “has a totally different letter than ours.” When Carrie asks about his former relationships, Sean nonchalantly replies there was “Kaylynn and Leslie, and before Leslie there was Mark.” Stunned with Sean’s bisexual confession, Carrie tries to cover her judgmental astonishment. To which Sean acknowledges, “Is that a problem?” And Carrie lies “of course it’s not a problem.” As Carrie recounts this story to her friends she asks, “When did the sexes get all confused?” Samantha, the sex object archetype thinks it’s great. Miranda says, “it’s greedy, it’s double dipping.” While Charlotte says she is “very into to labels: gay/straight, pick a side and stay there.” Charlotte wants everything to fall into rigid boundaries so she can make sense of her world. Carrie asserts, “I’m not even sure bisexuality exists. I think it’s just a layover on the way to gay town.” Except for Samantha, the other three characters seem uneasy with a more fluid sexual continuum. Carrie attributes her sexual rigidity in this case to her age. “I’m an old fart,” she says about herself. Throughout the episode, Carrie tries to force Sean to admit that he is more attracted to men or women. Sean simply explains that he has “been in three major relationships and one just happened to be with a guy.” Finally Carrie attends a party with Sean and his gender-bending friends, who all seem to have had various sexual relationships among each other: two were married in a heterosexual relationship and now

divorced and both dating same sex partners. The male couple shares a child. One member of the male couple and one of the females both dated Sean.

Later in the episode, a partygoer decides it is time to play spin the bottle and Carrie reluctantly joins the circle with Sean. The first two kisses are between a man and a woman. A female player spins the bottle and it lands on Carrie. Carrie simply responds, “whoops it’s a girl spin again,” relying on the heterosexual rules of the game she learned 20 years earlier. The female spinner leans in and kisses Carrie. Uncomfortable with this kiss, Carrie excuses herself from the party, stating that she needs more cigarettes. It turns out, Carrie is simply not comfortable with fluid gender roles or the sexualities of Sean or the other party guests. This resolution privileges heteronormativity and denies bisexuality.

In season 4, episode 4 and 5, Samantha experiments with lesbianism, announcing that she is dating someone new, Maria, someone she really likes, and “yes ladies, I’m a lesbian.” The other three characters act in disbelief. Samantha’s sexual exploits have always been shocking, but this foray into lesbianism is unfathomable for Charlotte, Carrie, and Miranda. As the three walk home, Carrie questions Samantha’s sexuality, “how does that work, you go to bed one night and wake up and puff you’re a lesbian!” To the presumed absurdity of this announcement Miranda says, “Oh I forgot to tell you I’m a fire hydrant.”² It is interesting to see how a show about sex does not tolerate much beyond strictly heterosexual relationships. Samantha says lesbian is “just a label like

² Miranda’s response is particularly interesting here, given that shortly after the series ended Cynthia Davis left her long-time boyfriend and father of her to children for a woman.

Versace.” Although Samantha is trying to tell Carrie not to label her, Samantha really is just trying lesbianism on like a fashion accessory, while learning fun facts about the women’s sexual pleasures. The other women call Samantha the “lesbian du jour” and prudish Charlotte suggests that Samantha is just experimenting with lesbianism “to bug us,” demonstrating that Samantha’s lesbianism is disturbing to the rest of the group.

In episode 5, Maria grows jealous of Samantha’s many men, who they continue to run into while out on the town. Samantha responds to Maria’s inquiries about who these men are with a wave of the hand and a simple statement, “a guy I used to fuck.” Toward the end of the episode, Samantha has grown tired of the intimacy that Maria insists on in their relationship. Samantha feels she can no longer just have sex; but must now talk about her feelings, which she does not enjoy. “I don’t know how you people do it,” Samantha complains to Carrie, Miranda, and Charlotte at brunch. Samantha ends her relationship with Maria not because she is a woman, but because she does not want that kind of intimacy. Through this episode lesbianism is seen as an overly intimate relationship with two women, and this is not likely true of all lesbian relationships. In any case, Samantha’s lesbianism is seen as a joke and never truly accepted by Carrie, Miranda, and Charlotte, reinforcing the otherness of lesbianism to the norm of heterosexuality.

Within *Golden Girls* and *Living Single* heteronormativity is even more strictly enforced. This might have something to do with the fact that the women live together on these two series, and NBC in the 80s and FOX in the 90s simply were not ready for any homosexual undertones in these shows. Rather, they were explicitly concerned that

lesbian undertones be absent, and both *Golden Girls* and *Living Single* deal with issues of homosexuality through guest star characters.

Golden Girls

There are three gay-themed episodes in *Golden Girls*. Season 2, episode 5 involves an old friend of Dorothy's, Jean, who recently lost her partner. The other two episodes (S4, E9 and S6, E14) involve the coming out and later marriage of Blanche's brother, Clayton, respectively and Blanche's acceptance of Clayton's sexuality. In season 4, episode 9, Blanche comments on her brother's lifestyle, "I don't really mind Clayton being homosexual, I just don't like him dating men." Dorothy responds, "You really haven't grasped the concept of this 'gay thing' yet, have you, Blanche?" Blanche in her heterosexist denial says, "Well there must be homosexuals who date women." And Sophia chimes in, "Yeah. They're called lesbians."

In season 2, episode 5, Dorothy's friend Jean plans to visit, and Dorothy feels uncertain whether or not to tell Blanche and Rose that Jean is a lesbian. Jean's sexuality does not seem to have been an issue in her life as she had been openly living with her partner. There is no discussion of any kind of discrimination. Jean simply states, "I am not embarrassed or ashamed" when asked bluntly by Sophia, "so the lesbian thing, you keep it under your hat or what?" Throughout the episode, the idea of lesbianism seems to be a mystery, shrouded in secrecy, not necessarily for public discourse unlike *Sex and the City*. The episode uses lesbianism as its situational misunderstanding to provide humor. All the women demonstrate compassion and acceptance of Jean's sexuality. Sophia knows Jean is gay because a "mother knows." When Dorothy questions Sophia about

how she would react if one of her children were gay, Sophia responds, "I wouldn't love him one bit less and I would wish him all the happiness in the world."

Before Blanche discovers Jean is a lesbian, she encourages Jean to start dating men. When Jean declines Blanche says, "Maybe you're not ready for men yet." Sophia responds, "You don't know the half of it." When it is revealed to Blanche that Jean is gay, Blanche says "I'll never understand what Jean doesn't see in the opposite sex, but hey if that's what makes her happy, it's fine by me." This demonstrates a superficial level of acceptance of homosexuality. Blanche's response also reflects the oddity of a sexuality unlike her own hyper-heterosexual one. The thing Blanche is really shocked about is Jean's attraction to Rose. Blanche responds in horror, "Well I'm shocked, to think Jean would prefer Rose to me. That's ridiculous." Blanche continues her disbelief and demands of Dorothy, "If you had to pick between Rose and me, who would you choose? She's [Rose] not as worldly and sophisticated as I am." Always consumed with her perceived desirability, Blanche is not uncomfortable with homosexuality, only the idea that someone would prefer Rose to her.

Jean falls for Rose after they spend the day together. They have a lot in common, as they both grew up on dairy farms. Jean says she has not met anyone as kind and warm as Rose since her partner died. Rose and Jean stay up late talking and playing cards. Jean even enjoys Rose's stories. To not disturb the others, it is agreed that Jean will sleep in Rose's room. Rose still does not know Jean is a lesbian or that Jean has feelings for her. Rose begins to fall asleep when Jean confesses her feelings. Rose slumberly repeats Jean's declarations until Jean says, "I'm quite fond of you." Then the wide-eyed Rose

pretends to sleep and begins to snore to avoid the awkward moment. The next morning Rose confides in Dorothy that she thinks Jean is gay; and Dorothy confirms her belief. When Rose confronts Jean about her feelings she says, "I have to admit I don't understand these kind of feelings." And then Rose hems and haws over if she were gay she would "be proud and flattered." Rose hopes "their friendship is enough," and the episode concludes with Rose and Jean hugging to acknowledge that Jean is fine with the two of them being just friends. It is interesting that the *Golden Girls*, an issues-oriented show that generally incorporates critiques of social issues, would even include a gay-themed episode, given the lack of political import this episode has with regard to gay rights. It seems as though the episode is used to ensure audiences that the main characters are in deed not lesbians, although they are [somewhat] comfortable with homosexuality.

Living Single

Season 3, episode 22 of *Living Single* is the only episode that contains a gay theme. In this episode, titled "Woman to Woman," Max's former college roommate, Shayla, visits with her fiancé Chris. Max has planned a bridal shower for the two of them. When Chris arrives at the door before Shayla has time to tell Max that her fiancé is a woman, everyone is stunned. Synclaire awkwardly says "lesbians, neat!" to break the tension. Max's reaction is angry and flippant. When Chris says she has heard all about Max, Max responds, "I had you pictured a little differently. I thought you'd be a man." Shayla explains she just did not know how to tell Max. And Max replies, "'I'm gay' is a real toll saver." Shayla asks Max, "Are we cool?" and Max says, "Yeah we cool, I just

hope I can get the deposit back on the male stripper.” Max gives the couple “His and Her” underwear for a present, getting one last shot in about not knowing the truth. Although Max’s reaction to finding out her college roommate is gay is not necessarily supportive, it seems as though Max is more upset that she was the last one to know than uncomfortable with her former roommate’s sexuality.

Synclaire’s response is particularly naïve as the child archetype would be. When she begins to hang a sign that reads, “Welcome Lesbians” Khadijah warns her to take it down. Synclaire apologizes, stating that she’s “not up on lesbian etiquette, it’s not like I’ve know any before.” Khadijah informs, “Aunt Gladys is gay.” Synclaire doubts, “Aunt Gladys is not gay. She just never found the right man ... like her roommate Aunt Hazel.” This exchange demonstrates the naiveté of the child archetype.

At the bridal shower, Regine awkwardly welcomes guests dressed in oversized sweat suit and a baseball cap, hiding behind the door, stating in a monotone voice (Regine even perceives her voice as sexy), “Welcome to the shower, drinks are on the table.” When Khadijah inquires, “What the hell is this?” pointing to Regine’s clothes. Regine explains, “I’m thinking of our guests. You know I’m cute and you know how enticing I usually look. Why put out the banquet if they can’t eat.” Regine’s response is superficial and self-absorbed, proclaiming her irresistible beauty, and believing everyone will fall in love with her. While similar to Blanche’s sex object response, neither sex object archetype is as progressive and accepting of homosexuality as Samantha in *Sex and the City*. Khadijah seems untroubled by Shayla’s announcement throughout the

episode (Zook, 2003a). Khadijah has known since junior year, and Max is even more hurt that Shayla felt comfortable telling Khadijah before her.

Shayla explains to Max that she never told her because she had been in love with her. Max stumbles, uncomfortable with this confession and inquires, “but you knew I was straight, right?” Shayla says, “Well, I wondered every time you’d rant about how men were like snorting wart hogs without the charm.” The episode resolves with Max coming to terms with Shayla’s sexuality. Max says she does not know how she would have responded back in college, but she “wish[es] you would have given me a chance, think of all the time we wasted, think of all those times we could have dissed about your dates, I can’t imagine some of the heffers you must have gone out with.” And their friendship is restored. It is interesting to note that as the iron maiden archetype Max’s sexuality is questioned. As stated earlier, the iron maiden archetype is masculine; and this masculinity can be confused with homosexuality. This could be another reason why the creators hyper-sexualized Max’s iron maiden archetypal character throughout the series.

Patriotism

Golden Girls

Another interesting theme that stands out among the series is the notion of patriotism. In *Golden Girls*, for example, there are no fewer than three episodes devoted to the idea of “American-ness.” In season 2, episode 21, “Dorothy’s Prize Winning Pupil,” Mario Lopez guest stars as a young student who writes a paper about what living in America means to him. Dorothy is so moved by his writing and high regard for his

country that she submits his paper to a writing contest. Unbeknownst to her, Mario is in the United States illegally. Due to the publicity of winning the writing contest, Mario's immigration status is revealed. In the end, Mario is deported, but Dorothy vows to bring him back legally because he is "what this country is all about." Since the show is set in Miami, the immigration discussion seems important to address. This episode accomplishes a few things, it: 1) demonstrates the strength of America as it was built on immigrants from many lands, 2) praises America for its openness and freedom, and 3) promotes the idea that immigrants should come in to this country legally.

In season 5, episode 21, Dorothy's ex-husband's Czechoslovakian cousin, Magda, visits shortly after the non-violent overthrow of the communist party in Czechoslovakia. Magda stereotypically represents the ill-tempered communist who is disgusted by the excess she sees in the American way of life. She complains about America while shopping and drinking Slurpees that she describes as delicious and "so fruit like" in a deep, monotone, Eastern European accented voice. In this episode, Dorothy argues with Magda about the advantages of a democracy, the importance of freedom, and many other American values. Magda complains about everything especially the consumerist society she sees. While in a bookstore, Magda states that there are too many competing ideas in all of these books and that it cannot be good for people to be exposed to too many ideas. Again Dorothy espouses the beauty of American ideals, specifically freedom of expression. The episode resolves as Magda returns to Czechoslovakia having learned not to be afraid of the changes occurring in her country and that the newfound freedoms will serve her country well.

During season 5, episodes 25 and 26, then President of the United States, George H. W. Bush, plans to visit Miami. The secret service arrange for a visit with Dorothy, Blanche, Rose, and Sophia. These episodes are set up as a clip show with flashbacks from previous episodes as the secret service conduct a background check of the four women. In episode 26, Dorothy plans to interrogate the President on issues such as education and the environment. Rose urges Dorothy not to attack the President as she sees it as un-American. Dorothy explains that it is important to question authority. However, when the President arrives, Dorothy is so awe-struck with his position that she is unable to speak. This is an interesting turn of events to not question the President, as Dorothy complained about his administration tirelessly amongst the flashbacks. Dorothy, the most vocal and feminist character of the series, literally loses her voice in the face of conservative American politics. This is significant because it reinforces the idea that while the woman's movement has made progress, questioning authority and status quo power structures remains a difficult and challenging task. This pro-American support of the powers that be in the *Golden Girls* is also significant because it points to the idea of age and generation. The *Golden Girls* characters represent the demographic group Tom Brokaw (1998) called the greatest generation. This generation came of age during the Great Depression and World War II and upon their return from the war built a modern America. Brokaw (1998) asserted that this generation was united by American values of honor, economy, service, love of family, and nationalism. It is interesting to see this blatant pro-American stance in *Golden Girls* as it seems absent from the other two series.

Living Single

There appears to be less of a pro-American stance in both *Living Single* and *Sex and the City*. While this could simply be attributed to the age and generation of the characters, I think race and feminism play a bigger role. Although all the main characters on *Living Single* are Black, issues of race are seldom an explicit part of the narrative in this series. Race, however, is brought up in many places from the magazine that Khadijah runs to African dress, art to hairstyles, and T-shirts to guest stars. These characters seem to have overcome the obstacles of racism and in some cases (Khadijah and Regine) poverty to achieve varying degrees of success in their twenties. While this might seem to be the American dream personified, the characters do not attribute their success to American values. Notions of American-ness are often tied to, and thus ridiculed, by describing them bourgeois. The character most closely connected with the idea of the bourgeois is Regine, who affects a white-middle class idea of beauty (including her light complexion) and success through her superficial snobbery, materialism, and social climbing desires. In season 1, episode 7, Regine takes her boyfriend's daughter out shopping. The pair comes home dressed in Jackie O sunglasses and scarves and Khadijah says, "Who knew bouesgie came in such small sizes." As Jackie O represents American royalty, the idea of bourgeois is implicitly connected to American-ness here.

Another example of equating American-ness to bourgeois politics involves Regine's participation in an uppity group known as the ELBOWs (Enterprising Ladies Benefiting Our World) to which Max comments, "that bouesgie group that thinks

wearing Versace is the best way to beautify the environment.” In season 3, episode 27, Max, power hungrily, agrees to run for city alderwoman and accepts the ELBOW’s support. When Max asks Regine for help with her speech, Regine replies, “democracy in action or dirt?” Regine, true to her sex object archetypal form, goes for the superficial gossip about Khadijah’s lawsuit over a discussion of politics.

In this same episode, Khadijah is being sued for libel because of the comments Russell, *Flavor*’s music editor, made about a band. Here Russell tries to bribe the court, but is met with hostility. Russell, confused by the unwillingness of the court to accept his bribe, responds, “I thought this was America.” This comment demonstrates the perception of the America legal system as greedy and corrupt. In contrast, as a lawyer, Max upholds a particular allegiance to the law as demonstrated in season 4, episode 5 where she makes Regine tell the court that she has not keep the proceedings confidential because she slipped and told everyone that she was a juror on a particularly salacious trial.

There is no intrinsic respect for the police or the military in *Living Single*. While the characters of *Golden Girls* demonstrate an inherent respect for authority as demonstrated with the former president, the characters of *Living Single* feel they cannot rely on the police for help. As mentioned, in season 1, episode 14, the women’s apartment is burglarized. The police show up three hours later and simply take a report. The characters do not feel comforted by, or confident in, the police officers’ ability to protect and serve their community. The lack of confidence in, as well as distrust of, the police is a common protest among Black communities. These communities are often

neglected and/or criminalized. The people within these communities ultimately have to rely on themselves to protect their own interests.

With regard to military service, in season 1, episode 22, Russell, the Jamaican music editor, quits *Flavor* and says he will join the military because they “take virtually anybody.” While this quote criticizes the military, African Americans and other marginalized groups have historically been lured into military service with the hope of improved status, conferred dignity, and honor. Military service was one way many marginalized groups believed they would be accepted into mainstream America. According to Takaki (1993), many Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans fought in World War II “for a ‘double victory’ against fascism abroad and racism at home” (p. 395). In many cases, these efforts fell short of their ideal when servicemen returned home and opportunities for integration failed in the workplace as well as in community development. Mass movement toward suburbia in developing residential communities only available to Whites left inner cities abandoned, undervalued, and eventually impoverished. This mass exodus impacted Brooklyn, and this city did not begin to recover until the 1990s where we find the women of *Living Single* residing. While the critiques of the police and the military in *Living Single* are superficial, the comments do not valorize these institutions that have historically oppressed African-Americans.

In many ways, the critique of American-ness, and its historical and institutionalized racism, comes through in what is not said in this series. In many episodes, the characters wear African apparel. Kyle is the character who is most closely

associated with his African heritage. He often wears African clothing, dates an African princess, and celebrates Kwanza. Other characters wear historically Black college sweatshirts and Negro league baseball paraphernalia. Overton often wears an “Eracism” baseball cap. These subtle aesthetic choices reflect a much different American narrative than the *Golden Girls* and allude to the history of slavery and racism in this country, as well as pride in an African and African-American heritage.

Sex and the City

The idea of American-ness in *Sex and the City* is more cynical than critical. American-ness involves freedom of choice with regards to consumerism and sex in this series. The only discussion of politics throughout the series occurs in season 2, episodes 1 and 2, when Carrie dates a man, Bill Kelly, who is running for the comptroller’s office in New York City. In their first meeting at a firefighter calendar competition on Staten Island, Bill asks Carrie, “Which district do you vote in?” Carrie’s rather apathetic response is “Whichever one is near Barney’s.” This episode aired five months before the 2000 Presidential election where Gore won the popular vote, but George W. Bush was appointed President when the Supreme Court stopped the recount in Florida. Carrie’s lack of voter registration did not seem to alarm any of her friends. At a time when political apathy was running high, yet political participation seemed most important, Carrie states,

I had been dating Bill Kelly for three weeks and since most of that time was spent on the campaign trail, I decided to dress the part. I found some vintage Halston and did a spin on Jacqueline Kennedy, the early years. I

figured we made a good match. I was adept at fashion and he was adept at politics. Really what's the difference? They're both about recycling ideas and making them seem fresh and exciting. (Season 3, episode 2)

This quote reflects the superficiality that many see in today's politics. Another reference to Jackie Kennedy Onassis, representing American politics for women, appears in this quote as well.

Later, in a discussion at lunch about the political behaviors of the four characters in *Sex and the City*, Charlotte, always looking for the perfect prince, says getting involved in politics is a good way to meet eligible men. Charlotte's idea of eligible meant someone from a prominent traditional family who was looking for the supportive and dutiful wife. Samantha, the sex object archetype, concludes that she would only vote for the candidate who was good looking and reminds the women that things were bad when Nixon was in office because "no one would fuck him." Samantha also states, "I don't believe in the Republican party. I don't believe in the Democratic party." Now this is not a critique of the two-party system, but a joke as she finishes and says, "I just believe in parties!" The cynicism, not criticism, at work here demonstrates an apathy among the four characters that suggests these women, because of their already privileged status, do not need to be concerned about politics. Miranda, the iron maiden archetype, who generally is the most feminist, states to her three apathetic friends, "I'm glad you weren't around during the original 13 colonies. I don't think our founding fathers were very fuckable." A final observation on the political cynicism in *Sex and the City* occurs as Carrie tries to set-up her friend Stanford with one of Bill Kelly's advisors. When

Carrie resorts to lying to save her friend from feeling rejected, she states that this newfound ability to lie meant that she “was getting good at politics.” All of this speaks to the idea that politics are superficial and corrupt. In addition to the characters apathy, their political awareness lacks any intelligent or sophisticated understanding of the world. Thus, there is no need to be politically active, as women neither have a clue about, or voice in, this process. And as privileged White women, reaping the benefits of previously fought feminist and political battles, the women of *Sex and the City* selfishly do not seem to have, or need, an activist agenda.

After the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the series did not become more pro-America. It did, however, become slightly more subdued in its final two and a half seasons. The series never criticizes or valorizes President Bush. While there is an occasional reference to Mayor Giuliani, these off-handed comments are limited to his ban on smoking, prostitution, and art as byproducts of his tough-on-crime stance. The series overtly pays tribute to its favorite city in two episodes, one aptly titled “I Heart NY” and the other “Anchors Away,” which takes place during Fleet Week. Fleet Week involves active duty U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard servicemen and women docking ships in major cities for a week “rest and relaxation.” In this episode, Carrie dates a Navy man from Louisiana, but breaks up with him because he says New York is only a great place to visit. Carrie will not have anyone talk trash about her one and only true love – Manhattan. And rightly so, as New York has historically been a place where women come to achieve the American dream independently (Israel, 2003).

The next chapter synthesizes the above analysis and findings, particularly answering the research questions addressed in this dissertation. It connects the findings with broader social implications. Finally, the chapter acknowledges limitations and provides suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the findings and concludes the dissertation. This discussion specifically focuses on providing answers to the four research questions addressed in this study. While much analysis was provided in chapters four and five, this current chapter synthesizes the more salient meanings among the findings. It also emphasizes the broader social implications and connections. The chapter acknowledges limitations and makes suggestions for future research.

Research Question One

Research question one asked if the four main characters of each series reflect four archetypes: the iron maiden, the sex object, the child, and the mother. Using a content analysis, I discovered that the four archetypes do exist in each of the series' characters. Dorothy Zbornak, Maxine Shaw, and Miranda Hobbes, from *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* respectively, embody the iron maiden archetype. The characters Blanche Devereaux, Regine Hunter, and Samantha Jones, from *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* respectively, embody the sex object archetype. The characters Rose Nyland, Synclaire James, and Charlotte York portray the child archetype in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*, respectively. Sophia Petrillo of *Golden Girls*, Khadijah James of *Living Single*, and Carrie Bradshaw of *Sex and the City* represent the mother archetype.

These series reflect the recombinant nature of television programming (Gitlin, 1983). Critics lauded, and networks promoted, these series for their innovativeness, nevertheless the main characters are simply updated versions of ancient archetypes that have been used and reused in television programming. One can almost hear the recombinant talk that took place in the pitching of these shows. *Living Single* might have been proposed as ‘*Golden Girls* meets Hip Hop culture with Queen Latifah as the star vehicle.’ *Sex in the City* might have been pitched as *Golden Girls* with cosmopolitans instead of cheesecakes, and all of Manhattan will be showcased.

Recently, I heard connections made among these series. For example, in a promotion for *Golden Girls* re-runs on Lifetime Network, the announcer states, “Before there was *Sex and the City*. There were cheesecakes in Miami.” Gitlin (1983) described how recombinants facilitate much of the production, not only with regard to pitching the series, but also with casting, script writing, and audience affiliation. While casting for the role of Dorothy in *Golden Girls*, the description for the character was “a Bea Arthur-esque role” (IMDB). Most likely, this characterization reflected Arthur’s role as the independent, iron maiden archetypal woman in *Maude*¹. The idea of recombinant characters can be embodied in the star text of an actor (Dryer, 2004), as is the case with Bea Arthur/Dorothy Zbornak. In contrast, and counter to a developing star text, Rue McClanahan who was supposed to play Rose, and Betty White who was supposed to play Blanche, chose to switch their roles so that they would not be typecast from earlier roles

¹ *Maude* (1972) was a spin-off of *All in the Family*.

as the shy Vivian in *Maude* and the aggressive Sue Ellen Nivens in *Mary Tyler Moore* respectively.

It is no surprise that audiences found themselves connected to these series quickly. In addition to the archetypal representations, remnants of former characters and connections among other programs facilitate our familiarity. Unfortunately, the prevalent use of recombinants reflects a narrowed worldview, particularly of characters on television. The fact that the most prevalent modern female characters on television over the past two decades embody ancient archetypes might signify a lack of progress and diversity.

These archetypes live in media today, not only in the syndicated versions of these shows, but also in new series created each season. Programs such as *Cashmere Mafia* (2007) and *Lipstick Jungle* (2008) have connections to *Sex and the City* beyond their similar characters and narratives. In addition, a series promoted as the male version of *Sex and the City*, *Big Shots* (2007) made the airwaves this past fall. Darren Starr is the executive producer of both *Cashmere Mafia* and *Sex and the City*; and *Lipstick Jungle* and *Sex and the City* were both written by Candance Bushnell. In an online interview with Lucy Liu, star of *Cashmere Mafia*, she complained about being asked about the rivalry between the two programs:

It's such a strange question. People ask, 'What do you think of these shows coming up, and is it your competition?' No. Why does it have to be your competition? Why can't there always be shows about women? No one asks a man if it's difficult to have another show about men.

While I agree with Liu's sentiment, the answer to her question is that these programs not only incorporate the same archetypal characters, but also the setting and narratives are similar. There is not enough differentiation.

The discovery of the four archetypes among *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* provided the groundwork for conducting a comparative textual analysis to explore the meanings the four archetypes create within the series. These meanings are part of our collective media conscious. These characters and texts carry ideological meanings.

Research Question Two

Research question two asked what the similarities and differences are among the archetypes in each series and how do these archetypes function within each series.

Research question two also queried if there was a privileging of any of the archetypes' perspectives, and if so, what meanings are produced because of that privileging.

The archetypes function in an ideological way within the series and produce different discourses. While I expected there to be similarities in the overall archetypal representations, I was surprised at the extent to which the similarities were portrayed among the archetypes.

The Iron Maiden Archetype

The iron maiden archetypes include Dorothy, Max, and Miranda from *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*. These characters are masculine, perceived as unattractive, and have careers, often in a male-dominated field. At best, the ideological

function of the iron maiden archetype is to carry the feminist perspective. At worst, this character is simply perceived as bitchy.

Max and Miranda are lawyers, and Dorothy is a teacher. Both Max and Miranda are corporate lawyers; therefore their vocation upholds patriarchal systems, instead of challenging them. As the feminist archetypes, their performances are progressive only in the sense that they depict women as highly paid, successful professionals who can compete with men in the public domain. Dorothy's career as a high school teacher might seem like feminized work, and thus marginalized. However, it provided her with stable work, benefits, retirement, and a satisfaction in that she supports and encourages others. As a divorced woman, Dorothy knows, first hand, the importance of being independent and the struggles women experience when a marriage dissolves. She plays a character in a culture in which after a divorce, men's standard of living rises, whereas women's drops significantly (Peterson, 1996). Also, men tend to remarry within a year after a divorce, and generally to younger women (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2007). Dorothy's circumstances reflect these inequities, as she shares rent and cares for her mother, while her ex-husband re-marries inappropriately younger women. Not only are these disparities reflected in her circumstances, but also Dorothy makes these inequitable experiences known in the series. While Max and Miranda point out some of gender inequities, they do not necessarily, or only temporarily experience the consequences of these inequities, whereas Dorothy lives them.

All three of the iron maiden archetypal characters marry or become engaged by the series finale. Their partnerships seem to be good matches. This provides a more

feminist depiction of marriage since it is a marriage of equals. In her article, “Radical Heterosexuality,” Wolf (1992) argued that heterosexuals need “a version of marriage untainted by centuries of inequality; a ritual that invites the community to rejoice in the making of a new *freely chosen* family” (added emphasis p. 178). This “radical heterosexuality” involves real partnerships where gender norms are not strictly followed, and where each partner recognizes their own complicity in patriarchal norms and seeks to challenge them. Wolf stated that women need to be financially independent, and this is true of the iron maiden archetype in the three series.

Of the iron maiden archetypes in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*, Dorothy’s perspective is the most privileged, Max’s stance is most ridiculed, and Miranda develops and changes the most throughout the series. While sometimes portrayed as masculine and unattractive, Dorothy is always depicted as the smart one. Her perspective is privileged because she is the voice of reason among the group. In addition, Dorothy serves as the connecting character in the show; this role generally goes to the mother archetype. While her appearance may be ridiculed, her progressive ideas rarely are, thus privileging a feminist perspective in the series. Of the three series, I argue that *Golden Girls* is the most feminist, in part because of Dorothy and her privileging, and in part, because the series tackles many social issues and specifically addresses the impact on older women. I would also assert that because of the age of the women in this series, adhering to gender norms is less compulsory.

I argue that Max is the most ridiculed, and therefore, least feminist character of the three iron maiden archetypes, although more feminist than the child and sex object

archetypes within *Living Single*. While Max has a powerful career, dominates the men in her life, and spouts comments about the women's movement, her buffoon-like and hyper-sexualized performances discount her feminist import. Her histrionics are humorous, but her superficial feminist stance lacks Dorothy's privilege. Khadijah, the mother archetype, assumes this more feminist perspective in *Living Single*.

Miranda's viewpoint is less privileged and ridiculed in the series, and unlike her iron maiden cohort, her character develops over the course of the series. Miranda's masculine façade and unattractiveness soften. As the series progresses, she wears fewer business suits and more dresses, her hair color lightens from a sharp red to a soft strawberry blonde, and she has a son at the end of season 4, learning to negotiate his needs with her own. While Miranda's harshness was seen as her strength, by the end of the series her compassion makes her strong. This type of development is rare in half-hour comedies, but I contend that because *Sex and the City* is more serial than episodic, this growth is able to occur. Even with this development (and possibly because of it), I claim that Miranda maintains her iron maiden archetype status throughout the series.

I assert that without this iron maiden archetype a feminist agenda cannot be maintained within the series. Hubert (1999) argued that, after Ellen DeGeneres came out as a gay woman on her television sitcom, the series was unable to maintain a political agenda and/or gay rights perspective. While Hubert attributed this apathy to the network as well as to DeGeneres' own aversion to this kind of platform, I argue that *Ellen* did not have the iron maiden archetype character to carry this progressive agenda. This series consisted of Ellen Morgan (Ellen DeGeneres), who played a care-giving connecting

character, reflective of the mother archetype, Paige Clark (Joley Fisher), who resembled the sex object archetype, and Audrey Penney (Clea Lewis), who after appearing as a pessimist in one episode in the first season, was re-written and became the chipper, optimist, a child archetype with a squeaky, child-like voice. Without the iron maiden archetype, the series simply did not have the character to impart these more political messages.

The Sex Object Archetype

The characters of Blanche Devereaux, Regine Hunter, and Samantha Jones, from *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City* respectively, embody the sex object archetype. While these archetypal characters are generally reduced solely to their sexual exploits, they can still be seen as powerful characters in that they unabashedly own their sexuality, desire sex for their own pleasure, and genuinely love and appreciate their bodies. Lorde (1984) described the erotic as powerful. She viewed the erotic as “our most profoundly creative source ... when I speak of the erotic, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women: of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives” (p. 173). Since women’s sexuality has historically been a source of constraint and vulnerability (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2007), seeing these sex object archetypes celebrate their sexualities sends a powerful message. However, because they are so often ridiculed, the celebration of self is displaced with a self-absorbed meaning.

Blanche Devereaux's most progressive aspect is that she revels in her own beauty and makes it known how much and how often she enjoys sex. While this same statement can be made about the other women, it is more significant for Blanche because of her age. Older women are commonly portrayed in the media as sexless (Kilbourne, 1999); Blanche shatters these narrow views with her many "sexcapades." While Blanche is progressive in some ways, this character pits herself against the other women often putting down the others' appearance to praise her own. This aspect of Blanche constructs her as a less feminist character.

While Blanche's sexual drive might have been considered outrageous in the eighties, Samantha Jones, of *Sex and City*, raised the sex object archetype to a new art form. She unapologetically has "sex like a man," that is, without feelings, according to season 1, episode 1. Samantha's sexual encounters are always about pleasure and rarely about long-term commitment. As with Blanche, her sexuality is often so over the top, one might miss the significance of this character and reduce her to debauchery. Although Samantha grows somewhat toward the end of the series when she commits to a partner, she, like Blanche, develops very little during their respective series, and often these characters are reduced to a sexual joke. It is interesting that a series touted for its sexual progressiveness depicts a stagnant and repressive sex object archetype. This reductive focus on one aspect of a person's character – sexuality, reflects experiences gay men and lesbian women encounter as their identities are oftentimes reduced solely to their sexuality.

Unlike her sex object cohort, Regine uses sex as a tool to get what she wants. She finds pleasure in sex, but seeks to “get a man” to support her in the manner in which she has fashioned for herself. While this character is not at all powerful, Regine is most interesting not only because she has the most growth in the final season, but also because she creates and maintains a pretentious style and personality. Regine’s performance of gender, race, and class in many ways parallels Helen Gurly Brown’s “Cosmo Girl,” an identity that is malleable to achieve a beautiful and moneyed aura to capture a man from a higher class. Regine epitomizes this “beautiful phony” (Ouellette, 1999, p. 120). Thus, Regine’s performance as the sex object archetype is disempowering for women. It is about getting a man dishonestly, however, as she grows in the final season, Regine nearly grows out of the sex object archetype. This development can be seen in her relationship with Dexter. As Regine develops beyond the sex object archetype, her role in the series diminishes as she leaves before the series finale. The series is not without a sex object archetype as Max’s hyper-sexualized performance fulfills this role.

The Child Archetype

The characters Rose Nyland, Synclaire James, and Charlotte York portray the child archetype in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single*, and *Sex and the City*, respectively. In many ways this child archetype carries traditional values, harking back to a simpler time. The child archetype portrays a naiveté that seems ridiculous in an adult woman, and thus, she is dismissed and disparaged even when her discourse is important. This is typical of Rose Nyland of *Golden Girls* and Synclaire of *Living Single*. Charlotte, while still naïve, is not portrayed as dim-witted and therefore her discourse has import. Each child

archetype is optimistic about life and love. Rose and Synclaire do not develop throughout the series, even though their circumstances change. They are as simple and optimistic in the first season as they are in the last. Charlotte's character, on the other hand, develops throughout the series, and this provides some privileging of the discourse surrounding her. This privileging reflects tenets of third wave feminism's desire of the feminine as well as some modern feminist backlash. Charlotte's character is fairly complex and contradictory. She lives by antiquated rules in a modern urbane setting. While her character is not one-dimensional, her focus on marriage is somewhat problematic. Charlotte challenges the virgin/whore dichotomy while trying to maintain a "good girl" image. Media messages that portray girls as the virgin/whore dichotomy are ubiquitous. Girls are told to be virtuous yet alluring and sexual (Kilbourne, 1999). This is not only a dangerous image for girls, it is near impossible without consequence. The three child archetypes embody this virgin/whore dichotomy masterfully. They are seen as sexual prudes, but once in a sanctioned relationship (i.e. marriage or long-term commitment) they exhibit a sexual prowess without the inhibitions they had cultivated previously.

The Mother Archetype

Sophia Petrillo of *Golden Girls*, Khadijah James of *Living Single*, and Carrie Bradshaw of *Sex and the City* represent the mother archetype. These archetypes contain the most variance, although there are some similarities. The single most defining mother archetypal characteristic is their storytelling ability.

Sophia is a biological mother to Dorothy. Blanche and Rose view Sophia as a mother figure as well. Sophia, as a mother archetype, typifies the ethnic mother stereotype. She tells stories about the “old country.” Most of these stories have a point or a lesson embedded within them, although some do not. This stereotypical embodiment of the mother archetype and her age contribute to her static role. While there are some beautiful mother/daughter moments in this series, Sophia is basically reduced to an eccentric old woman. Compared to the other women in the series, she has a smaller role. For such a small role, it is packed with punchlines. Sophia does not serve as the connecting character to the others in the series, as do Khadijah and Carrie, the other mother archetypes. This small role might be reflective of our societal devaluation of seniors, and particularly mature women or the reduced role mothers play in their adult daughters lives. It might also be reflective of the role reversal that sometimes occurs when adult children care for their aging parents. In this case, Sophia had a stroke. This stroke is also used as the reason Sophia just rattles off insults at the others. While Sophia provides some nurturing moments, she basically serves as a voice with no tact to point out all the flaws in the other characters. Age gives Sophia permission to act in such ways, as she feels less bonded by feminine social norms.

Khadijah and Carrie each serve as the star vehicle and connecting character in their series. This capacity privileges their discourse. Each plays a motherly role the others seek out for advice on many matters. Another interesting connection involves their careers. Both are journalists. Khadijah owns her own magazine and Carrie writes her own column. As producers of media content, they serve a broader advice-giving role.

Khadijah, as the owner of a Black urban magazine, also serves as the conveyor of culture for her community. Khadijah's role is much more feminist than the other two mother archetypes and more feminist than the iron maiden archetype in *Living Single*, who generally carries a feminist discourse. Khadijah is the voice of reason. She provides physical and monetary support to her younger cousin Synclaire, the child archetype. Khadijah is feminist in her independence in the workplace and in relationships. This portrayal of the strong, independent Black 'mother' is typical in Black communities (hooks, 1993).

Carrie, as the narrator, has a privileged omnipresence in the series. Her role is much less feminist than Khadijah as she tries to remain the neutral observer. Carrie's most empowering impact on social norms involves her interrogation of sexual dating mores, although she often quells the feminist discussion in the series through her neutrality. She is wrought with insecurities. As much as these insecurities drive the inquisitive narratives of the series, they also reduce Carrie's feminist import. These archetypes reflect ideological fractures within the women's movement that have existed since the first wave. The most prominent ideological fracture involves the differences between cultural and liberal feminists. The child archetype personifies the cultural feminist, whereas the iron maiden represents more liberal feminist ideals. These archetypal representations are most prominent in *Sex and the City* between Charlotte, the child archetype, and Miranda the iron maiden.

Research Question Three

Research question three asks about similar narratives among the series and the meanings produced through these stories. As demonstrated with recombinant characters, television narratives are not immune to the pressures of the industry; common narratives involving women include finding love, marriage, and motherhood, and are found throughout these series. While there were plenty of references to these narratives, this dissertation focuses on the following: family and sisterhood, prostitution, crime and violence, heteronormativity, and patriotism.

Family and Sisterhood

Narratives about family and sisterhood are as prevalent as love, marriage, and motherhood, and are not mutually exclusive. The notions of family in *Golden Girls*, *Living Single* and *Sex and the City* are not necessarily about biological relations, but the supportive associations one creates for herself. In each series, the four characters have created an intimate and nurturing family unit among themselves, although there are some differences among the series. In *Golden Girls*, the disruptions to, and ultimate restoration of the family unit serve as a narrative ploy throughout the series. Misconstrued proposals, misunderstandings, arguments, and illness provide the cause for these disruptions. Of the three series, *Golden Girls* is the most formulaic with the use of this disruption/restoration narrative. While the preservation of the chosen feminine family unit is powerful, the conflict among the characters (although humorous) depicts women as adversarial rather than truly supportive. Antagonistic relationships among women have often been used to thwart feminist movement. Therefore, these representations

might reinforce the idea that the fragmented sectors within feminist movement cannot work together for broader social causes.

The notion of family in *Living Single* extends beyond the four women to include the two main male characters in the series as well. Similar to *Golden Girls*, *Living Single* includes conflict, mostly in the form of verbal sparring. Unlike *Golden Girls*, the banter is playful and marks identity in an African American culture. At times “playing the dozens” (Smithermann, 1977) might seem harsh within the series, however when performed among the in-group, it marks camaraderie and parity. This parity is a powerful and feminist expression of the group dynamics in *Living Single*.

The family unit in *Sex and the City* is its most powerful feminist contribution. It depicts women as allies not adversaries. Although there is conflict among the main characters, the disruption of their friendships is only invoked in a couple of episodes discussed above and it is rarely seen as a narrative ploy as it is in *Golden Girls*.

Prostitution

Both *Golden Girls* and *Sex and the City* had narrative episodes about prostitution. The *Golden Girls* episode used a prostitution police bust for humor, whereas, *Sex and the City* interrogated the connection between sexually active single women and prostitutes when Carrie asks in her column, “Where’s the line between professional girlfriend and just plain professional?” This episode problematizes the idea of sex and power in heterosexual relationships. Unfortunately, the resolution of this episode does not provide much more beyond noting that the line between “professional girlfriend and just plain professional” is blurred. Superficially there was a nod to historical sexual oppression of

women, inequities in the social construction of gender, and an esteem of a powerful vagina, but ultimately women's power was reduced to their sexuality in this particular narrative.

Crime and Violence

Each of the three series contains an episode where some sort of burglary occurs and the characters must deal with the consequences of this event. In *Golden Girls*, the intruder episode serves as a character reinforcement as much as a "dark man" (Estes, 1992, p. 43) narrative. Dorothy stands up to the security salesman. Blanche worries only about her precious jewelry, and Rose is stricken with fear until she beats up the parking attendant who meant no harm. The resolution of this episode involves the stolen items being returned and faith in the community, and their own ability to be safe restored. On the contrary, the intruder narrative in *Living Single* does not resolve so neatly. Rather, it centers on the need to build not only relationships among the main characters, but also in the broader community. Unlike the *Golden Girls*, this episode does not end with a positive resolution. Instead of having stolen property returned or feeling safe because you defended yourself, this episode ends with sirens howling in the background. The differences point to differences not only of geographical location urban versus suburban, but also class and race issues. In both episodes, the idea of living with such fear is crippling for the women. This is important to note because women, consciously or subconsciously, carry this kind of anxiety with them all the time (Steinem, 1997). This fear constrains women's ability to move about freely. Unlike the other series, *Sex and the City's* burglary episode does not address women's vulnerability. Carrie believes that

her mugging is due to karmic retribution for having an affair with a married man. The idea of White privilege (McIntosh, 1988) is particularly relevant within this intruder narrative in the outcomes of the *Golden Girls* and *Sex and the City* episodes.

Heteronormativity

The three series depict a narrow understanding of sexuality. While *Sex and the City* is a highly sexualized program, it still seems to promote a strictly heteronormative lifestyle, with homosexuality being its deviant opposite. Characters who deviate from prescribed notions of heterosexuality, including the sex object archetypes, are synonymous with sexuality. Their identities, like that of many gay men and lesbian women, are reduced solely to their sexuality as the character rarely develops beyond that one-dimensional portrayal. The three series embody the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, despite some of the challenges suggested in *Sex and the City* as well as the fluid sexualities of real life stars Queen Latifah (*Khadijah – Living Single*) and Cynthia Nixon (*Miranda – Sex and the City*).

Patriotism

Patriotism might seem like an odd inclusion in this dissertation; however, the pro-American stance was so prominent in *Golden Girls* and seemingly absent in the other series, it needs further exploration. I attribute these differences to age, race, and class. The *Golden Girls* characters represent the demographic group Tom Brokaw (1998) called “the greatest generation.” This generation came of age during the Great Depression and World War II, and upon their return from the war built a modern American. Brokaw (1998) asserted that this generation was united by American values and nationalism.

This pride can be seen in the respect these characters give authority, whether it is the police, immigration officers, or the President.

In contrast, the characters of *Living Single* rarely make verbal acknowledgements of their allegiance. They wear African apparel, historically Black college sweatshirts, and Negro league baseball paraphernalia. Overton often wears an “Eracism” baseball cap. These subtle aesthetic choices reflect a much different American narrative than the *Golden Girls* and allude to the history of slavery and racism in this country, as well as pride in an African and African-American heritage. As for *Sex and the City*, cynicism, not criticism, is at work here, demonstrating an apathy among the four characters that suggests these women, because of their already privileged status, do not need to be concerned about politics.

Research Question Four

Research question four asks how talk functions within each series and what meanings are conveyed through this talk. This dissertation explores the communicative patterns among the characters within the series. I argue that the talk in *Golden Girls* resembles that of Dow’s (1986) interpretation of *Designing Women*. Dow asserted that the women in *Designing Women* express their values based on their characters’ personalities, bringing her personal experiences to the discourse. These experiences are framed by their character’s archetypal personality. Generally, the iron maiden archetype brings the discourse to a broader political level (Dow, 1996). I expand on Dow’s study, asserting that these character types are archetypal. In addition, I argue that each archetype serves a particular function within the series in general. For example, the child

archetype carries a traditional discourse, while the mother provides nurturance and the sex object, sensual freedom.

One particular difference in communication in *Living Single* that is not reflected in the other series involves “playing the dozens” (Smithermann, 1977) or “verbal dueling strategies” (Labov, 1972), which are elements of African American oral tradition and involve one-upmanship of insults exchanged light-heartedly. The meanings conveyed through these exchanges mark racial, group identity, and parity with male co-stars.

Finally, the communicative exchanges within *Sex and the City* represent freedom for women to speak frankly about sex, a once taboo subject, something that was done mostly by the sex object archetype in *Golden Girls* and *Living Single*. This is a positive step as much about sex, sexuality, and reproductive health are shrouded in shame. This type of dialogue contributes to promoting greater sexual health for women.

Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation explored three television series’ representations of archetypal characters. A content analysis was conducted to provide a starting point for further analysis. This content analysis’s limitations include sample size and coder conformity. The sample taken for this project was quite small, only 16 episodes, and the sample included only the first season. Additional textual analyses were conducted to explore archetypal representations beyond the first season. An interesting future study might conduct content analysis comparing the first season to the entire series to systematically explore if the characters develop beyond their archetypes.

Another limitation with the content analysis involves coders' fluency with the series, characters, and codes. It might be constructive to employ additional coders who are less familiar with the programs to determine if the results are reliable. The three series were chosen specifically because they had four main female characters and the archetypal patterns were placed upon them to determine if the characters reflected the archetypes. It might be useful to conduct a content analysis of the characters by employing coders to watch the series and describe the characters, instead of starting with archetypal categories already in place.

Additional studies comparing more recent recombinant characters would also provide more depth and comparison. Including programs such as *Girlfriends*, *Desperate Housewives*, and/or *Cashmere Mafia* might illuminate other differences among race, age, and career choices. Another comparison could be made between female and male series to explore gendered differences. Future studies might incorporate a political economic analysis. Exploring how audiences respond to and connect with these characters might also prove fruitful.

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